

**Survival in a Collapsing Economy:
A Case Study of Informal Trading at a
Zimbabwean Flea Market**

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of Philosophy (Sociology) to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the
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Abstract

The central concern of this study is the nature of informal economic activities among urban traders in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study focuses on a particular flea market and describes the precarious lives of a sample of informal traders. It is shown that, as through much of Africa, the market is a social as well as an economic nexus. It is not only the site of economic production and exchange constituting the survivalist activities that are increasingly important in the collapsing Zimbabwe economy, but also the site of diverse social relations. The thesis also shows that the formal and informal are part of the same deeply segmented economy and not two distinct, separate economies. The extended case study method is used to describe and analyse the nature of informal trading activities among traders dealing in four types of goods commonly found at the flea market: clothes and shoes, DVDs and video games, arts and crafts, and second-hand books. Primary and secondary sources, interviews with policy experts, researchers and activists, a total of 70 semi-structured interviews with traders and participant observation, over a period of one and a half years were used to obtain data on the nature of the informal economy in the current Zimbabwe crisis, and to profile these traders. The thesis describes the daily lives of the traders, their social characteristics and work histories, and the social relations of trust and reciprocity which enable them to source their goods. It is shown that the majority of the traders live an extremely precarious existence marked by low, unstable incomes. However, they should not be viewed as passive victims of the economic crisis, as they demonstrate qualities of resourcefulness and innovation. Nor are they totally

excluded from global circuits of production and exchange. Global connections are identified and shown to be relevant to the sourcing and sale of goods. These connections suggest an alternative way of conceptualising globalisation.

Key words: informal economic activities; informal traders; Harare, Zimbabwe; precariousness; globalisation; extended case method; localisation of the global; globalisation of the local; social networks

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

(Hamadziripi Tamukamoyo)

_____ day of _____ 2009

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my Mum, Dad, Nelson, Itai, Hazvinei (Tsitsi) and Kudzai.

It's been a long walk and each one of you has played your own part, like a perfect symphony.

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List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
BEE	Black economic empowerment
BSA	British South Africa
BWPI	Brooks World Poverty Institute
CBD	Central business district
CCJPZ	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
CCZ	Consumer Council of Zimbabwe
CD	Compact Disk
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CHRA	Combined Harare Residents Association
CID	Criminal and Investigations Department
CoRMSA	Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
CZI	Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
ETD	Emergency travel document
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

FMSP	Forced Migration Studies Programme [University of the Witwatersrand]
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNU	Government of National Unity
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFPI	International Federation of the Phonographic Industry
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISS	Institute of Security Studies
IT	Information technology
LRF	Legal Resources Foundation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MNC	Multinational corporation
MoHCW	Ministry of Health and Child Welfare
MPA	Motion Picture Association
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIPC	National Incomes and Pricing Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OM	Operation Murambatsvina

PF ZAPU	Patriotic Front, Zimbabwe African People's Union
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
SAP	Structural adjustment programme
SAPP	Southern African Partnership Programme [of Action Aid]
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SBP	Strategic Business Partnerships for Growth in Africa
SDA	Social Dimensions of Adjustment [fund]
SIRDC	Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SWOP	Society, Work and Development Institute [formerly the Sociology of Work Unit]
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
USA	United States of America
VCD	Video Compact Disc
VHS	Video Home System
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union [later ZANU-PF]
ZAPU	[see PF ZAPU]

ZAR	South African Rand
ZCIEA	Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZHRF	Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum
ZIMPREST	Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation
ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZMC	Zimbabwe Music Corporation
ZPP	Zimbabwe Peace Project
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police
ZTA	Zimbabwe Tourism Authority
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research

1.1 Research aims

The central concern of this study is the nature of informal economic activities among urban traders in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study focuses on a particular flea market and describes the extremely precarious lives of a sample of informal traders. It is shown that, as through much of Africa, the market is a social as well as an economic nexus. It is not only the site of economic production and exchange constituting survivalist activities that are increasingly important in the collapsing Zimbabwe economy, but also the site of diverse social relations. Some of these relations involve support and solidarity (among the traders), while others involve a level of exploitation (of customers and suppliers). The market brings together a wide range of interests from former “Rhodesians” expressing nostalgic sentiments for their colonial past, to desperate peasants from the rural areas, to precarious (cross-border) informal traders, to Chinese retailers from Johannesburg, to French collectors of African “chic”. In doing so, it reflects connections which span the globe. The social ties and social networks of the traders than span southern African borders are conduits of the informalisation of the social welfare economy in Zimbabwe. For instance, money remitted to traders for various reasons circumvents the formal banking system. An analysis of the lives of traders reveals a latticework of various connections.

The study describes these connections from the local, to the regional and on to the global. These connections suggest an alternative way of conceptualising globalisation. It could be argued that this study indicates processes of globalisation both from above and from below. “Globalisation from above” refers to the growing power of economic institutions situated in the North such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the increasing connections between multinational corporations (MNCs) which operate in many different countries in both the global North and the South. According to Barlow and Clarke (2002: 84):

The corporation is the most powerful institution of contemporary economic life. There are now over 45,000 transnational corporations in the world and the top 200 are so large and powerful that their combined annual sales are greater than the sum total of the economies of 182 of the 191 countries in the world.

This shows the reach of the power of global corporations. Another example of the power of MNCs is indicated by Brodie, (2003: 56):

Transnational corporations may still be headquartered in one country, but their operations are increasingly deterritorialized. They can demand subsidies and expensive infrastructure in one state, elect to pay taxes in another and download the human and environmental costs of production on yet another jurisdiction.

“Globalisation from below” is sometimes used to refer to the response of groups like non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which increasingly link up across the globe to fight the dominant workings of these corporations and institutions whose activities have deleterious impacts on the lives of the local populations. This is a form of resistance which is forging a grassroots international solidarity. Appadurai (2002) has referred to this as “grassroots globalization.” These NGOs are “concerned with mobilizing highly specific local, national, and regional

groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution” (Appadurai, 2002: 281).

This formulation has been criticised by Ferguson (2006) who prefers the notion of global resistance “from across”. He asks:

Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a ‘grassroots’ that would be not local, communal or authentic, but worldly, well connected and opportunistic? Are we ready for social movements that fight not ‘from below’ but ‘across’ using their ‘foreign policy’ to fight struggles not against ‘the state’ but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies and market institutions through which contemporary capitalist domination functions? (Ferguson, 2006: 107).

This study documents “globalisation from above” in the form of structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF, which had devastating impacts on the Zimbabwean population. One response to this devastation is a form of “globalisation from below” in the activities of informal traders who sometimes connect to the “global” in the sourcing of goods. Examples are second-hand clothing from the global North, and DVDs and video games whose content is developed in countries such as the United States of America (USA).

Informal economic activities have intensified in Zimbabwe over the years, a pattern which is not restricted to the global South. The global increase in the level of informal economic activities is related to capitalist restructuring and crises (Castells and Portes, 1989; Castells, 1996; Standing, 1997). There has been recognition that “...informal employment tends to expand during economic crises or downturns...” (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2132). For example, a linkage has been drawn between the increase in the level of informal economic activities in Asian cities and the 1998 financial crisis (Bhowmik, 2005). The crisis in

Zimbabwe resulted in a similar pattern, as demonstrated by the growth of informal economic activities because of structural adjustment and during the recent economic turmoil in the country. Those with the means to do so migrated from Zimbabwe to regional and international destinations in search of better employment opportunities.

This study provides a perspective from Southern Africa on how those people who chose not to migrate, or who did not have the means to do so on a long-term or permanent basis, survive in the face of economic involution. The lives of traders are one of the lenses through which to look into how different people react differently to similar processes of economic restructuring and globalisation at the local level. Another angle is to consider the nature of the economic activities in which they engage. The informal and the formal segments of the economy have both been affected by economic restructuring, and different lenses can be used to examine the impacts of economic restructuring and globalisation on these segments of the economy.

The focus of this study is on a *collapsing* Zimbabwean economy as opposed to a *collapsed* Zimbabwean economy. This study follows an approach which views the state of the Zimbabwean economy not as static but rather as going through several processes of change. The lingering question is whether economies ever really collapse or totter on, on the brink of collapse. This study views the case of Zimbabwe as more of a *collapsing economy*, which is processual, in contradistinction to a *collapsed economy*, which is static. In such a conjuncture the narratives of traders, for instance, are important in examining how they survive in an economy in constant flux.

There has often been a tendency to marginalise the narratives of those living in areas that are seen as not being “globally connected” as far as the impact of globalisation is concerned. Some authors, like Ferguson (2006: 25), have indicted recent narratives on globalisation which manage to “characterize ‘the globe’ and ‘the entire world’ in ways that say almost nothing at all about a continent of some 800 million people that takes up fully 20 percent of the planet’s land mass”. Achille Mbembe (2001: 4) argues that Africa is “the supreme receptacle of the West’s obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of ‘absence,’ ‘lack,’ and ‘non-being,’ of identity and difference, of negativeness – in short, of nothingness”.

Analysts like Ferguson (2006) take umbrage at the fact that academic blockbusters like Saskia Sassen’s (1999) *Globalization and Its Discontents* and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz’s (2003) book of the same title only devote a few pages to discussions on Africa. The African continent suffered tremendously under structural adjustment, one of the discontents of globalisation. Ferguson (2006: 23) argues that:

The questions raised by considering Africa’s place-in-the-world, then, are indeed ‘global’ ones, but not in the way that most discussion of globalization would imply. Instead, they point to the need for a new framing of discussions of the global: centered less on transnational flows and images of unfettered connection than on the social relations that selectively constitute global society; the statuses and ranks that it comprises; and the relations, rights, and obligations that characterize it. To take seriously African experiences of the global requires that any discussion of ‘globalization’ and the ‘new world orders’ must first of all be a discussion of social relations of membership, responsibility, and inequality on a truly planetary scale.

This study, although not focusing on the African continent as a whole, attempts to fill this gap by bringing to the fore a perspective from a country on the continent:

Zimbabwe. Ferguson (2006) makes a clarion call for “situated understandings” of what is happening in specific places across the globe instead of all-encompassing narratives. The study utilises the case of Zimbabwe to “excavate” what is really happening in the so-called “black hole” or “fourth world”, appellations which are loosely used by authors like Castells (1998). For example, the study considers the connectedness, albeit in a different and unequal way, of informal economic activities at a flea market in urban Harare to what is happening at the global level.

This study is about the lives of traders, their struggles, their fears and their hopes. The dissertation frames the accounts of traders in a broader discussion about globalisation. The lives of the traders are parallel to the fortunes and misfortunes that post-colonial Zimbabwe has gone through. As the country sank deeper into crisis, so did the lives of the majority of the informal traders who are the subject of this study. If anything, the story that traders have to tell about their lives is also the story of Zimbabwe, that Southern African country which had so much promise just after independence. Within the first decade of independence, the promise was petering out

1.2 Rationale

Case studies of informal economic activity are important in that they demonstrate the linkages between the so-called “first and “second” economies. For example, former South African president, Thabo Mbeki (2003), has referred to the informal economy as “the second economy” or the “marginalised economy”, and describes it as being “structurally disconnected from both the first and the global economy”. The notion of disconnection (the dual economy thesis) has however been

criticised for failing to recognise that there are multiple forward and backward linkages as people move between formal and informal realms in terms of their economic activities, a movement which Devey, Skinner and Valodia (2006) refer to as “churning”. This study explores these linkages. The study also recognises that state economic policy will invariably have an impact on the range of survival strategies that individuals in developing societies undertake, especially when economies are in crisis. The state, through various institutions and policy instruments, affects the access that individuals have to the resources necessary for their social reproduction.

Studies on Zimbabwe have tended to focus mainly on the collapse of the economy, political repression, social disorganisation and the concomitant exodus of qualified professionals (Bond, 1998; Bond and Manyanya, 2003; Chikanda, 2004; Masunungure, 2004). A significant gap in the literature, especially on the contemporary crises, is a lack of up-to-date studies that examine the innovative and creative ways in which Zimbabweans themselves are dealing with economic difficulties. Traders are not just passive victims of Zimbabwe’s economic implosion, and this study contributes to addressing this gap in research. Most studies have also not considered and theorised the possibly contradictory nature of the relationship between the state and the informal sector in Zimbabwe. In particular historical conjunctures in Zimbabwe, the state supported informal economic activities, and in other moments neglected and even attempted to destroy them. It is important to consider and theorise these contradictory moments.

Studies of informal economic activities like this one also illuminate the problems that the working class has to deal with as capitalist restructuring takes places across the globe, and how those left without employment react to these processes of restructuring. Standing (1997) argues that a new era of labour market flexibility and insecurity in the world of work has been spawned across the globe and that, as a result, new social forms are necessary in order to cater for those individuals who are, for example, dispossessed of their jobs as the juggernaut of capitalist restructuring proceeds. The growth of informal economic activities may be a clarion call to how we consider the “future of work”.

Conceptualisation of work in the twenty-first century involves rethinking the concept of work and how households and communities are reproducing themselves materially by engaging in “new forms of work” (Von Holdt and Webster, 2005). These new forms of work involve making a living on the “periphery” of the economy, on the “representational gap” or on the “margins” (Philip, 2005; Von Holdt and Webster 2005; Webster, 2005). Von Holdt and Webster (2005) have conceptualised these changes in the world of work in terms of three major zones: the core, formal-sector workers in stable employment relations with wages and benefits; the zone of casualised and externalised work often involving less stable employment relations with sub-contractors and the zone of the periphery where people secure their livelihoods through informal economic activities. Connections exist among these different zones, and between them and the “global”.

Studying informal economic activities in contemporary Zimbabwe unpacks the “forces” and “connections” between the “local and the global” and in

the process casts informality not only in a particular historical conjuncture, but also a specific geographical context. The study seeks to do this by focusing on a single case and examining how this case (the local) connects to the global. Geographical specificity is important in that, at the local level, the policy instruments and promulgations of the state play a role in shaping the trajectory and patterns of individual survival strategies. Important in the case of Zimbabwe is the general environment of economic and political crises in recent years. Globally there is a crisis of social reproduction (Bakker, 2003; Bakker and Gill, 2003a, b) and the situation in Zimbabwe should be understood within this broader context. Over the years the country as a whole had been lurching from crisis to crisis and the local population has been engaging in informal economic activities that, although they have been shaped by local conditions, can also be found in other countries which have gone through similar socio-economic and in some cases political trajectories.

This study contributes both empirical and theoretical knowledge on the multiple crises in Zimbabwe and the multidimensional sources of these crises. It also contributes knowledge on how individuals are coping with the harsh economic and political environment perpetuated by the state, and on how they have reproduced themselves and their families both in the past and in the present. The study excavates the nature of these local responses. It is structured upon the central role played by informal economic activities in the survival of impoverished groups of people. These informal economic activities should be understood within a historical context.

In many urban African cities, and in many other cities of the developing world, informal economic activities have, historically, played a central role in the lives of the poor and dispossessed. In a country like Zimbabwe, with estimates of over 80 per cent unemployment and, up until recently, hyperinflation of proportions similar to that of the Weimar Republic¹, informality² continues to play a key role in survival. Zimbabwe's currency has since become defunct.³ The lives of the urban populace in Zimbabwe, many of them poor, have over the past years grown increasingly precarious. Working people across the country have witnessed the erosion of their pensions and savings and many have lost their jobs under the weight of a "crisis" which has lasted for well over a decade. This study examines how these people, who have witnessed their lives being violently assaulted by the economic crisis, have adapted to an economy in constant flux.

The economic, political and social history of Zimbabwe frames this study. Of central importance is the collapse of the productive sectors of the economy brought about by the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s. Intimately connected to structural adjustment is the issue of globalisation. The globalisation of free market economic fundamentals as an ideology and

¹ Rigorous study and documentation of behaviours associated with hyperinflation in the social and economic sciences followed its occurrence in the Weimar Republic (present-day Germany) in the period between the two World Wars. Zimbabwe's inflation approached but failed to surpass the world record setting inflation experienced in Hungary in 1946.

² In some cases I use the terms informality and informal economy interchangeably in the dissertation.

³ Towards the end of 2008 most companies stopped trading in Zimbabwe dollars, and by the beginning of 2009 the Zimbabwean dollar was largely defunct. The US dollar and the South African rand, along with other foreign currencies, have since become *de facto* currencies of the country. The research for this study took place from January 2007 to the middle of 2008. While having a historical lens, the study largely covers this period and does not consider the more recent political, social and economic events that have been unfolding in the country, including what has been dubbed the "dollarisation" of the economy where the US dollar and (and other hard currencies), are used as *de facto* currencies.

subsequently the implementation of policies aligned to the dictates of the “free market” greatly affected the economic performance of many developing countries like Zimbabwe. Free market economic principles largely emphasised the “rolling back” of the state.⁴ In Zimbabwe, this meant a heavy trimming of the public sector workforce, which spawned massive unemployment. Those left without jobs in both the public and private sectors were increasingly propelled into informal economic activities so as to cope with the crisis. The issue as indicated earlier is how the dispossessed are surviving in such an environment. There is need for a much more nuanced and textured understanding of their lives and this study contributes to generating knowledge on this.

While economic restructuring triggered poor economic performance (if not economic collapse), economic mismanagement, corruption and a protracted political impasse, among other things, worsened the trajectory of the Zimbabwean economy in subsequent years. In dealing with the economic crisis, those who chose the route of the informal economy have come to symbolise the resilience and innovation of the local populace in protecting themselves against the “tide” of economic collapse. However, this resilience and innovation does not equal triumph at all. The large majority of informal traders continue to lead a very precarious existence.

Most traders do not have life savings, pensions or affordable health care plans. They also face myriad other challenges similar to those faced by a large

⁴ It could be argued that prescriptions by the international financial system that the state should scale back are in fact anti-development, especially in the developing world. A developing country may need the state to spend on a range development projects such as infrastructure and other public works, in an environment where private-sector investment for a variety of reasons, some of them political, is for the most part not forthcoming. The state may be the only actor that may actually have an interest in funding such projects without necessarily seeking monetary returns as is usually the case with the private sector.

number of inhabitants of cities in Africa and across the developing world. These challenges include an unreliable public transport system, inefficient and corrupt bureaucracies, inadequate and unreliable provision of amenities like water and electricity, and problems with accommodation. Those who still had formal jobs after structural adjustment in more recent times have had to watch as companies have either relocated or permanently shut down their operations, leaving workers unemployed and with very little or nothing at all to fall back on. It is also important to note that what happened in Zimbabwe during the period of economic restructuring is not particular to the country. Several other countries have gone through similar crises, a majority of them triggered by economic restructuring and the subsequent implosion of their economies.

The question that one may ask, then, is how do societies with historically disparate economic, political and social trajectories respond to processes of global restructuring and the implosion of local economies? In the volume of essays edited by Burawoy and Verdery (1999) titled *Uncertain Transitions: Ethnographies of Change in a Postsocialist World*, the contributors examine the varying responses of different people to systemic transformations in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe for instance. In the wake of the “great transformation” charted in the work of authors like Castells (1996, 1998), when the world goes through change, the issue is whether or not we can simply label one part of globe as belonging to a “network society” or whether it is part of an un-networked “marginalised” society that belongs to the so-called “black-hole”.

Zimbabwe emerged from a history of a racist, colonial, capitalist economy⁵ which continued to shape the post-colonial trajectory of the country. On the other hand, the former Soviet Union emerged from a highly centralised socialist economy. All this had an impact on the range of survival strategies that ordinary people could take up. In post-colonial Zimbabwe there were also compounding factors like structural adjustment, partly implemented to service the debt of the colonial regime. The well-documented history of structural adjustment demonstrates how restructuring served as a mechanism by international financial institutions to insert Africa into the world economy. Saul (2005: 9) argues that the “African crisis ... has ... roots in the nature of colonialism’s impact on Africa and in the kind of transition to independence”. The author goes on to add that:

the problems of Africa (including those of Southern Africa) in the new millennium are sharply defined by the particular mode of the continent’s insertion into the wider global capitalist system and, further, that African countries are most unlikely to realize either substantial economic growth or a significant measure of humane development along the lines defined by such a circumstance (Saul, 2005: 15).

Southern Africa has had a long history of migration. This dates back to the colonial period, which saw large numbers of people moving within the region to countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe where they worked as cheap mine and farm labour (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman, 1991; Chirwa, 1996, 1997; Crush, 2000; Christiansen and Kydd, 1983). After independence in Zimbabwe, especially following ESAP, there was also acceleration in the pace of immigration to other locales outside the country in search of better working and living conditions.

⁵ In the first decade or so of independence, state-driven welfarism with a dose of state-supported capitalism managed to deliver tangible benefits to the populace in a variety of areas like health care, education and employment. The gains of this project were eroded by the economic restructuring which eventually triggered the implosion of the economy.

There was already a long tradition of people migrating throughout the Southern African region and internationally in search of better economic opportunities. It is not new because in the current economic milieu, after the economic involution, people have been engaging in economic activities, whether formal or informal, that are globally connected and involve migratory tendencies.

Those in the diaspora are important in the flow of, among other things, ideas and material and cultural capital. As noted by Bayart (2000: 252), “Practices of consumption, far from amounting to a process of Westernization or alienation, have enabled local actors to appropriate a modernity which was originally imported, and hence to effect a ‘reinvention of difference’ which is inherent in the process of globalization”. Remittances are also important in an understanding of the connections between African countries and other parts of the globe. Those from African countries migrate to the very same countries which, through powerful institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, may have been the root cause of the ills that result in their migration.

Research on Zimbabwe has shown the importance of remittances for survival among those still in the country who have lived through the Zimbabwean crisis (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006, 2008; Maphosa, 2007). Those in the diaspora can also facilitate the movement of kin and friends to foreign destinations by providing, for example, money for travelling. Diasporic connections have also been found to be very important in providing new arrivals with accommodation and in networking them with potential employers (Andersson, 2006). Connections that would have been established in the country of origin of the immigrants are reproduced in a variety of ways among the

immigrants in destination countries, and they are important in the immigrant's endeavours to establish themselves there (Andersson, 2006). In the case of Zimbabwe some of these remittances are important in the very survival of those at the local level. The issue that needs to be understood is how those at the local level are deploying these resources (remittances) in their daily lives so as to shield themselves against the economic crisis. Only then can a fully textured and nuanced understanding of their survival mechanisms, and how these mechanisms connect to the global, emerge.

1.3 Understanding Zimbabwe and informality in a globalising context

Though there are many variants of what constitutes globalisation,⁶ there seems to be much agreement that “the globe”, the “planet”, “the world” has become an increasingly interconnected whole. Still there are those who argue that in the current conjuncture Africa is still not part of that globalised, networked society. For example, Castells (1998) maintains that much of Africa is largely a “fourth world”, a “black hole” where wars, hunger and conflicts dominate and where the vast majority of the populations are “marginalized” from the “global networks” that make up what he terms the “network society”. It seems in Castells' account that much of African remains the “dark continent”.

⁶ Chapter 2 goes into detail and explores the different conceptualisations of the notion of globalisation.

Analysts like Bayart (2000: 237) have argued that the current events in Africa reflect something totally different to most of the narratives that are ubiquitous in the literature:

Current conflicts do not stem from the fundamental fault of construction which has distorted the relationship between the state and society ever since, but rather from the long osmosis between these two spheres. Africa's contemporary political struggles and wars are not the consequence of a radical rupture – colonization – but more symptomatic of a historical line of continuity, namely a practice of extraversion. They are not an expression of the marginalization of Africa within the world economy but of older dynamics (or occasionally of very new ones) generated by the manner of its insertion into the world economy.

Bayart (2000: 240) further asserts that:

Africa is thus, in its way, a player in the process of globalization. Some of the events which are often said to be evidence of its alleged de-linking with the world in fact serve as most eloquently to demonstrate the opposite. Thus some of Africa's bloodiest conflicts, often predictably interpreted as manifestations of its supposed primitiveness, cannot be separated from the ebbs and flows of the global economy and also from global cultural practices....

Also pertinent according to Bayart is that it was through air transport that diseases like cholera were brought to regions like the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, which had never known such sickness; in fact, Africa has become the continent most severely affected by the most modern of diseases, HIV and AIDS, which are “tragic expressions of its globalization...” (Bayart, 2000: 240). Above all, the author concludes, the “discourse on Africa's marginality is a nonsense” (Bayart, 2000: 207).

This dissertation takes a similar position, arguing that those in the global South, for example in Africa, are not totally disconnected at all. The argument is that through their economic activities, the informal traders in the case study are

variably connected to the “global” or the “network society” albeit in an unequal manner. There are instances of the “localization of the global” (where commodities produced at the global level are sold at the local level by traders in Zimbabwe) and the “globalization of the local” (where commodities manufactured at the local level in Zimbabwe find global pathways when sold by traders). Commodities and ideas have long been a point of connection between Africa and the rest of the world. One analyst argues that, “considered in the view of the history over the *longue duree*, Africa has never ceased to exchange both ideas and goods with Europe and Asia, and later with the Americas” (Bayart, 2000: 218). The issue of ideas is important here in that it was through ideologies around economic restructuring – a form of globalisation – that the African economies were most devastated.

Processes associated with economic globalisation triggered the collapse of the economy in Zimbabwe in the 1990s (Bond, 1998). Concurrently, through processes associated with globalisation, some traders were and continue to be able to make a living. The sociology of a post-apartheid Southern Africa involves analysis of issues of connection at economic, social and possibly political levels. These connections exist at the regional level and at the global level.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has played an important role in the integration⁷ of the Southern African region as a whole. For example, through the easing of cross-border movement between the countries of the SADC bloc there has been considerable movement of goods and people within

⁷ Weeks (1996) provides a short but cogent account of economic integration in the SADC region and how the World Bank used this economic integration to promote neo-liberal economic restructuring in the region.

the region. Since becoming a member of the SADC bloc in 1994, South Africa has become an economic and political powerhouse in the region and attracts economic migrants not only from across the Southern African region but also from the African continent at large. Research on globalisation and economic regionalism has to be grounded in the dynamics involved in some of these processes. South Africa is also an important node in the migration of, for example, qualified African professionals in the Southern African region and on the continent as whole. These professionals sometimes migrate to South Africa where many global companies operate. After working and gaining experience in South Africa, they move on to other locations outside the continent, such as Europe and North America.

This study follows in the footsteps of works like the collaborative *Grounding Globalization* by Webster, Lambert, Bezuidenhout (2008) and *Global Ethnography* by Burawoy et al (2000). These works essentially put a “human face” on processes of globalisation. The first work “grounds” globalisation by analysing how workers in Australia, South Africa and South Korea deal with the growing insecurity associated with global restructuring in white goods⁸ manufacturing plants. The authors demonstrate the variable responses in different societies to similar processes of globalisation. The second work utilises case studies from Brazil, Hungary, Ireland and a host of other countries, and considers how globalisation affects diverse groups of people such as breast cancer activists,

⁸ The term “white goods” generally refers to the appliances used for house keeping. They used to be painted only in white hence “white goods”. However, now a range of colours exist but the use of the term persists.

environmental groups and software engineers in what the authors dub a “post-modern world”.

Generally, globalisation as a process allows ease of movement of goods, money and in some cases people not only between regional countries but also globally. Indeed, emigration is one form of extraversion whereby African countries are inserting themselves into the international economic system (Bayart, 2000). Besides migration, legal or illegal, African countries are also inserting themselves into the international system through their participation in illegal activities such as trafficking in narcotics and smuggling of “blood diamonds” and weapons (Bayart, 2000; Nordstrom, 2004, 2007). It is important then to recognise that in a global era, (global) space is a “product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005: 9). At the same time space, in such a global moment, is constantly being constructed and reconstructed (ibid).

So while processes of globalisation are limiting they can also be enabling in that they facilitate some level of economic exchange. In the Southern African context informal traders can move within the countries of the region to source goods. This does not mean that this movement is always unfettered. Human movement has its own spatial challenges. Traders have to deal with immigration and customs regulations in Zimbabwe and similar regulations in the countries that they visit. They have to negotiate entry and exit with these gatekeepers, who can deny them entry into “their territory” and may use the “plight” of traders for their own personal gain. For example, gatekeepers may want favours, financial or otherwise, from the traders.

This study analyses the lives of four types of traders at an informal market: clothes and shoe traders; DVD and video game traders; arts and crafts traders; and second-hand book traders. The choice of these types of traders was based on the fact that they sold the most commonly available goods at the market. Informal traders and their activities connect to the global in a variety of ways. This is a form of extraversion which looks outward to the global in search of ways to make a living, particularly in an economy in crisis. While these connections to the global are structurally unequal, they are an alternative way of conceptualising globalisation. Informal traders responded to the socio-economic crisis by engaging in activities that may in some instances be connected to this global level. The two different ways of conceptualising this connection to the global are illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Typology of globalisation among informal traders

Type of globalisation	Goods
Localisation of the global	Clothes and shoes DVDs and video games
Globalisation of the local	Arts and crafts Second-hand books

Commodities like clothes and shoes with production sites in the East and DVDs and video games from the West and in some cases the East⁹ are sold on the local Zimbabwe market. This is what I term the “localisation of the global”. On the other hand, arts and crafts and second-hand books that are sourced locally are sold regionally and in some cases internationally. I term this the “globalisation of

⁹ The visual content is mainly developed in the West – for example, in Hollywood in the United States – and pirated through the internet by networks based in some countries in the East such as China.

the local”. Essentially these two types of globalisation illustrate responses to the failure of the Zimbabwean economy. Economic crises in some developing countries across the globe were triggered by the structural adjustment programmes carried out in the developing world in the 1980s and 1990s, which were largely under the aegis of the World Bank and the IMF. Zimbabwe went through a period of restructuring, and the consequences were deleterious, particularly for poor people. Economic restructuring also connected developing world countries as wealth flowed from their coffers in the form of balance of payments to institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF based in the global North.

Bayart (2000: 227) maintains that “financial extraversion can take the form of direct financial aid by friendly governments and multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank, the IMF and the European Development Fund”. In some cases it can take the “guise” of structural adjustment aid (Bayart, 2000). As indicated earlier, in the developing world we have seen local populations dealing innovatively with the challenges emanating from the restructuring of economies. By engaging in informal economic activities, poor people in the developing world were confronting head-on the challenges emanating from a World Bank-IMF led attempt to insert Africa and the developing world into the world economy.

Economic involution triggered by World Bank and IMF policies, and later worsened by economic mismanagement, propelled Zimbabweans to migrate throughout the region and to other international destinations in search of better livelihoods. In the case of traders, travel to those countries where they could source goods cheaply continues to be an important way to survive. These traders contend with many challenges as they travel within the region; for example, the

xenophobic violence in May 2008 in South African targeting largely foreign-born nationals demonstrates some of these challenges (Pillay, 2009). The xenophobic violence had antecedents in other smaller, less publicised incidents in some of the country's provinces (Nyamjoh, 2006). For a while during and after the xenophobic violence, some of the traders interviewed stated that they stopped travelling to South Africa to source goods because they feared for their lives. Curtailed movement had enormous negative impacts on their ability to make a living.

It is estimated that there are some 25 000 informal traders “on the books” in SADC (Keepile and Kadida, 2009), where the informal economy continues to be a flash point of contestation and sometimes outright conflict between informal traders and municipal and national authorities. There are many such cases in other parts of Africa and throughout much of the developing world in general. For example, in its March 2009 newsletter, StreetNet International¹⁰ reported on the decision to relocate some of the informal traders at the Warwick Market in Durban, South Africa (Roberts, 2009). The decision was made by city officials without consulting the traders themselves, leading to outcries from the affected traders.

In a synthesis of studies focusing on street trading and other informal activities in six African countries (Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana and Zimbabwe), one analyst concluded that authorities in urban areas in these countries made by-laws arbitrarily, resulting in inappropriate laws that

¹⁰ StreetNet is an international alliance of street trader and hawker organizations launched in Durban, November 2002.

continued to be an obstacle to the traders (Mitullah, 2003). The author asserts, with reference to local authorities, that:

Most of them use out-dated restrictive policies, by-laws and regulations originally intended to control and regulate the growth of indigenous enterprises. The restrictions make vending principally illegal, and view vendors as responsible [for] making cities dirty, obstructing traffic and therefore a public nuisance. Such provisions and perceptions were for dealing with cities planned for colonial governors. The policies did not provide for any trade within the Central Business District [CBD], and most street trading activities that take place within the CBD had no legal provisions. The policies did not appreciate the role of street vending in an urban economy (Mitullah, 2003: 10).

The case of Zambia,¹¹ where there has been a “love-hate” relationship between traders and authorities over the years, also demonstrates the contestations that are involved when it comes to informal economic activity in some African countries. In a fascinating analysis of the situation in Zambia, Hansen (2004: 77) calls “not for an iron fist of control actions to be applied across the economic board, but a policy that is flexible enough to reckon with the distinct needs of some of the many diverse branches of activity conducted on the streets”. This clarion call could apply to most governments in Southern Africa. In a globalised or post-modern world in which there continues to be a restructuring of the world of work, informal economic activities “from below” may very well hold the key to up-lifting the standards of living in both the global South and North.

Governments need to take a much more progressive, less elitist perspective on informal trading that does not view informal traders as harbingers of chaos responsible for defacing the modern city. Rather, they can and do contribute to

¹¹ During the early years of Chiluba’s presidency the authorities extended a friendly hand towards traders. However, the situation changed later on. For example, in April and May 1999 there were major crackdowns on street vendors in Zambia.

income-earning activities that provide goods and services to the city's inhabitants. There will always be legitimate contestations about the use of space in African cities. However, these claims to the use of city space by the well-off and powerful on the one hand and by the poor and less powerful on the other can be better managed. This will involve putting in place much more innovative, less parochial legislation which balances the interests of all stakeholders. The poor and the well-off do have equally legitimate claims to the use of urban space. In the case of the poor in the developing world in general and Zimbabwe in particular, informal economic activities such as trading at flea markets are a protective "moat" that individuals use to shield themselves against the tide of economic involution.

1.4 Research methods and sampling

There are specific problems of sampling and researching those who are informally employed (Gaughan and Fermean, 1987; Portes and Sassen-Koob, 1987; Pratt, 1987). One analyst has maintained that it is very difficult to establish whether or not a person is truly informally employed (Jurik, 1998). It has been suggested by another author that "an attempt to measure ... social phenomena whose *raison d'être* is to defy observations is fraught with empirical difficulties" (Feige, 1990: 113). All research, whether it is quantitative or qualitative, is fraught with its own problems. There are issues of generalisability, validity and representativity to be considered.

Informal economic activities are very prevalent in African cities, to which historically increasing numbers of individuals have migrated for better economic opportunities (Rakodi, 1995). Harare reveals the possibly contradictory nature of

government actions when it comes to the informal economy, for example, in the case of the clean-up exercise, Operation Murambatsvina. In previous years local government turned a blind eye or even supported informal economic activities in the city but during the clean up exercise attacked and destroyed some of them (Mlambo, 2008).

This study uses the extended case study method at a flea market in urban Harare. The method as expounded by Burawoy (1998, 2000) seeks to do four things. Firstly, it seeks to extend the researcher into the world of the participants. Secondly, it extends observations over time and space. Thirdly, it extends out from micro-processes to macro-forces, tracing the source of small differences from “the space-time rhythms of the site to the geographical and historical context of the field” (Burawoy, 1998: 19). Lastly, it seeks to reconstruct theory, looking for theory’s refutation and not its confirmation.

This four-pronged method had several implications for the study. Firstly, extending into the world of the participants meant becoming familiar with the entrepreneurs at the markets. This involved both semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Field interviews involved “...asking questions, listening, expressing interest, and recording what was said” (Neuman, 1997: 371). The field interview is a “joint production of a researcher and the respondent ... where respondents are active participants whose insights, feelings, and cooperation are essential parts of a discussion that reveals subjective meanings” (Neuman, 1997: 371). Field interviews include a mutual sharing of experience, and the researcher might reveal his or her background to build trust and encourage openness from the respondents (Neuman, 1997).

Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection. Anonymity of all the respondents in this study is maintained by use of pseudonyms. A sample of 70 “own account” informal traders at the market was interviewed and the dissertation largely reports on and analyses these findings. “Own account workers” are those workers in the informal economy who “do not hire others and who contribute both their own capital and labour to the enterprise (either a single person operation or a family business/farm)” (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2132. Such traders are likely to have more “expert” knowledge on the dynamics of sourcing goods since they usually source them on their own. They also have better knowledge of the dynamics of trading at the market as they normally attend to the stalls themselves. In addition, own account traders come to the market much more regularly and are easier to follow up on. They spend most of their time at the market it is also easier to establish meaningful relationships with them. These issues informed the choice of own account workers at the flea market as interviewees.

Selected key informants with expert knowledge on informal economic activities in Zimbabwe were also interviewed. These included academics at a local university, especially policy experts and researchers. Their understanding of the informal economy as a “soak-pit” for the unemployed or a necessary social evil was probed, particularly in relation to events like Operation Murambatsvina. The Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) has been prominent in advocating the rights of informal traders (especially following Operation Murambatsvina), and some of the organisation’s representatives were interviewed.

Social research also involves some “...form of participant observation because we cannot study the social world without being part of it” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 249). The researcher in participant observation joins respondents for “...extended periods of time as well as in different places” (Burawoy, 1998). Observations and experiential knowledge gathered from immersion in the world of informality are used in this study. Immersion into the world of informal trading entailed helping out at some of the stalls at the flea market. Observations enabled the gathering of information on some of the hidden aspects of the informal economy, like the handling of stolen goods. Through observations, information issues such as the relationship between informal traders and their customers – for instance, payment procedures (whether credit is allowed and to what type of customers) – and negotiation of prices was also gathered. There were also brief observations of the transactions between traders and the shop owners in Johannesburg where goods are sourced. I accompanied some of the male traders when they searched for merchandise in Johannesburg, and engaged in informal conversations with some of the suppliers.

Secondly, extending observations over time and space meant ensuring that the study was sensitive to the connectedness of events occurring at different moments and in spatially different locations. It also meant taking into consideration the social and historical context in which informal economic activities take place. For example, comparative research data can be gathered from primary sources, secondary sources, running records and recollections (Neuman, 1997). Primary sources consist of “letters, diaries, newspapers, novels, articles of clothing, photographs and so forth of those who have lived in the past and

survived to the present” (Neuman, 1997: 396). Secondary sources are the “writings of specialist historians who have spent years studying primary sources” (Neuman, 1997: 398). This study drew on primary and secondary sources. Running records “consist of files or existing statistical documents maintained by organizations” and recollections “consist of words or writings of individuals about their past lives or experiences” (Neuman, 1997: 398).

Archival newspaper articles were analysed to trace the trajectory of informal economic activities in Zimbabwe from a historical perspective as well as debates following Operation Murambatsvina. Documents from the post-independence period were mainly used. An extensive review of the literature on the informal economy from a global and particularly Zimbabwean context was undertaken so as to illuminate the changing perspectives and the ideological contestations as far as informality is concerned.

Thirdly, extending micro-processes to macro-forces involved relating the individual experiences of entrepreneurs to structural conditions such as restructuring and unemployment. The study, for example, considers how global forces¹² in the form of ESAP in the 1990s shaped the development of informal economic activities in Zimbabwe in general and more specifically in Harare. Added to this is the contemporary environment of political repression, the economic crisis and the general social disorganisation which has been shaping life among the populace and the traders in important ways. As Burawoy and Verdery (1999: 14) maintain, “the economy is always thoroughly embedded in a variety of

¹² In their volume, *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*, Burawoy *et al.* (2000) consider these global forces and how individuals in different localities engage with and are affected by them.

non-economic practices” and there “can be no pure economy”. “What exists is a “political and cultural economy” (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 14).

Lastly, extending theory meant engaging with globalisation theories and the theory on economic involution and then re-casting these theories in a new dimension.

The approach used for the study meant linking structure, process and meaning. This involved locating Zimbabwe in a long-term historical perspective, what Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) refer to as “the historical imagination”, and at the same time geographically grounding informality in the experiences and understandings of a sample of informal traders and entrepreneurs. C. Wright Mills (1959: 5), in his classic *The Sociological Imagination*, notes that the “sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals”. It enables us to “grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (Mills, 1959: 6). This study “reaches out” for this “sociological imagination” and considers how the lives of informal traders (their biographies) intersect with “historical change” and “institutional contradictions.” Mills maintains that there are “structural transformations” which affect the biographies of particular individuals and the sociological imagination takes these transformations into consideration (Mills, 1959).

The lives of informal traders, then, cannot be fully understood without considering the economic, political and social conditions within Zimbabwe. Their lives are embedded within these structural conditions. The lives of traders and their informal economic activities were analysed in terms of issues like the impact

of state policy, the social characteristics of the traders, the kinds of goods and services provided at the market, the social ties and the social networks in which the traders are embedded, the income levels, the skills among traders, and the work histories and experiences of the traders, particularly the degree of “churning”. Goods and money also move between the formal and the informal economies.

The sampling was a mixture of purposive sampling and snowballing.¹³ For instance, it was necessarily purposive to cover the heterogeneity of types of goods sold at the market and to also include both males and females and the young and old. As stated earlier, the traders interviewed were those who sold the four most common types of goods available at the market. Some of the traders were also important in recruiting other traders for interviews (snowballing). These traders referred me to other traders within their social networks. All in all, 70 “own account” informal traders were interviewed at the market; 46 were male and 24 female. All the 12 DVDs and video games traders at the market were male. There were only 2 female traders out of a total of 11 traders in the arts and crafts trade. Of all the 10 second hand book traders at the market, only 3 were female. These factors accounted for the larger number of males in the sample. Among the clothes and shoe traders 18 males and 19 females were interviewed. The period in which the research was carried out was marred by political hostilities and violence in the country. Thus traders were suspicious about my identity. Some thought that I worked for the police and some flatly refused to be interviewed. Once relationships were established with some of the traders, they facilitated access to

¹³ Both purposive sampling and snowballing are non-probability forms of sampling (Neuman, 1997).

other traders whom they knew. They “put in a good word” for me. The more time I spent at the market, the more the traders opened up to me regarding their “world”.

Penetrating the field involved getting to know some of the traders on a very personal basis. I have maintained contacts with some of the traders and sometimes meet with them on the occasions that they come to Johannesburg to source goods. This indicates how relationships of trust established in the field can actually grow beyond the field. In some cases I found myself sharing food with some of the male traders. I also found myself helping out at some of the stalls and on some occasions attending to customers when traders ran personal errands for long periods of time during the day.

During fieldwork I also found myself being “fashion conscious”. My friends have always accused me of being “preppy”. I had to tone down my style of dress but at the same time remain “smart”. For example, it was important to appear stylish among the clothing traders; this was viewed as one of the ways of attracting customers to stalls. Most other traders emphasised that it was important to be smart every day and to wear “nice” clothes. I found myself having to toe this fine line by learning from the traders themselves. At some point I was even a customer to some of the traders as I “updated” my wardrobe. Purchasing goods from some of the traders was also a tactical way of establishing rapport with them, especially the male traders.

This study acknowledges the limitations of research that uses non-probability sampling methods. For instance, it is important not to generalise to the whole population (Neuman, 1997). The research method used aims for a textured

and nuanced understanding of the nature of informal economic activities and the lives of informal traders.

1.5 Organisation of the dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews some of the literature on the informal “economy” and considers the various debates dealing with its origins. It considers the contested nature of the informal sector/economy concept. The chapter also looks into concepts such as economic involution, commodity chains, social networks and globalisation. In the process the chapter maps out the theoretical approach that is utilised in the rest of the dissertation. The theoretical approach that is developed in this chapter has several elements. For example, informality and formality have to be understood as existing within a single economy that is deeply “structurally segmented”. The other issue is that an understanding of the lives of the informal traders and their responses to economic involution can only be fully grasped by considering how the precarious lifestyles they lead are embedded within Zimbabwe’s social, economic and political conditions. By considering theories of economic involution the argument here is that traders respond to the economic crisis by engaging in activities that are not inward looking and of a subsistence domestic nature, but in fact are outward looking and have “global” connections. In other words there is “extraversion”.

Chapter 3 maps the trajectory of what has come to be commonly known as the Zimbabwean crisis. This chapter essentially charts the social, economic and political fortunes of the country. To reiterate, Mills (1959: 5) states that the “sociological imagination allows its possessor to understand the larger historical

scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals”. In terms of this, chapter 3 maps Zimbabwe’s historical scene, especially the trajectory of the political economy. This sets the terra firma on which to explain the lives of the traders in subsequent chapters. The argument is that a majority of the populace were propelled into informal economic activities as result of the economic structural adjustment regime. The “scaling back” of the state also meant that the populace could not depend on it for social provisioning in times of need, unleashing a crisis of social reproduction. This chapter sets the scene for the argument that connections exist between the structural conditions in Zimbabwe and the particular lives of traders. Here, history and biography intersect.

Chapter 4 reports on primary data. Firstly, the chapter briefly describes the informal market which is the focus of the study and contextualises it within the informal segment of the economy and other informal markets in urban Harare and the broader Zimbabwean crisis. The chapter then identifies the four types of traders based on the goods they sell. Thirdly, there is a brief discussion of the socio-economic characteristics of the customers that frequent the market. Finally, the greater part of the chapter reports on and analyses the socio-economic characteristics of traders based largely on data gathered from the 70 “own account workers”. The majority of trades lived a very precarious existence in which they were individually responsible for their social reproduction. Sometimes they were unable to sell anything at the market for days or weeks, which further worsened their social and economic conditions. Their ‘savings’ were stored in the goods they sold at the market, and most of them did not have any assets to fall back on.

In looking at the lives of traders, the chapter briefly considers the notions of social capital and social networks and sets the scene for the analysis in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 considers in more detail the utility and applicability of the notion of social networks in understanding how traders “get the goods” to the flea market for purposes of trading. The social network concept is the central analytical pin of this chapter. Informal traders interact with customers, other traders, friends and kin in various ways, and in the process they produce social capital. This chapter focuses on the sourcing of goods by those traders who sell clothes and shoes, and those who sell DVDs and video games. I argue that the global is localised (“localisation of the global”) by the traders to reinforce the argument that the traders are not globally disconnected at all but are actually connected in a different, albeit unequal way. This chapter also illustrates that the informal economic activities of traders have regional and global extensions. These activities are not inward looking, primitivist domestic activities. They are outward looking and connect to the global. This is a process of extraversion, as stated earlier.

Chapter 6 follows the same analytical framework as Chapter 5 but shifts focus to the case of arts and crafts traders and the second-hand book traders. Here, the argument is that the activities of some of the informal traders link up to the global through what I term a “globalisation of the local’ as opposed to the “localisation of the global” referred to in Chapter 5. This chapter again illustrates again how the activities of seemingly disconnected informal traders connect to the global. Social networks are also shown to be important in understanding how the

traders “get the goods” to the market and to their customers. The chapter shows that informality has not only encroached on the world of work but also the remitting of money between individuals in different countries. This demonstrates the informalisation of the social welfare economy which has been taking place not only in Zimbabwe but also across the globe as the burden of social reproduction has been “downloaded” back onto individuals. This has had particularly deleterious impacts on the poor.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, revisits and ties together the central argument of the dissertation. The conclusion reached is that informal economic activities, as a response to the country’s challenges, are largely a precarious and insecure existence. These economic activities depend on and are embedded in the various social networks and social ties based on trust, reciprocity and cooperation among traders. At the same time these activities are in some instances the conduits of globalisation, even if in an unequal manner. It is flawed to think of the African continent only in negative terms, as an abyss or a black hole. The nature of the interactions between the African continent and the global North are symptomatic of the unequal and exploitative nature of the insertion of the continent, and the developing world in general, into the international economic system.

Chapter 2

The Theoretical Approach

2.1 Introduction

This chapter maps out some of the theoretical issues relevant to an analysis of the research context, the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. It will argue that informal economic activities are highly heterogeneous and are structurally connected to formal economic activities. The contested nature of the notion of the “informal sector” and later, the “informal economy” will be examined and the chapter will trace the contours of the development of the concept in the literature. This chapter reviews some of the literature and concurrently develops the theoretical approach utilised in the dissertation. The informal economy and the formal economy are not two separate economies, but a single deeply segmented economy. Rather than seeing informal economic activities as being at the margins, informality forms the centre of survival in the lives of the Zimbabwean populace. Consequently, “the economic involutory moment” in Zimbabwe has resulted in responses that are connected to the Southern African and African region, and to the globe. Instead of a retreat to a “primitivist” domestic economy, this chapter argues, among other things, that there has been in some instances a regional and global extension of informal economic activities over time and space. Social networks play an important role in

this extension of informal economic activities regionally and globally in addition to their important role at the local level.

In developing the theoretical approach that ties the dissertation together, the chapter argues that value chain analysis is a useful conceptual schema that can be used to demonstrate not only the movement of commodities across the globe and the inequalities and socio-economic exclusion involved in globalisation, but also the concentration of market power. Dynamics in the global economy, like the increased use of outsourced and flexible labour, and relocation to cheaper sites of production, have resulted in the informalisation of work. Workers are becoming increasingly insecure as capital searches for cheaper and cheaper labour, and those who lose the permanent, more ‘stable’ jobs, sometimes have to resort to “eking out a living” in the so-called informal economy.

2.2 The informal sector concept and its contested nature

The “informal sector” is a contested concept. Researchers and policy makers who apply the concept employ discrepant definitions which are so often incoherent that the usefulness of the concept has been called into question (Moser, 1978; Crow, 1989; Scott, 1991; Rakowski, 1994; Roberts, 1994). A panoply of terms has been used to describe informal economic activities, including: the shadow economy (Frey, Weck and Pommerehne, 1982; Cassel and Cichy, 1986), the black economy (Dilnot and Morris, 1981), the irregular economy (Ferman and Ferman, 1973), the underground economy (Simon and Witte, 1982; Houston, 1987), and the subterranean economy (Gutmann, 1977, 1980).

The concept of the informal sector was introduced into international usage in 1972 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its report on Kenya, and later followed by Hart (1973)¹⁴ in his work on the poor urban populace in Ghana. Informality was seen as characterised by “ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale operations, labour intensive and adaptable technology, skills acquired outside of the formal sector and unregulated and competitive markets” (ILO, 1972: 2). Some authors assert that a central feature of the informal sector is that it is “unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated” (Castells and Portes, 1989: 12).

The 1993 International Conference of Labour Statisticians defined the informal sector in terms of “the characteristics of the enterprises in which activities take place rather than the characteristics of the persons involved or their jobs” (Samson, 2004: 6). In 2002 the Committee on the Informal Economy at the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference opted for the term “informal economy” on the grounds that it could “accommodate the diversity of enterprises and workers who are not covered by formal arrangements, and not confined to any specific sector of economic activity but cut across many sectors” (ILO, 2002b: 53). In the conclusions of the conference the term “informal economy” was used to refer to:

activities that are not included in the law, which means that they are operating within the formal reach of the law ... or they are not covered in practice, which means that although they are operating within the formal reach of the law, the law is not applied or enforced; or the law discourages

¹⁴ Though credited to anthropologist Keith Hart, who popularized the concept, the ILO had alluded to it in the 1972 report on Kenya.

compliance because it is burdensome, or imposes excessive costs (ILO, 2002b: 53).

According to Samson (2004: 6) the notion of the “informal economy” amplifies the concept of informality to include both “enterprise and employment relations”, and therefore captures the “totality and heterogeneity of the informal economy”. The notion of heterogeneity is important in that informal economic activity is made up of a variety of activities (Devey, Skinner and Valodia, 2006). Informal economic activities are also highly stratified, and the study will demonstrate this.

In the 1970s the *dualist school* called for a conceptualisation of informality that disconnected the informal sector from the formal sector, and saw the former as a distinct and separate entity (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). The crux of dualist argument is that informal economic activities are made up of small family firms which rely on family labour, are labour-intensive, have low levels of capital input, use unsophisticated technology and have very low levels of productivity (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). These informal economic activities are seen as forming part of the second economy. In contradistinction to this, the formal level of production is capital-intensive, uses sophisticated technology, is made up of large capitalist firms and has high levels of productivity (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). Despite acknowledging that the informal economy acts as a safety net for the unemployed and the dispossessed from the formal sector (ILO, 1972; Senthuraman, 1976; Tokman, 1978; Pahl, 1987), the major criticism of this school has been its continual use of a dual, informal versus formal, conceptualisation (Castells and Portes, 1989).

The approach followed in this dissertation concurs with the view that:

The concept of a second economy is a metaphor that should not be taken literally to mean that there are two geographically separate economies. Instead, the notion of a second economy is best seen as a form of shorthand to describe the deeply segmented nature of an extremely unequal economy (Webster, Benya *et al*, and 2008:7).¹⁵

Most importantly there has been a realisation that a great deal of movement of not only goods but also of workers themselves occurs between the formal and the informal realms of the economy, a phenomenon known as “churning” (Devey, Skinner and Valodia, 2006).

The *structuralist school* in the 1970s and 1980s “rectified” the disconnection problematic within dualist theorisation. Structuralist scholars conceptualised the informal sector as being made up of economic units subordinated by larger firms which are always looking at ways of reducing input and labour costs and therefore intensify the competitive advantage of larger capitalist firms (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). The structuralists, unlike the dualists, acknowledge not only that the informal and formal co-exist, but that the relationship is one of interdependence of the different forms of production (Moser, 1978; Henry, 1987; Castells and Portes, 1989). For example, large capitalist firms, which are capital and technology intensive, subcontract some of their activities to much smaller labour-intensive firms (Castells and Portes, 1989; Rakowski, 1994). Hiring informal labour is seen by formal enterprises as a way to cut on labour and other associated costs, and it is argued that it leads to the lowering of industry wage standards (Portes and Walton, 1981). Evidence does show that there has been an increase in the number of home workers who are

¹⁵ Edward Webster, Asanda Benya, Xoliswa Dilata, Katherine Joynt, Kholofelo Ngoepe and Mariane Tsoeu 2008 “Making Visible the invisible: Confronting the Challenges of South Africa’s Decent Work Deficit”.

subcontracted by big firms in Australia, Britain, India and South Africa, among others (WIEGO, 2006a).

In the 1980s and 1990s the *legalist school* argued that the cumbersome and expensive nature of operating and registering formally is the main reason why entrepreneurs move into the informal sector (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). De Soto (1989) is one of the main proponents of this argument, following the studies on Peru by the Institute of Liberty and Democracy which document the circuitous process of registering formally in operations like street trading and public transport. The proponents of this approach have gone on to emphasise that among the informal traders lies the hope of competitive capitalist development if the elimination of the bureaucratic maze and costs associated with legalising business operations takes place (De Soto, 1989, 2000; Rakowski, 1994). De Soto's approach has been criticised for not recognising the complexity of informal property regimes and how formalising them could actually disadvantage the poor (Cousins *et al* 2005)¹⁶. Perhaps, those in the informal may actually have more to lose if they upgrade themselves to operating formally.

Another approach which concurs with De Soto is the *microenterprise development approach* which sees "microenterprises as synonymous with informality, poverty and entrepreneurship" (Rakowski, 1994: 43). Promoters of microenterprises are non-governmental organisations, international donor and development agencies, and private business groups working in poverty alleviation who, like De Soto, see procedures to register formally as cumbersome (Rakowski,

¹⁶ Ben Cousins, Tessa Cousins, Donna Hornby, Rosalie Kingwill, Lauren Royston and Warren Smit, in a paper titled "Will Formalising Property Rights Reduce Poverty in South Africa's Second Economy?", questioning the mythologies of Hernando Desoto.

1994). Their approach has been to level the playing field, and to expand jobs, income and productivity among entrepreneurs through unveiling credit facilities and providing training in management and accounting for the poor. Criticisms of the microenterprise approach include its neo-liberal inclinations like the promotion of deregulation, tax reform, the general emphasis on economic efficiency and the “menu approach” which just lists recommendations to promote microenterprises while lacking rigorous analysis in some cases (Rakowski, 1994).

There has also been the *illegalist school* of thought, popularised by neo-classical and neo-liberal economists over the decades (WIEGO, 2006b). This school of thought argues that there is a conscious and intentional motive among informal entrepreneurs to avoid taxation and regulations and, in certain cases, to engage in criminal activities. The main argument is that informal operators want to evade the costs of operating formally (Maloney, 2004). This debate invokes images of a vibrant, illegal, underground economy.

The fundamental and most important *shift in the debate* between 1983 and 1994 was the shift from viewing an expanding informal sector as an indicator of the failure of development paradigms to an emphasis on the informal sector as an asset or solution to economic activities and poverty (Rakowski, 1994). Integrally linked to this development is the realisation that informal economic activity is “here to stay” and that it is expanding with modern, industrial growth (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). This position implies an indictment of some of the actions of the Zimbabwean state, in which it destroyed emerging businesses belonging to informal entrepreneurs.

Recent thinking, which has roots in the post-1990 period, has gone further to argue that informal economic activity is in fact made up of a wide range of economic occupations ranging from casual day labour to “emerging new occupations” like temporary part-time jobs to home working in the high-tech and footwear industries (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). Informal economic activities are made up of non-standard wage workers as well as entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals who are producing legal goods and services, albeit through irregular or unregulated means (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004).

Informal employment does not only consist of self-employment but also includes wage employment (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004). Most recent thinking has also prioritised the need for an *integration of the different schools* in a conceptualisation of informal economic activities and to identify how the differing elements of for example the dualist, structuralist, legalist and illegalist theories are appropriate for an understanding of particular segments of informal employment in certain contexts (WIEGO, 2006b). Essentially, this is a call for an eclectic kind of theoretical application of the various strands of conceptualising informality which have come out over the years that take cognisance of the data which shows the increase in informality.

Globally, informal economic activity accounts for more than one third of non-agricultural employment (ILO, 2002a). The informal economy is said to make up over 70 per cent of non-agricultural employment on the African continent (WIEGO, 2006a: 1). Taking South Africa out of the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) figures, for example, increases the percentage of non-agricultural informal employment from 72 per cent to 78 per cent (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006:

2133). Informal employment makes up 30 to 50 per cent and 50 to 80 per cent of the non-agricultural employment in South East Asia and South Asia respectively (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2133). Data from Latin America and the Caribbean shows that it makes up over 55 per cent of non-agricultural employment, and in southern Europe and western Europe it makes up 24 per cent and 10 per cent respectively (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2133). The North American figures show that in Canada, informal employment accounts for nearly 18 per cent of total employment and in the United States just over 8 per cent of total employment is made up of the informally employed (WIEGO, 2006a: 1).

The data shows greater participation of women in informal economic activities, especially in the developing world. The exception seems to be in North Africa where only 43 per cent of women workers are in informal employment (ILO, 2002a: 8). In the developing world over 60 per cent of women workers are found in informal employment [outside agriculture] (ILO, 2002a: 8). In sub-Saharan Africa 84 per cent of women non-agricultural workers are in informal employment, compared to 63 per cent of male non-agricultural workers (ILO, 2002a: 8; Chen, Vanek and Heintz 2006: 2131). The Latin American data shows similar trends, with 58 per cent of non-agricultural workers being women and 48 per cent being men, while the numbers of women and men in informal employment (outside agriculture) in Asia are roughly the same (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2131). The ILO (2002a: 8) indicates that “although women’s labour force participation rates are lower than men’s, the limited data available point to the importance of women in home-based and street vending in the developing

countries”. What is important is that most of this informal work is seasonal, sporadic and lacks substantial benefits.

For this study, informal economic activities will be conceptualised in terms of two criteria. First is the degree of state regulation. Conceptually, the focus is on those economic activities that are not as tightly regulated in terms of formal contracts, labour laws and corporate taxes as in the formal part of the economy. The second criterion relates to the level of social exclusion. The focus will be on the precarious, insecure and vulnerable situation of informal sector workers who have low incomes. They are often the self-employed, or those whose contracts are either non-existent or unstable, and who lack benefits compared to that part of the population employed formally who may have access to pensions and other employment benefits.

To reiterate, in their analysis of work in general, and more specifically work restructuring in post-apartheid South Africa, Von Holdt and Webster (2005) conceptualise the differentiation of work into three distinct zones. The first zone is that of the “core” where workers have access to set wages and to “legislative rights”, the second is what they call the non-core zone where “workers are subject to job insecurity, low wages and alienation at work” and the third zone is the “periphery of unemployment and informal subsistence activities” (Von Holdt and Webster, 2005: 28). The authors conceptualise the last zone as that of precariousness and uncertainty. This study considers the nature of informal economic activities inside the third zone of this conceptual schema.

The case of Zimbabwe at times defies compartmentalisation into this neat box of theory. As a result of the collapse of the formal part of the economy,

increasing numbers of people have been propelled into informality. There has been a contraction of the “core zone” of formal employment, and informal economic activities have become central to the survival of the Zimbabwean populace. Even in the remaining core, wages have become negligible, a problem which is further compounded by hyperinflation, making incomes there grossly inadequate even for basic survival (Chapter 3). The notion of a core does remain important, however, as a heuristic and also for (comparative) analytical purposes.

A rethinking of the concentric zones model conceptualised by Von Holdt and Webster (2005) entails a shift from thinking of informal economic activities as being at the periphery of the “world of work” to seeing them as central to the survival of the majority of the populace. This is the case in Zimbabwe which has been referred to as the “fastest shrinking economy outside of a war zone” (Raftopoulos, 2007b: 36). The situation had a pernicious impact on workers for instance. Raftopoulos (2007b: 36) notes that:

For workers, in particular, the picture since the 1990s has been one of unrelenting decline. Average minimum wages at the end of the 2006 were 16.6% of the Poverty Datum Line, while the share of salaries in Gross Domestic Income declined from an average of 49% during the pre-Economic Structural Adjustment period 1985-90, to 41.5% between 1991-96, dropping further to 29.9% from 1997-2003. Formal employment dropped from 1.4 million in 1998 to approximately 950 000 by 2004. In the last three years indicators have declined further with estimates that 80% of Zimbabweans live below the Poverty Datum Line. Moreover, the monthly wage of a commercial sector worker only covered about 10% of the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe’s basket of household goods in 2007.

In such an environment it becomes important to highlight the centrality of informal economic activities in rethinking the concentric circle model devised by Von Holdt and Webster. Informal economic activities have become the pillar of survival among not only informal traders but also the broader populace, hence our

argument that they can hardly be seen as marginal in the lives of the Zimbabwean populace.

Dual labour market theory (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Saint-Paul, 1997) resembles the model developed by Von Holdt and Webster (2005). Dual labour market theorists divide the labour market into primary, secondary, informal and illegal categories. The primary sector in the dual labour market theorisation corresponds with the core in Von Holdt and Webster's (2005) conceptualisation, and this is where there are regular, wage jobs that are taxed. The secondary sector (corresponding to the non-core) is the sector of less secure jobs which are not so well regulated as in the service economy (Cross and Johnson, 2000). The informal sector, which corresponds to the periphery, is the category of low-wage, low-security, and poorly regulated jobs. Dual labour market theorists go on to add the illegal sector which is where illegal, unregulated criminal activity lies (Cross and Johnson, 2000).

The broad general argument of dual labour market theory is that "...workers have different degrees of access to the labour market" (Cross and Johnson, 2000: 101). Essentially, the dominant, privileged groups in society are able to "...obtain the highest skill and thus control the best positions in the primary sector where they are able to extract the high wages and benefits from employers" while those with lower skills and/or less access, like minorities and women, are propelled into the secondary labour market "...where their lack of control over the workplace leads to lower income and worse working conditions" (Cross and Johnson, 2000: 102).

Recent (marginalised) immigrants, for example, and others who are unable to access the primary and secondary labour markets “...search for opportunities in the informal sector, where ethnic networking can make up for lack of skills related to the local formal labour market” (Cross and Johnson, 2000: 102). The analysis followed here will focus on the informal employment that is largely legal. This includes precarious informal economic activity like street trading, hawking and flea markets. However, the criterion followed in this conceptualisation of informal work is blurred by the fact that precariousness is becoming a common feature of all forms of employment globally.

2.3 Precarious work

The notion of “precarious work” is becoming mainstream in the sociology of work literature, and refers to “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the point of view of the worker” (Kalleberg, 2008: 1). Workers live under the constant threat of job loss and, when experienced, job loss often triggers a domino effect which has an impact on other aspects of life. For example, those who lose their jobs also lose health insurance, have problems paying their mortgages, and may even have to file for bankruptcy (Kalleberg, 2008). The issue is that precarious work, not only creates anxieties and uncertainties among workers concerning their work, but its effects also cascade into non-work-related issues like the family, the community, and into the political realm (Kalleberg, 2008; Webster, Lambert and Bezuindenhout, 2008).

The advent of precarious employment in the formal world of work can be linked to “intensified economic integration” as a result of globalisation which has

led to increased competition across the world (Kalleberg, 2008: 3). There has been a hyper-geographical mobility of capital in recent years, which has meant that sometimes workers are left without jobs, at little or no notice, as capital moves in search of cheaper labour (Harvey, 1990; Carr, Chen and Tate, 2000). There has also been outsourcing to lower wage countries (Lee, 1998; Silver, 2002; Salzinger, 2003; Ngai, 2005; Kalleberg, 2008). Companies have increased their use of less labour-intensive technologies (Harvey, 1990), and where there are labour problems capital simply relocates (“spatial manoeuvre”) to a less tumultuous region (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008). Globally, we can see markers of an increase in the level of precarious formal and informal work.

“Precariousness” is closely related to increasing social and economic insecurity. Across the globe we have witnessed, in recent times, following the Polanyian Great Transformation, a “Second Great Transformation”. This second transformation is an instance of increased social and economic insecurity (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008: vii). Job insecurity is on the rise as global companies have the capability to easily relocate their manufacturing networks, leaving employees with neither jobs nor benefits to fall back on after employment termination. There has been a growth in outsourced and flexible temporary work: work which is “uncertain and unpredictable” and does not have employment benefits like pensions and medical aid among other things (Kalleberg, 2008; Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008). Even in situations of war and reconstruction (e.g. in Iraq), there has been the outsourcing of certain functions (like security), traditionally the responsibility of the state, to private contractors and to private military companies (Klein, 2007). Most of those

employed by these companies have no benefits and, when maimed in the “line of duty”, have to fund health care on their own. With the growth in the level of precarious employment in the formal sector there has also been a concomitant rise in precarious informal employment globally.

In their compelling analysis of economic restructuring in three towns located in South Africa, South Korea and Australia, Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout (2008) chart the impact of increased insecurity among workers in the white goods industry. Their analysis is grounded in global economic dynamics and develops a powerful conceptual schema that illustrates the growing inequalities that come with globalisation. Their analysis illustrates the way in which global companies in the white goods industry like LG and Electrolux have so much power that its effect, as we mentioned earlier, not only cascades into the working relationship but also into non-work aspects of life. As far as the realm of work is concerned, these companies are so powerful that they control the pricing of components supplied to them by the companies to which they outsource this part of the production chain (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008). Consequently, global companies even dictate the type of employment relationship in some of these downstream component industries and they have tremendous power over workplace organising. For example, in the case of Electrolux in Orange, Australia, the authors argue that the company has so much power that it has the “capacity to command and produce space” and to “use geography to reinforce its structural domination over labour” such that this has “further undermined the workers’ belief in the value of unionism, for unions seem paralysed by these changes” (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008: 144).

So while there may have been secure permanent jobs in the “first transformation”, in the current wave of the “second transformation” there has been an accelerated commoditisation of labour, a “fictitious commodity” whose reproduction, Polanyi (2001 [1944]) argues, was never meant for sale on the labour market. As a result countries now compete to have the best, most attractive conditions that can attract direct foreign investment. Workers bear the major brunt of these dynamics in the global economy which have concentrated power in the hands of “the corporation” which is mobile and has no commitments to geographic space, while on the other hand workers have been dispossessed and left with little or no capability to organise effectively in the face of the (almost) inexorable march of capitalism. Globally, previously permanent workers are becoming “contingent” workers, and companies have shifted risk from themselves to employees (Hacker, 2006). There has been a decline in “defined benefit plans (in which the employer absorbs more of the risk than the employee by guaranteeing a certain level of benefits)” (Kalleberg, 2008: 14). This is the age of the “risk society” (Beck, 2000).

Analysts argue that precarious work is increasingly contributing to instability within families, and that there has been a concomitant increase in stress levels and related health problems (Kalleberg, 2000). In the United States, for example, signs of the increase in precariousness include issues like a decline in attachment to employers (Cappelli, 2008; Farber, 2008), increasing long-term unemployment (Mishel, Bernstein and Shierholz, 2009), growth in perceived job insecurity among workers (Fullerton and Wallace, 2005; Kalleberg, 2008), the accelerated growth in non-standard and contingent work (Kalleberg, 2000, 2001;

Kalleberg and Marsden, 2005), and, as mentioned earlier, the displacement of risk from employers to employees (Kalleberg, 2008). The growth of contingent, temporary work has also been found in countries like Australia, South Korea and South Africa (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008), with consequences like violence and family instability in some of the country cases.

In the late 1990s, the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Musasa Project (which deals with gender violence) became “concerned about the escalation of gender violence especially in relation to economic stresses on men and women in households and families” (Gaidzanwa, 1998: 24). This was linked to the advent of structural adjustment which resulted in unemployment in several sectors of the economy. What is clear is that across the globe, in the past two decades or so and presently, many people have become dispossessed and live in very desperate circumstances. Increasingly, the differences in incomes between highly paid top company executives with access to stock options and a long list of benefits, and those of the contingent, casualised and temporary workers who have to eke out a living in a “new economy”, with unstable insecure forms of employment, are becoming glaringly divergent.

This is a new and unprecedented era of social inequality, marginalisation and social exclusion (Kalleberg, 2008; Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008). It is in the global South that poverty is estimated to be at its most severe. For example, in a 2004 report the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) indicated that “between 28% and 38% of the absolute poor population in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be chronically poor, totalling between 90 and 120 million people” (CPRC, 2004: 24). In an analysis of poverty in 22 sub-Saharan

African countries for which data was available the CPRC (2004: 12), using the US\$1/day figure as an indicator of poverty, concluded, “Of these 22 countries, approximately 310 million people live in 12 desperately deprived countries, about 150 million of whom live on less than US\$1/day”. In South Asia, with its high population levels, the number of chronically poor people was estimated at 135 to 190 million people in 2004 (CPRC, 2004: 24).

Across the globe, migrant workers are unable to afford the very commodities they produce. This situation has been compounded by the global recession which has resulted in contraction of the disposable income among workers in general. Increasingly, there is dissatisfaction among workers with their standard of life, which is exacerbated by glaring income inequalities across the globe. Precarious work, it is argued, differs across countries, “depending on their stage in development, social institutions, cultures, and other national differences” (Kalleberg, 2008: 28). For example, in advanced industrialised countries precarious work is evidenced by wage inequalities in the formal economy, unequal levels of insecurity, and unequal levels of vulnerability to job dismissal (Maurin and Postel-Vinay, 2005). In the developing, transitional economies, precariousness is seen as more prevalent in the informal economy (Kalleberg, 2008). However, as mentioned earlier on, it is clear that in the present conjuncture precariousness prevails in both formal and informal work right across the globe.

An analysis of the case of Zimbabwe reveals aspects of this precariousness among those in both the formal and informal segments of the economy. Their situation has not been made any easier by recent economic problems, especially hyperinflation which has wiped out savings. The value of pensions has gone down

dramatically because of currency fluctuations, which means that these pensions are of little value in terms of their contribution to the quality of life. At the local level we see the populace engaging in economic activities that have some linkages to the world economy as a response to the involution of the Zimbabwean economy. The political dispensation in Zimbabwe has resulted in the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the elite, who have access to the patronage system of the state (Saul, 2005). Glaring social inequalities are visible between the majority of Zimbabweans and a small clique of elites who have captured and “privatised” the state and use it to socially, politically and economically exclude the rest of the populace while they enrich themselves (Raftopoulos, 2004). If anything, the fruits of the struggle promised to all at independence have not materialised for the majority of the populace.

2.4 Involution, the black hole thesis and social embeddedness

Economic involution in Zimbabwe has resulted in individuals who previously held secure formal jobs having to engage in informal economic activities in order to survive in Zimbabwe’s unprecedented hyperinflationary environment. Chapter 3 will trace the contours of the economic involutory moment in Zimbabwe’s economic trajectory. As a result of the collapsed Zimbabwean economy, a large proportion of the populace is unemployed and lives in poverty. Current estimates show that 80 per cent of Zimbabweans may be living below the poverty datum line (Raftopoulos, 2007b).

The notion of economic involution refers to the collapse of the productive industrial and agricultural sectors (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina, 2000). The

theoretical task here is to establish a framework that considers the utility of the notion of involution and, if need be, to extend the concept and apply it to the Zimbabwean context. The concept of agricultural involution is used by Geertz (1963) to refer to the way in which Javanese peasants responded to the intensification of sugar production (the estate economy) for export purposes by the Dutch. Geertz identifies three characteristics of agricultural involution among the Javanese. Firstly, as the peasants were driven into forced labour or had their land expropriated for sugar production, they intensified their own production of rice. “The Javanese could not themselves become part of the estate economy, and they could not transform their general pattern of already intensive farming in an extensive direction, for they lacked capital ... and were administratively barred from the bulk of their own frontier...” (Geertz, 1963: 80).

Secondly, facing the “...pressure of increasing numbers and the limited resources Javanese life did not bifurcate, as did so many other ‘underdeveloped’ nations. Rather it maintained a comparatively high degree of social and economic homogeneity by dividing the economic pie into a steadily increasing number of minute pieces” (Geertz, 1963: 97). This was an “egalitarian” response in which the Javanese tried to defend themselves against the onslaught of “agro-capitalism” (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina, 2000: 61). The involutory process results in the “...the overdriving of an established form in such a way that it becomes rigid through an inward over elaboration of detail” (Geertz, 1963: 82). The third characteristic of involution that Geertz identifies among the Javanese peasants is that they did not introduce new agricultural techniques but reverted to old forms of production (Geertz, 1963).

Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000), in their analysis of the Russian transition, go on to identify, on top of the defensive strategies identified earlier by Geertz (1963), what they term entrepreneurial strategies. For them, “defensive strategies retreat to a primitive domestic economy in the face of the collapse of industry and agriculture while entrepreneurial strategies reach into the more dynamic sector of trade and service” (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000: 43).

The other dimension of involutory process can be seen as a global moment. Rather than responding to involution by retreating to a so called “primitive domestic economy”, an inward collapse, there has been in some instances an extension to the global. One of the arguments in this dissertation is that rather than a complete retreat as identified by Geertz (1963) and later on by Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000), what has happened in Zimbabwe is a moment of global extension in which individuals are connecting with the global as a response to economic involution. The conceptualisation of involution by Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000) is still very useful in that it acknowledges that the populace engages in a multiplicity of strategies (as subsequent chapters will show) in response to the involutory moment. However, the thesis will seek to extend the conceptualisation by arguing that responses to the involutory moment are also embedded in global economic processes, a point which we argue is absent in the work of Geertz (1963) and not fully developed by Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000).

Theorists like Castells (1996) view the so-called third world as being essentially disconnected from the global in the age of the “global network society”. Images of the “black hole” pervade much of his commentary on the

African continent; wars, hunger and totalitarian regimes seem to be the order of the day. Africa is not a black hole as Castells would have us believe. It has always been globally connected, even before the colonial period marked by the “scramble for Africa”, as evidenced by slave trade and exchange in other commodities. Indeed, “contemporary Africa is clearly not a featureless void defined only by its exclusion from the benefits of global capitalism, nor is it an informational ‘black hole’” (Ferguson, 2006: 29). There is a need to consider some of these positions when examining the case of Zimbabwe in southern Africa.

In the period between 1873 and 1973, southern Africa was very much linked to the cyclical rhythms of the capitalist world economy (Wallerstein and Viera, 1992). According to some analysts:

Processes within the region – political struggles, economic transformations, and social restructuring – occurred within the framework of the larger world system of which they were now a part, and local actors had to take account of far-away actors, but conversely far-away actors now were being affected by developments in southern Africa (Wallerstein and Viera, 1992: 5).

In the present conjuncture Africa is being linked to the global in a number of ways. For instance, there is growing evidence that the biggest economy in the world, the United States of America, is already “heavily dependent on African oil imports” and these “developments challenge the idea that Africa’s place in the global economy is defined simply by marginalization or that the continent is simply irrelevant to the wider global economy” (Ferguson, 2006: 195). The reality is that “specific forms of ‘global’ integration on the continent exist with specific – and equally ‘global’ – forms of exclusion, marginalization, and disconnection” (Ferguson, 2006: 41).

The notion of a southern Africa, therefore, has conceptual implications on how we view global dynamics, and implies an indictment of conceptual frameworks that see Africa, and more specifically southern African, as disconnected from the “global network society.” For example, large population movements within Africa and out of southern Africa to other parts of the world illustrate that Africa and southern Africa are globally connected. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimated that as of 2002 there were over one million foreign-born Africans in the United States, with 7 per cent of those being from southern Africa (MPI, 2008).

Turning to the case of Zimbabwe, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) notes that despite the myriad socio-economic problems facing Zimbabwe, it is still a transit and destination country for irregular migration from other countries in Africa and also from Asia (IOM, 2005). The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), in a paper about Sino-Zimbabwean relationships, reported on the presence of Chinese residents in Zimbabwe who are very prominent in the importing and selling of cheap textiles in Zimbabwe, much to the detriment of the local textile industry (FES, 2004). This reveals that even though the country has been in economic decline nationals from other countries move there to exploit niche economic opportunities. At the same time there has also been movement of people out of Zimbabwe. According to the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) estimates of Zimbabweans living in South Africa are as high as three million (CDE, 2008).

The thesis will argue that what occurred in the past in Zimbabwe, and what is going on presently, cannot be separated from the events on the global

stage. This is a new global moment. While there has been social exclusion of the populace in terms of their “immiseration” in the wake of the collapse of industry and agriculture (see Chapter 3), an examination of the case of the flea market traders reveals that they are actually engaged in creative ways in dealing with the involutory moment in Zimbabwe. These creative ways reveal multiple and complex connections to the global.

Theorising the role of informal economic activity within the Zimbabwean crisis would be incomplete without a reference to how informal economic activity is embedded in the social, economic and political trajectory of the country. By embeddedness here we mean the notion that “...social actors can be understood and interpreted only within relational, institutional and cultural contexts and cannot be seen as atomized decision makers maximizing their own utility” (Ghezzi and Mingione, 2007: 11). Essentially then, economic actors “...do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (Granovetter, 1985: 487). At a theoretical level, the actions of the informal traders who are the main focus of this study cannot be separated from local economic dynamics. Economic difficulties, as discussed in Chapter 3, have historically led to more and more Zimbabweans being propelled into the realm of informality as a way of defending themselves against the vicissitudes of an economy in tailspin.

Also, the informal economic activities of the traders are necessarily embedded in the networks of social relations (see Chapters 5 and 6) that exist

among the traders themselves. The thesis will seek to demonstrate, among other things, that relations of co-operation and reciprocity are a norm in the day-to-day operations of informal traders, and that these relations are used not only to take advantage of economic opportunities but also to deal with problems, whether economic or social, that traders encounter. Informal economic activities are embedded in the broader social, political and economic milieu in Zimbabwe, and these activities are concomitantly (socially) embedded in the relations of informal traders. While there was substantial employment in the formal sector in the post-independence phase, and informal economic activities may have been marginal to the survival of the populace, in recent time these informal economic activities have become a linchpin of survival in the lives of Zimbabweans in an increasingly globalised world. The thesis argues that Zimbabwe is part of this globalised world, and it is because of these connections that part of the populace has been able to, and continues to, make a living in the current difficult environment.

2.5 Globalisation and its contested nature

Globalisation is another contested concept. In as much as it unites the planet, globalization as a phenomenon also divides that same planet (Ferguson, 2006). Though globalisation has its “uncertainties and inadequacies as a term”, it “does usefully call attention to a series of developments associated with the ongoing dynamic of economic restructuring at the global level” (Falk, 1997: 17). For Appadurai (2002: 282),

Globalization (understood as a particular, contemporary configuration in the relationship between capital and the nation-state) is demonstrably creating inequalities both within and across societies, spiraling processes

of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between finance and manufacturing capital, as well as between goods and the wealth required to purchase them.

One analyst has questioned the utility of the concept of globalisation, asserting that in talking about globalisation very crucial questions about the “limits of interconnection, about the areas where capital cannot go, and about the specificity of the structures necessary to make the connections work” are not asked (Cooper, 2001: 189). In addition, according to the same analyst, “What is missing from the discussion of globalization today is the historical depth of the interconnections and a focus on just what the structures and limits of the connecting mechanisms are” (Cooper, 2001: 190).

The dissertation acknowledges that there are many “globalisations”. In other words, there are variable experiences of what constitutes globalisation. Even where the global forces may be similar, there are variant responses to these forces, as the case of Zimbabwe shows. So, despite Zimbabwe being a pariah economy at this juncture, there have been among informal traders some instances of a connection to global sites of commodity production, and this is linked to processes of globalisation. This is one of the theoretical innovations of the approach followed by this thesis.

The “processes and actions” that refer to the notion of globalisation have “been proceeding, with interruptions, for many centuries, but the main focus of the discussion of globalization is on relatively recent times” (Robertson, 1992: 8). If globalisation is associated with “developments such as the emergence of world markets for commodities, and technological improvements to communication, attention might, in the first instance, shift back several centuries” (Holton, 1998:

24). For instance, the sixteenth century is seen by some scholars as marking an important point in the development of a global capitalist world economy (Wallerstein, 1974). Other scholars argue that long-distance trade existed well before this time, in the thirteenth century, linking parts of Europe, Asia and Africa (Abu-Lughod, 1989). The issue really is that various theorists and scholars tackle different aspects of globalisation debates: some consider economic aspects (Holton, 1998: Chapter 3), some the socio-cultural (Gurnah, 1997; Jalan, 1997; Street, 1997; Tao and Ho, 1997; Holton, 2000), and yet others the international dimensions of the political and the role of the nation-state on the global stage (Holton, 1998: Chapters 4 and 5).

Globalisation reflects for some the “intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across the borders” (Holm and Sorenson, 1995: 1). It refers “both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson, 1992: 8). Other theorists see globalisation in terms of the “compression of time and space” (Harvey, 1989). For Giddens (1990: 21), “the concept of globalization is best understood as expressing fundamental aspects of time-space distancing. Globalization concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations ‘at a distance’ with local contextualities”. Immanuel Wallerstein’s (1974, 1979, 1984) work, which considers the domination of the capitalist system on a planetary scale driven by the logic of capital accumulation, is another alternative way of perceiving globalisation.

As indicated by Gopalkrishnan (2001: 41), “economic globalization as it exists today is a more recent phenomenon, defined by rapid changes in technology

that collapse time and space, and establish global players who have enabled a world-wide restructuring of states and people to take place” and the consequent “government deregulation” and “technological change” has created an environment in which capital has the capability to be hyper-mobile. Multinational corporations (MNCs) have in the process become very powerful “pathological” “governing institutions” with the power to “force” their will on governments and societies (Bakan, 2004). MNCs are at the apex of the “topography of power” in the current conjuncture.

For Holton (1998: 16), globalisation could alternatively be seen as the way in which “we understand, experience, and act within the world and not simply the large transnational structures that form the subject matter of the political economy or international relations”. In this conceptualisation there is room for how local communities act within and interact with “globalising tendencies” (“glocalisation”). Burawoy *et al.* (2000) speak of individuals in the “postmodern world” having certain “imaginings” of the globe. Some scholars note that “globalization is occurring in the absence of either a cultural or economic ‘hegemon’ and that processes of standardization and diversification, and unification and fragmentation, are occurring simultaneously” (Scott, 1997: 7). There is a “complex fabric of globalization, that of hybridization, or syncretization. It centers on intercultural exchange and the incorporation of cultural elements from a variety of sources within particular cultural practices” (Holton, 2000: 148). Indeed globalisation is “uneven, problematic and contested” (Holton, 1998: 17). The “global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” and the “complexity of the current

global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics” (Robertson, 1992: 296).

The issue of disjuncture in the global cultural economy is articulated by Appadurai (1990) who uses the framework of “ethnoscapes”, “mediascapes”, “technoscapes”, “finanscapes” and “ideoscapes” to explore interactions on a global scale. Ethnoscape refers to the “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons” (Appadurai, 1990: 297). In the southern African region in recent times there has been movement in search of employment, and also due to war and famine in other parts of the continent. Most recently, because of diseases like cholera, there has been a movement of people from Zimbabwe into other parts of the region (especially South Africa) in search of treatment. The technoscape refers to the “global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious borders” (Appadurai, 1990: 298). It is closely linked to the idea of the finanscape which is the landscape of global capital, currency markets, national stock exchanges and commodity speculations on a world scale (Appadurai, 1990: 298). In last the few months of 2008 we witnessed a global economic recession in most financial markets across the globe, which illustrates how interconnected the world really is.

Mediascapes refer to the “distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, etc), which are now available to a growing number of

private and public interests throughout the world; and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai, 1990: 299). Closely related to this are ideoscapes which are “concatenations of images” which are often “political and frequently have to do with ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (Appadurai, 1990: 299). The latter is becoming especially central with the resurgence in recent years of what are seen as terrorist elements, not only in the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) but most recently in India and Pakistan. All this serves to show not only the contested and multiple ways of conceptualising globalisation, but also of what fundamentally constitutes globalisation.

Meyer (2000) has identified five dimensions of globalisation. The first dimension is “the increased political and military interdependence of a set of sovereign nation-states and the expanded and strengthened set of organizations involved: here, states are the main actors” (Meyer, 2000: 233). This aspect is very important in an understanding of the southern African region dating back to the formation of the Southern African Development Community in 1980. Greater regional co-operation among states in the past has involved issues like peace keeping and electoral reform, although the success of the later remains to be seen given the continuing problems with elections in some countries. We have also seen the United Nations being involved in attempts to solve the political impasse in Zimbabwe, with varying degrees of success.

The second dimension, in which states and firms are the main actors, is the “increased economic interdependence of a set of national or sub-national

economies and the relevant multilateral and international public and private organisations (Meyer, 2000: 233). This necessarily follows from the first aspect in that greater political and military collaboration in most cases results in the creation of an environment in which it is much easier for economic synergies to develop. Whether these synergies are equally beneficial to all the actors is of course debatable. This second dimension of globalisation is important in any analysis of the economic history of much of the developing world, especially Africa, and especially when it comes to the analysis of structural adjustment. According to Saul (2005: 22) the era of “disciplining Africa”, was an era in which “the neo-liberal reorientation of economic policy became required medicine for virtually all sub-Saharan African economies”. He further indicates that:

Given that most of Africa’s debt was to the World Bank and other multilateral agencies, the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) emerged as particularly central to the process of dictating global capitalism’s new terms to Africa. As manifested in their aggressive administering of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the invasive impact of the international financial institutions (IFIs) on the national sovereignty of the target economies cannot be overstated (Saul, 2005: 22).

Chapter 3 will trace the contours of the impact of structural adjustment on the Zimbabwean economy. Structural adjustment perhaps marked the beginning of the economic involutory moment in Zimbabwe, which was further compounded by, among other things, economic mismanagement and a prolonged political impasse. In the era of structural adjustment, free market economic theory was spawned across the globe and became very influential in most governments’ economic policy.

Meyer's (2000: 233) third dimension of globalisation means "an expanded flow of individual persons among societies through socio-economic migration, travel and political expulsion", and here states and individuals are central to the analysis. The African region has witnessed enormous cross-border movements in recent times due to economic collapse and civil war in countries such as Rwanda. South Africa has had to deal with the problems that come with being a magnet, not only for economic migrants but also for those fleeing political expulsion and civil strife, for example, from countries like Zimbabwe, some parts of central Africa and parts of West Africa.

Fourthly, globalisation means "the expanded flow of instrumental culture around the world", resulting in a situation in which "common models of social order become authoritative in many different social settings (Meyer, 2000: 233-4). In this fifth dimension globalisation involves the "creation of common models of national state identity and purpose", the creation of "common models of socio-economic development" in "which national policies change with changes in world scripts", the scripting of "common models of human rights" which "produce waves of national policy and practice in areas such as the status of ethno-racial minorities or women" and, lastly, "education, linking both ideologies of human rights and of social progress, has been highly scripted with enormous impact on educational expansion around the world" (Meyer: 2000: 234).

The issue of models of socio-economic development will become important when considering the historical (and perhaps contemporary) role of the World Bank and the IMF in the structural adjustment era, not only in Zimbabwe but across the globe. It will also be important when considering the impasse that

has been in existence between Zimbabwe and the international community when it comes to certain economic fundamentals that the World Bank and the IMF tout as central to the genesis of a robust, well-oiled and functioning economy. It is the transgression of some of these fundamentals that these international institutions see as the cause of past and present problems in Zimbabwe.

Lastly for Meyer (2000: 233), globalisation also means the “expanded interdependence of expressive culture through intensified global communication”. Actors from “individuals to organisations to national states” are involved in this fourth dimension (Meyer, 2000: 233). The commodity chain analysis approach will be useful in an analysis of the cross-national movements of commodities like clothes – a “web of brands” (Klein, 2001: xii) – and arts and crafts, among others, and how the peddling of some of these “expressive cultures” is being driven by certain consumption patterns, not only locally but also globally.

Notions of globalisation have several important implications for the study. Zimbabwe is still connected to the globe, especially through the images that have been generated about the country. At the same time the issue of remittances, as mentioned earlier, remains an important element in the connection as kin send money back to the country through other relatives and colleagues for instance. Zimbabwean migrants (inclusive of illegal migrants) working in South Africa have, for example, been found to transfer significant amounts of money, using both formal and informal channels, to households in southern Zimbabwe, and these incomes are an important part of survival (Maphosa, 2007). The World Bank (2008) estimates that between 2004 and 2007 money totalling US\$38.4 billion was received in the form of inward remittance flows in sub-Saharan Africa,

and this was just from officially recorded sources. If unrecorded formal and informal flows were to be included, the size of remittances would be significantly larger (World Bank, 2008). An aspect of this flow of remittances, especially how it is used in income-generating projects by the recipients in Zimbabwe, is one of the ways of “grounding globalisation”.

Globalisation is grounded in this study by considering aspects of the regional and global flow of commodities in and out of Zimbabwe and how traders are tapping into this flow to make a living in the current economic crisis. While an analysis of global value chains may reveal that major corporations are endowed with market power, which allows them to pursue aggressive marketing strategies that sometimes affect consumption patterns in the global economy, the focus in this study is on traders who may be at the penultimate end of particular value chains. This is a much more modest approach to an analysis of commodity chains.

2.6 Commodity and values chains

The value chain concept has its genesis in attempts by analysts in the 1960s and 1970s to map out the trajectory of development for mineral-exporting countries (Kaplinsky, 2000). A variant of it, the French *filiere* approach, has been “applied mostly to agricultural commodities originating from former French colonies (Raikes, Jensen and Ponte, 2000). It has also been used prominently in the analysis of global capitalism especially by Gereffi (1994, 1999a, b). The notion of the “value stream” has also been used to refer to the value chain concept (Womack and Jones, 1996).

Global value chains, also called global commodity or supply chains (Carr, Chen and Tate 2000: 125), “describe the full range of activities which are required to bring a product or service from conception, through the intermediary phases of production (involving a combination of physical transformation and the input of various producer services), delivery to final consumers, and the final disposal after use” (Kaplinsky, 2000: 121). Value chains are “networks that link the labour, production, and distribution processes that result in different commodities or products” and they “represent an important dimension of global integration” (Carr, Chen and Tate 2000: 125). When looked at in this manner “the value chain is merely a descriptive construct, at most providing a heuristic framework for the generation of data” (Kaplinsky, 2000: 122).

For Kaplinsky, there are three important components of the value chain which:

transform an heuristic device into an analytical tool: the first, is that value chains are repositories for rent and these rents are dynamic, the second is that effectively functioning value chains involve some degree of governance and the third is that effective value chains arise from systemic, as opposed to point efficiency (2000: 122).

The rent component, especially in the form of “barriers to entry”, has been eroded with more and more countries having “developed their capabilities in industrial activities”; this erosion has become more glaring with the entrance of the Chinese into the world market with their highly educated and abundant supply of labour (Khan, 1999; Kaplinsky, 2000).

The notion of governance means that certain actors within the chain are responsible for the “inter-firm division of labour, and for capacities of particular participants to upgrade their activities” (Kaplinsky, 2000: 124). Systemic

efficiency means that focus is not on the individual nodes/links/points in the system but on the overall efficiency of the integrated system. This integration means that there is more responsibility for governors of the value chain, and there is also an increase in levels of trust among the different nodes and link in the value chain (Kaplinsky, 2000: 126).

Other analysts have added a fourth component which they see as important to the value chain (Bair, 2005). This is the institutional context of the value chain. Value chains are embedded in the broader political and socio-economic environment, which may to a great extent be regulated by the workings of the nation-state. The issue is that commodity chains are related to and affected by the institutions of the nation-state, and they are also impacted by global imperatives, especially global forms of regulation (Bair, 2005). Certainly, nation-states play a very important role in the way that global firms operate, and have an impact on the environment in which firms operate. The current global economic crisis may well see the return of a much more robust state in which there could be greater state regulation of firms and less reliance on free market fundamentals. In the case of Zimbabwe the state plays an important role in the promulgation of rules and regulations that are not explicitly aimed at regulating value chains at a global level, but that nonetheless have an influence on the flow of goods into and out of the country. For instance, clothes and shoe traders in this study had to pay customs and excise duty in accordance with rules and regulations.

There are many variables that have an impact on the global dynamics at play in the production of certain commodities. For example, economic competition more or less results in retailers locating their production networks in

countries with much lower costs (Carr, Chen and Tate, 2000). Clothing items for sale on the informal market in Zimbabwe are manufactured in China as evidenced by the “Made in China” labels inside the collar. It is through a very complex value chain that products manufactured in Asia and other parts of the world, where labour and other costs are cheaper, end up in some of these informal markets.

There are several complexities involved in carrying out a commodity chain analysis at a global level, and here the study relies on research that has already been carried out to trace some parts of the flow of these commodities (for example Lee, 1998; Salzinger, 2003). Some of the stages of the production of certain goods are outside the observable scope of the study: for example, the manufacturing of clothes in factories located in Asia. However, some data was gathered by interviewing some of the traders, identifying the source of goods and following up on these nodes in places like South Africa.

An analysis of globalisation and commodity chains opens up a whole Pandora’s Box of inequalities and social exclusion within an increasingly globalised world economy. While there have been tremendous gains – like greater income and the availability of better quality goods – there has also been “increasing tendency towards growing unequalisation within and between countries and a stubborn incidence in the absolute levels of poverty, not just in poor countries” (Kaplinsky, 2000: 117). It appears “globalization has bypassed much of the world’s population” (Kaplinsky, 2000: 118). In the summary of its 2008-09 Chronic Poverty Report, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) indicates that “Globalization is creating a world in which the poorest are exposed to new, and perhaps greater, levels of hazard – financial crisis, economic

restructuring, increased food prices and global warming” (CPRC, 2008: 3). The report also indicated that across the globe, “Between 320 and 443 million people are now trapped in poverty that lasts for many years, often for their entire lifetime” and that the children of these people will often inherit chronic poverty, if indeed they survive infancy (CPRC, 2008: 1). In their 2004-2005 report, the CPRC put the estimate of those leaving in chronic poverty at between 300 and 400 million (CPRC, 2004).

For the purposes of this study the analysis considers some of the regional nodes in the flow of commodities. For instance, South Africa is an important economic node regionally and on the continent, and is also an important source of many of the commodities sold in the informal market in Zimbabwe. Traders who import and sometimes export goods have to manoeuvre around various types of barriers at the local and cross-border level in the process of doing business. These barriers include the shortage of foreign currency locally, dealing with corrupt immigration officials on both the Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean side of the border, transport constraints especially during peak seasons, and the sometimes prohibitive import and export regulations.

The study will engage with some of the issues raised above, issues which are not normally analysed by some of the more economic approaches to commodity chain analysis. This analysis will, among other things, reveal the unequal access to power, resources and even to markets occurring among the different traders and also between the traders and their suppliers for instance. The study will also examine the role of social networks in the lives of the traders and

in the flow of commodities from a variety of sources to the market where they are sold.

2.7 Social networks and social capital

Social networks have been considered to be “invaluable in the analysis of informal economies and their role in processes of economic change” (Meagher, 2005: 217). Across the globe “informal economic arrangements based on ties of kinship, friendship and community have entered into the heart of contemporary economies through processes of subcontracting, moonlighting, transnational migration, and diminishing state involvement in popular welfare and employment” (Meagher, 2005: 217). Social networks have been “found to engender trust and flexibility, reduce transaction costs, and facilitate integration into the global economy” (Meagher, 2006: 554). Meagher (2006: 554) maintains that there is some agreement, even among neo-liberal thinkers, that “where states and markets are weak, social networks offer an informal mechanism of economic co-ordination capable of filling gaps in formal institutional provision and regulatory capacity. It could be argued, however, that while the state in Zimbabwe is weak in terms of its delivery of social services, it is strong in terms of its monopoly over the “means of violence” and political repression.

The notion of social networks refers to “informal organizational arrangements based on social ties” (Meagher 2005: 219). Meagher (2005: 224) argues that “African social networks are either celebrated as social capital to the extent that they appear to promote stability and economic growth, or denounced as social liabilities if they fail to do so”, and in the process what is lost “is the fine-

grained analysis of informal institutions that the concept was originally intended to promote”.

This study will move toward such a textured, “fine-grained” analysis of, among other things, the role of social networks in the sourcing of goods by Zimbabwean traders. The approach taken in this study maintains that social networks should be understood within their specific contexts. Therefore, it is imperative to move away from stereotypical generic approaches to the nature and role of social networks and social capital in Africa that exist in the literature. Pierre Bourdieu (1985: 248) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”.

Portes (1998: 3) states that social networks “are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits” (Portes, 1998: 3). While there have been other definitions of the concept of social capital, “consensus is growing in the literature that social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership or other social structures” (Portes, 1998: 3). Actors, therefore, operate within certain social ties or networks that allow them to access the benefits that come as part of that membership.

Social capital perspectives can be put into four categories: the communitarian perspective, the institutional perspective, the synergy perspective, and the networks perspective (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Proponents of the communitarian perspective emphasise the importance of local organisations like

associations and civic groups, and “look at the number and density of these groups in a given community”: the greater the number of these groups within a community the more positive the effect on the welfare of the community (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 229). However, in a study of violence in Colombia, Mauricio Rubio (1997: 814) states that it is inadequate to argue that “social capital always and naturally contributes positively...”, as the persistence of perverse forms of social capital which rely on gang membership and criminality illustrates. The Colombian example illustrates that “it is not enough to limit the analysis of social capital to what takes place in the society’s formal productive” system (Rubio, 1997: 815). It is also not enough to just analyse legal economic formations. Social capital in the illegal, underground and criminal world should also be researched and analysed for a holistic understanding of the concept. However, this study considers social capital in largely legal informal economic processes.

The institutional view argues that the “vitality of community networks and civil society is largely a product of the political, legal, and institutional environment” and the very “capacity of social groups to act in their collective interest depends on the quality of the formal institutions under which they reside” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 234). The work of Skocpol (1995, 1996) illustrates that civil society can flourish when the state supports it. The clear message from most of the studies that implement this approach is that “rampant corruption, frustrating bureaucratic delays, suppressed civil liberties, vast inequality, divisive ethnic tensions, and failure to safeguard property rights (to the extent that they exist at all) are major impediments to prosperity” (Woolcock and

Narayan, 2000: 235). Some commentators argue that this perspective fails to acknowledge that “coherent and competent bureaucracies may take decades to construct and may yield benefits more immediately suited for the corporate interests than to those of the poor” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 235).

Proponents of the synergy¹⁷ view, who have synthesised some of the major perspectives on social capital, broadly argue that: “governments, corporations, and civic groups are variable in the impact they can have on the attainment of collective goals”; that it is important to consider the “synergies that occur amongst states, firms, and communities as each on their own cannot foster prosperity”; and that the state’s role for economic prosperity is the most important but conversely the most problematic because the state is “not only the ultimate provider of public goods” and the “final arbiter and enforcer of the rule of law”, it is the state that is also best able to “facilitate enduring alliances across the boundaries of class, ethnicity, race gender, politics and religion” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 236). This study does not go into the debate on synergy, which is more relevant to the analysis of the role of the state and private sector in national development

The network perspective of social capital “stresses the importance of vertical as well as horizontal associations between people and of relationships within and among such organizational entities as community groups and firms”

¹⁷ Evans (1996) is one of the more popular proponents of the synergy view. He asserts that the notion of synergy can best be understood by considering the concepts of “complementarity” and “embeddedness”. The former is the “conventional way of conceptualizing mutually supportive relations between public and private actors” and the latter refers to the “ties that connect citizens and public officials across the public-private divide”. The synergy view proposes that “governments are best suited to delivering certain kinds of collective goods which complement the inputs more efficiently delivered by private actors” and in merging the two kinds of inputs there is “greater output than either public or private sectors would deliver on their own” (Evans, 1996: 1120). It is important, however, to indicate that state-society relations may not always be positive but may sometimes “degenerate into conflict, violence, war and anarchy” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 238).

(Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 230). In this view, social capital can have both benefits and costs. For example, social “ties can place considerable non-economic claims on the members’ sense of obligation and commitment, with negative economic consequences” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 231). It is also important to consider that “imputing only desirable outcomes to social capital, or equating them with it, ignores the possibility that these outcomes may be attained at another group’s expense, that given outcomes are suboptimal, or that desirable outcomes attained today come at the price of significant costs tomorrow” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000:231).

Still, studies that utilise this perspective have illustrated the importance of social networks in, for example, minimising risk and in protecting individuals from economic uncertainty (Barr, 1998). Social networks also have a solidarity function, as demonstrated in a study of Malawian immigrants in Johannesburg. Andersson (2006) found that new immigrants depended on kin and friends already settled in the city for moral support, accommodation and finding employment. A study of social networks among informal manufacturers in Nigeria demonstrated their importance in the economic organisation of these types of firms (Meagher, 2006). It could also be argued that criminal networks can even promote perverse or negative social capital. The section below briefly considers some social capitalist perspectives on African social networks, since this study deals with an African country.

Three broad perspectives on African social networks in the literature have been identified by Meagher (2005). The first perspective maintains that social networks in Africa have played a more efficacious role than states in economic

development, and have actually been hampered in the process by inept state intervention. The literature repeatedly points to the “the vast ethnic trading networks and dynamic informal sectors of the African economies, which provide livelihoods, housing and services in the face of crumbling official economies” (Meagher, 2005: 554). One commentator has argued that there is a “robust” economy in Africa, an “economy of affection”, which rivals formal institutions (Hyden, 2006: 73).

The second perspective in the literature contends that “Africans are incapable of forming effective social networks” and that “African societies suffer from a lack of networks owing to cultural incapacities and the historical disruptions of colonialism and rapid urbanization” (Meagher, 2005: 222). Others, who follow this approach, point to what they see as the “primordial” nature and “redistributive values characteristic of African informal economies” and social networks whose effect is to “undermine productive investment, contract enforcement and innovation, blocking economic development” (Meagher, 2005: 223).

The third perspective is that “Africans are culturally predisposed to form perverse networks based on clientism and corruption, which actively undermine rational economic institutions” (Meagher, 2005: 223). This is the “criminalisation of the state” thesis which argues that social capital in Africa “appears to display a marked affinity with the spirit of criminality” (Bayart, 1999: 34). These essentialist analyses in the literature have been criticised by some authors (Hart, 1998; Meagher, 2005). It could be argued that among the traders that are the focus of this study the first perspective on social capital is much more applicable, as

traders rely on their social networks in an environment in crisis where the state has largely failed to provide for their social reproduction needs. Traders rely on these social networks for sourcing goods when they themselves cannot travel. When they can afford to travel to source goods, traders may rely on other traders within their social network circles to watch their stalls during their absence. As subsequent chapters will show, there is a latticework of social networks among the traders themselves, and between traders and various kin and other individuals such as transport operators whom the traders rely on in carrying out the ventures.

2.7 Conclusion

The approach in this thesis is to see formal and informal economic activities as part of a continuum, with legal and highly regulated formal economic activities on one end and criminal economic activities on the other end. Informal, largely legal economic activities that form the bulk of this study lie somewhere along this continuum. In reality, the formal and the informal, the legal and the illegal are imbricated with one another. Individuals find themselves moving somewhere along this continuum, between the formal and the informal. Money and goods also move between the formal and the informal. These movements are known as “churning”. In moving between these various segments of a deeply segmented single economy, the informal traders rely on a multiplicity of social networks which eases the carrying out of informal economic activity.

Informal economic activities are highly heterogeneous. They comprise a multiplicity of activities: from casual agricultural labour, to street trading, to other forms of casual and irregular employment in manufacturing, contract cleaning and

other segments of the economy. The focus of this dissertation is on the trading of goods at an informal market in urban Harare. The rise in informal economic activities not only in Zimbabwe but across much of the globe, including in the advanced industrial countries, is fundamentally linked to processes of economic restructuring. Zimbabwe went through such a process in the 1990s. This had a negative impact on the economy, and the situation worsened in subsequent years, largely due to economic mismanagement, corruption, ill-considered land invasions and the protracted political impasse.

As the juggernaut of global restructuring has proceeded across the globe, and companies have either relocated or been shut down, large numbers of people have had to rely on informal economic activities for survival. Global processes also play an important role in the flow of commodities and how they end up on the informal market in Zimbabwe. With the rise of China and other Asian nations as economic forces to be reckoned with, there has been a growth in cheaper manufacturing, for example in the textiles and clothing industries and in electronics. Cheaply manufactured goods easily flow to the developing world and they are sold in a variety of formal and informal markets. For example, cheap clothes from China find their way through South Africa to informal markets in countries such as Zimbabwe where they are sold to the general population.

Commodity chain analysis can illustrate the inequalities inherent in globalisation and the concentration of market power in this global flow. Cheaper quality goods from textiles to electronics are dumped onto developing world markets with deleterious impacts on local industries. Such negative impacts include factory closures and the consequent loss of jobs. As demonstrated in the

next chapter which, among other things, traces the trajectory of Zimbabwe's political economy, globalisation has its "winners" and "losers". The Zimbabwean case shows how the deregulation of the economy led to the collapse of the productive sectors which resulted in massive unemployment in the country. With countries like China having a globally competitive advantage in the textiles and clothing industry's global production chain for instance, the local sectors collapsed as the local market was inundated by cheap Chinese products. This succinctly illustrates the unequal gains of globalisation and the inequalities inherent in global production chains with consequences such as closure of industries and the rise in unemployment in developing world countries with weaker manufacturing bases, such as Zimbabwe.

Consequently, the unemployed - dispossessed of their jobs - were propelled into the informal segments of the economy, where employment is largely insecure and earnings unpredictable. These precarious jobs have no benefits such as pensions or medical aid which makes the conditions of those in this segment particularly burdensome. Restructuring also resulted in the scaling back of the Zimbabwean state, as shown in the next chapter, which denuded its capability to make meaningful interventions in the lives of individuals affected by the structural adjustment programme.

Chapter 3

The Research Context: The Zimbabwean Crisis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter maps out the nature of the Zimbabwean crisis. It locates the early genesis of the crisis in the disastrous economic restructuring programme directed by international financial institutions from their citadels of power in the global North. The newly independent Zimbabwean state was heavily funded by international donor aid in the first decade. In that first decade international donor institutions played a considerable role in directing the trajectory of development, funding a variety of development projects in areas such as health care, education, infrastructure and agriculture. In the second decade of independence donor institutions were central in forcing the implementation of the structural adjustment programme. Economic restructuring was meant to recoup the money pumped into Zimbabwe by international financial institutions after independence. Some of the money owed, however, did date back to the days of the settler colonial government. The restructuring triggered economic collapse in Zimbabwe and set an inauspicious precedent for what has over the years come to be known as the Zimbabwean crisis.

The Zimbabwean crisis has to be understood as being made up of a combination of events which fermented into a deadly concoction that left Zimbabwe limping under the burden of, among other things, hyperinflation (the

highest in the world in 2007/2008), an economy in free fall, a contracting productive sector (manufacturing and agriculture) and a highly impoverished local populace. Certainly, the crisis had its early origins in the economic restructuring, but there are also issues like the authoritarian tendencies of President Mugabe's regime, economic mismanagement and the protracted political impasse with an opposition, with legitimate claims to power, which exacerbated the situation in later years.

A cholera outbreak at the end of 2008 in the country's urban centres, which hit the densely populated centres such as Harare the hardest, was a revelation of the decay of the health care system but also a stark reminder of the failure of the Zimbabwean state under President Mugabe's regime. For over a decade Zimbabwe has been lurching from crisis to crisis, whether it be social, political or economic, and these crises have developed into a deadly time bomb. Perhaps the cholera outbreak was the zenith of the crisis in that it revealed the gamut of problems in Zimbabwe: many of the hospitals did not have drugs for patients; the impoverished sick could not travel to the nearest hospitals simply because they had no money; some of them sought treatment in neighbouring countries, raising the ire of some neighbouring states which were already dealing with the influx of economic immigrants; the secretive regime denied the death toll being reported by foreign news agencies, many of which were banned from reporting within the country; and President Mugabe accused the west of a conspiracy to unseat his regime.

The chapter will map out the development of the Zimbabwean crisis up to the year 2008 and reveal its historical antecedents. As mentioned earlier, structural

adjustment in the 1990s was a turning point in the economic conditions of the country, whose fortunes were worsened by economic mismanagement, land invasions, political repression and a political impasse. It seems plausible that if Zimbabwe had dealt with issues like political intolerance, had rooted out corruption earlier on during independence and had carried out a better-sequenced land reform process the situation might have been totally different, even with the problems which were triggered by the structural adjustment programme.

Essentially, the Zimbabwean state has been privatised for the benefit of the elite who stand to lose if a complete change in government is to take place. The Zimbabwean elite, many with government connections, continuously blocked the proposed unity government between the Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). A majority of members of the elite have continued to benefit from the chaos. One cannot help agreeing with the thesis that in Africa, “disorder” works and is a useful “political instrument.”¹⁸

At the end of January 2009 the main opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai agreed to join a government of national unity, but it remains to be seen what tangible impact this will have on an economy that has been in nose-dive for more than a decade. There are still issues that have to be urgently confronted, including the need for real economic and democratic transformation and above all rooting out the corruption and economic mismanagement that have become endemic to the country. For example, economic mismanagement, especially meddling by the

¹⁸ This thesis is developed in Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999), *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe fuelled the collapse of the local currency, which had become virtually useless by the end of 2008.

3.2 The 1980s

3.2.1 Mortgaging the future: successes and failures in the 1980s

The 1980s are important in the history of Zimbabwe for a number of reasons. While there were successes in terms of economic and social development, these were largely underwritten by the World Bank and the IMF, and the debt accrued by the newly independent government came back to haunt the country in the 1990s. Precedents for the tendency of the ZANU PF regime to be repressive were set during this period. For example, there was the massacre of what were seen as “dissident elements” in Matabeleland. The repressive tendencies and violence later came to the fore in the form of attacks on the opposition and other civil society groups and in the disastrous attacks on the urban informal economy (Operation Murambatsvina, of which more will be said in section 3.4.2).

Zimbabwe gained independence from the white settler regime in April 1980 after a protracted liberation war. Like any other newly independent country, Zimbabwe had to grapple with issues of delivering education, health, jobs and infrastructure to the hitherto marginalised majority. As this section will show, the government of President Mugabe seems to have delivered reasonably well to the expectant population. It was, however, a very delicately balanced act.

The country was “full of promise that the future would be one of economic prosperity, political freedom and a generally decent livelihood for all” (Mlambo,

2008: 9). Still, the Lancaster House Agreement which ended the war in 1979 and the Constitution that emerged from it were largely a compromise which in effect “gave settler capital a decade long period of consolidation, during which issues around the radical restructuring of the legacy of economic inequality were effectively put on hold” (Raftopoulos, 2005: x). Mandaza (1986: 42) notes that:

Mugabe would have to begin the delicate task of nation-building in an atmosphere of intense suspicion and even hostility on the part of those he had defeated at home: against the covert threats of military, political and economic destabilization from South Africa; and with the pervasive threat of economic and political blackmail by the imperialist powers that had been the undertakers of the Lancaster House Agreement but were now seeking to keep the new state in line.

Important in considering the Lancaster House agreement is that this was a settlement largely directed from the citadels of power in the global North. For example, there was the (still contentious) issue that extensive funding for the land redistribution programme would be provided to the Zimbabwe government by the former colonisers. The journalist Heidi Holland in her book *Dinner With Mugabe* suggests that the nebulous nature in which the Lancaster House conference dealt with the land issue may have been one of the causes of disagreements over the way forward in later years. A clearly written and signed agreement detailing the obligations of the signatories in future land reform never actually existed though the document did state that land redistribution could only take place after ten years (Holland, 2008). Up to today there is still much disagreement over the terms of the settlement, and the whole debacle has been replete with finger pointing from both sides of the divide. Inequitable land ownership patterns, one of the reasons the liberation struggle had been fought, remained very much intact in the first decade and for much of the second decade of independence (Sachikonye, 2002).

President Mugabe's regime, in the face of very robust political opposition and widespread popular opposition, would seize on the issue of land reform in 2000 to force its way to subsequent election victories. If the land issue had been properly dealt with over the years, it is likely that President Mugabe, ever resourceful and tenacious, would have run out of political gambits. It could be argued that it was in the interests of both the local white farmers and the international community to aggressively pursue a much more rapid land reform process before it reached the fever pitch that it did in the year 2000.

The post-independence government had inherited a relatively robust, and reasonably large and heterogeneous formal segment of the economy (see Table 3.1). However, the "perseverance of economic stagnation" continued to plague the country and was the "single most important constraint Zimbabwe experienced in its political and social life since independence" (Bond, 1998: 150). As noted by Bond and Manyanya (2003: 28):

The reasons for post-independence economic dynamism are complex, as they reflected in large part subjective issues such as white investor confidence (extremely negative until around 1984), an ongoing fall in the rate of the corporate profit, and the failure of the ZANU government to substantially alter wealth and income distribution to improve the buying power of the masses.

There was the "boom of 1979-1981", and also 1985 and 1987-1990 in which there was significant real per capita GDP growth (Bond, 1998: 150). In the years 1982-1984 and 1986-1987 real per capita GDP growth was in the negative (at -4 per cent in 1984 and 1987). Regardless of this, Zimbabwe was one of the "top four more industrialized countries in sub-Saharan Africa; it possessed a more

diversified economy than most countries; and it had a better human resource base than most; and it had a middle-income status” (Sachikonye, 2002: 130).

Table 3.1: GDP and employment by sector for selected years (GDP at constant prices)

Sector	Percent of GDP				Percent of Employment			
	1980	1985	1990	2000	1980	1985	1990	2000
Agriculture	14.0	17.6	14.8	18.4	32.4	26.3	24.3	26.3
Mining	8.8	4.7	3.9	3.9	6.0	5.3	4.8	3.6
Manufacturing	24.9	20.7	20.5	17.4	14.7	16.0	16.7	14.7
Electricity	2.2	1.9	2.5	2.1	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.9
Construction	2.8	2.2	2.9	2.2	4.1	4.4	5.7	4.3
Finance	6.3	7.6	8.4	11.0	1.2	1.5	1.5	2.8
Distribution	14.0	14.1	15.2	16.9	6.9	7.7	7.9	8.4
Transport	6.6	5.9	5.5	8.3	4.4	4.8	4.4	3.5
Public Admin	9.0	6.8	5.7	3.3	7.5	8.6	8.0	4.7
Education	5.2	6.1	5.9	7.2	3.4	8.1	8.9	11.3
Health	2.2	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.5	1.9	2.0	2.3
Domestic service	2.0	2.0	1.6	1.4	11.2	9.5	8.8	8.3
Other services	5.4	3.5	3.6	5.1	4.3	5.3	6.1	9.0

Source: Kanyenze (2004:108).

For most of the 1980s “the majority of the domestic manufacturers were definitely not oriented to global markets, in terms of which they would have required cutting edge imported capital goods and advanced technology” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 30). The weaknesses of this kind of insulated development would become much clearer with the advent of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s, which exposed the Zimbabwean economy to the global economy without putting in place the structural conditions which would have enabled it to survive and compete in such a context.

President Mugabe's ZANU PF had come to power with the "usual" fanfare: promises of social reform, job creation and wealth redistribution, promises that punctuated the rhetoric of most liberation movements not only in Africa but also in much of the developing world, as history has so poignantly shown. The 1980s did have some promising starts and there was a "steady consolidation of independence" with the new regime concentrating on both social and economic development (Sachikonye, 2002: 14). Table 3.1 reflects some of the "progress" of the 1980s.

The 1980s in Zimbabwe can best be characterised as a period of very aggressive class formation under the patronage of the ruling elite (most of them liberation war leaders) and quite impressive social and economic development gains (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). Parallels of rapid class formation exist in most of sub-Saharan Africa. Most recently this has been seen in South Africa where, following the collapse of the apartheid regime in 1994, there has been an equally aggressive black bourgeoisie class formation under the rubric of black economic empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action. The process has been haunted by corruption and patronage.

In Zimbabwe there was a historic improvement in broad social indicators like health, education and levels of literacy right across the board. In the first decade of independence the following were achieved: infant mortality went down from 86 to 49 per thousand live births; the immunisation rate went up from 25 per cent to 80 per cent; life expectancy rose from 56 to 62 years; there was a doubling of primary school enrolment (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 35). However, the massive spending for social and economic development which improved these

indicators was bankrolled by the World Bank and the IMF, and in the process the post-independence government accumulated a massive debt, on top of the one inherited from the white settler government (which the Mugabe regime had been cajoled into not defaulting on).

Most likely the post-independence government would not have received the large amounts of money it required for reconstruction if it had taken the route of defaulting on the debt inherited from the white settler regime. However, the government then was in a better position to actually negotiate debt forgiveness. It could have made the moral argument that a large part of this money had been used to fund upliftment for the minority in colonial Zimbabwe.

This is not to say that the post-independence government did not benefit from funds that were provided by the international financial institutions. In fact, until the early 2000s much of the gains in the expansion of sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, which contributed tremendously to GDP and to employment (see Table 3.1), was on the back of government support. Most of this support the Zimbabwean government acquired in the form of donor aid before relations soured in light of the regime's intransigence concerning political and economic reform. Relations between Zimbabwe and the international community reached breaking point with the chaotic and violent land reform exercise which cemented the country's image as a pariah state.

The 1980s were "years of restoration and hope" (Raftopoulos, 2004:4). The government "embarked on a vision of national reconciliation that, in economic terms, sought to combine a continuity of existing production structures with policies to improve the conditions of the majority of the population neglected

during the colonial years” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 4). The “reconciliation policy of Zimbabwe’s ruling party, constructed within a purported discourse of socialism, placed less emphasis on legitimized private accumulation than on the extended reach and interventionism of the state” (Raftopoulos, 2005: *xi*). The constituency of the previously oppressed Zimbabwean population expected a lot from government and the latter, using this interventionism, reasonably delivered for most of the 1980s in an environment of economic protectionism. However, it also became clear that “what was presented as the ‘logic’ of nation-building most often had a highly partisan intent” (Saul, 2005: 133), and Mugabe would later prove that he was just (another) “authoritarian nationalist” (Saul, 2005: 132).

As far as land reform was concerned, the Zimbabwe government was very cautious and followed a policy based on the notion of willing-buyer, willing-seller, which in a way slowed down the process (Moyo, 2000; Raftopoulos, 2004). By the end of the 1980s approximately three million hectares had been acquired for resettlement using this policy. Although the process was proceeding slowly, there were many positive developments which resulted in qualitative improvements in the lives of those who were resettled (Raftopoulos, 2004: 5).

As far as workers were concerned, the state passed several pieces of legislation to improve the conditions of workers (income levels and employment security), and in 1980 passed the Minimum Wages Act and the Employment Act. The year 1985 saw the passing of the Labour Relations Act which paved the way for workers to join trade unions. However, the fact that there was still a measure of control by the Minister of Labour showed “the new state’s nervousness about conceding such power” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 4). There was “some protection for

workers in the 1980s” but the longer term trends in income and employment levels were largely negative (Raftopoulos, 2004: 4). From 1980-1982 there were wage increases in commerce, mining, and industry, but later on they were either static or declined. In sectors like agriculture and domestic employment, wages did increase. Between 1980 and 1990 employment growth levels hovered around an average of 1.72 per cent (Raftopoulos, 2004).

3.2.2 An uneasy alliance and the beginnings of dissent and repression

On the political frontier there was an “uneasy alliance’ of two political parties, the Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe (Raftopoulos, 2004: 5). At the same time, labour was very much under the control of the state, and the establishment of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in 1981 was really an extension of an arm of the ruling party (Raftopoulos, 2004). This effectively meant that labour, which had been weak at independence, could not engage in meaningful political activity. Labour in Zimbabwe had not been one of the parties to the peace agreement between Ian Smith’s regime and the nationalists. In essence labour was in the “shadows of the state” (Raftopoulos, 2001: 3). For much of the 1980s “the authority of the ruling party went largely unquestioned as the majority of organizations in the country fell into line behind the development project of the state” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 5).

The situation in the 1980s was such that the “government also made moves to flood the space available to civil society” and most “student and intellectual groups, residents’ associations, and women’s organizations were

either created under ZANU PF's patronage, or soon came to function as refractions of the party's broad political policies" (Saul, 2005: 134). ZANU PF, now effectively a party-state, dominated politics, controlled much of the media, controlled and manipulated electoral processes and orchestrated violence against any dissenting voices (Raftopoulos, 2001). In electoral processes "ZANU PF manipulated unscrupulously both nationalist trappings and the regulatory regimes to sanction and deepen its control to all levels of the state" (Saul, 2005: 134).

ZANU PF often articulated "the class contradictions of an unequal society in merely racial terms – ZANU'S radical rhetoric thus intermittently disguising racist resentment (and ethnic chauvinism) rather than guiding a more profound transformation of colonial society in the interests of ordinary Zimbabweans" (Saul, 2005: 132). The violent dissident repression in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions in the mid 1980s, dubbed *Gukurahundi*,¹⁹ showed the uneasy nature of the ZANU-ZAPU "alliance" but also showed the lengths to which the ruling party would go to stamp out dissent. This was a precursor to the repression of political dissent in the late 1990s and for much of the 2000s.

The *Gukurahundi* violence in the Matabeleland region came to a halt in 1987 with the Unity Agreement between ZANU and PF ZAPU (to form ZANU PF). However, some commentators view the process as more of a usurpation

¹⁹ *Gukurahundi* actually referred to the North-Korean-trained 5th Brigade deployed to quell the unrest caused by dissident attacks on civilians and white farmers. The term is now generally used to refer to the events during that time. The dissident attacks had their origins in the conflicts between former soldiers of the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), whose disbanded soldiers were in the guerrilla holding camps around Matabeleland and Midlands and in other parts of the country. Most of the dissidents were former cadres of ZIPRA. The unrest in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces resulted in the massacre by the 5th Brigade of thousands of people seen as dissidents and as supporters of the dissidents. The Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) published a report titled *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1980* detailing the atrocities committed by the Brigade during that time.

which “effectively emasculated the major opposition party, PF ZAPU, and confirmed the regional subordination of Matabeleland” (Raftopoulos, 2005: *xi*). However, the dissent at that time was also a revelation of the fact that there was polarisation with no “durable basis amongst the existing social forces for the liberation movement’s socialist ideology (Bond, 1998: 151). There still existed disparate groupings that had been brought together and perhaps co-opted into the post-independence socialist ideology with nothing to bond them. The liberation war had largely been fought in the rural area among the peasantry, and this class shared with the new ruling class nothing beyond reclaiming the land that had been appropriated by the white settlers (Bond, 1998). As is sharply noted by Fanon (2001 [1961]: 119), often after colonialism there is “lack of practical links” between the ruling/educated classes and “the mass of the people”.

Also, in the late 1980s and the 1990s there was an increase in the powers of the executive, which withered away the powers of the legislature and had the “unintended consequence” of increasing the role of the judiciary in curbing executive excesses (Raftopoulos, 2004: 7). Authoritarianism in the form of the one-party state accelerated in the late 1980s, and the 1988 Willowgate scandal, in which government officials were implicated in a shady car scheme, and the subsequent executive pardoning of the culprits, was indicative of the decay and corruption within the ranks of the party-state (Raftopoulos, 2004; Saul, 2005). Such blatant disregard of the law and the refusal of the party-state to be accountable raised the ire of the general populace and of civic groupings, which originally had toed the party line, or at the very least had watched from the sidelines.

Dissent began to grow and Edgar Tekere's short-lived opposition party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM)²⁰ was formed in the late 1980s. There was also opposition from a more vibrant and resurgent labour and student movement, both of which had a vision of autonomy and sought greater accountability from the state. At the end of the 1980s there were "serious fractures in the notion of national unity imposed by the ruling party" and the first decade ended with growing economic problems and the emergence of an "embryonic opposition movement" (Raftopoulos 2004: 8). It had become clear that the nationalist project had largely benefited (and continued to benefit) the ruling class and those with connections to it.

As Zimbabwe waved goodbye to the first decade of independence, the omens were not propitious at all. The class compromise project that Mugabe had sought to craft was clearly tenuous and beginning to fracture. While the economy had done reasonably well, or at least had delivered some benefits, it had stayed stagnant and was shielded from the international global economy. The party-state had shown a dangerous proclivity towards corruption and violent repression of dissent, and clearly had no interest in opening up the political space or the media sphere. Much of the social and economic development had been bankrolled by the donor community and Zimbabwe had also inherited a massive debt from the regime of Ian Smith. That debt would have enormous repercussions on economic developments in the 1990s as the international financial institutions, gunning for economic liberalisation, used the debt as leverage for their own ends.

²⁰ That ZUM did relatively well in the 1990 elections was perhaps a sign that Zimbabweans were searching for political alternatives. Edgar Tekere, along with other ZANU-PF stalwarts such as Robert Mugabe, John Nkomo, Joshua Nkomo and Josiah Tongogara, was at the forefront of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe. Tekere would later pen his controversial autobiography titled *Tekere: A Lifetime of Struggle*.

3.3 The 1990s to the early 2000s

3.3.1 The neo-liberal economic project of the 1990s

Economic reform in the 1990s was largely driven by the vested interests of the global financial institutions and triggered a massive economic collapse, worsened in later years by other local factors. During this period the “informal economy came into its own” because of the deleterious impacts of ESAP, and it was during this time that “‘backyard industries’ sprouted everywhere and more workers found their livelihood in this sector. In the 1999-2000 fiscal year, the informal economy in Zimbabwe was estimated to be 59.4 per cent of GDP, the highest in Africa (Mlambo, 2008: 15). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2009), in 1980 the informal economy had been relatively small, accounting for less than 10 per cent of the labour force. In the years 1986-1987 it accounted for 20 per cent of the labour force, and in 1991 for 27 per cent. By 2004 estimates were that the informal economy’s contribution to the total labour force was well over 40 per cent (IDMC, 2009). Informal economic activities among the impoverished people in Zimbabwe in the 1990s were a response to the deleterious impacts of economic restructuring which had been directed by the World Bank and the IMF from their citadels of power in the global North.

The 1990s clearly started in an environment in which omens did not augur well. Franz Fanon’s prophetic words are an apt characterisation of the conditions in Zimbabwe in the 1990s:

The party, instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontentment, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people up to the government, forms a smoke screen, and forbids such ideas. The party leaders behave like common sergeant majors, frequently

reminding the people of the need for ‘silence in the ranks.’ This party which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for full expression of the people’s will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control hastens to send the people back to their caves (Fanon, 2001 [1961]: 147).

For much of the 1990s Zimbabwe descended into a very dangerous abyss, economically, politically and socially, and the situation would worsen beyond that period. The contours of that descent are traced below.

In the late 1980s the IMF and the World Bank had “refused to sign an agreement for an extension of the export revolving fund in 1987 until measures were taken to liberalise trade” (Kanyenze, 2004: 123). Consensus on the need for reform clearly existed but there were divisions as to the “form the reforms would take in order to boost depressed investment, streamline inefficient labour regulations and restructure the economy in order to achieve growth with equity, promote exports, and create employment” (Kanyenze, 2004: 123).

The finance ministry, under then finance minister Bernard Chidzero, which had been very secretive in formulating the seminal documents for the reform programme, revealed in its *Framework for Economic Reform, 1991-1995*, which was touted as a locally formulated document, their projections for the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Bond, 1998: 380). The Framework projected that the economy would grow annually by 5 per cent, that the budget deficit would “shrink to 5% of the GDP”, that investment from the private sector “would rapidly overtake government investment, doubling from the levels of the late 1980s”, that inflation would be down to 10 per cent by 1994, that there would be a growth in export sectors like mining, agriculture, and manufacturing and these “would grow steadily through to 1995”, that new direct investment would

also peak and “Zimbabwe would have better terms of trade in dealing with the world economy over the subsequent five years” (Bond, 1998: 380; Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 31-32). The ESAP targets at the outset were about the “need” to cut government spending, although this would greatly limit growth (Bond, 1998: 381). At the same time the programme was “accomplished by mortgaging the future at a rate unparalleled in the country’s history” (Bond, 1998: 382).

“In reality, ESAP failed miserably” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 32). The so-called accomplishments of the programme in the 1991-1997 period in which it was implemented were as follows: an estimated “18 000 government jobs were abolished and the civil service bill was reduced from 15.3% of the GDP in 1990 to 11.35% in 1994”; there was a disassembling of the controls on foreign exchange; a significant curtailing of tariffs “except for some ‘import competitive tariffs’”; an “extensive liberalization of foreign investment regulations; abolishing of controls on prices; elimination of “local zoning and trading restrictions”; and “labour markets were largely deregulated”, particularly regarding wage determination and employers’ rights to hire and fire (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 37).

Reality on the ground in terms of economic reform painted a very dark picture as some of the key economic indicators in Table 3.2 show. While GDP growth was 5 per cent in 1995 it averaged 1.2 per cent from 1991 to 1995; inflation averaging at 30 per cent (1991-1995) never reached the lofty goal of 10 per cent (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 32). During the ESAP era the budget deficit was at more than 10 per cent of GDP, at least double the targeted 5 per cent, and during the drought of 1994-1995 it was 13 per cent (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 37). The core questions are “did the government stay the course with the

treatment” and “if so, was it the wrong medicine?” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 37).

While there may have been exogenous factors that had an impact on the reform process, like the 1992 and 1995 droughts, “tampering with the complex system of protective tariffs, duties and quotas created several problems that should have been foreseen” according to Bond and Manyanya (2003: 33). There was a surge in the “speculative imports of luxury goods, raw materials and machinery”, the trade deficit spiralled upwards in the early 1990s, and exports (including “manufactured exports” fell sharply.

The contribution of manufacturing to GDP fell and while there were increases in the contribution of sectors such as transport and communication, real estate, finance, education and agriculture these did not balance the “disappointing declines in volume outputs experienced in several manufacturing subsectors” and “de-industrialisation ravaged the textiles (-64%), metals (-35%), transport equipment (-31%) and clothing (-28%) subsectors” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 35).

ESAP had called for a reduction of government expenditure, and this had an enormous impact on the standard of living. For example, by 1996 annual earnings for civil servants as a percentage of the level in 1980 fell by 65 per cent, and declines in earnings were also experienced by domestic workers (-62%), construction (-56%), teachers (-50%) and farm workers (-48%) (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 35). That in subsequent years most workers could not afford the basket of basic commodities in the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe’s basket suggests a steep decline in real wages. For example, by 2008 it was reported that

the salary of a doctor in the public health sector was the equivalent of less than US\$1 per month, showing the dire economic situation in the country (Todd, Ray, Madzimbamuto and Sanders, 2009).

Table 3.2: Key economic indicators, 1995-2003

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Real GDP (%)	0.2	9.7	1.4	0.8	-4.1	-6.8	-9.5	-14.7	-14.0
Per person real (1990) GDP US\$	235	220	180	90	55	42	32	28	26
Inflation (%)	22.5	21.7	18.9	31.7	58.5	55.9	71.9	133.2	365
Savings/GDP (%)	22.4	16.9	10.3	18.0	19.3	12.1	0.8	4.3	4.3
Investment/GDP (%)	25.3	17.4	18.8	22.3	17.1	13.5	10.3	8.9	8.5
Budget Deficit/GDP (%)	-12.2	-7.7	-8.2	-5.5	-7.7	-24.1	-8.2	-13.8	
External payment arrears US\$m	-	-	-	-	109.0	471.1	762.7	1333.3	-
Domestic debt Z\$bn	24.7	33.2	31.4	44.2	77.6	162.1	194.1	345.8	590.9
Foreign US\$m	4001	4141	4117	3841	3285	3164	3180	4503	
Export growth (%)	13.8	12.6	-2.9	-20.6	-0.1	14.3	-28.5	-10.8	-5.3
Balance of payments US\$m	44	4	-739	-283	9	-166	-197	-1182	-825
Employment growth (%)	-1.9	2.8	5.6	-0.1	-2.3	-5.9	-0.6	-	-

Source: Kanyenze: 2004: 133.

Table 3.2 shows the impact of reform on some of the key economic indicators for selected years up to 1997 when ESAP officially ended. The table also shows declines in the post-ESAP phase and into the twenty-first century. The lower wages that had been instituted by ESAP did not, in real terms, improve the job market, and thousands of school leavers could not find formal sector

employment. As retrenchments increased and the “social wage” fell, there was a soaring number of school dropouts (because of cost recovery programmes that put in place school fees), and girls suffered most (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 35). There was also the onslaught of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the situation was exacerbated by a fall of “20% in real terms” of per capita expenditure on health care. This cut in expenditure resulted in the lower income groups being unable to afford health care since one of the instruments put in place under ESAP was a cost recovery mechanism which meant people had to pay for treatment and for drugs. People died because of unaffordable health care, and this produced what came to be known as the “ESAP deaths” (Mlambo, 2008: 15).

As economic conditions worsened, the great trek of professionals to regional countries like South Africa and Botswana accelerated. For example, in 1997 Zimbabwe’s public health sector was only able to employ 28.7 per cent of its national requirements (Chikanda, 2004). It is estimated that 18 000 nurses have left since 1998 (Todd *et al.*, 2009). Bread riots in 1993, dubbed the “IMF riots” hit the high-density suburbs and the city centre in Zimbabwe’s capital, Harare, a revelation of discontent with the deteriorating standards of living (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 37). The 1997 strike of private employees came on the heels of the 1996 public workers strike as the working class sought to voice their discontent with the impact of structural adjustment, not only on their lives but on their future prospects. Toward the end of the 1990s there was growing discontentment with the course the economy had taken, and frantic attempts were taken by government from 1997 onwards to remedy the situation (Kanyenze, 2004: 135).

Attempts by the government to right the economy did not bear any fruits. For example, economic programmes like the 1998 Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) “failed to deliver on targets, let alone reduce poverty” (Mlambo, 2008: 17). As shown by the key economic indicators (Table 3.2) such programmes did not manage to raise the overall GDP, which was in the red. Indicators like inflation continued to worsen. At the same time overall debt continued to balloon as the government failed to meet its payment obligations.

During the 1990s, especially with the implementation of ESAP, informal economic activities became much more widespread and came to play a central role in the livelihoods of the Zimbabwean populace. Marginalised people in Zimbabwe resorted to informal economic activities as a way of dealing with the economic crisis unleashed by ESAP (Brand, Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1995). Even in the early post-independence period there had been a realisation that the formal economy could not keep pace with the number of people entering the job market. For example, the heavy subsidisation of education resulted in the system producing a large number of graduates into a constrained job market (Brand, 1986). The Riddell Commission on incomes, prices and conditions of service had already recommended that a government study of informal economic activities in the country be undertaken so as to gather data on its size and on how it could be made viable with government and private sector support (Riddell, 1981).

Early in the post-independence period the trend was that those who were less educated dominated informal economic activities in the country. These included activities like street trading in food and clothes, home-based industries

that manufactured home wares like metal dishes, kettles, pots and pans, and light industries that manufactured burglar bars, sliding gates and other such items. A study of informal economy workers in Magaba in Harare, for example, found that 93 per cent of them had not gone beyond primary education (Brand, 1986). Interestingly, the data already pointed to participation by a considerable number of foreign nationals in informal economic activities – around 30 per cent in the Brand (1986) study. This resonates with southern African trends where cross-national human movements, in search of better economic opportunities, have largely been to those countries with better-performing economies. (Zimbabwe had an economic “boom” just after independence.)

With the advent of ESAP and the concomitant decrease in real wages, the retrenchment of people from both the public and private sectors and the declining economic situation, the numbers of the more educated participating in informal economic activities increased. For example, a study of informal traders in Harare showed that employed educated women supplemented their incomes by engaging in informal cross-border trading within the SADC region (Brand, Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1995). It is important to recognise that this was not the first time that cross-border movement existed within southern Africa. Engaging in cross-border trade and migration has its antecedents.

There has always been a history of migration within southern Africa in search of better economic opportunities. This dates back to the days of the Rhodesian Federation government and even before. Up until the 1980s, for example, there was a centrally organised migration of Malawians to the mines of South Africa (Andersson, 2006) and to the farms and mines of colonial Zimbabwe

(Christiansen and Kydd, 1983). There was also migration of other nationals from within the region to the gold mines, who contributed to the development of South Africa's so called "labour empire" (Crush, Jeeves, and Yudelman, 1991). There was a reincarnation of this migration, albeit in a different form, in the days of ESAP in Zimbabwe.

There was an upwards spike in the number of women in transnational and cross-border trade who moved within the region, and the numbers of people involved in street trading also increased. The study by Brand, Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1995) revealed the predominance of women in cross-border and street trading in Harare as the country grappled with retrenchments. Increasingly, women engaged in supplementing the incomes of their spouses or took over as the main breadwinners from retrenched spouses (Brand, Gumbo and Mupedziswa 1995). If economic restructuring was a mode of inserting African and other developing world economies into the global economy (Ferguson, 2006), then it was a dismal failure and it negatively affected the majority of the population in countries such as Zimbabwe. Those who were impoverished and dispossessed had to find alternative ways to eke out a living in an economy in crisis.

During the period of economic collapse authorities specifically allowed the use of residential areas for "specified non-residential activities, as authorities were forced to accept the importance of the informal sector" (Mlambo, 2008: 16). However, the burgeoning sector would also be at the centre of conflict in future.

According to Mlambo (2008: 16):

informalisation of the economy and the legal concessions from government in terms of relaxing by-laws to facilitate easier entry into the sector, and production and distribution of goods and services inevitably brought with it the informalisation of operating and production

infrastructure, as unauthorized vending stalls and open-air ‘factories’ sprang up everywhere, becoming the *potential source of conflict with authorities in the future* (emphasis added).²¹

In the late 1990s and the 2000s the economy went through further general collapse, cementing the importance of informality during that time as increasing numbers of Zimbabweans were propelled into this sector so as to eke out a living during a period of unprecedented economic difficulties.

The generalized plunge of the Zimbabwean economy began on the morning of 14 November 1997 when the Zimbabwean dollar went down 74 per cent in value. There had already been bad omens preceding this – a stock exchange crash in August of the same year, rising interest rates in the period from November to December 1998, and several thousands of jobs lost in retrenchments during that year.

There were other events during the tumultuous period of September-October 1997 which perhaps ignited the decline of the Zimbabwean economy. Firstly, President Mugabe finally conceded to the demands of the liberation war veterans and agreed to pay them Z\$50 000 each as well as a Z\$2 000 per month pension. It did not help that the World Bank immediately discontinued balance of payments support after that. Secondly, Mugabe made known government’s intention to implement land reform under the Land Designation Act, and that 1 500 mainly white-owned farms had been identified. In spite of government’s intentions, the land designation exercise failed to take off:

²¹ The Zimbabwean government turned a blind eye to the growth of the informal economy but would later destroy these ventures during Operation Murambatsvina. This exposes the contradictory relationship that the Zimbabwean government has had with informal entrepreneurs. In certain periods, when it suited the powerful elements, informal enterprise were allowed to grow without much regulation, and then when the same elements were seen as anti-government there was an attack on them.

The ambitious land designation exercise was not successfully brought to fruition via the Zimbabwean legal system: the courts, the World Bank and the IMF, the British government and other donors, the private media, and other pressure groups sided with white farmers and together effectively vetoed any forced sales in 1998. Instead, a ‘donor’s conference’ was held to work out a more gradual method of land transfer. It was only in 2000 that the land designation process took on substance, once war veterans were mobilized ... with Mugabe’s blessing, to invade more than 1000 white owned farms” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 40).

There was already growing opposition to the ZANU PF government, and the constitutional referendum in 2000 resulted in the rejection of the regime’s proposed Constitution by the populace. Even before that the party state had shown signs of attempting to re-assert its “sovereignty” – for example, the 1998 price freeze on staple goods, institution of tariffs on luxury goods and “several minor technical interventions to raise revenues, slow capital flight and deter share speculation” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 41). There was, however, growing pressure from international donors and there were calls for removal of price controls and relaxation of import tariffs, very central to the World Bank and IMF free-market mantra. The deal for loans from the World Bank collapsed in 1999 in an environment in which the export prices for Zimbabwe’s raw materials had collapsed rapidly since 1997 and continued to do so well into the twenty-first century. “Export led growth was revealed as a fantasy” (Bond and Manyanya 2003: 41).

The decision by Mugabe to cease payments on loans generated an atmosphere of tension between his regime and the international financial community. His regime had over the past decade or so benefited from donor support, not to mention the billions borrowed for social and economic development on top of the debt inherited from the settler government. There had

been a tightening of monetary policy during ESAP, and the opening up of the economy had revealed its weaknesses. The decline of economic growth during the ESAP years had hampered the ability of the government to repay World Bank and IMF loans.

When Zimbabwe had waved goodbye to the first decade of independence, foreign debt stood at US\$3.27 billion and it would balloon to US\$4.372 billion by 2000 with government accounting for 76 per cent of that debt. In 1998 “Zimbabwe spent an historically unprecedented 38% of export earnings on servicing foreign debt” and it became more and more clear that the foreign debt was simply too large to pay off, as pointed by the finance minister at the time, Dr Simba Makoni (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 45). The falling out with the international community meant that the regime became isolated internationally, and at home Mugabe was increasingly facing challenges from an impoverished populace. The opposition was getting stronger, and the situation within the ranks of the ruling party itself was becoming openly fractious.

3.3.2 From the late 1990s to the 2000s

The unfolding of events in the 1990s and the 2000s is important in that it was during this period that there was general economic collapse and dissent became much more widespread. Also, in this period the ruling Mugabe regime became much more repressive and violent. This was reminiscent of the *Gukurahundi* massacres. There was widespread use of violence on the general population. The regime also got away with acts like the promulgation of repressive media legislation, and it became much more daring and sometimes even paranoid in its

attempts to coercively cling to power. Later on, in the 2000s, it would clamp down on the informal economy, dealing a double blow to a populace which in the 1990s had been negatively affected by the restructuring exercise. Importantly, in the early and late 1990s, up until the “urban clean-up” operation, government had largely pursued a “hands-off” approach when it came to informal economic activities. Among those hardest hit by the clean-up operation were the informal traders whose activities had grown tremendously on the Mugabe regime’s watch during the period of economic collapse.

The most important political developments in this period were the growing linkages that developed between the ZCTU and the public sector workers in the 1997 general strike and the 1998 mass stay-aways. The strikes “established the potential effectiveness of labour as a social movement signalling the escalating momentum for change in the country” (Raftopoulos, 2005: 10). With the escalation of the economic crisis the leadership of the ZCTU, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, “articulated the linkage between this crisis and the problems of governance” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 10). One scholar notes that “Zimbabwean politics since independence has been anchored in patronage and such politics can only thrive when there is a large public sector” (Masunungure, 2004: 188).

The ZCTU was a linchpin in the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), which sent out a clarion call for the necessity of constitutional reform. The NCA was also instrumental in forcing the government into taking constitutional reform seriously, which led to the setting up of the Constitutional Commission by government (Masunungure, 2004). The National Working People’s Convention in February 1999, organised by the ZCTU, recommended

the formation of an opposition party under the auspices of labour (Raftopoulos, 2004: 10). This led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change in September 1999. Labour in Zambia, for example, had similarly been very central in the formation of an opposition party.

Dissent was also fuelled by the government's foray into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in search of new sources of income (Raftopoulos, 2003). This deployment of the army into the DRC was an unconstitutional action in which Parliament and the politburo – the highest decision-making body of the party – were not consulted (Bond and Manyanya, 2003) The growing opposition movement, together with civic groups, exploited such government actions to expose the escalating crisis in Zimbabwe. The DRC expedition, together with the “plunging economy made political crisis management all the more difficult” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 70). The foray into the DRC also meant that the government could not provide a safety net for the population, which was already reeling from the economic crash, since it was diverting its already limited resources towards the war effort.

Widespread corruption within the party-state itself, for example, in the irregular awarding of tenders for construction of a new Harare international airport, did not help matters for the Mugabe regime (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 73). There were also several very murky investment partnerships, for example, with Malaysia, which clearly benefited government officials, and an increase in “ubiquitous conspicuous consumption by government elites” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 73). In addition, there were also repeated efforts to muzzle the free press and to quell dissent through violent repression of University of

Zimbabwe students who often carried out strikes, and through attempts at demobilising labour which was clearly playing a central role in the strengthening of the opposition movement (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). The ruling party's legitimacy would not only be tested in 2000 and beyond, but would also suffer major setbacks.

3.4 2000 and beyond

3.4.1 The politics of repression

The year 2000 is often marked as a watershed year in Zimbabwe in that it “constituted an important junction of political events” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 12). Government's draft Constitution, which gave enormous powers to the executive, was resoundingly rejected in a referendum; the “vote represented the first major defeat for the ruling party since independence, and the protest threatened to translate itself into an election defeat later in the year” (Raftopoulos, 2004: 12). In addition, the rejection of the draft Constitution “presented a major step towards imagining alternative futures” (Kagoro, 2005: 249).

February 2000 saw the advent of the land occupations by the war veterans who became “Mugabe's shock troops”, by party youths, and by various other radical elements within the ZANU PF party (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 77). These land occupations can be “read as a direct response to the referendum humiliation and as political codewording for revenge against white farmers on the one hand, and emotive delivery and vote-catcher on the other” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003: 76). In the mid 1980s the ZANU PF elites had been at the

forefront of land re-distribution and later on they had demobilised this land movement only to reconstitute it again in the late 1990s, with war veterans at the forefront (Moyo, 2001). This illustrates how the ruling elites constantly change their (policy) positions to suit their interests at different historical conjunctures. The land invasions were orchestrated for the “disorganization and marginalization of commercial farm-worker communities” which had played a central role in the rejection of the draft Constitution (Saul, 2005: 142). Land occupations also heralded the emergence of a new ideology:

ZANU (PF) in 2000 promised the land, but at the price of an extreme and violent political intolerance that severely undermined the long standing popular aspirations for a ‘good’ state, and labelled as enemies a range of social groups that had once been included in the nationalist constituency. It was not a revived pre-independence nationalism that lay behind the wave of occupations in 2000, but a far narrower one (Alexander, 2003: 99).

In later years, with the rise of the opposition, the urban populace was marginalised in the construction of a discourse that cast them as anti-struggle and as enemies of the state in supporting the opposition movement. Operation Murambatsvina in June 2005 could be read, as suggested by Hammer (2006), as an attempt to disorganise the urban population - the main supporters of the opposition movement - just like the land invasions were designed to disorganise the farm workers, seen as responsible for blocking the passing of the draft constitution.

The tactics developed in the land occupations were refined and assiduously put to use in the June 2000 parliamentary elections. Election fraud was reported by local and international bodies that came into the country to monitor the elections. The end result, though, was telling of the direction in which

the political conditions in Zimbabwe were heading, with the opposition MDC winning 57 seats outright and ZANU PF winning 62 seats. Given that 2000 was a year in which the “worst election violence in Zimbabwe’s history” was recorded and the legitimacy of the elections was in doubt, the opposition challenged several of the election results in the courts and was awarded a further four seats to almost equal ZANU PF’s number of seats in Parliament (Raftopoulos, 2004: 13).

Following the June 2000 parliamentary elections the ruling party continued to act with impunity in an attempt to forcibly control the trajectory of politics in the country, and persisted in targeting the opposition movement (Masunungure, 2004). The judiciary also faced assault. For example, several legal rulings in which the courts ordered the Commissioner of Police to remove the land occupiers went largely ignored. Historically “ZANU PF’s record regarding respect for court rulings clearly demonstrates that it considers itself to be superior to the judiciary and to have the license to choose which decisions to comply with and which ones to ignore” (Goredema, 2005: 105). Further, as noted by one scholar “a power-hungry regime, that is not prepared to brook political opposition, has brought Zimbabwe to the brink of disaster by casting aside legality and constitutionality” (Feltoe, 2004: 221).

After the 2000 elections, in which the MDC took control of most urban municipalities, ZANU PF obstructed the free functioning of those municipalities which fell under the control of the opposition. The most blatant act was the meddling in the city of Harare, in which the opposition mayor was dismissed under frivolous charges, following which the affairs of the city were put under a special (ZANU PF appointed) commission. This commission turned out to be

incompetent and corrupt but was forcibly retained despite an outcry not only from the opposition MDC and Harare residents, but even from within ZANU PF itself. The way in which ZANU PF has continued to undermine democratically elected local government structures has deepened the urban electorate's alienation from it (Raftopoulos, 2007a: 37). The illegitimate commission would be at the forefront of Operation Murambatsvina in Harare.

Added to these attempts to stifle opposition elements was the fast-tracking through Parliament of the Broadcasting Services Act (No 3 of 2001) in an "attempt to control alternative opinions in the electronic media, particularly through the radio which is the dominant source of information for the rural population" (Raftopoulos, 2004: 14). In 2002 there was the passing of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), "designed to silence the critical media and increase the influence of the Minister of Information on mediated communication in the country" (Chuma, 2005: 134). In September 2003 the *Daily News* and the *Daily News on Sunday* were shut down, and in May 2004 the weekly *Tribune* followed suit.

As far as the rule of law was concerned the situation was such that "law enforcement agencies have either actively collaborated in these lawless activities or were rendered powerless to act" (Feltoe, 2004: 222). Following the violence in the parliamentary elections, many of the perpetrators were granted amnesty which was an injustice against those who bore the brunt of this violence. This is not unusual in Zimbabwe where "epidemics of organized violence and torture" have "invariably ... been followed by planned forgetting and silence, underpinned by laws granting indemnity and impunity" (Reeler, 2004: 226).

Another instance in which the precepts of justice were disregarded was the “blatantly political basis of land allocation” (Feltoe, 2004: 223) in the fast-tracking land reform exercise since the “land invasions”. The government later showed its disregard for economic justice by carrying out Operation Murambatsvina which destroyed the informal economy in which the struggling Zimbabwean population eked out a living.

3.4.2 Operation Murambatsvina and the increased securitisation of the state

Some analysts argue that the urban clean-up exercise, Operation Murambatsvina – officially “Restore Order”, but actually meaning “to clean up the trash” – originated in the British colonial system in Rhodesia (Vambe, 2008). “Colonialism’s methods of stripping Africans of their natural resources are well documented” (Vambe, 2008: 1), and set a dangerous precedent which found a modern-day reincarnation in the hands of the post-colonial state. When it carried out the clean-up operation, the Zimbabwean state hid behind the very thin veneer that it was trying to curb a rampant and uncontrolled defacing of the urban landscape in the form of, for example, unauthorised construction of structures, illegal informal trading and increased crime. It could be argued that the urban clean-up exercise can be understood within the context of the increased failure of institutions and the government’s own paranoid attempts to cling to power. Moore (2008: 25) suggests that operation Murambatsvina should be seen as “an almost logical extension of the techniques of a party that has consistently failed to rule Zimbabwe through consent rather than force or its possibility”.

ZANU PF won the parliamentary poll in March 2005 by securing a two-thirds majority (78 seats of the 120 elected seats); MDC won 41 seats. ZANU PF then used the “post-election phase period to launch further attacks on opponents, both inside and outside the party, in a series of somewhat chaotic policy decisions, ostensibly in a bid to consolidate their power base” (Maroleng, 2005: 1). The post-election period also saw the increased “securitization of government and civil service” with Mugabe appointing security personnel to key strategic civil service posts (Maroleng, 2005: 1). There was also blatant “ethnic chauvinism” with Mugabe appointing to key posts his trusted lieutenants, the “Zezuru old guard” (of the influential Zezuru clan).

During the period leading up to Operation Murambatsvina the “urban dwellers had become politically suspect in the eyes of the ruling ZANU PF elite” (Mlambo, 2008: 21), and they bore the major brunt of the urban clean-up operation. Clearly the case of Operation Murambatsvina was an attempt to control what was seen as an “unpatriotic” urban population. The operation also revealed that the post-colonial Zimbabwean state was in the “throes of economic, political and cultural crisis” (Vambe, 2008: 1). It was largely about the survival of the powerful elements in politics (Vambe, 2008).

On 19 May 2005 the City of Harare launched Operation Murambatsvina [OM] to clean up the capital. The Chairperson of the commission appointed to run the city made the following remarks in a speech at Harare Town House:

The City of Harare wishes to advise the public that in its efforts to improve service delivery within the City, it will embark on Operation Murambatsvina, in conjunction with Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). This is a programme to enforce by-laws to stop all forms of illegal activity. These violations of the by-laws in areas of vending, traffic control, illegal structures, touting/abuse of commuters by rank marshals, street-

life/prostitution, vandalism of property infrastructure, stock theft and illegal cultivation, among others have led to the deterioration of standards, thus negatively affecting the image of the City. The attitude of the members of the public as well as some City officials has led to a point whereby Harare has lost its glow. We are determined to bring it back. Harare was renowned for its cleanliness, decency, peace, tranquil environment for business and leisure; therefore we would like to assure all residents that all these illegal activities will be a thing of the past. To intensify Operation Murambatsvina, an ongoing exercise, the City of Harare will work hand in glove with other enforcement units of the Government which include the ZRP to make sure that this exercise is realised. It is not a once-off exercise but a sustained one that will see the clean-up of Harare. The eradication of chaos that currently prevails in the City, the seat of government, home to all diplomatic missions, headquarters of major business and commercial activities requires the co-operation of all authorities, business and individuals. The people of Harare must all appreciate the City is ours, it is our pride and belongs to us all: thereby let us all be responsible citizens.....Operation Murambatsvina is going to be a massive exercise in the CBD and the suburbs which will see the demolition of all illegal structures and removal of all activities at undesignated areas...” (*The Herald*, 24 May 2005, quoted in Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum Report [ZHRF], 2005).

Action Aid (2005) indicated that, based on its survey, nearly 1.2 million people had been affected by Operation Murambatsvina and that 70 per cent of these has lost shelter. A study carried out by Afrobarometre (2005) after the Action Aid study suggested that over 2.7 million people had been affected by the operation. Both studies concluded that the majority of people affected were urban dwellers who had been involved in informal trading, and that the operation had a tremendous impact on their income levels.

One analyst at the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa noted that the clean-up operation was “paradigmatic of the erratic nature of policy making and implementation in the country (reminiscent of the flawed implementation of the land reform programme)” and that it was “disturbing in the profound disregard for fundamental human rights of ordinary Zimbabweans, as

well as in its heavy handed and violent nature” (Maroleng, 2005: 1). The opposition MDC also made suggestions that the primary goal of the operation was political and that it was “designed to destroy the party’s urban support base, relocate the people to the rural areas where they would be under the sway of ruling party-aligned chiefs, and forestall popular protests by the poor as the food crisis deepened” (Maroleng, 2005: 3). One commentator writing a “Letter from Zimbabwe” in the *New Yorker* noted that:

The project ... was a pretext for remaking Zimbabwe’s political map. Two months before Operation Murambatsvina, the circle of security advisers who surround Zimbabwe’s President, Robert Mugabe, had warned him that the United States and the European Union were planning to rally slum dwellers and small traders, the backbone of the pro-democracy opposition, into a ‘Ukraine-style revolution’ (Hammer, 2006: 28).

Another analyst suggests that the operation should be “read as symptomatic of various government anxieties about the loss of control of the urban population, irrespective of political affiliation (Harris, 2008: 40).

The demolition of informal trading was done in tandem with the arrest of informal traders. *The Guardian* (24 May 2005) reported that over 9 400 small traders, informal entrepreneurs and flea market stall owners had been arrested in Harare as part of Operation Murambatsvina. The same article stated that the government accused stall owners of selling scarce commodities at inflated prices and of being involved in illegal foreign currency deals which were wrecking havoc on the economy. In 2006 a local newspaper, *The Zimbabwe Independent* (29 September 2006), reported that vendors from Mbare and Highfields high-density suburbs, traditional opposition strongholds, had been threatened with withdrawal of trading licenses if they did not attend President Mugabe’s

homecoming at the Harare International Airport. This shows the way in which the aftermath of the operation was heavily politicised and how the government sought to gain political control of the urban informal working class. Operation Murambatsvina demonstrated that “for the ruling party the emphasis of its strategy for the urban electorate rests largely on violence and control” (Raftopoulos, 2007a: 37).

Clamping down on informal economic activities and destroying informal stalls was ill-informed. The government did not pay due regard to the livelihoods of the populace in Zimbabwe, with economists estimating in 2005 that the informal economy may well have been generating in the region of 40 to 50 per cent of GDP and employing up to 60 per cent of the population (Maroleng, 2005: 4). Operation Murambatsvina had a huge impact on earnings among those engaged in informal economic activities. The ZHRF estimated in a preliminary report in 2005 that losses may have been around US\$700 million, or between 15 and 20 per cent of GDP (ZHRF, 2005).

In November 2006 the ZHRF (2006: 34) noted that:

The wrecking of the informal sector will have detrimental effects at a time that the economy remains in serious difficulties. Apart from drastically increasing unemployment, the Operation will have knock-on effects on the formal economy including agriculture.

The organisation went further to point out that the operation “must be seen as a deliberate destruction of the survival strategies to which Zimbabweans had to resort as a result of the economic decay deliberately wrought by a government determined to retain power irrespective of the costs imposed on others” (ZHRF, 2006: 35). In a trenchant remark, the forum further put the issue into perspective:

The anti-developmental framework that has been put in place in Zimbabwe is the antithesis of international norms and commitments expected of an underdeveloped country. The interests of the few who are given the chance to exploit the highly distorted environment to accumulate wealth rapidly and entrench their control of major segments of the economy, are riding roughshod over the well being of the majority of Zimbabweans (ZHRF, 2006: 36).

The operation also revealed the increased securitisation of the state in a number of ways, especially as it spread to most urban areas in the country to “encompass unapproved housing and illegal extensions to homes owned or rented by the poor, with armed police (together with the army) deployed to enforce eviction orders and government officials insisting that the victims return to their rural homes (Maroleng, 2005: 3). It is the “case that the unique organization and efficiency of the military in Zimbabwe make it the only institution capable of undertaking such a large-scale operation” (Maroleng, 2005: 3). Military officials were also said to be responsible for the brutalisation of the urban populace, who are seen as anti-ZANU PF, and there were reports of property being confiscated and taken away for personal use by the members of the security establishment.

Again, Zimbabwe’s government did not pay attention to the calls by the international community to stop the illegal evictions and to rehabilitate and compensate those affected by the operation. On 20 June 2005, then United Nations (UN) secretary general Kofi Annan appointed Anna Kajumolo Tibaijuka, UN-Habitat’s undersecretary and executive director, as a special envoy to head a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to evaluate the impact of Operation Murambatsvina. In the executive summary of the report released in New York on 22 July 2005 it was noted that the operation had affected upwards of 2.4 million people. The report also made the following remarks which were quoted in the

New African Magazine (2005: 22) which supported has been known to support President Mugabe's regime:

Operation Restore Order took place at a time of persistent budget deficits, triple-digit inflation, critical food shortages and chronic shortages of foreign currency. It was implemented in a highly polarized political climate characterized by mistrust, fear and a lack of dialogue between government and local authorities, and between the former and the civil society. [The] operation, while purporting to target illegal dwellings and structures and to clamp down on illicit activities, was carried out in an indiscriminate and unjustified manner, with indifference to human suffering, and, in repeated cases, with disregard to several provisions of the national and international legal frameworks Operation Restore Order turned out to be a disastrous venture based on a set of colonial era laws and policies that were used as a tool of exclusion. There is an urgent need to suspend these outdated laws and to review them within the briefest time possible to ensure the sustainability of humanitarian response and to set the stage for meaningful physical reconstruction and restoration of livelihoods.

In response to growing local and international pressure, the Zimbabwe government had sought to present the operation as part of a well-co-ordinated and well-planned exercise in "urban renewal". On 9 July 2005 it launched *Operation Garikayi/Hlalani Kuhle (Stay Well)*, in which it claimed that US300 million was earmarked for housing construction for the urban poor dislocated by the operation (Maroleng, 2005: 3). The UN special envoy reported that the government did not have the capacity to carry out this rehabilitation programme, and castigated the way in which local and international NGOs were being hampered from helping those who had been affected. In spite of its claims of a vision for displaced Zimbabwean citizens to "stay well", the government's actions had enormous repercussions on several thousands of school-going children who were relocated to places far away from schools. Several thousands of people were moved to areas

where adequate health care was either inaccessible or non-existent, which especially affected those infected by HIV and AIDS (Maroleng, 2005).

An analyst wrote in 2005 that “even when faced with economic collapse, a deteriorating humanitarian situation and the increasing likelihood of social unrest, Zimbabwe’s ruling elite continues to view the use of violence as a acceptable means in attaining its political objectives as was highlighted by Operation Murambatsvina” (Maroleng, 2005: 5). There has generally been a chaotic environment of personal self-aggrandisement among the “power elites”. The case of Operation Murambatsvina showed to the world the ends to which those with political power in Zimbabwe would go, no matter how unjust, in order to retain that power. The “process ... provided the small group of crony businessmen, army officers and senior officials who support ZANU PF with enough rewards to retain their support and give them a vested interest in the continuation of the politics of disorder” (Maroleng, 2005: 5).

The local elites with vested interests and those connected to the military establishment continue on the destructive and chaotic path which benefits them. A project officer at the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town commented in an article which appeared in the *Cape Times* on 3 June 2008 that “while the rest of Zimbabwe society is in crisis, those in the military and everyone connected to that establishment have never had it so good” (Fakier, 2008: 12).

3.5 The persistence of desperation and marginalisation in Zimbabwe

Since operation Muramabatsvina, the situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated even further in the political, social and economic realms. One analyst noted in 2007 that the Zimbabwean economy is the “fastest shrinking economy in the world outside of a war zone” (Raftopoulos, 2007b: 36). GDP per capita in 2006 was 47 per cent below the 1980 level and 53 per cent below the peak value of 1991 (Raftopoulos, 2007b: 36). Estimates at the end of 2006 showed that the average minimum wages were “16.6% of the Poverty Datum Line, while the share of salaries in Gross Domestic Income declined from an average of 49% during the pre-Economic Structural Adjustment period 1985-1990, to 41.5% between 1991-1996, dropping a further 29.9% from 1997-2003” (Raftopoulos, 2007b: 36).

Employment levels in the formal sector, the subject of much disagreement in Zimbabwe between the Central Statistical Office – a government body – and other independent bodies, went down from 1.4 million in 1998 to approximately 950 000 by 2004. Estimations showed that in the three years since 2004 the situation worsened, and that 80 per cent of the Zimbabwean populace was defined as poor by the Central Statistical Office in 2007 (Raftopoulos, 2007b). For example, they could not afford most of basics in the basket of household goods as measured by the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ). The “monthly wage of a commercial sector worker only covered about 10% of the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe’s basket of household goods in June 2007” (Raftopoulos, 2007b: 36). In August 2007 actual inflation as estimated by independent experts was said to be at 15 000 per cent, while the government claimed that it was 7 600 per cent.

The executive summary of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) 2008 manufacturing sector survey report (for the year ending December 2007) concluded that “the workforce is not being paid a living wage. Transport costs in a number of cases were higher than the actual salaries earned by the staff” (CZI, 2008: 14). In the same report the CZI noted with concern that “most were not even earning a living wage, with low level employees earning an equivalent of about US\$10-20 per month” at the interbank exchange rates at that time (CZI, 2008:16). worsening food shortages and food inflation had resulted in most people absconding from work, and those who came to work did so to use company resources (phones, stationery) for their personal businesses. Most of the workers interviewed at the time were found to be struggling to pay school fees for their children (CZI, 2008).

The situation was not helped by events earlier on in June 2007. The government launched *Operation Reduce Prices*, which worsened inflation and led to an upsurge in parallel black market activities for basic commodities (Sachikonye, 2007). Government sought to curb the increase of prices, which had gone up by over 300 per cent in just one week in June, and wanted business to reduce prices while the proposed prices were under examination by the National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC) (Mtapuri, 2008: 50). In 2007 there was also increased confrontation between business and government, with the later arresting business leaders whose companies did not heed calls to reduce prices. Then Minister of Industry and International Trade Obert Mpfu argued that “escalating price increases were a political ploy engineered by detractors of the government to effect an illegal regime change against the ruling party ...

following the failure of illegal sanctions. As a result, the government, he argued, could not stand idly by while the situation continued” (Mtapuri, 2008: 50).

The government also made several other bizarre policy moves. For example, statutes were promulgated limiting quantities and the institution of import tax on those importing a wide range of basic agricultural goods which were (and continue to be) in shortage inside the country. These included sugar, margarine, vegetable oil and mielie meal. Such policy actions, together with price controls, resulted in commodities disappearing from supermarket shelves. Most of them ended up on the much more profitable parallel black market. In an piece headlined “Basic foodstuffs are now a hot commodity”, which appeared in the *Mail and Guardian* on 21 September 2007, a journalist interviewed Zimbabwean informal traders who pointed out that they sold most of the foodstuffs they brought in from neighbouring South Africa and Botswana on the black market which was thriving and had better chances of profitable returns (Banda, 2007: 24). At the flea market that is the subject of this study, traders were prohibited from selling foodstuffs by the management of the market. Some traders did report that they sold basic foodstuffs from home and some did occasionally bring these to the market but did not display them. These were hidden and clandestinely sold from bags.

Food shortages in Zimbabwe have become much more widespread, with estimates that 1.4 million people were facing hunger in August 2007 (Sachikonye, 2007: 39). The situation has worsened in recent times. Water and power cuts, which have been ongoing, were affecting the economy, especially industry, with some enterprises operating at 30 per cent capacity (Sachikonye, 2007). Several

businesses have shut down. Indications showed that July 2008 inflation was at a record-shattering 231 million per cent (*Financial Gazette*, 22 January 2009). There has also been a partial “dollarisation” of the economy – which had been well under way informally – with the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe issuing 1 000 licenses authorising certain shops and warehouses across the country to sell goods in foreign currency such as US dollars. This partial dollarisation of the economy has made the situation worse for those companies that failed to secure licenses.

In the foreword of the CZI manufacturing sector survey report for 2007, one industry expert noted that “the manufacturing sector continues to bleed under a plethora of conflicting policy initiatives which are neither coherent nor long lasting” (Mafukidze, 2008: 8). In January 2009 a Zimbabwean business newspaper, reported that some “companies may fail to open after the traditional annual shutdown as a result of the hostile operating environment blighting the Zimbabwean economy” (*Financial Gazette*, 22 January, 2009). Some businesses that failed to secure licenses chose to break the law. The paper reported that many charged for goods and services in foreign currency, but that there “still remains a significant portion of the economy which is law abiding that is now teetering on the verge of collapse” (*Financial Gazette*, 22 January, 2009).

The CZI had already warned that “Zimbabwe’s manufacturing sector risks being swept aside if it does not regroup and strategise” in its manufacturing survey report (CZ1, 2007: 5). The report also noted with concern that investment in the manufacturing sector in real terms was continuing to go down and “firms are doing the bare minimum required to keep their plants running with little or no meaningful effort towards upgrading existing machines and technology” (CZI,

2007: 5). In general, the manufacturing sector, along with other sectors, has taken a heavy blow from the economic crisis and consequently there have been negative repercussions on the lives of working-class people, with the majority now eking out some sort of living by engaging in informal economic activities. People engaging in informal economic activities as a protective moat against the “tide” of economic collapse is not a new phenomenon. Obviously as the economy has worsened more and more people, even those lucky few who still have formal sector jobs, have had to find alternative means of survival as the value of the local currency has sunk even further in recent times. The country that was once the region’s “breadbasket” has been reduced to a “basket case” (Mlambo, 2008).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the contours of Zimbabwe’s socio-economic and political trajectory from independence up to recent times. The current crisis is best seen as having multiple origins. Among them are the uneasy alliance encapsulated in the Lancaster House Agreement at independence – especially with regard to land reform – the neo-liberalisation project in the 1990s, corruption, economic mismanagement, political repression, the chaotic land reform exercise and the intransigence of the ZANU PF elite vis-à-vis an inclusive government with the opposition. Also, one of the contentious issues in the settlement, land, was not tackled as vigorously as it should have been by both sides and it did not help that the government of the newly independent country could not move on the issue because of the parameters set in the Lancaster House Constitution. Land reform

remained a contentious issue up until the land invasions led by the war veterans, and still is today.

The impact of the crisis in its totality has been the violent strain imposed on the lives of most ordinary Zimbabweans. Many of them, skilled and unskilled, who cannot migrate on a permanent basis, have resorted to engaging in informal economic activities in order to make a living. The lives of traders in the informal segment of the economy have not been made any easier with the government engaging in questionable and sometimes bizarre policy decisions and implementations, like the violent and unjust Operation Muramabatsvina, which had negative consequences for the majority of informal traders. The government has also fought regular battles with some of the traders. For instance, they were accused of being the cause of the economic downturn by engaging in illegal black market activities like the buying and selling of foreign currency and scarce basic commodities.

Many employed and unemployed Zimbabweans have come to live very desperate and marginalised lives, and the cholera outbreak in 2008 was a stark reminder of that desperation and marginalisation. The argument in this dissertation is that, despite the economic collapse in Zimbabwe and the country being ostracised by the international community, the economic activities that traders engage in are connected to the region and to the globe in very innovative but at the same time desperate and unequal ways.

While there were massive gains in a broad set of social indicators in the first decade of independence, the improvement in these indicators was funded by

borrowing from international financial institutions who would later insist on economic restructuring that would trigger the crisis in the country.

Of course, it is important not to characterise all the problems that Zimbabwe has encountered as having their origins in the economic restructuring directed by the international financial institutions in the global North. In the case of Zimbabwe it was a mixture of external and local forces that led to the eruption of what has come to be commonly referred to as the “Zimbabwean crisis”. The local forces, whose contours have been traced in some sections of this chapter, plunged the country into an abyss following the implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. At the end of January 2009 the main opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, agreed to join the proposed government of national unity (GNU). It remains to be seen whether there will be considerable changes in the trajectory of policy (economic, social and political) and in the fortunes of the country, and above all whether there will be any considerable changes in the precarious lives of the local populace, some of whom are the subject of this study.

Chapter 4

The Flea Market and the Traders

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter located this study in the Zimbabwean crisis which is propelling increasing numbers of people into the informal segment of the economy. Firstly, this chapter briefly describes the flea market which is the focus of the study and contextualises it within informal economic activities and other markets in urban Harare and the broader Zimbabwean crisis. It is important to acknowledge that informal trading at the market is only one of a wide range of adaptive strategies that those facing tough economic conditions in Zimbabwe take up to survive. Secondly, the chapter identifies four types of traders based on the goods that they sell. Thirdly, there is a brief discussion of the socio-economic characteristics of the customers who frequent the market. Finally, the chapter reports on and analyses the socio-economic characteristics of traders based largely on data gathered from 70 “own account workers”.

The work histories and operations of some traders demonstrate the linkages that exist between the formal and informal parts of a single economy. That some of the traders have operations in both sectors illustrates that the two are not two separate economies but are part of a single, deeply segmented economy (Webster, Benya *et al.*, 2008) in which those in the informal part of the economy

are largely excluded from decent work.²² Traders' work histories also reveal their movement between the formal and informal (churning). Money and various other commodities also move between the formal and the informal parts of the economy.

Traders are not isolated individuals. They are involved in a variety of social networks in carrying out informal economic activities. Social networks here refer to "informal forms of economic organization" (Meagher, 2006: 553). These "non-state forms of organization constitute what are referred to as ... informal 'economic networks'" (Meagher, 2006: 559). That they are non-state forms of organisation is not coterminous with implying that they do not interact with the state (Meagher, 2005). Chapter 5 will go into greater detail on how traders often have to interact with state regulation, even if in an indirect manner.

The analysis of informal traders' socio-economic characteristics is grounded in the Zimbabwean crisis as a way of demonstrating the impact of the involution of the economy on, among other things, the experiences and circumstances of the traders and their way of life, and their reasons for engaging in informal businesses. Obviously issues like gender, educational status, family circumstances and the kind of assets (i.e. social assets, economic assets) necessarily mean that the impacts and responses to the economic involution are differential. Everyone has been affected in one way or another, largely in a negative manner, particularly as the Zimbabwean economy has worsened in more

²² In its Decent Work Agenda the International Labour Organisation (2008) sets out four strategic objectives: (1) the attainment of **full employment**; (2) the entrenchment of **workers' rights**, whether it be in the formal economy or the informal economy; (3) **social protection** aimed at bringing different levels of protection, including for those in the informal economy; and (4) the establishment of **social dialogue** as an institution for solving conflicts. The majority of traders interviewed fell outside these four strategic objectives.

recent times. Across the globe there has been a troubling trend towards the “privatization of previously socialized institutions associated with provisioning for social reproduction” (Bakker and Gill, 2003b: 19). This, as it applies to Zimbabwe, will also be analysed in this chapter.

An analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of the traders reveals that their life experiences in most cases mirror the twists and turns taken by the Zimbabwean economy. Most of the traders expressed disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their lives. This does not mean, however, that traders have been helpless in the face of the economic collapse. The multiplicity of responses among the Zimbabwean populace in general, and the traders in particular, reveal a certain level of creative energy which debunks some of the stereotypical images, especially in the visual and print media, regionally and abroad, which portray Zimbabweans as helpless victims in the face of economic difficulties and political repression.²³ One analyst remarks that, “the creativity, energy, inventiveness and entrepreneurship demonstrated in the informal economy is impressive” (Overa, 2005: 1).

This dissertation, however, seeks to emphasise that traders connect to the “global” through their activities. For example, some traders have been able to carve a niche in the buying and selling of second-hand clothes which have their origins in advanced capitalist countries. They acquire these from Mozambique and Zambia. Also, the DVD and video game traders connect to the globe through the Internet, where they download content from piracy websites and then sell this at

²³ SABC 3, in its weekly *Special Assignment* TV programme, has in the past screened several episodes in which images of Zimbabweans as helpless victims abound. Popular are images of Zimbabweans scaling the Beitbridge border fence into South Africa to escape economic collapse, images of urban dwellers being attacked by police and the military, and many others. Admittedly, many people are victims in the current crisis.

the market. Another global connector is the remittances that some traders receive from within and outside the continent in times of hardship, when their ventures may not be doing particularly well.

4.2 The city of Harare

The market that is the subject of this study is situated in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe which is located in the north east of the country (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Map of Zimbabwe showing city of Harare

Zimbabwe has a total area of 390 759 square kilometres and an estimated population of 13.12 million people (IOM, 2009). Adult HIV prevalence was estimated at 15.6 per cent in 2007 (UN, 2008). In 2001 HIV prevalence was estimated at 26.5 per cent, in 2003 at 23.2 per cent, and in 2005 at 19.4 (UN 2008). These estimates show that HIV prevalence has been decreasing. The World Bank (2009) put the life expectancy of the population at 45.1 years in 2008, down from its peak level of 61.4 years in 1987.

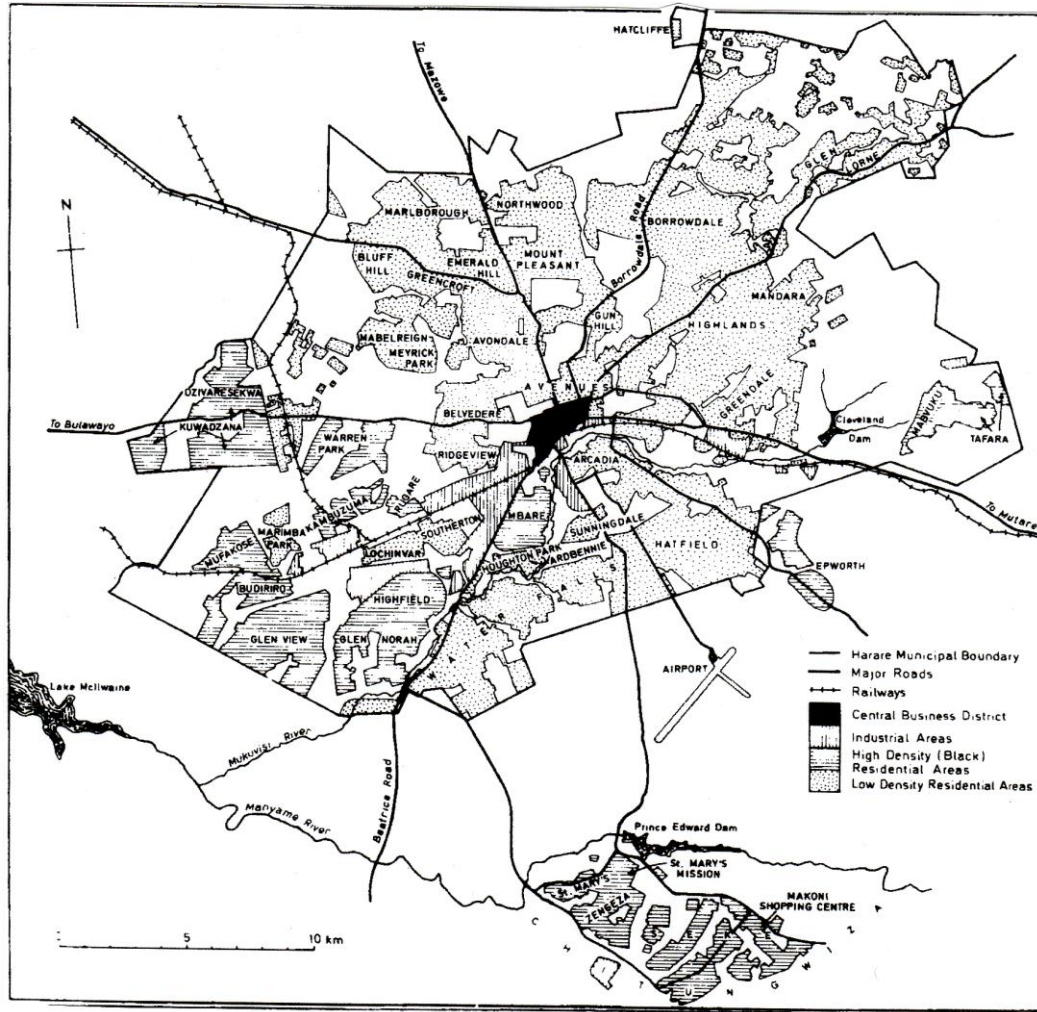
The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme did affect the health delivery system in the 1990s, as shown in the previous chapter, and this could be one of the contributing factors in the decline of the life expectancy. In recent years there has also been a massive exodus of health professionals to neighbouring countries and to other international destinations, and this has worsened health delivery, especially in the public sector (Gaidzanwa, 1999; Chikanda, 2004).

In 2006 Harare had an estimated population of 2.6 million people, with some 1.8 million in its metropolitan area (USAID, cited in Muronda, 2008). Cities in the developing world are “beset by grave physical, financial, and management shortcomings that endanger the hopes, and even the health, of their swelling populations (Annez and Friendly, 1996: 12). Many of these problems have also beset Harare. In the recent past there have been power cuts, and residential areas have been known to go for weeks without power. Many of the traders interviewed in 2007 and 2008 mentioned that some of the high-density areas they lived in only had power for about two or three hours a day, and some no power at all. In 2007 Harare was also infamous for its burst sewer pipes which contaminated water sources, and residents in both the high and low density suburbs complained that

they had intermittent water supply. A majority of traders interviewed confirmed that they faced these problems. Cities in the developing world are also beset by transport problems and urban dwellers face long commuting times to get to work (Annez and Friendly, 1996). In the case of Harare, it inherited problems arising from “the historical tragedy of locating African housing estates a considerable distance from workplaces” (Chikowore, 1993: 4) and this, as shown later, has negative impacts on traders in the present conjuncture.

Harare is a “product of a settler colonial political economy” (Rakodi, 1995: 8) which “emphasized differentiation, domination and accumulation” (Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni, 1999: 3). It was founded in September 1890 “when the Pioneer Column of White settlers organized by the British South Africa (BSA) Company terminated its march at the site of the present city” (Zinyama, 1993:8). The central business district (CBD) is laid out in “grid street pattern” and most residential areas are to the north, east and west (Figure 4.2).

From its founding, Harare was a racially divided city with white residential areas to the north of the CBD and far away from the industrial areas (Zinyama, 1993). Black suburbs, where most of the black working class who provided cheap labour lived, tended to be located closer to the industrial areas. “As in formal apartheid towns, black people were forced by law to reside in underdeveloped conditions to the south and the west of the city ... consistent with the direction of ill winds blowing though the industrial sites which lay between the black townships ... and the CBD” (Bond, 1999: 187). The black suburbs are commonly referred to today as the high-density residential areas (Zinyama, 1993).



Source (Zinyama, 1993: 10)

Figure 4.2: Land use patterns in Greater Harare

The earliest development of a black residential area in Harare dates back to 1907 when Mbare, the oldest township, was first occupied. Mbare was developed for all those blacks not living within the employers' premises and was deemed by colonial standards of the time, at 2.5 km south west of the town centre, far enough from white residences (Zinyama, 1993). Between 1907 and 1979 there developed, either through the direct aegis of government or parastatals, ten other strictly black

urban residential areas.²⁴ The residential areas were located in areas where land for future expansion was limited. Consequently, future residential areas would be located further and further away from the city.

The development in the 1970s of urban complexes like Chitungwiza, 25 kilometres south of Harare, was a result of the colonial government's "decision to pursue forcefully policies similar to those of Apartheid South Africa" (Zinyama, 1993: 26). Also, land for expansion of black residential areas was unavailable in the more established black areas. As a result, the black population was located in areas further from the CBD which had inadequate road networks. Some traders lived in townships far away from the market, such as Chitungwiza, and as a result faced regular transport problems.

After 1980 the post-independence government was responsible for the development of other residential areas in collaboration with USAID and the World Bank (Zinyama, 1993). A variety of what were called "people's markets", where commodities ranging from vegetables to clothes were sold, developed in some of these areas. These markets provided goods and services to those living there and in the surrounding areas.

In the present conjuncture, because of congestion in some of these high-density areas, there have been problems with providing adequate amenities and infrastructure. The congestion in cities like Harare can be understood in the context of urbanisation across much of the developing world, as shown in Table 4.1.

²⁴ These black residential areas were Highfield (established 1935), Mabvuku (1952), Mufakose (1959), Rugare (mid 1950s), Dzivarasekwa (1961), Marimba Park (1961), Kambuzuma (1964), Tafara (1967), Glen Norah (1971), and Glen View (1979) (Zinyama, 1993).

Table 4.1: Urban population as a percentage of total population

Area	1995	2007	Urban Growth Rate 2005-2010
Latin America and the Caribbean	74	78	1.7
Asia	35	41	2.4
Africa	34	39	3.2
East Africa	22	23	3.7
Middle Africa	33	41	4.1
North Africa	46	52	2.6
Southern Africa	48	57	1.0
West Africa	37	44	3.7

Source: Skinner, 2008.

Over half of the population in southern Africa is urbanised. In Zimbabwe a declining agricultural base, social and political turmoil, and economic collapse have in the recent past pushed people into the urban areas. Some have been displaced beyond the country's borders into neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa. In terms of housing in cities such as Harare, the supply does not meet demand. There are also issues with transport, as is the case in most African cities. The traders interviewed had difficulties with transport from the high-density areas, where a majority of them stayed, to the market. Some of the problems encountered by inhabitants of the city have historical origins and can be traced back to segregationist practices of the colonial regime, where the black population lived in congested, under-serviced areas while the white population lived in well-serviced, spacious neighbourhoods.

4.3 Flea markets in Harare: an overview

The eight existing flea markets in Harare have to be understood in the context of what has, for over a decade, been an economy in crisis. Before Operation Murambatsvina there had been an explosion of flea market activities in Harare, especially on the periphery of the CBD. In a 1998 study Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1998) suggest that the motivation to establish flea market operations in the 1990s may have been due to the impacts of structural adjustment. In their analysis, the authors divided the flea markets into three categories: those serving the high-income groups, like the Sam Levy Flea Market in the Borrowdale residential area; those serving the middle class, such as the Union Avenue and Speke Avenue flea markets which were mainly located in the city centre; and those serving the lower-income groups with very little disposable income, which were located at the periphery of the city.

After Operation Murambatsvina the two city centre flea markets were permanently closed. These had been the only flea markets in the CBD. Some of the flea markets in the periphery were permanently shut down while others reopened. Six flea markets remain outside the CBD at present, and there are still two flea markets in two low-density residential areas. The closure of some flea markets put pressure on space as all the traders could not possibly be allocated stalls in the limited spots available.

In their study Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1998) indicate that flea markets provide a range of goods, from clothing and hair products to electronic gadgets. The authors link the growth of flea markets in Harare to the proliferation of cross-border trading in the 1990s. Women cross-border traders approached the “city

fathers” and asked for the establishment of markets that were closer to the city, similar to the Mupedzanhamo clothing flea market in the Mbare suburb which was established in 1991 and which is still very popular with poor people even today (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1998). The attacks during Operation Murambatsvina show the contradictory nature of government policy towards flea market operations given that it was through the aegis of local government that flea markets were originally set up.

4.4 The flea market: the case

The market used as a case for this study is located in a small shopping area that is a site for middle-class – what is left of it – and upper-class consumption. Imported second-hand, high-end cars can frequently be spotted there, as can individuals in branded clothing eating in the few expensive restaurants that are still in business. Patrons can be seen in a few specialist shops dealing in bed linen, home décor accessories, high-end shoe repairs and expensive gifts. Most of the local Zimbabwean banks have branches in the area that service clientele from all walks of life. Some customers of these banks seem to prefer coming to the shopping area because they see it as less congested than Harare’s CBD.

It is a well-established flea market and most people from Harare and outside know it. In the present conjuncture the flea market serves a wide spectrum of people from the low income, to the high income, to the young, to the old. This market, like most markets throughout Africa, is a social as well as an economic space. Commercial exchanges occur but it is also where social and personal transactions are negotiated (see Cook, 2008): news is exchanged, gossip

is shared and heated discussions of contemporary local politics take place like other informal markets in Africa. For example, a study of trading at an informal market in Senegal showed that relationships which went beyond economic exchange were nurtured between customers and traders, and amongst traders (Bass, 2000).

Traders selling new clothes and shoes and second-hand clothes can be found at this market, just like other flea markets in Harare. These goods attract lower, middle and high income buyers. Unlike other markets, the case used here has an established reputation for its range of arts and crafts which are popular with some tourists. DVDs and video games can be found at other flea markets in Harare but traders at this particular flea market are known for stocking the more recent material. This market also has a larger cohort of traders selling a variety of second-hand books, unlike other markets where sometimes there are only one or two traders who deal mostly in second-hand school textbooks.

The space that is used as a flea market is an unused parking lot owned by a white Zimbabwean who is presently living in the United States. Traders who have a recollection of early days when the flea market was established, around 1995, knew this and noted that the owner of the market does visit occasionally. This is another example of a global connector where money moves from the local to locations outside the country. The black male Zimbabwean in charge of the day-to-day running of the market flatly refused to give any interviews and neither was he willing to enter into conversation about the owner of the market. A request for records about the turnover at the market and the numbers of traders was categorically refused. Some traders maintained that this was because he was

misappropriating funds and siphoning them off for his own personal use since the owner of the market is mainly absent. Other traders allege that, unknown to the owner of the market, some of markets stalls are not on the records. It is the money from these stalls that the manager misappropriates, they alleged.

In the middle of 2008 there were 150 open stalls at the market, based on an actual physical count. This was down from 180 at the beginning of 2007. The number of stalls sometimes went up to 200 in 2007, especially on Fridays and on weekends, especially on Saturday and during major public holidays. Traders indicated that as the economic situation worsened some people completely shut down their stalls, and this could account for the variation in the number of stalls operating on different days. Others said that some traders no longer opened their stalls on a daily basis because of the drop in business, so that they could save on rental money. These traders would only come on weekends or in some cases at the end of the month when people got their salaries. Between 2007 and the first half of 2008 traders paid on average an equivalent of ZAR25-30 per day for using the space from Monday to Friday, roughly ZAR50-60 on Saturday, depending on the movements of the Zimbabwean dollar, and about an equivalent of ZAR30-40 to use the space on Sundays.²⁵

On a good day the majority of traders estimated that some 200 adult customers came through the market. Some put the estimate at 150 and others at 100. Not all of them purchased something, according to the traders. There are those who just milled around the market, perhaps doing some “window

²⁵ These figures are based on estimates. Before its scrapping the Zimbabwean dollar had become virtually useless and unconvertible on the international currency markets. Estimates here are based on converting the Zimbabwean dollar equivalent to the rand in a distorted economy. The usual caveats of either over-reporting or under-reporting by traders apply.

shopping”. Some were looking to change their foreign currency or perhaps to “mop up” the currency that was available. Foreign currency dealers looked for notes to purchase, no matter how small. They bought these from traders who sold some of their goods for hard currency or from customers who wanted to change their money. Other people at the market were there to purchase illegal substances, the most popular being cannabis. While most traders were unwilling to identify those that sold illegal substances, they mentioned that it was an open secret that cannabis was available at the market. Traders also remarked that pornography (visual and print) could be purchased at the market if one looked hard enough. Other traders pointed out that there were also a few individuals peddling precious stones from Zimbabwe’s eastern highlands where there has been a major diamond find which is being exploited by small-scale illegal miners who are said to sell to the political and business elite.

This study focuses on traders dealing in (1) clothes (broadly defined to include footwear, clothes for small children and other related accessories), those dealing in (2) second-hand books and magazines, those in the (3) African arts and crafts trade, and those dealing in (4) DVDs, and video games. These are the most widely available goods at the market, hence the focus in this study on the traders dealing in these commodities.

There are days when traders who sell other goods (such as toiletries for men and women, bathroom mats, napkins for small children) can also be found at the market but many of these traders are transient and operate irregularly. One such female trader, in informal conversation on a Saturday morning in December 2007, indicated that she was at the market to raise a bit of money to contribute

towards the passport application fees for a brother who wanted to go to South Africa to work odd jobs. This trader was selling women's hair products which she got from a sister working as a domestic worker in South Africa. The trader only traded for one other day and that was the last I saw of her at the market.

At the market there are also regular ambulant hawkers selling cooked and/or uncooked mielies and various kinds of fruit in season. A young boy or girl selling "freezits," flavoured drinks packaged in 250ml plastic packs and left to freeze, which are popular for cooling oneself in summer, also add to the hustle and bustle of the market. They sell to many of the traders and also to customers who frequent the market. Some of the food items sold by these hawkers are an important part of the diet of traders who cannot afford the expensive, more nutritious food. Hawkers also made stops at the stalls of their regular customers and joked with them or gave the traders important information concerning an obscure shop in town stocking some few basic commodities at reasonable prices. This shows how the market sometimes serves as a site for the exchange of crucial information.

It is important to acknowledge that trading at the market is one of a multiplicity of informal economic activities that Zimbabweans engage in, as a way of dealing with the economic collapse. Other informal economic activities include the buying and selling of foreign currency on the black market, selling scarce basic commodities imported from regional countries such as South Africa and Botswana and some intermittently hoarded from a few local supermarkets, street hawking of cooked foodstuffs, backyard welding and small furniture manufacturing industries, the buying and selling of diesel and petrol which was

scarce in the country, buying and selling a variety goods from across the border such as printers and computer consumables to local companies, and a variety of other activities. As asserted by Chimedza (2008: 89), the “informalised or ‘peripheral’ economy supplies everything efficiently almost without fail”. In the case of Zimbabwe it is not so much peripheral but rather “the economy”.

At the market some traders reported that some of their customers were people who were involved in the illegal informal mining of precious minerals which were sold to middle men in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. The most talked-about mineral was diamonds.²⁶ Before the “dollarisation” of the economy, which effectively made the Zimbabwean dollar obsolete, buying and selling foreign currency was a very popular way of making a living in Zimbabwe. In gossip circles around the flea market, some of the most powerful political figures in Zimbabwe were widely believed to be heading cartels dominating the trade in hard currency and diamonds. The economic crisis essentially made Zimbabwe a “nation of traders” as a majority of the populace bought and sold anything that it could lay its hands on.

²⁶ The Marange diamond fields in Eastern Zimbabwe have been the most talked about since the discovery of diamonds there in June 2006. Many influential politicians have been implicated in the buying and smuggling of diamonds illegally mined from the fields. In 2008, Human Rights Watch in its report titled *Diamonds in the Rough: Human Rights Abuses in the Marange Diamond Fields of Zimbabwe* reported on human rights abuses in the area which had since been taken over by the military. The intelligence infrastructure was also implicated in some of the atrocities in the area.

4.5 The traders: Profile 1 – precariousness and disillusionment in the Sunshine City²⁷ (Tanaka’s story)

Tanaka is 26 years old and is typical of many of the 70 traders interviewed at the market. He is married with one small child and he rents a back room in a Harare high-density suburb south west of the CBD for the equivalent of ZAR100, where he stays with his wife and child. These are his only dependents at the moment. He got information about the availability of a place to rent through his only sibling, a sister who is married and stays in another high-density suburb close to the one where Tanaka lives. Tanaka is fortunate that his landlord still accepts rent in Zimbabwe dollars. Some of his friends have not been so fortunate. Tanaka studied for O-Levels but failed the qualifying exam. His wife, who is 19 years old, hopes to sit for her O-Levels again once the distractions of raising a baby have passed. Tanaka worked two formal jobs, one as a loader and then as a supervisor, before deciding to open up a stall at the flea market using savings from his last supervisory job.

Tanaka started off buying and selling sneakers from South Africa but he now gets his merchandise from neighbouring Botswana because its visa regime is less restrictive than that of South Africa. He buys sneakers for the equivalent of ZAR80 and sells them at the market for the equivalent of about ZAR160. Tanaka sometimes goes for several days or as much as two weeks without selling anything. His income is precarious and highly unpredictable, like that of most traders. Sometimes he makes the equivalent of just over ZAR320 in a single month, which is equivalent to two pairs of sneakers. His wife and child largely

²⁷ Harare was once referred to as the “Sunshine City”, not only because of the sunny climate for most of the year but its orderly structure.

depend on him. This has been compounded by the fact that his wife had to leave her job as a shop assistant to breastfeed their small child. They cannot afford a child minder. Tanaka complains constantly about the unavailability of basic commodities at affordable prices, and also about the terrible transport situation in Harare.

He feels despondent about his position, and over the years he has resigned himself to the fact that he will always be a lodger. Affording property is now out of reach for most ordinary Zimbabweans. Recently his child fell ill with a rash. He does not have medical aid so he had to pay cash for the doctor, including what he feels was an exorbitant price for the medication. He is worried that if he falls seriously ill he will not be able to afford hospitalisation fees and he will be unable to work for his young family. He does not have an emergency fund to fall back on in case of such unforeseen events. Saving money has become very difficult in Zimbabwe's hyperinflationary environment, he says.

Tanaka's first job was as a loader at a company manufacturing feed for animals. After the expiry of his contract Tanaka moved to a cooking oil manufacturing company. His job was in the packaging department. It was much the same as the previous job, and involved moving products from the line, packaging them and loading them onto trucks for delivery. He was later promoted to being a supervisor of the loaders and got a salary increase. On taking up his supervisory role he also began participating in worker's committee meetings. According to him these had very little influence at the company. For instance, people were sometimes dismissed arbitrarily without a hearing, and the workers' committee could do nothing about it. The promotion entitled him to take his tea in

the company kitchen; he brought his own lunch, unlike some other supervisory staff. Though he cannot remember how much he got paid at the factory, he maintains that it was reasonable enough at the time. He could afford most basics and even bought some food items for his parents, who have both since passed on. He also managed to accumulate some savings in the bank then. According to him, “things were not bad in Zimbabwe”.

Disillusioned with the trajectory of his career and facing almost zero prospects of meaningful promotion because he lacked any qualifications, Tanaka resigned from his job in early 2002. The situation in Zimbabwe was worsening at the time. Tanaka invested his meagre savings from his formal job to set up a stall at one of the urban flea markets in Harare. He specialised in buying and selling sneakers, which he still does. Tanaka is ambivalent about whether it was a good idea to have invested his money in this particular business. His money is invested in his stock at the market. He feels, however, that it is much better to be his own boss as he can dictate “the pace of things”. Tanaka’s life has not changed much. Like most traders he finds himself living day to day, “from hand to mouth”.

Life is a constant struggle for Tanaka, and though he sometimes makes 100 per cent profit if a customer does not haggle for a discount, which is very rare, he is not selling enough for the profit to make a huge impact on his life. He still rents the same room that he moved into as a bachelor. He notes that if he had not moved to the flea market he would not have been able to afford to pay *lobola* for his wife, and neither would he be able to look after his child. Though he does not sound totally convinced, he says life is “all right” because he can at least afford to buy some meat sometimes, which has become a luxury in Zimbabwe,

and he can have a beer at the end of the day at a nearby bottle store before he goes home, provided he has had “a good day at the market”.

He feels that being able to dictate his own working hours is a positive thing. He is solely responsible for managing his stall at the flea market, though on some occasions he will leave a close friend at the market to look after the stall when he goes for a three-day trip to source goods. If he does not have much stock he shuts down operations for the time he is away on such a trip. On some days, which are far between, he gloats that he can make enough money to buy a few pints of beer for some of his friends that he went to school with and who went up to university but have no jobs at the moment. Tanaka is very contemptuous of civil servants, especially teachers, whom he feels wasted time by getting a higher education because they “earn peanuts.” However, Tanaka complains that his income has been much more irregular recently, and though it makes sense to ask customers to pay in foreign currency because of hyperinflation, most either cannot pay or do not want to pay for shoes in foreign currency.

His income now varies between nothing to ZIM\$450 000 and sometimes ZIM\$900 000 per week, depending on his sales. ZIM\$450 000 was equivalent to the price of one pair of shoes, and later to the price of two pairs. Sometimes this was all he would sell for a whole week. When I talked to Tanaka again later in 2007 he complained that things were getting worse. Basic commodities were unavailable in the shops, and they were very expensive on the black market. Some of the peddlers of these commodities insisted on payment in either rand or the US dollar. Most traders now combine business trips to South Africa with shopping for

groceries, and it is common to send a friend, kin or a fellow trader with money to buy a few manageable groceries.

Tanaka is worried that with “the way things are going” his business might collapse. While some of his friends have joined the Great Trek to South Africa, he feels that with his failed O-Level he will not be able to find a “good paying job”. He also feels that he has been his own boss and has not worked for anybody for a very long time, and so he will find it very difficult to adjust. He believes that moving to South Africa or Botswana is for those who have qualifications or who have relatives on the other side that can set them up in the first few days while they are looking for a job. He does not have any contacts with close relatives except for his sister who has an irregular job doing laundry for families in a low-density northern suburb. At the market Tanaka has social networks with other traders. He sometimes looks after the stalls of his friends when they travel to source their goods and, together with these traders, they contribute to buying lunch which they share among themselves.

Tanaka mourns the fact that inflation makes it difficult to save any money. The cost of everything from transport and fees is spiralling upward on a daily basis. He sums up this point by saying: “You cannot afford to be sick in Zimbabwe these days. Even if you have the money you might find that the doctor is not there or there is no medication at the pharmacies. That’s if you can actually afford to get to the hospital.” Tanaka feels that his life hangs on the edge. His is a very precarious existence. The themes that emerge from his biography are common among many Zimbabweans and particularly among a broad spectrum of the traders at the market where he is based.

Like most Zimbabweans, traders like Tanaka are concerned about issues like their inability to accumulate savings in the current crisis, the fact that they do not have unemployment benefits, and their irregular and unpredictable incomes. Traders and most Zimbabweans, it seems, share a sense of disillusionment with the trajectory of their lives, particularly the chances of them amounting to somebody in the current economy. Like Tanaka, many Zimbabweans have no hopes of owning property. It is simply out of the reach of most people. Traders, like other urban dwellers, live in areas where it is difficult to travel to work. Water and sanitation are inadequate and many traders live in rented lodgings where they are at the mercy of landlords who may increase rents or may evict them at short notice. Zimbabweans who still have jobs earn wages which cannot assure them a secure existence. They live precarious lives, in precarious times. This precariousness is a key characteristic of the informal traders studied.

Across the globe precarious work has become a major challenge (Kalleberg, 2008). Most of the literature on precariousness (Kalleberg, 2008; Webster, Benya *et al.*, 2008) has tended to refer mainly to workers in formal employment. Precarious work creates "...insecurity for many people and has far reaching, pervasive consequences not only for the nature of work, workplaces, and people's experiences, but also for many non-work individual (e.g., stress, education) and social (e.g., family, community) outcomes, as well as for political instability" (Kalleberg, 2008: 2). Zimbabwe, which went through massive deindustrialisation in the late 1990s because of ESAP (Bond, 1998; Bond and Manyanya, 2003) and the recent economic collapse (Raftopoulos, 2007a; Sachikonye, 2007) shows similar pathways, like political instability and increased

insecurity. Across the globe the poor and the working class are increasingly becoming insecure because of economic restructuring and other crises. In Zimbabwe the social characteristics of traders reflect the crisis in the country.

4.6 Social characteristics of traders (part 1)

4.6.1 Age and family status

The ages of the traders interviewed ranged from 19 years to 63 years. Although the majority of the traders interviewed were aged between 19 years and 35 years, there was a greater concentration of respondents in the early 20s to early 30s age group. Forty-six of the respondents were men and 24 of them women. Men were over-represented in the arts and crafts trade, in the second-hand book and magazine trade, and in the DVD and video games categories. Peberdy (2000), in a study on immigrant traders in the arts and crafts trade in South Africa, some of them from Zimbabwe, reported an over-representation of men in this trade.

Generally, among those who reported themselves as own account workers, who are the subject of this thesis, men are over-represented. In contrast, using national data from a set of five developing countries, Chen, Vanek and Heintz (2006) argue that in the informal economy (in non-agricultural employment), women are more likely to be own account workers, domestic workers and unpaid workers in family businesses. On the other hand, men were more likely to be employers and wage workers. It is important to note that the data reported here is based on a sample that was purposively generated, so broad generalisations should be made with caution.

While this study uses a mainly qualitative case study method through purposive and snowballing sampling, which would make comparisons with national data analyses from other developing countries spurious, the method used here may reveal different dynamics in developing countries with moribund economies like Zimbabwe where most of the population has been and continues to be dispossessed and where males are often regarded, in “traditional African culture”, as the breadwinners. The males interviewed often use this breadwinner trope to explain their motivation to set up informal enterprises. These males saw themselves as the breadwinners, and saw it as their responsibility to take care of their spouses, siblings, children or other dependents. On the other hand, females who were single, divorced or unmarried also saw themselves as the breadwinners of their families. Those traders who “are doing it for themselves” – that is, those who do not work for anyone but themselves – are often highly regarded at the market. They themselves regard owning their own operations, no matter how modest they may be, as far better than being engaged as waged workers, formal or informal, in the current conditions in Zimbabwe.

Of the 70 traders interviewed, 11 were in the arts and crafts trade, of which 9 were male and 2 female; 37 traders were in the clothes and related trading business, of which 18 were male and 19 female; 10 traders were in the second-hand book and magazine trading, of which 7 were male and 3 were female; and 12 were in the DVD and video games trade, all of them male. All of the traders at the flea market in the arts and crafts, second-hand book and magazine trading, and DVD and video games trade were interviewed and all of them regarded

themselves as own account workers. They owned their operations and they predominantly provided the labour for the running of their stalls.

Of the female arts and crafts traders, one was married and the other widowed. Of the male traders, five were married and four were single. Of the female clothes traders, seven were married, ten were single and two were widowed. Of the male clothes traders, eight were married, nine were single and one was widowed. One female book and magazine trader gave her marital status as single and two as widowed. The male book and magazine traders were almost split in half, with three of them married and four single. Among the DVD and video games traders (all of them male), three were married and nine single. In the whole sample, eight females were married compared to 19 males, 11 females compared to 26 males were single, and five females were widowed compared to six males. Of the whole sample, 38.5 per cent (27 respondents) was married, 52.8 per cent were single (37 respondents), and 8.5 per cent were widowed (six respondents).

An interesting issue is that of all those who indicated that they were single, over half did say that they had been involved in some kind of long-term relationship. They did not regard these relationships as marriage, though. For example, the females said that the men they had been involved with had never, strictly speaking, married them since they had never paid “something” to their families, although they had stayed together in some sort of “marriage-like” arrangement. Most of the males said, “We were just staying together”. Some said they would have married if the partners they were staying with had got pregnant. Some single male traders said that they were not married because they could not

afford it in the current economic environment. They simply did not have the money for *lobola*, they said. For others, starting a family was simply unaffordable given their meagre earnings at the market.

As far as having children is concerned, just over half the sample (some 51.4 percent) had children, which could in part be a reflection of the fact that 52.8 per cent of the respondents were single. Of the total in the sample that had children, 69.9 per cent were male and 30.6 per cent female. Those who did not have children (whether male or female) tended to be single. Except for two (older) female traders, most of the traders had at least one child, sibling or a closely related family member (older mother, niece or nephew) dependent on them. Even the single traders had other extended family members who either depended on them most of the time or on some occasions, especially when there was an emergency. The latter were not necessarily staying in the same household as the trader. On some occasions it was these extended family members who would look after the stall when a trader had to make a trip or attend to urgent business. However, traders generally preferred to look after their stalls themselves. They felt they understood the dynamics of their own business much better than anybody else.

One male trader indicated there were “always demands” placed on him as the eldest male to provide for some extended family members, especially in times of emergency: “Sometimes I have to give money to relatives that I barely know. It’s very frustrating.”²⁸ Another male trader, CC, remarked that even though he was not married he had to look after a deceased sister’s child who stayed with his

²⁸ Trader interview: Rick, Harare, November 2007.

widowed mother, whom he was also responsible for as she was old and did not work.

The general pattern is that even where traders are single or have small families they almost always have other regular or intermittent obligations towards nieces, aunts, (aged) retired parents, or their own brothers or sisters who are either married or unmarried. These kinship networks may put a burden on their already stretched resources. It is important to acknowledge, however, that in some cases the traders would rely on some of their relatives to look after their stalls for short periods of time while they travelled to source goods. In cases where traders closed their stalls, a female trader with children might ask a relative to check on them while she was travelling.

4.6.2 The family circumstances of informal traders

The family circumstances of traders have a variety of impacts on the trajectory of trader's lives and also on their ability to weather the economic collapse in the country. A study by Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina and his collaborators (2000: 47) on the responses of the Russian citizenry to the collapse of the Soviet economy reports that sometimes citizens can rely on a range of "citizenship assets" – that is, "claims that can be made on the state for pensions, child support, public assistance, rent subsidies and so forth".

As indicated earlier, the state in Zimbabwe has become largely moribund and cannot provide many of the amenities that it provided in the era before structural adjustment and the unprecedented economic collapse and hyperinflation which has wiped out public sector pension funds. In the 1990s the government,

through its social dimensions of adjustment fund (SDA) did try to provide a safety net for those affected by the economic restructuring programme, but there were serious problems around an “inappropriate targeting strategy”, a funding crunch at the administrative level, and “a limited conception of the social effects of adjustment” (Chisvo and Munro, 1994: 25).

Most of the affected population was simply not reached by the various food schemes, school fees programmes, and the employment and retraining programmes for retrenched people conceived under the SDA fund (Chisvo and Munro, 1994). With the worsening of the economy safety nets of any value simply disappeared. In the 2000s a widely circulated story was that it cost more in terms of travelling for a pensioner to go to cash a pension cheque from the public sector pension fund than the actual value of the pension. At the time of research, most public pension funds had stopped making payouts because they did not have the funds or simply because the payouts were so miniscule that they would not have made a difference. The state did not provide old age pension or unemployment benefits. In such circumstances the general population has had to depend on various social networks to make ends meet in the current climate. For instance, remittances from outside the country are very important for survival (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006, 2008).

There are a variety of “networks of relatives and friends to which individuals or households can appeal for help or to which they are obligated to” and these networks can be termed “social assets” (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006). Later sections will illustrate various instances of “social assets” in operation, like the pooling together of resources for food at the market and to fund

visa fees and travel expenses for one trader, who then purchases merchandise on the behalf of other traders.

A study of Malawian long-term and short-term migrants to South Africa, for example, found that there was a dependence on social networks for travel money, accommodation and employment (Andersson, 2006). Migrants used some of these networks to courier money, goods and information back and forth between sending and receiving areas. There are several other instances in which social assets are utilised by traders, and these instances can be fully appreciated by considering the family circumstances of some of the traders in this study and how these have differential impacts on the nature of their lives (see also Profile 2 below).

4.7 The traders: Profile 2 – sketch of Jimmy Jimalo

Jimmy Jimalo is a stocky, sinewy man of 37 and is a book and magazine trader. He was born and raised in Mbare and stays there in a two-roomed house which he “inherited” from his parents, who are both deceased. His mother passed away late in 1999, and his father was killed in a bus accident in 1995. He is the only son among all his siblings. His three sisters are all married and they stay with their husbands. He has worked as a street sweeper and as a garbage man for the Harare city council.

He managed to get two O-Level passes, and got the job at the city council only because he had a C-grade pass in English. With the worsening of the economy in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s, Jimmy was retrenched and started selling mainly stolen school textbooks on the streets of Harare to make a living. Most of

his friends were already in the business and they introduced him to the trade. Most of the books they sold then came from schoolchildren. Then he could afford an “all right life” he says, and there was demand for cheap textbooks because most people were unable to afford new books from bookshops. Facing constant harassment from police, who were also targeting street kids, Jimmy decided to open a stall at the market.

He complains that the journey to the market is now expensive because he needs to get a public taxi into town and then another one to the market. When he worked in town (in the CBD) he could just walk to and from home. Even now he still walks part of the way if he does not have enough money. He just gets a taxi from the market into the CBD and finishes the rest of the journey on foot. He is grateful that, unlike other traders, he at least has somewhere to stay that he can call his own. He does not have to worry about rent like other traders at the market.

The profile described above illustrates a case of “inheritance assets” which traders can rely on and which can sometimes protect them in a period of economic collapse. Because of his family circumstances – for example, that he was the only male among his siblings and that his sisters lived with their husbands – this particular trader inherited a modest house, and does not have to worry about rental money. Unlike other traders, he does not have insecurities about whether his landlord will raise his rent or whether he will have to relocate at the end of the month.

In some cases traders have to rely on their parents for accommodation, and it is very common for young married men to live in backrooms on their parents’ property and pay an average rent of the equivalent of ZAR100 for a room. The

terms of payment are normally favourably set. Most traders pointed out that they did not find this unusual, especially where a man is married and has a family. “Under normal circumstances a married guy should be staying on his own with his family. If he chooses to stay on his parent’s property there is no reason why he shouldn’t pay rent. Things are tough these days. Some people rely on their back rooms to survive”, said one married male trader in his 30s.²⁹ Young married male traders often point out that it is an advantage to have parents who are alive and who own property, no matter how modest. Traders agree that it is much easier for male siblings to live on their parents’ property than it is for a married female to bring her husband to live on her parents’ property.

Some of the financial constraints mentioned by traders can be traced to the period of ESAP (1991 to 1998). Traders mentioned a time in which parents lost jobs due to retrenchments or the complete closure of some companies. It was a time in which they had to adjust their expectations in life. Some traders could not continue with their schooling. Male traders, especially those in their 30s, indicated that it was expected of them for example to find jobs soon after they finished school, especially low-skilled jobs, and to bring an income to their families, especially in cases where both parents did not work themselves. “I had to find a job. I had been taken through school and even that was hard enough for my parents, especially with my father being the only one who worked. A lot of other people depended on him, including my grandparents in the rural areas”,³⁰ said one trader.

²⁹ Trader Interview: Rickson, Harare, August 2007.

³⁰ Trader interview: Simon, Harare, August 2007.

Another trader said that his father had six children in all, and there just was not enough money for the whole family, so it was up to him to go on and find something to do after his O-Levels. This included doing low-paying odd jobs, then a stint in South Africa as an illegal immigrant in which he managed to raise enough money to get a passport, and later on to buy some stock so that he could start his own stall selling men's clothes. In South Africa he was often helped by male friends with whom he grew up. These kith often found odd jobs for him to do, but he found that most of the jobs paid very little and he was not treated well because he was not qualified and his employers knew he did not have the "right papers". An observation made by one analyst with reference to immigrant workers in advanced countries applies here: "Many immigrant workers too soon become aware that the pay and labour conditions in store for them ... do not go far in promoting their economic goals" (Portes, 1997: 7).

Sometimes the family circumstances of traders may lock them into a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. The trader's parents may have been poor themselves and could not afford to provide him or her with a decent education. As a result some traders could only find low-paying jobs. A disgruntled male trader remarked:

Well, we were a poor family. My father was poor. I am poor. If things don't change, my children will probably be poor. Things are tough right now in the country. It's us, the poorest, who are having the toughest time. If things go on like this I will not even be able to come to work. I struggle right now to put together bus fare to come here. I also need to look after my wife and two children. Some of the other guys at the market have friends and brothers in South Africa or Botswana who can help them out when things are tough. They send a bit of money sometimes. I don't. My life depends on whether I can sell something or not. I have not been able to save money for a long time. There are lot of other things I have to spend

my money on. With the way things are going I will run out of stock very soon. I will not even be able to replace it.³¹

Sometimes “social networks and a minimum of economic resources can be critical to sustain even a subsistence level of economic activity in the informal economy” (Heintz and Pollin, 2003: 4). The case of the trader above illustrates the importance of having favourable family circumstances like family networks which one can rely on in harsh times, even if it is on an irregular basis. Those individuals who do not possess some minimum of social networks may be curtailed from continuing to operate in the informal economy (Heintz and Pollin, 2003).

Traders and Zimbabweans in general have to rely on social networks based on trust when it comes to receiving money sent by kin and friends from regional and international countries. Traders within some of these networks received money through informal channels which do not rely on the modern-day banking system. For example, kin working formal and informal jobs in countries such as South Africa or Botswana would give other traders whom they knew, who were on trips to source goods, money to give to other traders or to kin in Zimbabwe. The traders on such trips would physically courier the money back home, an illustration of how money transfer has become informalised.

This “informalisation of the money transfer system” has been reported by Bracking and Sachikonye (2006: 32) in a study on remittances and the household economy, based on a survey in selected suburbs in Zimbabwe’s two largest cities, Harare and Bulawayo. The study documents the importance of these remittances to survival, and indicates that “poor households who don’t receive them are, of

³¹ Trader interview: D, Harare, July 2007.

course, in a critical state” (Bracking and Schikonye, 2006: 32). The study concludes that the “informal economy has emerged as a critically important conduit for households in terms of their sending and receipt of remittances” (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006: 39). This again is an indication of the ways in which money connects people in a globalised world, but more importantly it demonstrates how, even when there is capital flight, money from individuals flows in some way back into the country.

4.8 Social characteristics of traders (part 2)

4.8.1 Educational experiences

Informal economic activities, of which flea market trading is one of many examples, have been popularly conceptualised as being largely taken up by those people who are outside the formal economy and who may lack substantial formal educational qualifications. Such assumptions abound in media images of immigrant informal traders in South Africa (Peberdy, 2000).

The traders interviewed showed a different pattern. All of the traders interviewed, except for two older female traders (60 years and 63 years old) who had their primary school education in the then Rhodesia, went through secondary school and some had sat for their O-Level qualifying exams with varying outcomes. A variety of reasons, linked to family circumstances, were adduced by traders as contributing to their failure to either complete O-Level education or to go further. Most prominent among the reasons that traders mentioned was that their parents or older siblings who were paying for their education did not have

enough money for them to go on to A-Levels, even if they had “decent” O-Level passes. A female trader said:

I got some good passes and I would have wanted to go to A-Level but we didn't have money. My father struggled to pay fees for my older brother, who failed his A-Levels. I am sure he didn't want a repeat of the same thing. Besides, he lost his job soon after my O-Levels. He got retrenched. Well, I got pregnant after that and I decided to get married. My husband is late now and it's too late for me to go back to school. Besides, I have a child to look after. I am the child's only parent.³²

None of the traders interviewed had a university qualification, though some did have a tertiary-level qualification. A 29-year-old male trader in the DVD and music CD trade had a tertiary -level diploma in information technology (IT) from a local technical college. Another, a very successful trader in the same business, had a tertiary-level qualification in electronics from what used to be a very highly rated institute of technology. Another male trader in the clothing business, with a tertiary-level qualification in clothes tailoring and design, had worked at a clothing manufacturing company as a tailor and lost his job when the company was shut down in the late 1990s. The owner relocated with a small staff complement to South Africa. This reflects how the business environment had simply become unviable in Zimbabwe.

The hairdressing qualification came out as very common and popular among the young single females, with 9 of the 11 single female traders either having completed the course or having done some of the coursework and harbouring intentions of completing it in future. It was common to see some of these female traders plaiting a customer and taking intermittent “breaks” to also

³² Trader interview: Jane, Harare, April 2007.

attend to flea market customers. The standard fee for plaiting ranged from an equivalent of ZAR20 to ZAR50, depending on the style.

4.8.2 Reasons for entering into informal trading and traders' work histories

Various arguments exist as to the reasons why people are propelled into informal economic activities. There is widespread recognition that “informal employment tends to expand during economic crises or downturns, suggesting that necessity – in addition to choice – drives informality” (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2133). Some writers argue that it is imperative to transcend both the conventional depictions of the motives of those in the informal economy as “necessity-driven” and the emergent “depiction of them as opportunity-driven.... Rather, their motives should be seen as both concurrently necessity and opportunity driven” (Williams, 2007: 239). The growth of informality has also been seen as a core feature of “contemporary economic growth” and the global economy (Williams, 2007).

Of the 70 traders interviewed for the study, 67 of them reported the economic situation in Zimbabwe as the main reason for going into informal trading. Others gave different reasons for entering into the flea market trade. One male trader (40 years old) in the DVD and video games business had seen the flea market as an opportunity to diversify and grow his business, using money earned from his formal small businesses. These formal businesses comprised two shops, registered years ago with the city council, where he started out renting the old

VHS video tapes, but with the change in technology he had gone into DVD rentals.

In the past three years or so the flea market business had given him better returns than his two high-density DVD rental shops and he had invested more money in the flea market. Most recently, however, business at the flea market had taken a dip. There has been stiffer competition with some of the newer traders at the market. Most of his regulars are long-term clients he has been doing business with for upwards of almost four years. “They trust the quality of my DVDs and music,”³³ he said. This case is an example of how traders operate both in the formal and informal parts of the economy, and demonstrates how goods and money move between the two. The case is a poignant illustration of the flaw of conceptualising the formal and the informal as two separate economies. Rather they should be seen as existing within a single deeply segmented economy.

A 63-year-old female trader, Aunty Tilly, with one of the biggest arts and crafts shop at the market, also regarded by most traders as the most successful trader in that business, said she had started out over ten years ago when things were still fine in Zimbabwe. Then her husband had a “decent job”. She lived a “decent” life, especially with remittances from some of her children who were scattered abroad. This case illustrates how international (and regional) remittances have remained an important global connector despite the flight of capital from Zimbabwe. For this trader, the flea market was a way of tapping into the booming arts and crafts business, especially with the very good tourist flows into the country at the time, and also at some point the boom in the export of Zimbabwean

³³ Trader Interview: DV, Harare, August 2007.

arts and crafts pieces into some Nordic countries. In the past she had regularly supplied some of traders with connections to these destinations and did a fair amount of very good business. It is important at this juncture to indicate that the case of this particular trader is atypical of the majority of the traders at the market. Their lives are insecure and, unlike this trader, they do not have children living abroad who regularly remit money to them.

Aunty D, a 60-year-old female trader, with a large shop dealing mainly in second-hand clothes, pointed out that when she started the market was a way of growing her business. She started out trading in second-hand clothes from Mozambique from her house, selling mainly to low-income, high-density working-class people where she lived. The opportunity to open the flea market stall came when a friend who had a clothes stall informed her that she had seen people “with money”, both black and white, buying second-hand clothes, said to be from Mauritius, at one of the stalls at the market. She decided to open a second-hand clothes stall and discovered she could actually charge customers at the market more than she charged some of her customers who bought clothes directly from her house. She exploited an opportunity which she heard of through a friend, showing the importance of being entrepreneurial and conscientious if one wants to succeed in the informal economy.

While the literature has acknowledged the “entrepreneurial qualities” of those operating in the informal economy (De Soto, 1989; Cross, 2000; Browne, 2004), the data reported here reveals economic necessity as the main reason for setting up informal economic ventures. Informal economy entrepreneurs who are driven primarily by economic necessity have been labelled “necessity

entrepreneurs” (Williams, 2007). There are also issues of “opportunity” and the choices that informal workers make. The approach followed is that “necessity” and “opportunity” run concurrently in the choices that own account workers make to enter into the informal economy. The traders interviewed for this study certainly chose to go into informal employment, and some of them even invested their own funds in starting up operations. They could have opted instead to join the “trek” to South Africa or to Botswana. The Centre for Development and Enterprise (2008), while acknowledging that the statistics on immigration are unreliable, notes that estimates of illegal Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa are in the region of three million. Those at the market could have been part of this tide to South Africa, but for a variety of reasons opted to stay in Zimbabwe.

On top of mentioning the economic situation as the main reason for setting up informal operations, some traders added that the informal economy was the only way they could make money (Profile 2). Often traders made statements like: “It’s my job”³⁴; “This is what I do”³⁵; “What else could I do?”³⁶ Some arts and crafts traders sometimes said: “I love art, man”³⁷; “I have always had a passion for art since I was young”³⁸; “It’s what I could do. I used to love the arts and crafts classes in school”³⁹; “I decided that I might as well do something that I like since I couldn’t find a job after my O-Levels. I didn’t do so well when I wrote my

³⁴ Trader interview: Ras D, Harare, September 2007.

³⁵ Trader interview: Mos, Harare, Septemeber 2007.

³⁶ Trader interview: Sonny, Harare, October 2007.

³⁷ Trader interview: Charles, Harare, November 2007.

³⁸ Trader interview: Ras Tindo, Harare, December 2007.

³⁹ Trader interview: Ras Sam, Harare, December 2007.

exams”.⁴⁰ While some traders expressed passion for their work, they acknowledged the economic necessity of earning an income.

Traders deploy various forms of social and economic capital, especially in the early stages of setting their businesses (Profile 3). Traders also rely on various forms of capital to protect themselves from the vicissitudes of an economy in crisis. Creativity can be seen in how traders negotiate various barriers to their business at the local moment (like inefficient and corrupt bureaucracies at passport offices) or at the cross-border moment (where they often face hostile and equally corrupt immigration officials).

4.9 The traders: Profile 3 – “It’s my job.” (an arts and crafts trader explains his choices)

“What else could I do, man? Back when I started in this business things were still all right. In the 1990s doing your own thing was often seen as the way to go. Most people were losing their jobs. Jobs for people like us were simply not there or were not paying enough. I mean, I only did O-Levels. I did pass English but I failed to pass most of the subjects including Maths.... So you know how we Rastas are often seen as the art people. I mean, look at the market here. Most of the guys selling art are Rastafarian.⁴¹ I decided it was something I could also do. It’s my job now. I have been doing it for years now. Besides, some of these things are easy to make. You can learn quickly. I can even teach you. Art is art.

⁴⁰ Trader interview, Ras T1, Harare, December 2007.

⁴¹ The respondent here is referring to the fact that so-called Rastafarians are seen as the people who largely deal in arts and crafts. Strictly speaking, being Rastafarian is much more than just sporting a mop of dreadlocks, but at the market just having dreadlocks meant one could be called by this appellation.

Anything can be turned into art. I still make some of my sculptures but sometimes when I have something urgent that's needed I have to buy from someone else and re-sell.

I used to see some of these guys making sculptures in our neighbourhood.... Actually when I started off I didn't think I would stay doing this for this long. We made some good money back then. Well, some of my friends did make a hell of a lot of money then. Sometimes we got screwed over by some of the white people. A lot of them used to get pieces from us and sell them for a lot more outside the country. Later even the black guys joined them. These guys just made money from buying from us and selling to other people. They had the contacts. We didn't. There is this guy. He is now based in South Africa. He made tons of cash through us, this guy. I have lost touch with him now. Things are good for him. I am told he has a shop there now.

I decided to stay here. I mean, things were still all right then, man. We never knew things would change. There isn't money now, I tell you. Sometimes it's a struggle. Sometimes I regret not having left when I could. I am sure I could have managed back then. I could have managed to leave or something. I never got big orders. I mean, if I had done something big I would be somewhere now, I tell you.⁴²

The reality is that the conditions for survival in Zimbabwe have become very difficult, both in the formal and informal economies. While some traders' fortunes may have been much better before the accelerated collapse of the economy, they have not fared well in the recent past nor is their condition getting

⁴² Trader interview: Ras T2, Harare, January 2008.

any better now. The younger traders have no “radiant past” to speak of, like some of the few older traders who nostalgically speak of the days when “things were all right” and when jobs paid “decent” salaries. The present vicious environment, in which it is difficult to find employment, is all that they know.

The work histories of the traders up to the point where they went into the informal operations reveal heterogeneity. Of the 46 male respondents interviewed, 30 of them had held some kind of low-skilled, formal economy job. Some had been loaders at companies that manufactured basic commodities, and some had worked as general assistants in Internet shops, clothing shops and bookshops. One man had also worked as a security guard for a private security company. Just over half of those males interviewed, 16 respondents in total, had moved jobs at least twice within formal employment and then decided to move to the informal part of the economy. Again, this illustrates the point that there is a lot of movement of goods and people between formality and informality.

Of the 24 females interviewed, 11 had had at least one formal job. This included working in registered salons, in shoe shops as assistants, as till operators and general supermarket assistants, and some as clerks in various kinds of small businesses operating in the city. Much of the work was low-skilled and low-paid, and some complained that as things had worsened in Zimbabwe there were instances when they could not even afford the bus fare to go to work. For some of them, this was one of the reasons they decided to go into the realm of the informal where they “could work for themselves” and be their “own bosses”.

Traders remarked that they had found some of their jobs in the past through colleagues or through friends, and reported that some of these friends,

whom they went to school with, were also very important customers for them now. One trader said that he was motivated to start something of his own by some of his church members. Though questions on religious activity were not asked, traders said that Sunday was a day for rest, with some explicitly saying they went to church. It was also common to find male traders who reported that Sunday was a day for the “other church” which usually meant that they visited the pub on such days either to watch live local and international soccer broadcasts or just to drink.

Another association among male traders included playing social soccer together on weekends. The majority of traders reported that if one of the traders at the market lost somebody close they would make a contribution which was collected at the market and presented to the bereaved trader. Amounts contributed varied from the equivalent of ZAR10 to ZAR50. It did not matter if they were not close to the bereaved trader. They felt bound by the fact that they shared the same working space.

The examples above show the importance of having social networks in daily life at the market. Some of these networks play a central role in the decisions that individuals make on whether to or not to enter the informal economy.

4.10 The traders: Profile 4 – pathway informality (the tailor’s story)

The tailor, as we shall call him, earned a tertiary-level qualification in tailoring and design at a local technical college in the early 1990s. He is a thin man and often dresses in some of the outfits which he designs and tailors himself. There are certain advantages to having some of his skills, he asserts. He can wear “what he

wants” and he claims he wears “exclusive stuff” unavailable anywhere else at the market. Indeed, many of the styles of t-shirts and track pants that he wears are only available at his stall where he sells a mixture of some of his own tailored clothes and some from across the border in South Africa. He prefers track pants and t-shirts because, in his words, they are “laid back”.

He is a regular smoker and often goes through two ten-packs of a local brand of cigarettes in a single day. Rumour has it that he also smokes cannabis, popularly called *dobe* or *mbanje* by most traders. After earning his tailoring and design qualification, he worked for a local manufacturing company. He often reminisces quite nostalgically about the “good old days in Zimbabwe” when things were “still fine”. The tailor even managed to purchase his own piece of land in one of the medium-density suburbs in Harare. The six-roomed house he began building in the early 2000s is still incomplete, though he lives in part of it with his wife. His two sons work odd jobs. One is in South Africa and the other in Botswana. He managed to complete part of the house using some of the severance money he got when the manufacturing company he worked for relocated. He also used part of the money to buy new parts for his sewing machine, which he uses even now. He has been trying to complete the building project but things have been “tough”. When he lost his job he had to quickly complete part of the house and move out of his rented house because he did not have a regular income. The loss of his job ruined his plans, he says.

In the late 2000s, with things becoming even more difficult, he had started to make and sell track pants at the local market. It had been a common practice for most of the workers at the manufacturing company to “smuggle” material left

over from some of their jobs. He used some of the material he had gathered over the years to make clothing to start off his business. In 2004 he was contacted by one of his former colleagues, whom he had worked with years back. One of few local manufacturing companies still operating in Zimbabwe, but on an intermittent basis, opened up for a two-week job. It was a sudden order to supply a consignment of 150 satchels to the Zimbabwean army. It was easy work, he says, because the pieces had already been cut. They went through a day's "training" and then spent the rest of the two weeks doing the sewing. Part of the money he got from that job he used to get passports for his two sons. He had to pay what he calls "big money" to fast-track the passport application process. Part of the money was also used by his wife to get some merchandise from South Africa.

In the early days he would go to the market mainly on weekends. He spent the rest of the week doing the sewing of mainly women's and men's tracksuits. He has experience in tailoring adult clothes from his previous job. At some point business had been good. He even managed to install satellite TV then, and he paid for the installation of piped municipal water on his property. He also bought a modest pump for his borehole. While his two sons are fine, he still has to look after some other relatives who are solely dependent on him. These are an uncle from his father's side, his wife and two children. He also looks after an old aunt on his mother's side. Most of the shops that supplied reasonably priced materials have since gone out of business. "You can't make money, let alone a profit in this environment"⁴³, he says. "We will just wait and see. Maybe things will get better in the future", he adds. He does not sound or look convinced, though.

⁴³ Trader interview: The Tailor, Harare, May 2007.

4.11 Social characteristics of traders (part 3)

4.11.1 Informal employment and earning a living

The tailor in the above profile is exceptional, with his partially completed six-roomed house and satellite television. His circumstances point to the economic diversity of the traders. Some have done much better than others but the majority by far still “eke out a living” in Zimbabwe’s collapsed economy. Even those who were successful in the past have fallen on hard times and revealed that their lives had taken a negative turn.

Research difficulties on incomes in the informal economy are compounded by the fact that most workers in this sector have variable and unpredictable incomes, and for a variety of reasons may either have no monetary income at all or may have an intermittent income, with the economic environment being one of many important factors contributing to this variability. Participants may “want to respond in a way that makes them look as good as possible” (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002: 247). In the case of traders, they may either inflate earnings or deflate them for a variety of reasons. It is also common in the informal economy for traders to have other forms of social capital like “goodwill” from other traders – for example, the unpaid help they may get from other traders if they want to run their own errands. It is often difficult to put a value on some of these forms of capital.

It is also common to find in the informal economy workers who receive non-monetary forms of payment for their labour. Payment in kind could be in the form of food, clothing or shelter. There are workers in the informal economy who

are “unpaid family workers (in family businesses or on farms), who contribute their own labour and may or may not contribute their own capital (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006). It is common to find women contributing their unpaid labour to such family enterprises (ILO, 2002a; Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006). There were and irregular operations at the market where close or distant relatives would attend to the stall. Sometimes the owner’s daughter or son would be there. In such cases there were no wages paid. In an informal conversation one such female relative selling women’s hair extensions said that she was staying with her aunt who looked after her and she did not expect payment. She also indicated that this was once-off. She would be leaving the following weekend for Botswana where she hoped to find a job as a domestic worker. Her aunt, who owned a small salon in the high-density areas would provide her with bus fare for the journey.

The data reported on weekly incomes and earnings is based on self-reporting by the traders themselves (Table 4.2). It is important to note that the sample is based on the snowballing method and therefore it is not possible to make claims that it is representative of the general population. Neither will I seek to generalise the conclusions to the whole population. The approach in this study aims towards a more nuanced and textured understanding of the informal economy among flea market traders. Information about the traders’ incomes is supplemented by observations about the quality of their lives, their consumption patterns, and mapping how and what they spend their incomes on.

The information presented is based on the researcher’s own calculations, based on conversions from the local, now-defunct currency to the rand which is stable currency. The conversions are not based on the official Reserve Bank of

Zimbabwe (RBZ) exchange rates, as these would inflate the reported earnings. Rather the calculations are based on the unofficial exchange rates at the market where traders who sold their merchandise in local currency could buy the hard currency. Even these rates were distorted, making an accurate rendering of the income levels difficult. The incomes here are averaged out to cover the period of the research. By juxtaposing the data in Table 4.2 against the very difficult lives of most traders, one discovers that there is need for caution in interpreting the reported earnings.

Table 4.2: Weekly earnings among traders based on self-reporting (converted to South African rand)

Types of Goods	ZAR0-500		ZAR500-1000		ZAR1000+	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Arts and crafts	1	7	0	1	1	1
Clothes, shoes, etc.	7	10	11	8	1	0
Book and magazines	3	5	0	0	0	2
DVDs, video games	0	3	0	5	0	4

Data reported here is based on the earnings from the operations that traders have at the market not on other income opportunities. For example, it is common to find traders, both male and female, acting as middlemen in foreign currency transactions, where they may sell foreign currency notes with a slight mark-up and pocket the difference. Traders themselves often do not publicly regard these transactions as part of their income. Even if privately they do, they do not have similar attitudes towards such monetary gains as they do towards the profits they may make from selling their own merchandise. It is very common, for example, to

find male traders buying themselves a pint of beer or buying a bottle of whisky or vodka to share with other traders at the market with some of this money. This again demonstrates the social networking ethic among the traders.

Table 4.2 shows that just over half of the respondents (36) had incomes that ranged between ZAR0-500 a week, 25 respondents had incomes in the ZAR500-1000 range, and nine respondents had incomes in the over ZAR1000 bracket. Many traders in the ZAR0-500 income bracket pointed out that they sometimes did not make any money at all in a given week. Sales were irregular and traders had to worry about transport money, money for food and other necessities. Traders in this bracket noted that if demands were made on their incomes other than their own personal needs and those of a spouse or children those got very difficult. For example, a sick relative might need money to see a doctor or for drugs. Traders also reported that on occasions when they could find basic commodities on the black market they would cost twice the price they would pay in South Africa. Obviously, other traders in other income brackets had almost similar pressure on their earnings, but they were able to deal much better with these demands because of their higher incomes. Important in interpreting these earnings is also the issue of food prices in an environment experiencing food shortages. For instance, between 2007 and 2008 the price of bread in South Africa ranged from 7 rand to 10 rand or even more depending on quality while consumers in Zimbabwe paid almost twice this amount when it was available. The reported incomes therefore have to be understood in a context of excessive profiteering not only in retail but, also in the transport and other sectors.

The quality of the traders' lives is an important indicator of the trends in their earnings. Traders, especially those reporting to be earning in the ZAR0-500 and in the ZAR500-1000 range per week range, commented that they no longer ate meat regularly. One male trader said, "I have not had meat for over three months now. Just vegetables and *sadza*⁴⁴ for supper. Meat, it's too expensive. Most butcheries are officially closed but they do business behind the doors with people who have money. Real money. Not Zim dollars".⁴⁵ Another trader whose income fell in the same range said, "I sometimes buy a bit of meat when I go to South Africa, especially if I am going to Messina because it's close by. That way it will still be fresh when I get to Harare. I do not have a fridge so I can't buy too much of it. Besides I can't be spending money for luxuries like that".⁴⁶

At the market it is very common to find traders skipping lunch. When they do have lunch it may be a mielie cob from an ambulant hawker or cooked or roasted nuts. Sometimes traders contribute money and buy food from nearby shops, such as bread and relish, but even then they complain that it is not enough since they share it among many people: "Well, we just share the little that we can buy. It's just enough to get through the day sometimes".⁴⁷ Traders would share such meals with other traders at the market with whom they were friends. The pooling of resources illustrates the ethic of networking among informal traders. Generally, pooling resources is one of the ways in which traders cut costs in a collapsing economy. Most traders lack the social protection mechanisms such as

⁴⁴ Staple food of Zimbabwe made from mielie meal and boiled to a thick porridge. Referred to as *pap* in South Africa.

⁴⁵ Trader interview: Choice, Harare, March 2008.

⁴⁶ Trader interview: SS, Harare, March 2008.

⁴⁷ Trader interview: Mark, Harare, June 2007.

pensions, savings and health insurance that some in the formal private and public sectors have (Heintz and Pollin, 2003). It is imperative that traders cut down on costs so that they make some attempt to save money for unexpected future events like an illness in the family or emergency travel to a funeral at their rural home.

Traders also reported that they no longer consumed “luxuries” like eggs, for example. One male trader said, “In the morning I will just have black tea and one or two slices of home-made bread. Maybe with jam and that’s it. Sometimes I don’t eat anything at the market. I will just come back and have supper here at home.”⁴⁸ The pattern here is congruent with that existing among the working poor in many developing countries, especially own account operators, who make just enough for a “poverty-level standard of living” or a subsistence living (ILO, 2004). The United Nations (2005) notes with grave concern that over a billion people worldwide live on less than US\$1 per day. In its publication, *World Employment Report 2004-05: Employment, Productivity and Poverty Reduction*, the ILO (2005) points out that of the one billion people across the world who are struggling to survive on US\$1 per day, over 500 million of them are working.

The US\$1 per day purveyed in the “development industry” is in most cases not enough to actually live on decently (Warah, 2009). Another statistic that is widely purveyed is that of the minimum wage. Some studies have concluded that often the minimum wage is not enough for survival in the developing world (ILO, 2004). Incomes among the working poor do not enable them to “deal with the economic risks and uncertainty they face” (Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006: 2131). As indicated earlier, sometimes traders have to rely on making small

⁴⁸ Trader interview: Silas, Harare, November 2007.

amounts of money by, for example, acting as middlemen in some other transactions like forex deals.

Another very common source of extra income among traders, especially clothes traders, is acquiring items from other traders and selling them to customers with a slight mark-up. When traders do not have a certain size of a t-shirts or pair of jeans at their table, they will often ask customers to take a seat while they look for the size: “You can sit down here. I will go to my other table and get a size for you. I am sure I have got it there,” traders often say. In a majority of cases the claims by traders of going to another table or stall belonging to them are false. Traders often get the clothing item in the size requested by a customer from a colleague’s stall in another part of the market. Often traders quote their prices at a higher level than they actually want so as to leave a margin for bargaining. In a case where a trader acts as a middleman, they may even undercut a fellow trader’s asking price after making a sale. A trader will claim to have given a discount to a customer when in most cases she or he has pocketed part of the money from the sale.

That traders have to sometimes rely on other sources of income regardless of how small they may be is evidence of the problems that they have in earning enough to be able to protect themselves from the economic crisis. The section below illustrates many of the problems that traders have in terms of social protection.

4.11.2 Insecurity and social reproduction

In its decent work agenda, the ILO aims to make jobs more secure, both in the formal and informal sectors. Insecurity is a major problem that Zimbabweans in general and traders in particular face in their day-to-day lives and in their jobs. The hyperinflationary environment prior to the introduction of the US dollar and the South African rand as *de facto* currencies (at the end of 2008) was one of the most important factors in causing insecurity among traders. The online news website *newzimbabwe.com* points out that according to officials at the Central Statistical Office the inflation for July/August rose to a staggering 231 million per cent or more, from 11.2 million per cent in June 2008. This hyperinflationary environment meant that most traders were unable to save money, an additional factor making their lives extremely insecure. For instance, the traders did not have a secure “provident fund”, indicating that their work falls within the category that the ILO is trying to deal with in its decent work agenda. In other words, the traders have been excluded from decent work.

Traders interviewed expressed concern about the fact that they could not save their money in the hyperinflationary environment (e.g., Tanaka’s profile). A majority of respondents remarked that they could not withdraw their Zimbabwean dollar savings from the bank because of Reserve Bank regulations on cash withdrawals and also because of the cash shortages in the country. Indeed, Zimbabwe has had cash-shortage (Zimbabwean dollar) problems compounded by the hyperinflation in the period up to the end of 2008. Most banks had insufficient cash to meet demand. Since the end of 2008 the South African rand, the US dollar

and in some cases the Botswana pula have been the currency of exchange in most retail shops. However, this period is not covered by this study.

None of the traders interviewed had any health care or medical aid plan. This is due to the common linkage between waged employment and employee health cover. In most cases the employer pays a larger portion for health care coverage, with the employee paying a lesser amount. This situation reflects how globally “social citizenship, secured and supported by governments, seems to be giving way to market citizenship, where citizens become responsible for helping themselves in a more privatized social order”, thus leading to the intensification of individual risk (Bakker and Gill, 2003b: 29).

In the case of Zimbabwe, even those with medical aid face problems as medical funds have been unable to fund health care costs for members because of inflation. The level of contributions simply cannot cover the costs of the most basic medical expenses such as consultation fees. An official from a leading Zimbabwean medical aid expressed this concern, indicating that the problem was compounded by the fact that a large number of drugs had to be imported because they were not available locally:

This has seen a serious erosion of benefits to our members to the extent that the relevance of medical aid societies is being questioned. Members are running out of drug benefits and are also facing sizeable shortfalls whenever they seek medical attention (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 20 March, 2008).

Traders have anxieties about falling ill and about the fact that most government hospitals, historically seen as providing much cheaper health care, have insufficient drugs or medical staff. Traders, especially cross-border traders, said that falling ill would curtail their ability to earn an income as they could not work

or travel to source their merchandise. While traders could sometimes rely on their colleagues to attend to their stalls in emergency situations, they normally preferred to do it on their own. Own account workers largely rely on themselves for labour and capital (ILO, 2002a; Chen, Vanek and Heintz, 2006).

With reference to health care, most informal traders express their concern in the following way: “It’s expensive to fall sick in Zimbabwe.”⁴⁹ Many of these anxieties have been caused by the absence of a reliable health care infrastructure and the associated costs that beset traders when they fall seriously ill. One male trader said, “Most of the time there are no doctors at hospitals. The medicine is also expensive. You have to go to a private pharmacy to get medicine. It’s expensive, man”.⁵⁰ Other traders felt that if they fell ill it would affect their incomes: “How will I earn money if I am at home? I have to be here every day. It doesn’t matter whether there is business or no business. I just have to come. Sometimes customers do not come. Sometimes a customer with good money might show up and I am not here”.⁵¹ Another trader said, “If I was to be sick I would have to go to the doctor. That means time, man. Time which I don’t have. I need money to go there. Money which I might not have. It will mess up my plans, man”.⁵²

Indeed, traders live in very hard times. With the economy not creating any jobs and most public institutions having completely collapsed, it seems respite from their woes is nowhere in sight. In some cases, traders reported paying US\$50

⁴⁹ Trader interview: Julia, Harare, February 2008.

⁵⁰ Trader interview: Kudzai, Harare, June 2008.

⁵¹ Trader interview: Clarson, Harare, March 2007.

⁵² Trader interview: Gerald, Harare, May, 2008.

for consultation fees and even more for drugs when they or their children or spouse fell ill. They would normally have to dip into the money they had put aside to buy goods to sell, and this would normally derail their plans. A male trader said:

The other time my daughter was ill. Do you know how much I had to pay for consultation fees at a private doctor? US\$50. Some of the doctors are even charging up to US\$100. The drugs cost me US\$70. I had to use most of the money that I had been saving for a while. That month I couldn't even go to South Africa. I had to send one of the guys to get me few pairs of jeans and a few groceries. He got me the wrong sizes. They don't sell fast enough. That cost me. If I had gone myself I would have known what to buy.⁵³

The experiences of traders demonstrate that they now live in an era in which there may be a “progressive detachment of individuals from social networks and supports while, at the same time, responsibility for systemic problems is being downloaded onto the individual (Brodie, 2003: 63). “Social citizenship” has been eroded and been replaced by “market citizenship” where citizens bear the costs of social reproduction (Bakker and Gill, 2003b). Zimbabwe faces systemic problems such as the collapse of the health sector, which is linked to an inefficient and corrupt political elite and general economic mismanagement. Poor working conditions and low remuneration have been the predominant push factors in the migration of health professionals which has negatively affected the delivery of health services (Chikanda, 2004).

According to the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MoHCW), in Zimbabwe the nurse-patient ratio in 2004 was one nurse to 700 patients: in a country in which nurses have historically been the backbone of the health system

⁵³ Trader interview: K, March 2008, Harare.

this does not bode well for the delivery of health care, more so in areas that are economically disadvantaged like in rural areas (Chikanda, 2004). Though not common to all health institutions across the country, the MoHCW put the estimate for the doctor-patient ratio at 1:6000 in 2004 (Chikanda, 2004). The quality of health care in most public health institutions has been severely compromised.

The views expressed by informal traders poignantly illustrate how the provision of essential services like health care has been “downloaded” onto individuals. In addition, traders express insecurities and anxieties about their capability for self-provisioning when it comes to health care and a variety of other amenities necessary for their survival. At the same time, traders fear that health problems may curtail their ability to be mobile and to stock up on their merchandise. This was of grave concern to cross-border traders. In a study covering Australia, South Africa and South Korea, a majority of factory workers expressed insecurities about whether they would have a job or not especially if their companies chose to relocate to cheaper sites of production (Webster, Lambert and Bezuindenhout, 2008). In this study traders expressed insecurities about whether they would have business on a given day, let alone customers who would actually make a purchase so that they have an income, no matter how meagre.

With the spiralling increase in the cost of living in Zimbabwe, traders also have insecurities about accommodation. A Harare estate agent with expertise in the low-income and upper-lower-income housing market noted that most people could not afford to buy property, with those putting up their properties for sale demanding payment in foreign currency. As far as renting was concerned, the

official noted that it was quite common to charge rentals in hard currency, with a one-roomed back quarter in a very low-income residential area going for upwards of ZAR100 per month. This is in an environment where a majority of the populace do not earn hard currency.

A common sight in Harare at the end of the month is the large number of pick-up trucks ferrying an assortment of household furniture such as beds, wardrobes and tables across the city. It is almost always a sign that somebody is relocating. Often low-income earners, among them traders, relocate to areas that are further from their places of work, and this has enormous repercussions on their ability to carry on their business. One trader remarked, “At the end of the month most landlords will increase rent. They know people are desperate for accommodation, especially now that things are difficult. When you have no money you have no choice but to move”.⁵⁴ Another female trader said, “Often when you move to cheaper accommodation it’s far away from the flea market. It might be cheaper but it costs us more in terms of time we spend trying to get to work”.⁵⁵ A male trader who had recently relocated expressed his concerns in terms of fears about staying in some areas:

Often it’s late when you leave work. Most people will also be trying to get home at that time. I sometimes get home at about nine or ten at night because I stay far and getting transport is difficult. It’s very late at that hour and I am always afraid that I will be mugged, especially when I am carrying some money on me.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Trader interview: Erica, Harare, May 2008.

⁵⁵ Trader interview: Tendai, May 2008.

⁵⁶ Trader Interview: Solo, Harare, May 2008.

In recent times it has also been common for landlords to ask for the payment of rent in basic commodities like cooking oil, soap and other household groceries. A Consumer Council of Zimbabwe official said:

The economic crisis has hit everyone hard. Those with assets like houses, no matter how modest, will try and use them to their advantage. It's common now for landlords to ask for rent payment in groceries. This means that tenants have to buy groceries for their own family and for the landlord's family. Often they can't afford the two. It's a tough choice.⁵⁷

A trader at the flea market reported that when he travelled to South Africa to buy merchandise and groceries, often he had to buy some food items for his landlord. The result is that traders sometimes end up cutting on their own needs to fulfil the demands put upon them by landlords. Some of the lucky few in the formal economy have given up their monetary wages in lieu of payment in the form of basic household groceries. In March 2008 a human resources officer at a prominent insurance company said that it was now company policy at his firm that they source groceries for employees:

There is no use in paying employees in cash. Most groceries are far too expensive. We now pay employees in the form of groceries. Those employees in similar salary grades get the same groceries, with those in higher salary grades getting more groceries, and so on and so on.⁵⁸

A social policy expert at a local University said:

Some companies have been trying to cushion their employees from the crisis by buying basic commodities for them. Companies get lower prices because they buy in bulk. Some companies have resorted to importing basics for their employees. They know that salaries are simply not enough. They have to subsidise employees. They know employees have to survive. They have to commute to work and they also have to deal with constantly changing rents for instance.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Interview: CCZ official, Harare, April 2008.

⁵⁸ Interview with HR Officer, Harare, March 2008.

⁵⁹ Interview with policy expert, Harare, November 2007.

On top of ever-changing rental for accommodation, traders also voiced concerns about the public transport situation. According to the World Bank (2009: online), informal economy workers in the developing world face a panoply of problems, among them difficulties related to the poor transport infrastructure. This results in workers paying a considerable amount of money for transport, which affects their profit margins. The cross-border traders interviewed indicated that transport costs were a major issue for them, often affecting the amount of money they could save and spend on food. Sometimes traders manoeuvred around transport costs by using their social networks. For instance, they asked other traders going on a trip to South Africa or Botswana to get merchandise for them. An similar case, in which resources were pooled together to save money and to curb consumption expenses, albeit under different circumstances, has also been reported among Chinese immigrants in New York (Zhou, 1992). Most cross-border traders mentioned, however, that they preferred to shop for merchandise on their own when such opportunities existed. That way they could shop for a variety of styles, whether it be shoes, jeans, shirts and so on.

A one-way ticket for the bus from Harare to Johannesburg (a popular destination for cross-border traders) costs in the range of ZAR250-500 depending on the operator. Often traders have to pay extra for their luggage, with some operators allowing approximately 30 kilos for free. Some operators will charge ZAR5 a kilo for anything above the 30 kilo limit. There are also bribes to be paid, especially on the Zimbabwean side, when trying to enter with goods on the return journey. Traders reported that they had to pay bribes ranging from ZAR100-500, depending on the amount of goods they were carrying.

All the traders selling shoes or clothes – except for one male who sold second-hand clothes which he bought from suppliers at another informal market at the periphery of the city centre, in one of the high-density suburbs – regarded themselves as cross-border traders. Most of those selling second-hand clothes had to travel to Mozambique or Zambia to get supplies. They felt that this was much cheaper, and they could buy in bulk and cut the number of times that they had to travel back and forth. Most of the cross-border traders dealing in new clothes reported that they had to cross the border once every two months. However, as the economy further worsened traders complained that goods sold slowly because people did not have much disposable income. A majority of the traders sold similar clothes which meant that competition was much stiffer. Traders had since resorted to crossing the border only once every three months or even five months. In between they would rely on their friends or colleagues to get any emergency items they needed so as to cut down on costs. That traders depended on each other for sourcing goods in such instances is a revelation of the importance of social networks in their operations.

At the local level, traders also reported transport difficulties (aside from transport costs) within Harare, to and from the market. Some of these could be linked to colonial segregationist planning. Historically, as mentioned earlier, the high-density areas were under-serviced by the colonial regime. While the post-independence government did do some work on road infrastructure, problems still persisted. These problems were further compounded by misappropriation of funds at local government level. With the growing post-independence urban flux, there was inadequate land for expansion in established high-density residential areas

(Colquhoun, 1993). New sites further and further away from the CBD had to be found, and traders lived in some of these areas. In most cases traders had to use two different taxis to get to the market, with one trip alone costing an equivalent of ZAR6-7. On average, traders had to spend an equivalent of ZAR25 or more on transport if they chose to take public transport all the way. Traders staying in areas like Mbare, one of the oldest high-density suburbs, walked part of the journey and then would take a connecting taxi to the market. Some of these traders said that on some occasions they got to the market late, which meant they sometimes missed out on crucial business. Also, in some cases they were tired from the walk but still had to put in a whole day's work since they largely relied on their own labour to operate their stalls.

Some of the transport problems experienced by traders in 2007 and the first half of 2008, when fieldwork came to an end, were connected to the countrywide fuel shortages caused by the foreign currency crunch. As a result, government and private importers could not import sufficient fuel. The little fuel imported was sold at exorbitant black-market prices. Of course, bus operators who purchased fuel on the black market would pass on the cost to the consumers. In such cases a trip that would normally have cost an equivalent of ZAR6 would cost an equivalent of ZAR8-10. There were also transport costs incurred in cases where the trader had gone on a trip to source goods and now wanted to get the goods from home to the flea market. Operators would normally ask a trader to pay the equivalent of an adult passenger ticket for them to ferry the large bags in which traders carry their goods.

When travelling in and out of the country, but mostly on return trips, flea market traders are known to be targeted by immigration officials. Traders can be easily identified by the bulky bags they carry. Often traders complain that immigration officials believe that they have a lot of money because they carry a lot of merchandise. In most cases not all of this merchandise belongs to a single trader, because of the cost-cutting approach to buying trips discussed above. A cross-border trader captured this by saying:

As traders we will contribute bus fare or money for the visa so that one or two traders can travel to South Africa to buy goods for all of us. It's a problem at the border when coming back. Sometimes we have to pay the guys on the Zimbabwean side of the border a lot of money for them not to confiscate our goods. Last time the guy wanted ZAR500 for the five large bags I had. I had to pay it because I could not leave goods belonging some of my friends at the market. They might end up thinking I spent their money on my goods. Well, the guys at the market did contribute some bit of money for this. Well, not all of it, though.⁶⁰

The issue of corruption at the border has also been discussed in the print media. For instance, *Business Day* reported in an article on 27 October 2009 that one of the biggest problems at the Beitbridge border post, shared by Zimbabwe and South Africa, was corruption among immigration officials. The same article indicated that the SADC region was infamous for red tape at its border posts, which affected movement of people and goods.

Traders stated that in terms of mobility they also faced obstacles when travelling from South Africa in peak periods, such as during the Christmas holidays. This is when a lot of Zimbabweans working in South Africa travel back home for the festive season. In most cases both traders and non-traders would be carrying a lot of goods such as clothes, foodstuffs, furniture, and in some cases

⁶⁰ Trader interview: CB, Harare, January 2008.

even containers with fuel. Cross-border transport operators would take advantage of this situation to maximise profits by charging higher tariffs. A frustrated female cross-border trader articulated this problem:

Towards the end of last year I failed to get on to the bus even though I had paid for my bus ticket. These guys said I had too much luggage and my stuff would take up too much space for other people who also wanted to go home for the holidays. They didn't even refund me. All they wanted was a cut [bribe] so that I could get on to the bus. I don't use those buses anymore.⁶¹

Traders, as shown above, face a multiplicity of problems locally and also when they travel through various SADC borders to source goods.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter described the flea market in the context of other markets in urban Harare. Most of the chapter analysed the lives of traders, largely using socio-economic data gathered through interviews. The majority of traders live vulnerable and insecure lives. Incomes are unpredictable, and they have to live with the constant knowledge that they may not earn anything for periods of a week or even longer.

Traders did not have social protection mechanisms they could fall back on in times of illness involving either themselves or their dependents. They could not rely on the state for social protection in an era where, locally and globally, the cost of social reproduction has largely been “downloaded” onto the individual. Unemployment and pension benefits were non-existent. In addition, in a hyperinflationary environment it was virtually impossible to save any money,

⁶¹ Trader interview: Charity, Harare, March 2008.

meaning that traders could not protect themselves against the vicissitudes of an economy in tailspin.

While there were a few traders who made substantial amounts of money, the majority of traders struggled to make a living. They could not afford a basic meal at the market, for example, and would pool together resources to purchase a meagre meal to share among themselves.

In addition to these problems, the following chapter will demonstrate the range of difficulties traders who deal in clothing and shoes, DVDs and video games experience locally and when they travel to other southern African countries to source goods.

Chapter 5

The Case of Clothes and Shoe Traders and the DVD and Video Game Traders

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported on and analysed socio-economic data based on the accounts of 70 own account workers. There was also a brief discussion of the concepts of social networks and social capital as they relate to the lives of informal traders. This chapter and the succeeding one cover the local and regional⁶² sourcing of goods by the four types of traders who are the subject of this study. These two chapters will consider in more detail, among other things, the utility and applicability of the notion of social networks in understanding how traders “get the goods” to the flea market for the purpose of trading. The analysis is split over two chapters so as to focus on goods that are largely sourced locally in one chapter and those that are mainly sourced from outside the country in a different chapter. In the process the similarities and differences of the particular cases emerge.

The social network concept is the central analytical pin of these particular chapters. Social networks are a source of social capital. In sourcing goods traders depend on social networks, and in the process produce social capital. This chapter will focus on the sourcing of goods by those traders who sell clothes and shoes, and those who sell DVDs and video games. These goods are largely sourced

⁶² Regional here refers to the southern African region – SADC.

outside the country. Though the content that DVD and video game traders sell is largely downloaded from the Internet in Zimbabwe, it is developed outside the country.

In Chapter 4 it was argued that while the lives of the traders are steeped in the realm of informal forms of economic organisation, it does not necessarily mean that there is a complete absence of state regulation. Nevertheless, at the local level there is minimal engagement with the local state. For example, at the market, there were no visits from council health officials and traders did not require any licenses to trade. Since it is a privately owned space most of the day-to-day operations at the market were managed by the manager of the market with the help of two assistants. Management made sure that traders kept their stalls clean and paid their daily rentals. Every morning traders cleaned the spaces that constituted their stalls. The public aisles and walkways around the market were cleaned by staff employed by management.

There was no engagement with local civic groups. For instance, the Combined Harare Residents Association has been very active in advocating the rights of residents and informal traders in the city and in reporting the excesses of government in dealing with informal traders. It has been very vocal in the struggles for space among traders in areas such as the Mupedzanhamo informal market in Mbare, which serves low-income groups. The traders interviewed had never heard of the activities of CHRA, nor had they participated in any of their meetings. The Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA), which consists of informal economy associations throughout Zimbabwe, has also been active in negotiating with local municipalities in some cities on the behalf of

its members, especially in terms of trading spaces and regulations. While based in Harare, not a single trader interviewed at the flea market was a member or had ever heard of this organisation. This may reflect the fact that the flea market was privately managed and therefore there was very little interference from the state, which affects traders at flea markets such as Mupedzanhamo. A CHRA official in response to a question on issues of membership and the reach of their activities said:

Our advocacy is for all those who live in the city of Harare and obviously there are others who need us more than others. Some people are affected by various council activities more than others obviously. Even though informal traders in some locations have not heard of us we focus on variety of issues which affect them as residents of the city. For instance, the issue of council rates affects most people in Harare and trust me, we are working behind the scenes and publicly to push the council to charge reasonable rates given the economic situation right now. Even if somebody is renting they are ultimately affected in terms of rent they are charged because landlords factor in things like rates. So we represent everybody.⁶³

Traders reported that once a year they were required to submit criminal record clearance certificates from the Criminal and Investigations Department (CID) to the management of the market, but they were unaware of the reasons for this. One of the management assistants at the market said that they did this to make sure that there were no criminal elements operating at the market. No trader had ever submitted a police clearance certificate with a criminal record according to the assistant, but he did maintain that any traders found to have recent criminal records would lose their stalls at the market.

The operations of cross-border traders, especially in processes of sourcing goods, significantly intersect with the workings of the national state. For example,

⁶³ Interview: CHRA official, Harare, 24 February 2009.

the state plays a central role in issuing passports and regulating the importation of a variety of goods, including those traded at the flea market by some traders. Most of the traders who sell DVDs and video games have almost no engagement with the state, unlike the clothes and shoe traders. Traders reported that while the police often frequented the flea market to “stake out” traders who allegedly sold illegal substances,⁶⁴ none of the traders selling pirated movies had ever been accosted or apprehended. Because of its scaling back either as a result of historical processes such as ESAP, or because of the general contraction of capacity due to the inability of the state to pay adequate salaries and consequent resignations, the Zimbabwean state does not monitor or regulate those aspects of public life that would normally require some form of state presence. In the recent past the police have been mainly used as instruments of oppression to repress all forms of popular dissent.

Different types of traders incur different types of costs in terms of their operations. While cross-border traders had to rely on certain social networks in order to acquire passports or other travel documents and in manoeuvring the border, especially when it comes to bringing goods into the country, these are challenges that DVD and video games traders rarely had to grapple with in the course of doing business. Social networks for the DVD and video game traders were for totally different purposes, such as for acquiring pirated copies. Issues such as the level of engagement with the state, costs incurred in sourcing goods, and whether or not travelling is required to source goods will be analysed in relation to the two types of traders who are the focus of this particular chapter.

⁶⁴ No trader at the market had any recollection of anybody ever having been arrested at the market for selling illegal substances.

A country like Zimbabwe falls neatly into the category of developing states considered by some theorists of globalisation, like Castells (1998), to be “black holes”. However, traders in Zimbabwe are in fact connected to the networked global economy, especially through their sourcing of goods, albeit in their own way. These different connections can be conceptualised as an “alternative globalisation” or “globalisation from below”. Indeed, the participation of African countries in globalisation has “certainly not been a matter simply of ‘joining the world economy’; perversely, it has instead been a matter of highly selective and spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with widespread disconnection and exclusion” (Ferguson, 2006: 14).

The advent of economic crises on the African continent, with their early genesis in global structural adjustment, restructured and globalised the nature of certain forms of economic activities like transborder trading (Meagher, 2003). For instance, with the advent of economic restructuring a lot of cheap textiles and clothing flowed into African countries as borders opened following increased deregulation. This had severe negative impacts on local manufacturing in many parts of the developing world such as sub-Saharan Africa.

The evidence shows that in the last 40 to 50 years there have been considerable global shifts in the textiles and clothing industry, with production moving from the United States and Europe to the global South. For instance, over the last two decades China has emerged as a key nation in this industry, and in 2008 accounted for 20 per cent of the global textiles industry and 27 per cent of the clothing industry (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2008). With the involution of the Zimbabwean economy, the local populace began to engage in activities such as

cross-border trading as a way of making a living outside of the formal economy (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1998). Some of this informal trading involves the buying and selling of clothes originally manufactured in China, though traders sourced these goods in Johannesburg. Social networks are crucial in understanding these informal economic activities especially the sourcing of goods.

5.2 Sourcing clothes and shoes (part one)

5.2.1 The South African connection

Clothes and shoe traders source their goods from countries within the southern African region – South Africa, Zambia, Botswana and Mozambique (see Table 5.1) with strong connections to Zimbabwe. Some of these connections can be traced back to the colonial period. For instance, there was considerable movement of people from within the region to work on South African goldmines (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman, 1991), and from places like Malawi to work as agricultural labour on farms in colonial Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) (Sanderson, 1961).

In the contemporary era the flow of commodities and people still follow some of these long-established regional trends. For example, over 300 trucks arrive at the Beitbridge border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa every single day (*Business Day*, 27 October 2009), showing the importance of some of these traditional routes even in the present conjuncture. Some of these trucks are bound for Zambia and Botswana and some are come from other countries in the southern African region. In the present conjuncture there has also been increased

illegal and legal migration of people from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi to South Africa. Most of these people are economic migrants even though some, including Zimbabweans, seek asylum citing political reasons.

Table 5.1: Sources of clothes and shoes

Country of Source	Number of Traders	
	New Goods	Used Goods
South Africa	20	0
Zambia	8	1
Botswana	6	0
Mozambique	0	2

Asylum applications by Zimbabweans increased after 2004 and “cumulatively” approached 44 000 at the end of 2007 (Polzer, 2008). According to the Department of Home Affairs in South Africa, in 2000 alone, 17 667 applications for asylum were made by Zimbabweans, although only 271 were approved and 1 628 rejected (cited by Polzer, 2008). The number of deportations of Zimbabweans in the 2000s also increased, perhaps reflecting increased outbound migration as economic conditions inside the country worsened. In 2002 38 118 Zimbabweans were deported, in 2003 deportations increased to 55 753, and in 2004 increased again to 72 112 (Polzer, 2008).

An estimated three million Zimbabweans are living in the diaspora, with South Africa being the main destination of these migrants (IOM, 2009). In its May 2009 Migration Policy Brief, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) together with the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) at the University of the Witwatersrand stated that there is a maximum of

1.5 million Zimbabweans living in South Africa and remarked that it was unknown how many of these are “undocumented” (CoRMSA and FMSP, 2009).

South Africa, as the economic powerhouse in the region, seems to be the main source of goods such as new clothes (see Table 5.1) and shoes, though traders reported that they could also get their goods in Botswana and Zambia. All of them maintained that if it was up to them they would only go to South Africa to get merchandise. Traders reported that prices were much lower in South Africa than in other countries in the region, and they claimed that they could get a greater variety of styles there. For instance, a pair of shoes could be ZAR10-20 cheaper in South Africa. Traders also said that they could combine the purchase of items for sale at their stalls with the purchase of basic commodities for their own personal consumption.

Traders found such basic commodities as cooking oil, bathing and washing soap, sugar, flour and mielie meal cheaper by some 10-15 per cent in South Africa. They indicated that retail outlets in countries like Botswana or Zambia got most of the basic goods they stocked from South Africa and put a mark-up so it was much cheaper to get them from their original source. Some traders also remarked that in some cases there was a wider range of brands of the same products available in South Africa than in other countries such as Botswana and Zambia. However, traders indicated that they were sometimes forced to travel to Zambia or Botswana because they did not require visas, while the South Africa visa process was costly and time-consuming.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ On 3 April 2009 the South African Department of Home Affairs “announced its intention to grant Zimbabweans in South Africa a twelve-month ‘special dispensation permit’ on the basis of the 2002 Immigration Act, section 31 (2) (b). This permit grants the right to live and legally work in the country. As complementary measures, a moratorium on deportations and a 90-day free visa

Even though South Africa is where most of the traders buy the goods they sell at the flea market, the original source of most of these clothes is China. Two of the most popular sources of new clothes and shoes in South Africa, as reported by traders, are China City and Dragon City in Johannesburg. The China City wholesale complex is located behind Ellis Park Stadium. There are some 150 shops in the complex. Though there are a few shops selling cooked food operated by the Chinese and some South African Indians, most of shops stock products such as clothing, textiles, electronics, leatherwear and general goods. Some shops also sell Chinese tea, rice, cooking sauces and other products to Chinese clientele and to others from South Africa and southern Africa.

Most shops at China City are owned by immigrants from China. In 1994 it was estimated that that the Chinese community in South Africa numbered 20 000 and this increased to between 100 000 and 200 000 by 2007 (Wilhelm, 2006). According to shop owners, China City supplies goods to street traders in the local informal economy and also to small traders in the formal economy. Some of the shop owners who purchase goods there are Chinese with businesses in downtown Johannesburg or in rural areas of the country. Small traders from both the formal and informal segments of the economy from countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana also get their stock there. A father and son team operating a shop at China City indicated that most of the clothes and shoes that they sold in their shop were sourced from China. An uncle there was responsible for sending these goods to them. This illustrates the importance of kinship networks that are maintained despite vast differences in geographical location. The owners also indicated that at

for Zimbabweans entering South Africa have been implemented from May 2009” (CorMSA and FMSP, 2009: 2). The 90-day free visa is what traders now use.

the end of the year one of them personally travelled to China to see extended family members back home, and on the return trip would bring in goods.

Dragon City, situated at the corner of Main Reef Road and Park Road in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, is another popular source of clothes and shoes for traders, with some 400 wholesale shops that sell to customers in South Africa and from the southern African region. Customers include Pakistanis, Indians and Nigerians who have shops in and outside Johannesburg. The complex, much like China City, is a melting pot of a number of nationalities. You will meet Nigerians speaking in their pidgin English, and Zimbabweans speaking Shona, Ndebele and English. The Chinese speak Cantonese, and other nationalities communicate in their home languages.

Dragon City is also very popular with the Chinese community in South Africa. Many of them purchase Chinese groceries from the few shops dealing in these commodities. Some shops also sell Chinese newspapers and magazines, which enable Chinese nationals to keep up with events back home. They maintain the connections to their homeland despite being far away from home.

While there were shop owners at both China City and Dragon City who said they themselves imported the goods they sold, most goods are actually imported by specialist import companies in South Africa owned by the Chinese (*Mail and Guardian*, 9 January 2006). Most of these arrive in containers at the Durban port, though it has been reported that some shipments travel through Zimbabwe and Mozambique to escape “stricter” port authorities at the Durban port (*Mail and Guardian*, 10 December 2007). By trimming import taxes from their costs, and perhaps even smuggling goods without paying customs and excise

duty, the retailers in places such as Dragon City sell commodities at much cheaper prices and are only profitable by moving larger volumes. A pair of male adult shoes at Dragon City sells for as low as ZAR50 in some shops. Prices are almost the same in China City. In China City a belt for a male adult can be bought for ZAR20. Duvets can be purchased for ZAR50 at both the China City and Dragon City markets. Most owners depend on selling high volumes to remain profitable. Shopping complexes such as China City and Dragon City have been described as “an economic web of China meets Africa”, which oils the informal economy (Wilhelm, 2007: 360)

Chinese shopping complexes like Dragon City in Fordsburg have in the past attracted the attention of the authorities, who believe that they are the epicentre of criminal activities such as money laundering, drug peddling and human trafficking (*The Star*, 16 August 2005). For instance, in August 2005 the Dragon City complex was raided by the Scorpions and officials from the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) searching for drugs, illegal immigrants, counterfeit goods and import and export documents (*The Star*, 16 August 2005).

Despite these issues Chinese-manufactured goods, whether counterfeit or original, dominate the globe. Many of the Zimbabwean traders interviewed travel to South Africa to source these goods. They constitute the large cohort of African cross-border shoppers who, according to the Strategic Business Partnerships for Growth in Africa (SBP), spent over ZAR12 billion in South Africa in 2005 – the largest proportion of foreign direct investment (SBP, 2006). Though in an unequal manner, they are still part of the global commodity chain that ultimately supplies

these goods to South Africa and then Zimbabwe, where they are purchased at local flea markets.

5.2.2 Travel documents and the visa regime

Before traders can travel to countries in the region to source goods they have to go through processes that involve interactions with the Zimbabwean state. In order to bring goods into Zimbabwe for sale, cross-border traders have to grapple with the various instruments of governance, both at the local and the national level and also across national borders. Governance here refers to:

ideas that justify or legitimate political power and influence, institutions through which influence is stabilized and reproduced, and patterns of incentives and sanctions to ensure compliance with rules, regulations, standards and procedures. Governance entails both public and private forms of power, institutions of state and civil society, and it operates either within particular localities, or across national boundaries in regional or global frameworks (Bakker and Gill, 2003a: 5).

For travel to South Africa, Botswana or any other country to be possible, it is imperative that traders have travel documents in their possession, whether it be a valid passport or an emergency travel document (ETD). It is in the process of acquiring these documents that trader's lives intersect with the workings of the state. Traders encounter various obstacles like an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy, sometimes hostile and unhelpful public sector officials, and an inefficient public transport system – all very common in the developing world.

Many Zimbabweans have historically applied for the visitor's visa, which stipulates that they should not engage in formal or informal employment. Many traders illegally engaged in casual employment such as working as temporary

shop assistants, domestic workers or casual help in informal small businesses during their periods of sojourn in South Africa. Some visits may last as much as the maximum 30 days allowed under the visitor's permit, which is a considerable amount of time for one to carry out their business.

Many of the traders complained they had to deal with very hostile officials at the South African embassy when they tried to acquire the travel visa; many of these officials were local Zimbabweans who the traders said did not seem to have any sympathy for their fellow Zimbabweans. "These people at the embassy know that things are tough in the country"⁶⁶, said one male trader in early 2008. "They do not care at all, they don't help you when you want information, they are rude and sometime they will lose your documents and ask you to submit another set of documents. It wastes time"⁶⁷, added a female trader.

Traders travelling through the region normally depend on public transport. Some of these companies are well known for plying the local routes and have in recent years taken up the cross-border routes, which allows them to earn foreign currency.⁶⁸ They operate routes to countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. Traders who sourced their goods from Botswana and Zambia remarked that they sometimes used haulage trucks because these were cheaper than buses. For instance, they would pay ZAR200 for a trip from Harare to Gaborone, which would normally cost ZAR250-300 by bus.

It is by tracking the processes that traders have to go through that we can fully appreciate some of the obstacles that they have to contend with.

⁶⁶ Trader interview: Corlet, Harare, March 2008.

⁶⁷ Trader interview: Mv, Harare, March 2008.

⁶⁸ At the time of research a majority of local route operators could not charge in foreign currency as the now-defunct Zimbabwean dollar was still legal tender.

5.3 The traders: Profile 5 – Mavis’ story

At 4:45 a.m. on a summer morning in December 2008, Mavis (35 years old) wakes up to start her day. She has to queue up at the passport office to get an ETD. She washes in the bathroom which also doubles as the toilet. The house where she stays, located in the Glen View high-density suburb to the south west of the Harare CBD, has the older-style bathrooms which have a toilet bowl built into the floor of the bathroom with a shower hanging above and the cistern for flushing the toilet on the side. Because of the regular water and power cuts all over Harare, she does not use the shower now. She has to fill containers with water whenever there is water. Most of the time water is connected in the very early hours of the morning, sometimes as early as 2 a.m. Mavis will often leave one of the kitchen taps turned on slightly so that she can hear the trickle of water when it has been turned on. She will often wake up and spend 20 minutes filling up the containers while her children are sleeping. She believes that she is fortunate because she is a widow with two children so she does not require as much water as a larger family would.

By 5:15 a.m. Mavis is standing on the side of the road which is just a three-minute walk from where she stays. Most of the time she can hear a taxi tout in the distance shouting, “City, City”, meaning that the taxi is going to the CBD. She boards the taxi and pays her fare, which is the equivalent of about ZAR6. With one more person picked up further down the road, all the seats on the taxi are taken up and it heads to town. Mavis gets off at one of the drop-off points at 5:35 a.m. Her older daughter, who is in Grade 6, must have woken up and boiled water for porridge either on the fire or on the stove if there is power. She will

bathe herself and her younger brother who is at crèche and the two of them, after having some porridge, will pack their lunch boxes (often peanut butter or marmalade sandwiches and diluted juice). The two of them will walk together, with Mavis' daughter leaving her younger brother at a day care centre 15 minutes' walk down the road, and then she will proceed to her own primary school.

When she arrives in the CBD, Mavis walks across town heading to the passport office which is almost a 20 minute walk from where she drops off. By the time she gets there Mavis is sweating profusely and there is already a queue of those wanting to make applications, snaking along the fence at the passport office. The collections line moves faster than usual when the passport office officially opens at 8 a.m. and Mavis is in front of the queue. She did an EDT application for US\$70 over a week ago, and she is one of the lucky few who get their document on the day: only after some haggling with the officer on the other side and a ZAR50 “greasing of the palms” (this is called a “cut” in local parlance). Mavis cannot afford the US\$670 that the government charges for an adult passport. She is hoping that the prices will come down soon, but for now she has to make do with an ETD. Mavis complains that passport officers often demand a cut to fast-track the processing of travel documents. Even when the documents have been processed, sometimes the officers will simply hold on to them and claim they are not ready yet. “All they want is a cut,”⁶⁹ Mavis says. “If you give them a cut your documents will mysteriously appear from somewhere or the processing will be fast-tracked as you wait”, she adds.

⁶⁹ Trader interview: Mavis, December 2008.

The South African Embassy does accept EDTs for a visitor's visa application, which is the only one that Mavis qualifies for at the moment. She will do the application in the next few days after she has been able to get travellers cheques at one of the local banks. Even if she had the travellers cheques today, it is already too late. It is of no use trying to get to the South African embassy as there will be long queues there as usual. Also, the South African embassy does not accept applications after noon. She is happy that she at least has an ETD. Mavis starts walking back to the CBD to get a taxi to the flea market. There, she will set up her stall where she mainly sells women's clothes, especially tops and jeans. It will be another long day, as usual.

Mavis wakes up at pretty much the same time the day after getting her ETD and follows a similar routine to go to town. When she arrives, she walks to the branch of the local bank, and by 6 a.m. she joins the queue with other women her age and a motley group of younger men and women. The women that Mavis knows, their relationships having developed from meeting in queues such as this, let her slip into the line closer to the front. She already has her ZAR2 000 in cash, which she will give to the cashier at the bank in exchange for travellers cheques. On top of that, she has to pay a nominal processing fee in Zimbabwean dollars. By the time the bank opens at 8 a.m. there is, like everywhere else in Zimbabwe where such essential services are offered, a very long queue. There has been a huge demand for travellers cheques, especially with the requirement that those visiting South Africa on the visitor's visa should show proof of having at least

ZAR2 000 in a South African bank account or in travellers cheques.⁷⁰ Most Zimbabwean cross-border traders have problems opening bank accounts in South Africa because of the banks' strict requirements, so getting travellers cheques is simpler.

When it is Mavis' turn to be served she hands over her hard-earned ZAR2 000 to the teller plus the Zimbabwean dollar processing fee. She gets a receipt and then has to wait outside until she is called in to get her cheques. As she sits outside with other women, a security officer comes out of the branch to announce that the branch has accepted payment for all the travellers' cheques available on the day and those still in the queue for paying will have to come back the following day. At 11 a.m. Mavis finally gets her travellers' cheques. She goes to the nearest copy shop to make copies of the travellers' cheques. She will submit the copies to the embassy the following day when she makes the application for her visa. After making the copies she briskly walks to the nearest pick-up point to take a taxi to the flea market. She is running late. One of her regular customers promised to come by with samples of jeans and tops that she wants Mavis to get for her (the customer's) children on her next trip.

Following the same routine again on the third morning, Mavis heads for the CBD. She walks to another taxi terminus and takes a taxi to Belgravia, which is in the Northern Suburbs of Harare. This is where the plush South African embassy compound is located. At 6:30 a.m. Mavis arrives at the busy intersection where the embassy is located. I am already at the embassy, having been dropped

⁷⁰ This requirement sometimes made it difficult for traders to make "urgent" trips to South Africa if they did not have a visa already. The process of getting the South African visa was time-consuming. In such cases traders tended to opt for Botswana.

off earlier by a friend, and I see Mavis as she briskly walks towards the gate. Mavis joins the long queue which is moving slowly. At the gate there is a security guard from a private security company, and he controls who goes in and comes out. There is another queue inside the compound where those let in at the gate have to queue up again to submit their documents. At 8 a.m. the visa section opens.

I wait outside as Mavis is let in. I have no business in there so the security guard cannot let me in. At the gate many other people, young and old, male and female, are trying to get in. Some shout insults at the guard when they feel they have been refused entry for no reason. A young man offers the guard some “bit of money”, using a local slang expression, to be let in. The guard uses his two-way radio to talk to another guard on the other side of the compound where there is an entrance for those using vehicles. He talks in some code and eventually directs the young man there. A few minutes later I spot the young man in the distance walking up to join the queue inside the compound. I suspect that some money has changed hands. Many of those still outside the embassy compound confirm that they sometimes have to pay to get in. When Mavis gets back she complains about the rude staff who served her, but she is happy that she was allowed to submit her passport and supporting documents. It normally means one will get a visa. She now has to wait for at least seven working days, though it may be much longer.

After waiting for seven working days Mavis collects her passport from the South African embassy with a visitor’s visa in it and heads off to the Road Port cross-border bus terminus in Zimbabwe. There are many operators at the terminus who ply the cross-border routes, especially the Zimbabwe-South Africa route

which seems to be the most popular judging by the over 20 bus companies there. Mavis will take off on the afternoon bus which departs for South Africa at about 1 p.m. The journey, which costs⁷¹ her an equivalent of ZAR300 one way, will take her just over 16 hours depending on the delays at the border. She will probably arrive at Park Station bus terminus in Johannesburg the following morning.

When she disembarks Mavis, like some traders, will immediately buy a ticket for the return journey. Most traders prefer not to stay overnight in South Africa so that they can save money on accommodation. Traders like Mavis would rather get back to Zimbabwe as soon as possible because, while they can leave other traders looking after their stalls, they always feel that they themselves would do a better job. They know their customers better than the other traders. In the case of Mavis, there is also the case of her two young children, who will have spent the night alone, though she did ask a neighbour to check in on them.

Unlike Mavis, other traders may leave young children in the care of close relatives or other traders they are close to at the market⁷² and will collect them on their return to Harare. This was the case among some traders who preferred to stay a few days in South Africa on some of the shopping trips so that they would have enough time to shop for their merchandise. In such cases traders will normally split the accommodation expenses among themselves, depending on how many of them they are. Traders travelling together will also share expenses for food.

At one local hotel in the CBD, popular with Zimbabweans, the fees for accommodation ranged from ZAR300 for a single room to ZAR400 per night for

⁷¹ The cost of a one-way ticket to South Africa varies depending on the bus operator.

⁷² Some traders stated that in the current economic situation they it would be “burdensome” to leave children in the care of relatives. Some traders felt that their children were “well trained” and they could take care of themselves in their parents’ absence.

a double room. Traders are well known for booking a single room and then sneaking in one or two colleagues later in the night and then splitting the expenses. At another hotel close to the Park Station bus terminus a guest had to pay ZAR150. Most of the rooms were designated for sharing. Traders who frequented this hotel noted that they used it because it was within walking distance to the terminus. They complained that it was very uncomfortable and sometimes they had to share rooms with strangers, even if they had been promised that there would be nobody else occupying the room. In such cases they worried constantly about their own safety.

Traders like Mavis opting not to stay overnight will normally spend the day they arrive going around in malls like China City, and in small shops downtown where they purchase jeans, tops and accessories like belts. Depending on the quantities they want to purchase they may also spend some time bargaining on the prices. They will also search for personal clothing items or, in the case of traders like Mavis, for clothing for their children at home. Traders normally purchase clothing items for themselves that are different from those they get for resale. The routine may be punctuated by a trip to some food wholesaler to purchase basic commodities for personal consumption or for somebody in Zimbabwe who might have facilitated the acquisition of travellers' cheques. At the end of a long day traders like Mavis will get a public taxi or hire a private taxi to have their goods transported to Park Station. A private taxi to Park Station may cost upwards of ZAR100 depending on where they are coming from. It is only when they have settled down on the bus back to Zimbabwe that some of them will

have their first substantive meal, a take-away purchased from the one of the many fast food outlets at the Park Station bus terminus.

Mavis' case reveals many of the obstacles that traders face in their encounters with the state. Much of the time they have to navigate both formal and informal channels, and in most cases the formal and the informal are imbricated with one another. Sometimes there may be no clear-cut distinction as to where the formal and the informal begin and end. The official (in a formal position) on the day that Mavis picks up her ETD uses his formal position to get an informal "reward" (bribe) from Mavis. On the morning that Mavis visits the passport offices she is anxious to get to South Africa as soon as possible to get merchandise before the festive season gets into full swing. It is during these periods that traders maintain they sell the most so they cannot afford to have low stock levels. In addition, after many months of scrounging and saving, Mavis is eager to get a small fridge for her house and to get a few festive "goodies" for her two children.

The public sector officials Mavis has to deal with have not escaped the ravages of the economy. In comparison to private sector wages, the wages in the public sector remained very stagnant. Many traders claimed that the personnel at the passport offices blatantly sought bribes. One trader raised this concern in early 2007: "Many of these guys earn very little. It's only by asking for bribes that that can make a living. They will offer to fast-track the processing of the passport

within a few days or to get you an ETD within a day. There are normally very long queues for passports⁷³ and these guys know we are very desperate.”⁷⁴

Traders, as will be revealed later, have various encounters in which monetary demands will be made upon them, and at various levels they will have to “fork out” their hard-earned money either to have some service provided to them or to get an official behind a desk somewhere, be it at the border post or at a government office, to turn a blind eye as far as strict application of the rules is concerned. While traders complain that public sector officials, like immigration and customs officials and passport officers, take advantage of them, traders also at times sought to take advantage of the desperate situation of some of these officials by inducing them to take bribes.

5.4 Sourcing clothes and shoes (part two)

5.4.1 The South African visa regime and implications for traders

While SADC has taken steps to reform the regulations for the movement of people, which would be expected for a bloc of countries that are economically integrated, institutional barriers remain. A treaty with the European Union (EU) allows ease of movement within the bloc, and this has been complemented by strong institutions which competently facilitate these movements. Traders reported that they found the South African visa process very taxing and time-consuming

⁷³ At some point passport fees were as low as the equivalent of ZAR25 for an ordinary adult passport (at the black market exchange rate), and snaking lines could be seen early in the morning outside the Harare passport offices.

⁷⁴ Trader interview: Nelson, Harare, June 2008.

Traders' lives are replete with challenges. With the collapse of the economy and most public services in Zimbabwe and the acceleration of migration to South Africa and other countries, the passport offices, the banks where travellers cheques can be acquired, and embassies such as the South African embassy have come under pressure. Here they compete with other traders who also engage in informal trading outside the country.

At the same time, economic conditions have created an environment rampant with corruption where the "gatekeepers" at the local level are on the look-out for ways to make money off the desperate population who want to be served by them. Traders are targeted by embassy staff, themselves under pressure from the deluge of applications. Some of these officers may solicit bribes and this increases the costs that traders incur. Also, traders, like other Zimbabweans, are targeted at the Zimbabwe-South Africa border, notorious for corruption, by immigration officials who may want bribes for them to be let through, even in cases where the traders have all the travel documents required. Even though they may have authentic visas, immigration officials have been known to allege that some visas are counterfeit and to confiscate documents as a way of inducing the traders to pay a bribe.

In an environment which has become largely informalised, individuals and groups begin to rely on social networks to access the services they need. In the case of Mavis, for example, the women she has established relationships with over a long time allow her to jump the queue. There are several other instances in which traders rely on these networks. For example, when getting travellers cheques, traders maintained that sometimes it was important to know somebody at

the bank who could put aside cheques for them. This would save them time in that they did not have to spend a great portion of the day queuing up outside banks.

Traders related how they sometimes reciprocated these “favours” by getting the tellers at the bank basic commodities like cooking oil, even if the teller might not have asked for such items. In some cases an expectant female teller might ask a trader to purchase disposable napkins as a way of returning a favour for facilitating access to travellers’ cheques. In such cases it was always expected that the trader pay for these items. On trips to South Africa some female traders might buy a bottle of cooking oil, a bar of washing soap or some washing powder for another female trader back in Zimbabwe who was watching over her stall during her absence. At the time of research there were also a few local agencies specialising in applying for the South African visitor’s visa on the behalf of clients. Traders remarked that in case of an emergency some of the staff working there could “fast-track” the processing of a visa such that it came out within a day where it would normally take a whole week to process. Such contacts may ask that a trader bring them a few “basics” at the trader’s discretion. This shows the importance of reciprocity in “oiling the wheels” of the social networks that traders rely on in doing business.

The profile of Mavis illustrates the growing “interpenetration of formal and informal forms of organization” in which there is a blurring of the boundaries between the formal and the informal (Meagher, 2005: 217). For instance, at several junctures, those that I have termed “gatekeepers” will sometimes require that a trader pays them to do something that they, as public officials, are officially employed to do. Some security guards who control access to certain spaces, like

gates into embassies, use their power to extort bribes from members of the public, including traders. Corrupt immigration officials may solicit bribes to stamp passports or to process permits.

Informal ways of organising play an important role in allowing access to those social services that a “scaled back state” – or in the case of Zimbabwe, a “weak” and bankrupt state – is unable to provide for its citizens. Collapsed states are breeding grounds for corruption and manipulation which, according to some authors (Bayart, 1999; Hyden, 2006), are “normalised” in much of Africa. Countries such as Zimbabwe, Somalia and those in the Great Lakes Region have been cited by some analysts as examples of “state failure”⁷⁵ (Dorussen, 2005), making them fertile ground for informal forms of economic, political and social organisation. This informality can be rampant at the borders where traders pass through in search of other opportunities to make a living.

⁷⁵ Boas and Jennings (2005) consider the notion of a failed state to be mere rhetoric used in international development and policy circles. They argue that the notion of “failed” is loaded with the “assumptions that every state can be evaluated on the basis of a prototype of an advanced state” and that “against the backdrop of the prototypical state, the notion of ‘failed states’ and ‘state failure’ is shorthand for those states undergoing severe political, economic and humanitarian crises...” (Boas and Jennings, 2005: 387). They further assert that the concept of “‘state failure’ – predicated as it is on the existence of the prototypical state – is built on a faulty assumption of uniformity in state organisation, structure and behaviour. To say that something ‘fails’ or ‘is failing’ is a normative judgement that is only meaningful in comparison to something else; in this case, that something else is the existence of a Westernised, ‘healthy’ state that, unfortunately, has little relevance to most of the states in question because it has simply never existed there” (Boas and Jennings, 2005: 388).

5.4.2 Travelling to the source

Traders reported that when they did travel they would leave colleagues and friends whom they worked with looking after their stalls. They had formed social ties with those who were spatially near them in terms of the location of their stalls. Still, traders felt that they understood their own businesses better and would rather, as far as possible, be the ones who attended to their own stalls. Perhaps showing issues of distrust and also competition for customers, some traders remarked that they could not always “trust” that a colleague who sold the same goods as themselves did a “good job” in their absence. They alleged that in such a case a trader might “steer” customers towards their own stalls. Still, that traders relied on each other to watch stalls is evidence of the importance of social capital. According to Fernandez Kelly (1995: 219) the notion of social capital is best understood not as a “quantifiable feature” but more as “the characteristics of resources available to various social groups”. Mavis’ profile demonstrates that traders have access to certain resources by virtue of their work as informal traders.

As indicated earlier most traders tended to make journeys that did not last too long. For example, traders departed Harare on a Tuesday afternoon and arrived in South Africa on Wednesday in the morning. They then spent the whole day on Wednesday shopping. They departed for Harare the same day in the evening and arrived back the following day (Thursday). Delays at the border, like too much traffic going in either direction or whether immigration officials on the South African or Zimbabwean side were on “go slow” or not, affected the time of arrival. Traders indicated that they followed this taxing routine to save on money for accommodation. The traders also reported that spending too long in South

Africa could mean a loss on crucial business if customers came by and their stalls were not well stocked.

Traders' access to certain kinds of social capital is affected by variables such as social class, race and gender (Fernandez Kelly, 1995). When they travel and opt to stay overnight in South Africa they share accommodation with others of the same gender. Traders also share food with those of the same gender when travelling and at the market. Female informal traders normally left their female friends in charge of their stalls at the flea market when they themselves were not available. All the male traders and female traders dealing in new clothes and shoes reported going to source their goods in regional countries at least once every two months. Of the three women traders exclusively selling second-hand clothes, two sourced goods from Mozambique and one from Zambia. They all stated that they bought their goods in bulk, which meant that they did not have to make frequent trips. One of the traders stated that she visited Zambia every two months, while the other two synchronised their trips so that they could travel to Mozambique once every three months.

The accounts of informal traders like Mavis illustrate that they have very taxing and tiring routines. Single parents may be anxious about the safety of their children, who they leave at home from time to time even though they may ask neighbours or other traders to check up on them. However, some other traders who were single mothers reported that they did from time to time leave their children with relatives when they needed to travel. Female traders also reported that in some cases it was common for them to leave their children with another female colleague they trusted at the flea market. A trader who co-operates with

another trader may expect the favour to be reciprocated in some way in the future. One analyst maintains that urban dwellers, like the traders who are the subject of this study, “develop their own rationality and logic of behaviour” in their struggles for survival on a day-to-day basis (Lourenco-Lindell, 2001: 31). For example, sometimes Mavis had to collect one of her colleague’s children from a nearby crèche and leave the child at the colleague’s sister’s house at the end of the day. This same colleague looked after Mavis’ stall when Mavis herself travelled to South Africa. This account shows the importance of relations of trust and reciprocity in the lives of traders, and how traders rely on these relationships when they travel out of the country to source goods.

5.4.3 Going back home: the illegal and the legal at the border

At the border traders, who may be carrying bulky bags, are an easy target for immigration officials who solicit bribes. Traders will usually rely on social ties that they have cultivated over long periods so that they can take their goods across the border. For example, it is very common to find several individuals at the South Africa-Zimbabwe border who facilitate the movement of goods for traders to the Zimbabwean side.

These people are normally Zimbabwean and South African males in their 30s and 40s, who sometimes operate in gangs. They are commonly referred to as *guma gumas* in local parlance, which loosely translated means “hustlers”. Some of these *guma gumas* were known for smuggling people without documents across

the border into South Africa from Zimbabwe.⁷⁶ Some of these *guma gumas* had strong connections with South African and Zimbabwean immigration officials at the Beitbridge border post. These smugglers use small vehicles for carrying smuggled goods into Zimbabwe and charge a range of prices depending on how heavy the goods are.

In late September 2007 one trader who sold jeans, t-shirts and shirts for men reported that he was charged ZAR200 for three bags which in total weighed 80 kgs for them to be smuggled to the Zimbabwean side. For him this was a cheaper option than paying duty (see discussion below). Five male traders who sold men's clothes reported that before September 2007 they went through the normal channels and saw no particular need of using smugglers because most of the time they paid duty ranging between ZAR50-100 in Zimbabwean dollars to get their goods through customs. Three of them reported that since September 2007 they always used a smuggler when they travelled to South Africa to source goods because of new statutes (Statutory Instrument Number 158 of 2007⁷⁷) which stipulated that they pay a component of the duty in foreign currency.

Two of the five male traders, who sourced goods from Zambia and Botswana, reported that in their experience the customs officials on the Zimbabwe-Zambia border and the Zimbabwe-Botswana border were "reasonable people" who could be negotiated with, so that even after the advent of the Statutory Instrument they were charged reasonable customs and excise fees. Female traders dealing in clothes felt that smuggling was a risky thing if you got

⁷⁶ It is likely that since the waiving of visas the business of those smuggling people into South Africa has taken a dip.

⁷⁷ Referred to in the Government Gazette as The Customs and Excise (Designation of Luxury Items (Amendment) Notice, 2007 (No. 1).

caught and that it was for men. The general feeling among traders was that most of them smuggled goods in some way, although they would not always admit this. It was the only way to cut costs, according to the traders.

Statutory Instrument Number 158 of 2007, which came into full operation on 7 September 2007, resulted in the designation of a number of items that were sold at the flea market by clothes and shoe traders as luxury items. For example, tariff number 6203.4200 pertaining to men's or boy's trousers of cotton stipulated that the "general rate of duty" would be 60 per cent of the value of the goods charged in Zimbabwe dollars plus a component charged at a rate of US\$10/kg payable in US dollars.

Taking the example of the trader above who chose to have his goods smuggled, he would have to pay, in terms of the statutory instrument, at least US\$800 (roughly ZAR5 600 at 2007 exchange rates)⁷⁸ for the three bags for which a smuggler charged him only ZAR200. The same statutory instrument also gazetted that footwear made of leather or synthetics would attract 60 per cent duty paid in local currency plus US\$5 per pair of shoes (tariff number 6405.1000). Putting aside for the moment the Zimbabwean dollar component, a trader carrying a bag with 30 pairs of shoes would have to pay at least US\$150 to customs officials at the border. This demonstrates the attractiveness of using illicit means to get goods across the border, especially when a trader is carrying bulky and conspicuous bags. Traders used illegal tactics so that that they could cut down on their costs. High costs would lower their profit margins at the market back home. These costs include, as stated earlier, the customs and excise charges and the cost

⁷⁸ The US-rand exchange rate averaged around ZAR7 to the US dollar at the time.

of travel and accommodation. There may also be bribes to be paid, especially where immigration officials can easily identify traders and hence target them.

One female trader reported that she got around the problem of carrying bulky bags by packing her goods into smaller bags which would not attract attention. However, another male trader pointed out that he preferred to carry one or two bulky bags so that he could easily keep track of them. According to this particular trader a smaller bag, unlike a bulky bag, could be easily snatched away at the border or at the numerous drop-off points that cross-border buses stopped at during the long journey.

The three male traders who admitted to using smugglers indicated that another reason they opted for them was because of the time factor. They noted they did not have time to wait at the official border post for their goods to be unloaded and then wait for the tedious examination of the contents of their bags. Furthermore, these traders would rather not risk having their goods confiscated because the process of trying to get them back was difficult. Often, items have been known to go missing from the storage rooms belonging to the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA). In an informal discussion on a bus trip from Johannesburg to Harare, two male traders based in Harare indicated that it was a double expense having to go back to the Beitbridge border post to collect the goods that had been seized by the border authorities. According to them, traders would rather take their chances with the smugglers, who have been known to do an efficient job and have experience in the business. In 2007, one such male smuggler at the Beitbridge border post reported that he had been in business for

over five years. He claimed that on a good day he could make ZAR1000 for facilitating the smuggling of goods.

Immigration officials also cashed in on the crisis by cultivating associations with drivers from certain bus companies. It was quite normal for traders to prefer using particular bus companies because drivers from these companies were more connected than others. However, these connections came at a price. For instance, on a return journey from South Africa it is quite common for travellers on public transport to be asked to each make a contribution of, say, ZAR10-20. On a bus carrying 60 passengers, the total amount collected could range from ZAR600-1200. This money would normally be given to an attending customs official at the border post to carry out a perfunctory examination of goods in the trailer that is pulled by the bus; most operators ferry goods this way. Some bus operators have occasionally resorted to ferrying goods on separate, smaller trucks which reach Zimbabwe before the bus with passengers. Drivers from these bus companies reported that they had resorted to doing this in order to minimise delays at the border and also because the bus took a shorter time to reach Zimbabwe when not pulling a trailer.

Certain bus drivers have also been known to have connections which can facilitate crossing the border, even where one does not have a valid visa or where one may have over-stayed in South Africa. In such cases immigration officials on the South African side were willing to overlook the over-stay or to use a back-dated stamp which would not reflect a breach of immigration rules. However, all this required money, and immigration officials normally expected to be paid by the drivers for rendering such services even if it was at a future date. Such

relationships were normally directly with the bus drivers who are the ones who travel regularly and who were most likely to have an interest in maintaining good relations. A passenger would usually have to pay, on top of the bus fare, the equivalent of a “normal” one-way bus ticket (ZAR200-300) which is, as with most informal transactions, negotiable.

It is quite common on the return journey to find passengers, who may include cross-border traders, handing over their travel documents to drivers once they arrive at the South African side of the border. These drivers facilitate the exit of passengers without leaving blemishes on the passports which may hamper future travel.

All the above examples demonstrate the importance of trust and social networks and other informal social relations. Traders trust these drivers and the drivers in turn have established social networks and relationships with traders and immigration officials which benefit all the parties involved. For instance, traders at the time complained that regulations changed far too regularly and that when such changes did take place they sometimes did not get information about them which disadvantaged them at the border, hence the motivation to “beat” the system.

Truck drivers moving within the region are also very important for facilitating the movement of traders and their goods. While new clothes came mainly from countries like South Africa and in some cases Botswana and Zambia, the three traders who exclusively sold second-hand clothes sourced them from Zambia⁷⁹ (one trader) and Mozambique (two traders). More recently, South

⁷⁹The account by Karen Tranberg Hansen (2000) on second-hand clothes in Zambia remains the most authoritative account of the flow of second-hand clothes from advanced industrial countries

Africa's economy has been flooded by new clothes imports from China. Countries such as Mozambique and Zambia are well-known destinations for second-hand clothes. Hansen (2000) has shown how the deregulated economy of Zambia facilitated the easy flow of second-hand clothes, referred to as *salaula*, into that country.

As indicated earlier, the movement of goods such as new and second-hand clothes within the region is also facilitated by the movement of haulage trucks in the southern African region. Traders mentioned the importance of haulage trucks in transporting their goods. Another trader who regularly travels the Zimbabwe-Mozambique route revealed that while the journey using a haulage truck took much longer because the driver sometimes stopped on the way to rest, there were certain advantages. For instance, one could get more goods across the border if they used a haulage truck because it was unlikely that a truck driver would be asked to unload bulky goods at the border and so bags could always be hidden on the truck. Another male trader who frequents the Zimbabwe-Zambia route said:

These trucks are convenient in that they are not searched at the border and the truck drivers also charge less than the long-distance buses. I mean, if you use a bus you have to pay more for the ticket. Some operators will charge you for luggage. When you get to the border there will be customs to pay and you run the risk that your goods may be confiscated if you don't have enough money to pay whatever they may charge you. It's better off to try and get your goods across on some of these trucks. The journey is long but at least you pay less. If you want to carry a lot of things then you definitely have to find a truck that's passing through Zimbabwe. When you deal in second-hand clothes like me you have to buy in bulk. When you buy more you are also in a better position to negotiate the price with suppliers in Zambia.⁸⁰

to global South countries like Zambia. In Zimbabwe during the 1990s there was an increase in the flow of cheap imports and second-hand clothes, with severe negative impacts on local textiles and manufacturing.

⁸⁰Trader interview: Donaldson, Harare, July 2007.

Traders also mentioned that haulage trucks were convenient if they wanted to carry goods like bags of mielie meal, sugar, or bottles of oil, particularly in large quantities, when they carried these for friends and relatives back home. They said that on haulage trucks they could hide their goods among the load on the truck and did not have to pay customs and excise duty on them. Traders could also evade some of the regulations on the import and export of certain commodities.

In August 2007 the government promulgated Statutory Instrument 137 of 2007, the Control of Goods (Import and Export) (Agriculture) Regulations, in terms of the Control of Goods Act [Chapter 14:05], which saw it as “necessary and expedient to control the imports and exports from Zimbabwe of certain goods”. This statute was mainly for what were broadly termed “agricultural products”. Traders indicated that they were sometimes targeted by customs officials if they were carrying quantities of basic commodities like mielie meal, cooking oil, sugar and other basics which they themselves felt were reasonable quantities for personal consumption. In September the Customs and Excise (Designation of Luxury Items) (Amendment) Notice, 2007 (No. 1) came into effect – the Statutory Instrument Number 158 which was discussed above. Some traders felt that this constant changing of regulations made them susceptible to being taken advantage of by immigration officials who knew that traders did not know the intricacies of the regulations:

Sometimes we don't even know that things have changed at the border. These guys sometimes take advantage of us. They know we don't know what's happening. Sometimes they even make miscalculations. You end paying much more than you need to. I don't even think that these guys even know all the regulations themselves.⁸¹

⁸¹ Traders interview: Cisse, Harare, March 2008.

This confirms the argument of one analyst that bureaucratic procedures may actually force individuals into the informal realm of operation so as to escape the costs and complicated procedures of operating formally (De Soto, 2000). In the case of Zimbabwe, these are the sometimes complex and constantly changing customs and excise regulations instituted by revenue authorities in an economic crisis where revenues were declining.

One researcher at a local policy institute in Zimbabwe argued that the government was taking advantage of the desperation of traders by taxing them. He said:

The government is broke and it is bound to take advantage of cross-border traders. Traders work with foreign currency a lot of the time. Most of the companies have either closed down or have scaled down their operations. This means that they are not bringing in that much revenue to the state in the form of taxes. Those in formal employment are not paying that much in taxes and the situation has been worsened by the fact that the Zimbabwean dollar is almost next to worthless.”⁸²

The same analyst added, “They definitely have to tax those in the informal economy at the border. It’s a contradiction given that just recently we saw the government cracking down⁸³ on informal traders and now they want revenue from these very same people whose operations they destroyed.” As demonstrated in earlier sections of this chapter, traders faced difficulties at the local level and also when travelling in the region to source goods originating from “global” production sites.

⁸² Interview with a researcher at a local policy institute, Harare, August 2007.

⁸³ Reference to the clean-up operation in major most cities dubbed Operation Murambatsvina.

5.4.4 Global and southern African connections in sourcing clothes and shoes

New clothes and shoes sold by traders at the flea market travel a truly global journey from where they are manufactured in East Asian hubs to South Africa. Indeed, the issue of illegal Chinese imports into South Africa has been a challenge facing labour, as this has been accelerating the contraction of the textile industry in the country. The opening up of borders has also accelerated job losses in the textile industry as local South African companies cannot cope with the deluge of cheap Chinese imports. *Business Day* reported on 29 August 2009 that South Africa was increasing the “threshold tariff” on clothing from China from 40 to 45 per cent so as to protect the declining local textile industry. As stated earlier, shops owners in China City and Dragon City in Johannesburg sell goods to informal traders from other southern African countries, showing the regional connections in this type of trade.

Research by Peberdy and Crush (1998), carried out for the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), showed the popularity of Johannesburg as the leading destination for non-South African migrants involved in trading in the informal economy in South Africa itself and for those looking for goods to trade in other parts of Africa. Johannesburg was a very popular source of goods amongst the 37 clothes and shoe traders interviewed – twenty of them indicated that they sourced goods in Johannesburg. Of the 37 clothes and shoe traders interviewed, 34 sold new clothes or shoes. Of those 34 traders, four exclusively sold shoes, five traders had stalls with a mixture of shoes and clothes, and the rest (25) exclusively sold women’s clothes or men’s clothes or children’s clothes.

Three traders, who were all women, exclusively sold second-hand clothes from either Zambia or Mozambique. These two countries are very important sources of second-hand clothes from the advanced industrialised countries, and these clothes connect the Zimbabwean “local” to the “global”.

Traders reported that places such as China City and other smaller shops in the Johannesburg CBD were convenient places for purchasing commodities because of their proximity to the Park Station bus terminus and also because many of the Chinese and Pakistani store owners there were used to doing business with cross-border traders. Nigerian shop owners in downtown Johannesburg also said that they sold goods to Zimbabwean traders. They reported that they acquired their goods in places like Guangzhou in southern China, again an illustration of the way in which Chinese manufactured goods are “connecting the globe”. Fluctuations in the value of the US dollar, for example, on the global markets were reflected in the change of prices at China City during the 2007 and 2008 period. Back in Zimbabwe, traders at the flea market would keep track of these changes – poring over newspapers every morning much like stock traders – because it affected the price they paid for clothes and shoes. A female trader said:

Well, I have to know at how much the rand is trading against the US dollar. Whenever the value of the rand goes down in South Africa it means we will end up paying more. Most of the Chinese shops that I buy from get their goods directly from China. If prices go up on the other, we end up paying more also.⁸⁴

Another female trader said:

In the days leading up to my journey to South Africa I will often follow the exchange rates. It's very important for me to know what's happening so that I can negotiate prices. Here in Zimbabwe you will sometimes get

⁸⁴ Trader interview: Jessica, Harare, March 2008.

customers who may be willing to buy in either US dollars or rand. I have to make a calculation whether I have to accept US dollars or rand, because sometimes you will accept US dollars and when you get to South Africa you get less rand than you will have budgeted for. Sometimes in the shops where we buy, the Chinese guys there will tell you that their costs have also gone up because they are paying more to get these things here. You have to know what's going on.⁸⁵

The issues discussed above illustrate the different ways in which the activities of seemingly marginalised, unconnected informal traders in Zimbabwe are in fact connected to events that are occurring on the global stage, although in a different, unequal manner. These accounts disprove arguments about Africa as a disconnected “black hole”.

Traders, as the accounts above demonstrate, have been able to take advantage of economic processes like integration within SADC, which has to some extent eased the flow of human and non-human traffic. Some of this traffic moves legally and some of it is illegal.

Research at the SAMP has indicated that since the collapse of apartheid in South Africa there has been an unprecedented increase in the movement of goods and people within the region, which has been facilitated to a great extent by the increased official trade among the SADC countries (Peberdy and Crush, 1998). There has also been an increase in illegal immigrants to South Africa, resulting in deportations. In 1999 some 123 961 illegal immigrants from Mozambique were deported, up from 71 279 in 1994, and 42 769 illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe were deported in 1999, up from 12 931 in 1994 (Waller, 2006). In the 2008-2009 period some 300 000 Zimbabweans were deported from South Africa (CoRMSA

⁸⁵Trader interview: Lolo, Harare, March 2008.

and FMSP, 2009). Some of these immigrants were fleeing economic crises in their countries of origin, and even hunger caused by grain shortages back home.

Official trade in grain also occurs in SADC, which means that food moves throughout the region. For instance, “While overall trade between SADC countries is low, their trade in food follows a definitive pattern. The five SACU⁸⁶ countries tend to import over 70 per cent of their food requirements from South Africa, while the other countries intermittently import large amounts of grain (and larger amounts of dairy products and other minor foods) from South Africa and the rest of the world” (Moyo, 2008: 75). In terms of haulage traffic it has been reported, as indicated earlier, that some 300 trucks arrive at the Beitbridge border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa every single day (*Business Day*, 12 October 2009).

Over time, traders have developed relationships with some of the haulage truck drivers who operate in the southern African region. They keep some of these truck drivers’ mobile numbers and call them on return journeys to find out if they are heading to or passing through Zimbabwe. A study by Muzvidziwa (2005) reported the importance of various kinds of transactional relationships between truck drivers and some of the female cross-border traders. Some of these relationships involved the exchange of sexual favours for free transportation of goods and for free accommodation. Most drivers of haulage trucks sleep in compartments on their trucks. In the research by Muzvidziwa (2005), some women were found to perform cooking duties for the drivers.

⁸⁶ SACU is the Southern African Customs Union which is made up of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa.

In contrast, the sample of women traders interviewed for this research did not report any such associations with haulage truck drivers. They did mention that on some occasions they used haulage trucks on return journeys, especially in peak periods like November and December. During these months transport from South Africa is either expensive or difficult to find because of increased demand due to the high number of Zimbabwean immigrants travelling home for the end-of-year holidays. The bus ticket price varies by operator, with those operators who have newer, more luxurious coaches charging the higher end ZAR400 per return trip while others charge ZAR300 and the operators with less luxurious older-model coaches charging ZAR200 in normal periods. The ticket price increases by between ZAR50-100 among the different operators during peak periods. Sometimes operators keep the price of the ticket the same but increase the price of ferrying luggage. For instance, one bus operator is known for increasing the price charged on luggage from ZAR2 per kilo to ZAR5 per kilo during peak periods. In addition to the price of the tickets, traders considered issues like leg room on the coach, whether the operator had a trailer for goods, and the time a bus departed for Harare when making a booking to travel.

The fact that women traders in the sample did not report some form of (sexual) transactional associations with haulage truck drivers does not rule out their existence. Some of the women traders saw haulage trucks as men's transport. For these women haulage trucks were "uncomfortable" and they felt that they were too cramped for a journey that took over 16 hours. The feeling among women traders was that most truck drivers preferred to have men as passengers

because men could help out if the truck driver had mechanical problems or a punctured tyre.

The issue of relationships between haulage truck drivers and women cross-border traders also came up in interviews with some male traders, who maintained that they would never let their wives engage in cross-border trading. One male shoe trader said:

Most of these women claim to be selling goods when they go to South Africa. It's all lies. They are selling themselves. Many women here at the market have boyfriends in South Africa who give them money. A lot of women also have boyfriends who are truck drivers. Some of these women simply go to South Africa too many times. Where do they get the money? I am sure they are not selling that much stuff. I go to South Africa after two months. Then you see women who sell just the same stuff that other women are selling going to South Africa every two weeks.⁸⁷ I don't think they are making that much money to be able to afford so many trips. They go there with their truck driver boyfriends who give them money, free transport and free accommodation. I will never let my wife do any cross-border trading.⁸⁸

On the other hand, a single female cross-border trader felt that it was because of her marital status that she could travel to South Africa. She said:

I have a friend who is married and even though they have financial challenges her husband won't permit her to go to South Africa to look for casual employment or to sell things. She says her husband always tells her stories of how women go to South Africa and become sex workers when they are there. I am free to travel because I am not married. I can travel as regularly as I want.⁸⁹

The dynamics of operations among the DVD and video game traders, as will be seen below, are different to the dynamics found among the clothes and shoe traders. Rarely do the operations of the DVD and video game traders intersect

⁸⁷ No women trader at the market reported making trips that often.

⁸⁸ Trader interview: Shame, Harare, August 2007.

⁸⁹ Trader interview: Chiwoniso, Harare, December 2007.

with the workings of the state. These traders did not incur transport costs for travelling to South Africa and while they occasionally travelled to South Africa or to Botswana to buy basic commodities for personal use, passports were not crucial for them to be able to carry out their day-to-day operations at the market.

5.5 Sourcing DVDs and video games (part one)

5.5.1 Piracy across the globe

The activities of traders dealing in DVDs and video games at the flea market illustrate what we earlier termed alternative globalisation or “globalisation from below”. These traders have been able to carve a niche area for themselves, and they provide their customers with the latest films and video games as they are released across the globe. In the case of some films, their “release” at the flea market may even “beat” the official theatre and DVD releases. The activities of most DVD and video game traders have very minimal and sometimes no interaction at all with the operations of the state. For example, most of the DVD and video game traders did not have to travel to South Africa or to Botswana to source digital copies of the DVDs and video games that they sold at the market. Thus they did not come into contact with customs or immigration officials.

An 11 January 2002 report on a South African news website (www.iol.co.za) indicated that “Far Eastern piracy cartels are flooding South Africa with pirated videos, music CDs, DVDs” even before they are officially released (Sewsunker, 2002). At the time experts signalled that over 70 per cent of Sony Playstation video games in circulation in South Africa were illegal pirated

copies (Sewsunker 2002). The same report asserted that the intensive pace at which digital technology had improved over the years made it extremely easy to produce reasonably good quality videos and DVDs. While there were a few instances in which the Zimbabwe Music Corporation (ZMC) would send undercover agents to the flea market to check if there were traders selling pirated materials, they targeted local music DVD recordings. It is illegal to sell pirated local music and locally produced visual content in Zimbabwe, and offenders can be fined US\$100 or be sentenced to do community service. The law in Zimbabwe is silent regarding piracy of foreign movies like the ones sold at the flea market examined in this study. None of the traders interviewed sold any local music although they did say that in the CBD there were individuals who sold pirated “local music”. They remarked that there was no business for that type of music at the market.

According to a 2006 report (the most comprehensive to date) by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) – a body which according to its website represents some “1400 record companies in 72 countries and affiliated industry associations in 44 countries” (*www.ifpi.org*) – some 37 per cent or 1.5 billion of all CDs purchased legally (or otherwise) worldwide in 2005 were pirated copies (IFPI, 2006). The IFPI also estimated that, based on pirate prices, the global traffic of pirated products was worth about US\$4.5 billion in 2005. In a 2006 study a leading analyst argued that illegal file sharing, enhanced by world-wide use of advanced technologies, harmed the music industry and negatively affected CD sales globally (Liebowitz, 2006). In its 2006 piracy report, the IFPI (2006: 5) cites research showing that “most CDs purchased illegally were

bought from the traditional commercial piracy sources, such as markets, street sellers and ‘car boot’ sales”.

The movie industry has not escaped this increase in the growth of piracy across the globe. Research commissioned by the Motion Picture Association (MPA) found that major US motion picture studios lost US\$6.1 billion to piracy in 2005 (MPA, 2005). The same research noted that world-wide the motion picture industry (including foreign and domestic producers, distributors and many others) lost some US\$18.2 billion due to piracy. The MPA identified “hard goods piracy” and “Internet piracy” as the most threatening forms of piracy to the industry.

Hard goods piracy is defined as “obtaining movies by either purchasing or acquiring an illegally produced VHS/DVD/VCD⁹⁰ through a commercial source, or making illegal copies for oneself or receiving from a personal source (friend or family) an illegal copy of a legitimate VHS/DVD/VCD” (MPA, 2005: 5). Internet piracy is “obtaining movies by either downloading them from the Internet without paying or acquiring hard copies of illegally downloaded movies from friends or family” (MPA, 2005: 5). The case of the DVD and video game traders at the flea market in Harare is definitely part of this global trend in the increase of piracy, albeit on a smaller scale. Piracy rates⁹¹ in 2005 were found to be highest in

⁹⁰ VHS refers to Video Home System. DVD stands for Digital Versatile Disc. VCD refers to Video Compact Disc, which is a CD with the capacity to store moving pictures and sound.

⁹¹ Piracy rates are derived from the “MPA member company legitimate revenue plus estimated revenue lost to piracy in each market” (MPA, 2005: 6).

China,⁹² Russia and Hungary (MPA, 2005). Combined world-wide industry losses were reported as highest in China, France and Mexico.

Research has concluded that the “typical worldwide pirate is 16-24 years old, male and lives in an urban area (MPA, 2005: 11). All the DVD and video game traders interviewed at the market were male; however, the majority of the 12 DVD and videos game traders at the market were 23-30 years old. Seven traders exclusively sold DVD, three traders exclusively sold video games, and two traders sold both. All of them either sold pirated DVDs and/or video games, although on some occasions an original video game could be found. A video game trader displaying an original copy said that this was from his home collection, and that he was not interested in the game any more as he had acquired much more “advanced” game releases. There were no original DVDs displayed and sold at the market, though some traders did pass off DVD copies with high-quality sleeves as original and would sell them for much more than the rest, sometimes as much as ZAR50.

5.5.2 The dynamics of DVD piracy

Besides selling Internet downloads at the market, traders also had social networks with some Chinese nationals who facilitated access to pirated movies. The Chinese nationals stayed in Zimbabwe but made regular visits to their home country and on return trips would bring traders copies of movies. Such pirated DVDs often had ten popular movies with a similar theme on one disc. The movies

⁹² Some traders did report that China was source of video games, though of course they did not go there themselves.

could be violent thrillers, horror films or romantic comedies. This example shows how traders can sometimes be globally connected.

Traders sometimes acquired original copies of video games or “cult movies” through friends and kin overseas in places like the USA, the UK and Australia. Traders reported that the originals that they acquired in this way would normally be for their own personal use and they did not make copies to sell at the market, largely because these were special interest pieces which did not have a wider market. These would, for example, be documentaries or, in the case of one 40-year-old male trader, “classic movies” released as far back as the 1950s. These connections with kin and friends are another instance of global connectors in an economy in crisis.

Traders did not have to physically make journeys to acquire the goods that they sold. Their trade was made easier by the Internet. In other words, they were logged onto the information highway facilitated by modern technologies. This disproves arguments that those in the global South are disconnected from the so-called network society. That these traders did not travel also meant lower costs for them. Also, they did not interact much with the state. Unlike the clothes and shoe traders, who had to pay customs and excise duty as well as to pay for transport and travel documents, the DVD traders did not have those costs.

At two stalls there were traders who sold or offered to acquire pornographic material. This was clandestinely done given the nature of the material. Pornographic DVDs were not displayed at any stall. Those traders selling such material reported that they only sold to their “regulars” and they did not provide such services to anybody that they were not familiar with or who was

not introduced to them by one of the regulars. These two traders also indicated that they could easily get pornographic films from the Internet.

Once the traders had an illegal copy of a particular movie, they made several other copies to sell. Even in the case of video games, where a trader might acquire an original copy and sell it to a customer, they made several other copies for sell to those unable to afford the original, and they also kept back-up copies for themselves. All those who sold video games indicated that, other than getting copies illegally downloaded from the Internet in Zimbabwe, on some occasions they did get copies from suppliers in South Africa and they made further copies for sale at the market. Both the clothes and shoe traders and the DVD and video game traders engaged in some kind of illegal activities, but of a different nature. For the clothes and shoe traders it was the smuggling of goods across the border in contravention of customs and excise regulations. DVD and video game traders made and sold copies in contravention of international intellectual property law. They were also recipients of high-quality but fake DVDs and video games from Chinese nationals.

South Africa is one of the few countries on the continent which occasionally has simultaneous releases of the latest movies with the USA and other global North countries. In some cases, like that of the film *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, directed by South African director Gavin Hood, it was released a day earlier in South Africa than in theatres across the United States. An unfinished version of the film illegally made it on to the Internet, highlighting the problems of piracy in the film industry. That South Africa it is the main conduit of movie distribution throughout the southern African region makes it a very fertile ground

for piracy. When movies finally make it on to DVD in South Africa, the starting price is normally above ZAR150 for new releases. Traders often complained about the very high prices of DVD movies in South Africa. For them it would be impossible to sell the original DVD movies at a reasonable profit:

We sometimes have customers who come here and they want original DVDs. Even if I was to sell these there are only so many people I could possibly sell them to. The market simply isn't there at the moment and I can't afford to stock up on original DVDs. Most of our customers want reasonably priced, high-quality movies and they want us to have the copies of the latest movies. I know for a fact that we have movies here on DVD when they are still showing in theatres in South Africa. Most of the time we are weeks ahead of the cinema releases. It is only by selling fake copies that we can make some bit of profit.⁹³

In April 2007 a DVD was sold at the flea market for roughly the equivalent of ZAR20, with the newer releases sometimes selling for the equivalent of ZAR25-30. Most customers at the market negotiated on the price and traders never sold something for the exact price which they first quoted a customer. The blank DVD onto which the movie was copied cost a trader at the time an equivalent of ZAR8. The DVD case and the printing of colour sleeves cost roughly the equivalent of ZAR5, though traders could cut this cost by just doing black and white covers. To produce the actual complete DVD would cost a trader the equivalent of ZAR13 and the DVD would be sold at the flea market for the equivalent of roughly ZAR20. This a profit of ZAR7, assuming that there was no price negotiation, which was rare. Most traders ended up selling a DVD for the equivalent of ZAR18-19 (a profit of ZAR5-6), and the newer releases would sell for the equivalent of ZAR22-23.

⁹³ Trader interview: VD, Harare, May 2009.

The process of getting the end product that is sold at the market involves several steps, the first of which is acquiring the first (high-quality) digital copy. Almost all the movies at the market were acquired from ‘Taurai (Profile 6). Access to a reliable broadband Internet connection is imperative for one to be able to download movies. The faster the broadband connection, the faster the movies can be downloaded and the sooner they are available for traders so that they can make copies to sell at their stalls. Some of the traders created very solid reputations for their ability to make new films available before they were in wide circulation at the flea market. The Internet, as shown in the profile of Taurai below, has been the main driver in connecting the Zimbabwean “local” to the “global” in the current conjuncture.

5.6 The traders: Profile 6 – From the digital copy to the hard copy (Taurai’s story)

Taurai is a 25-year-old male university drop-out who does website and database design at a small indigenous IT company. On the side, he supplies movies downloaded illegally from the Internet to the traders at the market. Most of the movies come in a compressed DVix format. This format allows for faster downloading and more movies can be stored on a storage device. It is the responsibility of the traders themselves to convert these into the more widely used DVD format which can play on most commercially available home DVD players.

According to Taurai, a variety of illegal websites are available on the Internet, and this is where people like him download illegally acquired copies of movies. Taurai stated that some of the movies posted on the Internet were

sometimes shot by hand-held cameras during preliminary screenings. Some of them are actual copies which through leaks in film studios find their way onto the Internet. Taurai has the advantage of having a high-speed broadband Internet connection at work, which allows him to download multiple movies at the same time while he does his own work. At the end of the day he normally leaves his desktop machine at work downloading several movies during the night. On some occasions glitches do occur in the downloading process, for example, when there were electricity cuts in Harare. Such power cuts shut down the whole downloading process, much to Taurai's chagrin.

After downloading the copies Taurai physically delivers them to his "friends" at the flea market who, according to him, are the most reliable in terms of payment. None of them was ever willing to divulge how much money exchanged hands for these illegally acquired digital copies but it seemed that everybody was reasonably happy with whatever arrangement they had. One of Taurai's customers, a successful trader at the market who also owned a DVD rental store, normally spends the whole night making DVD copies. The process of making copies requires that one has a DVD burner (optical disk recorder). This could either be a stand-alone unit or it may be part of a desktop or laptop computer. One also has to have the software that can convert the DVix format to a DVD-player-compatible format.

After converting the digital copy into DVD format, the process of burning the actual DVD then takes place. Most DVD movies are burned on to either DVD-R or DVD+R which can hold the expanded DVD format and can store up to six times more data than normal compact discs. At one trader's house there was a

small “lab” with a desktop computer, a stand-alone DVD burner, and a colour printer and photocopying machine for the reproduction of DVD sleeves. According to the trader, he stayed up into the early hours of the morning, especially on Thursdays (to prepare for Friday) and Fridays (to prepare for the two weekend days) to burn the latest films he had acquired during in the week. Being a one-man operation, it was obviously hard work for this particular trader, who sometimes went to sleep around 3 or 4 a.m., only to wake up at 7 a.m. to get to the market for the trading day.

The burning process is only one of several stages of making a pirated copy. There is the labelling of the non-playing side of the actual DVD which is done on the computer. Then there is the reproduction of DVD sleeves which is done on a printer or photocopying machine. It is cost-effective to print out one or two sleeves and then the rest are photocopied normally in black and white to save on ink. The burned DVDs have to be packed into their cases and the sleeves have to be slipped into transparent covers that are part of the DVD case. Two traders at the market had reproduction machines that they claimed could reproduce up to ten DVD copies every hour. The smaller traders had to rely on normal recorders which they said took longer to make copies. This affected their ability to have large stocks of the more recent movies.

Those without photocopying machines incurred additional costs because they relied on copy shops to make copies of DVD sleeves. They could not afford to label their DVDs and would sometimes have to label the disc using a pen, which affected the aesthetic qualities of the end product. Traders indicated that better-looking sleeves would attract more customers. Sometimes traders displayed

empty DVD cases with colour sleeves to attract customers but gave customers cases in black and white when a purchase was made.

Traders who were not so well-connected and who did not have direct access to the first digital copies waited until copies of something they wanted were available at the market. Then they asked a friend or somebody unknown to the other traders to purchase a DVD copy at one of the stalls which was already selling it. They then made their copies for sale from this.

The account above illustrates the basic process that traders go through in making copies for sale at the market. At another level it also demonstrates that one does not need to be physically in the global North to have access to the latest images, sounds and motion pictures that “make waves” in the heartland of the global entertainment industry. The ability of traders to access films which would otherwise not make it to the film circuit in Zimbabwe can be described as an instance of the “global in the local” as suggested by Robertson (1995). Through the Internet and relatively simple technologies like reproduction machines and photocopiers, traders gain access to global products and disseminate them at the local level. So while the traders are definitely not actors in the legitimate global film industry which nets billions of US dollars annually for studio companies, they are actors, albeit in a different and unequal manner, in the illegal side of the industry. They are part of a global but illegal entertainment industry that also nets billions of US dollars for those who participate in it. Movies can be downloaded as soon as they are released and customers in Zimbabwe can watch the same movies that other people across the globe are watching.

Customers indicated that if it was not for the traders at the flea market they would not get to watch the latest films. According to one customer, a regular at the DVD stalls at the flea market:

If you go and check what is showing at the theatres right now you will notice that they mostly screen movies released several months ago. Some are even releases from more than a year ago. Here at the market I can find the most recent movies and the quality is not bad at all. I can also watch and rewind the movie in the comfort of my home. I don't have to worry about noisy teens and ringing cell phones. What could be better than that, hey?⁹⁴

A contentious issue in the globalisation debate is that the world is becoming homogeneous as a result of globalisation, while on the other hand there are arguments that the world is becoming more “hybridized” and “polarized” (Holton, 1998). While the world is by no means becoming homogeneous, it is important to acknowledge the way in which the (visual) content of DVDs, in the form of music DVDs and movies for example, may also shape some of the tastes and consumption patterns at the local level, as seen in the account below.

5.7 Sourcing DVDs and video games (part two)

5.7.1 The Americanisation of the world?: DVDs, their content and local taste

In the winter of 2007 a young male, clutching a music DVD bought at one of the DVD stalls, approached one of the traders at the flea market. The trader is well-known for stocking a variety of the most fashionable hooded jackets, also called “hoodies”, especially in winter. The sleeve of the DVD was emblazoned with the

⁹⁴ Informal discussion with customer, Harare, December 2007.

image of Kanye West in a hooded jacket and the young man wanted a jacket exactly like that. The trader had something similar going for US\$50.

The trader stated that it was common for customers to inquire about certain styles of jeans, t-shirts and jackets based on the style they had seen in movies or on music videos, and in some cases he would even go to watch some of the DVDs to catch on to the styles. Some of the customers would also bring pictures of the sneakers that they wanted, which they had downloaded from the Internet, and they would show these to the traders and ask for something similar.

Another trader noted that dressing styles and even the way that some young people talked were very much shaped by the kinds of movies that they watched. He recounted that many of the young people now used swear words because of the movies that they watched, and that the f-word was becoming ubiquitous among young people. Minutes later a group of boys in their teens passed, using all sorts of invective, clad in baggy jeans and head bands. The trader gave me a knowing “what did I tell you” look. One trader at another stall had the same sentiments and said that he was always shocked by some of the things that some young people and customers at the market knew and talked about. He remarked that it was common to see young people of school-going age smoking at the flea market, and in his mind it was because of “all those DVDs from America that they watch”. The themes in this material included violent crime, war, science fiction and romantic love. Some of the DVD movies showed rebellious teenagers who talked back to their parents and had no respect for older people. Others showed teenage sex, according to the trader, and he said this was “immoral”. Some movies were liked by teenagers for the “fashionable” clothes like baseball

caps, baggy jeans and flashy sneakers, and the trader said that was how most teenagers acquired the tastes they had in certain kinds of clothes.

Besides shaping their tastes and consumption patterns at the local level, customers maintained that an advantage of piracy was that they had access to the latest movies, sometimes even before they were officially released. They boasted that they were part of the global. One customer said, “Whatever they watch there we are also watching here in Zimbabwe.” Another customer shared similar sentiments by saying, “I don’t have to travel to America for the latest movies or to know about the latest dressing styles. I see it in the music DVDs and the movies that I get at the market.” In the current conjuncture it is important to acknowledge, however, that sometimes the local can also influence the global. Dreadlocks, for example, have become global. African music is also very popular globally. In the case of Zimbabwe, local musicians such as Oliver Mtukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo, and Chiwoniso Maraire are well-known internationally through stage collaborations or solo concerts in North America, Europe and on the African continent.

While customers applauded piracy in terms of its ability to allow them to access those commodities (material, cultural, visual) which are considered *de rigueur* at a particular time, traders justified piracy in different terms which sometimes included economic necessity. Some traders indicated that “piracy is everywhere”. One trader argued that if the people in the United States and in Europe were also involved in pirated products then they saw nothing wrong in them doing it to make some money to survive in the difficult Zimbabwean economy. Another trade justified it by saying:

These people make millions of dollars on some of these movies. I am sure that me selling fakes is not going to affect how much they make, is it? I mean, we are just the small fish men. We need to make money. Things are tough, as you can see. We have to do what we can do.⁹⁵

Yet another trader saw it in similar economic terms, saying, “Things are tough right now. I have to survive. My family has to survive. Piracy is everywhere, man”.⁹⁶ On top of participating in DVD trading, traders also participate in a small way in the global video gaming industry by distributing pirated copies of video games. Like pirated DVD movies, most video games sold at the flea market also came from the Internet.

5.7.2 Getting the video games

According to an online gaming and technology news website, *www.xbitlabs.com*, “combined video game software unit sales across the world’s three largest games markets⁹⁷ experienced growth of 11% in [the] calendar year 2008, totalling 409.9 million units versus the 367.7 million units sold across these markets in 2007” (Shilov, 2009: online). From such figures the video game industry is definitely a billion dollar industry.

The process of getting pirated video games is very similar to getting video games. Traders at the Harare market sold a mixture of pirated and a very small number genuine copies. In a piece titled *Biting the Hand that Feeds You*, posted

⁹⁵ Trader interview: Ishe, Harare, June 2008.

⁹⁶ Trader interview: Munyaradzi, June 2008.

⁹⁷ The United State, the United Kingdom and Japan are the three largest markets for video games.

on a popular gaming resources website, the author indicates that “Virtually every game ever made can be found on the Internet and downloaded for free” and that “it has been this way nearly since the Internet was made public” (Guisinger, 2009: online). International intellectual property stipulates that it is only the owner of a game that can make a back-up copy for personal use and that copies should not be distributed. The “sharing, downloading, or game distribution of any kind is illegal whether the offender owns an original copy or not” (Guisinger, 2009: online). While the traders did know that what they were doing was illegal, they did not have a very sophisticated grasp of copyright law, which corporate lawyers for big companies definitely have.

Most traders at the flea market got their games from Taurai (Profile 5), who supplied them for a fee that both traders and Taurai himself refused to disclose. However, I often accompanied Taurai on his rounds around the market, where he would be given amounts varying from ZAR100 to as much as ZAR300 by different traders, which he simply said was money for movies and videos he had given the particular traders. Taurai was well-known for having flamboyant lunches at some of the food outlets nearby, so he probably made a reasonable amount of money from distributing films and games. It was up to the traders to make their copies for sale, a task which required a basic desktop computer with an optical device able to make copies in a file format called CD-ROM. PS2 version video game releases from the previous three years sold at the market for roughly the equivalent of ZAR80-150 (negotiable).

While the price of DVDs hovered around a particular mark, the case of video games was different. Issues of availability were very important and,

according to Taurai, games did not make it onto downloadable Internet sites as quickly as DVDs. For example, some traders charged as much as ZAR180 for newer releases of the PS3 version of video games. Those traders able to acquire high-quality pirated hard copies of recently released games could sell them for as much as ZAR250. However, one trader indicated that he preferred not to sell these high-quality pirated hard copies so that he could make further copies for sale.

Another very important source for video games was the Chinese community, which has a relatively strong presence in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean-focused news website *www.newzimbabwe.com* reported in 2008 that “Mugabe has cultivated relations with Asian countries as part of a so-called ‘look east’ policy since many western countries imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe four years ago, accusing the president of human rights violations” (*newzimbabwe.com*, 2008; online). Though actual figures on the settlement patterns of the Chinese are unavailable, the “look east policy” deliberately encouraged Chinese nationals to settle in the country, and the national airline, Air Zimbabwe, even had a direct flight to Beijing on a weekly basis. Processes of globalisation also involve the increased movement of nationals from different countries across the globe (Appadurai, 1990) and Zimbabwe, despite its pariah status, still had nationals from different countries visiting the country, though at a much slower pace than previously.

Social relations between Chinese nationals and some of the local traders facilitated access to pirated copies of video games (and in some cases DVDs) for the traders. While there were no Chinese nationals at the market trading in video games or DVDs, traders indicated that they had Chinese friends who sometimes

brought video games for them when they returned from their annual holidays in China. This demonstrates the importance of social networking between those at what could be termed the local and those that are at the global or have access to it, in facilitating the flow of commodities between the two. Traders indicated that they sometimes paid a nominal fee (which they were unwilling to reveal) for these games. However, some of the traders (not involved in selling video games) at the market claimed that teenage Chinese nationals would sometimes ask to be paid in cannabis. Further probing of these claims did not yield much, hence their veracity could not be ascertained.

One trader at the market, Kuziwa, on some occasions had Playstation game consoles for sale. In video game terminology such devices, on which games are played, are termed “platforms”. Desktop computers are another cheaper platform that “gamers” use. Some gamers also use their television sets for the simpler games, which just require a simple controlling device like a “joystick”. For a PS3 console customers would have to pay at least US\$1000. A pertinent point is that Kuziwa heavily relied on his brother who is based in Australia to send him some of these electronic devices. Though most of the devices were supposed to be for his personal use, Kuziwa sold them:

Sometimes it is very difficult for me to ask for money from my brother in Australia as regularly as I would want to. If I ask him to send me gifts I can always convert these to cash by selling them. A PS3 is relatively cheap in Australia. I can also ask him for games that can play on the PS3. I am 25 years now so it's expected that I should be looking after myself. I don't have any qualifications so there is no way I am going to ask my brother to join him in Australia. I visited him once but it's not the kind of lifestyle that I would want to live. It's tough, especially if you are not educated.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Trader Interview: Kuziwa, 15, August 2007.

It is through relatives that traders like Kuziwa can access the latest technological products. Earlier on we indicated that monetary remittances have remained an important global connector. The same argument can be made for some of the latest electronic equipment that traders receive from relatives who are based abroad. They are a form of non-monetary remittances that traders may convert to cash at a later stage depending on their financial needs. In a time of globalisation, commodities, rather than the Internet or air travel may sometimes be the link that connects people. These connections should be seen as an alternative form of globalisation, contrary to conceptualisations that see Africa as a disconnected, marginalised black hole.

5.8 Conclusion

In *End of the Millennium*, Castells (1998) hypothesises that hope for most of sub-Saharan Africa to connect with the networked society lay with South Africa which accounted, at the time of his writing, for 44 per cent of the total GDP of sub-Saharan Africa and 52 per cent of the industrial output. While South Africa continues to be the continental economic powerhouse, Castells does not take into consideration that countries on the continent could actually be part of the global networked society in a different, albeit unequal way to those countries in the global North. Throughout the thesis there has been an emphasis on this unequal pattern of global connections across Africa.

In a critique of some of the negative conceptualisations of the African continent, one analyst asserts that “recent thinking about ‘the globe’ and ‘the global’ often evokes an image of a planetary network of connected points, and

that 'Africa' is marginal to, and often even completely absent from such dominant imaginations of 'the global'" (Ferguson, 2006: 6). Africa is not completely absent from what is happening globally. For instance, the activities of Chinese companies who are investing in oil ventures in countries such as Angola shows the way in which the continent is linking up to the globe. Recently the Chinese government pledged US\$10 billion to sub-Saharan African countries, again an example of how capital is connecting the continent.

If anything, the Internet has allowed Africa to have the same desires as the rest of the world and to consume the same images, sounds and products. The case of the DVD and video game traders reveals the need for such a conceptualisation.

As Ferguson (2006:49) writes:

The fact that an African-focused picture of globalization looks so unlike what most global theories lead us to expect does not mean that other accounts, 'from' other 'places,' can simply be dismissed.... Instead, the view from Africa challenges us to develop new, more situated understandings of emerging global patterns, understandings that attend more adequately not only to new interconnections, but also to material inequalities and spatial and scalar disjunctures that such interconnections both depend on and, in some ways, help to produce. Above all, what the inconvenient questions coming out Africa show us is how much more thinking, and how much more empirical research, remains to be done before we can really understand a globalization that divides the planet as much as it unites it.

The approach in this project is to consider the variability of globalizations as far as Zimbabwe is concerned. While the role that Zimbabwe is playing in the global economy or the information technology industry is minimal, a different lens reveals that the global connections through commodity flows like clothes and shoes and also the flow of digital commodities like pirated films and video games do exist.

In addition, social capital and social networks are important in understanding the lives of traders at the market and in enabling these global connections. It is also pertinent to re-imagine and contextualise how networks and social capital enable those in the developing world, like Zimbabwe, to manoeuvre their way in difficult times. A central point is that social networks and other types of social capital are also enablers in periods of economic crises as they facilitate access to certain kinds of resources, especially where the state has been “scaled back” or where it is unable to meet the needs and demands of the populace.

Also, on a global scale it is much more useful to think in terms of different and alternative globalizations that may follow multiple, dissimilar and (materially) unequal trajectories. Countries like Zimbabwe may actually be networked much like the global North countries, albeit in a different way. Informal economic activities among the clothes and shoe traders and the DVD and video game traders “reach to the global”. At a time when the Zimbabwean economy has essentially involuted, the activities of these particular traders have not reverted to a primitivist domestic economy but are in actual fact connected to the global.

The following chapter focuses on goods that are largely sourced locally by traders.

Chapter 6

The Case of Arts and Crafts Traders and Second-hand Book Traders

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered the cases of the clothes and shoe traders and the DVD and video game traders with reference to issues of social networking as a source of social capital. The chapter also considered how the activities of these traders connect them to the “global”. This chapter proceeds with a similar conceptual and analytical framework to reveal the other side of the story. The focus shifts to the case of arts and crafts traders and the second-hand book traders who largely source their goods locally. Social networks also play a pertinent role among these traders, especially in the sourcing and selling of goods.

While all the clothes and shoe traders interviewed had to travel outside the country at some point to source goods, this was not the case for the majority of arts and crafts traders interviewed. A few did travel to places like Cape Town in South Africa. They travelled there either to deliver goods to other Zimbabwean street traders or to meet with dealers from countries such as the Netherlands who had a consignment of arts and crafts.

Clothes and shoe traders and the DVD and video game traders acquired goods manufactured at the global level and sold them at the local level. Their case is that of the “localisation of the global”. The focus of this particular chapter is on the “globalisation of the local”. These are instances in which goods acquired

locally and sold at the market find their way onto the global level. The activities of the traders extended into the SADC region. They sold commodities like arts and crafts to dealers from countries like South Africa and Botswana. These dealers then often exported the arts and crafts directly to international destinations or sold them to tourists and other dealers who visited countries in the region. In recent times there has been a contraction of the number of tourists coming to Zimbabwe because of political instability, and this has diverted tourists towards other regional destinations which are seen as much more stable politically, economically and socially.

While the economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe certainly resulted in a reduction in tourist arrivals, there has not been an outright collapse of the tourism industry. For arts and crafts traders, tourists constituted a substantial portion of their customer base. In the context of a collapsing economy where many locals faced, and continue to face, economic difficulties, the amount of disposable income that locals can spend on luxury items like arts and crafts has definitely contracted. Foreign nationals and some of the locals based in countries in the region occupied an important nexus in the flow of arts and crafts to regional and in some cases international destinations.

Book traders, as will be seen, gained in that they were able to access cheap books from Zimbabweans who were relocating because of the economic and political crisis. On the other hand, their trade was hit by the crisis in that slowing tourist arrivals resulted in declining sales of “rare” and out-of-print books which were much sought after by tourists from other countries. Due to the collapse of the most productive sectors of the economy in Zimbabwe, there have also been major

shortages of locally printed school textbooks for almost all levels of the education system. Some traders were able to take advantage of this situation by buying and selling textbooks, though these were generally in short supply. The illicit nature of trade concerning some of these books will be considered later on.

6.2 Early global connections in the modern arts and crafts trade in Zimbabwe

The establishment of the National Gallery in 1957 and sculpture parks in later years in urban Harare was central in bringing not only stone sculpture but Zimbabwean arts and crafts in general to the attention of the international community. The gallery as an institution spawned early interest in arts and crafts not only among those who identified themselves as artists but also among people who traded in arts and crafts.

As far as stone sculpture is concerned, the literature has most prominently referred to “Shona sculpture” but experts on the topic assert that the term is misleading because it assumes that “all artists are Shona, and implies a collective societal and cultural allegiance on their part. The sculptors are from different societies, indigenous and immigrant to Zimbabwe, with differing ontological and cosmological perspectives which determine subject matter, treatment of subject and treatment of material” (Winter-Irving, 1991: 29). At the market there were also sculptures in wood which traders reported to be much easier to handle because these pieces were much lighter than stone pieces. There were also arts and crafts pieces, particularly from countries such as Zambia, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – previously Zaire. The pieces from these

countries tended to be predominantly ceremonial masks, costumes, head rests and stools made of wood. These were sold exclusively in US dollars.

Stone sculpture in Zimbabwe dates back to the time of what is now called Great Zimbabwe, an ancient empire from about 600 years ago (Mor, 1987) which bequeathed stone sculptures to the present-day nation. Several pieces of sculpture from this era, regarded as belonging to the people of Zimbabwe, are displayed at the National Gallery in Harare. The first director of the National Gallery of Harare (then Salisbury) was appointed in 1957 and, as mentioned earlier, with the gallery came the attention of the international community. For example, there were Zimbabwean sculptures in exhibitions at the Commonwealth Institute in London in 1963 and the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1969 (Mor, 1987). Exhibitions were also held at the Musée Rodin in Paris in 1971 and at the Musée d'Arte Moderne in Paris in 1972, and this was done under the auspices of the National Gallery (Winter-Irving, 1991). Obviously, participation in these events was for those who were categorised as professional artists. What is important is that many of these Zimbabwean artists, just like the traders who today manufacture their own pieces, did not go to any tertiary art school to learn their craft. Most were self-taught, and learned by observing others.

The establishment of The Market, where arts and crafts could be bought, on the ground floor of the National Gallery in 1986 helped to expose the Zimbabwe arts and crafts scene to the international community (Winter-Irving, 1991). The Market was established in time for the 1986 Non-Aligned Conference held in Harare and it allowed artists to gain international recognition, with some of them subsequently being invited to places like Hungary for exhibitions. At the

time metal sculpture and other arts and crafts pieces in metal found their way onto the arts scene (Winter-Irving, 1991). Importantly, other people who sold arts and crafts in the street and at informal markets also benefited from this attention as they also sold to tourists visiting the country.

Another institution which was very instrumental in the internationalisation of sculpture and other arts and crafts in Zimbabwe was the Tengenenge Sculpture Park established in 1966 on a commercial farm about 150 km north of Harare. It was a haven for several sculptors from southern Africa. During Zimbabwe's peak in terms of tourism – before and after independence – it was considered an institution that any tourist had to visit (Winter-Irving, 1991). Through Tengenenge various artists were also able to exhibit abroad, especially after independence, in places such as Bulgaria, Holland and Germany, under the auspices of the National Gallery and other associations like the Zimbabwe-Germany Society. Tengenenge attracted many art buyers from international markets, and in the process made Zimbabwean arts and crafts widely available to the international community in the post-independence era (Winter-Irving, 1991).

The Chapungu Sculpture Park in Harare was also instrumental in bringing arts and crafts in Zimbabwe to international attention, with exhibitions in locations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Middle East, as well as in African countries like South Africa. Established in 1980, the Chapungu Sculpture Park played a prominent role in the large-scale commercialisation of the arts and crafts, especially of stone sculpture, and had a widely circulated monthly newsletter in its heyday (LaDuke, 1997). Perhaps a testament to the success of the commercialisation of Zimbabwean crafts,

especially sculpture, is that Chapungu also has very prominent operations in Colorado in the United States under the directorship of Chapungu's original founder, Roy Guthrie, where there is a 26-acre open-air exhibition park popular with tourists and locals. Sculpture pieces can also be bought there. Traders at the market in Zimbabwe did not report any linkages with international operations like that of Chapungu in United States, although two very successful traders at the market did report that on occasion they sold a large number of pieces to some Zimbabwean nationals and they suspected they were exporting these pieces to foreign destinations like the United States.

Trading in arts and crafts in the current environment is seen as especially risky by some of the traders because of the decline in tourist arrivals. The collapse of the Zimbabwean economy and issues concerning negative international outlook for the country have already been charted in Chapter 2. Traders at the market had a very good grasp of the root causes of the decline of their trade, especially with reference to the non-arrival of tourists. With the economy sinking ever deeper, British airways, the only other carrier which still had direct flights into Zimbabwe from Europe, ceased direct flights from the end of October 2007. This did not help the image of the country. The situation was compounded when warnings were issued by countries such as the United States, Germany and Australia regarding travel to Zimbabwe. These negative perceptions abroad definitely contributed to the contraction of tourism in the country. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, which has offices in Zimbabwe, cited figures showing tourist arrivals had declined by 36 per cent in the first half of 2004 when compared to 2003 (FES, 2004). The FES also indicated that tourism performance in Zimbabwe had declined at an accelerated

pace, especially since 2002, contributing to continued negative performance of the economy. A testament to the institutional collapse is that none of the tourism bodies, like the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), have produced any information in recent times which empirically track statistics like tourist arrivals. In early 2009 hotel occupancy rates were reported to be about 30 per cent, if not lower. Generally, there has been a negative growth in the hospitality and tourism industry in the past few years, just like in other sectors of the economy. The decline in tourist arrivals has affected traders like Mason, profiled below.

6.3 The traders: Profile 7 – Mason

Mason, also known as Dread because of his mop of dreadlocked hair, is a 36-year-old arts and crafts dealer who stays in Chitungwiza, which is part of Greater Harare. He is married with two children, a boy and a girl, both of whom are in primary school. His wife does not work. She is a full-time mum. On the morning that I arrive at his stall in mid-2007 looking to establish rapport with him, after having been introduced the previous day by another trader, he is late by the standards of the market, where most people open their stalls around 9 o'clock in the morning. When he does show up two hours later, he tells me he went to bed well after midnight because he had to move house after a dispute with the landlord over rent.

According to his estimates he had been paying an equivalent of almost ZAR500 per month to rent a four-roomed cottage, and the landlord wanted to double the amount on short notice. Mason felt that this was unreasonable and totally out of his reach given that he was already struggling with the current rate.

Mason's rental payments were a mixture of Zimbabwean dollars, US dollars and South African rand, depending on what he had managed to make at the market and on his "reserves." When he got back home from work the previous evening, the landlord was threatening immediate eviction if Mason did not agree to the rental increase. Having failed to reach an agreement, Mason called some of friends in and around Chitungwiza to find out if they could assist him in getting a place to stay. It was at about 10 o'clock at night that one of his friends found a place belonging to his uncle that was available to rent.

Mason hired a small truck to move his furniture the same night; he was charged the equivalent of ZAR300 for the three trips needed to move to the three-roomed cottage about two kilometres away from where he was. He managed to pay half of the amount and promised to pay the rest in future in hard currency. His new rent was the equivalent of ZAR300. Evictions at such short notice are very common in Harare where there is shortage of accommodation. Landlords prey on the situation of urban dwellers like Mason and often announce abrupt rent increases to coerce tenants to agree to them. Though legally the Rent Board stipulates at least one month's notice for eviction and for rental increases, this edict is rarely followed by the city's landlords. Many, like other Zimbabweans, are reeling under the effects of Zimbabwe's economic crisis.

Mason's life story, like that of most traders at the market, is also the story of the Zimbabwean crisis which has had a deleterious impact on the lives of the local populace, traders included. He recalls that he started a stall at the flea market in about 1996 or 1997. He claims that then the arts and crafts dealers and manufacturers did not pay rent because the owner of the market had personally

invited them to come and sell their goods there. This, according to Mason, was meant to introduce some diversity to the market, where most of traders just sold clothes. His account of events is disputed by other traders, who say they were there in those early days, and maintain that everybody paid rent though none of them, a mixture of retrenched workers and school dropouts, had any recollection of the precise amount they paid. Mason, however, says that it was only when there was increased pressure on stall space that everybody began to pay rent.

Mason dropped out of school before he completed his O-Levels. He was very evasive about why he dropped out. He had been staying with an uncle, his late father's brother, whom he said could afford to pay his fees. Mason said, "It was all right staying with him"⁹⁹ and left it at that. After dropping out he moved in with a friend who was a bachelor and stayed in Glen Norah in southwest Harare. The friend made and sold arts and crafts at the road side on Beatrice Road, which connects Harare to Masvingo where the Great Zimbabwe ruins are located, and goes on further to the border town of Beitbridge.

Mason learned sculpture by observing, and began making and selling small pieces of birds, the human form and others. When the friend got married, Mason moved to his own rented room in Highfield but continued working with his friend. Although he was young then, about 19 years old he said, he was already learning to look after himself. Most of his friends then either stayed with relatives or parents. He could not move in with his sister who was married. He said, "It's not right to go and stay with a brother-in-law where I come from". Also, his sister was still not happy with the fact that he had dropped out of school

⁹⁹ Trader interview: Mason, Harare, June 2007.

when there was somebody who could afford to pay school fees for him. She felt that Mason should have stuck it out.

Mason recounts that in those days, in the mid-1990s, things were fine. He could pay his rent and he could also send bags of seeds and fertilizer to his mother in the rural areas in Masvingo about 280 kilometres from Harare. He sold sculpture pieces and other curios to motorists, some of them white South African tourists travelling by road, and also other tourists from Namibia and Zambia. Mason says that he moved to the flea market in the hope that he would develop and grow his business. When he started out at the market he got friends to leave their pieces and sold them at a mark-up and pocketed the difference. Over time he developed a client base that included tourists and cross-border traders who sold arts and crafts in countries such as South Africa and Namibia. With time and with better revenues, Mason bought sculptures and other arts and crafts from his friends and then put a 40 to 50 per cent mark-up on them, and then sold these to clients. Mason said that then he would buy necklaces for the equivalent of ZAR10 and sell them for the equivalent of ZAR15. He relied on selling large volumes. He remarks that he made some good money, though it is unclear what he did with the money he made, given his precarious situation at present. He does not seem to have saved or invested any of it. When he was 26 he got married and moved to Warren Park which is closer to the CBD, where he rented a comfortable two-roomed cottage with his young wife. He was able to furnish his house, and when his wife became pregnant he could afford medical check-ups at the Avenues Clinic, known then for its high-quality services. She also delivered there. He said

it cost him a “bit of money” and though he paid up front he could “afford” it and his wife got the best medical attention.

Mason recalls that in the late 1990s and early 2000s things had gone bad and his income was dwindling. He also found himself constantly moving house. Sometimes he missed rent payments because he did not make any sales and on other occasions the landlord requested that he move because a male relative who had been retrenched needed a place to stay with his family. From Warren Park he moved to Chitungwiza in 2002. By then they already had a second child. He recalls that the rent in Chitungwiza was about three-quarters of what he paid in Warren Park. However, cheaper rent also meant that he moved further away from the CBD, Chitungwiza being some 25 kilometres from the Harare CBD, so commuting to work took longer. On the infamously inefficient Harare public transport system it sometimes took him three hours or even more, including the time spent queuing for transport, to commute from home into the CBD and then to the flea market. This commute could be tiring at times.

The periods of decline in business mentioned by Mason coincide with the problems in the Zimbabwean economy which affected industries such as manufacturing, agriculture and also the tourism industry from which traders like Mason earn their living. This was confirmed by the accounts of other arts and crafts traders who said that their businesses had been hit in recent years as the tourist arrivals had slowed down.

Mason remarks that in the current, very difficult environment his priority was making sure that his children had enough to eat and could go to school. His wife now insisted that the children take off their school clothes and shoes as soon

as they got home because she did not want them getting worn out quickly since there was no money for replacement. Mason says that he can no longer afford to send seeds or fertilizer to the family rural home where a married male cousin looks after the place, Mason's mother having passed on. He fears that if he does not make enough money he cannot not pay his rent which might result in eviction, putting his family out on the street. Mason also has deep-seated anxieties and fears about anybody in the family falling ill. Though he tries to always keep about US\$100 stashed away in case of a medical emergency he sometimes has to use this money either to pay rent when he does not make enough in a particular month or to pay a supplier he owes and has not paid for a while. Like other traders, Mason remarks that if he falls ill it would curtail his ability to make a living and it would also cost him money. He could not afford private medical aid for himself and his family, so in case of an emergency he would have to pay medical fees upfront. Also, medicines and other essentials like basic household commodities were scarce and where available, out of reach for ordinary Zimbabweans.

When he manages to make a sale Mason sometimes asks his friends who trade in clothes and shoes to get a few basic commodities in South Africa when they make trips there. Like other traders he relies on social ties and networks with colleagues at the market for sourcing these basic groceries in an environment where basics are unavailable in local shops. His priorities in such cases are mielie meal, cooking oil, bathing and washing soap, and non-perishable foodstuffs for his children's lunch boxes when they go to school. The difficulties that he experiences with transport and the decline of earnings resonate with the accounts of the majority of traders at the market. These traders, just like Mason, have very

precarious lives where incomes are unpredictable. Life is a daily struggle in an economy in crisis where social reproduction is largely individualised.

Mason uses his access to the market to dominate his suppliers, who include peasants from rural areas. In the tough economic situation he insists that suppliers leave their crafts and then come to collect the proceeds of the sale at a later date. He says that in the past he was able to pay up front but given the declining sales he wait to sell a piece before paying the supplier. Mason simply does not have the money to pay his suppliers. He also remarks that he has to maximise his profits when he gets an opportunity to make a sale. Mason says, “Business is business, man. I have to make money when the opportunity is there. I might not make a sale for a while so I have to make sure a sale is a good sale”.

Sometimes Mason buys a small sculpture for the equivalent of ZAR50 and sells it for seven to ten times the price. He does not have any qualms about the huge difference between the price differential. In most cases he tries as much as possible to undercut the prices that he pays suppliers for their commodities. The relationship between him and his suppliers is thus an exploitative relationship. The vast majority of arts and crafts traders at the market who rely on suppliers for commodities also tend to have exploitative relationships with their suppliers.

Traders sell finished arts and crafts, and in that sense do not add any value to the goods they sell but exploited their position in the commodity chain. There is considerable evidence of this exploitation and inequality in other parts of the African continent as far as economic relations in the informal economy are

concerned. For example, a study of women shea butter¹⁰⁰ producers in the informal economy in West Africa by found that the women were exploited by local middlemen who sold the raw material to other exporters and accrued most of the profits along the chain (Carr, Chen and Tate, 2000). For example, in the case of the shea butter produced in Burkina Faso, the end consumers in Europe paid 84 times the price that local women were paid for the raw material by the local middlemen. In their compelling account Carr, Chen and Tate (2000: 129) argue that most commodity chain analysis considers the main agents locally and globally and fail to consider “weaker links” in the chain, where those with the “least knowledge, mobility, or power, and hence, the lowest returns” are located. This is where the suppliers who sell arts and crafts to the traders at the flea market are located. Besides the struggling young and old peasants from rural areas, there were other suppliers. Some were young male urban dwellers who were trying to raise money for passports fees and intended to leave Zimbabwe for countries such as South Africa, Botswana or Namibia. Others were urban dwellers looking for an opportunity to make money quickly. They possessed less power and knowledge in the commodity chain than the traders who sourced goods from them and “squeezed” them on prices.

Although most traders sourced arts and crafts such as stone and wooden sculptures locally, there were goods that came from other countries in the southern African region.

¹⁰⁰ Shea butter is used for cooking, as lotion and for medicinal purposes, and there is a growing market for it in North America, Europe and Japan where it used in high-end cosmetics (Carr, Chen and Tate, 2000).

6.4 Sourcing arts and crafts: local and regional connections

6.4.1 The local connections

In addition to stone and wooden sculpture, the arts and crafts scene at the flea market also involved the production and selling of handicrafts and curios. Traders sold pieces like bangles, necklaces, earrings, wire crafts (small figurines made of wire and sometimes larger pieces), paintings, wallets, picture frames, head rests, baskets and a variety of ironwork. The rubric term “arts and crafts” is used here to refer to all the goods sold by traders at the market. Similar arts and crafts are also ubiquitous in informal markets in other parts of southern Africa. For example, Peberdy (2000) gives an account of the handicraft and curios sector among traders in Cape Town and Johannesburg, with some of the pieces originating in Zimbabwe. Demonstrating the transnational nature of this sector on the African continent, the author also found that some of the arts and crafts and the traders themselves came from other southern African countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, as well as countries such as Kenya and Ghana.

As indicated earlier the majority of arts and crafts traders at the market did not need passports in order to ply their trade. While there were regional connections, for example with Zimbabwean traders in places like South Africa and traders and dealers from other regional countries and other international destinations, the large majority of traders at the market did not report partaking in cross-border travelling in the sourcing and selling of their commodities. Unlike the clothes and shoe traders who are highly connected to what can be termed the global, in the sense that their goods originated from countries as distant as China,

this was not the case in the sourcing of arts and crafts. Also, while clothes and shoe traders interacted with the state in terms of getting passports and in manoeuvring the customs and excise regime, this was not the case with the majority of the arts and crafts traders who mainly sold their goods locally.

The vast majority of arts and crafts sold at the market were manufactured in Zimbabwe, either by the traders themselves or by other manufacturers who then sold them to traders at the market. All 11 arts and crafts traders at the flea market were interviewed. As indicated earlier, there were nine males and two females trading in arts and crafts. Of the two females one was 60 years old and married and the other was 39 years old and widowed. Of the male traders five were married and four were single. All of the traders reported sourcing most of their goods locally. All nine male traders reported that they had at some point made certain pieces themselves or continued to do so, especially pieces like bangles and necklaces.

Traders considered items like bangles and necklaces as reasonably easy to make since the manufacturing process does not require much artistic expertise. The 39-year-old female trader at the market reported that she made most of the items that she sold, sometimes at the market in between attending to customers and at times at home as she prepared meals. She mainly sold necklaces, bangles, earrings, key rings, rings carved out of wood, and other accessories. She also made and sold wire-craft. She reported that she had learned to make these by observing others. This trader reported that she had started her business in 1995, making and selling crafts on the Msasa Road which connects the Chapungu Sculpture Park and the CBD. Like other traders, she hoped to take advantage of

tourists on their way to the park. With the decline in tourist arrivals she had moved to the market in the hope that she could make more money there, but life was a struggle.

The other female trader reported that she had always bought her pieces and had never been personally involved in manufacturing what she sold at the market. She was a globally connected trader, with children in the United States and the United Kingdom who facilitated her sale of expensive sculptures. She reported that her children sometimes carried one or two large pieces with them when going back abroad after coming to visit her. Despite the vast geographic distances, this trader maintained social ties to her children who remitted money to her. In her case money was sent through the bank to relatives in South Africa who then had the money physically taken to her by relatives or friends visiting Harare. She acknowledged that the money sent to her did cushion her when things were not going well, but said that it was good that she did not always have to rely on these remittances. She said, “I like doing things for myself. If I fall sick or there is an emergency I am sure I will manage to at least take care of the situation until my children send money later on if there is a need”.¹⁰¹ Her case, however, is atypical from that of most of the traders at the market who did not have children overseas they could rely on either to sell goods on their behalf or to remit money to them. Most of the traders relied on themselves for sustenance, especially in an environment where unemployment or pension benefits were virtually non-existent and where the task of social reproduction has been “downloaded” on to the individual.

¹⁰¹ Trader interview: Aunty Tilly, Harare, Dec 2007.

Traders regarded the sourcing of arts and crafts as an art in itself, and most considered the ability to acquire those pieces that were not ubiquitous at the market as a very important criterion for a trader to attract more customers. Generic pieces like bangles, necklaces and figurines could be found at almost all stalls. Those traders with the “discerning eye” and who had the money to buy the more expensive and unique pieces stocked and sold them at their stalls. This was very common with stone and wooden sculptures which were considered by traders to be very valuable because of the amount of labour which went into not only producing such pieces, but also into sourcing the raw materials involved. However, while the traders regarded issues like the amount of labour and materials used in larger sculptures as important when setting the price to customers, there were double standards in that they did not consider these issues when coercing manufacturers into accepting lower prices that were not commensurate with the labour and time invested in their manufacture.

Traders indicated that if they were going to spend a lot of money on a unique piece it had to be worth it. The piece had to be something that they could sell at a considerable profit. For example, one itinerant wood carver reported that a piece he was selling – a wooden carving of a fish eagle clutching its prey, just over one metre high with a circular base about 40 cm wide – had taken him almost a month to make. This included the time it took him to scout for a suitable tree, cut it down and then do the actual carving using a hammer and chisel. For such a large piece the carver was hoping to find a trader who could purchase it from him for the equivalent of ZAR500. It was bought by one prominent male trader at the market for a negotiated price equivalent to ZAR300, with half of it paid in cash. It

was agreed that the rest would be paid at later date when the piece had been sold. This could sometimes take weeks if not months due to the slow nature of the arts and crafts business at the market. This piece was later sold in foreign currency for US\$150 to a former (white) Zimbabwean¹⁰² who had since converted to South African nationality and was now based in France. This was over three times the price the trader had paid for it. The former Zimbabwean owned a curio shop on the French Riviera: a European tourist hot spot. Some of the commodities that informal traders sell at the market travel truly “global” journeys to other places where they are sold (e.g. France and the Netherlands).

One male trader, who was very well known in the arts and crafts business at the market and who had been trading at the market since 1998 reported that most of the large and therefore valuable sculptures were not usually bought for cash because there was always the risk that a trader might either fail to sell them after having paid the full price or might fail to sell a piece for a targeted price which would mean a loss. Such dynamics sometimes meant that traders reneged on agreements. For example, the prominent trader mentioned above sometimes told his suppliers that he had only managed to sell pieces for a price similar to the buying price so that he could not afford to pay the remainder of the money without making a loss. Usually this was untrue and often it was a stratagem for undercutting suppliers.

Undercutting suppliers was very common among the traders, both male and female. Traders at the market, like Mason in Profile 6, often exploited their ability to access customers and markets as indicated earlier. In other cases traders

102 This case is also referred to later to illustrate the point on globalisation of the local.

bought pieces from kin living in the rural areas. This is an illustration of the importance of social networks in the interface between rural and urban livelihoods of Zimbabweans in the current conjuncture. Although traders claimed that that they paid a fair price when supplied by kin, there were still huge disparities between the cost price and the selling price. There was no “moral economy” in the sense of a consensus on fair prices that was recognised and understood by both parties.

A pertinent point to consider in the arts and crafts trade was the burden placed on the suppliers to scout for business among the traders at the market. While travelling expenses to source goods were considerable for clothes and shoe traders, for example, the arts and crafts traders mostly had goods brought to them by their suppliers. One sculptor said,

I came from Murehwa. I had to pay bus fare to come here and I do not know anyone here in Harare. I make sure I get here early in the morning and then sell some pieces and go back. If I don't manage to sell anything I am in trouble. I have to look for people to buy my items. They will never come to me at my rural home. I have to look for them. It's expensive for me to come here.... These guys don't want to pay. Sometimes I have to come back and collect the rest of the money. It's a double expense, really.¹⁰³

Although the majority of traders waited for suppliers to bring pieces to the market, there were occasions when some traders, on visits to their rural homes, also brought pieces to the market. For instance, traders took advantage of the times they travelled to the rural areas for the festive season, to visit a sick relative or to attend a funeral to bring pieces from there. They also sometimes made arrangements for a supplier who might be a distant uncle or young male in a

¹⁰³ Interview with sculptor: Forget, Harare, March 2008.

nearby village to travel to Harare later in the month and bring the arts and crafts. In such cases traders advanced bus fare for the trip to the city, which in most cases was deducted from the total amount due on the supplied stock, especially if traders were dealing with more distant relations or with non-kin suppliers.

The sourcing of goods by the arts and crafts traders relied on the social ties and networks they had established with their suppliers. All the traders who at some point sourced crafts from other suppliers or manufacturers reported that they sourced them from the same people they had been doing business with when they came to the market or even before they came to the market. Some traders indicated that they could rely on and trust the quality (real or perceived) of the pieces made by these suppliers. They also felt that they had to support the business of their colleagues by buying from them, especially given the harsh economic times. Despite the exploitative nature of the relationships between most traders and suppliers, these networks, nurtured over very long periods were very important for the survivalist strategies of both traders and suppliers given the involution of Zimbabwe's economy. The decline in tourist numbers meant demand was much lower, which consequently meant that traders could only buy so many pieces from their traditional suppliers. The economic crisis was a strong negotiating point for traders, who took advantage of the suppliers whom they knew also had precarious lives. Even if suppliers asked for what they felt was a fair price, traders would always push these prices downwards.

Those traders who had made pieces for themselves in the past (nine male and one female), or who continued to do so, relied on their own labour and expertise for production. They even made these pieces (bangles and necklaces) as

they attended to their stalls. This meant that the space used for production of the arts and crafts pieces was sometimes the same space used for selling them. The female trader who made items on her own reported that in some cases she made these pieces as she cooked. This shows how in the informal economy there may sometimes be no demarcation between the “production space” and the “living space”. A 2008 study of *shebeens* in Soweto, South Africa, reported related patterns where the space in which families lived was also used to entertain patrons (Tsoeu, 2008).

Traders acquired for themselves most of the raw materials such as scrap metal, stone, wood from places like industrial dumps and sometimes from nearby bushy areas, especially in the high-density suburbs such as Tafara and Kambuzuma, suburbs on the city’s outskirts, where there are sometimes tracts of forested areas. Some traders brought string for making beaded necklaces from formal shops in the city centre while some scouted other informal markets in Harare for the beads which they used to make earrings and bangles.

An important point is that, contrary to the articulations of the dual economy thesis, multiple “forward and backward linkages” do exist between the informal and the formal parts of the economy, as illustrated by traders who source raw materials from the formal and make goods for the informal. The informal and the formal are not two distinct, separate economies. Linkages also exist among traders and suppliers in the informal part of the economy where, for instance, traders manufacture arts and crafts using raw materials they acquire from suppliers in that segment. One male trader who made metal sculptures said that he would get scrap metal for free from some informal “home industries” which

manufactured window frames and door frames. It was his responsibility to transport these materials to his place of residence. On some occasions his neighbour, who had an informal home-based business manufacturing burglar bars, also gave him leftover material (off-cuts) that he no longer required. The trader then used these materials to manufacture pieces sold at the market. While these materials were ostensibly for free, there were also occasions when the same neighbour would ask the trader for rods used in the welding process. This illustrates the importance of social networks in the survivalist activities of traders that may sometimes rely on reciprocity and co-operation.

These social networks were also important to the three male traders who sold sculptures and figurines made from scrap metal. They reported that they relied on the goodwill of kin and friends who allowed them either to use their welding machines on weekends or in the early mornings when they themselves were not working or sometimes provided them with raw material for free. These traders had acquired the necessary skills to weld metal pieces into intricate sculptures of birds, wild animals and the human form by watching kin and friends who had home-based industries that involved welding. They had simply adapted and refined these skills to the making of sculptures, and they maintained that anybody who was willing to learn could acquire these skills in a few months' time. One male trader pointed out that necessity had forced him to learn very fast:

In these tough times I had to find something to do. I have a wife and one child. When things were fine you could live with relatives. I had an uncle who had a welding business and I used to help out. I was not paid anything but I lived in his house. I wasn't married then. He looked after me and I ran errands for him. He has since closed his business. Things are tough now. I am 32 now. It's expected that I should be able to look after myself. Besides, I can't go back to the rural areas. I haven't been there for years. So I now make metal sculptures and I sell them at the market. It's tough

but I can afford to pay my rent. I am surviving, but you know things are tough. We make do with what we get.¹⁰⁴

The account of this trader illustrates the importance of social networks and ties in the acquisition of skills that are necessary for survival. In addition, social ties enabled some of the traders to access certain resources, for example, the welding machines that they required to manufacture pieces. Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (2001) assert that various forms of associational life and social networks are crucial for survival in periods of crisis in African cities. The examples given above illustrate the vital role played by social networks in the ability of some traders to manufacture crafts sold at the informal market. Selling these items was essential for their very survival in urban Harare, a city in a country in crisis.

In times of such crisis, when institutions of governance cannot cope with the needs of the city dwellers, they have to confront economic challenges on their own (Hansen and Vaa, 2004). Concerning informal trading and distribution, it has been found that strong social networks and ties between traders and suppliers develop in such situations. For example, Meagher (2006) reports on the very strong social ties that exist between raw material suppliers and manufacturers in the informal shoe and garment production clusters in Aba, Nigeria, among the Igbo. These social networks are also important for imparting skills necessary to make shoes. Broadly, the social networks among Igbo have been singled out by some analysts as a blueprint for “entrepreneurial success” in the informal economy (Forrest, 1994; Brautigam, 1997; Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 1997). Among the arts and crafts traders studied, social networks were also important in how some

¹⁰⁴ Trader interview: Tanyanyiwa, Harare, April 2008.

of them acquired skills, as Mason's profile shows. Through observing a close friend, he acquired skills for making sculptures, and he was also introduced to the arts and crafts business he originally operated from the roadside. Social networks are also important in connecting some of the traders to suppliers from countries in the southern African region.

6.4.2 The regional connections

Three traders at the market sold goods which they acquired from suppliers outside Zimbabwe. These suppliers included: truck drivers who were driving through Zimbabwe to southern African countries such as Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, and Malawi; Zimbabwean citizens of Malawian or Zambian origin who sometimes visited their relatives still living in those countries and brought pieces on return trips which they would sell to the traders; traders from countries such as the DRC who supplied to curio shop owners, especially in the Victoria Falls area, and who travelled on cross-border trucks. They sold some pieces to the traders at the market to take care of their costs while they were in Harare.

Even though there are economic problems in Zimbabwe, there is still a considerable amount of road traffic, especially in the form of haulage trucks that can be seen at the Beitbridge border post and also along the Harare Beitbridge road. Traders reported that truck drivers travelled through many countries and sometimes brought pieces which they supplied to traders. In most cases they came back for payment at a later date. Traders said that these drivers wanted money to spend on the road as they travelled, and also wanted to make "a bit of money on the side".

Arts and crafts from outside Zimbabwe were mainly ceremonial masks, head rests and stools which they said were from countries such as Zambia, Malawi, Nigeria and the DRC. These pieces were sold strictly in US dollars. A mask said to be from Nigeria could be bought for upwards of US\$100 and a stool for US\$150. Traders largely acted as middlemen in these transactions. Their suppliers left these goods at the market and settled on a particular price for them. They sometimes showed up again after several months to collect what was owed to them. It was up to the traders to make sure they sold the pieces at a price above the one agreed upon with the supplier; they could pocket the difference as their share from the sale. In this commodity chain, truck driver suppliers were probably knowledgeable about prices since they travelled in different parts of the southern African region and knew the value of the arts and crafts they gave to traders. This contrasts with the local suppliers and manufacturers, who did not have the same knowledge of markets and were more susceptible to exploitation by the traders at the flea market who bought from them.

Social networks, reciprocity and trust are also involved in these cases. One supplier reported that he trusted the particular trader he dealt with at the market because they had been doing business together for a very long time. According to him they both had an interest in maintaining the good relations between the two of them. They understood that they made money off each other and that it was in both their interests to keep it that way. The local trader indicated that the supplier kept on leaving pieces with him and had been doing so for over five years. This, he said, showed that they had a mutually beneficial relationship, otherwise the supplier would have stopped leaving pieces. This type of relationship was also

beneficial to the traders because all arts and crafts from outside Zimbabwe were sold in US dollars and provided the traders with an opportunity to earn the much more valuable hard currency which was not susceptible to fluctuations like the local currency still in use at the time.

The social ties and networks between traders and such suppliers had obviously taken a very long time to nurture, and hence the situation worked for both the traders and the suppliers. This indicates how the traders are rich in social capital, as opposed to economic capital, in the form of social ties and connections that they can draw on in the sourcing and selling of goods at the market

6.5 Selling arts and crafts: global, regional and local connections

As mentioned earlier, the arts and crafts traders maintained that their trade had been hit by the decline in traditional tourist arrivals because of the conditions in Zimbabwe. The so called “look east policy” in Zimbabwe promoted tourism with Asian countries, especially China. In a 2004 policy briefing paper on Sino-Zimbabwean relations, the FES reports that the number of Chinese tourists to Zimbabwe went up by 254 per cent in 2004 and that Chinese tourists made up 7 per cent of all tourists arriving in the country in 2004. In August 2007 a local Zimbabwean tour company brought Asian nationals to the flea market in a 40-seater bus, a sign of increased tourist arrivals from that part of the globe. Arts and crafts traders were the main beneficiaries of that particular visit. One male arts and crafts trader said:

We don't sell as regularly as other traders, and most of our customers are the few tourists that still come here. With the way things are in the

country, business has gone down. Sometimes I come to the market and spend the day talking to friends, reading the newspaper and discussing what's happening in the country. Politics especially. It keeps me busy and I don't think about the difficult times. I also make friends. On some good days we can sell to the Chinese when they come here like today. I sold some big pieces today. I sold a piece for US\$100. It's been a good day for me. Such sales are far between, though. I might not sell any big pieces for the next few weeks so I have to maximise when I get an opportunity.¹⁰⁵

Some of the traders, however, described the Chinese as very “difficult customers” who always wanted a bargain and often engaged in “long-winded” negotiations when it came to the price of arts and crafts. One trader said, “They always want something cheap”.¹⁰⁶ Another said that they did not have an appreciation of how expensive “good art” was and they offered what he felt were low and “insulting” prices. All the same, the Chinese customers were important to the traders given the decline in tourist arrivals from traditional locations like Europe and North America. The few that bought pieces were partaking in important economic exchanges with local traders. In addition, the case of Takesure who may spend the whole day talking to friends and discussing local politics demonstrates that the market needs to be understood not only as an economic space but as a social space as well.

Some of the Chinese nationals, in informal conversations at the market, reported that they had bought small sculptures as souvenirs and as gifts for when they returned home. On the day mentioned above, in August 2008, six out of ten randomly-approached tourists who came on the bus were Chinese nationals from either Beijing or Shanghai. Five of them were males who reported that they intended to sell the pieces they were purchasing in their own curio shops in China

¹⁰⁵ Trader interview: Takesure, Harare, August 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Trader interview: Luckson, Harare, August, 2007.

to nationals from different countries. One female reported that the items she bought were ornaments for her home, and the smaller pieces like bangles and earrings were gifts for kin and friends back home. This account illustrates the ways in which the informal economic activities of seemingly globally disconnected informal traders have connections to what is happening at the global level. As mentioned earlier, these instances of particular connections of the local to the global demonstrate that it is imperative to conceptualise globalisation in alternative ways which may not conform to patterns which are seen as the standard. For instance, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells (1996) mainly uses examples from the wealthier OECD countries¹⁰⁷ to make arguments on the “network society” and therefore makes sweeping analyses which do not consider the more textured and nuanced way in which countries outside his lens are connecting to the global. This study considers global connectedness in Zimbabwe, an example of a developing country which is not considered in Castells’ analogy.

Another way in which the local activities of the traders at the market are being connected to the global is through the Chinese, who have an expanding presence in countries like Zambia. Chinese economic activity on the African continent in general has grown in recent years. For example, Ching Kwan Lee (2009) charts the growth of Chinese capitalism on the African continent using the case of the Zambian mining industry and the Tanzanian textiles industry. Such economic activities are sometimes accompanied by short-term to long-term settlement and also diversification into other sectors of the economy. According to Simon, an arts and crafts trader at the market, on two occasions in August 2007 he

¹⁰⁷ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an organisation of 30 wealthy countries.

had sold several pieces worth US\$250 to a Chinese national who owned a lodge in Zambia. The customer, according to Simon, bought them for his curio shop at the lodge. This case shows how the Chinese are also diversifying out of their “traditional areas” of trading in cheap clothes and electronics into the tourism industry as they set up bases on the African continent.

In an environment of declining tourist arrivals, the Zimbabwean arts and crafts traders relied on these connections for them to do business. However, they also complained that because of the economic situation they were undercut by shrewd customers and dealers who were aware of the declining tourist arrivals. Some of these customers were curio dealers of other nationalities based in countries in the southern African region or Zimbabweans who had curio shops in some of these countries. Simeon said:

Some of my customers know that most tourists are now visiting Zambia instead of Zimbabwe to see the Victoria Falls. They know we are not selling as much as we used to. They will obviously make very low offers. Some of the times you have no choice but to accept the offer. If you have not sold anything for three weeks what choice do you have? There are some guys who had to close their shops because they were not selling anything. They could not afford to get new pieces and also pay the rent¹⁰⁸ here. I mean, if you have a lot of pieces you might need to have a bigger space to display them, which means you pay more.¹⁰⁹

While arts and crafts traders took advantage of the local suppliers, they were taken advantage of by arts and crafts traders coming from countries in the southern African region who exploited their position in this commodity chain to their advantage since they had knowledge of tourist trends in Zimbabwe. They knew

¹⁰⁸ As indicated earlier, in 2008 the daily rentals for stalls at the flea market was the equivalent of ZAR25-30 per day for using the space from Monday to Friday, and roughly ZAR50-60 on Saturday (depending on the movement of the Zimbabwean dollar), and the equivalent of ZAR30-40 to use the space on Sundays.

¹⁰⁹ Trader interview: Simeon, Harare, January 2008.

that not many tourists were coming to the country because of the economic and political situation. They then used this knowledge to “squeeze” the local Zimbabwean traders to lower their prices.

Some Zimbabwean nationals have gone into business in countries such as Malawi and Zambia, and are important conduits in the flow of commodities from the local into the southern African region. They maintain the connections to, and use knowledge of their native country to spur the growth of the business ventures they have established. A female customer buying curios at one stall said that she owned a spa in Malawi which she had set up with the assistance of some of her extended family members staying in that country, an example of the social networks and ties that are maintained when transnational emigration occurs. This case also shows how countries like Malawi, which used to send labour to Zimbabwe during the colonial period, have in the recent past begun to see Zimbabweans with Malawians connections like relatives, going to establish business there as the Zimbabwean economy has imploded: a reversal of fortunes, perhaps. According to the female spa owner, her establishment was frequented by nationals from Europe and America and also by some African nationals. She had decided to set up a small curio shop at the spa, and she sourced most of her curios from her native Zimbabwe, which she had intimate knowledge of. For her, the quality of the products could be trusted and they were “different” from the curios that she found in Malawi.

One trader at the market indicated that he had connections with a white couple who used to own a game farm in Zimbabwe, and who had moved their operations to Namibia because of the land invasions that rocked Zimbabwe. In

their new venture, they had set up a lodge and a curio shop. The couple visited Zimbabwe twice a year, according to this trader, and sometimes bought one or two metal sculptures from him as well as other smaller items like wallets, rings and earrings, which they said were easier to carry. He indicated that he had managed to sell the couple a metal sculpture of an eagle (about a metre high) for ZAR400; he had bought the sculpture for the equivalent of ZAR100 from a peddler at the market. However, he said such good sales were not very common so he always tried to maximise profit when such opportunities presented themselves. “They own a lodge in Namibia now. I know they will make much more than the ZAR400 I charged them. Most of their customers are rich tourists,” he said. As mentioned earlier, the connections that exist between traders and some of the Zimbabweans that left the country for a variety of reasons have proven to be important nodes in the arts and crafts business in the current conjuncture, since they enable the local traders engaging in survivalist trading activities to eke out a living.

Connections also existed between the traders at the market and other Zimbabwean traders in places like South Africa, where they are involved in selling arts and crafts in places like Cape Town and Johannesburg. Six male traders at the market reported that they either had kin or friends in South Africa who were involved in arts and crafts trading. These kin or friends would sometimes take crafts from traders at the market and then sell these pieces in South Africa. For example, in December 2007 one male trader said that a friend he trusted had taken two sculptures with him to Johannesburg at the beginning of the year, and it was only in August that the friend had sent some money

(ZAR300) and groceries from the proceeds of the sale of the sculptures. The trader reported that the groceries and the money sent by the Zimbabwean friend matched reasonably well what he had hoped to get from selling the sculptures. Whether kin or friend sent back proceeds in money or other form in future, the traders reported that they trusted the value of what was given to them. One trader said, “I have known this guy for years and we went to school together”¹¹⁰. Another trader said, “I know his family and he knows my family. We have worked together for a very long time”.¹¹¹ And another trader speaking with reference to a member of his kin group said, “We are relatives. We are close. He wouldn’t cheat me”.¹¹² As indicated by Bass (2000:33), in a study of informal traders in Senegal, “Kinship plays an important role in the adaptations of market sellers”.

The case of arts and crafts traders who had kin or friends who took pieces which they sold on their behalf in Johannesburg or Cape Town also illustrates another process of informalisation. This is the informalisation of money transfers. For instance, the six male traders mentioned above never travelled to South Africa to collect proceeds from the sale of arts and crafts they had given to friends or to kin. On some occasions groceries would be sent in lieu of money. Traders said they never insisted on receipts as they had a general idea of how much things cost in South Africa through friends and colleagues who travelled there regularly. In cases where actual foreign currency was sent, it was given to colleagues, friends, bus drivers or to other kin returning from South Africa. The money was never

¹¹⁰ Trader interview: Ras Tamuka, Harare, December 2007.

¹¹¹ Trader interview, Simeon, Harare, January, 2008.

¹¹² Trader interview, Luckson, Harare, August 2007.

deposited into a bank account and neither was an official money transfer agent used. All these examples indicate high levels of social capital in the form of relations of trust and reciprocity.

The accounts here show the importance of social ties and social networks in the operations of the arts and crafts traders, much like in the cases of the two types of traders in previous sections. They also illustrate that in periods of crisis individuals build institutions, whether *de facto* or *de jure* to “substitute for those formal sector ones that have been functionally lost” (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2008: 5). For example, transnational economic transactions rest on relations of trust connecting the Zimbabwean traders in South Africa, who may have a better market access, to local traders who have been struggling given the economic crisis and the low tourist arrivals. The Zimbabwean arts and crafts street traders in South Africa are part of a larger cohort made up of nationals from other southern African countries also partaking in survivalist informal economic activities.

In a study of the handicraft and curio sector among African nationals in South Africa, Peberdy (2000) reports that the majority of the traders in her sample came from either Zimbabwe or Malawi and some from other southern African countries such as Mozambique, Swaziland and Zambia. The study indicated that traders in that sector made regular trips to their countries of origin to visit kin and to source crafts, and they maintained social ties with them. These kin and friends regularly facilitated the movement to South Africa of not only the finished arts and crafts but also raw materials. Much like the locally-based traders referred to earlier, some of the traders from countries in southern Africa in the study by Peberdy (2000) possessed the necessary skills and used raw materials supplied

through kin to manufacture arts and crafts as they worked at their stalls. The social networks and ties among traders also facilitated the movement of money among traders themselves, and also between the traders and kin in other regional countries, showing the importance of these relationships in providing incomes where the so-called free market has failed. Many of the countries of origin of these traders, such as Zambia and Malawi, implemented austerity economic restructuring measures which had negative consequences on economic growth and consequently on levels of employment.

On some occasions the traders in this study were fortunate enough to have direct contacts with dealers from countries like Germany, but these arts and crafts dealers were only willing to go as far as South Africa in terms of picking up the consignment. Only one male trader reported having such contacts. In this case the contact, according to the trader, did not want to come to Zimbabwe because he believed it was unsafe. It was the responsibility of the trader to facilitate the process of moving arts and crafts pieces from Zimbabwe. The trader personally made sure that the sculptures were properly wrapped so that breakages did not occur during shipping. He also arranged to transport the sculpture pieces to the nearest DHL depot and did all the paperwork required. Fortunately, the shipment was for a customer who, according to the trader, was a diplomat who in the past had been based at the Germany embassy in Harare. The trader reported that he did not have to worry about the payment of customs and excise duty on the Zimbabwean end. It was free for diplomats. Any fees that needed to be paid on the South Africa end were the sole responsibility of the customer. The trader indicated that payment for the sculptures came through Western Union. In April 2008 this

trader reported that in February and March of that year he had shipped two sculptures for the customer, one worth US\$100 and the other US\$120, and the customer had also reimbursed him for the DHL courier fees.

The above example illustrates an instance of the “globalisation of the local”, where informal trading not only has regional cross-border connections but also transcontinental connections. Again, it was through social ties established between the trader and the customer when the later was still based in Zimbabwe that enabled the particular trader to sell crafts to the customer who had since moved back to Germany. The trader indicated that sales like these, which came intermittently, cushioned him against economic challenges in the country, especially when he was unable to make a sale for long periods of time. He claimed that he could live off one such major sale for a month and a half, even if he did not sell anything else in the interim period.

Small arts and crafts pieces are easier to transport, especially for customers who have to travel long distances. Traders said that customers did not have to worry about expensive cargo fees and about the possibility of damage during transportation. Small pieces could be packed into hand luggage and then declared as gifts or personal items at customs and immigration. In contrast, large pieces like sculptures are difficult to transport and there is always the extra burden of paperwork. Customs and excise might also want to know whether certain pieces have not been illegally acquired from the National Gallery, for instance. In recent times there have been concerns regarding the smuggling out of the country of valuable national treasures housed at the National Gallery and museum, and some former Zimbabweans have been implicated.

In November 2007 an ex-Zimbabwean (white male and 30 years old) who had assumed South African citizenship was scouting the market for beads, necklaces, bangles, earrings and other smaller items to the tune of 200 Euros. He said smaller arts and crafts such as beads and bangles were easier for him to carry. The ex-Zimbabwean had trained as a helicopter pilot in South Africa but had since quit his job and moved to France with his French fiancée.

The ex-Zimbabwean was now a part owner in a small curio shop on the French Riviera, a European tourist “hot spot”. According to him, there was a tremendous demand for African crafts, especially small curios, among the tourists that frequented his shop:

It’s amazing that people would travel all the way from the US and all over Europe to buy souvenirs of African crafts. You would think that after coming to France they would want a souvenir that’s French. Half of the people that I sell curios to insist they want something African. Funny! They want something African to remind them of having been to France, a European country. I sometimes get friends and relatives who make trips to some African countries to bring small curios for me. I have just been bungee jumping at the Vic Falls and came to visit some relatives here in Harare. I figured I should get some pieces while I am here. It will give me an opportunity to get a variety of pieces.¹¹³

The ex-Zimbabwean asserted that perhaps the reason that tourists wanted African curios was that “they are different from most of the curios that you see in Europe”. On top of this, the ex-Zimbabwean said that some of his tourist customers wanted a “part of Africa without having to travel to Africa”. The case illustrates an instance of global connections which draw on an exotic (non-existent) image of Africa. Through these connections in the tourism industry commodities like arts and crafts make their way to countries in the global North,

¹¹³ Informal discussion: ex-Zimbabwean Harare, November 2007.

such as France, where they are sold to well-off customers. While the ex-Zimbabwean was endowed with economic capital which enabled him to move around the globe and still come back to his native country and be a tourist, the majority of the traders he purchased arts and crafts from had different profiles. They lived very precarious lives of constant struggle, a revelation of the inequitable gains from globalisation.

Broadly, like most other traders at the market, the arts and crafts traders relied on their social ties with customers, kin and friends when they carried out their trading. Ties with customers in other countries “globalised” the commodities that traders sold at the market in Zimbabwe. Often kin and friends in other countries acted as middlemen and facilitated access to markets in the southern African region. These kin and friends also provided important links in informally remitting money back to Zimbabwe, and in some instances they also sent back scarce basic commodities in lieu of actual money to cushion traders from shortages in the country. Important family news also flowed between the two points. The case of sending back money through informal channels and sending basic food commodities illustrates the informalisation of the social welfare economy. In the case of money, there is circumvention of formal money transfers through banks and money transfer agencies which may sometimes be costly. Traders said they preferred receiving money through such informal channels because in most cases banks and money transfer agents might not have the money to pay out, and some banks insisted on making payments in local Zimbabwean currency at lower exchange rates. These examples show the ability of individuals

to adapt where institutions are incapable of meeting their needs, by putting in their place informal means.

A 2005 survey study on the flow of remittances, carried out in the residential areas of Harare and Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's two largest cities), reported extensive use of money couriers, kin and friends, in transferring money back to the country (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006). The authors argue that this informalisation of the money transfer system is an indicator of the widespread informalisation of the broader social welfare economy in Zimbabwe. In a follow-up study the authors assert that "reliance on the personal physical carriage of money has grown as trust in other individuals and firms has shrunk during a period of deep and extended crisis" and that "the resourcefulness of people in crisis continues to astound (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2008: 2). Traders were resourceful in that they took advantage of their social ties and networks to access the South African arts and crafts market. These social ties and networks were also important conduits through which family news, gossip and notifications sometimes flowed, taking advantage of the high levels of both vehicular and human traffic between the two countries. Indeed, as noted by Akyeampong (2000), in the context of crisis and scaling back of national governments it is important for African families to have members in the diaspora for them to economically survive and to prosper.

The case of second-hand book traders who operate at the Harare flea market also reveals the importance of social ties and networks in their survivalist informal economic activities.

6.6 Sourcing second-hand books: the local connections

This section reports and analyses data on the sourcing of goods by all ten of the second-hand book traders interviewed at the market. Of the traders, seven were male and three were female. All of the traders sourced their books locally. A range of titles and types of books from different sources were available for purchase at the market.

The second-hand books sold at the market included novels by local authors like Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera and Shimmer Chinodya. There were titles by well-known African authors like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and Wole Soyinka. Titles from outside the continent including the various genres of thrillers from authors such as Steven King, Dean Koontz, John Grisham, Robert Ludlum, James Baldacci and Patricia Cornwell were available. There were also romance novels of the Mills and Boon type. Classics from authors like Jane Eyre, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy could also be found. There were children's books like the Dr Seuss series, books by J.K Rowling and abridged popular classics for children by Charles Dickens such as Oliver Twist. Cookery books, rare books from colonial Zimbabwe, school textbooks across the disciplines (for all levels of schooling) were available. Traders also sold books on birds and other wild animals, focusing particularly on Zimbabwe and other southern African countries.

The most popular books at the flea market were novels, especially thrillers by authors such as Patricia Cornwell and John Grisham, which changed hands constantly as people came to do exchanges. Among children, especially those in the 10 to 13 year age group, the Harry Potter books were very popular, though

these were also very difficult to find, especially the more recent titles. Older woman, both black and white, in their 40s and over, regularly searched for cookery and baking books.

Traders reported that in recent times they there had been many schoolchildren, especially those sitting for O-Levels and for A-Levels looking for various study guides and book series with collections of past exam papers and solutions, especially in the sciences and commerce. These were scarce in school libraries and in bookshops. However, traders did not have sizeable stocks of these books to meet the high demand. Supplies from school leavers, for instance, were few and far between. Also popular at the market were primary school books, especially for the early school grades for disciplines like English and Maths, but these were not easily available. All the books sold at the market were second-hand, some of them in pristine condition while others were relatively old but still intact.

The concern in this section is with the first source of the books for the traders at the market. The trade in books in Zimbabwe has to be understood against the background of a declining economy where individuals may sometimes choose the simplest route to make an income. This route may be illegal. The case of books also shows how the economic difficulties in the country have affected a large spectrum of the population in Zimbabwe, from the well-off to the poor.

For example, “live in” gardeners came with books to the flea market, some of which may have been stolen from their employers. They sold these to make extra money. At the same time the relatively better-off who had connections in other countries came to the market to dispose of their books (sometimes for

free) as they relocated to these foreign destinations. According to traders, they cited the difficult economic and political situation as the main reason behind their choice to emigrate. Other sources of books are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Sources of second-hand books

Source	Number of Traders Reporting Source		
	Male	Female	Total
Purchased from people they knew were gardeners	7	3	10
Purchased from people who said they were relocating	5	3	8
Purchased from other traders at the market	4	0	4
Purchased from schoolchildren	7	3	10
Purchased from bookshops	2	0	2
Purchased from street traders in the CBD	7	0	7
Given as gifts by past customers	7	3	10
Purchased from itinerant strangers	7	3	10
Trade-ins by past customers	7	3	10

The bulk of the books that traders had for sale at the market were delivered to them at their market stalls by their owners. This was advantageous for traders as they did not have to travel to collect the books, hence they saved on transport costs. If it was a bulky load, a trader paid the equivalent of an adult public transport bus ticket to transport the books to the market. Relocating individuals were reported by eight book traders at the market to be a source of good quality second-hand books. Traders said that relocating individuals provided a good opportunity to get a large supply of a variety of books all at once. Relocating individuals were also willing to sell books at very good prices. For example, in

August 2007 one trader said that he had managed to get a box with an assortment of 20 novels for the equivalent of ZAR100 and he had already managed to recoup the money he had spent on the books. He estimated he had made some ZAR200 in profit and he still had almost half of the books that he had purchased from this relocating customer unsold at his stall.

Historically, with the worsening of the Zimbabwean economy people relocated to a range of countries. A study of Zimbabweans living in the diaspora estimated their total number based on various scenarios – that none of them came back, or either 5 per cent or 10 per cent came back (Chetsanga and Muchenje, 2003) (see Table 6.2).

The UK was the most popular destination in the study, especially with professionals such as engineers, teachers and medical personnel. A different 2004 study¹¹⁴ by the International Organisation for Migration on Zimbabweans in South Africa and the United Kingdom reported that 48 per cent of respondents, in a sample of 1000 people, had relocated because of economic conditions back home (IOM, 2005).

¹¹⁴ The survey study comprised 1 000 respondents, 500 in the United Kingdom and 500 in South Africa. It was carried out with the assistance of City University, London.

Table 6.2 Estimated number of Zimbabweans in the diaspora

Country	Proportion of Total Population	Assumed % Returning		
		0%	5%	10%
(Estimated total)		(532 609)	(505 978)	(479 348)
United Kingdom	0.368	196 000	186 200	176 400
Botswana	0.345	24 500	174 563	165 375
South Africa	0.046	25 500	23 275	22 050
United States	0.069	36 750	34 913	33 075
Canada	0.034	18 109	17 203	16 298
Other	0.138	73 500	69 825	66 150

Source: (Chetsanga and Muchenje, 2003)

In South Africa, Zimbabweans are said to constitute the largest group of migrant, and estimates of their total number range from one million to five million, although these include undocumented border crossings (Polzer, 2008). A 2008 study by the Centre for Development and Enterprise reported that Johannesburg city officials put the number of foreigners in Johannesburg at 2.5 million and said most of them were Zimbabweans. Empirically reliable recent statistics on the number of Zimbabweans who have relocated, whether legally or illegally, are unavailable as shown by the variability in some of the estimates. Statistics aside, relocating individuals were an important source of books sold by traders at the market.

Other sources of books included schoolchildren, gardeners who worked in the surrounding suburbs and other itinerant individuals. While on the one hand the sources of these books were legal, there were other aspects of this sourcing which bordered on or were outright illegal. Sourcing books from illegal sources was for traders a way to make larger profit margins because they could always push prices

downwards for suppliers who wanted to get rid of their “contraband”. According to one trader, when somebody was in a hurry to get rid of books they could always be convinced to sell at a much lower price. This would enable second-hand book traders to make a much larger profit when they sold books later.

Like the arts and crafts traders, the second-hand book traders took advantage of their position in the commodity chain as they had the access to the market in a situation where most formal bookshops in the CBD did not have adequate stock. Some of the second-hand book traders had become the *de facto* book suppliers to customers. In informal conversation in early 2008, one customer searching for school textbooks around the flea market, together with his two daughters who were preparing for A-Level and O-Level examinations later in the year, said:

These days you cannot even find books in the shops. There is nothing. The schools don't have books either. It's sad. We are trying to get books before examinations later in the year. Exam preparation books are in short supply even in good schools. Kids have to share with several other kids. For them to prepare well it's best they have personal copies.¹¹⁵

Central to the sourcing of second-hand books was the nurturing of relationships with the different suppliers, sometimes over very long periods of time. For example, Louis, a 33-year-old male who had been at the flea market since 1995, said it was important to maintain good relations with the customers who sometimes came back to do “trade ins.” He said:

It's important to always keep in touch with one's suppliers. They have to trust you and you always have to pay them a decent amount for their books. Most of my suppliers are old white couples who are always looking to get rid of books. Some of these have only been read once and they are in very good condition. They also put me in touch with some of their friends

¹¹⁵Informal conversation with customer, February 2008.

who want to get rid of their own books. Often, I get somebody calling me saying that they heard I give good prices for books. Most of the time they are referred to me by someone I have been dealing with for years.¹¹⁶

Maintaining these relationships involved keeping a log book of suppliers' contact numbers, both cell phone and landline if available. A few of the suppliers preferred that book dealers came to their places of residence to pick up the books. Louis also mentioned that sometimes there were advantages to going to pick up books. Often times an individual who wanted to dispose of a large consignment of books was also relocating and would have other items like small furniture pieces that they were selling. Tina, also a book trader, said:

If I go and pick up the books I always make sure that I choose those titles that I know sell much faster. I always give a fair price. Sometimes when I visit my suppliers I find that they are selling much more than just books. Their assumption when they get in touch with me is that I am only interested in books because that's what I deal in. I am also interested in small furniture items and even electrical appliances for my place. One time I got this really good radio at a bargain price from this old white couple who were leaving the country. The other time I managed to get a kitchen table and a set of chairs. I mean, I would have had to pay a fortune for these things if I had gone to a furniture shop. Things in the shops are expensive these days.¹¹⁷

The case of traders purchasing goods for personal use, other than the second-hand books that they sold at the market, demonstrates the occurrence of "commodity circuits" that connect the better-off Zimbabweans leaving the country to the struggling traders. These commodity circuits mirror the second-hand clothing exchanges that link advanced industrial countries, the source of these clothes, to the developing world, where they are sold at informal markets.

¹¹⁶ Trader interview: Louis, Harare, August 2007.

¹¹⁷ Trader interview: Tina, Harare, March 2007.

Though traders like Louis and Tina made proclamations about their supposed fairness when dealing with suppliers they, like other traders, always looked to “squeeze” suppliers, especially itinerant book owners whom they sometimes knew were struggling themselves and wanted to make money quickly off possibly stolen books. Like other trader they always justified buying from such sources with statements such as, “Well, how do I know he has stolen them? If he says the books are his then I suppose they are his, hey?” or “Well, I never ask too many questions”. Their trading in second-hand books, it seems, did have illicit elements.

In August 2007 there was an incident at the market concerning accusations of stolen books, which illustrates involvement in some these criminal activities. On this particular day a white male visited a stall belonging to Louis and claimed to be looking for any books on southern African birds. These books were in stock at the stall and the potential customer, after browsing through them, said he would be back during the course of that day or the following day to buy the books.

When the customer had left Louis took the books off display because he felt that “something is not right”. Towards the end of the day the customer returned, this time accompanied by a policeman. The customer looked through the shelves but could not find the books he had seen only a few hours earlier. He demanded to know where the books were. According to him these were his books which had gone missing from his house a few days earlier. He strongly suspected that his gardener, whom he had since dismissed, had stolen the books. Louis claimed he had sold the books in question to someone else. He told the police that

the books in question belonged to him and he had purchased them from a nearby bookshop several months back.

The issue of the stolen books could not be resolved because no proof could be found. The most the aggrieved customer could do was to make a police report. When the customer and the policeman had departed, Louis revealed that he was aware that some of the books he sold may be stolen. He said:

When that guy came here I was immediately suspicious. He did not even want to negotiate the price on the books. This is a flea market. People always want a lower price. That's why I removed them from the shelf. I bought these books from one of my regular suppliers. He was in a hurry to sell the books and he was asking very little for the books. He wanted ZAR50 for each of the three books. We ended up agreeing on ZAR130 for the three books and I paid him half in Zim dollars. I told him to come back after a week to get the rest of the money. I could get US\$50 for those books. They are very rare and you can't find them anywhere these days, even if you go to South Africa. They are out of print. I am sure they were stolen books. A lot of live-in gardeners have access to some of these books, and they probably steal them and sell them to him at very low prices. He doesn't work. I am sure that's the only way he can get such valuable books.¹¹⁸

In some case there were a few textbooks with school stamps of various Harare public and private schools in them; Louis and other traders sold them even though these stamps clearly meant the books were school property. Though many school leavers did sell books that legitimately belonged to them, Louis did not seem to have any moral difficulties concerning the handling and selling of what were potentially stolen books. He said:

If a guy comes here to sell me books and they are cheap, well, I buy them. It's the only way to make money. How can I know whether they have been stolen or not? Most of the books that I get in bulk, I get them from people leaving the country. They are not stolen. Sometimes I have kids in uniform who come here to sell their books, especially at the end of the year. They will have written their exams and they have no use for the books.

¹¹⁸ Trader interview: Louis August 2007, Harare.

Sometimes a stranger will come here and offer to sell me a rare book ... something that I know I can sell at a good price later. Who am I to ask him whether the book is stolen or not? If I don't have money at that time I might even ask a friend to give me something because I know there is good money to be made on that book. Somebody selling you such a book doesn't want too many questions asked and I don't ask them. I just buy the book. Everybody is happy. If it something rare I don't even display it. I will put it away. I know somebody will come looking for something like that. Then I will take it out from the boxes.¹¹⁹

The other traders (both male and female) reported that they sometimes got books which they suspected were stolen. One male trader justified it by saying that things were tough and they as traders had to make a living by "any means necessary". A female trader said:

Sometimes you get this guy who comes here and says he is selling some of his books which he doesn't want any more. You look at the guy and he doesn't look like the type that actually went into a shop and bought those books. And somebody who reads would want to do a swap and get something that he hasn't read. Obviously with such a person you know they are stolen books or he got them from somebody who stole them. You just buy the book and rub any identifying marks or pull out a few pages.¹²⁰

Issues of dishonesty and theft also came up among the book traders themselves. The second-hand book traders at the Harare market, unlike the book traders in Duneier's (1999) *Sidewalk*, did not have to remove their stock at the end of the day.¹²¹ It was understood by the management that it was too tedious for them to remove their stock daily. Book traders just covered their stalls with waterproof plastics and left them there for the night. Arts and crafts traders did the same. In June and September 2007 there were two occasions in each of the two months when book traders accused one another of theft of very valuable books. For

¹¹⁹ Trader interview: Louis, Harare, August 2007.

¹²⁰ Trader interview: Kimon, Harare, August 2007.

¹²¹ A security guard employed by the management patrolled the flea market space and an area nearby where traders stored goods at the end of the trading day.

example, one male book trader accused another male trader with a stall nearby of stealing a valuable copy of *Contact* by John Lovett which he had hidden away in one of the boxes under the tables at his stall. The trader whose book had gone missing indicated that the other trader was the only one who knew where the book was. He had seen him leaving the book there the previous day when he left early to go home. The book was never found. Clearly there are instances when the trust, reciprocity and co-operation that sustain the individual traders is disrupted.

As regards the above incident, non-book traders at the market said that second-hand book traders could not be trusted, so the trader who claimed his book had gone missing might be lying. Other traders said that most of the books the traders sold were stolen so it was not a surprise that they sometimes snatched books from one another. With reference to the stolen book incident, one cross-border clothes trader said, “These guys sell stolen books most of the time. They don’t know what it means to save money for months so that you can go and buy stuff to come back and sell. I am not surprised that they sometimes steal from each other.” Another trader nearby said, “The book was probably a stolen book anyway. He got what he deserved”. However, the book traders insisted that their sources of books were legal.

Traders also sourced books from each other. Four male traders reported that they got some books from other traders at the market but this was not on a regular basis. In such cases it was usually the trader who wanted to buy a particular book who made an offer to purchase. Often in such cases the trader would have a customer waiting for the book. While a price would be agreed on between the traders, it was usual that no money changed hands until the books had

been sold. In negotiating the price the two traders often tried to undercut one another so that they could make a profit off each other. Other traders reported that they did not buy books from other traders because they either did not have the money to do so or because the profit margins were too small in such transactions. Other male traders reported that it was not good for relationships with other traders because there would always be a “fight” over the price. This illustrates the fragility of the social capital of some of the traders.

Only two male traders said that they bought books from nearby bookshops and then sold them at their market stall. These were the two traders whom all other traders at the market (both male and female) perceived as doing more business than anybody else. The two traders reported that when they did buy books from a bookshop they did not make much money from it. Both the traders reported that while there was sometimes a 5-10 per cent profit to be made from such transactions they often sourced books from formal bookshops for trusted customers whose business they valued. Often such customers did not have the time to scout for the books they wanted. These books could be A-Level textbooks, for example, which were very difficult to find. If this was the case it illustrates the connections that exist between the formal and the informal within a single, deeply segmented economy and shows the flaw within the “dual economy” thesis which conceptualises the formal and the informal as two distinct, separate economies.

Scouting bookshops in the Harare CBD for books for their customers was sometimes a lengthy process. However, the two traders who did this indicated that it was a way of maintaining good social relations with and gaining the confidence of customers. There was “always a good chance” that such customers would come

back in future. All the ten book traders at the market did report that it was important to maintain good relationships with customers because they sometimes came back to do swaps. For example, a customer who wanted to swap a novel for another novel by a similar author would have to pay half the price of the novel they wanted on top of leaving the trade-in novel. When I asked some of the traders if this was fair, they said that this was “the only way to make money”. Those customers they did regular swaps with had come to understand that traders needed to make money, he said.

All seven male traders reported that they sometimes purchased books, especially school textbooks, from street traders in the Harare CBD. These street traders did not display books on pavements.¹²² They normally sold them from satchels and did not carry large stocks. The three female traders said that they did not like buying books from these traders because they (the street traders) were always looking to make “quick money” and “ripped” off customers. One of the female traders also said that anybody selling books from a satchel was probably selling stolen materials and you never knew who was watching them on the streets.¹²³

All the traders reported that they had at some point received books for free from past customers who simply did not want the books any more or who were relocating out of Zimbabwe as the country sank further into economic, political and social crisis. These were either regular customers who had bought books in

¹²² Street traders were also affected by Operation Murambatsvina. Afterwards, it was common to see the few hawkers left on the streets in running battles with the police.

¹²³ This trader also said that she they sometimes bought books which she suspected were stolen but only if they were brought to the stall at the market. She feared that the police might be following somebody selling stolen goods on the street and she did not want to be implicated.

the past, even if on a single occasion, or who had done swaps with the traders. This is an illustration of the significant role that having social ties with customers, even if thin, played in the sourcing of books. Usually, those giving away the books would deliver them for free to the trader concerned, and in the process they saved the traders transport costs. Book owners who were leaving the country clearly had better endowments of economic and social capital than the second-hand book traders, and this capital opened up opportunities for them to relocate. Some had maintained social networks and ties with relatives, colleagues and friends who arranged employment and accommodation for them as they made the transition.

In both second-hand book trading and DVD and video game trading there is some occurrence of illegal activities. Book traders were sometimes conduits for the sale of stolen books, and in DVD and video game trading there is rampant piracy. However, in both these types of trading there is scant evidence of the state in terms of policing. Paradoxically, it is in the largely legal clothes and shoe trading and the arts and crafts trading where a state presence is felt. In the case of the clothes and shoe traders and the arts and crafts traders, those who travel have to have passports, pay customs and excise duties and some of them have to endure the confiscation of goods. In the past the clothes and shoe traders were affected by a constantly changing customs and excise regime. On the other hand, the second-hand book traders and the DVD and video game traders did not have much interaction with the state, although in some instances they definitely break the precepts of international intellectual property law by copying and selling pirated content. Second-hand book traders, who in some cases sold illicitly acquired

goods, also relied on their social ties and networks, like other traders, in selling a variety of second-hand books.

6.7 Selling second-hand books

From the onset it is important to realise that while traders sourced their books locally there were instances in which the selling of the books had connections to the region which also connected to the global. For example, two traders sold rare books to specialist book dealers in South Africa who then sold them on Internet sites to customers in Europe and North America.

In addition, some second-hand books traders also sold children's films on video tape. These were mainly popular children's stories which had been adapted into films. For example, Louis would sometimes have a stack of children's movies alongside the children's books. On one occasion he had purchased these together with some children's books from a man who used to run a crèche but had since retired and left the country to settle in South Africa. In response to being asked why he sometimes traded in materials other than second-hand books, he said:

Well the point is to make money, isn't it? If I occasionally sell children's movies, there is no harm in that. Sometimes children's books are very hard to find and some of the classical stories are only available on video. The other day I had this one customer who wanted a copy of *Alice in Wonderland*. I did not have a print copy but I offered her the video tape movie version of the book. She took it as an alternative. Some of the customers bring their kids here to buy books for them. Sometimes the kids want the videos instead of books. I think parents find videos of popular children's stories to be a better compromise.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Trader interview: Jahdel, Harare, October 2007.

Second-hand book traders had to constantly look for niche markets which they could take advantage of. Artson, who explicitly identified himself as a “book dealer” indicated that sometimes it was difficult to make sales every day given the economic situation in Zimbabwe. He said:

Books are seen as luxury commodities. I mean, who would come and buy books when they do not have anything to eat? I can't sell novels every day. I make sure that I have out-of-print books from the Rhodesian era. These sell for up to ten or more times than other ordinary books. For example, the Rhodesiana collections are very popular with some people. They are real collector's items. Some of my customers go on and sell these books on the Internet. I know it and they know it. I can always charge them much higher prices for these books. The good thing is that if I sell one or two of these books they take care of my costs for that week and I even have something left over if I don't make sales that week, which is rare, of course. On Saturdays I am bound to always sell books. It's a busy day.¹²⁵

Prices were normally written in on the inside page of the book. Traders normally used pencil for easy erasing in case prices had to be changed in future. However, in recent times the traders had resorted to not pencilling in prices at all. This was because of the hyperinflationary environment which necessitated a regular upward revision of prices. Traders said regularly changing price stickers was tedious so they kept a list of prices by category of books.

The book traders also had “privileges” that other traders did not have. They tended to have larger spaces than everybody else because books need more display space. Six of the book traders (all male) had been at the market for upwards of five years. This meant that they had been the first beneficiaries of the larger original stands. In recent times, with more people engaging in informal trading, there has been an increase in the number of people coming to the market in search of stands. There was greater pressure on space and stalls got smaller

¹²⁵ Trader interview: Artson, Harare, April 2007.

because of “demarcations”. With more people taking up informal trading there was also greater competition, and with the worsening of the economy business was low for most traders. Those book traders (and other traders) who could afford to transport their goods sometimes tried to increase sales by going to events like sports festivals and music festivals where traders were allowed to sell goods.

Tina and Louis took advantage of the weekend flea market at another shopping centre. There were certain advantages to going there. Louis said:

Here ... customers tend to be much wealthy and they rarely ask for price reductions. We can charge them more than we would at.... Sometimes some of my suppliers come by to drop books they want to dispose of. It's close by for them since they live in the area. It's a win situation for both of us because I do not have to make an extra trip on another day to come and pick the books. At the end of the day I just put the new stock together with those books I brought on the day on the truck that we hire to bring us here. I don't have to pay extra for the extra load.¹²⁶

While going to the weekend flea market had its advantages for the book traders, it also involved risks. For example, none of the book traders owned a pick-up truck so they had to hire somebody to take their books to the other market. Traders had to pay the equivalent of ZAR25 for a return trip to the market and there was no guarantee that they would sell books there.

Attending the weekend-only market was also hard work given that traders largely relied on their own labour to pack books at the beginning and end of the day. Most stalls were “one-man” operations. Traders did look forward to the prospect of making money but the prospect of having to pack and unpack a stack of several hundred books, for example, was not very attractive. However, the traders themselves understood that it was something that they had to do if they

¹²⁶ Trader interview, Harare, October 2007.

were going to make any money given the economic environment. Christian, a book trader, noted indicated that:

Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays are my busiest days. Towards end of day on Saturday I have to pack the books into several boxes in preparation for the Sunday market at.... Then on Sunday I have to wake up early to get to the ... market and wait for the guy we hire to pick us up. Then we have to load the boxes on to the truck and we head off to.... This has to be done early because it takes a lot time to unpack the boxes and to also put them on display. Sometimes I am here by six in the morning. At the end of the day on Sunday I have to pack the books again and it's back to.... Normally I am so tired by then that I just leave the boxes at the stall and go home. The work will still be waiting for me on Monday morning, though.¹²⁷

Book traders, unlike other traders, printed out fliers which they gave to their customers and to potential customers who sometimes asked for their contact details. This was a form of advertising which the other types of traders at the market did not do at all. While traders like the clothes and shoe traders incurred cross-border transport costs and costs for visas and travel documents, this was not the case with most book traders. However, second-hand book traders did have their own business costs, like the printing of fliers to advertise their operations.

Tina and Louis often mentioned that they had to be “organised” to make a good impression on the customers and on their suppliers. If a potential supplier came by but was in a hurry, they often just took out a flier with their contact details and gave it to the customer. That way the trader did not have to waste time writing down the contact details. In the case of Artson, who also owned a small formal bookshop close to the flea market area, giving out the fliers also presented him with the opportunity to advertise his bookshop business.

¹²⁷ Trader interview: Christian, Harare, January 2008.

The case of Artson is significant to the study in the way it demonstrates the existence of close connections between the informal and the formal segments of any economy. When asked why he owned a stall at the flea market as well as a small formal bookshop nearby, his response was:

Well, at the bookshop I have to make sure that prices are attractive to customers and this means that they have to be reasonably priced. Also, it is a good front for getting deliveries. Often potential suppliers are impressed when they know that I have a legitimate bookshop. I always tell them that I deal in second-hand books and they are more than willing to keep coming back. Ultimately the books make their way to the flea market, of course, but suppliers do not have to know this. At the flea market I can also charge much more than I can here at the bookshop. Here at the bookshop I have to make sure that I am constantly changing prices because nobody wants to come to a bookshop and be told the price of something off the top of the head. They will be suspicious and think I am trying to rip them off. At the flea market I can just charge any price that I want. I can inflate the price and when a customer complains I will offer a discount. They will take the discounted price but I know I will have made a profit. I can make more money there than at the bookshop.¹²⁸

His case demonstrates the multiple backward and forward linkages that exist between the formal and the informal segments of any economy. For example, goods sourced in the formal part of the economy may be resold in the informal part. In addition, earnings, which had fallen drastically among second-hand book traders at the time of research, made in the informal may be invested in the formal and vice versa.

In recent times, with the worsening of the Zimbabwean economy, traders said that for regular sales they now relied on their regular customers whom they had been doing business with for a very long time, in some cases for longer than five years. Traders indicated that their sale of novels, for example, had taken a dip while traders who could access school textbooks said they made a “bit of money”.

¹²⁸ Trader interview, Artson, Harare, April 2007.

They mainly sold textbooks for the secondary and high school level, especially in periods leading up to the mid-year exams and to the final year-end exams. This could be attributed to the fact that consumers normally cut down their spending on “luxuries” such as novels and instead spend more money on necessities. Two traders at the market reported that they now had to rely on intermittent sales to customers in Johannesburg to weather the decline of sales locally.

Two male traders at the market indicated that they sold rare books to collectors in Johannesburg and that they personally made the trips there to deliver the books. In November 2007 one of the traders reported that he had made three such trips to South Africa during the course of that year. The other trader said he had made two trips to deliver a consignment of books. Among the rare books, the most popular was the “Gold Series”, a collection which consisted of 36 volumes focusing on the settler history and development of colonial Zimbabwe. These were reprints of the original titles and they were issued between 1968 and 1974. Included in the series was a volume by John Thomas Baines and one by Frederick Courteney Selous.¹²⁹ This made the whole series, and some of the individual volumes in the series, very expensive. Louis, a successful trader sometimes had a few titles in the series for sale. For example, he said that he had sold Selous’ volume titled *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia* for US\$100 to a tourist. He had bought it from one of his suppliers for ZAR200.

¹²⁹ Both men are well-known for their explorations of southern Africa. Baines is now best known for his paintings of life in the then colonial southern Africa and Australia. Some of his paintings are kept at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Selous is best known as a hunter of big game, a naturalist and a conservationist. Zimbabwe’s capital Harare still has roads named after the two men. The notorious Selous Scouts, an elite military group in colonial Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, were named after Selous in honour of his “stellar” military career.

Other sought-after books from colonial Zimbabwe included the book *Contact* written by John Lovett, which chronicles the history of the Rhodesian army and its operations. The Collectors' Edition was limited to just 115 copies which were individually numbered and bound in elephant hide. One hundred of the books were put up for sale; of the other 15, some were given to what was then the Rhodesian National Archives, some to senior servicemen and a few to high-ranking politicians. One trader claimed that he once sold an original of the Collectors' Edition for US\$500; he had bought it from an itinerant stranger for US\$100. (Other traders could not corroborate these claims, but the original limited editions of *Contact* are priced upwards of US\$1200 on some Internet sites.) Only one or two traders made "good" sales, and these were usually very intermittent. Most of the book traders, like the large majority of traders at the market, struggled to sell books on a regular basis. While there was good money to be made from the sale of rare books, these were hard to find, even for the well-connected traders, and it was also very difficult to sell them.

The two traders who had contacts in South Africa reported that their business with these contacts always involved rare, valuable books because there was no point in shouldering the heavy time and money costs involved in travelling all the way to Johannesburg only to incur a loss. The only travelled that far if there was "good money to be made". For example, Artson said, "One can always make a killing if you play your cards properly".

One of the dealers in South Africa said that that he sold most of the rare books to ex-Rhodesians or to kin of ex-Rhodesian who wanted to know about

“their country”.¹³⁰ A researcher at a local university said that the crisis in the country, seen as caused by a black-led government, had in the recent past actually heightened yearnings for colonial Zimbabwe among some white ex-Rhodesians who felt they had been dispossessed by the post-independence black government; they felt that things were better then than they were in the present conjuncture. Some customers expressed a deep sense of nostalgia for the past. Anthropologist Pamila Gupta (2009: 55) asks, “What, exactly, is it about colonialism that we are nostalgic for?” and suggests that “nostalgic power may rest ... in its remembered (or rather forgotten) way of life in the past (its ‘order’ and ‘rules’ as opposed to the ‘chaos’ of today)”. This may explain the yearnings for the colonial past by ex-Rhodesians who obviously had much more advantaged lives in the colonial period. However, some traders even yearned for the early post-independence Zimbabwe when they felt that “things were better then”. Some traders said, “Things were all right back then” in reference to the past; they equated that past with decent lifestyles and bemoaned how the same regime that brought them such a “past of plenty” had also propelled them into survivalist activities in the present conjuncture.

The majority of the book traders, just like the majority of traders, struggled to make ends meet from their survivalist activities. Their lives were precarious and income was very unpredictable. Like other traders, some of the books traders would sometimes act as middlemen in small foreign currency deals so that they could either pay the daily rental for the stall or so they could purchase a cheap meal. The small amounts of money acquired from acting as middleman were

¹³⁰ Personal email conversation, June 2008.

sometimes essential contributions to the bus fare for the trip back home at the end of the day, especially in cases where a trader might have failed to make a sale. Generally most of the traders could not save money at all, and they had deep-seated fears and anxieties about falling ill unexpectedly, about basic necessities and about their accommodation.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter set out to demonstrate the occurrence of instances of “globalisation of the local” in the trading of arts and crafts and at some moments in the trading of second-hand books. Through transnational circuits that involve social networks and ties between the local traders and their customers, arts and crafts flow out of the country to regional countries and also to international destinations. These social networks produce the social capital that traders rely on, especially given the economic crisis in Zimbabwe.

The case of arts and crafts traders and some of the book traders also demonstrates the need to conceptualise a different moment of globalisation which is not considered by some theorists of globalisation, like Castells. Seemingly disconnected, un-networked individuals like the traders at the flea market may actually be connected to the global. It is through the survivalist, informal economic activities they engage in at a local level that they are connected, albeit in an unequal way, to the global network society.

The activities of the arts and crafts traders, especially those who send kin and friends to sell goods on their behalf, besides illustrating the importance of social ties, also indicate the ways in which there has been an informalisation of the

social welfare economy in Zimbabwe. Traders in Zimbabwe receive money from the sale of their goods in South Africa, not through the banks but through friends and kin travelling back to Zimbabwe. The formal banking system and that of money transfer agencies is circumvented.

Like other traders, the lives of traders in this chapter illustrate the importance of social networks and social ties in the daily lives of individuals in African cities like Zimbabwe, especially during periods of crisis. In such times, when the institutions of the state have all but collapsed, it is left to the citizens, in this case the traders, to put in place alternative informal forms of organisation to protect themselves against the tide of economic involution.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 A changing context

Since the completion of the fieldwork for this study in the middle of 2008, the situation in Zimbabwe has changed. In one sense it worsened, with inflation reaching 231 million per cent in July 2008 according to the Central Statistical Office in Zimbabwe. On the political front, there was the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) between the opposition MDC and ZANU PF in November 2008. The GNU has gone a long way in stemming the tide of economic collapse. As of July 2009 the battered Zimbabwean dollar ceased to be official currency, and there have been tentative signs of economic recovery; inflation is now in the single digits, for instance.

Across the border, the South African government relaxed the regulatory regime for Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa in May 2009. The new regulations enable Zimbabwean citizens to stay for up to three months in South Africa without a visa. The relaxed visa regime has resulted in those Zimbabweans who could not migrate under the previous, more restrictive visa regime moving into provinces such as Gauteng and Western Cape where they are frequently subject to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and labour brokers. In Western Cape some are employed as casual farm workers and earn as little as ZAR60 a day. Some have also been the target of xenophobic attacks by the local populace.

For instance, in November 2009 there were attacks in the De Doorns farming community near Cape Town, where Zimbabwean casual workers were accused of accepting lower wages than local South Africans, thus “robbing” locals of crucial seasonal employment (Pillay, 2009).

Despite the difficulties that Zimbabweans and other foreigner nationals encounter in South Africa, the country, as the economic powerhouse in the region, remains an important node in the economic activities of traders, such as the cross-border clothes and shoe traders who source their goods there. Informal traders source goods which have origins in global sites like Asia from traders in both the formal and the informal segments of the economy in South Africa. These goods are then sold to locals in Zimbabwe who, like the traders they buy from, also live precarious lives in precarious times.

7.2 On precariousness

This thesis has demonstrated that heterogeneous informal economic activities in Zimbabwe are central to the survival of the majority of the populace, and the traders in particular, who have been subjected to the vicissitudes of an economy that has been in crisis for over a decade. The thesis has also shown that the market where traders are based is a social as well as an economic nexus where a range of social activities occur in addition to the production and exchange of goods. While traders struggle to survive, they demonstrate qualities of resourcefulness and innovation. Like other citizens, they have not just been passive victims of the Zimbabwean crisis. An excavation of their lives and the informal economic activities they engage in, using the extended case method, reveals a latticework of

connections that in some cases span the globe. These connections illustrate that there is a need to reconsider how we conceptualise globalisation in the present conjuncture. In addition, while traders may have very low levels of economic capital they are endowed with social capital in the form of social ties and social networks which are important in the precarious times they live in.

Across the globe, precariousness is a dominant feature of most informal economic activities. In recent times, with the broad restructuring of economies, precariousness has also become prevalent in formal work. Both informal and formal aspects of work are now even more uncertain and unpredictable. The traders who are the subject of this study lead insecure lives where incomes are variable and consequently unpredictable. Precarious work not only creates anxieties and uncertainties among traders concerning their work, but its effects cascade into other spheres beyond the work situation. These effects may have a deleterious impact on family relationships and on relationships with colleagues. The majority of traders did not have pensions or emergency health care funds. None of the traders interviewed belonged to any medical fund. When they fell ill they had to pay medical costs up front from their meagre savings. The majority of those interviewed also reported that health care was now out of reach for most of them. Traders reported deep-seated fears about issues such as their unpredictable incomes and about the possibility of being evicted from lodgings as a result of their inability to pay rent.

Some of the anxieties that traders expressed can be linked to the negative impacts of the implementation of ESAP in the late 1990s, which resulted in the Zimbabwean state “downloading” the task of social reproduction onto the

populace. Economic restructuring was a mode of inserting Africa and the developing world in general into the global economy (Ferguson, 2006). This was a complete failure, as illustrated by the negative impacts of the policy instruments instituted under the restructuring regime – for instance, cost recovery measures across a range of essential services. The commodification of services such as health and education made them unaffordable for the majority of the population. Some of the traders reported that they had dropped out of school because their parents could not afford school fees as a result of retrenchments or because their wages were inadequate. This propelled them into informal economic activities in order to survive. Other traders were retrenched workers who had previously been employed in the formal economy. There were also some traders who had left formal employment willingly and anticipated that they had a better chance of success in the informal segment of the economy, as wages in the formal segment of the economy were hit by hyper-inflation.

While precariousness in terms of employment and general livelihoods may have been triggered by the structural adjustment programme, this was later worsened by factors such as economic mismanagement and also the protracted political impasse which compounded the difficulties in the economic and political realm. Traders, such as those dealing in arts and crafts, were affected by the negative image of the country abroad which resulted in a decline in tourist arrivals, which consequently meant lower sales. Those supplying goods to local clientele also suffered because a majority of Zimbabweans had their lives violently assaulted by the economic crisis and possessed very little in terms of disposable income. Potential local clientele faced difficulties as companies either

shut down permanently or retrenched workers. The buying power of the meagre wages earned by those still in employment was truncated by the hyperinflationary economic environment, and this affected all traders.

The hyperinflationary environment in Zimbabwe before the “dollarisation” of the economy also meant that traders could not accumulate savings to fall back on in case of emergencies. Traders invested most of their capital in the goods that they sold at the market, and with the decline in the economy their sales plummeted. The outcome of this was that traders had a very low income base on which to cushion themselves against the impacts of the economic crisis. Their lives were a constant struggle in an environment where, for instance, there was a shortage of basic commodities, where landlords took advantage of their situation to raise rents, and where they could not rely on the state to come to their aid if they faced financial and social difficulties.

Generally, traders lived insecure lives. Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008 assert that:

To understand insecurity, it is not enough to identify the sense of helplessness, fear, depression, anger... It is necessary, as Mills argued, to identify the broad social forces, institutions and organisations that manufacture this insecurity.

One of the dimensions of the extended case method used in this study is “extending out from micro processes to macro forces, from space-time rhythms of the site to the geographical and historical context” (Burawoy, 2000: 27). The fears and anxieties among the traders in this study have their origins in the economic restructuring process. In this sense the Zimbabwean case demonstrates that micro-processes at the local level are in fact connected to global, macro forces.

Within the difficult environment that traders live in, social networks and social ties based on relationships of reciprocity, trust and co-operation emerged as important in their struggles to eke out a living.

7.3 On social networks and social ties

The illegalist school of thought, popularised by neo-classical and neo-liberal economists over the decades, argues that there is a conscious and intentional motive among informal entrepreneurs to avoid taxation and regulations, and in certain cases to engage in criminal activities. However, it is necessary to examine the motives of traders when they try to evade regulations. Chief among these reasons is the restrictive and cumbersome nature of state regulation, which may be steeped in ideological positions that perceive urban informal economic activities as an eyesore which spoils the urban landscape. Roberts (1994: 8) asserts that:

The issue is not regulation per se but the form of regulation. All markets are regulated ... so the issue is the balance between formal regulation based, ultimately, on the state, and informal regulation based on personal relations such as those of kinship, friendship or co-ethnicity. Personal relations and the cultures that sustain them may, under certain conditions, prove more efficient in regulating economic activity than do formal structures....

This thesis had shown that the relationships of traders in terms of their informal trading activities and also in other spheres of their lives depend on and are embedded in the various social networks and ties based on trust, reciprocity and co-operation that they have with people such as kin, friends and colleagues. Traders are not just atomised individuals. For instance, arts and crafts traders relied on kin based in South Africa in their economic activities. These kin and

colleagues had better market access to sell goods on their behalf, and remitted money back to Zimbabwe. This money was important in cushioning them against the deleterious impacts of the economic crisis. Kin also sometimes sent basic commodities which were scarce in Zimbabwe. The social ties and social networks among traders worked because there were governed by norms of reciprocity and trust that had been established over long periods of time.

Social ties and networks are also important in the lives of traders in terms of watching each other's stalls when they travelled to source goods in other countries. Female traders reported that they relied on kin or colleagues at the market to look after or check on their children when they travelled. Both male and female traders reported that they shared food expenses when at the market and when they travelled together, and they also shared accommodation expenses in cases where they slept overnight in South Africa, showing the importance of long-established social ties and social networks they had developed with other traders at the market.

These social relations have also contributed to the informalisation of the money transfer system. Generally, traders and other Zimbabweans rely on kin and colleagues to physically carry money into the country from outside. This reflects how the social welfare economy, broadly, has become informalised in Zimbabwe (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006, 2008). Such informal frameworks for money transfer are based on social relations of trust, reciprocity and co-operation. Meagher (2005) indicates that analogies that examine social networks have emphasised the role that social forces, which are deeply embedded in popular relations of "solidarity" and "trust", may play in providing an efficacious and

flexible framework that regulates informal economic activities. This thesis has demonstrated the utility of this informal regulatory framework which does not depend on state regulation or on largely defunct state institutions in Zimbabwe.

The social networks and ties among traders may in some cases enable them to connect to the global from the local.

7.4 On global-local connections

One of the aims of the extended case method is to extend theory. Theorists like Castells (1998) argue that much of Africa is an “un-networked,” marginalised black hole where wars, hunger and poverty are pervasive. This thesis has argued that there is a need to reconsider such conceptualisations of globalisation, particularly the place of Africa in the current conjuncture. Africa has always been globally connected, dating back to the time of slavery and colonialism when vast amounts of cheap labour and wealth were appropriated from the continent. James Ferguson notes:

Looking at globalization from the vantage point of recent research focused on Africa brings into visibility things that might otherwise be overlooked and forces us to think harder about issues that might otherwise be passed over or left unresolved (Ferguson, 2006: 29).

The market that is used as a case for this study is not a zone of exclusion on the margins of the global political economy. It has both direct and indirect connections to the global. Arts and crafts sold at the market are in some cases sold on to customers coming from Asia, Europe and North America. Visual images, such as movies, developed in North America are pirated through technologies such as the Internet and are sold to locals in Zimbabwe. This shows that there are

always exchanges between the local and the global. As indicated by Doreen Massey (2005: 102), “The local is implicated in the production of the global” and vice versa.

Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina (2000), in their study of how people survived in the context of the “degeneration” of the Russian economy, argue that in the context of economic involution individuals revert to a “primitivist” domestic economy that is inward-looking in order to survive. This study builds on and extends this argument by showing that in some cases the informal economic activities of traders in economies that have imploded, in this case the Zimbabwean economy, may in fact have qualities of extraversion that connect the local to the global.

Although Africa’s position in the global economy is based on inequality and exploitation, it still is a relationship that spans the globe. China, for instance, is making considerable investments in Africa, and African oil resources are fueling the economies of the USA and China itself. Africans in the diaspora play an important role in remitting money back to the continent, which is central for survival among those whose lives have been violently assaulted by the restructuring of economies. In terms of crime, large swathes of East, West and North Africa are reported by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to be emerging hubs for exporting heroin and cocaine into Europe. Countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Guinea are also becoming centres for the manufacture of synthetic, illegal drugs. UNODC (2008) reports that cocaine worth some US\$2 billion in wholesale prices in European cities is being imported from the West African region. Rather than being a black hole, Africa is being

incorporated into the “black economy” in these instances. Oil, crime, clothing, textiles and remittances are connecting Africa to the global in compelling ways.

A few of the traders who are the subject of this study reported receiving remittances from kin based outside the continent in places such as the United Kingdom. Though intermittent, these remittances were important in cushioning them against economic difficulties as sales of their goods declined. A few of the traders also received goods such as DVDs and video game consoles, showing how commodities are becoming important connectors in the current conjuncture. Clothes and shoe traders connect to the global through the commodities that they sell to locals. Some of these goods have origins in places such as China, which has over the past decade emerged as the hub of the textile and clothing industry, manufacturing for both poor and wealthy consumers across the globe.

China becoming the centre of this type of manufacturing can be linked to the restructuring of the world economy, which has been felt by workers in both the advanced industrialised countries such as in Europe and North America and also by workers in the developing world like South Africa. For example, traders from Zimbabwe acquire their goods from “Chinese” shopping complexes such as China City and Dragon City. This economic restructuring has resulted in the relocation of manufacturing across a range of industries such as textiles, clothing and automobiles to cheaper sites of production like China. Workers in both the advanced industrialised countries and in the developing world have been witnessing the pernicious impacts of global forces on their livelihoods. Across the globe there has also been the informalisation of work, with more workers becoming “contingent workers” who are largely underpaid, uninsured and do not

have pensions. This, as indicated earlier, makes their working and non-working lives very precarious.

7.5 On the linkages between the formal and the informal

History teaches us that in periods of economic crisis there is a progressive increase in informal income-generating activities as people either lose jobs or seek to supplement their incomes. It could be argued that historically people have always engaged in informal economic activities as a way of building a “protective moat” against the tide of economic involution. In an analysis of the case of Zimbabwe, Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1998) consider the negative impact of the country’s economic decline on the population in general, and specifically on vulnerable groups such as women and the working class. The authors illustrate that as the formal segment of the economy went through accelerated negative growth more and more people entered the informal segment of the economy to survive. Some operated in both the formal and the informal segments. Among the working class, money earned in the formal part of the economy was sometimes invested in informal economic activities.

Contrary to the dual economy thesis, the approach in this thesis has emphasised that the informal and the formal are not two distinct, separate economies. Rather, they exist within a deeply segmented single economy. By revealing the connections that exist between the formal and the informal, the thesis has demonstrated that it is flawed to think of the so called “second economy” (informal) as separate from a “first economy” (formal). To reiterate, as asserted by Webster, Benya *et al.* (2008: 7):

The concept of a second economy is a metaphor that should not be taken literally to mean that there are two geographically separate economies. Instead, the notion of a second economy is best seen as a form of shorthand to describe the deeply segmented nature of an extremely unequal economy.

Some of the traders who are the subject of this study acquire goods and raw materials in the formal segment and then sell them in the informal segment of the economy. Some traders may have operations in both segments of the economy, and income earned in the formal may be invested in the informal and vice versa. For instance, a second-hand book trader reported owning operations in both segments of the economy – a stall at the market and a bookshop nearby. Some of the traders reported that they had left their jobs in the formal part of the economy and invested the savings they had accumulated to set up operations in the informal segment. This demonstrates that it is not only people who move between the formal and the informal (churning), but also money and various commodities that traders source or manufacture and then sell.

As the Zimbabwean economy totters to some semblance of stability, informal economic activities are definitely going to play an increasingly important role in the lives of the poor and the working class, and they will also play a role in the economic recovery. The state needs to put in place policies that are progressive and that recognise that those in the informal part of the economy actually supply much-needed affordable goods and services to those in the urban areas who have been pummelled by the economic crisis in recent times. The destruction of vibrant “home industries” engaged in a variety of activities such as welding and manufacturing furniture and also the attacks on street trading activities during Operation Murambatsvina were retrogressive.

The state needs to consider urgently how some of these home industries can be revived, as they provided crucial income and employment for the urban poor. There may even be a need to extend lines of credit to some of the entrepreneurs in this segment of the economy so that they can build and expand capacity. With adequate monitoring and quality control, some of these industries could provide goods and services for the formal part of the economy. Working together with civic groups and local government authorities, the national state has to urgently put in place less restrictive legislation which allows, and encourages, street and flea market traders to carry out their informal income-generating activities. This will enable them to earn a living and to contribute to the revival of the Zimbabwean economy. The state also needs to contribute to and lead the shift in thinking among legislators, municipal authorities, planners and the police, who may view informal economic activities in urban areas as contributing to crime and the defacing of the urban landscape.

However, these policy implications are long-term and beyond the scope of this thesis. In the immediate term, the lives of the informal traders described in the pages of this thesis provide some insight into the current desperate and daily struggles of many Zimbabwean citizens.

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