

“Invisible migrations”: megaprojects, social ties and south-south migration from Zimbabwe to Mozambique

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Introduction. Since the 1990s, South-South migration movements have grown much faster than South-North, with an increasing number of international migrants moving between countries located in the same region (HUGO, 1996; UN, 2013; IOM, 2017, UN DESA, 2019). However, the literature on international migration has consistently privileged South-North movements, that is, from developing to developed countries (CASTLES, 2010; JORGENSEN ET AL., 2019). This article analyses the dynamics of international south-south migration through the case study of migration from Zimbabwe to the province of Tete, in Mozambique. This is an important theme, given that even today, Mozambique is perceived primarily as a country of emigration (RAIMUNDO, 2011a). Focusing on this specific migration flow will broaden our understanding of intra-regional migration in Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe), given the historic and current complexity of migratory movements in this region.

Background to the Case Study. In 2007, the province of Tete in Mozambique (Figure 1) had a population of 1,807,485 (around 9% of the country’s population). In recent years, Tete has been a key destination for immigrants, mainly from neighbouring Zimbabwe (RAIMUNDO, 2011b; PATRÍCIO, 2016). In contrast to the provinces in the southern part of the country – which have historically maintained a migratory flow with South Africa – the province of Tete has a secular historical connection with Zimbabwe based on geographical proximity, linguistic and cultural similarities and trade links, even before the European presence in the continent and before the borders separating Mozambique from Zimbabwe were drawn up during the Berlin conference in 1885.

Figure 1- Republic of Mozambique and the Province of Tete

From the 2000s onwards, with the outbreak of the internal socio-political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, following an agrarian reform and the subsequent economic sanctions imposed by western countries, an important migratory movement from Zimbabwe to Mozambique began to emerge. In addition to these regions’ ethnic and cultural proximity, since 2007, the economy of Mozambique, and the province of Tete in particular, has been dominated by mega mining projects, mainly with Brazilian capital, which has provoked a wave of internal and international immigration.



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE, 2007)

Theoretical background: Several scholars have pointed out the existence of a ‘Northern bias’ in the literature on international migration, which has relegated south-south movements to the background (CASTLES, 2010; GEIGER & PÉCOUD, 2013). The increasing barriers to migrating to the countries of the North, have led many African citizens to migrate to other African countries: half of African emigrants live in another African country and 9 out of 10 Africans have sought refuge in a neighbouring country (UA, 2006; UNCHR, 2006; GUILLON, 2005). Many large-scale movements between countries of the region are associated with the beginning or the end of conflicts (BAKEWELL, et al., 2009).

Other causes related to the interaction between environmental change, livelihood collapse and state fragility, have also been pointed out as contributing to the growth of South-South movements (BETTS, 2010). In this sense, South-South migration also involves a central economic component, related to household survival strategies (BILSBORROW, 2016). In addition to these individual or household economic motivations, other factors such as the existence of migration routes and transport networks, as well as kinship ties and social networks, which may act as facilitators, seem to be important.

Data and Methods. The paper employs a mixed methodology approach that combines secondary quantitative data with primary qualitative data. The quantitative data derives from an analysis of microdata from the 2007 Mozambican Census and records of immigrant workers from the Provincial Directorate of Labour, Employment and Social Security. The qualitative data derives from forty semi-structured interviews conducted with Zimbabwean immigrants in Tete in 2017, recruited using snowball or chain of reference techniques from key actors. The specific geographical areas for the study were selected based on their concentration of immigrants and geographical proximity to Zimbabwe.

Preliminary findings. Table 1 summarizes results from the interviews conducted with Zimbabwean immigrants in Tete. These preliminary results indicate that the majority of Zimbabwean immigrants in Tete are located in the informal sector of the economy and their employment is not registered in the official state records. Migrants recourse to survival in the informal economy may be explained by their low levels of education, as shown by the census data. The formal job market in Tete is dominated by mining companies and subcontractors, which imposes a series of prerequisites for hiring labour, such as a high level of education or experience in specific areas. The selectivity mechanisms of Tete’s megaprojects are discriminatory for unskilled labour and therefore for the vast majority of Zimbabwean immigrants, although most of them used to be employed in the formal sector in their country of origin.

Although economic attractiveness is one of the main motivations for migration, the results indicate that Zimbabweans’ choice of Tete as a destination is not limited to the labour market, but is also explained by geographical proximity, and social factors related to ancestral and cultural connections and kinship and cultural affinities between the two peoples. In addition, the internal socio-political crisis in Zimbabwe appears as one of the main motivating factors for the emigration of its population.

We argue that the socio-political issue in Zimbabwe, along with two other important factors, have contributed to make Tete, historically a region of emigration, also into a region of immigration. First, the long tradition of intra-regional mobility in southern Africa, facilitated by relatively porous borders and strong cultural, linguistic and family ties between these countries. Second, the apparent economic growth of the province of Tete, propelled by the installation of mega mining projects, just at a time when South Africa (the main recipient of immigrants in the region) was witnessing rising levels of xenophobia. These issues will be thoroughly developed in the full version of the paper.

Finally, the type of evidence discussed in this article contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of South-South migration, an area of study relatively overshadowed by the literature

bias in the trajectories and outcomes of South-North migration, despite its growing importance in global migration flows.

Table 1. Main interview findings – Zimbabwean Immigrants in Tete

Questions / Themes	Total		Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Labour insertion in origin country (Zimbabwe)						
Formal Sector	28	70%	20	83,30%	8	50%
Informal Sector	12	30%	4	16,70%	8	50%
Labour insertion in destination country (Mozambique)						
Formal Sector	13	32,50%	12	50%	1	6,25%
Informal Sector	27	67,5	12	50%	14	93,75%
Migration Motives						
Economic	18	45%	12	50%	6	38%
Political	20	50%	10	42%	10	63%
Spiritual	2	5%	2	8%	0	0%
Reasons for migrating to Tete						
Ancestral and kinship links	22	55%	12	50%	10	63%
Geographical proximity	4	10%	3	13%	1	6,25%
Job opportunity (megaprojects)	2	5%	1	4,17	1	6,25%
All of the above	12	30%	8	33,33%	4	25%
Suffering ethnic/tribal prejudice or xenophobia						
Had not experienced any violence or prejudice	28	70%	18	75%	10	62,50%
Had experienced verbal violence	12	30%	6	25%	6	37,50%
Financial remittances to Zimbabwe						
Sends remittances	20	50%	14	58,33%	6	37,50%
Does not send remittances	20	50%	10	41,67	10	62,50%
Plans to return to Zimbabwe						

Does not intent to return	28	70%	17	70,83%	11	68,75%
Intents to return if situation improves in Zimbabwe	12	30%	7	29,17%	5	31,25%

Source: field research (2017)

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