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**Reconstructing Home: Zimbabwean Women in  
New Zealand.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy  
in  
Women's Studies

at Massey University,  
Palmerston North,  
New Zealand.

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**2005**

## **Abstract**

'Reconstructing home: Zimbabwean women in New Zealand' is a feminist project focusing on the migration experiences of four women aged in their early twenties to late fifties resident in New Zealand over a period of two to five years. Given the expansive nature of women and migration studies, this project presents a partial, situated, reality of the vast migrant experiences of Zimbabwean women in New Zealand.

The project uses the concept of 'home' and its potential for belonging or exclusion to explore the implication of gender in the construction of the women's identities. The findings of the project highlight that the identities of the participants arose from perceived differences resulting from their gender, race, ethnicity, age and social status. As a result, home and identity are inflexed as abode, identity, action, a way of life and behaviour.

The project centres Zimbabwean women in migration by giving voice to women who are a racial and ethnic minority in New Zealand. The project also acknowledges the diversity of Zimbabwean and celebrates the diversity of these women as shown by their subjectively fluid and sometimes simultaneous positioning in place and time as they interact at home, work, amongst themselves, and in society at large.

The project goes beyond identifying the traditional migrant adjustment problems to acknowledging the women's resilience and innovation in seeking a better life for themselves thus transcending the silent sufferer image popularised of women migrants. The resilience and ability to re-strategise in face of shifting multiple and changing oppressions resembles a continuous building process through which the participants continue to construct and remodel places in which they best know themselves and ones they can call 'home'.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge those who walked me through to the completion of this thesis.

I am most grateful for the insights of the four women who opened the doors of their lives so that I could see them even at their most vulnerable moments.

Sincere thanks to my supervisors and mentors Dr. Jenny Coleman and Dr. Celia Briar for being the walking stick that bore the weight of this challenging journey. Their encouragement and guidance has enduring empowering qualities that will be at home with me where ever I am.

A word of thanks to the Massey University, Palmerston North campus, School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work for providing research funding for this project.

Finally, to mum and dad the pathfinders and great inspiration, and to my husband Victor and son Muchengeti for setting aside their journeys to accompany me on this journey in body and spirit, I am ever so thankful.

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## **Preface**

### **Researcher self disclosure**

Feminist theory advocates that research evolve and develop from the researcher's experience (Reinharz, 1992). The interest, rationale, and impetus for this project are better understood by my location as a researcher. The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century heralded increased emigration of Zimbabweans owing to a combination of factors rooted in political, economic and social circumstances such as family reunion, adventure, porous borders and the lure of global labour circuits. Working in the 'development' sector and involvement in women's rights and the protection of the girl child in Zimbabwe fuelled my interest in the experiences of my compatriots in New Zealand. My experiences as a black girl child born in segregated Rhodesia [1], growing up in independent Zimbabwe and later living in Costa Rica and New Zealand are part of the sensibilities that inform my understanding and interpretation of stories told to me by the four women.

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[1] Rhodesia. The country now known as Zimbabwe was colonised by the British in 1890. Rhodesia made a unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965. The country regained independence in 1980 and was named Zimbabwe.