

Social Ties and the Dynamics of Integration in the City of Johannesburg among Zimbabwe Migrants

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ABSTRACT The emergence of South Africa as one of the economic giants in Africa has had a profound influence on neighbouring countries especially those undergoing socio-economic challenges. The progressive position of South Africa has acted as a catalyst in cultivating a desire amongst African men and women to migrate and explore better opportunities. South Africa seems to be highly preferred by African migrants from Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, the latter being the focus of this study. The migrants depend on a wide range of social ties to make it in the host country. These social ties also influence the identity formation process when the migrants arrive and attempt to establish themselves in the new environment. This paper attempts to show how the new trends in the migration to Johannesburg which is one of Africa's biggest cities has illuminated new social trends in the making and maintaining of identities. At the arrival in big cities such as Johannesburg, new contacts or social networks assume a very pivotal and significant position. The isolation created by migration leaves a gap in migrants' lives thereby putting pressure on the new migrant to explore for possible and options in establishing new relationships for socio-economic and political gains. New identities begin to emerge in response to a wide range of socio-economic factors impacting on the lives of these migrants.

INTRODUCTION

I grew up with a feeling that when I finish school, I will follow my uncle in Johannesburg to go and accumulate wealth like him. When the situation deteriorated at home, I did not hesitate to cross the border to South Africa in anticipation of a better futureⁱ.

This is the story that will be told by many Zimbabwean migrants who have left their country in search of greener pastures since their economy took a downward spiral. This paper explores the subject of social ties in the lives of migrants. It looks at how social ties function and how they influence the lives of the migrants. The paper also investigates how migrants assume new identities in new settings and how these are maintained whilst serving various purposes in different environments.

From time immemorial people have moved from one place to another for various reasons ranging from social, economic and political reasons. Wentzel and Tlabela (2006:72) observe that in Southern Africa, the discovery of gold and diamonds coupled with the age of industrialization in the latter half of the 19th century attracted thousands of migrant labourers from the Southern African sub-continent to the mining and industrial centres of South Africa.

In modern times, the mobility of migrants has

been made easier by technological advancement in modes of transport and other communication systems. In Africa, migrants are targeting big cities which seem to offer better life prospects. In Southern Africa, cities such as Gaborone in Botswana and Johannesburg in South Africa have had profound influence on the scale of migration. South Africa is undoubtedly one of the biggest attractions to the prospective migrants due to a number of factors. The economic dimension coupled with the currently prevailing democratic atmosphere and well organized social structures have acted as pull factors to migrants from neighbouring countries in Southern Africa and other parts of Africa. The city of Johannesburg is the most favourable due to its position as an economic power house in the country and indeed in the continent. It is generally believed among the migrant community that when one migrates to South Africa for whatever reason, one is guaranteed of a job, success and better life. Most Zimbabwean migrants have many social networks in the city of Johannesburg in the form of relatives, family and friends upon whom they rely to achieve their dreams in the 'city of gold'. According to Gelderblom and Adam (2006) the journey to this city is relatively easy due to improved and cheaper transport connections. The close proximity of South Africa to Zimbabwe makes the country the preferred destinationⁱⁱ. These two

countries share a border post at Beitbridge. The journey to Johannesburg from Zimbabwe can be undertaken within a single day of travelling.

It has been observed that South Africa has in the last nine years received a sizable number of migrants from Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe with the latter making the biggest single number of migrants that are estimated to be above a million¹. The recent relaxation of the stringent visa requirement at the beginning of the year 2009 and the granting of special dispensation permits which allow Zimbabweans to live and work in South Africa have made entry into the country relatively easierⁱⁱⁱ. Previously, it was very difficult for Zimbabweans to cross to South Africa because of stringent visa requirements. As part of the visa requirements Zimbabweans had to prove the source of income and buy traveler's cheque to the value of R2000 but that proved to be too high for the locals who were surviving under severe economic conditions. As a result, Zimbabweans wanting to migrate resorted to what became popularly known as 'border jumping' meaning crossing the border illegally without proper documents.

The journey to Johannesburg and other cities in South Africa has been an 'option' to many Zimbabweans who beginning from the year 2000 experienced serious socio-economic and political challenges. The land reform that was implemented in Zimbabwe led to the decline in agricultural production hence the country's failure to feed itself and resorting to limited imports. Drought in many parts of the country also put a lot of pressure on food demand against limited supply. The shortage of both the local and foreign currency further exacerbated the problem of acquiring basic commodities and food became a luxury as people's purchasing power through the 'black market' (Unofficial parallel market) was eroded. The hyper inflation which was at record high scoring the first in the world in 2007 made the life of many Zimbabweans unbearable, as the value of the local currency was being devalued each hour and prices of all commodities inflating at the same pace. The civil servant's salaries were eroded and were almost value-less as they could not cope with the inflation. The workforce gradually lost value and respect in the society as they could not afford to sustain themselves, let alone feed their families. The 2005 government-sponsored 'Operation Murambatsvina'^v meaning the cleaning up of trash,

destroyed the livelihoods of many urban dwellers and rendered a sizable population homeless. As a result, people started to migrate to other neighbouring countries like Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia as well as abroad to Britain, Canada, America and Australia among other countries. It has been widely reported in the media and other sources that Zimbabweans have been migrating at panic levels to South Africa both legally and illegally since the year 2000. The high unemployment rate which has been estimated to be as high as 94% by the UN's humanitarian arm in January 2009 drove Zimbabweans to neighbouring countries in search of better lives².

The situation in Zimbabwe has however changed slightly over the last year after the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) by the ZANU PF Party and the Movement for Democratic change (MDC-T) and (MDC-M) on the 15th of September 2008. These political parties entered into a unity pact to end the political stalemate and resuscitate the ailing economy. However, Zimbabweans still flock to South Africa as the unemployment rate shows no signs of abating in the near future.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Research for this paper employed qualitative methods of enquiry such as in-depth interviews and personal observations to gather data. Informal discussions were also used to gather data. The information was gathered from 20 key research informants who were sampled through a snowball technique. The Zimbabwean migrants who informed this research are scattered in the city of Johannesburg. The targeted respondents were those that came in the country after the year 2000. Both men and women were interviewed. During the interviews open ended questions were used to probe and gather information. Field work was done during the period between May and July 2009 in Johannesburg.

It was relatively easy to access the informants and acquire their personal insights, since many saw me as 'one of them' being conversant with the three official languages of Zimbabwe, which are English, Ndebele and Shona. I have also been following the events as they unfold both in Zimbabwe and South Africa for a period of more than two years. This research was however limited to the experiences of Zimbabweans in urban areas,

and does not focus on Zimbabwean migrants living in the rural part of the country. The desktop information was also used to compliment the field work information, hence both primary and secondary sources ranging from newspapers, journals, published books and reports were used.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND IDENTITIES

Much literature has been written on Zimbabwean migrants in the post 2000 era. Most of the debate has focused particularly on the reasons why Zimbabweans are leaving their country (Muzondiwa 2008). While Zimbabweans were sometimes viewed as asylum or refugee seekers, others regarded them as purely economic refugees fleeing from the ravaging economic meltdown in their country. The South African government perspective is that such Zimbabweans were mainly economic migrants hence the failure of asylum seekers to be granted asylum, rendering a sizable number as illegal immigrants who are subject to deportation. However, the human rights activists and other advocacy groups considered them to be both political and economic refugees (Refugees International 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 2004). Although there has been such a wide ranging debate, this paper concentrates on how migrants relate to social ties, create and maintain networks and how these in turn shape their identities and further looks at how the new environment impacts upon the migrant in various spheres of their lives.

Social ties can be defined as relationships that are formed based on a shared understanding. These ties can be based on family membership, friends and shared nationality. It is through membership in these networks that migrants have access to various forms of social capital. For example, through social network, a migrant might secure a job and accommodation and can easily settle down in the new environment due to guidance from other network contacts. They also help one another through favours such as providing friendship and emotional support (Gelderblom and Adam 2006: 234). It is through certain ways of relating and maintaining social ties that migrant identities assume certain characteristics.

Identity in this paper is understood as that which defines and makes a person. It can be acquired through family, ethnicity, and nationhood however the social environment also plays an important role in shaping identities. Castells

(1997: 6) views an identity as the people's source of meaning and experience. Therefore each person has a name, language and culture which distinguish them from others. A person however can have plural identities in some instances, although it has been observed that such identities are a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action (Castells 1997). An identity also is fluid and evolves and assumes new forms and character in different settings. For the migrants, identities evolve and change in response to various factors. At times, identities may conflict, interact and shape each otherⁱⁱⁱ.

The Migrant and the Family

The family unit is of fundamental importance amongst Zimbabweans in which marriage plays a very central role. Most Zimbabwean migrants have families in Zimbabwe and these play a very pivotal role in influencing their decision to migrate. A family acts as a support structure, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Most respondents alluded to the involvement of their families during the process of emigrating. It is the family that provided financial support and also linked them to other networks of relatives and friends who were already in South Africa. One of the informants mentioned that it was actually both the nuclear family and extended family that arranged her journey to Johannesburg. The immediate family paid for her trip and other relatives arranged her transport through cross border taxi drivers popularly known as 'Omalayisha' (the Transporters) to their clients. Because she could not get a visa to cross the border legally, such arrangements were necessary as these taxi drivers were seasoned personnel who knew how to smuggle illegal immigrants into South Africaⁱⁱⁱ.

One of the respondents said that because they are a very closely knit family, when the idea to migrate came up, he had to first go to his parents who reside in the rural areas to inform them about this decision. Some traditional rituals were arranged and performed for him. But on this occasion, it was only the close family members that were involved. These rituals were performed to communicate his journey to the ancestors so that they could usher him with their blessings. His neighbours were not informed about his decision to migrate since mistrust endemic among locals force them to believe that such information could jeopardize his chances of safe travelling. How-

ever one of the family members quietly gave him contact details of one of the neighbour's son who was already in Johannesburgⁱⁱⁱ.

The decision to leave the family and migrate to South Africa was not an easy one, despite the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. The importance attached to the support rendered by the family in times of need is reflective of such sentiments. One of the respondents said that migrating had been a terrible experience to him, because he had become accustomed to operating in a family unit and having to start life afresh elsewhere was challenging, stressful and leaves a void in one's lifeⁱⁱⁱ. Migration and close-knit families are juxtaposed to each other and extremely costly in emotional ties.

While families support and often encourage migration, it must be viewed against the socio-political realities that Zimbabweans face. To many, the journey signified abandoning all they had become through all those years spent together as one family. One of the respondents said that because of her middle class family status prior to the economic melt down in Zimbabwe, she could feel the void that was being created by her departure. Her family was respected in their community and that gave her a certain identity that distinguished her from the rest of the community. It gave her privilege and confidence and all the security she needed. Although she herself was gainfully employed in the public service as a senior teacher, she always had a family by her side when she needed moral, physical and psychological support. However, when she decided to migrate, she knew that she was sacrificing her family identity and all the securities that it entailed. That had to be sacrificed to secure better economic prospects not only for herself but also for her family whose middle class status was downgraded by the prevailing economic condition at that timeⁱⁱⁱ.

Although families seem to play an active role in the migration process, the departure of one of its members also has negative consequences. The separation of the nuclear family with either the emigration of the husband or wife has in most cases led to the destabilization of the marriage union and in some cases ended in divorce due to social and economic reasons. One of the respondents said when he got to the city of Johannesburg "things did not go as anticipated"ⁱⁱⁱ. The major problem appeared to be finances. His newly wedded wife bemoaned his lack of contact with her

and his irregularity in sending money and food for them from South Africa. He claimed to be unemployed and therefore had financial problems that impacted negatively on this relationship, which eventually broke down after a year, leading to their separation.

The family unit remains an important part to most migrants who on arrival trace their extended families for various reasons. Often, the need for accommodation during the early days when the migrant has not secured employment necessitates reliance on family contacts. It is these family members that assist the new arrival to settle down, learn about the landscape and adjust to their new surroundings. The maintenance of the links with kin and friends both inside and outside Zimbabwe is crucial to their settlement in South Africa.

Although migration causes a lot of disruption to the family unit, the economic benefits seem to outweigh the potential psychological, emotional and physical cost that both the family and the migrant undergo. Some migrants start new families with locals for emotional support and personal gains. Others lead double standard lives by establishing a family in South Africa and maintaining another one in Zimbabwe. The migration process has therefore altered the operation of the family and given new meaning to how the unit relates.

Factors Leading to Migration

Although the migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa is not new as Zimbabweans used to work in the gold mine fields at Witwatersrand during apartheid, the difference is that these were temporary migrants who returned home on retirement because they migrated on a small regulated scale. At independence, white people fled to South Africa after the ZANU PF victory in 1980 elections, fearing for their safety (Sisulu et al. 2007). Others fled the 'Gukurahundi'ⁱⁱⁱ massacres in Matabeleland and parts of Midlands after independence in Zimbabwe. These massacres mainly targeted the Ndebele ethnic groups, who in turn fled to South Africa where they sought refuge. Their cultural and linguistic affinity with the Zulu community enabled them to settle largely unnoticed in South Africa and many took on South African identities, some of them through unlawful means (Sisulu et al. 2007: 534). Others left after the introduction of the IMF spon-

sored structural adjustment policy in 1992 in search of better paying jobs in other countries.

However, the current trend of migration has been on a greater scale with some sectors labeling it as a 'Human Tsunami'ⁱⁱⁱ. There are several factors that have been identified as influencing the trend at which this migration process is taking place. Some of the reasons are political intolerance and persecution that has characterized the country since the year 2000^{iv}. The hostile environment became even more pronounced after the first round of the national elections in 2007 where all the contesting parties failed to get enough votes for presidency. This necessitated the need for a second round of elections. The intense hostile political environment pushed others beyond their borders to seek refuge in South Africa (Solomon 2003; Wentzel et al. 2006). Some of the respondents who left due to political reasons were very emotional about the issues because when they arrived here, they struggled to obtain documents as asylum seekers, and since some of them did not even have relatives, they ended up seeking refuge at the Methodist Church in central Johannesburg which was already flooded by other destitute emigrants. Hove, a Zimbabwean asylum seeker, said that he had left all that he had including his wife and children to seek refuge in South Africa. Later on he learnt that his wife and children had gone back to her biological parents because he could not support themⁱⁱⁱ.

The complexities of the political situation in Zimbabwe coupled with a "soft-soft" approach towards Zimbabwean issues by the former South African government administration led by President Thabo Mbeki, created many problems to migrants. The Zimbabwean political refugees became victims without rights both in their country of origin and in South Africa, where they often faced life threatening situations, the majority of them being caught up in the xenophobic violence that engulfed South Africa in 2008.

Some of the migrant community came to South Africa purely for economic reasons. According to Wentzel et al. (2006: 173), the perceived and real availability of employment in South Africa plays a major role in the decision of potential migrants to move to South Africa. For non professionals, it was difficult for them to acquire jobs in Zimbabwe, but for professionals, the valueless Zimbabwean dollar made it impossible for them to continue rendering their

services. Some Zimbabweans in technical fields have been able to acquire jobs under the scarce skills category in South Africa. These also have migrated because their fields are much better paying in South Africa. Ronald said that back home in Zimbabwe he was a well-respected Primary school Principal but due to the economic upheavals in Zimbabwe, he was left with no option but to seek greener pastures across the border. Although in the community where he previously worked he had so much prestige and was well respected and recognized in various sectors, that changed when he got to Johannesburg. All that is now but a dream since he now works as a security guard which makes him feel like a non-entity. He has lost all the recognition that he once held as a professional and receives treatment like that of lay man who did not go to school. While he finds the job demeaning, it is employment for him. He also indicated that when he got to Johannesburg, the people who assisted him were lay people employed either as domestic workers, security guards and taxi drivers, whose educational level did not allow them to fit elsewhere, hence when he arrived, they introduced him to their industriesⁱⁱⁱ.

There are some Zimbabweans who migrated to South Africa for education prospects. Since the country has a number of universities and training colleges with a wide range of courses to choose from, this has attracted a number of foreign students. Nkosana a former clerk in Zimbabwe said that he came to South Africa to further his studies however, he was also fortunate to secure a part time job. Although he also says that the decision to advance his studies was to improve his chances of employment, he is happy with his studies and is able to operate in the academic community where there are people of diverse backgroundsⁱⁱⁱ.

The education route has been pursued in some instances by illegal immigrants with relatively low education who hope to get better access to employment opportunities once armed with certificates. One of them lamented that, without South African papers and documents one is destined to suffer.¹ As the job market shrinks and job opportunities are diminishing, most migrants are exploring innovative ways for survival.

Social Dilemmas in New Milieu and the Emergence of New Identities

Although most migrants move to another country in anticipation of better life prospects, not all have been successful in this endeavor. There are a number of challenges that are faced by migrants. One of the first is the challenge of trying to adjust psychologically to the 'long journey' that awaits one in a new milieu. The challenge of leaving one's family for a journey is not only disruptive to the migrant only but it creates a chain reaction of anxiety, worry and fear to the family and friends left behind. The uncertainties of what the future holds and how that will impact on the family ties and social networks induces psychological anxiety and stress. The feelings of loss and grief, social isolation, traumatic experiences, culture shock, acculturation and minority status aggravate the situation (Hack-Polay 2009; Freire 1997; Castles et al. 1998). One of the informants who left his newly wedded wife said that there was so much anxiety on what the future held for his young family. Besides that, he was also leaving a job with high status, as a former principal and going down to the level of a security guard was both a humbling and humiliating experience since back home such a position is occupied by people with lesser education¹. Although he has a teaching diploma and a B-Tech degree, for him, the position that he now occupies has stripped away his former social standing. He has lost his high status which he identified with at home and has also lost recognition and respect that he used to command. This he says has had a tremendous impact on him. Most of his friends are now in the security field. He lamented his status saying; *Can you imagine moving from a position of heading a school with a number of teachers under you to actually being a mere guard and having to report to a superior! Besides, we work very long hours and the salary besides being low, it does not come on time. I can not report anywhere as I am not a member of any union and I am also not sure how the law in this country operates*²

After talking to him about the new identity that he now possesses, he also showed that he carried his new status with a sense of shame and humiliation. He has avoided talking about his former school principal status to his friends. He also mentioned the fact that he had tried to apply

for teaching jobs in public and private schools but they all demanded SAQA evaluation for which he would have to pay. He was still trying to save some money from his low salary which has to cover a number of monthly bills in and out of South Africa.

Most migrants driven by a variety of problems to South Africa expect to lead a better life in the new place but that is not always attainable due to scarcity of work opportunities. Employment therefore proved to be one of the challenges to migrants. The high expectations of getting employed have proved to be an illusion in the first few months. Most employers demand valid documents which tend to be difficult to secure. Unless one is willing to settle for odd jobs that are low paying, it is a struggle to acquire employment. The pressure mounts from the sending and receiving networks since they both expect to start receiving some remittances or money for food and accommodation. As a result, most migrants end up stooping so low and accepting odd jobs which are not in line with the kind of qualifications that they possess or professional jobs for which they are trained. Therefore, the kind of employment one settles for redefines one's identity. Social networks also play a significant role in securing employment. Sometimes, it is through certain networks that one gets to know about the existence of a vacancy. One of the informants who worked as a waitress in an up market restaurant in Sandton got the job through her cousin who worked for the same company. So, for her, it was relatively easy to get absorbed into the labour market. She had several applications through friends and relatives and concurs that if it was not for the kind of connection that she had through friends and relatives, it would have been difficult for her to find employment.

The lack of employment also led to problems of housing leading some to live under deplorable conditions in Hillbrow flats where up to ten people are forced to share one room. This takes away one's self esteem and exposes them to stereotypes such as being failures in life, poor, destitute and the like. Sihle, a migrant residing in Hillbrow said that she was accommodated by relatives during the first months of her arrival. However, their welcoming tone changed after five months of unemployment as she was now becoming a burden; hence she was forced to move and share a room in a dilapidated flat with

others who were in the same predicament. In desperation, she also opted for odd jobs in order to earn a living.

Another challenge that is faced by migrants in South Africa is that of new languages. It becomes difficult for one to settle in a certain community or environment due to language barriers. In the case of South Africa with diverse languages, 11 of them as official languages and Zulu being the most spoken local language and a mother tongue to 23.8% of South African^{vi}, it is a big adjustment to migrants. Language embodies social dynamics hence it is difficult to adjust to these dynamics. Among the Zulu or Xhosa, for example, there are distinctive ways of communicating issues at various points of life. As pointed out by Manajlovici (2009: 51), language, signs and behavior is part of a complex and established system of measuring which bears importance for the cultural identity of a group or an individual, and ones language and culture form part of the basic form of identity.

It has been observed that in South Africa, in each province, there is a dominant language with which the majority of people in that area identify with. Hence, for the migrant who is ignorant of the language of the local people he is likely to be isolated and vulnerable. Hack-Polay (2009: 7) concurs that, failure to master the language or to put it metaphorically, the refusal to be linguistically colonized leads to diminished chances of survival in the unknown social and cultural jungle. Charlie said that because of his lack of local language skills, he was being isolated from the community as they could not understand why he always communicated in English. He was also easily identified as a foreigner and derogatory terms such as 'amakwerekwere'^{vi} were used against him. He also became an easy target to the xenophobic attacks that erupted in May 2008. He therefore lived in fear as he still does now and is not able to be his natural self and feels like a social misfit due to language barriers. He says he is now 'like a child learning to walk' due to both language and cultural barriers and therefore is still failing to fit into the social system. This has alienated him from locals and therefore most of his contacts are other Shona speaking Zimbabweans^{vi}. Therefore, the failure to communicate in local language carries with it feelings of shame and has a negative psychological impact. Psychologically, this ignites a deeper crisis whereby the migrants in the new environment

fail to find their marks, themselves and their identity in the new language and culture (Hack-Polay 2009: 6; Louw-Potieger 1991: 317). Those who fail to assimilate get marginalized (Castles and Miller 1998: 37). It is because of fear of being marginalized that other migrants have accepted cultural conquest and have adopted values, standards and the goals of the invaders (Freire 1997: 134). As a result some migrants have localized themselves (Wallman 1998: 198) through assimilating and adopting their hosts value and communication systems.

The situation is, however, different from the migrants that speak the Ndebele language which is one of the Nguni dialects and therefore carries similarities with Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and the local Ndebele. One of the informants who speak Ndebele had a different story to tell. When she first arrived in Johannesburg, she had no language barriers since she could communicate in isiZulu. By being able to speak a local language, she had a smooth integration and limited chances of being vulnerable³. She therefore assimilated into the local Zulu groups and was easily absorbed socially. Most of her friends are locals who easily relate to her, leading them to regard her as one of them^{vii}. Hence, she no longer carries her natural identity but is using 'borrowed' identity' which however puts her at a social advantage. It has been observed though that through assimilation, the individuals tend to lose their personalities and other indigenous traits to lead an adopted life^{vii}. It is therefore clearer that the migrants lose or alter their identities after being uprooted from their former communities, culture, work and language^{vii}.

The geographical landscape also assigns certain identity to its communities. The movement away from one's natural place alienates the migrant. Knowledge and memories fade away. Due to the disruption of the biographical stock of knowledge, the migrant is then forced to learn new behaviors, understand new rules and adapt to new values and another type of social organisation^{vii}. The migrant will therefore not enjoy the same status and social privilege in this new environment.

Most migrants face difficulties in accessing proper documents. They also lack proper knowledge and information on how to go about obtaining proper documents. For most migrants the local police stations are not places where they can ask for assistance as that will normally lead

to detention and facilitate deportation. The fear of home affairs department also repels migrants from accessing proper information. Therefore, because of this challenge, most migrants hide their identities and do not want to be known that they are from Zimbabwe. They, therefore, lead secret lives, and in some instances they resort to illegally acquiring local documents. One of the migrants said that he lived for two years without any proper documents and all that time he felt like an outcast and could hardly function socially. However life changed after obtaining local documents through some relatives who came here several years ago and who are now local citizens. Acquiring of documents substantially changed his life since he can now fully assert himself, has a well paying job, a car and is also planning to buy a house^{vii}. Some of the migrants actually said that they were happy with the stance that was now being taken by the government of South Africa to issue them with proper documents in order to live and work legally.

The perceptions of local people also play a very big role in shaping certain identities. Most migrants interviewed were of the perception that the local people are increasingly becoming hostile due to limited resources in the cities for which both the locals and the foreigners are competing. There is therefore heightened tension through name calling leading to most foreigners concealing their identities. Migrants, therefore hide themselves, assimilate, lead dual lives or isolate themselves to migrant communities^{vii}. The role of the media was also viewed as negative in perpetuating hatred and instilling fear in the migrant communities. One of the migrants said that he did not know if he still had any identity because of the way foreigners were portrayed in various sectors of the media:

I do not think I am anyone in this country, I am a no one, we are not wanted here, they beat and they killed some of us last year. Some of the local papers call us 'aliens' as if we are from some other strange continent, as it is I am not comfortable to admit or divulge my identity, I have even changed my name and surname so that it sounds local and I am fluent in a number of local languages. I am therefore lost as I have alienated myself from myself to survive^{vii}.

The media has therefore played a role in reinforcing certain stereotypes and this could have an impact in the way the local communities perceive migrants^{vii}. It has also been observed that

many South Africans are becoming xenophobic in their attitudes towards migrants generally and illegal immigrants in particular (Solomon 2003: 92). The plethora of problems that beset the locals are often blamed of foreigners on as shown by service delivery protests which sometimes assume xenophobic character by attack on foreigners.

The state has also played a role in shaping immigration policies which keep changing over time. Since, the Zimbabwean migrants have made big news both on print and electronic media, Kok (2006, 1) observes that the government notes these events with alarm and grapple with policy reforms aimed at selecting certain migrants and keeping others out. The institutions used by the state to control and monitor the activities of migrants shape the construction of migrant identities^{vii}. The state institutions such as the immigration department, the police and the military defines the legal and the illegal, the unwanted and the wanted and therefore these institutions play an important role in the political and cultural production of migrant identities in the public sphere^{vii}. The fear of police and immigration officials that exists amongst the illegal migrants demarcates the social space that such migrants can operate within. One of the informants said that she always had a hard time with the SAPS as they are always able to pick up that she is not local through 'Zulu interviews'. She said that she has been asked several times to name certain body parts in Zulu of which if she fails to do so, she would have failed the interview and hence detention⁴. Where there are law enforcement agents, she minimizes her presence to avoid being detected as an illegal migrant.

The Making of Home Away From Home: Negotiating The Alien Status

The social networks created prior and after arrival to South Africa have played an important role in the 'making of sense' of and normalizing the environment. Such connections have made the journey possible in most instances largely through the provision of finances and accommodation. It is such networks that create a sense of belonging, for example some migrants operate in ethnically defined social circles, yet some go beyond to use nationhood. Ethnicity has been a fundamental source of meaning and recognition through out human history (Castells 1997; Castles

and Miller 1998) it is through ethnicity that community can be achieved and history made to make sense due to similar experiences and values. In the event of life challenges such as retrenchments and bereavement, one is always able to lean on the people or group of people that they identify with. In order to expand the pool of networks, some migrants join burial societies run by old migrants, they also attend to each other's events, such as parties and weddings. Some of the networks are created through religious activities. Some even acquired employment through those networks. Most of them also said that, the church gave them a sense of belonging and the environment was welcoming and not judgmental. At church, as long as one is a member, the environment is neutral and members generally feel welcome. Both local and foreigners operate in neutrality. One of the informants said that it was through church that she was able to re-define herself in certain terms and that carried no sense of guiltiness or shame^{viii}.

Most migrants have also found solace in Christianity which occupies an important psychological and social role. It helps in relieving people from mental oppression and gives them hope for a better future (Hack-Polay 2009: 22). The disruption caused to the family and other social networks weigh heavily on the migrants and religion acts like therapy in giving hope and new meaning to the migrants. Most migrants interviewed said that they belonged to a certain church where they had already established contacts. The most popular churches that are attended by the migrants are the Pentecostal and Zionist churches. Most respondents said that they had sought solace in church and were comforted when there was no one to comfort them. It was at these churches where they got the strength to carry on when life seemed to be holding no more. One of the respondents pointed out that, it was the church that consolidated their faith, hope in the face of frustration. In the face of failure, he was taken up and made to believe that someone will make things right and he will be a victor again. He also said that in his case of having lost his wife and child because of challenges he faced as a migrant, the role of the church in his life was now that of a family, through worshipping together, and being surrounded by people with a common cause, his alienation was taken away and instead gave him a sense of belonging and therefore looks forward to being with 'his adopted family' every

Sunday^{viii}. On a Sunday at his church he therefore assumes another identity which is safe and secure and is just like at home. The churches also seem to understand the cause of the migrants and have been vocal in advocating for the protection of their rights and some like the Methodist have even stretched their resources to care for the destitute.

CONCLUSION

The migrants from Zimbabwe operate within a set of networks in order to transcend their barriers in South Africa. It is such networks that provide a certain identity to the migrant, the identity of being a member in a certain community both in terms of kinship associations and friendship and also brotherhood based on both ethnic and nationality. The identities of migrants are not stagnant but revolve in response to various situations. The movement away from home to a foreign country reforms one's identity in various ways. The pressure exerted by the foreign environment influences the migrants engage in solidarity making measures with their country men as survival tactics. However, when the migrant is isolated in the local communities and does not have some networks to lean on, that can create a psychological and emotional crisis as the individual feels lonely, neglected, abandoned and is not able to function. The social positions occupied by migrants through employment accords them certain identities which may differ from their previous identities in their home country. Lack of legal protection in some cases make the migrants vulnerable and therefore prone to abuse and exploitation. The negative approach by the local communities which are in most cases reinforced through the media creates certain stereotypes. However, migrants also negotiate their identities through assimilating the local communities and joining religious groups.

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NOTES

- i Interview with Lizwe, 4 May 2009, Johannesburg
- ii See http://www.hsrc.ac.za/research/output/outputDocuments/556_Muzondiwa_Majoni-joni.pdf
- iii See www.idasa.org.za/gbOutputFiles.asp?writecontent=Y&RID
- iv More detailed information on the policy document regularizing the Zimbabwean Migration to South Africa can be obtained at: <http://www.cormsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/MigrationPolicyBrief/Migration%20Policy%20Brief%201%20-%20Zim%20special%20Permits.pdf>
- v The 'Operation Murambatsvina' was a Zimbabwean government sponsored clean up programme that was aimed at putting order in Zimbabwe cities. This saw the destruction of the informal sector, the Flea Markets were the worst affected as they were accused of being engaged in illegal foreign currency dealings. The unofficial building structures in people's homes and the informal settlements were also razed down leaving a lot of urban dwellers destitute. See more on http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/AleqM5inTkGEP84_3QTVcSGu_8w3YrP8wA
- vi http://www.warwick2.ac.uk/study/cll/esrea/abstracts/morrice_paper.pdf
- vii Interview with Joyce, 6 May 2009, Johannesburg
- viii Interview with George, 5 June 2009, Johannesburg
- x Interview with Kholwani, 13 June 2009, Johannesburg
- xi Interview with Nobuhle, 15 May 2009, Johannesburg
- xii Interview with Ronald, 26 June 2009, Johannesburg
- xiii The word 'Gukurahundi' is a Shona term meaning the rain that cleans the chaff. It is a military programme that was set up by the ZANU PF government after independence to deal ruthlessly with discontent Ndebele ethnic 'dissidents' <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2007-09-04-media-exaggerate-zim-tsunami-says-report>
- xiv <http://www.refuge-rights.org/Publications/RRN/2009/May/v5.13.SouthAfricaAttempts.html>
- xv Interview with Hove, 3 July 2009, Johannesburg.
- xvi Interview with Ronald, 26 June, Johannesburg.
- xvii Interview with Nkosana, 20 May 2009, Johannesburg.
- xviii Interview with Thoko, 4 May 2009, Johannesburg.
- xix Interview with Ronald op cit
- xx Interview with Ronald, ibid
- xxi More information on languages spoken in South Africa can be obtained at: <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/languages.htm>
- xxii The word 'amakwerekwere' is used by local South Africans to refer to black African migrants in a derogatory manner.
- xxiii Interview with Charles, 5 June 2009, May 2009, Johannesburg. The Shona language is one of the dominant and official languages in Zimbabwe. It is mainly spoken in the northern part of the country although is also spoken at a significant scale in other provinces where Ndebele is dominant.
- xxv See: <http://www.unaidsstesa.org/userfiles/file/Zim%20Migrants%20Impact%20study%20RSA.pdf>
- xxvi Interview with Nolwazi, 17 July 2009, May 2009, Johannesburg.

- xxvii More information at: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel
- xxviii Information on how identities are altered or lost can be found at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/esrea/abstracts/morrice_paper.pdf
- xxix ibid
- xxx Interview with Norman, 25 July 2009, Johannesburg Charles, op cit.
- xxxi Interview with Zweli, 26 June 2009, Johannesburg. The xenophobic attacks started in Johannesburg informal settlements in May 2008 and spread to other provinces around the country. More than 60 people were killed and thousands of foreigners left homeless prompting the South African government to set up temporary refugee camps, these have since disbanded and victims re-absorbed into the communities
- xxxiii The story on how some of the local new papers were supporting xenophobic attacks can be assessed: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-05-30-daily-sun-in-hot-water-over-war-on-aliens>
- xxxiv <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/50/1/3>
- xxxv <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/50/1/3>
- xxxvi Interview with Thembi, 19 June 2009, Johannesburg
- xxxvii Ibid
- xxxviii Interview with Ronald op cit

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