

Negotiating In(security): Agency and Adaptation Among Zimbabwean Migrant Women Working in the Informal Sector in South Africa

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Abstract

The deepening levels of poverty in Zimbabwe have resulted in high numbers of Zimbabwean women migrating to South Africa in the hopes of securing better wages and job security. Most of these migrants end up working in the informal sector with limited income, high levels of insecurity, and a lack of protection against gender-based violence and xenophobia. Regardless of the adversities that these women encounter, they often display resilience and adaptability. Based on semi-structured interviews with 22 Zimbabwean migrant women, this article documents how these migrant women navigated some of the vulnerabilities and challenges they encountered. Instead of always being constrained by different structures of violence, this article unpacks the women's strategies to ensure their survival.

Keywords

Migration, feminization, agency, human security

Introduction

The deepening levels of poverty in Zimbabwe have resulted in high numbers of Zimbabwean women migrating to South Africa in the hopes of securing a better standard of living. The relatively stable political climate and relatively strong

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economy, coupled with low travel costs, make South Africa an attractive destination for many Zimbabwean migrants (Crush et al., 2017, p. 13). Historically, mostly men migrated from Zimbabwe to work in South African farms and diamond mines, while the women stayed at home, looking after families. However, a change in gender roles and deepening poverty have influenced several women to migrate to South Africa to look for work to provide for their families (Gouws, 2010, p. 1; Hlatshwayo, 2019, p. 161).

Migrant women from Zimbabwe span across all classes and professions. However, those who are unskilled and undocumented can be regarded as precarious workers, employed in the informal sector as independent traders, hairdressers, domestic workers, street vendors, and tailors, earning low wages (Hlatshwayo, 2019, p. 162). These unskilled Zimbabwean female migrants are exposed to a range of insecurities in the form of xenophobia and gender-based violence, amplified by the intersection of their different identities, particularly, gender, social class, race, and migration status (Freedman et al., 2020, p. 2; Mutopo, 2010, p. 474; Sigsworth, 2010, p. 2). Simultaneously, these women also exhibit agency and survival strategies in these constrained circumstances.

Based on in-depth interviews with 22 female Zimbabwean migrants, this article presents an analysis of these women's social agency, and their ability to navigate through their positions of insecurity and vulnerability. This article provides a counter-narrative to the literature that presents Zimbabwean female migrants in South Africa solely as victims who do not have any social agency by employing a lens that views them as social agents who survive despite the positions of insecurity they face as migrant women in South Africa. This article is grounded on the feminist intersectional approach, which emphasizes how individuals' social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of oppression. The feminist intersectional approach is a lens for seeing how various forms of identity and inequalities operate concurrently to create inequalities (Steinmetz, 2020). In this context, the theory is used to acknowledge the complexities of how Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa experience several insecurities because of their gender and immigrant status.

Background Context

South Africa for many years has been a destination for many migrants across the region. Zimbabwe is one of the countries that has seen a significant increase in the number of its citizens leaving the country to other neighboring countries like South Africa to escape the protracted prevalence of political and economic insecurities (Bloch, 2010, p. 235; Dzingirai et al., 2015, p. 6). Migratory patterns from Zimbabwe to South Africa have changed significantly over the years, with migration becoming more varied and feminized, meaning that both the proportion of women migrants and the actual number of migrant women have increased (Mbiyozo, 2018, p. 8). There are no reliable estimates of the number of Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa, as most of the migration data is not

gender-disaggregated and unknown figures are undocumented. However, recent research studies suggest that Zimbabwean women have been migrating in significant numbers, all ages represented with no evidence of child migration (Zack et al., 2019, p. 8). The demographic profile of Zimbabwean migrants from 1997 to 2010 showed that 44% of the migrants were female and they were the main breadwinners in their households, suggesting that feminization of migration was well advanced compared to other countries in the Southern region (Crush et al., 2015, p. 367).

While some of the female migrants are skilled, a significant number of women are unskilled and are exposed to structural violence in different ways. For those that are undocumented, in particular, their legal status intensifies their vulnerabilities as they are viewed as the “other” and limits them from accessing and benefiting from public services like opening bank accounts and, in some cases, accessing health care services (Von Kitzing, 2017, p. 10). A significant number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa are unskilled and undocumented because of the stringent immigration requirements that do not accommodate low and unskilled migrants to apply for a temporary work permit (Landau et al., 2005, pp. 13–17; Mbiyozo, 2018, p. 9; Moyo, 2020, p. 65). Often Zimbabweans use the 90-day visitor permit granted to all Southern African Development Committee (SADC) citizens to enter and stay in South Africa. At the end of 90 days, they are expected to depart from the republic. However, most of them do not leave and overstay in South Africa, leading to their undocumented status (Moyo, 2020). In 2009, the South African government approved amnesty permits for all undocumented Zimbabweans under the Dispensation for Zimbabweans Project (DZP), which provided a platform for undocumented Zimbabweans to be documented to be able to legally work, conduct business, and study in South Africa. This move was also aimed at reducing pressure on the asylum seeker system as most of the undocumented and low-skilled Zimbabwean migrants resorted to seeking asylum so that they could attain legal immigration documentation (Gigaba, 2014; Rietveld, 2016, p. 46). However, the challenge with these permits is that they have several conditions that do not guarantee an extended legal stay in South Africa, as they can only be renewed at the discretion of the South African Department of Home Affairs, and holders do not qualify to apply for a permanent residence permit. Moreover, a large proportion of Zimbabwean migrants do not have these permits, as they were first issued in 2010, and the subsequent permits were an extension of the DZP that had already been granted (Moyo, 2018, p. 1143). It was only for those individuals who had the opportunity to apply for the first dispensation who were allowed to renew their permits.

Access to the asylum system also poses challenges to Zimbabweans, as they are not considered to be refugees but economic migrants, and proof would be required that they fled political persecution to be granted refugee status (Moyo, 2020). Furthermore, the majority of Zimbabwean migrants usually do not apply for asylum as it restricts them from traveling back to Zimbabwe. Due to the barriers to being documented, there are a significant number of Zimbabwean

migrants who decide to stay undocumented once their 90-day visitors' permits have lapsed (Moyo, 2020, p. 66).

South Africa has high levels of gender-based violence and, increasingly, xenophobia, and migrant women are also victims of such violence (Lefko-Everett, 2011, p. 277; Sigsworth, 2010, p. 2). There are common misconceptions that African migrants import diseases and crime, steal jobs and opportunities, and drain the health care system and other state resources (Crush et al., 2017, p. 21; Dodson, 2010, p. 5). Institutional xenophobia has also been widely reported in literature, implicating institutions such as the police department for frequently intimidating and arresting migrants through targeted operations (Opfermann, 2019, p. 7). Migrant women also confront gender-based violence, and scholars like Von Kitzing (2017, p. 7) argue that migrant women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence in their own homes and close relationships. She argues that migrant women are less inclined to report when they are being abused out of the fear of illicit xenophobic treatment by the police and the fear of being retraumatized. This concurs with the view of the World Health Organization (2012) on intimate partner violence (IPV) being the most pervasive form of violence against women, and migrant women often do not have access to help or a legal remedy out of the fear of encountering xenophobic treatment at the police station (Von Kitzing, 2017, p. 8). Migrant women experience different structures of violence in their day-to-day living (Hlatshwayo, 2019; Lefko-Everett, 2011). Against this background, it is important to try and understand the conundrum between insecurity and agency in the migration of Zimbabwean women. The decision to migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa as a livelihood alternative on its own can be considered as an agency as it provides them with opportunities to improve their economic situations. However, it comes along with some vulnerabilities and risks that affect them for being women and foreigners. According to scholars like Kabeer (1999, p. 438), agency can be defined as the ability to identify goals or make choices and then act upon them. It can take many forms, for instance, "bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance..." For the migration experience to be considered empowering to the women, it is important to look at the different strategies that Zimbabwean migrant women use to survive the different forms of insecurities and vulnerabilities they encounter in South Africa. The first part of the article presents some of the vulnerabilities that Zimbabwean migrant women encounter throughout their entire migration experience in South Africa. The second part presents how the women navigate and negotiate their identity and security in circumstances and spaces where they are vulnerable and their rights and security are constrained.

Methods

This article is based on the results of a qualitative study carried out with Zimbabwean women migrants living in one of the metropolitan cities of South Africa, Durban. The increasing economic growth of the city attracts a high number

of African migrants and refugees in search of employment; hence, it seemed to be a suitable research site for the study. In-depth interviews with 22 Zimbabwean female migrants working as informal traders in Durban Central Business District were undertaken. Observations were also carried out at the places where the women were working. Participants were aged between 25 and 49 years and were self-employed in the informal sector as hairdressers, street vendors, informal tailors and seamstresses, and childminders. It is also important to note that 18 of the participants who were interviewed were undocumented, and the other 4 were documented with DZP permits. Purposive and snowball sampling were used in recruiting the participants. All participants determined the places where the interviews were conducted, but in most cases, they were conducted at their place of work. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and confidentiality was assured; hence, all names reported are pseudonyms. Interviews were conducted in Shona, the participants' home language. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed for emergent themes in line with qualitative research methodologies (Creswell, 2012).

Forms of Vulnerabilities

Economic Challenges

Previous studies that show the migration pattern from Zimbabwe to South Africa suggest that one of the drivers of migration over the past two decades has been the country's political instability and ailing economy (Bloch, 2010; Crush et al., 2017; McDuff, 2015). The data is similar to a study that examined the reasons that influenced Zimbabwean women to leave and concurs that economic difficulties in the form of poverty and unemployment are the key migration "push factors" for female Zimbabwean migrants (Lefko-Everett, 2010, p. 269). This study revealed that most of the participants migrated in response to the prevalence of economic challenges and insecurities in the country. The participants indicated that life in Zimbabwe was becoming unbearable, and it was extremely difficult for them to live and maintain sustainable livelihoods because of the worsening poverty, scarcity of jobs, and income. Hence, they left Zimbabwe to come to South Africa with the hope of finding better economic security, as some of the women said:

Back home, there was nothing that I could do to sustain myself, with no jobs. And you will be thinking that maybe if I go there, things will be better, and I can find a job. (Participant 6: Age 36)

The reason I came from Zimbabwe in 2008, was because of the political situation that the country was facing. Our government was not in an amicable state, everything was not okay. And when I decided to come here, my main intention was to come and work so that I could support my family. Back home, I used to be a hairdresser, but because of the economic situation which affected the cash flow, we were no longer getting customers. (Participant 11: Age 28)

While other women were focused on attaining economic security through the provisions of basic food and shelter, others migrated so that they would be able to afford their children's education fees. Two of the participants said:

I came from Zimbabwe in 2007. The economic crisis was too bad for us, there were no jobs, everything was so difficult, especially for me, I had children, the educational system deteriorated, teachers were no longer coming to class. The conditions were just deteriorating, and I decided to come to South Africa to raise school fees. (Participant 4: Age 37)

I came here to South Africa in 2009, and my main intention was to raise school fees money for my kids. (Participant 7: Age 49)

Crush et al. (2015, p. 365) note that over the year's migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa has shifted from being temporary to semi-permanent or permanent. Several of the people migrating consider South Africa as a place where they can start a new life instead of it being a temporary place of relief and economic endeavors. The data revealed that some of the women were already involved in informal cross-border migration, and they stayed in South Africa for temporary short periods. However, due to the worsening economic situation in Zimbabwe, it was difficult to earn sustainable profits from cross-border trading, and they decided to migrate to South Africa on a semi-permanent basis. One of the participants narrated how she had always been coming to South Africa since 2001 with a group of four other women. They would knit sets of doilies and purchase wooden cooking sticks in bulk that they would come and sell in Johannesburg. When they arrived in Johannesburg, they would rent and share a room as a temporary home for a few months until they had sold their products. She explained that this was how they were able to earn an income. However, when the economic situation worsened and their informal business strategy was no longer producing enough profits, she decided to stay in South Africa for a long-term period. Another participant also said something similar and said:

Before I came here, I was involved in cross-border trading, buying, and selling different products. However, it was difficult to sustain the business as many did not pay on time because of the cash crisis. I then came here and now I am doing hairdressing. (Participant 3: Age 30)

Upon arrival in South Africa, most of the participants secured jobs in the informal sector, working as hairdressers, manicurists, street vendors, and informal tailors. The data suggested that some of the women felt that their economic circumstances improved because they migrated to South Africa, as they could now afford to take care of their needs and those of the families they left home. Makina (2012, p. 149) notes that migration offers the opportunity to sustain the livelihoods of those who were left back in Zimbabwe through remittances sent by their relatives in South Africa. Some of the participants said:

I started to plait hair when I came here to South Africa; as it is right now with the little that I can manage to get from my job, I can take care of my family back home, as well as take care of my well-being. (Participant 3: Age 30)

I would not want to lie and say that I will go back home, maybe to visit, yes, I can go. I am now so used to life in South Africa. Life is better here (Participant 12: Age 26)

However, the data also suggested that for some of the participants, their expectations of better lives contradicted their experiences, and they found it challenging to attain the security and life-changing opportunities they imagined staying in South Africa would bring. Different from some of the Zimbabwean female migrants who work in the formal sector as better-paid professionals, migrant women working in the informal sector are particularly vulnerable as they mostly survive on an income per day basis earning low wages with no job security and benefits (Hlatshwayo, 2019, p. 161). Scholarly evidence also shows that the informal work that female migrants often engage in is excluded from legal frameworks that involve work contracts, and they are less able to ensure legal protection (Chinyakata & Raselekoane, 2021; International Organization of Migration, 2009). Importantly, the data showed that the scarcity and competition for opportunities in the informal sector made it difficult to earn a sustainable income. Some of the participants said:

Life is so difficult in this foreign land, jobs are scarce, and every day it is a struggle to get money to put food on the table and pay our rentals. (Participant 6: Age 36)

In some cases, the client might leave you, so, most of the time I end up lowering the price for my services. You charge the normal price of 200 Rands because they take advantage, the client might say 100 rands. Because things will be difficult for me, I end up expecting less for my services because I would be in desperate need of the money. (Participant 11: Age 28)

Similar to the study by Von Kitzing (2017, p. 10), this research study also revealed that, due to the struggle and difficulties of making enough income to meet their basic needs, some of the Zimbabwean migrant women ended up engaging in sex work as a means of survival. Though she did not admit to engaging in sex work herself, one of the participants revealed that she knew several Zimbabwean women who engaged in sex work for survival. She mentioned a local bar that was located in the city center and was popular for being used as a brothel by most Zimbabwean women. She said:

Life is so difficult most of the time in this foreign land because they are other people that I know of who have since resorted to prostitution. That is where most of the Zimbabwean women end up, trying to make a living. (Participant 5: Age 30)

Economic insecurities often make it difficult for migrant and refugee women to find proper and safe accommodation, which renders them susceptible to various

forms of violence and insecurities (Freedman et al., 2020, p. 6). They often stay in overcrowded spaces with poor housing conditions and sanitation services (Lancet, 2020). Similarly, the data also revealed that, due to financial constraints, some of the participants were often forced to live in cheap and poorly maintained accommodation. For instance, an observation that was made during a fieldwork visit to one of the participants' houses revealed that some of the migrant women resided in dilapidated and overcrowded blocks of flats where the rooms were divided with cardboard boxes and they used a communal toilet and bathroom that was filthy and rundown exposing them to the risk of contracting several communicable diseases.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

This study also revealed that several of the participants experienced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during their stay in South Africa. The data indicated that Zimbabwean female migrants experienced IPV more than once, either from their partners whom they migrated with or the ones they met when they arrived in South Africa. One of the participants narrated how she regretted migrating to South Africa to join her husband as she frequently suffered from IPV. During the period when the interviews were conducted, she had recently suffered from a second miscarriage after being beaten by her husband. She mentioned that she had dealt with the loss of pregnancy on her own without informing her husband. This narrative is also similar to what another participant said about her husband whom she also migrated with. Pulling up the sleeve of her dress, she revealed a permanent scar on her right arm, which she obtained during a domestic fight with her estranged husband. She said;

I understand what gender-based violence is because it happened to me. I was beaten by my husband. Things were not okay in our marriage but I did not expect that kind of violence to come from him. I came to South Africa because of him, he was already living here and he was the closest person to me that I knew in South Africa. I looked up to him in everything. (Participant 3: Age 30)

IPV was common for many of the participants, and some of the women revealed that they were unable to leave their abusive partners because they economically depended on them. Hence, some of the participants remained in abusive relationships as long as they had access to basic commodities such as shelter, clothing, and food. One of the participants said:

My boyfriend is not always nice to me, especially when he is frustrated, he can even beat you up... I just tell myself that it is part of life, no relationship has got no issues.... He gives me good money. (Participant 20: Age 37)

Previous research shows that the lack of legal documentation compounds and exacerbates the existing vulnerabilities of most migrant and refugee women in

South Africa (Mbiyozo, 2018). The study also revealed that most of the participants who were interviewed were undocumented because their 90-day visitor visa had expired and they had overstayed, making them illegal migrants and significantly vulnerable to different structures of insecurity. Being undocumented increased their dependency on their perpetrators and, in some instances, restrained them from reporting cases of gender-based violence at the police station. Participants did not report gender-based violence cases because they feared exposing themselves to deportation. One of the participants said:

I never went to report him at the police station, because they never take us seriously, instead, they will start checking other issues that are meant for home affairs and send us back home. (Participant 4: Age 37)

Challenges to Accessing Health Care

The lack of legal documentation also negatively impacted participants' access to public health care services. Most of the women who were interviewed revealed that they encountered challenges in their attempt to access health care services in South Africa because they lacked legal documentation. They indicated that when they went to the hospital, they were required to have valid passports with temporary residence permits. The demand for these documents proved to be a problematic issue for some of the women, and as one of the participants said, she had difficulties registering at antenatal clinics, risking their health, and that of her unborn children.

I only registered at the clinic when I was 8 months pregnant. I was about to give birth but all this time I could not register the pregnancy because I did not have the right documents. This time they had no option as I was about to give birth, that is when they assisted me. (Participant 21: Age 35)

Study by Crush and Tawodzera (2014, p. 658) point out that migrants and refugees in South Africa are often victims of medical xenophobia in the public health care system. This study also revealed that some of the interviewed participants were also exposed to discrimination and xenophobic attitudes from some of the health care workers. Most of the women perceived hospitals and clinics as places of fear because of the stigma and abuse they encountered. One woman recounted her experience with one of the nurses when she gave birth:

I gave birth in 2016, and there was an older midwife who told me that I should stop giving birth in South Africa as this is not my country because the population of South Africa is increasing and they do not need any more foreigners (Participant 17: Age 40)

Harassment and Name-Calling Experiences

Participants also recounted daily experiences of harassment, abuse, and exclusion by citizens, police officers, and government officials. Most common were the frequent and derogatory name-calling and the blame for the socio-economic challenges in South Africa. When walking past one of the main streets in the Durban CBD, the first thing that one can notice is that the area is full of salons, and the space is dominated by foreigners, mostly Zimbabweans, who do hairdressing on the streets. However, because of the competition for customers, some of the participants revealed that they were frequently labeled with names like *Kwere Kwere*. The name-calling was a source of hurt and humiliation, as most of the participants revealed that it increased their feeling of being socially excluded and insecure.

You just cannot speak loudly in public because you can easily be labeled as a *Kwere kwere* and it is not safe. (Participant 10: Age 29)

However, some of the women adapted and trivialized the derogatory terms when used. One of the observations was made while waiting for money change from one of the participants who had just sold mealies to the researcher. Since she did not have loose change, she decided to ask for change from a local woman who was also selling mealies. As soon as she approached the woman, she replied on top of her voice, *ufunani Kwere Kwere (what do you want Kwere Kwere)*. Repeating it three times... the participant just laughed and went on to look for money change in the shop that was nearby. In hindsight, this incident revealed that most of the participants have become accustomed to some of the xenophobic encounters they face daily. They get used to being labeled with derogatory names. This was affirmed by one of the women, who said,

Especially after the 2008 attacks, it became so prevalent and normal to be called with other names like *Kwere Kwere* or *Mazai zai*. (Participant 18: Age 30)

In addition to the name-calling and poor treatment from citizens, participants also reported experiencing routine harassment from police officials. The participants whose workspaces were located on the streets encountered problems such as the metro police officers who often raided their stalls or chased them away from their workspaces as a step toward implementing the informal trading municipal by-laws.¹ The urban spaces that the women occupied were usually considered illegal by the municipalities, hence the raids. Despite the raids, both local and migrant people continued to occupy the spaces for informal trading. Even though these raids affected both local and migrant persons, most of the participants felt more vulnerable and believed those police officers targeted them because they were foreign. This was recounted in one of the interviews:

Not a day goes by without the metro coming by. Before, they used to chase us away, but nowadays they just come, and we give them some money and they leave...I have never seen them harassing or getting money from South Africans, they just come to us. (Participant 5: Age 30)

Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies

Intimate Relationships with Local Men for Citizenship

Although migrant women experience violence, the study established that most of the participants developed coping mechanisms and strategies to gain social acceptance and ensure survival. The participants' narratives revealed that the heightened pressure and need for legal status and basic survival in South Africa influenced some of the women to engage in intimate relationships with local South African men. One of the participants narrated how she had a sexual relationship with a local South African man, with the short-term goal of attaining economic security and, in the long-term, getting married. Marriage would ensure access to South African citizenship. She narrated how the relationship was abusive, but she did not leave because she believed that, in due course, the man would marry her and she would have access to a permanent residence spousal permit enabling her to stay in South Africa legally. While engaging in intimate relationships could sometimes be problematic if the men were abusive, the participants acknowledged it to be a coping and survival strategy for acquiring basic needs and notably attaining a legal status to reside in South Africa. This concurs with the thoughts of Kiwanuka (2010, p. 173), who contends that "migrant women exchange their present self with the hope of a better situation comprised of security, liberation, and access to essential services."

Using Language and Dressing as Disguise Tactics

Furthermore, the interviews also revealed that the participants sometimes used the things they learned from their surroundings to cope. To ensure their survival, they learned to be street smart by adopting several techniques that assisted them to navigate their working spaces with ease. One of those techniques was adapting and learning the local isiZulu language. Learning the local language is one of the best ways to not being identified as a foreigner (Chinyakata & Raselekoane, 2021). Time spent with some of the participants revealed that they could lure their clients by using basic isiZulu. The ability to speak "enough" of the local language proved to be a survival mechanism. Some of the participants changed their accents when they started canvassing or when they were conversing with potential clients. Through adapting and switching off their accents, the women were able to pass as temporary insiders (Nyamnjoh, 2006). Their identity as migrant women was overshadowed as the locals perceived them, even briefly, as one of their own, and they looked beyond the stereotype of a foreign street vendor or a foreign street hairdresser. In their endeavor to attract customers, they would use isiZulu catchphrases, for instance, saying *unjani* (how are you) or trying to create a social connection with the clients by referring to them as *sisi* (sister) or *bhuti* (brother). One of the participants said that

Because we work in the street, we must at least know and understand the language. You cannot canvass and attract customers from speaking English. (Participant 4: Age 37)

As Hungwe (2013) argues, the study revealed that language was not the only visible marker of difference; some of the participants said that dressing was also one of the things that made it easy for some locals to know that they were foreign. Hence, several of the participants said that they tried to integrate into South African society by dressing like most of the indigenous South Africans. Two of the participants said:

The way we dress as Zimbabweans always make us be visible. Most of us, dress conservatively. I do not understand how, but it is always easy to know that one is Zimbabwean before they even speak. So, I just try to dress in a manner that makes me blend with the others (Participant 4: Age 37)

We just have to break the idea that foreigners look a certain way by dressing just the way the local women do. That way, we are all the same and you will only know that I am a foreigner when I speak. (Participant 10: Age 29)

To also ensure that they were not caught between the criminality and xenophobic acts and on the street, another coping strategy for the women was being conscious about the time they knocked off from their informal workspaces. The data revealed that the women felt that their identity as foreigners, coupled with their inability to speak the local language fluently, was a visible marker of difference that heightened their vulnerabilities and exposed them to possible xenophobic violence. Because of this assumption, the participants were always conscious about their security, and they navigated the city with great caution. Similar to what was shown by the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) study of 2008, this led to migrant women being largely invisible in the urban center after certain hours (CSV, 2008). The participants perceived their homes as relatively safe spaces where they were not as vulnerable to crime and xenophobia. One of the participants recounted that

During holidays like Christmas, you must knock off early to avoid being mugged at the market. Once you try fighting back speaking English, they will make it their point to take everything from you and possibly harm you. (Participant 20: Age 33)

Bribing Police Officers and the Use of Fake Documentation

In their competitive informal trading environments, the study also revealed that most of the participants were inclined to set aside money to pay off the metro police officers. The fear of being chased away from their workspaces and potentially losing clients for the day left them with no other choice but to budget for the bribe money. The interviews highlighted that most of the Zimbabwean women working in the CBD streets had to collect a minimum of 50 Rands each to give to the police officers. Despite the participants feeling like victims of exploitative xenophobic behavior from the police officers, the practice of bribing

the police officers was a routine that the participants were now used to, and it guaranteed their survival on the streets of Durban. Crush and Peberdy (2018) indicate that there is considerable evidence of South African police officers who take bribes from migrants who want to avoid being fined, deported, or imprisoned. For most of the participants, police officers soliciting bribes were regarded to be part of the business. This was revealed by one of the participants, a 45-year-old woman who owns and runs her internet café with her son. She used her internet café as a cover for another operation where she forged and made fake asylum and work permits for foreigners. She said:

There is no need to panic when I see the police in here, even if they know what is going on, if I just give them bribe money for them to go buy drinks, it will be sorted.
(Participant 22: Age 45)

From the above narrative, the use of fake documentation was also another survival strategy that the women used. The data revealed that some of the participants used fake documentation in public institutions like hospitals where valid documents were required to get assistance. One of the women revealed that she had to use a fake permit so that she could register at the antenatal clinic. She said:

After I did not register for the first time I went and got a fake permit, that is the one I used and they never checked to see if it was legit. (Participant 20: Age 33)

This clearly shows that some Zimbabwean female migrants worked around the system by acquiring fake documentation, helping them to benefit from a social and economic system that structurally excluded them.

Faith-Based Organizations and Social Networks

While migrant women have individual coping strategies, they also rely on communal coping strategies (Chinyakata & Raselokoane, 2021). The study showed that most of the participants were part of Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) and networks that played an integral role in facilitating their agency. Many of the participants who were interviewed noted that they often sought psychosocial support from local FBOs like the Roman Catholic Church located in the Durban CBD. The church actively engaged in offering shelter and support groups to migrant women who encountered covert and overt xenophobia and gender-based violence. They offered women the opportunity to discover entrepreneurial and economic ideas that could enable them to sustain an income. For instance, some of the women were taught dressmaking and bead making, which added to their skills. Because the income and profits that the women got from their informal trading businesses were not always sustainable, additional skills helped them with different ideas on how to establish multiple streams of income, ensuring more sustainable economic security and agency.

Their faith and religious beliefs also played a versatile role in promoting their agency and survival in a foreign land that seemed not to provide much-needed human security for minority groups. The participants also attributed their survival to their beliefs and their faith in God's protection.

...the situation in South Africa keeps getting difficult daily, but we believe that God will continue to guide our path. (Participant 7: Age 49)

Besides the local Roman Catholic Church, the majority of the participants found solace and support from their families and friends who were part of their communities and other FBOs that originated from Zimbabwe. It is from the same FBOs and communities that women formed social codes and networks. The social networks provided a space of security for most of the women, as they were able to form tight-knit relationships where they could freely discuss and share their challenges. They provided a sense of "belonging," which was very important in constructing the women's agency. One of the women explained that if one of them was affected by xenophobia or struggling financially and in need of startup capital, these community networks often contributed money to their fellow countrymen. This reaffirms the idea by Naidu and Nzuzwa (2013, p. 196) and Waiganjo (2018) that most migrant women are a part of different social networks with natives from their home country, which makes it easier to cope with the various challenges like xenophobia and gender-based violence. However, some of the participants said that at times the networks that originated from FBOs rendered them vulnerable as they often encouraged silence when they experienced gender-based violence. One of the participants narrated that after suffering from domestic violence, she sought help and solace from her pastor's wife, who encouraged her to let it go and be a forgiving wife who prayed for her marriage. Some of the conditions set by these networks are structural, as they continuously develop behavioral codes that turn a blind eye to the existence of gender-based violence in some of the women's homes.

Conclusion

The results of this research study pointed to the various ways in which Zimbabwean migrant women are vulnerable and are exposed to a range of insecurities constructed on the various legal, political, economic, and social structures that they encounter. Besides the economic violence and insecurities that they faced back in Zimbabwe, the women are rendered vulnerable by the fact that they are foreigners and females (Mbiyozo, 2018; Sigsworth, 2010). Their identity as foreign women put them in double jeopardy and exposes them to xenophobic discrimination and harassment daily, alongside SGBV. The restrictive immigration policies in South Africa that do not accommodate unskilled migrants leave many women undocumented. Coupled with the economic insecurities common in the informal sector, migrant women were particularly vulnerable to intersecting systems of violence. Some of the women engaged in intimate relationships with local men for legal and economic dependency. However, it put them in a situation

where they were constantly vulnerable to gender-based violence and harassment (Hlatshwayo, 2019, p. 174). Their legal status and identity as foreigners made them vulnerable to institutional violence, which impacted their ability to access basic services like health care and justice. The lack of proper and valid documentation is indeed a huge obstacle for migrants trying to access the public health care system (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014, p. 660). They are also exposed to xenophobic harassment from law enforcement officers and sometimes health care workers.

It is important to note that these challenges and vulnerabilities are not only confined to Zimbabwean female migrants, instead, they also affect other African female migrants. While South Africa is regarded as one of the countries that have the most progressive immigration policy in the world, the progress has not been good enough. Although migrant women are exposed to structural legal, political, and economic vulnerabilities, they are not entirely victims. The study showed that Zimbabwean female migrants had agency, and it was visible through their migration process as they actively made decisions that were strategic, enabling them to cope and adapt ensuring their survival. The fact that they decided to migrate for better opportunities showed agency, and the way Zimbabwean migrant women sometimes used their positions of insecurity as a means of survival reflects how migrant women embody many identities. They sometimes use these identities strategically to their advantage, and in some instances, the identities shape and influence some of the burdens they bear. The study also highlighted the role of faith-based organizations in safeguarding agency. It would be interesting for further research to explore the extent to which FBOs play a role in empowering migrant women, considering the sometimes-strict views that they may hold on issues regarding IPV and domestic violence. There is a need to strengthen migrant women's strategies by collaborating with stakeholders that can assist female migrants to cope and overcome their insecurities. Both government and civil society organizations need to address the legal and economic discrimination that places migrant women in situations of vulnerability and insecurity.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval

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1. Ethekewini Municipality Informal Trading regulations www.durban.gov.za

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