

# The Migration Experience and Multiple Identities of Zimbabwean Migrants in South Africa

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**This study shows how South African authorities and locals create 'spoilt identities' for non-South Africans through the *makwerekwere* image. It also shows how the non-South Africans, in this case Zimbabweans, try to resist such claims creating their own strategies and moral defences against such stereotyping. They also invent their own identity of South Africans. These Zimbabweans go on to reinvent themselves and create new identities as *injiva*. My argument is that while the process of identity formation is that of claims and counter-claims, it largely requires certain material, economic, symbolic resources to be deployed for successful identity formation. The command of certain resources and ability to adapt quickly to the new environment determines the level of success in evading the *makwerekwere* identity and also in carving a positive *injiva* identity.**

**Keywords:** *Injiva*, *makwerekwere*, migrants, xenophobia, South Africa, Zimbabweans.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The mobility of people in and out of Zimbabwe predates artificial colonial borders imposed by the colonialists such that even after the establishment of these borders people tended to ignore them as they continued to visit their relatives in other areas [1]. Therefore the mobility of people across borders whether for political, economic and social reasons is as old as the borders themselves [2]. Zimbabwean migration to South Africa became popular in the colonial era when Zimbabweans migrated to South African mines, plantations and farms, Crush [3]. The motivation for migration tended to be socio-economical and political. In some cases migration was viewed as 'rite of passage for males', while in others males were pressured by colonial authorities to migrate to satisfy a host of colonial demands. Migration tended to be the solution to the following circumstances that affected colonial citizens:

1. cyclical recurrence of droughts in the semi-arid regions of Masvingo, Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North and the Midlands which depended mostly on rain-fed agriculture.
2. expropriation of land through various legal instruments such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, the Land husbandry Act of 1951 and taxation (hut tax, poll tax, dog

tax etc.).

3. 'forced labour' under the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau (RNLB). Most desertions from Rhodesian mines resulted in migration down South. The RNLB wages simply could not compare with the attractive wages offered by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA).

Mamdani [4] captures the motivation for migration as follows:

"Migrant labour was semi-coerced and semi-servile...The institution was set and kept going through a web of extra-economic compulsions. The native was traded and kept on course like a beast by one set of laws; not simply directly with a whip as would be a beast, but through legally defined injunctions and prohibitions that left him- and eventually her- 'free' to work as a migrant in one of the many laborious and dirty jobs most easily found in mines, plantations or farms".

Such migration tended to be circulatory, male dominated and temporary [5]. There were no formal processes of inclusion into the South African community and non-South Africans remained isolated communities.

In the post colonial era Zimbabwean migration continued due to a number of political (such as the purging of the Ndebele between 1980 and 1986), social (such as operation restore order) and economic pressures (economic hardships, inflation, unemployment) faced by Zimbabweans [6]. Again there were no formal ways of including these non-South Africans in the labour market, especially so for the 'undocumented' migrants who tended to be the majority. The response by the South African State to such migration tended to be arrests and deportations [7,8]. Research has revealed that South Africans do not like foreign nationals regardless of where they come from and they prefer highly restrictive immigration policies. More-so black South Africans prefer western European foreigners than black Africans [9].

However, in April 2009 the Department of Home Affairs announced its intention to grant Zimbabweans in South Africa a 12 month special dispensation permit' on the basis of the 2002 immigration Act section 31(2) (b). This permit grants the right to legally live and work in the country. As a complementary measure, a moratorium on deportations and a 90 day free visa for Zimbabweans entering South Africa have been implemented [8].

The change in the South African policy towards Zimbabwean migration came partly as a result of the increase in Zimbabwean migration and the futility of its practices of deportations. Zimbabwean migration has had great social implications that have included congestion in institutions of health, housing and employment. Employers have taken advantage of the illegality of Zimbabwean migrants and other foreign nationals by paying them lower wages since these workers can not negotiate for better working conditions and remunerations for fear of being 'exposed' to authorities [7,10,11]. Some migrants have always occupied most jobs resented by South Africans such as underground mine working and farm-working.

In terms of housing and other social amenities Zimbabweans face harsh conditions of overcrowding, lack of privacy, living in shacks in informal settlements that are dirty, having no water and electricity. Dumba and Chirisa [12] maintain that poor Zimbabweans face social exclusion in two main ways; marginalisation (through unemployment) and segregation (in terms of residential areas where without formal documents one can not have access to formal housing). Zimbabweans also face inequality and discrimination in the health and educational institutions [13,14].

Zimbabwean migration to South Africa is mainly negatively evaluated, being described by locals using metaphors such as the 'Zim Tsunami' 'floods' 'hoards', 'barbarians' or 'infestation' [9,15,16]. Scheen [16] furthers states that South African residents in the Limpopo feel like non-South Africans in their own country because of this 'Zim Tsunami'. There are negative stereotypes created for non-South Africans. Zimbabweans are accused of criminality, being hosts of all sorts of

diseases, taking away South African jobs and women, and having many babies [13,17]. These migrants are perceived with resentment and scorn and even hatred. The term *Makwerekwere*<sup>1</sup> describes non-South Africans in South Africa and reflects the level of resentment the host population has for non-South Africans. These attitudes culminated in xenophobic attacks on non-South Africans that left 62 people dead and displaced between 80 000 and 200 000 people in May 2008 [10, 13]. For most Zimbabweans Xenophobia is an everyday experience [12,17]. Recently, there has been resurgence in the cases of Xenophobia leading to the death of three Zimbabweans killed by mobs The Observer Sunday News 5 [18]. Of particular mention is the death of Farai Kujirichita on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2011 [18] who was killed 'for being a Zimbabwean' in the poverty stricken informal settlements of Diepsloot.

This study analyses how Zimbabweans in South Africa manage or try to create a South African 'insider' identity by learning the language, dress style, faking identity documents, marrying South African men/ women etc. as survival strategies in a largely alienating and xenophobic environment. The study makes use of Goffman's [19] concept of spoilt identities to show how the '*makwerekwere*' identity is largely imposed on Zimbabweans and other non-South Africans while it is also resisted strongly by the same groups who however, do not have enough symbolic power and resources to reject and therefore must find ways to manage that identity. There are various ways of resisting and managing the *makwerekwere* identity; some include faking identity cards, learning the language, dressing and mannerisms of South African groups such as the Zulu, Xhosa and using historical ties and connections to define kinship and affiliation relationships with South Africans [11].

Back home the *injiva*<sup>2</sup> identity is carved and maintained through certain mannerisms and behaviours which delineate them as different from others. The *Injiva* identity is actively created and maintained by the transmigrants (borrowed from [20] who used it to mean migrants who want to actively keep ties in both countries), themselves and also the Zimbabwean locals who formulate their own images of South Africa and its effects on the non-South Africans. Their imaginations coupled with horrific stories told by the *injiva* concerning their perilous journeys to South Africa and precarious living in the country, help create an image/ identity of the *injiva*.

Plans for the regularisation of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa were mooted in May 2009. Before the regularisation of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, most Zimbabweans travelled to South Africa as 'illegal'

<sup>1</sup> Derogatory name used by South Africans to refer to foreigners. They mainly target black Africans from other countries such as Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Name given to a Zimbabwean who has been to South Africa or lives in South Africa

'undocumented migrants' [7,8,13]. These migrants mainly faced the wrath of South Africans starting with the border officials, the police, the army and the locals all of whom wanted to extort as much as they could from these non-South Africans. Because of the illegal nature of that migration some Zimbabweans commonly used *omalayitsha*<sup>3</sup>. However there was always fear of the *magumaguma*<sup>4</sup>. There are many victims of these *magumaguma* who especially for women ended up dead, pregnant or contracting the HIV/AIDS virus because of their desire to reach EGOLI (the place of gold- that is how it is perceived by Zimbabweans, for them the whole of South Africa is EGOLI), where everything is better and people can live decent lives, at least that is the perception even among youths [11,20].

After surviving this trip to South Africa, the Zimbabwean meets with discrimination, Xenophobia among locals especially police who at every point of interaction demand that they show their identity card, passports, failing which they got deported (especially if they could not afford the R50 or more bribe [14]. Local South Africans would always, taunt Zimbabweans for their dressing – it is too formal [13,23], they have no style, their clothes are too loose etc [14], and their language and tone. Most non-South Africans have problems speaking the local languages and for some the ultimate test that defines the insider from the outsider is the ability to pronounce accurately the meaning of 'elbow' and 'ankle' in Zulu [24]. If one passes it, they are not defined as *makwerekwere*, if they fail, they are *makwerekwere* who must be shown their back home in a violent way (See posters that South Africans carried during the height of Xenophobic attacks in 2008 which were written operation *buyela ekhaya* (go back home) [17,25].

That whole experience of the journey and the living conditions in South Africa changes a Zimbabwean. Their need to fit in and integrate requires that they have to change everything from dressing, music, food and even their temperament. That way they hope to deny the *makwerekwere* identity and pass as local Zulu or Xhosa men and women. However, in trying to resist the *makwerekwere* label Zimbabweans turn into the *injiva* who speak a mixture of languages and who vent out their frustrations on anyone back in Zimbabwe [26]. The South African experience changes them while they also in their own way create their own labels and identities of local South Africans- as lazy, violent, promiscuous and uneducated [23,25] who are jealous of hard-working non-South Africans. Therefore while South Africans carve images of Zimbabweans and others as *makwerekwere* non-South Africans also create images of South Africans in an also damaging manner- especially when South African women end up preferring foreign men because of

their perceived wealth. South Africans manage to create the *makwerekwere* identity by spoiling everything about the foreigner- from their educational qualifications/certificates (that must be validated by SAQA to be declared useful), clothes, outlook, style of walking, language etc. everything about the foreigner is deemed inappropriate and thus spoilt. The term *makwerekwere* itself is supposed to convey the un-understandable sounds and languages of non-South Africans which only provides 'noise' and funny sounds to the local listener because the language is dominated by the letter 'r' [20]. By sticking the *makwerekwere* label on non-South Africans, South Africans spoil the identities and images of these migrants.

### The *injiva* identity

Zimbabweans who migrate to South Africa are referred to as *Injiva* (among Ndebele) or *majoni-joni* (among the Shona) by Zimbabwean locals [20,23]. While the origin of the word *injiva* is unknown, this seems to be the latest terminology for describing Zimbabweans in South Africa. Other names that have been used previously include *umjubheki* (derived from Jo'burg UMWENELA (derived from WNLA (Witwatersrand Native Labour Act- under which migrants were recruited from Southern Africa), *Umgoli-* derived from EGOLI-meaning Johannesburg [20].

The *injiva* are viewed as outsiders that have a different outlook for life because of their experiences in a foreign country. These outsiders actively carve an image of themselves as different and so do locals also create myths about the South African migration experience. As outsiders the *injiva* actively perpetuate the status of outsider by showing difficulties in speaking the local language. They become subject of jealousy and scorn by local people where even somebody who has been away for three months comes back and starts talking the '*injiva*' language which is a mixture of Zulu, Afrikaans and sometimes Xhosa which includes words such as '*mara*' - but '*ne*' -so [26]. These words are thrown into every sentence even in places that are not appropriate. Almost every sentence of an *injiva* starts with '*mara*' and ends with *ne*. The *injiva* also wear expensive clothes and play loud South African music in their cars.

The *injiva* are regarded by locals as irresponsible, violent and troublesome. However, they are also seen as the trouble solvers- any pending disputes are solved by the *injiva* upon their return- they are able to mete instant justice- using knives, bricks etc [20,27]. Some however, become successful business people- but only a few. The rest are known for hiring flashy cars from South Africa and showing off for a short time- over Christmas holidays returning very poor in January. It is argued that this violence is compensatory behaviour for the violence that they experience in South Africa where they are subjugated. The *injiva* is the direct opposite of the

<sup>3</sup> Cross border taxis that can bribe border officials on behalf of the undocumented migrants that they bring illegally to South Africa Maphosa [20].

<sup>4</sup> An umbrella term for non-state actors responsible for various forms of abuse, exploitation and extortion along the border, Araia and Monson [21].

*makwerekwere*. He/she is largely loud, violent, overconfident, showy pompous and unafraid. The aggression of the *injiva* is usually excused and they are treated with sensitivity. That toleration comes from carved up image of the *injiva* as having braved the perilous journey to South Africa, when most of the time one risked their lives to get there. Therefore local people understand them because of their own creation of the *injiva* identity.

The South African TV programmes such as Zone 14, Tshisa and Yizo-Yizo, that most Zimbabweans in South and South Western Zimbabwe watch reflect the violent nature of the land of South Africa and South Africans. It is perceived that only the brave survive. However, there is an understanding that the pain an *injiva* suffers in South Africa as the unwanted *makwerekwere* is vented upon the locals when the *injiva* return. There is almost a feeling of fear combined with pity for the *injiva* whose behaviour is tolerated as displaced aggression. However, some aggression is rationalised on the basis of the broken, bad relationships that *injiva* almost inevitably have with their family, (wives, husbands, children). Some may return only to discover that their partners have moved on (while still receiving the hard earned remittances from the *injiva*) such discoveries may have dire consequences such as suicide of the *injiva* or death of the 'cheating partner' [27]. However, some *injiva* may come back with nothing to show after having failed to remit meaningful money and property due to concentration on the pleasures of South Africa. Such *injiva* are negatively evaluated as *umadliwa*<sup>5</sup> (literally meaning the one who is eaten) [20]. These *injiva* do not get sympathy from local Zimbabweans. Murray [28] maintains that migration causes serious problems for families as it divides them and prevents men from fulfilling their roles as fathers, husbands and community members.

### The *makwerekwere* identity

Because of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe many Zimbabweans fled to Southern African countries where they live as asylum seekers, petty traders and illegal contract workers. Zimbabweans have mostly faced Xenophobia from Botswana and South Africa where they are called *makwerekwere* [29-31]. South African Politicians and the media have led the 'othering project' against Zimbabweans and other non-South Africans. Comments made by ANC Member of parliament chairperson of the parliamentary portfolio on domestic affairs Maggie Maunye show the deep seated deep rooted hatred of non-South Africans. In her speech Maunye stated that "...for how long is South Africa going to continue tolerating this influx of people".....In Spain one sees on television how they send refugees back and here we are told of human rights and laws ... all types of

excuses. Here we have people living in poverty, people who are unemployed. We have never enjoyed our freedom as South Africans since 1994 when we got independence.... there have been refugees from all over" [32]. Though she later apologised [33] the damage had already been done. What is problematic is her attitude towards non-South Africans as a political leader in the department of Home Affairs. Her speech incites violence and it would be true that government tends to condone violence against non-South Africans through its 'business as usual approach' [8]. This was not the first time that a political leader made xenophobic speeches. Non-South Africans have been referred to as 'leeches' by the chairperson of the Johannesburg hawkers' committee [34] and Zimbabweans specifically referred to as 'a nuisance' [29]. According to the South African Minister of Home Affairs, not only do foreign men take South African women and engage in marriages of convenience, but they also bring in diseases, notably Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV [22]. Even the former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki is said to have feigned ignorance of the offensive nature of the label '*makwerekwere*' [15]. This goes to show the extent to which politicians themselves have created a spoilt identity for non-South Africans as diseased, hungry, selfish, deprived, alien, animals.

### The legal framework for migration in South Africa

Legislation regulating migration issues includes the Refugees Act (1998), the Immigration Act (2002) (last amended in 2004), the Immigration Regulations (2005), the Criminal Procedure Act (Act No. 51 of 1977), the Defence Act (Act No. 42 of 2002) and the Child Care Act (1983) for minors, [35,36].

The Refugees Act (1998) sets out the procedures for applying for and the granting of refugee status. Condition no. 9 of the asylum-seeker permit allows asylum-seekers to work and study while their applications are pending, although it may take up to six months for an application for political asylum to be processed [35].

According to section 49 of the Immigration Act, it is an offence to enter or remain in the country without a proper permit or papers. Anyone who fails to produce valid documents entitling them to be in the country can be arrested by an immigration officer or a member of the police without a warrant, for purposes of identification (sect. 41). Section 34 of the Act provides for the arrest, detention and deportation of "illegal foreigners". An illegal foreigner is defined under section 1 as "a foreigner who is in the Republic in contravention of this Act." According to the Act, an immigration officer may declare any person an illegal foreigner if that particular officer is not satisfied that he or she is a citizen, a permanent resident or a temporary resident under the Act. Section 32(2) of the Act requires that anyone declared an illegal foreigner be deported [35].

<sup>5</sup> Term used by local Zimbabweans to refer to the *injiva* who come back with no property or money. These are ridiculed for having been so absorbed in the pleasures of South Africa that they forgot to invest back home in Zimbabwe.

Under the Immigration Regulations (2005), an illegal foreigner may be issued a "Form 20" exempting them from arrest and detention pending the outcome of a status application. A person may be detained on "reasonable grounds" for up to 48 hours while his or her status is investigated. After being declared an illegal foreigner by an immigration officer, he or she may be detained for up to 30 days without a warrant. For detentions lasting longer than 30 days, the immigration officer must obtain a warrant from a magistrate's court. The warrant may extend the detention for a maximum period of 90 days [35].

Non-South African in South Africa are the *makwerekwere* who live in fear of being caught, harassed, beaten up and killed by the local police and residents. They live in overcrowded, squalid conditions and are largely not in control of what happens to them [12,24]. The state of Zimbabweans has been described by [37] as precarious and transitional. Borrowing Van Gennep's arguments [37] argues that Zimbabweans in South Africa are in a state of liminality that is "neither this nor that and yet both". This position means that they have no rights, no status, no property and no kinship ties as transitional beings. They live in 'a state of exception' where they are 'naked before the law' and become 'rightless' [38,39].

In its quest to define the nation delineating insiders from outsiders, South Africa has defined all non-South Africans, and even minority South African groups, as outsiders [30,40]. However, this definition has also meant that outsiders have been identified as less human and therefore deserving the inhuman treatment they get from South African citizens. The non-South Africans are the less human *makwerekwere* who must die for being foreign in South Africa. Non-South Africans are also depicted by the South African media as the extra terrestrial 'aliens' invading South Africa [15]. Therefore the nation building project in South Africa is largely exclusionary, stigmatising and spoiling the identity of the non South African through a deliberate process of 'othering'.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Caught between trying to be a 'South African in South Africa' and a 'foreigner' in Zimbabwe the *injiva* ends up being a 'culture-less' individual who fails to belong either in South Africa or Zimbabwe living on the margins of both cultures. They risk being viewed as outcasts in both countries [41]. In Zimbabwe they are largely looked down upon as violent, showy, irresponsible people whose uncultured behaviour and language is neither Shona nor Ndebele. Such people are also regarded as not South African enough because of the existence of foreign identity markers within them- they remain non-South Africans in one way or the other.

Theories on social identity explain and describe how identity is defined internally by the self and how it is externally defined others and then internalised by the self. The labelling theory posits that in the field of education positive labels that are given to students are internalised by the students to the extent that the students evaluate themselves in light of these labels thus changing who they are and affecting their definition of themselves and identity. Goffman's [19] concept of spoilt identities reveals that the process of identification is often a matter of imposition and resistance, claim and counter claim rather than a consensual process of mutuality [42]. In his seminal study of Stigma and identity, Goffman [19] defined stigma as any condition, attribute, trait or behaviour that symbolically marked off the bearer as 'culturally unacceptable or inferior, with consequent feeling of shame, guilt and disgrace. He identified three types of stigma (a) domination of the body (b) blemish of individual character (c) membership of a despised group. The stigmatised individual is 'reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. The common element in all these three categories is the spoilt identity that they all share and how it is managed through concealment, defiance or irony [19]. Zimbabweans and all the non-South African migrants in South Africa belong to a despised group called the *makwerekwere*.

Social identities exist and are acquired within power relations. Identity is something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems are advanced. It is a means and end in politics. In Nigeria under colonialism, administrative authorities 'invented traditions' and exacerbated the 'us' and 'them' mentality between the Muslim and Christian, the Northerner and the Southerner. Religious, regional and ethnic differences were given prominence in conceiving and implementing social, educational and economic development policies and projects under the indirect system of colonial administration by the British [43]. In South Africa non-South Africans are devalued and rendered powerless. In the nation building project that needed to define insiders and outsiders, the identities of non-South Africans were increasingly spoilt in order to define them as outsiders [44]. The stigmatisation of non-South Africans has led to their being defined as the 'other' 'alien' and outcasts.

## CONCLUSION

Zimbabwean transmigrants hope to benefit from both countries by spending some time in both countries. They actively carve 'hero' identities of themselves among Zimbabwean locals who also have their own largely negative images and identities they create for these *injiva*. In South Africa, Zimbabweans are stigmatised and given spoilt identities of the *makwerekwere* who are subject to degradation, discrimination and even violent death through mob justice. The *makwerekwere* identity

leads to negative treatment and automatic stereotyping of non-South Africans in South Africa. However, non-South Africans in this case Zimbabweans, in South Africa also have their own identities and carved up images of South Africans that are also damaging though they do not have enough resources and symbolic power to fully stigmatise South Africans. The *injiva* and the *makwerekwere* identities belong to one individual who has learned to have multiple identities and shifting, negotiated constructions of the self.

The history of cross border movement between South Africa and Zimbabwe far precedes the colonial encounter and post-colonial socio-economic problems going back to the Mfecane period of when waves of South African ethnic groups crossed the Limpopo to settle regions north of the Limpopo as far as lake Tanganyika, followed by the next which was generated by the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in the 1880s which culminated in a regional draw of labour from territories as disparate as Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe. The point being that the post-colonial phenomenon of population movement across the Limpopo whether voluntary or involuntary, political or economic is not new. It has antecedents. It is therefore a sign of singular lack of intelligence for a minister or a member of parliament in the new South Africa to express alarm at the entry of non South Africans into their country today most of whom are fleeing socio-political conditions that leave them no other choice. The 'othering' of Zimbabweans and other non-South Africans through the *makwerekwere* label is an excuse for failure to address deep seated structural socio-economic problems bedevilling the 'rainbow nation' of South Africa.

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