

Renegotiating Gender Identities and Sexual Bodies: Zimbabwean Migrant Women's Narratives of Everyday Life in South Africa

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Abstract

A wide range of literature reveals that women in many African societies have historically been faced with the challenge of patriarchy and lack of freedom in their households—a challenge also mirrored in institutions of education, the economy, law and politics. This gendered position produces gendered inequalities which lead women to experience poverty more severely than men. The feminisation of poverty has over the years resulted in the feminisation of migration, which implies a change in women's migratory identities and roles, where women are increasingly migrating as independent migrants rather than to rejoin male family members. Often, women migrate due to a desire for greater autonomy and a decrease in social restrictions on their productive and reproductive bodies. They also migrate to enhance their economic opportunities and seek new survival strategies in their endeavour to cater for their family's needs and those that pertain to their being. It is against this backdrop that this article explores the experiences of migrant women and the strategies they employ as they, against all odds, renegotiate and reconstitute their gendered identities and sexual bodies in order to survive the complex realities of living in a "foreign" space. The article focuses on 15 Zimbabwean migrant women's experiences of feminised poverty that pushed them out of the boundaries of their homeland, and the sexual and gendered livelihoods that emerged as part of their survival strategies in South Africa. As the article engages with Zimbabwean migrant women's experiences prior to and after moving to South Africa, it is at work to illuminate how sexuality and migration shape and reshape one another. The article analyses the role of sexuality in gender and migration research that has not been given the pre-eminence it should in the Global South. Overall, the article reveals that the often subsumed and hidden role of sexuality in gender

and migration research adds another complex layer of vulnerability to the bodies, identities and roles of Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa.

Keywords: gender; sexuality; migration; Zimbabwean women; South Africa

Southern Africa's Transnational Migration Landscape

A critical analysis of the literature reveals that contemporary migration flows are not only constituted by “South–North” or “East–West” vectors as nearly half of all reported migrants move from one developing country to another (Batisai 2016). In other words, the number of migrants who move from “South to South” approximately balances the number of migrants who move from “South to North” (Aleshkovski 2016). The southern African transnational migration system, pivoted on South Africa, is the largest system on the subcontinent (Agadjanian 2008). South Africa, the most recent democracy on the subcontinent, is the main migrant receiving country and one of the most preferred destinations by southern African migrants, including those from its neighbouring country Zimbabwe (Bloch 2010; Nshimbi and Fioramonti 2014). It has become a popular destination for migrants from all over Africa and the globe due to the perception that it is the regional powerhouse on the continent (Singh and Khan 2017). Migration to South Africa is therefore a poverty reduction strategy (Bloch 2010; Manjowo 2019).

Traditionally, the southern African migration system rested on large-scale recruitment of workers from the countries of the region for work in South Africa, primarily in the mining industry (Agadjanian 2008). Although transnational migration in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be dominated by young men, the subcontinent, as in many other parts of the world, has seen an increase in the share of women in the international migration flow (Agadjanian 2008). Though not specific to sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA Population Division 2016) stipulates that Africa hosts about 21 million migrants and women made up 48% of the 244 million international migrants in 2015, an increase from 222 million international migrants in 2010. The reason for the increase in women migrating can be traced back to the discovery made in the 1980s when a group of third world feminists analysed poverty from a gender perspective (Godoy 2004). They identified a phenomenon called the “feminisation of poverty,” where poverty specifically affected women more than men and poverty among women displayed a more marked tendency to increase (Godoy 2004). The historical position of women in many African societies is such that they face the challenge of patriarchy and lack of freedom in their households and this challenge is also mirrored in institutions of education, the economy, law and politics. This gendered position produces gendered inequalities which lead women to experience poverty more severely than men. For instance, about 1.2 billion people are still living in extreme poverty and the majority of these poor people living on US\$1 a day or less are women (United Nations 2013).

Consequently, the feminisation of poverty has over the years resulted in the feminisation of migration, which implies a change in women's migratory identities and roles, where

women are increasingly migrating as independent migrants rather than to rejoin male family members, often to enhance their economic opportunities by seeking jobs or education (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015; Fluery 2016; Jamie 2013; Russell 2014). Thus, women migrate for various reasons including lack of opportunities to engage in paid work and life options, poverty, divorce or separation, women's desire for greater autonomy, and a decrease in social restrictions on women (Benería, Deere, and Kabeer 2012) and their productive and reproductive bodies. The ultimate aspiration of these women is to seek new survival strategies to cater for their family's needs (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008) and those that pertain to their being. Women's aspirations speak to the notion of livelihoods defined by development scholars either as means and strategies for maintaining and sustaining life in the context of underdevelopment or as a synonym for jobs or incomes in the context of constrained circumstances (Piper 2008). Subsequently, migration is a significant livelihood strategy for women and women-headed households (Bloch 2010; Marchetti and Salih 2017).

The new pattern of migration alluded to above is evident in Zimbabwe where more women are seeking livelihoods beyond their borders than was the case a few decades ago (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012). Although many professional and qualified Zimbabwean migrants leave their country as legal emigrants and are accounted for, the vast majority of illegal immigrants from this country are unaccounted for in official statistics (Garatidye 2014; Makina 2013; Pretorius and Blaauw 2015). These irregular migrants end up in unregulated labour markets which are characterised by long working hours and low wages (Pretorius and Blaauw 2015). They tend to join a composite precarious labour pool which is overwhelmingly black, to a considerable degree migrant, and increasingly female (Hungwe 2013; Schierup 2016). Migrant women's opportunities are mediated by border controls that challenge women's migration along gender lines through laws that restrict women's reproductive labour opportunities. Issues of extreme abuse, exploitation and death of domestic workers exist in countries where the status of women is low, where women are confined to private settings, and where migrants have few rights (Boyd 2006). Lack of policies for the protection of women is among the main causes for their involvement in low-paid jobs; in other words, they survive with limited economic opportunities (Humera and Ambreen 2017).

The migratory experience emerges as a chance to overcome vulnerabilities and seek autonomy on one hand but on the other it reinforces gender normative roles which position women in subordinate positions in destination countries (Marchetti and Salih 2017). Upon arrival in their host country, women disproportionately suffer discrimination, mistreatment, and deskilling based on gender and race. Women frequently confront sexually segregated labour markets in which they are eligible only for jobs with low wages and status (Sager 2012). Hence the inference that although South Africa has increasingly been a popular destination for migrant women from across Africa, they suffer violence, hostility, social exclusion as well as economic exploitation (Singh and Khan 2017). The feminisation of migration in this context reflects the continued impoverishment and marginalisation of many women in developing countries

(Lefko-Everett 2007). Thus, the feminisation of migration flow is one of the important trends of contemporary transnational migration, which is accompanied by exploitative practices as women work in the gender-segregated sectors of the economy, such as domestic services and the leisure sphere, where they suffer more discrimination on account of their gender (Aleshkovski, 2016). They end up being entrenched in different precarious situations such that migrant women's sexual and reproductive bodies serve as sites through which they renegotiate and reconstitute their gendered identities and sexual bodies in a "foreign" space.

Although the studies cited above reveal the sectors in which the migrant women are concentrated, they do not go further to explore the experiences of these migrant women and the strategies they employ as they, against all odds, renegotiate and reconstitute their gendered identities and sexual bodies in order to survive the complex realities of living in a "foreign" space. It is against this backdrop that this article focuses on Zimbabwean migrant women's experiences of feminised poverty that pushed them out of the boundaries of their homeland, and the sexual and gendered livelihoods that emerged as part of their survival strategies in South Africa. As the article engages with Zimbabwean migrant women's experiences prior to and after moving to South Africa, it is at work to illuminate how sexuality and migration shape and reshape one another. In other words, the article analyses the role of sexuality in gender and migration research that has not been given the pre-eminence it should in the Global South. The often subsumed and hidden role of sexuality in gender and migration research adds another complex layer of vulnerability to the gendered identities and sexual bodies of Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa.

Methodological Processes

To uncover the precarious gendered identities and sexual bodies of migrants in South Africa, the study targeted Zimbabwean migrant women who reside in Yeoville, Johannesburg. The fact that Yeoville is a hub for migrants, among them Zimbabweans, and that it is a low-income suburb rendered its suitability as a location for this study unquestionable. For instance, Yeoville experienced a huge influx of foreign nationals from other African countries around 1998 and the 2011 census further revealed that the suburb accommodated 52% foreign nationals relative to 48% locals (Abe and Katsaura 2016; Smithers 2013). According to the 2011 census, Yeoville is also a place where 13% have no income at all while 48% of the residents earn an income between R1 and R3 200 per month; 25% get between R3 201 and R6 000, and 14% earn more than R6 400 (Smithers 2013). The housing structures in Yeoville, predominantly apartments in which migrants share flats, rooms and even the balcony to minimise the relatively exorbitant rentals ranging from R1000 to R1500, generally attract most migrants to the suburb. The low-income bracket and the living arrangements locate migrant women in precarious situations which expose them to feminised poverty and gendered sexual realities worth exploring.

Guided by a qualitative methodological framework, the second author (referred to as the researcher here) collected data in Yeoville between April and June 2018. The researcher was particularly informed by qualitative interpretivists' concern with revealing multiple realities and the subsequent belief that research must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people (Blandford 2013). The qualitative interpretivist framework in this study presented the researcher with the opportunity to construct reality through Zimbabwean migrant women's outlines and interpretations of their lived experiences and survival strategies in Yeoville. The fact that qualitative methodology is reflective and iterative allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Neuman 2014) as they narrated their "stories" from the time they left Zimbabwe to the process of settling in South Africa.

In the absence of a database of all Zimbabwean migrant women, the researcher used snowball sampling to select 15 Zimbabwean migrant women who participated in this study. Thus, participants were selected using the referral system whereby the researcher relied on her networks and personal contacts to access initial participants who were then requested to refer her to other Zimbabwean migrant women. At the time of fieldwork, the 15 Zimbabwean migrant women had lived in Yeoville for more than a year, long enough to have established a living and establish social networks or reinforce those that existed prior to migrating. The sample, naturally or by default, included both documented and undocumented women whose migration experiences often differ, especially in the absence of tertiary education as this makes them unequivocally vulnerable. For instance, 14 of the 15 migrant women had only obtained an Ordinary Level¹ certificate in their education while one had reached Form 3.² Table 1 below provides a profile of the 15 migrant women.

Table 1: A profile of migrant women

<i>Name³</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Migrated alone, with or joined family/ husband</i>	<i>Years in Jo'burg</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Immigration status</i>
Hlengiwe	26	Single	Alone	5	Cashier	Asylum
Christina	37	Single	Alone	10	Hairdresser	ZSP Permit
Nyasha	32	Married	Alone	10	Domestic worker	ZSP Permit

¹ The Ordinary Level certificate is an equivalent of Grade 11 in South Africa.

² An equivalent of Grade 10.

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout the article to uphold the ethical principles of research.

Grace	32	Single	Alone	9	ECD teacher	ZSP Permit
Caroline	41	Divorcee	Alone	11	Hairdresser	ZSP Permit
Martha	28	Single	Alone	7	Cleaner	Asylum
Tafadzwa	45	Divorcee	Then husband	18	Child-minder	Permanent Residence
Namatai	41	Single	Alone	10	Administrator	ZSP Permit
Angela	34	Single	Alone	11	Unemployed	Undocumented
Abigail	36	Single	Alone	17	Domestic worker	ZSP Permit
Danai	44	Single	Alone	17	Bookkeeper	ZSP Permit
Tendayi	29	Married	Husband	9	Cashier	Asylum
Maria	36	Married	Alone ⁴	16	Entrepreneur	Undocumented
Shamiso	23	Single	Alone	5	Cashier	Asylum
Melody	43	Single	Alone	10	Hairdresser	ZSP Permit

Data collected from the Zimbabwean migrant women was complemented and triangulated with insights shared by two key informants from the Africa Diaspora Forum (ADF), a non-governmental organisation that over and above dealing directly with African migrants has close proximity to Yeoville. The informants from the ADF were included in the sample because the researcher was convinced that they were likely to generate useful data for the study. The likelihood was informed by the realisation that ADF aims to create a platform for African migrants to voice their concerns and work towards an integrated society (ADF n.d.). Furthermore, gathering data from the ADF became much more focused because the organisation has representatives from Zimbabwe who deal with the challenges faced specifically by Zimbabweans in South Africa. The data that the two key informants from the ADF, who are practitioners in the subject area of migration and are knowledgeable about the experiences of migrants, provided was of great importance because it further illuminated Zimbabwean migrant women's lived realities.

The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the 15 Zimbabwean migrant women and two key informants from the ADF. The themes that were covered during the open-ended interview sessions were planned ahead of time, but lines of inquiry were pursued within the interview to follow up on interesting and unexpected avenues that emerged (Blandford 2013). The thematic interview questions interrogated how Zimbabwean migrant women's gendered identities and sexual bodies shaped and were shaped by the process of migrating from Zimbabwe, and subsequently by the everyday life upon arrival in South Africa. Comprehensive qualitative questions often allow the researcher to understand in-depth the actual way a social world functions and how participants in a particular social world go about living, working, interacting and how they feel about their place in that setting (Denney and Tewksbury 2013). Data generated from the interviews allowed the researcher to interpret the meaning people

⁴ Single at the time of migrating to South Africa.

attach to their experiences and investigate the complexity, context, and process of lived experience (Townsend, Cox, and Li 2010).

Post fieldwork, having captured and understood Zimbabwean migrant women's world of reality in-depth enabled the authors to interpret and analyse this reality meaningfully. The second author for instance reviewed empirical and theoretical literature on gender and migration on the subcontinent that resonates with Zimbabwean migrant women's gendered experiences in South Africa. The first author on the other hand conceptualised and constructed theoretical arguments that balanced and sharpened the empirical and analytic frameworks utilised and presented in previous and subsequent sections of this article.

Narratives of Zimbabwean Migrant Women Escaping the Economic Crisis Back Home

Reflecting on their journeys, migrant women admitted that the harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe drove most of them to South Africa. These are women who, like the majority of Zimbabwean citizens, never imagined that they would ever leave their country in search of better livelihoods given Zimbabwe's history as the breadbasket of Africa (Mudzonga and Chigwada 2009). Surviving has over the years become a challenge for many Zimbabweans who are unemployed and as a result, some women opted to migrate to South Africa in search of job opportunities. These migrant women's narratives concur with Kihato's (2007) study of migrant women in South Africa, which revealed that their main reasons for leaving Zimbabwe were economic. Over and above the economic challenges, Kihato also revealed socio-cultural reasons for leaving Zimbabwe, particularly escaping patriarchy and social stigma, as well as loss of a parent or guardian. Kihato's findings are echoed by how several migrant women in this study were pushed to leave Zimbabwe by economic responsibilities largely stemming from socio-cultural dynamics. The effects of the death of a breadwinner and the subsequent lack of family support pushed Hlengiwe and Tendayi, who were then the eldest siblings, to take up the responsibility of looking after the young ones, an experience framed as the child-headed household phenomenon. Consequently, the child-heads of the households migrated to South Africa in order to eke out a living in the absence of support from relatives. Zimbabwean migrant women have come to accept their breadwinner role, which was once perceived as a male preserve. Thus, the socio-cultural reasons for migrating have been central in the formation and prevalence of socio-cultural identities among Zimbabwean migrants in the host country.

Reinforcing Social Networks in South Africa

Social networks play a powerful role in how internal and cross-border migrants settle down, access work and survive in Johannesburg (Myroniuk and Vearey 2014), especially for Zimbabweans who are coming from a socio-economically volatile space. Zimbabwean migrant women narrated about the networks that brought them to Johannesburg, Yeoville in particular. The majority of the migrants relayed that they had

a relative or social networks that either funded their journey or helped them settle in when they arrived in South Africa. Only a few exceptional cases framed social networks as a temporary solution to the accommodation challenge upon arrival because they were only accommodated for a couple of months as they looked for a job. The reality that most of them relied on social networks for job opportunities and financial support in the absence of family support demonstrates the power of social networks beyond family ties. For instance, Angela has been getting help from her church and food from her tenants. Melody, a hairdresser, had this to say: “I get financial assistance from my clients who have become close to me over the years. They are now like my sisters and I know if I approach them, they will assist me.” Thus, the great influence social networks have on migrant women settling in a foreign land cannot be overemphasised.

How Gender and Sexuality Influence the Initial Migration Steps

The empirical findings of this study reveal how Zimbabwean migrant women’s gendered identities and sexual bodies influenced and were influenced by the process of migrating from Zimbabwe and settling in South Africa. For instance, migrant women’s narratives illuminate ways in which the decision to migrate was negotiated through various aspects related to their gendered identities and roles as well as the sexual and reproductive meanings ascribed to their bodies. Nyasha (11 May 2018), similar to Hlengiwe who had care issues in the absence of family support, emotionally shared how she had to take care of her daughter and simultaneously deal with the stigma attached to having children out of wedlock, especially when there are issues of declined paternity:

I had a dependent [my child] ...so my family expelled me because my father said he cannot cater for somebody’s “wife” so either I had to cater for myself or my “husband” had to cater for me. I did not have a husband. I had to look after my baby all by myself so I decided to come to South Africa.

It is typical in the Shona culture, similar to many other African cultures, that when a woman gets pregnant out of wedlock she has to elope, but if the man responsible for the pregnancy rejects her, she has to go back to her parents like Nyasha did. Therefore, Nyasha’s decision to migrate to South Africa was against the backdrop that she had to single-handedly raise her daughter and as she found herself in a situation where both the partner and the father had rejected her, she also had to escape the stigma of staying in Zimbabwe as a single mother. The gendered and sexualised violence stemming from the cultural values resonates with the domestic violence against women that is prevalent in many parts of the world, including Zimbabwe. These realities speak to the transition that women go through as they escape the stigma, cope with the pressures of single parenting and escape domestic violence. As such, gender inequalities are a powerful motive for women to migrate in order to seek greater autonomy, improve their livelihoods, and thereby empower themselves (Bhadra 2008). Asked about her reasons for relocating to South Africa, Maria (8 May 2018) had the following to say:

It was a way of escaping my previous marriage. He used to beat me up; I was young and he was older than me; he was like 10 years older than me. I was 17 years old and he was 27 years old.

Although Maria, like many victims of domestic violence, blamed herself for being violated by her partner, as revealed in the statement “I was young and very immature so the things that I did made him angry and so it did not work at all,” she used migration to South Africa as a tool to exercise her agency and silently confront the violence that characterised her previous marriage. This is read as a silent confrontation because she did not verbally or physically fight her husband. On the contrary, Tafadzwa is the only one out of the 15 participants who came to South Africa specifically to join her husband: “When I first came to South Africa it was because I was married and my husband was this side so I just came to join him.” Tafadzwa’s experience is contrary to the observation that women are increasingly migrating as independent migrants rather than to rejoin male family members (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015; Fluery 2016; Jamie 2013; Russell 2014). On a positive note, the interview narratives also demonstrate how the migrant women relied on gender and sexual relationships with their husbands for job opportunities. For instance, Nyasha (11 May 2018), who was eventually married in South Africa, got a job through her husband:

My husband got a job as a security guard and so I got a job [as a domestic worker] by the complex he was working because they used to ask him if he had someone who wanted to work, so I got that job.

The narratives revealed the relatively exorbitant rentals which have shaped the living arrangements and everyday realities for some migrant women in Yeoville. Hlengiwe narrated of sharing a room with someone and they pay R1 500 each while Abigail opted to share space, a small dining room, which costs them R1 000. Grace stays on a balcony which is believed to be one of the cheapest spaces to live compared to inside rooms; she reveals “it’s tight ... a balcony is like R1 200 going up.” Furthermore, there is no privacy in most migrant women’s lives as they have to always share a room or a bed with someone in order to manage their rentals. As Nyarai (8 May 2018) explains, “I have got someone that I am sharing a bed with and she is actually paying R600.”

Tendayi narrated how some migrant women find themselves sharing rooms or space with male strangers while others, with a very limited degree of agency, desperately enter into sexual relationships with men to cut accommodation costs. Although Tendayi migrated with her husband to fulfil her gender and sexual roles, this gendered position has spared her the sexual dangers and risks associated with sharing accommodation in Yeoville. She says, “accommodation is expensive because other people are staying in rooms divided by curtains because you can’t afford to pay that rent alone so you have to share with someone. I am fortunate, I am using a small room together with my husband.” Demarcating rooms with curtains on the one hand violates the general privacy let alone sexual rights of most migrant women who live with their children, but on the

other, it is one of the gendered strategies used by many to renegotiate and fulfil their sexual roles and manage rentals in a context of limited, if any, alternatives.

Negotiating Crime and Gendered Violence in Yeoville

Migrant women's narratives expose the hidden role of sexuality in the migration process. In particular, the narratives speak to how their bodies constantly negotiate gendered and sexualised violence as they navigate the different corners of Johannesburg every day. Similar to findings from the EuroMed region (Freedman and Jamal 2008), the experience is shared with South African women but the migrant identity makes the experience of Zimbabwean women complex. The relative vulnerability stems from lack of documentation such that some criminals pose as law enforcement officers who have to check passports and residency permits and in the process harass and steal from the migrant women; some corrupt law enforcement officers also ask for bribes in the absence of documentation. As such, they mentioned insecurity in Yeoville as one of their main concerns. Most migrant women described Yeoville as a hive of criminal activities and explained that they are not comfortable staying in that area due to crime. Narrating the horrors she witnessed during her stay in Yeoville, Nyasha (11 May 2018) reiterated the notion of high crime and violence:

I do not feel comfortable staying in Yeoville because what is happening here is now very scary. There are cases of rape and violence against women and people are just killing each other more as compared to the time we came. These days, it doesn't matter what time of the day it is, people get killed; it's no longer safe. I think they kill you because they want something that you have; life is now difficult.

Tendayi (9 May 2018) shared similar concerns:

Yesterday I was standing by the balcony and I saw a guy who was going down the road and then a car came and they shot the guy six times and he died there and then. ... So, it's not safe at all because you can be caught in the crossfire.

The narratives speak to the realities and discourse of gendered violence and abuse in the streets of Yeoville and South Africa at large. For instance, Martha (23 April 2018) narrated how she was almost attacked by a criminal:

Yesterday, I was coming from my sister's place and this man was holding a knife and wanted to stab me and I was just walking and I didn't have any phone in my hand but I was just passing so I had to run. ... Someone was stabbed at night at around 12 midnight and they were coming from work and that person passed on.

Danai also acknowledged that the situation becomes worse when you are a woman and alone. She narrated how they were attacked in church: "I was comfortable staying in Yeoville in the beginning but now I am not because of crime here. You don't feel at home, if they can attack people at church what more in the house. Last year in June, they attacked us in church and they robbed us." Church is a place where most migrant

women seek solace and if they are attacked in that place, then there is absolutely no place that is safe. A place where one is not secure cannot be homely, that is why migrants like Maria and Caroline have come up with strategies to avert the situation. As Caroline (11 May 2018) explains,

they [gangsters] now know me and if I knock off early, they accompany me home. You have to find a way around the situation. They just say to me; “sister are you done?” and then they take me home. That is how you do it here in Yeoville if you want to be safe. You become friends with them just to negotiate your safety.

On the other hand, migrant women devised their own safety measures in order to manage the situation. Their coping strategies include knowing which roads to use when going about their business, staying indoors when it is late, and leaving their cell phones and handbags at home to avoid unnecessarily attracting criminals who think that they will probably get something valuable from these bags. For instance, Maria shared the following: “I have been here long enough to know my ins and outs and I know I can’t go there and I can go there; I know I can answer my phone here and not there because I am just used to the place.” Likewise, Nyasha noted, “we just have to manage; when we go out we leave our phones and we stay indoors at night. At school, kids are told not to move around alone and not to go with people they don’t know.” Therefore, migrant women draw on their gendered identities and sensibilities to infer that Yeoville is not a safe place to stay or raise children as they can be caught in the crossfire.

The gendered violence alluded to above resonates with experiences that Zimbabwean women who have been to countries like Botswana prior to migrating to South Africa cited, especially how Botswana is unfavourable because of the gendered harassment that foreigners suffer at the hands of the police. Furthermore, the gendered violence that characterises the streets and different pockets of Yeoville resonates with the broad question of domestic violence against women that is on the increase worldwide. Grace and Angela shared their experiences of how they were violated by their children’s fathers. Core to their migration stories are accounts of the gendered and sexualised violence that their bodies suffered and endured as they depended on their abusive husbands in the “foreign” space. Angela (25 April 2018) revealed the following:

The father of my kids was very abusive, he would burn me with an iron, hit me with anything that he could pick, he would try and throw me out through the balcony ... He would do anything that you could think of, burn me in front of the kids and abuse me in any way ... His main reason for abusing me was that he was fed up with me ... He would come home drunk every night and we would fight. Everybody knew about us in the building. I stuck around him because at the time I was not working and I could not go back home because there was no one to go to. ... He never changed until I decided to move out that’s when I started seeing life from a different angle.

Grace (24 April 2018) shared similar experiences of violence:

I have been violated by my former guy that I was sharing the bed with, that's the father of my daughter. He violated me in all ways possible. I reported and he bribed the police, when I went after one week, I checked the document. I went to the hospital and the hospital told me I had to file a case whatever I brought against the person who did this and I filed a case at the police station and he was incarcerated then after that, after one week, he stayed like two days, after one week I went to check on my case and the case was not there ... He was abusing me because he was the one looking after me and our child so I decided to stay with him. However, it became too much and I opted out.

What connects Grace's and Angela's accounts is the reality that both suffered abuse at the hands of their children's fathers who ordinarily are expected and supposed to protect them not only at home (as in the private sphere) but in a "foreign" space that is characterised by violence. Although they felt they were being violated, the two women stayed because they were being looked after—an indication that a lack of options pushes migrant women to stay in abusive relationships where their bodies are sexualised and violated. Today, living and hustling around in a foreign country have afforded the two women some power to renegotiate their gendered identities and sexual bodies. Grace and Angela have managed to disentangle themselves from the violent men and deal with the long-term gendered effects of physical and emotional abuse.

Medical Xenophobia and Access to Reproductive Healthcare

Closely related to the gendered violence discussed above is the issue of medical xenophobia that migrant women's sexual and reproductive bodies suffer in the "foreign" space. Women who migrate from low to high income countries are more likely to benefit from the health system of the host country if they have jobs (Adanu and Johnson 2009) and access to medical aid. The fact that migrant women are often unemployed means that they do not possess health insurance such that they experience the challenge of lack of access to health services. The interview narratives reveal that most Zimbabwean migrant women do not have medical aid. In the absence of health insurance, some migrant women delay seeking treatment such that the minor sicknesses may worsen into serious health challenges while others seek medical assistance from public hospitals in South Africa. Staff at public hospitals are notoriously known for ill-treating or denying migrant patients treatment because they are foreigners, which is read as medical xenophobia (Crush and Tawodzera 2014; Mafuwa 2016). Therefore, harassment and threats by medical personnel in public spaces are experienced daily by migrant women in pursuit of medical attention. Martha (23 April 2018) experienced medical xenophobia when her asylum document was stolen:

I went to a clinic in Hillbrow and they told me that my days had expired so they could call the police. ... You just feel down and ask yourself is it because I am a foreigner and I am not in my own country, it's not that easy.

The interview narratives on migrant women's sexual and reproductive bodies suggest that medical xenophobia is worse for migrant women who seek antenatal care from public hospitals. Commenting on the xenophobic ill-treatment of migrant women, the

ADF official (ADF Official 2, 18 April 2018) narrated an ordeal faced by one migrant due to what seemed to be negligence on the part of hospital staff:

We have serious challenges as migrants, especially those that are not documented, access health centres. Just two weeks back, we had a serious challenge at Tembisa hospital where one lady from Shurugwi passed on. She went to the hospital to deliver; we are still investigating on what happened. She went to deliver twins; we are told she left her home healthy going to hospital and she never came back. We are now told that she collapsed, when they tried to save her it was too late. What is now a contradiction which we still want to understand is that we were told that she managed to deliver one twin who then passed on and the other one was assisted through caesarean operation so the report that we have received so far from Tembisa hospital is not really convincing. The hospital official said we should wait for the post-mortem which we are still waiting for.

Nyasha (11 May 2018) also gave her account of what transpired when she gave birth to her two children in Johannesburg:

I gave birth to my second child in Hillbrow General and I was just being scolded by the nurses. I would call them to come and attend to me but they would tell me to go back to Zimbabwe and at that time I was in labour. I went to the same hospital to give birth to my last child and because you won't be having any complications they will not refer you to Johannesburg because we are under Hillbrow. We were in a labour waiting room and I called the nurses because I could feel that the baby was coming and no one came until the baby just came out with no assistance. They came after the baby was out already and asked me to carry my baby without checking anything; it was difficult, you will just thank God that the baby is alive and well. They took the child and asked me to clean the bed and change the sheets. They treated me like that because I am from Zimbabwe, because they would say to my face that I should go back to Zimbabwe.

Discriminatory access to medical attention in South Africa is a violation of the country's Constitution and Bill of Rights, international human rights obligations and the existence of professional codes of ethics governing the treatment of patients (Crush and Tawodzera 2014). However, medical facilities seem to implement their own laws and discriminate against migrants such that lack of immigration documentation poses as a threat to accessing proper medical care at public hospitals and clinics. This is what Christina (11 May 2018) experienced:

It's difficult to access medical treatment for foreigners only if they don't have papers. I went to Johannesburg hospital, they don't give you proper attention, and they will just be sitting. You end up just going to a pharmacy or a private doctor which is expensive [for someone without medical aid].

The literature further suggests that women who migrate from low to high income countries are more likely to benefit from the health system of the host country if they speak the language of the host nation (Adanu and Johnson 2009). However, most

Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa are Shona-speaking and do not speak or understand the South African local dialects. The language barrier prohibits migrant women from accessing healthcare services, particularly the much-needed reproductive health services, because it either jeopardises effective communication between the migrant women patients and healthcare personnel or it victimises the migrant women who do not speak the local languages. Angela (25 April 2018) shared her experience with language-related medical xenophobia when she sought treatment for her child at a local clinic:

I went to Cosmo City with her as she was coughing and I was carrying the yellow card from Zimbabwe since she was born there, so the lady who attended to us said we are like those foreigners who bring those diseases and she is coughing who knows maybe it could be Ebola and she was speaking in her language and she thought I couldn't hear. I had to ask for her superiors to get the service, which I later did.

The burden may actually be heavy if these women, in addition to language issues, are undocumented, because they might fear exposure to the immigration authorities and the police, which might lead to deportation (Mafuwa 2016; UNFPA 2015). A study of Ugandan sex workers in Guangzhou China revealed that in addition to fear of being arrested due to lack of Chinese visas, these women also could not access health services due to other reasons like low pay, housing exploitation and remittances (Davis et al. 2016). Migrant women are therefore often disproportionately affected by reproductive ill health because most of them are exposed to sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV because of their poverty. Some women even experience unwanted pregnancies and forced abortion (UNFPA 2015). These women will generally have lost control over their general physical and sexual being such that their situations may worsen because they do not have a fall-back plan. They often remain in their precarious situations of poverty coupled with loss of their dignity.

Overall, migrant women emerge as “sites of constant struggle” as their gendered migrant identities as well as sexual and reproductive bodies are given little attention by the host countries aimed at meeting migrant women's health needs. Instead, host countries mainly focus on the infectious diseases that migrant women might bring into the host country and not on family and reproductive health issues of these migrant women (ActionAid International Vietnam 2011). Most migrant women do not access gynaecological care and are often unable to access essential obstetric services and also suffer from mental health problems (anxiety, headaches, insomnia, stress, depression) due to separation from their children whom they would have left back home (OHCHR 2015). These problems often go unnoticed because they fear going to public health institutions for one reason or the other. They may lack information about the health system in their country of employment and their entitlements to it (OHCHR 2015). These migrant women may end up not being in a position to work and support themselves and their families due to prolonged sickness that is not attended to. This may in turn affect their ability to remit money back home to their families.

Gendered Labour Markets and Sexual Violence

Most of the women interviewed in this study cited the gendered division of labour, their limited education and lack of choice as main reasons for the different menial jobs they engage in. In acknowledging that they, relative to male migrants, easily get gendered jobs like domestic work, the migrant women also hinted how women's work in the "foreign" space is somewhat reduced to their reproductive roles such that the labour market is negotiated through their gendered identities and sexual bodies. Abigail (18 April 2018) and Maria (08 May 2018) respectively, who expressed similar sentiments, had the following to say:

Survival is difficult for some men because it is more difficult for them to get jobs than us women. For women, you can just look for a job as a domestic worker and you can easily get one than men's jobs which are more difficult to get. A man can look for a job for a very long time and get nothing.

Imagine you have a relative who is looking for somewhere to stay, you would rather take the female relative because she can help with house chores unlike a male. You can source piece jobs for them from friends but with men, it's difficult because how many people paint their houses or have gardens?

Furthermore, the migrant women highlighted the gendered inequalities that characterise the workplaces such that most men have got better jobs than their female counterparts. Some migrant women like Namatai felt that these gendered inequalities make women worse off than men. She explained that "women are very disadvantaged because looking at structures in workplaces, at the top there are mainly men, and one woman here and there and most likely occupying a very menial post. As for female migrants, they end up doing any type of job just for the survival of their families." She (Namatai, 20 April 2018) further highlighted how migrant women negotiate their reproductive and caring roles which affect women's position in terms of their well-being relative to male migrants:

The other factor is that most men are very irresponsible such that we end up with this burden of looking after our children alone. A woman will give birth and after two weeks, she takes the baby to crèche because there is no option besides working for that child because the father will be irresponsible.

Nyasha (11 May 2018) also lamented such lack of support:

The piece jobs that I do, I get R200 a day, I pay for transport. For example, it's now R14 to go Sandton where I work. Transport cost is too much for me with the money I am getting. I also have a small baby who is nine months who goes to crèche. I don't have an option than to send her to crèche. Even when I was pregnant, I never got maternity leave. In fact, pregnant or not, I do not have leave at all, I work January to December. I don't have a contract with the people I work for because I just work for days, I don't

have bonuses or any allowance. When I was pregnant, I was going to work until I was due for delivery. I went back to work one month after I gave birth.

The literature reveals that due to the nature of their jobs as domestic workers, migrant women are often secluded in private spaces where some bosses verbally harass them and control every aspect of their lives. In a study of Philippine and Ethiopian migrant women in Iraq, the interviewees shared experiences of sexual harassment and rape and described how women who do not agree to their bosses' sexual advances are fired at once (Carter and Aulette 2016). The Filipino and Ethiopian women also highlighted how they often do not go to the police to report such cases for fear of deportation due to inadequate immigration documents as well as the language barriers which exist between them and the police (Carter and Aulette 2016). Although migrant women are subject to the same types of violence as non-migrant women, the specificity of their positions as migrants may increase their vulnerabilities to certain types of violence and may limit the forms of protection to which they have access (Freedman and Jamal 2008). For example, the labour laws in Iraq are weak in that they do not cover immigrant care workers (Carter and Aulette 2016). Therefore, the vulnerabilities increase when a woman is illegally in the host country and has no access to information about the specialised services available to her (Freedman and Jamal 2008).

Migrant women may also be more vulnerable to violence than migrant men because of gender inequalities within the migratory process in both the country of origin and the host countries (Freedman and Jamal 2008). Gendered violence is experienced in the context of human trafficking, which is a manifestation of the feminisation of both poverty and migration (Raigrodiski 2015). The study of Ugandan migrants in China revealed that some migrant women were deceived about job opportunities in China and were trafficked, with their traffickers paying for their travel. However, upon arrival in China, they were forced to engage in sex work in order to repay their debts to the traffickers who used physical violence, threats of violence and incarceration (Davis et al. 2016). By the time they cleared their debts, their visas would have expired and so they end up being stuck in the sex trade. Those who are not forced end up in the sex trade because of lack of documentation and the need to send remittances back home which drives them to stay in such work.

The Ugandan women also face isolation and discrimination, first, because they are African migrants and second, because they are sex workers (Davis et al. 2016). Similar to medical xenophobia observed in South Africa (Crush and Tawodzera 2014; Mafuwa 2016), Chinese government-affiliated organisations including hospitals and the police are also other places where these migrant women face discrimination and ill-treatment (Davis et al. 2016). The discrimination continues when they return home where they are isolated because of the stigma attached to African women working in China (Davis et al. 2016). That notwithstanding, the same stigmatised women make sacrifices and send money back home to their families via remittances. For instance, Melody strategises in the following way: "I save up first then I send because I can't afford to do it regularly."

Migrant women send money home due to the gender-specific expectation (Browne and Braun 2008) configured around women's identity as reproductive beings and carers of children and family members. As such, women are expected to fulfil these roles through remittances if they live outside their national borders.

Surviving Gendered and Sexualised Realities

Contextualised scholarship engaged in this article has ascertained that the increase of South–South migration has over the years witnessed an increase in women who migrate on their own in search of better livelihoods in an endeavour to escape different forms and effects of feminised poverty. Conceptual and empirical analyses have further illuminated that the feminisation of migration, which is an effect of feminised poverty, is not a gender-neutral phenomenon despite the fact that both men and women migrate. Juxtaposing migrant women's experiences with those of migrant men, the article revealed the complex gendered and sexualised realities that migrant women continuously deal with in a foreign land. As previously observed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR 2015), these two gender groups' positions are different in terms of the reasons for migration, the legal migration channels, sectors they migrate into, forms of abuse they face and the consequences thereof. Zimbabwean migrant women in this article shared experiences of gendered and sexualised discrimination within different pockets of South Africa such that their lives are affected by gender inequalities and their experiences are more often than not precarious.

Though the study was about Zimbabwean women, the article could not ignore obvious (but few) parallel experiences that emerged from the findings. As such, the article juxtaposed migrant and non-migrant women's experiences and unearthed that in the process of migrating to and settling in the destination countries, migrant women experience the positive and negative effects of migration differently from female citizens of South Africa. Although migrant women are subject to the same types of gendered and sexualised violence as non-migrant women in the workplace, the specificity of their positions as migrants (especially without immigration documentation) increases their vulnerabilities to certain types of violence and may limit the forms of protection to which they have access. Thus, a focus on how sexuality and migration are shaped and reshaped by one another has not only allowed this article to illuminate but give pre-eminence to the often subsumed and hidden role of sexuality in gender and migration research. Rather, the interplay between sexuality and migration has revealed the complex layer of vulnerability that sexuality adds to the identities and bodies of Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa.

Despite the socio-economic challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrant women, they often exercised agency in order to overcome poverty. The women put in place different livelihood strategies ranging from sharing space as far as accommodation is concerned, and taking any kind of job so as to get by, to negotiating with gendered and sexualised violence that their bodies are exposed to in the domestic and public spheres.

Zimbabwean migrant women's diverse strategies and initiatives for their survival in a foreign land challenge the general perception and narrow constructions of migrant women as helpless beings that are despondent. For instance, the fact that migrant women cited their main reasons for migrating as pursuing livelihood opportunities shows agency and further deconstructs an image of migrant women as mere victims of the migratory process portrayed in some interview narratives in this article. They exercise their agency against all odds and frame themselves as strong and self-sufficient even in the absence of father figures for their children: "I am the mother as well [as] the father to my child/children." Renegotiating their gendered identities and those that are linked to their sexual and reproductive bodies, the migrant women have come to accept their breadwinner role which was once perceived as a male preserve.

Furthermore, all participants have aspirations of a bright future which will not be deterred by the present-day challenges and such focus and determination mean that they cannot be reduced to mere victims of circumstances. Asked about their future, most participants shared their strategies for the future either in the foreign country or back home. Although the change of president in late 2017⁵ in Zimbabwe gave migrant women some hope to go back home, they are aware that Zimbabwe is not a space where they can renegotiate identities and sexual bodies because the situation in the country has been in a dire state for a long time. Thus, migrant women do not want to fall back into the complex gendered and sexualised vulnerabilities that characterised their lives prior to migrating to South Africa such that being a migrant in Johannesburg for these women is better relative to the gendered discrimination faced back home.

As reproductive beings, there are some who want to settle back home because that is where their children are while others are concerned about raising their children in the streets of Johannesburg. As such, the migratory process for these Zimbabwean women is shaped and reshaped by and negotiated through women's gender and sexuality and the associated vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities, such as the crime and gendered violence that women's bodies suffer in Yeoville, are a major concern among the participants and that is why most of their future plans are set back at home rather than in South Africa. Staying in an environment that is not secure for migrant women justifies the need to renegotiate their gender identities and sexual bodies in South Africa and beyond.

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⁵ Emmerson Mnangagwa became the Zimbabwean president when his predecessor Robert Mugabe was ousted from power in a "soft" coup in November 2017.

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