

**Human rights and migration: Perspectives of Zimbabwean
migrants living in Johannesburg, South Africa**

Mutsa Murenje

BSW (Hons), University of Zimbabwe; MHRS (MSc.), University of
Ibadan

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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Dedication

To my late parents, Watson and Elizabeth, and my late brother, Wilson Simbarashe, whose death in South Africa inspired this study. I further dedicate this study to all the migrants in South Africa and around the globe in the hope that safety, dignity, and human rights for them will be a reality achieved in our lifetime.

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Preface

In January 2012, I received a call I would never forget. Writing about it now, I realise it was not the call that was unforgettable, but the caller, my brother, Wilson or Simbarashe, which, in my *lingua franca*, means God's power. On that Sunday afternoon in the first week of January, I was at home and on holiday. I had been in Johannesburg's West Rand for about six months, having returned from Ibadan, Nigeria, where I had completed a postgraduate degree in humanitarian and refugee studies on a German Academic Exchange Service scholarship. Like millions of Zimbabweans who had embarked on the risky journey to South Africa, my 35-year old brother had fled Zimbabwe when the pressure at home became unbearable for him. He had called because he needed money to get from the East Rand, where he was staying with a maternal relative, to the Free State. Six weeks later, I learnt from my family in South Africa that he had been missing for several days. I had last seen him in Manesa, our home village in Chipinge, Zimbabwe, in 2006, when we were burying our father's only remaining sibling, uncle Matthias, a chain smoker, who avoided doctors, even in the advanced stages of throat cancer. Ironically, his death had brought the family together.

On the fifth day following my brother's disappearance, a passerby found his body in a state of advanced decomposition in a field in the abandoned mines of the Free State. I then understood why I had not been able to reach him after that last call, which, like his death, had been unexpected. I positively identified my brother's blackened, worm-ridden body at the forensic department, at which time I enquired whether we could bury him in Zimbabwe, but this was not possible due to his decomposed remains. Instead, we buried him in Welkom, South Africa in early March. I attended his funeral with my two brothers and maternal relatives, who had seen him last during his brief stay in South Africa, along with a host of others from the

Zimbabwean community in the Free State. We buried him among strangers and, to this day, only my brothers and I know where to find his grave.

Although I had been exposed to migration issues during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, my brother's death prompted me to delve deeper into people's migration experience. I had migrated to South Africa and had lived and studied in several countries. At one time, during my early days in South Africa, I was stopped by the police in central Johannesburg. I had planned to meet a friend when a police car suddenly stopped. Two police officers got out and stopped me together with my friend. They searched my pockets, took out my passport and 'verified' my eligibility to be in their country. Satisfied that I was, they left me and continued with their own business. However, I felt disrespected, that someone would enter my pockets without permission. What if I had money? What would have happened? Would they have taken it from me? How sure was I that it was genuine police officers that had pounced on me unexpectedly? This incident left an indelible imprint on my mind and unanswered questions that I hope, one day, to be able to answer.

As things stand, I have not been able to make sense of that incident and I have been wondering whether every other South African migrant will have to go through that experience. Thus, when the University of Newcastle awarded me a scholarship for PhD study in Australia, I decided to study international migration focusing on Zimbabwean migration to South Africa and migrants' experiences. Although my experiences might differ from those of other Zimbabweans around the world and my brother had not lived long enough to tell his story, in honour of his memory, I decided to explore others' experiences whose voices, like his, no-one would otherwise hear. Hence, I interviewed a small group of Zimbabweans to discuss their migration experiences and professionals working with migrants in Johannesburg. This thesis is the outcome of these conversations.

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List of abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
ARC	Australian Research Council
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DZP	Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project
EWN	Eyewitness News
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FMO	Forced Migration Online
GCM	Global Compact on Migration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MPC	Migration Policy Centre

NDP	National Development Plan
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NSW	New South Wales
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZEP	Zimbabwe Exemption Permit
ZSP	Zimbabwe Special Permit

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the migration experiences of Zimbabwean migrants living in Johannesburg between 2000 and 2016 from a human rights perspective. As a global reality affecting almost all nations, migration has gained humanitarian and political prominence and is a major policy concern in several countries. Although migration is critical for human survival and prosperity, it requires systematic management, especially since most migrants gravitate to cities, where they are confronted with a multiplicity of challenges that inhibit their successful incorporation and full participation in the social, cultural, economic, civil, and political spheres of their host societies. As is the case in many countries of the Global South, Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg faced serious human rights abuses. This study brought to the fore the inherent economic, cultural, and political injustices faced by the migrants in this study and demonstrated how these injustices became obstacles to successful integration in Johannesburg. The study used Nancy Fraser's social justice framework to decipher the injustices associated with human rights and migration. A systematic review of the literature revealed a growing tendency to construct and manufacture migration crises when these were non-existent. This study, therefore, employed a compassionate and humanitarian view of migration to highlight the injustices suffered by Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg. It used in-depth interviews with 16 (eight males and eight females) Zimbabwean migrants and six key informants whose responsibilities related to migration. The key informants came from health, social work, and legal backgrounds. The findings revealed that documentation was a pressing challenge for all the migrants, with undocumented migrants being the worst affected. Undocumented migrants in this study endured poverty and destitution, were constantly harassed by corrupt public officials, and lived on the periphery and in the shadows of South African society. All the

migrants experienced prejudice and discrimination, extreme levels of xenophobia, and lacked representation, while others were excluded by their inability to speak indigenous South African languages. Nevertheless, the migrants exhibited resilience bolstered by their social and kinship ties, which enabled them to survive in Johannesburg. The study proposed realistic remedies to improve migrant lives in Johannesburg including the introduction of regional passports and removal of visa requirements; establishment of migrant-friendly resource centres; reframing migration discourse; fostering migrant entrepreneurship; and promoting migrant representation.