

## **Making Life Liveable in an Informal Market**

### **Infrastructures of Friendship amongst Migrant Street Traders in Durban, South Africa**

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■ **ABSTRACT:** African migrants working in street trading business in Durban, South Africa often face xenophobia and must navigate policies regulating the informal economy. However, they sustain livelihoods in urban markets through building friendships while maintaining transnational connections back home. Based on qualitative research conducted in 2019 and 2021 with thirty street traders from Senegal, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Malawi at the Workshop Flea Market in Durban, the article interrogates the way in which friendship and conviviality emerge in informal market spaces. Building on AbdouMaliq Simone's concept of "people as infrastructure," we show how migrant street traders in the Workshop Market invest in the urban collective, while locally and transnationally connected through economic and affective exchanges.

■ **KEYWORDS:** conviviality, friendship, informal economy, migrant infrastructure, migrant street traders, South Africa, transnationalism

The Workshop Flea Market is one of the busiest open trading markets for migrant street traders in Durban, a diverse port city on the eastern coast of South Africa. The unassuming workshop courtyard comes to life every morning with a vibrancy of colors, mostly from the tarpaulin covers atop the gazebos, transforming the market into a bright maze. Situated in the inner city next to the municipal bus terminals and taxi ranks, the market is accessible to flows of people traveling to various destinations in and around the municipality.

At the Workshop Flea Market, "Lucky," a 39-year-old street trader who holds dual citizenship from Senegal and The Gambia, arrives regularly in the morning and can be seen meticulously setting up a street trading structure made from two gazebos. A pile of sports shoes for sale had lost their color due to exposure to Durban's unforgiving scorching sun day after day. Leaning behind a pile of shoes and looking for a pair of Vans to fit a customer, Lucky explained that, like many migrant traders, when he arrived in Durban he "thought it would be easy to start-up a business." However, he faced multiple challenges, including, he lamented, that "I am from The Gambia and I could not communicate using local languages, and the market was dominated by Indians and Whites." Lucky narrated the recent changes in these urban spaces of informal business, where newcomers continually arrive, move through, and settle into the marketplace, forging connections and friendships. "It is different now," he explains, "because there is a balance between Nigerian, Senegalese, and South African street traders who own enterprises in the market."



When he was starting out, Lucky was helped by a South African trader named Vusi, a native of Durban who owned a flat in the Central Business District. Lucky affectionately explained that in his first few years in South Africa, Vusi became his “brother.” Vusi taught Lucky IsiZulu, which provided him with a sense of belonging, as it was widely spoken by the locals in the city. Vusi also welcomed Lucky into his home where he lived together with his wife. Lucky explained:

To secure a trading spot, he became my street trading proxy. Later on, when foreigners were accepted by the municipality, I registered this stall under my name. Street trading is not easy for many brothers because there are many things we deal with, such as people not accepting us, but business is business. We learn to respect each other as brothers. We help each other to face the challenges imposed by the city or people.

This article interrogates the locally embedded and transnationally connected “infrastructures” that allow and sustain friendship-making and conviviality among African migrant street traders of different nationalities such as Lucky, and also between migrants and South Africans in the informal economic and social spaces of the market. We build on AbdouMaliq Simone’s (2004: 407–419) concept of “people as infrastructure” to show how “residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life” engage in forms of “economic collaboration” and “generate concrete acts and contexts of social collaboration.” We add to recent reflections on the instrumental yet also affective way friendships shape migrant “communities of convenience” (Kathiravelu 2013; Landau 2017) and allow for a sense of urban belonging and liveability (Bunnell and Kathiravelu 2016). Despite the burden of “obligations” that may avert migrants from forging friendships in a new city (Landau 2017; Kathiravelu and Bunnell 2018), narratives and ethnographic research from the informal spaces of migrant business in Durban revealed that convivial relationships, such as those between Lucky and Vusi or between other migrants, allows for the imagining of futures. Migrant street traders may embody Francis Nyamnjoh’s definition of conviviality for “frontier Africans” (F. Nyamnjoh 2017: 259) who “contest taken for granted and often institutionalized and bounded ideas and practices of being, becoming, belonging, places and spaces” and rather produce “spaces for social reinvention” (F. Nyamnjoh 2017: 264). Thus, rather than navigating “friendship fears” due to their orientation toward multiple “elsewheres” (Landau 2017), the migrants in the Workshop Flea Market invest in the urban collective, wherein the “elsewheres” are intimately and transnationally tied together with the “here” through economic and affective exchanges and investments.

## **Migration and Informal Street Trading at Durban’s Workshop Market**

African mobility is highest between countries within the continent, with social transformations motivating migrant aspirations (Awumbila 2017; Flahaux and De Haas 2016). Since the end of apartheid in 1994, migration to South Africa from beyond the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has increased, and growing urban spaces in African cities have become what Loren Landau (2014:361) has termed “estuaries”—heterogenous “meeting places of multiple human flows that remain largely unregulated by states or dominant social institutions.”

A large number of migrants in South African cities turn to the informal economy for their survival and to build livelihoods. However, street trading markets in South African cities have been spaces where migrants regularly endure xenophobic attacks, lack of support from police, and constant insecurity (Crush and Ramachandran 2015; Crush et al. 2017; Moyo et. al. 2018; Rogerson 2016; Zack 2015). Such xenophobic attacks are often legitimated by local political leaders enhancing the “opportunistic” aspects of the violence (Crush and Ramachandran 2015).

However, despite xenophobia, migrant entrepreneurship has still grown in urban spaces (Pineteh 2017; Pineteh and Mulu 2020; Tevera 2013). Ernest Pineteh's study of Somali shopkeepers in South African townships shows in a similar sense how often community resistance and resilience in the face of xenophobia "fostered stronger bonds, business networks and a collective identity, which give them better control over these spaces" (Pineteh 2017: 134). Migrant street traders in South Africa often build friendship networks for financial and other forms of support and often employ South Africans as they work to overcome language and other barriers (Tengeh 2015). Andrew Charman and Lief Petersen (2015: 80-94) propose that many xenophobic outbreaks have been "geographically bounded" and examples do exist where South Africans are "accommodating" to migrants, where local relationships are motivated by "respectability."

Since the mid-1990s, downtown Durban has experienced a visible influx of migrant street traders and the growth of informality (Devries 2018; Moyo and Gumbo 2021); in response, the city has aimed to address inequality and create a "liveable" and a "sustainable" city for the future (Sutherland et al. 2018). Research by Ndumiso Sidzane and Pranitha Maharaj (2013) almost a decade ago on street trading at Durban's Workshop Market, the site of the research in this article, found that, despite a few incidents where local traders referred to migrant traders as criminals who reduce the prices on goods, such lamentations did not incite violence or hostility within the market. Shahid Vawda (2017: 63) writes that migrant street traders in Durban found their customer base composed of "good people" as opposed to the experiences of hostility from the police and local government. In this sense, we interrogate how migrants in Durban work around the challenges posed by xenophobia, paperwork and "ontological insecurity" (H. Nyamnjoh 2017), through convivial and social engagements embedded in their business practices.

This article draws from interviews and ethnographic observation of the day-to-day work of over thirty migrant street traders from Senegal, Nigeria, The Gambia, and Malawi in Durban's Workshop market from 2018–2019, with follow-up interviews in 2021. The research did not initially set out to explore friendships and conviviality, but aimed to understand how street trading helped sustain migrant livelihoods in Durban, exploring the role of social capital. The research was conducted at a time of heightened xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg and Pretoria in which some migrant street traders had been killed or forcibly removed from their businesses. As a Black South African researcher, Mbatha had to navigate her own positionality; while interviewing a group of Senegalese traders in 2018, one man asked her whether she listened to the news: "Do you know what your brothers and sisters are doing? They are killing our brothers and sisters in Johannesburg," he said. A year later, the market temporarily closed due to COVID-19. Upon arriving at the Workshop Flea Market in 2021 for follow-up interviews, migrant street traders had still not returned; at the time, political groups had made renewed xenophobic threats and were opposed to foreign nationals occupying the market spaces (Erasmus 2021). Something was amiss, as it lacked the vibrancy and dynamism and one could not find the unique goods that usually are sold by migrants. This study highlights the infrastructure of collective life that enables the "endurance" to return after spending time away from the market to escape xenophobia. Therefore, as we will show, such "infrastructures" provide a space where convivial encounters may "pursue repair" (Simone 2021: 1345).

## Friendship and Conviviality in Urban Spaces

Informal street business provides an urban space for migrants to socialize, share knowledge, and support and learn from each other. These economic and social networking practices of migrants who are navigating and inhabiting urban informal markets to build livelihoods are

defined by Camilla Ravnbøl, Trine Korsby and Anja Simonsen (2023: 5) as “transnational street business.” The narratives of migrant street traders presented here offer insights into how friendship-making as a “transnational street business” practice shapes notions of liveability in the informal business space of Durban.

Laavanya Kathiravelu and Tim Bunnell (2018) argue that, rather than the term “social capital,” the notion of friendship allows us to better understand the affective and emotional aspects of relationships and social bonds. However, friendship can also be contradictory; Jane Dyson’s (2010: 484) review of the literature on friendship discusses how it has been shown as a means of “empowerment” for marginalized groups or in other work as site of “unequal social production.” Friendship does not necessarily indicate continual harmony and can be “tentative” and “fragile” due to disappointments and loss of trust that occurs, especially “in contexts of precarity” (Amrith 2016: 8). Among urban migrants, friendship may take on specific meanings. Robertson (2018: 7) describes how “translocal subjectivities are contested and negotiated” in the friendship interactions of migrant students in Australia, and are often based on “connections or reconnections around shared interests and shared spaces.” Kathiravelu’s (2013: 12) description of friendship elucidates “communities of convenience,” which interrogates “both the convivial communitarian aspect, as well as the utilitarian uses to which urban ties lend themselves.”

In South Africa, even within diasporic communities such as Cameroonians in Johannesburg, social, ethnic, political, and class distinctions may interrupt attempts at forming cohesive community associations (Pineteh 2017). Hungwe’s (2014: 126) research on the social capital of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg further demonstrates that while migrants can connect and find information, often they remain within the boundaries of church and ethnic networks, which may not expose them “to a different reality” outside of their own community. Landau’s (2017) notion of “friendship fears” describes the kinds of burdens that migrants may avoid in the mobile spaces of African cities where they may be in transit. He argues that the “fluidity” of the city, where migrants may avoid kin or try to be invisible due to “desires for onward movement or return,” to “minimize local obligation,” or to avoid confronting “failure,” reveals how social networks and friendship can be “counterproductive” for migrants (Landau 2017: 7-8). Migrants have to navigate what Landau (2021: 664) refers to as “temporal-spatial infrastructures” between migrants and “hosts,” and thus they often “alienate in preparation for a life and recognition in a potentially elusive elsewhere” (Landau 2021: 664). Whereas Landau (2017: 2) focuses on the “transience” of migrants in Johannesburg, where “rooting and local intimacy may be neither possible nor, more importantly, desirable,” the Workshop Market is rather a business space where multiple and enduring connections may deepen, often based on the transnational and local economic and social worlds of street trading. Migrant street traders rely on the care and support of local friendships with both South Africans and other migrants in the marketplace and in Durban itself, as well on their transnational connections.

This brings us to the concept of conviviality, which has been drawn upon in literature on migrant social spaces, especially in South Africa. Amanda Wise and Greg Noble have rightly critiqued the glossing over of the term conviviality to merely denote “happy togetherness,” while neglecting the “reproduction of power” (Wise and Noble 2016: 425) and temporal framing. Kathiravelu (2013:15) has described conviviality through friendship as “a ritualized form of the capacity to appreciate living with and in diversity.” We draw in particular from Francis Nyamnjoh’s (2017) deepened discussion of what “conviviality” may mean in the African context: the “recognition and provision for the fact or reality of being incomplete” and thus being “opened in our articulation of identities” often in precarious inner-city spaces (F. Nyamnjoh 2017: 262). Conviviality may arise out of a “resolution of frictions” that can be “negotiated into meaningful relationships” and also “facilitate mutual interests between individuals” (Nyamnjoh and

Brudvig 2014: 341). We highlight Francis Nyamnjoh's (2017: 258) concept of "frontier Africans" to argue that migrants in the Workshop Market "constantly seek to bridge various divides in the interest of the imperatives of living interconnections, nuances and complexities made possible or exacerbated by the evidence of mobilities and encounters." African migrants may also actively engage with South Africans through the sharing of cultural and culinary practices as well as "embodied performances" through which friendships have been built (Murara 2020), or through forms of "ordinary" intimacy and "xenophilia" (Owen 2016) between South Africans and other African migrant groups. Henrietta Nyamnjoh (2017: 242) argues that conviviality for Cameroonians in Cape Town is prioritized over "individuality," leading to "interconnections and interdependencies of relationships that are woven in their ontological security, personhood and everyday lives to reduce vulnerability." Forging interdependencies underlies our discussion of the infrastructures that allow for investment in friendships in Durban's informal market spaces.

To organize these conceptual debates on convivial friendship, we further build them into Simone's (2004) concept of "people as infrastructure" to understand how migrants adapt to and interact in urban settings. Simone refers to infrastructure beyond material and physical space to include the "conjunction" between "complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices." Drawing from Lefebvre's notion of "space" the concept of infrastructure helps to describe urban "modes of organization at various and interlocking scales" (Simone 2004: 411). Suzanne Hall and colleagues (2017: 4) further propose the notion of "migrant infrastructure" to describe the way the street markets are connected to global flows of mobility, as a "consortium of aesthetics, affinities, goods and ideas connected to wider geographies." Migrant infrastructure connects remittances and transnational flows and negotiations, which also rely on "trust" and "reliability" (Cirolia et al. 2021: 8). Infrastructures emerge both materially and across social scales, allowing for a deeper understanding of the transnational aspects of urban desires and sociality (Korsby 2017, drawing from Harvey 2017). In South Africa, "porous infrastructures" of informality in market spaces for migrants in Cape Town's Bellville reveal the "politics of spatial access," which, "in turn, narrate the way social spaces are scaled" (Tayob 2019: 54).

Friendship infrastructures that emerge in street trading involve interconnected relations both local and transnational, some of which are new while others are enduring, and which are built with convivial encounters with others. This also helps us to understand how certain localized and informal spaces in a city can become a solidary space for migrants (Bauder 2021; Bunnell and Kathiravelu 2016; Darling 2011). "Solidarity" emerges in a "sphere of informality" (Kathiravelu 2012: 107), and we follow Bauder's (2020:1076) description of migrant solidarity as "a productive and inventive practice that. . . provides opportunities to rethink ways of belonging." A "culture of hospitality" (Bunnell and Kathiravelu 2016) is able to flourish in the business space of the market, where small talk, sharing of food, reciprocity, and ideas can be exchanged. In South Africa, Pragna Rugunanan (2022) has similarly termed bonds between precarious migrants as "instrumental and contingent solidarities" that emerge out of necessity and collaboration in facing challenges of xenophobia and insecurity. Vawda's (2017: 33) research on the entrepreneurial activities and tactics of Muslim Senegalese and Malawians in Durban shows how religion may provide a "basis for social interaction and solidarity, rather than seen as instrumental in the making and perhaps unmaking of social life."

Indeed, the informality of these spaces allows for affective and material investments to flow and circulate, making "life liveable." Thus we agree with Bunnell and Kathiravelu's (2016: 202) emphasis on the need to "reconceptualise liveability for less elite-centred policy agendas," to rather focus on the "role that intimate social relations such as friendships play in making cities liveable." In this case, friendships help migrants to "get by" or endure, to find protection, to

imagine their future, and to build diverse communities upon which they can rely in the space of informal business. The informal space of the market allows migrants to build their businesses and establish their friendships over time, building “relentless collisions between human situatedness, human endeavor, and the inheritance of resourced realities” (Simone 2021: 1343).

### **Building Friendship Infrastructures in the Informal Market**

These “resourced realities” (Simone 2021: 1343) may describe the way migrants built their businesses with the help of South Africans. Michael, a street trader from Malawi, was putting up his gazebo when he explained how his business was handed down to him by the previous owner, a South African from Durban, whom he had “met through a friend.” He narrated, “We sold clothes, shoes, and bags at the time and it was so busy. He showed me the ropes of the business, and I learned a lot from him.” Michael explained:

You see the problem here is that the people hired by the municipality do not understand how we as foreigners are eligible for the rights to trade and get the spaces. Sometimes they are quick to confiscate because they think [in] the space we are given, we always use South African proxies.

Michael’s boss had initially hired him to run errands around the market; at the time there were no trolley pushers, and he used to carry the stock from the car to the center of the market where they ran the business. Closer to the owner’s retirement, Michael found himself spending more time at the market on his own. Every day he would sell items, submit income, and schedule his days for buying stock. He felt that it was an elevation from being an “errand boy.” After working together for a number of years, the owner then eventually sold the business to Michael through monthly instalments. The previous owner also helped Michael with the paperwork:

One day he told me that he needed to retire and stay at home, and he asked me if I could manage. For about two to three years, I managed the business on his behalf. Mind you all the papers [municipal contract lease] were his. Back then there were not so many migrant street traders because it was hard for the municipality to approve for people like us.

Michael’s narrative demonstrates the instrumental yet affective aspect of the social worlds of the market and the “communities of convenience” (Kathiravelu 2013; Landau 2017) that underlie the friendships. Based on this notion, while a power relationship initially existed between “owner” and “errand boy,” this transformed over time as the owner relinquished the business to Michael, and as Michael became more experienced, it allowed for the owner to retire and earn income. Michael spoke of their relationship with fondness, and was proud that the owner would have the trust to allow him to pay in instalments. Running his own business also helped elevate Michael’s status in the market; as he said, “I was the first Malawian to own around here.” The friendship was enabled by the growing autonomy Michael experienced as their relationship became more equal. Michael shared: “If you look around, these young guys [Malawians] work. For me this business is a lot. I feel like I have achieved something because being a foreigner in this country is not easy. But I have a life of my own like everyone else.” This allowed him to perform and imagine a new identity within the market place. In addition to business transactions, the intimate aspects of friendships between the migrant street traders with local or other migrants could be seen during off-peak times as they sat around the market, talking about life and joking around. In between selling, traders would spend time outside of their gazebos to socialize, catch up with each other on what is happening in the market, or even gossip.

## Infrastructures of Here and Elsewhere

Lucky, the street trader introduced at the beginning of this article, started street trading because it was the only business he knew and had learned; when he was younger his family migrated from Senegal to The Gambia, where he learned street trading from his parents. After finishing school, he returned to Senegal and attended business school at college level. During his time at college, he learned that there were Senegalese “brothers” who were moving into South Africa to start businesses. South Africa was presented to him as a land of opportunities; as he exclaimed, “everyone was coming here.” The Senegalese brotherhood is a transnational “community” (Diouf 2000) which enables a migrant street trader to live a life “here” (in South Africa) and “there” (in Senegal). The brotherhood facilitates knowledge of business, trading tactics, and the migration process. Bruce Riccio (2004: 937–938) describes the Senegalese brotherhood as crucial in “maintaining transnational identity,” providing migrants with “spiritual and ideological points of reference.”

Lucky is part of this “brotherhood,” and he conveyed that in the brotherhood, one’s success is centered around work. He has maintained his transnational ties with members of the brotherhood in Senegal and The Gambia throughout the years as a street trader by being actively involved in sharing information and assisting young Senegalese street traders in setting up businesses in South Africa. Lucky gave his brother from The Gambia a share of business, which allowed them both to remit money to their parents and family. Across from where Lucky was selling athleisure clothes, his brother from The Gambia and Moses from Malawi operated another street trading enterprise. In this “infrastructure,” Senegalese migrant street traders have a distinctive relationship with Malawian migrant street traders who work for them. Lucky explained: “I asked my brother to come and help me and to give him training so he can be able to start his own business. They [pointing at Moses] need to learn the business from me if they want to be successful. The brothers here also use me as a business teacher.” Lucky continued, “I am also teaching how to be a better street trader. In case I am not here, he can work on his own and fully understand the business.”

The Senegalese street-trader networks advocate businesses practices instituted by the brotherhood. They portrayed themselves as valuing competency; one becomes a fully-fledged street trader once the group has faith in their skills and that a trader can “double the money.” A street trading business is regarded as successful by other migrant street traders if it can avoid unnecessary economic losses and the trader is able to generate enough profit to economically support themselves, send remittances, and buy stock. Lucky explained the role of a business teacher in becoming a street trader:

My sister, if I give you R15,000 how do you make it R100,000? Money must grow—you must not lose it. Do you think, how do the brothers here learn to operate this business? For us from Senegal, the younger ones learn the trades from us and take over once they are ready. We are not in the business of losing money. I know people think of us as rich. We are not—it’s just that we learn how to multiply money.

“Multiplying money” was a collective endeavor and required transnational and local connections. Lucky’s statements reflect the idea that they are “incomplete” without brotherhoods, and success is a collective effort. While these may be described as networks, we emphasize friendship and conviviality for the necessary layer of reciprocity and care it brings. Lucky seemed to enjoy the role of “business teacher” and managed to build social worlds out from the brotherhood into forming new friendships.

The informal market is also a transnational space, and the “multiple elsewheres” to which migrants orient themselves are a part of the friendship infrastructures. Often migrant street

trading is “embedded in complex procurement and value chains that extend beyond South Africa” (Gastrow and Amit 2015: 160). Migrant street trading relies on economic and social practices, transnationally circulating information and care exchanges, including financial and “social remittances” that tie migrants to their countries of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). While social obligation and moral economies of status and prestige may shape the dynamics of remittance sending (Kankonde 2010; Dzingirai et al. 2014), cultural norms of “generosity” and “reciprocity” within the migrant community provide not only a “means of transferring information and resources” but also “sanctuary. . . and a refuge from the difficulties of daily life” (Vasta and Kandilige 2010: 591). “Transnational street business” (Ravnbøl, Korsby and Simonsen 2023) in this case operates both “here and elsewhere,” where migrants converse, spend time together, joke, and work together in the local market while orienting their business practices through transnational points of reference. Convivial encounters between migrants show how street trading is not only about profitability but also about finding ways of making life liveable.

### **Religious Spaces of Migrant Sociality and Conviviality**

Islam is one of the commonly practiced religions in Durban, and the market is within close proximity to several mosques, including The Heritage Mosque Masjid Maryam. Friendship among Muslims in shared urban spaces acts as a modality of liveability and belonging (Vawda 2017), and the Senegalese street traders also spoke about being connected to their faith. Every Friday, Durbanites know that Muslim businesses close between 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm to accommodate the hour of prayer. Senegalese Muslims who went for prayer left the care of their businesses to South Africans, Malawians, and Nigerians. While Senegalese and Malawian migrant street traders are Muslims, it was observed that the Malawian traders did not go for prayers at 1:00 p.m. Vawda (2017) explains that Malawians practice their Muslim faith in Marianhill, where there is a large Malawian community. To enable Senegalese traders to perform their religious practices, they have developed trust and shared spaces of tolerance.

When asked how they manage competition, because it seems apparent that they all sell similar clothing, Lucky started to talk about respect and Tawbah, which is a multi-layered term that can be translated as “repentance of sins.” He explained: “Tawbah teaches me to respect my brothers and other people—I cannot do wrong to them. We as brothers—we teach each other respect and how to handle difficult customers. In this business respect is very important for success.” The friendships between Senegalese and with other groups emerged through tolerance and religious connections and helped maintain peace in the market. This discussion of brotherhood and relationships in the market is based on the foundations of the Mouride Brotherhood and to preserve the memory of Touba: a “place where the Murid memory and *imaginaire* were elaborated, the place where their economic, social, architectural, and cultural successes were inscribed” (Diouf 2000: 688). As Lucky puts it, “Touba is all around us.”

### **“Raising Obamas”: Friendships and Legacies Across Here and Elsewhere**

Another migrant street trader, Leo, a welcoming Senegalese street trader above the age of fifty, also shared the way new and young Senegalese street traders still need to learn all about the trading business. Many of the owners of the businesses had returned to Senegal or act as managers. Leo explained that he worked for his family, and that “sometimes it can be difficult.”



Regarding xenophobia, he shared, “many South Africans don’t like us, but if they are not willing to learn the ropes of this business what can we do? Chasing us does not help. We are raising Obamas.” Mbatha asked him what he meant by “Obamas.” It was then he explained:

For many of us here, our children are born in South Africa, like this one [pointing to a baby that he held in his arms]. It is important that we teach our children not only about where we come from but how to run a business—a successful one—should they choose otherwise. The South African government is not making it easier for young people to find jobs, but as long as our families are able to run such a business, we will be fine. We travelled from far, but our children will carry our legacy, just as Obama has for Kenya.

This comment was striking in that it reflected the imagination of a legacy of a successful African migration. The “Obamas” that Leo describes will have access to Senegalese brotherhood, and will also be mentored and trained by the successful Mouride businessmen who will provide them with a trade network, which can stretch as far as Dakar (Golub and Hansen-Lewis 2012). The comment about raising “Obamas” thus touches on what friendship infrastructures can do: the Workshop Market was a space of teaching and sharing, affective and material exchanges, and the building of trust and legacies. In this way, migrants were invested in the friendships because they knew their time in Durban was not fleeting. Rather, they held onto hope through the creation of generational legacies. Furthermore, this discussion about Obamas had emerged after a conversation about xenophobia; the friendship infrastructures were being continually built upon, and migrants relied on enduring friendships and conviviality in the face of precarity.

Other migrants also wished to remain in South Africa and were emotionally and economically invested in the market space. We offer another example of David, a Nigerian street trader who has lived in Durban for over twenty years and who also once had the opportunity of being the chairman of the market. He arrived in South Africa right after the end of apartheid in 1994 and prides himself for being one of the first Nigerians who settled in Durban. Unlike some of the other West African migrant street traders, such as Lucky, Durban was David’s first choice of destination. After unpacking, he sat at a municipal bench next to his gazebo. He reflected:

I have been here for over twenty years, and I have known many guys, especially those that have left. The market plays a huge role in each of us as we are able to help each other and talk about problems we cannot shy away from, such as harassment, and if a brother needs help financially or something we help.

The narratives of David and Leo show how the emotional and material investments in friendship arise out of a need for stability, protection, and social connection, rather than as transient encounters or transactions.

### **The Dynamics of Making a Life “Less Brutal”**

The way migrants relied on and trusted each other and other South Africans shaped the everyday rhythms and exchanges that helped make life more secure and liveable. Traders relied on each other for informal support and day to day business practices. To illustrate, when Mbatha arrived in the market one morning to meet David, the aforementioned trader from Nigeria, he was not there. A nearby group of South African street traders asserted that David would arrive after 9:00 a.m., because “that’s the time he usually starts working.” They knew each other’s work timings and worked together. When David arrived, another street trader exclaimed, “I told you

he would come.” Everyone had been taking turns in looking after David’s stock, which had been left by a trolley pusher. Building trust and affective communities of care are also vital for the generation and sustainability of a liveable future, at once both transnational and local.

Migrant and friendship infrastructures were also built around everyday exchanges. While Michael unpacked his goods, a mobile Nigerian food street trader came by and Michael gave him his lunch order. Michael explained, “we don’t have to go to places like Point to buy Nigerian food. We support these guys and they support us.” The connections between the retail migrant street traders with the trolley pushers and those that sold lunch in the market became apparent. David explained that he could not carry his goods to storage. Like everyone else, he relied on trolley pushers whom he trusted for collecting and delivering his goods on time. These friendships that exist in the marketplace allow them to re-create an African identity (Okolie-Osemene 2022), potentially demonstrating how street trading is socialized action. These features resonate with Tamuka Chekero and Sharon Morreira’s (2020) discussion of “personhood,” where notions of friendship are often localized and focus on interconnections and social cohesion. Conviviality embraces this notion of personhood; we refer to the South African saying of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (“I am because you are”); As F. Nyamnjoh (2018) explains, this notion implies that without the “other” we are “incomplete.”

A liveable life also was contingent on the social engagements upon which security and trust were built. For example, the market chairperson, who is a South African, could often be found playing a game of pool with other street traders in the market, which was one of many instances observed of South Africans and migrant traders socializing and passing the time together. He also offered some sense of protection to the traders in the market, due to his knowledge of the dynamics of the market. During research, the chairperson also assisted in introducing the migrant street traders to Mbatha.

In this way the notion of a “liveable” space emerges. As Leo explained, although he had a street trading business in Johannesburg and then Brits, he moved to Durban “to do something different.” Durban was a more “liveable” city; in his words, it was not as “brutal.” He explained: “Durban is not as brutal to the brothers as Johannesburg. Our businesses are doing very well this side. I know people think we are rich, but we are not. We are working for our families.”

## **Conclusion: Friendship Infrastructures Make Life Liveable**

The concept of “people as infrastructure” (Simone 2004; Simone 2021) elaborates a conjunction where social transactions and negotiations take place and livelihoods are constructed in order to endure precarity and make life liveable. In the Workshop Market, the conversations and interactions between traders showed that many of the migrants relied on each other to get by and developed friendships in the marketplace. Sometimes these friendships grew out of religious affiliation, other times due to the convenience of the marketplace and the need for security. Such friendships and conviviality emerge from what may seem as mere instrumental transactions: the business relations, training, customer recommendations, exchange of stock, and being able to help in business during absences, such as prayer hours. However, the narratives and interactions reveal how migrants also maneuver and act on multiple moments of conviviality, especially in the absence of other rights and protections. We have followed Kathiravelu and Bunnell’s (2018) focus on “friendship” and Francis Nyamnjoh’s (2017) notion of “frontier Africans” as a way to describe the emotional and intimate forms of care that go alongside the economic practices. The term “frontier Africans” (F. Nyamnjoh 2017) acknowledges the uncertainties of migrant life, which compels them to reach out. Considering their experiences of xenophobia, migrant

infrastructures and their economic investments open spaces for the enduring connections and solidarities to be forged.

While attuned to Bunnell and Kathiravelu's (2016) critique of narratives regarding migrants working to merely make life "bearable," we find "liveable" to be a term that demonstrates how marginalized migrant groups can choose to navigate Durban's possibilities. Liveability in the informal place of street trading involves waiting while hoping for the future (Mbatha and Koskimaki 2021), as well as finding a space "less brutal" through hanging out, affective and reciprocal interactions, care and cooperation. Despite the presence of xenophobia, in such informal spaces in Durban one can locate convivial friendships not only among migrants but with South Africans as well. Although some urban migrants may avoid or be unable to sustain connections, the narratives we have presented show how often the friendships in Durban market become those which allow for trust and enduring success. Friendship infrastructures among migrant groups are built on and simultaneously ease the burden of being both "here" and "there." The informal space of transnational street trading thus fosters being "open-ended" in their "articulation of identities" (F. Nyamnjoh 2017: 262). This "infrastructure" of friendship is built from working side by side and through solidarity and gestures of shared personhood, as migrants work to build family and work legacies to make life, and their futures, liveable.

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