



# Low-income African migrant women and social exclusion in South Africa

J Mafukidze and V. Mbanda  
Paper presented at HSRC 2009 Conference

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# Presentation layout

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- **Research questions**
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- **Findings and discussion**
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# Introduction

- This paper came out of a larger study on African Migrants in South Africa carried out by the co-author in 2007.
- The objective of that study was to understand how migrants gain entry into South African socio-economic space, the challenges they encounter and how they resolve them, and whether they intend to settle permanently or not and if and how they send remittances back home
- The aim of this paper is specifically to look at how low-income African migrant women negotiate their socio-economic lives in South Africa
- The paper is premised on the understanding that migrant women encounter gender specific challenges posed by **individual actors, social structures and institutions** and that they play active roles in resolving them hence it sets out to collect narratives of how that **agency** plays itself out in daily existence.

# Introduction cont: background

## Background

- The study of women as independent migrants began to gain prominence a few decades ago as it became apparent that their movement had significant economic and social effects at both sending and destination sites
- Prior to then women featured as migrants **accompanying** or joining spouses or as **victims** of human trafficking
- But women are gaining prominence as migrants at a time when migration is globally negatively projected. Global powers are advocating for the containment of refugees in **regions of origin**. Other destinations such as SA already feel flooded by migrants due to high unemployment whose negative effects are exacerbated by the global eco crisis.

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# Introduction cont: background cont

- The perceived flooding concomitantly triggers a rise in negative attitudes towards migration by hosts who want to protect their jobs and social space
- This study therefore focuses on understanding how migrant women of different age groups and nationality who migrate for various reasons equipped with different skills and commanding limited resources negotiate for social and eco space and structure their livelihoods in a context characterised by a measure negativity



# Research questions

## Research questions

- The study was guided by two important questions:
  - How do low-income migrant women construct and understand their survival strategies in South Africa
  - What does it tell us about their understanding of themselves and their context

# Methodology

## Case study method

- Two areas Pretoria and Thohoyandou were chosen with intent to understand how locality affected migrant livelihoods
- Pretoria represented large metros while Thohoyandou represented peripheral urban settlements whose life draws much from surrounding rural areas
- 70 female respondents were identified largely through snowballing and were deliberately chosen to ensure that varying nationalities, ages and other aspects were covered
- Structured and unstructured interviews and observation were data collection techniques used
- Thematic analytical method was used for data analysis

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# Methodology cont.

## Definition of terms

- ***Social exclusion:*** for this study implies the shutting out of one person or by another (institutions) which leads to constrained or no access to material and social space (Giddens 2006, Todman 2004).
- Social exclusion could also result from an actor's failures such as failing to fulfil legal obligations (Giddens 2006). In this study we analyse how and where migrants are shut out and where they are allowed entry into socio-economic space and how they respond.



# Findings and Discussion

## **Four prominent forms of exclusion**

- Lack of institutional support as a form of exclusion
- minorisation
- legality
- Age preference

# Findings and Discussion cont.

## **Lack of institutional support**

- Our findings indicate that 21 of 70 respondents were refugees who would have preferred to study rather than engage in eco activities
- However SADC, AU and the UN offered them no institutional support in SA
- Lack of support leads to economic marginalisation
- As a response they look for jobs or set up small ventures of their own
- But due to desperation some tend to take up menial jobs in peripheral and insecure envts.
- They choose not to down and attract sympathy as objects of pity but strive to better their lived reality

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# Findings and Discussion cont.

## Minorisation as a form of exclusion

- Our findings suggest that migrant women find themselves working in the agric sector (Thohoyandou) and in restaurants (Pretoria) because this is where entry is relatively easy and employers prefer them over men and hosts
- These sectors are notorious for long working hours and poor remuneration
- Migrant women are considered hardworking and easy to lead (agric) and honest, loyal, hardworking, “nice” to clients who are largely male and easy to train due to their edu. background (restaurants) hence preferred.
- Women who are trained as teachers and nurses find themselves washing dishes
- However to many of them regard these peripheral jobs as an important **stepping stone** that also takes care of immediate needs

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# Findings and Discussion cont.

## **Legality as an unintended institutionalised form of eco exclusion**

- Findings suggest that possession of legal documents influences where the women seek employment
- As already noted undocumented women seek invisibility so they take peripheral jobs in marginal areas (men too) e.g. as maids, agric workers, waiters etc.
- Poorer, lowly edu an less connected women hardly ever get work permits
- They are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men offering security and shelter and institutions such as Home Affairs and police

# Findings and Discussion cont.

- Employers, ordinary people and state institutions abuse illegal women well knowing that they are afraid of approaching the police for help and lack resources for instituting legal recourse
- Therefore the women are exploited and excluded from both social and economic space
- However institutionalised exclusion is should not be seen as intentional victimisation of foreigners but an attempt towards inclusion and protection of citizens and desired migrants which incidentally excludes the weak while supporting the strong
- Solution: women apply for asylum, forge documents, engage in marriage of convenience and have relationships with marriage men both migrant and host. They also form support groups for emotional and financial support

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# Findings and Discussion cont.

## Age and child rearing as causes

- Findings suggest that older women struggle to get jobs as first time employees (“*magogo* go home” – employers say. Age preferences therefore exclude them
- Women who have young children find it difficult to take up full-time low paying jobs coz they need to take care of their children and cannot afford a maid.
- Male partners also encourage women to look after children while offering financial support
- Women are therefore excluded by socially constructed child rearing gender roles
- Solution: some turn to buying and selling or other forms of self-employment for flexibility others repatriate their child

# Findings and Discussion cont.

## Conclusion

- Both institutional and diffuse forms of gendered exclusion expose women to insecurity, vulnerability, and exploitation.
- Lack of attention to causes of migration prejudices some women as poor women are treated as one homogenous group of employment seekers
- Women do not claim victimhood but
- ✓ Create employment
- ✓ Find solutions to problems of documentation
- ✓ Some exploit male exploiters
- ✓ Understand the importance of menial jobs as a stepping stone

# Recommendations

## 3. Recommendations

- There is need for sensitivity at policy level to the plight of migrant women esp. those accompanied by young children
- Regional and global institutions should be encouraged to assist refugees and asylum seekers especially those living outside holding camps
- Migrants should be given a temporary right to work especially after spending many years in the country

**THANK YOU!**

**September 2009**

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