

Abstract

With the worsening political and socio-economic climate of Zimbabwe, migration to South Africa continues unabated. Research has already proven that migration is a result of many push and pull factors. The prospect to improve one's life and that of one's kin remains a key motivation for migration. What needs to be clearly articulated, in so far as Zimbabwean migration to South Africa is concerned, is the level of economic stability of Zimbabwean workers within the South African job market. This is the aspect addressed in this article, which contends that most of the Zimbabwean migrant workers in Johannesburg, South Africa are employed in career-less and unstable jobs that are precarious. While precariousness exists everywhere, and in varying levels, I argue that the migrant status is a devalued identity that leads to exclusion from certain basic rights at work and worsens the situation for most unskilled and semi-skilled Zimbabweans. Zimbabwean workers possess certain characteristics that both create advantages and disadvantages for them as they interact with employers. Employers know this fully well and capitalise on these characteristics, especially the lack of documentation needed to work and stay in South Africa.

The precarious nature of Zimbabwean migrants is an outcome of a combination of various factors which are: a very strict migration legal framework, institutionalised xenophobia, capitalists whose interests are in lowering labour costs and thus go for cheap Zimbabwean labourers, desperate Zimbabwean workers who would accept anything offered because it is believed to be far much better than what they would receive 'back home' and a sending government (Zimbabwean) which does not seem to care enough about the situation of migrants who are mainly viewed negatively for having left the country in the first place. The precariousness of Zimbabwean migrants is both as much a product as it is also a factor of a vicious cycle of precariousness. The intersection of the migrant status (whether documented or undocumented but even worse for the undocumented) with low educational qualifications (for most migrants studied), race (black), poverty and desperation creates barriers and constraints for most Zimbabwean migrants rendering their lives quite precarious.