

**SOUTHWARD FROM THE BLAZING SUN: CLIMATE CHANGE, MIGRATION AND
THE EXPERIENCES OF CROSS-BORDER MIGRANTS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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B.A., Yale University, 2019

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Resources, Environment and Sustainability)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

September 2022

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Southward from the Blazing Sun: Climate Change, Migration and the Experiences of Cross-Border Migrants in South Africa

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the degree of Master of Arts

in Resources, Environment and Sustainability

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Abstract

People who migrate, at least in part, for reasons relating to climate/environmental change most often move within their country or region. Given that the countries of Southern Africa experience significant effects of anthropogenic climate change, it is important to study the phenomenon of climate migration in this region. Through a historical analysis of the phenomenon of environmental migration in the context as well as an exploration of the lived experiences of African cross-border migrants in South Africa, this thesis provides an introduction to this topic. Climate migration is inherently multicausal and inextricably connected with broad structures of power, such as capitalism and neo-imperialism. Moreover, the concept is often misappropriated and misunderstood to advance a view of migration that emphasizes security rather than human rights or migrant self-determination. Thus, we must be careful how we employ this terminology. However, broader and more contextualized understandings of climate migration can be used to push the boundaries of contemporary migration paradigms, such as the forced/voluntary dichotomy, the concept of the refugee, and modern emphases on securitization. Interviews with Zimbabwean, Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Johannesburg and Musina illuminated the various failures of the South African government in regularizing the stays of migrants and providing them with social services. However, even against these great odds, migrants continue to carve out a space for themselves in a sometimes-hostile South African society. Migration cannot be seen as homogeneously perverse or criminal; it is a fact of life for many people in Southern Africa and will continue to be so—especially in these times of political transformation, economic struggles, and climate change.

Lay Summary

People in Southern African countries are already experiencing the negative effects of human-caused climate change. As a result of these environmental changes, as well as other political, economic and social factors, people are leaving their homes and seeking refuge elsewhere—most often within their country or region. A historical analysis suggests that people in Southern Africa have moved, at least in part, for climate/environmental reasons, for a long time. Interviews with Zimbabwean, Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian migrants in South Africa illuminated the various challenges that migrants face in the areas of documentation, healthcare, education, housing and xenophobia. However, these migrants continue to carve out a space for themselves in an often-hostile South African society. This thesis demonstrates some of the ways that the South African immigration system is floundering, and suggests that we have much to do to ensure that the human rights and self-determination of migrants are protected.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished work of the author, Lekha Tlhotlhamaje. The fieldwork conducted for this thesis was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate number H21-02984, under the title "Climate Migration and Border Contestation in Southern Africa". Dr. David R. Boyd is named as the primary investigator, and I am named as the student investigator. With feedback from Dr. David Boyd, Dr. Leila Harris, Dr. Stephanie Chang (in the class RES502), and Dr. Becki Ross (in the class GRSJ501), I designed this study. I conducted interviews, transcribed them and analyzed the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5. These results will be distributed to the migrants and experts who participated in the study, as well CoRMSA, my host organization while I was in South Africa.

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List of Abbreviations

ACA	Aliens Control Act
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BMA	Border Management Authority Act
CoRMSA	Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa
CSVV	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DZP	Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NP	National Party
RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANDEF	South African National Defence Force
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZEP	Zimbabwean Exemption Permit
ZSP	Zimbabwean Special Dispensation Permit

Acknowledgements

With immense gratitude:

To the migrants who participated in this research project for sharing their stories. Thank you for spending time with me and gracing me with your knowledge and histories. To CoRMSA for so generously hosting me at their offices—with particular thanks to Muluti Phiri for taking time out of your hectic days to help connect me with various organizations. To the experts and government officials for sharing their experiences.

To my advisor, Dr. David Boyd, for his kindness and wisdom. In an era in which the future sometimes feels bleak, your boundless optimism gives me hope. To my committee member, Dr. Simon Donner, for your guidance and expertise. To my professors at UBC, who prepared me as best they could for this thesis project, even given the strangeness of ‘Zoom school’. To the IRES administrative staff, the cleaning/maintenance staff, and UBC librarians for keeping the engines of the university going in a time of great upheaval and uncertainty.

To my fellow students at IRES, who are a source of great inspiration. To Georgia, Taya, Simone, Atlanta, Emma, Julia, Mauricio and Justin, in particular—this journey was made so much more manageable with you all around. To my dear friends, near and far, for their unwavering support. It may take up too much space to mention you all (but I will try, anyway): to Aaliyah, Amelia, Bri, Catherine, Ellen, Kelly, Ladi, Lauren, Lerissa, Meg, Nikhil, Sarah, Shreya, Tien, and everyone else—I am immeasurably lucky to have you in my life. To Klaire, especially, for spending your summer in the land of the Canucks and going on meandering lending library walks with me.

To my family back in South Africa for their support from half a world away. To Sags Masi for driving me all around Joburg for this fieldwork and for lending me books from your collection. To my parents most of all—it is impossible to put into words my eternal gratitude for all you have done and continue to do for me. Your conscientiousness, perseverance, and capacity for love inspire me every day.

To the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), S_kw_xwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) People, whose unceded, ancestral lands I have lived and studied on for the last few years. It has been a privilege to learn a little bit about your histories and cultures while I have been in Vancouver. Living here and working on this project showed me how deeply our struggles intertwine.

Chapter 1: What is in a Name?

*In the blazing sun
The sand rose from the desert
And fled with the wind*
Richard Wright, 'Haiku 610'¹

1.1 Introduction

For all of human history, people have wandered near and far, migrating across lands and seas and borders. And over this time, the limitations and possibilities of migration have been articulated and applied in ever-shifting ways. Today, as Cameroonian political theorist, Achille Mbembe, writes, “The capacity to decide who can move, who can settle, where and under what conditions is increasingly becoming the core of political struggles.”² This is vividly apparent in Africa, where not only are many Africans shut out from the Global North, but also from other countries on the continent. The imperial and racial connotations of the restrictions at the European borders, as well as the human rights violations occurring there, are well documented.³ Of course, there is always more to be studied in this area, but most people have some idea of the treacherous and inhumane conditions in the Mediterranean region. However, mainstream media and academic studies focus far less on the more commonplace intraregional migration taking place *within* Africa. And as natural disasters and climate change-related challenges continue to impinge on life on the continent, more people may depart their homes—possibly moving across borders. Focusing on Southern Africa, this research project will explore the phenomenon of climate-induced migration: how it fits into a longer history of migration in the region, the lived experiences of migrants, and the possible ways that climate migration might challenge contemporary immigration paradigms.

¹ Richard Wright, *Haiku: This Other World* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 153.

² Achille Mbembe, ‘The Idea of a Borderless World’, *Africa Is a Country*, 11 November 2018, <https://africasacountry.com/2018/11/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world>.

³ Gregory White, *Climate Change and Migration: Security and Borders in a Warming World, Climate Change and Migration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini, eds., *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=4871282>; Sanjay Chaturvedi and Timothy Doyle, *Climate Terror: A Critical Geopolitics of Climate Change, New Security Challenges* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137318954>.

The South African border—physically and metaphorically—has long been a site of tension. Power has crystallized in these spaces between South Africa and its northern neighbours; here, the hierarchies between countries, ethnic groups and racial categories have been articulated in different people’s abilities to migrate and travel across these barriers. In this project, borders are understood, not as neutral lines on the ground between two lands, but rather as politically and socially constructed spaces that are continually contested.⁴ For as long as borders have existed, people have challenged them. This is notable in South Africa where, throughout its histories of colonialism and apartheid, the border became a site for political contestation and, also, solidarity. In contemporary Southern Africa, there are innumerable factors (often many working in combination)—including a dearth of job opportunities and political violence—that precipitate people’s move to South Africa from other nearby countries. Recently, some have speculated that climate and environmental factors have contributed more towards more people’s decisions to move. For example, Xiao et al. wrote about the role of climate variability on internal migration within South Africa, and Funke et al. compiled information about the impact of both slow and rapid-onset environmental change on migration flows from the Limpopo river region and the Gaza Province of Mozambique.⁵ This phenomenon of (the contentiously-named) climate migration (also called environmental migration or climate-induced migration) unearths new dimensions and challenges at the South African border. Studies in places such as Bangladesh, small island nations in the Pacific, and the Caribbean reveal the myriad of ways that climate migration is affecting the broader immigration regime, as well as the distinct experiences climate migrants tend to have while crossing the border and trying to stay in host countries.⁶ In these contexts, as well as in Southern Africa, many questions arise about the interlinked causes of migration, the future of contemporary immigration systems and

⁴ Michael Neuman, ‘Rethinking Borders’, in *Planning Across Borders in a Climate of Change*, ed. Wendy Steele et al. (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 15–30.

⁵ Tingyin Xiao et al., ‘Complex Climate and Network Effects on Internal Migration in South Africa Revealed by a Network Model’, *Population and Environment* 43, no. 3 (1 March 2022): 289–318, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-021-00392-8>; Nikki Funke et al., ‘Environmental Migrants: The Forgotten Refugees Affected by Slow-Onset and Rapid-Onset Events in Two Case Study Areas in the Limpopo River Basin, Southern Africa’ (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, 1 November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17547.11046>.

⁶ Michael B. Gerrard and Gregory E. Wannier, eds., *Threatened Island Nations: Legal Implications of Rising Seas and a Changing Climate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139198776>; Neel Ahuja, ‘From Insecurity to Adaptation: Bangladesh, Human Capital, and the Figure of the Climate Refugee’, in *Planetary Specters* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 98–130, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469664491_ahuja.6.

nation-states, and the pathways to addressing the climate crisis. Indeed, “It is at the border that the reconfiguration of sovereignty in the face of globalized capital and planetary crises is negotiated.”⁷

Understanding climate-induced migration solely through the lens of climate change is impossible; rather, we must consider the political, social, and economic structures in place that lead to disparate outcomes of climate change, based on people’s identities and circumstances. In mainstream narratives, climate migration is often portrayed, flatly, as an apolitical phenomenon removed from underlying structures such as capitalism, neo-imperialism and racism. However, in both its causality and its interpretation/perception, it is intricately tied with politics—in the way that wealthy, powerful countries and corporations are most responsible for anthropogenic climate change (and thus, climate migration), and in the fact that that they use their power to misrepresent this phenomenon. Indeed, the spectre of climate migration is often used as a scapegoat for virulently bigoted immigration policies. There has been a marked rise in ‘climate securitization’ rhetoric that is often a mere disguise for racist and xenophobic expression. For example, a leader of the National Rally, a far-right French political party that currently stands as the main opposition party, said that “Borders are the environment’s greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet.”⁸ They seem to suggest that the way to tackle the climate crisis is for countries to shore up their borders to prevent inflows of migrants. Marine Le Pen, the party leader, went on to remark that someone “who is rooted in their home is an ecologist”, whereas those who are “nomadic... do not care about the environment; they have no homeland.”⁹ Such binary, often-racist logics miss the greater structures in place moving the cogs of the world’s deadly and exclusionary immigration structures and causing climate change. Thus, when studying climate migration, it is vital to broaden one’s considerations to include the larger political and social beliefs and understandings of immigration that operate in both the migrant’s country of origin and the host country.

⁷ Baldwin and Bettini, *Life Adrift*.

⁸ Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 208; Aude Mazoue, ‘Le Pen’s National Rally Goes Green in Bid for European Election Votes’, France 24, 20 April 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190420-le-pen-national-rally-front-environment-european-elections-france>.

⁹ Peter Beinart, ‘White Nationalists Discover the Environment’, *The Atlantic*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/white-nationalists-discover-the-environment/595489/>.

This exploratory project will delve into the phenomenon of climate migration in Southern Africa. It will explore the history of environmental migration in the region, the lived experiences of 22 African migrants in South Africa, and possible future directions for thinking about climate migration based on an analysis of South Africa's current immigration system and global understandings of climate migration. This modest contribution will provide a broad exploration of climate and environmental migration in Southern Africa that future studies may benefit from. We do not know what the precise future of the climate crisis looks like, although its parameters are increasingly clear. However, it is essential that we try to understand the current realities of people migrating, at least in part, for climate or environment related reasons so that we are better equipped for potential future scenarios. It is also important to better understand the flaws in South Africa's immigration regime, so that, going forward, the rights of migrants can be championed. It is clear that most contemporary immigration systems have not reckoned with climate migration (or, really, migration in general) in ways that recognize the humanity and self-determination of migrants and aspire towards the safety of all.

1.2 Climate Change in Southern Africa

People all over the world are already facing a multitude of challenges related to climate change. Scientists have observed environmental changes in all corners of the earth, ranging from drought to more frequent heat waves to harsher and more incessant natural disasters.¹⁰ Climate change-related extreme events can be slow-onset (for example, drought, desertification or sea level rise) or rapid-onset (for example, cyclones or heatwaves). Although it is difficult to attribute rapid-onset extreme events to anthropogenic climate change, the evidence for this connection is much clearer for slow-onset events such as long-duration extremes of heat or rainfall.¹¹ However, the growing field of attribution science continues to illuminate the causal relationships between anthropogenic

¹⁰ IPCC, *2021: Summary for Policymakers*, ed. V. Masson-Delmotte et al., Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021, 8, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf.

¹¹ IPCC, 'Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation', ed. C.B. Field et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX_Full_Report-1.pdf.

climate change and both slow and rapid-onset disasters.¹² This is certainly true in Southern Africa, where studies suggest that anthropogenic climate change contributed to the 2022 cyclones on the east coast of Southern Africa and the 2015 drought in Ethiopia and Southern Africa.¹³ In every emissions scenario—regardless of whether emissions continue to increase or nations achieve the emission reduction goals established in the Paris Agreement—the global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the middle of the 21st century.¹⁴ In Southern Africa—a region including Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (and peripherally, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, Tanzania and Comoros)—people and ecosystems are experiencing negative impacts of climate change (See Figure 1 below for a map of Southern Africa).

¹² Renee Cho, ‘Attribution Science: Linking Climate Change to Extreme Weather’, *State of the Planet* (blog), 4 October 2021, <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/10/04/attribution-science-linking-climate-change-to-extreme-weather/>.

¹³ Simon Levey, ‘Climate Change Increased Extreme Rainfall in Southeast Africa Storms’, *Imperial News* (blog), 12 April 2022, <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/235619/climate-change-increased-extreme-rainfall-southeast/>; Chris C. Funk, *Drought, Flood, Fire: How Climate Change Contributes to Catastrophes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108885348>.

¹⁴ IPCC, 2021: *Summary for Policymakers*, 14.

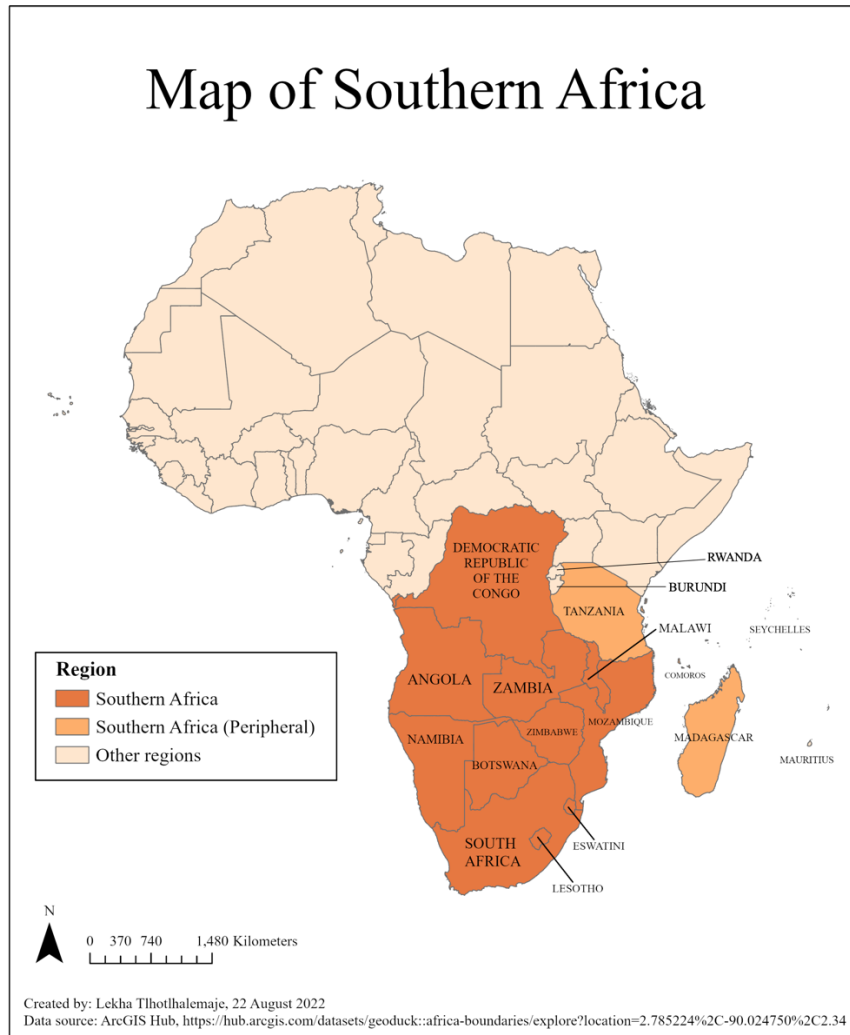


Figure 1: Map of Southern Africa

One of the great ironies of the global climate crisis is that the societies least responsible for this situation are often disproportionately affected by its outcomes. The countries of Southern Africa have, cumulatively, contributed a tiny fraction of global CO₂ emissions since 1750, the beginning of the industrial revolution. In the region, South Africa is the outlier, contributing the most CO₂ of all the countries in Africa (1.3% of all global emissions between 1750 and 2017)—but still notably less than the United States, the United Kingdom and countries of the European Union.¹⁵ However, Southern African countries are already facing immense climate change-related challenges. A study of temperature trends in South Africa between 1960 and 2016 found that the country experienced

¹⁵ Hannah Ritchie, ‘Who Has Contributed Most to Global CO₂ Emissions?’, Our World in Data, 1 October 2019, <https://ourworldindata.org/contributed-most-global-co2>.

an annual trend increase in mean maximum temperature at a rate of 0.02°C per year.¹⁶ The most significant warming has occurred in the past two decades.¹⁷ As climate change has intensified, areas of Southern Africa have experienced more frequent and more severe extreme weather events.¹⁸ A World Meteorological Organization report on the ‘State of Climate in Africa in 2019’ noted that Southern Africa’s warming trends were higher in the 1991-2020 period compared to 1961-1990 period, that the number of cyclones in the southwest Indian Ocean was higher than the long term average (six over the usual five), and that several areas—particularly those in the west—experienced below average precipitation.¹⁹ Many of the effects of climate change, such as increased natural disasters and more inconsistent precipitation patterns, are occurring unusually often and intensely in Southern Africa. In fact, a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) classified Southern Africa as a climate change hotspot, both in terms of heat extremes and drying; temperatures have been rising in the subtropical regions of Southern Africa at about two times the global rate since the mid-1960s.²⁰

A recent example of the catastrophic effect of climate change in the region was the sequence of cyclones that hit southeast Africa a few years ago. Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in early 2019, leading to massive flooding and affecting millions of people.²¹ Cyclone Kenneth followed just six weeks later, and several more Category 3, 4 and 5 cyclones struck this region in the next three years.²² Because higher temperatures lead to more intense cyclones, the

¹⁶ Adriaan J. van der Walt and Jennifer M. Fitchett, ‘Exploring Extreme Warm Temperature Trends in South Africa: 1960–2016’, *Theoretical and Applied Climatology* 143, no. 3 (1 February 2021): 1346, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00704-020-03479-8>.

¹⁷ Climate and Knowledge Development Network, ‘The IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report: What’s in It for Africa?’, 2014, https://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/AR5_IPCC_Whats_in_it_for_Africa.pdf.

¹⁸ Climate and Knowledge Development Network.

¹⁹ World Meteorological Organization, ‘State of the Climate in Africa 2019’, 2020, https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10421.

²⁰ IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, ed. V. Masson-Delmotte et al., An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty, 2018, 260, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf.

²¹ Alan Yuhas, ‘Cyclone Idai May Be “One of the Worst” Disasters in the Southern Hemisphere’, *The New York Times*, 19 March 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/19/world/africa/cyclone-idai-mozambique.html>; Lucy Rodgers, Gerry Fletcher, and Mark Bryson, ‘Cyclone Idai: How the Storm Tore into Southern Africa’, *BBC News*, 22 March 2019, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47638696>.

²² Jennifer Fitchett, ‘Why the Indian Ocean Is Spawning Strong and Deadly Tropical Cyclones’, *The Conversation*, accessed 25 May 2022, <http://theconversation.com/why-the-indian-ocean-is-spawning-strong-and-deadly-tropical-cyclones-116559>.

rising temperature of the South Indian Ocean have become an important contributor to the increased intensity of cyclones in this region. Over 600,000 people were displaced (some temporarily and others permanently) during Cyclone Idai and its successors, revealing the unsettling effect that such events have.²³ This is just one example, but it illustrates the massive effect such disasters have in the region. If this trajectory of more frequent, more intense cyclones continues, as predicted, these effects will harm and displace even more people.

Looking to the future, it seems that warming in the Southern African region will continue. Even if global warming is contained to 1.5°C, the IPCC estimates that this region will experience more frequent heat waves.²⁴ Models predict that Namibian and Botswanan deserts will experience drying while southeastern South Africa will experience wetter conditions.²⁵ Climate change brings with it a swell of connected challenges in Southern Africa; scientists anticipate growing water scarcity, more erratic agricultural patterns, and more extreme weather events.²⁶ For example, at a global temperature increase of 1.5°C, the flow of the Zambezi River, an integral natural resource in the region, is expected to decrease by 10-15%, leading to possible issues with hydroelectric power stations in the area.²⁷ In addition, worsening climate change may lead to food scarcity as a result of reduced rates of agricultural production; in particular, the maize crop—the staple food of the region and a highly temperature and drought-sensitive crop—is at risk of reduced productivity.²⁸ Thus, climate change is expected to impact all aspects of life, with droughts, floods, extreme weather events and other hazards resulting in increased inequality and poverty, and food and water scarcity in the region.

²³ IDMC, ‘More than Half a Million Displacements across South-Eastern Africa as Five Tropical Storms Strike in Two Months’, *IDMC* (blog), 25 March 2022, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/media-centres/more-than-half-a-million-displacements-across-south-eastern-africa-as-five-tropical>.

²⁴ IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 260.

²⁵ Climate and Knowledge Development Network, ‘What’s in It for Africa?’

²⁶ ‘Migration Data in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)’, Migration Data Portal, 14 June 2021, <http://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/southern-africa>.

²⁷ IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 260.

²⁸ Kelvin Mulungu and John N. Ng’ombe, *Climate Change Impacts on Sustainable Maize Production in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review, Maize - Production and Use* (IntechOpen, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.90033>.

1.3 Migration and Border Securitization

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a border as “A side, edge, brink, or margin; a limit, or boundary.” However, it is clear that national borders are not rigid lines in the dirt; rather, we can think of them as historically, politically and socially manufactured spaces which reveal various dimensions of statehood and belonging. Wendy Steele suggests viewing borders, not as “the final frontier,” but rather as “zones of interpretation.”²⁹ For the people who manage them as well as the people who migrate across them, borders can have varied and disparate meanings. In every crossing, they are redefined, rearticulated and re-disputed. In this light, borders can be understood as active sites of “performance and contestation.”³⁰ Primarily, however, borders are about power—they prescribe meaning to space and create a particular order in society, help separate *us* (over here) from *them* (over there).³¹

The field of border studies has a long history but has expanded very quickly over the past three decades or so, suggesting a greater fascination with this topic as well as a recognition of the rapidly-shifting migration/border landscape. In academic discussions, there has been a move towards thinking about the border discursively, as a space that is legitimized through the historical and continuous production of things like border walls and national maps, and perpetuated through the narrative processes of nation-building, which rely on patriotic language and constructions of Otherness.³² In short, borders are socially and politically constructed—and continuously changing. Looking at a political map might lead one to assume that borders are simply immutable lines between sovereign territories but, in reality, they also play a vital symbolic role and are deeply ingrained in everyday interactions.

²⁹ Wendy Steele, ‘Shifting Borders in a Climate of Change’, in *Planning Across Borders in a Climate of Change*, ed. Wendy Steele et al. (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 3.

³⁰ Inocent Moyo, ‘Migration and the Spatial Mobility of Borders in the Southern African Region’, in *Borders, Mobility, Regional Integration and Development: Issues, Dynamics and Perspectives in West, Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed. Christopher Changwe Nshimbi and Inocent Moyo, *Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 116, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42890-7_9.

³¹ Gabriel Popescu, *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-First Century: Understanding Borders* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 8.

³² Popescu, 22; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

Increasingly, borders seem to be locations where difference is encoded and reproduced. It is at the border, broadly defined, that movement is controlled and belonging is determined. Achille Mbembe writes about the process of borderization, which he defines as:

The process by which certain spaces are transformed into uncrossable places for certain classes of populations, who thereby undergo a process of racialization; places where speed must be disabled and the lives of a multitude of people judged to be undesirable are meant to be immobilized if not shattered.³³

In this view, the border becomes a function of state control, where, often, differences between ideas of ‘the nation’ and ‘the state’ collapse, leading to racialized ideas of belonging. Processes of borderization are increasingly taking on ethno-nationalist or cultural-nationalist dimensions; nation-states from all corners of the world are narrowing their definitions of who may be included in the nation.

Intrinsic to these processes of borderization is securitization. Securitization is described as “the process through which non-traditional security issues (such as climate change or migration) are discussed and/or acted upon in terms of security and thereby drawn into the security domain.”³⁴ Under the auspices of security and the discourse of various ‘crises’, the state exercises its ability to moderate who is denied entry and who is permitted in (and under what conditions). The border is, of course, not a new concept—nations have used bordering practices to protect their citizens from threats of invasions for thousands of years. This, includes, for example, Rome’s border of limestone across the north of Britannia in the second century A.D., or the earlier Great Wall of China constructed around 200 B.C.³⁵ However, the justifications for and methods of bordering have changed drastically over time, becoming more securitized in modern society.³⁶ Challenges relating to migration are often distorted by politicians to create an image of an ‘invasion’ or ‘horde’ of migrants, reducing these complex issues to merely a question of ‘national security’. This political spin manifested, for instance, in the panicked narrative surrounding the so-called “migrant caravan” of migrants heading north from Central America in 2017. Then-president Trump called

³³ Achille Mbembe, ‘Bodies as Borders’, *From the European South* 4 (2019): 9.

³⁴ Ingrid Boas, *Climate Migration and Security: Securitisation as a Strategy in Climate Change Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315749228>.

³⁵ Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, ‘What Are Borders For?’, *The New Yorker*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/what-are-borders-for>.

³⁶ Popescu, *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-First Century*, 91.

this group of travellers an “invasion” and went on to tweet, “Our military is being mobilized at the Southern Border... We will NOT let these Caravans, which are also made up of some very bad thugs and gang members, into the U.S. Our Border is sacred, must come in legally. TURN AROUND!”³⁷ This case illustrates the security-minded response to a situation that, in another time or place, could have been approached from a humanitarian or human rights angle. Ibrahim views this phenomenon as part of a post-Cold War trend in which migration has become categorized as a security threat.³⁸ And this, in turn, legitimizes the fears about the often-racialized Other. These new dimensions and operationalizations of migration and security misrepresent the reality of migration and demonize migrants.

As with the discourse relating to the securitization of the border, so too have the *methods* of security become more complex and entangled in politics. Border security has expanded to encompass not only the fences and entry points between states, but also the borderlands reaching beyond them. This is evident in the Mediterranean, for example, where European countries give aid to North African countries in exchange for blocking African migrants’ journey north across the sea.³⁹ Fortress Europe, as it is called, has spent tens of billions of euros on building up and surveilling these borderlands, and is able to divert accountability for atrocities in the Mediterranean to their across-the-sea neighbours in the south.⁴⁰ European countries continue to provide aid (*quid pro quo*) to countries such as Libya and Niger, even though the security forces in these countries have been found to be brutalizing, torturing and killing migrants trying to pass through.⁴¹ In addition to these externalized and expanded borders, there have been extensive neoliberalizing efforts in border regimes around the world. In what Todd Miller has dubbed the ‘border-industrial complex’, private border security and surveillance companies are making huge profits from their

³⁷ Phillip Bump, ‘Analysis | The Multilayered Uselessness of Sending Troops to the Border Right Now’, *Washington Post*, accessed 26 May 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/10/31/multi-layered-uselessness-sending-troops-border-right-now/>.

³⁸ Maggie Ibrahim, ‘The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse’, *International Migration* 43, no. 5 (2005): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00345.x>.

³⁹ Raffaella A Del Sarto, *Borderlands: Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198833550.001.0001>.

⁴⁰ Walia, *Border and Rule*, 108–9.

⁴¹ Maeve Higgins, ‘How the \$68 Billion Border Surveillance Industrial Complex Affects Us All’, *Vice* (blog), 11 June 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/k7873m/how-the-dollar68-billion-border-surveillance-industrial-complex-affects-us-all>.

work on the borders.⁴² This \$68 billion industry, which creates and sells unmanned surveillance drones, biometric systems, and other monitoring devices, has grown enormously in the past two decades—especially in the wake of 9/11.⁴³ The model in which corporations profit from chaos and displacement at the border, which they themselves foment through paranoid rhetoric and the amplification of racist fears, is an alarming and harmful development.⁴⁴

In recent years, South Africa has bolstered its immigration regime by adopting many of the philosophies and practices of western border securitization.⁴⁵ Many of these bordering and securitizing practices derive from the nation's troubled history due to the influences of colonialism and apartheid, but are also impacted by the evolving border regimes in the Global North. In general, African countries have surprisingly harsh restrictions on travel within the continent; as of 2018, only 13 out of 55 African Union (AU) countries offered visa-free entry to other African citizens.⁴⁶ To work against this, there have been efforts at the national, regional and continental levels to create more fluid borders between African countries. Eastern Africa has achieved some success in this regard, through the East African Community, which makes travel easier within the six partner states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). This open border movement is also exemplified—in theory—in the South African Department of Home Affairs' (DHA) 2017 White Paper on International Migration which acknowledges that, “[South African citizens’] future lies, together with others, in being part of the African continent that has a knowledge-driven industrial base, thriving trade and a free flow of *people*, goods, information and capital [emphasis added],”⁴⁷ as well as the Southern African Development Community's

⁴² Todd Miller, ‘More Than A Wall: Corporate Profiteering and the Militarization of US Borders’ (The Transnational Institute, 16 September 2019), 26, <https://www.tni.org/en/morethanawall>.

⁴³ In the U.S. and Europe, these companies have also grown as a result of persistent lobbying on homeland security and campaign donations to government officials.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Gifford, ‘The True Cost of the EU’s Border Security Boom’, 21 January 2020, <https://www.worldfinance.com/featured/the-true-cost-of-the-eus-border-security-boom>; Todd Miller, ‘Why Climate Action Needs to Target the Border Industrial Complex’, *Al Jazeera*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/11/1/why-climate-action-needs-to-target-the-border-industrial-complex>.

⁴⁵ White, *Climate Change and Migration*, 74.

⁴⁶ Christopher Changwe Nshimbi and Innocent Moyo, ‘Borders, Human Mobility, Integration and Development in Africa: An Introduction’, in *Borders, Mobility, Regional Integration and Development: Issues, Dynamics and Perspectives in West, Eastern and Southern Africa*, ed. Christopher Changwe Nshimbi and Innocent Moyo, *Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 4, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42890-7_1.

⁴⁷ The DHA's White Paper is quite contradictory, calling for more mobility for other Africans coming to South Africa, but caveating this with the expectation that these migrants be skilled workers. This is not an appeal for more open borders but, rather, a policy intended to keep ‘undesirable’ immigrants out of the country and to make it easier

(SADC's) 2005 Protocol on the Facilitation on the Movement of Persons, the AU's Agenda 2063, and its Migration Policy Framework for Africa.⁴⁸ However, in contrast to these ideals and policy commitments on paper, South Africa's immigration regime is becoming more securitized and militarized in practice, leading to more deportations and rejections of asylum claims.⁴⁹ For example, right at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Public Works announced that it would build a R37 million (~\$3 million CAD), 40km fence between South Africa and Zimbabwe in order to, "ensure that no undocumented or infected persons cross into the country."⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ This is a clear example of securitization on the South African border; in this case, the spectre of disease was used as a pretext for increased security at the border, but its motives were, in fact, prejudiced.

The politics of the border are inseparable from issues of identity and belonging. In South Africa, as in many corners of the world, xenophobia is pervasive. People of all backgrounds are complicit in perpetuating xenophobic discourse and participating in anti-immigrant acts of brutality.⁵² Indeed, the border travels within people—migrants are marked as foreign and 'othered'

for 'skilled' and 'less burdensome' immigrants to come to South Africa. The Paper also uses highly securitized language, calling for immigration policies that prioritize "national security."

⁴⁸ Department of Home Affairs, 'White Paper on International Migration for South Africa', July 2017, <http://www.dha.gov.za/WhitePaperonInternationalMigration-20170602.pdf>; Southern African Development Community, 'Protocol on the Facilitation of Movements of Persons', 2006, https://www.sadc.int/files/9513/5292/8363/Protocol_on_Facilitation_of_Movement_of_Persons2005.pdf; African Union, 'Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)' (Addis Ababa, May 2018), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35956-doc-2018_mpfa_english_version.pdf.

⁴⁹ Khangelani Moyo and Franzisca Zanker, 'Political Contestations within South African Migration Governance' (Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, December 2020), 19–21, https://www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/sites/default/files/political_contestations_within_south_african_migration_governance_moyo_and_zanker.pdf.

⁵⁰ 'South Africa to Build 40km Fence along Zimbabwe Border', *Al Jazeera*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/20/south-africa-to-build-40km-fence-along-zimbabwe-border>; BusinessTech, 'A Look at South Africa's R37 Million Border Fence with Zimbabwe – Built to Stop the Spread of the Coronavirus', *BusinessTech*, 11 May 2020, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/396733/a-look-at-south-africas-r37-million-border-fence-with-zimbabwe-built-to-stop-the-spread-of-the-coronavirus/>.

⁵¹ In fact, this border fence was a complete failure; almost as soon as it was erected, border jumpers cut through it and crossed. Moreover, the saga was mired in corruption; the minister's political advisor, Melissa Whitehead was recommended for disciplinary (and possibly criminal) action for dealing in unscrupulous tenders with two construction companies. An investigating unit found that, "The R40.4-million paid to two companies—Magwa Construction and an unidentified principal agent or project manager—was irregular." Thus, not only was this border fence premised on faulty, anti-immigrant logic, it was also unsuccessful and associated with corruption.

Sabelo Skiti, 'De Lille Adviser Hung out to Dry on "Washing Line"', 4 September 2020, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2020-09-04-adviser-hung-out-to-dry-on-washing-line/>.

⁵² Jean Pierre Misago, 'Politics by Other Means? The Political Economy of Xenophobic Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *The Black Scholar* 47, no. 2 (3 April 2017): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2017.1295352>.

accordingly. Around the country, South Africans distinguish themselves from migrants based on differences relating to language, accent, phenotype, and socio-economic status. The security aspect of the border exists in these settings as well—South Africans take it upon themselves to police the idea of the border, with vicious xenophobic demonstrations erupting from time to time.⁵³ These attitudes and actions stem from patterns of colonial repression and state formation, as well as specific apartheid-era policies that excluded black people from cities and from politics.⁵⁴ Much of the creation of the mythical “demonic outsider,” as Landau refers to them, is created in immigration policy and in the mouths of politicians.⁵⁵ This is evident, for example, in a recent letter from the Economic Freedom Fighters—a far-left, supposedly pan-Africanist party that holds around 10% of seats in parliament—that announced the party leader’s intent to visit local restaurants to check that “locals are employed to a satisfactory level.”⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷ The ruling and opposition parties are no less explicit in their anti-immigrant agenda—the African National Congress’ (ANC) Deputy Minister of Police remarked that “South Africans have surrendered their own city to the foreigners,” and in 2018 the Democratic Alliance released a new slogan, “All South Africans First” (which they quickly retracted).⁵⁸ Concerningly, a vigilante group called Operation Dudula, founded in Soweto in 2021, has been targeting undocumented migrants and forcibly removing them from their homes and places of work.⁵⁹ It is clear that there are many layers and

⁵³ Moyo, ‘Migration and the Spatial Mobility of Borders in the Southern African Region’, 118.

⁵⁴ Loren Landau, ‘Introducing the Demons’, in *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*, ed. Loren Landau (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), 5.

⁵⁵ Landau, 7.

⁵⁶ Vuyani Pambo, Delisile Ngwenya, and Zixelise Gcilishe, ‘CIC Julius Malema Will Visit Restaurants to Check Employment Ratio of South Africans and Foreign Nationals’, 18 January 2022, <https://twitter.com/effsouthafrica/status/1483428590935027713>.

⁵⁷ In 2016, a new political party called South Africa First was registered by party president, Mario Khumalo. The Party’s platform is, at its core, nationalist and anti-immigrant; it calls for harsher immigration laws, more labour policies that favour locals, and a mass deportation campaign to send undocumented migrants out of the country. Piet Mahasha Rampedi, ‘We’re Not Xenophobic, Says South African First President Mario Khumalo’, *IOL*, 30 August 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/news/were-not-xenophobic-says-south-african-first-president-mario-khumalo-e9f129df-61ee-47a9-8794-fd100e994f1d>.

⁵⁸ Rebecca Davis, ‘2019 Elections: Xenophobia Is Flaring Pre-Elections – but It’s Not Only Politicians Who Are to Blame’, *Daily Maverick*, 3 April 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-04-03-xenophobia-is-flaring-pre-elections-but-its-not-only-politicians-who-are-to-blame/>; Timeslive, ‘You Are Fuelling Xenophobia, SAHRC Warns Deputy Police Minister’, *Sunday Times*, 17 July 2017, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-07-17-you-are-fuelling-xenophobia-sahrc-warns-deputy-police-minister/>.

⁵⁹ Bheki C. Simelane, ‘XENOPHOBIA: Soweto Group That Aimed to “Remove All Illegal Foreign Nationals by Force” Muzzles Members’, *Daily Maverick*, 21 June 2021, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-21-__trashed-9/.

nuances to the issue of xenophobia in South Africa, and that it forms an important piece of the immigration landscape in the nation.

1.4 Defining Climate-Induced Migration

Climate migration is not a new phenomenon; humans have moved around due to changing environmental and climate conditions for hundreds of thousands of years. Even in prehistoric times, human migration patterns were tightly linked to slow and fast-changing climates.⁶⁰ Of course, anthropogenic climate change, precipitated by rapid industrialization, has affected the climate and, thus, migratory patterns in unprecedented ways. However, fierce debate surrounds the term ‘climate migration’—for good reason. Writers and activists have critiqued this category of migration on several fronts; it may neglect the multi-causal reasons people migrate, it further partitions categories of migration when, perhaps, we should be heading towards broader and less policy-constricted ideas of migration, and its invocation sometimes leads to over-securitization and violent anti-immigrant policies and practices. A helpful springboard for this debate is the definition of a climate migrant adopted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is:

Persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within their country or abroad.⁶¹

Rather than offering an alternative definition of climate migration, this section will explore the advantages and pitfalls of the term. It is a concept that will be used throughout this thesis, thus, it is vital to be aware of the caveats embedded within it.

Although the IOM definition is used in some contexts, scholars and policy makers alike have struggled to pin down a definitive definition for climate migration. Perhaps because no universal or legal protections exists for this population of people, the definitions used for them are often

⁶⁰ R. McLeman and B. Smit, ‘Migration as an Adaptation to Climate Change’, *Climatic Change* 76, no. 1–2 (May 2006): 32, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10584-005-9000-7>.

⁶¹ International Organization for Migration, ‘MRS No. 31 - Migration and Climate Change’, 2008, <https://publications.iom.int/books/mrs-ndeg31-migration-and-climate-change>.

broad and imprecise.⁶² While others had used the term before, Essam El-Hinnawi's definition of 'environmental refugee' in a 1985 report for the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was greatly influential in the climate/environmental migration sphere.⁶³ He defined them as, "people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life."⁶⁴ He further sub-categorizes environmental refugees based on the permanence of their movement and the immediacy of the threat they are fleeing.⁶⁵ El-Hinnawi's contribution broadened the generally accepted definition of a refugee which, according to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, was based on "a well-founded fear of being persecuted."⁶⁶ However, the use of the term 'refugee' in an environmental context was controversial as the laws protecting refugees following World War II were (and still are) narrowly defined, and the introduction of an environmental aspect to this category of protection was viewed as a threat to the specific rights of (political) refugees. Responding to this criticism, later thinkers popularized the term 'environmentally displaced person', broadening the eligibility of what 'environmental refugee' suggested.⁶⁷ More recently, terms such as 'climate change displaced people', 'climate refugee' and 'forced climate migrant' have entered the lexicon, all containing different connotations of persecution, choice and vulnerability.⁶⁸ Organizations such as the IOM have warned against the term 'environmental refugee' or 'climate refugee' because there exists no current international legal framework for this category of people. The IOM warns that using this concept could "undermine the international legal regime for the protection of

⁶² Sharaban Tahura Zaman, 'Legal Protection for the Cross-Border Climate-Induced Population Movement in South Asia: Exploring a Durable Solution', *Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation* 36 (2021): 187–236; Joanna Apap, 'The Concept of "Climate Refugee": Towards a Possible Definition' (European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2019), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf).

⁶³ Issa Ibrahim Berchin et al., 'Climate Change and Forced Migrations: An Effort towards Recognizing Climate Refugees', *Geoforum* 84 (1 August 2017): 148, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.06.022>.

⁶⁴ Essam El-Hinnawi and UNEP, *Environmental Refugees* (Nairobi: UNEP, 1985), 4, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/121267>.

⁶⁵ Specifically, the categories included those who:

- (1) are temporarily displaced due to an environmental stress and return to their homes after a period of time,
- (2) those who are permanently displaced due to permanent changes in the environment (usually human-caused) and must resettle in a new area, and
- (3) those who migrate temporarily or permanently in search of a better quality of life

⁶⁶ UN General Assembly, 'Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees', 189 UNTS 137 § (1951).

⁶⁷ Berchin et al., 'Climate Change and Forced Migrations', 148.

⁶⁸ Zaman, 'Legal Protection for the Cross-Border Climate-Induced Population Movement in South Asia', 191.

refugees.”⁶⁹ Thus, unlike for political refugees, there has never been consistent and agreed upon terminology for people displaced from their home for climate or environmental reasons in either the academic literature or in everyday usage.

Beyond the specific definitional boundaries, there are many other issues with the category of climate/environmental migration. Firstly, most migration is multi-causal; thus, it is difficult to distinguish environmental/climate causes from other considerations.⁷⁰ In their critique of the term climate migration, Baldwin and Bettini describe the idea of climate reductionism, which is “a form of analysis and prediction in which climate is first extracted from the matrix of interdependencies which shape human life within the physical world... then elevated to the role of dominant predictor variable.”⁷¹ This sort of deterministic reasoning reduces people’s motivations to just the changing climate when, likely, this is not the case. They interpret this as a form of positivist thinking, in which researchers record precisely what they observe without thinking about the larger forces operating in that context. For example, when people fled New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, they were, of course, moving for environmental reasons. However, the structural racism in the City’s housing and infrastructure policies meant that black residents were disproportionately vulnerable to the hurricane and, thus, disproportionately impacted when the disaster came.⁷² Thus, a full picture of this exodus would include the racist politics and histories of the city and a discussion of the axes of inequality—not just the fact of the natural disaster. In recent years, the study of climate migration has evolved to reckon more with its multi-causal nature, and this has become ingrained in its definition. However, this fact is not always represented in mainstream discussions of the phenomenon.

Such misrepresentation of climate migration often leads to overly-securitized migration policies that dehumanize and brutalize migrants. There are two sides to this false narrative: victimhood and

⁶⁹ IOM, ‘Environmental Migration | Environmental Migration Portal’, accessed 11 February 2022, <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>.

⁷⁰ Belinda Dodson, ‘Mobility and Migration’, in *Climate Change, Assets and Food Security in Southern African Cities*, ed. Bruce Frayne, Caroline Moser, and Gina Ziervogel (Abingdon, Oxon: Earthscan, 2012), 82, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203144084>.

⁷¹ Giovanni Bettini and Andrew Baldwin, ‘Introduction: Life Adrift’, in *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique*, ed. Giovanni Bettini and Andrew Baldwin (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 3, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=4871282>.

⁷² Bettini and Baldwin, 5; Jean Ait Belkhir and Christiane Charlemaïne, ‘Race, Gender and Class Lessons from Hurricane Katrina’, *Race, Gender & Class* 14, no. 1/2 (2007): 120–52.

criminality. That migrants are unfortunate, helpless casualties of deteriorating environmental conditions and that, simultaneously, they threaten the host country's security and wellbeing because their arrival will lead to a rise in social ills (such as crime and disease), as well as fewer resources and, thus, greater austerity for all.⁷³ In most cases, the fear of criminality overrules the desire to provide aid for people who are perceived as victims, leading to an emphasis of security over humanitarianism (which, on its own can be problematic as well). Much of this argument comes from faulty Malthusian logics of overpopulation, giving nations justification for harsher security and greater social repression.⁷⁴ These increased levels of control fall under the banner of so-called climate security, which is concerned with the potential instability caused by climate change. The recent NATO 'Climate Change and Security Action Plan', for example, focuses on how the impacts of climate change can create "conditions that can be exploited by state and non-state actors that threaten or challenge the Alliance."⁷⁵ Such plans create clear delineations between those people who are to be kept safe and those perceived as a threat—in this case, those inside and outside the borders of NATO member states. In the wake of rising fears of climate change-related insecurity, scholars have been quick to warn against environmental determinism—or oversimplifying the effects of climate change by asserting that climate change has caused more conflict.⁷⁶ Overall, it seems that these fears of overpopulation and compromised safety motivate this security response. Moreover, rhetoric of 'hordes' or 'waves' of migrants entering host countries is also often highly racialized, with a fear of the 'darker other' becoming the through line of the climate migration story.⁷⁷ Countries in the Global North have long histories of racist immigration policies; climate migration is just a new layer in this storied tale of exclusion.

⁷³ Giovanni Bettini, 'Unsettling Futures: Climate Change, Migration and the Obscene Biopolitics of Resilience', in *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique*, ed. Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 83,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=4871282>.

⁷⁴ Bettini and Baldwin, 'Introduction: Life Adrift', 7.

⁷⁵ NATO, 'NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan', 14 June 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_185174.htm.

⁷⁶ Francesca De Châtel, 'The Role of Drought and Climate Change in the Syrian Uprising: Untangling the Triggers of the Revolution', *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 4 (4 July 2014): 521–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.850076>; Idean Salehyan, 'Climate Change and Conflict: Making Sense of Disparate Findings', *Political Geography*, Special Issue: Climate Change and Conflict, 43 (1 November 2014): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.10.004>; Ilan Kelman, 'Does Climate Change Cause Migration?', in *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (University College London, 2020), 124, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81874>.

⁷⁷ Giovanni Bettini, "'Climate Migration' Proved Too Political for the Paris Agreement – and Rightly So', The Conversation, 17 December 2015, <http://theconversation.com/climate-migration-proved-too-political-for-the-paris-agreement-and-rightly-so-52133>.

For all of its discursive history, the term ‘climate migration’ and its tangential phrasings have been critiqued and disputed. However, as discussed above, various studies have shown that people around the world *are* moving for reasons relating to climate change and environmental change, and that this will likely continue in the years to come. Thus, despite its ambiguities and drawbacks, climate migration is a term that will be used throughout this project. Perhaps, *in spite of* some of its critiques, it could be a useful term. Firstly, climate migration, here, must inherently be understood as multi-factorial. When the term is used, it is imbued with the knowledge that few people move purely for climate or environmental reasons, but that these factors often do play a role in this movement. Secondly, to work against the conception of climate migration as an overwhelming security-threat, it is important to preface any discussion of this phenomenon with the fact that most people who move for climate or environmental reasons migrate within their country or region. The image of waves of climate migrants banging against the doors of Europe or the United States is flawed and dangerous. And moreover, there are likely not nearly as many climate migrants (or even migrants in general) as the often-sensationalist media reports and as what the general public may believe.⁷⁸ The data show that only about 3.6% of the world’s population are migrants (i.e., live outside their country of birth).⁷⁹ Also, we must emphasize the modern-day nature of this securitized response to migration as a product of this particular (post-Cold War, post-9/11) political moment, global racism, and ethno-nationalism. And thirdly, the idea of climate migration is also useful because it encompasses some aspects of migration that are different from the more traditionally understood categories. The subjectivities of climate migration are wide-ranging but are also particular to this phenomenon. For some migrants, the homes that they leave may change irrevocably or disappear altogether. This may be similar, for example, to the impact of war, but there must be aspects of those experience that are different. Therefore, although the idea of climate migration is sometimes messy and imprecise—spatially (it includes internal and international migration), temporally (it includes temporary and permanent migration), causally (it includes migration due to slow and sudden onset changes and is tied in with other political, economic and social factors)—it is in this messiness that interesting patterns emerge. The

⁷⁸ Eduardo Porter and Karl Russell, ‘Migrants Are on the Rise Around the World, and Myths About Them Are Shaping Attitudes’, *The New York Times*, 20 June 2018, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/20/business/economy/immigration-economic-impact.html>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/20/business/economy/immigration-economic-impact.html>.

⁷⁹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, ‘International Migration 2020 Highlights’ (UNDESA, 2020), <https://www.un.org/en/desa/international-migration-2020-highlights>.

point is not to narrowly categorize migrants or show their experiences as overly similar, but to understand migrant experiences more deeply and delve into their distinctiveness. Thus, if used thoughtfully and contextually, the term ‘climate migration’ can help illuminate certain politics, experiences and nuances of the migration landscape.

1.5 Climate Change and Migration in Southern Africa

Given that categories of climate or environmental migration are not widely applied, many obstacles stand in the way of collecting such data. Most migration organizations do not aggregate data using this category and, moreover, most migrants would not necessarily identify as such. This makes sense, as there are no specific legal protections for climate migrants in international law, and so there are no material/political gains associated with categorizing oneself as such. And, as discussed before, even if a changing environment or natural disaster did play a role in a person’s decision to migrate, there were likely other factors, such as economic hardship or political unrest that contributed to this decision as well. As a result of all these factors, quantitative data on this phenomenon are scarce, meaning that it would be impossible to specify the number of ‘climate migrants’ or determine the extent to which climate change or environmental change affected the immigration regime of Southern Africa. However, several researchers have completed qualitative, empirical studies of environmental migration in the region. One well-studied example is that of the floods and droughts in Zimbabwe. A 2013 study of Kanyemba in the Mbire District interviewed 144 households and found that 8% of households became labour migrants in neighbouring Zambia or Mozambique in response to the floods in 2010.⁸⁰ The main economic activities in this area were smallholder agriculture and livestock rearing, so the recurring droughts and floods in the 1990s and 2000s greatly affected livelihoods. Migration was just one of many coping strategies outlined in the study. Households also changed their farming practices to adapt to the changing conditions and expanded their activities to include things like selling pottery, fishing and performing casual labour in the tourism industry. The prevalence of environmental migration in this study must not be overstated, but it does exist. Another example is that of Angola, where, in the southwest, thousands of people migrated south, to neighbouring Namibia, during a disastrous combination of

⁸⁰ G. Bola et al., ‘Coping with Droughts and Floods: A Case Study of Kanyemba, Mbire District, Zimbabwe’, *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth, Parts A/B/C* 67–69 (1 January 2014): 185, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pce.2013.09.019>.

drought and locust infestation.⁸¹ Al Jazeera reported that the dire conditions were exacerbated by a decades-long commercialization of the land, with 67% of it being taken over by commercial cattle ranches since 2002. This illustrates the way that the negative effects of environmental changes often occur in combination with other political and economic changes. Al Jazeera shared a Red Cross statistic stating that over 3,000 Angolans entered Namibia in 2020-2021. These are just two examples, but given the dearth of data on this phenomenon, anecdotal evidence is valuable in understanding the intersection of climate change and migration.

A large portion of the current literature on climate migration is speculative in nature. Many articles forecast that the number of people moving due to climate change will increase drastically in the coming years and decades. In 1993, Norman Myers famously predicted that there would be 150 million environmental refugees by 2050.⁸² This figure was replicated in official IPCC reports and in the news media, contributing to the alarmist response to environmental migration.⁸³ More recently, the Groundswell report released by the World Bank in 2021 reported that, by 2050, 86 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa, or 4.2% of the projected population, could move within their countries due to climate change (without significant climate action).⁸⁴ The most recent IPCC Assessment Report predicted that if global warming reaches 1.7°C above pre-industrial temperatures, by 2050, there is expected to be 1.5 million internal migrants in Southern Africa—approximately 2.3% of the total estimated population.⁸⁵ And a much circulated New York Times article on climate migration anticipated that, “As their land fails them, *hundreds of millions of people* from Central America to Sudan to the Mekong Delta will be forced to choose between flight or death. The result will almost certainly be *the greatest wave of global migration the world has seen* [emphasis added].”⁸⁶ These speculations vary greatly from study to study and, given the

⁸¹ Susan Martinez, ‘Angola’s Climate Refugees on “a Journey with No End”’, 23 February 2022,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2022/2/23/angolas-climate-refugees-on-a-journey-with-no-end>.

⁸² Norman Myers, ‘Environmental Refugees in a Globally Warmed World’, *BioScience* 43, no. 11 (1993): 752–61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1312319>.

⁸³ Richard Black, ‘Environmental Refugees: Myth or Reality?’ (UNHCR, 2001), <https://www.unhcr.org/3ae6a0d00.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Viviane Clement et al., ‘Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration’ (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2021), xxii, file:///Users/lekhatlhotlhalemaje/Downloads/Groundswell%20Part%20II.pdf.

⁸⁵ C.H Trisos et al., ‘Africa’, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 140, https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FinalDraft_Chapter09.pdf.

⁸⁶ Abrahm Lustgarten, ‘The Great Climate Migration Has Begun’, *The New York Times*, 23 July 2020, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>.

broad range of assumptions in climate change modelling, cannot be taken at face value. Moreover, as Kelman criticizes, often, “no empirical methodology existed to monitor or calculate such numbers.”⁸⁷ Also, the definition of climate migration is often loose or unspecified in these reports; most use the IOM definition, which includes people moving permanently *and* temporarily, within their countries *and* abroad. Thus, these large numbers include migrants of many different experiences, and the catch-all term of ‘environmental migrant’ means very little in this context. Moreover, these speculations tend to operate on a climate reductionist model, reducing the complex nexus of political, cultural, economic and environmental factors down to climate change. That is not to say that these projection-based reports are not useful, but it is important to understand the parameters and limitations of these speculations.

Given all this, although there exists evidence suggesting that environmental factors do play a role in the Southern African migration scene, it is important not to overstate or over-speculate the future of this phenomenon. Such misrepresentations may lean too heavily into the ‘hordes of climate refugees’ narrative that only works to dehumanize migrants and justify stricter border controls. We must find a balance between acknowledging that climate change is affecting how and why people move, while also resisting oversimplified and possibly exaggerated narratives of this phenomenon. Moreover, this project will not begin with the assumption that climate migration is an issue but will rather examine the evidence and go from there. As Kelman recommends, “Rather than either constructing climate-change migration as an overwhelming problem or pretending that it cannot happen at a large scale, a balance is needed that admits the actuality and potentiality of migration linked to climate-change impacts, but that never assumes inevitability.”⁸⁸ This thesis hopes to contribute to this complicated but intriguing area of study within this region.

⁸⁷ Kelman, ‘Does Climate Change Cause Migration?’, 128.

⁸⁸ Kelman, 130.

1.6 Objectives and Roadmap

The objective of this research project is to describe the climate migration phenomenon in Southern Africa, looking at historical precedents and contemporary challenges. The four research questions explored in this thesis are:

1. How can we contextualize climate migration in the long history of migration in the Southern African region?
2. Do climate/environmental factors influence African people's migration to South Africa to some extent? If so, what are these environmental factors?
3. What is life like for African cross-border migrants in South Africa and how can these accounts help us think about the future of migration—specifically climate migration—in the region?
4. How do these migrants think about mobility and migration, and do they challenge ideas of immigration and border control, identity and belonging?

This project exists at the intersection of an array of different literatures: migration studies, border studies, climate change studies, and post-colonial studies. Surveying these various literatures reveals the nuances and intricacies of this topic, but also affirms the need for a project such as this to fill in some of the gaps. The reason that this thesis focuses on Southern Africa is that the current literature neglects this region somewhat. Through a systematic study of 161 articles on climate migration, Ghosh and Orchiston found that only 14% of the articles focused on Africa, and only one mentioned Southern Africa or countries in the region explicitly.⁸⁹ Even within the topic of climate/environmental migration in Southern Africa, there are innumerable sub-topics worthy of further study. This project focuses on international migration, but there is much to be uncovered about internal migration within the various Southern African countries. Scholars such as Marina Mastrorillo and Tingyin Xiao have touched on this issue.⁹⁰ This project centers on cross-border migration because of the particular questions it raises about the border regime, the idea of the nation-state in this context and the prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa and beyond. In sum, this is a rich and relevant area of study. This project is a modest contribution to this complex and

⁸⁹ Rajan Chandra Ghosh and Caroline Orchiston, 'A Systematic Review of Climate Migration Research: Gaps in Existing Literature', *SN Social Sciences* 2, no. 5 (16 April 2022): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-022-00341-8>.

⁹⁰ Marina Mastrorillo et al., 'The Influence of Climate Variability on Internal Migration Flows in South Africa', *Global Environmental Change* 39 (1 July 2016): 155–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.04.014>; Xiao et al., 'Complex Climate and Network Effects on Internal Migration in South Africa Revealed by a Network Model'.

growing field, the objective of which is to provide a broad overview of the intersection of climate change and migration, and to illuminate the complex South African migration landscape through the experiences of migrants in the country.

Chapter 2 will offer a broad overview of the legal, political and social history of migration in South(ern) Africa, and will contextualize climate migration within this expansive history. Chapter 3 will explore the methodology of the study—namely, semi-structured interviews. For this study, 22 migrants, four experts and two government officials were interviewed in the cities of Johannesburg and Musina in South Africa. Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the interview data, focusing on the migrant’s reasons for leaving their home country and their journeys to South Africa. Chapter 5 will delve into the migrants’ experiences in South Africa, explaining some of the challenges they face and how they feel about their time in the country so far. Finally, Chapter 6 will offer concluding remarks, guidelines for the study of the intersection of climate change and migration, as well as limitations and possible directions for future research within this realm of study.

Chapter 2: The Past Imperfect

2.1 Introduction

Writing about history is like trying to catch flour in a sieve; there are some pieces that may get caught on the thin wire, but most of it passes through and away. Each fragment of evidence is mired in subjectivity and the landscape of power in which it originated. And behind each shred of evidence, there are thousands more perspectives that have been swept away or erased. Consequently, understanding colonial history and the stories of oppressed peoples is an onerous undertaking because much is left out of the historical archive. As Sadiya Hartman writes, “History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive, even as those dead certainties are produced by terror.”⁹¹ Indeed, these colonial archives were amassed through the destruction of communities and the usurpation of resources. And moreover, much of the history we compile renews the violence of colonialism (and other systems of oppression) by erasing and flattening the experiences of oppressed peoples. Because this chapter relies mostly on secondary sources, it cannot engage deeply with the work of unmaking and ‘writing against’ the archive.⁹² However, as we embark on this historical undertaking, we must hold awareness of these limitations and voids in the narrative.

This chapter will offer a brief overview of the bordering history of the country now known as South Africa, and the interplay between that form of state-making and perceptions/creations of national identity. It will also explore the history of environmental migration in the region, delving into relevant examples. This is an incomplete history—not just because of the boundaries of this thesis, but because of the limitations of the archive. Hence the title of this chapter, *The Past Imperfect*, which describes both the inherently flawed nature of history-writing (which can never perfectly capture a story or even a moment), as well as the continuity of the past, how it oozes into and influences the present. As the famous quote goes: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁹³

⁹¹ Sadiya Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 9.

⁹² Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance’, *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (1 March 2002): 87–109, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435632>; Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, 12.

⁹³ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951).

This historical analysis aims to reveal how past mentalities towards migration have seeped into present-day South Africa's attitudes and policies. Although flawed and incomplete, this historical overview will highlight important themes that will help situate this research in its context so that we can better understand the experiences of migrants in the country today.

A brief historiography of the so-called 'Mfecane' reveals the treachery of the archive and the complexity of writing about migration in Southern Africa. There have been many historical interpretations of the events of the 'Mfecane'—a period of great upheaval in the first half of the 19th century in which thousands of people in Southeast Africa scattered in all directions, several wars occurred, and the tentacles of colonialism and slavery gradually enveloped the Southern African landscape. Different versions of this history have highlighted or exaggerated different aspects of this moment in time: the supposed brutality of Shaka Zulu (the founder of the Zulu Kingdom), the role of harsh environmental conditions, and the growth of the slave trade.

Early historical accounts, spearheaded by E.A. Walker, who in 1928 coined the term 'Mfecane' (which prevailing belief claims is isiZulu for 'the crushing', but is not actually rooted in any African language) focused on the brutality of the 'black-on-black violence' instigated by Shaka Zulu.⁹⁴ These early scholars suggested that white people stood aside helplessly as shattered black tribes fled to the far corners of the region. White settlers used this narrative to justify appropriating large swaths of land, claiming that the land was now 'empty'. Later, English historian Julian Cobbing proposed that black people in that area were, in fact, "caught in the cross-fires of European encirclement and interpenetration." He suggested that the ascension of the Zulu nation was due to the rising slave trade (in which Africans were sent to Brazilian sugar plantations or to the Cape Colony on the southern tip of the continent as labourers) and accelerated land appropriation.⁹⁵ In the mid-90s, Elizabeth Eldridge responded by claiming that, actually, the disruptions of this era were multicausal.⁹⁶ She wrote that a major drought at the turn of the century

⁹⁴ Julian Cobbing, 'The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 3 (1988): 487–519.

⁹⁵ Cobbing, 519.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth A. Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa c. 1800-1830: The "Mfecane" Reconsidered', in *Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 1995), 125, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/mfecane-aftermath/AE08FC4A7E6DBECABDCE6269DF4B8E78>.

lead to competition for land and people, and that white colonists and slave traders on the southern and eastern coasts of Southern Africa agitated this conflict further.⁹⁷ More recently, Ndlovu pushed against this narrative, suggesting instead that coloniality—defined as “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations”—was the ultimate cause of the ‘Mfecane’.⁹⁸ He advances the idea that coloniality and the growing number of white settlers present in Southern Africa created an “encirclement complex,” which triggered all other causes of the disturbance—the slave trade, and the splintering and reformation of tribes due to drought and famine. He also noted that much of the history of this era relies on archival material generated by settler colonists and not the oral histories of black people and their descendants, thus limiting the scope of academic understandings of the events.

This impassioned and long-lasting debate over the narrative of the ‘Mfecane’ illuminates a core aspect of migration studies: that there is rarely a straightforward causal chain of events and that even if a changing environment does play a role in these stories, there may be other factors that overshadow or compound its effects—in this case, the growing presence of white settlers in Southern Africa. Indeed, drought and famine seem to have been influential in the events of the early 19th century in southeast Africa, but we must also consider the changing political conditions in the region as colonial violence and structures encroached on communities. This brief historiography also reveals the ways in which understandings of history and migration seep into the future. For example, during the apartheid era, the National Party (NP)—the white-supremacist, Afrikaner nationalist ruling party—used the reductive and racist historical narrative of “savage” ‘black-on-black violence’ during the ‘Mfecane’ to justify the repression and ostracization of black people in 20th century South African society.⁹⁹ Two important themes of this chapter are the way that tendrils of history creep into the present, and how historical narratives are used to construct an idea of who belongs in the nation. Yes, the ‘Mfecane’ is a story of environmental migration,

⁹⁷ Eldredge, 156, 160.

⁹⁸ Morgan Ndlovu, ‘Manufacturing Black-on-Black Violence in Africa: A Decolonial Perspective on Mfecane and Afrophobia/Xenophobia in South Africa’, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 12, no. 2 (3 July 2017): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2017.1401768>.

⁹⁹ Ndlovu, 101.

but it is also one of coloniality, war and slavery—a patchwork of causality and consequence that infuse all stories of environmental migration.

This chapter aims to chart the intricate history of immigration regimes, national identity and environmental migration in Southern Africa. Migration history is essential to an understanding of the region because, as Reitzes remarked, “the history of Southern Africa is effectively a history of migration.”¹⁰⁰ More specifically, *environmental* migration has always been a phenomenon in Southern Africa—for centuries, people in the region have moved temporarily and permanently, near and far, for reasons relating to a changing environment. Beginning with European colonialism, the migration landscape began to change drastically due to the creation of settler colonies and the construction of the nation-state of South Africa. As the borders became more formalized, as South Africa distanced itself from the British empire and as its relationships with its neighbours changed (especially as these nearby countries gained independence), the regulation of migration became more bureaucratized and securitized. As the state physically shaped and reified its boundaries, it further entrenched the exclusivity of its citizenry, determining who should be allowed in and who should be kept out.¹⁰¹ Gaining an understanding of the role of a changing environment in previous mass migration events and the history of state-making and border-making affords us an awareness of how these processes affect the political and social understandings of migration in South Africa today.

Before detailing the particular migration policies and patterns of migration in Southern Africa (and later, South Africa specifically), we must discuss two arguments relating to temporality that will help frame this analysis: the myth of the ‘postcolonial’ and the concept of entanglement.

Is there really such a thing as the postcolonial? As post-apartheid? Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati argue that these eras do not exist; for them, the dismantling of formal colonial administrations and

¹⁰⁰ Maxine Reitzes, ‘Introduction’, in *Migrants, Citizens and the State of Southern Africa*, ed. Jim Whitman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 1.

¹⁰¹ Sally Ann Peberdy, ‘Selecting Immigrants: Nationalism and National Identity in South Africa’s Immigration Policies, 1910-1998’ (Kingston, Ontario, Canada, Queen’s University, 1999), https://www.nlc-bnc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape8/PQDD_0006/NQ38323.pdf?is_thesis=1&oclc_number=46572478.

the creation of independent governments did not result in decolonization.¹⁰² They borrow Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term 'postcolonial neocolonized world' to characterize "the problematic terrain in which the ex-colonies operated with the Western world that occupied the apex of global power hierarchy while the developing world languished at the subaltern bottom."¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁴ Similarly to Ndlovu, referenced earlier in this chapter, they describe the condition of coloniality, in which formerly colonized peoples, even after independence and the dissolution of juridical-administrative colonialism, are caught in "patterns of power" or "a variety of colonial situations... [that] include the colonisation of knowledge, the mind, the imagination and subjectivity."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, even the material conditions of the former colony—including land ownership, economic capacity and control over natural resources—are dictated by this unequal power relationship, leading to a state of continued coloniality. It has become increasingly clear that, even almost 30 years after the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa is also not truly in a 'post-apartheid' era. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world: white South Africans earn on average three times more than their black counterparts and they own 72% of farm and agricultural land, compared to black people's paltry 4%.¹⁰⁶ Thus, this chapter will avoid the common division of South African history into the pre-colonial, colonial, apartheid and democratic eras, because, in reality, these periods bleed into each other and are not as rigid or distinct as one might imagine. Rather, this chapter will be organized around particular migratory events that will highlight certain aspects of those historical moments. The four events include the collapse of Mapungubwe, an early Zimbabwean society, in the 13th century, the movement of Batswana people to South Africa after a drought in the late 19th century, and the mass migration of Mozambicans to South Africa during their post-independence civil war. We must recognize that

¹⁰² Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Walter Chambati, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa* (CODESRIA, 2013), 3, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/25053>.

¹⁰³ Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati also describe the postcolonial neocolonized world as "an arena of frustrated dreams and shattered visions. In short, it is a world that is overseen and controlled remotely by global coloniality through invisible colonial matrices of power."

Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati, 16; Ndlovu, 'Manufacturing Black-on-Black Violence in Africa', 99; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London : Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999573905602121>.

¹⁰⁶ Alma Diamond, 'Burying the Past and Building the Future in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *The Conversation*, 22 February 2022, <http://theconversation.com/burying-the-past-and-building-the-future-in-post-apartheid-south-africa-174010>; Monty Fynn and Cecile van Schalkwyk, 'Redistribution of Land Remains a Man's World in South Africa', *The Mail & Guardian* (blog), 6 February 2022, <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-02-06-redistribution-of-land-remains-a-mans-world-in-south-africa/>.

events like decolonization and democratization do not happen in a moment but, rather, are “a concatenation of complex, uneven, and variegated processes that unfolded over a long span of time.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, by homing in on these specific events, we will perhaps be able to glean something about those moments in time and how these so-called eras overlap each other.

The other temporal consideration is that of entanglement, an idea that Achille Mbembe conjured up, writing that “As an age, the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*.”¹⁰⁸ One aspect of this is that time does not flow sequentially; we should rather think of it as “an interlocking of presents, pasts and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering and maintaining the previous ones.”¹⁰⁹ Entanglement conceptualizes of time such that the past, present and future are interlinked and responsive to each other.¹¹⁰ In this chapter, this manifests in the way that previous policies, practices and mindsets reverberate throughout the migration history of South Africa. We will witness repeat patterns, regurgitated logics and echoing policy that conjured together, produce the rocky landscape of South Africa’s current migration regime.

2.2 A Brief History of the South African Border and Migration Regulation

Over the last few hundred years, the forms of and limitations on migration to South Africa have changed drastically. Descriptions of South Africa that begin with colonialism neglect the long histories before that era, so this account will attempt to include some of this important pre-colonial history, albeit briefly. During this time span, there were both nomadic and more fixed communities living in the region, and they took part in migrations, big and small.¹¹¹ This includes the Khoe (or Khoikhoi) people, a group comprised of hundreds of ethnic groups that trace their ancestry in

¹⁰⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Columbia University Press, 2021).

¹⁰⁸ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2001), 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppkxs>.

¹⁰⁹ Mbembe, 16.

¹¹⁰ Debarati Sanyal, ‘Introduction’, *Critical Times* 2, no. 3 (1 December 2019): 347, <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-7862509>.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth A. Eldredge, *Kingdoms and Chiefdoms of Southeastern Africa: Oral Traditions and History, 1400–1830* (Boydell & Brewer, 2015), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/kingdoms-and-chiefdoms-of-southeastern-africa/EDC795007744B116674BEBD08A1D5EE7>.

Southern Africa to thousands of years ago.¹¹² Over time, different groups branched off, spreading to various parts of the subcontinent: the Namaqua went to modern-day Namibia, the Korana to the Orange River, the Gonaqua to what is now the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, and the Cape Khoikhoi to the southwestern tip of the continent.¹¹³ These indigenous people were amongst the first to encounter European in the 17th century. Once the Dutch arrived in 1652, they gradually colonized and reconfigured the landscape through settlement, the creation of a slave trade and the spread of the Dutch East India Company into the region. Later, at the beginning of the 19th century, as part of the expanding project of imperial industrial capitalism, the British settled on the southern tip of Africa which, again, impacted labour and migration patterns.¹¹⁴ With the creation of the Union of South Africa—a combination of the two Afrikaner colonies and two British colonies following the violent South Africa War of 1899-1902—white supremacist aspirations beat out Boer-British tensions, leading to the further disenfranchisement of black Africans and the entrenchment of more rigid colonial structures (including borders).¹¹⁵ In the early 20th century, the governments created various migration regulations to try and curb the immigration of black Southern Africans, South Asians and Jewish Europeans, while also encouraging the inflow of white western Europeans from both Europe and other African countries including Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Tanzania and Kenya.¹¹⁶ Once the NP came to power in 1948 and instituted the apartheid system, the mechanisms to regulate migration both to South Africa and within it became even more militarized and bureaucratized—all in order to control the movements of black people (and other people of colour) in the country. And when apartheid formally ended in 1994, the newly-elected ANC and the fresh constitution promised progressive change and the upholding of human rights for all people in the country. However, the remnants of old migration policies as well as the creation of prohibitive laws over the past thirty-odd years have resulted in many challenges for

¹¹² Alan Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139166508>.

¹¹³ South Africa History Online, 'The Khoisan', accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/khoisan>.

¹¹⁴ Martin Legassick and Robert Ross, 'From Slave Economy to Settler Capitalism: The Cape Colony and Its Extensions, 1800–1854', in *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard K. Mbenga, and Robert Ross, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 253–318, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521517942.007>.

¹¹⁵ Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315621562>.

¹¹⁶ Peberdy, 'Selecting Immigrants', 1999.

migrants in South Africa today—particularly for those from other African countries. It is clear that these historical moments have bled into each other, with each influencing the next. As a result, the influences of policies established before 1994 continue to shape South Africa’s approach to migration today. It is only by exploring this historical background that we can understand its lingering effects in South Africa, as well as the logics behind contemporary South Africa’s increasingly securitized border regime.

2.3 Histories of Environmental Migration

This chapter aims to show both how a changing environment has always played a role in the migration of people and communities in Southern Africa, and how these migratory patterns have always been intertwined with other political, economic and social factors. As environmental historians Armiero and Tucker write:

If we wished to be provocative, we would argue that we need an environmental history of migration which should not be obsessed with the ‘environmental’. The point is not to depart from the relevance of ‘nature’, which is the very foundation of the field, but to subvert the commonsense assumption that in order to see nature we need to separate it from the ‘rest’, be it culture, economy or society.¹¹⁷

Indeed, if we are to study environmental history and environmental migration as complex systems, we must acknowledge that all events have many causal components, and that reductionist thinking will not take us far. Thus, in this chapter, the migration events and patterns considered below will be analyzed with this complexity and uncertainty in mind.

2.3.1 Migration Following the Decline of Mapungubwe

Mapungubwe is one of Southern Africa’s most well-studied historical sites. Lying in the northern part of what is now South Africa, in the Shashe-Limpopo basin, Mapungubwe Hill and its surrounding area was a home and a sacred place for a large African community for several hundred years from the 11th century A.D., until it was abandoned in 1290.¹¹⁸ The history of this society is

¹¹⁷ Marco Armiero and Richard Tucker, ‘Introduction’, in *Environmental History of Modern Migrations*, ed. Marco Armiero and Richard Tucker (London: Routledge, 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315731100>.

¹¹⁸ Munyaradzi Manyanga and Shadreck Chirikure, ‘The Mapungubwe-Great Zimbabwe Relationship in History: Implications for the Evolution of Studies of Socio-Political Complexity in Southern Africa’, *Goodwin Series* 12 (2019): 72–84.

rich and complicated so, rather than getting lost in the tangled details, this section will focus on the decline of Mapungubwe and the reasons that so many people moved away from this area at the end of the 13th century. As with most narratives of environmental history, the role of the changing environment in the mass migration is highly contested in the case of Mapungubwe. Some researchers claim that climate change, which resulted in drought, was responsible for the decline of the city.¹¹⁹ Also, great debate also surrounds the onset of a little Ice Age in Southern Africa, which various researchers have dated as 1290, 1400 or 1600, resulting in great uncertainty about its impact on the abandonment of Mapungubwe.¹²⁰

Other researchers have criticised this climate change narrative as being overly environmentally deterministic and ignorant of the agro-pastoral societies that continued to thrive in those areas after 1290.¹²¹ Manyanga suggests that, in fact, locals were accustomed to cycles of environmental disturbance, and adapted to the shocks through “innovation, re-organization, transformation and adjustment.”¹²² Consequently, he surmises that the abandonment of Mapungubwe was due to social and political factors. However, of course, just because a community was able to adapt to a changing environment once, does not necessarily mean they have this capacity in perpetuity—so even Manyanga’s argument contains holes. Taking a wider perspective, Pikirayi specifically highlights the role of the Indian Ocean global trade system in pushing people from the core, Mapungubwe, to the peripheral areas of the region (mostly the coastal areas) as they became more developed and economically prosperous.¹²³

Recently, using chemical analysis and modern precipitation pattern analysis, Nxumalo has suggested that both environmental changes along with cultural, social and economic shifts

¹¹⁹ Thomas N. Huffman, ‘A Cultural Proxy for Drought: Ritual Burning in the Iron Age of Southern Africa’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 36, no. 4 (1 April 2009): 1004, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2008.11.026>.

¹²⁰ Munyaradzi Manyanga, ‘Dynamics of Survival and Resilience in the Shashi-Limpopo Lowveld’, in *The Resilience of Heritage: Cultivating a Future of the Past, Essays in Honour of Professor Paul J.J. Sinclair*, ed. Anneli Ekblom, Christian Isendahl, and Karl-Johan Lindholm (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 2018), 190, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323512812_Dynamics_of_survival_and_resilience_in_the_Shashi-Limpopo_lowveld.

¹²¹ Manyanga, 186–88.

¹²² Manyanga, 195.

¹²³ Innocent Pikirayi, ‘Trade, Globalisation and the Archaic State in Southern Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 5 (3 September 2017): 892, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1344923>.

precipitated the abandonment of Mapungubwe.¹²⁴ He notes that climate variability—namely, inconsistent precipitation, drier climates and flooding—influenced the downturn of Mapungubwe, along with changing political structures. Clearly, the causes of the fall of Mapungubwe, as with the demise of many historical communities, are complex and difficult to understand, even with a wide array of archaeological and ecological evidence. However, it does seem that Mapungubwe Hill was mostly abandoned, and that the local people moved to the more peripheral areas and further north to what was becoming Great Zimbabwe (although there is evidence that these two cultural entities arose in tandem).¹²⁵ This example of migration in the Southern African Iron Age reveals the complex nature of these movements and their uncertain causalities. It is worth noting that this sort of free movement would be nearly impossible in the region today given that Mapungubwe Hill lies directly north of the hard-to-cross border between South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Already then, the shifting power structures—in the form of the burgeoning Indian Ocean trade system—affected migration patterns. This influence would only grow with the arrival of the Europeans a few hundred years later.

2.3.2 Tswana People's Migration to South Africa

Leaping forward a few hundred years to the turn of the 20th century, a period of great political transformation—many Africans were on the move. Camilla Cockerton has written extensively about the mobility of Tswana men and women migrating from what was then known as Bechuanaland—present-day Botswana—to South Africa in this period.¹²⁶ This story reveals the ways in which environmental factors and colonial encroachment influenced the flows of migration in Southern Africa during this time.

The so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’, which was formalized through the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, led to the constitution of the British Bechuanaland Protectorate, putting the Batswana under

¹²⁴ Bongumenzi Nxumalo, ‘Integrating Geoarchaeological Approaches and Rainfall Modelling as a Proxy for Hydrological Changes in the Shashe-Limpopo Basin, South Africa’, *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 74, no. 211 (2019): 67–77.

¹²⁵ Shadreck Chirikure et al., ‘New Pathways of Sociopolitical Complexity in Southern Africa’, *African Archaeological Review* 30, no. 4 (December 2013): 339–66, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-013-9142-3>; Thomas N. Huffman, ‘Mapungubwe and the Origins of the Zimbabwe Culture’, *Goodwin Series* 8 (2000): 14–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3858043>; Pikirayi, ‘Trade, Globalisation and the Archaic State in Southern Africa’.

¹²⁶ Camilla May Cockerton, *Contested Migration: Tswana Women “Running Away” from the “Land of the Desert”* (Springer, 2018).

the rule of the tyrant, Cecil Rhodes, and the British South Africa Company.¹²⁷ Moreover, the establishment of this Protectorate resulted in the formation of a land border between Bechuanaland and South Africa.¹²⁸ In its early days, the British authorities did not enforce this boundary and, for the most part, people would come and go as they pleased. In fact, these authorities only constructed the first border fence in 1937, meaning that the borderline, up until that point, was mostly symbolic.¹²⁹ However, the border began to take physical root from the 1890s onwards. During this time, newly formed immigration departments began to create border control infrastructure to keep out undesirable immigrants, including South Asians, poor white people and ‘surplus’ Africans.¹³⁰ Thus began the formalized bureaucratization, militarization and racialization of migration in the Southern African region. Writing about the ‘paperization’ of the Mozambique-South Africa border, Macdonald notes that from 1890-1940, “the border was actively transformed, with great and prolonged difficulty, from map sketches and diplomatic agreements into tangible, material form through a regime of paper documents that defined which, when, and where migrants could move.”¹³¹ Although a physical border did not exist for much of this period, people’s movements were still mediated by the colonial forces. Migrants began having to show papers in order to get places, and they were cut off from previously-accessible communities in their vicinity. However, it is clear—in Mozambique, Bechuanaland and all of Southern Africa—that as long as those borders have existed, people have resisted and overstepped them.

Much of the migration from Bechuanaland, both before and after the imposition of borders, was economic in nature; many Tswana men would go to South Africa to work in the Kimberly diamond mines.¹³² This swell of migration in the late 19th century was associated with what Cockerton calls the “twin ‘natural’ disasters of ecological calamity and colonial taxation.”¹³³ Tswana people were

¹²⁷ Fred Morton, ‘Fenders of Space: Kgatla Territorial Expansion Under Boer and British Rule, 1840-1920’, in *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous Southern African Responses to Colonialism, 1840-1930*, ed. Peter Limb, Norman Etherington, and Peter Midgley (Brill, 2010), 42, <https://brill.com/view/title/15067>.

¹²⁸ Cockerton, *Contested Migration*, 23.

¹²⁹ Andrew Macdonald, ‘Forging the Frontiers: Travellers and Documents on the South Africa–Mozambique Border, 1890s–1940s’, *Kronos*, Paper Regimes, 40 (November 2014): 177.

¹³⁰ Macdonald, ‘Forging the Frontiers: Travellers and Documents on the South Africa–Mozambique Border, 1890s–1940s’.

¹³¹ Macdonald, 158.

¹³² Camilla M. Cockerton, “‘Running Away’ from “the Land of the Desert”: Women’s Migration from Colonial Botswana to South Africa, c. 1895-1966’ (Ph.D., Canada, Queen’s University (Canada), 1995), 128–30, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/205430391/abstract/FEC956833B2C40BEPQ/1>.

¹³³ Cockerton, *Contested Migration*, 30.

hit with droughts in 1894, a rinderpest outbreak which destroyed 90 percent of the cattle herd over the 1890s, a locust plague a few years later, and further droughts which resulted in severe crop failure and largescale starvation in 1895-1897. On top of this, the British expropriated large swaths of arable land and enforced a new hut tax, forcing many Tswana people to enter the wage economy in order to cover this cost. Clearly, in this period of great economic and political transformation, the catalysts of migration were multi-faceted and complex. Of course, expanding colonial reach pushed local Africans into less arable areas and introduced diseases like Rinderpest, which made the extreme environmental conditions even less survivable. Thus, the influence of colonial authority, new borders and environmental distress greatly affected the flows of migration. Even though the colonial border infrastructure was growing in strength, thousands of Tswana people jumped the border to South Africa, travelling across the Kalahari Desert. Cockerton notes the particular gender dynamics of this movement; while men were moving to South Africa to join the wage economy, women refused to stay in Bechuanaland and rebelled against both the gender norms of their communities and the colonial border impositions, migrating by the thousands to South Africa.¹³⁴ It is important to highlight the agency of these migrants during this time; although they faced new and increasingly dangerous barriers on their journeys, they continued to move.

2.3.3 Migration from Mozambique during the Civil War

In the second half of the 20th century, internal and cross-border migration in/to South Africa was regulated by the racist South African government. During apartheid—Afrikaans for ‘apartness’, defined as a system of segregation based on race—the government strictly controlled the movements of black South Africans and African migrants. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the newly formed Union of South Africa consolidated its borders and implemented stricter immigration control measures. Much of the early legislation specifically targeted the growing population of South Asian migrants (mostly from India) and codified whiteness as a prerequisite for full South African citizenship.¹³⁵ At this time, the government proliferated dozens of laws regarding the movement of both black people in South Africa and black foreigners. Several laws, including the Immigration Amendment Act of 1937 and the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923,

¹³⁴ Cockerton, *Contested Migration*.

¹³⁵ Audie Klotz, *Migration and National Identity in South Africa, 1860–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 114, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139208741>.

alienated so-called ‘tropical Africans’—black people from north of 22 degrees south latitude—and local black people from rights to citizenship, land-ownership and free movement.¹³⁶ Of course, these people continued to move—albeit with greater risk involved. Africans from other countries crossed the border into South Africa irregularly and black South Africans streamed into urban areas with and without documentation.¹³⁷

Once the NP came to power and instituted the system of apartheid in 1948, Hendrick Verwoerd, also known as the ‘Architect of apartheid’, began the project of Afrikanerizing the nation.¹³⁸ The nation building project was intimately tied to immigration policy, with the white Afrikaans person coming to represent the ideal South African through the exclusion of others (to varying degrees). Once South Africa left the British Commonwealth and became an independent republic in 1961, they further tightened the restrictions on cross-border migration—especially from neighbouring British Protectorates—and black Africans who had once had some sort of residency in South Africa became foreigners or ‘illegal aliens’.¹³⁹ Even though black Africans became estranged from South Africa, their fate still mirrored that of local South Africans, whose movements within the country became restrained by the increasingly stringent Pass Laws. With these laws, the South African government restricted where black people could live and tied them bureaucratically to their white employers. Even in their own country, black people were forced to settle in pre-determined, ethnically-segregated areas of the land (homelands) and could be asked to produce their documentation at any time. As a result of these increasingly draconian and racist laws, black people on both sides of the border became more united in their opposition to white supremacy and colonialism—especially as the neighbouring countries fought for their independence from their European colonizers.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, there was great solidarity between Southern Africans at this time, with neighbouring countries hosting South African political exiles and taking a stance against the apartheid government.

¹³⁶ Francis Musoni, ‘The Ban on “Tropical Natives” and the Promotion of Illegal Migration in Pre-Apartheid South Africa’, *African Studies Review* 61, no. 3 (September 2018): 156–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.73>; Jonathan Klaaren, ‘Historical Overview of Migration Regulation in South Africa’, in *Immigration Law in South Africa* (Juta, 2018), 29, https://juta.co.za/catalogue/immigration-law-in-south-africa_24845.

¹³⁷ Klotz, *Migration and National Identity in South Africa, 1860–2010*, 132–33; Musoni, ‘The Ban on “Tropical Natives” and the Promotion of Illegal Migration in Pre-Apartheid South Africa’, 172–73.

¹³⁸ Peberdy, ‘Selecting Immigrants’, 1999, 221.

¹³⁹ Klaaren, ‘Historical Overview of Migration Regulation in South Africa’, 30.

¹⁴⁰ André du Pisani, ‘Migration and Politics in Southern Africa: Past and Present’, in *Migrants, Citizens and the State of Southern Africa*, ed. Jim Whitman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 15.

One crystallization of these emerging conflicts and relationships was the Mozambique civil war. After Mozambique won its independence from Portugal in 1975, it descended into a 16-year-long civil war with the anti-communist Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) rebels challenging the ruling Marxist-Leninist Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) party.¹⁴¹ In the middle of this war, the southern and central Mozambique regions were hit with a disastrous drought in 1982-1983.¹⁴² A report by the Swedish International Development Authority estimated that 1.8 million people were affected and 100,000 people died as a direct result of the drought, which had led to devastating food shortages all over the country. Mozambique has a record of treacherous environmental incidents; the country has suffered cyclones, floods and droughts for much of its history.¹⁴³ However, the interaction of the drought and the war had calamitous consequences. Pihale writes about how the armed conflict in Mozambique meant that relief to areas affected by the drought was disrupted.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, in the early days of the famine, most countries in the west were reluctant to provide aid to a staunchly communist government, even though they had the resources to do so.¹⁴⁵ On top of that, Mozambican peasants were fleeing en masse to urban areas and neighbouring countries because of the encroaching war and guerrilla attacks. This meant that there were fewer farm workers to cultivate and harvest what could be grown, worsening the famine. Overall, the conflict resulted in the displacement and migration of millions of Mozambicans. For example, the Gaza district of Southern Mozambique lost most of its 25,000 residents over the course of the 1980s, many of whom fled to South Africa.¹⁴⁶

By 1992, when the peace accords were signed, half of the Mozambican population, or eight million people were displaced—two million across borders and six million internally.¹⁴⁷ When the war

¹⁴¹ Eric Morier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos Manuel do Rosário, 'Introduction The Civil War in Mozambique: A History Still to Be Written', in *The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976–1992*, ed. Eric Morier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos M. do Rosário, 1st ed. (Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2018), 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781787442931.001>.

¹⁴² Tom Alberts and K Eduards, 'Drought and Destabilization: An Evaluation of Swedish Disaster Relief in Mozambique 1983 to 1985' (Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish International Development Authority, 1 March 1987), 5, <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/drought-and-destabilization-an-evaluation-of-swedish-disaster-relief-in-mozambique-1983>.

¹⁴³ Estêvão Pihale, 'The Environmental Impact of the Armed Conflict in Southern Mozambique, 1977-1992' (University of Cape Town, 2003), <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/11640>.

¹⁴⁴ Pihale, 48.

¹⁴⁵ Alberts and Eduards, 'Drought and Destabilization'.

¹⁴⁶ Pihale, 'The Environmental Impact of the Armed Conflict in Southern Mozambique, 1977-1992', 57.

¹⁴⁷ Pihale, 59.

ended, about 240,000 refugees decided to stay in South Africa rather than returning to their home country.¹⁴⁸ At that time, the South African government was not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, so refused to provide protection for the refugees. This neglect is especially egregious because South Africa's politicians and military had contributed to the destructiveness of the war by providing such things as training camps and military equipment for RENAMO guerrillas.¹⁴⁹ The South African government did allow the semi-autonomous, ethnically-segregated African homelands¹⁵⁰ near the borders to host refugees, and they became essential to assisting the refugees.¹⁵¹ However, in other parts of the country, Mozambican migrants were treated as illegal aliens, and the already "draconian deportation regime" was enhanced to be harsher towards migrants through the Aliens Control Act (ACA) of 1991. This law, also known as 'apartheid's last act', was based on what Segatti calls "classical colonial settlement policy," which prioritized the development and protection of the white minority and preserved systems that exploited black labourers.¹⁵² In Mozambique, we see the amalgamation of Cold War politics, post-independence volatility, environmental disaster and coloniality, which resulted in mass displacement and uncertainty. Thus, the exact causes of people's migration are difficult to pin down, because they are tied in with so many different circumstances and politics.

2.4 South African Migration Policy since 1994

The apartheid government passed the ACA in its dying days, but its tentacles reached far into the democratic era of South African history. In 2001, Crush and McDonald wrote, regarding this act, that "there can be few areas, land policy excepting, where the apartheid legacy has seemed so

¹⁴⁸ Tara Polzer, 'Adapting to Changing Legal Frameworks: Mozambican Refugees in South Africa', *International Journal of Refugee Law* 19, no. 1 (16 March 2007): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eem001>.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen A. Emerson, 'The Battle for Mozambique: The South African Factor', *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 5, no. 1 (2 January 2014): 61–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2014.880988>.

¹⁵⁰ Also known as 'Bantustans', homelands were ethnically-designated areas to which the majority of the black population were moved to prevent them from living in South African cities. They were technically run by independent governments, allowing black people rights within their bounds, but worked to deny black people protection in other parts of the country and to ensure their continued disenfranchisement.

South Africa History Online, 'The Homelands', accessed 21 June 2022, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/homelands>.

¹⁵¹ Polzer, 'Adapting to Changing Legal Frameworks', 28.

¹⁵² Aurelia Segatti, 'Reforming South African Immigration Policy in the Postapartheid Period (1990-2010)', in *Contemporary Migration to South Africa*, ed. Aurelia Segatti and Loren Landau, Africa Development Forum (The World Bank, 2011), 37, <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8767-2>.

deeply entrenched and so difficult to transcend.”¹⁵³ For their first few years in power, the newly-elected ANC did not seem to prioritize migration policy reform—in part due to the thorniness of detangling the knotted thread of corporate influence (which aimed to preserve the pool of cheap black labour) in this sphere.¹⁵⁴ South African courts declared the ACA unconstitutional in 2002, but for almost the first decade of democracy, this Act advanced an exclusionary immigration agenda that deprived undocumented immigrants of many rights and restricted pathways to permanent residence (mostly for other Africans).¹⁵⁵ More than just maintaining the status quo, the post-1994 South African government created new legislation and policies that further problematized migration and criminalized migrants. Segatti writes:

Rather than moving towards firmer integration of migration into domestic and regional development policies, the approach to immigration that shaped policy after 1994 drifted toward a mix of laissez-faire and mismanagement, related to both chronically weak administrative capacity and coercive and abusive practices inherited as a result of the low human rights standards of police and immigration personnel.¹⁵⁶

This resulted in higher rates of deportation, greater corruption, and the stagnation of refugee applications.

Before commenting on immigration practice since 1994, we must first ground ourselves in the development of migration legislation over the last 28 years. Important pieces of legislation in post-1994 South Africa include:

- The South African Citizenship Act of 1995, which consolidated and slightly updated the ACA, but did not drastically change the conception of citizenship that the apartheid government had molded over decades.¹⁵⁷ In introducing a fee structure for applying for permanent residence and preventing people from applying for this status from within South Africa, this Act deterred many people from staying in the country.¹⁵⁸ This Act continued to use the problematic

¹⁵³ Jonathan Crush and David A. McDonald, ‘Introduction to Special Issue: Evaluating South African Immigration Policy after Apartheid’, *Africa Today* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 1.

¹⁵⁴ Segatti, ‘Reforming South African Immigration Policy in the Postapartheid Period (1990-2010)’, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Segatti, 38–39; Sally Ann Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa’s Immigration Policies, 1910–2005* (Wits University Press, 2009), 148, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/selecting-immigrants/FC4F040E8CCB729E519C36F727AAAB27>.

¹⁵⁶ Segatti, ‘Reforming South African Immigration Policy in the Postapartheid Period (1990-2010)’, 54.

¹⁵⁷ Klaaren, ‘Historical Overview of Migration Regulation in South Africa’, 32.

¹⁵⁸ Peberdy, ‘Selecting Immigrants’, 1999, 289.

language of “alien” and used the ambiguously-defined concept of “good character” as a determinant for citizenship.¹⁵⁹

- The Refugees Act of 1998 (amended in 2017) which created permits for asylum seekers, limited immigration detention, mandated a stronger legal foundation for refugee status, and outlined a refugee application procedure.¹⁶⁰ Although noble in intention, this Act has been poorly implemented with many asylum seekers facing inefficiencies, corruption and lack of due process.¹⁶¹ Its 2017 amendment restricted asylum seekers’ right to seek employment and access education.¹⁶²
- The Immigration Act of 2002 (amended in 2004), which intended to ease the restrictions on the immigration of skilled labourers to South Africa in order to boost the economy.¹⁶³ It also established an inspectorate to police the country within the scope of the act—i.e., to investigate possible “illegal foreigners” and deport them.¹⁶⁴
- The Border Management Authority Act (BMA) of 2020, which centralized all activity at the border under one authority—the Department of Home Affairs.¹⁶⁵ This new phase of border control involves the creation of an armed border guard with law enforcement capabilities and is expected to cost upwards of R10 billion (~\$762 million CAD) annually. Critics have expressed concern about the current systematic inefficiencies and corruption of border management, which are not explicitly addressed in new policies or plans.¹⁶⁶ The BMA also carries a very security-minded tone, stressing, early on, the “constitutional responsibility of the South African National Defence Force to defend and protect the Republic, its territorial

¹⁵⁹ ‘South African Citizenship Act’, Act 88 § (1995), <https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-citizenship-act#:~:text=The%20South%20African%20Citizenship%20Act,for%20matters%20incidental%20thereto>.

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Klaaren and Chris Sprigman, ‘Refugee Status Determination Procedures in South African Law’, in *Advancing Refugee Protection in South Africa*, ed. Jeff Handmaker, Lee Anne de la Hunt, and Jonathan Klaaren, NED-New edition, 1 (Berghahn Books, 2011), 61–87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qckdz>; Klaaren, ‘Historical Overview of Migration Regulation in South Africa’, 33.

¹⁶¹ Lee Anne de la Hunt and William Kerfoot, ‘Due Process in Asylum Determination in South Africa from a Practitioner’s Perspective: Difficulties Encountered in the Interpretation, Application and Administration of the Refugees Act’, in *Advancing Refugee Protection in South Africa*, ed. Jeff Handmaker, Lee Anne de la Hunt, and Jonathan Klaaren, NED-New edition, 1 (Berghahn Books, 2011), 89–116, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qckdz>.

¹⁶² ‘Refugees Amendment Act’, 11 § (2020), https://static.pmg.org.za/Refugees_AB_2017.pdf.

¹⁶³ Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants*, 2009, 150.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Immigration Act’, Act 13 § (2002), https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a13-020.pdf.

¹⁶⁵ Ottilia Anna Maunganidze and Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo, ‘South Africa’s Border Management Authority Dream Could Be a Nightmare’, *Daily Maverick*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-08-11-south-africas-border-management-authority-dream-could-be-a-nightmare/>.

¹⁶⁶ Chris Gilili, ‘Home Affairs Vows to Speed up Border Management Authority’, *The Mail & Guardian*, 12 May 2021, <https://mg.co.za/news/2021-05-12-home-affairs-vows-to-speed-up-border-management-authority/>.

integrity and its people.”¹⁶⁷ It also gives law enforcement officers expanded capacity to search, question and detain people who are suspected of breaking the provisions of this Act.

Peberdy notes that there have been some measures taken to make South Africa’s immigration regime more inclusionary.¹⁶⁸ These include the creation of ‘border control areas’, which acknowledged that colonial borders divided previously united communities and thus allowed people to traverse the border to keep in contact with their families on the other side. Another progressive policy allows Lesotho nationals to apply for six-month concession permits, granting them easier travel across the border to South Africa. A series of special permits for Zimbabweans allowed tens of thousands of Zimbabweans to regularize their stays in South Africa.¹⁶⁹ The South African government has also run several amnesty programs for people from neighbouring countries to get permanent residence—including one for Mozambicans who fled to South Africa during the civil war. However, Peberdy critiques these measures, saying that they, “drew a boundary for future exclusion of Southern Africans,” because South Africa could now reify its boundaries having shown ‘moral courage’ in allowing these earlier concessions.¹⁷⁰ Thus, it seems that in the almost 30 years since the demise of the apartheid government, South Africa has moved towards a more exclusionary approach to border control, with even their seemingly-benevolent grants contributing indirectly towards this goal.

Laws and policies are one thing, but how these translate into reality is another thing completely. Patterns of migration have completely changed since 1994. In particular, there have been many more people coming into South Africa from the SADC countries (which include Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, Tanzania and Comoros)—mostly people entering the country as visitors.¹⁷¹ According to Peberdy, in 1996, there

¹⁶⁷ ‘Border Management Authority Act’, Pub. L. No. 43536, Act 2 37 (2020), https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202007/43536gon799.pdf.

¹⁶⁸ Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants*, 2009, 155–57.

¹⁶⁹ Inocent Moyo, ‘Undocumented Migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa: Reflections on Migration and Peace’, in *African Borders, Conflict, Regional and Continental Integration*, ed. Inocent Moyo and Christopher Changwe Nshimbi (London: Routledge, 2019), 160–71, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429057014>.

¹⁷⁰ Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants*, 2009, 157.

¹⁷¹ Sally Ann Peberdy, ‘Changing Geographies of Immigration to South Africa: Contemporary Changes and New Directions’, 2019, 229, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94974-1_25.

were 3,781,351 border crossings into South Africa, while in 2012, there were 6,656,487. This shows that significantly more people are entering the country, for varied reasons and with various permits. Many more people also aspire to live in South Africa on a more permanent basis, with applications for asylum and permanent residence rising as well. Data is difficult to come by, but Peberdy's evidence suggests that between 1994 and 2004, the South African government received 150,000 asylum claims in total, while in just 2013-2014, they received approximately 140,000.¹⁷² Not all these applications are approved, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) approximates that 250,250 refugees and asylum seekers currently live in South Africa.¹⁷³ The origin countries of these refugees and asylum seekers have fluctuated in composition over time: in 1994-2001, most were from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia. By 2006, the large majority were from Zimbabwe. In 2021, the top five origin countries for asylum seekers were Somalia, the DRC, Angola, Ethiopia and Burundi.¹⁷⁴ All the while, a consistent stream of migrants have been arriving from Europe and Asia, with approximately 1,000-2,000 arriving each year.¹⁷⁵ Beyond this, there are also many people entering South Africa irregularly. The precise number of undocumented migrants present in South Africa is uncertain and incalculable. Overall, in the 30-odd years since the political enfranchisement of South Africans of colour, there have been tremendous changes in migration law and practice in South Africa. At the same time, the underlying sentiment of exclusion and fear of the other remains to some extent.

2.5 Historical Themes and Patterns

Throughout the course of this journey through South African migration history, several themes emerged: the contestation of history, the ways that colonialism and oppressive structures affected migration, the 'entanglement' of history—how the past and present are inextricably tied together and dependent on one another—and the ways that the migration regimes reflected, modified and created national identity. These themes are reflected to some extent in the historical record, but they can also help us understand this present moment of migration and all its complexities.

¹⁷² Peberdy, 237.

¹⁷³ UNHCR, 'South Africa', UNHCR, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/south-africa.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Peberdy, 'Changing Geographies of Immigration to South Africa', 237.

¹⁷⁵ Statistics South Africa, 'Stats in Brief' (Pretoria, South Africa, 2021), 35, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/StatsInBrief/StatsInBrief2021.pdf>.

In every example of migration detailed above, historians have interpreted and represented the story differently, highlighting disparate pieces of evidence and revealing new dimensions to the narrative. This suggests that there is yet much to be uncovered about these disputed histories. It also seems that historical narratives also emerge from and reflect particular moments in time. For example, the way that the apartheid government represented black communities involved in the so-called 'Mfecane' as barbaric and irrational helped them justify their program of white supremacy, disenfranchisement and land appropriation. Thus, we must always be cautious of reductionist thinking in history and be aware of the motivations of its writers. It is easy to fall into the trap of writing history with a black and white understanding of events and with clear causal chains. However, these discussions show that history is messy and chaotic; there are never simple answers.

In this same vein, another emergent theme is that of the intersection of changing political and social power structures and migration. The decision to migrate is never made in isolation—it is always made within a particular political, social, economic and environmental context. Throughout Southern African history, we have observed the ways that the changing colonial structures affected the movement of people—through the expropriation of land from the 17th century onwards, with the creation of the Union of South Africa and the exit from the Commonwealth, and through involvement in wars for and after independence in the neighbouring countries. In all these cases, it seems that these mass migrations took place amidst a tumultuous environmental moment—in the form of drought or famine—but that their effects were exacerbated by colonial violence and changing political structures. In Mapungubwe, this was due to the growing east Indian Ocean trade network. In Southern Botswana, this was intertwined with the imposition of a hut tax by the colonial powers, the demand for migrant labour in the mines of South Africa, and the borderization process happening between South Africa and Bechuanaland. And in Mozambique, this was connected to the civil war, which was agitated and exacerbated by foreign powers, including South Africa, as a proxy conflict during the Cold War.

In all these cases, historians have doubted the role of climate/environmental change in mass migrations throughout history, emphasizing, instead, the political changes noted above. In most of the case study areas, the communities were likely accustomed to periods of environmental

disturbances. Many parts of Southern Africa experience recurring cycles of drought and irregular precipitation. Historians used this fact to diminish the role of environmental change in these migratory phenomena, stating that if communities were used to adapting to drought conditions historically, they should have been able to adapt in that moment as well. However, as discussed, it is likely that the combined pressure of these environmental perturbations along with political, social and economic shifts resulted in the mass migrations. Moreover, just because a community once adapted to changing environmental conditions, does not mean they will be able to do so forever. Conditions and circumstances changed as the world around them shifted. It is only by understanding the broader political and social context that the role of the environment becomes clearer. An in turn, it is only by understanding the changing environment, that the political and social context is further revealed.

Separately, another theme that stands out is that of entanglement and the seepage of the past into the present. The metaphor of entanglement brings to mind a messy, snarled rope that is impossible to unravel—ensnared with relics from the past and thrust into the future, and knotted with legacies of oppression that are challenging to unwind. A clear example of this is the colonial border system in Southern Africa. Established by European powers without the consultation of local communities, these borders remain fairly intact from the late 19th century, dividing communities and preventing the free movement of people. Another example is the ACA of 1991, which stood as South African immigration policy well into the democratic era, and still influences the government’s attitude towards this issue today. The language and sentiments of the ACA itself were dredged from equivalent legislation from 1937 and 1972 aiming to “entrench the past in the future.”¹⁷⁶ And this extended further into the future; for example, the exclusionary, othering, language of “alien” was used in South African immigration policy until 2004. More broadly, the sentiments of the ACA maintained a certain idea of citizenship (in 1991, white Europeaness, and, later, ‘South Africanness’), which did not extend to South Africa’s black neighbours. It is for these reasons that we cannot say that South Africa has emerged from a state of coloniality or a state of apartheid; these structures and attitudes still remain in the country and lead to differentiated outcomes for different people in the country based on race and background. This theme of entanglement will materialize throughout this thesis as events and decisions from the past reappear

¹⁷⁶ Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants*, 2009, 144.

in present-day South Africa. It is not immediately obvious what the country can do to disentangle itself from this muddled web, but the solution, surely, does not lie in further entrenching exclusionary migration policies and reifying borders.

The final important theme from this historical background is that of the intertwining of immigration policy and nation building with the creation of a national identity. As the structure and ideologies of what transformed into the South African government changed, its weaponization of immigration law as a nation-building strategy changed as well. In the late 19th century, this manifested in the creation and manning of borders along South Africa's northern edge in order to legitimize the Union of South Africa, and in the late 20th century, in the creation of the restrictive ACA to maintain white supremacy when it came under threat. Interestingly, the current South African regime is, again, turning to strong border control as an immigration management tool through the BMA and other policies. Again, we see this entanglement of past and present, even though the ways that the BMA operates are vastly different from the colonial border authorities in previous eras. As Klotz probes: after the fall of the apartheid government and race was removed as a prerequisite to citizenship, the question of 'who are the people that democracy should serve?' arose.¹⁷⁷ In its nation building, it seems that the new South Africa is narrowing the answer to this question, to the detriment of Africans from neighbouring countries.

This chapter has provided a foundation to understand how South Africa has arrived in its current position. Established in 1996, the South African Constitution "enshrines the rights of *all people in [the] country* and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom [emphasis added]."¹⁷⁸ Thus, constitutionally, these rights should belong to all people in the country, regardless of citizenship. However, in practice, they sometimes do not extend to migrant populations. The same year as the Constitution was enacted, Thabo Mbeki, the future president of South Africa gave his famous 'I am African Speech'. He said, "The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes and unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins. It is a firm assertion made by

¹⁷⁷ Audie Klotz, 'Borders and the Roots of Xenophobia in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 2 (2 April 2016): 180–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2016.1153708>.

¹⁷⁸ 'The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa' (1996), <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf>.

ourselves that *South Africa belongs to all who live in it* [emphasis added].”¹⁷⁹ There is a vast disconnect between these early aspirations and the current situation in South Africa in which there are clear limits on who is able to assert their constitutional rights and who deserves to be treated, equally, as an African. The juxtaposition of these noble aspirations and exclusionary migrant laws and practices makes more sense in the context of this turbulent and oppressive history.

¹⁷⁹ Thabo Mbeki, ‘I Am an African’ (speech, Cape Town, South Africa, 8 May 1996), https://soweto.co.za/html/i_iamafican.htm.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology for this research project, including the data gathering and analysis, several ethical considerations, as well as the limitations ingrained in such methods. This chapter begins with a brief outline of my motivations for undertaking this research. Following that, I describe the research site, participant recruitment process, and participant population. Next, I chronicle the data collection method—namely, semi-structured interviews—and its analysis. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethical considerations, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, my positionality, and the challenges and limitations of this project. This project was greatly inspired by the academic field of refugee studies—even though most of the participants interviewed were not strictly refugees. It also relies on feminist and decolonial methods which contribute to making this work more reciprocal, localized and principled. This chapter will help to contextualize the findings of the study, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2 Motivations

I am part of what is called the ‘Born Free’ generation in South Africa—the young people born after the first democratic election in 1994. I grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa in the early 2000s, an era in which the country saw great political and demographic change. Due to the double recession that hit Zimbabwe at this time as well as political factors, thousands of Zimbabweans migrated to South Africa.¹⁸⁰ Overwhelmingly, the media represented these migrants through a lens of criminality and fear, and many South Africans responded to them with prejudice. It was jarring to be part of this new generation of South Africans, imbued with the hopes for a more equal and opportunity-filled future, and simultaneously witness incidents of sometimes-violent xenophobia. Growing up in such an atmosphere has pushed me to think about how the boundaries of the nation-state are fortified and about the need for better protections and expanded rights for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As I learned more about climate change in my university studies, I

¹⁸⁰ Francis Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv104tb2v>.

began to think more about this issue in the context of environmental or economic migrants, who are not explicitly protected by international refugee law because they are not fleeing persecution or violence. But after reading more about critical refugee studies, border studies and migration in general, it really seems, to me at least, that climate change and economic devastation/inequality *are* violent forces that push people to migrate elsewhere. And thus, I wanted to contribute to the conversation on how to rethink the modern migration paradigm of and how to ensure the protection of migrants from all backgrounds.

I also have a deep interest in environmental justice, which is a central theme of this thesis. I view this project as an important opportunity to understand different people's lived experiences of migration in better detail. With such large-scale challenges like climate change, individual narratives and struggles often get swept away in the blur of mass tragedies and calamities. However, I think an integral part of the environmental justice project is highlighting these stories in order to reveal how climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, even though it is mostly caused by wealthier, more powerful people and countries. I also think it is essential to approach environmental questions in ways that consider the effects of broader structures and institutions, such as capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy and neoliberalism. Thus, I became interested in doing this project to incorporate post-colonial studies as well as feminist and decolonial methods into the study of climate migration within my home-region of Southern Africa.

3.3 Research Site

This research was conducted in South Africa, a country that houses an estimated 3.95 million foreign-born people out of a total population of approximately 60 million.¹⁸¹ There is no way to know the exact number of undocumented migrants in the country, but research indicates that it is nowhere near the number of people that many South Africans believe it to be.¹⁸² All these figures should be taken with a grain of salt, given the indeterminability of undocumented migrant

¹⁸¹ Steven Gordon, 'Xenophobia Is on the Rise in South Africa: Scholars Weigh in on the Migrant Question', The Conversation, accessed 5 July 2022, <http://theconversation.com/xenophobia-is-on-the-rise-in-south-africa-scholars-weigh-in-on-the-migrant-question-181288>; Statistics South Africa, 'Mid-Year Population Estimates' (Stats SA, 19 July 2021), <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022021.pdf>; Statistics South Africa, 'Erroneous Reporting of Undocumented Migrants in SA', August 2021, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14569>.

¹⁸² 'Migration Scholars Release Statement on International Migration Situation in South Africa', Human Sciences Research Council, 13 April 2022, <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/media-briefs/dces/migration-scholars-statement>.

population numbers—almost every source analyzed for this chapter gave different statistics. Because South Africa’s last census was conducted in 2011,¹⁸³ even the reported number of documented migrants is only approximate. However, it does seem that South Africa is a significant destination country on the continent, receiving more immigrants than any other African country.¹⁸⁴ According to 2020 statistics from the United Nations Population Division, of the estimated 2,860,500 immigrants in South Africa (a significantly lower estimate than the aforementioned 3.95 million), 690,200 (24%) are from Zimbabwe, 350,500 (12%) are from Mozambique, 192,000 (7%) are from Lesotho, 94,100 (3%) are from Malawi, 67,400 (2%) are from the United Kingdom, 63,900 (2%) are from the DRC, and a few hundred thousand are from Somalia, Botswana, Angola and Eswatini collectively.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the vast majority of immigrants are from other Southern African countries. The gender balance is almost even, with 45.89% of female migrants reported in 2017.¹⁸⁶ Within this migrant population, 255,200 are classified as forcibly displaced people—76,800 of whom have refugee status and 173,500 of whom are classified as asylum seekers. In 2020, the top three origin countries within the refugee population were Somalia (23,054 people), the DRC (22,816 people) and Ethiopia (15,6290 people), and the top three origin countries within the asylum seeker population were Ethiopia (48,099 people), the DRC (34,779), and Bangladesh (25,482).¹⁸⁷ Based on the (now quite outdated) 2011 census, the geographic dispersal of migrants is not very wide, with 52% of migrants living in Gauteng Province.¹⁸⁸ Broadening the scope of this discussion to the entire population of South Africa, the racial composition of the country is 80.9% black, 8.8% coloured (a racial category specific to South Africa, including people of various multiracial backgrounds), 2.6% Indian/Asian and 7.8% white.¹⁸⁹ It is a fairly young population, with 37,647,298 (or 62.60%) people falling below the age of 35. Thus, South Africa is a mostly young and black country with great ethnic and linguistic diversity.

¹⁸³ The 2021 census was postponed to 2022, and the results of that one have not yet been published.

¹⁸⁴ M McAuliffe and A Triandafyllidou, ‘World Migration Report 2022’ (Geneva: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2022), <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.

¹⁸⁵ Khangelani Moyo, ‘South Africa Reckons with Its Status as a Top Immigration Destination, Apartheid History, and Economic Challenges’, Migration Policy Institute, 18 November 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/south-africa-immigration-destination-history>.

¹⁸⁶ World Bank Group, ‘Mixed Migration, Forced Displacement and Job Outcomes in South Africa’ (Washington, DC: World Bank, June 2018), 16, <https://doi.org/10.1596/30158>.

¹⁸⁷ UNHCR, ‘Refugee Data Finder’, The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, accessed 6 July 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

¹⁸⁸ World Bank Group, ‘Mixed Migration, Forced Displacement and Job Outcomes in South Africa’, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Statistics South Africa, ‘Mid-Year Population Estimates’.

The participants from this study lived in either Johannesburg or Musina (see Figure 2 below for a map of South Africa that will help contextualize this thesis). Johannesburg is located in Gauteng Province, and is the country's most populous city, hosting 5.8 million people as of 2020.¹⁹⁰ Known as the City of Gold or Egoli, Johannesburg was founded in 1886 when the settler colonizers unearthed gold, and is now the financial heart of the country.¹⁹¹ In fact, Johannesburg is the wealthiest city in Africa, and thus attracts migrants from all over hoping to make a better life for themselves.¹⁹² In spite of its immense wealth relative to other African cities, Johannesburg is highly racially and economically segregated and is home to millions of people of low socio-economic status. Most newcomers move to the city center or the peri-urban periphery. Musina is located in Limpopo Province and is the northernmost town in South Africa. It lies just 18 kilometers away from the Beitbridge border, which connects South Africa and Zimbabwe.¹⁹³ It also sits near South Africa's border with Botswana and Mozambique. Farms and mines in Limpopo have relied on migrant labour for decades, and thus, there exist longstanding practices of hiring temporary, casual and/or informal migrant labourers in the region.¹⁹⁴ Migrants in Musina have almost no chance of gaining refugee status; in 2016 near 0% of initial asylum applications were approved.¹⁹⁵ There are also few avenues for migrants to regularize their stay in South Africa, pushing many towards staying in the country undocumented, especially now that the various special permits for Zimbabweans are in jeopardy (more on this in Chapter 4).

¹⁹⁰ Samkelisiwe Khanyile and Christina Culwick Fatti, 'Interrogating Park Access and Equity in Johannesburg, South Africa', *Environment and Urbanization* 34, no. 1 (1 April 2022): 10–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09562478221083891>.

¹⁹¹ James Campbell, 'Johannesburg, South Africa', Britannica, accessed 13 July 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Johannesburg-South-Africa>.

¹⁹² Tyler W. Myroniuk and Jo Vearey, 'Social Capital and Livelihoods in Johannesburg: Differential Advantages and Unexpected Outcomes among Foreign-Born Migrants, Internal Migrants, and Long-Term South African Residents', *International Migration Review* 48, no. 1 (2014): 243–73.

¹⁹³ S. Frank Rapholo, 'Perceptions of Church Leaders on the Integration of Migrant Youth into South Africa: The Case of Refugees in the Refugee Camps Managed by Churches at Musina', *Theologia Viatorum* 44, no. 1 (10 June 2020): 6.

¹⁹⁴ Zaheera Jinnah, 'Silence and Invisibility: Exploring Labour Strategies of Zimbabwean Farmworkers in Musina, South Africa', *South African Review of Sociology* 48, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 46–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2017.1327822>.

¹⁹⁵ Khangelani Moyo and Franzisca Zanker, 'No Hope for the "Foreigners": The Conflation of Refugees and Migrants in South Africa', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (3 April 2022): 253–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.2007318>.

Map of South Africa



Created by: Lekha Tlhothlhamajje, 22 August 2022
Data Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (<https://data.humdata.org/dataset/cod-ab-zaf>);
South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (https://www.dws.gov.za/iwqs/gis_data/river/All.html);
ArcGIS Hub (<https://hub.arcgis.com/datasets/africa-boundaries/explore?location=-6.375902%2C32.501034%2C3.00>)

Figure 2: Map of South Africa

3.4 Participant Recruitment

3.4.1 Recruitment of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

For this project, I used purposive sampling methods in order to recruit participants. I recruited people over the age of 18 who had migrated from another African country to South Africa. They could fit into the broad categories of migrant, asylum seeker or refugee. When I reached out to potential participants, I noted that I could arrange a translator if they were not comfortable with being interviewed in English but, ultimately, all participants were interviewed in English. I was

hoping to recruit migrants from all different backgrounds and traditional categories of migration—economic, environmental, political, etc. I intentionally kept this broad so as not to fall into the trap of conflating policy categories with analytical categories, as Bakewell advises.¹⁹⁶ In his discussion of ‘policy irrelevant research’, he recommends that researchers working in migrant communities not be over-reliant on policy categories (for example, refugee, voluntary/forced migrant, economic migrant, etc.) because they may become limited by the boundaries of the field. For example, refugees may have many experiences in common with economic migrants, but if one limits their study to just refugees, these possible patterns and similarities may get lost. Because I was interested in the experiences of all migrants, regardless of political status, I recruited from a larger pool that included refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. I did, however, limit this project to cross-border migrants because I am interested in the legal frameworks and social barriers that non-South African migrants have to navigate.

I used a variety of avenues to recruit migrant participants. Principally, I worked with the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA), a national network comprised of 26 member organizations that works to protect, advocate for, and engage with refugees and migrants.¹⁹⁷ I reached out to CoRMSA and they were kind enough to host me in their offices and help connect me with some of their member organizations, who do grassroots work in various migrant communities. In order to honour the unwritten code of reciprocity, in my initial email to CoRMSA, I offered to help them with anything they needed that was within my skill set. Through this collaboration, I helped them compile a year-end activities document and transcribe their Annual General Meeting minutes. CoRMSA connected me with several organizations that, in turn, connected me with migrants. I also reached out to a few organizations on my own—mostly country-based advocacy and support groups—but none of them got back to me. The three organizations that I worked with were the South African Red Cross, Future Families, and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR). The South African Red Cross sends volunteers to various areas of the country to help migrants access essential services, reunite with

¹⁹⁶ O. Bakewell, ‘Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 432–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen042>.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Home Page’, accessed 6 July 2022, <https://www.cormsa.org.za/>.

their families and find missing or deceased family members.¹⁹⁸ They also work to ensure the preservation of rights in Lindela Repatriation Centre (the main deportation facility in South Africa). Future Families provides social assistance for people who have been displaced, within their general mission of providing services to orphans and vulnerable children.¹⁹⁹ And the CSVR advocates for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, provides psychosocial support services to members of these population, and does research on violence and conflict.²⁰⁰ When I reached out to these three organizations (via CoRMSA), I shared information about the project and outlined the characteristics of the participant pool. I also asked them to confirm the interest of potential participants before sharing their contact details with me. I did not want to reach out to migrants out of the blue. Once the participants had confirmed they were interested in being part of the study, I reached out to them over WhatsApp and we arranged a time and place to meet from there. This was the method followed for participants recruited through the CSVR and Future Families. For the Red Cross participants, I got in touch with the branch coordinator in Musina, and he recruited participants on my behalf using my recruitment letter as reference. In total, I interviewed 22 migrants.

There were a few limitations to my recruitment strategy. Firstly, I recruited participants through grassroots organizations—all of which support, advocate for and provide social services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This suggests that the potential participants were all tied to these organizations in some way—either as workers or beneficiaries. It also implies that the potential participants were more likely to be low-income and/or in need of social services or assistance. Thus, my sample was skewed in this direction; I did not get the opportunity to talk to middle-upper income migrants, migrants not directly involved with migrant-related organizations, or those lower-income migrants who might be unaware of the services provided by these organizations. Secondly, given that the organizations I worked with operated in English, the people that they work with were more likely to speak English well. Thus, all of the interviews were conducted in English, and potential participants who did not speak English fluently were not represented in the study. Thirdly, Future Families put me in touch with two migrants (who also

¹⁹⁸ The International Committee of the Red Cross, 'ICRC's Activities in Favour of Migrants in Southern Africa', 2020, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/southern-africa-icrcs-activities-favour-migrants>.

¹⁹⁹ 'Future Families – A Non-Profit Organisation', accessed 16 August 2022, <https://futurefamilies.co.za/>.

²⁰⁰ 'Homepage', CSVR, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.csvr.org.za/>.

happened to be case workers for the organizations), and they referred me to several other migrants. Thus, although intended to be more purposive and random, the sampling became snowball-like in nature to some extent. Jacobsen and Landau criticize this technique because it risks producing a biased sample and revealing potentially damaging information to members of a network or subgroup.²⁰¹ In the case of this project, the aim was not to produce a generalizable result but, simply, to gather perspectives and learn about people's experiences. Thus, it was fine that several of the migrants knew each other. Also, I was careful not to reference other participants in interviews, so there was a lowered risk of revealing damaging information. And fourthly, recruitment for this study was limited by COVID-19 restrictions. The migrants I was talking to were required to be vaccinated, which, undoubtedly limited the sample size given that it was more difficult for migrants to access COVID-19 vaccines in South Africa due to ID requirements.²⁰² Several pop up vaccination sites opened up in Johannesburg in late December 2021, but they were limited in reach.²⁰³ And only in early April 2022, after all the interviews had been conducted, did the South African government commit more fully to mass-vaccinating undocumented migrants and people in more remote areas of the country.²⁰⁴ Also, I was more hesitant to reach out to migrants because I did not want to potentially expose them to the virus; even though I was fully vaccinated, not seeing many people, and careful (i.e., wearing a mask and sitting at least 2m away) when I conducted interviews—there was still a chance I could give them COVID-19. I was especially worried because migrants might have found it more difficult to access healthcare if they did get severely ill. Thus, overall, there were several limitations on the recruitment of participants, but the study still managed to explore a large variety of perspectives.

²⁰¹ Karen Jacobsen and Loren B. Landau, 'The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration', *Disasters* 27, no. 3 (2003): 196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7717.00228>.

²⁰² Rebecca Walker, Jo Vearey, and Nicholas Maple, 'Excluding Migrants Undermines the Success of Covid-19 Vaccine Rollouts', 2 August 2021, <https://www.wits.ac.za/covid19/covid19-news/latest/excluding-migrants-undermines-the-success-of-covid-19-vaccine-rollouts.html>.

²⁰³ Zaheer Cassim, 'South Africa Rolls Out COVID Vaccines for Undocumented Immigrants', *VOA*, 22 December 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-africa-rolls-out-covid-vaccines-for-undocumented-immigrants/6365760.html>.

²⁰⁴ Xinhua, 'South Africa Targets Vulnerable, Undocumented People for COVID-19 Vaccination', *CGTN Africa*, 8 April 2022, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2022/04/08/south-africa-targets-vulnerable-undocumented-people-for-covid-19-vaccination/>.

3.4.2 Participant Recruitment for Experts and Government Officials

I also interviewed four experts from different organizations and two government officials from the Department of Home Affairs. I hoped to capture these perspectives in order to better contextualize my interviews with migrants and to see the opinions of experts and government officials fit into the migrants' stories. Throughout this project, I use the term 'expert' lightly, acknowledging that, of course, the migrants I spoke to are also experts. I got in touch with the two government officials by cold emailing them, having obtained their email addresses and information from official government websites. For one of them—Chief Director of the Inspectorate, Modiri Matthews—I had to submit formal research requests to his department, which got reviewed and approved. I connected with one expert through CoRMSA. I emailed the second expert having been introduced to her by a relative of mine, and she connected me with the third expert—they had worked together at the Central Methodist Church, which provided shelter for migrants in the 2000s. I cold emailed the fourth expert, having found out about his organization from an online search. This brought my total participant number to 28.

3.5. Participant Description

3.5.1 Description of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Information about the migrants was not collected in a uniform matter—participants were asked for a handful of descriptors at the beginning of the interview that helped contextualize their responses. This included information about their age, national origin, home language(s), occupation, gender and political status. Ultimately, of the 22 migrants whom I interviewed, ten were from the DRC, seven were from Zimbabwe, four were from Burundi and one was from Rwanda (see Figure 3 for a visual summary). In terms of age, three of them were 20-29 years old, twelve were 30-39 years old, four were 40-49 years old, and three were 50-59 years old (see Figure 4 for a visual summary). Eight identified as men and fourteen as women. Lastly, 13 interviews were conducted in person and the rest on Zoom.

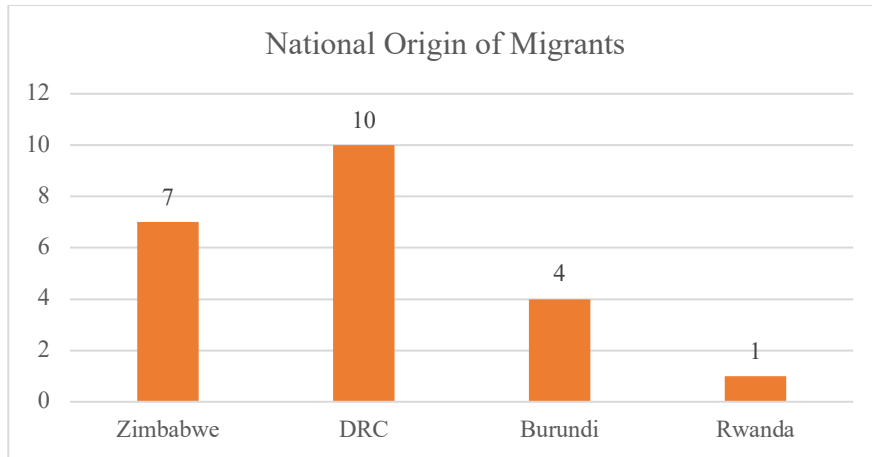


Figure 3: Graph Showing Migrant Origin Countries

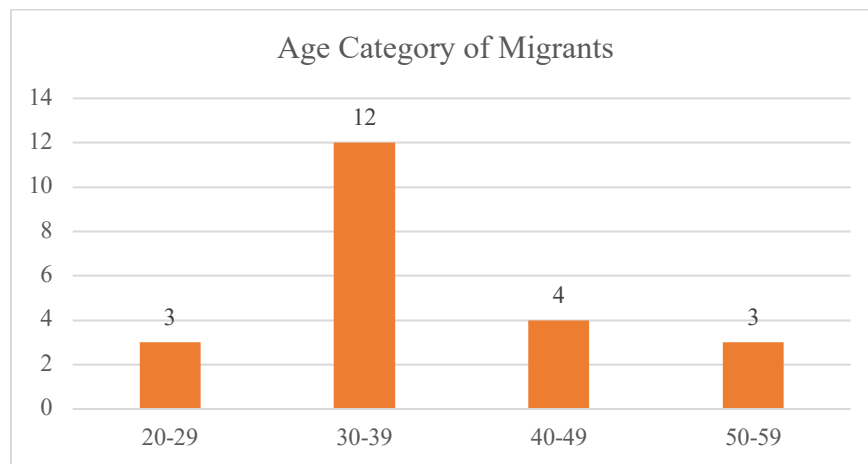


Figure 4: Graph Showing Migrant Age Categories

The participants were all multilingual (often speaking two to four languages), fell between the ages of 22 and 56, and included eleven asylum seekers (two with expired permits), five undocumented people, three refugees, one person who had overstayed their visa, one person on the Zimbabwean special permit, and person of status unknown (see Figure 5, below, for a breakdown of this distribution).

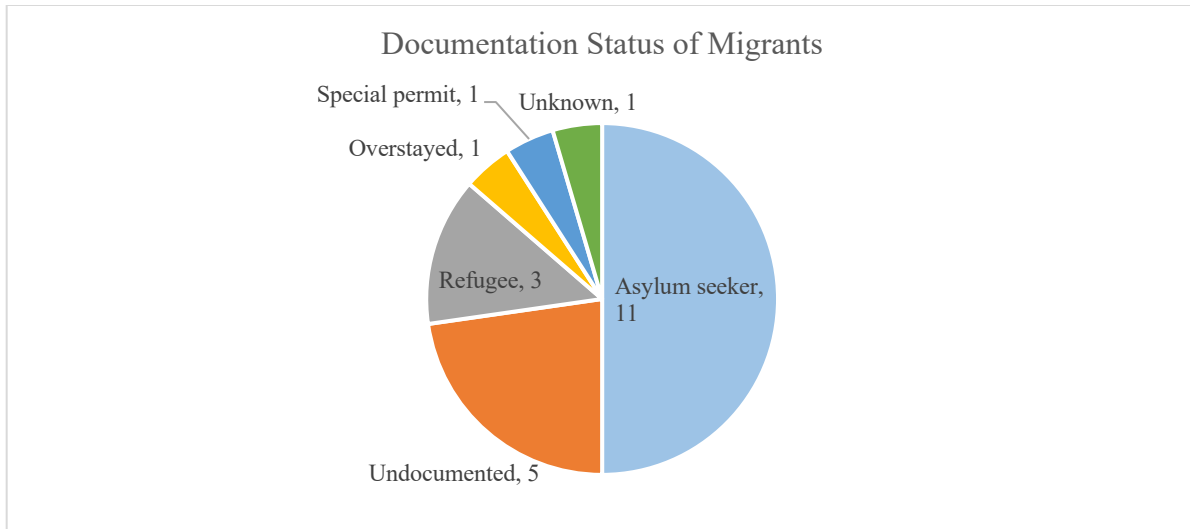


Figure 5: Graph Showing Documentation Status of Migrants

Table 1, below, summarizes the general descriptors of the participants.

	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Age Category</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Job/ Occupation</i>	<i>Year of Arrival</i>
1	Rwanda	20-29	Woman	Refugee	Student	2006
2	DRC	50-59	Woman	Asylum seeker	Caretaker for the elderly	2007
3	DRC	30-39	Woman	Asylum seeker	Domestic worker	2002
4	DRC	30-39	Woman	Asylum seeker	Unemployed	2008
5	DRC	40-49	Woman	Asylum seeker	Unemployed	2006
6	Zimbabwe	30-39	Woman	Special permit	Social worker	2010
7	Burundi	20-29	Man	Undocumented	Unemployed	2019
8	Zimbabwe	50-59	Woman	-	Piece jobs (cleaning and nannying)	1981
9	Zimbabwe	20-29	Man	Overstayed	Piece jobs (construction)	2021
10	DRC	30-39	Woman	Refugee	Care worker	2007
11	DRC	50-59	Woman	Refugee	Interpreter	2000
12	Burundi	40-49	Man	Asylum seeker	Runs an NPO for migrants	2010
13	Zimbabwe	30-39	Man	Undocumented	Piece jobs	2017
14	DRC	30-39	Woman	Asylum seeker	Unemployed	2017
15	DRC	30-39	Woman	Asylum seeker	Social worker	2005
16	DRC	40-49	Woman	Asylum seeker	Social worker	2008
17	Zimbabwe	30-39	Man	Undocumented	Piece jobs	2018
18	Zimbabwe	30-39	Woman	Undocumented	Domestic worker	2020
19	Zimbabwe	30-39	Woman	Undocumented	Fruit packer	2021
20	Burundi	30-39	Man	Asylum seeker (expired)	Piece jobs (interpretation)	2018
21	DRC	30-39	Man	Asylum seeker (expired)	Works at a salon	2015
22	Burundi	40-49	Man	Asylum seeker	Unemployed	2005

Table 1: Basic Migrant Descriptors

Here, I would also like to give a very brief description of the contexts that these migrants are coming from. There is not enough space here to go into detail about the histories and conflicts in Zimbabwe, the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, but a concise summary of the facts may help contextualize the stories and experiences of participants that will be further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. The map of Africa—Figure 6 below—may help contextualize this discussion.

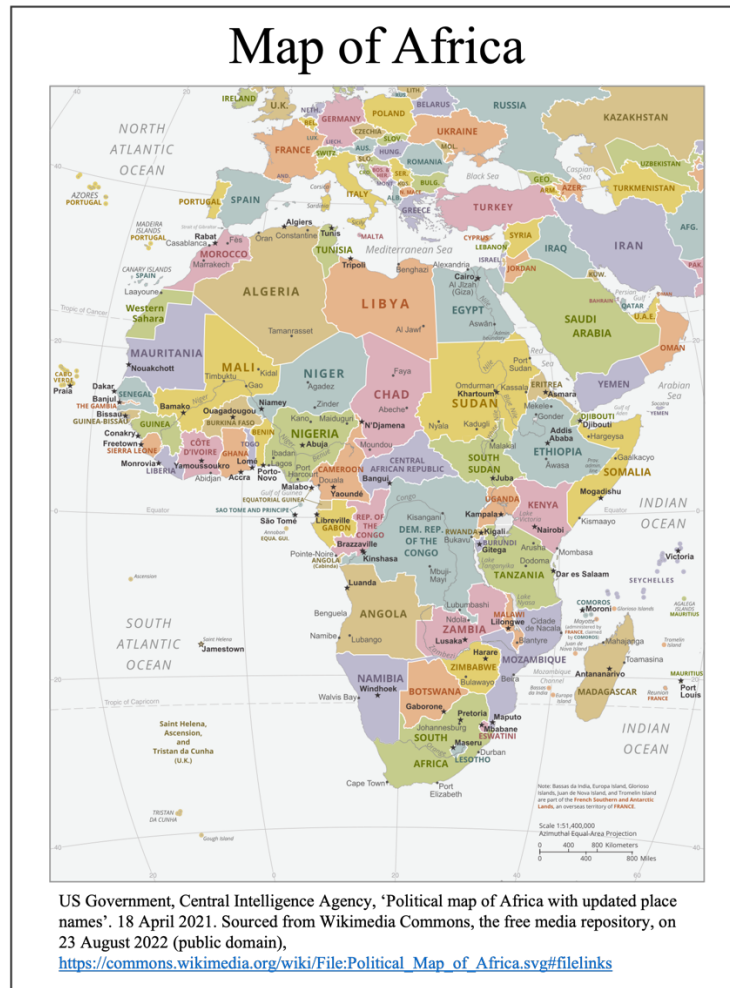


Figure 6: Map of Africa

3.5.2 The Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe’s fight for liberation culminated with its independence from the British in 1980, and Robert Mugabe became the country’s first prime minister. Many of the factors that precipitated the migration of thousands of Zimbabweans out of the country in the decades to follow were rooted

in historical events and colonial structures, and exacerbated by the decisions of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government (Mugabe’s party) in the 1990s.²⁰⁵ Due to slow economic growth, the country became constrained by the neoliberalizing requirements of international Economic Structural Adjustment Programs from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the 1990s. These loans did not jump start the economy as anticipated and, in the first half of the 1990s, unemployment rose from 30% to 50%, while inflation rose astronomically. During this time, the informal sector became more dominant in Zimbabwe, many skilled labourers left the country to seek greener pastures, and cross-border migration to South Africa greatly increased.²⁰⁶

The Aliens Control Act of 1991 ensured that many migrants to South Africa, temporary or permanent, would be classified as criminals. The ANC under President Mandela expanded on these deterrent measures, increasing the number of South African National Defence Force (SANDF) soldiers on the border and introducing the Border Police Division—concentrating on the Limpopo River, where many Zimbabwean migrants crossed into South Africa. Over the next few years, the barriers to entry for Zimbabweans only grew; in 1996, Zimbabweans were required to provide an invitation letter from a South African to obtain a visa. As a result of these increasingly draconian border protection measures, the 1990s saw the rise of the *maguma-guma*—people who would smuggle migrants across the border to South Africa. At the turn of the century, political tensions rose in Zimbabwe, spurred by the growth of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In the 2000 general election, ZANU-PF won a highly contested general election—due, in part, to their use of intimidation and violence.²⁰⁷ At this time, the ZANU-PF government was also tacitly supporting the occupation of white-owned farms by liberation war veterans and the expropriation of white-owned land without compensation under the umbrella of ‘fast track land reform’.²⁰⁸ In response, various foreign governments imposed sanctions onto Zimbabwe, leading to further economic decline. In the next election in 2008, there was no decisive winner and

²⁰⁵ Shingirai Nyakabawu, ‘Liminality in Incorporation: Regularisation of Undocumented Zimbabweans in South Africa’, *Anthropology Southern Africa* 44, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2021.1878381>; Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, 136.

²⁰⁶ Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, 137.

²⁰⁷ David Pottie, ‘Parliamentary Elections in Zimbabwe, 2000’, *Electoral Studies* 21, no. 3 (1 September 2002): 487, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794\(01\)00044-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794(01)00044-0).

²⁰⁸ Nyakabawu, ‘Liminality in Incorporation’, 5–6.

politically motivated violence cropped up. At this time, over 80% of the population was unemployed, more than 40,000 people were affected by a cholera outbreak, and inflation rates were over 7000%, leading to a near-valueless currency.²⁰⁹ Throughout the course of the 1990s and 2000s, Zimbabwe also experienced several droughts—with the most devastating one occurring in 1991/1992, which had reverberating effects throughout the rest of the decade.²¹⁰ Moreover, 2000-2010 saw an increase in the frequency of droughts, leading to reduced crop production and food shortages.²¹¹

Recognizing that many Zimbabweans were coming to South Africa, the DHA introduced the Dispensation of Zimbabwean Project (DZP) in 2009—it allowed any Zimbabwean who entered the country before that year (regardless of status) the opportunity to apply for a visa that would be valid for up to four years.²¹² This allowed close to a quarter of a million Zimbabweans to regularize their stay in South Africa. However, just recently, at the end of 2021, the South African government decided that the holders' permission to remain in South Africa would be revoked on the last day of 2021, and they would have a 12-month grace period to apply for other permits.²¹³ This has left many Zimbabweans worried about what the future may hold.

3.5.3 The Great Lakes Region Context

The countries of the Great Lakes Region—which refers to the area in and around the Great Rift Valley in East Africa—namely, Uganda, the DRC²¹⁴, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania have always been interlinked. According to Alusala, the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, in particular, are at the

²⁰⁹ Nyakabawu, 7; Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, 146.

²¹⁰ Oshneck Mupepi and Mark Makomborero Matsa, 'Spatio-Temporal Dynamics of Drought in Zimbabwe between 1990 and 2020: A Review', *Spatial Information Research* 30, no. 1 (February 2022): 117–30, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41324-021-00417-2>.

²¹¹ Godfrey Mutowo and David Chikodzi, 'Remote Sensing Based Drought Monitoring in Zimbabwe', *Disaster Prevention and Management* 23, no. 5 (2014): 649–59, <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-10-2013-0181>.

²¹² Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, 156.

²¹³ Godfrey Marawanyika and Ray Ndlovu, 'South African Faces Legal Fight Over Zimbabwean Work Permits', *Bloomberg.Com*, 15 June 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-15/south-african-plan-to-end-zimbabweans-permits-faces-challenge>.

²¹⁴ The Democratic Republic of Congo has formerly been called the Republic of Congo (1960-1994), the Democratic Republic of Congo (1964-1971), The Republic of Zaire (1971-1997), and then, again, the Democratic Republic of Congo (1997-present). For simplicity, it will be referred to as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) throughout this discussion.

core of the various conflicts in the Great Lake Region.²¹⁵ Belgium colonized all three countries, and there have been several cross-border disputes within the region since independence in the early 1960s. There is not space here, to delve into the multidimensional, highly contested history of this region, but this section will offer a compressed and surface level summary of its postcolonial history.

After the assassination of the DRC's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, and the overthrow of its second leader, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, in 1965, the DRC was ruled by the corrupt kleptocrat, Mobutu Sese Seko for over 30 years.²¹⁶ His large-scale theft of the countries almost-entire budget plunged the economy into a downward spiral. Countries such as the U.S. and the DRC's former colonizer, Belgium, ignored and even supported this devastation because Mobutu was considered an important Cold War ally. The 1990s brought a period of great change and adversity in the Great Lakes Region. A devastating event—the Rwandan genocide—greatly disturbed the region in 1994. Within 100 days, hundreds of thousands of people were killed and many more were displaced from their homes.²¹⁷ Millions of people fled into the DRC and other neighbouring countries. Burundi was also caught up in these events; the country's first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated during an attempted coup just a few months into his presidency, leading to an outbreak of violence in 1993.²¹⁸ In 1997, Mobutu Sese Seko was eventually removed from power in the First Congo War of 1996-1997 and replaced by Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

The dissolution of Mobutu's regime had broad ramifications of the region, and Nzonola-Ntalaja contends that, “Rwanda and Uganda, later on joined by Burundi, took advantage of the disintegration of the Congolese state and armed forces to create territorial spheres of interest within which they could plunder the Congo's riches.”²¹⁹ What followed was a period of great upheaval, with innumerable players, ranging from western corporations, to local politicians and rebel groups,

²¹⁵ Nelson Alusala, ‘Border Fragility and the Causes of War and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, in *African Borders, Conflict, Regional and Continental Integration*, ed. Inocent Moyo and Christopher Changwe Nshimbi, 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429057014>.

²¹⁶ Joy Owen, *Congolese Social Networks: Living on the Margins in Muizenberg, Cape Town* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015).

²¹⁷ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (Zed Books, 2002), 223, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350223004>.

²¹⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘History of Burundi’, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burundi/History>.

²¹⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 227.

to the armies of the Great Lake countries, to UN peacekeeping missions, playing a role.²²⁰ As a result of the economic, political, social and environmental tumult in the region, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced—some internally and other across borders.²²¹ Ong’ayo categorizes the causes of displacement in the Great Lakes Region as either relating to conflict or natural disasters (this is oversimplified, but useful for this summary). Large exoduses coincide with conflicts such as the wars between Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC in 1999-2000 (and into the 2000s), and/or natural disasters such as the armyworm infestation in 2017 that impacted Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda. There were/are so many refugees, asylum seeker and migrants that Patrycja Stys refers to the refugee camps in Rwanda and Uganda as ‘microstates’, with their own territories, governments and populations.²²² The number of displaced people has fluctuated over the years as some people return to their home country, but in 2015 the World Bank estimated that 3.3 million people were displaced in the Great Lakes Region (the majority internally and a smaller portion outside their countries’ borders).²²³

Although most people from the Great Lakes Region fled to neighbouring countries or within their countries, a fair few made their way southward to South Africa. In 1994, for example, Congolese asylum seekers made up the largest group of asylum seekers in South Africa.²²⁴ The UNHCR’s 2020 report on South Africa approximates that the country hosts 22,816 refugees and 34,779 asylum seekers from the DRC, 2,636 refugees and 6,927 asylum seekers from Burundi, and 1,016 refugees and 1,056 asylum seekers from Rwanda.²²⁵ These numbers do not include undocumented migrants, permanent residents or migrants on other visas (work, travel, study, etc.). Unlike for Zimbabweans and Basotho, migrants from the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda are not afforded

²²⁰ Gilbert M. Khadiagala, ‘Security and Governance in the Great Lakes Region: An Introduction’, in *War and Peace in Africa’s Great Lakes Region*, ed. Gilbert M. Khadiagala (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58124-8_1.

²²¹ Antony Otieno Ong’ayo, ‘Displacement and Cross-Border Mobility in the Great Lakes: Region Re-Thinking Underlying Factors and Implications for Regional Management of Migration’, *Africa Insight* 48, no. 1 (2018): 62.

²²² Patrycja Stys, ‘“With No Direction Home”: Refugee Resistance against Repatriation in Africa’s Great Lakes Region since 1994’ (Ph.D., England, University of Oxford (United Kingdom)), 66, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1947635774?pq-origsite=summon&>

²²³ World Bank, ‘Forced Displacement in the Great Lakes Region’ (Washington, DC, 2015), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/472441468001793344/pdf/945630REVISED000FINAL0web000revised.pdf>.

²²⁴ Sikanyiso Masuku and Sharmila Rama, ‘Challenges to Refugees’ Socioeconomic Inclusion: A Lens Through the Experiences of Congolese Refugees in South Africa’, *The Oriental Anthropologist* 20, no. 1 (1 June 2020): 82–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X20913713>.

²²⁵ UNHCR, ‘Refugee Data Finder’.

specialized permits; they must go through the regular asylum seeker process or remain undocumented.

3.5.4. Description of Experts and Government Officials

As mentioned before, I interviewed four experts and two government officials for this study. The first expert was Charlotte Margerit, the advocacy, communication and stakeholder engagement officer at Three2Six, an organization that provides an afternoon bridging education program for refugee children who are not able to enter the mainstream public education system due to documentation issues.²²⁶ The organization aims to prepare these children to transition into the mainstream school system by giving them experience with the South African curriculum and teaching them essential skills. Charlotte Margerit also gave me a tour of one of Three2Six's campuses at Sacred Heart School in Johannesburg, and I learned a lot more about their mission and activities. The second expert I interviewed was Penny Foley, the Chief Community Partnerships Officer at Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, a social enterprise building organization that aims to assist young Africans gain employment.²²⁷ I was also interested in her work with the Central Methodist Church in the 2000s. She put me in touch with my third expert participant, Cleopatra Buthelezi, who works to provide social support and other assistance to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in downtown Johannesburg. She used to do this work with the support of the Central Methodist Church, but since a change in leadership in 2014, she now gets backing from other supporters. The final expert I interviewed was Joseph Maniragena, the Human Rights Programme Manager for Africa Unite, a human rights organization that aims to empower youths and enhance social cohesion (especially between South Africans and non-South Africans).²²⁸ All four experts were involved in a variety of activities related to lives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa.

Both the government officials I spoke to work for the Department of Home Affairs. The first, Major Kobese, is the Director at Immigration Services and is responsible for application appeals.

²²⁶ 'What We Do', Three2Six, accessed 7 July 2022, <https://three2six.co.za/what-we-do/>.

²²⁷ 'What We Do', Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, accessed 7 July 2022, <https://www.harambee.co.za/>.

²²⁸ 'About Us', Africa Unite, 13 February 2014, <https://www.africaunite.org.za/about/>.

The second, Modiri Matthews, is the Chief Director of the Inspectorate and is responsible for enforcing the Immigration Act through arrests and deportations.

3.6 Data Collection

The cornerstone of this study were the 22 semi-structured interviews with migrants. Given the interdisciplinary nature of migrant/refugee studies, there is no specific methodology that the field follows.²²⁹ Thus, guided by my research questions, which focus on the lived experiences of migrants and the particular subjectivities of their experiences migrating to and living in South Africa, I decided to use semi-structured interviews as my primary methodology. This flexible format allowed me to ask open-ended questions, ask follow-up questions guided by my prior knowledge, and obtain deeper understandings of people's lives.²³⁰ This method also allowed participants to share longer, sometimes digressive stories that gave depth to their answers and were not limited by a rigid question framework.

Although this study does not fit fully in the field of refugee studies because the participant population (which included asylum seekers and undocumented migrants) falls outside that narrow boundary, I drew greatly from this field throughout this project. And in exploring possible methods for refugee studies, Schmidt suggested participatory, qualitative research, commending its ability to “[identify] problems or patterns in situ, clarify or propose causal chains, and be more exploratory.”²³¹ Given that this project is exploratory in nature, semi-structured interviews fit in well with the research goals. I was not trying to come to any concrete conclusions, just attempting to find out more about people's experiences and to understand relationships and patterns. For this project, I was inspired by researchers such as Thobeka Nkomo, who used semi-structured interviews with success in her paper on ‘Congolese refugee and asylum seekers’ survival strategy in South Africa’, a project peripheral to my own.²³² I was also inspired by Piguet's musings on

²²⁹ Anna Schmidt, “‘I Know What You’re Doing’”, Reflexivity and Methods in Refugee Studies’, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1 January 2007): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdi0245>.

²³⁰ William E. Cross and Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 45, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/22815>.

²³¹ Schmidt, “‘I Know What You’re Doing’”, Reflexivity and Methods in Refugee Studies’, 85.

²³² Thobeka S. Nkomo, ‘Exploring Congolese Refugees and Asylum Seekers’ Survival Strategies in South Africa: Implication for Social Work Practice’, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 29, no. 4 (19 May 2019): 499–518, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2018.1556142>.

research at the intersection of climate change, environmental degradation and forced migration; he notes that these kinds of qualitative studies have no hope of obtaining a quantitative measure of the weight of environmental factors on migration, *but* they still offer insight into people's ideas about climate/environmental change and its impact on their lives.²³³ On the whole, semi-structured interviews offered a way to explore different people's perspectives and hear about their lives in a way that suits this project's research questions and fit within external restraints.

My interview guide for migrants included 32 questions, and I used this as a general reference during interactions with participants (See Appendix A for the full list of questions). The three categories of inquiry included questions about their lives before coming to South Africa, their experience journeying to South Africa and their time in the country so far, and their thoughts on the immigration system and the possible challenges they have faced migrating to and seeking asylum in South Africa.

The interviews were conducted over a four-week period between 11 March 2022 and 6 April 2022 in a combination of thirteen in-person interviews and nine online Zoom interviews. Due to the pandemic, I had to be particular about the times and places that interviews could be conducted in order to better ensure the health of all participants. Common practice dictates that the participant should be able to choose the time and location of the interview to ensure they are comfortable. As a middle ground, I offered general time options (for example, Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon) and offered to meet somewhere outdoors in their neighbourhood so they would not have to travel far. Interviews were conducted in a variety of places including restaurants with outdoor seating and malls with open plans.

I began each interaction by introducing myself and the research project. I then went through the consent form orally in order to emphasize certain points, and also gave them time to read through it themselves. I underscored that they could take their time answering questions, could refuse to answer a question, pause or stop the interview at any point, and that we would need to remain masked and at least 2m apart during the interview. I also sent a scanned copy of the consent form

²³³ Etienne Piguet, 'Linking Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, and Migration: A Methodological Overview', *WIREs Climate Change* 1, no. 4 (2010): 521–22, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.54>.

to all participants after the interview for their records and in case they had follow-up questions. I recorded all the interviews on my phone so that I could later create a transcript. I also took handwritten notes in a journal. Once the participants signed the consent form, we then made our way through the interview questions. I asked all the questions in an open-ended way, avoiding yes-no questions, and phrasing follow-up questions in an exploratory way as opposed to a probing way.²³⁴ I tried not to ask leading questions and to discourage certain types of answers. However, given that I had introduced the project in the context of the research questions and the topic of climate migration, I had already given an indication of the type of information I was interested in. This was unavoidable. I concluded each interview by asking the participant if they had anything else to add and if they had anything they wanted to ask me. Some people asked questions about the research, and others about the University of British Columbia and life in Canada. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Before saying goodbye, I thanked each participant again and gave them R200 (~\$15 CAD) as a token of appreciation and to acknowledge the time and knowledge they had contributed to this research project.

Interview with experts and government officials were conducted over Zoom (except the interview with Cleopatra Buthelezi, which was held in Downtown Johannesburg) between 23 February 2022 and 14 April 2022. They were sent the consent form by email a few days before we met, and we went over it together before the interview. The interview guide for the experts included 27 questions, which revolved around their organizational missions, the challenges they face in their work, the changes they have noticed in the immigration field over the course of their careers, and their personal motivations for doing this work (see Appendix B for the full list of questions). The interview guide for government officials included 21 questions (see Appendix C for the full list of questions). I asked for a description of their roles in the DHA, their observations of changes in the immigration regime during their careers, the departmental priorities going forward, and their connection to migrant communities. None of experts or government officials were compensated for the interview.

²³⁴ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (Teachers College Press, 2006), 78–94.

3.7 Data Analysis

All the interviews were fully or partially transcribed using Otter.ai. On the topic of data analysis, Ryan and Bernard write that, “Analyzing text involves several tasks: (1) discovering themes and subthemes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few, (3) building hierarchies of themes or code books, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models.”²³⁵ I followed this guidance for this study, for the most part. Provisional themes arose from the data and from my prior understanding of the phenomenon. I made my way through the data (the interview transcriptions and my field notes), manually identifying and tagging thematic passages using NVivo computer software. In line with Ryan and Bernard’s guidance, I looked for repetitions, indigenous categories/typologies (specific understandings or phrases that seem to be used in that local context), metaphors and analogies. I also tried to look out for what people were not talking about—i.e., what was missing. I then used the ‘cutting and sorting’ method to categorize themes and subthemes. Specifically, I identified important themes from what I had highlighted earlier and then sorted them into piles. I then took time to reflect on those themes within the context of the data, then went through the highlighted text again and resorted it.

3.8 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This research project is guided by feminist and decolonial methodologies and by refugee studies methodologies. Both these spheres emphasize the importance of reciprocity and responsibility. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes about how decolonial research methods challenge the colonial research paradigm, which is, by nature, extractive and exploitative.²³⁶ It was important to treat participants with respect, honour their time and their stories, and to reject the one-way nature of knowledge extraction that was once common in the social sciences. With refugee studies, the methods emphasize the need to be aware of different power dynamics and to protect the identities of migrants—many of whom may be undocumented or have vulnerable political status. Here, I am aided by the guidance of Clark-Kazak, Jacobsen and Landau, and

²³⁵ Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard, ‘Techniques to Identify Themes’, *Field Methods* 15, no. 1 (1 February 2003): 85–109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X02239569>.

²³⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

Seidman.²³⁷ There are six methodological dilemmas/limitations I faced during this project: the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of talking about possibly traumatizing subjects with migrants, the matter of compensation, confidentiality and privacy, reciprocity, and the determination of causality and generalizability. This section will explore some of these considerations in order to help reveal the precise scope and acknowledge any limitations of this research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to change my plans several times, limit my interactions with participants, and comply with specific regulations within these interactions. The worry about COVID-19 permeated all of my field work. In terms of my interactions with participants, we were always two meters apart, masked, and had access to hand sanitizer. We also met outside when possible and exchanged contact information so that we could get back in touch if one of us fell ill. As I was heading to South Africa in early December 2021, the Omicron variant reared its head, leading to rising cases and a fourth wave of COVID-19 in South Africa. As a result, I put my field work off until February 2022. This meant that I had to compress my interviews in a slightly shorter period than expected, thus limiting the number of participants. I was also unable to meet people outside of Johannesburg because travel seemed risky. Thus, I limited my in-person interviews to the city of Johannesburg. Although the Zoom interviews worked well, I hesitated to ask for more interviews with Red Cross-affiliated migrants because I did not want to be a burden on the Red Cross workers who had to coordinate the interviews in their offices in Musina. Thus, the spectre of COVID-19 hung over this whole project, but did not completely derail it.

Talking with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers is not a light undertaking. Many such people have experienced very difficult and possibly traumatizing events, so it was important to keep this in mind when talking with them.²³⁸ It is important to maintain a balance between recognizing the agency and ability of migrants (i.e., not infantilizing them or viewing them purely as victims) and acknowledging that migrants may be in vulnerable positions—many without the protection of their

²³⁷ Christina Clark-Kazak, 'Ethical Considerations: Research with People in Situations of Forced Migration', *Refuge* 33, no. 2 (1 August 2017), <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043059ar>; Jacobsen and Landau, 'The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research'; Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*; Grace Newton, 'Building a Life: Integration Outcomes Among Government-Assisted Refugee Newcomers in Greater Vancouver' (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 2019).

²³⁸ Dorit Happ, 'Ethical Challenges Arising from the Vulnerability of Refugees and Asylum Seekers within the Research Process', in *Research Ethics in Human Geography*, ed. Sebastian Henn, Judith Miggelbrink, and Kathrin Hörschelmann, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507366>.

home government, lacking appropriate documentation and/or exposed to xenophobic or racial persecution.²³⁹ In my interactions with migrants, this fragile balance was sometimes difficult to navigate. Within this topic, my other consideration was that migrants might bring up traumatic moments from their past, which might be difficult for them or bring to mind things that they would rather not think about that. Given the somewhat hurried format of an interview and the perceived expectation for what an interview should encompass, it was common for participants to share very troubling moments from their past unprompted. I think that many of them had been interviewed about their experiences as a migrant before, so they shared what they expected I wanted to hear. A few participants got emotional as they shared these stories, and I felt slightly unequipped to respond to them. I had prepared for this possibility by compiling a list of mental health resources that I could share. However, I am not trained in counselling and probably did not say the exact right things in response to their distress. Lammers notes that, “giving emotional and psychological support in such circumstances is a very delicate process and clearly should not be the sole responsibility of untrained individuals.”²⁴⁰ Overall, this was a simultaneously expected and unexpected part of the interviewing process, and something that I tried to address ethically and kindly but definitely could have done better with.

In terms of compensation, I gave each migrants participant R200 (~\$15 CAD), or about 10 times hourly minimum wage in South Africa, in order to thank them for sharing their time and knowledge. I decided not to tell the organizations and potential participants about this compensation beforehand, so as not to put unfair financial pressure on people and sway their decision to participate. However, I did mention the compensation in the consent form and alerted people to the fact that receiving the money was not dependent at all on the completion of the interview or answering the questions in any sort of way.²⁴¹ I decided to give this compensation in cash-form so that participants were able to spend it or save it in whatever way suited their needs—this as opposed to a store-specific gift voucher or material objects that might not have appealed to them. I think overall, the decision to compensate participants helped make the interaction more

²³⁹ Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (University of California Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520277700.001.0001>; Happ, ‘Ethical Challenges Arising from the Vulnerability of Refugees and Asylum Seekers within the Research Process’.

²⁴⁰ Ellen Lammers, ‘Researching Refugees: Preoccupations with Power and Questions of Giving’, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1 January 2007): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdi0244>.

²⁴¹ Clark-Kazak, ‘Ethical Considerations’, 12.

reciprocal and established a symbolic (and material) acknowledgement of their assistance with this study. In terms of reciprocity, I will also share this thesis with migrants, so that they can see the product of their knowledge-sharing. At the end of one interview, one participant noted that she has been interviewed before and never heard from the researcher again. To avoid a situation like this, I stayed in contact with many of the participants and will share this thesis with all of them.

The matters of confidentiality and privacy are very important for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Thousands of migrants in South Africa are in a liminal political state; and, indeed, many of the migrants I spoke to had pending refugee applications or were undocumented, meaning they are more vulnerable. Thus, it was important to keep their information confidential and private, and to keep their identities anonymous. In line with Clark-Kazan, and Jacobsen and Landau's advice, I stored data without personal identifiers.²⁴² I anonymized and deidentified all the information I collected and stored it on a password-protected computer and server, One Drive. Throughout this paper, participants will be described by their national origin, gender and general age category, not by name.

This is a small-scale study, with only 22 migrant interviews, and is not intended to be representative or generalizable. Rather, this project is exploratory in nature, aiming to capture some stories of migration, identify patterns within the interviewed population and learn more about the phenomenon of climate migration in Southern Africa. There is a great deal of furor in the refugee studies field about generalizability, so it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this project with that in mind. Firstly, in terms of the make-up of the participant population, the migrants I spoke to were only from four different countries (the DRC, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Rwanda) which did not include some of the countries that have a large South African diaspora, such as Mozambique and Lesotho. Also, the majority of migrants I spoke to were woman (14 out of 22) and under the age of 40 (15 out of 22). Thus, in some ways, this was a limited sample of the millions of migrants in South Africa.

Secondly, the participant population could have been expanded along several dimensions. I was not able to speak to people who did not make it across the border to South Africa or who got

²⁴² Clark-Kazak, 'Ethical Considerations'; Jacobsen and Landau, 'The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research'.

deported back to their home country (i.e., migrants currently residing outside of South Africa). It would have been interesting to talk to such people because they might have had a very different experience trying to get to or stay in South Africa, which could have illuminated something about the immigration regime or the experience of different types of migrants. I also did not speak to migrants in rural areas of South Africa—all the participants lived in the cities of Johannesburg or Musina. Migrants who go to more rural areas of the country might face different challenges or have different types of interactions with South Africans. This could include temporary migrant farmworkers, mineworkers or domestic workers—documented or undocumented. I also did not engage with migrants who do not speak English fluently, which narrowed the perspective of this project—especially with respect to origin countries where English is not an official language (such as Mozambique). Also, all the people I spoke to engaged with the connector organizations in some way, so I did not get the perspective of people who were, perhaps, more isolated from the broader migrant community or not in need of migrant assistance. Thus, overall, there were many different directions this project could have taken, if I included more diverse perspectives. Although given time and resource limitations for this project, it captured a fairly diverse set of voices.

And lastly, one of the issues inherent to migrant studies is that the total population is always unknown, given that the number of undocumented migrants is indeterminable and that sometimes even the documented migrant population is miscalculated.²⁴³ Thus, it is never clear what the sampling frame is and what proportion of the population is part of a researcher's individual study. Moreover, as Jacobsen and Landau point out, often migrant-focused research has no 'control group'; indeed, this project does not compare the experiences of migrants to South Africans of a similar socio-economic level, those who live in the same cities, or those who have migrated internally. Some of the experiences that migrants have may not be specific to their migrant-status. Some South Africans may have also migrated within the country, have similar encounters with the authorities and/or experience challenges living in Johannesburg or Musina. These limitations are important to acknowledge, but unavoidable in this particular project. It is not catastrophic that we do not know the total migrant population, because this project is very localized and is focused more on highlighting these specific stories and experiences as opposed to inferring something about the general 'migrant experience' from the data. And where possible, this thesis will bring in

²⁴³ Jacobsen and Landau, 'The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research'.

the South African perspective (based on secondary sources) in order to represent this viewpoint to some extent. However, overall, this project aspires to delve into these 22 stories and explore the richness in these people's perspectives. The focus is exploring the subjective and varying ways that migrants understand themselves and their place in South Africa.

3.9 Situating the Researcher

Projects involving interaction with participants require a certain level of reflection and self-understanding. It is important to situate oneself within the context of the study in order to acknowledge certain dynamics, relationships and power (im)balances. Tewolde defines positionality as, “the position of the researcher owing to characteristics such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, education, age, religion, and language vis-à-vis study participants.”²⁴⁴ He also notes that positionality is “situational, relational and dynamic;” it is possible and highly likely that one's position relative to the participant can change over the course of an interaction as you learn new things about each other and spend more time together. Another important relational aspect to consider is that of reflexivity. Feminist scholar, Hope Alkon, emphasizes the importance of reflexive analysis, defined as the process of thinking deeply about how the researcher's identity and background impact their interactions with participants and how this affects the production of knowledge.²⁴⁵ Thus, it was important for me to reflect on how my identity affected my relationship with participants and with the project itself, and to learn as I went along. Throughout the project, I wrote down some of my thoughts in a field journal and included some ruminations in my field notes as I interviewed participants.

In terms of my identity, I am a black/Indian, cisgender woman, who is a South African citizen and of an upper-middle class background. Thus, I have some identity overlap with my participants—all of them were black and African, and some were women. However, there are also many divergences in our identities—none of them had South African citizenship and all of them were of lower to middle class socio-economic status. However, positionality is not just a game of matching

²⁴⁴ Amanuel Isak Tewolde, ‘Problematic Insiderness in Migration Research: Refugee Researcher Researching Other Refugees’, *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22, no. 3 (September 2021): 1031–44, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-020-00785-y>.

²⁴⁵ Alison Hope Alkon, ‘Reflexivity and Environmental Justice Scholarship: A Role for Feminist Methodologies’, *Organization & Environment* 24, no. 2 (1 June 2011): 130–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096026611414347>.

identity characteristics—it is about the ways that these similarities and differences manifest in interactions.

I left South Africa for university in North America after high school and did this field research representing the University of British Columbia. Thus, because of my connection to Canada and my Americanized South African accent, many of the participants assumed that I was Canadian. However, once I mentioned that I was South African, the tenor of the conversation changed because I became, perhaps, less of an outsider. Like the people I interviewed, I have experienced living as a black person in the highly racialized country of South Africa and have experienced discrimination because of that. And like the participants, I have also lived in a foreign country (the United States) with tenuous immigration status. During the COVID-19 pandemic when the South African border was closed, I was waiting for my visa to Canada and, at the same time, my status in the U.S. expired. Thus, I understand, to some extent, what it might be like to have liminal political status in a country and worry about not being able to stay. I do not intend to compare my situation to that of the migrants I spoke to in South Africa, but having experienced that type of insecurity, I felt myself empathizing with the migrants in a deeper way than I might have before. For the most part, I was studying people quite different from myself in terms of their experiences and the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Being what women and gender studies scholar, Shahnaz Khan, calls a “third-world researcher”—a person doing research on the Global South as a person from the Global South, while representing an institution from the Global North—pushed me to think carefully about certain power dynamics and how to avoid “(re)producing voices of alterity.”²⁴⁶ In writing about woman imprisoned under the *Zina* Ordinance in Pakistan, Khan felt politically and theoretically double bound by her desire to both speak out on the excesses of the Ordinance *and* work against the racist and misogynistic narrative that “seeks to free brown women from brown men.”²⁴⁷ Similarly, I hoped to explore the

²⁴⁶ Shahnaz Khan, ‘Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age’, *Signs* 30, no. 4 (2005): 2017–37, <https://doi.org/10.1086/428423>.

²⁴⁷ From Khan’s paper: “*Zina* means illicit sex, both adultery and fornication. The *Zina* Ordinance comes out of a social, historical, and political process that connects religion to nation building. Although these connections have been present since the creation of Pakistan, they intensified during the rule of General Ziaul-Haq (1977–88), who... attributed many of Pakistan’s social and political problems to an “un-Islamic way of life” (Ahmad 1992), identifying a lack of individual and societal morals as responsible for social woes. The solution to these ills, Zia believed, was a program of Islamization, the *Nizam-e-Mustapha* (governance inspired by the Prophet). Zia’s Islamization, Aijaz

impact that climate change has on migration in Southern Africa and to learn about the challenges of the immigration system without reproducing the sensationalist myth of ‘floods’ or ‘waves’ of climate migrants that only works to justify the reification of borders and the mistreatment of migrants, and without sensationalizing xenophobia in ways that portrays people in South Africa homogeneously. Thus, as Khan recommends, such third-world researchers must both speak on the effects of the phenomenon (in this case, climate migration), and also reflect on its reading in the Global North. She expands ‘the field’ to include both the site *over there* where the researcher interacts with participants and the site *over here* where the research is read and interpreted. In this vein, as Khan notes, it is important to acknowledge that as a researcher based in Canada, this research can only be read “via an analysis of my own location in the west.” I must consider how the message I am hoping to convey will be received by the people most likely to read this thesis. To tear oneself from this bind, Khan recommends beginning two conversations: one about accountability and transparency, and another that connects local power systems to global ones and develops, in her case, a transnational feminist analysis of the *Zina* Ordinances (in my case, a feminist, decolonial analysis of the phenomenon of climate migration). In the context of this research project, I hope to hold myself accountable by offering avenues for further conversation with migrants and sharing this work with them. I also do not aim to present my ideas as representative of ‘the migrant experience’—I acknowledge the limitations and boundaries of this research, my distance from the lived experiences of migrants, and my relative privilege in this regard. Also, as Khan recommends, I aim to connect the struggles of African migrants in South Africa to those of migrants all over the world, and to reveal what experiences and power structures might be held in common.

Ahmad (1992) notes, included a form of collective purification through the removal of impure and undesirable elements from society, either by death or imprisonment. Beginning in 1979, the brutal fist of the Pakistan army enforced a series of laws and ordinances to ensure this purification”
Khan, 2018–19.

Chapter 4: Of Places Left and Paths Imagined

*The heat
the burning heat in the sky
the blisters under my feet
the tight knot in my belly
the fatigue, the anger, the fear
i feel the excruciating pain in my joints
i can only go ahead, a man can only go forward
i run on the blisters
i think of home where i can't return
I think of the milk and honey ahead...*
Rodwell Makombe, 'Crossing the Limpopo'²⁴⁸

4.1 Introduction

In the poem, 'Crossing the Limpopo', Rodwell Makombe writes of the arduous journey across the Limpopo River from Zimbabwe to South Africa. In it, "the burning heat in the sky" seems to symbolize all that the narrator flees from in his "home where [he] can't return." For this thesis, the "burning heat" becomes a graceful analogy for the devastating effects of climate change but, also, the more blanketing feeling of oppression and danger that many migrants feel in their home countries. Like many people leaving home, the narrator dreams of "the milk and honey ahead." Many migrants coming to South Africa dream of possibility and opportunity, of finding refuge in one of the wealthiest countries on the continent. One migrant said:

Some people used to come from this side, from South Africa to Zimbabwe, and they would tell us South Africa is nice—jobs are there. (Participant 17)

Another mentioned:

²⁴⁸ Rodwell Makombe, 'Crossing the Limpopo', in *Splinters of a Mirage Dawn: An Anthology of Migrant Poetry from South Africa*, ed. Amitabh Mitra and Naomi Nkealah, 2013, 19.

When I was coming to South Africa, I was thinking maybe we'll be really safe. (Participant 21)

However, when met with obstacle after obstacle, many of these hopes become, as Langston Hughes once wrote, “a dream deferred”—a dream relegated to the back of many people’s minds in deference to surviving day to day.²⁴⁹ This is not to reduce migrants in South Africa to the sum of their struggles or to minimize their agency, but to suggest that there exist state structures and other hinderances that prevent many migrants from living much beyond precarity. This chapter will explore the lived experiences of 22 migrants in South Africa, delving into their reasons for leaving their home countries for South Africa and their journeys to the southern tip of the continent. As this project centers on the intersection of climate change and migration, this chapter will discuss how environmental and climate change impacted people’s movements. However, it is clear that all participants migrated for unique, multi-causal and complex reasons. The purpose of this project is not to measure the extent to which environmental, political or economic factors contributed towards each participant’s migration—causality cannot be segmented as such and gathering such information would not necessarily help us understand these migrants’ stories anyhow. Rather, this chapter aims to capture some of the lives of these migrants, consider the challenges they face, and highlight the major themes from the interviews. This will help lay a foundation to understand what future migrants may contend with if/when the consequences of climate change become more prominent in a Southern African context.

Several threads wind through the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. First, the multi-causality of migration. Climate change does factor into migration causality, but we cannot reduce people’s motivations to one thing, and we cannot ignore the other factors lurking in the landscape. Second, the inhospitality of South Africa to migrants, both in terms of state-led securitization of the border and widespread grassroots-level anti-foreigner sentiment. Third, the failing immigration system that disregards legal obligations and fails to protect migrants of all kinds. The state continually neglects its duty to provide adequate documentation for migrants, based on problematic (but globally accepted) categories of migration that this thesis will challenge. If migrants are already being condemned to political precarity and liminality—even those that fit into

²⁴⁹ Langston Hughes, ‘Harlem’, Poetry Foundation, 9 August 2022, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem>.

the generally-accepted definition of a refugee—what does/will this look like for people migrating for reasons related to climate change (who are not protected by international law)? A discussion of the postmigration lives of migrants in South Africa in Chapter 5 will highlight the major themes that colour the lives of these people in order to illustrate South Africa’s shortcomings in protecting migrants, as well as the ways that migrants work to make themselves a home in a sometimes-hostile, would-be sanctuary.

4.2 Leaving

Migrants gave varied and complex reasons for leaving their home countries. The participants often spoke about their childhoods/young adulthoods in their home countries, so as to better contextualize their departures. They spoke about how the political, economic, environmental and social conditions in their home country changed over the course of their time there, culminating in their exoduses. One Zimbabwean migrant shared:

As I was growing up, I think there were a lot of political changes between the two parties—MDC and ZANU-PF. We used to ignore them, but it became a situation whereby we say let’s visit other countries because the situation is getting worse, because we could like maybe go to sleep with only one meal a day. (Participant 6)

She identifies the growing tensions between the two opposing parties as an important influence in her home country’s trajectory. This, along with the declining economy meant that conditions in Zimbabwe gradually become worse, eventually pushing her to consider leaving. In other cases, migrants had peaceful childhoods, and conditions changed all of a sudden, causing them to seek refuge elsewhere. For example, one Congolese asylum seeker said that:

Basically, I grew up in Kinshasa, but I was in boarding school. I [had] a very nice childhood—no problem, no complaint. I was fine... I can say that the time that we were studying, everything was fine, like, no problems about economy or politics. It just when Mobutu and Kabila started fighting, it’s when things changed, when everything went right down. (Participant 2)

These discussions of childhood revealed that migrants from the same country may have had vastly different experiences. For example, another Congolese asylum seeker was born into a poor family, had a mother and father who were from two antagonistic tribes, and came of age in a time of war

in his province of Uvira. He noted that things had always been difficult for him, especially after his parents were killed and the rebels proliferated in the region. He shared that:

About politics, remember that Congo is a war country. Especially in Uvira, there's too much rebels. They are attacking the government soldiers each and every time, since from when I was there until now, these things still happen ... You find that they are killing people, innocent people... I fled my country, as I said, because of the insecurity because of the war... They [also] killed also my mother because... she's from the Banyamulenge tribe. And you will see that Banyamulenge tribe is a minority in Uvira, so that is why I fled the country because they were looking for me in order to kill me. And I even dropped my school because of that running away to come and seek for protection because I remember that my life was in danger. (Participant 21)

Interestingly, although these two Congolese migrants had quite different early years, the civil war in the DRC played a significant role in both their decisions to migrate. In this section, we will delve more into the nuances of people's departures from their home countries.

4.2.1 The Forced/Voluntary Dichotomy

The ideas of 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration are prevalent in migration studies, and are used to segment the migrant population into those who are compelled to migrate for reasons beyond their control and those who choose to leave. There has long been contention about the meanings ascribed to 'forced' and 'voluntary' in this field. Interviews with migrants in South Africa revealed the inadequacy of this dichotomy to represent migrant experiences. One Zimbabwean migrant, who cited job opportunities in South Africa as a reason for migration, shared that:

Ay, things were tight there. I just think, ay, let me change and go to South Africa maybe things can change too for me and for the family. (Participant 13)

The idea of 'tightness' implies a sense of constriction in Zimbabwe. In many contexts, this man would be classified as a voluntary, economic migrant, and he self-classified as an "illegal immigrant." However, there is a sense of forcedness in his departure from Zimbabwe. He noted that his parents passed away when he was in high school, causing him to leave school in Form 3 (Grade 10) and begin to fend for himself. Due to increasingly frequent droughts in his village and the absence of jobs in Zimbabwe, he hopped the border to South Africa. Was this migration forced or was it voluntary? It is near-impossible to determine where the forces of personal loss, economic devastation and environmental difficulty stop, and individual choice begins.

As Erdal and Oeppen explain, we should try to understand “forced and voluntary migration as a continuum of experience, not a dichotomy.”²⁵⁰ Trying to lodge migrants into one of the boxes of ‘forced’ or ‘voluntary’ serves merely to “[reify] extremes” and pigeonhole migrants in one or the other. These categories are often superimposed onto political categories, with so-called ‘forced migrants’ classified as refugees and ‘voluntary migrants’ having to apply for official work/study visas or being designated as ‘illegal’,²⁵¹ ‘undocumented’ or ‘irregular’ migrants. This allows certain people the rights to refugee protections and denies others these rights. It also works to characterize ‘forced migrants’ as ‘victims’ and ‘voluntary migrants’ as people more in charge of their destiny. To combat this urge to binarize these experiences of migration, we must emphasize the agency of migrants, rather than trying to categorize their movement as in or out of their control—as something beyond them. It requires a delicate balance of recognizing that many migrants *are* compelled to leave their homes due to insecurity or uninhabitability, and also acknowledging their agency and ability to make the choice to leave. Also, we must acknowledge that many, varied factors can contribute to feelings of compulsion, including economic decline, acute environmental disasters (e.g., cyclones), slow-onset environmental change (e.g., droughts), and personal conflicts (e.g., domestic violence). It cannot only be political persecution that is deemed forceful. For example, when asked why she had come to South Africa, one Zimbabwean migrant shared that:

My reason, it's different from other people. Because my first marriage, it didn't work out. So, the father of my baby was a CIO. The CIO is a criminal investigating officer—he works for the President. So, he was very abusive, physically. As I mentioned before, that I was supposed to marry him because of the situation. Now, my mother is dead—who is going to look after me and my siblings? But because him, he was financially stable, I was forced to get married to him. So, when I saw the situation of Zimbabwe, that it was getting bad. I talked to a lot of people, and they advised me that because this man he works for the president. So, for you to tell him that you are leaving him, it will be difficult. It's better that you run away. So, I ran away and came this side. (Participant 6)

²⁵⁰ Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, ‘Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (26 April 2018): 981, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384149>.

²⁵¹ The use of the word “illegal” is problematic because it compresses migrants who cross borders irregularly or without documentation into a box of criminality. The use of this term to describe migrants associates them with lawlessness and neglects to address the structural obstacles that prevent them from obtaining adequate documentation. It also feeds into the narrative of migrants being a security risk and being unworthy of protection.

This migrant would not be and was not recognized as a refugee when she arrived in South Africa, but it is clear from her story that she *had* to leave her violent home situation. Her husband's violence was compounded by that particular political moment in Zimbabwe and the power that her husband held in the community, which prevented her from reaching out to the authorities for help.

In her poem, 'Home', Warsan Shire writes that, "no one leaves home/ unless home is the mouth of a shark."²⁵² This sentiment is reflected in the stories that migrants shared, and further complicates the unconstructive binary between voluntary and forced. Many people who have not been given refugee status and, therefore, are seen as 'voluntary' migrants, fled their homes against their wishes. One Congolese migrant shared that:

Coming here in South Africa, it was not like something I really wanted. No, but things happened that yes—I have to. (Participant 2)

This excerpt suggests that the migrant felt like the decision to move was out of her control—she had to leave the DRC due to her involvement in opposition-party political organizing. This remark suggests that there is usually some level of compulsion in migration—for the most part, people do not leave unless they are pushed out, or pulled somewhere else. But even in the most extreme cases, human agency is invoked. As Steinberg writes, "Any serious scholar of the most constrained institutions humankind has produced, Auschwitz or Birkenau, for instance, will tell you that even here human agency is at times decisive, that it often determines who lives and who dies."²⁵³ Thus, there is always force and there is always choice.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Warsan Shire, 'Home', Facing History and Ourselves, accessed 9 August 2022, <https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home>.

²⁵³ Jonny Steinberg, 'The Vertiginous Power of Decisions: Working through a Paradox about Forced Migration', *Public Culture* 28 (1 January 2016): 142, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-3325052>.

²⁵⁴ Of course, at the same time, we must acknowledge the power that governments possess to either give or deny international migrants sanctuary within their borders. A long line of thinkers have engaged with this power dynamic. Hannah Arendt wrote about "the right to have rights," illuminating the chasm between many migrants' access to human rights that all people should have (by nature of being human) and their actual access to these rights as non-members of an organized political/national community or as stateless people. Michel Foucault wrote about the idea of biopower, what Peggs and Smart later defined as "the exercise of power over life." They continue by stating that, "biopower is exercised over individuals and populations, and, in administering or governing life, it has the capacity to *foster* life, or *disallow* it." Foucault ties this power to the sovereign state and how it exercises this power over those within and outside its boundaries. Later, Giorgio Agamben wrote about the idea of "bare life" and "the state of exception"—about "the no-man's land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life." When people, like migrants in between countries or without status in countries, are in a "state of exceptions," they are reduced to a "bare life," in which a person is only comprised of the biological facts of life and is deprived of a quality life and a political life. Extending these arguments, Achille Mbembe coined the concept of "necropolitics"—namely, "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not."

Several participants were family members or dependents of people who faced persecution and brought their families with them when they fled. In the case of child migrants, they have no alternatives other than to move, as they are legally and financially tied to their parents. One Rwandan woman, who moved to South Africa as a child, remarked on how her father had to flee the country for political reasons, and had his family join him in South Africa later. As a six-year-old, she had no choice in the matter, and still has questions about the exact reasons that they had to flee, noting:

I don't know the story quite well because I think it's something that's quite still sensitive for my parents. So, they don't really like communicating with us. Sometimes I tell my dad, I'm like, I need to know, because it's a part of me... So, all I know is that it was a political issue, because my dad was affiliated with... some organizations that came during genocide. So, my dad had some sort of relationship going on, I think a business relationship was something and then so the government—not directly from the top, but part of the government—felt threatened by this, I think. And so, it happened that somehow my dad had to flee for his safety. (Participant 1)

Thus, the question of the extent of force is always important to ask, but complicated to unpack. However, the forced/voluntary continuum can only be understood within the context in which it is being used. Indeed, “semantics are relevant to consider, as are considerations of who is doing the labelling and what the discursive work of those labels entails.”²⁵⁵ All migrants expressed some

Within this framework, state sovereignty is “defined as the right to kill.” And an important aspect of sovereignty, in this regard, is maintaining control of a geographical area, and establishing different rights for different people within it through the use of technology. This form of power is clear at the border, where the South African border patrol/government can decide the fate of attempted crossers. Thus, while it is important to acknowledge that migrants’ movements are partly compelled and partly chosen, we must also be aware of the power the state has, as Mbembe writes, “[to deploy weapons] in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating *death-worlds*, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*.”

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Wilmington, U.S.: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 1973), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=3302075>; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, accessed 17 August 2022, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/24073/society-must-be-defended-by-michel-foucault-ed-mauro-bertani-and-alessandro-fontana-trans-david-macey/9780241435168>; Kay Peggs and Barry Smart, ‘Foucault’s Biopower’, in *After Foucault: Culture, Theory, and Criticism in the 21st Century*, ed. Lisa Downing, After Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 61–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316492864.006>; Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo3534874.html>; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 2019, <https://read-dukeupress-edu.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/books/book/2640/Necropolitics>.

²⁵⁵ Erdal and Oeppen, ‘Forced to Leave?’, 993.

sort of necessity for their migration to South Africa, regardless of whether they were classified by themselves or others as refugees, asylum seekers or (undocumented) migrants. In his discussion of the utility of the metaphor of forced migration, Steinberg finds it mostly unhelpful in understanding migrants on the move. However, he explains that migrants may, themselves, use this language as a tool to explain their life histories to immigration officials in order to receive protection and services once they arrive in the host country. Moreover, understandings of ‘forced migration’ are unique to every migrant, their understandings of themselves, and how they view their place in the world. This discussion pushes us think about ideas of compulsion and choice in ways that recognize the agency and personhood of migrants, while also considering the current immigration system and how invocations of the forced/voluntary render migrant struggles legible to the government and the wider public.

4.2.2 Multi-causality

Another general categorization used in migration studies is that of migration causality; migrants are often classified as economic, political, or environmental in nature. However, these interviews, again, show a blurring and overlapping of these categories. The logic of the existence of these categories makes intuitive sense; it is useful to know why people are moving around. However, they often stifle the nuance and complexity of migrant stories. And worse, they tend to create a value-judgement hierarchy of migration that sees some migrants as worthy of protection and as helpless victims, some as parasitical job-stealers that are undeserving of assistance, and others as occupying the middle between these extremes. This infantilizes certain groups of people and criminalizes others. Moreover, when we utilize these categories, we tend to ignore the underlying structural factors and inequalities that connect migrants of all sorts. Capitalism, neo-imperialism and inequality influence people from all corners of the world to migrate. For example, in his critique of the transnational discourse surrounding climate migration, Ahuja unravels how narratives of climate migration in south and west Asia mask the impacts of neoliberal development policies, the oil economy, and war on the people of the region.²⁵⁶ The same could be said for reductionist narratives of, for example, the role of the civil war in the migration of Congolese

²⁵⁶ Neel Ahuja, *Planetary Specters: Race, Migration, and Climate Change in the Twenty-First Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469664491_ahuja.

migrants—accounts that gloss over the brutal history of exploitation, extractivism and colonialism in this context. Behind all simplistic immigrant narratives are woven other causalities and forces. Thus, the impulse to classify migrants into causal categories must be tempered by doing the work of capturing the individual stories of migrants and revealing the many nuances.

Indeed, most migrants had varied and complex reasons for departing their homelands. For example, one Congolese asylum seeker noted that she left her country because her husband was being persecuted by the new government due to his union involvement, and also because her child needed medical treatment. Describing this, she said:

And because both of us ... were teachers, and my husband is from a province [which is the] province of Mabutu (Mongala), so most of the people who were from that province, they were targeted by the new government. And as he was part of workers' union who were asking for the increasement of the salary. So it happened that he started having problems and then sometimes he will be arrested and after a few hours, they will release him. And what happened made us to flee is my firstborn was very sick. And we tried our best, but we couldn't see how we can get the treatment there. So, we say okay, with this political situation and the child, let us try maybe in South Africa. So, my husband came first with the child who was sick, then, us, we came after them. (Participant 2)

One could reduce these migrants to 'political migrants', given the husband's political involvement and his identity as someone from the former president's province. However, the pursuit of adequate healthcare seems to have been the catalyst for them. This other reason certainly played a role in their decision to move, revealing the multi-causality behind their move to South Africa.

4.2.3 The Role of Climate and Environmental Change

This idea of multi-causality extends into the discussion of climate migration. None of the migrants defined themselves as climate/environmental migrants, but several discussed the environmental changes and events that precipitated their move to South Africa. Often, these disasters arose in the midst of other political, economic or personal shifts in their lives and in their countries. For example, one Zimbabwean woman from rural Masvingo, whose family farmed for subsistence said:

[In] some of the places in Masvingo, there is still low rainfall as compared to other areas. So, some of the [people that live there] can't get enough food to support the kids and the

life... At this day, there's no food there's a shortage of rainfall because they grow early crop at October. So, after three months—January, February—there was no rainfall in February. So, there's no [food]... The other reason is that, because we know that there is a shortage of money in Zimbabwe, we come [to South Africa] to work so that we get money to pay school fees for the kids and get uniforms and accommodation. Because some of the kids, it is not all of us who are staying in rural [areas]... some of the people, they are staying in town, so they need money to get rent and the like. (Participant 19)

This woman cites the low rainfall, crop shortage, money shortage and need to pay school-related expenses as reasons for her migration to South Africa. These causes feed into each other, as we can infer that the lack of food to sell resulted in the money shortage and, therefore, the need to go to South Africa to make money. Thus, here we see the interlinking and overlapping changes in her hometown that precipitated her migration to South Africa.

When sharing her reasons for leaving the DRC, one asylum seeker said:

We don't really have structures—like you know your roads, your streets. So, it's always a big challenge, because if it rains, you just see the... you know, there will be water all over that. People can't even cross to go to the other side. So, it's difficult for people to move around, especially if it rains. But I can say for the weather, we've got a very beautiful weather. The roads are a big challenge. (Participant 10)

She grew up in Kasai Province near the border with Angola, which she described as more rural and quite peaceful. Her father was a farmer, growing a variety of different types of vegetables and caring for a few animals. She noted that many people in her hometown struggled to meet basic needs, and often turned to entrepreneurial ventures when farming was not enough. As seen in the quote above, the combination of poor infrastructure (due to the distressed economy) and environmental factors contributed to the challenges people in the town faced. As a result, she was sent to live in Kinshasa with her cousin, who funded her schooling. She later had to leave Kinshasa for South Africa because her cousin got involved in politics and, when the government changed, his life became threatened. Thus, she experienced two migrations within her life, for different and complex reasons. This story also illustrates that people do not necessarily only move once—sometimes they flee one situation, only to find themselves caught in another difficult one.

Another migrant—from Zimbabwe in this case—also spoke about the ways that poor governance and environmental change affected his life in his hometown. He shared:

There is no rain [in our village]. Dry, dry, dry totally. And we can't plant anything, can't reap anything, because it's dry. And it's full of chemicals. There were mines there, so the soil, this chemical, they can't reap something and you can't harvest anything. So, we just struggle. Looking for... everything we do look, look for something good. So, there's nothing that you can get and use there. (Participant 13)

While in Zimbabwe, he lived in Harare for half the time and in his village for the other half. He remarked on the difficulty of supporting his family with the lack of rain in the village. He spoke about how they would plan around the inconsistent rain, noting:

We were trying to support the family so that sometimes the rain was no rain there. So, when rain comes, we just budgeted then we support the family. So that things will go well. (Participant 13)

He also mentioned that he and his family would try to dig boreholes to help irrigate their crops. However, between the chemicals in the soil and the lack of water, it was difficult to harvest anything much. The presence of chemicals in the soil seems to be a problem in various areas of Zimbabwe. This is, in part, due to mining (both legal and illegal), where toxic chemicals such as mercury and cyanide are used in the extraction process.²⁵⁷ Scholars have written about the prevalence of illegal mining and chemical pollution in places such as the Chimanimani Mountains, Connemara and the Kadoma District.²⁵⁸ Thus, the lack of government oversight in managing mining has contributed to the deterioration of the soil in several areas of the country. Moreover, the fact that this participant became responsible for accessing water for their farms through boreholes also suggests a lack of government assistance in providing basic services to the people of Zimbabwe. As a result of these deficiencies and contaminations, as well as the challenging nature of finding a job in Harare, he hopped the border to South Africa. In a similar vein, another person from rural Zimbabwe spoke about how environmental and economic factors influenced her move to South Africa. Her family members, who were involved in agriculture, still live there—

²⁵⁷ Mwazvita T. B. Dalu, Ryan J. Wasserman, and Tatenda Dalu, 'A Call to Halt Destructive, Illegal Mining in Zimbabwe', *South African Journal of Science* 113, no. 11/12 (December 2017), <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2017/a0242>.

²⁵⁸ Stephan Bose-O'Reilly et al., 'Mercury as a Serious Health Hazard for Children in Gold Mining Areas', *Environmental Research*, Eighth International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant: Human Health and Exposure to Methylmercury, 107, no. 1 (1 May 2008): 89–97, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2008.01.009>; Dalu, Wasserman, and Dalu, 'A Call to Halt Destructive, Illegal Mining in Zimbabwe'; Martin Magidi and Promise Machingo Hlungwani, 'Development or Destruction? Impacts of Mining on the Environment and Rural Livelihoods at Connemara Mine, Zimbabwe', *South African Geographical Journal* 0, no. 0 (22 February 2022): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2022.2032294>.

even though they struggle with the drought conditions—but she came to South Africa to find a job, and due to health issues. She explained:

[The] problem in Zimbabwe is [that there is] no business because they don't have something to sell. But here [in South Africa], if you have the money, I go to the buying and selling and I [can get] a job and what. That's why in South Africa, it's very nice because I've got everything. (Participant 8)

The confluence of multiple threats to survival can result in feelings of disaster and helplessness. One Zimbabwean migrant spoke about how people in her home country perceive the current situation as a curse:

So, I think most people, they now feel that maybe Zimbabwe is cursed, because these things are happening. There's no rain. Nothing at all. Even if the rain comes, maybe after the flood, whatever they are ploughing, it destroys. The rain comes in floods. It's just too much it destroys. So, I think most of the people now, they are surviving from us—the diaspora people, the people overseas. But in terms of them ploughing and what, the climate really affected. I don't know the reason, but most people are affected. Every year, I think for the past 10-15 years, it's been bad bad bad. (Participant 6)

The invocation of a “curse” brings to mind a godlike fury—something out of the control of everyday people. Against such peril, what else can one do but flee? This metaphysical understanding of climate change, through the language of a “curse” emphasizes the depths of the challenges that Zimbabweans face, and the powerlessness they feel in the curse’s wake. Indeed, the migrant continued her explanation, saying:

People should apologize to God, because the things that are happening with like, it's a curse. It's not normal for a country to suffer like that. Honestly, Zimbabwe is suffering a lot a lot a lot. (Participant 6)

This idea of a curse also encapsulates the way that multiple factors seem to combine to create a seemingly-un survivable situation. This migrant related the curse to the Mugabe regime, identifying him as the root cause of this misfortune. During his rule, the economy was ground down, political tensions arose, and parts of the country cycled in and out of drought. It is no wonder some people feel they are cursed. Furthermore, this curse is perceived as being tied to Zimbabweanness, not to the countries borderline, meaning that it follows Zimbabweans on their journeys out of the country. The Zimbabwean women explained:

Even like if we run away from [Zimbabwe to] other countries. Like if I give an example: in South Africa, there are a lot of foreigners in South Africa, but the only foreigners they point to, it's Zimbabweans. You see, [the curse is] just following us from home, here. Even if you go away. If you are from Zimbabwe, you suffer. So, that's why people believe it's a curse. (Participant 6)

Even if environmental change is not a primary cause of migration, other factors may affect people's engagement with the environment and different forms of subsistence in their home countries, causing them to migrate away. One asylum seeker, who fled from Burundi spoke fondly about his childhood on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. His family was poor, but they were able to sustain themselves through fishing, hunting and farming. He remembered:

You are living in poverty, but you don't see [that] because... you go to the lake—because we got Tanganyika Lake—and then you can catch your fish, and you got something to eat on a daily basis. So, whatever there is poverty, you wake up in the morning, you wash yourself, you go to school, and then and then you'll come back you focus on your lessons, and then you study, and then life goes on... And there was peace as well: you could go you could go up and down, you wake up three o'clock you go for hunting or fishing, wherever. You go to the farm, you help your mother to [do] the farming and you plant then you reap. So, life was easy like that. (Participant 22)

However, the civil war in Burundi completely disrupted this way of life. Some of his connections to his home environment were severed with the encroachment of war. He explained:

So, everything changed with war starting, and then life changed, and then everything become so, so difficult. So, it was very horrific to the point where you cannot go to the other side because of your safety and the other one cannot go to the other side because of the safety and... then you have to flee to the neighbour[ing] countries. (Participant 22)

He remarked that when the Civil War started, it became difficult to live in peace because of the rebels living in the bush nearby. He spoke about how women stopped going out and he stopped going to the lake because the rebels might attack them. He ultimately migrated to South Africa in 2005 due to his political activities. Thus, we would not necessarily call him an environmental migrant. However, this story reveals the ways that political and environmental factors can intermingle, making an area less habitable. There are several dimensions to these stories of leaving: the many factors that influence the choice to leave, the varying timelines of how these determinants affected the migrant's life, and the political, economic and environmental contexts in which these migrants lived.

4.3 The Journey

When asked about their journeys to South Africa, migrants described quite varied experiences. Some came all the way from Central/Eastern Africa, stopping at many countries along the way. Other came from just over the border in Zimbabwe, but had to traverse the treacherous Limpopo River. Having discussed some of the reasons that people left their countries, the next step is to examine how they got to South Africa. The first question is: why South Africa? The numbers suggest that South Africa is the top destination for migrants on the continent.²⁵⁹ It is well known that most migrants move within their country or their immediate region, so it is interesting that there are so many Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian migrants as far away from their home countries as South Africa. When asked about this, migrants gave diverse answers. Some declared that South Africa was the only place they felt safe, due, in part, to the presence of spies in the neighboring countries of Tanzania and Zambia. One Burundian migrant who had fled due to his political activism and his work to improve the rights of youth, said:

Let us be clear, South Africa, it's only the place on my side I thought I would be safe. It's only the place I choose that I will be safe. In Zambia, they reach there and take people—Burundians... In Tanzania, it's worse. Maybe even you can check in the camp in Tanzania ... the camp is in Kigoma. There are many people who are killed there. There are many Burundians who was killed there ... So, Tanzania, it was not safe for me. Zambia it was not safe for me. Zimbabwe, it was not safe for me. The only country that I feel safe, even now, [is] South Africa ... I have all the right to access healthcare. I have all the rights to the authorities. So, it means I'm free. I feel free. (Participant 20)

This migrant fled due to the persecution he was facing in Burundi. In December 2017, he was detained, tied up and almost killed by the authorities because he had challenged the party in power. Thus, because he was being harassed and threatened and he felt unsafe in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, he travelled all the way down to South Africa. Other migrants echoed his sentiments relating to better services in South Africa. One Zimbabwean woman has been living partly in South Africa, partly in Zimbabwe since 1981 due to her health issues. She said:

I come to South Africa because South Africa I have even a hospital [inaudible] but no working. Me, I'm not working. I come here and sometimes I take piece job. Sometimes [the government and non-profit organizations] gives you grants, sometimes even clothes. And I have a pain in the chest and in the legs. That's why it's South Africa... I go to hospital to

²⁵⁹ Moyo, 'South Africa Reckons with Its Status as a Top Immigration Destination, Apartheid History, and Economic Challenges'.

see Doctor. [He] give me tablets and he [sees me] every month... That's why I come here to get healthy... In Zimbabwe, this is not the case. But I am healthy here in Musina. (Participant 8)

Thus, some people come to South Africa seeking specific services, even if it is a struggle to gain employment. This migrant had obviously weighed the pros and cons of migrating to South Africa, and found that the lure of better healthcare in South Africa was worth the sacrifices relating to employment she might have to make. Many others came to South Africa because they heard by word-of-mouth that there were opportunities here, and that life was better. One Zimbabwean, for example, shared that:

I was job seeking, the reason that made me come here. Things were tough. Life was tough for me. Some people used to come from this side, from South Africa to Zimbabwe, and they would tell us South Africa is nice, jobs are there. (Participant 17)

Indeed, South Africa is often perceived as a place of great economic opportunity within the continent. Many migrants migrate in order to make money abroad and send it home. These corridors of remittance—involving both money and food/clothing—are well-studied and very common across Africa, and certainly in Southern Africa.²⁶⁰ In general, migrants expressed that, in coming to South Africa, they were motivated by the possibilities of peace, job opportunities, access to services such as healthcare and criminal justice, and freedom from the fears associated with the places they were fleeing from.

Many migrants shared stories of the great risks they took when coming to South Africa, whether as asylum seekers or undocumented migrants. Most Zimbabwean migrants interviewed for this project jumped the border at the Limpopo River. One Zimbabwean migrant shared the story of her journey to South Africa, saying:

My journey... To come here from Zimbabwe—sometimes it's very hard. Sometimes we have issues with our passports, our passports are invalid. So, we used to cross at the border barefooted. We will pass through the river—the Limpopo River. We are getting more challenges here because we could get some maguma-guma—those people who can force

²⁶⁰ Mark A. Collinson and Mduduzi Biyase, 'Migration and Remittances in South Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy*, ed. Arkebe Oqubay, Fiona Tregenna, and Imraan Valodia, 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/37171/chapter/323742136>; Jonathan Crush and Mary Ceasar, 'Food Remittances and Food Security', in *Handbook on Urban Food Security in the Global South*, ed. Jonathan Crush, Bruce Frayne, and Gareth Haysom (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 282–306, <https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781786431509/9781786431509.00019.xml>.

you to do illegal [things], or something that you do not wish to do. So that at the end, you are going to risk yourself, or you'll get raped or you'll get [inaudible]. (Participant 19)

This was a common story among the interviewed migrants, and really highlights the dangers associated with jumping the border. Francis Musoni's book, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, explores this topic in detail.²⁶¹ Many of the themes he explored, including criminal activity at the border, migrant agency and border securitization (and the presence of border patrols) appear in this study as well. Overall, he emphasizes that border jumpers are, "individuals who are determined to seize control of their own lives and ... struggle to establish their own destiny."²⁶² To travel across this border without documentation is certainly an act of taking one's destiny into one's own hands, but it is filled with many hazards. The Limpopo River is incredibly perilous—especially in the rainy season. One Zimbabwean woman spoke of her experience crossing the river:

When we got to Beitbridge, they said we are going to stay in in Beitbridge for one week before you cross, because the river is full—the Limpopo River is full. So, we were waiting for the water to decrease. Then we stayed in Limpopo we were sleeping the outside garage by Limpopo... we slept there for one week. After one week, we went to the river to cross, of which nine people, they were taken by the river. Yeah, it was bad bad bad. I think it took me two years to to... you know like even when I open the TV, I see the water—it traumatized me. I could see those people screaming and flowing and going with the water. So, it was very bad, but we managed to cross—30 of us. Nine were taken by the river so we were left with 21. (Participant 6)

This horrific experience, tragically, is not uncommon. News articles from over the years document just some of the drownings on the Limpopo: 11 died in January 2022,²⁶³ 15 were swept away in April 2014,²⁶⁴ as many as 60 lost their lives in January 2006,²⁶⁵ and many others fell victim to the same fate without making the news. As seen in the testimony from the woman cited above, even those who survive the crossing experience immense trauma that may linger for a long time. Much of this is due to the increasingly securitized land borders that force border jumpers to resort to

²⁶¹ Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*.

²⁶² Musoni, 12.

²⁶³ Lenin Ndebele, '11 Zimbabweans Feared Dead after Attempting to Cross Limpopo River into South Africa', *News24*, 5 January 2022, sec. News24, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/11-zimbabweans-feared-dead-after-attempting-to-cross-limpopo-river-into-south-africa-20220105>.

²⁶⁴ Nehanda Radio, '15 Zimbabweans Drown in Limpopo River', *Nehanda Radio* (blog), 11 April 2014, <https://nehandaradio.com/2014/04/11/15-zimbabweans-drown-limpopo-river/>.

²⁶⁵ Andrew Meldrum, '60 Migrants Feared Drowned Fleeing from Zimbabwe', *The Guardian*, 20 January 2006, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jan/20/southafrica.zimbabwe>.

river-crossings. For example, the incident early in 2022 in which 11 border jumpers drowned occurred just a few days after the Zimbabwe Republic Police and South Africa Police Service tightened security at the border post.²⁶⁶ Another danger involved in the river crossing is the presence of crocodiles. One participant remarked:

Especially during the rainy season, it is very difficult for people to pass through the river because they are some crocodiles, so you can lose lives. (Participant 19)

And moreover, when people cross into South Africa, they sometimes land in bush areas, filled with other animals. Thus, there are many dangers afoot.

In order to get safely across the border, many migrants hire what are called maguma-guma, or cross-border smugglers. These smugglers are familiar with the routes, are able to bribe corrupt border officials and promise to get travellers safely across—for a price.²⁶⁷ One participant, for example, noted that she gave the smugglers R1000 (~\$78 CAD) for safe passage, selling her TV in order to get the money. However, due to the black-market nature of this activity and the vulnerability of the migrants (given that their lives are in the hands of the maguma-guma), the borderlands can become areas of lawlessness. As Musoni writes, due to the high activity in these borderlands, “The Zimbabwe–South Africa border—particularly the no-man’s land between the Limpopo River, which separates these countries, and the border fence on the South African side—also became a hotbed of crime and violence associated with border jumping.”²⁶⁸ This was reflected in several participants’ stories. When asked about his journey to South Africa, one participant said:

Eish, it was bad. Because we went by foot through the bush, and across the river. That time, there were too much maguma-gumas. We came across these guys, who took all of our clothes, money... We didn’t have passports. So, we had to come... there were guys who were in the bush and were like “I’ll take you to South Africa, take you to Musina. How much, how much?” And those were the guys who robbed us in the bush. Or they were in connection with those guys. (Participant 17)

This is a small glimpse into the smuggler economy and the presence of violence on the South Africa-Zimbabwe border. Musoni notes, “In addition to stealing travelers’ clothes, shoes, cell

²⁶⁶ Audrey L. Ncube, ‘Tragedy As 11 Zimbabwean Border Jumpers Drown In Limpopo River While Attempting To Cross Over Into SA’, *IHarare News* (blog), 6 January 2022, <https://iharare.com/tragedy-as-11-zimbabwean-border-jumpers-drown-in-limpopo-river-while-attempting-to-cross-over-into-sa/>.

²⁶⁷ Musoni, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa*, 142.

²⁶⁸ Musoni, 2.

phones, and cash, maguma-guma also raped, physically assaulted, and even killed people who sought their help with crossing the border.”²⁶⁹ Many of the Zimbabwean women interviewed for this project expressed how fearful they were while crossing over to South Africa because they had heard about such incidents. Thus, it seems that the increased border security in South Africa does little to deter migrants and, in fact, merely pushes them to resort to life-threatening passages to South Africa.

Even after crossing the border to South Africa, migrants often faced complications getting to their final destinations—especially due to encounters with border authorities. One participant said:

I just came this side. Through the road I didn't see anything wrong by the border there. That's where I see a big river there, the big razor wire there. I was starting to be afraid now and what can I do now? That's what they call South Africa. So, there is too much water there on the river, ay. I just saw, it was so scaring me. Then, I just swim on the water there and passed the border through. We meet soldiers there. Ay, they beat us until we [inaudible]. But to think of going back no—we didn't think of going back. We just proceed with our journey until I get where I am now. (Participant 8)

Thus, the violence of the borderlands is not limited to smugglers and other third parties—it extends to the state. And over the years, the South African has continued to dispatch greater and greater numbers of soldiers to the border. Just recently, in July 2022, as part of the new BMA, South Africa deployed 200 fully equipped border guards to Beitbridge.²⁷⁰ When border authorities attack migrants, like in the story above, they reveal the extent of state-supported violence in the borderlands. And these border authorities are rarely held accountable because of how vulnerable their victims usually are. Concerningly, vigilante groups have recently begun to patrol the South African border. AfriForum, a white/Afrikaner nationalist group, announced in June 2022 that they would be patrolling the border near Limpopo.²⁷¹ The Minister of Home Affairs, Aaron Motsoaledi's, response condemns the militia's presence at the border, but reprises the same song about a “crisis” at the border and a need for more security (which vigilantes can interpret as a call to action). In the same breath, he noted that the DHA was recruiting border guards through the

²⁶⁹ Musoni, 158.

²⁷⁰ Lenin Ndebele, ‘SA Deploys 200 Specially Trained Border Control Officers at Beitbridge’, *News24*, 15 July 2022, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/sa-deploys-200-specially-trained-border-control-officers-at-beitbridge-20220715>.

²⁷¹ Staff Reporter, ‘Armed South African Boers Militia Takes over Border Patrols’, *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.thezimbabwemail.com/world-news/armed-south-african-boers-militia-takes-over-border-patrols/>.

BMA and was planning to increase coverage of the border. This emphasis on securing the border vilifies migrants and justifies the often-excessive state-sanctioned violence used against people trying to cross into South Africa.

The journeys of people coming from further north than Zimbabwe are very different. Migrants took anywhere from a couple of days to multiple years to get from Central/Eastern Africa to South Africa. One Burundian migrant came to South Africa by getting lifts on transnational trucks. He travelled to Tanzania first, then Malawi and then, finally, to South Africa. Another Burundian man fled on short notice without a passport or much money and landed up in Tanzania. He stayed there for three months with a family. They helped him cross over to Mozambique, during which he had to swim across a crocodile-infested river. By the time he got to Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, he was completely broke and unable to complete the final leg of his journey. He eventually managed to link up with a school friend who connected him with someone who brought him over to South Africa in the back of a bakkie (a pickup truck). This story reveals the difficulties involved in making such long journeys. It can be an extremely expensive endeavour, which people who are fleeing persecution may not have. It is also a lengthy journey, and people might end up stranded in an intermediary country for a long time.

These stories “of places left and paths imagined” show the vast array of experiences that migrants to South Africa have.²⁷² Throughout these narratives, we have witnessed the presence of

²⁷² These lines, and the inspiration for this chapter’s name, are from the poem, ‘migrant blues’ by Raphael d’Abdon. The full poem goes as follows:

crossing a land grooved
by the presence of dauntless signs

sighs of solitude hovering
over the aching night

there are answers hidden
in these moonlit memories

at the centre of the margins
a quiet view
of places left
and paths imagined

Raphael d’Abdon, ‘Migrant Blues’, in *Splinters of a Mirage Dawn: An Anthology of Migrant Poetry from South Africa*, ed. Amitabh Mitra and Naomi Nkealah, 2013, 25.

environmental/climate change and the way it intertwines with other circumstances, such as a shifting political landscape or an economic downturn to influence people to migrate. This chapter has witnessed the winding paths of migrants from four different countries as they charted a course to South Africa—sometimes at great physical, emotional and financial cost. The next chapter will delve into the lives of migrants after they arrive in South Africa.

Chapter 5: Emplacement and Precarity

*Please Sir, I can't go back to that country
Look at the boils on my back
If you send me back there, they will finish me off*
Rodwell Makombe, 'Why are you here?'²⁷³

In a 2005 article reflecting on his decades of research on the migration of a small group of southern Ethiopian agro-pastoralists, David Turton, describes the idea of doing research on migration not only in terms of *displacement*, but also *emplacement*.²⁷⁴ These are stories, “not just about the loss of place, but also about the struggle to *make* a place in the world, where meaningful action and shared understanding is possible.”²⁷⁵ This chapter embraces that guidance, and aims to discuss the lives of migrants not within the framework of passive, displaced victims, but as people who are part of various communities that they actively participate in, and have diverse life experiences. In many cases, this place is precarious, carved out with great difficulty and against great odds. But it is a place, nevertheless.

Migrants face various challenges while living in South Africa. The two overarching themes that stood out were those of issues relating to documentation and experiences with xenophobia. Some other major themes that appeared in the interviews were access to healthcare and education, the difficulty of job seeking, encounters with the police, housing, the role of the church, and the hardships of the pandemic. Throughout this chapter, many contradictions and ironies will arise. For instance, many of the migrants I spoke with are low-income, but several felt compelled to live in more expensive areas because of fears of xenophobic vitriol or violence. Another example is that two of the women I spoke to are trained nurses, but South African hospitals do not accept

²⁷³ Rodwell Makombe, 'Why Are You Here?', in *Splinters of a Mirage Dawn: An Anthology of Migrant Poetry from South Africa*, ed. Amitabh Mitra and Naomi Nkealah, 2013, 20.

²⁷⁴ David Turton, 'The Meaning of Place in a World of Movement: Lessons from Long-Term Field Research in Southern Ethiopia', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 258–80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/refuge/fei031>.

²⁷⁵ Turton, 258.

them as employees even though the country faces a critical shortage of nurses.²⁷⁶ The ways that migrants weave into the tapestry of South African life are a blend of paradoxical, distressing and enlivening.

5.1 The Burden of Bureaucracy

Regardless of status, how long they had been in South Africa, and their gender, location or occupation, every single person that was interviewed mentioned documentation as one of the biggest challenges they face. In terms of immigration documentation, there are several options available for migrants: (1) they can apply for asylum under Section 22 of the Refugee Act, which they have to renew every six months until they get refugee status under Section 24 of the Refugee Act or their application gets denied; (2) they can apply for a work visa or a study visa, both of which need to be received before entering the country, (3) they can apply for a Relative's Visa, which is given to a foreigner with immediate family in South Africa who are able to support the visa-holder financially, (4) or if they were in South Africa within the right time span, they could apply for one of the Zimbabwean/Lesotho special permits.²⁷⁷ Migrants can also remain undocumented—a fairly common experience, especially amongst those who do not have any form of ID coming into South Africa. The main themes within this topic of documentation are the ill-treatment of migrants when they visit Home Affairs offices, the enormous delays in application processing, the presence of corruption and bribery in this process, and the effects of the COVID-19 on people's documentation access. Issues with documentation and immigration regularization place many migrants in a constant state of liminality and precarity. Fassin et al. have argued that:

This limbo epitomizes the profound ambivalence of the South African state, which acknowledges the right to protection but hinders access to it, which tolerates the presence of hundreds of thousands of people seeking refuge but submits them to continual police interrogation and harassment, which provides constitutional protections and socioeconomic rights to nonnationals but allocates these haphazardly and unevenly, which

²⁷⁶ Staff Writer, 'Massive Shortage of Nurses in South Africa – Here's How Much They Get Paid', *BusinessTech*, 12 May 2022, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/585998/massive-shortage-of-nurses-in-south-africa-heres-how-much-they-get-paid/>.

²⁷⁷ Department of Home Affairs, 'General Information about Visas', accessed 2 August 2022, <http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/types-of-visas>.

generates a bureaucracy to assess individual cases but gives it notoriously insufficient means, which mixes ‘corrupt circumvention and overzealous enforcement’.²⁷⁸

Indeed, the contradictions in the South African government’s approach to documentation are too numerous to count, and its lack of compassion is sometimes astounding.

5.1.1 ‘Hell Affairs’

Home Affairs has earned the nickname ‘Hell Affairs’ due to its infamous inefficiency and corruption.²⁷⁹ South African citizens also must go through Home Affairs in order to renew IDs and passports and other such administrative affairs. However, as noted in a recent opinion article, “While the relationship between the department and South African citizens has proven to be a frustrating challenge for most, its relationship with asylum seekers and refugees is in a worse state of atrophy.”²⁸⁰ The consequences of inefficiencies and delays at Home Affairs are often much more severe for non-South Africans—they may face detention and deportation. Migrants are wholly dependent on Home Affairs for all their documentation, and many shared stories of the horrific conditions during their experiences in these offices. One migrant remarked:

Home Affairs is another place. Because if you go there, there’s a lot of things that is happening within Home Affairs, you know. But I can say that... the treatment in Home Affairs, it’s not really good... If you compare some people’s stories, you see the Home Affairs treatment, it’s very, very poor. (Participant 10)

With the way that migrants spoke about this office, it seems a place of almost mythic discomfort and misery. Several migrants mentioned the issue of long lines at Home Affairs, which meant that they had to go back several times, paying transport costs every time. One Congolese asylum-seeking migrant shared that:

When I arrived here in Johannesburg, Home Affairs in Johannesburg was closed for newcomers. So, I had to go to Pretoria. And when I went there, it was not that easy. Because

²⁷⁸ Didier Fassin, Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, and Aurelia Segatti, ‘Asylum as a Form of Life: The Politics and Experience of Indeterminacy in South Africa’, *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 2 (April 2017): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1086/691162>.

²⁷⁹ The Daily Maverick, ‘HOME TRUTHS: “Hell Affairs” – Readers Share Their Sorry Tales’, *Daily Maverick*, 25 May 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-05-25-hell-affairs-readers-share-their-sorry-tales/>.

²⁸⁰ Zimkhitha Mhlhlo and Charlene Kreuser, ‘Home Affairs Department Fails to Serve Citizens and Non-Nationals’, *The Mail & Guardian*, 23 June 2022, <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-06-23-home-affairs-department-fails-to-serve-citizens-and-non-nationals/>.

we had to sleep almost three weeks outside Home Affairs for me to get inside. (Participant 15)

Another mentioned that:

But when we were supposed to go [to Home Affairs], so the whole day you can spend the day there in Pretoria and sometimes they don't help you. You will come back you will have to pay transport money for your children, for yourself, your entire family. You can spend like 700 [rand] (~\$50 CAD) or more than that. And then when you go there, there is no place to sit, like, yes you will be standing. If it's raining, they don't care. So, it is something. Sometimes you ask yourself why a human being can treat another human being like this. (Participant 2)

It was a common experience for migrants to wait for long times outside Home Affairs in order to begin their asylum applications, and to have to return many times in order to get seen. Many told stories of arriving at Home Affairs at 3am, only to find a queue already forming.

Another reason why Home Affairs features front and center in many migrants' minds is because they must keep returning. Asylum seeker permits are only valid for 6 months (and sometimes for as short as 1-3 months), so they have to keep going to Home Affairs to renew their permits. One man from Burundi said that some people remain undocumented because they cannot afford to keep travelling to Home Affairs to get their permits renewed. As a result, they must survive in this state of precarity, when they could be asked to produce their documents at any moment, and an absence of acceptable documentation may lead to arrest and deportation. Expanding on this, one Zimbabwean migrant spoke about her experience trying to get the Zimbabwean Special Dispensation Permit (ZSP), saying that:

The first time it was difficult because we slept in the different Home Affairs two nights, two nights [at a time] until we finally got them. It wasn't easy to get them because most people they really wanted them. And Zimbabweans, it's like we were almost the population of South Africa, but they said they were going to issue 200,000 permits. So, we could wake up and say today we are going to Home Affairs, we go there [would have] no luck because there are millions and millions of people. We sleep there—no luck. The next day we would say, no, let's go to Benoni, let's go. Until I had my luck ... in Springs. But because my friends were not that lucky, they never came out. Yeah, so it was only me in our group that got the permit. (Participant 6)

This story reveals the arbitrariness in how Home Affairs deals with documentation processes, resulting in feelings of helplessness and desperation in migrants. This participant noted that her

friends who did not get the ZSP remain in South Africa undocumented, and find work at restaurants, where they are not asked about their status. However, some migrants devise ways around this flawed system by obtaining counterfeit documentation to protect themselves in potential encounters with authorities. Before getting the ZSP, the migrant above crafted a plan of her own:

Because my uncle said the only way you can survive—because asylum is hard to get—then maybe you should make a fake asylum. He took me to the Nigerian guys. They made me fake asylum [seeker documents] so that when I go to the street and the police stopped me [I would have something to show them]. I showed them I think [for] a year, [after which] they introduced this [Zimbabwean Special Dispensation] permit. (Participant 6)

In the face of a broken bureaucracy, some migrants resort to counterfeit documentation, and others just remain undocumented. Most would prefer to regularize their stays, but the system makes this difficult.

When they are seen by Home Affairs officials, some migrants' bad experience continued. One migrant spoke about how, when she arrived at the counter, the workers dawdled, sat around drinking tea, and did not attend to people. Of course, not all workers are unhelpful, but it seemed like many people had such experiences. One migrant explained it succinctly:

Home Affairs is a very hectic place. Yeah, and the treatment, there, it's not good. There are a few people who are good though—it's not like everyone is bad. There are a few people that know how to respect people, and a few who see you like a little piece of shit. Sorry for that. (Participant 10)

Other also experienced similar feelings of condescension and rudeness. Even worse, some Home Affairs workers actively dissuaded migrants from applying for more stable documentation. One Congolese asylum seeker who has been in South Africa since 2008 asked an official about the prospect of applying for permanent residence. She recounted the moment:

I asked them, I said, "But I'm here for a long time—can I apply for these kinds of paper [permanent residence]?" They [said], "Mama, you want to go back home, try. If you want to go back home, try to just tell us that we didn't do our job nicely. You'll go back home. Stay there with your asylum seeker. Stay, it's fine. You can still live in here. If you try to tell us the contrary, you'll go home." Now I'm scared to go through that process. (Participant 16)

This atmosphere of intimidation further ostracizes migrants and dissuades them from securing a more stable status in the country. This suggests that the immigration regime is working to keep people in a state of liminality, divorced from the possibility of making South Africa a more permanent home.

In some cases, migrants even experience or witness violent moments at Home Affairs. One migrant detailed her experience:

Treatment is bad at home affairs. When you see them, they will call you names, they will push you. They think you're stupid stupid stupid. Me, I'm from DRC, I'm even lucky. But those Eritreans, they beat them, they push them. (Participant 16)

Again, state-sanctioned violence appears in the immigration regime. Thus, migrants experience hostility and cruelty in many dimensions: through physical violence, through the animosity and indifference of Home Affairs officers, and through the recurring nature of this horrific ordeal every six months for asylum seekers.

5.1.2 Cycles of Liminality

Few of the migrants interviewed for this project have experienced moments of true stability and security in South Africa. In interviews, it was interesting to see how undocumented migrants aspired to become asylum seekers, asylum seekers strove to get refugee status, and people designated as refugees hoped to get permanent residence. No matter what level on the chain of citizenship migrants fell on, they all expressed feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. This was exacerbated by the long wait times for all types of documentation. In 2020, the UNHCR approximated that the DHA's asylum backlog sat at 153,000 cases.²⁸¹ Some migrants have been on asylum seeker status for as long as 19 years. Meaning that those who have maintained status have been going to Home Affairs every six months for over a decade. This was the case for one Burundian migrant, who has been in South Africa since 2005. He remarked:

And we are sometimes even overwhelmed, you understand. You know, living in a situation where you are [in South Africa for] 15 years, but not even, not being recognized. And you [are] still nothing... So that's a situation where we are living which is not easy to cope

²⁸¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'South Africa', UNHCR, accessed 5 August 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/south-africa.html>.

with. But we are trying. We are trying because you don't have a choice. You don't have a choice. Or what we say in English: adapt or perish. So, we are living that. (Participant 22)

This interview excerpt really conveys the difficulty of living in this in between—not a refugee, not a citizen, not quite undocumented. Notably, this asylum seeker felt ‘unrecognized’, signifying that his asylum seeker status felt insufficient or not concrete enough to provide recognition of his place in South Africa. But as he noted, he does not have a choice; given his involvement in political activity in his home country, his fear of spies in other countries, and his lack of financial resources to move, he has to stay and try make it work in South Africa. The inefficiencies of Home Affairs and the ever-shifting rules condemn migrants to insecurity and precarity.

5.1.3 Corruption and Bribery

Corruption in the halls of Home Affairs is far from uncommon. When asked about her experience at Home Affairs, one migrant said:

I think, I think it's more of like money talks. So, it's always the ones who had more money, who get things quicker. You know, there's a system that we have to go through, like when we go at the Home Affairs; like in the morning we'd be in line, and then they'd have to until the office is open, [then] they would get it. But then you'd see people being allowed to just pass the line and just go in. (Participant 1)

Indeed, money is a powerful influencer within Home Affairs. Several migrants mentioned the necessity of bribery in the office. Sometimes, even to get in the building, migrants had to bribe the security guards. One Burundian man who only received a one-month asylum seeker permit bribed a worker with R20 (~\$1.50 CAD) at his next visit to Home Affairs and they increased his permit to six months. This economy of corruption is an obstacle for many migrants who cannot afford to pay bribes. One migrant spoke about this, saying:

You know what at Home Affairs what they're doing—those officers, they have their people. They go, they talk to others, they give money, and they privilege them. But we know those papers [should be] for free. We don't need to pay for them. And if you are not working, how are you going to pay for those papers? (Participant 5)

Indeed, under Section 22 and Section 24 of the Refugee Act, asylum seekers should not need to pay anything to apply for refugee status.²⁸² Thus, it is illegal for Home Affairs officials to ask for money—especially to line their own pockets.

5.1.4 Pandem(ic)onium

Given that the field work for this thesis was conducted during the pandemic, its findings were coloured greatly by the collective tragedy and adversity experienced during these years. The South African government seems to have used the pandemic as a reason to close its borders and shut refugee reception centers. This affected new migrants to the country, but also impacted the ability of already-present migrants to keep their documentation valid. Similar to many other axes of inequality, the pandemic intensified and revealed the frailties of migrant administrative and support systems in South Africa. An obvious example of this is the South African COVID-19 vaccination rollout, which discriminated against migrants—particularly undocumented ones. Until December 2021, undocumented migrants, and even some documented migrants, were ineligible for the vaccine because they did not have the necessary identification documents.²⁸³

On 26 March 2020, the DHA closed Refugee Reception Offices across the country, and they only reopened in May 2022.²⁸⁴ Thus, during the time that fieldwork for this thesis was conducted, the Refugee Reception Offices were closed. The DHA introduced an online system for asylum renewal which some asylum seeker expressed gratitude for because they could renew their permits without having to wait in long lines. However, the pandemic caused documentation debacles for others. One Congolese migrant said:

When I got here [in 2008], I went to Home Affairs to ask for the identity like asylum or something. I got it. But since COVID-19, everything just went off just like that. They said you should apply online. But we have applied online like four times, they're not responding to us. And then when we are walking in the road, they're disturbing us. In town. I can't go in town because I don't have anything to represent. This [document] is like overstay—like it's expired. (Participant 4)

²⁸² Department of Home Affairs, 'Refugee Status & Asylum', accessed 2 August 2022, <http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/immigration-services/refugee-status-asylum>.

²⁸³ Cassim, 'South Africa Rolls Out COVID Vaccines for Undocumented Immigrants'.

²⁸⁴ Tariro Washinyira, 'Home Affairs to Open Refugee Offices after Two-Year Closure', *Citypress*, 21 April 2022, <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/home-affairs-to-open-refugee-offices-after-two-year-closure-20220421>.

Thus, there seem to be issues with the online system. Moreover, this statement shows that an expired permit can cause problems for asylum seekers. The DHA did provide a blanket extension to all asylum seekers and refugees whose permits expired during the office closures.²⁸⁵ However, this does not exempt asylum seekers from harassment and fear of xenophobia, as illustrated above. Additionally, the message about the extensions seems not to have made it to the ears of many migrants and, possibly, to government officials in the DHA. Several migrants spoke fearfully about being deported during the pandemic due to their expired permits—a narrative that was reinforced by Home Affairs officials. One asylum seeker who, at that time, had an expired permit shared that:

The big challenge also we are facing for now: Home Affairs, refuses to open for foreigners to give them papers. Like, myself, for now, I'm illegal. My papers got expired since these things of Corona[virus]. Up until now, they don't want to open... They will just send the police to come and arrest us saying that you are illegal. So how come I'm illegal? And you are the one who don't want to give me the paper. You just closed the office for Home Affairs. [You] don't want to give papers, and then you're saying that, no you're illegal. I don't want to be illegal. (Participant 21)

He went on to say that many of his fellow migrants were computer illiterate, so it was difficult for them to use the online system to apply for permit renewal. Thus, although the DHA rolled out the online permit renewal system, this was not enough to ensure the continued protection of migrants. In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the inefficiencies and cruelties of the immigration system were further exposed.

5.1.5 (Ir)regularizing Zimbabweans' Stays

Another recent change to the immigration system involves the termination of the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP) Program that regularized the stay of tens of thousands of Zimbabweans in South Africa. The permits expired on 31 December 2021, and holders were given a 12-month grace period to apply for other visas or leave the country.²⁸⁶ This has thrown many people's lives into disarray, as they had made lives for themselves in South Africa, and now must remain there, undocumented, apply for a very difficult-to-get work visa, or leave the country all together. One permit holder spoke about this experience:

²⁸⁵ Mhlahlo and Kreuser, 'Home Affairs Department Fails to Serve Citizens and Non-Nationals'.

²⁸⁶ Marwanyika and Ndlovu, 'South African Faces Legal Fight Over Zimbabwean Work Permits'.

My family, [they're] documented and me now, it's like I'm the only foreigner in the house... The only time I like an outsider is now because our permits are expiring. And my family: I told you that my husband is documented [and] all my children, they have South African documents. So, I'm asking myself what is going to happen to me, since they said they no longer renew the permits? So, after the permit expires in December, I will stay in South Africa undocumented. What's going to happen?... Now they're saying whether you are documented or not, go back to your country. So, it's confusing. I'm starting to have other options, though I'm not 100%. But I don't see myself [in South Africa] in five years or so. (Participant 6)

This story speaks to the devastating effects of ending the ZEP somewhat out of the blue. This woman has a job and a family in South Africa and now that has all come under threat.

This seems to have been the general trend of this special visa program, since its creation in 2009. It began with the Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project (DZP) in 2009, which regularized the stays of 245,000 Zimbabweans, many of whom were undocumented or had fraudulent documents.²⁸⁷ In 2014, when the DZP permits were due to expire, the program was replaced with the Zimbabwean Special Dispensation Permit (ZSP), which was the same as the DZP, but was non-renewable and did not contribute towards migrants' time spent in South Africa to get permanent residence. When this permit expired in 2017, the government introduced the ZEP, which did not entitle holders to apply for permanent residence and expired at the end of 2021. Thus, with each new iteration of this permit, the pathways to permanent residence became narrower and narrower, thereby limiting the ability of holders stay in South Africa. Also, the fact that the program was remodeled and renamed every four years illustrates the volatility of such initiatives, which forces migrants to reevaluate and reconfigure their lives every four years. It also makes it difficult to trust the sincerity of the South African government; as one migrants remarked:

The government of South Africa has two faces. (Participant 15)

5.1.6 Precarity by Design

The examples of the struggle of asylum seekers and the termination of the ZEP reveal not only the dysfunction of the DHA, but also its cruelty. It seems that the system works to keep migrants

²⁸⁷ Moyo, 'Undocumented Migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa', 164–65.

suspended in precarity. Borrowing from Goldring and Landolt, we can understand precarious migratory status as, “the multiple and variable forms of ‘less than full status’, [which] is defined by the absence of key rights or entitlements usually associated with the full or nearly full status of citizenship and permanent residence.”²⁸⁸ Migrants to South Africa are kept in precarious conditions by the lack of access to documentation. As one Burundian migrant conveyed, when asked about the challenges he faces in South Africa:

Nothing is happening. So, imagine at my age I’m still going to fight with the police, being called undocumented and end up illegal. Since I’ve been here, we’ve been going to Home Affairs—the whole family—to renew our paper. So, I’m going to reach to the point where I’m stuck with a policeman who is going to qualify me as illegal. And they made me that. You understand? They made me that. (Participant 22)

This is an astute observation of the immigration regime in South Africa. Many participants try incredibly hard to keep up with their obligations and keep their permits valid. However, the DHA condemns them to a life of precarity and insecurity through their (in)actions. In failing to process applications and make documentation accessible, the DHA is *making* migrants ‘illegal’.

5.2 ‘The Other’

Closely linked to issues with documentation is the issue of xenophobia—defined as fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners. Much has been written on this topic, so this thesis will not go into too much detail about the background of this issue.²⁸⁹ However, xenophobia was an important theme in migrant interviews and is an unfortunate, but highly present thread in the lives of any non-citizen in South Africa (and even those citizens who were born elsewhere). Xenophobia is as old as South Africa itself, but it has manifested in different ways throughout history. Perhaps due to the progressive and Pan-Africanist ideals that saturated South African society after the fall of the apartheid regime, the presence of xenophobia in the so-called ‘Rainbow Nation’ feels particularly notable. Indeed, xenophobic beliefs are prevalent in South Africa today, with 44% of people polled in a Department of Justice study agreeing with the statement “foreigners should not be allowed to

²⁸⁸ Zaheera Jinnah, ‘Negotiated Precarity in the Global South: A Case Study of Migration and Domestic Work in South Africa’, *Studies in Social Justice* 14, no. 1 (2020): 217, <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v2020i14.1971>.

²⁸⁹ For more information on this topic, see *Exorcising the Demons Within* by Loren B. Landau, ‘Africa’s Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa’ by David Mario Matsinhe, and *From Foreigners to Natives: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa* by Michael Neocosmos.

live in South Africa because they take jobs and benefits away from South Africans.”²⁹⁰ This belief is widespread, even though there is no evidence that foreigners are ‘taking’ jobs. In fact, a World Bank report suggested that immigrants, in fact, generated jobs for locals in South Africa between 1996 and 2011.²⁹¹

Scholars and research organizations have long studied the roots of xenophobia in South Africa. A myriad of theories have been proposed. Some scholars put forward the scapegoat thesis, which suggests that xenophobia stems from the (often-false) association of foreign-born people with social ills, such as crime, unemployment and disease (HIV/AIDS in particular).²⁹² The relative deprivation thesis, alternatively, suggests that xenophobia arises from black South Africans’ frustration with the slowness and inadequacy of the amelioration of social and economic inequalities in the decades following the first democratic elections in 1994.²⁹³ Another theory—that of bioculturalism—proposes that foreign-born people become victims of xenophobia due to phenotypical and linguistic difference.²⁹⁴ This is evidenced by the incidents of xenophobic attacks on South Africans and non-South Africans alike who “look foreign”—those who are darker skinned or have other physical traits associated with non-South African black people. This theory is closely linked with the South African exceptionalism theory which suggests that South Africans see themselves as exceptional Africans, given the country’s level of industrialization and liberal democracy, and therefore look down on foreign-born black Africans.²⁹⁵ Both Matsinhe and Ndlovu link this to ideas of coloniality and identification with the oppressor. Ndlovu writes that:

The incidents dubbed xenophobia or Afro-phobic violence are enabled by what decolonial scholars have referred to as the coloniality of knowledge. This is a form of coloniality that

²⁹⁰ Tim Fish Hodgson, Kaajal Ramjathan-Keogh, and Mulesa Lumina, ‘Proposed Legal and Policy Reform Will Entrench SA Discrimination and Xenophobia’, *Daily Maverick*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-06-06-proposed-legal-and-policy-reform-will-entrench-sa-discrimination-and-xenophobia/>.

²⁹¹ ‘New Study Finds Immigrants in South Africa Generate Jobs for Locals’, World Bank, 13 November 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/publication/new-study-finds-immigrants-in-south-africa-generate-jobs-for-locals>.

²⁹² David Mario Matsinhe, ‘Africa’s Fear of Itself: The Ideology of “Makwerekwere” in South Africa’, *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2011): 297.

²⁹³ Matsinhe, 297.

²⁹⁴ Matsinhe, 297.

²⁹⁵ Matsinhe, 301.

affects the victim's mind by making him/her assume the attitude of his/her oppressor when encountering other victims that are more vulnerable than him/her.²⁹⁶

He links xenophobia/Afrophobia with a long history of coloniality in South Africa, which he suggests has infiltrated the minds of black South Africans, making them hate the blackness within themselves and attack those more vulnerable than them. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to endorse any of these theories and get to the bottom of the logics of xenophobia in South Africa. Rather, this section aims to highlight the stories of migrants in the country and consider their encounters with xenophobia.

Several migrants spoke, broadly, about how they did not feel welcomed in South Africa—specifically mentioning the episodes of xenophobic violence and feelings of otherness that pervade their daily lives. One Congolese migrant remarked:

South Africans, they are not welcoming people. I don't know why. I think it's about the experience they went to apartheid, or what, but they are not open people. Because us, back home when we were growing [up], when I know that this is a foreigner, I will try my best to be friend of him. So, I can know from him, some other things that we don't know. But here, it's different. I think for me, sometimes I think it's because of the experience they went through—the apartheid—it messed up their mind[s] or their thinking. (Participant 2)

She expressed feeling sad about the animosity she has received from South Africans during her 15-odd years in the country, and hypothesized that the root of this hostility is the unresolved violence baked into the country from apartheid. She called South Africa “a wounded country” and noted that xenophobia is rooted in these histories of violence and the country's current failure to address the psychological and material damages of apartheid. This fits into some of the scholarly discourse around xenophobia referenced above. The same migrant later discussed her impressions of the differences between South Africans and migrants, who she suggested were much more willing to work for less and make more sacrifices. She said:

Because me as a foreigner, I know this it's not my country. I don't have an uncle, I don't have an aunt here—I have to work hard so I can have a living. And when they see you working hard like this, they become jealous. “Oh no foreigners are taking our jobs.” Which job? Because me, the job I'm doing, when they send me [to] go and see that the lady there in Mayfair, I will not mind walking. But them, they will refuse. And when they hear the salary—because I can tell you the salary we are getting in the home-based care, you will

²⁹⁶ Ndlovu, ‘Manufacturing Black-on-Black Violence in Africa’, 106.

be surprised yourself... But them, South Africa[ns], will not accept this is small money. But me I will say okay, let me take it because it is something [rather] than nothing. And when you do, [they say], “ahh they are taking our job,” but they don’t know which sacrifices we are doing. (Participant 2)

This narrative fits in with the scapegoat thesis, in which South Africans justify xenophobia by blaming foreign-born people for taking ‘their’ jobs. It also furthers a common narrative of South Africans as less willing to make sacrifices and lazier than their foreign-born peers.²⁹⁷ Some migrants even expressed sympathy for the South Africans who say “the foreigners are taking our jobs” and recognition of the challenges that poor, black South Africans face, with one saying:

Even sometimes I’m like even if [South Africans] say that they don’t want us, part of me understands... the way they are living, eish. But that won’t change. (Participant 6)

A couple of migrants recounted experiences of devastating violence, motivated by xenophobic beliefs. For example, one migrant talked about her then-husband’s experience in Johannesburg:

I arrived here in 2002, then after that, they shoot my husband. They shoot him and then it was more difficult for me. After that time, they shoot him, the bullet entered here and left here, but he didn’t die. People from South Africa they’re the ones that shoot him. Ya, it was because he was doing this business for selling fruits and veggies. I think they wanted to take something, the robbers, then they shoot him. (Participant 3)

Economically and socially vulnerable people are disproportionate victims of xenophobia because they are more likely to have to navigate through public spaces in their daily lives. This migrant, for example, was a fruit seller, and so must have interacted with South Africans on a day-to-day basis. Given that he was new to South Africa, it is likely that he did not speak any South African languages and that, along with his appearance, might have marked him as a target for xenophobic violence. This is an extreme example of brutality, but many migrants spoke about living with the constant threat of violence. One migrant said:

Yeah, is it very difficult here because you are not free. Every day here, xenophobia every day, killing the people everywhere. You are scared walking [around]. (Participant 14)

Even when people are not direct victims, they often feel proximate to violence and sense that the threat of violence is always around. This brings upon feelings of confinement and makes it difficult

²⁹⁷ H. J. Dawson and E. Fouksman, ‘Labour, Laziness and Distribution: Work Imaginaries among the South African Unemployed’, *Africa* 90, no. 2 (February 2020): 229–51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972019001037>.

for migrants to go about their daily business. Many migrants spoke about their experience travelling in taxis (in South Africa, the term taxi refers to minibuses that millions of people use to get around). One shared Congolese woman shared a story:

Yesterday I was in the taxi. It was raining a lot. And they could see it was raining the taxi as well. We were all wet, like the seats, it was [like it was] raining inside. And the people was telling the driver, "please fix your car. Take this car to the scrapyard." Everyone was talking. And then I was the last one, because they end up in Bedfordview, I was the last one. When I tell him I say, "You can take [the issue of the falling-apart taxi] to your boss," he say, "You know why, that's why we're cutting your head. That's why we are killing you. You don't tell me what to do this is my job. Don't tell me, you Makwerekwere, tell me that. (Participant 16)

Even though other passengers had made similar remarks, the taxi driver's response to the Congolese woman was vitriolic and threatening. Thus, in everyday interactions, migrants come face-to-face with the threat of violence, due to their identity. 'Makwerekwere' is a derogatory name for foreigners, and reveals that the taxi driver's hateful remarks stemmed, at least in part, from his enmity towards foreigners. Another migrant shared:

When you are sitting in a taxi, for example, someone is sitting next to you [and the ride] won't end without [you] being asked where you [are] coming from. So, that question will come again and again daily, it's become a trauma then. But there's nothing you can do. (Participant 22)

Indeed, it seems that part of being a foreigner in South Africa is being reminded of your difference every day. This constant reminder of being an outsider can become a trauma, as this migrant noted. It almost feels like a wound that it constantly chafed, and so is unable to heal.

One migrant in particular, a young man from the DRC, has had many encounters with xenophobia that have coloured his time in South Africa. He has had to move multiple times due to xenophobia and the threats on his life. He described his tumultuous time in the country:

But I [tried] to go back [to the DRC] in 2015; my life was in danger, because there was too much xenophobia here... They were about to kill me in Durban ... Then I ran to the camp in Chatsworth, called Isipingo Camp... I spent three months in the camp there because my life was really in danger ... We were going to police station to report, [and] they said, "You go back to your country." ... I went to another place called Mpumalanga. In Mpumalanga, that same thing happened to me again. Then I decided to move [from] Mpumalanga to Musina. Now I'm in Musina. But in Musina, also, I'm facing so many

things. Like last year, I really get a big challenge. I was also about to run from Musina, because I was a renting [from] someone, but the landlord just came surprised me say that, “You must move from this place. If you don’t want to move, I can beat you.” ... He said, “My son is a police,” and they call straight that police[man] [and] the police[man] himself told me that, “If you say something and if you want to report [this], you will disappear, I’ll make you disappear in this Musina and you must keep quiet.” ... Now I’m just keeping quiet. (Participant 21)

This story illustrates many facets of xenophobia: its pervasiveness across many regions of South Africa, how it is tied in with a corrupt police force, and the tendency for it to escalate to physical violence. This story also shows the extent to which migrants lack protection from xenophobia; he did not feel like he could turn to anyone for help and, instead, moved cities entirely. In fact, he was told that if he went to the police, his might find himself in even greater peril. For the most part, migrants said that their lives were very different in South Africa compared to their home countries, with different challenges and advantages. However, this man said that the problems were the same in the DRC and South Africa; he felt that his life was under threat in both places:

Yes, [the challenges in South Africa and the DRC] are similar because in Congo, as I’m saying, that people wanted to kill me because of my tribe. So, here, they want also to kill me because of being foreign. It seems like I don’t know... It seems like the same.” (Participant 21)

Calling back to Warsan Shire’s poem, ‘Home’, referenced above—this man fled home because it was the mouth of a shark, but jumped straight into the mouth of another. Both in the DRC and South Africa, he has been running for his life, with no sanctuary or protection.

In recent months, xenophobia in South Africa has become more organized and absorbed into mainstream society in the form of Operation Dudula, which means “to drive back, repel, repulse, beat back or push away.”²⁹⁸ Operation Dudula is a splinter vigilante movement that broke off from the Put South Africa First Movement in mid-2021, and strives to drive out foreign-born people from South African communities.²⁹⁹ This mission is partially rooted in the false belief that immigrants are taking job opportunities from South African citizens. In June 2021, for example,

²⁹⁸ Ndaba Sibanda, ‘OPINION | Operation Dudula Is a Symptom of Unresolved Colonial and Political Issues’, *The Mail & Guardian*, 12 June 2022, <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-06-12-operation-dudula-is-a-symptom-of-unresolved-colonial-and-political-issues/>.

²⁹⁹ Pumza Fihlani, ‘Dudula: How South African Anger Has Focused on Foreigners’, *BBC News*, 13 March 2022, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60698374>.

dozens of people met in Soweto, brought together by a campaign under a poster proclaiming that, “We will be removing all illegal foreign nationals by force!!!”³⁰⁰ They marched through the area, threatening to violently expel foreign-born people. Several participants expressed concern about Operation Dudula. One Zimbabwean woman said:

It’s difficult because if we’re looking at this situation now, this operation Dudula—it doesn’t affect me, but my family is involved. They are undocumented. So, it’s affecting us a lot. (Participant 6)

Operation Dudula has fostered an atmosphere of fear—especially for migrants who are undocumented. Migrants are not only scared of encounters with police, where they may be asked to produce their documents. Now, they also have to fear vigilante citizens, who have taken the law (very loosely interpreted) into their own hands. Another migrant—a refugee from the DRC—spoke about how Dudula frightens her children:

And these stories of xenophobia—Dudula. You know kids, sometimes, now they are updated. They sit with a phone... And I think there was a time my kids were very traumatized ... So, the trend of seeing those violence [things] and people being killed, they got very scared. Like, “Mommy, Mommy can [we] go somewhere else?” (Participant 10)

She went on to say that she worries about her children saying that their parents are Congolese at school, because local children might have learned xenophobic ideas from their parents. Thus, Operation Dudula has exacerbated the atmosphere of dread and suspicion in South Africa, making life more stressful and difficult to navigate for migrants.

Xenophobia, unfortunately, is a matter that pervades all spheres of society, including the government. The renewed emphasis on border control and the militarization of the border advance the idea that the body politic of South Africa is threatened by an ‘alien invasion’. This is evident in the BMA, which “[Recognizes] that border management is exercised by multiple organs of state with the purpose of *securing the borders* of the Republic and *protecting national interests* [emphasis added].”³⁰¹ This securitization of the border leads to the tighter association of foreign-

³⁰⁰ Jan Bornman, ‘Operation Dudula Pushes Ahead with Hateful Politics’, *New Frame*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.newframe.com/operation-dudula-pushes-ahead-with-hateful-politics/>.

³⁰¹ Border Management Authority Act.

born people with criminality.³⁰² As Sutherland writes, “If migration is an urgent security threat, any action taken to remedy that threat requires less rigorous reasoning and justification. This results in restrictive policies and the framing of migrants as a threat to the safety and identity of local populations.” As the government pushes this narrative, they implicitly feed into the xenophobic rhetoric of movements like Operation Dudula. Even separately from policy decisions, the South African government seems to support and even lead the charge in much of the xenophobic activities in the country. Penny Foley, who has worked extensively on migrant issues in South Africa, said:

But the whole [immigration] system was stacked against any empathy, any ability to hear. And so now here we are in 2022, with bloody Dudula. And the ANC basically, in all their factionalism, is going to use foreigners as a scapegoat and [as] a way in which we can escape from the fact we haven't delivered services to our population. (Interview with Penny Foley)

This is reflected in the former mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba's, time in office, which was defined by his xenophobic activities.³⁰³ He accused migrants of bringing Ebola to South Africa and bringing rats to Alexandra (a township in Johannesburg), pushing forward the narrative that migrants bring social ills to the city. The entrenchment of these beliefs is reflected in an interview with a DHA official, who echoed some of the sentiments of groups like Put South Africans First, saying:

So now you get South Africans who are competing with skilled immigrants on the streets for everything. And most South Africans do not have the necessary skills to become competent; you know, they end up not getting the jobs. And you end up now with many foreigners taking jobs that maybe could have been reserved for South Africans. (Interview with Director Kobese)

Thus, it seems that xenophobia is not only a one-on-one interaction that migrants encounter; it is an institutionally supported attitude that pervasively dehumanizes and threatens foreign-born people.

³⁰² Katherine Sutherland, ‘OPINIONISTA: Securitisation of Migration and the Rhetoric Surrounding It Fuels Xenophobia’, *Daily Maverick*, 3 August 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-08-03-securitisation-of-migration-and-the-rhetoric-surrounding-it-fuels-xenophobia/>.

³⁰³ Jan Bornman, ‘Herman Mashaba's Xenophobic Legacy’, *New Frame*, 6 November 2019, <https://www.newframe.com/herman-mashabas-xenophobic-legacy/>.

5.3 Encountering the Police

Anti-foreigner sentiment is also reflected in migrant interactions with the police. Several migrants shared stories of being harassed and questioned by the police in both Johannesburg and Musina. Four major themes came up in discussions about the presence of the police in migrants' lives: the requesting of documents, detention, the avoidance of certain parts of town due to police presence, and corruption/bribery. One Congolese asylum seeker's account touches on many of these themes. She said:

And then when we are walking in the road, [the police are] disturbing us in town. I can't go in town because I don't have anything to represent. This [asylum seeker paper] is like overstay—it's expired. We can't go freely. We go walking scared in the road for the police. Sometimes when they ask you, "Where is your paper?" You produce the paper. They say, "This one is not the one. Okay, you must give me so much [money] for me to leave you." So that amount that [they're] asking, sometimes you don't have it. So, we are just surviving by the grace of God. (Participant 4)

This story highlights the feeling of harassment that migrants endure in encounters with the police. This participant is hesitant to go to certain parts of town where she is more likely to run into the police. She is especially reluctant to travel around town because her asylum permit is expired (due to closures during the pandemic lockdowns). She also spoke about the police asking for a bribe, highlighting the presence of corruption within the South Africa Police Service. Indeed, many police officers also exploit the vulnerability of migrants—especially undocumented migrants—as a way to line their own pockets.

Harassment relating to documentation is especially egregious in light of the earlier discussion about non-access to Home Affairs services. Several migrants spoke about misunderstandings relating to asylum seeker documents. The permit is a flimsy piece of A4 paper containing barely-legible writing, and police officers are sometimes unfamiliar with this type of document. One Burundian undocumented migrant said:

When I go out... the police ask me where are my documents. I try to tell them my problem (that Home Affairs is closed), and some they understand, some they don't understand. (Participant 7)

There is little uniformity in policing, and whether an expired permit becomes a problem is left up to the individual police officer. In extreme cases, police officers apparently go so far as to tear up migrants' documents. The same Congolese asylum seeker cited above said:

You can't walk freely because you see you see a person like he just a [civilian-looking] person, while he's [actually] the police. He just remove his ID then say, "I'm the CID (Crime Intelligence Division), where is your paper?" When you give them this one... Some people there said [the police officers] tear their papers. They were tearing the paper. They just want money. (Participant 4)

In some cases, encounters with the police escalate even further. When asked how her fellow Zimbabweans were treated by the police when they realized they were undocumented, one migrant said:

No, they arrest them. Especially in Johannesburg, CBD (Central Business District). Even me, I was once arrested because I had forgotten my passport, so they stopped me. They said, "Can we have ID?" I said, "I don't have. I have [one], but I left it at home." They said, "At least give us something." So, I give them a little bit of money. So, it's so traumatizing. Because even some of the people that I know, they've been in police cells for two months now because they were stopped in town ... Even in in my area, as I mentioned, nowadays, you cannot just go to the shops. It's either the police they stop you or the community they stop you and ask you, "Where are you from?" So, we are just living in fear. It's not easy. It's just not easy. (Participant 6)

This further illustrates the prevalence of corruption in police encounters with migrants. This is not an issue limited to migrants as police have been known to ask for bribes from South Africans as well—but the stakes are different for migrants who face potential imprisonment and deportation. Even the threat of encounters with police is enough to make migrants fearful. One undocumented Zimbabwean migrant said:

It's so tight because you can't go any further, you can't go anywhere. You have to run away when you see the [police] van passing. (Participant 13)

However, an interesting contradiction arises in the idea that the police are the root of a great deal of trauma and perturbation in some contexts, but a source of solace in others. Some migrants expressed a desire to have *greater* access to police. One Zimbabwean undocumented migrant, for

example, remarked that he wished to be documented so that he could go to the police when he was the victim of a crime. He went on to say:

And the police, they protect us so much. Because, here, this side, there is too much those guys—thugs—[and] they do whatever they like. But if [a] policeman is there, they protect us very well. (Participant 13)

The same migrant was cited above as saying that he runs away whenever he sees a van, fearing that they might be the police. Thus, the police are not monolithic—in some cases, they are a source of harassment, and in others, a source of safety. However all in all, it does not seem that migrants feel they can depend on the police to protect them on a consistent basis.

5.4 Other Aspects of Life in South Africa

The trifecta of documentation troubles, xenophobia and policing permeates into other aspects of migrants' lives, including their ability to find jobs, secure stable housing, and access basic services like healthcare and education.

5.4.1 Piece Jobs and Money Troubles

Migrants had varied experiences job-hunting in South Africa. One woman from Zimbabwe mentioned that when she got to Musina, things were difficult. But when she got a job as a domestic worker, everything became a great deal easier. Now she feels stable in South Africa and is able to send money home to support her family. Other migrants had much more tumultuous experiences, struggling to find consistent work and enduring exploitative working conditions. The major themes related to job-seeking include the obstacle of documentation (that keeps rearing its ugly head), the reliance on piece jobs (casual, short-term, usually manual labour jobs), and the exploitation of vulnerable migrant populations. Migrants' job-seeking is occurring in a moment of country-wide economic difficulty. South Africa is in the midst of an unemployment crisis; in the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate was 34.5%.³⁰⁴ These exceptionally high unemployment numbers are due to economic disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, poor government policy and general

³⁰⁴ Statistics South Africa, 'South Africa's Youth Continues to Bear the Burden of Unemployment', 1 June 2022, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15407>.

inequality, amongst other factors.³⁰⁵ In response to this dire economic moment and other factors, a burgeoning “South Africa First” sentiment has taken root, in which more South Africans are demanding that citizens be prioritized for job openings. This belief is reflected in new policy, such as the National Labour Migration Policy which, yes, does prioritize “Improving conditions for all migrant workers and their families in terms of human rights and fundamental rights at work as well as fighting xenophobia and any forms of inhuman treatment,” but also, “Imposing quotas to limit the number of foreigners with a view to protect employment opportunities for South African workers”—two incongruous goals.³⁰⁶ Thus, migrants trying to work in South Africa face many obstacles, both on the ground and on a structural level.

Many migrants came to South Africa, imagining that there will be abundant job opportunities abound, and that they will be able to support themselves, their families, and people back home. One Burundian asylum seeker said:

“South Africa,” [my friend] said, “it’s a paradise—you step on money.” But when I reached South Africa, I found eh, life is very hard. Very hard. No job—nothing, nothing. Not easy. The first year, I was just here and my mind went aside. I started drinking beer too much, just to calm down my nostalgia. I was missing my children, my wife, my brothers, sisters. And some people made me their friend. Since morning we were busy drinking, until night. When I was hungry, I would eat food from across the street. And then we would continue [drinking]. (Participant 12)

The idea that this man had of South Africa was vastly different to the reality once he got there. Not only did the absence of a job make life difficult for him—it also drove him to habitual drinking. Dealing with the divergence between “the land of milk and honey” they expected in South Africa and the murky reality can be challenging.

One of the main reasons that migrants struggle to get jobs in South Africa is due to issues relating to documentation. This is certainly true for undocumented migrants, who are confined to the informal economy, for the most part. But it is also true for asylum seekers; under the contentious

³⁰⁵ Tawanda Karombo, ‘What’s behind South Africa’s Shocking Unemployment Numbers’, *Quartz*, 25 August 2021, <https://qz.com/africa/2051433/the-reason-for-south-africas-record-unemployment-rate/>.

³⁰⁶ ‘Draft National Labour Migration Policy for South Africa’ (2022), <https://www.labour.gov.za/DocumentCenter/Publications/Public%20Employment%20Services/National%20Labour%20Migration%20Policy%202021%202.pdf>; Hodgson, Ramjathan-Keogh, and Lumina, ‘HUMAN RIGHTS OP-ED’.

Refugee Amendment Act, which went into effect at the beginning of 2020, asylum seekers now have to be endorsed by the DHA in order to gain the right to seek employment or study.³⁰⁷ This indicates a sharp turn from the original Refugee Act, which included these two rights for this population. This has made the job-seeking process more confusing and administratively taxing, and has made it easy for potential employers to turn migrants away—even those who are eligible to find work in the country. One Congolese asylum seeker shared:

Because, wherever you go and you look for a job, they will tell you, “Give us your paper.” When you show [your] asylum [permit], even if it’s written ‘Right to work and study’, they’ll say, “No this paper we don’t need it. We wanted [a South African] ID, we wanted this.” So, it’s a very challenging situation. (Participant 2)

Thus, the asylum seeker permit—even if it is stamped with the right to work—is often not seen as a legitimate form of paperwork. Or more cynically, potential employers use the asylum seeker permit as an excuse not to hire non-South Africans. Not only are many migrants unable to get jobs due to documentation barriers, but they are also made to feel ostracized due to their status (or lack thereof). One asylum seeker said:

Yeah, we still feel we are the outsider... If they ask you for that green ID, it means you’re not welcome here. We still have our refugee papers. There’s some work where you can go, you can apply, but they tell you they only want citizens. (Participant 5)

Because of the many obstacles standing between migrants and good, regular work, many turn to the informal economy and what are called ‘piece jobs’. One Burundian asylum seeker said:

The only challenge that I face [in South Africa is that] I don’t have work. I do this piece job so that at least [I get] bread [at the end] of the day. (Participant 20)

These job opportunities are usually more short-term and are less likely to require formal qualifications. For example, some migrant interviewees worked as seasonal fruit packers, interpreters for non-profit organizations, or construction workers. By nature, these jobs are temporary, highly variable and leave workers open to exploitation and underpayment. For example, one Congolese asylum seeker said:

³⁰⁷ Refugees Amendment Act; Staff Writer, ‘5 Things You Should Know about South Africa’s Controversial New Refugee Laws’, 2 February 2020, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/368786/5-things-you-should-know-about-south-africas-controversial-new-refugee-laws/>.

So even to increase salaries is a problem. You can find someone worked for 20 years, 10 years, is still getting the same salary. Same amount. (Participant 4)

Several migrants mentioned that they work several of these jobs and still struggle to make ends meet. A huge contributor to this is the price of transport. One migrant said, for example, that when she subtracted the price of transport from her wages, she was only going home with R100-200 (~\$7.60-15.20 CAD) a week. The dearth of well-paying jobs makes it difficult for migrants to cover their expenses. The same asylum seeker shared that:

It has been tough. Very, very tough. Because you know, when you don't work, when you're not working and you have children. So, the life in South Africa is just Hell itself ... Being a refugee, we are starving. (Participant 4)

This bleak reflection emphasizes the level of adversity that migrants face in South Africa. Migrants with children—of which there were 13—expressed the struggle of providing for their children, who require a seemingly-infinite supply of school supplies and food. One migrant, who has three children, and is pregnant with her fourth, said:

To meet the basic needs is a challenge. Even if they pay you on the 25th—on the 27th, you're broke. A lot of things. We have to support my family back home. I have children you know—you have to pay the school fees, you have to pay the transport to school, buying them lunchbox and you just feel yourself, by month's end, you can't even buy yourself a bra. I'm just, I'm just, I'm just tired. (Participant 10)

Overall, finding employment and trying to make ends meet become very demoralizing and arduous experiences for migrants. One migrant summarized this feeling:

What can I say? I can say that I'm not living the way I want. It's not the way I want. I went to school, I'm an educated woman. I want to work... Working is also part of helping the government. You are helping also your country. This country is also our country because we are staying here. I won't do bad things in this country because me, I am staying here. I must protect the place where I am staying because it is my place, also it is my country. I want to live also a nice life, but I don't know... (Participant 5)

This remark encapsulates the feeling of many migrants: wanting to work, wanting to contribute to their community, but immobilized by the broader bureaucracy and discriminatory policies. This Congolese asylum seeker has been in South Africa since 2006 and truly feels like it is her home and she has an obligation to make it a better place. This is a remarkable sentiment given the difficulties she has encountered there. Cleopatra Buthelezi, who works tirelessly to assist migrants

in Johannesburg access social services, spoke about what people often misunderstand about migration:

People don't understand, then, that there's a lot that we can learn from each other. If we can, like, you know, if we can merge, there's a lot that we can learn from each other. (Interview with Cleopatra Buthelezi)

Migrants are often seen as a burden to society but, as illustrated here, many have skills that they hope to use to contribute to South African society.

5.4.2 Securing Housing

The geographies of South African cities are unique, due to the country's history—particularly due to segregationist policy during the apartheid era. During apartheid, black South Africans (and black foreign-born people) were relegated to the outskirts of the cities, where they perched, precariously, and bore the constant risk of being forced out. The spatiality of South African cities is still influenced by these histories. The way that migrants' geographies layer over these historical ones further reveals the palimpsest of segregation practices and their effects on city-dwellers today. Due in part to issues with documentation, job security and xenophobia, many migrants experience housing insecurity and homelessness.

One significant issue is that migrants feel compelled to live in more expensive areas of the city because they are worried about encountering xenophobic violence in the more affordable areas, such as the townships (also known as locations). Several migrants live in areas such as Bedfordview and Randburg—places that they regarded as out of their price range—in order to avoid areas that are more closely associated with xenophobia. One woman from the DRC said:

Like I told you, you just live to pay rent. Your paycheck is for the rent... And location [are] cheaper but you can't go and live there. Now, you see they're chasing the people. You don't go there [because] it's not safe for you—a foreigner—to go and live in a cheaper place, in a location. (Participant 16)

This migrant seems most deterred from living in a more affordable area by the threat of xenophobic violence. As a result, she uses most of her income to cover rent payments. On the other side of the coin, there are migrants who do live in township areas like Alexandra and Diepsloot, and do not

like living there because of xenophobia, but cannot afford to live elsewhere. A Burundian asylum seeker who lives in Alexandra said:

I never get the privilege of living with other migrants since I've been here. Because to live with other immigrant, you need to have means. You see, to [rent] a place, for example, you need you must have means. So, the whole life, I've been living with citizens, as I told you when I told you that I'm living in a township. (Participant 22)

This shines a light onto the feelings of isolations migrants may feel when surrounded by South Africans. Especially because living in majority-South African areas means that there is a higher chance of dangerous encounters.

Several migrants who live in majority-South African areas voiced that they feel scared to disclose their status as non-citizens and therefore must keep to themselves, or even go so far as to pretend to be South African. A Zimbabwean woman who lives in Rabie Ridge spoke about her experience with this:

We are hiding our status because [in] this community, it's either you are Afrikaans or you are Zulu. So, because my husband is documented, they feel that he is a Zulu person, they feel that he is from South Africa. We are really hiding that as much as we can. (Participant 6)

This story reveals how migrants sometimes have to be chameleons in order to stay safe. Indeed, the theme of code-switching came up a few times in conversations with migrants; they sometimes change their language or mannerisms to blend in with South Africans and not become a target. For migrants who live with South Africans, their sense of security is dependent on their ability to pretend to be South African. And for migrants who live with other migrants, they must live knowing that their obviously-migrant community could become a target.

Many of the migrant participants did not have access to secure housing at all. South Africa at large is facing a housing disaster, but this problem affects non-citizen migrants differently because they are not eligible for government subsidized houses (colloquially known as RDP houses).³⁰⁸ Also, South Africa does not have refugee camps, so migrants are left to fend for themselves in cities.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ 'FAQ', Department of Human Settlements, accessed 6 August 2022, <http://www.dhs.gov.za/content/faq>.

³⁰⁹ This is not to suggest that refugee camps are necessarily desirable. They tend to isolate refugee populations from larger society, cut them off from job opportunities and subject them to second-class living conditions.

The statistics on migrant homelessness are unavailable, but from the number of migrants in this study housed in temporary housing, it seems that this is a common experience. One Burundian migrant, who was in a car accident and spent three months in hospital found himself without a place to stay once he got out:

And after I went back home [from the hospital], I started living in the street. It was a tough life, but that [was] the life that helped me to be to become what I became today. I started to live on the streets because I could not work and pay rent. In Johannesburg, everything's money. [Then I started living at] a church in Johannesburg—I'm sure you know it: [Central] Methodist Church? They're all homeless people, they were living there. (Participant 12)

Due to the lack of government-sponsored social services for migrants, various religious organizations and non-profit organizations often step in to fill in some of these gaps. The Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg is a notable example. The church housed thousands of migrants in the late 2000s and early 2010s, and in particular during the spurt of violence against foreigners in 2008.³¹⁰ However, after a change of leadership in 2014, the Church became less hospitable to migrants, and they scattered to different corners of the city. However, these are valuable institutions; several migrants emphasized the importance of these informal housing projects—especially in their first few weeks/months in South Africa. One Zimbabwean migrant who came to Musina in 2021 shared:

When you reached here, in South Africa, the place we are staying was Roman Catholic [Church. It] was fine was because we get accommodation and food to eat early in the morning when we are going to the work. And they keep the us nice. There's no problem there. (Participant 19)

Having a place to stay allowed some migrants to find a job and earn some income before having to worry about paying rent. However, it is difficult to live in informal/temporary housing like this for long. One migrant said that he felt like he had not gained anything in his few months in South Africa because he is not able to buy furniture or anything while he lives at the church. Another migrant expressed similar sentiments, saying:

Ay, it's horrible. I [don't] even have that good stuff that I can say "Now I'm okay." I still get less less less, more and more. When I try something, I don't know, maybe the Devil

³¹⁰ Richard Poplak, 'Clean up the Rubbish: What Happened to the People of Central Methodist Church?', *Daily Maverick*, 11 May 2015, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-05-12-clean-up-the-rubbish-what-happened-to-the-people-of-central-methodist-church/>.

goes in front of me. So, I'm finding that since the five years that I'm here, nothing now has gone up. I'm struggling with things so that I can be someone. (Participant 13)

Thus, issues with housing can really affect migrants' sense of self and their feelings of stability in South Africa. Having a consistent place to live contributes to a sense of home—something that many migrants are deprived of.

5.4.3 South Africans Only: (Non)-Access to Healthcare and Education

The South African constitution enshrines the right to healthcare services and basic education for everyone—not just citizens.³¹¹ However, for many migrants interviewed for this project, and for their children, this is not the case. Many South African citizens also struggle to access these basic services; but for migrants, this non-access is due to their status, not only the structural problems in the education and healthcare spheres.

Two migrants cited access to good healthcare as primary reasons for coming to South Africa—one Zimbabwean woman came to seek care for leg and chest pain, and one Congolese woman came because her son was ill. This suggests that potential migrants may perceive South Africa as a country with better access to healthcare than some other African countries. While this may be true, migrants also shared stories of incredible hardship and misfortune trying to access healthcare in Johannesburg and Musina. In a study of Congolese refugees' experience with what they call 'medical xenophobia', Zihindula et al. found that language barriers and documentation were significant obstacles to accessing healthcare.³¹² The study defined medical xenophobia as “any practice, judgment or behavior that creates and strengthens oppressive relations or conditions that marginalize, exclude and/or confine the lives of refugees [within the healthcare system].”³¹³ In some migrants' experience, this phenomenon has become even more injurious over the last few years. One woman shared:

The healthcare system... Before, it was fine, but I think this last three or four years, the system, it's like it's collapsing. Because there [is] a lot of negligence. You go there [and]

³¹¹ The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

³¹² Ganzamungu Zihindula, Anna Meyer-Weitz, and Olagoke Akintola, 'Lived Experiences of Democratic Republic of Congo Refugees Facing Medical Xenophobia in Durban, South Africa', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no. 4 (1 June 2017): 458–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615595990>.

³¹³ Zihindula, Meyer-Weitz, and Akintola, 459.

they start swearing on you: “You are a foreigner.” “You go back to your country and get the treatment.” “You are wasting our things here, our money.” ... Here, you will be fine if you have your money—then you’re going to private sector. But in the public hospital, for us, what we are seeing is that it’s a lot of negligence. (Participant 2)

This reflection highlights several important facets of migrants’ experiences in South African hospitals: the anti-foreigner sentiment of some hospital workers, the decline of the healthcare system, and the disparities between public and private healthcare services. Moreover, while seeking treatment at hospitals or clinics, many migrants run into language barriers:

In a hospital, it’s the same—they don’t speak English, those nurses. Only doctors can speak to you in English. But those nurses, ah no. If you are lucky that day, yes, you pray hard then you will find a nurse who can speak to you and make you understand in English. (Participant 2)

Language is a common marker of being an outsider. South Africans use it as a signifier of belonging, and migrants who are unable to speak a South African language are sometimes penalized and marginalized.

Another major problem is that some hospital workers charge migrants an extra fee for seeking treatment, even when it should be free/inexpensive (depending on the treatment) for everyone in the country. Several migrants spoke about the exorbitant fees they were asked to pay before being seen by a doctor. Cleopatra Buthelezi identified pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses as the primary casualties in this fraught medical landscape. Indeed, one migrant, who was HIV-positive, never started taking ARTs because he was worried about having a lapse in treatment if he was unable to access healthcare at some point in the future. He shared:

I’ve tested positive on HIV since 2002. And, for now, I resisted to take medication. I resisted to take medication not knowing where I am. Because when you take medication, [it] is for life ... My health deteriorated in 2019, where I had to make a choice of starting ART. So being in this situation, and not having proper documentation, that’s where it’s a serious, serious, serious challenge. (Participant 22)

The fact that this man hesitated to start potentially life-saving ART treatment because he was worried about the continuity of his access to this medication shows the additional calculations migrants must make when seeking healthcare.

With regard to education—migrant children, regardless of status, are often denied entry into public schools or have to pay extra fees. Charlotte Margerit from Three2Six spoke about how lack of documentation prevents many children from enrolling in schools in Johannesburg, revealing a discrepancy between legislation and practice. She also noted that this problem does not exist to as great an extent in Cape Town, implying that these inequalities are irregularly distributed throughout the country. In Johannesburg, even when children are born in South Africa, they may struggle to gain admission to public schools. One Congolese asylum seeker, whose children have South African birth certificates said:

My children didn't even have anything. Even the birth certificate they gave here, they said when is the child is doing Matric (Grade 12), we have to apply for the asylum. But why they're not even giving us the asylum? So, it's just a stress... They manage to go to school but, still, we are paying. Because they don't have IDs; only ones who have IDs go to school for free. (Participant 4)

These requests for ID are not applied uniformly across the city, as one Johannesburg-based migrant's experience reveals:

I remember at one school where I wanted to register my child, they didn't accept it. They say because it's because he doesn't have South African ID. Then I went to try to another school. That other school, they accepted him. (Participant 11)

Overall, many migrant children are relegated to alternate schooling systems through non-profits like Three2Six, or do not get to attend school at all.

5.5 To Stay or to Go

Contrary to popular belief, migration is rarely a unidirectional, one-time endeavour. The three types of movements/non-movements discussed by participants included those who wanted to return home but could not, those who wanted to leave South Africa for another refuge, and those who migrated circularly between their home country and South Africa. The question of mobility is significant because it reveals the tension between migrant agency and state power. For example, asylum seekers who await decisions on their asylum applications are not able to leave the country without their status being compromised. Thus, those who have been waiting for refugee status for upwards of 15 years are immobilized in South Africa. Some even feel stuck in their city because they were told they have to apply for asylum seeker permit renewal at the same Home Affairs

office every time and it is too expensive to travel repeatedly. This conversation is important because it pushes against the boundaries of what migration looks like in the popular imagination and helps us conceive of a migration system that is more flexible, circular, and open.

Several migrants expressed a longing to return to their home countries—temporarily or permanently—but felt unable to do so because of restrictive South African policies or safety concerns in their homeland. None of the migrants from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda have been back since they left although, some wished they could. One Rwandan refugee, who left when she was a young child, said:

So, I've never been to Rwanda since we left, because things aren't really okay. So, I don't know if maybe they have like, maybe my surname, and I'll be identified when I get there or anything ... Yeah, but then I've always been longing to go, actually... There's times when my mom would ask me, what would I do first if I ever went back. And I told her that I really want to see my grandmother again ... I've always wanted to, like, get a chance to see her again ... So, the thought of not ever being able to do that kind of hurts me, you know. (Participant 1)

Being separated from family for such a long time can be difficult for migrants—especially those who feel like outsiders in South Africa and do not have a large community there. Another migrant, whose parents were kidnapped in the DRC, forcing her to flee, said that she wanted to go back to the DRC but was warned against it by her family members who still live there. In another case, a Burundian migrant who has been in South Africa since 2005 requested that the UNHCR Voluntary Return Program repatriate him.³¹⁴ He explained:

In 2013, I reached, you know, you reach to a situation where you cannot even afford to pay rent, so you can even face the eviction. So, things are bad, too. You don't even [have] this job where you can go and do gardening and get even R100 (~\$7.60 CAD) a day. So, things are really very bad to a point [where you] say, no, this is too much, I'd better go back ... You see, you look like the weight of the whole world is on top of your shoulders. You understand [that] you are there alone; you don't have nobody to talk to where I live. So, the [ones] I can address in my language is only my wife and my children. (Participant 22)

He was given counselling and, ultimately, decided to stay. However, this story shows how troubled his life became, how his movements were limited by his status and the extent of isolation he

³¹⁴ 'Voluntary Return', UNHCR South Africa, accessed 19 August 2022, <https://help.unhcr.org/southafrica/get-help/return/>.

experienced. The trapping of migrants in South Africa contributes towards feelings of distress and loneliness. But because many migrants feel that they have to ‘prove’ that they are unable to set foot in their home countries (i.e., that they are being persecuted), they become tied to South Africa.

Other migrants expressed their frustrations with South Africa, and articulated a desire seek refuge elsewhere—in a place they hoped would be more hospitable and survivable. One migrant said, simply:

I'm tired of this country. I am. If there was an opportunity to leave to go somewhere else, I'll do [that] because life has become so expensive. (Participant 10)

Participants hoped to move to places like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Dubai. One Congolese migrant, who had spent some of her life in Zambia voiced her desire to return, leaving South Africa for a place she perceives as more welcoming and affordable:

Zambia, they said, is a Christian country. People there think about others. And the rent there is not too expensive. Here the rent [is] expensive. I'm not even affording anymore. I'm just thinking that if God can bless me now or if I can find the divine helper who can take me from here to Zambia. (Participant 4)

Like other migrants, her desire to move was rooted in her material conditions (being unable to afford the rent) and in a yearning for better community and generosity from local people, which she felt was missing in South Africa.

Some migrants—mostly those from neighbouring countries—go back and forth between their home country and South Africa. This form of temporary, or circular, migration has long existed in Southern Africa, particularly in the mining and agricultural industries.³¹⁵ With changing migration policies and the increased monitoring of the border, the mechanics of this movement have changed slightly. The existence of circular migration suggests that the migration landscape is ever-shifting; people do not just move once and stay still. Rather, they come and go—at great risk every time if they are undocumented. Landau wrote that:

Many of the people coming to South Africa do not intend to live permanently in the country, although there are significant numbers who would like to do so. Rather, echoing

³¹⁵ Aurelia Segatti, ‘Explaining the Impasse of Circular Migration in Southern Africa’, in *Impact of Circular Migration on Human, Political and Civil Rights*, ed. Carlota Solé et al., vol. 12, United Nations University Series on Regionalism (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 93, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28896-3_5.

long-standing patterns of circular or temporary labour migration, many come only to earn enough to meet their needs (or those of their families) in their country of origin or to finance their journeys onwards to Europe or North America.³¹⁶

This attitude was reflected in several interviews—especially of those conducted with Zimbabwean migrants who had come to South Africa, primarily, for job-seeking. One Zimbabwean undocumented migrant said that he planned to stay in South Africa for three months, make some money and then go back. Another Zimbabwean woman said she had been going back and forth between her home province of Masvingo and her South African home of Musina since 1981.

This flow of migration is, of course, limited by the existence of the border and stringent immigration policy. Based on interviews with two directors at the DHA the South African government seems to be putting more emphasis on security-minded migration mechanisms. The DHA is implementing these changes in reaction to perceived criminal threats flooding into South Africa from abroad. When asked about how the migration landscape had changed, the DHA's Director of Immigration Services (Appeals) said:

This is how our minister put it: he said the mistake that we made was that we swung a pendulum—we moved from one extreme of immigration control to another extreme of immigration control wherein there were a lot of restrictions on people coming in [to] having few restrictions and sitting with the problem. And that was not the intention. What we are doing now is that we have moved away from the policy of easy access to South Africa to a policy where we will be able to manage. Because you see, in migration there is something called a mixed flow migration ... [and] within that, [there are] also criminal syndicates that are involved—people who are involved in smuggling of immigrants. There are people who are involved in human trafficking ... So, if we do not have stricter controls of people who are coming into the country unfortunately, we end up allowing even people who are coming to South Africa as criminal syndicates. (Interview with Director Kobese)

This demonstrates the shift to a security-minded approach to migration that has taken root in the heart of the immigration organ of the South African government. As mentioned in an earlier discussion of the BMA in Chapter 2, the South African government is taking steps to increase the presence of the authorities on the border. When asked about the priorities and level of success of the DHA, the Chief Director of the Inspectorate (in charge of deportations), said:

³¹⁶ Loren Landau, 'Regional Integration, Protection And Migration Policy Challenges In Southern Africa', in *Advancing Refugee Protection in South Africa*, ed. Jeff Handmaker, Lee Anne De la Hunt, and Jonathan Klaaren, Human Rights in Context, v. 2 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 34.

There's loads and loads of challenges when you're talking of effective border enforcement. What we're trying to do is we're now developing the Border Management Authority, which is going to have the task of having a dedicated border force that is going to monitor and protect the border line for immigration, in addition to the defence. And there's other forms of technology that they will look at that could tell where movement is happening ... at various parts along the border line. So, we've never administered public statements: it's been accepted that the border line is porous, that there is a need for tighter more secure enforcement in order to secure a border line. (Interview with Director Matthews)

Again, the border is characterized as a place of crisis and the proposed solution is tighter security and more border patrols. During the conversation, the border was continually spoken about in terms of “risk” and “security.” Neither of the DHA officials acknowledged the humanitarian difficulties at the border, where researchers and non-profit organizations have documented the violence against migrants and the deaths that occur while crossing. It seems that the commonplace action of circular migration is at odds with a border control regime that is prioritizing the ‘defense’ of the border.

5.6 A Prison and a Home

Two themes kept appearing in interviews with migrants: feelings of confinement/unfreedom in South Africa, and the idea of what a home is or what it could be. These encapsulate some of the experience of what it means to be a migrant in South Africa, and in many other places around the world. Arriving in South Africa brought a sense of safety and freedom to some but embedded a sense of confinement in others (separate migrants described South Africa as “a paradise” and as “Hell itself”). One Congolese migrant, who fled her country due to political persecution, said:

I feel like I don't belong here. Like I'm in the prison. (Participant 14)

The python-like vice of the immigration bureaucracy, the never-ceasing dread of encounters with the police or vigilantes, and the often-frigid reception of migrants in the healthcare, formal labour, housing and educational spheres produce feelings of constriction. Migrants are inhibited geographically, economically, politically and socially. One Burundian migrant, speaking about his issues with documentation said:

The only problem, I have no paper—the right paper, I mean. And this is limiting me. I'm limited. I cannot achieve what I want to achieve. I can't put my talents, what I'm skillful [in]—I cannot put them into practice because I'm limited. (Participant 13)

When asked about their idea of home, several migrants described the opposite of these feelings of restriction. One migrant shared:

Home: it means where you are safe, you are secure, you live in peace, and you are free. (Participant 5)

Another said:

At home, you are free and happy. (Participant 14)

It is in this gap between the realities of migrants' existence in South Africa and their aspirational ideas of home and freedom that the work needs to be done, to ensure that migrants in South Africa can live safely and freely in this place of refuge.

In puzzling through and seeking to understand the lived experiences of migrants in South Africa, we have illuminated the complex and sometimes contradictory natures of these experiences. The knowledge and stories that migrants shared have brought to light some of the challenges that they face, as well as the ingenuity they employ in order to keep afloat in a sometimes-hostile nation. It seems that the immigration system in South Africa is failing a large subset of migrants—even those who fit into the country's narrow categorization of those who deserve protection (i.e., refugees and asylum seekers). For migrants who cited factors such as environmental change and economic decay as reasons for leaving their home countries to migrate to South Africa, little protection is offered. Even beyond the state's failings, an atmosphere of hostility greets many migrants in South Africa. This benefits neither migrants nor citizens. Thus, this study can serve as an entry point (one of many in the literature) to understand what life is like for some migrants in South Africa, and to get an idea of what challenges lie ahead.

What was clear throughout this study was the resilience and strength of the participants. It is easy to view migrants as victims, as people displaced by powers beyond their control. But, time and time again, migrants demonstrated agency. Of course, there do exist powerful forces that influence their lives, but migrants are not defined by them. Turton's idea of emplacement comes to mind—these stories, indeed, have illustrated the ways that migrants carve out a place for themselves in South Africa. As a migrant from Burundi so aptly stated:

So, I thank God, because yes, I'm living in South Africa. So, I won't say that they welcomed me. But I welcomed myself. (Participant 22)

Chapter 6: A Line that Birds Cannot See

For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism. Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong, the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun. It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with the fraternity of olden days.

- Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*³¹⁷

In this chapter epigraph, Aimé Césaire, a Martinican poet, scholar and politician, writes about a future after colonialism. He warns us against trying to recreate the past or lingering in the rancid colonial present. Rather, he advises us to imagine a new society based on unity and warmth, bringing together all oppressed people to create something novel. This reflection may help us contemplate the future of the phenomenon of climate migration. When confronted with draconian immigration regimes and climate injustice, it is tempting to imagine a return to the ‘before-times’—before tyrannical borders and before the spill of pollution and chemicals into the landscape. However, we cannot retrieve this “dead society” and must, rather, push forward and remold our future into something that prioritizes community and freedom.

Thus far, this thesis has endeavoured to describe and contextualize the concept of climate migration and place it in historical context by chronicling climate migration in times past. This background set the stage to explore the lived experiences of 22 African migrants in South Africa, help understand what it means to be a 21st century migrant in the country, and consider a possible future in which more people will come seeking refuge. This chapter will tighten these threads by exploring three themes that have been woven throughout this thesis: the border as a site of contestation and power negotiation, the way that this study of South Africa links to global trends, and some guidance for how to think about climate migration going forward (especially in a Southern African/Global South context). It will also offer some limitations of this thesis, and possible avenues for future research, of which there are many.

³¹⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (NYU Press, 2000), 52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfkrm>.

6.1 The Border

The title of this chapter is borrowed from the first lines of Alberto Ríos' poem, 'The Border: A Double Sonnet'.³¹⁸ In it, he describes the fluidity, absurdity and violence of the border (in his case the U.S.-Mexico border, near where he grew up). He depicts it as, "a rusted hinge that does not bend"—a relic, but one that refuses to give way to something new—and as "a handshake that becomes a squeezing contest"—a tool that can welcome or constrict. Even though the border is represented as, "a big, neat, clean, clear black line on a map that does not exist," it can still be used to exercise power. Indeed, the border is both imagined, in that it is an invented, arbitrary political concept, and very real in terms of the ways that people experience it while trying to traverse it and/or protect it. All in all, as Nugent and Asiwaju remark, "Borders are made to be zones of partition, but are actually zones of interaction."³¹⁹

This interaction is evident at the South African border, where different parties contest, secure and cross the border based on their divergent understandings of the borders function and effectiveness. For example, along the Limpopo River, a complex relationality takes place between various actors, including border jumpers, border patrol officers, smugglers, residents of the borderlands, and vigilante border patrollers (including, recently, AfriForum). Each of these actors has a different perception of the border and their obligations towards it. And all of these perspectives are couched in the specific contexts that these people and groups arise from. For example, the AfriForum militia, perceiving the border as a line of defence, is motivated by their white nationalist objectives and spurred on by the claims from the government that the border is "porous" and "insecure". The question, of course, is whose safety they are trying to preserve? Many border jumpers, on the other hand, view the border as an obstacle on their journey to South Africa and as a place filled with potential violent encounters. The border jumpers interviewed for this project shared stories of the incredible hardship they experienced while crossing. But none were deterred by the daunting border, and all arrived in South Africa. Granted, this project did not include interviews with people who did not make it to South Africa. But regardless, the evidence suggests that, when considering with the treacherous journey from Zimbabwe and other nations to South Africa, many migrants

³¹⁸ Alberto Ríos, 'The Border: A Double Sonnet', 2015, <https://poets.org/poem/border-double-sonnet>.

³¹⁹ Paul Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju, 'Introduction: The Paradox of African Boundaries', in *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, ed. Paul Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju (London; New York: Pinter, 1996), 2.

would risk death and/or detention to make it across this final hurdle. Thus, the border reveals the limits and shifting nature of power. Here, ideas of sovereignty, community and responsibility are negotiated and contested, and power flows in multiple directions. Given that borders mark the limits of a sovereign territory, any breaches are viewed by the state as an undermining of its power. However, many issues extend beyond the border; the greatest challenges that the world is facing today—the exploitation of vulnerable people and countries, climate change, inequality, to name a few—bleed over this imagined boundary. Making people fit their existence into these circumscribed boundaries strangles out community and makes us face these challenges alone.

6.2 Placing this Work in a Global Context

Chapter 3 described the ‘third world researcher’. Shahnaz Khan emphasized the importance of such researchers connecting the local power structures under study to global ones, revealing these different levels and forms of oppression “not only as simultaneous but also as constitutive of each other.”³²⁰ Taking on this mantle, this section will draw some general connections between this discussion of climate migration in Southern Africa and a global context to show how the issues discussed in this thesis relate to a larger immigration ecosystem.

In even the most isolated crevices of the world, people have something to say about migration. Countries near and far are making changes to their immigration laws, policies and practices—increasingly in ways that further ostracize and criminalize migrants. This trend is not unique to South Africa. However, South Africa provides an interesting case study because of the way its immigration practices are influenced by countries in western Europe and North America, which were, in turn, influenced by the architecture of apartheid in the 20th century. In her book of the same title, Catherine Besteman writes about *Militarized Global Apartheid*—“a loosely integrated effort by countries in the global north to protect themselves against the mobility of people from the global south.”³²¹ Based on a xenophobic and racist ideologies, this method of immigration control is inspired by apartheid South Africa and utilizes modern surveillance and military technology to prevent certain (usually racialized) people from crossing the border to the Global

³²⁰ Khan, ‘Reconfiguring the Native Informant’, 2028.

³²¹ Catherine Besteman, *Militarized Global Apartheid* (Duke University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478013006>.

North. The mechanisms of such a system include the impoverishment of the oppressed class, the use of identification documents to suppress movements, labour exploitation, and the expansion of a militarized apparatus. The idea of militarized global apartheid could be applied to the U.S.-Mexico border or the North Africa-Western Europe border on the Mediterranean. Thus, countries in the Global North have adopted the racist, insider-outsider thinking of apartheid, armed with a modern array of technologies, in order to “secure” their borders against black and brown people from Africa and Asia. These mechanisms are certainly present in the sphere of climate migration and climate securitization. The loop of influence is completed by the adoption of these tactics by the South African government to “secure” its border against African people from just north of their border. Furthermore, countries and multinational organizations in the Global North export border surveillance technologies and military equipment to South Africa in order to assist in border control efforts. Two examples of this are the expansion of biometric technology at the border, inspired by countries in Europe and INTERPOL, as well as the collaboration in border patrol occurring between the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Southern Africa, the South African Border Control Operational Coordinating Committee, the Netherlands and the European Police Office.³²² This cycle reveals how local oppressive structures tie into global ones. These dynamics repeat through history, growing more sophisticated each time but remaining rooted in similarly hateful ideas. Thus, the study of migration at the South African border cannot take place in a vacuum; it is essential to understand these further-reaching relationships and influences.

6.3 On Thinking about Climate Migration

This thesis has attempted to describe the thorny nature of climate migration studies, revealing how the concept is sometimes misappropriated, sensationalized and misunderstood. Others have written on this topic, but here, based on the qualitative interviews and a historical examination of Southern African climate migration history, this concluding chapter shall offer some thoughts on how to think about climate migration—first more generally and then in a Southern African/Global South context.

³²² Jane Duncan, *Stopping the Spies: Constructing and Resisting the Surveillance State in South Africa* (Wits University Press, 2018), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/stopping-the-spies/559D29E577900C85CD792E4C612D7E1E>; ‘Border Control’, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed 12 August 2022, <https://www.unodc.org/southernafrika/en/bc/index.html>.

The first lesson is to recognize the multi-causality of migration, and not think about it in reductionist, positivist terms. This does not only refer to the complex reasons that each individual may give for migrating, but also to the intricacy of the political, economic, environmental and social contexts in which they exist. Accordingly, it is important to understand local contexts and also high level, further-reaching systems. For example, when thinking about the people who cite the drought in Zimbabwe as a reason for migration, we also have to consider the sometimes-fraught political context, the troubled economy, the role of colonialism and the presence of international sanctions in the early 2000s, amongst other things. We must not flatten these experiences to support a certain narrative—something that, unfortunately, is common in the climate migration sphere. Many migrants interviewed for this project were classified or self-classified within migration policy categories of migration (for example, refugee, economic migrant, “illegal” migrant). However, it was clear from their stories that they occupied multiple identities and could not be defined by the nebulous and/or too-narrow categories ascribed to them. It is important that we question and expand upon our understandings of migration, while also considering the utility of some political categories (namely, the refugee) in our current immigration paradigm.

The second lesson is to try and destigmatize migration. Migrants are often viewed as deceitful criminals or helpless victims, but both these perceptions oversimplify and distort actual migrant experiences. Rather than value-judging migration or trying to characterize them in certain ways, we should try to think about migration as just a fact of life. As Baldwin and Bettini wrote, “Viewing the migrant as ‘other’ reinforces the incorrect belief that modern life is sedentary, settled, and removed from the transnational flow of labour, capital and technology.”³²³ As Chapter 2 on the history of environmental migration shows, migration has always been part of the human experience. And regardless of the barriers put in place, people *will* move. Moreover, the oversimplification and (often) vilification of migrants works to uphold certain power structures and justify the oppression of groups of people. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the discussion on circular/temporary migration, many people do not or do not want to migrate permanently. Many migrants interviewed for this project expressed a desire to go home—some just to visit and others semi-permanently—suggesting that migration should not be understood as a permanent shift in location. Perhaps, if borders were more permeable, migrants would be trapped in neither their

³²³ Bettini and Baldwin, ‘Introduction: Life Adrift’, 3.

home country nor the host country. In summary, the movement of people, permanently, temporarily, near, and far, is inextricably tied with the human condition. It is not inherently perverse or criminal, but a mere fact of life.

Related to this, the third lesson is to reject the narrative of migration as predominantly a security issue. While it is indisputable that *some* people jump the border and violate the law of the host country, that does not justify the treatment of *all* migrants as criminals and the breaching of international treaties and local laws that should protect the rights of all migrants. As Bettini writes, “The only way forward, I would argue, is to continue looking awry at the question of migration and climate change, pushing an understanding of it as a relation that has to do with climate justice, rather than security.”³²⁴ The idea of climate migration, in particular, has been weaponized by countries as a way to securitize and militarize their borders (and extended borderlands) against people who are migrating for all sorts of reasons. Climate change is sometimes viewed as an apolitical phenomenon (through expressions like “climate change knows no borders”, etc.). However, it is deeply political in several ways. Firstly, powerful people, companies and governments and their systems of extractions, hyper-consumption and predatory capitalism are the root causes of the climate crisis. Due to their relative power, it is difficult to hold these parties accountable, revealing a critical dimension of climate injustice. Secondly, the continued failure of nations in the Global North to reduce emissions at a sufficient rate to avoid catastrophe affects nations in the Global South disproportionately. And lastly, these wealthy nations have not allocated an acceptable amount of funding to assist climate-vulnerable nations (many of which are in Africa) with adaptation or compensate them for ‘loss and damage’ (the cost that countries bear that cannot be prevented by adaptation). This is clear, for example, in the American Inflation Reduction Act of August 2022, a nearly \$370 billion plan which has been touted as a progressive climate change policy, but which contributes barely anything to climate aid and nothing at all for ‘loss and damage’.³²⁵ Thus, climate change is deeply political and must be considered from a climate justice

³²⁴ Bettini, ‘Unsettling Futures: Climate Change, Migration and the Obscene Biopolitics of Resilience’, 90.

³²⁵ Somini Sengupta, ‘Climate Forward Newsletter: Global Reach’, *New York Times*, 19 August 2022, https://messaging-custom-newsletters.nytimes.com/template/oakv2?campaign_id=54&emc=edit_clim_20220819&instance_id=69745&nl=climate-forward&productCode=CLIM®i_id=72774668&segment_id=101852&te=1&uri=nyt%3A%2F%2Fnewsletter%2F20ff4eb4-f964-5f89-802d-ebb963e5e6cb&user_id=3ce8fa26b217ca60c00e3ccc8813670d.

angle. The environmental conditions which are causing people to migrate (and even many of the political, economic and social ones) are the product of the actions of powerful people, corporations and nations. So, for them to turn their backs on these migrants—and to go so far as to reframe their migration as a security threat—is beyond contempt.

All these lessons apply to the study of climate migration within the Global South as well as the Global South to Global North migration pathway, although the specific power dynamics and histories are different in each of these contexts. Within the Global South, as we have discovered in this thesis, there are also power imbalances and fraught histories that colour the migration landscape. Interviews with officials in the DHA revealed that much of the hesitancy about opening South Africa's borders comes from the idea that people from poorer neighbouring countries will pour in and South Africa will bear an unfair economic burden. It is beyond the scope of this project to delve into the nuances of such an argument, but it begs the question of the responsibility countries have to other countries—especially those in their region. Throughout its history, in the apartheid era and after democracy, the South African government has financially, militarily and discursively supported violent political movements and leaders in several of its neighbouring country. This was true in the so-called 'Border War' of the second half of the 20th century in which the SANDF (then known as the South African Defence Force, or SADF) fought against the independence of South-West Africa (now, Namibia) and caused enormous destruction, displacement and death in Namibia, Zambia and Angola. It was also true in Zimbabwe, where South Africa supported the revolutionary-turned-despotic Robert Mugabe, shepherding the country to greater economic and political devastation and leading to the displacement of many Zimbabweans. Given this background, for South Africa to absolve itself of its historical accountability to its neighbours by marginalizing and oppressing migrants is disquieting. South Africa has an opportunity to do better for its neighbours than countries in the Global North are doing for those in the South. Here is an opportunity, as Mbembe suggested, for South Africa to change the paradigm of migration and statehood and open its border to its neighbours in a true sense.³²⁶

³²⁶ Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonise: Open Africa's Borders', *Mail & Guardian*, 24 March 2017.

6.4 Limitations and Future Avenues of Exploration

This thesis is an introductory and limited foray into the topic of climate migration in Southern Africa. It provides a broad understanding of this phenomenon as well as a small-scale study of the lives of 22 migrants in South Africa. Of course, the timeline and geographical scope of the project was bounded, leading to several limitations. These limitations are important to acknowledge but, rather than viewing them as weaknesses, we can also recognize them as opportunities for further inquiry. Thus, this section will explore both the limitations of this project as well as possible avenues for future research.

The 22 migrants' stories recounted in this thesis cannot be taken as representative of the migrant experience in South Africa. The population was limited in terms of representation along the lines of country of origin (participants were from Zimbabwe, the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi), socio-economic status (most were low-income), gender and sexuality (this question was not asked explicitly, so it is unclear what the breakdown was),³²⁷ urban-rural divide (all migrants lived in urban areas in Johannesburg or Musina) and language group (all migrants spoke English fluently). Future studies might broaden the participant pool in order to capture more perspectives. In particular, it would be valuable to hear from migrants from countries like Mozambique and Lesotho (which represent a large portion of the migrant population in South Africa and have histories of environmental hardships) and more people from/in rural areas (who may be more in touch with the changing environment, especially if they work in agriculture). However, it might also be illuminating to narrow the participant pool to concentrate on the experiences of, for example, rural Zimbabwean migrants or migrants displaced by cyclones in Mozambique. Overall, because of these gaps in the participant sample, these findings cannot be generalized to the broader migrant population in South Africa or to climate migrants more specifically. However, this was never the intent—rather, this thesis aimed to explore some of the experiences of a small group of migrants in order to illuminate some facets of their lives and consider the complexity and varied nature of each migrant's experience. There are some themes that were present throughout many migrants' narratives, but various contradictions and contrary understandings/accounts also arose.

³²⁷ See Ingrid Palmay's *Gender, Sexuality and Migration in South Africa* for a more detailed exploration of the experiences of migrants from a broader array of genders and sexualities

Thus, this project provides a narrow but meaningful glimpse into the lives of migrants in South Africa.

Another limitation was that this study did not include interaction with people who either tried and failed to migrate to South Africa or were unable to leave their hometown/home country at all. Lubkemann refers to this experience as “involuntary immobility.”³²⁸ And indeed, there are many factors—including poverty, family obligations, local politics, and immigration restrictions—that hold people immobile. The launching point for this thesis was the experiences of migrants in South Africa. From there, it pondered the role of climate change in people’s migrant lives. However, beginning from people’s hometowns and thinking about how and why people leave or stay would have been illuminating in a different, but certainly meaningful way. This would have helped reveal the factors that lead some people to leave and others, who may be experiencing similar phenomena, to stay. Doing so would maybe also help address the research study design problem inherent to this field, which is that few migrants identify as climate/environmental migrants, and so winnowing down the sample population is difficult. Beginning in areas experiencing environmental distress could help in this regard. Additionally, all the migrants interviewed for this study had success in coming to South Africa, but it would have been interesting to speak to people who tried to migrate and were deported or were unable to complete their journey for other reasons. Thus, a future study might begin in a community in another African country and ask local people about their experiences with and thoughts about migrating to South Africa (or another country). Or, a study might focus, specifically, on migrants who want to move but are immobilized and those who have tried and were deported or unable to cross the border. As Lubkemann rightfully points out: studies of displacement should include those who are unable to move (and those whose journeys are thwarted).

Another limitation—more of a consideration, really—is that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which certainly affected the findings. The pandemic likely influenced the attitudes and material circumstances of many migrants, given its psychological, social and economic consequences. Thus, this thesis captures some of a particular moment in history, in

³²⁸ S. C. Lubkemann, ‘Involuntary Immobility: On a Theoretical Invisibility in Forced Migration Studies’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 454–75, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen043>.

which people were dealing with unprecedented events. These findings are, perhaps, not representative of migrants' experiences in more ordinary circumstances. However, this is still a valuable perspective because, as became clear over the last several years, the pandemic did not necessarily create new forms of inequality—rather, it revealed and exacerbated existing ones. Thus, many of the themes discussed in this thesis are likely not uncommon to many migrants' experiences in South Africa. For example, although the lack of vaccine access is tied into the specific challenges of the pandemic, it is symbolic of migrants' struggles to access healthcare in a broader sense. The pandemic also limited this project methodologically and temporally. If not for worries about spreading the virus, the field research could have involved more sustained, more regular/prolonged contact with migrants. It would also have been interesting to have more casual encounters with migrants because, due to the pandemic, all meetings were held outside, two meters apart and masked, which gave them a stiffer formality. Thus, it would be good to conduct further field research on this topic once the COVID-19 pandemic is a less destructive force in South Africa.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

It is essential to consider the role of climate/environmental change in the migration landscape of Southern Africa. Evidence suggests that the environmental ramifications of human-induced climate change have struck the southern region of Africa hard, making certain areas less habitable for their residents, many of whom already faced daunting challenges in other spheres. In conjunction with political, economic and social determinants, environmental change currently causes and will continue to cause cross-border migration within Southern Africa. This is not just a post-industrialization phenomenon; a historical analysis revealed that people have always moved due, in part, to environmental changes. Historians have long debated the causes for these historical migrations, and much is still unclear about these moments in time. However, the role of a changing environment keeps cropping up. Similarly heated discussions are reflected in our discussions of climate migration today; causality is always clouded in a complex array of personal, societal and scientific elements, and is difficult to fully understand. In any case, considering the intersections of climate change and migration allows us to think more deeply about political categories of migration and what protections are owed to people who cross national borders for a wide array of

reasons. An examination of the contexts in which people are migrating from highlights that the forces of political persecution, economic devastation and environmental transformation are all tied together. This forces us to further ponder the ways that we could discuss migration outside the narrow confines of the refugee regime and forced/voluntary paradigm, trouble the rise of security-minded migration discourse, and imagine a better future for immigration in South Africa and the world more generally.

On the ground level, interviews with migrants illuminated some aspects of migrant life in South Africa. The documentation of these stories helps reveal the variation of the migrant experience, the systemic barriers that lie between migrants and full participation in South African society, and the ever-shifting nature of the immigration structures of South Africa. Major challenges include access to timely and secure documentation, xenophobia, police harassment, access to basic services, and the difficulty of job-seeking, amongst other things. Many South African citizens experience great hardship in similar ways, but for migrants, these challenges arise as a nature of their non-South African status. It is clear that South Africa is not fulfilling its legal duty to protect all those who reside within its borders. Beyond that, South Africa's attitude to migration is troubling as the government is, increasingly, approaching migration from a security perspective and in a way that denies the humanity and self-determination of these migrants. However, there are migrants in South Africa today, and more will continue to arrive tomorrow. This fact should not be used in a fearmongering way—migrants should not be homogenized and denounced as a burden or a security risk. These flows of migration have always existed in this region and are a part of how people survive and strive to flourish. Overall, interactions with migrants throughout this project revealed the modern face of migration in Southern Africa. The interviews demonstrated the determination of these people to come to South Africa and, despite a system that subjugates and ostracizes them, carve out a life for themselves. We cannot return to a time before the ills of climate change and border reification, but we can work together to imagine something better in the future—based on an acknowledgment of our shared struggles and a genuine warmth for our fellow people.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Migrant Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself?
2. What is your gender, age, ethnicity, home language and national origin? (if they feel comfortable disclosing this information)
3. Can you tell me a bit about where you grew up and what your childhood/ young adulthood was like?
4. What did you do for living in your home country and where did you live (ask specifically: was this area rural, suburban or urban)?
5. Can you talk about how/if things changed in your town/country during the time you lived there?
6. Did you observe a changing environment or shifting climate in your hometown/home community before you left? Can you tell me about specific things you have noticed changing? Or can you share more about what the landscape in your hometown is like?
7. How long have you lived in South Africa?
8. Can you talk about some of the factors that led to your migration to South Africa?
9. Was there a specific event that led to your migration, or was it a series of events? Can you talk about that event/series of events in more detail?
10. Can you talk about your experience coming to South Africa?
11. Specifically, can you share more about your experience crossing the border?
12. If you feel comfortable and able, can you explain to me how you would define yourself in terms of your immigration? For example, would you consider yourself a refugee, a migrant, an asylum seeker, or even more specifically—an economic migrant, an environmental migrant, etc.?
13. Can you talk about your experience(s) navigating the legal/immigration system in South Africa?
 - a. Did you have assistance with your applications, etc.?
14. How do you think the immigration system/the South African state treats non-citizens?
 - a. What are some challenges you have faced in navigating the immigration system, if any?
15. Do you think your gender, sexuality, race, age, national-origin or ethnic group affected your experience of migration? If yes, can you tell me about a specific experience where you felt this?
16. Did you have family or community in South Africa that were able to assist you while you settled into South Africa? If yes, can you tell me more about them and how they helped you? And if no, can you share more about your first few weeks/months in South Africa and how you got by?
17. Can you tell me a bit about where the rest of your family is and what they are up to? Are they also thinking about migrating?
18. Around where do you live in South Africa? (No need for a very specific answer, a general answer is sufficient) Can you tell me what this place is like?
19. Generally, what has your life in South Africa been like?
20. Do you feel like the obstacles you faced back home are similar or different to the ones you face in South Africa? If yes, how are they different?
21. Are you employed?
 - a. If yes—What do you do for work in South Africa? What is this job like?
22. What communities are you a part of in South Africa? Can you share specific memories or experiences you have had in these communities?
23. Have you returned home since you arrived in South Africa? Are you able to do so and/or do you plan to do so in the future?
24. What are your connections to your hometown like? Do you have family there? Do you send money back?
25. How do you think about home? Does it seem static/stationary in your mind? How do you imagine it changing while you're away?

26. Do you ever feel like an outsider in South Africa? What experiences have made you feel like that? Or what experiences have made you feel welcomed?
27. What does home mean to you?
28. If you know, can you tell me about your family's history of migration? For example, have they lived in the same place for generations or have they also migrated in their life?
29. Can you share, generally, how you feel about your migration and your time in South Africa so far? Please feel free to share any stories you feel might illustrate what you are saying in more detail.
30. What do you think about the idea of open borders in Africa? What do you think this would have meant/ means to you?
31. Given the questions you've answered, is there anything else you'd like to add that you think might be useful for this research?
32. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Expert Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself—where you're from, your gender, what language(s) you speak, etc.?
2. Can you tell me, in your own words, what the mission of your NGO is and what role it plays in the community?
3. Can you tell me about your role in this organization?
4. What communities do you work with?
5. Can you tell me about your work with migrants to South Africa? (especially if the organization is not solely focused on migration issues)
6. What is the demographics of the migrants you work with? It's okay if you don't know the precise numbers/percentages.
7. What are some challenges you face in your work?
8. How has the migration landscape changed over the time you've been working at this organization?
9. Do you think that historical (anti-)immigration policies are still affecting people's ability to move more easily to South Africa?
10. What are the main challenges you think migrants face in South Africa/Johannesburg specifically?
11. In your experience/from what you have observed, do you think that environmental and climate change are affecting the migration landscape? Do you think growing numbers of migrants are motivated to move for environmental/ climate reasons?
12. Is your organization thinking about climate change/the climate crisis in your work?
 - a. Does it seem like an important issue to consider?
13. What you think about the category of climate migrant or climate refugee? Do you think it is useful, harmful, meaningful (politically, culturally, etc.)?
14. What are some of the solutions to the migration challenges that your organization puts forward?
15. What discussions happen within the organization about the best path(s) forward? Is there disagreement/divergences?
16. Where is there room for improvement in the way that the government handles immigration issues?
17. Specifically, what are your thoughts on the new Border Management Act of 2020?
18. What do you think of the move towards more open borders in the SADC region/Africa in general?
19. Do you think open borders are an intriguing and/or feasible idea in Southern Africa/Africa/ the world? What are the possibilities and limitations of this idea?
20. What do you think the role of the NGO (in a general sense) is in immigration work? Where can non-governmental entities make a difference in South Africa in the immigration sphere?
21. How does your organization receive input from the communities you work with? How do you ensure that you are representing their best interests?
 - a. Relatedly, how do you try to ease the power dynamic between NGO workers and the people you work with?
22. What drew you to this work? Why were you interested in working here?
23. Why do you think this is an important issue to be working on at the moment?
24. Do you think that your identity influences your work/your stances on immigration issues?
25. Given everything we've spoken about, is there anything else you would like to add that might be useful to this research?
26. Is there anyone else you think it would be good for me to talk with?
27. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C: Government Official Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your background—where you're from, your gender, what language(s) you speak, etc.?
2. Can you tell me about your role in government?
3. (If they work with communities directly) What communities do you work with?
 - a. How much interaction do you have with people on the ground?
4. How has the migration landscape changed over the time you've been working this job/ in this field?
5. Broadly, what do you think about the immigration structures, policies and practices in South Africa?
6. What are the priorities of the immigration system as it stands?
7. Do you think that the immigration system/border control system is effective in achieving these goals? Why or why not?
8. In your work, have you been thinking about climate/environmental migration? Does it seem like an important consideration? Why or why not? Has it been growing in importance over time?
9. What do you think of the category of climate migration? Do you think it is meaningful, useful, harmful?
10. How do you conceptualize the difference between economic and environmental migrants? Between refugees and non-refugee migrants?
 - a. Do you think the categorizing process the government uses is working well? Why or why not? (Getting to the question of: even if we accept these categories, do you think the way they are being implemented makes sense?)
 - b. How would you change this system if you could?
11. Have you noticed changes in migration over the past few years—especially in correlation with environmental disasters such as Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi?
12. Where is there room for improvement in the way that the government handles immigration issues?
13. How have regional and global changes to approaches to immigration affected South Africa's approach?
 - a. Ask specifically about the move to more open borders in other parts of Africa, etc.
14. Can you talk about how the recent 2020 Border Management Act has affected your work?
15. Do you work directly with migrants? How do you receive input from migrants, refugees and asylum seekers?
16. How do you think the history of border control, immigration control, colonialism and apartheid have affected the current immigration system?
17. What drew you to this work? What has your career trajectory been?
18. How do you think your identity affects your work in this realm?
19. Given everything we've spoken about, is there anything else you would like to add that might be useful to this research?
20. Is there anyone else you think it would be good for me to talk with?
21. Do you have any questions for me?