

Chapter 2

Retheorising Migration: A South-South Perspective



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2.1 Situating a South-South Theoretical Perspective

Literature reveals that very little conceptualisation has been done on South-South migration with a particular focus on African migration, despite an increase in the movement of people, goods, services and capital within and across the continent (Batisai, 2016a, 2017; Aleshkovsky, 2016). For instance, the number of South-South migrants approximately balances the number of South-North migrants, as almost half of all reported migrants move between countries located in the Global South (Aleshkovsky, 2016; Batisai, 2016a; Nawyn, 2016). Where scholars such as Deshingkar et al. (2014) have explored South-South encounters, the focus has been on gendered realities of migration between and within Asian countries. Other scholars have analysed the South-South migration patterns through which countries in the Global South serve merely as stepping stones enroute to global cities in the Global North (George, 2005; Sassen, 2003). These migration patterns have produced ‘Asian biases’ as scholars focus on migration between Asian countries in the Global South or from Asian countries in the South to the Global North (Europe and the USA, but not Japan, Singapore or Hong Kong). Broadening the conceptual scope beyond the Global North and its Asian biases, this chapter’s gaze is on the realities of migration within and between African countries.

This chapter is not a reinvention of the wheel; neither is it a mere expansion, nor disregard, of existing international migration theories. Rather, the chapter takes cognisance of the challenges of universalistic approaches to migration realities that often undermine the fact that both experience and knowledge are contextual. In this chapter, the emphasis is on retheorising migration to account for contextual specificities that characterise and shape the realities of those who move within and across the continent. The chapter makes a deliberate effort to illuminate how emerging

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South-South theorisations resonate with migration realities in the broader Global South context; and, where necessary, expose gaps or enhance existing theorisations located in the Global North.

The chapter focuses particularly on Africa, where migration – subsequent to involuntary push factors such as civil wars, political violence, economic challenges, extreme poverty and other social realities specific to the continent – is often a forced experience compared to the Global North where it is a choice and lifestyle. For instance, South Africa is increasingly a major transnational destination for migrants from different African countries due to the ever-evolving socio-political and economic crisis on the continent (Batisai & Manjowo, 2020; Batisai, 2016a; Kufakurinani et al., 2014). Migration to South Africa is therefore a poverty reduction strategy for most southern African migrants (mainly Zimbabweans), and those from distant African countries (Nigeria, Cameroon, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo), who regard the country as the regional powerhouse (Manjowo, 2019; Singh & Khan, 2017; Nshimbi & Fioramonti, 2014). One cannot begin to understand and theorise migration on the continent without paying attention to the socio-political and economic challenges that push or force many citizens involuntarily out of their homeland into a foreign country, which in many instances is South Africa. An analysis of the South-South migration experience from a Global North perspective misses these contextual specificities that shape the migratory process in the Global South.

Guided by the observation that there is very little theoretical understanding of South-South and African-southern African migration, this chapter develops context-based theorisations rooted in the socio-historical, as well as theorisations informed by situated contemporary meanings and complexities of the migratory experience on the continent. Contextual theories of migration in this chapter avoid rendering the specific universal by exploring the state and how it polices the migratory process; society and the social meanings it attaches to ‘that which is foreign’; and the ultimate meaning of being a black African migrant in Africa. The chapter theorises that when the diverse experiences of people who have crossed internal and external borders in Africa are juxtaposed, they tell a profound conceptual narrative about the meaning of living in a ‘foreign’ space. The main conceptual contribution of this chapter is that it is built around experiences that hardly find their way into mainstream discourses and theorisations because of the Global North and Asian biases articulated above, which have dominated what is considered as the literature and theories of migration. Analysing the politics of inclusiveness and exclusiveness allows this chapter to raise ontological and epistemological questions that serve as powerful phenomenological lenses through which scholars located in the Global South can imagine and explore notions of identity and diverseness (Batisai, 2019). Answers to these questions are key to that which is produced as a sociology of migration theory and knowledge.

2.2 Rethorising Migration Without Recreating the Borders

This chapter rethinks migration without recreating the same intellectual and physical borders that sociology of migration scholars strive to dismantle. As the chapter refers to the unavoidable Global North-Global South binary, as well as (trans) national and ethnic borders, it illuminates the importance of the deconstruction theory in sociology of migration. Inserting a deconstructive perspective into migration theory allows scholars in the Global South to debunk both imagined and real borders that create complex insider-outsider identities that often exclude internal and cross-border (transnational) migrants. Instead of merely rehashing realities known or obvious to the sociology of migration, retheorising migration in this chapter entails identifying key contextual conceptualisations. These contextual realities further our understanding of migration in light of the much-needed theoretical explanations that are shaped by the diverse socio-political and economic realities specific to the continent. The contextual specificities include the history of labour migration, the economic meltdown and political violence that have shaped the migratory process over the years, gendered vulnerabilities and sexual and health-related realities, xenophobia, feminisation and the precariousness of labour, Africanness, and emerging questions of exclusion and inclusion. These thematic areas expose how existing definitions and experiences of an internal or cross-border migrant are shaped and reshaped by historical intersections of race, class and gender among other categories central to the formation of a migrant identity in Southern Africa.

2.3 Historicising (Labour) Migration in Southern Africa

A theory of migration will be inadequate without mapping the history of labour migration in Africa, particularly southern Africa – the historical and contemporary epicentre of migration in sub-Saharan Africa (IOM, 2020; Agadjanian, 2008; Oucho, 2006). The historical position echoes the observation that, in addition to post-independence realities, internal and transnational migration configurations are better understood within the historical and political context that has been central to the evolution of African societies (Adepoju, 2006). Throughout the colonial period and the apartheid era, unskilled labour criss-crossed from non-mining to mineral-rich countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Oucho, 2006). Over the decades, the criss-crossing birthed a wide range of concepts in migration literature aimed at understanding the complexity of migration configurations based on the migration regimes specific to the African context (Adepoju, 1979, 2006). Of particular interest is the concept of circulation, which “seems to best encapsulate the essence and specificity of migration dynamics in Africa – the non-permanent movements in circuits within and across national borders, which begin and (must) end at ‘home’” (Adepoju, 2006:26). To date, circulation – also referred to as seasonal or

temporary migration – is central to conceptualisations of migration and the realities of a migrant identity in Southern Africa.

Circulation – which explained how migrant mineworkers in apartheid South Africa, who were recruited from the peripheral countries for specified periods, had to go back home and repeat the migration process as and when their labour was needed (Adepoju, 2006) – is still relevant almost three decades after apartheid. Over the years, South Africa has received and continues to receive a huge influx of non-permanent migrants from Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, now known as eSwatini, and Zimbabwe to work in farms and mines across the country (IOM, 2010; Sachikonye, 1998; Crush, 1995). The influx is best understood in light of context-specific, complex social factors as well as persistent economic difficulties that push internal and transnational migrants in Africa (Adepoju, 2006). By the turn of the twenty-first century, Zimbabweans were migrating in numbers to different global destinations, including South Africa, in an attempt to escape the shifting socio-political terrains and economic strain weighing heavily on citizens with limited (if any) sources of income in their homeland (Batisai, 2017; Kufakurinani et al., 2014). Hence the conclusion that “the southern African transnational migration system, pivoted on South Africa, is the largest on the sub-continent” (Manjowo, 2019:1). Post-apartheid South Africa is yet to fulfil the promises of democracy, such that a South-South theory of migration interrogates the realities of being a migrant in a country where historical forces intersect and produce hierarchized inequalities for citizens (Batisai, 2018). Juxtaposed, the realities of South Africans and black Africans from across the continent suggest a way for re-engaging and retheorising the multilayered notion of xenophobia that affects the region and the continent at large.

Even though labour migration has been observed across the globe, the historical character, in southern Africa, of migration that is largely seasonal or temporary (IOM, 2010; Brummer, 2002) makes it particularly interesting for scholars to theorise about the vulnerabilities and precariousness of being a migrant worker in the region. The theory of migration would be incomplete if not conceptualised and located in the context of HIV/AIDS, gendered vulnerabilities and risks that the migratory process causes for migrants in southern Africa. For instance, the region accounts for 46% of the world’s HIV infections; and women are 61% of the infected population, accounting for 59% of new infections, whilst adolescent girls and young women account for 29% of new infections (UN Women, 2020). A theoretical analysis of gendered vulnerabilities and risks is pertinent for African migrants whose number one destination country, South Africa, recorded a total of seven million people infected with HIV in 2015, and accounted for 40% of new infections worldwide (Statistics South Africa, 2016; UNAIDS, 2016). Currently, South Africa has 221 new infections and an alarming record of nine girls and young women infected per hour on average (UN Women, 2020). A South-South migration theory stands to benefit from an analysis of the unique contextual vulnerabilities and risks, as well as the intersections of HIV/AIDS and migration in southern Africa.

While scholars acknowledge the non-causal relationship between migration and the transmission of HIV, there has been an increasing recognition of the

vulnerabilities to HIV infection among mobile populations relative to non-mobile ones (Muindi et al., 2014; IOM, 2010; Oucho, 2006; Brummer, 2002). The vulnerabilities are attributed to the way migration influences behaviours and creates environments conducive for the transmission of HIV from person to person (Muindi et al., 2014). The transmission often happens as migrants working in the context of circulation (seasonal or temporary migration) return home to their families regularly (IOM, 2010; Adepoju, 2006; Oucho, 2006; Brummer, 2002). In addition to circulation, southern Africa experiences high levels of forced mobility as political violence survivors seek refuge or asylum and ordinary citizens try to escape extreme poverty in their home countries. A gendered analysis of the migration trends in southern Africa reveals that young women – younger than 19 years – constitute 20% of the 44% of migrants who either voluntarily migrate or are trafficked from Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, among other countries across the region (IOM, 2014). Women migrants, whether trafficked or not, “face the triple burden of being female, foreign and, often, working in dangerous occupations” (UNDESA, 2006:2). From a healthcare perspective, this burden, world over, manifests as medical xenophobia, experienced when migrant and refugee women try to access maternal and general healthcare services (Zihindula et al., 2017; Pollock et al., 2012).

What differentiates the South from the North is that, often, healthcare systems in the former are battling with the increased burden of disease (Chiwire, 2016), overwhelming demands of a rapidly increasing population (Yeld, 2013), and high levels of migration (Walls et al., 2016). In southern Africa, for example, South Africa is failing to meet the medical demands of its citizens to the extent that medical xenophobia can be partly attributed to increased pressure from migration that aggravates existing healthcare challenges (Batisai, 2020) as migrant women resort to free public maternal healthcare (Benjamin, 2019). Migrant women of child-bearing age in sub-Saharan Africa (median age: 30.6 years) constitute 47.8% of 22,976 migrants (IOM, 2017:25), while in South Africa the same population constitutes 44.4% of the 4,037,000 migrants, with a median age of 33.7 years (UNDESA, 2017:26). Most migrant women have very limited financial resources, which puts them at risk of sexual violence with little to no access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (Mafuwa, 2016). An analysis of the impact of intersecting socio-economic, gendered labour realities and sexual and health-related factors on the well-being of migrants and refugees in southern African enhances South-South migration theory.

2.4 Migration and Feminisation of Labour in the South

The South-South migration theory in this chapter builds on the observation that, similar to the migration of women from the Global South to global cities often located in the Global North (Sassen, 2003), new forms of labour have resulted in the migration of women between Global South countries in search of green pastures (Batisai, 2016a, 2017). However, African women’s migratory experiences of feminisation of labour on the continent are hardly incorporated into mainstream

discourses and theorisations because the focus has been on the socio-economic impact of women's transnational migration from Asia to countries in the Global North and in the Middle East. The scholarly gap presents an opportunity for this chapter to focus on African migrant women's experiences of feminisation of labour in response to ongoing calls for new theorisations of gender and sexuality in the diaspora (Batisai, 2015, 2016a; Pasura, 2014; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014; Fonkem, 2013).

A theory of feminisation of labour migration on the continent brings to the fore the interplay between gendered migrant labour and women's empowerment. Contrary to the domestication of women that traditionally reduced their work to "reproductive or intimate labour" (Boris & Parreñas, 2010), the theory of feminisation of labour takes into account African migrants' progressive roles as key economic actors who, through their work in destination countries, exercise their agency and navigate or subvert long standing gendered and xenophobic hierarchies (Batisai & Dzimiri, 2020; Batisai, 2016a). For instance, Zimbabwean women in South Africa break the shackles of gendered stereotypes that previously tagged them as non-productive citizens, and they emerge as superheroes whose financial contributions sustain families and the economy of their motherland (Madambi, 2020). The women renegotiate gendered identities that are linked to their sexual and reproductive bodies and embrace an emerging breadwinner role, which was previously perceived as a male preserve (Batisai & Manjowo, 2020). Thus, the process of theorising feminisation of labour on a highly patriarchal continent deploys migrant women's emerging identities and roles to debunk the long standing gendered categorisation of women.

By contrast, the process of retheorising migration is also informed by the shortcomings of the rising feminisation of labour on the continent that has led to the marketisation of childcare within households (Smit, 2014). Children in the Global South increasingly spend more time with domestic workers than their migrant parents; and migrant domestic workers also emerge as absent mothers who spend more time at work than with their children (Sibanda & Batisai, 2021; Sibanda, 2019; Batisai, 2017). For instance, the multifaceted economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe saw many parents migrating alone and leaving their children behind, resulting in prolonged periods of separation or even permanent separation (Madziva, 2010). Batisai (2017) interrogates the meaning Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa assign to transnational mothering experiences, particularly those that expose theories of motherhood, intimacy, separation, moral degeneration, and bewilderment. The theories complement those stemming from South-North migration, especially the experiences of Zimbabwean mothers in the UK that reveal how separation undermines family life (Madziva & Zontini, 2012), as well as a sense of loss rooted in the absence of physical interaction between mothers and their children recorded among Ecuadorian mothers in Italy (Boccagni, 2012).

Evidence from South-South migration contradicts positive narratives of material mothering observed among Sri Lankan women located in the Global North, who use the money they remit home to compensate for their absence (Gamburd, 2000).

In essence, it challenges conceptualisations that mothering can operate without physical proximity (Madziva & Zontini, 2012). Zimbabwean migrant women's experiences in South Africa challenge the materiality of love because they feel guilty about neglecting the children they left across the border (Batisai, 2017). The absence of parents affects the child-parent bond, leaving the children to negotiate their identities in a context of low self-esteem and with no sense of attachment, such that they resort to anti-social forms of recognition, including drug misuse (Sibanda & Batisai, 2021; Sibanda, 2019). These South-South realities expose gaps and enhance existing theorisations that unpack migrant women's experience of mothering from a transnational context.

South-South migration literature reveals that while family separation, among other social consequences of migration, cannot be addressed remotely, digital media plays a central role in how migrants experience and manage transnational relationships (Meyers, 2019). Zimbabwean migrant women, for instance, acknowledge that social networking platforms such as WhatsApp have, in recent years, increased their levels of interaction with their children back home (Batisai, 2017). Thus, South-South theoretical discussions that make reference to the interplay between digital media and transnational mothering in South Africa and the continent at large contribute to the body of literature on this emerging field of social enquiry (Mandewo, 2022; Meyers & Rugunanan, 2020; Meyers, 2019).

2.5 Rethinking Africanness in the Context of South-South Migration

Several incidents of xenophobia have been recorded in Global South contexts, particularly in Asian countries such as China (Hangwei, 2020; Wang & Qin, 2020) and India (Rugunanan, 2016). However, the unique nature of xenophobia in southern Africa calls for ongoing serious contextual theorising. Episodes of xenophobic attacks in South Africa justify conceptual renegotiation of the meaning of Africanness or African identities, especially for black African migrants located in spaces of violent and brutal prejudice against those perceived as foreign. Emerging out of the 2008, 2015 and 2019 spates of xenophobic attacks is a contextual theorisation about 'black against black violence' that captures the violent and brutal attacks on black foreign nationals by black South Africans (Batisai, 2016b; Brookes, 2015; Gqola, 2008). Even though the reasons for these xenophobic attacks vary, it can be argued that a wide range of theories about xenophobia attributes the attacks to a shortage of jobs and poor service delivery (Rukema & Khan, 2013). The black African migrant in this instance is theorised and perceived "as a new danger to society, a threat, an invader intent on usurping the hard won materialities which the locals earned with sweat and blood" (Tafira, 2011:116). Rethorising migration from a South-South perspective allows a migrant identity to be understood and read through contextual socio-economic and even politicised realities. The theorisation

further exposes “the xenophobic grammar and vocabularies that frame black African migrants as bodies that destabilise the very foundation and survival of the nation” (Batisai, 2016b:129).

Theoretical analysis of the foreign identity in the context of xenophobia reveals that “foreign nationals are ‘throw-away people’ who disturb the status quo” (Batisai, 2016b:128). This analysis echoes what Mary Douglas terms “matter out of place” or “dirt in the bedroom”, particularly the argument that dirt belongs in the garden, such that when it is in the bedroom, it is pollution and the only way of dealing with “matter out of place” is to “sweep it up” or “throw it out” (see Hall, 1997:330). Ultimately, “the ‘foreigner’ [should] be kept at a distance, expelled and if all else fails, destroyed” (Tafira, 2011:116). The metaphors speak to the ways in which the violent insults, prejudices and physical attacks on foreign nationals become a legitimate way of marking difference which, according to Douglas, serves “to stigmatise and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal” to ensure that order and sanity return to society (Douglas quoted in Hall, 1997:330). These metaphoric representations illuminate some of the situated social meanings that society attaches to ‘that which is foreign’; and the ultimate meaning of being a black African migrant in Africa – core to the production of rooted theories of migration in this chapter.

2.6 A Theory of Migration That Crosses Nationalistic and Ethnic Boundaries

The chapter rethinks migration and the meaning or scope of xenophobia in the context of identity politics that emerge from social relational interactions and intermarriages between South Africans and black Africans from across the continent. As children of the latter acquire permanent immigrant status, or South African citizenship upon reaching the age of majority irrespective of their place of birth or nationality, they produce complex ‘diluted’ identities. These acquired identities blur the xenophobic migration boundaries that often serve as the very foundation of excluding the other. Consequently, answers to who belongs and who does not or what constitutes the ‘in group’ and the ‘out group’ are not static, due to “ethnic and cultural intermixing, intermarriage, cross-cultural love relationships and ‘interbreeding’” in South African societies (Tafira, 2011:116). Hence the inference that “the xenophobic binaries that exist between citizens (‘in group’) and foreign nationals (‘out group’) shift depending on one’s contextual socio-economic positionalities” (Batisai, 2016b:128). As migration boundaries become blurry, the liberty to retheorise migration in Africa allows this chapter to move beyond binary nationalities in a manner that generates contextual knowledge – core to our understanding of the South-South and African-South African migration realities – which either makes new contributions or enhances existing international migration theories.

2.7 Concluding Theoretical Standpoints

This chapter provides contextually relevant insights into how migration is experienced, understood and theorised from a South-South perspective. Emerging out of this chapter is a South-South migration theory that crosses and debunks nationalistic and ethnic boundaries that are too deterministic in nature. ‘Beyond nationalisms and binaries’ is a theory that is inspired by the observation that, similar to women’s land struggles that are shared across Africa (Chipuriro & Batisai, 2018; Bauer et al., 2017; Bouilly et al., 2016), being black in South Africa is a constant struggle for both citizens and migrants (Batisai, 2019). This observation validates the recommendation that scholars who write about women’s struggles in South Africa should go beyond South African women to encompass “women who follow the flow of the Limpopo southwards” because “they too seek their emancipation” (Gasa, 2007:xv). Similar to the seminal work of Biko (2004) on collective forms of blackness, juxtaposing African migrant women’s struggles with those of their South African sisters moves these struggles from the peripheries of literature on migrancy (Gasa, 2007), presenting these struggles as polarised slips into “unnecessary and uncomfortable hierarchies of blackness” (Batisai, 2019:97), which, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, are more complex than before (Khunou et al., 2019).

As the chapter moves beyond exclusive nationalistic binaries, it illuminates the shared experiences, connectedness and commonalities amongst blacks irrespective of nationality and contextualised cultural specificities (Chipuriro & Batisai, 2018; Gasa, 2007). The collective theorisation brings Africa together and reinforces the spirit of solidarity without perpetuating the same colonial gaze and the global matrices of power that have historically homogenised African people at the expense of their heterogeneity, individuality and diverseness (Tamale, 2011). The theoretical standpoint acknowledges that the most significant differences amongst blacks intersect and collectively influence their positionalities, which in turn determine how they access opportunities and resources and what they produce as knowledge (Batisai, 2019). Reflecting on being a black South African, Phaswana (2019) hints at these commonalities implied in how she survived exclusion in higher education by pledging solidarity with other blacks, and how she ultimately realised that her struggle was not isolated because it speaks to black people’s broader struggle for existence and survival.

The all-encompassing black African identity disrupts language and nationalistic borders; it deconstructs pigmentation differences and divisive grammars or vocabularies such as ‘the better black’ discourse, which breeds competition over space and recognition (Batisai, 2019:98). The disruption or deconstruction is of great significance to a South-South theory of migration because the binaries constitute the very basis for xenophobic othering, which raises questions of belonging as one tries to ascertain where home is (Ndlovu, 2010). Black African migrants in the South African context have become part of the broader society such that their struggles warrant scholarly attention (Kihato, 2007). These experiences are rich conceptual sources that enhance theoretical and analytic frameworks in this chapter. That way,

black African migrants “emerge as brothers and sisters whose black African identity, not nationality, matters [and] Africanness as a result of this ‘embrace’ ceases to be territorialised [or] reduced to one’s national identity” (Batisai, 2016b:127). Acknowledging collective struggles allows this chapter to retheorise migration by assigning new meaning to Africanness and embracing a ‘black African identity’ that crosses nationalistic and ethnic boundaries.

The thought-provoking solidarity theory hints at the intellectual wealth in Africa that could potentially rebuild the continent from within through socio-economic and political regional integration facilitated by migration. The need to acknowledge the intellectual wealth in Africa is partly informed by African migrants’ progressive self-representations in print and social media as ‘not just foreigners’, given how they deconstruct long standing xenophobic hierarchies and actively contribute to the economy in transnational spaces (Batisai & Dzimiri, 2020). Although the focus is on Africa, southern Africa and more specifically South Africa, far reaching empirical and theoretical conclusions can still be drawn because some of the migratory experiences discussed in this chapter are shared across countries in the broader Global South context. These commonalities are often characterised by unequal distribution of resources that shape the socio-economic and political dynamics of migration in the Global South. Thus, inserting African experiences into existing South-South literature exposes gaps in scholarly debates that have been largely informed by the gendered realities of migration amongst and within Asian countries; and simultaneously enhances existing South-North migration theorisations.

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