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Migration, housing and neighbouring: Zimbabweans in Diepsloot informal settlement, Johannesburg

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Abstract

The precarious nature of access to housing is faced by migrants, either documented or undocumented as opposed to what the literature claims. The perilous and disbarring experience related to access to housing by Zimbabwean migrants in Diepsloot informal settlement attests to this. However, migrants' access to the neighbourhood differs for those with no documentation as they have to constantly take precaution when moving around their social milieu to avoid falling victims to the police because of their illegal status. Thus, inculcating feelings of unacceptability and thereby limiting the migrants' chances of assimilation.

The research explores the procedures that Zimbabwean migrants follow to acquire a shack in Diepsloot informal settlement and also how these migrants navigate the neighbourhood and with what challenges. It employed a qualitative approach as it is interested in the lived experiences of these Zimbabwean migrants. The concepts of 'the stranger' and 'social networks' were used as a theoretical framework guiding the research. The data was gathered by the use of the semi-structured interviews, which were later transcribed for the purposes of the research report. Snowball sampling was used to identify the participants of the research with the initial participant being randomly chosen. This participant then referred the researcher to other participants.

The findings reveal that most Zimbabwean migrants have gained purchased access to Diepsloot. These Zimbabwean migrants do not have ownership of these shacks but rent from some of the locals who once resided there and now are beneficiaries of the RDP housing. Regarding the supposition that Zimbabwean migrants rely on social networks for access to housing, the findings corroborate this hypothesis as some of the Zimbabwean migrants have gained access to the shacks via their social networks. The minority Zimbabwean migrants who claim ownership of the shacks did not get these shacks through proper channels; either they got it through corruption or via their social networks. Zimbabwean migrants' access to the neighbourhood as demonstrated by informal business ownership, the establishment of churches and entertainment activities is still marred by issues of nationality. This is demonstrated by the concept of 'living apart' with locals, and also identity swapping; with Zimbabweans disguising as people from Limpopo and Mpumalanga. The Shona who face double exclusion from the Ndebele group and from the locals, pretend to be the Ndebele people. This is superficial and failed form of assimilation.