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Precarious life: Zimbabwean undocumented salon workers in Johannesburg

Tambulu, Bukiwe

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ABSTRACT

Large numbers of Zimbabweans continue to flock to South Africa for various reasons, some looking for work and others for educational purposes. It is no secret that some of the push factors are poverty, environmental catastrophe, economic decline and political instability hence there is a crisis of influx of migrants, some “illegal” from Zimbabwe. However, the transition from Zimbabwe is not smooth sailing for everyone, some have papers that allow them to cross borders legally and others do not (Pinedo 2009). Subsequently, Chaudry and Hlatshwayo (2013) argue that undocumented immigrants have the most precarious of jobs with lowest wages and they are often in the informal economy or as casual labour in the informal sector. Thus, this study examines the experiences of undocumented migrant hairdressers, working in informal salon operations in Braamfontein. The study looks at the experiences of these migrant workers through the lens of precarity as a political concept. The claim is that: employment is precarious in South Africa, and more precarious for undocumented migrants whose ‘illegal’ status works as a disciplinary mechanism. Literature argues that, undocumented migrants are mostly absorbed by the informal economy, thus this study looked at the relationship between migrant status and precarity. But not only looking at precarity as induced by work, but also as politically induced.