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Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, South Africa: space, movement and spatial identity

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Abstract

Focusing on Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, this thesis engages the ways in which diverse groups and individuals construct and negotiate spaces in the city. I have looked at how Zimbabwean migrants spatially respond to the regulatory and socio-economic environments within which they lead their everyday lives in Johannesburg. I emphasize the theme of heterogeneity, specifically highlighting the differentiated nature of Zimbabwean immigrants living in South Africa and discuss their movements and spatial identities. Theoretically, I have combined de Certeau's conception of space as represented by the schema of "strategies" of the powerful and the "tactics" of the subordinate with Bourdieu's concept of "habitus", which operates within a field of social forces that are responsible for, and the result of, its emergence. Following my empirical engagements within the context of Johannesburg, I observe that, the initial decision by Zimbabwean migrants to move to South Africa, be it in search of work opportunities or forced by political circumstances, enable a structure that predisposes them (migrants) to continued mobility. Firstly, as transnational migrants who engage in frequent short term and long term movements between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Secondly, as transient residents of Johannesburg who frequently change residential addresses yet remain largely within the same spaces where they first arrive. Thirdly, as de Certeau's *ordinary man* who walks the city while engaged in everyday activities such as, shopping, going to places of employment, to places of education, etc. I theorise mobility as a way of *making do* and an inhabited space that migrants mobilise in contestation with the broader strategic entities such as the City of Johannesburg's regulatory platforms, South African citizens and other migrants. I also argue that, for migrants to engage in different mobility cycles and deploy mobility as a tactical resource, particular dispositions are necessary. I refer to these dispositions as the *transnational migrant habitus*, which operates within a *transnational social field* constituted by socio-cultural factors in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both, the transnational habitus and the transnational social field are hybrid social formations that are not reducible to either the Zimbabwean or the South African contexts that are responsible for their genesis and ongoing reconstitution. Methodologically, I employed a mixed methods research design, which refers to a procedure by which the researcher mixes two or more methods with different meta-theoretical assumptions in a single study in order to understand a research problem. I used mixed methods because I needed sufficient breadth to explore the diversity of Zimbabwean migrant experiences and spatial

decision-making, but also sufficient depth to uncover the reasons for behaviours and decisions.