

Method Document

PREFACE

I first came to South Africa in 2008 to study for a year. In 2010 I returned to South Africa to stay with my husband who is a resident. Since 2008, I have taken eight bus trips between Malawi and South Africa. During the trips and my stay I have met a number of migrants from my country, some with no residence permits or visas. The migrants are very determined to enter and stay in South Africa despite having no legal protection. Out of curiosity, I have made observations of how the undocumented migrants manage to cross the borders, at times repeatedly. It is this curiosity that made me embark on a writing project to document migrants' travel stories and add to the body of existing literature on migration.

Most migrants use buses. The bus trip is much cheaper but strenuous. The two-day trip is worsened by long hours spent at the border posts. There are two countries in between Malawi and South Africa – Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and these bring the sum total of border posts to six. It often takes hours for all the bus passengers to go through border controls. A lot of time is spent by migrants without proper documentation negotiating and bribing their way through the borders.

INTRODUCTION

Joni, as South Africa is popularly known in the villages and townships of Malawi, is a dream for many young people. *Joni* is a beacon of hope for a better life. Many work hard and save for a passport and bus fare to *Joni*. Others sell their family property like cattle or borrow money just to make it to *Joni*. Nothing can stop the determined ones from migrating; neither the immigration laws nor the violent, xenophobic attacks on foreigners. Most leave their loved ones and stay separated from their families for many years.

As promising as life in South Africa may appear, some migrants struggle as they have to survive on very little income. There are stories of migrants earning as low as R800 per month yet they have to pay for their bills in South Africa and support their families in Malawi. The migrants are restricted in their movements due to lack of residence permits or visas. While trying to save, they stay for as long as they can, often missing important family occasions such as births, weddings and funerals.

For first timers, entry into South Africa is relatively easy. All they need to have is a valid passport, a bus fare and a travel allowance of R3,000 or more obtained from an authorised foreign exchange dealer in Malawi. They enter South Africa as visitors. However, some migrants fail to even meet these requirements, especially the travel allowance. After raising money for the bus fare (about R900) and passport, which is fairly high at K48,500 (about R1,000), there is little left for the travel allowance. Entry is difficult for migrants that overstayed their previous visitors' visas because the law does not allow them to return to the country for a certain period. However, determined migrants return to South Africa even before the period elapses.

THE RESEARCH INTEREST RATIONALE

This research project investigated how undocumented migrants from Malawi travel across the six borders. Undocumented migrants are migrants who do not have work or residence visas. Much has been said and written about the corruption at South African borders, but this research sheds more light on how the money exchanges hands and how the bribes are determined. Migration between Malawi and South Africa has been going on for close to two centuries and the dominant means of transportation has been changing over the years. At first, the migrants would walk the distance of close to 2,000 kilometres, spending many days on the way. Then they used trains and later aeroplanes. In the early 1990s, buses became the dominant means of transportation. Buses are the most accessible and affordable means of transport. However, bus trips are a challenge for undocumented migrants. This research exposes how the migrants are often treated as illegals at the borders and how they are made to bribe their way through. Undocumented migrants have been blamed for stealing jobs from South Africans, but what is rarely talked about is the role of South African officers at the borders in controlling the migration. This research found that tighter immigration regulations have not yielded much in controlling the number of undocumented migrants but increased the amounts that illegal migrants pay in bribes to officers. This research adds value to the body of information on corruption and migration of low skilled people in southern Africa, with a focus on Malawians. It shares the findings in form of a bus trip story, which makes the information accessible even to lay people. The project gives an opportunity to migrants, whose voices are rarely heard, to share their experiences.

Aims and Rationale

The aim of this project is to document the corruption at the borders between Malawi and South Africa. The research combines my observations and personal stories of how low skilled Malawian migrants manage to enter, overstay their visitors' visas and re-enter South Africa in search for work. It is the first research project focusing on how Malawian migrants manage to beat the immigration system. It goes beyond general sentiments about corruption at the borders by looking at the exact amounts that migrants paid and who they paid the money to. The project also looks at economic factors which force migrants to move from Malawi to South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Illegal migration is a longstanding phenomenon that arose with creation of states and control of borders (Zohry 2011). Migrants move from less developed countries with the hope of escaping poverty and improving their living standards (*ibid.*). Since 1988, low and unskilled Malawian migrants have no rights to work in South Africa and, without residence visas, are considered illegal. Zohry (*ibid.*, pp.2) observed that the term illegal migrants comes with a negative connotation. However, the term can be used to refer to the act of illegally staying in

the country and not to imply that the migrants are criminals. The migrants can also be referred to as undocumented or irregular immigrants.

Theories

There are two theories that help explain labour migration from Malawi to South Africa: the Three Ps and Chain Migration. The Three Ps explain the motive for migrating while Chain Migration explains the pattern of geographical sources of migrants and the type of work they do in South Africa.

Three Ps of Migration

Contemporary migration to South Africa is motivated by what scholars call Three Ps: Profit, Protection and Passage (Landau & Segatti, 2009). In a case study of South Africa, Landau and Segatti found the majority of migrants come seeking Profit. Some come looking for Protection from persecution, natural disasters, or violence, while others consider South Africa a Passage to other developed countries in Europe, North America and Australia. Yet a few others use the country as a Passage to neighbouring countries of Mozambique and Swaziland.

The desire to make Profit can be linked to the Push – Pull factors established by Ernest Ravenstein. Ravenstein is the earliest migration theorist (Tomanek 2011). Using census data from England and Wales, he established that there were push factors in the country of origin that forced migrants to move out. The migrants' choice of destination was determined by what he called pull factors. The push factors are hardships such as low wages, high unemployment rates, and lack of health care while the pull factors are better economic conditions including high wages and low unemployment rates. Ravenstein conducted his research in 1885 (Corbett 2001 – 2011). Writing in recent times, Corbett (*ibid.*) agrees that migration is closely related to push and pull factors.

Most migrants from Malawi come to South Africa seeking Profit. Unlike war-torn countries, whose citizens seek Protection in South Africa, Malawi has been a peaceful and stable country since independence in 1964. Most migrants move for economic reasons. The migrants are likely to get paying jobs in South Africa than in Malawi. The emphasis is on paying jobs because on paper Malawi has a lower rate of unemployment than South Africa, which would then contradict Ravenstein's theory. The official rate of unemployment in Malawi, using the expanded definition, is 20 percent (National Statistical Office 2014). Using the narrow definition, which excludes people that have given up looking for work, Malawi's unemployment rate is seven percent while that of South Africa is 24 percent (Statistics South Africa 2015). However, the rate of unemployment in Malawi is lower because the country counts subsistence farmers as workers. South Africa, unlike many African countries, does not count subsistence farmers as workers (Chiumia 2014).

Some migrants move to South Africa because the pay is considered to be better. There are migrants that would qualify for, say, entry-level teaching jobs in Malawi but they would

rather do domestic work in South Africa and earn more. This project looked at entry-level salaries for jobs such as teaching, nursing and policing in Malawi.

While the push-pull factors explain the motives for migration, other scholars find the theory limited for focussing on geographic and economic barriers to migration leaving out the challenges of crossing borders illegally (Zohry 2011, pp 4). Zohry argues that migrants face the challenges of travel, finance and restrictive migration laws to reach their desired destinations. He highlights the need for scholars to develop theories that cover migrants who have illegally crossed one or more countries, and also illegally stay in the destination countries.

Chain migration

I have observed a pattern on the areas of origin of Malawian migrants and the types of jobs they take up in Johannesburg. Many Malawians from the Northern Region, Mzimba district in particular, take up domestic jobs. Many migrants from the Eastern Region, especially Mangochi and Machinga districts, work as shopkeepers in the central business district (CBD), at Oriental Plaza and other Chinese-dominated malls in Johannesburg. One can easily tell the migrants areas of origin through language. Migrants from the Northern Region speak Chitumbuka while those from the Eastern Region speak Chiyao.

I can also speculate that migrants from those two districts form a larger population of Malawians travelling to South Africa. Some bus companies have even introduced direct services from Mangochi and Mzimba districts, apart from the major cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe. But this claim is impossible to prove without numbers. However, some research has shown similar trends. Andersson (2006, pp. 378) found Mzimba district, particularly the western part, to be one of Malawi's major source of undocumented migrants. However, one source disputes the observation that there are more migrant workers in South Africa from Mangochi district. According to the Mangochi District Assembly (n.d., pp. 23), few people from the district migrate to South Africa for work; most of them are traders.

The pattern between migrants' areas of origin in Malawi and the type of jobs they do in South Africa can be explained by what MacDonald and MacDonald (1964) termed chain migration. McDonald and McDonald studied Italian immigrants in the United States and established that prospective migrants were assisted to move by family and friends living in the destination country. The two scholars define chain migration as the "movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants." The scholars emphasised chain migration is different from "organised recruitment migration" because it involves people who know each other.

Research conducted in South Africa and Malawi has confirmed there is chain migration. Writing about migrants in South Africa, Crush and Williams (2001, pp. 4) observed that "many have networks that alert them of employment opportunities or know where and how to

obtain employment.” Andersson (2006 pp. 388) says kinship-based social networks are very central in the production of informal migration. “‘Going South’ is seen as the natural thing to do...” in Mzimba District in Malawi (*ibid.*). “Originating from specific areas within the country these migrants built upon long-established historical patterns of independent migration that had remained concealed because of the dominance of organised migration to South Africa” (*ibid.* pp. 382).

Background and Context

Illegal Migration is a Global Challenge

Illegal migration is a challenge for many countries and regions across the globe. Many receiving countries are struggling to balance the need to protect their borders and uphold migrants’ human rights. While South Africa has made headlines for violent, xenophobic attacks on foreigners, the picture is also ugly elsewhere. Media reports have shown traumatising images of migrants arriving in foreign countries in inhumane conditions. Many have lost their lives on the way. The United Nations reportedly estimates between January and March 2015, 25,000 migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh arrived in Southeast Asia on “rickety smugglers’ boats” (Buckley & Ramzy 2015). Their desired destinations were Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Europe has not been spared. 26,000 migrants from Africa and Middle East landed in Europe between January and April 2015 (*New York Times* 2015). Sadly, about 1,700 migrants died on the way over the four months. Since 2000, about 22,000 migrants from Africa and Middle East have drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to enter Europe (Moore 2015).

About 60-million migrants have been forced from their homes by violence, persecution and human rights violations, according to the most recent data from the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR (2014). The case of a man from Johannesburg who landed unconscious in London clinging to an aeroplane last year shows the level of desperation among migrants (Taylor 2015).

Over a Century of Migration

Malawi is a developing country in Southern Africa with over half of its population living in poverty (The World Bank 2015). Malawi was colonised by Britain in 1891. The country got independence in July 1964. Until 1993 when Malawi voted for multiparty democracy, the country was under one-party rule led by Dr Hastings Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP).

Some Malawians looking for greener pasture migrate to other countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and South Africa. South Africa, being closer, appears to be a convenient destination for many.

Migration to South Africa has been going on throughout the different political regimes. Actually, it is written that migration to South Africa started before the colonial rule. Malawi,

historically, was a labour reservoir for Zimbabwe and South Africa, (Boeder 1984). According to Boeder, the first Malawians in South Africa were four slaves who worked as servants for Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) missionaries in the 1860s. Then more Malawians started trickling in to work in diamond and gold mines. Miners from Malawi, Mozambique and Lesotho came on foot to work in Kimberley diamond mines (Crush, n.d). In the 1890s, they were joined by miners from countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola to work in the Witwatersrand gold mines (*ibid.*). Research by Jens Andersson (2006) also found migration from Malawi might have started earlier than the late 19th Century. He found migration from areas like Mzimba preceded the organised recruitment regimes (*ibid.*, pp. 386).

Under colonialism, Malawians were forced to emigrate to earn tax money (Boeder 1984). The migrants did not enjoy any legal protection until 1935 when an investigation on their living conditions and the fate of their remaining families was conducted. The findings were published in what was called the Travers Lacey Report (*ibid.*). The general public in Britain reacted to the findings and forced the colonial administration to end the abuses (*ibid.*). The administration obliged and in August 1936 entered into discussions about the labour situation with Zambia and Zimbabwe, then known as Northern and Southern Rhodesia respectively. Malawi was then known as Nyasaland. The discussions resulted in the Salisbury Agreement, which stipulated that the migrants must be issued with identity certificates and medical reports (*ibid.*). The identity certificates were treated as passports. The colonial administration also made a labour agreement with South Africa's Transvaal Chamber of Mines. The Transvaal Chamber of Mines owned the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (Wenela), the group which was responsible for recruiting foreign labour for the gold mines (*ibid.*). Under the deal, known as the Johannesburg Agreement, it was agreed that Malawi would provide a steady supply of labour and the Chamber of Mines would ensure improved working conditions for the miners. The then Nyasaland government would also benefit from increased revenue through differed pay, family remittances and taxes paid at home. That marked the beginning of organised labour recruitment between Malawi and South Africa. In 1937, Wenela recruited 2,000 Malawians. It paid for their transport and provided each miner with a shirt, pair of trousers, belt, blanket and jacket. Between the late 1930s and 1940s, South Africa and Rhodesia competed for Malawi labour.

In 1953, the Federation of Nyasaland and Rhodesia (both Northern and Southern) was formed (Rosberg 1956). The Federation strengthened political and economic ties among the three countries. In the late 1950s the Federation started facing resistance from the locals and finally ended in 1963 (Boddy-Evans 2016). As the Federation crumbled during the late 1950s, the numbers of Malawians going to Rhodesia declined "while there was a corresponding increase in number of men travelling to South Africa for work" (Boeder 1984). In 1964, Malawi attained independence and the number of migrants going to South Africa increased "dramatically" (*ibid.*, pp. 18).

Under Banda, the first leader of independent Malawi, Malawi's foreign policy favoured South Africa, which was then under apartheid government. In 1964, Malawi was the only

black African nation to exchange ambassadors with South Africa (*ibid.*, pp. 18). During the colonial period, the South African government refused to discuss labour with Nyasaland officials. Instead, it was Wenela, which handled the recruitment issues.

It is not surprising then that in 1965, Malawi and South Africa reached a government-to-government labour agreement. South Africa stopped recruiting miners directly (Boeder 1984, pp. 20). Instead, the Malawi government supplied recruits to Wenela depots. The Malawi government charged R1 for each recruit (*ibid.*). In 1967, the South African government pledged to enlarge employment opportunities for Malawians. Malawians who were illegally working in South Africa were regularised (*ibid.*). The Malawi government expanded its drive to formalise the migration too. It established the Employment Services Division (ESD) under the Ministry of Labour to manage the recruitment (*ibid.*).

Kamuzu's ties with South Africa were not only at government level. He arrived in 1918 as a teenager and worked at a mine in Boksburg, Johannesburg before he moved to the US in 1925 and the UK where he studied medicine (Walker 1997). Banda continue with his studies while working in South Africa.

By the end of 1972, the ESD was recruiting 20,000 men annually and there were close to 130,000 Malawians in South Africa, making over 31 percent of the Africans employed by the Transvaal Chamber of Commerce (*ibid.*). Recruitment of Malawian migrants grew so much so that between 1972 and 1974 Malawi was the largest supplier of mine labour (Andersson 2006, pp. 379). Recruitment for other industries, too, was formalised. Any South African requiring Malawi labour had to obtain a permit from local authorities, who would then submit the request to the Malawi government's representative in Johannesburg. The prospective employer would be screened and provided with an employee, if approved. The employee received a passport, employment record book, work permit, minimum wage, and train fare. The employees were entitled to round-trips to Malawi every two years. But they were not allowed to bring wives and families.

The strengthening diplomatic ties benefitted both countries (*ibid.*). For instance, Malawi enjoyed custom-free exportation of tobacco, tea and other products. South Africa extended a US\$33-million loan to finance Banda's ambition of moving the capital city from Zomba district to Lilongwe (*ibid.*). A South African company was engaged in the construction of the railway between Malawi and the port of Nacala in Mozambique. In 1970, South Africa's then Prime Minister John Vorster travelled to Malawi. Banda, who was known as the 'odd man out' among African nationalists for working with the apartheid government, reciprocated in 1971 (Walker 1997). During the visit he renewed the trade agreement (Boeder 1984, pp. 22). Remittances from the migrants were very significant, coming second to tobacco sales in terms of foreign currency earnings by 1972.

At the beginning of organised migrant recruitment, the migrants used to travel by train until 1974 (*ibid.* pp. 21). But following the civil war in 1975 in Mozambique, the migrants were flown to Francistown in Botswana. They would then continue to South Africa by train. The

employers were paying for the air tickets. The migrants were flown on Air Malawi and Wenela aircraft. The relationship between Malawi and South Africa took a twist in 1974 when two Wenela aircraft were involved in accidents in a space of 10 days (*ibid.*). In the first accident, which happened in Malawi, there were no injuries. In the second accident, at Francistown in Botswana, 74 miners died. Banda immediately suspended all Wenela flights and announced the labour agreement would be terminated in 1976. However, Malawi could not absorb the returning migrants so it reignited the ties later. But it was too late; Lesotho and Mozambique had moved in to provide more labour.

Organised labour recruitment continued under The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA), which took over from Wenela (Chirwa 1997). Organised recruitment ended in 1988 after the South African authorities demanded that potential recruits must be screened for HIV (Chirwa 1998). However, the end of TEBA did not stop low skilled Malawians from migrating to South Africa. Chirwa (1997) notes that “there is evidence that the adventurous ones still go back clandestinely”. Andersson (2006, pp. 382) writes that while formal contract migration declined, migration actually expanded in the 1990s. Many Malawians migrate as undocumented workers. He attributes the increase in migration to democratisation and economic liberalisation both in South Africa and Malawi in the 1990s. The liberal immigration regime in South Africa permitted Malawians to visit the country for a maximum of 30 days without obtaining visas, which eased entry. The liberalisation of the transport sector in Malawi saw the introduction of several bus services, which are cheaper and accessible. Andersson (2006, pp. 383) found that 20 buses were leaving Malawi for Johannesburg per week at the time of his research. “Cheap travelling by bus became the dominant means of transport to South Africa in the 1990s” (*ibid.*). This research made similar findings. According to Malawi’s Department of Immigration spokesman, every week an average of 15 to 20 buses leave Malawi for South Africa. The economic crisis in Zimbabwe also pushed travellers from Harare, which used to be a popular destination for Malawians, to Johannesburg (*ibid.* pp. 384). It must be noted though that the bus passengers include documented and undocumented migrants, visitors, traders and students.

Migration between Malawi and South Africa has not always been southbound. Between 1820 and 1840, two tribal groups led by Zwangendaba Jele and Ngwane Maseko left Natal and settled in Malawi (Madise 2015). The two groups run away from tribal conflicts among the Zulus under Shaka’s reign. Their descendants are known as Ngoni and they are found in two big districts in Malawi: Mzimba and Ntcheu. They are the third largest tribe in Malawi, making 13 percent of the total population (National Statistical Office 2016).

Immigration Laws

Malawi is one of the countries whose citizens are exempted from obtaining a visa before travelling to South Africa for a maximum period of 30 days (Department of Home Affairs 2014a). The travellers are granted a port of entry visa upon arrival in South Africa. For those intending to work, the Department requires that they obtain a permit in the home country. This requirement is often met by skilled migrants. Most unskilled and low skilled migrants do

not qualify for work visas. The new immigration regulations (2014, pp. 37 – 38) stipulate punishment for visitors who overstay their visas. Visitors who overstay their visas are declared undesirable persons and may not be allowed back in South Africa for a certain period. An overstay of not more than 30 days attracts a ban of 12 months. If a person overstays for the second time within a period of 24 months they are declared undesirable for two years. A person who overstays by more than 30 days is declared undesirable for a five-year period.

“Lawful entrants, unlawful stayers”

Many Malawians use the visa exemption as an opportunity to enter South Africa, even when their intention is to stay for longer. So their entry is lawful but their stay is not. Such migrants fit Crush and Williams (2001, pp. 16) definition of “lawful entrants, unlawful stayers”. Using the legality of entry and legality of stay as determining factors, Crush and Williams broke down the migrant population into four categories: lawful entrants and stayers; unlawful entrants and stayers; lawful entrants, unlawful stayers; and unlawful entrants, lawful stayers. The lawful entrants, unlawful stayers group is further broken down into three subcategories. First are contract workers that remain in South Africa after losing their jobs. Second are those who entered the country for non-work purposes but they are working without permits or in the informal sector. Third are migrants whose permits have expired. Many undocumented Malawian migrants would fit the lawful entrants, unlawful stayers, especially the second subcategory.

Corruption at Border Posts

Corruption on South African borders has been researched and documented. Kihato (2009), in her thesis for a Doctor of Philosophy, wrote about the corruption at border posts. She recorded migrant women’s accounts of how they crossed borders and she had this to say.

However, as migrant women’s accounts of border crossing illustrate, it is not necessarily the statutes that govern who comes into the country and who does not. In practice, borders are porous for those people able to negotiate their way through by paying border guards money, or having transactional sex. Their very existence creates an opportunity for the development of a sub-economy whose actors include migrants, border guards, drivers and smugglers. Using this intricate network of actors, women without passports and/or visas can negotiate their way through border guards to gain entry into the country, often at great personal and financial cost to themselves. These alternative economies create spaces that resist official border restrictions and develop new “rules of the game” that at once subvert sovereign codes and laws, and reinforce the significance of the physical border.

Kihato studied female migrants but the findings partially apply to men too, as some use corrupt means to cross the borders. “Many undocumented African immigrants pay corrupt immigration officers to gain entry into South Africa... Once in the country those who enter in

this way pay corrupt police officers many times over to remain and work in the country” (Ncube 2015).

Lack of numbers

There is no official data on the number of Malawians living in South Africa, migration experts say. The lack of accurate numbers applies to immigrants from other countries as well. The 2011 Census found about 3.3-percent of the 51.7-million population were non-South African citizens. However, there is no breakdown on neither nationalities nor documented and undocumented migrants.

No one knows how many international migrants are in South Africa, how long they have been there, how long they stay, or what they do while they are in the country.
(Landau & Segatti 2009, pp 5)

Anecdotal evidence shows that Malawians form a considerable proportion of undocumented migrants in South Africa. First is the number of Malawians affected by the xenophobic attacks. In the latest spate of violence, 3,526 Malawians were victimised and seven lost their lives (Banda 2015). Second, Malawian immigrants were in the top four countries of origin for asylum applicants in 2007 (Landau & Segatti 2009, pp. 9). Lastly, Malawians form a high proportion of detainees at Lindela Repatriation Centre. Between 2009 and 2010 researchers from the African Centre for Migration and Society, then known as Forced Migration Studies Programme, conducted a study on conditions at the Lindela Repatriation Centre, where illegal migrants are detained while awaiting repatriation (Amit 2010). During the study, the researchers found migrants from Malawi and DRC topped the list at 14% for each country.

However, the deportation figures cannot be used to estimate the proportion of Malawians among undocumented migrants living in South Africa. Crush and Williams (2001, pp. 12) suggest that some nationalities are “cheap and easy targets for the police and are vulnerable to arrest and mass deportation.” “It would be foolish to assume that those arrested form a representative sample” (Brunk quoted in Crush and Williams 2001, pp. 13). Neither can the xenophobic and asylum numbers be generalised.

METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic Approach

The research project adopted an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research, which involves participant observation, and informal and key informant interviewing, brings out real life stories (Okamura 2009). Writing about ethnography, anthropologist Brian Hoey (2015) from Marshall University in the United States of America (USA) agrees the approach allows for “a detailed description of everyday life and practice.” An ethnographic approach allowed me to combine my observations during several bus trips and information from key informants to tell the story of undocumented migrants’ journeys between Blantyre and

Johannesburg. I used observations, which I made on eight bus journeys taken between Blantyre and Johannesburg since 2008, to choose suitable interviewees. I also used my observations to come up with right questions for the interviewees. An ethnographic approach allowed interviews specifically tailored “to the knowledge and experience of the interviewee” (Clifford n.d).

I used the most common language in Malawi, Chichewa, when interviewing the migrants and other key informants. During the bus trips I picked terms which are used to describe certain documents and activities and that helped me to pose questions in a language that the interviewees were familiar with. For instance, I observed that the bus hosts refer to emergency travel documents as ‘papers’. So when I interviewed some of the respondents I used ‘paper’ instead of emergency travel document. As Okamura (2009) put it, “[t]he ability to carry on conversations in the local vernacular obviously enhances the ethnographer’s relationships with the people and enables him or her to engage in participant observation most effectively.”

Apart from the migrants, I interviewed government authorities, bus drivers and their assistants. Bus drivers and their assistants are major players in migration as they, at times, negotiate with officers on behalf of undocumented migrants. I approached immigration and embassy officials for the four countries that form part of the journey. Some responded with information on time while others did not. At the Mozambican High Commission they said the responsible officer did not provide a response despite promising to do so. The personal assistant to the Zimbabwean Ambassador could not provide information on record. I was unable to get information from South Africa’s Department of Home Affairs. Intercape, the bus service that I have used for most of my trips, refused to comment.

I told the interviewees the purpose of the research. To create rapport with the key respondents I started with “questions which most immigrants do not mind answering” (*ibid.* pp 31). I usually started with the question, when did you come to South Africa? And followed with, why did you move to the country? I asked the migrants, host and bus driver issues that I had observed during the bus trips to determine if my observations were correct.

Some officers were interviewed telephonically and via email. I recorded the interviews except in circumstances where the sources refused to be recorded. I took notes of the conversations, environment and body-language to enrich the story. The success of this project, like with any good journalism work, largely depended on the quality of the interviews (Steele 2003). I limited my research area to Johannesburg for feasibility.

Longform Journalism

A longform is defined as “a lengthy, relaxed, deeply-reported non-fiction” by David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker* (Sharp 2013). Longform journalism is not only defined by the length of the story but also by the depth of reporting (Tenore 2012). I have produced a story of about 12,000 words using the information I gathered from my observations and

interviews with key informants. I used a bus trip as a vehicle to tell the stories. I have then weaved in personal narratives into the bus trip.

Longform can also be described as narrative journalism, a combination of good story-telling and journalism (Xue 2014). Narrative journalism allows for individual voices to be heard instead of relying on the official group voices. Narrative is remarkably well-suited to transforming tedious topics by offering revealing moments in the lives of people involved and affected (Kramer in Nieman Reports 2002).

Good quality longform journalism requires in-depth understanding of the topic, and quality information from the sources. Qualitative interviewing enabled me to collect detailed information about how migrants understand and explain their journeys.

Ethical Considerations

Since most of the issues I have covered are illegal activities I have concealed the identities and details of some of the interviewees.

Findings

The findings of this research project are presented in a longform story titled, ‘Bus Trip to *Joni*’. This project found that even first time travellers had to pay bribes at the borders. Instead of turning back migrants who did not have either a travel allowance or receipt from authorised dealers, officers asked for bribes and let them pass. The bribes were usually R50 for each border. The migrants either negotiated directly with the officers or were assisted by middlemen, bus hosts or drivers. This project found that there are some bus services where passengers pay double their bus fare. Half of the money is spent on bribes for border officials and the bus staff. The undocumented migrants, when going back to Malawi, either jumped the border or presented their passports to officers through the bus hosts. But either way, they had to pay bribes. Those that jumped the border, particularly at Beitbridge, paid officers whom they met as they walked across the border. Those that sent their documents to the immigration desks through bus hosts were asked to pay the bribes to speed up the processes. Out of fear of facing the officer and delaying fellow passengers, the migrants obliged and paid the bribes. Some migrants, just before returning to Malawi, reported to the police as if they lost their passports. They then used the police report to obtain emergency travel documents from the Malawi Consulate, which they used on the return trip. But it appears border officials were aware of this deceit and still demanded bribes to assist such migrants. The migrants paid bribes at all the borders including in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Returning to South Africa was difficult for migrants who were declared undesirable persons. This research found migrants that managed to return before the expiry of their ban. Some migrants, upon returning to Malawi, changed their identities and obtained new passports. That was possible for two reasons. One, Malawi did not have a national identity system for a long time. The country has just embarked on a project to start issuing identity documents. So when one wants to obtain a passport, the applicant has to produce proof that she or he is a

citizen in a form of a letter from her or his traditional leaders, stamped by a district commissioner and certified. Secondly, until 2010, applicants did not need to provide biometric details for their passports. With these two loopholes it was easy to take on a new name, obtain a new passport and return to South Africa. A migrant would simply enter South Africa as a new visitor. Since February 2010, Malawians provide fingerprints to get passports, which makes it difficult for holders of the new passport to change their identities.

CONCLUSION

What started as a travel story ended up as an exposé on the corruption taking place along the borders between Malawi and South Africa. The project exposed the challenges that undocumented migrants from Malawi face on their journeys to South Africa. The South African government banned recruitment of low skilled labour in 1988 and has tightened its laws to punish visitors who overstay their visas. This research found this did not stop the migration neither do other activities such as xenophobia and deportations. Migrants have just become shrewder in their ways. And they are mostly assisted by corrupt officials and opportunistic bus drivers and assistants.

During the research I found that some undocumented migrants use smugglers and uncharted routes, which are dangerous than the bus trips. But this project did not look at that category as it was beyond the scope. This project found migrants are willing to bend rules and laws to gain economic freedom in South Africa. Measures like the demand for a travel allowance, work permits and bans on migrants who overstay their visas seem to achieve little in controlling the migration. It remains to be seen if the efforts by the Malawi government to introduce a new passport and national identity cards will yield much in reducing undocumented migration. The extent to which the migrants are willing to bend the law and pay for their way shows the desperation in them to leave their country in search for a better life in South Africa.

Most available literature on Malawian migrants is limited to the organised contract work dispensation when Malawi had agreements with South Africa to provide workers to the mining industry. Malawian migrants have also been passively covered in some research looking at regional migration issues. This is the first project focusing on how Malawian migrants travel by bus between the two countries, beating the immigration laws. The story allows migrants' voices to be heard. The major challenge on the project was to identify and convince the migrants and bus drivers to open up and share their personal stories. This method document is an accompanying scholarly essay providing the theoretical framework and explaining the methodology. The essay also briefly explains the major findings.

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