“We Are Not Welcome”

The Life and Experiences of Female Migrants in Cape Town

Karin Gustafson

Supervisor: Shahram Khosravi
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my informants in Cape Town who so generously and open-hearted shared their private thoughts and experiences. A special thanks goes to all the staff at Whole World Women Association whom without I had never been able to do this fieldwork. You all provided me with support in the field and privately.

I will be forever grateful.

I want to thank my supervisor, Shahram Khosravi, for believing in my project from the start and for giving me invaluable support and advice. I also want to thank my family, closest friends and fellow students, who have believed in me and given me the strength to keep up the work. Without your support this thesis could not have been written.

You all have my endless gratitude.
Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the life of female migrants in Cape Town. The thesis is based on material gathered through informal conversations, semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted among female migrants in Cape Town.

South Africa is today the strongest economy in the Southern African region which attracts people from other poorer African countries. They migrate to South Africa for a chance to a better life or an opportunity to support themselves and their families. However, South Africa’s restrictive immigration policies make it difficult for many migrants to obtain the right documents and be able to ‘legally’ cross the South African border. Even if migrants get an asylum-seekers permit they are not allowed to legally work in the country. They are included and excluded at the same time. The constant ‘criminalization’ of migrants´ acts makes it hard for migrants to access any human rights and protection in general, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

More and more women are crossing the borders to South Africa to get work and physical security as a part of the global ‘feminization’ of migration. Women’s movement therefore questions the picture of the man as the sole breadwinner. Even though this is the reality women are excluded from the discourse about migration and existing immigration policies in South Africa. Female migrants are not acknowledged as important actors and are even more vulnerable in the forced and marginalized position of ‘illegality’, then male migrants.

This study explores the female migrants’ own experiences of struggles like getting documented, work, secure housing and being exposed to xenophobia. The women have also developed different strategies to handle these difficulties. This thesis criticizes the ‘victimization’ of female migrants, which ascribes them with powerlessness and being without agency, and shows that they are active in seeking solutions and creating strategies to increase their scope of action.

Key Words: Migration, Female migrants, Southern Africa, South African immigration policy
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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and aims

The purpose with this study is to explore how female migrants experienced their own life and situation in Cape Town. During my three months of fieldwork in Cape Town I focused on female migrants from other poorer African countries with asylum seekers permit or a refugee status. I wanted to find out why did the women migrate to South Africa? What expectations did they have before arrival? How did they create any kind of social security? How did they experience meeting the South African authorities and xenophobia? What did they struggle with and what were their solutions or strategies to tackle difficult situations? What did they think could differ between the situation for a female migrant and a male migrant?

I reacted to that most of the research in the field of migration deals with migration from poorer countries in the south to richer countries in the north. My aim is to give more focus to migration between developing countries in the south, and that is one of the main reasons why I choose to do my study in Cape Town. Women are often invisible in the debate about migration in South Africa. The reality is though, that more and more women are crossing the South African border. My aim is therefore also to be able to increase the awareness about female migrant’s life and situation in Cape Town through this thesis.

1.2 Disposition

This thesis is divided into three parts. The first part is the introduction that aims to give the reader an insight to the context of my fieldwork. In this part I try to explain what I wanted to do, what I did and which methods I used. I also give a background with previous research and theoretical points I see as relevant to my field of research.

The second part focuses on the empirical material I gathered during my fieldwork. This material is structured into seven different chapters based on the main patterns and themes that I found in my informants stories and experiences (see Table of contents). Every chapter contains examples and an analysis based on my understanding and interpretation of my ethnographical material.
Finally, as the third and last part, is the discussion and conclusion. In this part I try to summarize the main points of my thesis and engage in further analysis of the ethnographical material.

1.3 The field

My interest for the area of migration and especially the connection to human rights has been growing more and more since I started studying social anthropology. I got introduced to the non-governmental organization (NGO) Whole World Women Association (WWWA) when I was doing an internship in Cape Town during the year of 2009. WWWA works mainly with providing support to female migrants in the region. After meeting with Mary Tal, the director, my interest for the female perspective of migration grew stronger. After continuous contact with Mary I asked if she and WWWA would like to cooperate with me during my fieldwork in Cape Town, and fortunately she said yes. I will now go more into detail about what WWWA does and them as an organization.

1.3.1 Whole World Women Association

I arrived at WWWA´s office in Community House during my first week in Cape Town. Community House contains offices for many different NGOs and organizations. It is placed in Salt River, just about a 20 minutes’ walk from Observatory where I stayed. Salt River is a very lively central area in Cape Town. The streets are full of small shops mixed with kiosks and local restaurants. WWWA´s office space basically consists of two small rooms. First you enter a rectangular room and in the end of that is the door in to Mary´s office. The longer outer wall has several windows that bring in a lot of light. Underneath the windows run tables all along the wall that provide space for two computers and the staff to sit and work. Even though the office is small it gives a warm and welcoming feeling. One of the short walls is painted in a soft light purple color and the other long wall in a lion yellow color. There are posters everywhere containing information about different human rights issues, which makes the wall-space feel well used.
WWW A was registered as a non-governmental organization in 2007 on the initiative of Mary Tal who has been the director and leader of the organization since then. Mary came to South Africa about ten years ago from Cameroon. In Cameroon she had graduated in law and also had the time to practice her knowledge. After her arrival in Cape Town Mary struggled a lot and she has firsthand experience of many of the difficulties female migrants meet when they arrive. Finally she met someone that gave her a helping hand and she described that situation as something that inspired her to help other women in similar situations. Mary wanted to create a space for women in need for assistance.

WWW A started out with a support group for women, but have grown and expanded their activities a lot since then. Today WWW A employs eight staff members including Mary. They are all from different countries around the African continent like Cameroon, Congo DRC, Malawi, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Together they create different teams that go out into the field. They go to, for example, the Department of Home Affairs and different refugee centers. The main point with these field visits is to meet migrants and be able to give them information about WWW A and their different workshops. Some of the workshops are open to both men and women, for example one regarding HIV/AIDS awareness. Then there are other skill workshops that are directed directly to women. The purpose with the skill workshops are to give the women tools to be able to create working opportunities for themselves and it can be training in usage of, for example, sewing machines or computers. I had the opportunity to attend a HIV/AIDS Awareness and Management Workshop with both male and female participants. It gave me a chance to get to know female migrants a little bit better and to be able to observe the interaction between the participants. During the workshop there was a lot of laughter and curious questions about sexual realtions. More people came than expected and had to sit on extra chairs or on the floor, which shows the obvious need for these things. The response from the participants afterwards was very positive, even though it was hot and crowded.

All WWW A´s activities are for free and they want to be able to keep it like that, since the whole purpose is to help those who have no recourses of their own. But it is impossible without any funding from outside donors or the state. When I asked Mary about the future she said:

*The future is quite scary for me now. (...) In as much what we do is very vital to the community, we cannot exist without no funding, that is the most delicate place where.*
we are now. (...). There are times now when more peoples’ needs are becoming bigger, and the more the recourses diminish.

Mary expressed her concerns for the sustainability of WWWA. The more she talked about it the more she raised her voice and talked with big hand movements. To me it is clear that she is worried and feels very passionate about these issues.

What we are looking at is to have a place where people can be directed from the moment they arrive, you know that this is the kind of action you can take to protect yourself to be not raped and be assisted with papers, food or somewhere to stay.

Thanks to my cooperation with WWWA and that I was accepted as a part of the team I got an entrance to the field. With them I gained access to places where I otherwise would not have been able to go and I was able to meet people relevant for my research.

1.4 Method

1.4.1 My role as a researcher

Since I had spent a longer time in Cape Town during 2009 I had already experienced the deep rooted segregation based on skin color present in South Africa. This is a legacy from the apartheid regime that wanted to keep blacks and whites separated. In Cape Town, for example, it is normal to talk about someone as black, colored or white. The segregation is still present in Cape Town since the majority of the black population lives in the poorer suburbs and townships, and the whites, who are a minority of the entire population, usually lives in more expensive neighborhoods and the central parts of the city. To be white, for example, is therefore often equal with being rich and well off. I was prepared for that my skin color could affect interaction in different situations. It was still trying to often be the only white person in the field, for example inside the Home Affairs, always sticking out. Seeing that there were always new people in the field I kept sticking out. During the workshops it was easier since I had several days in a row to interact with the participants. Some people seemed curious about my presence and others did not seem to care at all. The hard part was when some people
seemed bothered or annoyed. I still do not know though how much of my own thoughts, fears and feelings effected my interpretations of the look that they gave me. Once again I do think that my cooperation with WWWA improved my chances of being accepted. Since all the staff members themselves are migrants I also think that the migrants I met became less suspicious towards me when they could see us together. This has also made me wonder how or if my presence effected WWWA’s work. At times a lot of focus was put on me and I wonder how that affected the actual work and intake of the information we were there to give.

The staff and people in the field were also curious of me and my opinions on different things. But I had to think about how I phrased some of my thoughts and opinions since some subjects can be a bit sensitive. For example I had learned the last time I was there that it can be quite tricky to discuss religion since religion was an important element to most of the South Africans and other Africans that I met. And a lot of them questioned why I do not believe in God. In previous discussions on the subject I have noticed that people can become a bit more reserved towards me after finding out that I am not religious, so this time I was very cautious about what I said about my belief.

1.4.2 Participant observation and informal conversations

It turned out quite quickly that I would have to use several different methods depending on the variations between the different situations I would enter and the people I would meet. Through participant observation, informal conversations, interviews, ‘appointment anthropology’ (see Luhrmann 1996), different media and publications I got both a general overview and personal stories of the situation for female migrants in Cape Town.

Since I was included as a part of the team during my cooperation with WWWA participant observation and informal conversations were the best suited methods. To be able to meet migrants I followed the staff in their daily work to Home Affairs and to different refugee centers. To not only observe, but also participate in the actual work in the field, and be seen as a staff member of WWWA, made it easier for me to be accepted and engage in conversations with migrants. If I felt that a person was not bothered by us talking to him or her, I tried to take the opportunity to ask more questions relevant to my research. These conversations often ended up with us throwing questions back and forth, since they often also wanted to know about me and my stay in Cape Town. Even though being a part of the team and getting this
access have been invaluable to me, being a representative of WWWA could at times also feel a bit restricting. I could not do anything that could risk hurting their name or reflect badly on them. For example, I wanted to take pictures from inside Home Affairs, but when I asked for permission the officials started to question me and my presence there instead. I then decided to drop my request, since I did not want to risk that the officials would get suspicious about WWWA´s intentions. I also do not know how the migrant´s answers to my questions were influenced by them seeing me as a member of WWWA.

Even though the focus of my study is on female migrants I tried to talk to both women and men, since I also wanted a chance to get a man´s point of view of a female migrant´s situation. I did not feel comfortable to pull out my notebook in front of the people I was talking to, since I was afraid that it would make them feel uneasy and more hesitant to talk to me. Instead I tried to sneak away to take notes during the time in the field. Otherwise I waited until we were back in the office or at home later at night.

My daily conversations with the staff of WWWA, both in the field and at the office, became an important resource of information and gave me a better insight to the situation of migrants and especially female migrants. They all have a lot of experiences and knowledge from working in the field for many years and on top of that their own personal experiences from being migrants in Cape Town. In the office I sometimes throw thoughts and opinions out into the conversation to get their direct responses and spontaneous opinions. Besides my informal conversations with the staff I also took opportunities, when they arose, to talk to friends and people around. All these conversations with a lot of different people have provided me with facts, opinions and thoughts about the general situation for female migrants residing in Cape Town.

At several occasions it turned out that a friend or just a person around, I had started talking to, knew a female migrant that they thought I should talk to. These tips were very valuable to me, especially since Mary and the staff at WWWA had warned me that asking someone about their legal status could be seen as a very offensive question. Some of these referrals resulted in me being able to do an interview.

When I did not spend time with WWWA, at the office or in the field, I searched online for relevant research, documents and publications. I also collected relevant material like magazines, brochures and booklets when I had the chance.
1.4.3 Interviews

Finally I was able to conduct ten semi-structured interviews. In these cases I and the interviewee had been in contact at least once before and decided on a time to meet for a planned interview, so called ‘appointment anthropology’ (see Luhrmann 1996). In contrast to an informal conversation I asked questions and the informants told me their stories and life experiences. I met most of the female migrants that became my informants through WWWA in one of their bigger workshops. One of the staff members introduced me and my research to the women and told them that I would like to talk to them if they wanted to. Since the workshop went on for three days I got a lot of time to sit and talk to the women during breaks and lunchtime. I did not want to pressure anyone, so I did not mention my desire to interview them until the last day when I knew them all a little bit better. When I brought it up and asked them to think about it most of them said yes directly and wanted to give me their contact-details. During the following weeks I met with them separately at Community House.

Except for the women that I met through WWWA I also got two contacts, one female migrant and one male migrant, through a friend. I also interviewed Mary, the director of WWWA, and a representative for Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), Vincent Williams. Since SAMP had done a big study among female migrants in South Africa, about four years ago, it felt relevant to meet with Vincent and get his perspective.

In the beginning I had a problem with finding a good place to conduct the interviews. I knew that I would not be able to ask some of the personal questions I wanted to ask in the presence of other people, so cafés and other public places were out of the question. Since we could not be in the informants’ homes, depending on the sometimes insecure areas they lived in or the presence of other family members, I ended up doing two of them in my own house. It was easier at Community House since I could book a little room on the second floor were we could sit and talk with no interruptions.

Since some of the questions I wanted to ask could be sensitive I made sure that they knew about the confidentiality measures I would take to protect their identity. I also asked if they were comfortable with me using a recorder. To my satisfaction none of the women minded me using the recorder which made it easier for me to concentrate on their stories and it has also made it more possible for me to quote them correctly. I have used a lot of quotes in this thesis because I want to use the women’s own words. For the same reason I have not changed the wording, even if some of the quotes do not have the right grammar. To protect the identity of the informants I have changed all their names and the different staff member of WWWA
will also only be mentioned as ‘one of the staff members’ or my ‘college’. Except for Mary, the director, who wanted to be called by her own name. When it has been necessary I have also changed smaller details in their stories to make them unrecognizable, but without affecting the meaning of the information.

I choose to use the word ‘migrant’ when I talk about my informants for two reasons. Firstly, because ‘migrant’ was the word used by both my informants and other people in the context of my fieldwork. So, by using ‘migrant’ I’m trying to get closer to my informants’ own perspective, which is called an ‘emic’ perspective (Hylland Eriksen 2000: 38). Secondly, since no one of them had applied for permanent residence or had any intention to stay in South Africa permanently by the time I met them. The word ‘migrate’ refers to periodical moves from one place, country or region to another and the word ‘immigrate’ is defined as: “to enter and usually become established; especially to come into a country of which one is not a native for permanent residence”¹. The words ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ are sometimes used without being defined as having two different meanings, which can be confusing. In the next section, named Background, when I refer to other literature and references I have used the words the original source is using.

I had my research-questions written down in front of me, but except from that I wanted to hear their stories and what was important to them. I usually started by asking them to tell me about why they migrated and what picture they had of South Africa before they came. I always asked about their social networks both in their home countries and in South Africa. What did they struggle with? What were their solutions or strategies to tackle difficult situations? I also asked them to mention if there were any positive outcomes from migrating to South Africa. If they had not already brought it up themselves I also asked what they thought could differ between the situation for a female migrant and a male migrant.

Several of the women told me that it felt important to them to be able to talk to me, almost as they took pride in being a part of my study. One woman also told me that she was very bored just sitting around the house, when she did not have a job, so this was an opportunity for her to get out and do something new. Another reason could also have been that someone else was interested in them and their stories, which probably is the case for many informants.

¹ Britannica Online Encyclopedia. Accessed 2011-03-31
http://www04.sub.su.se:2150/bps/dictionary?query=immigration
http://www04.sub.su.se:2150/bps/dictionary?query=migration
1.5 Background

South Africa is today the strongest economy in the Southern African region which attracts people from poorer countries. They migrate to South Africa for a chance to a better life or an opportunity to support themselves and their families, if there is any (Crush and Ramachandran 2009; Nyandoro 2011). However, there are considerable flaws in the South African migration system and they do not have the proper resources to handle the growing flows of migrants (Crush and Ramachandran 2009). In this section I will give the background to the main issues that will be discussed throughout this thesis. These descriptions will hopefully help the reader to better understand the context where the following empirical material has been collected.

1.5.1 Post-apartheid migration policy-making

During the apartheid regime migration was controlled by racial selection and for most of the time only ‘whites’ were allowed to immigrate. The majority of the official migration from neighboring African countries came as contract labor to the mines, and was allowed because of their shortage in workers (Crush and Dodson 2006a:437-40; Nyandoro 2011:114). Despite strict laws, ‘porous’ borders and lack of enforcement made it possible for people from other African countries to enter South Africa. In 1980 there was an ‘upsurge’ in undocumented migration to South Africa (ibid: 443). According to Dodson (2001a:74) the immigration policy under apartheid was also sexist and directly discriminating against women. Even though the overt gender discrimination was later taken out from the 1991 Aliens Control Act, like the usage of ‘he’ when talking about migrants, the gender discrimination continued after the end of apartheid, according to Dodson.

After the official ending of apartheid and South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994, the country started the process to build a new democratic nation. New policies were drawn up to create a non-racial and inclusive national identity. All South African citizens should now have equal rights to the nation’s resources (Peberdy 2001:15-16). While South Africa was transforming into a democracy there were expectations for a more open and nondiscriminatory immigration policy, but there would be disappointment (Dodson 2001a:74). Instead of developing a new immigration policy the South African government chose to keep in force the 1991 Aliens Control Act, which was a remain from the apartheid
era. The Act was amended in 1995, but without any radical transformations of policy. Instead changes were made to regulations and legislative amendments to be able to better control what kind of migrants entered South Africa. The barriers to enter the country were raised and accompanied with a negative attitude towards non-South Africans from other parts of Africa (Dodson 2001b:2).

Administrative methods were used to keep unwanted migrants on the outside. All applications for immigration or temporary permits, for example work permits, had to be made from outside South African borders. The applicant had to be able to show a bank statement and other forms of documentation, which became a problem for a lot of people in the poorer neighboring countries. The new system with high nonrefundable fees was also more likely to create barriers for African migrants then for migrants from example Europe (Peberdy 2001:17-18). But these were not the only practical methods that were used to keep non-South Africans out. The police and the military were assigned to enforce the new regulations around the country and control the borders. The aggressive policing and use of methods were not too different from the old apartheid state (Klaaren & Ramji 2001:36-38). ‘Massive’ sums of money were poured at different operations to focus on detention and deportation, which resulted in doubling the amount of deported migrants from 1994 until 2000 (Crush & Dodson 2006a:446). There were numerous reports of violation of human rights during arrest and detention of both undocumented migrants and refugees (Klaaren & Ramji 2001). Roadblocks were set up and there was an increase in the number of border-patrols that controlled parts of the South African border and also part of the electrical fence (ibid:41). All together there has been substantial effort made to control and discourage all kinds of migration to South Africa, both legal and irregular, during the first decade of democracy (Peberdy 2001; Klaaren & Ramji 2001).

1.5.2 ‘Otherness’ and ‘illegality’

It was not only regulations and the implementation that showed the South African government´s attitude toward migrants, but also the extensive exclusionary language that was being used (Dodson 2001b:2; Peberdy 2001:23-24). Migrants, specifically from Africa, were seen by the South African state as a ‘threat’ to their citizens. Non-South Africans would take citizens´ jobs, use the citizens´ social services and bring diseases and crime into the country
Words like “illegal aliens” and “unwanted immigrants” were frequently used in the 1991 Aliens Control Act. They also did not make any clear difference between immigrants and migrants since they were all seen as “aliens” that had planned to spend the rest of their lives in South Africa (Peberdy 2001:23-34).

This rhetoric where the ‘other’, the foreigner, is painted out to be a threat to the ‘self’, the state and its citizens, is a common method used to justify harder control measures and treatment of migrants as a security threat in many countries in the EU for example, according to Bigo (2011:298). The same rhetorical method has been used in the US against Mexican and South American migrants (Délanos & Serrano 2011: 272-273) and in many other countries (Douglas 1966).

Even though the ‘othering’ was directed towards migrants in general (Crush and Dodson 2006a:443), there was a growing focus on catching undocumented migrants in particular (Klaaren and Ramji 2001). Different operations focused on areas with predominantly black migrants as residents to check their papers and documents. If they did not have the right documentations they were seen as doing something illegal and against the law and were there for ‘criminals’ in the eyes of the South African state (ibid:36). Reports from the Human Rights Watch (1998a:23-37) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (1999a:21-22) show in fact that it was not uncommon that the police themselves by confiscating or destroying legal documents created ‘illegal’ migrants and a reason for arrest. A lot of the people arrested were also sent to the deportation center without having the chance to prove their legitimate status. Endless lines and the inefficiency at the Department of Home Affairs also made it sometimes impossible for migrants to obtain the right documents. Together the different departments, like the police and the Department of Home Affairs, are producing ‘illegality’, according to Klaaren and Ramji (2001:44-45). The unlawful detentions and abuse was also proved to be a lucrative business to officials working in the police or the Department of Home Affairs. According to SAHRC (1999b:71) corruption and bribery was common and detainees could for example be forced to pay to be released. Bribery is still common and used by officials and border guards as a source of income in both South Africa (Griffin 2011:30) and other places (Khosravi 2010b).

The image of the ‘illegal’ and ‘criminal’ migrant was not only about them being migrants, but also about them being featured as black. This also had direct consequences for black South African citizens that had been fighting discrimination on the bases of their skin color for decades. Not only migrants with the right documentation were approached and detained, but also black South African citizens (SAHRC 1999:9, 27). One study made by Human
Rights Watch (1998b) showed that a ‘large’ number of the arrested and detainees were South African citizens or had a legal status.

The police and other officials could easily encourage the public to help in their anti-immigration campaign, according to Klaaren & Ramji (2001:44). One example is when the Human Sciences Research Council was about to determent how many undocumented migrants there were in the country. They asked South African civilians to estimate how many undocumented migrants that lived in their neighborhood. This method did not only create ‘absurd’ results, but it also, together with all the other methods, fired a growing xenophobia (Crush & Dodson 2006a:443). Délano and Serrano (2011: 272-273) also mean that the more a state tighten their border control with the argument that it is to keep the nation ‘safe’ the risk of intolerance within the state’s population and discrimination against migrants will just increase. I will go more into xenophobia and its effects in a specific section below.

An introspective nation-building process and no enthusiasm for immigration policy resulted in a continuance of the hostile apartheid-era when it came to immigration policy. This in turn resulted in a decline in both formal migration and immigration during the first decade after 1994 according to Peberdy (2001). Even though it was a shortage of skilled workers the South African bureaucracy kept defending the high rate of denials for work permits with the argument that migrants were taking South Africans’ jobs (Crush & Dodson 2006a:441-443). Paradoxically these high and tough restrictions maybe instead increased the amount of people crossing the border without legal documents, after being refused a visa or not even getting the chance to apply (Peberdy 2001:18). In the case of the US-Mexican border, harder border controls has been claimed by the US state to also make it safer for the migrants crossing the border, which is not the result in reality according to Délano and Serrano (2011:263). Instead the US state has failed to deter undocumented migration, but forced them to reorganize into sometimes insecure routes. Délano and Serrano (ibid:271) states: “Clearly tighter enforcement has entailed negative implications for the way in which these flows organize and coordinate their movement”. To make migration into something ‘illegal’ and punishable has become central to many states’ policies and their ‘governing through crime’, according to Simon (2007).
1.5.3 Developing a new immigration policy

After both international and national critic (Crush & McDonald 2001), the first step towards a change in the discourse about immigration and migration policy came with the publication of a Green Paper on International Migration in 1997, according to Dodson (2001b:1). The Green Paper was followed by a White Paper released in 1999. When the Bill based on these two papers were to pass through the government the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, working for the Department of Home Affairs, demanded another extended public hearing. The papers were met with criticism from different parties, like other government departments, different human rights organizations and members of the public. The critic was mainly about the fact that there were no real changes and they still had a strong anti-immigration tone and focused on strategies for control, according to Dodson (2001b:6, 13). An event that did show a change in attitude in the new post-apartheid government was the passage of a new Refugee Act in 1998. By becoming a signatory to the United Nations refugee convention they now had to be committed to the protection of refugees, and in practice that meant allowing people to seek asylum and refugee status (Crush & McDonald 2001:10).

In 2002 a new Immigration Act was presented, but because of further amendments it was not properly implemented until 2005. The new Immigration Act is the one still in use today. The South African government stated that this new act would change the earlier anti-immigration policy and focus on economic growth and therefore attract needed and skilled foreigners. From only seeing migrants as a threat they now admitted to the need for skilled migration, but only as it promoted economical growth without taking away jobs from South Africans (Crush & Dodson 2006a:441-442). The South African embassy in Sweden\(^2\) states:

\[\text{In the first instance the country has a vast reserve of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who are entitled to employment opportunities and to an economically viable lifestyle for themselves and their families. For this reason no one in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories will normally be accepted as an immigrant worker.}\]

A long list of different kinds of temporary residence permits was established to be able to easier attract the ‘needed’ foreigners and keep out the ‘un-needed’ (Crush & Dodson 2006a:442). In the Immigration Act 2002 it says that “A temporary residence permit is to be

issued on condition that the holder is not or does not become a prohibited or an undesirable person”. The problem is that with most of these permits, like visitors permit, study permit or asylum seekers permit, you are not allowed to work anyway. And to meet the high skill-requirement to actually get one of the work permits exclude a majority of the people crossing South Africa’s borders from other African countries for a chance to make a legal living. Mantu (2011:29, 49) argues that a heightened focus on skilled labor migration provide receiving states with a control mechanism where preconditions is making distinctions between those who are allowed to come in and those who are denied to move across their borders easier.

These conditions force a lot of the migrants from the Southern African region to become asylum seekers or undocumented without any legal right to work (Crush & Dodson 2006b; Klaaren & Ramji 2001). Migrants’ ‘illegality’ makes them easy to exploit as cheap labor under sometimes inhuman conditions, since they have no way to seek legal help (De Genova 2002; Griffin 2011:29). Gabriel (2011:151) argues: “This categorical organization of free and unfree labour is accompanied by unequal access to rights and protections.” Criticisms have also been directed towards the lack in the Act of any indication that foreign employees should be employed at the same standards and get the same rights and protection as South African citizens (Crush & Dodson 2006b:13). Since different kinds of permits and South African citizenship are so difficult to obtain, the result is that a lot of non-South Africans are living in the country without any formal citizenship rights. This leads to unavailability of social services like health and housing for non-South Africans (Klaaren & Ramji 2001:39). This shows the paradoxical situation for so many migrants around the world who have to be citizens to access their universal human rights (Khosravi 2010b:121).

One positive effect with the short-term visitor’s permits is that you are allowed to do some kind of business in South Africa, during your three months stay. This has made it easier for foreigners to do business instead when they cannot be employed. Trading has been the biggest growing entrance cause since 1994, especially for women from neighboring countries like Zimbabwe. Migrants bring products from their home countries to sell or they buy things in South Africa that they can sell back home, usually things that are hard to access in their home countries, like some kinds of food and fabrics for example (Crush & Dodson 2006b:5, 15). The underlying reason to this adjustment was that there had been indications that this would be beneficial for South Africa’s trade and economy (Dodson 2001b:9).

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Even though the new Immigration Act promises a new openness and dealing with the skills shortage (Crush & Dodson 2006b:6), the reality shows that it is still difficult to get a permit to enter South Africa (Crush & Dodson 2006a). The new discussion about migration has taken more consideration and acknowledgement to human rights, but this is quite hollow and only something on paper, according to Klaaren and Ramji (2001:1). There are still a lot of changes that has to be made and a clear break with South Africa’s apartheid legacy. Crush and Dodson (2006a:451) states

*Without such reform, another lost decade of dysfunctional immigration policy seems likely to follow, with negative consequences for both human rights and economic development in South Africa and the wider region.*

1.5.4 Growing xenophobia

The slow development of a new immigration policy should be seen in the light of the new nation-building project, according to Peberdy (2001). While the South African government focused on constructing a new inclusive national identity for all citizens, the exclusion of migrants became a powerful tool in creating territorial integrity. The exclusion of people has also been used by states in Europe, for example, in creating nationality and territorial integrity, according to Bigo (2011:302-304). Even if there has been a change in attitude and the South African government today is saying that it is more ‘pro-immigration’ the South African citizens have not changed their views. Hatred towards other Africans have been fed for decades based on incorrect information about the number of migrants and their impact on the country (Crush & Dodson 2006a). Bigo (2011:298-299) talks about ‘government xenophobia’ and how governments are using media and other public means to feed the picture of the migrant as a ‘threat’ to the states security.

Xenophobia and attacks towards migrants is not a new phenomenon in receiving countries around the world. For some time now it has been highlighted in international forums as one of the biggest obstacles to development of the relationship between international migration and human rights. Xenophobia has a direct effect on the vulnerability and safety of migrants and refugees, according to Crush & Ramachandran (2009). They also state (ibid:3) that “In a
broader sense, xenophobia undermines principles of human equality, social justice, and social cohesion”.

In South Africa more and more migrants have become victims of a growing xenophobia during the last decade. The making of non-South Africans as scapegoats for high numbers of unemployment and crime resulted in an outbreak of violent xenophobic attacks in Cape Town in May 2008 (IRIN Africa 2010-04-27). Xenophobic attacks in South Africa resulted in over 60 deaths and a big number of people had to leave and flee from their homes (United Nation 2008:3; McKnight 2008:33-34). Because of the South African government’s unwillingness to admit that they have a huge problem with xenophobia no real measures have been taken to deal with it. A number of both national and international NGOs and human rights organizations started up anti-xenophobia campaigns to change the attitude of the public, but without political will and funding by the state it has been hard. After the extensive attacks during 2008 and the heightened international attention it draw the government could not ignore the problem. But when the immediate crises was over the will to address it started to wane. The results of the work done by different organizations are yet to be seen (Crush & Ramachandran 2009:80-88).

South Africa is not alone. Many countries around the world are lacking the political will and leadership to properly deal with xenophobia. It is easier to blame the migrants themselves for the xenophobia when they do admit that it exists (Crush and Ramachandran 2009:87-89). Migrants themselves are often pointed out to be the scapegoats for many of society’s ills, including violence and insecurity (Bigo 2011:299; Douglas 1966; Khosravi 2010b). Anti-xenophobia laws have to be drawn and there has to be a stronger international coordination and effort to deal with xenophobia, according to Crush and Ramachandran (2009:87-89).

For many migrants the awareness of their own vulnerability and being unsafe creates a life filled with psychological stress and anxiety (Ohlson 2006). There is a clear positive connection between social support and psychological wellbeing, and the ability to handle stressful situations. The family and friends are usually the ones that provide the most important social support and feeling of security (Cohen & Wills 1985). Separation from family and friends are often a result of migration, which can therefore also lead to a loss of social support. To leave family and children behind can be, only in itself, an emotionally stressing factor (Khosravi 2010a).
1.5.5 The lack of a gender perspective

More and more women are crossing the borders into South Africa from neighboring countries because of various social and economical reasons (Dodson 2002). This increase and ‘feminization’ of migration is a general trend in international migration worldwide (Dodson (2001a:85; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2004:5). Globally more women are on the move today than ever before and “fewer families can rely solely on a male breadwinner” (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2004:3). It is clear that a lot of the migrants coming to South Africa are often put in difficult and vulnerable positions. For female migrants there is also another dimension and that is deep going gender discrimination (Dodson 2001a; Dodson 2001b; Crush & Dodson 2006b).

The relationship between gender and migration has hardly been acknowledged at all in the discussions and development of immigration policy since 1994 (Dodson 2001a:73). Since all migration takes place within a social context where gender plays a big role, it is an oversight not to take that in to account when developing immigration policy. For example, men migrate predominantly to get work, while research shows that women migrate for many different reasons. It is often to get work, but also to trade, shop, visit friend or family, according to Crush & Dodson (2006b). Women are being discriminated in both policy language use and practice. A gender neutral language is more gender blind than gender aware in this context. It is important to use gender-specific language for areas that will in fact have different outcomes and effects for men and women, according to Dodson (2001a:81-82).

In spite of both national and international organizations criticism pointing out the lack of a gender perspective, the new Immigration Act fails to deliver. The Act is directed towards a skilled or highly educated male worker with a dependent wife and children, or an unskilled male worker who has left his wife and family behind (Crush & Dodson 2006b:17). The ‘needed’ and ‘skilled’ migration are predominantly in sectors which is dominated by men, for example the mine and construction industry. Women are often discriminated from getting a job with the argument that it would be too heavy for them, according to Dodson (2002). It is also important to acknowledge the cultural context in where a lot of Southern African women are not always allowed or prioritized to get educated or own any kind of resources, according to Dodson (2001b:4-6). Men are therefore more likely to meet the high skills requirements and get a work permit then women.

There have always been more women than men migrating under the spousal and family category. With some of the work permits migrants are allowed to bring spouses and other
close family members. But the reality today is that brought family members are not allowed to work under several of these permits, which yet again discriminate unfairly against women, since they are more likely to enter under the family category then men (Dodson 2001b:3). The focus on the man as the supporter of the family risks both categorizing and creating women as dependent on a man and the contributions that they make and could make are being ignored. In fact, women working abroad are usually more likely to send home half or nearly all of their pay-checks than men, according to Ehrenreich & Hochschild (2004). “These remittances have a significant impact on the lives of children, parents, siblings, and wider networks of kin – as well as on cash-strapped Third World governments” (ibid:7).

One positive change for women and for their independence is the short-term visitor’s permit that gives them an opportunity to do some kind of business, usually in the form of cross-border trade, when they cannot be legally employed. This has become an important source of income for many households in the Southern African region and increasingly practiced by women. Women from neighboring countries cross the South African border with products to sell or to buy commodities that they can bring back home and sell. However, this does not change the fact that they are just allowed to stay in the country for three months at a time and have no right to maintain permanent residency (Crush & Dodson 2006b:5, 15).

Reasons for the increase of female migrants in South Africa could be the closing down of a lot of the mine industries that earlier had been employing many migrant men and the overall difficulties to get any kind of work permit. One consequence to this has been an increase in other forms of migration, particularly by women (Crush & Dodson 2006a). The reduction of work opportunities in a labor migration dominated by men also affects the survival of the rest of their households. The increase in women´s migration to South Africa since the 1990s is closely related to changes in male migration. The increase in women migrating to be able to support the family can partly be explained by the loss of the income from male household members, according to Crush & Dodson (2006b:4). Through the ‘feminization’ of migration gender roles are changed and female migrants becomes transnational breadwinners, which is a general trend in migration patterns and not only specific to Southern Africa (Lan 2003:204; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2004:2-3). Women migrate to work at farms or with domestic service, for example. These labor markets are not likely to provide the women with a chance to a ‘legal’ permit since it is impossible for them to maintain that there is no one in the South African population with the required qualifications. These socio-economic changes together with the overall gender bias therefore forces women to work or migrate without the right legal status, which also increases the risk for exploitation. A woman that end up outside the formal
labor system risks being caught in the sex industry or sexually abused by her employer (Dodson 2002; cf. Luibhéid 2002). For obvious reasons it is hard to know exactly how many undocumented migrants there are in South Africa today, but it is likely that a considerable number of these migrants are women, according to Dodson (2000:40-46).

Another important gender difference is that women who become transnational breadwinners are also still burdened by their duties as mothers and wives to the family back home (Lan 2003:204). Lan’s study looked closer on Filipina migrant domestic workers going overseas to be able to support the family back home. These mothers, working abroad, are often torn between being forced to migrate to support the family financially and having to leave their children and husbands behind. And while physically separated not being able to fulfill the caring and emotionally ideals of motherhood and domesticity (ibid:194). Lan also brings up the complexity in going in between the unpaid and the paid domestic work and the stress the Filipina women feel over not being able to do both at the same time. Lan (ibid:205) argues that “transnational mothers send remittances and gifts to sustain family ties impaired by physical separation, while searching for emotional attachment and moral recognition in their paid mothering work”. Transnational mothers live with the constant struggle between money and love.

It is ironic that migrants are seen as a threat when research shows that they in general are law-abiding, responsible and resourceful, according to Dodson (2001). Women are also entrepreneurial and are less likely to stay long-term. In fact, female cross-border migration has the potential to increase development and economic growth in both South Africa and their home countries, which should encourage the development of a gender-equal immigration policy, according to Dodson (2001:80). Researchers, like anthropologists and sociologists, claim that it is crucial to see gender as one of the key factors in the structure of migration if we are ever to understand it (Mahler and Pessar 2006).
2 Ethnographical material

2.1 The dream about South Africa

My name sounds like flowers

I am from a field full of flowers
beautiful home of flowers
I am the girl who lost her home country
I am the girl who lost

I am the girl who was lost in the forest
I am Flora who hopes to become somebody
Searching for joy happiness and strength
Courage and empowerment in the future

I am from a field full of flowers
colorful lovely and hopeful

Flora Mandudu⁴

When I read or hear about the difficult situation for many migrants in host countries around the world I cannot help but to wonder what kind of life situation they left behind and what they were expecting to find. During my time in Cape Town I got to hear many stories and different reasons for leaving the place the migrants themselves call ‘home’. Something that they all have in common is the hope and expectations that constitutes the dream about a chance for a better life in South Africa.

2.1.1 Why migrate to South Africa?

One of the first interviews I conducted was with Rinaa. She worked as a cleaning lady at one of the restaurants in my neighborhood. A friend of mine used to work there as well and knew most of the staff, including Rinaa. After I had told my friend about my research he suggested we should meet, Rinaa and me. The first time we meet she seemed a little bit shy and gave short answers to my questions, but the more we met the more she opened up and I understood that she was just not used to someone asking questions about her life story.

Rinaa is 28 years old and came to Cape Town from the neighboring country Zimbabwe in 2009. She grew up in a rural area in Zimbabwe. Including herself, they were 12 children in her family. During the war her father had been injured and could not work. They got help from the social welfare to pay for the younger children’s school fees, but besides that they struggled a lot. Rinaa started working at a farm producing green beans as a young girl. When she was 19 she got married and had a daughter. But the marriage was filled with conflicts and after a couple of years they got divorced. Shortly after the divorce her daughter got sick and suddenly passed away.

She now struggled both financially to survive, but also with the pain and sadness of losing her daughter. She moved in to a relative’s house and kept working at the green bean farm. After some time she also tried some other jobs, like making concrete at a building construction site and being a salesperson in Zambia. But at this point the Zimbabwean currency had become so low that the money she got was hardly worth anything at all. Rinaa explained to me that she did not want to give up and so she struggled for a long time in Zimbabwe. At the same time she kept hearing stories about how the South African Rand was much stronger. So, one day she decided to take the chance to go to South Africa and make money to help support her family, especially the children of her deceased sister.

Rinaa felt that she did not have any other choice then to migrate to be able to support her family. The economic and financial reason was one of the most common reasons to migrate among my informants and the migrants I talked to. Especially for migrants from Zimbabwe who all expressed that hopes about being able to make some money and be able to support the family were the primary reason for migration. When I asked Victoria, one of my other informants from Zimbabwe, about why she thinks people migrate to South Africa she answered “why? For business I think, and for finance and for better life, I think.”

Victoria is 35 years old and had been coming back and forth to South Africa to do trading, for a couple of years before she decided, in 2007, to bring her husband and her two children.
Both Victoria and her husband struggled to support the family back in Zimbabwe for many years. Victoria was educated in the area of fashion and was self-employed as a designer and a seamstress. But doing business in Zimbabwe was hard and she decided to try to use her skills and products to do cross-border trading. The actual going back and forth every month was not the hardest part for Victoria. It was when she felt that there was a need for her back home and being left with no choice then being separated from her family for a longer time. Being separated from her children was especially hard. This was another reason for her to move the whole family to South Africa. And since she knew that the school fees was cheaper in South Africa she also wanted to make sure her children got an education.

Another common reason behind the decision to migrate was the issue of security, especially among the women from Congo DRC and Cameroon. One of my informants from Congo DRC, Denise, described the situation in her home town as very insecure. Denise is 31 years old and had been in Cape Town for about two years. She is educated and trained to be a nurse and her husband as a teacher. When I asked her about what made her leave Congo DRC she did not have to think about it and gave me a quick and firm answer:

*The first reason is that there is a war and a lot of trouble there. (...). There is nothing to get, no jobs, there is nothing there. When I finished school I had a job in the hospital there, the public hospital, I worked there three years there before the trouble started there, maybe we worked there at night and at nine or two o’clock the soldiers come and open the doors getting the chance to do the violence to the woman, something like that. We started running, we didn’t know where we were going, things like that. From that time I left that job.*

After years of struggling in a country suffering from conflict and violence they decided to leave, and they first ended up in Zimbabwe. But in Zimbabwe they met a lot of the same struggles and did not feel secure enough. She said:

*When we came there the Zimbabweans came here to South Africa. So we said “hey, let’s follow them”. And they were saying that in South Africa there is a peace, you can live there. That’s why we are here. (...). Like, we had nothing, but they told us that in South Africa there is peace there, that’s what we want, peace. We ran away from Zimbabwe when we were there, there was the same things, no job, just struggling.*
Etienne, another woman from Congo DRC who had been smuggled to Zimbabwe before she came to South Africa also said: “It is not safe for refugees there in Zimbabwe, you see. Now I don’t know if they welcome refugees, but there they say that you can be safe in South Africa, you can have safe the asylum, so.” Etienne is 28 years old and had been in Cape Town for about five months when I met her. She had become a victim of a corrupted legal system in her home country. Through her work she had got in to a situation where her involvement led to her being threatened to her life. After extensive threats and not getting any help from the ‘corrupted’ local police she had no other choice than to leave the country. She looked for protection at church, the only place where she felt safe. One day later she was on her way to Zimbabwe.

I also met a couple of other women who did not only talk about insecurity directly connected to war and conflicts, but also the political instability they meant was behind the insecurity and violence that had made them fear for their life. One woman that I met at the Home Affairs told me that she and her husband had come to seek security in South Africa since they had been sympathizing with the opposing party to the president in their home county Cameroon. She explained that being against the current president is very dangerous so you had to be quiet and not say anything. People she knew had been physically abused or killed for working against the president. She was always afraid that someone would find the political material she had in her possession. She and her husband therefore left Cameroon to escape the violence and get physical security.

The main reasons to migrate for the women I have met have been to get a job, security and a better life. This is consistent with a study published by Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) in 2007 (14-20). The priority reasons, called ‘push factors’, for the women in that study were mainly poverty, political instability and low life quality. The SAMP report, also brought up the women’s expectations about getting a job and with that money and the ability to buy food, school fees and other commodities that would increase their quality of life. These are the same expectations that were expressed by my informants four years later.

Another factor that seems to have had an impact on their choice to migrate to South Africa was the positive information my informants got from other migrants and people in their communities. Horst (2006) also points out that information coming from different social encounters and from other migrants have an important impact on migrants´ hopes and dreams about a chance to a better life elsewhere. Horst did her study among Somalis in refugee camps that dreamt about migrating from South to North. Even though the pre-migration conditions were not identical for the Somali refugees in Kenyan refugee camps and my informants´, they
mention a lot of the same things as reasons to migrate like economic stability, security, peace and education (ibid:149).

When my informants talked about their reasons to migrate and their expectations they used the words ‘I’ and ‘my’ almost consistently. The women who migrated together with or met up with their husbands also talked about the decision-making process as their own or something that they did together. Rinaa saw no other alternative then to migrate to be able to support herself, the children to her deceased sister and other family members, but she only told her twin-sister when she left Zimbabwe. She knew that her older brother and her mother were against her plans of migrating and she was afraid that they would not understand and try to stop her. She called them later when she was already in South Africa and at that point they respected her decision. The same result was found in SAMP’s (2007:20) study where many of the women had decided to migrate even when there was discouragement from other family members. I see this as indicators of independence in the women’s decision-making and contesting the stereotype of the ‘male migrant worker’ and of the woman as always dependent on a man as the breadwinner (Crush and Dodson 2006b: 17). Some scholars (Griffin 2011; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004) argue that women’s movement can also be seen as increasing their independence and scope of action when taking over ‘male’ responsibility. In some cases the actual move away from husbands, fathers and other male relatives is central to a woman’s increased scope of action.

2.1.2 Disappointments

During my first week in Cape Town I got to attend a workshop held in Mowbray Town Hall. It is an old well restored colonial building in an otherwise quite wore down neighborhood. The workshop was held inside one of the big halls. It was a co-operation between WWWA and ODEC (Open Door Education Center). The workshop was basically to get the migrants aware of different ways of getting money through jobs they can create themselves. According to Mary, the director of WWWA, people that come will struggle to get a job and need to be prepared to see opportunities in everything. They can for example recycle material around them and work with their hands. During this workshop we got to make vuvuzelas from Kelp, which is a kind of seaweed. The group was a mix of people from for example Angola, Congo DRC, Cameroon, Malawi and Zimbabwe.
During Mary’s presentation of WWA and their work she also pinpointed something that often comes up when you talk to migrants about their expectations before they migrate. “You hear that there is money in South Africa and you see a chance to improve your life by going there”. Then she asked a rhetorical question and said “have any of you here found it easy to get any of that money?”. The others were all shaking their heads, and Mary continued to say that a lot of people she meet says that if they would have known how the situation was going to be for them, they would never have come.

When I asked Victoria, who came from Zimbabwe with the expectation to be able to create a better life for herself and her family, if she felt that she had a better life in South Africa she said: “For now, for my business is not going well, I think no [she shakes her head]. No it is not better, cause nothing for my business is going on you see, cause all I need is to make money.” The difficulty to get a job and through that money to be able to buy things like food or pay the rent is without a doubt the biggest disappointment to my informants. All of the women I got to interview was unemployed or did not have any income bringing business going on at the time of the interview, except for Rinaa.

Soon after Rinaa’s arrival in Cape Town she got a job to take care of the children of a South African couple, but they did not pay her enough to be able to survive. She struggled a lot to get a job with a descent pay. One day she came to the neighborhood Observatory to look for work in a restaurant she had heard was hiring, but since they did not have anything for her at that moment she got recommended to go and put a note about herself at the local grocery store. The next day the owner of the restaurant, where she now works, called her and wanted to employ her as a cleaning staff. At the restaurant she gets a ‘descent’ pay and they treat her well. Rinaa says that she knows that she has been lucky and that most of the migrants she knows struggle to get this kind of job. With the money she earns she can pay her rent, buy food and other commodities and she is also able to send money home to her family. Even though Rinaa finds other things difficult, like her personal security and being separated from her family, she still gives a more positive and relaxed picture of her stay in South Africa, than most of my other informants. As long as she has a job and money she is ‘ok’, Rinaa says. This example shows how crucial it is to get a job and an income to be able to create ‘a better life’ and stay positive.

Several of the women also express disappointment over not being able to give the financial support that they were hoping for to their families back home. Denise, the woman from Congo DRC, says “there is no money to send back home. The salary my husband can get, but we can’t finish the end of the month. There is no money to send there [home].” The woman
from Cameroon that I met at the Home Affairs told me that her family had helped her by selling some of their land to get money for her plane ticket to South Africa. She now felt like they are disappointed, not with her, but with the situation she is in. She felt stressed and pressured by the fact that she has not been able to get the means she need to both support herself in South Africa and send money to her family back home.

Roseline, a 35 year old woman from Congo DRC, also brought up the difficulty to get documented when she came to South Africa to meet up with her husband. She said:

*It was not what I expected because when you run away from a place of danger into a place where you expect your life to be better off, so when I left my country, I was expecting that I was going in to this land where I would have everything easy, as easy as it could be. Then my first chock was that it wasn’t easy for me to be documented, it took forever.*

Not having their hopes and expectations met about getting a job and money has also had direct effects on finding housing, buying food or pay for school fees, for example. Etienne, one of the women from Congo DRC, says:

*You cannot survive without a job, that is the problem. (…). You can have your papers, but with no money, no job, nowhere to sleep, you see, not fair. You have to strive for everything. (…). I cannot be without stress, every time I’m stressing.*

Mary also confirmed this general feeling of disappointment when she talked about the migrants she meets through WWWA:

*When they arrive here the first thing is the disappointment, the cultural chock. Because it is always different form their place of origin. (…). Then many people go in to depression and after that they are desperate, they want to hold on to anything that they can find.*

The difficulties that follow from not having an income created stress like Etienne and Mary is mentioning. In the following chapters I will go more in to detail about the different struggles my informants have had or are still experiencing.
From hearing story after story about difficulties after arrival in South Africa and the women not being able to say that their lives have become better, I got a general sense of disappointment among my informants. Although, Denise answered my question about her life getting better or not like this:

*South Africa is in peace. That is all I can say, we are in peace. You can be in your house with no food no nothing, but you are safe. That is the very important thing, we can appreciate this, that we are in peace.*

Even though Denise, like most of my informants, expressed a lot of frustration and disappointment over not getting a job this statement got stuck with me. Denise did not regret coming to South Africa with her husband, even though they had to struggle a lot to survive financially. In difference to most of my other informants Denise had given peace and security as her primary reason to migrate, and not to get work, which could be a reason to why she did not feel as much disappointment. It is important to note that even though most of my informants expressed disappointment and could not explicitly say that their lives had become better after migrating, it does not necessarily mean that they regret their choice to migrate.
2.2 Meeting with the authorities

2.2.1 Home Affairs

On the Monday morning, during my second week in Cape Town, when I came in to WWWA‘s office I was asked to go with some of the staff members to Home Affairs. The place that the staff at WWWA and my informants refers to as Home Affairs is Cape Town‘s Refugee Reception Center (RRC). The RRC is managed by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), which is the nearest equivalent to the Swedish Migration Board. I was excited to go there, but at the same time a little bit nervous and did not really know what to expect. We all got a ride with Mary to Home Affairs in the suburb Maitland. On the way there I asked the other staff members what they thought of the neighborhood. They described it as a very busy business area that attracts a lot of people thanks to the jobs all the stores and factories provides. It is mainly a mix between blacks and coloreds who lives in the area. The main street is a big busy street with heavy traffic going strait all the way through to another part of the city called Bellville. Mary dropped us off on this street right outside the big grocery store Shoprigt. When we walked the main street I could not avoid the familiar smell of frying oil oozing out from all the small fish and chips places along the road. We crossed the street and then we could enter the Home Affair´s premises.

We turned into a smaller road that led up to a huge building that looked a bit like a big warehouse. It was a hot day and the sun was burning. People were trying to sit or stand where ever they could find a bit of shade. When we went around the corner of the building people were sitting and waiting on chairs in a sort of an outside room connected to the bigger building and it was good to see that at least some got shelter from the sun under the roof. The WWWA staff explained that people had to wait on the outside until someone from the Home Affair staff would come out and take their papers inside. After that they could be asked to come inside to another waiting hall and sit there until their name would be called. This procedure could take hours and sometimes days, so some people would have to come back.

We went to a gate where the WWWA staff introduced themselves and me. We were let in and taken to a door leading in to the inside waiting halls. When we entered the building a wave of hot and stuffy air hit my face. It felt like walking in to a sauna. The air was thick and

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5 See picture in Appendix – Pictures from the field.
6 The term started out as a racial classification under apartheid for people of mixed ethnic origin, and is still a common term used in Cape Town. Dictionary.com, accessed 2011-05-13.
stuffy and since there was no form of air condition or ventilation it almost felt like the oxygen was on its way to run out. The inside felt a lot like a warehouse with really high ceiling and temporary and moveable walls put up to divide the space into different sections. People were sitting in rows on steel benches waiting to be called in to smaller booths in the back of the hall. There were guards spread out sitting on chairs. The people waiting looked drowsy and I could see that a couple of them were dozing off. Others were sitting just watching the officials coming out from their booths, probably hoping to hear their own name being called.

The WWWA staff explained to me that they now were going to go around to the people waiting and present WWWA and the upcoming workshop and offer them to attend for free. Since I was not really sure how they wanted to do this I kept in the background and followed one of them to the first group of people. First she introduced herself and then me, which made me more comfortable than just standing behind. She talked to people and tried to encourage them to come to the workshop to get empowered. She also tried to make them part of the conversation by asking them questions about what they knew about HIV and sexually transmitted infections. The men were in general more talkative and asked us a lot of questions, and also expressed their suspicion against us. The women were quieter. Maybe they were more worried about opening up to strangers and sign their name and number on our application form. After walking around talking to people and trying to help the staff in their information task we sat down for a pause. I already felt tired and the headache was making my head pound. I wondered to myself how the people sitting there waiting managed to sit there for days. And the officials working there, how can they do a good job after a couple of hours in that heat without fresh air and oxygen?

Several of the migrants inside expressed frustration over the long waiting times and not knowing if they would get help or not in a near future. Since the visits to Home Affairs can be very time-consuming some of them also talked about problems with being away from work and not knowing for how long. Some of my interviewees also talked about the wait and problems with getting there documents. Etienne from Congo DRC told me about her first visit to Home Affairs when she had arrived in South Africa:

_The first time was not good, I had to sit from the morning till five, ya, they did not say anything, they come and say that you have to go home and come back another day, but the second day that I was there, after 20 minutes they got us inside and it was not difficult._
Roseline, who came from Congo DRC with her two children to meet up with her husband, said that she had to wait ‘forever’ to get documented.

*I got the asylum seekers permit, that shows that you have arrived and that you will be interviewed. Then when you are interviewed and your application is successful then you are given refugee status. So I was given three months, which I had to use for six years. (...) I was never lucky, I never had the luxury of six months.*

She explained to me that you can be given three or six months at a time when you extend an asylum seekers permit. What my informants generally referred to as asylum seekers permit is officially called a section 22 permit, which is simply a proof that you have applied for so called refugee or asylum status. Then you are supposed to be called to a second interview, called a Status Determination hearing. If your application goes through you will get a section 24 permit, refugee status, which will be valid for two years.

Neither Roseline nor anyone else that I asked, including some of the staff members at WWWA, really knew what the decisions to give someone three or six months were based on. The waiting time to get the second interview also seemed to differ a lot. Most of my informants had been in South Africa for more than one or two years and were still waiting. Some of them also told me that they had been told that they would be contacted within a couple of months, but they were still waiting. The waiting and the constant risk of deportation creates a condition of ‘deportability’ (De Genova 2002). The ‘deportability’ created forced immobility and made it hard for my informants to plan their futures. When I discussed the issue with the staff members at WWWA’s office it became clear that the experiences could differ a lot from person to person. One of the staff members said that she had been lucky and got her interview for the refugee status just after a couple of months in South Africa. But for one of the other staff members it had been much harder. She had struggled for over two years before she got her refugee status. She had been forced to go back and forth to Home Affairs many times for the renewal of her asylum seekers permit. She said that there was a lot of bribing going on. People paid to get in and get papers, so they would not have to stand there for days. She also said that she sometimes got better taken care of when she brought her baby. She described the feeling of going there as humiliating and that they were treated like

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animals. According to her “a lot of the staff there were very cold and not nice, but of course there are good people as well.”

Denise was one of the informants who already had got refugee status and her experience had been good since her husband had been able to prepare for her arrival, and when he later got his refugee status she could get it too. She said:

_I got asylum seekers [permit]. Because my husband already told the Home Affairs he’s got a wife and she is gonna come and she gonna get the paper, and from that they put me in his folder. With that asylum you cannot find a job. We cannot open an account we cannot do nothing with that._

From what I could tell there were no set time regulations concerning the waiting period from filing an application until the second interview and an approved refugee status. My informants expressed a lot of frustration about not knowing how long they would have to wait. To me it seems like you get lucky or not and the whole system is in that sense arbitrary. What kind of help you get depends on the Home Affair’s official who takes care of your case, according to some of my informants. Since so much else in the migrants life are depending on and would get easier with a refugee status my informants´ frustration is understandable.

### 2.2.2 Security at Home Affairs

When I was in Cape Town the first time during 2009, the Home Affair´s office was placed in an industrial area next to the township Nyanga. One of my friends at that time was involved with a NGO working to improve migrants´ rights and I got the opportunity to go with to the Home Affairs in Nyanga. A man working with the NGO, with my friend, was himself a migrant and could tell me about the situation from first hand experience. Migrants would have to come in the middle of the night to get a place in the queue. Since bribing could get you in quicker migrants with something to offer had to carry that while standing in line. This in turn attracted gangs from surrounding townships to come and rob people of their valuables. For women that came alone it was a highly insecure place during the dark hours and they would be easy targets. The insecurity, the violence and the extreme waiting times made people react and a big network of different NGOs were working on the local governmental officials to
move Home Affairs to a safer place. The businesses in the area also reacted and took the case to court.

In the end of 2009 Home Affairs was finally moved to an area closer to the city center, the suburb Maitland. According to staff working at WWWA these new facilities are safer, but they do not know if people still can bribe their way in. The area is considered to be safer, but at the same time one of the staff who used to live there also said that the area is starting to get overcrowded which, according to her, brings more crime. If that will have any consequences for the safety of the people visiting Home Affairs she does not know. Apparently there have been complaints from people living in the area close to Home Affairs because of all the noise in the early morning hours, since people still have to come early to get a good place in the long queue. The staff does not know if any measures have been taken in the matter.

During the last couple of years there has been a bigger focus on the Department of Home Affairs and their responsibility to provide safer and more efficient service to migrants and asylum seekers. This attention has not only led to the move of Home Affairs in Cape Town, but also to an increase of officials working at the Home Affairs in Maitland, according to the staff at WWWA. This was also confirmed by Vincent Williams, a represent for Southern African Migration Project in Cape Town. When I asked him about his thoughts and opinions about the new Home Affairs in Maitland he said:

First the change of premises, because they had to do it for the safety of the people coming there. Because of the change in leadership [at DHA] it has also been a change in behavior. (…). I do get the sense that when people go now to Home Affairs they do not seem as angry and frustrated when they come out. It is slightly better. (…). Part of the problem is that a lot of the officials misbehave. If a female migrant go in to Home Affairs there are very likely to be seen as much more vulnerable and at higher risk to be treated badly, because they [women] are not likely to say anything. A male migrant is much more likely to speak up. She most know her place in society, views like that. And a lot of this has to do with the context we are in.

Vincent also touched upon the importance to see the context, which in this case is in a society with patriarchal structures that puts the woman in a position where she should be quite. This view of a woman´s position below a man´s could therefore put a woman in a more vulnerable position and make them easier to mistreat. Marcus, one of my other male informants, came from Zimbabwe two years ago with his wife. He has had the chance to experience both the
Home Affairs in Nyanga and the new premises in Maitland. He also puts forward that women are more vulnerable in general when they visit Home Affairs. When I asked him about the new Home Affairs in Maitland he said that it feels much better than the previous one placed in Nyanga, because now “there are no thieves and gangs”. But he still always goes with his wife when she needs to renew her visa, because he do not trust that she would be safe alone.

The fact that the migrants still had to come early to Home Affairs to get a good spot in the line was a risk in itself. An example of this was a woman, in her forties from Congo DRC, that I met inside Home Affairs where she told me her story. To avoid the longest queue she had left the place where she was staying early in the morning, around three am, to go to Home Affairs. She did not know which minibus-taxi that was safe so she had got into the wrong one. The men in that taxi had taken her somewhere far away and raped her for three days before they had let her go again. Now she was pregnant with a baby and scared of HIV, so she wanted to get tested and asked for help.

The general opinion about the new Home Affairs in Maitland seems to be that it has brought some positive change. But it is also clear that it is still not safe enough and some of my informants feel mistreated. A staff member at WWWA said that he thought it definitely was a safer place now, but that they were still treated very badly. “They are just foreigners here, and treated like animals”.

2.2.3 Being outside or inside the legal system?

More than half of the women I interviewed had crossed the South African border without a passport and a visa, which in the eyes of the South African state made them “illegal”. Rinaa, for example, crossed the border from Zimbabwe into South Africa without any documents. She did not have a passport so she crossed a river at the border together with fourteen other people. They all paid a guy who took them over the border into South Africa. They crossed a river and then walked the long way to Musina. She said that she was scared to cross because she did not know what to expect. And she knew that it would be very bad if the South African police would have found them because “they don’t like border-jumpers”. The first thing she did was to go to Home Affairs when they got in to Musina, to apply for asylum seekers permit. She said that the staff did not ask too many questions at the Home Affairs, because they know that if you come there you basically do not have anything to show. She had to be in Musina for a week waiting to get the papers and to be ‘legal’ in the country. After being in
Cape Town for about a year she was now in the process of getting a passport so she then could apply for a working permit which would allow her to go home and visit her family. “With the permit no one can stop me, it will be safe”. She could be afraid that the state would chase her out, “but if you have a passport or work permit they cannot do anything to you”. When I met her she was just waiting for her passport that hopefully will make it much easier for her.

Victoria, one of the other informants from Zimbabwe, had started to come to South Africa for cross-border trading. She told me about how she had had to pay the officials at the border to get a visa to cross. She had a passport and sometimes she travelled ‘illegally’ and sometimes she negotiated for a visa. She said “when you are going back to Zimbabwe not a problem, the problem comes when you come in [to South Africa], I always negotiate with the border [guards]. (…). They want money, of course.” Victoria also explained to me that the South African government wants all Zimbabweans to get passports if they want to stay in the country and get a four year permit, which was the same procedure that Rinaa was in at that time. She also mentioned that it is expensive to get the passports, so it would take her some time to gather the money needed. When I asked her why she thinks the government has changed the rules for asylum seekers permits for Zimbabweans she answered:

Oh, I do not really know why, but I maybe think they want to reduce the labor of going to Home Affairs after every three months. (…). So if someone can go after four years, I mean it is going to help them. (…). I think it is good. As it is now for the asylum seekers, I don’t like it as it is now. (…). I think they do it for the people already in the country. They want all people to live in South Africa legally. But ya, you have to prove that you have a reason to stay, like work. Otherwise they say no, you can’t get it, because they have people staying in South Africa for a purpose.

Like Rinaa also said, Victoria pointed out the benefits according to the work situation with the new four year long permit. They would be allowed to work legally and not as easy to be exploited, because they can then ask to be treated and paid in the same way as the South Africans, according to Victoria. When I asked her how she felt about asylum seekers being exploited and paid less then South Africans she said “ah, I’m a foreigner. It is painful, but it is nothing to do you just have to take it or leave it.”.

Most of my informants talked a lot about being ‘legal’ or not and issues connected to that, like being able to work or get security. It seemed important to them to be ‘legal’ and have the
right documents. At the same time all of my informants tried to get a job, had been working or were working when I met them, to be able to survive even if they did not have refugee status yet. This shows the difficulties in wanting to be ‘legal’, but being forced into ‘illegality’ to be able to survive.

An Ethiopian woman that I talked to on the beach, while she was offering to do henna tattoos, expressed thoughts about staying ‘illegally’. She had an asylum seekers permit at the moment, but she continued to tell me how much trouble she usually had to renew it, so sometimes she gave up and did not. She claimed that no one had ever asked to see her papers anyway, so she was not afraid to be without. She shrugged her shoulders and said that she stayed ‘illegally’ sometimes. “If they don’t want me here, I don’t care, I will leave”.

Another thing that struck me when I was listening to my informants’ stories and thoughts about meeting with the South African authorities was the way they were talking about themselves. When I asked Victoria what she thought about the treatment she got from the South African government and at Home Affairs she said “Eh, they treat us quite fair, as refugees you don’t expect much”. Alice, a 41 year old woman from Zimbabwe, came to get an education in South Africa, since she had no opportunity to get one back home. When I met her she was hoping to get a four year study permit so she could stay in the country and finish her education. She said “here I’m no body” and that she was experiencing that people around her kept questioning her and if she was ‘legal’ in the country.

Except for the explicit comments, for example being ‘treated like an animal’ or feeling scared off getting run out of the country as some of them pointed out, their comments also said something about their self images. My informants referred to themselves as ‘border jumpers’, asylum seekers, refugees, foreigners, strangers, or ‘illegal’, for example. Their stories were telling that many of them were treated as outsiders, and the way they referred to themselves gave me the impression that they also were seeing themselves as outsiders. They were no longer just citizens of their home countries, they were now also migrants in South Africa. To me it seems that they were incorporating the images that exist in the South African society of migrants and the way they were treated, into their own migrant identity and the way they were viewing themselves.

Griffin (2011:17) talks about how different processes of identification within a country’s borders are based on practices that separates citizens from non-citizens and locals from the ‘other’. Even though there is a legal system regarding migration and immigration, South Africa ‘fails’ to enforce these laws and gives space for both legal and illegal ‘bordering’ practices, according to Griffin. Griffin looks at the everyday experience for female migrants
from Lesotho to understand the reality and the effects of this ‘failure’ and the use of different ‘bordering’ practices. Practices within the system of documentation are, for example, important factors that constitute ‘illegal’ subjectivity. Since corruption is widespread within South Africa female migrant domestic workers from Lesotho are given the opportunity to bribe their way across the border (ibid:30). Even if these women knows they will never be able to get a work permit in South Africa, Griffin means that it is still beneficial to them to get or buy a 30 days visitor’s visa and cross the border legally. The visa in their passports could make it easier in contact with other officials within South Africa and they do not have to have the constant fear of being deported (ibid:24). But Griffin highlights that it is not just the mere lack of documentation, like a visa or work permit, but it is the repeated practices, like having to renew a visa over and over, that reinforces migrants’ experienced subjectivity as ‘illegal’. Griffin (ibid:35) states that “migrants’ own experience of ‘illegality’ then refers not only to the mere unauthorized nature of their employment, but pervades and defines their lived identity within South Africa”. To be let into the country, but without being given a permit to legally work, they are included and excluded; legal and ‘illegal’ at the same time, according to Griffin.
2.3 “Without money, nowhere to sleep”

2.3.1 Work

The main reasons behind the decision to migrate for my informants were to get work or peace, or both. In either way, through that be able to create a better life for themselves and their families. As shown in chapter 2.1 many of my informants’ pictures of South Africa did not reflect the reality that they faced after arrival. Most of them had to struggle a lot or were still struggling at the time I met them to get an income. Rinaa was the only one of my interviewees that was employed and had a regular income at the time of the interview. Without any money they also faced problems in getting housing, which was one other thing most of my informants mentioned as a big difficulty.

Namoso, a 42 year old woman, had been working with children in her home country for over 13 years when she lost her job. She could not get a new job and struggled to support her own children. When a man came to her and said that he could help her to go to South Africa and get her a job there, she saw a chance to get the money she needed to feed her children and put them through school. After paying the man all the money she had left and leaving her children with her mother she left for Cape Town. After a week in South Africa she realized that there was no job waiting for her as promised and her contact threw her out from the small apartment he stayed in, after taking and selling her return ticket to Uganda. She has now been in Cape Town for two years struggling to get a job. She said “I have a hard time to get a job. I can clean or take care of children, but I do not get a job.” Just before I met her she had a job as a domestic worker, but after two weeks they had forced her to leave without paying her. They said they did not want her working for them since she had a limp on one of her legs, an injury from having polio as a child. She was angry, but despite all of that she said “I’m feeling more hopeful, more time to put myself together, I have to work hard to get money to bring home.” Namoso knew that she had to get a job, so she just had to keep looking.

Several of my informants had also left their home countries with a higher education. Victoria, for example, was an educated and trained seamstress, Denise was a nurse and Etienne was an educated doctor with several years of working experience. Despite their degrees they have not been able to get work. Denise explains her situation as a nurse:
I’m a nurse in DRC, but since I’m here I haven’t worked as a nurse. (…). They say come do the training. There it is both South Africans and foreigners and you do the training and all of you success in that training, but when you go now to ask for the job they now try to select the South Africans. (…). They say “we want a South African, you can wait”. Maybe they say “go, we gonna call you”, but if we go now we can wait for long time and they are not gonna call you until you gonna forget and start looking for another job. It is like this.

As shown in chapter 2.2 almost all of my informants were still waiting to get a refugee status and were therefore forced to work without the right papers. Without a work permit or a status that makes it legal to work migrants become easy to exploit, since their ‘illegality’ makes it impossible for them to get legal help and get protection against unfair employers, according to Griffin (2011:27). Victoria expressed her concern about being exploited and not treated in the same way as South Africans:

I think they must consider the qualifications, if a person is a foreigner they most look at the qualification, then see if they qualifies and then get him the jobs no matter of the nation or their skin. Ya, I don’t like feeling being used like I told you, because it’s like it is just not fair.

While she was talking about this she changed the tone in her voice and sounded upset. In the end of the interview when I asked if there was anything else she wanted to bring up, she came back to this issue, so it was clearly important to her. Victoria said that she rather did her own business, then being employed, ‘used’ and underpaid. But when I met her she struggled to make her business profitable and she said:

Now it’s like a bit tricky, because like I been doing the business for selling, ya, like now, for that sowing you need someone to have money, enough capital, then you buy the material and you can sow and then you can sell that one. That way it is easier, but I don’t have enough money for the capital, I don’t have that now.

Griffin (2011: 27) also says that the feeling of being exploited and ‘cheated’ were common among female migrants from Lesotho. She also points out the fact that the work most female migrants are left to do are farming or domestic work, which could be done by a South
African, and it is therefore hard for them to obtain a work permit and be ‘legal’ (ibid:22). Work and documentation is connected. They cannot work legally and if they get a job it is difficult for them to get their asylum seekers permits renewed since they cannot be away from work.

One day one of the staff members at WWWA brought up that she had been thinking about my study and that she knew a woman that could be interesting for me to meet. The woman she talked about was a female migrant working in one of the suburbs braiding hair for a living. According to my college that was a common skill and occupation among female migrants in Cape Town. She had already asked her contact if she could bring me there and she had been fine with the proposal. I saw this as an opportunity to meet her and observe how she and other women were working, and hopefully be able to chat with them.

We decided that the following Monday would be a good day, since they were busy before Christmas and that would mean a lot of women working, according to my colleague. My colleague met me at the train station and we went together to the hair-salon where her contact was working. I went down with the woman to the street below the salon where she was trying to get customers in to the salon. While we were standing there she told me about how she had started braiding people’s hair in the street. But since that was illegal she, and other women doing the same, often got chased away by the police. She also said that South African women working as hairdressers also tried to chase them away at times, since they said that they were destroying their business and doing something ‘illegal’. She had been doing the business of braiding for several years and finally she had got lucky and able to rent the space in the salon where she now was working. There she felt safer and did not have to risk being chased away by the police. She told me that she was still struggling to make enough money to support her whole family, and since her husband did not have a steady job they never knew how the next month would look like. She said that some days she did not get more then maybe one customer. That did not generate enough money for her family to survive, which made her stressed.

She also wanted to show me one of the places, away from the bigger street, where a lot of women were standing and doing braiding in the street. When we walked around the corner of a building I saw around ten women standing up braiding and fixing the hair of their costumers sitting down on plastic stools or old crates in front of them. There was a lot of movement and people looking in the market-stalls around them, but the women were working in silence. The woman that I came with said that they had to be prepared to leave if the police would come. Since the customer took a risk not getting their hair done if they would be chased away, the
women had to keep the price low and the profit was minimal. I wanted to take a picture of the women, but they all spoke French so the woman I was with asked them for me. She said that she had explained to them that I was not a state official and that I wanted to know about their situation, but they all said no. They all looked suspicious and angry about my presence, so I did not want to push it and we left. When we were walking away she told me that they probably wanted to get paid for me taking their picture.

To make your own business profitable was not easy, according to both Victoria and the woman doing braids. On top of that, several of my informants, like the woman doing braids, mentioned that they often got blamed by the local South Africans for taking ‘their’ jobs. Denise, for example, said:

*When we try to ask them [South Africans] why they don’t like us to be here, they say “oh, you come back and go, you come here in our country you want to take all our things, our jobs, you want to be more up then South Africans”.*

On one off the hottest days in Cape Town, during my stay, I also got the chance to talk to a women working on the beach, about this issue. I and a friend had decided to go to the beach to escape the heat and enjoy the coolness of the ocean. I was lying on my towel when I heard an unfamiliar voice. I turned around and saw a black woman crouching down next to my friend. They were in a discussion about a henna tattoo. The women, who was originally from Ethiopia, worked at the beach offering people henna tattoos to a cheap price. My friend wanted one and while she was looking through her sample books they discussed a price. The women wore jeans and a black west, even though to me, it was extremely hot being in just a bikini. Her hair was wrapped up in a colorful scarf protecting her head from the burning sun. When she sat down to start drawing on my friends hand she panted and complained about the heat. To my satisfaction she did not seem shy and she immediately started asking us all sorts of questions, like where we were from. I saw an opportunity to get her point of view, as a female migrant, and I asked her about her working situation and how she usually supported herself. She said that she mostly tried to do her ‘own thing’ and not be dependent on someone else. Doing henna tattoos was the best opportunity for her at the moment. Like some off my other informants she also mentioned that it was an unstable occupation and that she some days struggled to get customers. Then she also brought up her experience of the locals’ attitude towards her. She said that South Africans were she staid usually gave her a hard time blaming her and other migrants for taking their jobs. After she had said that she looked out over the
beach and raised her arm in a sweeping movement and asked if we could see any South Africans going around on the beach doing henna tattoos. By now she had raised her voice and I got the feeling that it made her upset. She said that the situation felt ‘unfair’ and that you had to be strong to face the local South Africans.

Cristina, from Zimbabwe, was 25 years old and one of my youngest informants. She had had a lot of the same experiences as my other informants in getting a job, and she was still unemployed when I met her. She also brought up another dimension about not having a job and she told me that she was very bored just sitting around the house not having anything to do. She saw the interview with me as an opportunity for her to get out and do something new. Several of my other interviewees also expressed feelings connected to not having anything to do as a result of unemployment or no business opportunity. Victoria talked about how she wants to keep busy and that she was trying everything to get her business going. She said “I don’t like to just sit, I’m not happy to just stay at home”.

Vincent, the representative for Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) in Cape Town, said that both female and male migrants mentioned most of the same things when it came to the struggle in finding work. But he also talked about another dimension:

*The other dimension for female migrants is that it increases their vulnerability, so if it is a man who comes here and don’t find a job he necessarily don’t become more vulnerable, which women do if they don’t find a job and there is an opportunity for exploitation. But it is a cultural conflict here that is important, I mean, while the men are usually seen as the breadwinners the woman are seen as the nurtures of the family and they bring their cultural context with them. (...) That is “if I don’t get a job I have to find another way to support my family”, where as for men it is kind a “maybe I do something else”. (...) And I think the burden of responsibility weighs much more heavily on women, compared to men.*

Basically all of my female informants were not only talking about supporting themselves, but also their families, the ones they had with them or the ones back home. They particularly expressed stress over not being able to send money home, or not being able to provide for their family in South Africa. In general, having a job and an income seemed crucial for my informants’ lives in Cape Town. Not only on a practical level, like being able to pay rent, school fees and buying food, but also on a mental level, like feeling bored and being stressed over not being able to improve their situation.
2.3.2 Getting housing

When I asked my informants to mention one of the things they struggled the most with a common answer was with the housing situation and getting good and secure accommodation. This problem is closely connected to the difficulties in finding a job and the lack of an income. Etienne said “you can have your papers, but with no money, no job, nowhere to sleep, you see”. Rinaa who had a job and an income pointed out that she felt ‘free’ now when she could pay her own rent. She said “it is good for women to stay together so it is safer and you don’t have to be dependent on a man”. When I met her she shared a room with a female friend and she said that it was fine. Before she moved in with this friend she had stayed together with four other people in one room, in the township Khayelitsha. She explained to me that this was very common, that people had to stay in overcrowded rooms and houses, because there is not a lot of places to stay and “people don’t have money”. But the landlord of the house did not want so many people in every room, since they are charging per room and want to make money, so several of them had to leave, and Rinaa was one of them.

Denise and her husband struggled to survive on only his salary since she did not have a job when I met her, which created difficulties in finding good housing for them and their little daughter. She said:

*We don’t have a lot of money, maybe it is 3000 Rand. We cannot finish the month and a house [rent] with that salary. And also they don’t want to give us [migrants] a house, maybe they say “oh, you have a lot of children”. But there are other South Africans who maybe have eight children and they find easily a house.*

Alice, who stayed in the shelter for South African women, felt very grateful over having a space there, but not ‘free’. She explained to me that “you have to leave every day during daytime and it is hard to have somewhere to go, and at night they turn off the lights early so I cannot study”. She said that she felt safe there, but alone and as an ‘outsider’ among the South African women. When I met her she was doing the laundry and some other work at the shelter, since she had no money to pay with. She was now hoping to get a paid job in the church where she was a member, so she would be able to get her own accommodation, which she said was her biggest problem at the moment. When I met Namoso she stayed with a male friend to her son’s friend. She said that she did not want to complain, since she was glad to have a roof over her head and she felt safe in the area, but then she said that “it is not friendly,
you see” and that she did not like it. The house was in one of the townships outside central Cape Town and she shared a room with the guy and then they shared the toilet with the rest of the house. She did not feel welcomed by the South Africans in the house and she said:

Like where I stay now the building is very big, it has upstairs and down stairs and seven different rooms and many people. But they don’t clean the bathroom, they don’t clean the toilet, it is dirty. So I have to clean the toilets every day, and it is worse if someone see you, because they [South Africans] have that feeling that you do not belong to them, you see. But as if someone have seen you finish they can deliberately bring the food like rice or pap in a pot and throw it in the washing tub, just to provoke you, but me I’m not provoked at all. (…). This is not my home and I have to learn to tolerate them. Because they can come and they want to insult you, but I just keep quite.

Meeting and get in contact with people willing to help with accommodation seemed to have been crucial to my informants, since most of them did not have enough money to be able to rent something on their own. Many of them had to move around from place to place. It was the same thing for Etienne when she first arrived in Cape Town, but after a month she met the guy who she now refers to as her boyfriend. “I was to church and then we meet, I explained my case, and he said ‘you can come here with me’, I had no choice I was suppose to go in there and now he is helping me”. He was taking care of her and they were staying in his apartment. She said that she feels stressed because she wants to contribute to the rent, so they can afford to buy food and other stuff.

Most of my informants stayed in different townships surrounding the city of Cape Town, since the choices are few depending on their money situation. The townships are a kind of suburbs where the majority of the residents are black and considered to be poor. During my first stay in Cape Town, during 2009, I was working in one of the bigger townships and had the chance to see the living condition at close quarters. People live in everything from shacks, built from any kind of material at hand, to simpler houses\(^8\). Areas officially acknowledged by the government usually have access to electricity and individual or shared water tabs. But from my experience other areas lack humanitarian conditions like access to electricity, water and toilets. The shacks and houses were also usually overcrowded. If my informants wanted to stay in other areas it would cost more than they could afford. The issue of security is also

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\(^8\) See pictures in Appendix – Pictures from the field.
closely intertwined with the issue of finding good housing. When I asked Victoria about the neighborhood where she and her family stayed, she highlighted her security concerns as a mother and said:

_back then when I brought my children here we were staying there in the other suburbs, so that was the time when they were talking about xenophobia to that place. So that was when we decided to move to this expensive place, because by then I started to be afraid for the security, because the previous was a bit not good [she shakes her head]. (...) So we took the sacrifice and go, but it is very expensive._

Most of the women felt safe inside the houses, apartments or the shelter where they were staying, but some of them did not feel safe in the areas they were living in, mostly because of the crime rate and the xenophobia. In the next section there will be a closer look at the women´s experiences of xenophobia and thoughts on different security issues.
2.4 Xenophobia and security

2.4.1 “We are not welcome”

A friend of mine was living in a suburb with a majority of coloreds. One day we met in a small restaurant in her neighborhood. I wanted to get her perspective as a colored and asked about her thoughts and opinions about migrants in Cape Town. At first she seemed a bit surprised about my question and said “I don’t really know”, but then she kept on saying that “there is a lot of rumours going around”. She said that she did not have a lot of own experience of ‘them’, but that a lot of people see ‘them’ as a threat. She repeated several times that she did not want to judge, and that she could only relate to the Somali guy around the corner from her house, who had a little shop, and he was always friendly and that was good. At the same time she talked about ‘them’ coming to take over where South Africans should be. She also said that people around her did not talk much about it since they really did not have that many migrants in her neighborhood, but that it probably was another story in the townships where they had so many of ‘them’. She had spent some time in different townships and seen a lot of small shops that she thought were owned by migrants and she said “they probably feel much more threatened [the local South Africans] there and that is why it is a bigger issue there”. In a conversation with Mary she also brought up that black South Africans were the ones who attacked migrants and subjected them to xenophobia. They were the ones who were in the same positions as ‘them’ and felt threatened by ‘them’, not the white and not the coloreds, because they were not usually competing for the same jobs in the townships, according to Mary.

Research and surveys done by SAMP and the South African Human Rights Commission shows that South Africans as a whole are ‘negative’ and ‘not tolerant’ to migrants from other African nations. And that “South Africans favour forceful approaches to controlling immigration.” (2001:2-3). The growing xenophobia have resulted in violent attacks against black non-South Africans in the townships around Cape Town at several different occasions, for example during 2008. Migrants and small shops owned by migrants were physically attacked and at least one person died⁹. Problems connected to growing anti-migration attitudes

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and xenophobia is not only specific to South Africa and developing countries, instead it is also ‘strongly’ entrenched in Western receiving countries (Crush and Ramachandran 2009:2).

As shown in chapter 2.2 and 2.3 the women have experienced a negative attitude and discrimination in many different situations, for example, when they have met with authorities or have been discriminated in work related situations. In the section about housing some of the women also mentioned not feeling welcomed by the local South Africans. Victoria also mentioned moving her whole family because of the fear of the xenophobia in the township were she stayed at first. Later in the interview when I asked her about what she felt was one of the biggest challenges at the moment, she came back to the issue:

That kind of thing like, normally they, the South Africans, they got that kind of discriminating feeling. What can I say, you have that inferior complex, you don’t feel free. It is like some of them have that sort of attitude towards us. (…). They most have the spirit of love, we are good Africans, Zimbabweans and South Africans we are Africans, that is one thing they don’t know. (…). We must have a spirit of oneness.

Denise mentioned several times how migrants were discriminated when it came to both work and housing and how they were not welcome in South Africa. When I asked her if she felt at home in Cape Town and where she, her daughter and husband stayed she explained:

Not a lot, because there are some times when you are somewhere and they start calling you ‘makwerekwere’, they use that word ‘makwerekwere’ is in their own language. That means foreigner and they start calling us ‘makwerekwere’. When someone call you ‘makwerekwere’ you don’t feel better in yourself. I don’t feel good in myself.

‘Makwerekwere’ was a word for foreigner, I was told by my informants. According to Lefko-Everett (2007) name-calling and verbal abuse was also a ground for feelings of hurt and ‘deep’ social exclusion to many of the female migrants participating in one of SAMP’s studies. Except for the emotional effects the women are mentioning they all also seem to have a hard time excepting the negative attitude directed towards them describing it as ‘unfair’ and saying that they do not understand why they get that treatment.

Vincent from SAMP also brought in the aspect of gender when we discussed xenophobia and fears and feelings of insecurity connected to that. He said:
But I think there is an important point here which is that it has to do with the kind of gender that exist in the society, if a migrant is to be attacked it is much more likely that it is a man who is attacked instead of a female migrant. And that is just how society works, in the sense that it is more acceptable to attack a man then a woman. (...) In fact, many of the women attacked [during xenophobic attacks] were South African women who lived with migrant men. So when I think about how South Africans tend to treat migrants they seem to be a little bit more gentile with female migrants then what they are with male migrants. But it doesn’t take away the fact that they [women] are potentially at risk and what they [South Africans] do.

When my informants were talking about xenophobia and how they could feel insecure, they did not make any explicit differences between themselves and male migrants and I got the sense that they were referring to themselves and migrants in general. Most of them used the word xenophobia and were well aware of the meaning of the term. When they talked about xenophobia it was more about feeling insecure because of the locals’ attitude and not feeling welcomed, but then they also talked about feeling insecure because of the violence and crime rate that was not directed specifically towards them as migrants. In the next part of this chapter I will go more into how the women experienced the violence and crime in Cape Town.

2.4.2 Stereotypes: The ‘violent’ South African

The Ethiopian woman, me and my friend met on the beach, had been experiencing an unwelcoming attitude from both the authorities and the locals. According to her you have to be though to meet South Africans today. The hardest part was to be questioned and blamed for taking the South Africans’ jobs, by other people in the township where she was staying. She had been to Cape Town several times and in many ways she liked it there, but the city was now changing and she did not appreciate the changes. She said it was changing for the worse so she was planning to leave soon. I tried to ask her some questions about these changes she was talking about. She started to say that black South Africans are a very violent people. We talked a bit about the growing violence she experienced and I asked her if she thought that it might have something to do with their apartheid history. She said “off course”, and continued by saying that they do not want to forgive, they want to rub you instead. She
had been robbed three times in a couple of months, so she seemed quite dejected about the whole situation.

She also blamed the insecurity on other migrants coming to Cape Town looking for work. Since it is hard to get a job and money a lot of the migrants also turn to crime as a last resort, according to her. She had strong and firm opinions about both the local South Africans and the situation in Cape Town. She talked in very negative terms and when I asked her if she had never met any friendly and helpful South Africans, she stopped and thought for two seconds before she answered and said “now, most of them are bad”. She explained that she had had South African friends several years ago, but now it was hard for her to find anyone who was not treating her as a ‘stranger’. Even though I felt that some of her statements were quite harsh she obviously had a lot of experience from crime in Cape Town and it did not feel right to question her too much. Before she left us she had a dejected look on her face when she said that it is no point to try to change people in Cape Town. She reasoned that if this is the way they want to live and since they cannot forgive and forget, according to her, she will not be coming back.

Rinaa first said that it was ‘ok’ in the township were she was staying and that she had not been facing any real problems there, but she heard a lot of stories about other people being rubbed and having problems. Later on during the interview she came back to the stories she had heard and she now said that she was scared and that she was worried that it could be her time next. She then kept talking in generalizing terms and how South African people will rob you. “I never know if one of the days they gonna rob me. This country is really nice, but the people staying here in South Africa are bad. They gonna kill you for twenty Rands or a cigarette”. According to Rinaa South Africans are jealous and lacy. “They can come up to me and say give me money, but where will I get that money” she shrugs her shoulders and look at me with questioning eyes. “In my country they do not rob”. She means that if you are poor you cannot ask for money or rob someone else in the same situation. This was the first time she seemed upset and she talked louder and more freely.

Victoria felt quite safe in the area where she was living with her family at the time. But when I asked her if she felt at home in Cape Town she also stated that the violence and crime was a reason to why she did not feel at home:

Not really. One, because here I just feel afraid of the thieves, something like killing and whatever, whatever. It is like you are not very safe, no police. Like there in Zimbabwe there is no such crime rate like here. Always afraid, here you cannot even
go around with money [she laughed and shook her head]. They will take it, at gunpoint or with a knife, that kind of thing.

These examples show how safety was a big concern for my informants. Most of the women talked about the locals in generalizing terms and used negative words as ‘violent’, ‘thieves’, ‘bad’ and so on to describe them. Even though most of them also could mention situations when they met helping South Africans, they referred to this negative stereotype of the locals. Another thing that almost all of the women had in common was that they compared the crime rate and the unsafe situation in Cape Town with the situation in their home countries. Especially the women from Zimbabwe claimed that they felt safer in Zimbabwe and that Zimbabweans do not rob each other like South Africans do. All though, there were exceptions. Denise, for example, talked a lot about how she felt unwelcome and that she suffered emotionally from being called a ‘makwerekwere’, but when I asked her if she ever felt threatened she said:

No, not afraid, we are already here so we cannot be afraid. We are safe were we live. There are a lot of thieves, but we are safe. We can live like them. There are many, many thieves who are staying there in the streets and they rob people there in the street, the do it to all, but that is not a big problem, we cannot worry about that.

Denise was one of the women who had come to South Africa and Cape Town to seek protection from the violence in Congo DRC. She highlighted that the peace in South Africa was the most important thing for her to stay and she could therefore accept problems connected to security issues.
2.5 Social support and networks

2.5.1 The ones left behind

Rinaa was sitting in a big armchair in the launch area in my house when her cell-phone rang. We were in the middle of our interview so she started looking for the phone to turn it off while she apologized for the ringing. When she finally found the phone in the bag between her feet, she said out loud “oh, it is my brother from Zim [Zimbabwe]” and a big smile spread across her face. She looked up and asked if she could take it. I was surprised that she asked for permission and just answered quickly “off course, answer it, no problem at all”. She had already told me a bit about her family back home. Especially that her biggest problem when leaving Zimbabwe was not really that she was scared, but the fact that she felt a lot of pain in leaving her family and friends.

During the conversation between Rinaa and her brother she laughed loudly several times. Since she was talking in a Zimbabwean language I could not understand, but she smiled and looked happy. When Rinaa and her brother hanged up she laughed softly and looked down on the phone in her hand while she said how glad she was that he had called. She said that it is very expensive to call, but she had to now and then. Otherwise they would worry about her and she missed them a lot. She was in the process of getting a passport so she was now hoping to get it as soon as possible. Then she could apply for a working permit which would allow her to go home and visit her family that she had not seen for over a year. The only family member she had seen was her twin-sister that recently also had come to Cape Town. But she still missed home a lot and she tried to call her sisters and brother when she felt lonely. She explained that one of her sisters back home was still the person she needed and wanted to talk to the most if she felt worried or sad. “She is very close to me”, she said. But in the next sentence she also said that now when the situation is what it is, she had to deal with it. She wanted to go back home, but she knew that first she had to save up some money. The family back home came up again when she started talking about her job and salary. Even though she had a job, when I met her, it was still hard for her to support herself and both be able to save and send money back home.

All of my interviewees left family and friends behind when they migrated to South Africa. Just like Rinaa they all expressed difficulties in doing so. Victoria said, for example, “all of them are there, my parents, my husband’s parent, they are both alive, and other brothers and
sisters. (…). *It is very hard to be away.*” Several studies have been able to show how the family and the closest friends are the most important givers of social support (Dean et al 1990; Miller & Darlington 2002; Valery, O’Connor & Jennings 1997). House, Umberson and Landis (1988) defines social support as a social process in where individuals get support and give support to other individuals in their social network. This network, like family, friends, partners and colleagues, gives a person social support through caring, appreciation and practical help (Rydén & Stenström 1994). Research claims that social support can reduce a person’s level of stress and increase their ability to cope with stressful situations. A lack of social support could therefore increase the risk for bad mental health (Cohen & Wills 1985; Gencöz & Özlale 2004). Even though there can be differences (Nisbett 2003), the relationships we have to the people around us are important factors for our well-being irrespective of cultural belonging, according to Abe (2004).

Three of the six mothers also had to leave their children behind. Christina was one of the mothers that had been forced to leave her son and daughter behind with her mother in Zimbabwe. When I asked her about them she got a sad look on her face and said:

>*Ya, I miss them. Now it’s been over one year and three, four months since I have seen them. I’m stressed, but my daughter says that ‘mom, we are fine, don’t worry about us, we are with grandmother.’*

Her ex-husband and father of the children, who was in Zimbabwe, was not helping to support them, so she had to do it by herself. She said: “*He does not even know that our son is going to school next year, but me I’m just stressing, stressing, stressing. If I just get something I send it home and my mother will be happy*”. She knew that she was lucky because she had her sister and the sister’s family in Cape Town, but she still felt that her mother was the most important persons to her. Both because she was taking care of her children and she could always get good support and advice from her. Christina always tried to put some money aside so she could afford to call her mother and her children regularly.

Leaving home and family, especially children, behind were also a common difficulty and source of distress among the female migrants in SAMP’s (2007:24) study. Both female and male participants in SAMP’s study (2007:75) also pointed out that leaving family and children were more difficult for a woman than for a man, but at the same time unavoidable in looking for work. The woman is responsible of taking care of the home, according to participants in the SAMP’s study. This also agrees with Lan’s (2003) argument that the
duties to take care of the family and the home are put on the woman, which becomes very
difficult and stressful when going abroad to be able to support them financially. Lan
(ibid:189) also brings up that migrant mothers often are forced to leave their children with
other family members, like in Christina’s case when she had to leave her children with her
mother. The Filipina women in Lan’s study also expressed feeling stressed and worried about
their families and children back home. Migrant mothers end up in a complex situation when
they are forced to go abroad to support their families and at the same time feeling like they are
failing to fulfill their roles as mothers being there to physically and emotionally take care of
them (ibid:204-205).

As shown in chapter 2.1 most of the migrants I met had come to South Africa with hopes
of being able to support themselves, but also the family back home. One of the staff members
at WWWA expressed the stress she was feeling over not being able to support her family both
financially and with her physically being back home helping out. The women from Congo
DRC also expressed their worries about their family’s security. Denise said:

_They [her family] are not good [unsafe]. One year after I left they [rebel soldiers]
killed my father. And after that the rest of the family ran away. They are just in DRC,
but they don’t live at the same place. (…). I used to call my brother, the first born of
our family, I used to call him, that’s the only contact I can have. (…). I’m not happy
for that. Because when I’m always start to remind about that I start sicking. I get a lot
of headache and I’m always sicking, like that. I worry about them._

Not just family members, also friends were left behind. Denise pointed out that she also
missed her friends in Congo DRC. So when I asked her about whom she talks to, except from
her husband, when she is worried she said:

_I talk that [about problems] to my friends, but I cannot do that now. I used to talk to
someone and just relax, you feel better. Some days when I’m alone at home I can just
go to the library and just visit the internet for maybe two hours and then go back
home. I usually send the message from the email._

She told me that she had a couple of lady friends in Cape Town, but that she was used to talk
about the things that worried her with friends from home. Emailing with her friends was now
the only way she could be in contact with them, because calling was too expensive for her.
The family and friends back home was a subject the women usually brought up and came back to several times during the interviews. To me, this shows the importance of the social networks back home. And that the families also were constantly present in the women’s daily life and thoughts, even though they were in different countries. Not being able to be there for them or not being able to help them in different ways seemed to have created feelings of stress and frustration among my informants.

As shown in chapter 2.1, the social networks at home had also been important in being connected to people in South Africa who could give them information and help them to migrate. Social networks based on kinship, friendship or community connections are central in the migration process by providing financial support and information (Boyd 1989; Massey 1986). Without access to relevant networks and contacts the migration process would be characterized by uncertainty and wondering (Khosravi 2010b).

2.5.2 Social networks in Cape Town

When Roseline first came to South Africa from Congo DRC she met up with her husband. When he had to leave to try to get a job somewhere else in South Africa she basically got left alone with their children. She did not know anyone else at that point and she explained that in the time that followed after her husband’s departure she started to feel ‘extremely’ isolated and it was hard to meet people to socialize with. She said:

> The first thing that I experienced as a non-south African was that it was very difficult for me to socialize. It was me and my children. (...). So this was the family I had, this was everything that I had. The only time I could speak to a grownup person was if my husband phoned me or I was in a shop buying something and someone asked me do you need this, do you need that.

A real turning point for Roseline was when a woman started talking to her in the grocery store. Since the woman could see that she struggled and always was alone she offered her help and took her to the Refugee Center. By the time I met Roseline her brother and his family had also come to Cape Town. She said that she now could appreciate having him close since she knew from firsthand experience what it was like to have nobody to trust and no family close by.
The ones of my informants who had family members in Cape Town commented on the importance of having them there when I asked about their experienced social support. Victoria who had her husband, her children and her sister with her in Cape Town also named them as the most important social support. She said:

*I think I’m happy with my family, I never feel lonely, and I also stay with my sister, we stay together, talk, discuss. (...). If they are not in school we go together to church or we are at home, so most of the time we spend the time together.*

When I asked if she had any friends outside the family she said that it was not that important to her, but that she had friends. For example, she liked going to church and there she felt that she had friends. She said:

*Ya, where I go to church. In church I met my pastor and stuff, ya. And also I got this friend of mine who brought me the machine [a sawing machine], she is South African. I met her there and she had things to give away so she decided to give me the machine, it is that kind of thing, ya I have friends here.*

Denise said that she and her husband support each other, but she still misses her close friends from home that she was used to talk to when things worried her. When I asked her if she had met any other migrants to talk to or if she had any other friends in Cape Town she answered

*Ya, I know them, maybe we met in the Refugee Center or in the church, like that. And we call them, go visit them and they come visit us, things like that. We feel more better. We can talk and tell “you can do training in this or you can get job there.*

Then she continued to tell me about the importance of having people around you:

*When we are with friends we are good, we feel like a family. All of them are important, maybe when I feel alone and my husband is not there, my friend is not there, I’m just going out the house and talk to the neighbors, and I can feel just relaxed talking to them. They start to consolate you, that is also good.*
Having someone to talk to, even though it is not their closest friends from home, seemed important to my informants. It seemed especially important in the cases where there was no close family around in Cape Town, like for Denise, even though she had her husband and baby with her. The importance of being able to talk and ventilate ones feelings have also been confirmed by Pennebaker och Seagal (1999). In their study they could see that there were both physical and psychological benefits to gain through ventilating ones feelings and thoughts, which was the same for both sexes, different ages and cultural contexts.

For my informants who had come alone without any family or contacts related to their homes the situation was quite different. From day one Etienne, for example, had been forced to only rely on strangers to her. Luckily she had met people who were willing to help, but it was not until she met the man that she called her boyfriend that she got any real, both practical and emotional, support. She told me that he gave her good support and that he listened when she was worried about her family back home. He also helped her practically with letting her live with him and paying the rent, since she did not have a job. To Etienne he was the only real support and she had not met any women she could talk to. She told me how she met her boyfriend in church, but had not been able to make any other friends because people were too busy. To Etienne it seemed like there was no room for social interaction to people in her church, who were mostly South Africans. She said:

In my church you go and pray and then everybody go in their house, without time to discuss. (…). There is many South African. They are fine, but they don’t have time to talk to you, everyone is very busy, 'I’m busy, I’m sorry I’m busy’. No way to survive, you must be only busy, so you get something to eat and have something for rent, ya.

Christina also mentioned her boyfriend as a source for support. "If I got somebody, if I can share things with him, maybe sometimes I don’t stress myself”, she said.

In general it seemed like it was a bit easier for the women who said that they got good support from family members close by in Cape Town or if they could have regular contact with the ones back home. And even though they expressed that they missed their families back home they did not seem to feel as lonely as, for example, Etienne and Alice that had no family or friends from home present in Cape Town. The examples above also show how the women talked about and needed both emotional and practical social support. Family members and close friends seemed important for both kinds of support. But new contacts seemed to be particularly important for practical social support, probably for the simple reason that they
were close by and knew the new environment. Trying to actively meet new people, especially other migrants, seemed to be an important strategy for my informants in getting practical help and advice. Most importantly I got the impression that all of my informants actively tried to meet new people and create a social network around them that could provide them with both emotional and practical support. The church seemed to be the most common place where to start this networking process. I will go more into this in the next section.

Vincent from SAMP also brought up a gender perspective connected to the ability to create these social networks. According to Vincent and research made by SAMP women are better at taking initiatives and creating relationships and social networks, then men. According to Vincent these differences were based in cultural gender roles where men had to be the strong ones not admitting the need for support. For example, he mentioned women´s initiatives to create support groups to meet and talk and basically support each other as something men usually did not do. He said:

Vincent: *Men would never decide that now we have to come together and talk about our issues and problems.*

KG: *Do you think that men do not have the same need to talk?*

Vincent: *I think it is probably more about that it is seen as an expression of weakness if men come together to talk about those sort of things. Men are much more likely to go and sit and drink and they talk about these things anyway, but they won’t admit to the need to have a group around them, to have that kind of support.*

According to Cohen and Wills (1985) research has shown that there is a gender difference, where women prefer emotional support and men find it easier to ask for practical support. In general, women find it easier to ask for any kind of social support and to talk about their difficulties than men (Jung, 1987; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997). This does not necessarily mean that men do not have the need to talk, as Vincent points out, but instead that gender roles may be affecting their behavior and attitudes towards social support. WWWA´s activities and support groups is a good example of women´s initiative and need to create social networks around them where they can talk and give each other emotional support. Even though the women did not always feel welcomed by local South Africans it was easier for women to be integrated among South Africans, then for men, thanks to their ability to socially network, Vincent argued. Women network through church, support groups and work. He said:
There [migrant women] activities are much more rounded so they can connect to South Africans in different places. A lot of the men who comes, even those who work in the craft market, they tend to stick with the people that they know they don’t really become part of broader networks. And so the opportunity for them to get integrated and accepted becomes much more limited.

When Vincent talked about women’s activities as more ‘rounded’ he meant that they actively seek up opportunities for social interaction and that they use social interaction as strategies to get connected for both social support and create job opportunities, for example. Namoso gave a good example of the ability to actively create social networks. She said “whenever I talk to people I make a lot of friends. I like to make friends and to ask questions and know more. Me, if I have a problem I just ask and ask.”

2.5.3 The role of religion and the church

All of my female interviewees mentioned the church as a place where to get social support. Several of them even mentioned the church as the most important or only place where they felt really welcomed. To Alice the church had been a direct helping hand in getting both emotional and practical support. For my interviewees, most significantly, the church has been the place where they met and connected with people who then have become friends or contacts for housing and jobs. Both Victoria and Denise explicitly said that they met new contacts and friends at church. The church provided a safe environment and stood for something good to the women, and it was also a place to network and create a new social sphere.

To seek up a congregation seemed to have been one of the first things the women had done after coming to Cape Town. Most of the women had found churches and congregations where they could meet people from their home countries. Women from Congo DRC that I met also told me that some churches held services in French that they could attend. Except for the social aspects several of the women also mentioned their belief in God and that the church was an important space for them to practice their beliefs. When I asked Victoria what she likes to do and what made her happy she answered: “Me, I just like to go to church, most of the times I’m going to church. I like to pray. If you pray God is gonna take care of your
family. And it is also good for my spirit”. Namoso also explicitly expressed that she liked her church and why. She said:

*I like church very much. Because at my church we have weekly prayers, every day we have a prayer, like yesterday we were praying for finances and today for healing, like that. During the day I do my work in the house and in the afternoon I go to church. I like it very much. (...). They care a lot, most of them are South African people in the church, I’m the only Ugandan there. They care a lot, if I have not been there for two days they have to know ‘are you sick or what?’.*

It was also common that my interviewees mentioned God as a source for hope, strength and support. When Victoria talked about her feeling unwelcomed and unsafe because of the xenophobia she came back to her belief in God and finished with saying that “*this is the reason why I always go to church. I’m always praying*”. She prayed because she believed that God would protect and keep her family safe. Alice, who had applied to an education that would give her a degree as a pastor, mentioned that “*God knows best*” and that she trusted ‘him’ to guide her.

Hagan (2008) is one researcher that brings up the importance of the migrants’ faith and the crucial role that religion can have for migrants in being able to cope with traumas and uncertainty accompanied migration. Religion works as a protecting and guidance force, according to Hagan (2008), which my interviewees themselves mentioned several times. Khosravi (2010b) also argues that religion can function as social capital for people in migration. Religious identities can give access to different social networks in similar ways to how ethnicity works as social capital that connects people. To me it was quite clear that religion and my informants’ religious identities was something that made it easier for them to find a space and a social network that could provide them with the feeling of belonging, in an otherwise sometimes unwelcoming environment. To see religion as a kind of social capital, I think, can also help us to understand why the connection to the church is such an important factor in my informants’ creation of social networks. Some of them also seemed to combine their religious and ethnic identities since they also chose to be a part of a congregation with members from their home countries. In general, the role of religion as an aspect in the migration process has been poorly researched, according to Khosravi (2010b:51).

I was not really surprised by the women’s focus on the church since my previous experiences from South Africa, during 2009, was that religion and the connection to the
church is a big and important part of the daily life for many Africans. The church as a space seemed to combine several different things and needs to my informants, both the social networks that could provide social support and feelings of belonging and the ability to exercise their religious believes.
2.6 Together we are stronger

2.6.1 Differences between being alone or not

Etienne’s life changed in less than three days. Etienne did not have time to prepare for her departure from Congo DRC and she turned to a group of priests in her church for help and protection. Since she had to be taken out of the country as soon as possible they used their connections to just get her out, the destination was not important according to Etienne. The day after she was on her way to Zimbabwe. All that she knew at that point was that she was going to be taken to Zimbabwe and after that she would be on her own. She repeated several times “I was so scared”. She described that she was scared of the unknown since she had no idée what to expect, but that she trusted the people she was with since it was contacts to the priests. In Zimbabwe she was taken to a house with other migrants from Congo DRC. She described how that calmed her down a little bit and that she did not feel as alone and scared when she could be with them. When another group of migrants said that it would be easier for them in South Africa and that they planned to leave Zimbabwe, she decided to go with. According to Etienne they crossed the border in a bus and that she was sleeping and when she woke up they were in South Africa. So when I asked her about the process at the border she just shook her head and said that she did not know since she was sleeping. In Johannesburg she had trouble to find anywhere to stay and through one of the other migrants that she came with from Zimbabwe she got recommended to go to Cape Town and got contact details to a man that could help her there. When she finally arrived in Cape Town the Ugandan man who she got connected too helped her with a place to stay and to get started. Etienne left Congo DRC without anyone that she knew by her side and she did not go to meet a family member or friend in Cape Town. But when I asked her how she felt about coming alone to South Africa she answered “I was not alone, I was always with someone else. It was not easy, but I got help”. She continued to explain, since she had started to be connected by her priests in Congo DRC who she trusted she also trusted the people that they referred her to and so on. I had just assumed that she would see herself as a migrant coming alone, just because that was how I saw her from just hearing the beginning of her story, but her answer and explanation made it quite clear that she saw a difference between her situation and someone else coming alone, since she got connections and help. When I asked her if she thought that it would had been different if she had not got the contacts and help that she got she said “yes, then I would
have been alone. Maybe I would have been scared, because I didn’t know how to go here. Without help it would be difficult, very difficult [she shook her head].

Rinaa decided to leave Zimbabwe without any family members and she did not know anyone in South Africa at that time. But what became important for her experience were the contacts she got through people in her home community. She got smuggled over the border together with fourteen people. She had got the contacts to the smuggler through friends to friends. In difference to Etienne she had time to prepare for her departure and she managed to save some money before she left. But just like Etienne she said that she was scared to cross the border because she did not know what to expect, but she did not feel alone since she was with other people the whole way. During her first week in Musina she described feeling very lost and she did not know what to do and where to go. Then she met another Zimbabwean lady that wanted to go down to Cape Town where she had her son, but she did not have any money for transport. So, since Rinaa had some money with her they made a deal, she paid for the transport and the lady let her stay with her and her son in Cape Town. Together they took the train down to Cape Town. When she started talking about this part she shined up and smiled. She then emphasized how happy she was that she had met that lady and how good it was. She knew she had been lucky and that it was good to come with a little bit of money and she continued saying “but when you come alone without money you are in trouble”. She especially highlights that you are an easy victim for men if you are a women on your own:

_The men take advantage of you when you are stranded, they gonna force you to do all the bad things. I was not stranded, big difference when you come with someone. It was very good for me, I did not face any problems. (...). It is the main problem here in South Africa when you do not know anybody._

Both Etienne´s and Rinaa´s stories is good examples of that the journey to Cape Town was not always just a one step transfer for my informants. Instead the journey was built on connections made before or on the way. Denise, who came together with her husband, also told me about how they left Congo DRC without really knowing where they would end up, which also shows that, like for Etienne, Cape Town was not always a planned destination from the start. In common for the ones of my informants who decided to migrate on their own was that they never really were alone and they did not see themselves as migrating alone. Even though they came without any close family members, they had got some kind of connections and also got lucky to meet helpful people on the way. These examples show how
crucial the good contacts they made seemed to be to my informants’ experiences and feelings of safety during their journeys. For my other informants South Africa and Cape Town were a planned destination and they made arrangements before they came and they knew that they were going to be met up by a family member or another contact known since before the departure. Like Roseline, for example, who came straight from Congo DRC to meet up with her husband already in Cape Town.

Victoria started coming to South Africa without her husband to perform cross-border trading, but she made sure that she was never alone and always travelled in a group with other women. She explained that women know that it is not safe to travel alone so they always stayed together six-seven women and “cause it is a difficult distance from Zimbabwe”. Not being alone also made her feel safer at the border when negotiating with the border officials about getting a visitor’s visa, because she knew that they could not do anything ‘bad’ if she was with the other women. And she also mentioned practical reasons:

_Because of this high crime rate here [in South Africa], they steal your stuff and because when you are going home you have to carry a lot of stuff, like there was a problem for food in Zimbabwe so we would carry home big bags of food. So there are like three or four women who can help each other to hold and lift heavy bags, and if you have to go to the toilet someone can watch the bags. So it was safe for us to move together._

When I asked her what she thought of the situation for female migrants that do not have the opportunity to travel together with other people, like she had had, she started by saying “it is not good”. Victoria meant that it in general was easier for men to travel and come alone and it was much better for women to come together with their husbands. Denise, who always stayed with her husband in South Africa, answered my question about the situation of female migrants who came alone like this:

_It would be difficult, very difficult. Because here we are together [her and her husband], but we are struggling, but I’m not alone. (…). The first thing, because the men used to sleep maybe in the street, the side of the bush, inside the bush, he can sleep there all night, but a woman cannot. That is what is difficult. I cannot see any woman do that, I cannot see. (…). Woman who come by themselves have many problems. Many of them go to do the hair [working as a hairdresser], but maybe no_
clients, and they get no money for rent. Many of them start doing the prostitute to have money.

Denise felt a lot of security and support by the fact that she was not alone and had her husband. She said that they could always rely on each other when they faced difficulties, but a woman coming alone did not have that support when facing the same difficulties.

Marcus, who was a man from Zimbabwe, just sighed and shook his head when I asked him about the situation for female migrants coming alone. To him it was also clear that women were at greater risk. He said that one of the reasons to why it was easier to exploit a woman sexually was because it was harder for women to get jobs and they then had to sell their bodies for money and housing. It did not seem to be any hesitations among my informants when it came to the issue of female migrants travelling and coming alone to South Africa. They all seemed to have a pretty clear picture of the difficulties a female migrant could meet. Especially, they all also seemed to see prostitution as a result of coming alone and as something some women had to do to survive.

Mary also highlighted that people that get desperate are more likely to take a lot of risks. “You maybe find somebody in the street that says ‘come home with me’ and they don’t know if that person is going to rape them or really assist, so people are taking a lot of risk when they come out to a strange place.” According to Mary women are especially at risk of being exploited sexually in connection to labor and finding accommodation. She said:

Somebody may say to you that “if you come to me and work for me you can stay in my house”, but the nature of work is not defined. You might go there and become their slave, their sex-slave, you will work for long hours and maybe you get nothing in pay because you are just accommodated in that house. And then you cannot go out except on weekends when everything is closed, all the offices are closed so you cannot get help and information, so you realize that you are practically in a prison.

Mary argued that this is the reality for many female migrants coming alone and especially if they come unprepared with no contacts or arrangements made prior to arrival. Vincent also argued that social contacts were crucial for women coming alone to decrease the risk of getting trapped in a situation of abuse. He said:
The problem is that if a woman get trapped in that sort of situation it is extremely difficult to get out of, and it is even more difficult if they don’t have no social contacts and nobody knows where they are, because it pushes them involuntarily in to that situation where they get trapped.

According to Vincent a lot of the women trapped in exploitation often have a fear to speak up and turn to authorities for help and particularly if they are foreigners in a country where they do not know how things work.

The staff at WWWAs also gave me their views on why it was harder for women than men to be on their own in South Africa. Except for the difficulties and risks of sexual exploitation connected to getting a job and housing they also mentioned different cultural contexts as reasons to why women could not behave in the same way a man could in some situations. For a migrant man, for example, one strategy could be to look for a South African girlfriend who then could help him with housing and provide him with a social network of contacts that could be helpful in getting a job. The situation for migrant women was the opposite, since South African men do not want to be with foreign women, according to the WWWA staff. Migrant women can more easily find security with other migrant men, preferable from their own home country. Men from their home countries knew the cultural context they left behind and what treatment they were used to, according to WWWA´s staff. Many women in SAMP´s (2007:62) study also expressed that they preferred to be in relationships with non-South African men from similar cultural background as themselves.

During my interview with Vincent he came back to women´s ability to create social networks around them in a way men do not. That ability can also be seen as a strategy women use to protect themselves during traveling and avoid being vulnerable. This also led to that women seemed to be a bit more organized then men before they came, according to Vincent. A man could migrate and just know that someone he knows is somewhere in Cape Town, while a woman would make sure she knows exactly where that person is. He said:

Women tend to be a little bit more organized. Which is that they think “ok now, before I go I need to have a sense of what it is that I’m going to find there, I need to know where the person is that I know in CT”. So actually by the time they leave they have a sense of what’s going to happen. Which is much more planned and much more organized and again I think it has to do with the ability to create social networks around them and to establish those relationships so that they can make things work.
According to all of my informants, women coming alone are definitely at higher risk and more vulnerable to exploitation than men or women coming together with someone else. It is also quite clear that female migrants were aware of these risks and that they had different strategies, like traveling in a group or networking, to make migration possible and safer. By using these strategies I got the sense that my informants did not see themselves as only victims, but instead capable of taking care of themselves.

2.6.2 Household changes

Roseline came from Congo DRC to meet up with her husband in Cape Town. After just a couple of weeks her husband had to leave her and their children to go and look for work in other parts of South Africa, since he could not get enough work in Cape Town to support the whole family. After being left by her husband the real difficulties started for Roseline. As described in chapter 2.5 she now became completely alone and isolated and struggled to survive. After some time her husband stopped returning her calls and disappeared, as she described it. Through contact with relatives back home she later found out that he stayed with a South African woman and working in another city.

According to Mary, a fate like Roseline’s was quite common and that the majority of the migrant women she had met through her work had been abandoned by their husbands. It was also common that the man went first and when they later brought in the rest of the family to South Africa they could not handle the difficulties in now supporting the whole family, Mary argued. So, even if a female migrant came with or met up with her husband that was no insurance for security and stability, since different and often unexpected difficulties could break families up. The women were usually the bigger loser in these situations because of several reasons. First of all because it was in general harder for women to get work and an income and that they also often had the sole responsibility for taking care of the children. But Mary also mentioned that women had a harder time to find a new partner in South Africa, just like the other WWWA staff had mentioned. Mary said:

*They [migrant men] have often disappeared in to a place with another woman who is local who will then provide free accommodation, food and the possibility of them having papers to stay here. It is very difficult in our culture to find women who go out*
looking for a man and saying to this man ‘please marry me’. It is always the men who come to women to say that I want to be involved with you.

The main reason for Mary to provide support to female migrants through WWWA was that she had seen women struggle alone for several different reasons, but often because of these household changes.

Vincent also brought up the importance to see the cultural context and gender roles within them to understand different household changes and how it affects men and women differently in migration. He said:

But it is a cultural conflict here that is important, I mean while the men are usually seen as the breadwinners the woman are seen as the nurtures of the family and they bring their cultural context with them. (...) And I think the burden of responsibility weighs much more heavily on women, compared to men. Men are much more straightforward, I need to make money to send back home, I don’t have to protect in the same way that women feel the obligation to do.

So, when a woman also becomes a breadwinner gender roles are being questioned. The big difficulty for women is that they still have to live up to their role as the family nurturer at the same time, according to Vincent. These difficulties were also detected by Lan (2003:204) in the cultural context for Filipina mothers. Lan meant that the sole responsibility for family care and household chores usually is put on the woman and through the ‘feminization’ of migration women also get the responsibility of creating an income, which results in dual responsibility. Lan also argued that in cases where the woman had to leave the household to work elsewhere, usually overseas for the Filipinas, their husbands were left with domestic responsibilities.

During one of WWWA’s workshops that I attended I started to reflect over the small number of women in comparison to male participants. The men were also in general the ones who talked out loud and asked questions. I had seen the lists with the migrants’ names and knew that a lot of women also had registered their interest to participate. When I later asked the staff at WWWA about the unequal number of men and women participating they explained that they had invited everyone, but for different reasons the men are the ones showing up. First off all there were still more men than women in the migrant community. Secondly WWWA generally did not allow participants to bring their children with them,
which could be an obstacle that directly affected women since it was usually their responsibility to take care of the children. Thirdly they explained to me that they lived in a society where the men are very dominant. In cases where WWWA invited both spouses the staff thought that it was common that the man wanted to go first and see what the workshop was about and then the woman might be able to participate.
2.7 The way forward

2.7.1 “Home is best”

The desire to go back to their home countries was something all my female informants had in common. All the women expressed a deep which to return home as soon as possible. One main reason was to be with the family they had left behind, but also simply because “home is home” and Cape Town did not feel like home to anyone of them. The different difficulties, already mentioned throughout this thesis, which the women had faced in Cape Town were also given as reasons for wanting to go home.

Mary and the staff at WWWA could also confirm that the wish to go home was common in the migrant community and among the people they worked with. Some of the staff themselves also explicitly expressed that they wanted to go back home when we were talking about the future one day. We were sitting in the office after a long day at Home Affairs and when I asked them if they would like to go back home they all laughed a little and one of them said “yes, back to our real lives”. One of the other staff members continued and said that she would like to go back home as soon as the insecure situation changes in her country. Etienne and Denise, who had left their home countries to seek shelter from violence and war in South Africa, also expressed that they wanted to go home as soon as the situation became more secure in their countries of origin. To Etienne it was hard to talk more detailed about her future since she had no idée were her family were and did not have contact with anyone in Congo DRC. When I met her she lived her life day by day focused on how to survive in Cape Town. When I asked her about the future she sighed, shook her head and said that she wanted to go home, but at the moment it was not safe for her there and she did not know anything for her future. Then she said:

Oh, I think now for a job, if I have a job, working, I know I can live my life and so I can talk about being back home, because now I have nothing. I don’t know where to go, how to do, what to do, you see. But if I get a job, maybe I can find a way to go home.

My other informants, who mainly migrated to get job and an income, expressed a need to stay and try to gain some capital before they could go home. Rinaa, for example, had plans
for business she wanted to start up in Zimbabwe, but first she needed to get capital. One business plan she had was together with her sister in-law back home. Together they wanted to organize and cater wedding parties. If Rinaa could get a passport with the four year working permit she had planned to stay those years and work as much as she could to get enough capital, and then go home. She was very clear about not wanting to stay longer then she needed in South Africa and she seemed confident when she talked about her future plans. One reason to why it seemed easier for Rinaa to talk about the future more in detail and within a timeframe could be that she was the only one of my informants with an employment and regular income. With a job and an income the set up goal to gain capital probably felt more within a reach. Victoria, for example, also expressed the same desire to gain capital and be able to go back home. She said “I would not like to stay here for the rest of my life, no no [she shook her head]. I just want South Africa for business.” But, in difference to Rinaa she had no idée of when this could be possible. When I met Victoria she struggled to make her own business profitable and her husband just got short jobs here and there.

Alice came to get educated to be a pastor. She could not afford to get educated in Zimbabwe, but her goal is to go back there as soon as she has her degree. Even though Alice was one of the women who expressed that she felt very lonely and she had met a lot of difficulties, she was still not prepared to give up. I wanted to understand what it was that kept up her will to stay and when I asked her about it she said that she could not go back to Zimbabwe without a degree, otherwise people will wonder what she had done for several years in South Africa. The issue of not wanting to return unsuccessfully seemed to be very crucial to a lot of my informants.

To gain capital to be able to create a better life at home, for both themselves and their families, seemed to be the main goal for most of the women. None of them could really say when they thought that they would be able to go home though. They just knew that it would not be in a near future. Some of them expressed a deep frustration over there situations and not getting forward as long as they could not get a job or their business profitable. Most of them were also still waiting to get an approved refugee status, before that they are legally not allowed to work.

Even if my informants struggled, both financially and socially, they seemed to have hope for the future. Alice, who had just got a spot at a church to study, said “my future is now bright, I want to be in the leadership not run away”. Some of the other women also expressed that they thought it was worth waiting and they still had hopes to get a job. So even though
my informants met a lot of struggle and had a quite negative view of their lives in Cape Town, and that they really wanted to go home, it seemed like their best or only choice was to stay for now. Christina, for example, who had got some shorter domestic jobs before I met her, said “sometimes I’m happy, because now when I’m here I can at least get a little bit and I can send it home, so it is better for them.” The ability to be able to contribute to the household costs back home was the biggest concern and reason to stay for many migrants in SAMP’s study (2007:38). The SAMP study could also show how women who had a job had a more positive view of their lives in Cape Town, the future and in general they worried less if they could send money home.

I think it is important to highlight the fact that even though my informants explained and talked about their lives and situations as quite difficult and that they struggled a lot they did not just complain. They told me about the situation in Cape Town as they experienced it, but most of them did also talk about their difficulties in terms of what they thought had to be changed in the future to create a better situation for migrants, which was related to laws and migration policies. Both Victoria and Denise, for example, pointed out the problems with discrimination against migrants in the hiring process and in general unfair terms of employment. This was also connected to the fact that they were forced to work ‘illegally’ without any rights, because of difficulties to be documented. Problems in getting documented connected to unsafe, lengthy and expensive procedures were pointed out by most of the women. Both Rinaa and Victoria also said that the corruption and bribery going on among officials at the borders and at the Home Affairs was a big problem that needed to be changed.

Vincent told me that one of the questions that had been asked in SAMP’s (2007) study was what the women themselves thought that the South African government could do to improve the lives of female migrants. One of the female migrants had responded, according to Vincent, “tell the government to come talk to the ladies. We know what needs to be done, tell them to come ask us”. In similarity with my informants the women participating in the SAMP study could point out the difficulties that they struggled with and explain why they were difficult, which also led to suggestions on what should be done to make it better. Vincent continued “and that for me was a real sense of this is not someone who is a victim and have no sense of what she wants and where she wants to go and so, she knows”. Another woman in SAMP’s study had said “the government can help us, but they must come and talk to us, they must not sit over there and decide what is best for us.” Not just seeing women as victims is a very important way to approach the situation of female immigrants, according to Vincent.
3 Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout the empirical section of this thesis I have tried to show and explain certain themes and patterns that I have found in my informants stories and experiences of the life as female migrants in Cape Town. Different struggles with, for example, getting documented, getting an income, getting housing and experiencing xenophobia were reoccurring patterns connected to social structures and systems. A lot of these structures and systems were in turn results of South African immigration policies. The South African immigration policy is open towards needed and wanted skilled migrants, but not towards ‘unwanted’ asylum seekers. As shown in previous chapters several different factors contributed to the female migrants´ difficult situation. With the asylum-seekers permit the migrants were allowed to stay in the country, but not allowed to legally work, which put them in a difficult and marginalized position (Ruhs & Anderson 2010). They are included and excluded at the same time. Structural constraints, based on immigration policy, made it hard for the female migrants to access any rights and protection in general, which made them more vulnerable to exploitation. The women were also exposed to gender discrimination, both as a result from the lack of a female perspective within immigration policies and cultural gender structures where women should be quiet and stay in their place. The ‘feminization’ of migration and women’s increased movement question these existing gender roles and the picture of a migrant as a man. But in difference to a male migrant a woman ends up in the complex situation of being both a breadwinner and the nurturer of the family, which was a source of distress to all of my informants.

More importantly the women’s stories have also shown how they have developed strategies to try to deal with these difficulties and struggles and how they were good at taking opportunities around them. Networking seemed to be one of the most central strategies, used by my informants before the departure from their home countries, during their travel and after arrival in South Africa. All the different strategies brought up in this thesis show an ability to take initiative and a will to seek out solutions. As shown in chapter 2.3 the women created opportunities for themselves when it came to work even if they were well aware of the ‘illegality’ of their actions. They constantly had to live with having their acts ‘criminalized’ and being exposed to ‘othering’.

In a practical sense the women had to accept these conditions to be able to work around them. But they were actively questioning them, pointing them out to me as ‘big problems’ and talking about them as unfair. This also shows how they negotiated their environment and the
attitude from people around them to move forward or sideways to look for other ways and strategies. To most of my informants the crucial thing was to get an income and to be able to support both themselves and their families. As discussed in chapter 2.2 my informants also wanted to be legalized. But since they had no legal rights and could not get protection against unfair treatment they were forced into a position of ‘illegality’ that made them vulnerable and easy to exploit. In this sense they were trapped in a conflict between what they thought was wrong and what they felt that they had to do.

No consideration is made in immigration policies to the fact that the female and male migration process can be quite different. Even though they have created strategies to try to handle the struggles they face as female migrants in Cape Town it does not change the fact that they are victims to larger structures that they cannot control. But the word ‘victim’ often comes with different preconceived attributes and it is therefore central to take a closer look at this terminology. According to Dahl (2009) the two terms ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ are often used as opposites when labeling subjects within social sciences. The term ‘victim’ is used to describe an individual put in a situation by other forces unrelated to his or her own agency. The ‘victim’ is depicted to be passive, lacking capacity to take initiative and is generally seen as powerless against structural constraints. An ‘agent’ on the other hand is described to be the opposite, an active seeker of solutions and having agency. ‘Agency’ comes into play every time there is a choice to be made (ibid: 397). According this approach you cannot both be a victim and have agency to be an active agent seeking solutions. Within feminist theory the term ‘victim’ was used to point out structures of inequality and oppression, but there is a risk for internalization of victimhood and that women would see themselves as passive and powerless. To not reproduce oppressive structures and ideology women should be seen as capable actors and active agents (ibid: 394). In difference to this approach and divide between the terms Dahl (2009:405) argues:

We must be able to talk about the impact of structural patterns on the scope of people’s action without being seen as questioning their preparedness to act within the framework of possibilities. We must make a clear distinction between agency in the sense of efficient impact and in the sense of willingness-to-act, not to reread the effects of constraints as individual shortcomings of character.
An individual can be a victim to a situation that he or she cannot control or cannot have an efficient impact on, but still be active in seeking solutions and in trying to change one’s own situation.

As shown in this thesis my informants are victims of difficult situations, in both their home countries and in South Africa, and at the same time active agents in seeking solutions and constructing strategies to help themselves. It is therefore important to see and point out the structures, which in this case constrained my informants’ scope of action, to be able to understand their situation and how they actively created ways to deal with it.

Today’s South African Immigration Act is not connected to migrants’ realities and their needs, especially not women’s. By ignoring the relation between gender, migration and development the South African government is working against itself and not for economical growth and the consideration of human rights that was set out to be the foundation of the new Act, according to Crush & Dodson (2006b). Through the framework of this thesis I argue that it is possible to draw connections between gender, migration and development. The women were capable of both creating survival strategies and pointing out what was wrong and what needed to be changed, but without any rights and protection the women were made ‘speechless’ in the public debate. This is where a difference can be made by including female migrants in the migration debate and making of policies.
Bibliography


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Appendix - Pictures from the field

Picture nr 1. This is outside of Cape Town Refugee Reception Center, called Home Affairs in chapter 2.2. This picture is taken in the afternoon. In the morning migrants and refugees are lining up along the road straight ahead passing through the gate.

Picture nr 2, 3 and 4, below, were all taken in the townships Khayelitsha and Nyanga. As the pictures show the living conditions can differ a lot between different parts of the same township. Picture nr 3 and 4 were taken in the same township not too far apart, but picture nr 3 is from an unofficial area, not approved by the government.