

“Beyond the allure of Gold”

Zimbabwean migrants belonging, attachment and identity in Johannesburg

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Introduction

Zimbabwean migration to South Africa has a long and multi-phased history. In this work, I focus on attachment to place. This refers to the relationship that migrants have with personal spaces that include: their house · street · suburb · city · country

The literature on Zimbabwean migration primarily focuses on causation and mainly engages movement of migrants in relation to the humanitarian, political and economic situation in Zimbabwe.

By engaging different forms and meanings of attachment to place, I invite migration researchers to shift the lens and challenge colonial stereotypes of African migration. For instance, the enduring presence of Zimbabweans in South Africa over many generations, implores us to look at the different dimensions of permanence and relationship to place rather than just focusing on circulation.

Selected results

Attachment to house	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly attached	42	28.0
Attached	44	29.3
Slightly attached	29	19.3
Not attached	27	18.0
Strongly unattached	8	5.3
Total	150	100.0

Attachment to suburb	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly attached	33	22.0
Attached	53	35.3
Slightly attached	24	16.0
Not attached	31	20.7
Strongly unattached	9	6.0
Total	150	100.0

Attachment to Joburg	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly attached	33	22.0
Attached	52	34.7
Slightly attached	25	16.7
Not attached	34	22.7
Strongly unattached	6	4.0
Total	150	100.0



A rose with thorns?

“...we love Johannesburg, but home is home you know. You can never be attached to Johannesburg because every corner they talk badly about foreigners. I think it is only this country where they do not like foreigners...”

Conclusion:

Attachment to place does not only pertain to the way that migrants view certain spaces in the origin and destination cities but, it is a description of the personal relationship that migrants have with specific spaces. As such, it is conceivable to disaggregate the relationship that migrants have with place of residence, neighbourhood, city and country. Such variation recognises the agency of migrants and permits new ways of looking at the Zimbabwean presence in South Africa beyond temporality.

Selected migrant responses:

“I am strongly attached to the city of Johannesburg; the first reason is the economic prospects. It is also the nerve-centre for the family; that is where many of our family members and people from home live. It is like home as the whole family from our grandfathers have come here and not gone anywhere else, so I feel strongly attached to Johannesburg because it is like my second home”

“I am strongly unattached to Johannesburg because it disgusts me”

“I have no attachment to Johannesburg because there are too many thieves”



Methods

The study relied on data from a survey of 150 Zimbabwean migrants living in Johannesburg, participant observation in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to engage the different forms of attachment to place that migrants develop over time

Inner city migrants housing market in Joburg

