

Johannesburg (South Africa) inner city African immigrant traders: pathways out of and beyond poverty?

Abstract

By deploying two contrasting perspectives (exclusion and exit) on urban informality as analytical lenses, this paper explores the interconnectedness and complexities associated with the entry by African immigrant into informal trading within Johannesburg (South Africa) inner city. Using experiences of the African immigrants, the paper brings to the fore new insights into the complexities of joining and growing informal businesses, thus providing a re-reading to the dichotomous presentations of the exclusion (harassment by regulatory authorities and lack of the necessary trading licences) and exit (attractions to opportunities within the informal sector) theses. The paper demonstrates that in the majority of cases, African immigrants' experience the two at the same time, thus revealing that they are two sides of the same coin – that can be very complex to disaggregate hence the simplicity approach to factors that influence entry and growth of the informal businesses is questionable in the case of African immigrants.). Using a qualitative study of 40 African immigrant traders, this study suggests as simplistic the explanation that African immigrant traders continue to set up businesses and trade in the Johannesburg inner city, because they were only escaping from among others, poverty and exploitation. Insights from this study seem to suggest that they also engage in street trading because of the lure of less or no stringent controls and the possibility of earning higher incomes. Such insights seem to complicate the perception by African immigrant traders that they engaged in street trading simply because of discrimination, xenophobia and the devaluing of their qualifications. Instead there is a coterie of pathways that lift immigrants out poverty and set them on a journey towards wealth creation. This raises implications regarding the complexity of reasons why African immigrants in a setting like the Johannesburg inner city engage in street trading.

Key words: African immigrant traders, urban informality

Introduction

Subsequent to the democratic dispensation in 1994, there has been an increase in the number of immigrants into South Africa (World Migration Report 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Adepoju 2003; Landau et al. 2005; Campell 2010). While the South African legislation attempts to limit the entry of foreign nationals into South Africa, many have entered the country (Peberdy 1998; Peberdy and Rogerson 2000) as either legal or illegal immigrants. Peberdy and Rogerson (2000) have argued that the South African immigration laws are generally hostile to small immigrant businesses and as a result few qualify for business permits. Some African immigrants have entered the country on temporary visas that do not explicitly allow them to set up a business or to trade in South Africa. This has however, not prevented immigrants from setting up businesses in South Africa (Peberdy and Rogerson 2000), with many African immigrant traders setting up predominantly informal and unregistered businesses. The result is that small businesses owned by immigrants were and probably still are a growing phenomenon in South Africa (Rogerson 1997; Peberdy and Rogerson 2003).

Subsequent and comparable studies (see e.g Cohen 2010; Dwyer 2010; Kalitanyi and Visser 2010; Mapadimeng 2011), seem to suggest that African immigrant traders are a growing, significant and more or less permanent feature of urban South Africa's small business landscape. For instance, a study of African immigrant traders in Cape Town suggests that they were relatively well developed and contributed to employment creation (Kalitanyi and Visser 2010). In Durban, the study revealed that African immigrant traders' activities were inextricably linked to the formal economy (Mapadimeng 2011) as were those in Johannesburg inner city's Bree Street (Cohen 2010). If this is the case, what is important for the present purpose is to comment on the environment within which these African immigrant traders operate. This is deemed important for the simple reason that, it will provide the context within which to analyse the agency of African immigrant traders and thus, address the question of why and how they engage in street trading and the experiences that are incidental to their operations.

That African immigrants in general, experience discrimination, harassment, hostility and xenophobia as opposed to other immigrants in South Africa is well documented (see e.g. Crush 2008a, 2008b; Crush and Tevera 2010; Crush and Tawodzera 2011; Crush and Tawodzera

2014; Dodson 2010; Laher 2010; Landau 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011; Landau and Freemantle 2010; Landau and Monson 2010). We mention this background in order to introduce and focus on the specific case of African immigrant traders. In this vein, a number of popular and academic writers have reported that African immigrants who engage in business in Johannesburg have not been treated well. True to 'the entrenched and systemic' xenophobia 'in South African society' (Dodson 2010, 8), violent attacks on and deaths of African immigrant traders by South Africans have been recorded. For example, Landau and Polzer (2007) chronicled detailed incidents of the attacks, some of them fatal, against African foreign nationals in general and informal traders specifically.

In the Gauteng Province, where the city of Johannesburg is located, this is evidenced by the attacks on Somali shops by the residents of Ramaphosa settlement in June 2011 (The Star, 2 June 2011, p. 6) and in May 2013 (The Star, 29 May 2013, p.4). A newspaper (The Star, 19 May 2011, p.6) reported that the harassment of foreign traders in Reiger Park (Erkurhuleni Municipality), in Soweto and in other townships around Johannesburg was led by a formal business forum. The incidents of xenophobia in the latter two references show that foreign shop owners are vulnerable victims who cannot return to their countries of origin as the reasons that motivated them to leave their countries of origin and come to South Africa still persist. In January 2015, there was an attack on foreign owned businesses, especially those owned by the Somalis in Johannesburg (Hlubi 2015). In April 2015, foreign owned shops and especially those of African immigrants were looted in Jeppestown, Johannesburg in what is considered as a xenophobic rage (De Klerk 2015; Hawker 2015) and similar incidents were reported in Alexandra, Johannesburg (Aboobaker 2015).

It should be noted that the 2015 attacks on African immigrants' traders did not specifically occur in the geographical area of this case study, but near to the research area. These attacks together with earlier observations by Peberdy and Rogerson (2000), that there is reluctance on the part of the authorities to grant African immigrant traders, trading licences, provide the general context of the environment in which African immigrant traders occur and operate within the geographical area of this case study. Therefore, the overall aim of this paper is to explore, why in the midst of the challenges of on-going attacks and lack of support from South African authorities to issue African traders with the necessary licences, African immigrants still resort to informal trading on the streets of the inner city in Johannesburg. In order to provide the framework of this case study, this paper will first discuss the perspectives on urban informality as related to immigrant traders. This will be followed by a description of the data

gathering process and data analysis methodology and will then report on the findings of the qualitative interviews to provide some explanation on why African continue to set up businesses and trade in the Johannesburg inner city, despite the number of challenges faced as immigrants in South Africa.

Theoretical framework: Perspectives on urban informality

Several theses have been put forward in an effort to explain the development of urban informality. These include the dualistic, structuralist, legalistic and social relations perspectives. However this work made use of the two relevant theses, that are structuralist and the legalistic perspectives.

The structuralist perspective regards urban informality as a product of economic crisis or the informalisation of the formal economy as people who are forced to join the sector to survive after being retrenched by the formal economy (Portes, et al. 1989; Chen 2012). It was however realised that the structuralist thesis was mostly applicable to industrialised countries which had experienced widespread informalisation during the economic crisis in the 1980s, but could not explain the presence of informality in less industrialised countries that did not have widespread informalisation of formal businesses (Sassen 1988, Sassen 1989). Socialist countries with low industrial production also experienced a sharp increase in urban informality particularly due to rapid urbanisation and small economies that could not absorb migrant labour (Kim 2002, Kim 2003, Kim 2005; William and Round 2007a, William and Round 2007b).

The structuralist views failed to consider that urban informality existed due to a stringent regulatory regime in the formal economy (De Soto 1989). This led to the formulation of the legalist perspective of the phenomenon (World Bank 1989; ILO 1993; Meagher 1995). Reformists and radical neo-liberalists believe that informal economic operators choose to voluntarily exit the formal economy that has stringent regulations for registering and operating a business (Gumbo and Geyer 2011). However, the alternative view has been found too narrow as it is only relevant to own-account informal operators with relatively high incomes, better education and skills, but is not applicable to informal waged employees and petty traders (Williams and Windebank 1998). Besides, its prescriptions for free markets and complete state withdrawal (ILO 1972; De Soto 1989; World Bank 1989; Gerxhani 2004) from dealing with the informal sector are retrogressive as the sector gets exposed to serious global competition and lack of resources or support from the state. It has repeatedly been proven that giving urban

informality autonomy, flexibility, and freedom alone, without active support by the state and formal economy is not enough (Gumbo and Geyer 2011).

What emerges from these perspectives of the informal sector is consensus on the significance of the informal economy in the creation of employment and the provision of livelihoods to large numbers of urban residents across continents (Castells and Portes 1989; De Soto 1989). This observation was also made by Fleming et al. (2000), who contended that urban informality has grown to become the buzzword across disciplines and world economies.

What is also suggested by these perspectives is that urban informality is common in all countries - developed, transitional and developing countries. However, its levels, magnitude, and composition differs considerably. This is due to differences in economic, social, political, and legal characteristics (Potts 2008). In the case of developing countries, urban informality, plays an important role in the economies of these countries. For this reason, there is a need to conduct empirical and theoretical studies on urban informality in order to gain a better understanding of *inter alia*, circumstances and conditions that lead to its growth (Kesteloot and Meert 1999; Moreno-Monroy 2012). However there is dearth of literature on the seamlessness of the two perspectives about the entry into informality and the growth of the phenomena. The legalistic perspective dwell on the exclusion thesis whilst the structuralistic solely advances the exit thesis. This paper is thus, a modest attempt at illuminating the connectedness of the two theses as they influence entry and growth into informality sometimes occurring at different but closely related junctures. In pursuit of this goal, and by focusing on a South African case study of African immigrant traders in the Johannesburg inner city, this paper targets at broadening the understanding of situations that influence entry and growth of the informal sector in an African context.

For this reason, this theoretical framework is intended to situate the case of African immigrant traders within phenomenon of urban informality, suggesting that this background provides an analytical frame in terms of the insights that is throws on this case study. The critical question for this paper is to explore how and why African immigrant traders have joined the urban informal sector by resorting to trading on the streets. Thus, questions of whether this has happened as an attempt by the African immigrant traders to escape from poverty and actual and/or perceived discrimination, segregation and xenophobia arises. Is engaging in this economic activity by African immigrant traders, heroic entrepreneurship (De Soto 2000). Based on that African immigrant traders, had the tenacity and courage, that after the

devaluation of their qualifications, exploitation and other forms of exclusion, they still managed to pick up the pieces and engage in street trading – could that be seen as heroic?

Another question relates to whether, engaging in street trading by African immigrants could be regarded as a defiant attempt against occupying the 'habitus of the dispossessed' (Bayat 2007, p.579). Habitus is defined as a collective of practices in the social field (Bourdieu 1977, 1990 cited in Thieme 2011). It is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant 2005, p, 316). The term habitus of the dispossessed is deployed in this paper to convey the seemingly hopeless context and condition within which African immigrant find themselves in Johannesburg inner city relating to economic, structural, and socio-political conditions that had "dispossessed" them of *inter alia* chances at professional jobs, which reduced them to abject levels of poverty and reducing them to the subaltern. Hence, they were resisting what the Johannesburg inner city had "guided" and "structured" them to feel and live accordingly, by engaging in the informal sector and 'strategies that respond directly to their immediate concerns' (Bayat 2007 p. 588), in a variety of actions and strategies that can be called 'street politics' (Bayat 1997, 9.63; Bayat 2012, p.119). Addressing among others, these questions, is an attempt at understanding the motivations for engaging in street trading by African immigrants in the Johannesburg inner city.

Methodology

The qualitative interviews were conducted with forty African immigrant traders from, DRC (3), Ghana (4), Malawi (6), Mali (1), Mozambique (3), Nigeria (5), Somalia (2), Tanzania (8) and Zimbabwe (8) over a period of nine months, between June 2012, and February 2013 and centred on the events and process with the events referring to what the African immigrant traders did and the process referring to the nature of activities which they undertook, an approach suggested by Huberman (1994 cited in Creswell 2009, p.178).

In focusing on these, the research sought to understand the phenomenon represented by African immigrant traders in terms of why they engaged in the informal sector. The data was manually analysed by establishing classifications and finally making connections and explaining these, a method endorsed by Creswell (2009). In the section which presents the actual interview data, fictitious names have been used so as to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents.

Johannesburg inner city is located in the city of Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa and had a population of about 4434827 (City of Johannesburg-Statistics South Africa 2013) in 2012. It is the capital city of Gauteng which, according to Wray (2014), is the richest province in South Africa. In addition, 7.1% of the population in the province is made up of immigrants (Statistic South Africa 2012), of whom 82% are from the SADC (Transport trends in the GCR - GCRO Gauteng City-Region 2013).

As Johannesburg is the biggest city in South Africa, this could explain why it is a major attraction for immigrants, and hence described as a city of in-migration (OECD 2011) or 'a quintessentially migrant city', but also 'one of the least-immigrant-friendly cities in the world' (Crush 2008, p.280). Murray (2010, p.145) estimates that a quarter of the population of Johannesburg inner city is made up of immigrants 'from virtually everywhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia'. It is estimated that there are about '7000 to 10000 traders' in the Johannesburg inner city (Regional Spatial Development Framework for Region F 2010-2011, p.17), hence Johannesburg inner city was chosen as the case study to include in this paper.

Entry and Growth Experiences of immigrants within informal sector in Johannesburg: Beyond the dichotomy of exclusion and exit thesis

The testimonies of the African immigrant traders were divided into exclusion, exit and intersection of exclusion and exit factors.

1. Exclusion Thesis

Inoe - NB. Lets pick examples of responses that point to exclusion – we dwell on themes and not people – because we can not justify why we pick people. I need your help here.

The testimonies of the clear majority of African immigrant traders seem to paint a picture of people who had suffered different levels of what can be regarded as different forms of exclusion. This ranges from the lack of recognition of qualifications and failure to secure resident and work permits to exploitation. Based on these similar interview accounts, only four testimonies and life histories of African immigrants, who were considered to be representative will be discussed in this part as a prelude to the analysis in the following section, in order to understand the motivations of African immigrant traders in engaging in street trading. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the four African immigrants who participated in these qualitative interviews for this case study.

Kasongo is an immigrant trader from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and he is the owner of an informal clothes, cell phone and cell phone accessories; cosmetics and hair product business on the corner of Eloff/Jeppe Streets. His enterprises are doing very well revealing that he has managed to identify opportunities and invested his entrepreneurial skills as noted before in other settings by several scholars (see Williams 2007, 2010; Shane, and Venkataraman 2000). He came to South Africa in 1999 because of war and political instability in his country of origin. He has chosen to stay because, he believes that life is better in South Africa, than his country of origin. He obtained a Bachelor Degree in Psychology while still living in the DRC. He explained that his qualification was not recognised in South Africa and as a result he has not been able to find a suitable job commensurate with his qualification. In order to earn a living he decided to start a small business and over the years has been able to earn a decent living (Interview with Kasongo, a DRC immigrant trader, Johannesburg inner city, August 2012). He trades on the streets in Johannesburg and has given up the hope of ever working as a psychologist while in South Africa. He firmly believes that even though he was forced to join the informal sector as a result of the lack of recognition of qualifications, he thinks that he plays an important role in the Johannesburg inner city by selling goods at low prices directly to the consumers. Although he was initially forced to create his own jobs outside the conventional FES to survive and feed their families, a development that has simply been considered a reflection of the by-product or exclusion thesis of participating in the informal sector (see Portes & Castells; Meagher 1995; Williams 2010), this work has revealed that there is a fine line between desperation and strands of entrepreneurship by the immigrant. This alone reveals the complexities that are associated with entry and participation in the informal sector.

Joe, is from Malawi, and trades at the intersection of Joubert/Plein Streets. He came to South Africa for economic problems in Malawi and continues to stay in South Africa for the same reasons. He asserted that as a result of his failure to get a work permit, it was impossible for him to be employed in the formal sector. He stated that he was vulnerable to the potential employers in the formal sector as they would offer him lower salaries on shorter term contracts without any benefits. Most of the positions he could obtain in the formal sector required strenuous manual work, as a result he decided that was a tough life and thus resorted to trading on the streets. Joe sells consumable goods, clothes, blankets and a variety of other goods. He declared that he was prepared to continue in this business because in spite of his difficult experiences, he managed to secure a decent livelihood. Even though he asserts that on occasions the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police harasses him, he had learnt to weather

challenges where possible by paying bribes. His business has grown in terms of the profits which he claims he realises and now employs two people from his home town in Malawi.

Debra is a Zimbabwean immigrant who sells vegetables and clothes from a stall along Eloff Street between Bree and Plein Streets. She is married and has four children all of whom are in Zimbabwe. She stated that she came to South Africa in 2000 as a result of economic reasons namely better opportunities for advancement and a better living standard for her children in Zimbabwe. Therefore, when she could not find employment due to the strict restrictions relating to acquiring a work permit, she applied to the Johannesburg Metropolitan Trading Company and was allocated a big stall from which she sells different types of vegetables on one side and clothes on the other. She argued that, trading on the streets was not easy and had often experienced harassment from the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police who sometimes looted their goods despite her legal status to trade on the streets. For this Zimbabwean respondent, her chances of formal employment are limited as she was not granted a work permit, and consequently started trading on the streets.

2. Exit Thesis

George is a Tanzanian immigrant who sells African attire, beadwork and embroidery from the Bree Street Taxi Rank. Since arriving in South Africa in 1999, for economic reasons in his country of origin, he has not been able to obtain a work permit. He married a South African woman and now has permanent resident status. He indicated that the reason for him making his living in the informal sector is due to general hostility towards him as an African foreigner. He argued that even when one held good qualifications, this was not a guarantee of finding suitable employment in the formal sector. His shop is well supported by customers and he has made good profits in the past and has managed to open two more shops. He is generally happy with the way he earns a living. George stated that he intends staying in South Africa for as long as his business can sustain him and has no intentions of ever looking for employment in the formal sector as he believes that he will never earn a good salary or become accepted as an African foreigner. He has managed to beyond survivalist tendencies and has created wealth for himself and his family

what they called low class jobs before they started the small trading businesses. For example one man from Zimbabwe claimed that he had a Diploma in Education and before he started his

business, he worked as a gardener and from his point of view that was low class. In addition a Tanzanian man added that 'I used to wash plates in a restaurant in Fourways and since I had a Diploma in Transport Management, this was far below what I am professionally worth' (Interview with James, a Tanzanian immigrant trader, Johannesburg inner city, January 2013).

A Zimbabwean woman stated that, she had been a teacher in Zimbabwe for many years and when she arrived in South Africa she thought that her qualifications and experience as a primary school teacher would secure her employment. The only position she could find was to work as a maid. She would work four to five times a day and the same number of times per week for different people, so as to raise her income. Some of her employers would so easily ill-treat her by shouting at her for failing to properly use a washing machine. She narrated that one lady told her that she could not properly use a washing machine because in Zimbabwe these were not available and some of the people whose houses she cleaned would not pay her the agreed salary. She made the decision to rather trade on the streets than suffer the abuse from her employers as a maid.

3. Exclusion and Exit intersection

The immigrants revealed that they faced both hardships – rejection by both the formal institutions and formal job markets– exclusion theses and opportunities that they could tap from the informal sector. Almost all the respondents were not only forced to join the informal sector but levels of attractions by the opportunities that presented themselves were also experienced although different.

NB – there is need for details from interviews – lets demonstrate the intersection - complexity

Escaping out of and beyond poverty : Towards the Fusion thesis of Johannesburg inner city immigrant traders

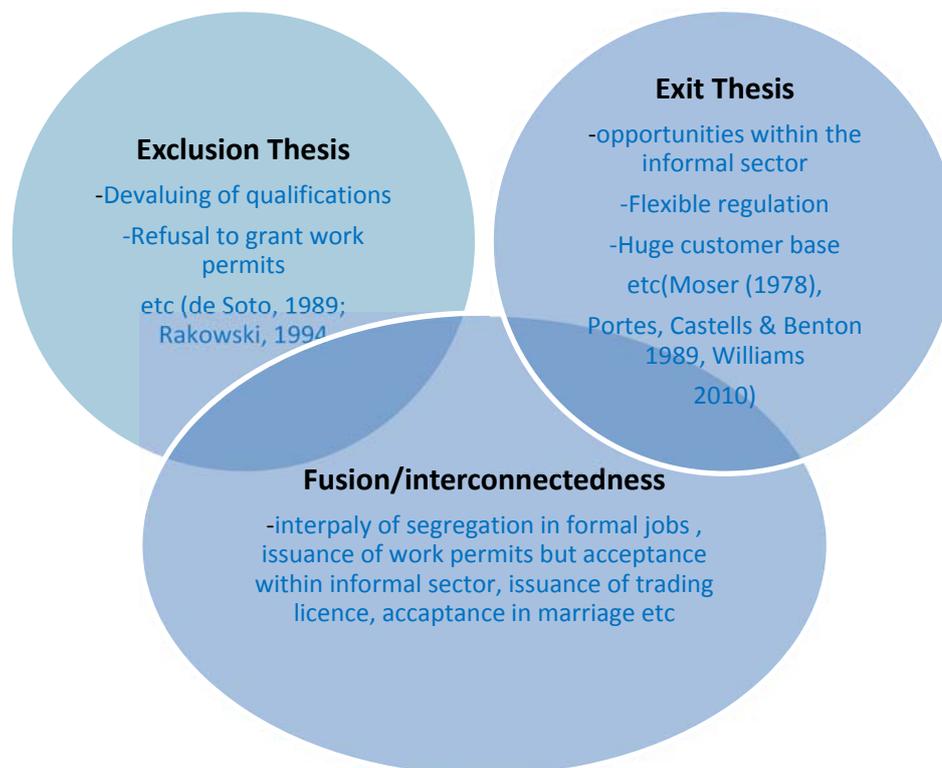
Faced with challenges related to exclusion with the formal sector and institutions, the informal sector kept on beckoning the African immigrants. This demonstrates the interplay of exclusion and exit at the same time. Literature sources have been silent about the simultaneous existence of hardships and opportunities for participants of the informal sector at once.

Exclusion – segregation - Immigrants had their qualifications devalued and lack recognition. They also could not easily join the informal sector. They were refused work permits. Low salaries in formal jobs. No recognition by formal institutions.

Exit – Immigrants could easily join the informal sector with very few requirements if they were there. They could also be granted trading licences – Zimbabwean lady. They could easily be accepted in informal marriage arrangement to locals.

Fusion – the interplay of these factors at the same time made them shift from formal institutions and settings to join the informal sector.

As opposed to the dichotomous treatment of informal traders by the structuralist and legalistic perspectives – the African immigrants never separately and at different times forced to enter the informal sector and during other settings attracted to join the sector, rather the forces acted upon them at the same time – hence exclusion and exit work at the same time giving positive results to African immigrants particularly in better performing economies that have stringent conditions but friendly and supportive informal settings.



In all the narratives included in this case study, the majority of African traders resorted to street trading as they could not find another source of livelihood. The devaluing of qualifications of many of the respondents was significant in this case study. Table 1 reflects the qualifications of the forty respondents.

Table 1: Summary of undervalued qualifications held by African immigrant traders

Country	Undervalued qualification	Frequency
DRC	Diploma in Nursing	2
DRC	Degree in Psychology	1
Ghana	Diploma in Policing	2
Ghana	Diploma in Nursing	2
Malawi	Diploma in Journalism	3
Malawi	Diploma in Policing	1
Mali	Certificate in Education	1
Mozambique	Diploma in Architecture	1
Nigeria	Degree in Town Planning	2
Somalia	Diploma in Philosophy	1
Tanzania	Certificate in Education	2
Tanzania	Diploma in Transport Management	2
Zimbabwe	Diploma in Education (Primary)	4

N=40

What is suggested is that, in light of Bourdieu's theory of practice, the decision by African immigrants to trade on the streets of Johannesburg, demonstrates practices and contestations in the social field. This is because the operation of the social field is governed by 'laws', which means that there were social practices which are allowed and there are some, which are not (Thieme 2011:334). A clear majority (29 out of the 40 respondents) of the African immigrant traders asserted that they have not been able to get employment and those who have been are unfairly treated and remunerated low salaries due to the fact they are foreigners.

Sixty per cent (Table 1) of the respondents explained that their qualifications were not recognised and/or undervalued and as a result had to do what they called low class jobs before they started the small trading businesses. For example one man from Zimbabwe claimed that he had a Diploma in Education and before he started his business, he worked as a gardener and from his point of view that was low class. In addition a Tanzanian man added that 'I used to wash plates in a restaurant in Fourways and since I had a Diploma in Transport Management, this was far below what I am professionally worth' (Interview with James, a Tanzanian immigrant trader, Johannesburg inner city, January 2013).

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The lack of recognition of their cultural capital demonstrates that, what was important and recognised in their country of origin was not accorded the same respect in South Africa, for example, teachers with certificates in education from Mali and Tanzania were not recognised, so also were those with Diplomas in Journalism, Transport Management, Philosophy, Policing among others (Table 1). In order to earn a living in Johannesburg inner city, the African immigrants had to resort to trading. In Johannesburg inner city, the African immigrants whose educational qualifications were not recognised initially accepted low class jobs, out of which they raised the capital to start businesses. They thought that the only way to economically uplift themselves was to form businesses, where at least, they could earn according to their efforts than to be undervalued, discriminated and reduced to low class jobs, such as teachers becoming maids and gardeners and transport managers becoming dish washers in restaurants. Thus, engaging in street trading was an avenue out of a low class live – pathway out of poverty. The reasons for participation in lucrative informal productive activities confirm the alternative or exit thesis of informalisation (Fiege 1989; Harding & Jenkins 1989; World bank 1989; ILO 1993; Meagher 1995; Gumbo & Geyer 2011).

It needs to be noted however that, the devaluation of qualification is not something that is neither new nor specific to the Johannesburg inner city. In fact, this case study seem to confirm other studies such as that of Moyo (2014) and Smit and Rugnanan (2014). The former was based in the same study area and the latter focused on African refugee women from countries like DRC and Burundi. We highlight this point in order to demonstrate that in this paper, we move beyond any analysis that limits explanation to just the devaluation of qualifications and other forms of exclusion.

Nevertheless, this picture of all African immigrants having their qualifications devalued should not be taken as representative of all African immigrant traders in the Johannesburg inner city. About 27 per cent of the interviewees indicated that they came to South Africa and the Johannesburg inner city specifically to set up businesses, which suggests that the idea of being 'stuck' is not universal. Thus, there could be some African immigrants with critical skills who have moved up the social and professional ladder. This, together with the fact that some African immigrants came specifically to set up businesses and not to look for employment seem to illustrate that those who have been forced to resort to street trading have taken a brave attempt to escape poverty.

Likewise, the Malawian, Tanzanian and Zimbabwean immigrant traders stated that they engaged in street trading as they failed to get work permits which would allow them to look for jobs in line with their qualifications. The situations African immigrant traders (whose life stories were captured above) suggests that engaging in street trading was an avenue to escape out of poverty as they had no other source of livelihood in the Johannesburg inner city, a foreign city. In fact, the DRC immigrant trader asserted that he has given up being a Psychologist and the aspect of giving up suggest a desperate attempt to escape out of poverty. In the same breath, it can also be regarded as heroic, that after all else relating to the skills that that the Congolese had trained for failed, they still had the courage and wisdom to start street trading.

Furthermore, the Zimbabwean immigrant trader ran away from economic problems in her country of origin, which had reduced her to serious levels of poverty only to arrive in the Johannesburg inner city and suddenly realize that she could not easily get a job, which placed her in a difficult and desperate economic and social position. The African immigrant traders have similar stories, which is the struggle to survive and escape out of a desperate situation by engaging in street trading.

The economic activities, in which these African immigrant traders are involved in, include selling clothes, cell phone and cell phone accessories and consumable goods. These goods are bought from established wholesalers in and around the Johannesburg inner city. This suggests that African immigrant traders in the study area are linked to the formal economy in a buying and selling relationship and this keeps the both sectors in sound business. This implies that the explanatory power of dualistic perspective of urban informality which conceives of the phenomenon as separate from the formal economy seems to fail in this case study. The activities of the African street traders revealed in the interviews are not only inextricably linked

to the formal economy but also that they are not backward. This confirms other studies (see e.g. (Potts 2008; Venter 2010; Cohen 2010). African immigrant traders are a vibrant source of livelihood for the African immigrant traders who were interviewed and seem to supply affordable goods to the consumers in the Johannesburg inner city at affordable prices. The creative and agentive ways through which they operated their businesses seem to suggest some entrepreneurial skills.

Beyond the functionalist: Complex and connected pathways out of and beyond poverty - The Fusion thesis

An important issue which arose from these interviews is that all the African immigrant traders interviewed in this study indicated that it was relatively easy to enter into the informal economy. In other words, the informalisation of formal economy was already in place and this could be used to explain why the decision by African immigrant to trade on the streets was not difficult. In this way, the structuralist perspective of urban informality seems to shed some insights into African immigrant traders in the Johannesburg inner city. With this in mind, it is possible to argue that, African immigrant traders engaged in informal trading for reasons beyond just escaping out of poverty - it was the easiest way of earning an income. Some of these African immigrant traders may not have suffered the devaluation of their qualifications, but that looking for and finding a suitable job may have been more unattractive than just starting an informal street trading business.

In addition, the life story of Kasongo (DRC immigrant trader), although indicating that he may have given up practicing Psychology as a result of what he considers as the devaluation of his qualifications, it may indeed be the case that he has realised that although challenging, selling on the streets earns him more money. He may have realised that he makes more money on the streets than the office of a Psychologist. This should not be considered as simply a brave attempt at escaping out of poverty. Furthermore, the life story of George (Tanzanian immigrant trader), seems to indicate that poverty is not the main target or concern. He thinks that trading on the streets offers better and greater earnings. For this reason, if he was offered a formal job, he would not take it up. On the basis of this, we argue that this does not appear to be a simple case of engaging in street trading so as to escape poverty; it illustrates a street trader bent on exploiting economic opportunities to make more money.

Furthermore, some African immigrant traders left employment because of what they considered as low salaries. The low salaries imply that they were not, after all in serious levels of poverty. It suggests that they wanted more money and this implies that engaging in street trading was something beyond just escaping poverty. The lure of high earnings and less control in the informal street trading could have been another motivation in the choice to engage in street trading. In this regard, the legalist perception of urban informality seems to throw some insight into why African immigrant resorted to street trading. There could be some African immigrants who may have resorted to street trading because they considered it as an uncontrolled income generating activity – this goes beyond the desire to just fight and beat poverty.

Although this is not the same as opting out of the formal economy, due its strict control, as propounded by the legalist perspective, it may be considered as a variant of this perspective to the extent that African immigrant traders are engaging in this economic activity because of lack of strict regulatory controls. This is similar to people who quit the formal economy to start informal businesses. In this way, the legalist perspective in urban informality seem to suggest that the claim by African immigrant traders that, their qualifications were devalued which ultimately blocked their upward professional mobility may be part of the explanation. The other explanation may be that they opted for the informal sector because of the promises of freedom to do as they please on the streets including not being required to pay tax.

Furthermore, all African immigrant traders engaged in street trading for economic reasons. Whether, their qualifications were devalued, or they did not get a work permit and suffered exploitation, what seems to emerge is that they believed that street trading would assist them to realize profits. The objective was making more money on the basis of which they could lay claim to a decent life. Although the post-structuralist, post-capitalist, or post-colonial perspective stresses that people may engage in informal economic activities to help kin and family and not for profits or economic gain, in this case study, it seems as though African immigrants engaged in street trading so as to finally help kin and family. They are selling different kinds of goods and services so that they can look after their family here in South African and back in their countries of origin. Poverty does not seem to be main motivation, than the creation of a family welfare system.

This means that these African immigrant traders make profit in order to help family. How different is this from engaging in urban informality for no economic gain if the ultimate reason

is to assist family and friends? It appears as if it may not be different from an income generating activity whose proceeds are intended to finally assist other people who may not have the means to make more money for themselves. For this reason, it is possible to argue that this is not different, because the final desire is the need to help kin and family.

Accordingly, it appears as though perspectives on urban informality may help to illuminate the intricacy of the reasons why African immigrants resorted to street trading in the Johannesburg inner city. Such insights seem to complicate the perception by African immigrant traders that they engaged in street trading simply because of discrimination, xenophobia and the devaluing of their qualifications. This raises implications regarding the complexity of reasons why African immigrants in a setting like the Johannesburg inner city engage in street trading.

7. Conclusion

Even though the case study of African immigrant traders in the Johannesburg inner city suggests that these economic actors may have suffered among others the discrimination, the devaluing of their qualifications and xenophobia, which made them to resort to street trading, accepting this as the only explanation may be too simplistic. This is because some African immigrant specifically came to set up street trading businesses in Johannesburg inner city, suggesting that the issue of being stuck is not a universal characteristic. Some who have critical skills which are in high demand in South Africa may have experienced upward social and professional mobility. This means that it is not all qualifications which are always devalued.

Furthermore, the motivations and practice of street trading by African immigrant traders in this case study seem to broaden perspectives on urban informality. Regarding the dualistic perspective on urban informality, this study suggests that the activities of African immigrant traders are inseparably linked to the formal economy and are neither fading away nor backward. They seem to be a permanent feature of the Johannesburg inner city economy. In the case of African immigrant traders who chose to engage in street trading because they were escaping from among others poverty and exploitation, it seems as though they choose to do so because of the lure of less or no stringent controls and the possibility of earning higher incomes. This appears to be a variant of the structural perspective on urban informality. African immigrant traders may well have been escaping out of poverty, but also the freedom to earn their own money without any taxation could have motivated them to engage in this type of economic activity. This scenario seems to combine than considering separately the insights from both the

structuralist and legalist perspectives on urban informality and this can be regarded as broadening the understanding of this phenomenon as reflected in this case study.

In addition, some African immigrant traders engage in this economic activity in an effort to support members of their family in South Africa and back in their countries of origin. Thus, while the post-colonial perspective posits that informality may be undertaken for non-economic gain so as to help friends, family and community, this study seems to suggest that African immigrant traders engage in this type of economic activity because of the lure and promise of economic gain, which would ultimately help their friends and family. This seems to broaden the post-colonial perspective on urban informality in that whereas the post-colonial perspective assumes that informality may be undertaken for non-economic gains so as to help members of family, this study seems to suggest that informality may be undertaken for economic gain, to realise profits out of which friends, members of family may be assisted. On the basis of this, the four perspectives on urban informality seem to assist in shedding more insights on why African immigrants have resorted to trading on the streets. This shifts the focus beyond the simplistic claim and assumption of devalued qualifications, exploitation and discrimination and the desperate and brave escape out of poverty.

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