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WESTERN CAPE**

**SEEKING A DIGNIFIED LIFE:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASPIRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN
REFUGEES IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.**

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DECLARATION

I, Lenishia Frank, declare that this mini thesis **SEEKING A DIGNIFIED LIFE: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASPIRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN REFUGEES IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA** has not been submitted before for any examination or degree program in any University. It is my own work and I have not previously submitted it at any university for a degree or examination. All sources that I have cited have been indicated and appropriately acknowledged by means of referencing.

Signature: _____  _____

Date: 6 April 2023



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ABSTRACT

This study documented the experiences of a group of refugee women during the COVID-19 lockdown in Cape Town, South Africa. In late 2019, the women participated in a sit-in protest with a large group of refugees in the central business district in Cape Town against the xenophobic attacks and social injustices they have experienced with South Africa. During the protest the group of refugees gathered outside in the Waldorf Arcade near Greenmarket Square. On the 26 March 2020, after the nationwide lockdown to curb the rapid spread of COVID-19, the City of Cape Town forcibly moved many of the refugee protesters and families to a camp site situated at Wingfield in Goodwood. This research documents narratives of the women's experiences, emotional trauma, and day to day life while they were settled in the temporary Wingfield Camp.

Theoretically, the thesis explored the aspirations of the refugee women in their pursuit of a dignified life. The study employed a qualitative research methodology involving semi-structured interviews, ethnography, and observation. Using purposive sampling techniques, a total of 10 women- 9 from DRC and 1 from Burundi- were interviewed to ascertain their challenges and aspirations. The thesis reviews ethical and methodological reflections on conducting research with vulnerable refugees and migrants, as well as reviews literature on migrants and refugees in a global and South African context, trauma and emotion in refugee experiences, and challenges such as xenophobia and unemployment. The thesis also analyses the gendered aspect of their migration experiences during and after migration, with a focus on their emotional trauma. Overall, the data reveals their challenges in achieving their aspirations while staying within the camp; the women could not invest in their aspirations but were rather still trying to cope with the trauma of their experiences.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

IOM:	International Organization for Migration
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
STATSA:	Statistics South Africa
DRC:	Democratic Republic of Congo



KEYWORDS

Refugees

Migrants

Women

South Africa

Dignity

Aspirations

Experiences

Trauma



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The ongoing global refugee challenge has been an enduring topic in migration studies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022) reported that in a span of one year from 2020 to 2021 the number of refugees globally increased from 20.7 million to 21.3 million. South Africa is a major destination for asylum seekers and refugees seeking a better life, many who migrate from other countries in Africa such as Somalia, Burundi, South Sudan, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR, 2022).

In late 2019, the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted and further exposed the precarity of life for many vulnerable migrants and refugees. Countries around the world imposed various sanctions and hard lockdowns, and this had an economic, social, and psychological impact on all people, especially vulnerable groups. Governments faced challenges in providing social security and assistance, and many refugees and undocumented migrants were excluded from these initiatives. The vulnerability of refugees in South Africa, especially women, amid the global pandemic has raised concerns around the access of refugees to state social security.

This thesis explores some of the experiences and aspirations of a group of women refugees who had been settled at the Wingfield tented site in Goodwood, Cape Town during the COVID-19 pandemic. To offer a summary of this circumstance, in late 2019, a refugee sit-in began outside the UNHCR office near Greenmarket Square in the Central Business District of Cape Town. A large group of refugees, mostly from the DRC, protested ongoing xenophobic attacks and social injustices they have experienced within South Africa. The group of refugees gathered and slept outside in the Waldorf Arcade and later settled in the nearby Methodist Church. In March 2020 the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions took place, and the refugee protestors were forcibly moved by the government, with one group being sent to the Wingfield tented site at Goodwood. However, the circumstances of living in the Wingfield site, alongside the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, brought up questions regarding whether refugees could follow their aspirations, find new opportunities and access to support. Although the camp site was temporary, the welfare and wellbeing of women refugees amongst the large group was questionable.

In this qualitative research study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women at the Wingfield site. This study followed an ethnographic approach to share insight into the experiences of the women. Refugees aspire to work and become part of the local community in which they live (Van Heelsum, 2017), and their concerns highlighted the right to live a dignified and flourishing life. All people have the right to a dignified life and are gifted with capabilities, which can ensure this dignified life (Nussbaum, 2011).

1.2 Context of the sit- in protest

The women participants in this study were involved in a sit-in protest with more than 600 refugee protestors at the Greenmarket Square in Cape Town, South Africa. The protest began in October 2019, organised by a group of refugees and asylum seekers in response to xenophobia in South Africa. The protesters, mostly from other African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, demanded that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) intervene in their situation and help them to leave South Africa, which they claimed had become unsafe for them due to xenophobic attacks and discrimination (Yauger, 2019).

The refugees were evicted from the protest site at Greenmarket Square, and many refugees moved to the nearby Central Methodist Church, as the Reverend had offered the church as a temporary place of stay. By November 2019, fifty refugees had requested and accepted the resettlement offers to be integrated in communities and offers of repatriation. By January 2020 there were concerns raised regarding the hygiene and safety in the Methodist church due to the overcrowded population staying there (Nowicki, 2020).



Refugees protesting at Greenmarket Square. Source: Daily Maverick, 24th June 2020.

In February 2020, the Western Cape High Court issued a ruling that allowed the City of Cape Town to evict the refugees from the church (Nowicki, 2020). A news article (Hendricks, 2020) reported how over one hundred law enforcement officers removed refugee belongings. The City of Cape Town, through the court, ordered an eviction of the group to end the protest (Hendricks, 2020). The report stated (Hendricks, 2020):

“When Ground Up arrived at the Methodist church at about 9:20am, tents, some of which were self-made, mattresses, cooler boxes, crates, and chairs could be seen strewn on the street alongside and opposite the church. Families and children sat around nervously as law enforcement moved in groups patrolling the area.”



Refugees protesting at Greenmarket Square in Cape Town. Source: Daily Maverick, 24th June 2020

Shortly afterwards, on 26 March 2020, a nationwide shutdown was announced because of the COVID-19 global pandemic (South African Government News Agency, 2020). When the COVID-19 lockdown began, large groups of refugees were relocated to two locations: in Paint City, Bellville, and the Wingfield Military base in Goodwood. The women in this research study were interviewed at the Wingfield camp.

1.2.1 Context of Wingfield site

Wingfield is situated between Voortrekker Road and the N1 in Cape Town, and the state owned 225-hectare space remains vacant with potential for development (Future Cities Report, 2020). The military base was the proposed location for the Olympic Park for the 2004 Olympic bid;

however, the land has remained unused (Future Cities Report, 2020). In 2014, the Dutch Alliance for Sustainable Development in Africa (DASUDA) developed a proposal to develop the site for mixed residential and commercial use (Future Cities Report, 2020). Around 450 people had been moved to the Wingfield site in March 2020 by the City of Cape Town (News24, 2020).



The white tent at the Wingfield site occupied by the large group of refugees staying in smaller tents with their families. (Photo taken during research in 2021).

The refugees demanded to be resettled to a third country; however, this was unlikely, as the UNHCR in South Africa reported that it is impossible to repatriate such a large group of refugees who are extremely vulnerable (Mail and Guardian, 2021). The UNHCR in South Africa furthermore reported that only 1% of these refugees were resettled in other countries (Mail and Guardian, 2021).

1.3 Significance and rationale of the study

The UNHCR (2016) observed that more women are migrating due to various socio-economic, political, or cultural reasons. However, women refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa face many challenges and obstacles in their life before and after migration. There is a need to continually understand the nuanced complexity of the experiences and aspirations of refugee women in different contexts and settings around the world. This research study was significant

in understanding viewpoints of women refugees in Cape Town and how their aspirations were impacted in an encampment context during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A comprehensive understanding and analysis of how refugees manage their lives can be further assessed through documenting the experiences and aspirations. As Van Heelsum (2017:2148) has also argued, in contrast to an “integration” perspective, “the aspiration perspective adds more insight into the migrants’ desires and effort, it relates to their agency, to what they have gained, and secondly it shows much more clearly why and where things go wrong, including problems caused by the receiving society.” Building on this point, this study is significant because it investigates life after and experiences of migration of women in their own words, as well as whether and how women refugees can realise their aspirations. This study aims to contribute towards understanding the lack of protection and access to support for women refugees in South Africa.

1.4 Problem Statement, Aims and Objectives, Research Questions

1.4.1 Problem statement

South Africa is a major destination for migrants; international migrants in South Africa have significantly increased from 2 million in 2010 to over 4 million in 2019 (IOM World Report, 2020). In South Africa the settlement approach for refugees allows them freedom of movement; however, access to formal employment opportunities remains a challenge for refugees (IOM World Report, 2020).

The misrepresentation of migrants in public discourse and media in South Africa has also affected their inclusion and integration into South Africa. The belief that migrants steal job opportunities and livelihoods has sparked hostility against migrants, which was evident by the 2008 and other waves of xenophobic attacks against migrants. The lives of vulnerable migrants are precarious and unsettled.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of refugees because they could not access government provisions or earn a living to support themselves (Mulu and Mbanza, 2021). Refugees aspire for a better life and future. An in-depth understanding of the experiences and how refugees managed their lives during this circumstance is needed to create opportunities

and resources available for them to live a life that is dignified. The documenting of the narratives of refugees provides a lens to their migration experiences.

1.4.2 Study aims

The aim of the study is to document the experiences and aspirations of women refugees who were settled at the Wingfield Camp area during the COVID-19 lockdown in Cape Town, South Africa.

1.4.3 Study objectives

The objectives of the thesis are:

- To review literature on migrant and refugee challenges globally and in South Africa.
- To explore the aspirations of the women refugees at the Wingfield site.
- To document narratives and the experiences of refugee women in their migration to South Africa and their experience in the Wingfield site during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research also initially aimed to document the migration trajectories of the women, but due to the traumatic experiences of mobility expressed during the research, and the limited time to conduct the research, I revised this objective. This was also done in line with ethical standards and sensitivity to the women's emotional well-being, who expressed trauma while recounting their migration journeys. The thesis also initially proposed to understand their capabilities using the Capabilities Approach. This aspect was reduced, and the analysis has been focused on their aspirations, as this was a more suitable theoretical concept to analyse the data from the study.

1.4.4 Research questions

- How do women refugees at the Wingfield encampment site in Cape Town describe their experiences of migration?
- What are some of the challenges of the refugee women settled at the Wingfield site?
- How do refugee women at the Wingfield site describe their aspirations?

1.5 Outline of chapters in the study

Chapter One: This introductory chapter presents the background and contextualisation of the study, the problem statement, the research questions, aims, and objectives.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review of migrant categories, migration themes, refugee challenges, and offers a gendered perspective. The chapter also theoretically situates the concept of aspiration.

Chapter Three: The research methodology is described and explained, with a reflection on methods in refugee related research.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents the research findings of the study.

Chapter Five: This concluding chapter presents a significant discussion in terms of the findings and recommendations.



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

International migration has grown over the years, which has resulted in increased multidisciplinary research in migration studies. Within this literature, the experience of migrants during the process of migrating and the impact on their lives has been an area of interest for many scholars and researchers. This chapter reviews some of the literature on refugee experiences, the categorisation of migrants, gender in migration, and aspirations in migration studies. The final section theoretically discusses the concept of aspiration as it is applied in the study.

2.2 Migration and mobilities

“All the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces-these and many others fill the world’s airports, buses, ships, and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense” (Sheller and Urry, 2006:207).

Movement plays a fundamental role in everyday life and is shaped by social and historical contexts. The current literature on human mobility argues for viewing migration as not a problematic phenomenon but one that should be normalised (De Haas, 2010). For example, Bakewell (2008:29) critiques a “sedentary” model in development literature that sees migration as a “failure.” He argues that this “sedentary bias” started with colonial policies and still shapes the outlook of contemporary development agencies. Bakewell (2008:29) also critiques the view in migration policy that the poor constitute a “threat” to prosperity and public order if they move.

People may move from areas of low income and few opportunities to places where economic growth and innovation present them with new opportunities (Castles 2010). However, while mobility has been a significant aspect of the human experience, it is subjected to control, which Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013:189) term “regimes of mobility.”

Early work in migration studies investigated the reasons why people migrate. Zelinsky (1971) for example presented a “Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition” in which he argued when societies become wealthy, it leads to a mobility transition, in which countries transform from countries of net emigration into countries of net immigration.

Migration literature has explained the reasons for mobility as “push and pull factors”; drivers such as poverty, unemployment, and political repression are viewed as “push” factors and drivers such as better income and employment prospects, better social welfare services and political freedom are “pull” factors. In the African context these include economic stress, political instability, and poverty (Sithole and Dinbabo, 2016). However, the push-pull model has also been critiqued as “static” (De Haas 2011), and Van Hear, Bakewell and Long (2018:1) rather emphasise “fluid and shifting driver complexes.” They define drivers as “the array of factors” that are made up of the broader “structural elements” and the spaces in which people form their decisions, aspirations, and desires to migrate (Van Hear, Bakewell and Long 2018:4). Furthermore, as this study shows, migration aspirations are not necessarily based on “economic rational” decisions, but shaped by emotions, social obligations, power relations, as well as “the brute realities of displacement” (Carling and Collins 2018: 15).

This study also is informed by the study of movement in the social sciences called the “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006:65), which sees the 21st century as an age of fluidity, openness, and technological development. This has changed transportation and culture, making it more common for people to think beyond borders and to cross them frequently (Urry, 2006). The mobilities paradigm introduced “spatial analysis” to aspirations for movement of people. The focus on mobilities critiques the sedentary bias of social sciences and can efficiently question “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003:75).

Moreover, Cresswell (2010) describes mobilities beyond migration as movement that includes individuals walking, driving, cycling and flows of information and technology. According to Sheller et al., (2006:2) mobilities uses “a social lens” and considers the “movement of ideas, information and things.” Cresswell (2010:551) furthermore emphasises the role of power, the creation of identities and spatial life experiences of people. Bass and Yeoh (2019) allude to the new mobilities paradigm as influential, as it questions who can migrate, under what conditions and how discussions in receiving nations are focused on economic autonomy.

The notion of mobilities is important as there is a series of crises related to how people move (Sheller 2018). Mobilities research focuses on the power of systems governing mobility and immobility (Sheller 2018). “Mobility justice” is a way to conceptualize inequality and uneven accessibility with a goal of social justice. Foucault (1980) early on asserted that no one is beyond space or geography nor free from the constraints of geography. According to Soja (2010:2) “space is socially produced and can be socially changed”; people are spatial, temporal, and social beings.

Mobility justice relates to the concept of encampment for refugees. Using “spatial” analysis, Ramadan (2013) argues that not much attention focuses on refugee camps as a characteristic of a political space. His research in Palestinian camps in Lebanon shows that refugee camps are more than just a place of struggle, war, or a space of support for humanitarian organisations, but should also be understood as an important site for understanding politics of space, cultural practices, and day to day political practices of refugees (Ramadan 2013). Living in a camp also has psychological effects and “often causes damage to one’s self-control, resilience, and hope” (Khan, Kuhn and Haque 2021:5).



2.3 Migrants and Refugees in a Global Context

2.3.1 Categorisation and representation of migrants and refugees

The UN Migration Agency (2019:1) defines a migrant as:

“Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person’s legal status; whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary and what the causes for the movement are; or what the length of the stay is.”

Further, the UNHCR (2019b) defines an “asylum seeker” as a person who is seeking safeguarding, but such a person’s requests for preservation is yet to be processed. A refugee is defined as (UNHCR, 2018:1):

“A person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion,

nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so.”

These definitions are important but must also be analysed further. The experiences of people moving are often placed in categories such as tourist, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeker, and these categories each hold social and bureaucratic effects (Ehrkamp, 2016). Placing people into categories who are socially, culturally and class dissimilar influences whether they will receive generous or antagonistic treatment (Gatrell, 2013). Generally, migration is referred to as “voluntary” when people are considered to have left of their own free will, or “involuntary” or “forced” when they are forced to flee, either internally or outside the country (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018:215). People are often placed in categories that influence their experiences, such as race, status, nationality, and class. However, Erdal & Oeppen (2018:982) contend that these “bureaucratic distinctions and labels have discursive power” and argue that the “labelling of individuals as forced or voluntary impacts their migratory experiences.”

The English term refugee originates from the French term *réfugié*, which means to flee (Fassin, 2018). Fassin (2018:1) describes refugees as “persons seeking refuge to escape a danger threatening them in their place of origin and while there is an official statement establishing their status.” Malkki (1995) reviewed the term refugee in its social and historical context, stating that the term “includes within it a world of different socio-economic statuses, personal stories, and psychological or spiritual situations” (Malkki, 1995: 496). These authors show that the realities and experiences behind these categories may vary from the context in which they are used. Although the categories are utilised to provide access to rights and services, they also reinforce narratives and perceptions around “good” and “bad” migrants, with only the former as “deserving” of protection.

Language is variously used to defend or undermine the rights of individuals to make refugee claims and can be used in oppressive and manipulative ways; Clark-Kazak, Carastathis, Kouri-Towe, Mahrouse and Whitley (2018) note that the debates around linguistic correctness have advocated against the distinction between refugees and migrants. It is argued that the term refugee can be an exclusionary, antagonistic, and stigmatising category (Clark-Kazak et al., 2018). More so Clark-Kazak et al. (2018:145) postulate that the language of “refugee crisis” thus shifts the focus from refugee experiences to that of the entry of refugees as a “crisis.”

De Genova (2016:25) writes that refugees may be seen as “victims” when they stay in refugee camps in receiving countries; as soon as refugees portray entrepreneurial agency by leaving the refugee camp, they may be then suspected and labelled as “illegal” migrants, which further reflects the “discursive power of migrant labels and categories” (De Genova, 2014:25). However, terminology to label migrants can “imply causality, generate emotional responses, and transmit symbolic meanings” (Bauder, 2014:328). Bauder (2014) contends the term “illegal immigrant,” for example, suggests that a migrant who has committed a crime is seen as no longer sharing a form of belonging.

Classifications and terminologies also shape the way communities and employers interact with refugees and immigrants in the everyday life. Jinnah (2020) contends that a main factor creating conditions of precarity is lack of citizenship status, defined “by the absence of key rights or entitlements” that citizenship may hold (Jinnah 2020:8).

Furthermore, media and language are interconnected and play a very critical role in the representation of refugees and asylum seekers. De Genova (2013) notes that the ambivalent use of terms and labels in mass media news coverage creates obscurities. Media representations and outsider narratives of refugees play a significant role towards social attitudes around the world. These are also influenced by media imagery of refugee flows and boat migration, which creates alarming ideas of “invasion” (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016). Godin and Dona (2016) suggest that the use of social media can challenge the construction of refugee voices, as well as the power relations between refugees and advocates such as researchers, humanitarian agencies, and journalists. Media imagery of migrants has also, however, become an important tool for communication and conveying messages. Kihato (2013) advocates for the use of visual imagery especially in an era of technological advancement and mass media, where people can share images across space and time.

2.4 Trauma and emotion in refugee experiences

There are various bodies of literature that have analysed refugee narratives, and some literature has also questioned the interpretation of migrant and refugee experiences and voices. Khosravi (2018) has argued that while many writings of refugee experiences are based on research, one may need first-hand experience to fully explain and understand refugee lives.

The trauma of the refugee experiences has been written about in migration literature (Assounga 2014). Carling (2018:6) argues that drawing attention to emotions is critical in understanding and documenting the experiences of refugees and “to see the subjectivity and identity of migrants as always in formation rather than predetermined by place of origin and mode of arrival.” Many refugees face disruptions in their lives, impacting their memory and mental health (Khan et al., 2021:2). The refugees who participated in Khan et al.’s (2021) study expressed their narratives with emotional reactions such as hopelessness, aggression, sadness and helplessness around their losses and anxiety around their migratory trajectories. Following the responses of participants in their study, one of the refugees stated, “It feels as if we did not have a soul” (Khan et al., 2021:10). In another comment of one of their study participants, Khan et al., (2021:10) quote: “It was an unforgettable journey fraught with challenges and uncertainty for many refugee people, and at times they thought they might not be able to complete or survive it.” Many refugees face ongoing mental health challenges due to the atrocities they faced in their home countries, which include sexual violence, genocide, torture, and political persecution (Bandeira, Higson-Smith, Bantjes, and Polatin, 2010; Nkomo, 2019).

The psychological wellbeing of refugees appears to influence and impact refugee experiences of adapting to life in South Africa. There has been an increase in literature addressing psychological wellbeing of refugees, which had previously been limited in the South African context (Assounga, 2014:9). Migrant women often experience traumatic experiences that psychologically impacts their ability to achieve personal goals and aspirations of a better and dignified life (Kihato, 2013). Migrant perspectives and life aspirations often remain underexplored in the literature on integration (Van Heelsum, 2017). When people migrate in the hope for a better life, they have a high level of aspirations; however, life in a new country is usually much more difficult than they imagined (Van Heelsum, 2017).

2.5 Migrant and refugee experiences in South Africa

The growing refugee population in South Africa has led to more and important research on this topic (Rugunanan and Smit, 2011:2). Refugee challenges include accessing employment opportunities, lack of security, accessing legal papers and refugee status, falling victim to crime and inadequate housing and unsafe overcrowded accommodation (Rugunanan and Smit, 2011).

Refugees and migrants face xenophobia, and often fall victim to crime and these include sexual offences such as rape, robbery, assault, and violence. This will be later discussed in the analysis chapter following the quotes that illustrate the experiences of the women. This section reviews these challenges further.

2.5.1 Xenophobia

Xenophobia is the fear and hostility towards foreigners, and this has become a prominent issue in South Africa. South Africa's history of apartheid and its legacy of social inequality have impacted intergroup dynamics (IOM World Report, 2020). Like many places in the world, vulnerable migrants and refugees in South Africa also face xenophobia. Migrants and refugees have faced increased and violent episodes of xenophobia in urban South Africa (Tevera, 2013), largely towards other African migrants, which has also been referred to as Afrophobia (Owen, 2016). Research has documented xenophobia in South Africa against migrants working in the informal economy (Crush and Ramachandran 2014) as well as when trying to access health services (Crush and Tawodzera, 2014). COVID-19 further exacerbated xenophobia and exclusion of migrants (Zanker and Moyo, 2020). Xenophobia has led to a loss of livelihoods, and migrants have suffered extreme injuries and even death (Landau, 2006; Crush and Tawodzera, 2023). Derogatory terms are used such as *amakwerekwere*, *amagringamba* (foreigners), illegal migrants or aliens (Wambugu, 2003; Nyamnjoh, 2006). Nationwide xenophobic attacks have left thousands of migrants displaced, deaths, looting and destruction (IOM World Report, 2020). Xenophobic attacks in 2008, 2015 and 2019 have involved violent attacks on black foreign nationals by black South Africans (Batisai, 2016). Often attacks take place in South Africa's economically impoverished areas where South Africans perceive foreign nationals as an economic threat. Politicians and media outlets have exploited these tensions for their own agendas (Misago and Landau, 2023). Political opportunism and scapegoating exploit xenophobic sentiments for personal gain (Wambugu, 2003; Nyamnjoh, 2006). Landau and Bakewell (2018:136) write:

“The scale of hate violence, and especially the authorities’ constant refusal to recognize that most attacks and killings of migrants are being driven by xenophobia, has made some analysts question whether xenophobia has not become a normal ‘South African way of life’, making the country one of the most dangerous places to be a migrant”.

Many myths circulate around migrants; In a social attitudes survey conducted in 2017, South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) presented that 75% of South African adults have expressed feelings stating immigrants are the cause of increased crime rates, job losses and the spread of disease, for which there is no evidence (The New Humanitarian, 2020).

Landau and Bakewell (2018) argue that one solution to addressing xenophobia in the country is by changing how xenophobia is reported and how stories are told about migrants and their challenges. The use of social media has contributed significantly to the representation of the refugee situation, which occurred before this study was conducted. These negative portrayals were evident in remarks and reports presented by officials. The New Humanitarian (2020) news reported social media contributed to the negative social attitudes during the protest as imagery of violence were portrayed. This results in the exclusion of groups of migrants as “out of place.”

Moa Dahlberg & Suruchi Thapar-Björkert (2023) have recently examined the concept of xenophobia as a form of structural violence and a systemic issue for refugee women in Gauteng, South Africa. They show how xenophobia is an ingrained societal bias that limits their access to essential services and restricts their opportunities for socioeconomic integration (Moa Dahlberg & Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, 2023). The unique nature of xenophobia in southern Africa thus needs ongoing theorising (Batsai, 2017). Batsai (2022) argues for a “conceptual renegotiation of the meaning of Africanness or African identities, especially for black African migrants located in spaces of violent and brutal prejudice against those perceived as foreign” (Batsai, 2022:17).

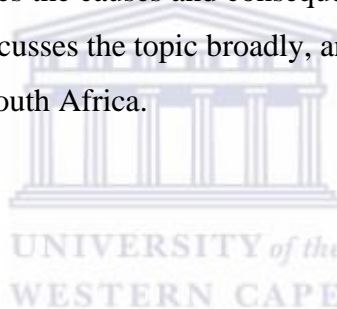
2.5 Refugee policy in South Africa

Various international conventions and treaties uphold refugee rights in South Africa. These include the United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Convention of the Organisation of African Unity (Rugunanan and Smit, 2011). The Refugees Act of 1998 in South Africa guarantees freedom of movement, the right to work and to access public health care and education services (Department of Home Affairs, 1998), and is used to legitimise claims of asylum status (Pineteh and Mulu, 2016). Although South Africa has a legislative framework for the protection and inclusion of refugees, refugee

experiences reflect a different narrative due to inadequate systems of protection and support (Khan, 2020). The country is constitutionally obliged to protect refugees, and has a policy of integrating refugees into society rather than camps; despite this policy refugees continue to live in precarious circumstances.

2.6. Gender and migration

This section of the literature review draws on the importance of gender in migration literature. Earlier work shaping gender debates include Sherry Ortner (1974), who argued that gender categories have been largely influenced by social and cultural life, social roles, and values. In the 1980s the concerns about women being forced to migrate came forth amongst academics and international organisations (Indra, 1999). Indra (1999) noted that a gendered approach was needed and required further research and attention. This review touches on some of the recent debates around how gender shapes the causes and consequences of migration and informs the journey. The first subsection discusses the topic broadly, and the remaining sections focus on vulnerable women migrants in South Africa.



2.6.1 Global context

The IOM World Report (2020) contends that repeated wars and violence have steered to an increase in the number of refugees everywhere in the world, with a significant percentage of women and children. Refugee women are “even worse off in terms of labour market inclusion, given their more precarious status and situation” (IOM World Report, 2020:196). UNICEF (2020) stated that there a great need to delve deeper into capturing the distressful and violent experiences of women, men, and children as they cross international borders under inhospitable and precarious conditions, as well as the agency they deploy.

Current studies in migration increasingly account the migration experiences of women. Research and literature on gender roles amongst refugees and migrants has drawn attention to the displacement experiences of refugee women and how family dynamics influence their relations and aspirations. Migration has become a basis for survival and has influenced and changed the dynamics of the nuclear family (Adepoju, 2006). Changes in gender roles and responsibilities because of displacement and lack of resources significantly influences the roles

of women, whereby women are pressured to occupy jobs to sustain the household demands (Assounga, 2014). This however may “threaten” the financial power dynamics in the households which are led by their husbands.

Women migrants are also exposed to danger during the migration process (Farley, 2019). Women face unique challenges in escaping widespread war, because of moving long distances. Refugees require considerable resources and are subject to risks (Damir-Geiltsdorf & Sabra, 2018). Women are perceived as one of the most vulnerable groups amongst others as women experience various forms of injustice such as gender-based violence, discrimination, oppression. Nisrane’s (2019) study of the integration of Ethiopian women migrants show that they face many kinds of abuse, which impacts their reintegration when they return (Nisrane, 2019).

Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley (2017) assert women migrants have received less scholarly attention than migrant men regardless of the international observation that half of all migrants are women. Jacobsen and Landau (2003:187) have argued, in refugee studies, key terms from social sciences such as “gender” are often used without clarity and may remain “ill-defined in advocacy and policy circles, perhaps to build consensus or increase chances for funding.” Although research on women migrating and their experiences increased, a closer study on the opportunities and resources available to them requires an enquiry which is contextually studied through narratives of women refugees.

2.6.2 Vulnerable African women migrants and refugees in urban South Africa

Women migrate to South Africa with various motivations, such as pursuing economic opportunities, accessing education, and seeking a better quality of life. Additionally, some women flee violence and conflict in their home countries, recognising South Africa as safe and stable place to go (Farley, 2019). However, many women face new kinds of vulnerabilities and challenges after migrating to South Africa.

Gender is a significant factor that explains the lived experiences amongst migrants. Women’s migration is “often conceptualized in frameworks of vulnerability, marginalization and

discrimination” but that there needs to be more work on “a narrative of agency and strategy” (Jinnah 2013:54).

Isike (2017) shows in her research on Mozambican women migrants to South Africa how women experience migration and integration differently from men. Additionally, refugee women in South Africa have experienced numerous constraints such as taking care of their families, working to ensure that their children are educated, and face social and economic financial hardships (Wambugu, 2003). Migrant women require psychosocial, financial, and economic opportunities and resources to live a life that is dignified (Ncube et al., 2019).

While South Africa may offer opportunities, migrant women, including African women, also face various challenges and vulnerabilities. Xenophobia, as previously discussed, contributes to their marginalisation, and restricts their access to services, employment, and social integration. Additionally, migrant women may experience discrimination, exploitation, and gender-based violence, further exacerbating their vulnerability and hindering their ability to fully benefit from their migration experience. Refugees often experience heightened feelings of emotional distress. Smit and Rugunanan’s (2015) work has shown how distress, frustration and mental health challenges of women refugees is impacted by their lack of accommodation, problems accessing social and healthcare and education, and concern for their children.

2.6.3 Challenges and strategies of women refugees in South Africa

African women migrants journeying to South Africa experience extreme risks of abuse and exploitation, specifically if unaccompanied by men (Memela and Maharaj 2018). Furthermore, Mothibi, Roelofse, and Tshivhase (2015) observed in a study in South Africa refugees and migrants are vulnerable because of their status in the host country. There is a gender related aspect to the institutionalisation of precarity and exclusion, as women migrants remain in legal limbo as they try to make a living in urban spaces (Kihato, 2013). Migrant women living in South Africa with an asylum status even face various challenges such as in opening a bank account (Crush, 2015). Living in such precarious circumstances financially and psychologically affects migrant women, as well as their lack of formal qualifications that results in further inequality (Nyamnjoh, 2017). Refugee women in South Africa experience gender-based violence and discrimination (Ramparsad, 2020; Mulu and Mbanza, 2021). Wambugu’s (2003) earlier study on the experiences of Rwandese refugee women in Gauteng, show that also two decades ago refugee women experienced the double discrimination of being

female and outsider. Furthermore, most refugee women are heads of households which is overwhelming and exposes them and their families to the risk of physical abuse and rape (Wambugu, 2003). Further, migrant women who live at the margins of the city's legal and economic structures have more limited capabilities, and their marginality is impacted by social obligations and aspirations, hindering their success (Kihato, 2013). Women migrants with educational and entrepreneurial capabilities develop strategies to cope (Ncube and Mkwanzani, 2020), such as working in the informal economy (Nyamnjoh, 2020).

2.6.4 Social support for women refugees in South Africa

The UNHCR (2015) points out the need for the political resolve of countries to ensure that social support is accessible to women refugees. Crea, Loughry, O'Halloran, & Flannery (2017) argue that South Africa needs a holistic approach that aims to respond to the vulnerabilities of refugee women while advancing mental and physical well-being, social welfare and protection. Access to social services for refugees depends on their ability to acquire needed documentation such as asylum papers (Magqibelo, Londt, September and Roman, 2016). Thus, access to social services is an obstacle, despite the provisions set out in the legislative frameworks (Magqibelo et al., 2016).

Given this background, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the South African government did not do much to support asylum seekers and refugee women, as they did not initially qualify or could not access government support during the lockdown and lost their means of income (Mulu and Mbanza, 2021). Lockdown restrictions during COVID-19 impacted the livelihoods women in South Africa because of their involvement in informal sector (Mulu and Mbanza, 2021). Although the South African government offered short-term financial relief packages for businesses and unemployed citizens, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants were not included (Mukumbang et al., 2020).

2.7 Aspirations for a dignified life: Theoretical reflections

The thesis draws on theoretical reflections on “aspirations” in social science, development studies and migration studies literature to analyse whether and how the women in the study can

imagine and enact better future and a dignified life for themselves and their families. This is important because, as Appadurai (2013) argues, aspirations play a critical role in shaping individual and collective behaviour, particularly in the context of globalisation.

Every human being has human rights; irrespective of their nationality, gender, citizenship status people have the right to live and aspire to a dignified life. Drawing from of Amartya Sen's (1985) notions of capabilities, Chinyakata, Roman and Msiza argue in the context of South Africa (2021:8) that "For people to flourish and to live a dignified life, focus should be on the genuine opportunities that a person has to do things according to what he or she values in life." With this notion as a starting point, this section provides a theoretical discussion of the concept of aspiration. The section also describes how the notion of aspiration has been applied in migration studies and in this research. This will provide context to the data analysis which will focus on migrant and refugee women's experiences and aspirations for a dignified life.

2.7.1 Conceptualising aspirations

Aspirations is a concept increasingly applied to development and migration research over the past two decades. One example is Arjun Appadurai's (2013:13) description of aspirations as the imagined futures that people create for themselves. He focuses on the "capacity to aspire", which refers to an individual's ability to imagine and pursue a better life for themselves and their community. As people become increasingly aware of opportunities and challenges of the global economy, their aspirations are shaped by new possibilities for mobility, consumption, and social status. This can lead to a "politics of aspiration", in which people compete for resources and opportunities based on their imagined futures (Appadurai, 2013). However, Appadurai (2013) also cautions that aspirations are not simply individual desires or preferences but are deeply embedded in social and cultural structures. As such, he argues that it is important to understand the social, economic, and political context in which aspirations are formed and to address the structural inequalities that can limit people's ability to achieve their aspirations.

Building on Appadurai's notion, Conradie and Robeyns (2013:562) conducted a study on women's capabilities and aspirations in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. They argue that women experimented with their level of aspirations and that aspirations are "context dependent" and "dynamic". They can be collective or individual and are formed "through interactions with

others” (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013:562). They argue that aspirations “can unlock the agency that is needed in order for the necessary changes to happen” (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013:565). In their research, women deliberated on concrete aspirations and worked collectively.

Additional work on aspirations has also examined people’s ability to consider a better future. Bennike, Rasmussen & Bo Nielsen (2020:4) argue that “aspirations provide a useful lens through, which to analyse the historically contingent negotiations of imagined futures.” Even in the direst circumstances, people are still able to imagine, plan and dream towards a better life (Bennike et al., 2020). Hart (2016) similarly postulates that aspirations are formed and forced by various influences; Hart (2016:327) writes, “thinking about future-oriented goals requires at least a basic level of capability in relation to being able to anticipate and imagine the future and exercise practical reason.” Flachs’s (2019) study on the aspirations of Indian cotton farmers shows how they are intertwined with social, economic, and political desires on various scales. According to Flachs (2019) aspirations are not the results of mere cost-benefit exploration rather it is the desire, wish, dream to overcome historical injustices and poverty. Van Heelsum (2016) postulates aspirations are the futuristic ideas and perspectives an individual would like to achieve to have a better life. Overall, this literature shows that the ability to imagine a better future is linked up in social and cultural circumstances. This is important for this study as it relates also to psychological wellbeing.

Kosec and Mo (2017) recognise the significant connection between aspirations and well-being. Aspirations can have a significant impact on individuals’ well-being. Having positive aspirations that align with a person’s values and goals can provide a sense of purpose and meaning which contributes to life satisfaction and happiness. Aspirations can also be described as an internal or psychological facet of well-being (Silva, Loboda, and Strong, 2018).

2.7.2 Migration aspirations

The concept of aspirations in migration research has been further developed by Carling (2002) and De Haas (2014), who have provided further discussion into the dynamics of migration. According to Carling (2002) factors such as family migration history, age, gender, and status are factors that significantly influence the ability to realise a desire to migrate. Migration aspirations are linked to broader life aspirations such as achieving better education or income

or improving one's socio-economic or political situation (Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2014). Carling (2014:2) notes that the term migration aspirations described "the conviction that migration is desirable." Understanding migrant aspirations is crucial for understanding migration patterns, as well as for developing support for the wellbeing of migrants (Carling and Collins, 2018). An "interest in migration only exists within a particular social context" (Carling and Collins, 2018:915).

This research draws on the elaboration of Van Heelsum (2016, 2017) who has turned the focus not only to aspirations to migrate but aspirations for a better life *after* migration. Drawing on the work of Van Heelsum (2017), Borselli and Van Meijl (2020) have stressed the importance of looking at aspirations after migration in the context of building a new life and attempting to integrate in a new society. Despite the challenges and obstacles refugees must manage, an understanding of refugee hopes, goals, and desires helps to understand "how refugees conceive and alter their life trajectories in response to specific constraints and how, by doing so, they can influence migration and integration processes" (Borselli and Van Meijl, 2020: 580).

2.8 Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed literature on migration and mobilities. Specifically, the reviewed literature has discussed the categories and labels attached to people as they move, which makes such an individual vulnerable to discrimination and to xenophobic attacks. A wide range of literature has shown how migrants, and specifically refugee women in South Africa, are exposed to and respond to the xenophobic attacks, unemployment, mental health challenges and poverty. Some literature highlighted the need to understand the agency of women refugees as well.

The concept of aspiration is therefore important to understanding refugee circumstances. As such, the chapter reviewed some key theorisations of the concept both broadly and in migration studies. Understanding migrant aspirations is crucial for understanding migration patterns, as well as for developing support for the wellbeing of migrants. Aspirations are the futuristic ideas and perspectives an individual would like to achieve to have a better life. The literature is based on the assertion that every human being has human rights; irrespective of their nationality,

gender, citizenship status people have the right to live and aspire to a dignified life. The next chapter will discuss the methodology employed in the research.



CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology and processes used in this study. The methodology is an imperative aspect of a research inquiry (Creswell, 2014). It begins with outlining the research design, explaining the use of the qualitative methodologies. The next sections then explain the sampling techniques, data collection methods, and process of data analysis. The chapter further discusses the challenges encountered during data collection and the ethical considerations made during the study, with a focus on research with refugees.

3.2 Research methodology

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is essentially the distinction between numerical and non-numerical data (Babbie, 2016). Qualitative research presents data in words based on people's real subjective experiences (Creswell, 2014). The nature of this study derives from an interpretive paradigm. As explained by De Vos et al. (2011), an interpretive paradigm focuses on meanings people ascribe to their experiences and how their meanings influence their behaviour. That can be done by giving a deep account of participants' responses.

As described in the introductory chapter, a main objective of the research was to document narratives and experiences of refugee women at the Wingfield site during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study thus employed qualitative approaches in that it investigates the individual experiences of women refugees. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology provided rich descriptions and narratives of participants which provided deeper insights into their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

3.3 Research design

A research design is a framework informed by and serving as a connector between the research study questions and the execution of the study (Durheim, 2004; Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research designs include the following: case study research design, grounded theory, participant observation research (PAR), ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative research

(Terre Blanche & Durheim, 2006). In this research study an ethnographic research design was used. It used an interpretive research approach, which involves and allows to make and bring meaning of lived experiences.

Ethnography emerges from anthropological and sociological fields and is a qualitative research approach that helps look at the complexity of cultural, social, and historical aspects of a study. Often ethnography requires the researcher to be involved in the day-to-day lives of participants (Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnographic research is conducted in a “natural” setting, where the researcher can act as both an observer and a participant (Angrosino, 2007). While traditionally ethnography requires a long-term commitment, due to the social circumstances of the research study being conducted during the peak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the study could not completely cover all the ethnographical elements. However, I can describe the research as “patchwork” ethnography; Gunel, Varma and Watanabe (2020:3) explain that “patchwork ethnography” is designed around “short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations.” I refer to “patchwork ethnography” because the research was conducted in shorter visits due to the pandemic restrictions and emotional state of the women, as well as my own ability to come and go from the space at certain times. According to Nyamnjoh and Brudvig (2013:8) “ethnography succeeds in narrating the everyday,” allowing the participants to be seen not “as “research subjects” but rather “characters with personalities, feelings and personal and social beliefs.”

3.4 Sampling

This research used “nonprobability” sampling, specifically purposive sampling, which is common in qualitative research as it locates participants with needed characteristics and is not meant to be generalisable. Specifically, the research also used snowball sampling, in which the researcher collects data from a few participants, and these participants refer the researcher to other participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study the target population group was women refugees who settled at the Wingfield temporary site. The dominant characteristics of the sample group included 9 African women refugees from the DRC and 1 woman from Burundi, between the ages of 18-50 years. The aim was to not have a structured representative sample but rather to investigate the experiences of the refugees.

3.5 Methods of data collection

The research study involved primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic using semi-structured interviews, ethnographic engagement, observation, and narrative collection. Secondary data was obtained through literature review of journal articles, books and reports.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview in this research was chosen as a method because it encourages two-way conversation and provides an opportunity for in-depth responses. Additionally, it is an open communication, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview (Creswell, 2010), rather than structured interviews, which employ a rigorous set of questions that do not allow one to divert (Babbie, 2016). As mentioned above, a total of 10 refugee women were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule and a checklist. The interviews usually went over time and went on for long periods, as participants narrated their experiences in-depth. The interviews were conducted in their environment in the Wingfield temporary camp. This was because it created a familiar environment and enhanced the researcher-participant relationship built on mutual trustworthiness. The interviews were scheduled before going to the site as mothers prepared their children in the morning and did their daily chores. All the interviews were conducted in English.

3.5.2 Research procedure

On a weekly basis I passed by the site and conducted observations of the camp and the activities of the location. I started off the data collection process by first approaching the Police Officials, who were regularly patrolling the site from across the road, to enquire about the processes of gaining access to the camp. The police officials assured me that the camp was safe; they explained that having the police accompanying me to the camp would result in intimidation.

For this reason, I went across to the camp and first approached the gate security on my own. The security guards enquired from the camp leaders to give me entrance. Before gaining access,

one of the camp leaders, a Congolese refugee man, first came to me and enquired about who I am, the research project and what is required. This was an intensive process as I first needed to be introduced to all the leadership representatives within the camp. While the research for this mini thesis was not deep enough to fully elaborate the political dynamics, at the camp I observed that there were inter-politics and disagreements amongst about the approach the refugees should take regarding their circumstances. I met a group of leaders who were strong voices behind the protest. They were all sitting in a shelter made by wood and surrounded by noise and smoke. After completing that process, the leader of the group of refugees started purposively selecting participants who understood English well. On the first day, everyone was inquisitive and wanted to know who I was, some out of desperation and others out of curiosity.

3.5.3 Observation

The research for this thesis took place at the Wingfield Camp site. This is because I wanted to document some of the day-to-day life of refugee women in the camp during the COVID-19 lockdown. The camp hosted a very large number of refugee families: men, women, and children. The pandemic impacted the livelihoods, social and economic activities of people including the group of refugees at the camp site.

While collecting personal narratives, observation was an integral method for engaging with the women in their temporary space. The experiences, interactions and daily life in the camp were best understood through using this technique. After interviews and spending time with the ladies, I usually walked around the camp and observed various behaviours and interactions.

Furthermore, although the research period was limited, observation of the living conditions, the general movement around the camp, interactions between refugee women, and body language was a very significant and valuable in interpreting the data in the interviews. It aided in understanding the emotions of participants, the sociability, and experiences living in their limited space. Observation in the refugee camp in Wingfield also involved self-reflection, in other words, reflexivity of my own presence in the camp and impact thereof. Jacobsen and Landau (2003:186) also comment on how “the researchers’ presence” may affect refugees during their study. I was aware of my presence as a South African researcher while

interviewing and gathering the non-verbal data, such as the interactions of women with each other or with leaders in the camp. To mitigate this, I ensured that I was there to hear their stories in a non-judgemental way and showed my concern for their circumstances. My training in Social Work aided me in sensitively gathering their responses.

3.5.5 Photographs

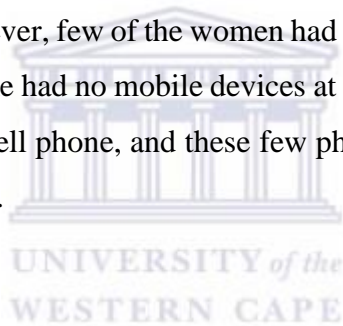
This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and hence in anticipation of social distancing, the research proposal aimed to include online and additional methods. The study proposed to request women to share online diaries which included photo elicitation to supplement the possibility of limited face-to-face engagement. As this section will explain further below, the aim of the diaries and photo elicitation was to be able to get a sense of the scene and what the women saw and viewed as important images to represent their own experiences and aspirations. However, due to the women's lack of quality cell phones, and the reduction of lockdown regulations allowing for face-to-face research, this method was not used in the study, except for a small number of photos.

Photo elicitation has been used by researchers for various reasons. To quote Moxey (2008:1), "images can trigger emotional reactions and carry an emotional charge." This is important as the women are living in a precarious space, and photos can further convey their setting. Edwards (2012:221) writes that photograph "convey communications" often "through an embodied engagement." By this, the photos aimed to add another layer of meaning and participation in the way their experiences are conveyed. The aim for this method also followed Copes et al. (2018: 489) observation that "narrating photographs has been shown to enhance self-reflection and provide an additional outlet to express fears and trauma."

Migration and refugee research has employed photo elicitation in various ways. Kihato's (2010) research on migrant women in Johannesburg uses photos and visual methods to show the way women make sense of "their worlds and experiences" and show what is important to them. In Kihato's (2010) research, women took pictures in the home and depict "how they want to be seen." Kihato (2010:40) argues that while many depictions of refugee women in media focus on their poverty and vulnerability, having refugee women share photos allows for the

women's "self-representations" and choices and are meant to show a more "humanized" aspect of mobility.

This research initially proposed incorporating photos within online diaries due to the lockdown restrictions. In online diaries, people may write about their day-to-day experiences, thoughts, and any content that they are willing to share with me in a free form. Initially, the women in the study were requested to share 1-5 photos of something that was meaningful for them, that reflected their aspirations or that gives them hope, and take pictures of their day-to-day living within the camp. The women would then have shared photographs of their day-to-day experiences, living conditions and experiences in the camp. I requested that they please do not take pictures of any illegal or sensitive information, nor identifying any people. Participants had the chance to decline to share any photos; and as I have been trained in social work, I was prepared to guide them through this process if it was to be emotional for them. I also had asked in the linked documents that they do not take pictures of the camp in a way that may make people suspicious or upset. However, few of the women had mobile devices that were in a good state to capture pictures, and some had no mobile devices at all. A few of the women requested to co-take the photos using my cell phone, and these few photos are the only ones included in this thesis, due to ethical reasons.



3.6. Qualitative data analysis and presentation

Data analysis and presentation facilitates the processing and transformation of primary data into valuable information (Scott- Jones, 2015). The data analysis is important in organising and analysing the data. The thematic analysis and representation of the data were also useful in the listing of themes and patterns in the findings of the research.

3.6.1 Qualitative data analysis

In this study thematic analysis was used to analyse data and is defined by Creswell (2010:10) as, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data." Furthermore, according to Braun and Clarke (2006:7), this approach emphasises the researcher locating themes within the data. Thematic analysis was used in this study, as the qualitative

data collected from the interviews, narratives and observations was transcribed. The data was presented under different themes, which are discussed in the next chapter. The data analysis was conducted by adapting the steps that Creswell (2013:190-191) describes for both “narrative” and “ethnographic” methods, which involves interpreting the findings, organising files for data, make notes, describing “the social setting, actors, events” and then analysing for themes. In the notes and transcripts, the following themes were drawn out: everyday domestic aspects of their lives; gendered divisions of labour such as childcare, schooling, and cooking; issues of safety and health; experiences of crime and violence; words related to emotional trauma; and expressions relating to aspirations, hope, and desires.

3.7. Ethical considerations

This study was undertaken in compliance with the ethical research standards of the University of the Western Cape. The study commenced after approval was granted by the University of the Western Cape’s Economics and Management Sciences and Senate Higher Degrees Committees. Consent forms were signed by every respondent before participating in the research. The purpose of this form was to solicit the respondents’ voluntary agreement to participate in the study. At all stages of data collection, the aims and objectives of the study were outlined. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequence. Jacobsen and Landau (2003:2) argue that refugees can become “stigmatised or targeted” if their personal information is revealed (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003:9). The identity of participants was protected and their personal details such as their real names were not included in the reporting of the findings of the study. The participants of the study were vulnerable and therefore the research aimed to be non-judgmental, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminative and sensitive.

In addition to these basic ethical guidelines, the research took account of the unique aspect of refugee research. Jacobsen and Landau (2003:186) note, “much of the work on forced migration is weakened by the fact that key components of the research design and methodology are never revealed.” For this reason, this chapter has aim to offer a transparent methodological approach.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, there are various research projects and bodies of literature that have explored refugee experiences and recount the narratives of refugees, and recent work has explored how to engage with and write about these experiences productively and ethically. For example, Khosravi (2018:51) discusses the “hierarchy of knowledge” in research of migrant practices and the importance to understand the experiences of migrants with their stories. Refugee voices are also often “ghosted” in the way that researchers “silence or amplify refugee voices in our own projects of representation” (Cabot, 2016). Cabot (2016:648) explains that refugees “thus often appear both present and absent, agentive, and yet silenced.” This research was aware of these ethical concerns and took care to best represent the women’s aspirations or narratives. Godin and Dona (2016:16) contend there is a political aspect to the experiences of refugees whose personal significance can be lost and thus “their voices become apolitical.”

Another ethical dilemma is seen in Rugunanan and Smit’s (2011: 715) research with similar narratives by refugee women in South Africa; in this research they show that refugees may “manipulate the ‘victim’ approach as a tool to achieve compensation” as part of a “survival strategy.” However, they continue that the refugee women in their research were “active agents who, despite (or because of) their dire situation, grab any opportunity to ask for assistance” (Rugunanan and Smit 2011: 715). Similarly in this study, despite their trauma, the women in Wingfield shared their stories, but also rightfully inquired about what they would get out of the research. Although I could not offer monetary compensation, the aim was to clearly share their narratives while navigating their emotional trauma.

3.8. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the research methodology used in this study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I only had a limited time to conduct the research while also maintaining social distancing, which was challenging in the camp. Despite this, through my experience with social work, the methodology was designed to attempt to privilege the voices of refugees and marginalised migrants, while acknowledging the tension and politics of representation between researcher and subject.

CHAPTER FOUR: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the responses gathered in this research, as well as observations of the Wingfield camp. The chapter is divided into the following themes, which emerged in the interviews: accounts of traumatic experiences of migration, refugee experiences of xenophobia and other challenges in South Africa, a description and experience of life in the Wingfield camp, notes on the gendered aspect of refugee women's experiences, and finally, reflections on their aspirations.

Nine of the women interviewed were from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and one was from Burundi. The ages of the women were between 18-50 years of age. All the women were staying at the camp, where they were placed after being evicted from the protest sit-in by the police at the start of the COVID-19 lockdown.

4.2 Emotional trauma in forced migration

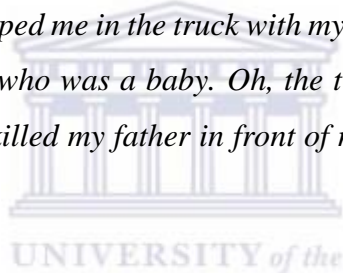
One of the most prominent themes that emerged in the interviews was the women's descriptions and expression of their emotional trauma. Many of the shared traumatic experiences were stories about their forced migration from their home. The descriptions and quotes in this section contain many sensitive details about the violence they witnessed and experienced. However, rather than hold these experiences to themselves, the women I interviewed seemed to need a space to share.

I start with the story of Mary, who was in tears as she shared her migration journey. She arrived in South Africa in 2011 from the DRC. She described to me how it took her 2 weeks to get to Cape Town. She explained that one-night soldiers came to their house and broke down everything. The soldiers started beating everyone, and Mary explained that they did not care whether they were a man or woman, young or old. Her father was a community leader and there was a lot of political unrest happening. Her father was "wanted" because he was seen as a threat as he would influence people's voting and behaviour. There were stories going around that the soldiers were going to come, but that specific night it was unexpected. She shared that

“As the soldiers rushed in and started beating everyone, I fled for my life. I ran and never looked back.”

Mary was raped on the way and faced sexual violence; I, however, did not push further for her to describe this traumatic experience because it was too emotional for her. She asked me to hold her baby whilst we arranged our seating under a small tree in the camp. We went to the back side that was covered with bushes as it was the only quiet place in the camp, and she looked very uncomfortable speaking inside the camp with all the noise, people stopping to listen, and the smoke within the camp. The emotion behind the narratives shared was so intense, that we had to pause throughout the interview. We allowed ourselves to be distracted by the road noise behind us, as the camp was situated directly alongside the roadway. Mary shared:

One night I took my daughter, and I was running. I was running and didn't know where I was running to. Someone helped me in the truck with my baby to come to South Africa... I travelled with my daughter who was a baby. Oh, the travelling was bad and difficult because I was running; they killed my father in front of me, they rape me, they rape my mom, they rape my sister.



Gorman (2005) describes the journey of a refugee goes beyond displacement, experience, and knowledge; it is the traumatic experiences and anxiety about the uncertainty of the future. As I am trained in Social Work, I observed how the migration experience and trauma affected the women, and although I was not in the position to make any formal assessment or therapeutical intervention, I observed that many of the women displayed symptoms of mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety and agitation and fear.

In the Wingfield area a big white tent was set up centrally, with smaller tents set up within it, each which was occupied by a family. Walking throughout the camp with one of the refugee leaders who was the gate keeper, we came across a young woman, who was sitting in a tent with a group of older women. She was the youngest in the group within the tent. They were speaking to each other; however, I could not understand as they spoke French. We approached to see if I could speak to her as a participant in the research. The camp leader explained the purpose of the interview in their language, and then she consented to the interview. The

interview began with her sharing her place of origin and then proceeded into her reason for leaving:

I am from Burundi; I was adopted by my sister. We left Burundi when I was very small; we came here with my brother-in-law. In 2016, my sister applied for legal adoption to take care of me, but the social services told her that she should go back to our country where they can help her. I don't remember much, but I remember that my sister went to Burundi, and she left me behind, saying that she will come back to get me. Since 2016 she never came back, and I never heard from her again; when I tried calling, I can't get hold of her and they say wrong number. I never found her till today.

As this quote shows, some of the women had traumatic separation from family members and little way to stay in touch due to lack of resources. They communicated their migration experience as sad and expressed helplessness. During the interviews each of the refugee women held a unique experience filled with deep emotions such as sadness, trauma, and anxiety. When I asked another woman, “Yama” from DRC, her the reasons for migrating she responded:

I ran because of security in my country; in 2009 I come with a truck. The driver helped me come to South Africa. My father was a Pastor. We moved, and everyone moved to make the church and gospel there. One-night soldiers came and killed my father and my mother. All I ever wanted was to be safe and have a good life for myself and family.

There were loud noises coming from the other tents and the smoke increasing in the camp the interviewed continued. Whilst I was walking pass the very crowed tents, I heard a lady crying, but the tent was closed. At that moment I felt concerned hearing the women cry. I had to keep walking as I did not want to disturb her privacy. I also interviewed a woman, Naka, from the DRC who shared that she came to South Africa seeking a “better life”:

In 2016, my husband was a boxer. He was fighting, and at that time soldiers were recruiting strong men to become soldiers. They took all the men in my community, and my husband didn't want to be a soldier because it was dangerous and involved a lot of killings. My husband ran away after he heard that the soldiers were coming to our community. He packed his bags and ran. He left me behind, and one night the soldiers came to our house and started throwing me around. They said: 'We will kill you if you

don't say where is your husband is.' They started beating me, making a video of how they are beating me up, using it to get my husband. That night my children was crying and my 6-month-old baby was crying. After that night I took my children and fled for safety and a better life.

This quote also demonstrates the kind of traumatic experiences the women went through in fleeing. Her aspiration to migrate was for safety and for a “better life.” Migration aspirations in literature are linked to broader life aspirations such as achieving better education or income or improving one’s socio-economic or political situation (Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2014).

I also interviewed Blen from DRC who fled her country. During my interviews many of their stories and reasons for leaving was because of political reasons and their lives were being threatened:

I left because of political issues back home; there were so many things after us because of political things. Me and my husband left because of safety; first my husband came because he was the one, they were chasing, and husband had to leave, but I joined afterwards. I travelled with a bus because I couldn't use an airplane because of safety.

Another woman, Busha, came forth and the leader introduced me to her. She asked me if we could sit in one of the smaller huts, and then started out:

I am from DRC. I was very young when we fled our country. My father was a soldier, and we ran away. One night we were sleeping. I just heard loud shouts: 'Let's go, let's go!' I followed my dad. We travelled with a truck for that we rent. They dropped us somewhere and there we asked for swop with another truck. We did this for a better life and for safety from our country.

To quote a narrative from another woman at the camp:

I ran away from my country because they were killing there. I am from Goma.... One day 4 soldiers came to my house and raped me, started beating and shooting, at me. When I came to South Africa, I thought something can change. I thought my life would change, but nothing changed. I only experienced pain Ahhhhhhh!!! [Participants starts crying out,

traumatised]. *I don't know I don't know ... It's more pain for me, I don't know, what I can do, I don't know what I can do.*

Migrant women, particularly those from neighbouring African countries, often experience various forms of discrimination, xenophobia, and gender-based violence (Farley, 2019). By these narratives and the definition of refugee and forced migration the women obviously had no choice but to migrate. Kihato (2013) concurs that migrant women suffer psychologically due to trauma and violence, and they feelings of distress, fear, and anxiety due to their experiences. Aspirations to migrate as a refugee or as a forced migrant are often not rational choices but they arise because of trauma, safety and seeking security. While they aspired for a “better life” and safety, they experienced a lot of trauma and violence, from which they had not recovered. This confirms Hart’s (2016) discussion that aspirations are formed and forced by various influences and challenges. The concept of aspiration is important to understanding refugee circumstances and migration patterns, as well as for developing support for the wellbeing of migrants. Aspirations are the futuristic ideas and perspectives an individual would like to achieve to have a better life.



4.3 Refugee challenges in South Africa

The thesis earlier reviewed literature on the experiences and challenges of women refugees in Cape Town and in South Africa. Labelling, discrimination, and lack of citizenship status are contributing factors to their conditions of precarity. These themes were also confirmed by the data in this study and explained in the following sections. The below quotes reflect the negative experiences of refugees in South Africa which include abuse, exploitation, and xenophobia. This precarity led to the women joining the sit-in protest at the Greenmarket Square described in the introduction to the thesis.

4.3.1 Xenophobia and discrimination

Most refugees in South Africa live within host communities where they fend for themselves, and thus also experience various degrees of xenophobia as they attempt to integrate into local

communities. The women in the study also explained their experience of discrimination and how it impacted them, which also led them to participate in the protest. One woman stated:

As a refugee I have no power, which has left me in this issue. I joined the sit-in protest at Green Market because I also faced discrimination.

Another woman had some difficult experiences in South Africa that she expressed regret coming to South Africa:

In this country there are South Africans- they are free. Oh God, I know is a mistake, but you brought me here in this country. Everything is bad for me- It was a mistake to come here. Everything is bad. South Africa is bad, everything is bad, I came here, and everything was taken from me. I don't like South Africa.

One of the refugee women, “Yonella” displayed and expressed her experience with much frustration and anger during our interview. She was frustrated by her living conditions and said: *Why did I come to this country- here is too much problem... I don't want to speak my story; I thank God I'm alive. Right now, I can even just die.*

Babalwa stated the following:

As a foreigner in this country, I have a problem with language; when I explain or speak to someone, they don't recognise you as a human being, this is one of the main things I experienced in South Africa. The first challenge is, we are not treated well and not considered as human being.

As these statements confirm, the refugee women who were moved to Wingfield, like many other migrants in South Africa, faced various kinds of discrimination. The women in this study, as explained in the introduction, all had participated in a refugee sit-in protest prior to being moved to the Wingfield site and so had reached a high level of frustration in their life in South Africa after migration, even before being moved to the encampment area. The women faced discrimination due to their language ability and felt powerless and mentally traumatised. If one reads these quotes alongside the previous section's focus on the trauma of forced migration, it reveals the ongoing emotional trauma and precarity of the women. The women expressed an

extremely negative impression of their life after fleeing to South Africa, after escaping conditions of war and violence in their home country.

4.3.2 Lack of security

We were sitting at the back of the tent where a group of ladies were sitting and having their talks. One of the ladies, Kethiwe, inquired what I was doing, and I explained the research to her. She voluntarily asked to take part, and I agreed by explaining the research study. She also referred to South Africa as “bad” and had a negative experience with the police. Because of this she felt insecure in South Africa. Although she left her country for “security reasons” she still felt insecure where she is now in Cape Town. She shared:

If I go to the police, they will ask, ‘why don’t you go to your country? Why did you come here? Didn’t you know this country is like that?’ ...I left my country for security reasons. I am crying, I cry every day.

The uncertainty and precarity was also impacted by violence and crime in South Africa. For example, during my interview with Bebe, she described their vulnerability to crime:

Too much happened when I arrived in South Africa. In 2016 my husband went to Goodwood-- he took the train. He was robbed on the train; they took everything and stabbed my husband. My husband was left to die, he was stabbed several times.

While the women shared fleeing in search of safety, most of them also shared that they did not feel safe in South Africa either. The lack of security experienced by migrant women in South Africa is a serious concern that highlights various challenges and vulnerabilities they face.

4.3.3 Health care challenges

Refugees were also told that they lack documentation or do not have necessary medical aid cards. Sometimes, they were turned away merely because of linguistic difficulties. As a result, refugee women shared that they visited hospitals with reluctance. Many would rather endure their symptoms than be ill-treated by health workers, resulting in a deterioration of their health. They aspire to have better health care but were unable to access what they needed.

One of the refugee women, Norma, shared her experience being a refugee and her access to health care. As Norma was telling me her story, her daughter came and sat in the little tent that was stuffed with clothes and travelling suitcases. The following narrative is her response and experience to accessing health care as a refugee:

The first 2 years of my life was good. Suddenly I got sickness of my eyes. I was struggling, I got 6 operations in South Africa- it was very bad. There is so much difficulty in my country. I was a public servant in my country. I don't receive proper medical care and had to travel to Johannesburg for an operation. It was so hard; people did not want to be with me. They are scared about how I look. I used to work at a salon, and customers never wanted to use my services for their hair due to my eye condition. I once walked from the hospital, and I was robbed. They took my medication which was for my eyes; it was the worse experience.

Migrant women often face significant health care challenges, both in their countries of origin and in the host countries they migrate to. These challenges can arise due to a combination of factors, including legal status, language barriers, cultural differences, limited access to health care services and discrimination which is evident in the case of Norma. As Crush and Tawodzera (2014) have shared in their research, many migrants experience “medical xenophobia” in South Africa’s health care system, and this has led to the inability to achieve required healthcare.

4.4 Urban spaces: refugee camp

During my research enquiry and observations within the camp, I saw how the structural limitations and lack of resources constrained the day-to-day living experiences of the group. As mentioned in the previous section, the women felt insecure. This insecurity carried forward into the camp situation. Their movement within the camp was limited as well as their movement outside due to various external challenges such violence, and crime. In South Africa where there is no legislation for the encampment of refugees, The South African Refugee Act No.130 of 1998 endorses the movement of foreign nationals within the country, allows the right to work, and promotes the integration and protection of refugees into local communities.

As much these regulatory frameworks are in place refugees continue to experience precarious circumstances thus making them immobile.

The placement of the large number of refugees at Wingfield thus led to this critical case study. As South Africa's policy is to integrate refugees into the society, this was a unique setting to meet refugee women living collectively at the Wingfield site. This section describes the experience of the women living day-today in the camp during the pandemic and thus is an interesting viewpoint on life after migration and the aspiration for a dignified life.

4.4.1 Life in the camp

The camp was often crowded with children walking and playing around asking me who I was and whether I was there to be their teacher, as they had been out of the school system for 2 years. While in the camp, one woman shared a photo of their living conditions. The picture below shows the photo of the tents at the camp:



The refugees living in the white tent with their families. (Photo taken during research in 2021).

The camp was made up of a big white tent that was set-up by the City of Cape Town on the roadside situated on a field. The white tent was enormous, and people stayed in family tents within the white tent. An NGO sponsored the refugees with smaller tents as the large group had no privacy; each family received a tent and was able to store their belongings in the tent. The above picture is what the tent looked like in the inside. In the tent there was a space that was used for creative arts and a small informal tuckshop was also within the tent that belonged

to one of the refugee women. Around the tent were smaller structures build from wood in which the women prepared meals for their children and family.

Yonella showed me around and pointed to the conditions depicted in the photo:

Now you can see where we are here in this tent, you see the condition we are living in- nothing changed. Pain, I see in my country. I come here thinking that maybe I can have better life, but it's just the same... nothing changes in my life.

One woman explained:

I came to the tent because I have nowhere to go. I have been staying here since the lock-down of the pandemic. My baby is sick; she has a chest condition and cough. This place is surrounded with smoke. My baby's chest is always tight. As a human being living in a tent, this is not a dignified life. It's bad; currently I'm not working, I am a single parent, cleaning the toilets and we are facing infections.

During this interview her hands were shaking. The striking part of the interview was that she used the word “dignified”. Refugee women were aware of their rights and expressed the lack of dignity in their situation.

4.5 Women refugees: Gender and migration

4.5.1 Gendered divisions of labour

I also observed different gendered activities in the camp. During my visits to the camp, I rarely observed men sitting with the women; the men had a space they created where all of them came together and would speak. Usually, the refugee leader, a man, would be in charge and would have meetings with the men regarding situations within the camp.

During my research at the camp, I observed the interactions and relations amongst men and women. For example, within the group there were male leaders and for female refugees there was a female leader. After a day of interviews in the camp, I came across a father who was busy bathing his daughter in a small bucket filled with water. This was significant to my observation as I presumed that such a responsibility would be usually given to a women or

mother due to cultural expectations. The life within the camp had impacted the roles and responsibilities of both men and women.

During an interview, one of the participants mentioned how she gets up early in the morning to go and get wood in the bushes, which also raises concerns around the vulnerability and safety of the women. They woke up early morning hours to get wood from the opposite graveyard before the security came on duty.

The COVID-19 global pandemic played an integral role in the relocation of the group of refugees to the different temporal camps and this impacted women in a particular way. The aspirations to achieve a dignified life can only be realised by the opportunities and freedoms that are available. Several women are confronted with the demanding accountability of trying to reconstruct their lives while providing for themselves and their families (Wambugu, 2003). Wambugu (2003) argues that to promote gender equity, it is necessary to empower refugee women through education, training, and access. However, as the next section shows, this was also a challenge.

4.5.2 Child care and no schooling

The following experience displays the daily routines of the women living in Wingfield. It was an early morning as I entered the camp, and around the camp were children playing and mothers cooking breakfast in the little kitchens they built with wood. I scheduled an interview with one of the women named “Rebecca” who stated:

Yesterday my daughter- she is 12 years- she was crying, and she doesn't want to talk to me. She told me, 'I want to go to school!' My daughter is crying to go to school. 'Mummy what life is this,' she asked me? I feel like killing myself, I'm tired of seeing this pain.

During this interview Rebecca became emotional, and there was a moment we needed to end the interview and there was a total silence. She was holding her head and kept saying “*it's too painful*”. I maintained calm using my experience as a qualified trained counsellor with strong quest of psychosocial support and therapy, as speaking about their experiences provoked anxiety. She continued to hold her head and said, “*it's too painful*”.

The inability to attend school was something many of the women brought up. The children were wandering in the camp with little to do. The women expressed feeling pain due to seeing their children's life affected. I interpreted this as their aspirations being placed onto their children, and yet these also being further unfilled.

I interviewed Nayma, one of the other ladies within the camp. I asked her about her experiences, her aspirations, and motivations, and her response was:

I just need help for what I need; I just need help if they can help me.

The desperate response of Nayma was like the other women in the camp. Bertina started with the following opening:

According to me all women have their experience; being a single mother as a refugee is terrible, it's shameful to live that life.

Within the camp were single mothers and parents who looked after their children and who were in search of a better life. In these classes different children as young as 1 years old will be sitting and listening to word sums and literature. She did this as she saw the need for the children to remain cognitively stimulated. There were many of the children who had not attended school for 2 years.

4.5.3 Survival and work in the camp

Some women started small businesses as a form of entrepreneurial activity due to unemployment and not having access to any form of social support. One activity that I observed was hair braiding, which is a common gendered work in the informal economy.



One of the ladies braids hair as a source of income

In the picture is one of the women braiding strands of hair, who aspires to have her own hair salon. One afternoon during my walk within the camp, I came across a group of women: one was busy making a traditional bread and the other was busy braiding hair. She invited me to take a picture of her braiding work she was doing. I admired how beautifully and how neat she twisted her braids. I asked her why she does not start it as business, but she explained that she did not have the money to buy the materials, and that the materials she currently have were sponsored to her once off. Her directing this photo could be described as showing her agency, as it humanised their life and work in the camp (Kihato 2010).

4.5.4 Cooking

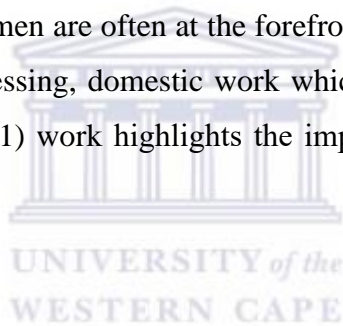
I observed that cooking was mainly done by the women in the camp. A group of ladies were sitting outside; one was preparing lunch, whilst the others were involved in other activities such as teaching the young children, washing clothes and cleaning work. The women in the camp shared spaces that were built from raw materials, which were used for kitchen purposes. They used wooden tables, spoons, and tree branches to cook. The camp was smothered by black smoke and fire due to the continuous cooking that took place at the camp. The women would sit together and converse whilst cooking for their family.

Yonella directed me to take a photo of their makeshift kitchen.



The wooden-made kitchen shared by the women to cook.

Kihato (2011) argues that migrant women play an important role in shaping urban spaces and economies, and that migrant women are often at the forefront of informal economic activities such as street vending, hairdressing, domestic work which is crucial to the functioning of urban economies. Kihato's (2011) work highlights the importance of migrant women's life experiences in urban spaces.



4.6 Aspirations

This thesis offers a review of the way aspirations have been previously discussed in migration literature mostly as aspirations to migrate and push-pull factors, while showing that less work has analysed aspirations during “life after migration” and the “capacity to aspire” for vulnerable refugees. Aspirations are related to the challenges of aspiring to a better life during a time of emotional trauma.

“I am still a human being”.

The group of refugees had certain aspirations and dreams when they fled their country to resettle within another country. However, because of various injustices, the data from this study points to an inability to realise their aspirations. Despite all the challenges, however, they made a point to assert their humanity and need for dignity- hence the quote: “I am still a human being.”

I thought my life will be better. I don't know...

Drawing from the work of Sen (1985), living a dignified life is based on the opportunities that are available for an individual to do what he or she values he or she values in life. Every human being as the right to live a dignified life.

In terms of migration aspirations, the women in the study all voiced their migration journeys as painful and based on traumatic experiences. However, they aspired to life a life of safety, or a better life for their children and family. Some voiced explicit aspirations for a “dignified” life. Importantly, Carling and Collins (2018:913) argue to go beyond “economic rationality” in analysing aspirations to migrate, and toward a focus more on emotions and political and social contexts. They emphasise the need to understand “emotions” as a part of migration aspirations, and the agency and changing identities of migrants (Carling and Collins 2018: 913). The relationship between “force” and “choice” in migration is complex due to the blurring of what it means between forced a voluntary (Carling 2014; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018).

However, this study then, following Van Heelsum (2017) and Borselli et al (2020), was aimed to explore aspirations in life after migration. The study found that the aspirations of the women being primarily constrained by various factors and lack of opportunities. It is evident within the findings of this study that the women living at camp were living at a very basic level within precarious circumstances and wanted to improve this. In some instances, the question was raised whether the women’s aspiration was “realistic” especially within the context of refugee challenges in South Africa.

To summarise the aspirations that emerged in the interviews, the women all presented various aspirations including completing their education, to have their own businesses, for their children to go to school, to find better employment, and have a better life for themselves and their children. Other women mentioned that they aspire to go back home and some aspired to be transported to other countries which they described to be countries where they can have a better life and education for their children. Although every woman had an aspiration that varied, it all came to one main which is hope for a better and “satisfactory life.” Van Heelsum (2017) argues that a satisfactory life is different for each person and their circumstances. In this analysis it is evident that for each woman in this camp their aspirations are different. The aspiration perspective not only provides insight into the desires and agency of migrants but

also shows the challenges they experience including problems and challenges within receiving countries (Van Heelsum, 2017). The need for resources such as money and documentation were noted nearly by all the respondents as the most pertinent instrument that was going to improve their lives.

If we draw from Appadurai's (2013) concept, we can say the women had the capacity to aspire, but their aspirations were limited and constrained. The women, according to my observation, was motivated and aspirations for a better life but could not access opportunities to help achieve them. Appadurai (2013) argues that the capacity to aspire is a crucial aspect of human agency, and the availability of resources such as education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social networks plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to pursue their aspirations.

The women in this study imagined that they would have a better and more dignified life, find better job opportunities, higher wages, and improved living conditions. However, the reality of life in a new country can be very different from these expectations. These women struggled to find work, have faced discrimination and cultural barriers, experienced language difficulties, and violence. When aspirations are not fulfilled, this often leads to frustration (Van Heelsum, 2016) and even depression, which was evident during the women's discussion about their trauma and migration journeys. They still clearly narrated and remembered the trauma they have experienced. It is important to acknowledge that the experience of migration is complex and challenging, and that these migrant women need support and resources to help them navigate these challenges.

4.7 Limitations of the findings of this study

This research was conducted for a mini-thesis, and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research span and depth were limited for the mini thesis. The findings of the research could be expanded for further research with a larger number of participants and could follow up on their aspirations and lives after leaving Wingfield. Finally, the sample was small and hence cannot be representative of all women refugees in South Africa. However, given the large literature documenting the challenges of women refugees, the study confirms these findings and then shares how they developed in the pandemic context. Finally, the interviews in the study took

place in English, and in some instances required a translator who spoke French. This may have limited the understanding of concepts in the interviews to an extent.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has in depth explored the experiences of the refugee women living within Wingfield camp using qualitative data analysis. The findings the study revealed the limited aspirations of the women living within the camp. It is useful to note that this chapter also explored what the women in the camp perceived as what would enable them to achieve a more dignified life. It can thus be deducted from this finding that the constraints that these women encountered has challenged their aspiration and desire for a better life. All the women aspired for a better life; however, they did not feel that had achieved it because they did not have the opportunities to do so. The women also were very traumatised, and many felt immobile in the camp due to lack of resources. There were various constraints with reference to resources that they raised in the interviews.



CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a concluding section of this study and is arranged into the following sections. The first section is a summary of the findings from the study. The second section provides recommendations for policy development, and the final section provides a conclusion to the study.

5.2 Summary findings

The thesis focused on the experiences and aspirations of women refugees who were settled in an encampment area during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cape Town, South Africa. The narratives were collected using ethnographic and qualitative research methodologies. The study confirmed that the women often aspired to better life, schooling for their children, and better health and safety. However, these aspirations were curtailed due to their traumatic psychological state and their feeling of being immobilised by the pandemic and their overall situation. The findings from the study showed that opportunities available for the women at the camp were challenged and constrained due to various factors such economic, political, and personal factors. The women within the study mainly spoke about the sorrow and pain in their lives, migration journeys and aspiration for a better life. The study examined the differences in the responses of the women and their views on their experiences. The aspirations of migrant women varied depending on their individual circumstances and the specific challenges they face as migrants. However, overall, they sought a more dignified life for themselves and their families.

Migration aspirations are the hopes and the dreams that people have about moving from their home country to another in search for better opportunities to escape difficult circumstances. These aspirations can be influenced by a range of factors, including economic, social, and political conditions in the home country. For the women in this study, migration aspirations were driven by factors such the economy, poverty, war, and political unrest in their home country as well as perceptions about the destination country of South Africa. As the data and literature shows, migration aspirations are not always met with success, as many people face

challenges and obstacles in their efforts to migrate, including legal and bureaucratic, financial and discrimination.

As the literature shows, life after migration refers to the experiences and challenges that migrants face once they have settled in their new country of residence. The women refugees experienced challenges and difficulties in adjusting to life in South Africa, including issues related to language, culture, and social isolation, violence, and xenophobia. Migrants in many global contexts also experience challenges related to employment, housing, education, healthcare as well as social isolation and discrimination. Migration aspirations are complex and an important aspect of the human experience. Life after migration involves adjusting to the new cultural norms and practices learning a new language and navigating unfamiliar social and economic systems. Van Heelsum (2017) and Borselli et al (2020) show that refugees need to have an active role in integration and their aspirations need to be better considered.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendation 1: More support for collaborative social development and support offices

Social service support models, organisations and programmes could be better supported to directly serve the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa. A satellite office or offices that provides support and services to migrants within the country working in conjunction with NGOs and state organisations would lessen the immediate pressures on main services providers such as Home Affairs that deal mainly with administrative processes. In this study, it was evident that the women have sought assistance from various service providers; however, the assistance was temporary relief and did not sustain their precarious circumstances. It was noted that most of the mothers had children who did not attend school due to various reasons and this impacted their development. Although many placed aspirations into their children, they worried about them being unable to receive an education. Importantly, the women require counselling and psycho-social support in order to help them overcome their trauma.

5.3.2 Recommendation 2: Enhancing policies that address the issues and challenges faced by refugees

It has often been recommended that the South African government addresses the gap within the system concerning refugees within the country, and in this way allowing for more economic opportunities and mobility, but the implementation of this has been a challenge and remains unresolved. This study suggests and supports the literature stating that gender-related policies should be invested in as they will help the women that rely on social support. Thus, the thesis confirms the need for better gender-sensitive policies in South Africa that address the unique needs and challenges faced by female migrants. These efforts should also prioritise the safety and security of women, including measures to address gender-based violence. The direct communication between policy makers and the refugee women could also serve as significant means for feedback that will allow policy makers to improve policies. Policies and programs that support the social and economic integration of migrants can play an important role in facilitating successful integration and helping migrants to build fulfilling lives after migration. This may include language and cultural training, employment services, housing assistance, and social support programs. Additionally, addressing issues of discrimination and social exclusion can help to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for migrants, which can contribute to their overall well-being and success in their new country of residence. Women migrants in South Africa often lack access to healthcare. Policies need to better address non-discriminatory access to healthcare for female migrants.

5.3.3 Recommendation 3: Creating family support programs for refugee women and children.

There is a need for psychosocial support for traumatised refugees as an important aspect to address in South Africa to help refugees realise other aspirations. South Africa needs to strengthen support for migrant and refugee women and children. Strengthening family support programmes and involving more professionals like social workers to offer psychosocial support to the women and refugees would help them to cope better and then be able to work on further goals. Additionally, increased access to legal services for female migrants in South Africa is important, as they often lack access to legal services, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

5.3.4 Recommendation 4: Provide skills training and employment opportunities

The literature has shown that women refugees in South Africa often face barriers to employment due to language barriers and discrimination. More support is needed to provide skills training and employment opportunities for women migrants. Additionally, there is a need to better address intersectional discrimination against female migrants in South Africa which is based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Policies should be developed to address intersectional discrimination, including measures to promote diversity and inclusion in all sectors of society.

5.4 Conclusion

This study has undertaken an exploration of some of the experiences of refugee women in the Wingfield camp, Cape Town. The study pointed out that the overall capacity of the women to aspire in the camp was low. A relationship was also established between the availability of resources and the attainment of desires, dreams, and aspirations of the women. Many of the women wanted a better life. As this study and the literature of refugee challenges has shown, it is important for government, NGOs, and other organisations to support and ensure the implementation of gender sensitive policies that would benefit the refugee women within this study. To achieve this refugee women should receive further psychological and social support so that they can contribute to the community and fulfil their aspirations for a better life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information Sheet

Seeking a Dignified Life: Assessing the Capabilities and Experiences of Women Refugees in
Cape Town, South Africa.

Institute for Social Development

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town,

South Africa Telephone: 021 959 3858/6 Fax:

021 959 3865

Email: pkippie@uwc.ac.za (Administrator) or akarriem@uwc.ac.za (Acting Director, ISD)

Information Sheet

What is this study about?

This research project will be done by Lenishia Frank, a master's student in the Institute for Social Development at the University of the Western Cape. The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of women refugees in South Africa. This study aims to look at how your access and ability to move might affect your future decisions. This study aims to contribute towards the development of policy for the protection and access to support of women refugees living in South Africa. You are invited to participate in this project because you are knowledgeable on the project topic and have experiences that will contribute significantly to the purpose of the study.

What is the Interview about?

The interview seeks to engage with you based on few research questions that have been pre-determined. The questions seek to solicit information based on the discussion to gather in-depth information on your experiences. Due to COVID-19 restrictions I will request the first interview take place online. I will suggest an asynchronous method, which is a process in which I will send you questions, and you can take your time to respond. If you agree, I may ask to follow up with you for a face-to-face interview and to meet you at or near the Wingfield site or a place that is safe and convenient.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

All participation will be treated with confidentiality and integrity. All personal information will be kept confidential and will remain anonymous. You will be required to sign a consent form before partaking in the study to protect your privacy and confidentiality. The researcher shall not reveal the identity of the participants and will safeguard the confidential information obtained during the study.

What are the risks of this research?

Although there are no risks anticipated from participating in this study, you may find that the questions ask you to recall difficult life circumstances. In such circumstances the researcher will act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

There are no material benefits for the participants (respondents). The researcher will provide data to your phone to conduct the online interview.

Do I have to complete the whole interview proceedings, or may I withdraw from the process at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Should you feel the need to withdraw from the study you can do so at any time.

How long will it take to complete the whole interview process?

The full interview session will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour complete. I may ask for another interview if I have further questions. You are free to contact me if you want to discuss any aspect of the interview after it is over.

Do I need to bring anything to the interview?

You do not have to bring anything.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

Yes, if you find that the questions bring back traumatic memories or psychological distress, then I will recommend that you seek support at the NGO, Scalabrini, which is an organization that support migrants and refugees in Cape Town.

The contact information for Scalabrini is as follows: (+27214656433)



What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Lenishia Frank, a student at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study or if you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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This research has been (undergoing approval) approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee. HSSREC, Research Development, UWC, Tel: 021 959 2988, E-mail: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

Appendix 2: Information sheet for Semi-Structured Interview

Title of Research Project:

**Seeking a Dignified Life: Assessing the Capabilities and Experiences of Women
Refugees in Cape Town, South Africa.**

Institute for Social Development

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town,
South Africa Telephone: 021 959 3858/6 Fax:
021 959 3865

Email: pkippie@uwc.ac.za (Administrator) or akarriem@uwc.ac.za (Acting Director, ISD)

What is this study about?

This research project will be done by Lenishia Frank, a master's student in the Institute for Social Development at the University of the Western Cape. The purpose of this study is to investigate aspirations and experiences of women refugees in South Africa. This study aims to look at how your access and ability to move might affect your future decisions. This study aims to contribute towards the development of policy for the protection and access to support of women refugees living in South Africa. You are invited to participate in this project because you are knowledgeable on the project topic and have experiences that will contribute significantly to the purpose of the study.

What is the Interview about?

The Interview seeks to engage with you based on few research questions that have been pre-determined. The questions seek to solicit information based on the discussion to gather in-depth information on your experiences. Due to COVID-19 restrictions I will request the first interview take place online. I will suggest an asynchronous method, which is a process in which I will send you questions, and you can take your time to respond. If you agree, I may ask to follow up with you for a face-to-face interview and to meet you at or near the Wingfield site or a place that is safe and convenient.



Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

All participation will be treated with confidentiality and integrity. All personal information will be kept confidential and will remain anonymous. You will be required to sign a consent form before partaking in the study to protect your privacy and confidentiality. The researcher shall not reveal the identity of the participants and will safeguard the confidential information obtained during the study.

What are the risks of this research?

Although there are no risks anticipated from participating in this study, you may find that the questions ask you to recall difficult life circumstances. In such circumstances the researcher will act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

There are no material benefits for the participants (respondents). The researcher will provide data to your phone to conduct the online interview.

Do I have to complete the whole interview proceedings, or may I withdraw from the process at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Should you feel the need to withdraw from the study you can do so at any time.

How long will it take to complete the whole interview process?

The full interview session will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour complete. I may ask for another interview if I have further questions. You are free to contact me if you want to discuss any aspect of the interview after it is over.

Do I need to bring anything to the interview?

You do not have to bring anything.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

Yes, if you find that the questions bring back traumatic memories or psychological distress, then I will recommend that you seek support at the NGO, Scalabrini, which is an organization that support migrants and refugees in Cape Town.

The contact information for Scalabrini is as follows: (+27214656433)

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Lenishia Frank, a student at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study or if you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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This research has been (undergoing approval) approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee. HSSREC, Research Development, UWC, Tel: 021 959 2988, E-mail: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

Appendix 3: Interview Guide
Title of the Research Project:

Seeking a Dignified Life: Assessing the Capabilities and Experiences of Women Refugees in Cape Town, South Africa.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research introduction: This study is conducted by Lenishia Frank in fulfilment for the requirements to obtain a master’s degree in development studies at the Institute for Social Development (ISD) at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. The study seeks to find out what your experiences are as a women and refugee and how you have been able to achieve your aspirations.

Participant

Respondent Code # _____	
Sex: Female	Country of Origin: _____
Qualification: _____	Marital Status: _____

- (1) How and when did you travel to South Africa?
- (2) With whom did you travel to South Africa?
- (3) What were your experiences after arriving in South Africa?
- (4) What are your experiences as women refugee in South Africa?
- (5) Can you please tell/share with me some of your experiences at the camp?

(6) Throughout your stay in South Africa, have you reached your aspirations?

(7) If no, why do you say so?

(8) If yes, what aspirations have you achieved?

(9) Has your temporary stay at the camp affect your ability to move?

(10) Do you have any difficulties being understood by others? Are you able to maintain your cultural and religious practices?

Thank you for participating in answering these questions!

