

Abstract

The ways in which the multiple spaces that make cities are culturally produced by the diverse bodies that occupy them has been illustrated in urban and other literature that examines the character and experiences within these spaces. However, these discussions have often not been linked to mobile bodies coming from across national borders. In this post-apartheid period South Africa's cities have been host to diverse bodies which are migrating from different parts of the region for varied, often overlapping reasons. These migrants are locating in their host cities for varying periods, determined by a combination of factors such as the particular motivations for their migration, changes in the political economy of their home country during the time they are away, as well as their 'success' in meeting their migration goals. In particular, changes in the Zimbabwean political economy in the last decade have resulted in a shift in the character of migration from this country to its neighbour South Africa, with increasing numbers, more diversification in terms of who migrates as well as shifts to more extended stay. Included in this current wave of migrants to South Africa cities are an increasing number of women who unlike the historically more visible Zimbabwean female cross-border trader are often locating in this host space for indefinite periods. This research explores the migration experiences of young Zimbabwean women in their negotiation of the everyday material and social conditions in the spaces of home and neighbourhood located in the periphery of the city of Cape Town. The qualitative approach was used to explore the nuances of these gendered negotiations and reproduction of home, identities and relationships. Participant observations, individual interviews with identified key informants as well as informal group discussions were used to answer the central research questions. It was found that as they find and maintain home in Cape Town through diverse networks and relationships, different aspects of the young women's gendered 'personhood' are reinforced as well as renegotiated. The manipulation and shifting of definitions of gendered norms, practices, identities and relationships is key to shaping the women's fluid and contingent gendered urban experiences in this migration context.