

An Intersectional Examination of Socio-Economic Challenges and
Resilience Strategies of Nigerian Female Economic Migrants in
Durban's Informal Hairdressing Sector, South Africa.

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts (Sociology) to be awarded at the University of
Mpumalanga

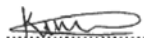
May 2026

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DECLARATION

I, Khanyisile Mngadi, 251074730, hereby declare that the dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Sociology) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.



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Khanyisile Mngadi

DEDICATION

This work begins with the lives of female migrant workers, and with the stories that shaped me long before I could name them.

To my sisters, Ntombiyenkosi and Nomakhosi Mkhize.

You left South Africa young and stepped into Ireland with only your names, your faith, and a quiet strength you had not yet learned to recognise. You learned to grow in places that did not know your language or your memories. You worked hard, learned fast, and tried to build ordinary life while far from home. Some of your stories came through long, tiring phone calls. Others remained unspoken. Many will never be known. You carry weight every day that you do not, and cannot, fully share. I wrote because of all of it. You will never know how many nights I lay awake, heavy with the pieces you trusted me with. I am proud of you. I love you. Keep walking forward.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Andile Sokani and Dr John Mhandu. You guided me with patience and direct advice. You pushed me to think harder and write more clearly. Your comments were sometimes tough to receive, but they helped me grow. I am grateful for the time, care, and sharp thinking you brought to this work.

To my husband, Sandile Mngadi. Thank you for understanding the many late nights, cancelled plans, and quiet weekends spent writing. You carried a lot so that I could finish. You listened when I needed to talk and stayed close when I had nothing to say. Your support gave me room to keep going.

To my friends and family. Thank you for cheering me on and checking in. Your encouragement meant a lot. Many thanks to Workers College South Africa (SA) for funding support and for believing in the value of this research. To the Director of Workers College SA, and friend, Mr. Dominic Msiya. Thank you for walking alongside me and offering guidance in both personal and workspaces. Finally, I thank the women who shared their stories with honesty. This study rests on your lives and voices. I hope this writing treats them with care.

ABSTRACT

This study presents a critical and intersectional examination of the socio-economic challenges and resilience strategies of Nigerian female economic migrants operating within Durban's informal hairdressing sector. Positioned within the broader context of South–South migration and African feminist frameworks, the study interrogates how migrant women navigate intersecting regimes of exclusion ranging from gendered xenophobia and precarious legal status to spatial marginalisation and institutional neglect within a post-apartheid city marked by structural violence. The study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretivist and feminist epistemologies, privileging meaning-making, context, and subjective experience as core sources of knowledge. Using a decolonial feminist methodology and drawing on semi-structured interviews with migrant hairdressers, the research centres lived experience as both evidence and epistemology. The analysis is guided by three intersecting theoretical frameworks: Intersectionality Theory, Structuration Theory, and Bourdieu's Capital Theory. Findings reveal that these women are not merely passive recipients of exclusion but active urban agents, mobilising embodied, relational, and symbolic forms of capital to assert visibility, economic survival, and informal legitimacy. Their work constitutes not only economic labour but a form of spatial, aesthetic, and political presence, what this study conceptualises as “secondary urban citizenship”. Rather than depicting informality as a deficit, the dissertation re-theorises the informal hair economy as a site of feminist resistance, everyday innovation, and urban co-production. The study contributes to emerging literature that seeks to decolonise migration theory and centre African women's voices as theorists of urban life. The research culminates in key policy and practice recommendations. These include the design of gender-sensitive municipal permit frameworks, the provision of inclusive and healthcare access for undocumented entrepreneurs, and the institutional recognition of migrant-led informal enterprises in urban economic planning. At a broader level, it calls for transnational policy dialogues between Nigeria and South Africa that acknowledge the realities of South–South migration and foreground the rights and contributions of migrant women. In doing so, the dissertation offers both theoretical advancement and actionable insights for re-imagining inclusive African urban futures.

Keywords: *South–South Migration, Nigerian Women Migrants, Informal Economy, Gendered Xenophobia, Intersectionality, Feminist Political Economy, Secondary Urban Citizenship*

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFCFTA: African Continental Free Trade Area

AU: African Union

CBD: Central Business District

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

FPAR: Feminist Participatory Action Research

ILO: International Labour Organisation

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NVivo: Qualitative Data Analysis Software

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SAHRC: South African Human Rights Commission

ST: Structuration Theory

UN: United Nations

WHO: World Health Organisation

WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the socio-economic challenges and resilience mechanisms of the Nigerian female migrants in the Durban informal hairdressing sector. The migration of Nigerians to South Africa, especially to cities like Durban, has become a progressively visible and politically controversial phenomenon influenced by a combination of global economic changes, insecurity in the country of origin and personal ambition. This study is specifically about Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers who leave Nigeria to seek opportunities in livelihood, especially in the informal sector, but whose situation cuts across the simplifying dichotomies of voluntary and forced migration. Their paths are typically characteristic of the new type of economic asylum seekers, who are driven by economic need more than by the desire to obtain foreign protection as a means of survival in an environment of more hostile migration policies (Obi et al., 2023:14).

This ambiguous location makes the study of dominant typologies of migration more challenging and makes the neoclassical model excessively focus on rational wage differentials as the underlying explanation of mobility. The city of Durban, an economic hub and port in KwaZulu-Natal, gives a good location through which to trace these dynamics. The Durban urban environment is defined by stratification of formal exclusion and informal accommodation as the place of entry and settlement of migrants of African origin. Migrants often cannot obtain formal work by being barred with documentation or marginalised through language or being xenophobic, leading to many migrants being forced into the informal economy (Tawodzera and Crush, 2023:4). The street level economy of the city, food vending to small scale personal work, therefore, makes it a key arena of economic activity, especially on the part of women. This involvement is, however, tentative. Durban is also the location of periodic anti-migrant violence, most notably in the organized assaults of April 2015, where migrant-owned stalls and stores were looted and burnt down displacing hundreds (Landau and Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2023:22). These dynamics must also be understood within the broader South African socio-political context, where migration is shaped by restrictive policy

frameworks and persistent anti-migrant sentiment. Recent scholarship highlights that immigration policies in South Africa often produce legal precarity, limiting migrants' access to formal employment and institutional protection while simultaneously pushing them into informal economic activities (Crush & Tawodzera, 2024; Landa, 2026). In addition, xenophobia has become a recurring feature of the post-apartheid landscape, with both historical and contemporary manifestations reinforcing the marginalisation of African migrants (Chekenya, 2026; Kenneth, Motsaathebe & Phemelo, 2024). More recently, organised movements such as Operation Dudula have intensified anti-migrant mobilisation through the targeting of foreign-owned businesses and informal traders, further shaping migrants' everyday experiences of insecurity and exclusion (Sikhosana, 2025; Mahlaba et al., 2024). These broader structural and political dynamics provide an important backdrop for understanding the lived realities of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal sector.

The female economic migrants of the hairdressing trade in Nigeria have a distinctly complex role within this tense urban ecology of Nigeria. Hair salons that are usually improvised in alleyways, informal constructions, or shared rentals turn out to be places of economic survival, culture, and relational labour. These women not only undulate in the macroeconomic instabilities in Nigeria and limiting South African immigration policies, but the micro-politics of race, gender, and space in Durban contentious public spaces (Erwin and Marks, 2024:89). Their salons do not only represent a competitive business industry but influence affective arenas of belonging, aesthetic labour and informal care.

This transnational dynamic is essential and should include remittances. Nigerian women outside the country tend to be the main breadwinners in large families, with remittance transfers paying 20 per cent to 65 per cent of household expenses (Olsson, 203:11). These are the financial responsibilities accumulated into diasporic networks and expectations of kinship, which concur with the global difference in terms of gendered labour and care chains. However, economic logic is not used alone to determine migration decisions. Although the neoclassical model of migration remains a powerful influence on much of the policy and scholarly literature, it often cannot explain the intricate social norms, emotional connections and cultural meanings through which mobility is constructed (Olsson, 2023:4). The Theory

of Reasoned Action (Inyama, 2021:3) is, however, somewhat more nuanced and postulates that the intention to leave and the anticipation of statusful gains or stigma influence the intention to migrate.

This is particular when it comes to younger women who find international migration to be a means of upward mobility, family honour and long-term economic independence. This study is informed by an intersectional perspective and draws on complementary theoretical insights to understand how Nigerian female economic migrants navigate structural constraints and everyday realities within the informal economy. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach to capture participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. A detailed discussion of the theoretical and methodological frameworks is provided in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Mhandu (2025:3) demonstrates how Zimbabwean migrant women in Durban's informal sector actively negotiate state restrictions and social exclusion, highlighting the importance of understanding both structural constraints and everyday adaptive strategies. In addition, qualitative research approaches highlight the importance of capturing participants' lived experiences and multiple realities, particularly in relation to their layered identities as mothers, breadwinners, migrants, and informal entrepreneurs (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:4).

Hairdressing is not merely a feminised business, but a relational business. It enables the women of Nigeria to work out their schedules, physical movement, and appearance at their own discretion, which frequently is more accommodating than male-dominated industries can provide. As Bhana et al. (2023:16) argue, feminised labour like that based on beauty work may both reinscribe and disrupt gender expectations, these forms apply simultaneously depending on the social-political environment in which they are located. Furthermore, membership in such an economy is usually subject to symbolic and cultural capital: hairstyling skill, aesthetic credibility, reputation, and affective trust among clients, which are socially constructed and negotiated on a daily basis (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet survival is precarious. The cosmopolitan reality of urban lives in which Nigerian women live and work is still influenced by xenophobic nationalism and populist discourses that present African foreigners as illegitimate or dangerous. Surveillance, harassment, or physical displacement

of space is put forward with discourses of criminality, contagion, or moral deviance (Crush & Ramachandran, 2024:8). Women, in turn, adopt forms of embodiment (mobility), coalition-based politics (alliance building), and meaningful invisibility (tactics). They can move salon locations during times of tension, sign into rental-sharing deals with trusted colleagues or they can resort to community savings schemes to cushion against economic shocks.

These survival tactics are reflective of dynamics prevalent in other Global South contexts. An example is the ethnography of Nigerian traders in Guangzhou, China, by Lan (2015:4): similar patterns of hybrid resilience are described in the example, migration is not one discontinuous event but a part of a longer process of transnational care and survival. These problematic relations highlight why an intersectional, feminist and decolonial approach to migration is needed. Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban do not fit well in traditional categories of risk, vulnerability or success. They are rather narratives of daily speculation, impermanent resistance, and relationship maneuvering in a post-colonial city that marginalizes them and simultaneously requires their labour. This study aims to focus on such stories. The study emphasizes women in the informal hair economies of Durban and thereby shifts the demographic abstraction mode of study to establish the convergence of structural constraints, informal economies, and affective practices to produce migrant lives. It has been added to the larger discussions about urban citizenship, informal labour, gendered migration, and African feminist praxis, in which these women are not seen as marginal participants, but rather as the creators of urban belonging in the context of legal and social precarity.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A combination of legal, economic, gendered, and social exclusions soundly defines the socio-economic realities of Nigerian female economic migrants, which restrict their everyday survival and their long-term ability to engage in economic mobility in an informal hairdressing economy of Durban. Although the informal entrepreneurship has been viewed as an adaptable route to empowerment, this research concludes that the viability of informal entrepreneurship to the migrant women is systematically challenged by convergence of

structures of discrimination, institutional neglect and spatial precarity. The working conditions of these women are in a volatile urban economy where they only have a transient access to secure premises, stable clientele, and affordable supplies. Such practices as municipal by-law enforcement, intermittent raids and outbreaks of xenophobic violence can destroy livelihoods overnight, eliminating weeks of income and pulping displacement cycles (Tshishonga, 2015:8; Sinwell, Maggott & Ngwane, 2023:41). However, they are not isolated cases of shock, they are structural and recurring, within the larger trends of exclusion that discriminate against African women in informal settings in a disproportionate manner. These vulnerable points are multiplied by gender. Migrant women have to worry about dual income-generation and reproductive labour that involves caregiving and maintaining transnational households as a result of remittances (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:2; Olsson, 2023:11). This dual burden increases their inability to diversify business or to invest in additional skills development. Furthermore, the circumstances of their economic practices are determined by not merely material suffering, but social and institutional abandonment as well. Their entrepreneurial operations are practiced within a situation where neither South African state policy nor host societies is supportive, recognizing, or protective in terms of structure. Rather, they receive xenophobic antagonism, moral surveillance, and spatial management that creates them as both a necessary source of the cheap, low-cost service work and simultaneously undesirable in dominant nationalist presentations (Crush & Ramachandran, 2024:8).

Another stratum of exclusion is the systematic denial of access to fundamental social services including healthcare. Several studies identify discriminatory practices in the foreign-born African women in health facilities, which results in delayed care, omission, or even the denial of care altogether (Temin et al., 2021:2). In the same vein, Sokani et al. (2024:2) in their application of the Three-Delay Model in the situation of low-income women and antenatal care in Johannesburg show how spatial, institutional, and socio-economic delays compromise the provision of the necessary services to low-income women. Although their study targets maternal health, their results reveal structural failures in urban service delivery that reflects the structural barriers. The Nigerian women economic migrants are confronted with lack of access to care or delayed access to care in the informal Durban-based hairdressers' industry that contributes to economically vulnerable individuals and perpetuates patterns of marginalisation. To hairdressers whose trade entails both proximity to others, sustained

exposure, and exhaustive work, these exclusions have direct consequences on the health and economic sustainability of their work. Their capacity to work may be instantly ruined by illnesses, injury, or pregnancy complications, disrupting income streams, decreasing remittances which are essential to their family back home in Nigeria. There is also the socio-political enmity that engulfs foreign women entrepreneurs, which has a psychological toll. Repeat social hysterics setting migrants as job thieves are frequently organised into systematic harassment and violence. To the small-scale salon owners in commercial streets with high surveillance such as the Pixley ka Seme Street, these threats manifest in physical losses, reputation losses, and loss of customer confidence (Tshishonga, 2015:8). Such disruptive effects are persistent: the disrupted listening of trust relationships accumulates over time in terms of these women towards the clients and neighbors into additional forms of isolation within the urban economy. Regarding social status, transnational expectations about remittances flows because of high cost of living and lowering incomes can result in low status among migrant sending household. Such upheavals do not just impact financial responsibilities, but jeopardize the support systems of families, as well as, transnational solidarity.

These disruptions usually have emotional and logistical effects, including a weakening of the support of relatives who can provide care to children in Nigeria, increasing the burden of affective and financial stress experienced by these women (Olsson, 2023:13). Policy environment worsens their vulnerability on both sides of the migration chain and not improving it. The South African immigration policies are still exclusionary ones, whereby they tend to deny low-income earners permission, yet ironically, they depend on them in the unregulated service industries (Lan, 2015:15). Lack of labour retention strategies leads to a continued out-migration in Nigeria amid domestic demands of skilled service labour. In this way, migrant women are in a position of maneuvering between two states that are dependent and at the same time, fail to facilitate their economic participation structurally. This structural marginalisation is aggravated by the lack of specific entrepreneurial assistance. The vast majority of business development programs in South Africa are structured by formalized paperwork, collateral, and investor-ready pitches criteria that lock out the majority of undocumented or semi-documented migrant women (Jali, Tengeh & Makoza, 2023:15). Women are deprived of capital, training and space even when they possess the technicality and are in demand. Migrant women entrepreneurs have their linguistic, cultural and spatial

barriers to the support programmes that make them ineligible to the state and non-governmental programmes. Such institutional blindness creates a political exclusion loop on top of exclusion where migrant women have no choice but to turn to informal networks and improvisational start/stop, as opposed to formal economic entry points. Consequently, resilience is individualised. The pooling of money with friends, temporary switching of stalls or changing locations, are all reactive and not transformative strategies of coping. This places migrant women in perpetual improvisation that perpetuates their livelihood on tactical manoeuvres but not structural inclusion. In this regard, the problems of Nigerian female economic migrants in the informal hair economy in Durban are not just issues of financial poverty, but symptoms of larger structural exclusions of urban governance, migration policy, and gendered labour hierarchies (Phillips and James, 2014:9; Jaiswal, Nunez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:3). The lack of recognition, protection and support structures forms a feedback cycle within which instability becomes normalised. Precarity is not an accident but rather a creation, maintenance and racialisation. (Mkhize, 2024:5). The issue finally addresses a broader developmental and epistemological dissonance: informal migrant women entrepreneurs form the centre of the economic and social fabric of such cities as Durban, but are still peripheral in policy, research and popular discourses. The answer to this issue will need a paradigm that will put their lived experiences at its core, embodied negotiations, and alternative knowledge that will acknowledge them not just as vulnerable individuals, but as theorists of survival, architects of belonging, and practise of insurgent urban citizenship.

1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to critically examine the intersectional socio-economic challenges encountered by Nigerian female economic migrants within Durban's informal hairdressing sector, and to explore the resilience strategies they adopt in navigating these.

1.3.1 Sub-Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences and socio-economic challenges faced by Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal hairdressing sector.
2. To identify and analyse the resilience strategies adopted by these women to navigate and mitigate the structural and social challenges they encounter.

3. To examine how intersecting identities such as gender, migrant status, and nationality shape their position and experiences within the informal economy.
4. To examine how migration and urban policies of South Africa impact the livelihoods and spatial practice of Nigerian female economic migrant workers within the informal hair economy.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the intersectional socio-economic challenges faced by Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal hairdressing sector, and how do they employ resilience strategies to navigate them?

1.4.1. Sub-Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences and everyday challenges of Nigerian female hairdressers operating in the informal economy of Durban?
2. In what ways do intersecting social identities such as gender, nationality, and migrant status affect their economic activities and social positioning?
3. What resilience strategies and informal networks do these women use to overcome socio-economic and legal barriers?
4. How do South Africa's migration and urban governance policies impact the livelihoods and spatial practices of Nigerian female economic migrants working within the informal hair economy?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is critical on both theoretical, methodological, empirical, and policy levels. Fundamentally, it provides a novel and opportune intervention to the sphere of migration studies, feminist political economy, and African urban sociology by making the lives of Nigerian female economic migrants who work in the informal hair economy of Durban central. The accounts of these women are frequently excluded in the mainstream policy and academic discussion, but they can be of invaluable importance in understanding the ways of living with and resisting intersecting forms of inequality within daily life in the city.

Theoretically, the work criticises dominant migration theories based on neoclassical economics or legalistic status categories, and provides an alternative explanation of informal migrant labour in an intersectional, feminist and decolonial approach. Addressing women whose migration paths fall neither into and coming from a purely economic or asylum-seeking framework, the study addresses new groups of the so-called economic asylum seekers, whose approaches challenge the standard categories (Obi et al., 2023:14). By doing so, the study destabilizes homogenising discourses of migrant entrepreneurs and prefigures the influence of gendered occupational niches, including hairdressing, as both a place of opportunity and restriction (Smit & Musango, 2015:6). It extends the analytical scope of informal economy literature by preempting relational labour, affective entrepreneurship and symbolic capital as critically important forms of survival and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986).

The study is methodologically rooted in intensive qualitative research to embrace the textured realities that are usually missed by the survey or macroeconomic research. The interpretivist approaches involving narrative-rich applications makes it possible to comprehend deeper and further adaptive strategies, resilience practices, and spatial negotiations of migrant women. Such concepts as the rotation of workplaces following xenophobic violence, pooling of resources within diasporic networks, or building up of professional images to win the trust of clients are insights that often remain hidden in the official economic reporting and may be imperative in maintaining livelihoods under structural strain (Onwukwe & Gibson, 2022:2). The new methodological contribution of these findings is theorising resilience as active, insurgent, and intentional rather than passive (coping).

In practical terms, the research provides practical recommendations to urban governance, entrepreneurship growth, and the migration policy. The city attempts to favour small enterprises frequently focus on formalisation or on the growth of licences without effectively tackling structural exclusions like site expenses, xenophobic implementation and the cumbersomeness of documentation (Tshishonga, 2015:2). The research can influence the design of microfinance schemes, training programmes, and permit systems to be sensitive to informal realities by basing the recommendations on the lived realities of migrant women. It also carries serious consequences to the policy of the health of the population. Migrant

women who work in physically intimate labour areas as hairstylers tend to postpone medical attention because of either facing deportation or unfair treatment (Jaiswal, Nunez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:9). Recording such exclusions makes the case of rights-based health provision (with migration status as a health determinant) more solid. The study is politically challenging to xenophobic discourses that portray African migrants as a financial drain. It disproves the displacement and illegitimacy arguments by showing the role of women in creating jobs, offering services and remittances (Tshishonga, 2015:11).

It also presents migrant women not as passive receivers of aid but as savvy participants in the formation of urban development, informal innovation and cultural production. At the regional level, the paper closes a long-standing gap in the migration scholarship across Africa that has largely focused on South-North migration but not on South-South mobility of women engaged in low-capital entrepreneurship in repression of limited regulatory regimes (Irabor, 2023:3). It is through the Durban case being put in dialogue with studies on Zimbabwean and Congolese migrant women experiencing the same exclusions across Southern African cities that it can be included in policy learning across SADC (Mutambara & Maheshvari, 2017:6). These comparative observations are applicable in municipal governments as well as regional migration systems. In the field of study, the disciplinarity is based on feminist theory, migration studies and urban sociology, which illustrates the usefulness of combined analytical frameworks to understand how structural inequality and every-day agency interplay. It locates the intersectional approach to understanding livelihood strategies based on gender, ethnicity, and class and legal status (Onwukwe & Gibson, 2022:4), highlighting the inherent shortcomings of single-axis explanations and the concerns of complex positionalities that the policy needs to address.

The study also contributes to the discussion of transnational development cooperation. By revealing institutional loopholes including lack of bilateral protection of informal migrant workers and emergence of diaspora networks as alternative to formal welfare provision it provides proof that Nigeria South Africa collaboration on migrant rights should be redefined. This underpins the arguments of regionally integrated, gender-sensitive policy regimes that capture the contribution of informal labour in continual operation of African cities economies

(Smit & Musango, 2015:6). Overall, the study makes conceptual, empirical and practical contributions to re-imagining how African cities govern mobility, informality and inclusion. Centreing the narratives of migrant women hairdressers reveals the invisible infrastructures underpinning everyday urban life and positions these women as central to both scholarly theorisation and policy reform across the continent.

1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.6.1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytic framework that examines how overlapping identities such as gender, race, class, and migration status interact to produce specific forms of disadvantage and privilege. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept highlights how systems of power do not operate independently but interlock in shaping lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991:1241). In this study, intersectionality is central to understanding how Nigerian female economic migrants' experiences in Durban's informal economy are co-constituted through the interplay of xenophobia, gender norms, legal precarity, and racialised urban space.

1.6.2. Migrant Worker

The International Labour Organization defines a migrant worker as “a person who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a country of which they are not a national” (ILO, 2022:3). The study is mainly applicable to the Nigerian women who have migrated to South Africa and engage in informal, often unregulated, hairdressing establishments to earn a living and provide to their dependants, both locally and transnationally.

1.6.3. Socio-Economic

The socio-economic term explains the integrated character of social and economic actions which determine access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility. Socio-economic challenges in this research denote actual constraints, including income instability, documentary obstacles, and housing precarity, as well as social ones, including gender-based violence, xenophobic exclusion, and cultural marginalisation (Bhana et al., 2023:21). The

term is applied across the thesis to represent the intricate relationships among labour, identity and survival in the life of urban migrants.

1.6.4. Resilience

The idea of resilience here is not only gained by being able to tolerate distress, but a strategic, dynamic procedure of negotiating and adjusting to crisis. Resilience (in reference to social-ecological models) is a mobilisation of cultural, symbolic, and social resources to keep people alive in circumstances of exclusion and precarity (Ungar, 2022:8). In the case of migrant Nigerian women in the Durban hair industry, spatial mobility, aesthetic performance, informal savings groups, and transnational care networks are some practices involved in resilience.

1.6.5. Informal Economy

The informal economy includes income generating activities that are not regulated by any formal bodies. Workplace The International Labour Organization determines that informal work is that which is not regulated and neither regulated nor secured by the state (ILO, 2022:7). In this dissertation, the term is used narrowly in reference to the unlicensed, mostly street-based or home-based, hairdressing businesses operated by Nigerian female migrants in Durban. They are businesses at the intersection of need and exclusion, providing livelihood opportunities, but subjecting the workers to an increased risk, surveillance, and social stigma.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters with each having a unique but related role in addressing the research problem.

Chapter One: Introduction

The chapter provides the context and justification of the study, the socio-economic and political situations that surround the migration of Nigerian women in the informal hairdressing industry in Durban. It introduces the research problem, aim, objectives, and questions, and explains the importance of the study to the discussion of gendered informality,

migration between South and South, and urban precarity. The theoretical framework and the methodological orientation are also briefly introduced in the chapter, which lays the groundwork of the other chapters.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter is a critical examination of the available literature on migration, gender, informality, African urbanism, and xenophobic nationalism. It considers international and sub-continental arguments, finds holes in both empirical and theoretical knowledge, and locates the study in relation to recent feminist political economic and intersectionality studies. The review shows constraints of prevailing theories of migration and the necessity to study the experiences of African migrant women in hostile urban cities like Durban contextually.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

The chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, which is based on the intersectionality, ST, and the capital theory developed by Bourdieu. It makes clear how every framework assists in analytic processes of the layered vulnerability, adaptive agency, and exercising economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital within precarious environments. The chapter goes further to address the weaknesses of these frameworks and encourages them to be used together to examine the lived realities of migrant women in informal urban economies.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

This chapter presents the qualitative research design, the application of semi-structured interviews, and how a reflexive journal is incorporated to address positionality. It elaborates on the application of purposive and snowball sampling, ethical clearance processes, linguistic inclusivity and precautions to preserve anonymity. The chapter also provides the analytical process, such as the use of Brauns and Clarke thematic analysis and the use of NVivo software to code and make sense of information in a systematic way.

Chapter Five: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

This chapter states the empirical findings and the themes obtained through the coded dataset. It explores experiences of bordering practices, legitimacy performances, aesthetic resistance, transnational care, informal governance and everyday citizenship by participants. Every theme is presented with a reference to the theoretical background and placed in the context of the recent South African, African, and other Global South scholarship. The chapter illustrates how the stories of the participants shed light on larger socio-political processes that define the lives of migrant women.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

This chapter brings together the findings of the study according to the thematic findings and theoretical lenses of the study as well as the literature. It examines the role of intersecting identity, informal governance, xenophobic urbanism, and feminised labour in the construction of precarious citizenship by migrant women. The chapter shows where the study either supports or criticizes the available empirical evidence, and it suggests conceptual amendments to intersectionality, structuration, and capital theory, on the basis of the results. It emphasizes the ways in which the migrant women generate novel cultural, economic, and affective urban citizenship in spite of systemic exclusion.

Chapter Seven: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides the major conclusions of the study and explains their theoretical, methodological, and policy implications. It provides evidence-based suggestions of migration governance, support of informal economy, gender-responsive planning, and urban policy reform. The chapter proposes the contribution of the study to the academic scholarship on South-South migration and feminist urban studies and outlines the opportunities of the future research. It ends by reinforcing the importance of Nigerian migrant women as economic, cultural and social agents of the city of Durban.

1.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has already provided the conceptual and contextual basis of a critical inquiry into socio-economic difficulties and resilience mechanisms of Nigerian female economic migrants who work within the informal hairdressing sector of Durban. It outlines the main issue of the study: the way migrant women can find their way to survive, resist, and belong in an inequality-filled and xenophobically hostile city. The chapter placed these experiences into wider discussions about gendered migration, informal urban economies, and African intra-continental migration forcing critical challenges of migrants being reduced to either passivity as victims or essentially economic agents. Intersectionality, informality, resilience and migrant worker are the key terms and they were demystified not only as a definitional imperative but as conceptual frames by which the study will pursue the stratified writings of migrant life in post-apartheid South Africa. Accordingly, the chapter propelled the necessity of a feminist, decolonial frame that anticipates the epistemological centrality of the African woman not on the marginal, but the epistemic centrality of city transformation today. The chapter also described the research problem, importance, and methodology, with which the work is placed at the crossroads of migration studies, feminist political economy, and urban sociology. As part of the foregrounding of lived experience as a valid location of knowledge production, the study will be not only beneficial to the academic discourse but also to policy and advocacy initiatives to re-imagine inclusion within African cities.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review serves to situate a study within existing scholarly debates, define what is already known, and identify gaps that the research seeks to address. In this study, the literature review plays a crucial role as the socio-economic experiences of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal hairdressing sector remain underexplored. While migration research in South Africa has engaged extensively with themes of xenophobia, informality, and governance, these discussions have largely been male-centred, often overlooking the experiences of women in feminised sectors such as hairdressing (Okeke-Ihejirika & Olajide, 2023; Bhana et al., 2023). This chapter serves three interconnected purposes. First, it engages with key conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, including intersectionality theory, structuration theory, and Bourdieu's capital theory. Second, it critically reviews empirical literature on migration, gender, and informality within the African context, with particular attention to South Africa. Third, it identifies key gaps in the literature that justify the focus and contribution of the present study. Complementary perspectives such as feminist urbanism, transnationalism, and care ethics are also incorporated to deepen the analysis of migrant women's agency and vulnerability in urban contexts. The chapter further examines how migrant women's experiences are shaped by intersecting structural inequalities, while also highlighting the resilience strategies they employ to navigate and survive within the informal economy. Rather than providing a purely descriptive account of existing studies, the review critically synthesises key debates and perspectives to demonstrate how structural constraints and forms of agency coexist in migrant women's everyday lives.

Despite the growing body of literature on migration and informality, limited attention has been given to Nigerian female hairdressers in Durban, particularly regarding their lived socio-economic challenges and adaptive strategies. By addressing this gap, the chapter establishes the originality and relevance of the study within broader debates on gender, migration, and informal economies.

2.1.1. Comparative Global South Perspectives

To contextualize completely the experiences of Nigerian female hairdressers in Durban it is worth making comparative observations regarding the rest of the Global South where migration, informality, and gendered labour constitute components of larger trends towards precarious livelihoods in developing urban areas. Surveys of migrant women in Lagos and Accra in West Africa demonstrate that hairdressing is a main source of livelihood of internal and cross-border migrants. Asare (2021:53) emphasizes the role of women in using apprenticeship and informal training to acquire trade and establish networks that promote economic survival in an environment with high youth unemployment and Tuwor and Osei (2022:87) establish that the urban markets of Ghana rely on rotating savings schemes and kinship ties to negotiate the volatile local markets. Mutopo (2020:109) notes that the informal work of Zimbabwean women in Harare and Nairobi is associated with spatial marginality and lack of state provision, where informal trading and hairdressing are accepted but criminalised, which makes the surrounding worlds of constant uncertainty. Likewise, Ndlovu and Chigumadzi (2021:65) state that the informal labour of women in Nairobi and Kampala is a gendered reaction to neoliberal urban reforms that have intensified precarity in the face of normalizing informality as a survival strategy.

In Southern Africa, the study by Mhandu (2020:121) of the undocumented Zimbabwean hairdressers in Durban offers additional comparative data, demonstrating how women can negotiate informal salon regulations, develop solidarity, and exercise agency despite their lack of legal status, and the study by Nyamnjoh and Motsemme (2022:133) of the Mozambican and Malawian undocumented workers in the informal beauty industry in Johannesburg demonstrates that both groups of women are doubly excluded as both Banda and Moyo (2023:112) also demonstrate that the strategies that migrant women in the informal markets of Lusaka use to counter the harassment by the municipalities, including spatial movement and skill exchange, ensure business continuity.

Outside of Africa, Latin American research offers similar information on feminisation of informality. Valdez (2021:224) observes that central to the lives of Venezuelan women in Sao Paulo are small-scale beauty services and street vending as the families depend on this

means of survival at the hands of xenophobic hostility and marginality in welfare systems, and Mora and Lopez (2022:198) report that central to the lives of Central American migrant women in Mexico City is small-scale domestic and beauty work which is a survival strategy in the face of restrictive migration regimes. On the same note, Ramirez and Pena (2023:142) note that female migrants in the informal service sector of Colombia, who are of Venezuelan descent, resort to forming collective savings groups and social networks as a means of coping with precarity. Yeoh and Huang (2021:412) record the practice of having Filipino migrant domestic workers in Singapore practice informal beauty services, such as hairdressing, on the rest days, to earn supplementary income and experience cultural legitimacy which helps them to persist in highly controlled spaces. All these comparative views underscore the fact that feminisation of informality is a transnational process in which migrant women are underrepresented in the labour force, especially in precarious and gendered labour sectors like household labour, street trading, and beauty services.

In the Global South, there are resilience strategies like social networking, income diversification, and cultural assertion, which are uniform but determine local circumstances and policy conditions. In this general context, the South African example and Durban specifically can be distinguished by the degree of xenophobic enmity and by the strict exclusion of the migrant people by the formal support mechanisms. With the experiences of female economic migrants in Nigeria in Durban placed within these broader global trends, this paper reinforces on the analytical breadth of the research and solidifies the role of Durban based scholarship in global discourses on gender, migration, and informality. Overall, the literature across the Global South reveals consistent patterns of feminised informality, where migrant women are concentrated in precarious, low-capital sectors such as hairdressing, domestic work, and street trading. While these studies highlight the importance of social networks, informal financial systems, and adaptive livelihood strategies, they often remain descriptive and context-specific, with limited comparative analysis across regions. Furthermore, there is insufficient attention to how these dynamics manifest within specific urban contexts such as Durban, particularly among Nigerian female migrants. This gap underscores the need for a more contextually grounded and theoretically integrated analysis, which this study seeks to provide.

2.1.2 South African Context: Migration, Gender, and Informality

South Africa is in a very unique position in the Global South due to its multi-layered migration, structural inequality and economic dualism. The patterns of the apartheid era space and labour inequalities still affect who is involved in formal and informal economies. The informal sector has emerged as a significant source of income among most migrants, especially women in other African nations that do not have formal jobs because of the limiting immigration laws and social stigma (Peberdy & Crush, 2020). Studies indicate that feminisation of migration to South Africa is directly associated with household survival burdens and transnational care burdens, as women are more often moving into the informal sectors like domestic workers, street vendors and hairdressers to keep their families across the borders alive (Rogerson, 2021).

The urban informal economy of South Africa is characterized by xenophobia. As Crush, Ramachandran, and Chikanda (2022) show, migrant women entrepreneurs are subject to regular harassment, seizure of merchandise, and intimidation by the police, particularly in urban central business districts like Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. This kind of exclusion is characteristic of urban nationalism as outlined by Landau (2021) in which local governments and residents are in a tussle to deny migrants a share in the economic activity. Nevertheless, research indicates the resilience and adaptation to migrant women despite these barriers. According to Tawodzera and Chigumadzi (2023), migrant women utilize transnational networks, religious groups, and other forms of collective housing to establish informal forms of social protection in urban areas that are hostile. Such networks do not only offer economic assistance but they also help in strengthening of collective identity and belonging among migrant women who are going through alienating urban environments.

Hairdressing, specifically, has emerged as a survival and community location of African migrant women in South Africa. Dube (2022:97) notes that the informal salons in Durban and Johannesburg are micro-economic enclaves, which integrate economic activity, emotional labour, cultural exchange, and solidarity. In these spaces, women gather social, cultural and symbolic capital to bargain access to clients, workspace and shield against local

hostility that reverberates the patterns that have been observed in the other Global South cities. The South African example consequently demonstrates the potential and the boundaries of the informal work as a source of empowerment. Migrant women are agency-driven and innovative in the way they maintain livelihoods, but their labor is precarious, unprotected, and criminalised. To connect this context to the study, experiences of Nigerian female hairdressers in Durban carry these contradictions: on the one hand, they are actors of the informal urban economy in South Africa; on the other hand, they are the victims of this economy: they are positioned between gender, migration, and exclusion.

2.1.3 The Durban Context: Informality, Gender, and Migrant Livelihoods

As the economic centre of the province of KwaZulu-Natal and one of South Africa's largest port cities, Durban provides a scaled-down version of the larger conflict between migration, informality and city governance. Concentrating on high unemployment rates, increasing inequality, and a surge of regional migrants in search of employment beyond formal labour market, the informal sector in the city is growing at an incredible pace in the last twenty years (Skinner and Haysom, 2021). Service-based occupations including hairdressing, nail salon and fashion retailing, which demand small amounts of capital and are commonly based on interpersonal connections and cultural familiarity, have become a common migration of migrant women to such jobs. These activities are however carried out in a very competitive urban setting created by exclusionary spatial planning, intermittent police raids, and crippling municipal by-laws which criminalise informal economic activity (Ngcamu, 2023).

Research has indicated that Durban informal economy is spatially and socially stratified. African migrant entrepreneurship has concentrated on the central business district, especially in the Pixley ka Seme Street, as its center. According to Rogerson (2022), this agglomeration of informal beauty and retail services is a significant but poorly acknowledged part of the local economic life. However, these spaces are tentative, as Dube (2022) notes, salons in the form of forced eviction, equipment seizure, and gendered exploitation by landlords and local authorities often affect these spaces. These circumstances lead to the feeling of constant instability when survival is determined by informal protection networks and collective organisation of workers.

To the Nigerian female migrant hairdressers in economic migrant contexts more specifically, the informal hair economy offers them a means of livelihood and a social reproduction domain. Olatunde (2023) states that the Nigerian women operating in the beauty industry in Durban utilize common ethnic networks to gain workspace, accumulate customers and share resources as examples of social and cultural capital to offset the lack of state protection. Nonetheless, hierarchy, competition and pressure to remit income to their families back home also influence these same networks and capture the transnational aspects of their labour. These women have to overcome xenophobic attitudes, police harassment, and shortage of financial services, but they are still key players in the daily economy of Durban. Their salons serve as transnational spaces that bring African languages, aesthetics and identities together with economic agency as well as cultural confirmation.

The informal industry of hairdressing in Durban thus represents the larger contradictions of post-apartheid city life. It is, on the one hand a model of resilience, innovation and social integration between marginalised migrant women, and, on the other, it is a revelation of the continued collapse in policy frameworks that do not include informal workers in urban economic planning. In finding Nigerian female economic migrants in this multifaceted terrain, the paper identifies the intersection of gender, migration and informality to construct both constraint and creativity in one of the most vibrant urban economies in South Africa.

2.1.4 African Migration and Informal Economy

The movement of people across African borders has been historically connected with the development of informal economy, especially in urban centres where formal job markets are structurally constrained (Peberdy & Crush, 2020). Initially identified in the development literature as the informal sector by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the 1970s, it has since acquired different specific shapes in Sub-Saharan Africa as reactions to economic liberalisation and rural-urban migration and in response to successive waves of cross-border movement (Hart, 1973; Rogerson, 2021). According to scholars, its growth is indicative of both need and displacement, offering a source of livelihood and at the same time reproducing structural vulnerability to migrant workers, particularly to women (Skinner & Haysom, 2021;

Dube, 2022). Whether more involvement in informality presents real opportunities to migrant women or continues to reinforce precarious labour relationships is the central issue in current migration and development research throughout the African continent (Tawodzera & Chigumadzi, 2023).

African economies are informal in terms of employment and output, which offer an essential yet unstable access to new migrants (Joseph, Nevo & Nwolisa, 2022:4). Researchers observe that in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 80 percent of all employment is informal, and this is the main absorbing pool of cross-border migrants who fail to take formal jobs in the labour market (ILO, 2021:17; Rogerson, 2021:625). For Nigerian women entering this space in cities such as Durban, informality is rarely a deliberate choice but rather a default outcome of structural exclusion driven by documentation barriers, xenophobic discrimination, and restrictive hiring norms (Peberdy & Crush, 2020:52; Tawodzera & Chigumadzi, 2023:242). Within these informal economies, female migrants face dual vulnerabilities: the general precarity experienced by all informal workers characterised by low productivity, lack of social protection, and unstable earnings and the gender-specific constraints of care responsibilities, exposure to harassment, and limited access to credit or workspace (Dube, 2022:94; Skinner & Haysom, 2021:175).

Across Africa, an overwhelming proportion of employed women work in informal jobs. According to the International Labour Organization, over 89% of non-agricultural employment and more than 92% of total female employment across the continent is informal (ILO, 2021:18). This means that most working women earn income outside of formal contracts, social protection, or labour regulation frameworks. This informality can be of different kinds: some women are small-scale homemakers; others sell in the open-air markets or offer personal services like hairdressing, childcare and tailoring. Income is low or unreliable to many and frequently there is no access to maternity leave, health care or pensions (UN Women, 2022:7; Chen, 2020:3). According to scholars like Skinner and Haysom (2021:176), such conditions are a symptom of structural gender inequality in African economies with labour of women still underrated despite the central need of their labour in urban life.

These dynamics are characterised by hairdressing. Highly skilled yet less fixed capital, it can be accessible to women left out of official working life, but remains largely hidden under the national economic policy that places emphasis on male-dominated so-called productive industries such as manufacturing or construction (Rogerson, 2021:628; Chen, 2020:6). The absence of a universal definition may be confusing in distinguishing informal sector, informal work, and informal economy, but they all boil down to two main characteristics: no job security, unstable income, and no insurance or regulation provided by the state (ILO, 2021:22; Hart, 1973:70). The informal sector includes activities like street vending, waste collection, home-based production as well as domestic service. Migrant hairdressers work on this ecosystem, and they share the same limitations of overcrowded housing in and around trading zones, unreliable water and electricity, and face exploitation or eviction by local state authorities (Horwood, Hennebry & Tawodzera, 2020:2; Dube, 2022:95).

More importantly, these vulnerabilities are amplified by the migration status. Studies by Peberdy and Crush (2020:59) and Tawodzera and Chigumadzi (2023:243) reveal that migrant women in South African urban areas tend to be undocumented and, thus, have no access to financial institutions, credit, and municipal trading permits. This disenfranchisement puts them at the mercy of rotating savings groups or co-ethnic lending networks with the basis of trust instead of contracts. Xenophobic violence also interferes with weaker businesses, as every now and then the migrants have to move away their places of business, making their earnings and assets disappear in the blink of the eye (Tshishonga, 2015:3; Landau, 2021:642). According to ILO (2021:24), this level of informality is a failure of development and a structural fact of the African labour markets that systematically marginalise women and migrants.

Furthermore, although there is an equal insecurity in both men and women in informal economies no pensions, unpredictable income and no legal safeguards, women have added to such insecurities with domestic labour and care-giving that women do not receive payment. The result of this dual household workload is what UN Women (2022:12) refers to as time poverty affecting how much time women can spend in paid employment. Dube (2022:97)

and Skinner (2022:18) observe that women traders have to balance the customer service with childcare or cooking, which makes them less productive and less income than male counterparts. The extent to which these trends continue is due to the lack of gender responsive social protection systems in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. Few governments have adopted maternity insurance, child care subsidies, or targeted pension schemes for women in informal economies (World Bank, 2023:9). Consequently, even though informality absorbs millions of new entrants each year, business survival rates remain low due to lack of access to credit, insecure premises, and constant exposure to market and policy volatility (Rogerson, 2021:634; Chen, 2020:10).

More women are in unprotected jobs like family helpers or homecarers instead of owning capital-intensive businesses, a pattern repeated in West Africa especially, which is reflected in cities in South Africa (Joseph, Nevo and Nwolisa, 2022:5). This restricts their potential contribution at the aggregate level at the macroeconomic level and exposes them to a greater degree to regulatory crackdowns on petty trading spaces. Overlapping with these general forces are migratory forces of origin countries such as Nigeria. The uneven effects of structural change there on gender equality opportunities are that rural residents and self-employed informal workers are not normally included in the discussion of wage differentials (Marire & Iqbal, 2024:5). In a context where economic restructuring does not generate viable domestic opportunities that can match the life conditions of women, mobility will be desirable despite the risks of destination country integration. The gendered experience of the Durban informal economy is then the piece of this broader continental puzzle: increased engagement with a lack of commensurate formalisation benefits; non-legal exclusion alongside urban developmental indifference; market dependency as well as socio-political hostility.

The Nigerian hairdressers at the street level within the commercial focus on Pixley ka Seme Street implement their strategies against an increasing threat of episodic xenophobic violence and regulatory fog on the border of legality. These scenarios define the contribution of migration in diversifying the socio-economic distributions of informality participation at various levels of in situ inequalities, local state apparatuses defining traders' dominion boundaries, national immigration policies defining allowable economic practices cross-

border relations defining the structure of the labour supply. Placing these lived experiences in the context of the emerging literature on African informality helps highlight how these migrant women are going beyond an economic category and to a more socio-political one the lines of which seem to change with the fossilised rubber of a structural force that is broader than that which they must face as everyday reality and adaptative practice as the women in this frame are opposed to it. It is this kind of constraint-agency balance that one of the fashions fads of the theory of the structure–agency interplays may be found in the level of the lived experiences of above said migrant population, economically active in low-capital entrepreneurial niches in the highly competitive African cities.

2.2 FEMALE ECONOMIC MIGRATION

The female cross-border economic migration phenomenon has unique social, economic, and political dimensions shaped by intersectional gender, class, ethnicity, and legal status. While mobility for many migrant women is a rational response to the absence of opportunities in their home country, the process of migrating is also shaped by distinct social, political, and economic transformations. Structural adjustments, currency devaluation, and privatisation policies in Nigeria have altered the migration and employment patterns, resulting in net outflows that have continued to rise in the past decades (Olsson, 2023:8). These structural economic changes increased joblessness while also reducing the security of real income, forcing economically active women in semi and skilled positions to pose the question of whether or not labour migration was a viable option. For many women, the pathway to joining the country's informal economy was perceived as migrating to other countries, to the entry requirements of which were relatively low, but the employment conditions were deplorable. These movement patterns illustrate the interplay between ambition and desperation.

Economic migrants have aspirations to migrate, which is tempered by the ability to fund the journey, the prevailing migration policies, and the existence of a social network Obi et al. (2023:4) To Nigerian women venturing into South Africa as hairdressers, they might have to overcome these hurdles by using personal savings, diaspora contacts who can help them get settled or introduce them to business or family business might mean negotiating family life by ensuring that they continue child care across borders. However, this agency is restrained by the existing systems of inequality. Migration decisions by women are not only guided by

the potential wage differentials but also guided by the gender roles ascribed by society that determines a departure as well as a destination integration opportunity. The challenges of integration within host societies are enacted in stratified risk scales. To most migrating females, a cross-country move may involve continuous exposure to violence at various stages, in home settings characterised by violence or socio-political unrest; at transit locations where trafficking is prevalent; and in receiving locations where immigration status or ingrained levels of social discrimination interfere (Gillespie et al., 2022:2) These various levels of vulnerability elevate precarity in migrant women whose job demands social interaction with an extensive clientele. Such risks are compounded by xenophobic sentiment in places like Durban where there are cases of targeted violence on small businesses belonging to migrants. Migrant women are supposed to have laws that organise their economic integration.

Dependent visa or limited work permits will tend to put them in limited areas of the labour market regardless of their level of skills (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:2) It is applicable to the so-called brain waste: the tied female migrants with higher education or specialised skills have to work at much lower qualification than they are qualified to do, because their legal status restricts the list of their possible jobs (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:10) The reenactment of gendered inequalities through such dynamics is shown in policy regimes that supposedly allow family reunification or limited economic involvement. Such constraints can be softened or improved by cultural capital depending on the context. The informal markets with co-ethnic customers can be exploited by means of personal skills such as control over culturally specific techniques of hairdressing. However, the diversification of clients may be held back by the language barrier or lack of understanding of local consumer behaviour (Onwukwe & Gibson, 2022:7). Linguistic flexibility can, in certain instances, allow the growth into larger markets; in other instances, a stuck set of perceptions regarding the right and wrongness of migrant workers blocks upward mobility regardless of skills competence.

Transnational obligations are also entangled with economically motivated migration. Remittances constitute a major force before departure in the form of expected contribution towards migration, and after arrival, in the form of the ongoing flow of finance that helps to

keep family members at home (Olsson, 2023:8). The incomes of women employed in the informal sector are usually directed to direct consumption demands among the dependents instead of investment back to their own businesses overseas. This remittance requirement may hasten occupational burnout where earnings volatility is accompanied by high cost of living at destination. On a micro level, qualitative narratives demonstrate how the female migrants create adaptive mechanisms not just to stay alive, but also to acquire some form of autonomy in structures that are exceedingly limiting. Nigerian hairdressers can work itinerantly to evade enforcement authorities or reorganise service provision in response to changing neighbourhood demographics with fluctuating unrest conditions (Tshishonga, 2015:7) They also create mutualistic co-operative systems, where they share retail spaces or share resources, in the form of savings clubs, both a buffer and a source of emotional succour in cases of hostile action against foreign traders (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:3). However, these strategies work in a context where exclusionary discourses around foreigners taking away jobs continue to erode popular trust and consumer brand loyalty. Attitude toward migrant presence by the destination country influences the larger opportunity structures. The situation is also similar in the urban nodes of South Africa where Nigerian migrants have reported experiences of criticism concerning any form of existence, whether employed or unemployed, due to ingrained stereotypes about opportunistic behaviour (Uroko, Obiorah & Nnadi, 2021:6). These fights over belonging contribute directly to barriers to sustainable business-building in informal sectors inhabited largely by marginalised foreign nationals.

The gendered aspect also occurs in the household labour that is disproportionately borne by women migrants even upon their relocation. Economic activity should be rebalanced with care (locally to bring children along) or through focus on kin networks at home (to leave offspring behind). Certain studies indicate that younger and more educated migrant couples become easier to challenge cultural gender-role division when integration requires joint economic activity; however, patriarchal norms intervene to mediate the possibility of market participation in most situations (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:10). In literary accounts with Nigerian immigrant characters, that I have come across, empirical observations find a reflection in identity reconceptualisation works in parallel with a risk laden multicultural employment shaped by discrimination and cross-border emotional connections (Opeyemi, 2021:3) While fictionalised narratives do not have the empirical immensity that socio-

economic data do, what they do is underscore broader issues of constraint and enduring institutional apathy that have become a part of the migratory experience.

There is a discernible and telling silence about the fact that female economic migration is not a simple extension of the North-South migration patterns, but rather a phenomenon shaped by acute gender imbalances of the driving and receiving societies. The scarcity of formal employment drives some individuals to take up informal occupational s; socio-political contexts may deem occupational niches unstable, and the lack of expected socio-economic outcomes may eventually support the reasoning for earlier-than-planned repatriation along with the transnational impetus(Gillespie et al., 2022:2; Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:10; Olsson, 2022) In analysing these trends, one must understand the reality that has shaped and continues to shape the participation of Nigerian women in cross-border informal economies. It is critical to take account both structural factors and individual adaptive responses.

2.2.1 Bourdieu's Capital Theory: Resource Mobilisation in Migration

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a French sociologist whose work focused on the relationship between power, culture, and social structure. His theory of capital extends beyond the traditional economic sense to include other forms of power and resources that shape people's social positions and life chances. Bourdieu (1986:241) identified three primary forms of capital economic, social, and cultural and later added symbolic capital as the recognition or prestige that legitimises the other forms. These capitals operate within what he called fields social spaces such as education, work, or politics where individuals and groups compete for resources and influence according to shared rules and hierarchies.

Economic capital refers to financial assets and material resources that can be directly converted into money or property. Social capital concerns the networks, connections, and social relationships that provide support and opportunities. Cultural capital is a set of knowledge, learning, language, and skills that give social advantage. Symbolic capital is prestige and recognition, which convert other types of capital into legitimate power (Bourdieu, 1986:243; Grenfell, 2014:17). Combined, these ideas show how social inequality is reproduced and how people are able to employ available resources to overcome structural

constraints. This paper uses the Bourdieu theory of capital to comprehend mobilisation and transformation of various types of capital among the economic migrant Nigerian women in Durban to make a living in the informal hairdressing industry. These women are dependent on social capital, co-ethnic networks, cultural capital, technical and aesthetic skills, and symbolic capital, reputation and client trust, in situations when legal status, gender and class restrict access to formal work. Through examining the interaction of different types of capital in daily activities, the study exposes how migrant women manage the power of exclusion, build resilience and create agentic space within a structurally unequal urban environment.

Bourdieu's framework therefore provides a valuable lens for connecting individual resource mobilisation to broader social structures of power and inequality. Bourdieu's framework of capitals economic, social, cultural, and symbolic has proven fruitful for understanding migrant women's livelihood strategies. Contemporary scholars have extended and challenged Bourdieu's concepts to fit the transnational, informal context. For example, Ncube & Bahta (2022) adopt a sustainable livelihoods approach (integrating Bourdieu's capital theory) to study Zimbabwean migrant women, finding that a mix of "innate and acquired livelihood capitals" underpins their coping strategies. In their study, human capital (skills, education, personal attributes) emerged as "most important in facilitating migrant women's coping and adaptation". Many women drew on vocational skills (e.g., hairdressing techniques, which constitute a form of cultural capital) to generate income where formal credentials were not recognised.

Social capital, the networks of family, friends, and co-nationals was also critical, providing information, loans, or clientele to support their informal businesses. Indeed, an ethnographic study by Mhandu (2020) in Durban showed that social networks play a two-fold supportive role for undocumented women hairdressers: first, networks back home and abroad "pave the way" by sharing information about the destination and facilitating the migration journey, and second, networks in the host city supply ongoing assistance and resources during business startup and operation. These networks helped determine migration trajectories (e.g., whether a woman migrated at all, or whether she pursued temporary or permanent settlement) and were deeply involved at "all stages of business creation", from finding shop space to

attracting clients. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital has also been reinterpreted in this context.

Migrant women often possess culturally specific skills and knowledge for instance, Nigerian hair-braiding techniques or savvy in sourcing ethnic beauty products which they convert into economic value in diaspora communities. Nevertheless, other researchers believe that the initial idea of Bourdieu, which is based on the reproduction of classes in formal societies, is too specific to the multifaceted nature of migration. The article by Hack-Polay, et al. (2023) advances the concept of the so-called total diaspora cultural capital as an extension of the Bourdieuan paradigm. They argue that the Bourdieuan concept of cultural capital does not reflect the various processes of diasporic resourcefulness, specifically the fusion of host and home culture to produce new versions of value. In their conceptualization, total diaspora cultural capital would not only represent the cultural competences of the migrant themselves but would involve the active blending of such competences with the local possibilities such as a Nigerian stylist integrating West African Hair styles with South African styling fashions in order to serve a wide client base. This idea is consistent with previous findings that most migrant entrepreneurs are innovative by blending cultural expertise and market demands, thus the nomenclature of innovation and flexibility as defined by Oyebamiji (2023) when analyzing the Nigerian traders of women. It also emphasises a collective aspect: the value created by the cultural capital of the diaspora will usually depend on the network of communities and the assimilation of the host society.

According to Hack-Polay et al. (2023), sustainable integration is possible only when both the host and the diaspora realise the mutual presence and exchange of cultural capital. Although this theoretical development is recent, it highlights a criticism of Bourdieu: that his focus on personal accumulation of capital may ignore the relational and transnational quality of capital to migrants. However, Bourdieu is still relevant in terms of power and inequality. The capacity to mobilise capital among migrant women is limited by their social locations in hierarchies. They tend to be economically deprived (lacking savings or property), as it is hard to become rich in precarious employment. Even though their social capital is a lifeline, it may

be confined to co-ethnic groups and not translate into wider influence and access to formal institutions. And the symbolic capital (status, recognition) they have in their native communities does not tend to transfer to a host society that stigmatises foreign informal workers.

According to the current literature, this disconnectedness is explicitly mentioned: say, a woman in Nigeria could be a talented and an admired beautician at home (high cultural and symbolic capital there), but in South Africa she may be viewed as nothing more than an illegal street vendor, not being recognized and meeting with aggression. This declassification is an acute challenge and women respond to it by accumulating new types of capital: e.g. learning local languages or fashions (new cultural capital), creating goodwill among local clients with good service (creating slowly earned symbolic capital in the community) and pooling savings in rotating credit associations to create economic capital. The literature documents such strategies based on personal experiences but also points out a gap: there is little quantitative or longitudinal research on how migrant women's various capitals change over time in the informal sector. This remains an area for further study.

2.2.2 Structuration Theory: Agency Within Structure

To theorise the interplay between migrant women's agency and the structural forces they face, some recent works have drawn on Giddens' Structuration theory. The Structuration theory posits that individuals are not simply victims of structure nor entirely free agents, but rather engage in a continuous process of producing and reproducing the social structures through their actions (the duality of structure). In migration studies, this translates to examining how migrant women both adapt to and subtly transform the social environment of the host city through their everyday practices. John Mhandu's work (2024) applies Giddens's framework to the case of undocumented Zimbabwean women hairdressers in Durban during the COVID-19 pandemic. His socio-cultural analysis explains that these everyday working practices of these women pooling resources to sharing salon space, to shifting services in line with the lockdown rules not only responded to the immediate structural limitations but were also innovative in the small manner in which they reconstituted the informal hairdressing industry. As an example, with the lockdown laws shutting formal salons down, some migrant

hairdressers started working in secret at home or making house-calls, as they exploited the reputation they had in their customer base. In doing so, they reproduced the informal nature of their work but also altered the spatial pattern of service delivery (bringing it into private homes).

Giddens' theory helps to frame these women not as passive subjects of pandemic regulations, but as knowledgeable agents who navigate and even modify the "rules and resources" of their environment. One study explicitly notes how migrant women's improvisations during COVID-19 illustrate structuration. During COVID-19, the South African government was supposed to provide relief, but instead tightened restrictions on informal trade. "Undocumented women responded by leveraging social networks via WhatsApp to quietly sustain their business, thus bending the structure to their needs" (Mhandu, 2025:118). This example demonstrates agency in action women using available structures such as social media and personal networks to secure income and mutual support despite structural constraints. Recent literature has critiqued and expanded Giddens's formulation of Structuration theory, noting that Giddens's (1984:25) original version is conceptually rich but abstract, which makes it difficult to operationalise in empirical research. In response, Stones (2005:76) proposed strong Structuration theory, a more detailed analytical model that distinguishes between internal and external structures and explains how these interact through specific cycles of structuration. Although most migration studies published between 2022 and 2025 do not explicitly adopt strong Structuration theory, scholars increasingly aim to make the structure–agency relationship more tangible within real-world social contexts (Archer, 2022:41; Sewell, 2020:51).

In this sense, Mhandu's (2020:117) analysis of social networks in Durban's informal economy provides a structuration-informed perspective by identifying both the structure of networks the patterned relationships and architecture that constrain or enable actors and the agency manifested through the content and function of those networks, including shared norms, mutual support, and resource exchange. His work illustrates how undocumented migrant women creatively use WhatsApp and other social platforms to sustain their livelihoods, thus bending existing structural limits to their advantage. By detailing how

network ties enable certain actions (like starting a business) or impose certain obligations (like remitting money home), he demonstrates the duality of structure: the networks are both enabling (providing support) and constraining (expecting reciprocity or limiting women to co-ethnic interactions). Giddens' insight that structure exists only through agency is mirrored in these findings the migrant women maintain their support networks (structure) by actively nurturing relationships and trust (agency), and those networks in turn shape their livelihood options.

Another critique comes from feminist scholars who argue that Structuration theory, as originally conceived, did not adequately account for power asymmetries (e.g., gender power relations) that pre-structure the field of action. In recent literature, we see attempts to merge intersectionality with structuration: essentially asking, how do intersecting power structures (patriarchy, xenophobia, class inequality) form the context within which migrant women exercise agency, and how do women's actions in turn incrementally challenge or reinforce those power structures? One example is a study by Chikowore & Maharaj (2024) on marginalised Zimbabwean women in South Africa (cited in a research nexus) which uses a structuration perspective to show how women gradually build a "sense of home" and belonging even when formal structures deny them inclusion. The women's repeated actions forming savings groups, holding prayer meetings, teaching each other skills create informal social structures that substitute for the formal support they lack. Over time, these agent-driven structures (often women-centric and community-based) can contest the exclusionary formal structures. Such research, though nascent, points to a convergence of theories: Structuration theory provides a dynamic view of structure and agency, while intersectionality ensures we keep in mind the layered power dynamics influencing whose agency is recognised. To conclude, studies that are informed by structuraluration have a significant message to them: migrant women are not merely moving within an already existing structure, but they are people who help shape the social world of the informal economy.

In their daily practices, whether it is modulating prices, sharing childcare responsibilities with other traders, or using digital platforms to locate consumers they reproduce some elements of the structures of the host society (usually through necessity) but also gradually alter some

elements of that society (such as making the case by example that migrants are important contributors, or cutting physical spaces in the city to do multicultural informal trade). This appreciation is a response to a perception of powerlessness and it is part of a larger paradigm shift in migration research towards viewing migrants as change agents. Nonetheless, the literature has a contradiction; although migrant women agency is being glorified in numerous case studies, it also admits that agency has boundaries in severe structural circumstances. The agency of an individual or an organization is frequently dulled by the structural forces of legal disenfranchisement, economic inequality, gender discrimination. In this way, researchers have warned against too many heroic portrayals of resilience that may end up exonerating states and institutions unnecessarily. There should be a balance, and the literature in question aims to achieve the balance, emphasizing resilience yet also suggesting a structural change to empower migrant women to the extent of being empowered.

While other theories such as feminist political economy or social network theory might have been suitable for exploring specific aspects of this research, they were deemed insufficiently integrative. Feminist political economy, for instance, offers a robust critique of gendered labour but lacks the granularity to engage with diasporic cultural capital. Social network theory, although useful for mapping connections, does not adequately theorise the structural power relations embedded in those networks. The combined use of intersectionality, capital theory, and structuration therefore provides a robust, multi-dimensional framework that captures the complexity of Nigerian women's experiences in Durban's informal economy.

2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF MIGRANTS

2.3.1 Legal and Documentation Barriers

The socio-economic problems that migrants must deal with can hardly be subsumed into a single problem and are more likely to manifest themselves as a product of the overlap of legal, institutional and socio-cultural systems which restrict access to life opportunities on numerous levels simultaneously. Migrants who lack secure legal documentation frequently encounter institutional gatekeeping in essential services such as healthcare access. In settings

where frontline health personnel act as de facto immigration officials by requesting identity papers before rendering assistance, absence of the "right papers" effectively disqualifies whole categories of people from timely treatment (Jaiswal, Núñez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:4)). For those in occupations requiring sustained physical contact with clients, hairdressing included, delayed or foregone care elevates the risk of protracted illness and income loss, deepening insecurities already inherent in informal sector work.

The requirement of official documentation as a precondition of service fortifies parallel exclusionary practices in labour markets, as undocumented status narrows the options of legitimate work and forces a great many to the least precarious form. Gendered inequalities add to the economic marginalisation worsening. Migration processes never neutralise the norms of patriarchy, but in fact, they tend to bring them into new contexts, where they blend with exclusions of the destinations. Instead, women do not get an opportunity to be put on par with male counterparts working in resource-intensive areas but are structurally guided to low-paying jobs as an extension of unpaid care or domestic skills. Their labour, as well, is undervalued and can be exploited in a number of ways, whether it is underpayment, extraction of fees on a per-trade basis on trading sites, or forceful sexual desires behind the dependency on landlords or local gatekeepers. Even universal rights that are guaranteed by the constitution are mitigated in the field when local service providers have discretionary capacity that disfavors non-nationals (Mutambara & Naidu, 2021:2).

2.3.2 Xenophobia and Discrimination

The social environment presents further constraints through xenophobic hostility and community mistrust. Rapid violent attacks against foreign citizens may slap a halt to economic operations; traders leave their workplaces during specifically aimed riots and lose their revenues, risking losing the relationships gained with customers. The testimonies of other migrant groups describe similar patterns: some of them talk about feeling deeply alienated by the local community after xenophobic assaults, distrust even within the co-ethnic groups, and reduced dependence on formal and informal support networks (Ncube, Bahta and Jordaan, 2019: 7) In the case of low trust, collective resilience mechanisms become

ineffective; mutually helpful schemes will be less useful when participants are afraid of exploitation or betrayal.

2.3.3 Income Instability and Precarity

Lack of socio-economic security is also made worse during such crises as pandemics. The economic lockdowns produce tectonic faults between the populations; multi-marginalised migrant women are especially subject to extreme deprivation as their earnings streams are interrupted, and institutional safety nets are lacking. In this situation, additional services such as food parcels delivery or emergency shelter are only able to respond to acute dangers in the short term but do not remove structural imbalances that restrict long term stability Gillespie et al., 2022:15) Once labour markets where migrants work in significant numbers were hard hit with employment contracts that demand close-proximity personal services, the full blow also stretches beyond the direct disruption of cash flow to the remittance of debt service payments in the local lending networks, rental payments on business premises and remitting funds to dependents overseas. Place politics is also significant: migrants often work within the city districts with a high crime rate or conflicting urban development policies, and they are more exposed to the policing strategies that explicitly target visible foreigners.

2.3.4 Spatial Constraints and Policing

The harassment of the regular inspections by the enforcement officers' amounts to the wastage of time in an activity that is generating revenue and consequently pressure payments to the enforcement officers as informal taxes on the right to trade (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:7) The circumstances form the atmosphere of constant precarity when any promising situation, an increasing customer base, saving build-up, can be reversed at any moment.

2.3.5 Gendered Pressures and Care Responsibilities

Livelihood problems represent an expression of hostile climates of reception and still ongoing affiliations with communities of origin that multiply economic pressures. Many migrants are also carrying with them a regular remittance requirement, which is not necessarily framed as economic transfers, but rather as morality and social identity maintenance (Olsson, 2023:12). Such transnational arrangements are disrupted by illnesses, market downturn or any effort to take control of trading equipment with consequences to the family life as well as in-house

relationships back home. The intersectional positioning only intensifies these issues: racialised attitudes towards African migrants influence discriminatory behaviours on the part of landlords who are unwilling to rent commercial space to municipal officers who identify local traders as the priority when distributing licences. The interaction between socio-economic status and nationality and gender results in unequal access to protective measures, and women having no financial reserves are more severely constrained in their mobility across trading locations during a time of unrest or increased expenses in finding safe shelter around their places of work (Gillespie et al., 2022:10) Even the solutions attempted are contradictory.

Formal association or informal networks may provide the advantage of pooled resources and leverage in advocacy but not all participate. Other women have to move without existing ties and cannot readily be absorbed into existing groups seen as closed networks; some women have no desire to join groups because of the fear of information being leaked about their legal status (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:7) Isolation, under these circumstances, contributes to vulnerability in the face of hostile authorities or predatory players in the market. The compounding effect is a livelihood geography that is aligned in negotiation between seeking opportunities and avoiding risks. Migrants use adaptative strategies, changing points of services in order to avoid crackdown areas, using kinship networks to sustain supply chains during border stalls, but the structural stipulations are strong determinants over performance (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:2). Unless these strategies are implemented at policy level to accommodate both the market inclusion and equal access to services irrespective of documentation status Jaiswal, Núñez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:4), these strategies do not provide sustainable development, but rather, they only provide fragile glimpses of stability at least.

2.4 RESILIENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES

The need to overcome economic precarity, unstable legal status, and unstable social settings frequently lead to the development of coping strategies among Nigerian female hairdressers in Durban. The approaches are a mixture of personal initiative and group ingenuity, coming

together in the collision of gendered expectations, migrant status, and involvement in the informal sector.

2.4.1 Leveraging Social Networks

Social networks are a vital form of resilience. Nigerian women rely on kinship ties, friendship groups, and community associations for emotional support, client referrals, and access to resources. Hiralal (2021:233) assumes that these networks allow women to overcome harassment and exclusion, as well as exchange skills and information. Transnational social connections tend to extend, connecting women in Durban with their relatives who remit, or they ship goods. Women depend much on the interpersonal networks established in the co-ethnic communities and in the wider circles of migrants. They can pool resources to rent or purchase stocks, coordinate safety in xenophobic outbursts, and provide mutual assistance in referral of clients when one trader cannot work, either because of illness or because of enforcement interventions, as these support structures which can also encompass non-migrant allies (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:2). This type of social capital serves as both a survival resource and a cushion during the adverse income shocks.

2.4.2 Diversification of Livelihoods

The resilience of the economy depends on the adaptive business practices that reduce the risk exposure and maintain the business flow. Most hairdressers extend their service industries, such as weaving or dyeing along with braiding, to broaden service offerings beyond a limited range of clients. This diversification will allow mitigating the impact of seasonal changes or the temporary absence of some customer segments in times of unrest (Gillespie et al., 2022:6). Another tactic repeated many times is reconfiguring operations logistics: traders move away stalls with the central hotspots when they are more actively controlled by the city authorities or arrange the working schedule to avoid being harassed during the most active inspection periods. In other places, women embrace the mobile service format, where they visit the residence of clients on predetermined appointments, eliminating the vulnerability of the workspace altogether (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:7).

2.4.3. Mobilising Cultural Capital

There are also pressures that discrimination in the context of public health systems enhances and necessitates certain coping responses. Migratory background results in hostile treatment or denial of care that causes some to self-treat or visit traditional healers in their respective communities as an alternative to the formal healthcare institutions (Jaiswal, Núñez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:4) (Although such options might provide readily available short relief, it might lead to more severe health problems in case of unmanaged underlying conditions. Instead, others reduce the effects of illness by rostering with trusted associates, so that even when one of the salon owners becomes ill, clients are absorbed into the other business until the business owner recovers, in which case the business continues to receive income albeit at a reduced rate.

2.4.4 Informal Savings and Credit Schemes

Resilience is not only about loss avoidance; strategies that are directed at creating greater stability over time in unpredictable conditions can also be included. The incremental capital accumulation is possible by participating in savings clubs or rotating credit associations, which would, respectively, be inaccessible in formal banks due to limitations in documentation (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:2). This capital can eventually finance renovations that attract more clients to pay premiums or purchase in large quantities to lower unit prices. However, such systems require trust; when individuals within a community do not trust each other (sometimes due to exploitation in the past), they will not engage with one another and this aspect will compromise this nature of financial resilience.

2.4.5 Affirming Cultural Identity

The assertion of cultural identity also conveys the idea of resilience. Hair salons are the locations where Nigerian women can claim their cultural presence and form a solidarity. Cultural pride through styles like elaborate braids or use of specific fabrics and ornaments can be used to fight against the consequences of assimilation. According to Mutopo (2020: 104), this can help women feel a sense of belonging, even in unfriendly places. As they claim cultural identity, the women produce symbolic capital that helps increase client loyalty and recognition in communities.

2.4.6 Informal Support Mechanisms

The collective support networks like sharing workspace, resource pooling, or childcare rotation among women can assist women in dealing with their daily stresses. Mhandu (2020: 123) records the case of undocumented hairdressers in Durban of Zimbabwe, who depend on mutual aid within the salon communities and develop solidarity in order to avoid exploitation. Nigerian women follow similar tendencies, where collective resilience approaches are independent of national groups, yet dependent on local environments. Gender is important in conceptualising as well as the functionality of coping mechanisms. Many hairdressers are combining productive labour either locally or across borders with reproductive labour. The ambiguity of informal incomes makes them find a means of making both worlds a routine. Others do arrange mutual childcare orchestrated in migrant networks according to which mothers are able to work more hours during a peak of need without being forced to incur unaffordable day-care services (Gillespie et al., 2022:2) Others drag dependents to their work place environment; children assist them in making runs around the salon and separation of work between home and business is not very clear but a practical and not a perfect answer. The resilience required rapid adjustments at multiple levels during such acuteness crises as lockdowns as a result of the coronavirus.

Physical distancing reduced the number of the salons and borders closures impacted on the supply chains of products; traders coped with it by seeking other materials where even they were of the bad quality (Gillespie et al., 2022:8) Contact with customers was made remotely by mobile messaging: advance bookings were made to guarantee a certain degree of predictability in the income as soon as the restrictions were lightened. Solidarity was not merely founded on the exchange of goods and services, the exchange of information on relief programmes or community helps efforts became a routine aspect of interaction in the female safe space and migrant networks at the local and transnational levels.

The other basic coping strategy is spatial strategy. The concentration of businesses in semi-formal places of trade offers a visible defence against crime or certain violence; organised groups can exert greater pressure with landlords to lower rents in the wake of post-unrest decreases in sales. Conversely, a few others opt to go underground and in the back street

areas, where the trade is less in the streets and thus, they are less visible. Both solutions represent trade-offs calculated based on the visibility to access the customer and the invisibility to secure personal safety. These material strategies are accompanied by psychosocial coping strategies. The stress caused by recurrent xenophobic incidents are cumulative and lead to chronic anxiety; religious practices offer emotional strength to a significant number of migrants dealing with the exclusionary climates (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:7) Unstructured peer counselling among other hairdressers enables them to console each other following traumatic events; sharing experiences of the same eliminates the fear response and spreads practical tips on how to avoid being caught during raids.

2.4.7 Language as a Tool for Resilience

Language acquisition becomes a long-term adaptation tool and a coping skill that is used every day (Onwukwe & Gibson, 2022:20). Knowing isiXhosa and it creates a connection with local customers who would otherwise be reluctant to walk into foreign-owned salons; this ability can increase the client bases beyond the ethnic enclaves and indirectly overcome the stereotypes about the unwillingness to integrate. However, the linguistic work bears uneven fruits as there are larger discourses stigmatising the African foreigners that can supersede the personal acts of making the other part of the self. These resilience practices have boundaries considering the structural barriers that were presented in Section 3.3. Strategies can also keep livelihoods afloat but they do not eradicate structural exclusions like licensing bans or institutionalised discrimination within health services (Jaiswal, Núñez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:4)

Moreover, the use of informal mechanisms continues to leave a number of entrepreneurs outside the formal economy, and subject them repeatedly to destabilising shocks, without having institutional solutions at their disposal. In this sense, resilience is better understood not as unwavering resistance to challenges, but as a dynamic process of continual negotiation, one in which present existence requires co-existing with inherent unpredictability of future conditions. Together these coping measures show an inherent adaptability that is based on the experience they share but diverge depending on resources, risk judgements and placements in the networks. They emphasise the agency of migrants despite constraint and at

the same time the continued necessity of external interventions, be it policy change or a special support programme, to help change reactive coping into proactive security-building over time (Ncube, Bahta and Jordaan, 2019:2; Jordaan, 2019:7; Gillespie et al., 2022:8; Jaiswal, Núñez Carrasco & Arrow, 2024:4)

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has critically engaged with literature on migration, gender, and informality to establish the conceptual and empirical context of the current study. By drawing on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989:140; Collins, 2019:25), structuration (Giddens, 1984:25; Stones, 2005:76), and capital theories (Bourdieu, 1986:241), the chapter developed a theoretical framework through which the experiences of Nigerian women in Durban's informal hairdressing sector can be understood. Intersectionality illuminated how gender, nationality, and migrant status intersect to produce overlapping forms of marginalisation, while the Structuration theory explained how migrant women navigate constraining social and institutional structures through acts of agency. The capital theory by Bourdieu further explained how women resilience strategies are determined by access to economic, social and cultural capital amid the exclusion and precarity. The empirical review revealed that migration scholarship in South Africa has investigated xenophobia, urban governance, and informality (Peberdy and Crush, 2020:46; Rogerson, 2021:627; Dube, 2022:93), but not much has been done concerning the topic of Nigerian female economic migrants working in the informal hairdressing sector. The available literature tends to concentrate on male dominated or formal economic spaces, neglecting the actualities that women have lived in, continuing to support the local economies through informal labor. Additionally, the resilience measures in the form of kinship networks, rotating savings groups, and transnational cultural practices are rarely examined as the means of agency (Tawodzera & Chigumadzi, 2023:244; Mhandu, 2020:117).

This review uncovers three areas of critical void: first, the absence of academic attention to Nigerian female economic migrants in South Africa; second, the absence of intersectional analysis in the positioning of women in informal economies; and finally, the fact that the issue of resilience strategies as expressions of agency has not been sufficiently examined. It

is these gaps that justify the focus, as well as the originality of this study which aims to preempt the voices, lived experiences, and survival practices of Nigerian women in the informal hair economy of Durban. It is based on this conceptual framework that the following chapter discusses the research methodology, which describes the qualitative paradigm, research design, sampling strategy, data gathering strategy, data analysis strategy and ethical procedures used to fill these identified gaps.

CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework used to analyse the case of Nigerian female economic migrants working in the informal hairdressing economy of Durban. The chapter acknowledges the complexity of their lived experiences, which are characterised by the overlapping types of exclusion and resilience, and draws upon three theoretically interconnected perspectives: Intersectionality Theory, Structuration theory and the capital theory proposed by Bourdieu. These paradigms are not used in isolation but are combined to provide a multi-dimensional approach to the way Nigerian female migrants to the city economy make their way through the hostile city space, build livelihood practices and challenge socio-political invisibility.

Every theory introduces its own analytical perspective Intersectionality reveals the interaction of multiple axes of identity including gender, race, class, and migration status to produce particular sets of marginalisation; Structuration theory serves the recursive relationship between agency and structure, anticipating the everyday practices through which migrant women reconfigure the spaces they inhabit and capital theory offers methods of understanding the alternative forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital mobilised in the absence of any formal support system. Combined, these views make up a strong analytical architecture that can help us not just to understand how exclusion works, but also to see how migrant women challenge, adapt, and become innovative in precarious urban settings. Chapter 1 provides the origins, central concepts and academic implementation of each theoretical framework and then illustrates how the frameworks are put into critical dialogue. In doing so, it establishes the intellectual scaffolding necessary for interpreting the empirical material in later chapters and advancing a decolonial, feminist reading of urban informality and migration in contemporary South Africa.

The theoretical framework of a study provides the intellectual lens through which the research problem is analysed and understood. For investigations into migration, gender, and informality, theory is particularly important because the issues under study are complex,

multi-layered, and shaped by intersecting structures of power. Without a theoretical grounding, the lived experiences of migrant women risk being reduced to descriptive accounts, rather than being critically analysed within broader socio-economic and political contexts. This study draws on three central theories: Intersectionality Theory, Structuration theory, and Bourdieu's capital theory. The combination of these frameworks makes possible a subtle analysis of the ways of negotiating the Durban informal economy of hairdressing by Nigerian female economic migrants. The intersectionality theory reveals how gender, nationality and migrant status converge to create specific vulnerability and other forms of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991; Akinola, 2024). The Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) dwells on the dynamism of interaction between structure and agency and the manner in which migrant women are constrained by the exclusionary policies and xenophobic practices, and conversely how the migrant women practice agency in their everyday survival tactics. The capital theory proposed by Bourdieu (1986) adds on to this, because it reveals how the various types of capital economic, social and cultural capital are turned into the valuable resources that women mobilise amid insecurity and informality.

Besides these three mainstream theories, the research is also intersecting with other related theories like feminist urbanism, care ethics and transnationalism. These conceptions complement the central paradigms by outlining the gendering of cities, the role of processes of caring and social reproduction in the experience of migrant women and how cross-border networks sustain the existence of the migrant communities. By integrating these theories, the study creates a comprehensive system that not only eliminates the weakness of women, but also recognises their power and negotiating capacity to resist the unfavourable circumstances. The theoretical orientation will ensure that this study of the Nigerian female economic hairdressers in Durban will find their place within the larger sociological and feminist discourse, yet the details of their lives will not be disregarded.

3.2 INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

Intersectionality offers the framework upon which the stratified approaches of inequalities to which Nigerian female economic migrants in the informal hairdressing industry of Durban are exposed can be examined without being reduced to one-dimensional issues such as gender

or nationality. The most important characteristic of this theoretical approach is the recognition that such social categories as race, class, gender, migration status and ethnicity do not sum up but are mutually constitutive. Once analytical position is formed in the frameworks of the multi-approach model proposed by Choo and Ferree, one can speak not only about co-occurrence of multiple marginalities but also about the relationships between them (Gillespie et al., 2022:5). This makes possible not only an interrogation of who is marginalised, but also how institutional as well as societal power relations constructively organise such marginalisations over time and space. Intersectionality in economic involvement of migrant women is used to highlight the fact that discrimination can arise at various levels: access to health care, labour market and urban governance frameworks.

The opportunities and resources are mediated by power dynamics within every socially constructed category. As an example, when tied migrant women come to a host country as dependents under the provisions of family migration, despite their relevant skills, their legal status as dependents creates institutional barriers to labour market entry (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:3) This interaction between gendered legal definition and labour policy demonstrates a sort of structural exclusion that would not be visible when analysed only in terms of economic variables or gender. The framework's utility becomes apparent in policies and practices affecting marginalised groups during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Where official guidance lacks explicit reference to intersectionality, service adaptations may ignore the compounded vulnerabilities facing migrant populations (Gillespie et al., 2022:16) For Nigerian female economic migrants operating salons in Durban, a similar neglect could manifest in public health interventions or business support programmes designed without consideration for immigration status, linguistic diversity, informal employment patterns, or caregiving roles, all of which intersect to shape their realities. The aspect of feminist participatory action research (FPAR) applied by Cubero and Garrido is important to note that intervention in the area of intersectionality is more than the list of disadvantages; it gives the opportunity to analyse how structures maintain oppression and also emphasise agency (Cubero & Garrido, 2023:4) Their emphasis on African migrant women in Southern Spain depicts how a focus on the spatially and temporally aware inquiry aids in tracking the conditions in the daily working and living patterns, family formations, and political situations in general. Focusing on the position of the individual narratives within these mutually

dependent scales, one will be in a better position to explain the changing priorities, like the one between earnings and transnational care requirement, which are not amenable to classification.

Lived experience is important as intersectionality is not an attributive categorisation system, it is a challenge to situated knowledge that arises as a result of an assemblage of oppression and privilege. Participatory strategies clarify the way the victims express survival strategies in limiting systems (Cubero & Garrido, 2023:20). With respect to the case of the Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers operating in the city centre of Durban, this could indicate the interactions between the racialised stereotypes about African migrants and urban spatial exclusion where the allocation of trading space logically deprives foreign nationals as well as increasing their reliance on co-ethnic support networks. Through such descriptions, relationships emerge between high-level policy actions (urban development zoning) and low-level stigma in dealing with clients. The social cohesion literature plays another complementary role in stating institutionalised racism, language barriers, sexism, disparities in unemployment, and geographic segregation as interconnected barriers (Rugunanan, 2017:4) Intersectionality offers the theoretical tools through which these impediments converge as opposed to being isolated. It questions the policymaker's preference to focus on discrimination in bits such as language inclusion without racism/economic precarity, by demonstrating why disaggregated reforms usually are not able to bring about equitable outcomes. Analytically, bringing intersectionality to migration studies also implies bringing fluid identities as opposed to fixed labels. The status of migrants can change according to context: a woman who can be registered as a legal economic migrant might still experience circumstances closer to that of refugees when becoming a victim of xenophobic violence or when deprived of the protection of welfare on the basis of nationalism (Gillespie et al., 2022:6) This instability is identified as a force against fixed typologies that obscure complexities in the lived experiences, as well as making it impossible to reduce the socio-economic strategies employed by people.

One of the most crucial aspects that permeate intersectional analysis is the fact that it demands that power is incorporated into category analysis (Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022:3). It is one of

the reasons why even two people with similar demographic characteristics might have different limitations due to the disparity in legal documentation status or metropolitan location. Practical to the owners of these salons in Nigeria, such variables may include whether they are in formal store rentals and street vendors, with the latter having different extents of exposure to by-law enforcement officials and police scrutiny. Such a framework approach requires methodological flexibility of data collection instruments, a sensitivity to contradictions in interviews by listening to the personal stories of the respondents, and thinking about the position of the researcher. Participatory paradigm-based techniques are not only focused on capturing perspectives but also co-producing analysis with participants which represent their contextual approach to negotiating discrimination in search of economic stability (Cubero and Garrido, 2023: 4).

In the end, the application of intersectionality allows complementing the criticism of the current models of urban economic planning. It identifies the ways in which simplifications in the discourse of development like assuming that the informal sector is a homogenous group can obscure the particular vulnerabilities of black African migrant women whose labour is caught up in the conflict over the use of the public space, the occupational health risks increased by lengthy hours of client contact and the social responsibilities of reproduction that are extended across borders. By identifying these intersections squarely within the discourse of power distribution, and insisting on them being discussed in conjunction, not separately, the theory offers not only increased diagnostic specificity, but a way to come up with policies that are responsive to experienced heterogeneity, as opposed to abstract averages.

3.2.1 Origins and Intellectual Development

The concept of intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her seminal work on Black women's experiences in the United States legal system (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Crenshaw argued that existing legal and feminist frameworks failed to capture the compounded discrimination that Black women faced, as they experienced both racism and sexism simultaneously. Intersectionality therefore arose as a corrective to frameworks that treated categories of oppression in isolation, insisting instead on an understanding of how multiple identities and social positions interact to produce distinctive forms of disadvantage.

While initially rooted in critical race theory and Black feminist thought in the United States, intersectionality has since developed into a global analytical tool that is widely applied in sociology, gender studies, migration studies, and development research (Collins & Bilge, 2020: 47). Its core premise that systems of oppression are interlocking and mutually constitutive, has been influential in studies of migrant women across diverse contexts, from Latin American domestic workers in North America to African women in European and Southern African informal economies.

3.2.2 Key Concepts

Intersectionality emphasises that social categories such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and legal status are not additive but interlinked. Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban are not only women, migrants, or Africans; they are simultaneously all of these, and their lived experiences are shaped by the interaction of these identities in specific socio-political contexts. Crenshaw (1991: 1252) distinguished between structural intersectionality, which refers to how social structures disproportionately disadvantage those at multiple margins, and political intersectionality, which captures how political and policy discourses often neglect groups that do not fit neatly into singular categories. In the case of Nigerian female migrants in Durban, structural intersectionality is visible in how their gendered labour concentrated in feminised informal work like hairdressing interacts with xenophobic exclusion and the legal precariousness of migrant status. Political intersectionality can be seen in the processes of policy making concerning migration and gender equality in which migrant women are disregarded or considered as an after-thought.

3.2.3 Application in Migration Studies

Intersectionality has been successfully utilised in the study of migration to bring to fore the distinct issues of women migrants who negotiate multiple forms of inequality. Hiralal (2021:229) illustrates that migrant women in Durban experience a dual burden of invisibility, as neither they are included in the mainstream labour policies nor do they receive gender-oriented programmes which prioritize citizens. Equally, Ojong (2020:64) finds that the xenophobic hostility of the Nigerian women in South Africa when it comes to the art of trading indicates an intersection of gender stereotypes that paint their image as an image of a dependent spouse or an image of a dishonest entrepreneur. Centring intersectionality helps

the scholars to abandon the treatment of women migrants as a homogenous group of people and rather analyse the interplay of various identities to create experiences. This is essential in the current study, as Nigerian women hairdressers are victims of certain stereotypes on Nigerian migrants as a scam, women as secondary earners, and informal workers as illegal that interplay to form their socio-economic problems.

3.2.4 Relevance to Informal Economies

Intersectionality is of specific importance to informal economies research because gender, race, and legal status significantly organize access to opportunities and vulnerability to risks. Even informality is not neutral: it is very gendered, racialised and spatialised. The case of Nigerian women in the hairdressing industry in Durban is limited not only on the basis of their lack of licence, but also in the fact that they are migrant women in an environment of increased xenophobia. Considering the example of migrant women traders in Kenya, Bhachu (2022: 87) describes how the intersectional disadvantages are reflected in informal markets, where women are forced to negotiate harassment, limited movement, and economic insecurity all the time. These observations are close to Durban, where hairdressers negotiate the territories of conflict in the city, in the Pixley ka Seme Street, between the needs of the customers, the police, the landlords, and the local rivals.

3.2.5 Critiques and Refinements

Although it has been widely used, intersectionality has been subjected to criticism as well. Other theorists believe that it can also be overgeneralized or overly diffuse, a buzzword with no definite methodological basis (Davis, 2020: 67). The others warn that dedicating too much attention to identities would blur structural and historical power relations, including global capitalism or colonial histories, which migrant precarity depends upon (Anthias, 2013: 105). Reactions To this, recent scholarship has attempted to develop intersectionality as a more materialist concept of power. According to Collins and Bilge (2020: 89), the concept of intersectionality is not limited to identities but also systems and structures of domination. In migration studies, this means paying attention to how immigration regimes, labour markets, and urban governance intersect with race, gender, and nationality to produce vulnerabilities. For this study, intersectionality is used not as an abstract concept but as a practical lens for analysing the multiple, layered challenges Nigerian female economic migrants face in

Durban's informal economy. It centres the simultaneous operation of xenophobia, gendered expectations, and legal exclusion, while also allowing attention to be paid to women's resilience and agency.

3.2.6 Relevance to the Present Study

Nigerian female hairdressers in Durban represent a case where intersectionality's analytical power is particularly evident. Their challenges cannot be understood through a single lens of identity. It is not enough to say they are migrants: their experiences differ from male Nigerian migrants working in trade or transport, because gender expectations shape their work and vulnerabilities. Nor is it enough to say they are women: South African women in the informal economy face different conditions, as they are not simultaneously outsiders in terms of nationality. Intersectionality highlights how being Nigerian, being female, being African, and being undocumented (in some cases) combine to create distinctive constraints. It also reveals how resilience strategies are shaped by these overlapping positions: for example, reliance on Nigerian community networks (national identity), marketing of braiding skills (cultural identity), and negotiation of gendered caregiving roles (gender identity). By situating intersectionality at the heart of this study, the analysis avoids both essentialising Nigerian women and homogenising migrant women's experiences. It ensures that the socio-economic challenges and resilience strategies of Nigerian hairdressers are understood in their full complexity, shaped by interlinking systems of power and exclusion. While intersectionality provides a critical lens for understanding how overlapping identities shape experiences of inequality, it does not fully account for how individuals mobilise resources within these structural constraints. To address this, Bourdieu's Capital Theory is introduced in the following section to examine how different forms of capital are accumulated, negotiated, and deployed by migrant women within precarious urban economies.

3.3 BOURDIEU'S CAPITAL THEORY

Bourdieu's capital theory provides a conceptual framework on how Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers in Durban convert, hoard or lose various forms of resources subject to the context of migration and engagement in an informal sector. The main concept of this framework is the fact that capitals, economic, cultural, social, symbolic, are

convertible, unevenly distributed resources within the organised power relations. These capitals are both dynamic and material; they accumulate or lose value depending on the particular social disciplines in which they are mobilised, and are mediated on the habitus, which disposes agents to engage them in a particular way. Economic capital, encompassing financial resources and assets, is perhaps the most visible dimension in the women's day-to-day business survival. Access to cash flow directly affects their ability to rent premises, purchase quality supplies, or absorb income losses during market disruptions. Yet in contexts where formal banking systems exclude those lacking residence permits or collateral documentation, economic capital often becomes contingent upon informal credit arrangements and community-based lending circles.

The lack of institute financial inclusion turns economic capital into a very vulnerable commodity which can be broken by any market fluctuations as well as xenophobic outbursts that can disrupt the trading activity (Tshishonga, 2015: 2). This vulnerability supports the view by Bourdieu that the possession of capital does not only rely on the possession of the individual but also field-related rules that govern its recognition and legitimation. The accumulation of real or probable resources associated with the enduring association of mutual acquaintance, social capital, according to Bourdieu, becomes a vital compensatory factor in situations where economic resources are volatile. These networks are usually built with time among the African migrant women as they share common cultural practices, trust among urban migrant communities, and navigate legal uncertainties jointly. They serve to achieve the overlapping of benefits: temporary housing in times of crisis; combined buying power to reduce supply prices; negotiated security in open space; and job referral bypassing discriminatory recruitment routes. This is similar to studies, which have underscored the fact that such networks entrench values, norms and information exchange that is fundamental in coping with unfavorable urban settings. (Ncube, Bahta & Jordaan, 2019:2). However, while social capital can mitigate certain vulnerabilities, its efficacy is shaped by its reach, closely knit co-ethnic groups may limit exposure to broader opportunities within the host economy if interaction beyond familiar networks remains minimal. Cultural capital manifests here both as embodied skills, technical proficiency in braiding styles from multiple African traditions, and as linguistic adaptability that enhances market interaction with diverse clientele.

The Nigerian female economic migrants who expand their apprenticeships by adopting local styles or learning transactional phrases in isiXhosa or Afrikaans demonstrate conversion of cultural into economic capital through increased customer base (Onwukwe and Gibson, 2022: 20)). However, this conversion needs cross-cultural exchanges that are not equally distributed. Cultural competencies can be underestimated or even ignored by sections of local consumers in highly segregated urban markets, or in situations where xenophobia is high.

This is more latent as regards symbolic capital: there is the command over recognition and a claim to be recognised in both migrant and host community spaces which these entrepreneurs have acquired. Being viewed as professional businesspeople as opposed to informal traders may bring in routine customer base and create security bloc with local players in the business like the landlords or other businesses. On the other hand, in political environments where anti-migrant rhetoric prevails in the population, symbolic capital is undermined in spite of the level of competence and the quality of service (Tshishonga, 2015: 3). Such a loss of legitimacy may deprive the protective buffer symbolic recognition offers of regulatory harassment or even violence.

A key difference to implementation of the Bourdieu theory is in addressing the relations between these capitals instead of addressing them separately. According to other African migrant communities, social capital relating to ethnic dance groups or savings clubs can directly translate into economic returns by creating an avenue of job placement or communal bargaining of rental space (Phillips and James, 2014: 15). Likewise, cultural fluency, which is learned in multilingual interactions, may be converted into a higher level of symbolic significance among mixed clienteles, as an indicator of integration processes (Onwukwe and Gibson, 2022: 20). This is also strengthened in the sustainable livelihood perspective which conceptualises capitals as pillars that affect the context of vulnerability and adaptive capacity. (Ncube, Bahta and Jordaan, 2019: 2) In this perspective, there are shortcomings in one way (e.g., the inability to have financial reserves), which means that that side must rely strategically on others (e.g., mobilisation of social ties).

However, adaptability of capitals can hardly be assured. Structural obstacles, restrictive immigration policies to be licensed and operate a business; racialised surveillance that prevents people from moving around in particular areas, can shut down interactions between capitals altogether (Fintel and Moses, 2017: 3). The resulting immobility restricts the ability of the migrants to transform technical expertise (cultural capital) into formal occupation jobs (economic and symbolic capitals), placing them in informal networks where they do not get high returns on their investment.

In the case of the female hairdressers in Nigeria in particular, gender meets all these processes with access determinants. Normative demands in relation to care giving roles may restrict time available to expand professional networks (influencing social capital) or engaging in training to diversify services (influencing cultural capital) (Zinatsa and Saurombe, 2022: 8). In addition, hairdressing is typically viewed as a feminised profession that needs little to enter, and due to some degree of gendered disparagement, it can provide only symbolic promotion, no matter how well one performs. The system of dispositions that individuals have developed through past experiences is the mediator of how they view possibilities of accumulating these different capitals.

Migrant women who shifted their movement orientations as temporary entrepreneurial activities can focus on short term cash flows rather than the long-term investments such as salon branding which can augment symbolic capital. Others who had previous experiences of running small businesses might be more suitable to transform the initial social connections to long term economic enterprises in the face of unstable markets. Analytically, mapping of such patterns elucidates the fact that the resilience strategies cannot be explained without placing them into unequal distributions of capitals across the fields that are characterised in terms of migration status, gender norms, urban regulatory regimes and public sentiment. By doing so, any possible leverage point of policy intervention can be outlined: deepening microfinance in line with undocumented traders empowers economic capital; the promotion of intercultural training empowers cultural competencies; the acceptance of foreign qualifications empowers symbolic legitimacy; the sponsorship of migrant associations empowers social resources required to survive through a crisis situation arises. Therefore, the

application of Bourdieu framework can provide a stratified understanding: it includes both the physical resources, such as capital, and intangible resources, such as trust or prestige, and exposes the circulation of structural inequalities through the networks of entrepreneurship by the female entrepreneurial group operating in the Durban informal economy. In conjunction with the insights observed in Section 2.1, it is possible to explain not only what resources such women possess but how cross-containment structures influence their mobilisation in the maintenance of livelihoods of persistently precarious conditions.

3.3.1 Origins and Intellectual Development

The concept of capital, as theorised by Pierre Bourdieu, emerged as a way of extending the economic notion of capital into the social and cultural domains of life. Bourdieu believed that to comprehend inequality, one should consider not just economic resources but also other non-material types of power held by individuals and groups (Bourdieu, 1986:241). This view contradicted the orthodox sociology that tended to view culture, education, and social relations as disconnected with economics. Instead, Bourdieu conceptualised society as a field in which different forms of capital are accumulated, converted, and contested.

This framework has proven particularly influential in migration and gender studies, where researchers seek to understand how marginalised groups mobilise resources beyond financial means. For migrant women in precarious economies, survival often depends on the ability to draw upon networks, skills, and reputations in ways that offset limited access to formal economic opportunities (Kelly & Lusis, 2021: 412).

3.3.2 Forms of Capital

Bourdieu identified several forms of capital that interact in social life:

Economic capital: money, assets, and material resources that can be directly converted into financial gain. Another form of capital is social capital which relates to networks of relationships and mutual obligations that provide access to opportunities, protection, and support. He identifies also cultural capital which focuses on knowledge, skills, education, and cultural competencies that can be recognised and valued in particular social contexts, Ultimately the symbolic capital which is underpinned by prestige, reputation, and honour that

confer legitimacy and influence. Later scholars have extended this paradigm to include political or regulatory capital, referring to the ability to access and navigate state systems, legal frameworks, and bureaucratic processes (Tattersall, 2022: 95). This extension is highly relevant for migrants, whose livelihoods are profoundly shaped by immigration regimes and regulatory exclusion.

3.3.3 Capital and Migration

Capital theory has been widely applied to migration research as a tool for understanding how migrants mobilise diverse resources in contexts of displacement and exclusion. Ryan et al. (2016: 15), for example, show how migrant women in the United Kingdom convert cultural capital in the form of language skills and educational qualifications into economic opportunities, while also relying on social capital through ethnic networks. On the same note, Kelly and Lusi (2021: 418) suggest that migrants usually undergo “capital disjunctures”, wherein their cultural or symbolic capital is undermined in the host communities. These dynamics are acute when it comes to African migrant women in South Africa. Home country skills and qualifications are frequently not recognised and xenophobic hostility sabotages symbolic capital by making migrants seem illegitimate rivals. Simultaneously, economic and social survival is greatly reliant on the community networks that give access to clients, suppliers and informal credit.

3.3.4 Capital in Informal Economies

In informal economies, one can see the interaction between various types of capital in a particularly prominent way. Economic capital is not always abundant: Nigerian women hairdressers in Durban have little startup capital, and they even use informal savings groups (stokvels) as a source. It requires social capital whereby the kinship and nationality networks give access to competitive salon spaces and safeguard against exploitation. Hairdressing is dominated by cultural capital. Knowledge of specialised forms of braiding, preservation of esthetic practices, and tailoring of fashions to South African markets represent a type of embodied cultural capital, which can be transformed into income. The symbolic capital is crucial as well: the reputation of being skillful and reliable is what defines clientele in a competitive city (Akinboade, 2020: 63). The scarcest is usually political or regulatory capital. Migrant women often have no documentation or legal status to enforce business licences, so

they are at risk of harassment, fines, and eviction. Lack of this type of capital worsens the issue of precarity and highlights the structural forces that define their lives.

3.3.5 Conversion of Capitals

One of the strengths of the Bourdieu framework is in the fact that it focuses on how one type of capital can be transformed into another. As an illustration, one example is transformation of cultural capital (hairdressing skill) into economic capital (income), as long as a symbolic capital (reputation) authorizes the service in the mind of customers. Economic capital may be accumulated through social capital (networks of friends, kin, etc) which may offer loans or referrals. However, these conversions are not absolute they are conditioned by structural inequalities and power relations. In the case of Nigerian women in Durban conversion processes are usually hampered. They are not in a position to convert social and cultural capital into safe and long-term economic fortunes due to limited regulatory capital. Symbolic capital is sabotaged by the ever-present danger of police harassment or xenophobic violence, since even talented and respectable women cannot escape the delegitimation process. These stalled conversions demonstrate the necessity of an intersectional analysis that would place the concept of capital theory in a wider context of power.

3.3.6 Critiques and Refinements

Despite the usefulness of capital theory, it has been criticized as having limitations. It has been criticised as putting too much emphasis on individual agency in capital accumulation and too little on structural violence and historical inequalities (Fine, 2021: 274). The other is that it is inclined to take the universal nature of capital forms and it may fail to appreciate the variability in the meaning and value of the capital forms in different contexts. Scholars have reacted by modifying capital theory to reflect the experiences of migrants in the Global South. As an example, Mutopo (2020:118) demonstrates that Zimbabwean female traders fall back on informal collective savings groups as a type of social and economic capital, which is highly context-sensitive. On the same note, Dube (2021:204) underscores the importance of symbolic capital as a factor that enables migrant women to earn the trust of South African markets, despite high xenophobia levels.

3.3.7 Relevance to the Present Study

In this study, the capital theory offers a framework of the study of the mobilisation of the Nigerian female hairdressers, its conversion and loss of access to various resources. Economic capital is restricted but supplemented through informal credit. Social capital is crucial for accessing clients and protecting against hostility. Cultural capital, particularly specialised braiding skills, is a valuable resource that distinguishes Nigerian women from competitors. Symbolic capital, embodied in reputation and trust, shapes long term survival in competitive markets. The absence of political and regulatory capital, however, creates structural barriers that undermine these resources. By applying capital theory, this study highlights not only what resources Nigerian women possess, but also how structural inequalities prevent their effective conversion into stable livelihoods. This framework thus complements intersectionality, which emphasises systems of oppression, and Structuration theory, which explains the negotiation of structure and agency. While Bourdieu's framework provides insight into the distribution and mobilisation of various forms of capital, it is equally important to understand how these processes unfold within broader social structures that both constrain and enable agency. Structuration Theory is therefore introduced to explore the dynamic relationship between structure and agency in shaping migrant women's everyday practices and survival strategies.

3.4 GIDDENS' STRUCTURATION THEORY

According to the Structuration theory of Giddens, it is analytically attractive to consider social life, not as a matter of one primacy over another, but as a recursive relation between structure and agency. This framing can be very fruitful in the deconstruction of the lived realities of Nigerian women hairdressers in the informal economy of Durban, as their daily practices are both conditioned by limiting macro structures, laws, market relations, social subordinations and determinations, and also by their own ability to act upon and in those structures. In other words, their choices, business practices, and adaptive strategies both reproduce and modify the very conditions under which they operate. This conceptualisation builds upon, but also differs from, perspectives described in Section 2.2, where capitals are mobilised within defined fields; here, the focus falls on the duality of structure itself. Structural properties in Giddens' sense encompass rules and resources that exist across time

and space, yet only materialise as a consequence of social practices being enacted (Gillespie et al., 2022: 3).

For migrant women entrepreneurs, municipal regulations on street trading are not just abstract policy provisions but sets of rules instantiated every time enforcement officers conduct inspections or impose fines. These experiences can strengthen the awareness of traders of the boundaries of regulation as well as offering the opportunity to push or redefine it, such as relocating business after tolerating harassment in one's location repeatedly shows constraint and agency. Similarly, immigration laws that delimit access to work permits function as structural conditions that shape salon owners' livelihood strategies; however, these women may draw upon transnational networks or informal agreements with local landlords to reconfigure access to workspace despite formal exclusion. Central to Structuration theory is the notion that agents draw reflexively on structural rules and resources in their everyday practices.

Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers make decisions about opening hours, service pricing, or sourcing materials by integrating accumulated knowledge from prior interactions (both within Durban and through connections abroad) with awareness of present constraints. This reflexivity is informed by continuous monitoring of risks, whether in anticipating xenophobic tensions or gauging changing customer demand, and by internalised ways for responding under threat (Cubero and Garrido, 2023: 6) In this way, action is neither fully determined by structure nor fully autonomous; rather it emerges through the ongoing negotiation between what is made possible by existing arrangements and what can be improvised.

Giddens distinguishes between allocative resources (control over material objects) and authoritative resources (control over people), both of which hold relevance here. Access to scarce salon equipment or imported hair products constitutes allocative resources whose distribution is affected by border regulation policies and global trade flows (Lan, 2015: 2) Authoritative resources surface in the ability to organise co-workers or apprentices within salons, negotiate fair rent with landlords, or mobilise group presence for collective safety

during volatile periods. (Ncube, Bahta and Jordaan, 2019: 15) The distribution and deployment of these resources illustrate how agents may take advantage of certain structural openings even when other aspects remain restrictive. Meanwhile, Structuration theory brings into focus the concept of power as a normal part of any social interaction. Power here is not merely coercive, but productive, it is there as capacity to achieve outcomes.

The capacity of migrant hairdressers to continue their business in the circumstances of unfriendly policies indicates the manifestation of the agency in the asymmetric power relations (Mutambara and Maheshvari, 2017: 15). Their spatial modalities of crowding stalls to meet or to organise their work in time with the police patrols will show how the relations of power built in the organization of the urban government are met with calculated resistance on the ground. The structural reproduction occurs because such iterative practices are likely to strengthen the existing structures; the practice of paying informal fees in order not to be evicted, the use of co-ethnic clients primarily reinforces the spatial division along the national borders inadvertently (Gillespie et al., 2022: 6) However, with each repetition there is a possibility of variation: mixing hairstyles to appeal to the local market introduces cultural discordance to the idea of salons owned by Nigerians, as the use of mobile payment apps gradually incorporates informal establishments into larger financial systems.

This methodology emphasises temporality; practices are placed in time in such a way that historical action predetermines the present possibilities and current action assists in establishing a future structural state. As an illustration, past experiences of targeted violence influence the current decision regarding the location of a salon; an example of this is that the decision to join a city-based training programme today can impact business legitimacy in the future (Sassen, Galvaan and Duncan, 2018: 9) Such shifting conditions are monitored regularly, a practice that highlights the importance of human agency in the constant interaction with the structure via praxis as underlined by Giddens.

Additionally, the concepts of modality, interpretive schemes, facilities, norms, and assist in expressing the way migrant women negotiate between subjectively comprehended rules and objectively enforced ones (Gillespie et al., 2022: 3) Interpretive schemes are collective

perceptions including norms of customer service style that can blend West African aesthetic tastes with South African ones. Facilities are physical resources on hand, e.g. hairdryers obtained through kinship networks; norms are the acceptable behavioural rules such as returning favours in trader communities. Both modalities relate structural contents to concrete action and explain why certain regulatory prohibitions are avoided and desired behaviour internalised. The use of Structuration theory should be sensitive to various scales.

On a micro level, through face-to-face interactions, the salon floor or street corner, ongoing enactions of trust and exchange are created, and on a macro-level, institutional racism within health services, the same actors act passively or actively in reproduction of systemic inequities by shunning formal clinics because of distrust (Mutambara and Maheshvari, 2017: 15). In this case agency also involves strategic retreat of some institutions in favour of reinforcing other types of care through community healers or advisory networks of women traders.

Finally, it is essential to understand unintended consequences: the approaches that were created with the goal of surviving in the short term may create new dependencies or vulnerabilities in the long term. Moving salons to less visible back alleys may help prevent police raids in the short term but decrease walk-in customers in the long term, developing a client base of migrants exclusively would prevent xenophobic hostility, but limit income streams based on diasporic economic changes (Cubero and Garrido, 2023: 6). The ST therefore prefigures the recursive cycle in which these adaptive decisions will become structured as they will contribute to future action contexts. In these terms, the Nigerian female hairdressers are idealised neither as mere victims of legal economic systems nor as entirely self-reliant business people who create a space where they do not belong. They are well-informed actors whose practical consciousness is perpetually occupied with socio-political environments of both constraint and opening, a perpetual interplay that makes livelihoods, and in the process is perpetually re-creating the very structures in which they labour.

3.4.1 Origins and Intellectual Development

The Structuration theory was developed by Anthony Giddens in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), as an attempt to overcome the long-standing divide in sociology between structural determinism and voluntarist accounts of human action. Giddens (1984: 25) argued that social life cannot be explained solely through the lens of overarching structures such as institutions, nor exclusively through the actions of individual agents. Instead, he brought forward the idea of the duality of structure, where structures constrain and enable human agency, and human actions reproduce and change structures at the same time. This theoretical innovation provides a way of analysing how individuals navigate contexts of constraint without portraying them as passive victims, while also avoiding an overemphasis on agency that ignores structural power. It has since been widely applied in studies of migration, informality, and gender, particularly to examine how people adapt to hostile or exclusionary environments through everyday practices.

3.4.2 Key Concepts

The Structuration theory rests on several interrelated concepts:

Duality of structure: structures are both the medium and the outcome of social practices. They provide the rules and resources that guide action, but are also continuously reproduced or reshaped by action.

Rules and resources: social life is governed by implicit and explicit rules, as well as by access to material and symbolic resources, which actors draw upon in everyday practices.

Agency: actors are knowledgeable and capable of reflecting on their actions, though their choices are always made within structural conditions that limit possibilities.

Time-space distancing: Structures exist over time and space, re-creating practices that are not directly related to immediate contexts but are re-created in action by the local. These ideas taken together offer us a stratified approach to the relation between individual action and larger power structures.

3.4.3 Application in Migration Studies

The Structuration theory has been applied in migration research to describe how migrants can deal with constraining environments by using habitual strategies. As an example, Bakewell (2010:1692) used the framework to demonstrate how migrants in Africa negotiate the border limitations and bureaucracies, both adjusting to and transforming the institutional practices. Likewise, Structuration theory was applied to the study of agency among Zimbabwean women traders in South Africa, which have to exert control over agency through social networks and adaptive strategies in order to resist structural exclusion (Mutopo, 2020:122). Building on these observations, Mhandu (2025:3) uses ST to explain how the undocumented migrant women of Zimbabwe in Durban in the COVID-19 pandemic exercise their agency in terms of their flexible working practices, spatial repositioning, and informal solidarities that defy state negligence. Such analyses prove that migrant livelihoods can neither be reduced to structural oppression nor to individual entrepreneurship. Rather, they are defined by agency-constraint negotiations.

3.4.4 Structuration and Informal Economies

The concept of structuration is especially handy in the analysis of the informal economies, in which rules can be dynamic, disputed, and selectively implemented. The Nigerian female hairdressers in the Durban Pixley ka Seme Street work in an area where formal rules often come to conflict with the informal practices. There are formal regulations against unlicensed businesses, but informal regulations that are the result of negotiation with landlords, street associations, and police form a parallel order that regulates the salon operation. Using the Structuration theory, it is possible to observe how these women are neither merely victims of structural exclusion nor fully independent entrepreneurs. Rather, their day-to-day negotiating practices with police, settling informal rents, or working alongside other hairdressers reproduce the informality of the urban economy and re-define the micro-rules on which it depends.

3.4.5 Rules, Resources, and Agency

In the case of the Nigerian women hairdressers, the resources are not equally distributed. Legal barriers and economic marginality limit the resource allocation, including access to capital or physical salon space. Social networks and symbolic capital mediate over resources

of authority like the power to command respect or influence. In controlling these minimal resources to develop survival tactics, like diversification of services, alliances, or mobilisation of kin, agency is created in the use of such resources by women. As Mhandu (2020:119) illustrates, by negotiating the informal conditions governing salon space, undocumented Zimbabwean hairdressers in Durban use agency to create a set of practices of solidarity and mutual support that help them to survive in precarity. These results connect to the lives of Nigerian women, indicating the mechanisms of structuration at a place where the formal structure is interacting with the informal structure to define the survival.

3.4.6 Critiques and Refinements

The structuration theory has been criticised as being too abstract and impractical to be empirically operationalised (Archer, 1995:45). It is claimed that it also downplayed deeply rooted inequalities, including racism, xenophobia, and patriarchy, because it placed excessive emphasis on reproduction of rules as opposed to their historical and materialization. Still others observe that it is dangerous in romanticizing the idea of agency by overestimating the power of migrants to redefine hostile environments. In order to overcome these weaknesses, researchers tend to integrate structuration with other theories, including intersectionality and capital theory. By triangulating this gives a more grounded analysis: intersectionality points to common axes of oppression, capital theory points to the mobilisations and boundaries of resources and the structuration places these in their place within the recursive relationship between agency and structure.

3.4.7 Relevance to the Present Study

In this study, the Structuration theory provides important perspectives of how the Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers in Durban confront and adapt to structural constraints at the same time. The duality of structure is manifested in their daily activities like trust building with their clients, collaboration with other migrants, or bargaining with the authorities. These women reproduce the informality of the Durban economy besides redefining its lines with resistance tactics. Using Structuration theory in combination with intersectionality and capital theory, this paper does not make migrant women victims of xenophobia, or heroic entrepreneurs. Rather, it embodies the complicated relationship

between constraint and innovation, showing how the agency is never external and is fabricated and influenced by larger systems of power.

3.5 INTEGRATIVE USE OF THEORIES

3.5.1 The Case for Theoretical Triangulation

The experiences of Nigerian economic migrant hairdressing women working in the informal sector in Durban are complicated and multifaceted, subject to mutual oppressions, limited resources, and daily structure and agency negotiations. There is no single theory that is adequate to explain this complexity. Intersectionality emphasises the exposing of overlapping sets of oppression; capital theory emphasizes the part that resources, networks, and symbolic power play in this approach and Structuration theory clarifies how women keep negotiating and reproducing structures through their practice. Combined, these theories give what could be termed as theoretical triangulation: an interdimensional prism that shows both the macro conditions and micro-practices of resilience. This combination will make sure that the analysis will not be reductionist and it will provide us with a textured description of the livelihoods of migrant women.

3.5.2 Convergence of Theoretical Perspectives:

The three frameworks complement one another in several important ways:

Intersectionality and capital theory: Intersectionality identifies how gender, nationality, and legal status intersect to create disadvantages, while capital theory explains how women respond by mobilising and converting various forms of capital. For example, the intersection of being female, Nigerian, and undocumented restricts access to regulatory capital, but women compensate by relying on social and cultural capital within Nigerian networks. Intersectionality and Structuration theory: Intersectionality highlights structural inequalities, but on its own it risks portraying women as passive victims of compounded oppressions. Structuration theory counters this by emphasising agency and the ways women act within and against these structures. Together, they capture both oppression and resilience, ensuring neither is overstated. Capital Theory and Structuration theory: Capital theory details the

resources available to women, but structuration explains how these resources are mobilised in practice. For instance, symbolic capital (reputation) has value only when enacted in everyday practices of trust-building with clients, which Structuration theory situates within the duality of structure.

3.5.3 Integrating for Contextual Relevance

Durban's Pixley ka Seme Street provides a particularly illustrative site for this integration. Intersectionality explains why Nigerian female economic migrants face compounded marginality in this space, capital theory identifies the resources they mobilise to survive in a hyper-competitive environment, and Structuration theory captures the day-to-day negotiations whether with clients, landlords, or police that reproduce or challenge the rules governing the street. By combining the three theories, this study positions Pixley ka Seme not merely as a site of oppression but also as a hub of adaptive capacity, where structure, capital, and identity intersect in visible ways.

3.5.4 Addressing Theories' Limitations

Each theory has limitations when applied alone. Intersectionality has been critiqued for vagueness and overextension; capital theory for underplaying structural violence; and ST for abstraction and insufficient attention to entrenched inequalities. This study has addressed these weaknesses by including them: Intersectionality offers the structural richness which structuration sometimes lacks and capital theory offers resource-based illustrated which intersectionality alone cannot offer and which structuration recovers to frameworks which would otherwise be over-reliant on structural determinism. This integrative theory therefore generates a more harmonious analysis, a constraint and possibility, a state of oppression and resilience, scarcity and creativity.

3.5.5 Positioning Within the Literature

This integration of theory is not entirely new but is not fully developed in the African migration literature. Research works on Zimbabwean traders, like Mutopo (2020), use capital theory, whereas Ojong (2020) uses intersectionality to describe the experiences of Nigerian women in South Africa. In his study, Mhandu (2020) applies Structuration theory to examine the case of undocumented Zimbabwean hairdressers in Durban. However, little research

initiates a discussion about these frameworks. In so doing, this dissertation bridges a much-needed gap because it provides a methodological and theoretical contribution that is both interested in Global South scholarship as well as broadening the arguments in gender and migration studies.

3.5.6 Relevance to Research Aims

The integrative framework justifies the objectives of this study:

- To examine the socio-economic challenges Nigerian female hairdressers face (intersectionality and capital theory).
- To explore the resilience strategies, they adopt (capital theory and Structuration theory).
- To situate these dynamics within the broader structure–agency interplay of Durban’s informal economy (Structuration theory supported by intersectionality).

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the conceptual foundations shaping the analysis of Nigerian female economic migrant hairdressers in Durban. Three interconnected frameworks intersectionality, capital theory, and Structuration theory provide the lens through which their socio-economic challenges and resilience strategies are examined. Intersectionality is the central anchor, revealing how gender, nationality, race, and legal status interact to produce layered vulnerability within South Africa’s xenophobic and gendered informal economy. It frames the experiences of the women in the wider discourses of urban marginalization, precarious migration and politics of belonging. Capital theory is the complement of this as it demonstrates how women mobilise economic, cultural, social, symbolic and regulatory capital to negotiate insecurity. It helps highlight the disproportionate conditions which dictate the resources they have and how far they can be transformed into sustainable livelihoods. The cultural capital of ability to survive, capital of mobility and capital of restriction are all created by cultural capital in the salons of Pixley ka Seme Street: skill, reputation, and networks.

The structuration theory provides a dynamic perspective of how women resist constraints in everyday life and at the same time define the informal economy in other ways. It emphasises

that the Nigerian hairdressers are neither active nor fully autonomous but exist in the recursive relationship between structure and agency, continuously trying to respond to the stresses of policing, competition and informality. Having all three frameworks, together, creates a multi-layered perspective; intersectionality is the forefront of systemic oppression; capital theory will shed light on mobilisation of resources; Structuration theory will describe everyday negotiation. Even though these theories have been applied separately in the past by other researchers, including Ojong (2020), Mutopo (2020), and Mhandu (2020), not many have blended them. This paper thus provides a more analytical framework to the understanding of livelihoods among migrant women in the Global South. This synthesised framework has now informed the methodological design of this study. Intersectionality guides sampling and selection of participants, capital theory guides the analysis of resource mobilisation and Structuration theory justifies analysis of daily practices in the inner city of Durban. This way, the chapter forms a logical ground in which the lived realities that will be explained later in the empirical chapters are formed.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter establishes the research methodology that informed the research on the intersectional socio-economic issues and resilience practices of Nigerian female economic migrants employed in the informal hairdressing business in Durban. Its methodology is well-grounded in the feminist migration scholarship and intersectionality theory that jointly highlight the necessity of placing women lived experiences at the centre of the context that depends on gender, migrant status, and informality. The qualitative and exploratory research design is a response to the relative lack of empirical research on informal labour among migrant women in South Africa, and, on the other hand, an appropriate framework to get a better understanding and the context-specific analysis.

The chapter starts with a description of the research design and the research paradigm, then passes to the study population and the research site of Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street. Sampling methods are then described and the data collection procedure is discussed in great detail with the difficulties that will be faced and measures used to overcome them. The next focus is on the data analysis process where thematic analysis was used to make sense of the narratives concerning the research objectives and hypotheses. The chapter ends by focusing on ethical issues and actions that can be taken to allow trustworthiness, which entails credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in this study is qualitative and exploratory, which is specifically appropriate when the researcher aims to get a deep insight into social phenomena as perceived by participants instead of testing a specific hypothesis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Silverman, 2020). This design enables the researcher to investigate meanings, experiences, and processes in the natural settings and thus is the most suitable to study the lived realities of Nigerian female economic migrants in the informal hairdressing industry of Durban. Qualitative exploratory designs are flexible and open-ended, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), which allows deep and contextualised knowledge of the voices of

participants and social environments. Likewise, Silverman (2020) points out that this type of design is concerned with interpretive cognition of how individuals create meaning in their lives instead of numerical generalisation. Qualitative research especially fits the task of studying the experiences of economic migrants among the Nigerian women since it tries to interpret the phenomena through the eyes of the participants, focusing on the depth of the meaning more than the breadth of the measurements (Creswell and Poth, 2021).

Qualitative designs do not have the same emphasis on statistical generalisation as quantitative designs do; they place greater emphasis on thick description and contextual interpretation, which are central to feminist and migration studies. The approach adopted was particularly exploratory because very little research has been done on migrant women in the informal hairdressing industry in Durban. The exploratory designs are suggested when the phenomenon being studied has been poorly documented or theorised because they enable the researcher to draw new insights and form themes that can be later used in more comprehensive research (Marshall & Rossman, 2022). This research gave the exploratory lens the flexibility to reveal the intricacies of the intersection between gender, nationality, and migrant status in forming economic strategies that women adopt, yet maintaining the study was based on lived experiences of the participants. The design will be also a feminist dedication to presume the voices of women whose experiences are frequently sidelined in migration and labour studies. The study has attempted to reduce hierarchical researcher-participant relationships through methods that focus on dialogue and relationality and also identify the participants as co-constructors of knowledge (Bhana et al., 2023). By doing so, the design allowed the participants to express their socio-economic difficulties, as well as their resilience strategies, which stood against the narrative of migrant women being victims only.

In addition, this design established coherence between the aims and objectives of the study and the theoretical framework. Intersectionality theory focuses on the multiple identities and Structuration theory and the capital theory of Bourdieu on the interaction between agency, structure and resources. These theoretical issues were empirically analyzed using a qualitative exploratory design that traced the ways in which Nigerian female hairdressers maneuver

through the exclusionary structures and in the process, achieve agency in their daily lives. The use of this research design was also directly used to inform the methods. Qualitative exploration was flexible such that semi-structured interviews could be utilized to elicit in-depth, first-person accounts whereas reflexive journaling enabled the researcher to record contextual information and her own positionality. Combined, these approaches made the design both methodologically rigorous and morally sensitive and attentive to the conditions of migrant women within the informal economy of Durban.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The present study is located within an interpretivist paradigm, as it places more emphasis on interpreting social reality in terms of the meanings that people attach to their experiences. Interpretivism is also interested in the richness and depth of lived realities, whereas positivist approaches are focused on generalisable laws, and human behaviour that cannot be decontextualized, specifically, the identities and relationships in which it is practiced (Creswell & Poth, 2021). This is especially suitable in the context of feminist migration studies, in which subjectivity, voice, and intersectionality are the most important aspects. To the case of the Nigerian female economic migrants in the informal sector of hairdressing in Durban, it is not only the economic conditions that define their experience, but also the coinciding identities of gender, nationality, and migrant status. An interpretivist study will enable the researcher to reflect these complexities by not forcing preconceived ideas onto the participants, but instead by giving them the chance to narrate themselves. It also enables sensitisation to power relation in such a way that the narratives of discrimination, resilience, and survival strategies by women are framed by their overall socio-political context (Bhana et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, the paradigm is consistent with theoretical frameworks which underlie this research. Intersectionality theory requires consideration of overlapping social identities and systems of power whereas Structuration theory focuses on interactions between agency and structure. Both views echo the interpretivism worry of description of lived realities in its social contexts. With this paradigm, the study will be placed to produce findings that are not only based on the experiences of the participants but also analytically linked to the broader

discussions on migration, gender, and informality. This paradigm directly influenced the methodological decisions taken in the study especially the use of semi-structured interviews as the main source of data collection. Interpretivism presumes that reality is constructed by both the researcher and the participant, so, interviews offered a chance to exchange ideas and have the participants shape their own experiences, whereas the researcher could inquire about the details and nuances (Marshall & Rossman, 2022). The approach also embodied the feminist interest in listening to the women, acknowledging them as authorities of their experiences, and contextualising their experiences in larger trends of structural inequality.

4.4 RESEARCH POPULATION AND CONTEXT

The study population is made up of Nigerian women who have migrated to South Africa as economic migrants in Nigeria and own or share informal hair salons located on Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street in central Durban. This choice of population is partly due to the interest of the study in the intersection of migration, gender, and informality. The Nigerian women hairdressers hold a special place in the inner city of Durban: they can be seen as participants of the urban economy, but not in the policy frameworks and statistical registers. Such invisibility is facilitated by limiting migration policies, problematic documentation, and marginalisation of informal labour in the South Africa economic planning (Tati, 2022; Landau & Freemantle, 2023).

4.4.1 Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street as an Economic Hub

One of the most significant commercial routes in the Durban is Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, which was originally West Street. It is a strategic transport corridor in the inner city, and because it is strategically placed, it has major taxi ranks, bus stops, and railway routes, enabling it to be very accessible to traders as well as customers (Zulu & Sibanda, 2022). The connectivity of the street allows the everyday movement of people and this allows informal businesses to flourish as they are able to tap the daily commuters and city workers. Public transportation is especially significant to the migrant women in the business since many depend on their customers beyond the immediate. Neighbourhood (Moyo & Kihato, 2021). This street has an economic significance that cannot be overestimated. It maintains a high population of informal traders and service providers such as food stalls, clothing stalls, and

hair salons. Informal companies in this corridor make significant contributions to job creation, reduction of poverty, and consumer needs, although they are not included in the formal policies (Skinner and Haysom, 2022). Hair salons, specifically, are both market and cultural places where African women not only make a living but also maintain cultural identities due to hair styling (Nkosi & Muthuki, 2021).

4.4.2 Migrant Women in Durban's Informal Economy

Although the research targets a particular population group of Nigerian women, one must acknowledge that the Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street is also home to a substantial number of African female economic migrants. The women of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia run their own small-scale businesses in the region, which are frequently characterized by the same circumstance of precarity and exclusion. These women do anything, including hairstyling and tailoring, down to food vending and informal retail, which adds up to the informal economy of Durban (Bhana et al., 2023). The street therefore serves both as a pan-African economic space through cooperation and competition of migrant entrepreneurs. The salons of Nigerian women fall in this larger ecosystem, thus revealing the intersectional nature of their plight and their tactics.

4.4.3 Salon Dynamics and Working Conditions

Salons on Pixley Ka Isaka Seme tend to be small, with one or two rooms being rented in commercial establishments or having several operators. Hours of operation are long and, in most cases, they extend deep into the evening to maximise revenue on the varied clientele. The air is alive, a sign of the concentration of economic life, but overcrowding, police inspections, and even police raids characterize the environment. Women who work in these spaces experience gendered vulnerabilities like harassment, xenophobic aggression, and are always at risk of losing their livelihoods due to by-law enforcement (Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera, 2022). However, it is these same spaces where women get essential chances to exercise agency, form networks, and keep their families on the ground and transnational via remittances.

4.4.4 Invisibility in Data Invisibility in Data and Policy

The lack of precise and in-depth statistic data on migrant women in Durban is one of the main problems in the research of this population. The migration governance system in South Africa does not often differentiate migrant economic activity based on gender or occupation, and undocumented women are particularly not represented in the statistical data (Peberdy, 2020; Landau and Freemantle, 2023). Besides presenting researchers with a methodological obstacle, this invisibility is also a political problem because it strengthens the marginalisation of women in policy discussions and deprives them of protection afforded to formal workers (ILO, 2020; WIEGO, 2020; Pearson, 2021; Oxfam South Africa, 2023; Mkhize, 2024). The study tackles these silences by focusing on the lived experiences of women who would otherwise be in the record by selecting this population and site.

4.5 Justification of Context JUSTIFICATION OF CONTEXT

The selection of Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street to conduct research was not random. It is a depiction of the dynamics within the inner city of Durban where migration, informality and gender collide most explicitly. The street is at once a place of opportunity with visibility and access to customers as well as livelihood income and a place of risk with women being subjected to exclusionary governance, exploitation and social animosity. By centering on realities of Nigerian female economic migrant in this context, the study does not only contribute to literature on resilience strategies of female migrants, but it also contextualizes the migrants in greater debate about the role of African migrant women in urban economies. Figure 4.1, Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street Economic Ecosystem, below, reflects the structural interaction and interdependent relationship characteristic of the study site, which explains its choice as the main site in conducting the research. Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, Durban city centre, is a dense and interconnected micro-economy, which includes transport junctions, informal traders, migrant-operated salons, and South African owned shops in a disputed urban space. The figure relays the position of the hair salons of Nigerian and other African migrant women within this ecosystem, intertwining with the pedestrian flows, street vending and regulatory control including police raids and by-law enforcement.

Pixley Ka Isaka Seme Street Economic Ecosystem



Figure 4.1 Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street Economic Ecosystem

The choice of this site was predetermined by the fact that it reflects the cross-section of informality, gender and migration, which is why it represents a rich background to study how migrant women negotiate structural limitations and make livelihoods in a precarious urban economy. Its accessibility to the major transport pathways is a significant appeal to customer traffic, but it also subjects migrant workers to the regular control of the municipality and xenophobic policing. The interrelationship of the economic actors and institutions, as depicted in the Figure below, reflects a dynamic, yet wavering system where power, mobility and survival are constantly negotiated. It is this complexity, which makes Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street a sociologically important site through which the everyday resilience mechanisms of the Nigerian female economic migrants themselves in the context of the wider informal economy of Durban can be understood (Rugunanan, 2017; Gillespie et al., 2022; Mutopo, 2020).

4.6 Sampling

The sampling strategy used in the study consisted of non-probability purposive, which was suitable due to its qualitative orientation and the emphasis on depth instead of statistical generalisation (Etikan and Bala, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2018). Unlike quantitative studies, which rely on probability sampling to achieve

representativeness and permit generalisation to larger populations, qualitative research prioritises the selection of information-rich cases that can illuminate the phenomenon under investigation.

Purposive sampling was selected because it allowed the researcher to identify women who directly met the study's inclusion criteria: (i) Nigerian citizenship, (ii) self-identification as female, (iii) ownership or co-ownership of a salon on Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, and (iv) residence in South Africa for at least one year. These criteria ensured alignment between the study population and the research objectives, which focus on intersectional socio-economic challenges and resilience strategies of migrant women entrepreneurs. Snowball sampling was used alongside purposive recruitment to draw on the trust networks within the migrant community (Mukumbang, 2024; Chawhanda, 2024; Mbombo-Dweba et al., 2022). As a non-probability technique in which existing participants refer others, snowball sampling is widely used to access hidden or hard-to-reach groups that cannot be identified through formal databases (Mukumbang, 2024). This was suitable to the study as the Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban are socially spread and undocumented making it impractical and ethically questionable to use conventional sampling.

Peer referral facilitated the access to women who might have evaded official recruitment because of mistrust or fear of being exposed or even because of legal vulnerability. It also enhanced the quality of data because the rapport was established and social desirability bias was limited because the introductions were conducted via trusted members of the community (Chawhanda, 2024). In Southern Africa, studies have confirmed the approach to be successful in- migrant research where informal livelihoods and lack of registries make it difficult to sample the populations (Mbombo-Dweba et al., 2022; Mukumbang, 2024). This method ensured confidentiality and safety of the participants, especially considering the constant fears of deportation or harassment (Peberdy, 2020; Landau and Freemantle, 2023). Since migrant women in Nigeria tend to engage with one another in closely knit business and social networks in the inner city, referrals served an effective way of expanding the sample as well as enhancing the credibility of the researcher. Ten participants became the final sample, which is methodologically sufficient in qualitative research when saturation is rather

homogenous groups is frequently achieved in 12-24 interviews (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020). Data saturation was reached during the data collection process, as no new themes, patterns, or significant insights were emerging from subsequent interviews. This indicated that the sample size was sufficient to capture the depth and complexity of participants' experiences within the scope of this qualitative study.

The participants were diverse in terms of age (25-45), documentation, family roles, business setups, and ensured adequate diversity to be able to gather a rich qualitative dataset, this was made with a clear understanding of inclusion. And exclusion criteria used in data collection. Only women 25-45 years old who self-identified as Nigerian and had migrated to South Africa due to economic reasons and were currently employed in the informal hairdressing sector in Durban were included to capture aspects of how legal status was affecting livelihood experiences and resource access in the informal economy. Women who were not within the mentioned age bracket, men or individuals in unrelated informal professions were not considered, since they would be beyond the intersectional and gendered focus of the study. These criteria made sure that the sample was homogenous but varied enough to provide a rich comparative analysis between documentation status, ownership, and the responsibilities of the family, as illustrated in the table below. The purpose of this thorough process of selection was the intention of the study to investigate the socio-economic problems and resilience mechanisms of Nigerian women who were operating within the informal hairdressing economy of Durban (Gillespie et al., 2022; Zinatsa & Saurombe, 2022).

Table 4.2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Documentation Status	Years in SA	Family Role	Salon Ownership
Ada	28	Undocumented	3	Single mother, sole provider	Chair renter

Ngozi	35	Temporary permit	7	Married, primary breadwinner	Co-owner
Ifeoma	42	Asylum seeker	11	Married, joint provider	Owner
Chika	30	Undocumented	5	Single mother	Chair renter
Amara	25	Temporary permit	2	Supporting family in Nigeria	Chair renter
Oluchi	38	Asylum seeker (pending)	9	Married, remittance sender	Co-owner
Uche	44	Permanent resident (spousal permit)	12	Married	Owner
Kemi	33	Undocumented	4	Single mother	Chair renter
Sade	29	Temporary permit	6	Supporting extended family	Chair renter
Ezinne	41	Asylum seeker	8	Single, supporting dependents in Nigeria	Owner

This heterogeneity in the sample enhanced the ability of the study to represent the different textures of the experiences of migrant women and still manage to keep the focus on a coherent group of women who work within the same social and economic landscape. Positionality of

the researcher also influenced the recruitment process. The community was easily identified by visiting salons on Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, but reflexive actions like journaling and peer debriefing were utilized to avoid bias or recruitment selectivity. Finally, the purposive and snowball sampling approach combined was methodologically correct and ethically required within a scenario where a large portion of participants are undocumented, marginalised, and hesitant to participate in a formal process. These trust-building, enabling safe participation, and data-rich, relevant information strategies were in line with the study objectives.

4.7.DATA COLLECTION

The method used to collect data was semi-structured interviews; a method that is quite suited to the interpretivist paradigm as well as feminist research ethics. Their existence is supported by the fact that assaults like these have been performed globally. The validity of their existence is in the fact that such attacks have been executed worldwide. The semi-structured interviews provided participants with a chance to recount their lived experiences using their own words and the researcher to inquire on the concerns regarding intersectional socio-economic problems and resilience measures. This approach has been selected as it privileges the voice of participants, recognizes the subjective meaning-making, and allows adaptable probing of the issues that arise naturally in the conversation.

The University of Mpumalanga Research Ethics Committee gave ethical clearance and informed the participants through a Participant Information Sheet and an Informed Consent Form. The consent procedure was made in plain English and in some instances in Nigerian Pidgin to match different levels of literacy and language variety. Informing the participants about the aims, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study, the participants were guaranteed the right to withdraw and not face consequences at any time. All participants were given pseudonyms, and identifying information, including names of salons and their specific location, was erased or coded. All study records and data were kept in coded files only available to the researcher and supervisors, which is appropriate according to the existing ethical standards (Marshall & Rossman, 2022; Bhana et al., 2023; Mukumbang, 2024; Kaguongo & Mudege, 2023).

Ten Nigerian female salon owners and co-owners along the Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street were interviewed and interviews were carried out between 30-60 minutes as per the availability. Even though the fieldwork was planned to last two weeks, it was later prolonged to three weeks because the participants worked long hours, clients interrupted them, and the noise in the environment. Following the ethics of care in feminism, two participants demanded to be interviewed by the presence of a friend, which was made possible. The interviews and informal talks were carried out in both English and Nigerian Pidgin. Applying Nigerian Pidgin, which is a widely spread lingua franca, helped create a level of trust and understanding, as well as cultural recognition, and allowed to discuss potentially sensitive issues of documentation status and discrimination more freely. The dual language strategy minimized confusion, boosted trust, and facilitated a more inclusive interviewing experience whereby the individuals were able to discuss their experiences in a way that they felt secure and genuine (Uroko, Obiorah & Nnadi, 2021; Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2023).

The positionality of the researcher who is also familiar with the salon setting was beneficial in forming a rapport, building trust, and gaining access to the participants. This first-hand knowledge boosted transparency in interviews and offered a chance to get a better sense of the contexts in which participants were living. Nonetheless, that close distance also brought about the possibility of bias especially when explaining the narratives of the participants based on prior assumptions or shared cultural views. To overcome this, the researcher kept a detailed reflexive journal as the fieldwork continued and wrote about interactions on a daily basis, emotional reactions and changing interpretations. Reflexivity was a perpetual act of self-criticism, which allowed the researcher to recognize the potential impact of personal background, values and relationship on the data. This continuous critical reflection served the purpose of balancing the insider knowledge with the analytical distance, which enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the results (Berger, 2015; England, 2020; Mukumbang, 2024).

Each interview was recorded by audio with the consent of the participants and detailed field notes were maintained to record non-verbal cues, environment and to note reflections of the

researcher. The tapes were verbatim transcribed in order to capture the originality of the voice of the participants and where interviews were carried out in part in the Nigerian Pidgin language, the translations into English were done with a lot of care in order to retain the meaning of words and depth. All the digital files to sustain data integrity and participant confidentiality were kept on encrypted and password-secured devices, and anonymised backup copies were put in secure external drives that could be accessed by the researcher only. In all written outputs, the process of identifying information was eliminated, and pseudonyms were employed. These protocols helped to guarantee compliance with the ethical principles of a qualitative study that involve the principles of confidentiality, data security, and the responsible use of sensitive data (BERA, 2022; Kaguongo & Mudege, 2023; Mukumbang, 2024).

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was utilized as the major method of the qualitative data analysis of the interviews with the women hairdressers along Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street in Nigeria. Thematic analysis is especially appropriate to interpretivist and feminist studies since it allows one to discover patterned meanings of meaning in the narratives of the participants and at the same time consider the uniqueness of individual voices (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This flexibility guided it in being suitable in capturing the intersectional socio-economic challenges and resilience approaches of migrant women whose experiences may be complex and multi-layered. The method adopted the six-stage paradigm that is well known and identified in Figure 4.3, presented by Braun and Clarke (2006; updated 2021).

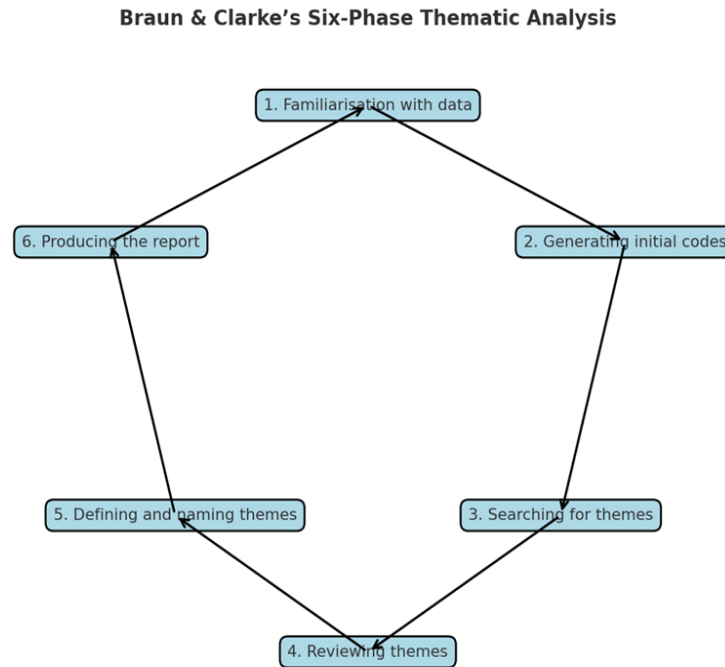


Figure 4.3 Braun & Clarke's Six-Phase Analysis (Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021) six stages were followed in thematic analysis, including familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, naming, and final synthesis. Individual phases were completed in an orderly manner to ensure rigour, transparency and analytical traceability. Data management was facilitated by NVivo (version 14), which was used to systematise transcripts, field notes and memos into logical categories that made coding and refining them possible. Its query and visualisation tools helped to find cross-cutting patterns, which reinforced the reliability and integrity of the new themes (Nowell et al., 2017; Zamawe, 2015; Woods, Paulus and Atkins, 2021). The software made organisation and transparency more efficient but interpretation was based on analytical judgement of the researcher. It was reflexive practice all through. The researcher had to keep on analyzing himself since he was already acquainted with some of his subjects and the general atmosphere in a salon setting. Reflexive journal was an account of shifting interpretations, affect, methodological decisions and potential biasness.

This enabled managing the dual nature of insider researcher to make familiarity an entry point without the loss of analytical distance (Berger, 2015; England, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017).

Note taking at the end of interviews and coding generated an audit trail which strengthened credibility and confirmability. On the whole, the thematic analysis showed both the convergent and divergent trends of how gender, migrant status, and informality influenced the experiences of women in the context of exclusion, adaptation, and resiliency. The application of the framework by Braun and Clarke, the organisation supported by NVivo, and the maintenance of the reflexive activity made the methodological rigour and ethical sensitivity possible, especially in an environment characterised by the idea of vulnerability and unequal power relations (Moralli, 2023; De Genova, 2020). This combined method ensured the genuineness of the accounts of the participants but placed them within longer discussions of gender informality, resilience, and South-South migration.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study has been ethically oriented based on the fact that it dealt with female economic migrants in Nigeria, with most of them holding vulnerable jobs that are on the basis of precarious documentation and unofficial jobs. Such research requires not only adherence to procedural guidelines but also ethical research that is a feminist effort to conduct research with respect, dignity, and care to the participants (Peoples, 2020; Small & Calarco, 2022).

Ethical approval from the University of Mpumalanga Research Ethics Committee was sought before the start of the fieldwork, and it was granted that the research qualified as a study with human subjects and that it lived up to institutional and national standards of a research study. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and an Informed Consent Form, which made the purpose, procedures, risks and the rights of the participants clear. These documents were discussed verbally in plain English and where the need arose translated into Nigerian Pidgin so as to make them accessible and comprehensible to the participants, particularly those who have different levels of literacy.

The concept of consent was understood as a participatory process, which was not one agreement but a continuous process that was signed. This method was a sign of a feminist ethical approach where respect, agency, and care were central to the relationships between the researcher and the participant (Peoples, 2020; Small and Calarco, 2022). During the

fieldwork, the participants were informed about their voluntary involvement in the fieldwork on a regular basis and about their right to discontinue or refuse to respond to particular questions without any negative impact. This is a dynamic consent approach that helped build mutual trust, safeguard the autonomy of participants, and maintain ethical integrity, especially in an environment that may result in fear of exposure or deportation to facilitate disclosure (Aguinis, 2025; Okoko et al., 2023).

Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly observed in the research process. All personal identifiers (names, names of salons and places where people worked) were removed or replaced by the pseudonyms in transcripts and notes. The secure storage of information ensured secrecy as well: the transcripts and field notes were copied and stored in encrypted and passworded devices that could only be accessed by the researcher and the academic supervisor. The actions were particularly applicable in the context of the informal economy of Durban whereby these actors can be subjected to the police raids or the immigration enforcement (Okoko et al., 2023).

The chances of injury were also considered and the emotional and practical susceptibility of migrant women that participated in this research was known. Mental risks were also expected since talking about xenophobia, harassment, or economic instability might trigger the unpleasant memories. Also, practical risks including fear of deportation or enforcing local by-laws were considered due to the precarious legal and work situation of participants. To address them, the trauma-informed interviewing strategy was selected as an ethically sound approach that places the safety of participants, their emotional control, and empowerment in the first place (Vasudevan et al., 2022). This method involved flexible interviewing procedures like permitting participants to pause or skip or stop questions, holding interviews in safe and familiar environments (typically inside or close to their salons) and being relaxed and non-judgmental in the entire approach. The design reduced the chances of retraumatisation and encouraged feelings of control and wellbeing among the participants (Peoples, 2020).

Additionally, the researcher was aware that vulnerability in research does not stay the same (Liamputtong, 2022; Guillemin & Gillam, 2020), so he was attentive to the non-verbal signs of discomfort and reminded participants of their right to withdraw throughout the study. These actions are indicative of a feminist ethics of care framework in that considers participants not as a source of data but as partners whose dignity and safety inform the course of the research (Small & Calarco, 2022). This cautious loyalty towards empathy as well as ethical rigour made the research stronger in terms of moral and methodological probity. The pre-existing relationships that the researcher had with some of the participants that were caused by previous interactions were another significant ethical issue that the researcher needed to consider as it was pre-established. This insider status provided some privileges, including superior trust, intercultural knowledge and the comfortable access to all those individuals who may otherwise be reluctant to participate in formal research contexts. Nevertheless, it also brought the risk of the bias, over-identification, and broken researcher-participant boundaries, which may affect the objectivity of analysis (Berger, 2022; Sultana, 2021). To overcome these issues, the researcher embraced a reflexive and transparent research approach in the fieldwork process. The reflexive journal was kept as a detailed journal that captured the personal reflections, emotional reactions, and changed meanings upon completion of each interview. This habit allowed practicing sustained self-examination of positional power and assumptions to establish a balance between empathy and critical distance (England, 2020).

Besides this, peer debriefing sessions with academic mentors were performed in order to offer outside views and provoke possible biases, enhancing the validity of interpretations. The reflexive approach and professional boundaries allowed the researcher to capitalize on the benefits of insider knowledge like rapport and contextual understanding and reduce its ethical and interpretive risks. This deliberate balancing practice corresponds to the ethics of feminist and decolonial research, which provides reflexivity, accountability, and respectful relationships in research on marginalised populations (Peoples, 2020; Small & Calarco, 2022).

4.10. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The concept of trustworthiness is core to qualitative research, especially feminist migration studies, where the goals include reflecting marginalised women realities of living with preciseness, frankness, and disposition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Shenton, 2020; Peoples, 2020; Small & Calarco, 2022). Trustworthiness shows that results are based on the views of participants and not researcher bias, and is achieved by using four criteria which are interrelated, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is an issue of trust in the truths of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Through further interaction, it was improved by triangulation of interviews, observations, field notes and member checking to confirm the initial interpretations. Reflexive journaling also minimized interpretive bias since it based analysis on the narratives of participants (Nowell et al., 2017).

Transferability is the extent to which results could be relevant to other related situations, which is not determined by the statistical generalisability but by the thick description of the migration backgrounds, salon settings, and employment conditions of the participants (Shenton, 2020). It is this contextual detail that enables the readers to establish relevancy with similar populations. Dependability is associated with the stability and uniformity of the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To achieve transparency and reproducibility, this study retained a comprehensive audit trail which documented the methodological decisions, coding process and analytical memos. Confirmability guarantees that the results are influenced by people, but not by the researcher assumptions (Nowell et al., 2017). The use of continuous reflexive practice also helped the researcher to overcome the insider-outsider position and avoid excessive identification with participants, enhancing interpretive neutrality (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Collectively, these measures strengthened the methodological soundness and ethical conduct to the effect of making sure that the stories of Nigerian migrant women were attributed with a degree of fidelity and that they were analysed with high precision and accuracy. The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are systematically applied based on feminist qualitative standards of care, reflexivity, and accountability, and reinforce the use of the study in the research on migration, gender, and informal economy (Peoples, 2020; Small & Calarco, 2022).

4.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the methodological framework, which forms the basis of the research, of the qualitative, feminist and decolonial approaches applied to understand the lived experience of Nigerian female economic migrants who work in the informal sector of the hairdressing industry in Durban. The research in question presupposes the voices of women whose stories are usually neglected in the discussion of migration and urban policy; therefore, the foregrounding of the study is that it is grounded in semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling strategy. The snowball sampling also helped access the networks of migrants and economic activity that are under-documented, especially on informal labour and feminised urban spaces. Of utmost importance is the fact that the methodological application taken here is not merely a technical process but a political and moral position. This research contributes to a decolonial feminist epistemology that challenges Eurocentric presumptions, practices research extractivism, and also makes participants co-producers of knowledge and not sources of data. This intersection of theory and practice was what allowed exploring power, precarity, and resilience as lived phenomena, but not categories.

After establishing the methodological background, the dissertation is now focused on the analytical core. Chapter 5 gives the main empirical results, extracting six unique themes based on the stories of interviews. The themes discuss the way in which Nigerian migrant women manoeuvre through militarised regimes of belonging, act legitimately in exclusionary urban spaces, mobilise Afropolitan aesthetics as resistance, maintain transnational chains of care and challenge the limits of the urban citizen. In these views, the chapter not only explains data, but recreates informality, migration, and gender in the post-apartheid city.

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a comprehensive interpretation of findings after conducting interviews on ten Nigerian female economic migrants in the informal hairdressing industry in Durban. Through a sequence of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021), the discussion follows the negotiation of insecure legal status, gendered marginalisation, restricted income, and repeated xenophobic hostility by these women in the course of negotiation. Their testimonies are the social fabric of informal salon work, in which economic involvement cannot be separated and is combined with vulnerability, cultural expression, and disputed belonging.

This chapter addresses the study's research objectives by examining how the lived experiences of Nigerian female economic migrants reflect their socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, and the structural conditions shaping their participation in the informal hairdressing sector.

Three theoretical lenses are used in the analysis. Gender, nationality, race, and documentation status are interlocking effects that are discussed in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2019). The theory of structuralisation (Giddens, 1984) can be utilized to understand the way women exercise agency but act within restricting conditions. The capital theory proposed by Bourdieu (1986) helps to explore the mobilisation of cultural, social and symbolic resources in situations where formal economic and legal capital is scarce. Collectively, these lenses aid in shedding light on the way migrant women operate against and through various structural constraints. When reporting the narratives of participants, pseudonyms are applied to maintain confidentiality. The interpretation that was formulated in this chapter directly contributes to the aims of the study:

- to explore the lived experiences and socio-economic challenges encountered within the informal hair sector;
- to analyse the resilience strategies women, deploy to mitigate structural and social constraints;
- to examine how intersecting identities shape their positioning within informal work;

- and to consider how South African migration and urban policies influence their livelihoods and spatial practices.

This chapter is organized into six themes that are interrelated. These demonstrate the sense of belonging of women under surveillance; legitimacy enactment during a time of questioning their right to work; aesthetic labour repurposing identity and resistance; care chains and precarious documentation; maternalism; spatial exclusion; and urban agency as informal citizens. These trends are revealed in a broader political context in which there is a heightened anti-migrant rhetoric. Dudula movements like Operation Dudula and March and March have transformed the routine social relations in Durban, invigorating the populist surveillance practices that put migrant women in greater danger (Landau and Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2023; Crush and Ramachandran, 2024). The legal and extra-legal power in inner cities is further smudged by informal policing by landlords, community patrols, and some metro officials. In this scenery, informal salons are not merely workplaces, but places of revenue, nurturance, beauty, and sustenance. Questions of the interviews underlie the analysis and give the voices the participants to take the lead. As reflected in their stories, they describe the emotionality of precarity, the ingenuity and community that keep economic and social life alive. Here the emphasis is interpretive, and not descriptive: quotations are examined in terms of emotion, context, and strategy, and each theme can be used to relate the testimony of an individual to larger structural processes.

These six themes are summarised in Table 5.1 below, illustrating how they directly relate to the objectives of the study. All of these themes have their contribution: some of them emphasize lived conditions of exclusion, whereas other ones demonstrate adaptive mechanisms and the impact of identity, migration policy, and informal spatial practice. The mapping enhances analytical rigor and shows consistency in the purpose of the study, interpretation of data and theoretical framework. In line with a reflexive thematic analysis approach, participant quotations are used selectively to illustrate key themes, while the primary emphasis remains on interpretive analysis and theoretical engagement with the data.

Table 5.1: Mapping Themes to Research Objectives

Theme	Linked Research Objective(s)	Objective Focus
Militarised Citizenship and Precarious Belonging	Objective 1	Explore lived experiences and socio-economic challenges
Performing Legitimacy in a Hostile City	Objective 2	Analyse resilience strategies
Afropolitan aesthetics as Urban Resistance	Objective 2	Analyse resilience strategies
Undocumented Motherhood and Transnational Care Chains	Objective 3	Examine intersecting identities shaped by gender, nationality, and migrant status
Invisible Borders: Surveillance, Xenophobia and Informal Governance	Objective 4	Consider how migration and urban policies impact livelihoods and spatial practice
Feminist Urban Citizenship: Right to Work, Move and Exist	Objectives 3 & 4	Examine intersecting identities and reflect on how migration and urban policies shape informal livelihood and spatial participation

5.2 MILITARISED CITIZENSHIP AND PRECARIOUS BELONGING

This theme draws from Interview Questions 1–4 and responds to Research Objective 1 (lived socio-economic challenges) and Research Objective 3 (intersectional shaping of migrant experience). Participants described Durban as a space of conditional belonging structured by suspicion, racialisation, and informal policing. Xenophobic mobilisation through groups such

as Operation Dudula and March & March intensified their sense of exposure. Their accounts position the city not as a neutral landscape but as a militarised social terrain where belonging is constantly negotiated. This theme addresses Objective 1 by illustrating the socio-economic challenges faced by Nigerian female economic migrants, and Objective 3 by demonstrating how intersecting identities shape experiences of precarious belonging.

5.2.1 Urban Arrival, Anti-Migrant Campaigns, and the Experience of Threat

Most women described their early months in Durban as a period of heightened vigilance, where they learned to interpret movement on the street, to anticipate raids, and to read the shifting moods of neighbours and community patrols.

As Ada recalled, arrival was not simply the start of economic participation, but an induction into scrutiny:

“When I arrived, I thought the main struggle would be papers, but it is your body that is questioned before anything else. When people greet you, they say where you are before they say your name and when they say Nigeria they change their tone as to say that you are doing something wrong. I have been taught what time of the day the road is clear and when the police in the metro clean it up, and I have been taught how to pack my things within a short time without demonstrating the fear. Dudula groups passing by would point at our door as though we were already guilty and this made me feel small even when I had not done anything. I operated with one eye on the customer, and one eye on the street, in order that I should be able to flee in case of trouble, and that is why I survived those initial months in Durban.”

5.2.2 Everyday Policing, Informal Governance, and the Border in the City

Participants spoke of a web of surveillance, which is not only the formal policing. The policing of migrant spaces is done by landlords, building caretakers, neighbours, and individual security actors. This reflects how urban governance is enacted informally through a social border that shifts in response to suspicion, rumour, and local politics.

According to Ifeoma, the city’s civic life has been overtaken by an everyday border:

“People think borders are only at the airport, but the border is here on this staircase because anyone can stop you, a police officer or just a neighbour who wants to show power.

Inspectors come with clipboards and ask for many things that have nothing to do with hair. Other days it's a man from the building who says we make the place dirty. He talks like he is the mayor. I keep my receipts, clean extra, speak gently, and smile even when I am tired. You are told that here your tone is also your permit."

5.2.3 Managing Presence and Safety: Tactics, Speech, and Selective Visibility

Participants described the need to balance visibility to attract clients and invisibility to avoid harassment as necessary in protecting themselves. They changed opening hours, aesthetics of the salon, their speech style, and even mannerism to minimise risk. These performances display the agency in constraint, as described in Structuration theory. They also show how cultural and symbolic capital are used as survival mechanisms. As Chika described, security is tactical:

"We learned not to be seen, or seen. During the morning, we clean the walk way and welcome everybody. We wear well, and we greet them in isiZulu, as it relaxes them. When the avenue is on edge we talk more quietly, get through more quickly, ferry funds out of view. These are the little things that matter. They permit the door to open tomorrow."

This narrative helps to directly answer the research objectives 1 and 3 because it demonstrates the manifestation of structural hostility in both material and emotional terms. The narratives show that it is risky to be a Black Nigerian woman with unverified documents in markets, streets, and places of work. The concept of structuration can be used to better understand the ways in which tactical routines that modify language, aesthetics, and working hours are active responses to constraint and not passive survival. Capital Theory emphasizes the transformation of presentation, multilingualism, and two-way relationships to social protection. The intersectionality is a key factor as every tactic is viewed with the complex perspective of gender, nationality, and migrant status.

5.3 PERFORMING LEGITIMACY IN A HOSTILE CITY

The theme is based on interview questions 2-4 and 5 and it meets research objectives 1, and 2. It takes over the working of migrant women towards proclaiming legitimacy in an environment where their right to be, work, or use physical space is continually challenged. Legitimacy is not merely a matter of law but it is carried out every day by aesthetics,

language, professionalism and moral identity. These performances transform into symbolic capital and cultural capital which alleviate even though not eradicate marginalisation. This theme addresses Objective 2 by highlighting resilience strategies deployed by migrant women, and Objective 1 by demonstrating how daily practices transform structural constraints into strategies for social and economic survival.

There are three sub-themes that show the enactment of legitimacy:

- i. entrepreneurial discipline
- ii. aesthetic and emotional labour
- iii. claiming moral legitimacy

Together, they show how salons are more than workplaces; they are stages on which women negotiate recognition, safety, and respect by performing what they believe the city will accept from them.

5.3.1 Entrepreneurial Discipline and Professional Presence

Participants explained how they develop a professional image to reduce the effects of discrimination and to stand out among negative stereotypes of the Nigerians. This involved cautious display, long hours of work, observable tidiness, and observable respectful contacts with the public. Such practices echo Bourdieu and the theory of Structuration of cultural capital which relies on survival strategies by being enacted repeatedly in adverse structures.

Professionalism as an active survival strategy was a calculated strategy as Ngozi (35, temporary permit holder, seven years in South Africa, co-owner) explained:

“I realised that very early, people here already have an idea of the Nigerians, and it is a negative one. To counteract that account, I opened the shop early, swept out of the door, and put on plain clothes. I smiled when clients passed whether they dismissed me. I attempted to be disciplined as I wished that neighbourhood could learn that I am serious about work. I gulp it even when I felt offended since it would only worsen things. I do not play loud music, I welcome anybody and I keep a book where I follow my bookings. That is the way I demonstrate that I am here to do business, not trouble, even where there are ones who like to see you fail.”

These narratives demonstrate how entrepreneurial discipline turns out to be a defence strategy that transforms symbolic and cultural capital into informal legitimacy. It highlights how migrant women perform professionalism not only for income but also for social protection.

5.3.2 Aesthetic and Emotional Labour as Legitimacy

Legitimacy is also produced through the emotional and aesthetic labour of hairstyling. Participants noted that skillful hair work, combined with the ability to build rapport, helped cultivate loyal clients who offered referrals, informal protection, and social acceptance.

As Amara (25, temporary permit, two years in South Africa, chair renter) explained, her skill speaks before her passport does:

“I don’t talk too much because my hands do the talking. When a client sits down, I listen to how they speak and adjust myself. I learned isiZulu greetings so people feel comfortable. When they believe in your hands, they take their sisters, friends, even children and that is when you become part of their life in a small capacity. Clients even warn me not to walk down the street when it is not safe or when the police van goes by. This is the kind of relationship that makes you live more than anything since your work is your shield.”

Such narratives explain how emotional and aesthetic competency are important kinds of cultural capital, which are traded in relation to social security and inclusion. The informal salon is an area of relationship in which intimacy becomes economic and political currency.

5.3.3 Claiming Moral Legitimacy

Participants recounted claiming moral identity to the prevailing accounts that identify Nigeria identity with crime. This was especially pronounced when discussing relations with landlords, officers, and suspicious neighbours.

Moral identity should be practiced continuously as Uche (44, permanent resident, owner) described:

“People believe that Nigerians steal or sell drugs, and even before they even know you, they have made their judgment about you. To reform that tale, I talk in a low voice, I wear plain clothes, I demonstrate that I am a mother. I tell people, 'I am here to work.' Those who believe you, do not stay; and those who do not believe you, stay. My customers represent me when

community meetings occur. They say I am not trouble. That is my survival method, not by screaming but by living in a different way from the story they tell about us.”

This sub-theme highlights the way Nigerian women carry out moral respectability in order to gain tolerance. They utilise symbolic capital including motherhood, religiosity and modesty as a response to stigma and assert a foot-hold in the informal economy.

The act of legitimacy explains how migrant women mobilize cultural, social, and symbolic capital in controlling structural exclusion. These acts are direct reactions to the mistrust that xenophobic stories and hostility on a communal level causes. The theory of structuration assists in demonstrating that these practices are agentic: women are not merely responding to oppression but they are creatively rearranging the social restrictions in order to ensure they continue to gain income and safety.

5.4 AFROPOLITAN AESTHETICS AS URBAN RESISTANCE

Interview Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, and 10 are the main sources of this theme. It is highly consistent with research objectives and 3. It is the way hairstyling is turned into livelihood and resistance practice. Women insist on visibility, identity and cultural pride in spaces that are often hostile to them through aesthetic labour. Their craft does not only generate income; it produces symbolic presence that counters erasure and xenophobic narratives. Here, aesthetic performance becomes political. The informal salon functions as a cultural studio where women re-make themselves and their clients, producing what African feminist thinkers describe as “everyday citizenship” enacted through the body. Their tools are not marches or petitions but hair, colour, braids, and care work that assert urban place-making and Afropolitan identity. This theme addresses Objective 2 by exploring adaptive strategies and Objective 3 by showing how aesthetic and cultural practices express identity and resist marginalisation.

Three sub-themes illustrate this:

- i. the salon as cultural archive
- ii. hairstyles as identity work
- iii. beauty as political communication

Together, these highlight how aesthetic labour reclaims space, builds community, and contests exclusion.

5.4.1 The Salon as Cultural Archive

Women described salons as living repositories of Nigerian and broader West African beauty traditions. These practices help them maintain continuity with their home communities while forging belonging in Durban. The salon becomes an archive where knowledge circulates: techniques, cultural stories, music, recipes, and shared memory.

As Ada (28, undocumented, three years in South Africa, single mother, chair renter) explained:

“When I braid hair, I feel like I am still home. We talk about Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja. We play our music, and we laugh in pidgin. The young girls here tell me that my braids remind them of their aunties back home. The shop is like a small Nigeria. It keeps me from feeling lost. Even when the streets are angry with foreigners, when I am inside the shop, I feel safe because I am surrounded by something that knows me. I am handing it over to the rest, so that the culture is not killed. And this is the reason why I wake up to the world, even when I am frightened.”

This sub-theme demonstrates the ways in which the salon is turned into a cultural refuge and informal archive, which helps to preserve identity in the case of displacement. The Structuration theory enables the understanding of the salon as a space the migrants co-produce, and claim agency in the culture life construction within the city.

5.4.2 Hairstyles as Identity Work and Social Belonging

Hairstyling constitutes a form of identity making. Nigerian women pointed out the communicative role of styles in terms of heritage, status, femininity, and belonging. The practices form cultural capital that makes them stand out in the competitive market.

As Ifeoma (42, asylum seeker, 11 years in SA, salon owner) explained:

“Back home, hair is not just ordinary. Every style has meaning. When we do Ghana weaving or knotless, people know where you are from. Here I must explain these meanings, and that

creates conversation. South African girls are shocked when I tell them that braids are older than colonisation. So, when they wear it, they are wearing our history. It is not just beauty; it is who we are. And when customers understand this, they keep coming because they feel connected to something deeper.”

This sub-theme shows how women use aesthetic skill to narrate selfhood and rewrite foreignness into recognisable presence. The act of styling becomes a form of identity negotiation asserting Nigerian heritage while building relational belonging in Durban.

5.4.3 Beauty as Political Communication and Quiet Defiance

Hairstyling becomes a mode of political expression. Women described how aesthetic labour challenges stereotypes of Nigerians as criminals, reframing them as artists, caregivers, and cultural workers. Beauty becomes narrative correction counter-speech through style.

Oluchi (38, asylum seeker pending, nine years in SA, co-owner) in her response reflected:

“People say Nigerians are only here to sell drugs or to trick others. But when they see the patience, it takes to braid, they change. They see how we talk with care to children, how we give advice, how we create friendships. Suddenly we are not criminals; we are artists. The hair speaks for us. It tells the city we are more than what they say. It is our quiet way of fighting without shouting.”

This sub-theme shows how beauty becomes political what Afropolitan feminist scholars describe as an everyday practice of resistance: ordinary actions that disrupt dominant narratives. Through the lens of capital theory, aesthetic mastery becomes symbolic capital, converted into trust, legitimacy, and informal protection.

Afropolitan aesthetics operates as cultural resistance in a hostile urban setting. Through salons, Nigerian women co-produce new forms of urban belonging that blend memory, identity, and political presence. These practices resist xenophobic narratives by asserting a living, visible Nigerian presence grounded in culture and creativity. Capital, identity, and agency converge here: women mobilise aesthetic expertise to access work, community, and recognition, revealing the political depth of everyday beauty practices, strategies do not erase precarity; they merely soften it.

5.5 UNDOCUMENTED MOTHERHOOD AND TRANSNATIONAL CARE CHAINS

This theme draws primarily on Interview Questions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 10. It is very much related to research objectives 1 and 3. The theme explores how Nigerian migrant women continue their roles as mothers and caregivers in the face of the limitations of undocumented or unsafe legality, displacement in space, and unstable economic situations. It is motherhood across the borders. Physical separation of their children in Nigeria is also coupled with the emotional availability and economic obligation to many of the participants. This theme addresses Objective 3 by illustrating how motherhood and transnational caregiving shape economic participation, and Objective 1 by showing the socio-economic challenges intertwined with gendered responsibilities.

Such relationships that are sustained via WhatsApp calls, voice notes and remittances constitute what feminist scholars term as transnational care chains; systems of care that move across space and are determined by economic necessity, limited mobility and emotional commitments. Although their work is keeping families in countries alive, this care is invisible to the host institutions that deprive these women of policy and social legitimacy. In this connection, informal salons are economic anchors that allow care on a long distance. Mothers have their hair braided in Durban to purchase medicine in Benin City, pay school fees in Lagos, or eat their relatives in Owerri. The body here works, so that the bodies far away may live. The phenomenon is exemplified by three sub-themes.:

- i. the emotional and financial weight of long-distance care
- ii. evolving forms of mothering under mobility constraints
- iii. social role expectations and burdened resilience

These reveal the intimate pressures shaping migrant women's daily lives and their complex negotiations of absence, duty, identity, and love.

5.5.1 Emotional and Financial Weight of Distant Motherhood

Many participants described intense emotional strain associated with supporting children and wider family members from afar. Their caregiving is daily, even when conducted through

digital platforms or remittance systems (28, undocumented, three years in SA, single mother, chair renter) captured the emotional complexity of parenting from a distance:

“Every day I wake up thinking of my son. He is with my sister in Lagos because I could not bring him when I came. I send money every month, even if I eat only bread. In some cases, he cries during video calls claiming that he wants me to tuck him in at night. I also act like I am very strong, but I cry after the call. I cannot fly home due to the absence of papers when he is sick. I am a present and absent mother. I carry him in my mind even when my arms are empty.”

In this account, motherhood is experienced as responsibility intensified by distance. This emotional labour coexists with economic precarity, illustrating how transnational care chains are maintained at high personal cost.

5.5.2 Mothering Through Technology and Constrained Mobility

Women referred to technology as an important mothering medium. The voice notes, video calls and WhatsApp groups enabled them to keep up with the homework, punish the kids and have relational closeness. This online intimacy only highlighted their physical distance. Ezinne (41, asylum seeker, eight years in SA, has dependents in Nigeria, owner of salon), elaborated:

“I make calls to my nieces and nephew living with my elder sister every night. I appeal to them to read, to attend church, to meet elders. And in quarrelling call me to judge. I leave them voice notes, read to them stories before bed, as my mother used to read to me. At times I manage to observe them grow tall only over the phone. It hurts since motherhood becomes a mask yet I do it so that they know I will stay with them even in my absence. My sister answers that the children hear me more than her, and in a sense, she is correct that I am even their mother.”

These considerations show how motherhood is redefined in globalised care associations. The concept of structuration is useful in explaining such an adaptive agency: despite being bound to mobility conditions, women re-construct the roles of their families using the existing technologies, maintaining kin networks even in a distance.

5.5.3 Burdened Resilience and Gendered Expectations

There were numerous mentions regarding the perception about participants as inexhaustible sources of care, which solidifies the narratives of the “strong Black woman.” The families, churches, communities tended to idealise their emotional endurance. Their emotional endurance was often idealised by families, churches, and communities. Yet women emphasised that such resilience is produced through suffering rather than innate strength.

Oluchi (38, asylum seeker pending, nine years in SA, co-owner) reflected:

“People say, ‘African women are strong.’ They don’t know that we are strong because we have no choice. When I am tired, nobody sees it. I send money to my mother in Imo, to my cousin who is studying, to my in-law who is ill. Even when I say I cannot help, they say, ‘But you are in South Africa.’ They think money grows on trees here. Meanwhile, metro police can raid us any day and take everything. But we keep going because others depend on us. It is not strength. It is pressure disguised as love.”

Care becomes obligation rather than choice, emotionally and financially taxing. Intersectionality helps explain this: gender, nationality and class intersect to position migrant women as caregivers despite their own precarity.

Undocumented motherhood produces forms of care that exceed national borders. Women operate simultaneously within South Africa and Nigeria, cementing their identity as mothers, daughters and providers despite institutional erasure. Through capital theory, remittances function as economic, symbolic and moral capital buying not only survival, but dignity, belonging and familial honour. Yet this capital conversion is fraught, precarious and emotionally draining.

5.6 INVISIBLE BORDERS: SURVEILLANCE, XENOPHOBIA AND INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

This theme responds primarily to Interview Questions 3, 4, and eight. It aligns with research objectives 3 and 4, examining how intersecting forces of state regulation, community hostility, and informal policing shape the everyday experiences of Nigerian female migrant

hairdressers in Durban. While borders are conventionally imagined as fixed national boundaries, participants emphasised how new urban borders appear inside the city. These borders are not marked by fences or checkpoints. They surface in raids, movement restrictions, sudden demands for documentation, threats from community movements such as Operation Dudula & March and March and differentiated access to trading spaces. This theme addresses Objectives 3 and 4 by showing how Nigerian migrant women assert urban citizenship, dignity, and economic participation despite structural and policy constraints.

For these women, belonging is conditional. It depends on being unobtrusive, likeable, or temporarily tolerated. In practice, their citizenship is checked daily not at airports but on pavements, in salons, and at taxi ranks. The threat is ever-present. Surveillance and suspicion materialise in different forms: municipal inspectors demanding “spot bribes,” metro police threatening confiscation of equipment, neighbours reporting foreign traders on WhatsApp groups, and activists threatening to “clean the city” of migrants. Women learn to live inside a city where they are seen and unseen at once visible as labour but invisible as rights-bearing people. Three sub-themes demonstrate how invisible borders regulate their lives:

- i. extra-legal raids and distributed policing
- ii. xenophobic community movements and moral surveillance
- iii. spatial vulnerability and the politics of hiding

These sub-themes reveal how urban space is governed by both formal and informal powers, producing fear and reinforcing the fragility of migrant belonging.

5.6.1 Extra-Legal Raids and Distributed Policing

Most participants described “unofficial” or unpredictable visits by metro police or municipal inspectors. These visits did not always follow legal procedures, nor were reasons explained. Women spoke of bribes, harassment, confiscation of goods, and humiliation. Oluchi (38, asylum seeker pending, nine years in SA, co-owner) recalled how these encounters carry emotional, financial and physical risk:

“The police come without warning. They do not greet or tell you what law you broke. They walk in, search the drawers, ask for papers, and even when you show them, they say it is not

enough. I remember one afternoon they came and took hair extensions worth thousands, saying they were not from here. We pleaded with them, but they answered, this is not your home. I could not sleep that night. You feel powerless. You are sure you are working straight, but your integrity does not cushion you.”

The above story highlights the fact that law enforcement both facilitates and eliminates migrant economic activity. The presence of documentation does not assure safety. Raids serve as imaginary boundaries. And Amara shared similar sentiments:

“Sometimes they arrive in groups, no explanation, just demanding bags, receipts, papers. Even when everything is in order, they insist something is wrong. Last year they seized our dryers and said we should ‘go back where we came from.’ They remind women that their presence is conditional permitted only so long as it can be revoked.

5.6.2 Xenophobic Community Movements and Moral Surveillance

Several participants referenced threats from community-based xenophobic formations, especially Operation Dudula and March & March. Such groups patrol neighbourhoods, mark out businesses that are owned by migrants and coerce landlords or local shop owners to evict foreign tenants. Women explained how these movements stereotyped them as criminals, prostitutes, drug dealers or stealing people their jobs. Their presence was politicised. Their livelihoods became evidence of wrongdoing. Amara (25, temporary permit, two years in SA, chair renter) explained how she had narrowly escaped one such confrontation:

“There was a Friday when some men came with placards. They were shouting, ‘Foreigners must go; they take our opportunities.’ They pointed at our building and said Nigerians are selling drugs. We do hair, not crime. They told the landlord to remove us or they would burn the shop. My hands were shaking while I braided a client. That week, I did not tell my family because I knew they would make me come back home. I felt like I was in hiding in plain sight. Even going to buy bread felt dangerous. Her description conveys how ordinary tasks become politically charged acts of movement. This was also shared by Oluche as she recalled:

“One afternoon a group marched past shouting that Nigerians were the cause of unemployment. They pointed at our block and called us criminals. I stayed calm in front of customers, but inside I was terrified. That night I closed early and sat quietly in the dark, scared they would return. I didn’t even tell my family because I knew it would make them

worry.” This surveillance is moral and racialised. Migrant women are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted through public prejudice, exposing them to danger even outside formal policing structures.

5.6.3 Spatial Vulnerability and the Politics of Hiding

Invisible borders create spatial restrictions. Women learn which streets are “safe,” which taxis to avoid, which inspectors demand bribes, and where activists patrol. Several participants described employing spatial tactics closing early, working indoors but near an escape route, hiding tools, or using someone else’s permit to occupy trading space. Ifeoma (42, asylum seeker, eleven years in SA, salon owner) explained:

“We choose buildings where we can see the street. If metro is coming, we whisper and everyone hides their bags. Some of us even have plastic bags ready, so if you need to run, you carry something small. We know when to work and when to close. Friday afternoons are risky. Public holidays are risky. It is like you are fighting a war you did not start. You want to do business, but your body is always tense. Even when laughing with a client, one ear is remains alert awaiting any probable danger.”

Their encounters give an impression of the city turning into a map with areas of danger and temporary security. The city experiences randomness in the culture of enforcement which increases its spatial vulnerability. Here, structuration can be observed: females negotiate the terms, which are designed by the actors that dictate differently.

Invisible borders demonstrate that citizenship is practiced by power and not law. The Nigerian migrant women stand in a legal grey area where the government is sufficiently present to be intimidating but not present when the safety they need is sought. Their bodies are their papers and they are negotiated on a daily basis. This insecurity is amplified in xenophobic movements, which identify migrant women as constant and continuous outsiders, and reflect everyday salon items, such as mirrors, braids, hair dryers, as symbols of illegitimate enterprise. Gender, nationality, Blackness, and informal status all intersect through an intersectional lens to make them more vulnerable, and therefore, foreign Black femininity becomes hyper-vulcanized to surveillance but not subject to rights. But these women are also creative. They follow patrol patterns, create strategic alliances, and create

internal warning systems to move around and reconfigure urban space. This way, they shape the informal systems of governance of the city at the very bottom, even though they have a peripheral place. Their experiences demonstrate a fragmented kind of urban citizenship biased, unsteady, and in continuous renegotiation.

To reside and operate in Durban as a Nigerian migrant lady is to occupy a space which is both homeland and frontier, chance and danger. Such accounts also reveal that motherhood displaced is relational and dynamic. The emotional labour of care is influenced by legal exclusion, digital mediation and transnational expectations. Mobile technologies maintain the contact but strengthen the feeling of distance, which emphasizes the contradictions of global care. These women and their lives are ultimately characterized as a transnational motherhood which is maintained, in turn, by devotion, desire, and cross-national labour.

5.7 FEMINIST URBAN CITIZENSHIP: CONTESTING THE RIGHT TO WORK, MOVE, AND EXIST

This theme is the subject of Interview Question 3, 5, 8 and 10, and is directly relevant to research objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4. It explores the ways in which the Nigerian female migrant hairdressers assert presence, dignity and livelihood in a situation where they were denied formal citizenship. Through their histories we see that citizenship is not only a category established by law but now is practiced as a labour, mobility and care. Even though most of them lack official records, participants claim citizenship by collaborating in a public workplace, creating social networks, and cultivating neighbourhood belonging. Salons make the places where women put themselves in the city and demand the right to contribute meaningfully and visibly. They do this without seeking the permission of the state. This is captured using three sub-themes:

- i. labour as citizenship
- ii. informal solidarities and belonging
- iii. re-imagining the right to the city

These discussions reveal how women position themselves within Durban despite being framed as outsiders.

5.7.1 Labour as Citizenship

The major way in which participants place themselves in Durban is through work. The hair salon is not merely a revenue generating facility but a machine where they show contribution, create legitimacy, and assert their right to stay. This is well articulated by Ifeoma (asylum seeker, eleven years in SA, salon owner):

“I did not go to sit down at home and await suffering; that is why I came here. When I started my salon, it was, to Durban, I am here; I am useful. Each braid that I make is as though I am creating something that is mine. I even say to myself, even when people are trying to chase us, my hands feed families. My hands pay rent.’ That is your ID when you labour in the streets day after day. It demonstrates that you belong to the city. The government will never see us, but those of us who do their hair, they know we are one of them.”

Her conceptualisation of labour as ID is impressive. Here, citizenship is created by economic contribution as opposed to paper. This story is how women perceive labour as a means of survival and as a social process. By way of their salons, they provide a public good beauty, emotional care, community maintenance that becomes a kind of informal citizenship. They affect the anti-migrant movements focus on exclusionary narratives by their contribution, making them not a burden but active participants of the city.

5.7.2 Informal Solidarities and Networks of Belonging

A sense of belonging to these women is nurtured not by the state but by social relationships. The participants talked about the way they created micro-communities with clients, neighbours, church members, and fellow stylists. These networks provide security, credit, emotional support as well as at times prior information on raids or uprisings. Sade (temporary permit, six years in SA, supports extended family, chair renter) explained how customers become a part of her urban attachment:

“I have had some clients who have been with me over the years. They visited me and took food when I was ill. One even paid rent money when there was no business. They inform me, You are now one of us. That feels like home. That home I do not have because of South Africa itself but because of its people. Customers at times come to our defense when metro officers arrive. They say, ‘She is good. Leave her.’ Those little things make you feel safe.”

Her narrative is that belonging is relative. Without documents, social interactions will become proxy citizenship. Such ties are not sentimental ones, but they serve as informal systems of care and protection. The structuration theory can be used to understand the ways in which women utilize the existing social networks to endure constraint and re-create micro-spaces of belonging. Their solidarities offset the illness created by xenophobic movements and patchy policing. Informal sociality thereby creates micro-citizenship which is maintained by reciprocity and proximity as opposed to legality.

5.7.3 Re-imagining the Right to the City

The participants expressed multiple times a feeling of entitlement to urban space, based on their contribution and presence and not their citizenship law. They referred to Durban as the home not by birth but by practice. The reason is because Ngozi (35, temporary permit, seven years in SA, married, co-owner) explained:

“When I pass through this city, I am not walking like a visitor. My children go to school here. My business is here. My friends are here. When individuals inquire where I have resided, I never say first Nigeria. I say 'Durban.' I am familiar with the roads, the police, the customers. When anything occurs, I experience it. This is the home because it is where my life is.”

This embodiment of belonging was resounded in interviews, where a number of women described themselves as being attached to Durban as the centre of their everyday life and identity, which is expressed by Uche.

“This is not a place I am passing through Durban after years of years here. This is a city that I base my days around. I understand what streets are safe, who will be able to come back as a client, who will be able to help me when something goes wrong among the neighbours. I do not feel like a foreigner, even when I am reminded of it by people. My life is rooted here now. My history is Nigeria and Durban is where I am living my daily life, where I am waking up, working, worrying and hoping. This is where I am made up of.”

The accounts undermine traditional definitions of citizenship. She finds a home in the lived experience, rather than nationality. Her speech revisal packages space right to space as an embodiment practice.

This story holds the view that citizenship is being enacted by everyday urban engagement. Labor, mobility, social networks, and nurture develop rights of urban affiliation. The Africana

feminist scholarship echoes here as marginalised women demonstrate citizenship practices outside institutions. Their assertions criticize nationalist constructions of belonging advocated by Operation Dudula and allied forces that facilitate mobilisation of exclusion in the name of defending South African livelihoods. These women generate alternative forms of citizenship founded on mutual accountability, culture and labour. Their salons are not only economic nodes but also space statements which say: “we are here”.

This theme prefigures the re-conceptualization of citizenship by migrant women as social practice, and not as a legal category. Intersectionality demonstrates the interaction among nationality, gender, race, and class to deprive them of recognition. However, in this marginality, they establish other ways of belonging. The informal, but socially consequential, vernacular citizenship that they engage in is their economic life, care networks, and cultural practices. Structuration assists in the description of how they make sense in limited conditions. Through labor, transportation and relationship creation, they re-create a city that in turn marginalises them. The capital framework by Bourdieu emphasizes the transformation of economic, social and symbolic resources into legitimacy. Their reputation, professional behaviour, symbolic capital trust is a currency that they use to claim urban space. All these things indicate that citizenship is not provided but negotiated and that migrant women, even when they are not given any official status, play a leading role in shaping the social and economic realities of Durban.

5.8 THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS: INTERSECTIONAL STRUCTURATION OF CAPITAL IN PRECARIOUS URBAN ECONOMIES

This section combines the main empirical findings of the research with the three main theoretical perspectives Intersectionality, Structuration theory, and the capital theory by Bourdieu. It uses the direct testimonies of participants to illustrate how Nigerian women hairdressers negotiate their marginalisation through mobilising capital, changing everyday activities, renegotiating spatial belonging, and establishing networks of care and visibility in an otherwise hostile Durban. This section synthesises findings to show alignment with all research objectives (1–4), integrating socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, intersectional identities, and structural factors including migration policy. Across interviews,

the women's narratives reflected a dynamic interplay between structure and agency. Their experiences show that even under the weight of precarious documentation, xenophobic hostility, and everyday policing, they continue to cultivate strategies that allow them to remain present, productive, and relationally embedded.

Three theoretical strands are discussed below.

5.8.1 Intersectionality: Layered Inequalities and Compounded Precarity

Intersectionality provides a lens to understand how multiple identities intersect to shape women's everyday experiences. These identities include gender, nationality, race, class, legal status and occupational location in informality. Rather than facing a singular form of exclusion, participants experienced compounded disadvantages that multiplies their vulnerability.

Chika (30, undocumented, five years in SA, chair renter) articulated the simultaneity of these forces:

“Every day, it is like three fires are burning you at once. One is that you are a woman, so men think you must listen or obey. Then because you are Nigerian, they think you are a criminal before you even speak. And then, because you have no papers, they say you have no right to be here. You cannot separate them. They hit you together. When police come, they ask for papers, but when community men come, they ask, ‘Who are you?’ and sometimes they want you to fear them. So even when you are just doing hair, you carry all these things on your body.”

Her three fires metaphor explains the way intersecting identities lead to increased marginalisation. These texts show that intersectionality reflects lived complexity and not unidimensional descriptions of oppression. The state apparatuses, e.g. the documentation policy, run parallel to the surveillance at the community level, anti-migrant movements (Operation Dudula and March & March) and gendered expectations in creating a topography of stratified insecurity. The experiences of women cannot be justified by a single gender or nationality, but by a combination of various factors, which give rise to precarity.

5.8.2 Structuration: Everyday Agency in Constrained Environments

By using the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984), it is possible to understand how migrant women negotiate structural limitations by acting purposefully to redefine their spaces.

Despite legal precarity, xenophobia, and informal policing, participants continue to tactically adapt and establish partnerships, reconfigure workspaces, change business hours, and develop relationships with clients. This duality of restriction and adjustment came to an end in the words of Ifeoma (42, asylum seeker, owner of a salon):

“We are not free to make plans like other people. We must plan inside fear. There are days when you show up late as you heard Metro is near. Then you close down some days early, you heard that Dudula is marching around. But you cannot stop. You adjust. You are shifting your chair in, you have a client on at once, you change the signboard. It is as though you were dancing: the city moves one leg and you have to move the other. But in that dancing, you survive.”

Her explanation of “dancing” makes agency play out on boundaries. Even where macro level change has been frozen, her use of small corners is an address to micro level change. These accounts demonstrate that structure does not extinguish agency, only it directs it into the wary kinds which are usually suppressed. Women are the ones in constant negotiation not just with state actors but landlords, neighbourhood structures and clients to establish livelihood conditions. It is through structuration that migrant women find themselves as co-producers of urban space in spite of structural hostility. Their strategies that change the layout of salons, share permits, form networks of alliance are reflective of minor yet significant reconfiguration of the city.

5.8.3 Bourdieu’s Capital: Currency Beyond Money

Since they were marginal in legal and economic terms, players depended on non-economic capital. The Bourdieu model explains why social, cultural and symbolic capital are essential means of survival.

5.8.4 Social Capital

Nigerian or general African migrants trust networks can be introduced as a network of insurance during the crisis. Respondents talked of money-pooling, sharing clients, products, and emotional support during periods of loss or displacement.

5.8.5 Cultural Capital

Hairstyling, multilingual navigation and cultural sensitivity technical expertise could attract clients and create loyalty. These skills differentiated their labour and enabled market positioning, even within saturated environments.

5.8.6 Symbolic Capital

The most precarious yet significant resource was reputation. Symbolic capital allowed women to negotiate safety and market presence. Oluchi (38, asylum seeker pending, co-owner) described symbolic capital as protection:

“Because the people in this area know me, they protect me. When someone tries to disturb my salon, they say, ‘Leave her. She is a good person.’ That respect is what keeps us safe. Papers cannot do that. Sometimes, the community helps more than the police. What saves us is not the government; it is our name.”

Her contrast between the state and community emphasises the protective power of symbolic legitimacy. Police raids, community violence, and populist mobilisation can erase hard-earned legitimacy in an instant. Symbolic capital is always conditional particularly for undocumented women whose visibility simultaneously attracts clients and heightens risk.

5.8.7 Integrative Summary

Intersectionality demonstrates that marginalisation is layered; structuration shows that women navigate and reshape constraint; capital theory reveals the resources they mobilise to endure. Together, these insights lead to what this study conceptualises as the intersectional structuration of capital: a framework describing how migrant women negotiate intersecting oppressions through everyday agency expressed via the mobilisation of non-economic capital. Such synthesis has placed the Nigerian migrant women as both vulnerable subjects and cultural agents, informal economists and social theorists whose practices are engaged in the active manner of defining urban belonging. As their lives demonstrate, the right to the city is not achieved by labor, relations, and contact in everyday life. Their salons, connections and reputations are survival, citizenship, and silent resistance infrastructures.

5.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented an analysis of the lived experiences of ten Nigerian female migrant workers in the informal hairdressing sector in Durban in a detailed and data-driven manner. Based on long interview accounts, the chapter showed how migrant women survive and work under the conditions of structural limitations, gendered enmity, and changing informal governance. Through pseudonyms that maintain the identity of women, the voices anticipate the existences of the human individuals behind the politics of informality, documentation, and survival. The six discussed themes show how citizenship in South African urban setting is frequently militarised and mediated by racialised surveillance, community-based policing, and the coercive activities of movements like Operation Dudula & March and March. These forces disaggregate the presence of women in the city and convert common streets and places of employment into a means of location. Nevertheless, migrant women do not lead a passive lifestyle in the city. They create temporary space of economic action, visibility, dignity through the careful enactment of legitimacy, strategic space, multilingual negotiation and solidarity bonds. Their presence turns into a constant statement of value in places where they are often seen as dangers.

The cultural and political significance of aesthetic labour was also mentioned in the chapter. Hair salons are not merely economic transactions; they become arenas of close attention, culture replication, and Afropolitanity. Hairstyling in these spaces is seen as an embodied resistance that reinforces the Black womanhood and yields the symbolic capital that helps to sustain everyday existence. Simultaneously, motherhood is borderless due to digital and financial labour. Transnational care work highlights that women are left to take care of families in Nigeria despite their maintenance of precarious work in Durban, and that migrant motherhood of structural exclusion builds on the emotional and material intensity of the condition. The discussion showed that border regimes cannot be defined by immigration checkpoints alone, but can be created by the work of the inspectors, landlords, neighbours as well as informal vigilante networks. These unseen boundaries define the movements of migrant women and where they can work and sleep. However, in its restrictions, women claim different versions of urban belonging. They form webs of trust, share resources and what they call salons confined micro-communities of support and cultural validation. Their demands on the right of work, move and being reverberate with wider African feminist

politics which hold that citizenship should not be viewed merely as a legal designation, and position, but rather as a social practice that is daily undertaken in labour, presence and care. Section 5.8 provides a theoretical synthesis that puts these empirical findings into a dual paradigm of intersectionality, structuration and capital theory.

This study hypothesises that the experiences of migrant women come out of an intersectional structuration of capital, in which identities are intersecting to create harm, and in which agency is realised through the mobilisation of social, cultural, and symbolic resources. Such resources make it possible to survive but it is vulnerable to systems that criminalize foreignness and informal economic activity. Within this framework, the chapter will be suggested to be the part of modern discussions of informal city citizenship since migrant women are not just sidelined to the creation of Durban; they are the agents of Durban aesthetic, social and economic texture. On the whole, the results below enhance the knowledge of daily lives of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban. They show that existence in unfavorable circumstances is material, but symbolic and relational. The strategies that women put in place are a deliberate negotiation of risk, identity and labour and through this, migrant women remain theorisation, construction, and maintenance of city life even when burdened with structural exclusion. Their experiences can prompt a redefinition of urban citizenship concept in South Africa by downplaying the inherent stasis of belonging that focuses on legal status only. Overall, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate clear alignment with the study's research objectives. Each theme collectively illustrates the socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, and lived experiences of Nigerian female economic migrants, while also highlighting how structural conditions such as migration policy and urban informality shape these experiences.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter critically interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter 5, moving beyond thematic description to examine how Nigerian female economic migrants in the Durban informal hairdressing industry negotiate gendered informality, urban belonging and contested citizenship. The women's narratives are read as embedded in postcolonial urban governance, rising nationalist sentiment, informal policing and patriarchal orders, rather than as isolated stories. These interlocking structures produce precarity, but they also generate new forms of agency, cultural production and locally situated claims to space. The discussion is shaped by three conceptual anchors: Intersectionality Theory, Structuration theory and Bourdieu's capital theory. Together, these lenses illuminate how gender, nationality and documentation status position migrant women within hierarchical urban economies, how they adapt to and reproduce the structures that constrain them, and how their survival depends on fragile forms of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Collins, 2019). At several points, the findings also reveal the limitations of these theoretical frameworks where these theories need to be stretched, especially to account for aesthetic, emotional and transnational dimensions of migrant livelihood. In this way, the chapter contributes to a more grounded theorisation of African urban informality that foregrounds the affective and cultural infrastructures sustaining marginalised women's participation in the city.

The six themes developed in Chapter 5 reveal patterned experiences rather than random incidents. Militarised citizenship, legitimacy performances, Afropolitan aesthetics, transnational mothering, informal governance and feminist urban citizenship overlap empirically and conceptually. Their interdependence shows that everyday life for Nigerian migrant women is negotiated through continual movement across physical, symbolic and bureaucratic borders. Informal salons emerge as economic nodes, cultural institutions and fragile sanctuaries within uneven geographies of citizenship. These findings resonate with work across Africa and the wider Global South that documents intensified hostility toward migrant labour under conditions of urban unemployment and governance strain, yet they complicate dominant accounts by foregrounding the gendered, aesthetic and transnational

registers through which Nigerian women inhabit Durban's city centre. Their narratives point to a politics of presence that is enacted through embodied labour, cultural expression, care practices and strategic sociability rather than through formal documentation. The chapter reads these themes against recent scholarship, drawing out convergences, divergences and theoretical gaps. Across the discussion, the link to the study's aims is constant: This chapter therefore explicitly demonstrates how the findings align with the study's objectives, including the examination of socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, intersectional identities, and the influence of migration and urban policy on migrant women's lived experiences

6.2 ANALYTICAL PATHWAY: FROM DATA TO INTERPRETATION

The interpretation presented here rests on a transparent and reflexive analytic process. All interviews with the ten Nigerian female economic migrants were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and checked line by line against the recordings. Pseudonyms were assigned at the point of transcription, and identifying details such as specific street names, landlords and clients were removed or generalised to protect participants' anonymity. Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher kept a reflexive journal to record impressions after each interview, note emotional responses and track emerging ideas. These notes later supported critical self-reflection on positionality and interpretive choices. The study followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis as the core analytic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Transcripts were imported into NVivo, which was used to organise, store and retrieve data segments. The first phase involved repeated reading of each transcript to gain an integrated sense of each woman's narrative and to begin noticing recurrent images, metaphors and concerns across the data set. Initial coding then proceeded within NVivo at sentence and segment level. Codes captured both explicit content and implicit meanings around issues such as raids, respectability, motherhood, aesthetics, church networks and digital care. Coding was primarily inductive, while remaining theoretically informed by focus on intersectionality, informality, bordering and citizenship.

In the next phase, coded extracts were examined across participants to identify clusters that spoke to broader patterns rather than isolated episodes. NVivo queries were used to trace where particular concerns appeared across interviews, decisions regarding theme

development were interpretive and reflexive, grounded in the meaning and salience of the patterns rather than in numerical frequency alone. Potential themes were reviewed against the full data set; the study's aims and the broader context of Durban's inner city. Reflexive memos documented why certain patterns were elevated to themes and how they related to the theoretical framework. This process produced six themes, each with its own internal substructure. Within Militarised Citizenship and Precarious Belonging, sub-themes clustered around securitised streets, municipal discretion and vernacular bordering by neighbours and landlords. Performing Legitimacy in a Hostile City centred on sub-themes of professionalism and respectability, client relationships as moral proof, and tactical management of visibility. Afropolitan aesthetics as Urban Resistance brought together sub-themes on the salon as cultural enclave, aesthetic labour as reputational work, and hybrid West–Southern African styles. Undocumented Motherhood and Transnational Care Chains focused on dispersed households, digital intimacy and care under documentation anxiety. Invisible Borders, Surveillance, Xenophobia and Informal Governance highlighted parallel policing networks, informal fees and the moral scrutiny of migrant women's bodies and spaces. Feminist Urban Citizenship: Right to Work, Move and Exist drew together sub-themes on solidarities, “quiet embedding” in local economies and everyday acts of claiming space. The sections that follow interpret these themes in relation to contemporary scholarship and theory, while remaining grounded in the empirical material that generated them.

6.3 MILITARISED CITIZENSHIP AND PRECARIOUS BELONGING

This theme captures how Nigerian migrant women inhabit a regime of securitised urbanism in which they are indispensable to everyday economies yet persistently framed as suspect. Across the data, women described a climate of raids, document checks and neighbourhood surveillance that renders legal belonging contingent and revocable. This pattern aligns with work on “everyday bordering”, where immigration control is enacted inside cities by police, municipal officers and civilians through routine practices of checking and shaming in streets and workplaces (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019: 23–27). In South Africa, the rise of community-mobilised xenophobic movements has sharpened this bordering logic. Campaigns such as Operation Dudula and related formations have redefined urban order as a project of disciplining or expelling African foreign nationals, including those in feminised service spaces such as salons (Landau & Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2023: 21; Chinyakata, 2024).

Three sub-themes stand out. The first concerns securitised streets, where the presence of metro police, private security and vigilante groups produces a constant sense of being watched. The second relates to municipal discretion and by-law enforcement. Durban's regulatory framework grants broad discretionary power over trading sites, licensing and confiscations, which generates uncertainty even for traders who hold permits, echoing wider Southern African findings on discretionary harassment of informal workers (Skinner & Rogerson, 2023: 118–121; Crush & Tawodzera, 2021: 6–10). The third sub-theme reflects vernacular bordering by neighbours, landlords and competitors, who use gossip, WhatsApp messages and anonymous reports to mobilise suspicion against Nigerian women. “Citizen enforcement” of borders has similarly been recorded in South African townships and CBDs, where residents act as informal immigration gatekeepers (Moyo & Kihato, 2022: 198; SIHMA, 2024).

Intersectionality is key to understanding these experiences. Gender, nationality, race and documentation status combine to produce specific forms of exposure, including sexualised harassment at checkpoints, moral policing of dress and behaviour, and extortion framed as “keeping the area in order” (Collins, 2019: 89–95). Structuration theory helps to explain how women respond. The data show a repertoire of tactics such as coded phone alerts, pre-planned escape routes, alliances with South African salon owners and flexible hours, which illustrate patterned efforts to negotiate space under constraint (Giddens, 1984: 374–380). These practices produce a limited sense of safety without disrupting the underlying power relations.

Capital Theory clarifies the fragile role of symbolic and social capital in this context. Women invest in symbolic capital by keeping salons clean, dressing professionally and using multilingual greetings to signal respectability and reduce the risk of being cast as “illegal foreigners” (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). These investments can convert into social capital through loyal clients and supportive neighbours. However, such legitimacy can be very swiftly taken away in case political pressure or vigilante campaigns become more acute, as the case of migrant traders in South Africa and other African cities demonstrates (Crush & Tawodzera, 2021: 6-10; Moyo & Gumedde, 2023: 316-318).

These findings align with broader scholarship on precarious legality, in which migrants are still susceptible despite partial documentation (De Genova, 2020: 42-49), but introduce a more acute gendered payoff that has not been well reflected in the urban security literature (Radu, 2025; Vlahakis, 2023: 55-62). The theme brings out a structural contradiction that permeates the chapter. The city relies on migrant women's labour in the informal hair economy while simultaneously treating them as detachable outsiders. Intersectionality, Structuration and Capital Theory all help to explain different parts of this dynamic. Collectively, they point toward an intersectional structuration of capital in which symbolic credit, painstakingly built through everyday practices, can be rapidly devalued by discretionary bordering embedded in the city's streets and buildings. This discussion directly addresses Objective 1 by deepening the understanding of socio-economic challenges and Objective 3 by illustrating how intersecting identities shape migrant women's experiences of precarious belonging within securitised urban environments.

6.4 PERFORMING LEGITIMACY IN A HOSTILE CITY

The second theme focuses on legitimacy as an ongoing performance rather than a fixed condition. In the women's accounts, being seen as a "proper businesswoman" required constant work: disciplined opening hours, careful self-presentation, visible cleanliness, tactful interaction with clients and neighbours, and avoidance of behaviours that could trigger accusations. This theme centres on three linked sub-themes. The first is professionalism and respectability, where women consciously adopt styles of dress, speech and conduct that they believe signal seriousness and morality. The second is client relationships as moral proof of belonging. Long term clients, including South Africans, become informal witnesses to the women's reliability. The third is tactical management of visibility, where women balance the need to attract customers with the need to avoid drawing the attention of hostile actors.

Recent work on informal women entrepreneurs in Ghana and South Africa documents similar patterns of legitimacy construction through cultural fluency, hard work and respectability (Amuhaya & Asante, 2025: 45; Cobbinah & Chinyamurindi, 2025: 7-9). The Durban data extends these insights by showing how legitimacy performances become a survival tool in contexts where foreignness is already over-interpreted as risk. Structuration theory helps

explain how women reflexively calibrate these performances in response to perceived threats, while capital theory illuminates how cultural and social capital are continually mobilised in the hope of securing a more durable position in the local moral economy (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986).

Meanwhile, the weakness of this legitimacy is evident. Research conducted in Johannesburg and other South African municipalities demonstrates that compliant traders are always at risk of removal when the political story against migrants starts (Nkosi and Harber, 2024: 202-203; Moyo & Gumede, 2023: 316-318). This volatility is reaffirmed by the current findings. Women emphasise that being careful, polite and “professional” does not guarantee protection during raids or xenophobic marches. In this sense, symbolic capital functions as provisional rather than cumulative credit. Intersectionality explains the additional burden that Nigerian women carry. They must navigate both the stigma associated with foreignness and the gendered expectations embedded in feminised service spaces. Recent feminist migration scholarship describes this “extra burden” of legitimacy labour for migrant women, who are often required to “over-prove” respectability in settings shaped by sexist and nationalist logics (Salami, 2023: 52). The data here shows how this labour is enacted through aesthetic discipline, emotional control and constant self-monitoring.

This theme adds to the literature in two main ways. First, it shifts the lens from legal status toward lived legitimacy, conceptualising belonging as a performance that can be revoked. Second, it places aesthetic and affective labour at the centre of this performance, rather than treating such labour as a peripheral feature of informal work. In doing so, it directly deepens the study’s concern with lived experience, resilience strategies and the intersectional construction of migrant women’s positions in the informal economy. This theme further addresses Objective 2 by demonstrating the resilience strategies employed by migrant women, while also reinforcing Objective 1 through its focus on the everyday challenges associated with maintaining legitimacy in a hostile urban context.

6.5 AFROPOLITAN AESTHETICS AS URBAN RESISTANCE

The third theme situates salons as sites where economic, aesthetic and political practices intersect. The sub-themes here revolve around the salon as cultural enclave, aesthetic labour as reputational work, and hybrid styles as visual markers of transnational belonging. Hairdressing is not simply a way to earn an income. It is also a way to curate a recognisable West- and Southern African aesthetic presence in Durban's inner city. The notion of Afropolitanism captures this dynamic. Mbembe (2021) and Nuttall (2022) describe Afropolitanism as an African worldliness that refuses narrow nationalist and racial scripts. In the salons, this takes concrete form in the styles offered, the music played, the languages spoken and the conversations held.

Current research on aesthetic labour notes that such work is deeply gendered and racialised, and that beauty practices can act as “quiet resistance” where women rework colonial and patriarchal aesthetics to define themselves on their own terms (Elias et al., 2023: 58; Tamale, 2022: 74–77). Capital Theory shows how aesthetic skills, taste and product knowledge form cultural capital that can be converted into economic and symbolic capital. Studies on migrant entrepreneurs in South Africa confirm the importance of reputational work in securing survival (Khosa & Mutinta, 2023: 116), and the present data specify that much of this reputational work is aesthetic. Braids, weaves and styles that blend Nigerian and South African influences become visual claims to belonging. They signal both expertise and connection. At the same time, the political context of xenophobia means that visibility is risky. The very aesthetics that attracts clients can also draw unwanted scrutiny, revealing a tension between visibility as resource and visibility as liability.

Structuration theory helps to explain how women negotiate this tension through everyday practice. They choose which symbols to display, which flags or colours to use, which languages to foreground, and how to manage crowds inside the salon. Similar dynamics have been noted in Nairobi and Lagos, where beauticians use aesthetics to negotiate class and ethnic boundaries (Aderinto, 2024: 211–213; Owusu-Ansah, 2022: 108–113). The Durban case adds the layer of foreignness and xenophobic risk, which means that Afropolitan expression is both a mode of self-assertion and a potential trigger for policing.

Intersectionality brings into focus how race, gender, nationality and class converge on the body in this setting. The migrant female body is a site where suspicion and desire, criminalisation and admiration, economic exploitation and self-expression all meet (Collins, 2019: 91–92). This theme contributes to the study’s aims by showing how aesthetic labour forms part of women’s resilience strategies, by revealing how intersecting identities are negotiated through style and presentation, and by highlighting how urban policy and security discourses shape yet cannot fully suppress these creative economies. In doing so, this theme contributes to Objective 2 by highlighting adaptive strategies and to Objective 3 by showing how identity and cultural expression shape migrant women’s positioning within the informal economy.

6.6 UNDOCUMENTED MOTHERHOOD AND TRANSNATIONAL CARE CHAINS

The fourth theme centres motherhood as an enduring but destabilised dimension of the women’s lives. The sub-themes cluster around dispersed families, digital intimacy and care under documentation anxiety. Many participants described caring for children and extended kin who remained in Nigeria, while also managing everyday risks in Durban. Their accounts reflect the concept of “transnational care chains” as articulated in global literature where migrant women sustain households across borders through remittances and emotional communication at a distance (Parreñas, 2021; Hochschild, 2022: 58).

Within the African context, recent work shows how restrictive documentation regimes and xenophobia reshape motherhood. Moyo and Ncube (2024: 212) describe “maternal exclusion” for migrant women who face barriers to registering births, accessing health care and enrolling children in schools. Adeyemi (2023: 49) notes similar dynamics in Lagos for undocumented mothers. The women in this study echoed these concerns, reporting fear of contact with state institutions and constant anxiety about children’s safety and schooling, both in South Africa and back home. Structuration theory helps to interpret how care is reorganised in response to these pressures. Participants described intricate routines of mobile-money transfers, WhatsApp calls, shared decision-making with caregivers in Nigeria and local mutual aid with other migrants. These practices illustrate the recursive production of social order in conditions of legal instability (Giddens, 1984: 376). Intersectionality shows how

documentation status, gender, race and class act together to shape the moral judgements directed at these women. They are praised for sacrifice, yet criticised for physical absence, echoing wider feminist findings on the contradictory expectations that surround migrant motherhood (Collins, 2019: 92; Pearson, 2023: 17).

Capital Theory clarifies the role of remittances as both economic and symbolic capital. Money sent home functions as a material resource and as a sign of care, respect and responsibility (Fall, 2023: 66). Yet, in hostile environments, being known as “the one who sends money” can also attract extortion or theft, revealing again the double edge of symbolic capital. Compared with Latin American and Southeast Asian contexts where some forms of care work are channelled through regularised migration programmes, African migrant mothers in South Africa operate largely through informal channels, with fewer institutional protections (Parreñas, 2021; Adeyemi, 2023; Ngcamu, 2023: 55). These dynamics highlight the limitations of existing theoretical frameworks. Structuration and Capital Theory explain adaptive routines and exchanges but do not fully engage with care as political labour. Intersectionality highlights overlapping disadvantage but often leaves the temporal and digital dimensions of care underdeveloped. Bringing feminist care ethics into the conversation helps to frame migrant mothering not as private sacrifice but as a practice that contests state neglect and patriarchal moralism (Tronto, 2020: 94). This theme further intensifies the lived experience and resilience focus of the study and enhances its criticism on the fragmentation of the African family life by migration and urban governance. This discussion addresses Objective 3 by demonstrating how gendered responsibilities such as motherhood intersect with migration status, while also reinforcing Objective 1 through its focus on the socio-economic challenges associated with transnational care.

6.7 INVISIBLE BORDERS, SURVEILLANCE, XENOPHOBIA AND INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

The fifth theme shows that Durban’s inner city is structured by an intricate mesh of formal and informal control. Sub-themes include parallel policing networks, informal fees and the moral scrutiny of women’s bodies and spaces. Participants described how landlords monitored visitors., taxi associations that policed movement, neighbours who reported

“suspicious” activities and local groups that demanded payment in exchange for “protection”. These practices align with what Crush and Ramachandran (2024: 8) describe as “vernacular border regimes”, where exclusion is reproduced through ordinary actors and local institutions rather than only through formal immigration agencies.

Research across the Global South documents a similar diffusion of border practices inside cities, where residents’ associations and vigilante groups take on quasi-policing functions (Darling & Velasco, 2023: 74; Aderinto, 2024: 209; Phiri & Chirwa, 2023: 56). The Durban findings further reveal a pronounced gendered dimension: salons, as feminised spaces, become particular targets of moral scrutiny. Hairstyles, clothing, accent and the presence of male clients all become grounds for gossip and suspicion. Mthonti (2024: 20) notes that Black female migrant bodies often carry the weight of national anxieties about crime and sexuality, and the present findings strongly support that claim. Structuration theory helps to explain how women manoeuvre within this landscape, adjusting routes, hours and alliances to reduce exposure. Intersectionality clarifies how race, gender and national origin shape who becomes a subject of surveillance and who is authorised to police others (Moyo & Kihato, 2022: 198).

The South African context is marked by particularly tight links between state and non-state actors: police and metro officers frequently appear alongside community patrols during raids, forming what Goga (2023: 92) calls “hybrid policing economies”. Capital Theory again highlights the ambivalence of social and symbolic resources. Friendships with landlords, long term clients and church leaders can offer protection, but this protection is conditional. As Moyo and Gumede (2023: 318) argue, symbolic legitimacy in such contexts operates as “revocable capital”, subject to rapid erosion when political narratives shift. Compared with cities such as Santiago or Bogotá, where “community-based bordering” is linked to newer migration flows (Velasco, 2023: 12), Durban’s configuration is shaped by the long shadow of colonial urban planning and apartheid segregation. These histories left rigid racial and spatial hierarchies that contemporary security discourses now revive (Crush & Tawodzera, 2021: 45).

The women's experiences show how these legacies are lived in small, everyday encounters over rent, noise, crowding and presence. This theme deepens the study's engagement with the ways in which urban policy failures, moral panics and informal governance co-produce a hostile environment for migrant women. It also strengthens the argument that borders in African cities need to be understood as relational and gendered, reproduced through everyday interactions rather than fixed at the national edge. Importantly, this theme addresses Objective 4 by illustrating how migration policy, informal governance, and urban regulatory practices shape migrant women's access to space, work, and economic participation.

6.8 FEMINIST URBAN CITIZENSHIP: RIGHT TO WORK, MOVE AND EXIST

The final theme draws together the insights from the previous sections to show how Nigerian migrant women in Durban claim a form of citizenship from below. Sub-themes include solidarities and sisterhoods, "quiet embedding" in local economies and everyday acts of spatial claim-making. In the data, women described paying rent regularly, mentoring local apprentices, supporting neighbours, contributing to church communities and maintaining long term client relationships. Through these practices, they actively inscribe themselves into the social and economic fabric of the city. Recent scholarship conceptualises such practices as forms of insurgent or vernacular urban citizenship, where the right to appear, trade and move is enacted through daily presence and contribution rather than formal recognition (Isin & Nyers, 2022: 9; Piper, 2021: 44; Miraftab, 2023: 14).

In South Africa, research shows that migrant women in informal economies often "citizen themselves" through solidarity networks and care practices when legal routes to inclusion are blocked (Ndlovu & Moyo, 2024: 211). The present findings reinforce this pattern. Salons function as "citizenship laboratories" where the women's labour, sociability and aesthetic work collectively assert their right to be in the city. Intersectionality frames the costs and possibilities of this emergent citizenship. Race, gender and nationality expose women to xenophobic violence and patriarchal judgement, yet these same intersecting identities also foster distinctive forms of agency and collective care (Collins, 2019: 92). Structuration theory interprets the women's routines as ongoing efforts to generate a liveable order within constraint, while Simone's (2023: 17) notion of "people as infrastructure" underscores how

their labour sustains the functioning of urban life in neglected spaces. Capital Theory helps to explain how, over time, women convert limited economic capital into social and symbolic capital. They are recognised as reliable tenants, skilled stylists and caring community members, building what Ndlovu (2023: 68) describes as informal citizenship capital. Yet this form of capital remains conditional and vulnerable to xenophobic mobilisation, raids and policy shifts, which means that belonging must be continually reasserted. Comparative work from Nairobi, Accra and Maputo shows similar patterns of bottom-up citizenship among migrant and informal women workers (Amisi & Aderinto, 2024: 103; Owusu-Ansah, 2022: 106). The South African case diverges in the intensity of hostility and securitisation, which turns the simple act of going to work into a repeated act of endurance. The theme thus reinforces the study's central concern with how women's everyday practices constitute both a response to and a re-making of urban citizenship. This theme integrates Objectives 3 and 4 by demonstrating how migrant women assert forms of urban citizenship through everyday practices, despite structural and policy-related constraints.

6.9 CONCLUSION

Collectively, the six themes show how Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal hairdressing sector live at the intersection of multiple forms of power and vulnerability. Their lived experiences are shaped by militarised bordering, precarious legitimacy, aesthetic labour, transnational care, diffuse surveillance and fragile forms of citizenship. At the same time, they contribute to the city through economic exchange, sociality, beauty and care, often in spaces that the state governs unevenly or abandons. The chapter has drawn on intersectionality, Structuration theory and capital theory to interpret these dynamics, while also indicating where these frameworks require refinement. Intersectionality remains central to understanding layered oppression but needs to more fully integrate spatial and aesthetic registers of exclusion. Structuration theory helps to highlight agency under constraint but tends to underplay emotional and care labour.

Capital Theory reveals the importance of symbolic and social resources but needs to better account for their volatility in xenophobic contexts. Reading these frameworks together, the study proposes an intersectional structuration of capital as a way of naming the process

through which migrant women's survival depends on the continual conversion of embodied, social and aesthetic resources into provisional legitimacy within hostile urban systems. The findings speak directly to debates on migration, informality, gender and African urbanism by showing that informal hair salons operate as microcosms of wider processes of bordering, gendering and re-citizensing in post-apartheid cities. The women at the centre of this study do not simply occupy Durban; they help make it. Their work, relationships and creative practices sustain everyday life in the CBD, even as they remain exposed to removal and violence. Overall, the discussion demonstrates clear alignment between the study's findings and its research objectives, showing how socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, intersectional identities, and structural conditions collectively shape the lived experiences of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal economy. Taken together, the findings and discussion confirm that the study's objectives have been achieved, providing a coherent account of how socio-economic challenges, resilience strategies, intersectional identities, and structural conditions interact to shape the lived experiences of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal economy.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the main insights of the study by explaining the empirical data in the context of larger theoretical, methodological and policy frameworks. It builds upon the discussion in the last chapter by showing how the daily life of Nigerian female economic migrants brings to the fore more questions regarding gendered informality, African urbanism, and challenged belonging in South Africa. Instead of identifying the findings as separate themes, the discussion places them in context of existing literature on migration, citizenship and feminist labour economies, whereby micro level accounts reveal macro-level politics, social, and moralities.

The chapter holds the view that the informal hair economy is an important location of urban negotiation in which women negotiate and resist structural exclusion. Their stories show how the practices of bordering, xenophobic populism, and regulatory precarity interact with gender, race, and documentation status to establish the conditions of their involvement in the city. Meanwhile, these results indicate that women actively recreate urban life involving aesthetic labour, care networks, transnational practices and forms of strategic sociability of agency that complicate the legalist conceptualization of citizenship.

The chapter brings together these conceptual and empirical strands, bringing to the fore the contributions of the study in terms of theory, methodology and policy. It also reveals the limitations and gaps that need more research especially in terms of feminist urban theory, emotional economy of migrant labour, and politics of informal governance in African cities. The discussion places the Nigerian migrant women in the centre rather than on the peripheries of the social, cultural and economic fabric of Durban whose experiences provoke a redefinition of the migration governance, urban citizenship and gendered workings of informality.

7.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of this study provide a number of theoretical implications that refine existing schemes of how one tries to make sense of migration, gender and informality in African cities, and even in some instances, expand them. In spite of the fact the analysis used intersectionality, Structuration theory and the capital theory of Bourdieu, it is the empirical evidence that demonstrates new dimensions undermining some of their assumptions and indicating the necessity of a more context-sensitive formulation.

7.2.1 Extending Intersectionality Through Spatial and Aesthetic Registers

Intersectionality remains critical for explaining how gender, nationality, race, and documentation status co-produce vulnerability. Yet the data indicate that intersectional harm is not only social or institutional; it is also spatial and aesthetic. Women's bodies, accents, hairstyles, and salon spaces become sites where power is exercised and contested. This extends intersectional analysis beyond its traditional focus on identity categories to include embodied and spatialised dimensions of oppression, which are highly salient in the South African context of xenophobic populism and urban securitisation. The study therefore contributes to intersectionality's expansion by demonstrating that beauty practices, visibility, and aesthetic labour form part of the matrix through which migrant women experience and resist exclusion elements underdeveloped in mainstream intersectional scholarship.

7.2.2 Refining Structuration Theory Through Precarious Urban Governance

The women's accounts show that agency is enacted through highly disciplined routines altering operating hours, adjusting visibility, cultivating alliances, and rehearsing interactions. These practices affirm Giddens's argument that individuals reproduce and reinterpret structures through everyday action. However, the findings also reveal that in contexts of punitive or discretionary governance, agency reaches a ceiling beyond which survival tactics falter. Structuration theory, in its classical form, underplays the coercive, racialised and sometimes violent nature of urban enforcement that collapses agency during raids, moral panics or community-led xenophobic actions. The data thus suggest a refinement: in hostile urban economies, agency must be understood as situational, fragile, and often reversible, requiring a more critical reading of the structural limits within which migrant women make strategic choices.

7.2.3 Deepening Capital Theory: From Symbolic Capital to Volatile Legitimacy

Bourdieu's account of capital conversion economic, social, cultural, symbolic helps explain how women invest in professionalism, politeness, moral respectability, multilingual communication, and aesthetic skill. Yet the findings show that symbolic and social capital are highly volatile under xenophobic pressure: months of reputation-building can be erased with a single rumour, raid or community accusation. This volatility challenges the assumption that symbolic capital accumulates steadily, suggesting instead that in hostile migrant economies it behaves as revocable legitimacy. The study therefore extends capital theory by conceptualising symbolic capital not as durable credit but as a precarious, continually renegotiated currency, contingent upon shifting neighbourhood moral economies and political moods.

7.2.4 Introducing Aesthetic and Affective Capital into Migration Theory

Perhaps the clearest conceptual innovation emerging from the data is the centrality of aesthetic and affective capital, the value generated through beauty, style, emotional care, and embodied presence in salon spaces. Such types of capital may not only determine income but also belonging, trust, and informal protection, but they are peripheral to traditional theories of migration. This paper shows that aesthetic labour is highly political: it enables women to establish humanity, create cross-cultural relationships, and fight xenophobic discourses that characterize them as strangers. The findings present a more decolonial, whole picture view of capital in migrant informal economies, in which creativity, emotional labour and bodily presence are viewed as core to survival by foregrounding these dimensions.

7.2.5 Toward a Theory of Feminist Urban Citizenship

Across themes, the study reveals that citizenship for migrant women is not defined by legal documents but by embodied, affective, and economic participation. Through labour, sociability, care, and aesthetic production, the women produce forms of insurgent, everyday citizenship that reconfigure the boundaries of belonging. This contributes theoretically to feminist urbanism by showing that migrant women's citizenship is enacted through presence rather than permission, and through practice rather than formal membership. Hair salons become laboratories of urban belonging spaces where women render themselves visible,

valuable, and socially enmeshed despite exclusion. The study thus contributes to emerging work that reconceptualises citizenship in African cities as performed, negotiated, and relational.

7.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The study makes several methodological contributions through its integration of feminist qualitative principles, reflexive thematic analysis, and digital analytic tools. Although grounded in established qualitative traditions, the methodological approach adopted here extends current practice in migration research by centring aesthetic, affective, and spatial dimensions of migrant women's narratives domains often overshadowed by policy-centric or economistic analyses. A primary contribution lies in the study's adaptation of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) reflexive thematic analysis to a context marked by xenophobia and gendered insecurity. The approach to the themes was to view them as dynamic interpretive processes, constructed and reformulated through engagement with the transcripts, reflexive journaling and repeated coding processes. This is in line with Braun and Clarke (2021) but builds on their model by preempting the emotional and political labour of understanding narratives about marginalised black African migrant women.

Reflexive notes taken by the researcher at the end of every interview provided valuable critical insights of the tone, atmosphere, pauses, discomfort embodied, and subtle tensions. These contextual indicators provided knowledge and contributed to the coding choices so that thematic development did not work only with verbal but also with affective expressions, silences and vulnerable moments. The study also has a contribution on the methodological front because it uses NVivo not just as a coding tool but as a tool to trace aesthetic, spatial, and emotional motifs between data. The query feature of NVivo enabled plotting documentation status, salon ownership, emotional strain, experiences of surveillance, and aesthetic practices. This resulted in a multi-layered analytic architecture that transcended to descriptive categorisation to thick, relational meaning of the strategies of migrant women. Through this, it was through digital analysis that interpretation was not mechanised but made more sensitive in theory.

The other contribution to the methodology is the conscious application of pseudonyms and biographical supports in the analytic narrative. Instead of anonymising the participants to the degree of abstraction, the study did not discard meaningful demographic traits age, documentation status, years in South Africa to demonstrate how structural patterning in the data. This methodology conforms to feminist methodological promises of recognised specificity of participants with identity protection. It also questioned traditional anonymisation methods that usually nullify the contextual richness that is needed to see the intersectional inequality. Interviewing is also a contribution to the study. The interview guide posed questions to the participants that encouraged them to ponder not only the economic limitations, but also aesthetic identity, emotional wellbeing, motherhood, and spatial strategies areas that had been overlooked in migration studies. The two-way style used in interviews helped unearth emotional states, fear, beauty, and care to produce a dataset that is disproportionately replete with emotional and sensory information. This proves the usefulness of the feminist rapport-based interviewing with its ability to produce data that can fully describe the richness of informal migrant life.

Lastly, the approach adds to epistemic justice discourses in the study of African migration. The study treats aesthetic labour, humour, gesture, and silence as analytically meaningful and therefore it does not allow one to make hierarchical assumptions in privileging policy-oriented data over lived experience. The outcome is a research design that does not consider migrant women as objects to extract knowledge, but as co-constructors of knowledge, whose experiences informed categories of codes and interpretations. These methodological contributions taken together move toward a more reflexive, relational, and decolonial method of conducting the qualitative study of migration, which is sensitive to the complexity of the lives of women in hostile urban infrastructures and generates empirically robust, morally informed, and theoretically dense knowledge about women.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the fact that the presented study provides a very important and original contribution to the scholarly literature on the topic of gendered migration, urban informality, and African feminist analysis, one must admit a number of methodological and conceptual shortcomings.

Such constraints do not diminish the worth of the findings, instead they place them in the context of the realities of conducting research on precarious and marginalised populations in unstable urban settings. First, the analysis relies on an insufficiently large purposively chosen sample of ten Nigerian women economic migrants working along Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street. Although this is a methodologically correct size to use in in-depth qualitative inquiry, it is not asserted to be statistically representative. The lives of these women cannot be supposed to be representative of the lives of all Nigerian migrant hairdressers in Durban, or of the rest of the African migrant women in South Africa in general. Rather, the results are a contextual, theoretically based snapshot that should be read with sensitivity by the readers to the larger structural processes.

Second, the ethical and epistemic limits were introduced by the documentation status of participants. Some of the women were either illegal or awaiting asylum determinations, and this influenced the information they considered safe to reveal. Selective telling or avoidance of very sensitive matters like bribery, harassment, or informal protection economies may have been due to fear of exposure, deportation of respondents, or retaliation. Despite the fact that the rapport was established on the basis of the long-term interaction and linguistic acquaintance (English and Nigerian Pidgin), there might have been even some more vulnerable layers that were not discussed.

Third, the researcher had a dual role because of the situated positionality. Familiarity with the salon environment facilitated access and trust, yet it also required continuous reflexive monitoring to avoid over-identification with participants. While journaling, peer debriefing, and member checking helped mitigate bias, complete neutrality is neither possible nor desirable in feminist qualitative research. The interpretation of narratives is therefore partially shaped by the researcher's embodied standpoint as an African woman engaging with migrant women in a shared postcolonial urban space.

Fourth, the study is geographically bounded, focusing exclusively on salons in Durban's inner city. Migrant women working in townships, suburbs, home-based salons, or mobile hairdressing arrangements may encounter different policing logics, xenophobic geographies,

and economic structures. Thus, the spatial lens illuminates one urban ecosystem but does not capture the full heterogeneity of migrant women's economic lives across KwaZulu-Natal or South Africa. Fifth, the research was conducted during a period when anti-migrant mobilisation (e.g., Operation Dudula and other vigilante formations) was intensifying, which shaped both participants' narratives and the researcher's ability to observe everyday practices. Increased tension might have magnified specific themes (surveillance, harassment, fear), and suppressed others (entrepreneurial experimentation, working with local actors). Future-directed and shifting quality of xenophobic sentiment restricts generalisability in time of the results.

Sixth, there are inherent limitations of language translation and interpretation. Transcription and interpretive coding may have distorted minor meanings, expressions, and emotional overtones even though the interviews were conducted using two languages. Though NVivo made systematic analysis easier, the coding process inevitably reduces complex lived realities into thematic groups and it is possible that some richness in narrative is lost. Lastly, the views of landlords, police officers, local traders, municipal officials and South African members of the community were not used in the study. Their exclusion restricts the multi-layered approach to informal governance, daily bordering habits, as well as conflicting claims to urban space. Research in the future where these actors are introduced into the narratives of migrant women would further complicate the analysis. The study despite these shortcomings has high methodological, theoretical, and empirical richness. The study offers important perspective of the gendered and racialised relations that inform the informal economies of modern South Africa and generates rich areas of subsequent intellectual enquiry by preempting the voices of Nigerian migrant women into a stringent analytical platform.

7.5 POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that there lies a deep-rooted disjuncture between the daily lives of Nigerian migrant women in the informal hairdressing sector of Durban and the presumptions that the existing migration, urban, and economic policies operate. The study provides a series of insights into the ways in which migrant women experience the city by foregrounding the lived, aesthetic, emotional and spatial activities in which they navigate the city, dismantling

the mainstream policy narratives and offering possible alternative ways of ensuring inclusive governance. One of the main contributions is the ability to show that the governance of South African migrations is realized not only by formal institutions but by an assemblage of municipal by-laws, discretionary enforcement and informal networks of policing. This diffused architecture of control means that interventions targeting only immigration legislation will remain insufficient if they do not also address the moral, spatial and administrative regimes that criminalise migrant presence at the local level. The findings therefore support calls for integrated urban governance reforms that treat xenophobia, informal governance and by-law enforcement as interlinked rather than separate challenges.

The study also contributes to policy debates by showing that, despite their exclusion from formal labour pathways, migrant women are embedded in vital micro-economies of care, beauty, service provision and everyday sociality. These activities sustain local consumer markets, generate income flows and produce relational value within communities. Yet these contributions remain absent from national and municipal economic planning. Recognising hair salons and similar feminised service economies as legitimate components of urban economic infrastructure would enable more targeted and gender-responsive policy tools, such as simplified trading permits, rental protections and micro-enterprise support. This follows new African feminist economic models re-branding informal labour by women as a developmental resource as opposed to regulatory danger. The other policy implication is related to documentation.

The study shows how precarious, delayed or inaccessible documentation regimes have a cascading effect of restricted movement into fractured motherhood, inaccessible health services and more exposure of surveillance. Any future reform should, accordingly, not only target the quickness and openness of the documentation procedures but also accommodate migrant women to municipal service provision and safety-net facilities. There is evidence that the regularisation programmes together with formalised micro-enterprise access points enhance cohesion and limit exploitative enforcement methods in South cities with a similar profile. Same experimentation deserves the South African context.

Other implications of the findings are the necessity to develop anti-xenophobia strategies that are gender-sensitive. Although xenophobia is generally discussed in terms of a general social phenomenon in the country, this paper demonstrates that migrant women are subject to gendered practices of moralised suspicion, extortion and space control. Intervention policies either through education of the populace, or through community discussion or by-law change should thus have some such intersectional sensitivity to the disparate ways in which xenophobia is practiced in gendered settings like salons, markets and streets. This involves more collaboration between local police institutions and municipal departments and civil society organizations that address issues of gender-based violence, migrant rights and urban safety.

Lastly, the study findings necessitate a redefinition of the conceptualisation of participation and citizenship in city policies. The daily activities by which migrant women assert space by labour, care, aesthetic production and social embeddedness form some practices of urban citizenship-in-practice. Although such practices cannot be confined to legalistic approaches to citizenship, they are quite fundamental to the operation of the social and economic environment in Durban. More inclusive, stronger and safer urban environment can be achieved through policies that recognise and promote such practices instead of repressing them. In general, it can be stated that the study proposes the change of the punitive and exclusionary government towards the collaborative, gender responsive, and developmental governance, which should take migrant women as agents of economic and social life in the city. This would help not only to make the city more resilient, but also reinforce urban unity and the larger objectives of social justice and development in post-apartheid South Africa.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study leave some gaps, which may be explored by future researchers in the field of gendered migration, informality, and urban citizenship in African cities. Although the research offers a highly textured narrative of Nigerian female economic migrants in informal hair economy in Durban, its findings can also illuminate the conceptual, methodological and policy-generated gaps, which future research may help to fill.

To start with, longitudinal studies that would take into account the change of strategies, vulnerabilities and aspirations of migrant women over time are necessary. The present study offers a cross-sectional lens, yet the dynamics of xenophobic mobilisation, urban policing practices, informal governance arrangements and immigration legislation in South Africa are in constant flux. Long term tracking of migrant households would illuminate how resilience strategies evolve, how burnout or adaptation emerges, and how life-course changes (e.g. marriage, motherhood, ageing) reshape participation in informal economies. Such research would also capture transformations in transnational care chains, particularly the effects of digital technologies on sustaining intimacy across borders.

Second, future research would benefit from comparative urban studies both within South Africa and across the continent. The experiences of migrant women in Durban may differ significantly from those navigating Johannesburg's hyper-policed inner city, Cape Town's spatially segregated service economy or Gqeberha's transitioning industrial zones. Comparative studies with other African cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Accra or Kigali would help identify which dynamics are Durban-specific and which reflect broader continental patterns. Such work could refine theories of urban informality, citizenship and xenophobic governance by situating them in diverse historical, political and spatial contexts.

Third, further inquiry into migrant masculinities is necessary to deepen intersectional analyses of household organisation, income distribution and emotional labour. While this study focused on women, their narratives hint at complex gender negotiations within migrant families involving male partners, absent fathers, and kinship obligations. Understanding how men navigate precarious legality, moral surveillance and informal labour markets could enrich feminist migration theory by offering relational insights into how gendered expectations and responsibilities are reconfigured in contexts of displacement and informality.

Fourth, there is considerable value in developing Afropolitan feminist methodologies that more fully integrate aesthetics, embodiment, affect and cultural production into migration research. Traditional qualitative methods remain essential but insufficient for capturing the

sensory, aesthetic and emotional dimensions of hair salon economies. Future work might employ participatory visual ethnography, sound diaries, creative mapping or collaborative salon-based workshops. Such approaches would deepen theoretical engagement with aesthetics as a form of citizenship and resistance, expanding beyond Eurocentric and policy-driven research paradigms. Fifth, the study highlights the need for further examination of urban border regimes beyond formal immigration control. The findings suggest that community patrols, taxi associations, religious networks, building managers and neighbourhood watch groups constitute parallel migration governance structures. Future research could map these hybrid policing economies, analyse their moral foundations, and examine how they intersect with state institutions and political movements such as Operation Dudula. This would advance critical border studies by conceptualising borders as relational, mobile and embedded within everyday urban infrastructures rather than at territorial edges.

Finally, future research should investigate the emotional and psychic effects of precarious citizenship. While economic and spatial dimensions of informality have been well-documented, less is known about how chronic surveillance, xenophobic threat and reproductive insecurity shape mental health, identity formation and social cohesion among African migrant women. Interdisciplinary work drawing from psychology, public health and decolonial feminist theory could illuminate these dimensions, informing more humane urban policy and support mechanisms. Collectively, these research directions illustrate that understanding African urban migration requires attention not only to structural exclusion but also to aesthetics, emotion, relationality and everyday practice. By expanding conceptual and methodological horizons, future scholarship can continue to challenge reductive narratives of migrants as economic competitors or security threats, foregrounding instead the complex ways they shape and sustain urban life.

7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has drawn together the empirical, theoretical and methodological threads of the study to offer an integrated interpretation of how Nigerian female economic migrants navigate Durban's informal hairdressing economy under conditions of legal precarity, xenophobic hostility and gendered economic exclusion. An analysis of their stories using the

intersectionality, Structuration theory and the theory of capital proposed by Bourdieu, the chapter has shown that the experiences of the women cannot be interpreted merely as survival tactics or personal adaptations; instead, they reveal the larger socio-political framework which informs the life of migrants in modern South African urban areas. The discussion has shown that militarised citizenship, aesthetic labour, transnational care, informal governance, and embodied forms of urban belonging operate as intertwined dimensions of migrant livelihood.

The findings confirm that citizenship is not a fixed legal status but a dynamic, contested practice enacted through labour, care, reputation, relational work and aesthetic presence. For the women in this study, belonging is negotiated rather than granted; it is performed through daily acts of visibility and discretion, vigilance and creativity, compliance and quiet defiance. Their narratives expose the contradictions of an urban order that depends on their labour while simultaneously constructing them as disposable outsiders. The study has also situated these findings within wider academic debates across the Global South, Africa and South Africa. Through comparison with recent studies, it has shown where Durban's patterns resonate with other cities such as the diffusion of border work into community policing and where the South African case diverges, particularly in its intensity of anti-migrant mobilisation and its moralised scrutiny of feminised informal economies. This comparative lens highlights how South Africa's unique political history, economic constraints and post-apartheid anxieties produce a more hostile environment for African migrant women than many other continental contexts. The theoretical contributions advanced here underscore the need for an expanded conceptual vocabulary capable of capturing the aesthetic, affective and transnational registers of migrant experience. While intersectionality remains essential for analysing layered vulnerability, it must be extended to include spatial and aesthetic exclusions. Structuration theory highlights the recursive character of agency under constraint but requires supplementation to account for emotional and moral labour. Capital theory explains the strategic deployment of symbolic, cultural and social capital, yet its economic rationalism does not fully capture the precarious moral economies within which migrant women operate. Together, these limitations point toward the conceptual synthesis proposed in this study: the intersectional structuration of capital, a framework that accounts for the

instability, creativity and fragility characterising migrant women's negotiations of urban belonging.

Finally, the chapter positions migrant women as co-producers of the city, not merely as marginal labourers or vulnerable populations. Their salons function as cultural institutions, emotional infrastructures and sites of informal governance; their economic contributions sustain city centre vitality; and their aesthetic and relational labour reshape urban sociality in ways unacknowledged by state policy. In this way, the study re-positions migrant women as the producers of urban policy rather than as recipient of it and as such, their embodied practices and life survival strategies have theoretical implications well beyond their immediate realities. This conclusion thus does not only summarise the results of the study, but also the wider implications of policy, theoretical clarification and contribution to knowledge arising out of the study. By so doing, it substantiates the main argument in this work their non-peripheral status to the urban fabric of Durban, but rather their active agents whose everyday practices mediate, disfigure and fill the negritude spaces of belonging that are the subject of contention in Durban.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Khanyisile Mngadi, student number 251074730). I am a Masters student studying at the University of Mpumalanga, Mbombela Campus. The title of my research is: An Intersectional Examination of the Socio-Economic Challenges and Resilience Strategies of Nigerian Female Economic Migrants in Durban's Informal Hairdressing Sector, South Africa The aim of the study is to examine the challenges faced by Nigerian female economic migrants and how they navigate these challenges). I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about 30-60 minutes
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of Mpumalanga, Mbombela Campus, . Email: 251074730@ump.ac.za
Cell: 0820579422.

My supervisor is Dr Andile Sokani who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Mbombela Campus, of the University of Mpumalanga R40 &D 725 Roads Mbombela, South Africa. Contact details: email: Andile.Sokani@ump.ac.za Phone number: 0719006124.

My co-supervisor is Dr John Mhandu who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Mbombela Campus of the University of Mpumalanga . Contact details: email john.mhandu@ump.ac.za Phone number: 0130020525.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... *(full names of participant)* hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE



Interview Guide

Student Name: Mngadi Khanyisile

Student Number: 251074730

Study Title: An Intersectional Examination of the Socio-Economic Challenges and Resilience Strategies of Nigerian Female Economic Migrants in Durban's Informal Hairdressing Sector

Target Group: Nigerian Female Salon Owners operating in Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, Durban

Allow me to take this moment to thank you for letting this meeting happen today. My name is Khanyisile Mngadi, and I would like to talk to you about the social and economic challenges that Nigerian women who move to Durban for work as hairdressers face and how they deal with them. The study's goal is to look at the social and economic challenges that Nigerian women who have moved to Durban for work as hairdressers face and how they deal with them.

The interview should go on for thirty to sixty minutes. That way, I will not miss any of the information you share, I will record our talk. Please let me know if you do not want the talk to be recorded so I can use the notebook to take notes instead. We will not share the answers you give to the questions with anyone else. Also, we will make sure that our record does not show who you are as a respondent. Keep in mind that you can end the interview whenever you feel nervous and that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Do you need to know anything else about the process? Are you ready to take part in this interview?

Section A: Background and Migration Journey

1. Would you be willing to discuss your experience of migrating to South Africa? (What factors specifically motivated your decision to relocate to Durban?)
2. How did you establish your hairdressing business in Durban? (What obstacles did you encounter during your initial stages?)

3. What are some of the challenges you face in operating your salon as a transient woman in this region? (xenophobia, permits, competition, safety, gender bias)
4. How do local laws or policies, such as immigration or municipal ordinances, affect your daily business operations? (Have you encountered any specific constraints?)

Section C: Strategies for Coping and Resilience

5. In spite of these obstacles, what sustains your business? (What resources, networks, or strategies assist you in managing your stress?)
6. Are you in collaboration with other Nigerian or African women in this location? If so, how do these relationships assist you in the management or expansion of your business?
7. On which types of support (financial, emotional, and community) do you depend? (Associations, clients, churches, families, social networks)

Section D: Reflections on Policy and Structure

8. Have you had any interactions with South African authorities, such as police or municipal officers? What was the nature of that experience?
9. What modifications to laws, policies, or community attitudes would facilitate your business's success?

Personal Reflections: Section E

10. In retrospect, how would you define your experience as a Nigerian woman who operates a salon in Durban? (What lessons have you learnt and what guidance would you offer to others?)

APPENDIX C: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER



Our Ref: **Cllr N.E Msani**
Your Ref: **072 705 3783**
Enquiries:

Councillor

Mezzanine Floor Shell House
Cnr. Anton Lembede & Samora Michell Street, Durban, 4001
P O Box 1014, Durban, 4000
Tel: 031 322 7030, Fax: 031 311 3827
www.durban.gov.za

25 May 2025

To:

The Research Ethics Committee
University of Mpumalanga
Mbombela, South Africa

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN WARD 26 – ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

This letter serves to confirm that Ms Khanyisile Mngadi, a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Mpumalanga, has been granted permission to conduct academic research within Ward 26, specifically along Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, Durban CBD.

The approved study is titled:

"An Intersectional Examination of the Socio-Economic Challenges and Resilience Strategies of Nigerian Female Economic Migrants in Durban's Informal Hairdressing Sector."

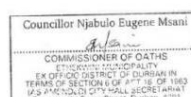
We acknowledge that Ms Mngadi's study involves interviews with Nigerian female salon owners operating informally along Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, and that she will conduct her work in accordance with the ethical standards outlined by her institution. Participation in the research will be voluntary, and all confidentiality and consent procedures will be adhered to.

The Ward Office recognises the value of this research in contributing to a deeper understanding of urban informal economies and migrant livelihoods in our community. We therefore support her application for ethical clearance and her request to proceed with fieldwork in the above-named location.

Should further information be required, our office may be contacted using the details provided above.

Yours faithfully,


Councillor N.E Msani
(Ward 26)
eThekweni Municipality



APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Faculty Research Ethics Committee

FREC-UMP



UNIVERSITY OF
MPUMALANGA

Ref: UMP/Mngadi/09/2025

Date: 26 September 2025

Khanyisile Mngadi [251074730]

School of Social Sciences
University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

An Intersectional Examination of the Socio-Economic Challenges and Resilience Strategies of N An Intersectional Examination of the Socio-Economic Challenges and Resilience Strategies of Nigerian Female Economic Migrants in Durban's Informal Hairdressing Sector

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/ modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ogujiuba Kanayo'.

Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo
Chairperson: FREC,
Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences
University of Mpumalanga

APPENDIX E: TURNITIN REPORT

An intersectional examination of the socio-economic challenge and resilience strategies of Nigerian female economic migrants in Durban's informal hairdressing sector

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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