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Chapter 16
"We maZimba… There Is Nothing That We Cannot Do": The Work Ethic of Undocumented Zimbabwean Day Labourers in eMalahleni, South Africa

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16.1 Introduction

Between June 2015 and December 2016, I interacted with undocumented Zimbabwean day labourers in eMalahleni. These were predominantly men who congregated at strategic locations such as the local shopping mall, Isibindi Centre, and road intersections around the mall, waiting to be hired for a day's work. Some of the men, such as Donald,[1] would strategically isolate themselves to avoid competition from the other men and make themselves easily noticeable to prospective employers. One afternoon, in the sweltering heat of October 2015, on my way to Isibindi Centre, I noticed Donald sitting alone with his lawn mower on the roadside. I joined him, and after exchanging salutations, inquired:

J: *So, life iri sei muno muJoni*[2] *umu?*	So, how is life here in Joni (South Africa)?
D: *Haa, Joni mazuvano life* ***yakakiya***	Haa, these days life in Joni is **tight**.
J: *Saka muri kuzvigona sei?*	So how are you managing?
D: *Haa tiri kungo* ***kiya-kiya*** *blaz kuti life ifambe*	Haa my brother, we are just **getting by** (***kiya-kiya)*** so life can go on.

The above vignette illustrates the work-related predicament confronting undocumented Zimbabwean day labourers and their tactical approach in dealing with the challenges. Examining this approach, which is driven by a logic of "getting by"

[1] I use pseudonyms for all the names of the participants and other locations (such as Isibindi Centre), except for eMalahleni, which is the study area.

[2] "Joni" is a term for Johannesburg but is popularly used by Zimbabweans to refer to the whole of South Africa.

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(*kukiya-kiya*), and guided by ethics of hard work and reliability, this chapter focuses on the (re)production of exploitation among undocumented migrants. While this approach makes undocumented migrants more attractive to many employers, I argue, they inadvertently discipline themselves, thus actively contributing to their own exploitation.

Job opportunities have significantly waned in South Africa. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) in the third quarter of 2019 showed that the country has an unemployment rate of 29.1%, its highest in more than 16 years (Statistics South Africa, 2019). This, coupled with structural barriers that prohibit the employment of undocumented migrants, makes it onerous for undocumented migrants to find work. However, research shows that undocumented migrants find work mostly in the informal sector, where employers prefer hiring them because they have less bargaining power and are thus more exploitable (Crush, 2011). Migrant "illegality", this literature notes, makes undocumented migrant workers reluctant to join trade unions or complain about unpaid or low wages and substandard working conditions for fear that their employers would retaliate and take action that could lead to their arrest and deportation. For example, the Human Rights Watch (1998) found that farmers would report their undocumented migrant farm workers to the police when time to pay their wages approached or when they appeared to be subversive, which, consequently, restrained the workers for fear of being reported to the police.

Reitzes (1995) cited in Solomon (2001) portrays undocumented migrants as passive victims who are heavily constrained by their "illegal" status to unwillingly acquiesce to their own exploitation. While acknowledging the structural constraints that predispose undocumented migrants to exploitation, such as South Africa's restrictive immigration and labour market policies, I seek to broaden this analysis by underscoring the place of agency in the (re)production of the exploitation of undocumented migrant workers. I utilise what the Zimbabwean day labourers call, in *Chi*Shona, *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* (joining things together to make do), which is a tactical approach for and a logic of "getting by" and "making do", as a lens through which I examine how these undocumented migrants adopt and cultivate a series of work traits that are guided by the moral ethics of hard work, trustworthiness and reliability to make themselves more attractive to employers, but, inadvertently, exploitable. So, instead of overstating the seeming vulnerability and powerlessness of undocumented migrants, I demonstrate how the Zimbabwean day labourers' agency can both shape and be limited by structures of power (see Giddens, 1993), thereby constituting an oxymoronic mix of a responsive strategy to their work-related challenges that also exacerbates their exploitation.

The chapter demonstrates how the moral ethics guiding the notion of *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* enable the undocumented Zimbabwean men to do a performance of willingness to be an obedient, flexible, and hardworking workforce - that is, performing some impression management (Goffman, 1959), which shapes their employers' perceptions of them and therefore, makes them preferred workers. This, however, raises some questions pertaining to such exercise of agency by these men through *kukiya-kiya*: Given that migrant "illegality" circumscribes the entry and involvement of undocumented migrant workers in the labour market, is

kukiya-kiya an exercise of agency by the undocumented migrant workers, or through *kukiya-kiya* they merely do what they should for them to survive? This analysis nuances the dynamics at play in the (re)production of undocumented migrant workers' exploitation, and more importantly, underlines how, as Batisai's chapter in this book highlights, the contextual specificities shape the work-related experiences of undocumented migrants, thus giving a southern perspective to the analysis of migrant worker exploitation within the South-South migration context.

In the sections that follow, I examine the concept of *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza*, highlighting its meaning and origins. I then look at daily wage work in South Africa and analyse how the undocumented Zimbabwean men deploy the idea of *kukiya-kiya* in their everyday work experiences in order for them to find work and negotiate and maintain employment relationships. This analysis will reveal how *kukiya-kiya* as an agential project enables the undocumented Zimbabwean men to both overcome their work-related challenges and actively contribute to the (re)production of their exploitation.

16.2 *Kukiya-kiya* or *Kubatanidza-batanidza*: Some Conceptual Explanations

For the past several years, many Zimbabweans searching for economic opportunities considered South Africa synonymous with the biblical land flowing with milk and honey. But South Africa's restrictive immigration policy forces many "low-skilled" Zimbabweans to cross the border "illegally". And those who do so often find life to be a parody of what they anticipated before they migrated, with limited opportunities for "better" paying jobs. Such migrants find themselves in conditions similar to, or even worse than, the ones they ran away from.

Oftentimes, my interlocutors bemoaned that "*zvinhu zvakakiya/zvakaoma"* (things are tight) when describing their daily life struggles in South Africa, and that *"tiri kukiya-kiya/kubatanidza-batanidza"* (we are getting by/we are joining things together) to highlight their responsive strategies to overcome the challenges. In this section, I examine the notion of *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza*, its meaning and conceptual origins.

Kukiya-kiya or *kubatanidza-batanidza* became popular in Zimbabwe at the height of the socio-economic crisis that started in the early 2000s and peaked in 2008 as everyday jargon, not only to define the crisis, but also to underline people's industrious efforts to keep going in the face of debilitating socio-economic circumstances (Madambi et al., 2015; Jones, 2010). I use the terms *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* interchangeably.

Kukiya is a verb whose literal meaning is "to lock". It is used to describe situations that are stifling. As we have seen in my conversation with Donald, undocumented Zimbabweans in South Africa also use the term *-kiya* to describe the "tight" conditions they live in. *Kukiya* is also used metaphorically with a sense of victory to

denote an act of forcefully or cleverly knocking down an adversary. This metaphorical usage of *kukiya* informs the meaning of *kukiya-kiya* which suggests "cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources are at hand" for self-sustenance (Jones, 2010:286). Therefore, *kukiya-kiya* is a tactical response to crisis that enables people to make ends meet in the here and now. *Kubatanidza-batanidza*, as the equivalent of *kukiya-kiya*, refers to the process of joining things together under difficult conditions as a way of desperately achieving a desired end – to get by (Chimhundu & Mangoya, 2001).

In Zimbabwe, these concepts referred to unorthodox survival strategies adopted by many people as the country's formal economy crumbled (Madambi et al., 2015; Jones, 2010). But, far from being a new phenomenon, the logic of *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* has always been a part of Zimbabwe's urban landscape (Jones, 2010). *Kukiya-kiya* was largely driven by a pre-existing and deeply held ethic of working with one's hands (*kushanda mabasa emaoko*) that was propagated by some churches and state programmes to promote self-sufficiency (Jones, 2010). For example, some African apostolic Christians, popularly known as *mapostori* in Zimbabwe, presented working with one's hands as a moral alternative to working for *varungu* (whites) (Dillon-Malone, 1978). Other formulations of working with one's hands were linked to the creation of a racialised labour force (Jones, 2010). Studies in the West show that - and this has been the case in most parts of contemporary Africa - the rhetoric of working with one's hands was a form of "protest masculinity" (McDowell, 2003) linked to the construction of certain occupational identities associated with "a particular type of working-class masculinity" among young, poorly educated men (Nixon, 2006:208). This "macho" masculinity considered one's competences as embodied in the body's physical ability, which contrasts middle-class "cerebral masculinities" that celebrate academic success, intellect, and non-manual labour (Nixon, 2006; McDowell, 2003).

The practices that constitute *kukiya-kiya* relate well to de Certeau's (1984) discussion on tactical action, which he argues is dependent on lack of access to "proper place". He defines "proper place" as "a place that can be delimited as its own" and can "serve as the base" for managing "relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats" (de Certeau, 1984:37). Because it is bereft of a "proper place", a tactic harnesses time, always looking to seize opportunities, and "constantly manipulat[ing] events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (de Certeau, 1984:xix). A tactic, therefore, is a "calculated action", an "art of the weak" (de Certeau, 1984:37) that depends on the clever utilisation of time and opportunities. What this means is that a tactic can enable one to opportunistically overturn unfavourable circumstances and derive some positive outcomes.

De Certeau's analysis helps elucidate the notion of *kukiya-kiya*. Migrant "illegality" positions the migrants "out of place" with no "proper place" and the space they exist in is the space of another. Thus, they "play on and with a terrain imposed on [them] and organised by the law" of the country, seizing "the chance offerings of the moment" (de Certeau, 1984:37). Being "out of place" subjects them to prohibitions and exclusions, making them structurally vulnerable. However, through *kukiya-kiya*, the migrants can exploit and manipulate the regulations designed to exclude

them; they can ingeniously cope with the myriad challenges they face in their everyday struggles to find work in an environment where they are perceived as criminals (see Crush & Williams, 2003), where jobs are scarce, and their "illegality" prohibits them from working.

As a tactical approach, *kukiya-kiya* depends on the "clever utilisation of time" (de Certeau, 1984:39), which gives it a limited spatio-temporal horizon. It is a transient response "just for now" (Jones, 2010:295) because the prevailing circumstances demand such a proactive response. In Zimbabwe, its functionality as a temporal means to an end that was defined in the here and now often resulted in the suspension of rules and straightness and adoption of "whatever works" (Jones, 2010:294) methods for achieving desired goals. This had far-reaching repercussions on the ethics and morality of the Zimbabwean people in general, as the culture of surviving through crooked means took root. While the undocumented Zimbabwean day labourers in South Africa build their understanding of *kukiya-kiya* around the ways the concept was understood and deployed in Zimbabwe, theirs is guided by some degree of moral propriety and ethics.

16.3 Daily Wage Workers: Men Who Stand by the Side of the Road

The daily wage labour market is burgeoning worldwide and is predominantly constituted by men. This informal labour market is linked to the expansion of global economic restructuring, the emergence of informal markets, and the decline of formal economic activity regulated by the state, particularly the rise of part-time and contingent work (Belous, 1989). It serves as a safety net for those people who fall out of or fail to enter the formal job market. In developed countries in the Global North, it serves as an entry point into the labour market for migrant workers who may be able to transition into the formal economy (Van Nieuwenhuyze, 2009; Valenzuela Jr., 2000).

In South Africa, daily wage work is linked to the liberalisation of the economy and the resultant erosion of employment opportunities for those with labour market disadvantage (Blaauw et al., 2006). Daily wage work thus became a source of livelihood for the "less-skilled", among them migrants from other countries. Just as in the United States of America, daily wage work in South Africa serves as an avenue into the labour market for many Zimbabwean migrants, most of whom are undocumented, but this is how far the similarity goes because the chances for these migrants to transition into the formal labour market are extremely limited (Blaauw et al., 2012).

Daily wage work is a precarious form of work; employment relationships are forged outside the regulatory systems designed to protect workers (Camou, 2009). It is a "laissez-faire market place" (Blaauw et al., 2012:1335) where work processes are easily alterable with little or no institutional protection for the workers. For example, labour is largely clandestine, undeclared, paid below the minimum wage,

or employed under circumstances that society's norms would not otherwise allow (Valenzuela Jr., 2000). The work is temporary, short-term (sometimes lasting only a few hours), and is often composed of daily work assignments. Recruitment for the jobs and the pricing of labour are mostly through negotiation with no written contract. This mostly takes place before the worker gets into the vehicle of the employer to be transported to the actual place where he is going to work for the day. The employer and the worker may agree on the terms of employment, but the lack of a written contract means there is no guarantee that the worker will be paid after completing the job. Incidents of under-payment or no payment at all are common (Blaauw et al., 2006). In the end, wages in this labour market depend largely on the goodwill of the employer (Blaauw et al., 2012). While I concur with this, we should also not understate the persuasive power of the daily-wage workers. Since the negotiation for the job happens mostly before the employer hires the worker, the Zimbabwean migrants invoke the notion of *kukiya-kiya* as being able to cunningly wheedle prospective employers into hiring them and agreeing to pay "better" once the job is completed.

As I indicated in the introduction to the chapter, the Zimbabwean day labourers in eMalahleni congregate at Isibindi Centre and surrounding areas, signalling to passing motorists either by shouting the jobs they are looking for or waving a placard on which is written the jobs they do, or holding the tools for the jobs they are looking for. It is common to see these men circling cars that stop looking for workers. The men try to outmuscle and outbid one another to get hired. Sometimes the men just scramble into the passenger seat or jump into the back of the car and urge the driver to drive off even before hearing they type of job to be done or terms of engagement. While the hiring sites are marked by bouts of pandemonium as the daily wage workers compete to be hired, for the most part, the workers maintain a modicum of orderliness (Valenzuela Jr., 2000).

16.4 Methods

This chapter is based on qualitative ethnographic data gathered with undocumented Zimbabwean migrant daily wage workers between the ages of 20 and 50 years in Emalahleni, a mining town in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. As I highlight elsewhere (Machinya, 2019, 2021), the undocumented Zimbabwean migrants in Emalahleni live with incessant anxiety over disclosing their "illegal" status for fear of arrest and deportation. This fear pushes them into spaces where they prefer their status to remain undetectable to state officials and anyone who shows interest in their undocumented status.

I was aware that for me to forge relationships of trust with such people and gain sufficient insights into the capriciousness of their everyday life, it was important that I follow these undocumented Zimbabwean men over a longer period, and ethnography provided me with appropriate methodological tools to achieve this. Between June 2015 and December 2016, I lived with the undocumented Zimbabwean

migrants in an informal settlement. My prolonged presence enabled more relaxed interactions with my interlocutors. I would write fieldwork notes to capture these informal conversations as well as the observations I made. The people were able to share more intimate stories as well as sorrowful narratives about their experiences in these relaxed informal conversations.

In addition to the informal observations and conversations through ethnography, I conducted and audio-recorded twenty-two in-depth interviews with the undocumented Zimbabwean daily wage workers. The interviews were all in *ChiShona* and I transcribed and translated them into English. The process of transcribing was time-consuming and tedious, but as Riessman (1993) notes, it proved to be an excellent way of familiarising myself with the data and gaining a more thorough understanding of the different aspects of the lives of my interlocutors. Through listening and re-listening to the audios, repeatedly reading the transcribed interviews and fieldwork notes, I was able to make sense of the verbal utterances in relation to the research participants' experiences of "illegality" and deportability. In fact, through this process, I immersed myself in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which was crucial for analysis.

16.5 "We *Kiya-kiya* to Survive"

The Zimbabwean day labourers deployed the notion of *kukiya-kiya* to both define and survive the existential challenges associated with migrant "illegality". Being "illegal" and subsequently prohibited from working and accessing other social services linked to citizenship evokes feelings of being left on their own with no one to help them; as Pardon revealed, "There is no one to help us here except ourselves." These feelings of socio-political abandonment propel the Zimbabwean men into *kukiya-kiya* as a pragmatic and well-calculated response for survival. When asked about their responses to the challenges they face in South Africa, the men frequently responded like Ronny, *"Munhu[rume] ndewekuzvishandira"* (A man must work for himself), or Amos, *"Murume chaiye ndewe kukiya-kiya"* (A real man must *kiya-kiya*), or Donald *"..tiri kungo kiya-kiya… kuti life ifambe"* (…we *kiya-kiya*… to survive).

These men see *kukiya-kiya* as underlining a certain degree of "real" masculinity and engendering self-reliance whereby they look not to the state for the provision of the means for survival, but instead look to themselves. Through *kukiya-kiya,* the men engage in self-employment and work with their own hands - as Pardon puts it, "… if you do not have a [formal] job, you must work for yourself with your own hands". These men take pride in their bodily ability to survive difficult situations, as Amos proudly articulated: "… We *maZimba* (Zimbabweans), we are strong. There is nothing that we cannot do; we use our own hands; we do not sit on our hands."

They celebrate working with their own hands as a display of "real" manhood, which is a form of protest masculinity (McDowell, 2003). This masculinity energises them to overcome labour market disadvantages that restrict their entry into the

formal labour market, particularly those associated with educational qualifications and "legal" status. While I met a few men with post-secondary school qualifications, most of the Zimbabwean day labourers did not have educational qualifications. These men exalt bodily ability and strength as central to executing their jobs. As such, most of the jobs they do through *kukiya-kiya* are manual jobs that require no or little mental dexterity. So to say that "… we are strong… [and] we use our own hands" downplays middle-class "cerebral masculinities" that celebrate academic success, intellect, and non-manual labour (Nixon, 2006; McDowell, 2003).

Migrant "illegality" and the general scarcity of jobs in South Africa leave these men with limited labour market choices, to the extent that through *kukiya-kiya,* they do anything and everything to survive. Amos said, "When we are here in Joni, we do anything to survive." These men are less selective in what they do. Through *kukiya-kiya,* they do the most dangerous jobs under minimum safety standards for low pay. For example, I once witnessed three men felling a tree in a suburb. One of them was precariously perched on tree branches cutting the tree with a chainsaw but with no protective clothing.

Doing anything to survive gives the men a wide array of activities that constitute the portfolio of *kukiya-kiya*. They do menial odd jobs, mostly groundskeeping (lawn mowing, landscaping, tree felling, gardening) or building maintenance (painting, tiling, and roofing). Others work in construction as casual workers or *madhakaboy* (mud-mixers), and others work as *vana mahobho* (security guards). Not only are these different work skills found amongst the different men within the group, but almost every man claims to be a jack of all trades able to fix any problem. For example, Mr. Dzika, a leader in one of the Zimbabwean churches, was doing tiling, painting, building, and selling mops, mats, and brooms. He told me, "I *kiya-kiya*. I do anything as long as it makes me survive."

Given that the majority of the Zimbabwean daily wage workers do not have educational qualifications, being jacks of all trades broadens their skills profile and makes them a convenient and dependable workforce for many employers. Amos Tumbare proudly referred to the group of Zimbabwean men that congregate at Isibindi Centre as a "one-stop-shop":

> Here we are a one-stop shop. You find [every worker] here; if you want a plumber, you find him here. If you want a welder or a builder, they are here. Men who fix electric faults are also here. All these men you see here know how to do many things; we don't just mow lawn.

The men acquire these different skills by persistently trying different avenues to earn a living: they try this today; if it does not work, then tomorrow they try another one. Also, the availability of some jobs in the daily wage market is subject to cyclical variations related to weather and seasonal periods (for example, lawn mowing), or the ups and downs of the construction or home improvement industry.

While "doing anything" to survive may insinuate that one may go to the extremes of getting involved in criminal activities, my interlocutors revealed that the jobs they do through *kukiya-kiya* and how they do them are guided by some form of moral propriety and ethics that cultivate and value hard-work, trustworthiness, and honesty. This effectively creates a culture of work that shapes how each migrant

approaches his work as well as how their employers perceive them. Their adoption of *kukiya-kiya* is intertwined with the drive to deconstruct the perceptions that associate migrant "illegality" with criminality (see Crush & Williams, 2003). These men mostly work around people's homes; so, for them, doing unstraightforward activities would jeopardise their chances of getting hired. Therefore, they try to establish a virtuous and moral community that is intolerant of improper behaviour in order to deconstruct public perceptions that associate migrant "illegality" with criminality and discourage anything that can invite unwanted attention from the police.

16.6 The Spatio-Temporal Horizon of *Kukiya-kiya*

The undocumented Zimbabwean day labourers frame *kukiya-kiya* in a spatio-temporal boundary limited to "these days" and "in this country". For example, Pardon told me that, "These days life in South Africa requires us to *kiya-kiya.*" The phrases "These days…" and "… in South Africa…" delimit the spatio-temporal zoning of *kukiya-kiya* as something the migrants adopt at a particular temporal juncture in a particular space. The framing of the temporal horizon of *kukiya-kiya* in the present suggests that the migrants have a certain moment located in the past that they compare their current experiences to. Often reflecting nostalgic memories of remembered or imagined pasts, the day labourers highlighted that things have changed in South Africa. How far they went back into the past was unclear, but they generally alluded to a past where life was better. Mr. Muzivi, who represented Zimbabweans as a committee member of the community policing forum said, "[South Africans] no longer want us here… Things were better when I first came here, even xenophobia, we did not hear about it."

Mr. Muzivi first came to South Africa in 2002 and moved to eMalahleni in 2004. According to him, jobs were easy to find and xenophobia threats were rare until May 2008. His account refers to a past that he nostalgically remembers, when "things were better". During that time, he easily found work as backroom staff at a butchery in eMalahleni. He fondly remembered those days because "we were paid better". Life for him took a slide in 2010 when his employer's business crumbled, and he lost his job. That is when he began *kukiya-kiya*. Some of the men had no experience of these better times; they only heard about such times from those who had been in South Africa before them. It is from these accounts that they imagined these past times. For example, Taonga Makombe, who came to South Africa in 2015, said, "We just hear that *kare* (some time ago) it was easy to find jobs here." Nonetheless, these men's remembered and imagined pasts in relation to the present, which is characterised by *kukiya-kiya*, were too romanticised, as the exploitation of undocumented migrants in South Africa is a well-documented reality (Solomon, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 1998).

What is conspicuous in these men's reflections on *kukiya-kiya* are feelings of shame about what they do – a shame produced when their migrant experience intersects with home. The jobs that these men do through *kukiya-kiya* are despised back

in Zimbabwe, and some of the men fail to withstand the indignity of doing such work, so they choose to return to Zimbabwe if they fail to find "real" jobs. As these men engage in *kukiya-kiya*, they discard their pre-migration aspirations and imaginations of life in South Africa. Most of them told me that the jobs they were doing were not the ones they envisaged before coming to South Africa. They had envisioned South Africa as a place of opportunity, but after failing to find the "real" jobs they hoped for, they turned to *kukiya-kiya*.

If the jobs that the Zimbabwean day labourers do through *kukiya-kiya* are seen as humiliating and degrading, why do these men continue doing such low-status jobs? Jones' argument about the limited spatio-temporal horizon of *kukiya-kiya* as a transient response "just for now", "these days" and in "this country" (Jones, 2010:295) is useful to explain this. The threat of deportation works as a disciplinary instrument that reminds undocumented migrants that their time in South Africa is ephemeral. This is tremendously productive of these undocumented migrants' consciousness of their "illegality", unwantedness, unbelonging, and unrootedness to the social setting they are in (Machinya, 2021). Deportability and the temporariness of their migration decouple the performance of these socially degraded jobs, as something they only do in South Africa, from their social identities back home. This is because an individual's social identity is located in their place of origin. "Home" is the place where their social identities as migrant workers are acknowledged and valued (Galvin, 2015), mainly through the tangible things they bring as the fruits of their toiling. That deportability unsettles the Zimbabwean day labourers from the social setting they are in makes them a true economic man, probably the closest thing in real life to the *Homo Economicus* of economic theory. The men frequently told me that, "We just do this when we are here [in South Africa]," which implies they cannot perform these are jobs in Zimbabwe.

Doing work that is generally held in low esteem back in Zimbabwe is emotionally draining for some of these men. And since such jobs do not fit the definition of what they understand as "real" jobs, they do not take *kukiya-kiya* as work. Such men were supremely disinterested in the jobs they do as such jobs did not correspond with the men's pre-migration imaginations. Taonga aspired to get a job as an electrical technician but ended up being, first, a *dhakaboy* and then a security guard. Lovemore also came to South Africa hoping to find a job as a truck driver, but he was working as a *dhakaboy*.

Those who were disinterested in their work were reluctant to have people back home know their actual jobs in South Africa. Lovemore queried, "How can I tell people [back home] that I am a mud mixer?" He said those who do low status jobs such as *"kukanya dhaka"* (mud-mixing), or *"kuchera matrench"* (digging trenches), or *"kucheka* lawn*"* (lawn mowing) do not disclose such jobs to people in Zimbabwe because they were despised. If he were to tell the people in Zimbabwe that he was working as a mud-mixer, Lovemore said, they would scornfully ask, "Surely, how do you go to Joni to be a mud-mixer?" For people in Zimbabwe, it is incomprehensible that one migrates to South Africa to do such despised jobs.

Most of these men remain evasive about their actual jobs to people back home using the statement, *"Ndiri kukiya-kiya"* (I am making do). This way, the undocumented migrants conceal their sources of livelihood, the same way Jones (2010) notes how *kukiya-kiya* was shrouded in secrecy in Zimbabwe. However, in this instance, the migrants conceal the actual nature of their jobs because the jobs they do are despised and they are afraid that people in Zimbabwe will mock them, while in Jones' study, *kukiya-kiya* is shrouded in secrecy due to the underhand and often illegal dealings involved.

16.7 Getting and Doing the Work Through *Kukiya-kiya*

The Zimbabwean day labourers deploy *kukiya-kiya* as tactical innovativeness that is little concerned with perfection but, instead, enables them to overcome the structural challenges that impede them from getting hired or getting the jobs done. One aspect that is central to *kukiya*-kiya is language proficiency, particularly given that recruitment and the pricing of labour is usually done through negotiation. Previous studies indicate that proficiency in the employer's preferred language places the migrants in a better position to communicate information about their skills and negotiate for better wages, thus enhancing their chances of getting hired (Blaauw et al., 2012; Chiswick & Miller, 2003). While English is a universal language in eMalahleni, my interlocutors said they get hired by people who speak other languages, mostly isiZulu and Afrikaans.

Amos narrated how, most of the time, Afrikaans speakers come and shout the jobs that they are looking for someone to do from their cars, *"Grassnyer!"* (Lawn mower!), or *"Verwer!"* (Painter!). Amos said if one does not understand Afrikaans, one would remain seated whilst others run towards the car shouting in Afrikaans, *"Ek kan dit doen; ek kan dit doen!"* (I can do it; I can do it!). This, I was told, is also a deliberate strategy by some employers to screen the workers, with those who cannot converse in the employer's language being automatically excluded. Here, *kukiya-kiya* is deployed as the ability to speak simple, usually broken, phrases in the employer's preferred language. Proficiency in the employer's preferred language acts as a form of social capital that helps in establishing relations between employers and individual workers and increasing one's chances of getting rehired. The possibility of rehiring stands in contrast to the image of daily wage work as a spot market of anonymous, substitutable individuals.

While *kiya-kiyar*ing the language of a prospective employer helps them get hired, sometimes the workers impulsively accept a job without getting full details about it. This opens opportunities for unfair labour practices as happened to Peter and his two colleagues. Peter told me that a white man pulled his car in at Isibindi Centre and called out in Afrikaans, *"Ek soek drie mense wat 'n stukkende heining by my huis kan reg maak"* (I'm looking for three people who can fix a broken fence

at my house). Peter outpaced the other men. In broken Afrikaans, he told the white man that he could do the job with his two friends, and that was how far he could negotiate. Without further conversation, the man ordered Peter and his friends into the back of the car, and off they went. Peter and his friends were surprised as they drove more than an hour out of eMalahleni. They arrived at the man's house and were shown where they were to repair the fence; actually, it was not a yard but a whole farm. They worked for three consecutive days at that farm without returning to eMalahleni, and Peter said that if he had known about that arrangement, he would not have accepted the job.

The art of *kukiya-kiya* is also mobilised when one successfully completes a job that they are not knowledgeable about. In a context where jobs are scarce, the Zimbabwean men use the catchphrase "*basa harirambwi*" (you do not turn down a job) even if they do not know how to do it. Instead, they summon the idiosyncrasy of *kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* wherein they would "join things together" and get the job done. *Kukiya-kiya* or *kubatanidza-batanidza* becomes an innovative way of learning how to fix things whilst actually doing the job. For example, Donald told me that a white man once pulled over his vehicle at the spot he was sitting looking for a carpenter to fix and repaint a broken ceiling at his house. Despite not having any carpentry skills, let alone the tools, Donald accepted the job. He was taken to the man's house and was shown a warehouse with many tools. He selected the ones he wanted for the job. Before he started fixing the ceiling, Donald took some time carefully examining how the other ceiling boards were joined so that he could lay the new ceiling boards the same way. He fixed the ceiling and magnificently repainted it and the employer was impressed. Boastfully, he said to me, *"Ndakakiya-kiya basa zvikaita murungu akanakirwa"* (I successfully did *kiya-kiya* the job and the white man was impressed).

Through *kukiya-kiya,* one does not need to have prior knowledge about how to do the job; one just figures out how to do it in the process. Through this kind of *kukiya-kiya*, the Zimbabwean men actually learn multiple skills which they did not have when they first came to South Africa. Therefore, *kukiya-kiya* is more about creativity and individual ingenuity, and less about doing things by the book. What Donald did qualifies as *kubatanidza-batanidza* (putting things together), whereby he took this and that and put them together to fix the broken ceiling. What is also important is being able to recognise moments of opportunity and quickly grab the opportunity before someone else takes it. Donald knew that, had he told his hirer that he was not a carpenter, he would have lost a big opportunity to make money that day.

Impressing an employer is a crucial part of *kukiya-kiya* as this creates a good relationship between the employer and the worker, increasing chances of rehiring. They may exchange phone numbers afterwards. Also, since the payment of wages depends on the goodwill of the employer, many employers pay if they are impressed. My interlocutors did not rule out that through *kukiya-kiya*, some people perform disappointingly and in such cases, employers may refuse to pay.

16.8 Conclusion: On the Question of Agency and Exploitation

Undocumented migrant worker exploitation in South Africa has largely been examined from a structural perspective, looking at how the structural constraints of "illegality" and deportability disempower undocumented migrants by circumscribing their participation in the labour market, weakening their bargaining power, and making them vulnerable to exploitation. Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that anti-immigrant policies hardly reduce the flow of labour migrants. Instead, such policies "illegalise" certain labour migrations, which leaves some of the migrant workers in a vulnerable position which perpetuates their exploitation.

As this chapter has highlighted, while the structural constraints of "illegality" weigh heavily on the undocumented Zimbabwean day labourers, these men do not completely capitulate to its disempowering force. They adopt *kukiya-kiya* as a tactical approach to overcome some of the challenges caused by their "illegal" status. *Kukiya-kiya*, which takes pride in bodily ability and strength, and the ability to work with one's own hands allows the Zimbabwean day labourers to tactically manoeuvre the terrain of "illegality", enabling them to find work in an environment marked by acute job scarcity. Moreover, the framing of *kukiya-kiya* around ethics of self-reliance, hard work, reliability, and obedience make Zimbabwean day labourers attractive to some employers. However, the downside is that it adversely makes them active in the (re)production of their exploitation.

This then raises questions about *kukiya-kiya* as an agential project. As an expression of agency by people who are circumscribed by their "illegality", it enables them to be self-reliant and more attractive to employers, but at the same time it makes them more exploitable. As a lens through which we can analyse the work experiences of undocumented migrant workers within the South-South migration context, *kukiya-kiya* presents these workers not as mere unwilling victims of exploitation, nor as inherent hard workers, nor liberated actors free of the constraints of "illegality". Rather, they are complex people who creatively engage in work-related struggles to make do and survive the difficult circumstances they live in.

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