

**Professionals ‘gleaning’ at the margins: the workplace integration  
of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction  
industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.**

**by**

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## Declaration of Authenticity

I Splugchna Ngoni Chikarara declare that this dissertation is my original work. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source or from the internet) this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria.

Signature.....

Date.....

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## **Abstract**

The global development of capitalism and the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' intensified international migration especially the migration of professionals. '*Flexible accumulation*' hinges on different forms of flexibilities mainly labour market flexibility, which is, made possible by dividing the labour force into 'core' and 'periphery'. Migrant professionals, however, occupy a unique position. As foreigners they can be easily marginalised in the social, cultural and political processes in the workplace. At the same time they hold scarce skills that are crucial for the success of business organizations.

The social ordering and the nature of interactions between employees at the workplace, generally, mirror what happens in the wider economic, social and political spheres. The reverse is also true. Thus, the workplace has the potential to perform an integrative function by connecting individuals with the larger society or by connecting individuals from different racial and ethnic groups. This is particularly important in heterogeneous countries, like South Africa, that are made up of diverse racial and ethnic population groups and significant numbers of immigrants. Despite its integrative capacity, there are also social and cultural processes that take place in the workplace that severely undermine its capacity to perform this integrative function.

South Africa's racial ordering during the colonial and apartheid eras created deep-seated racial divisions in the wider societal realm and the workplace. In post-apartheid South Africa the African National Congress-led government has set up and continues to put in place structural measures to undo the impacts of the past political and workplace regimes. Unfortunately, some of the measures put in place result in new and unexpected problems and challenges. Thus, South Africa continues to battle with structural unemployment and critical skills shortages, which has

necessitated the importation of skilled migrants. These migrant professionals, therefore, find themselves in a divisive environment in the South African workplace with limited opportunities for workplace integration. This case study of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg reveals that migrant professionals are far from being fully integrated in the workplace. They are faced with structural barriers that need to be redressed. If left unchecked these differential practices in the workplace will have negative impacts on the wider political democracy in South Africa.

**Key words:** Skills; South Africa; construction industry; democracy; Fordism; flexible accumulation; international migration; labour market; migrant professionals; workplace; integration



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## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ASGI-SA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative-South Africa
ASAQS	Association of South Africa's Quantity Surveyors
CAD	Computer Aided Designing
CESA	Consulting Engineers South Africa
CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
CIDB	Construction Industry Development Board
CNETU	Congress of Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DOL	Department of Labour
DPW	Department of Public Works
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GCI	Global Competitiveness Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICM	Information and Communications Technology
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ISP	Industrial Strategy Project
MBSA	Master Builders South Africa
MIS	Management Information Survey
NQF	National Qualification Framework
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SACPE	South African Council for Professional Engineers
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAFCEC	South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
SAIA	South African Institute of Architects
SAICE	South African Institute of Civil Engineers
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SME	Small-medium Enterprise
US	United States
ZIESA	Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers South Africa

## **List of Statutes**

Apprenticeship Act, No. 26 of 1922  
Apprenticeship Act, No. 37 of 1944  
Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No. Of 1997  
Black Building Workers Act, No. 27 of 1951  
Black Labour Act, No. 67 1964  
Black Labour Regulations Act, No. 15 of 1911  
Black (Urban Areas) Act, No. 21 of 1923  
Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998  
Engineering Profession Act, 46 of 2000  
Engineering Profession of South Africa Act, No. 114 of 1990  
Immigration Act, No. 13 of 2002  
Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 11 of 1924  
Labour Relations Act, No. 66 of 1995  
Mines and Woks, No. 12 of 1911  
Ordinance Act, No. 17 of 1904  
Professional Engineers' Act, No. 81 of 1968  
Skills Development Act, No. 31of 2003  
Skills Development Levies Act, No. 9 of 1999

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1. Introduction

Human migration has shaped and driven human history for centuries. The development of capitalism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century from what is known as '*Fordism*' to '*post-Fordism*' or '*flexible accumulation*' has clearly intensified international migration. This especially triggered high migration flows of professionals. In an era that is characterised by fragmented and flexible labour markets, the question of migrant workers' integration in host countries is pertinent. Both policy makers and social scientists continue to debate the questions around the political, economic and socio-cultural integration of migrants. A well established body of literature on this subject exists (see for example Johnston et al 2006; Massey 1990; Wallace & Leicht 2004; Mata & Pendakur 1999; Maxwell 2010; Khoo, Hugo & McDonald 2008; Girard & Bauder 2005; Stalker 1994: 71-105).

Migrants' integration is generally viewed, in the literature, as a gradual process that develops over time and across generations. A variety of variables are used to determine different aspects of migrant integration including political, social, cultural and economic indicators. Migrants' participation in political processes, whether or not they obtain citizenship of the host country, whether they can speak the local language(s), their employment status and duration of stay in the host country (Maxwell 2010: 25-34) are examples.

This study is focused primarily on the economic integration of skilled migrants<sup>1</sup> in general, and their workplace integration in particular. The

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'skilled migrants' and 'migrant professionals' are used interchangeably in this study.

literature in this field focuses primarily on *labour market incorporation*<sup>2</sup> and *job allocation*<sup>3</sup> (Vallas 2003; Hagan 2004). Less is said about the actual day-to-day activities and interactions that involve migrant workers' rights in the workplace. While labour market incorporation can be measured objectively or quantified by looking at the employment or unemployment rates of migrant workers, full workplace integration cannot be easily quantified due to its inherent subjective nature. The focus of this study is not merely to find out whether or not migrant professionals get jobs easily but to investigate what happens in the workplace after a migrant professional gets a job in the host country. The researcher is, therefore, required to take a very close look at the day-to-day relationships between migrant professionals and locals in the workplace as they engage in the daily production of goods or services in order to engage the latter. The interactions between migrant professionals and the host country's institutions have a direct bearing on what happens in the workplace moreover. Thus, for example, matters concerning migrant professionals' involvement with professional organizations are closely examined.

Taking into account the historical role played by the South African labour movement in shaping South Africa's economic context, assessing the workplace integration of migrant professionals is a key and necessary variable for research. In South Africa (and other countries) there is, arguably, a mutual relationship between what happens in the workplace and what happens in the wider economic, social and political spheres as has been suggested. In other words, the social ordering and the nature of interactions between employees at the workplace, generally, mirrors what

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<sup>2</sup> According to Peck cited in Bezuidenhout (2008:180) *labour market incorporation* describes the process through which individuals become wage earners in the labour market or self-employed which determines their potential to do certain jobs.

<sup>3</sup> *Job allocation* is the process of matching workers to particular jobs. This is influenced not only by skill and qualifications but also by specific ideologies and prevailing social prejudices (Bezuidenhout 2008: 180-181).

happens in the wider economic, social and political spheres. The reverse is also true. The building blocks of democracy in South Africa were first laid in the workplace before the broader political democracy was formally legislated and established in 1994. Black South Africans gained industrial citizenship before gaining political citizenship and rights. Hence, it can be argued that the political transition in South Africa took place against the back-ground of the historical battle for industrial and workplace democracy. Thus the workplace can be both a window through which a better understanding of wider socio-political issues in society can be attained and a vehicle for change (see Von Holdt 2003:5-8; Bezuidenhout 2008: 179-183; Buhlungu & Webster 2006: 248).

In her book titled: *How workplace bonds strengthen a diverse democracy*, Estlund (2003) argues that the day-to-day/ordinary workplace discourses and interactions among heterogeneous groups of core workers have the potential to play a significant role in strengthening democracy. In other words, workplace integration or non-integration strengthens or weakens the general principles that govern democracy and democratic life. Well integrated workplaces are not only desirable for production but for political, social and cultural reasons as well. This research project is largely inspired and driven by Estlund's (2003) argument on the relationship between the workplace and the larger societal realm. A brief discussion of her key arguments follows.

For Estlund, the workplace represents a platform for human interaction that offers unique opportunities for building diverse democracies. She argues:

The process of working together leads to sharing of experiences and beliefs, and it does so in the context of ongoing cooperative and constructive, even friendly, relations among [people] whose daily lives may not otherwise intersect. The workplace thus performs a distinctive kind of mediating function- an *integrative*

function both in the older sociological sense of connecting individuals with the larger society and in the newer sense of connecting individuals from different racial and ethnic groups. To be sure the capacity of the workplace to perform this function is not fully realised (Estlund 2003: 104).

Indeed and despite its integrative capacity, there are social and cultural processes that take place in the workplace that severely undermine its capacity to perform this “integrative function.” For example, unequal power relations and other forms of inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity and class weaken workplace bonds and thus diminish the capacity of the workplace to strengthen democracy. Nonetheless, the workplace offers:

a place for the informal exchange of experiences and opinions and knowledge among people who are both *connected* with each other, so that they are inclined to listen, and *different* from each other, so that they are exposed to diverse ideas and experiences. The convergence of diversity and connectedness, together with the legal mandate of equality, allows workplace conversations to make a particularly valuable contribution to democratic deliberation (Estlund 2003: 123).

Thus, underpinning this research project is the assumption that fully integrated workplaces composed of diverse employees can perform a very significant role in building wider societal democracy. This is particularly important in heterogeneous countries, like South Africa, that are made up of diverse racial and ethnic population groups and significant numbers of immigrants. In addition to the racial and ethnic differences there are further challenges for workplace integration brought about by the nature of work and the structure of organizations under ‘*flexible accumulation*’. Thus, the drive for workplace integration of migrant professionals is not an easy task.

A case study of Zimbabwean engineers who are employed in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg was carried out so as to identify and engage the barriers and opportunities for

workplace integration of migrant professionals in South Africa in this project.

### **1.1. Research problem**

The South African labour movement played a critical historical role in shaping the context of the political and economic dispensation in South Africa post 1994. In other words, the building blocks of democracy were first laid in the workplace prior to the formal establishment and institutionalisation of political democracy in South Africa. In line with the aforementioned, the workplace plays a key role toward building and strengthening democracy. This is crucial particularly in heterogeneous countries like South Africa for the workplace provides a platform for diverse population groups to come together and work towards one goal. The construction industry is one of the pivotal industries in any economy including the South African economy and thus provides a good example to consider both barriers and opportunities for strengthening democracy in South Africa. This sector of the economy is labour intensive and has high multiplier effects hence it is a crucial driver of the Gross Domestic Product and employment growth. (Lowitt 2007: 4, 7).

In South Africa, though, the construction industry continues to face perennial skills shortages. As a 'temporary' stop-gap measure to address the skills shortages problem skilled workers are 'imported' from other countries. This importation of skilled workers is taking place at the time when South Africa is undergoing a 'triple transition'.

In the context of 'labour market incorporation' and the subsequent 'job allocation' as well as workplace relations in previously white dominated professions, black South Africans are by and large still marginalised. Against this background, the introduction of migrant professionals is, arguably, positive in terms of boosting innovation capacity and human



capital but also creates challenges and threats. If not properly managed this diversity in the workplace can result in undemocratic practice and instability. On the other hand if properly managed such diverse workplaces offer many opportunities for strengthening democracy in developing countries such as South Africa. The basic assumption underpinning this study is that successfully integrated workplaces composed of diverse employees can and do perform a very significant role in building wider societal democracy.

Although workplace democracy and integration are clearly beneficial, we live in an era of *'flexible accumulation.'* This is an era where capitalism thrives on all sorts of flexibilities. To attain labour market flexibility, which is central to the success of businesses under *'flexible accumulation'* the labour force is ultimately split into two fundamentally different segments. On one hand there are workers who enjoy employment security and high wages and on the other are marginalised workers. This is made worse by the high unemployment rates (24.9% in 2012) in South Africa<sup>4</sup> (Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release P0211). Migrant professionals, however, occupy a unique position. As foreigners they can be easily marginalised in the social, cultural and political processes in the workplace. At the same time they hold scarce skills that are crucial for the success of business organizations. These factors, put together, make the South African workplace a fiercely contested arena.

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<sup>4</sup>In this study the official unemployment rate based on a 'strict' definition of unemployment is used. However it is important to note that the problem of unemployment in South Africa is arguably understated in the official statistical figurers. Estimates using a 'broad' definition of unemployment suggest that unemployment rate is much higher ranging from 35- 42% ([www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za); Barker 2007: 174-176) see chapter four, (**4.1.8. unemployment rate**), for a detailed discussion.

Thus, this study aims to consider, unpack and offer a sociological analysis of the opportunities and threats to democracy, in general, posed by the existence of migrant professionals in the South African workplace. The case of Zimbabwean engineers employed in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg is the case study.

## **1.2. Research question**

The following question drives this study in light of the issues discussed above:

- Are Zimbabwean engineers working in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg successfully integrated in their workplaces?

## **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to assess the workplace integration of Zimbabwean engineers who are employed in the public sector of the South African construction industry. In order to do that, the workplace relations between Zimbabwean engineers and locals are unpacked. These workplace relations are considered at three levels namely relations with top management; with workmates at the same level and with those in lower positions. Integral to understanding the process of migrant workplace integration is investigating migrants' participation in workplace democracy. Furthermore, and critical to workplace democracy, for migrant professionals, is the issue of professional recognition. Variables such as participation in work related social functions, access to training and promotion and participation in decision making are considered. They too are regarded as significant indicators of workplace integration.

#### **1.4. Scope of the study**

Time and financial resources limited the scope of this study. A small scale case study focused on Zimbabwe engineers employed by a government department that has offices both in Johannesburg and Pretoria was conducted. Since this is a small scale study its findings cannot be readily generalised. Nonetheless, the findings of the study are fundamental in laying the ground work for a large scale study. Case studies allow, in principle, for rigorous scientific investigation and given that a small scale study focuses on a small number of cases, it is relatively easy to manage.

#### **1.5. Outline of chapters**

Chapter 2: *Background notes: South African labour history*

This chapter provides a brief historical background of South African labour in general. This frames the context in which migrant professionals' workplace integration in the country has to take place. The colonial, apartheid and the democratic transition moments are briefly looked at. In other words, the chapter unpacks the relationship between what happens in the workplace and what happens in the broader societal sphere.

Chapter 3: *The construction industry: opportunities and challenges.*

In this chapter a survey of existing literature on the subject matter of this study is provided. The chapter looks at the key features of the construction industry in general and reviews literature on the South African construction industry by highlighting the challenges and opportunities in this sector. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the issues around the recognition of foreign obtained qualifications of migrant professionals in the host country.

Chapter 4: *Theoretical explanations.*

This chapter engages with the main theoretical works which frame and drive this study. They are the tools used to analyse the data collected.

Bonacich's (1972) *Split labour market theory* and Harvey's (1989) '*Flexible accumulation*' are discussed at length. These theories have been developed to understand the dynamics in labour markets in the developed world. I look at how these can be applied to the study of the South African workplace. To be more precise the chapter looks at the application of these theories in terms of the workplace integration of migrant professionals in the public sector of the construction industry in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

#### Chapter 5: *Methodology*.

In this chapter I unpack the methodological issues that relate to this study. The chapter begins with a justification of the decision to use qualitative research methods. I discuss how the research was conducted including the obstacles I faced and the decisions made to overcome such obstacles.

#### Chapter 6: *Zimbabwean engineers and workplace integration*.

This chapter serves two purposes; to present the data and to analyse its findings. In other words, the conceptual and theoretical tools unpacked in chapter 2, 3 and 4 are used, to make sense of, or to interpret the narrative data collected in the interviews conducted.

#### Chapter 7: *Conclusions and Recommendations*.

The last chapter pulls all the strings together as it were. This is done by way of summarising the main arguments and key findings of the study. From these key findings a number recommendations are noted and matters that require further investigation are flagged. I also raise a number of important questions for further debate amongst policy makers and scholars.

## Chapter 2

### Background notes: South African labour history

#### 2. Introduction

This chapter furnishes a brief historical background of South African labour in general. It contextualizes migrant professionals' workplace integration in the country. Three key historical moments shape this history namely, the colonial, apartheid and the democratic transition moments. In considering the aforementioned historical moments, the chapter unpacks the complex relationship between the workplace and the broader societal sphere.

#### 2.1. South African labour and authoritarian regimes

It is crucial to commence this discussion by acknowledging that the history of labour in South Africa is a very significant, complex and contested terrain as has been suggested. A complete detailed account of that history is beyond the scope of this study but placing the phenomenon of workplace integration for migrant professionals in a historical context is not only helpful but sociologically necessary. In the light of the aforementioned, however, it is sufficient, for this study, to take a close look at some of the 'key' historical events that are directly related to the subject matter of this study. One way of doing this is by looking critically at key labour legislation that regulated labour and workplace relations in this country. Albeit, that I pragmatically placed emphasis on certain pieces of labour legislation<sup>5</sup> and subsequent forms of industrial relations the broader socio-political context cannot be completely ignored.

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<sup>5</sup> This selection is based on whether or not a particular piece of legislation has a *significant* bearing on the subject matter of this study.

Granted, there was no *blue print* or a *grand plan* for inclusion or exclusion in colonial and apartheid South Africa; rather in most cases the labour laws passed were reactive rather than proactive. However, looking back, with the wisdom of hindsight, at the sequence of these particular labour laws one can begin to connect the dots, as it were, and reveal how these pieces of legislation link to one another. Under colonial rule in South Africa, a number of labour laws were passed to regulate the employment relationship in the workplace and beyond. These laws institutionalised a racialized system of exclusion and inclusion in the workplace and beyond. In other words, rights and resources were unevenly distributed along racial lines.

To begin with, the Ordinance Act, No. 17 of 1904 of the Transvaal was enacted “to regulate the introduction into the Transvaal (a former province of South Africa) of unskilled non-European labourers” (Jones & Griffiths 1980: 2). Though, there was no clause in this Act which specified a target group, it is generally viewed as being targeted at Chinese workers who were employed in South Africa. As a result of its introduction, Chinese immigrants in South Africa at the time were subjected to work under ‘slavery-like’ conditions (Jones & Griffiths 1980: 2). Thus whether it was intended to or not this Act contributed formally to sowing the seeds of a system of inclusion and exclusion based on race in the South African workplace.

Seven years later, the Mines and Works Act, No.12 of 1911 was passed (and was amended in 1926 and eventually repealed in 1956). Though this Act did not use terms such as ‘colour bar’ and ‘job reservation,’ which became buzz words in public discourses years later, one can deduce that it further ignited the commencement of such practices. Its ‘spirit’ and subsequent application meant that all skilled jobs at the South African mines were purposely and exclusively reserved for white workers. In other

words, this law ensured that white workers were insulated from potential competition from black African workers, at least in specialised trades (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 3). Additionally, white and coloured people were allowed a qualified franchise vote which meant that politicians treated them with kid gloves and by and large capitulated to their demands. On the contrary the state relentlessly repressed any attempts by black African workers to unionise broadly speaking.

The Black Labour Regulations Act, No.15 of 1911 was intended to “regulate the recruiting and employment of black labour” (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 4). This Act required employers to obtain an “employer’s recruiting licence” before they could recruit and hire black African workers. This, inter-alia, made it easy for the authorities to monitor whether or not employers were employing black people to do jobs that were to be set aside for white workers. Further, this Act did not make any provision for black African workers broadly speaking to organize into trade unions. Thus they could not legally negotiate with their employers or discuss and redress their grievances with their employers; yet their white counterparts enjoyed the legal right to do so (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 4).

The Apprenticeship Act, No. 26 of 1922 had a crucial bearing on skills shortages; a structural matter that has characterised the economic history of South Africa to date. Unnecessarily high educational requirements for apprenticeship enrolment, stipulated by this Act, meant that only well educated white youths would qualify for enrolment at the expense of poor and hence less educated black African youths. As a result, a “tradition of skilled artisan work being performed by white workers only” was instituted (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 19, 57).

The Black (Urban Areas) Act, No. 21 of 1923 underpinned the principle and practice of tolerating and treating black people in urban areas as mere

“temporary sojourners” who were only needed for their ‘cheap’ labour (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 21-23). As a result, they were regarded as partial citizens with no legal workers’ protection. This further compromised their already weakened bargaining power and subsequently their labour market incorporation as well as their workplace integration.

The year 1924 is a key historic point in South African labour and economic history; in that year the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 11 of 1924<sup>6</sup> was passed. This Act was aimed at “making provision for the prevention and settlement of disputes between employers and employees following the experience of the Rand Rebellion of 1922,” when thousands of white workers took to the streets in Johannesburg (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 23). The Industrial Conciliation Act defined an ‘employee’ to the exclusion of all ‘pass bearers’. In other words, despite the undeniable presence of large numbers of male black African workers in the South African mines, they were not defined as employees. The ‘catch’ here is the fact that under this Act only ‘employees’ could join and participate in the activities of legally registered trade unions. Thus this Act served the interests of white, coloured and Indian workers at the expense of black African workers in general (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 23). Lever (1978: 104) argues that the Industrial Conciliation Act led to the development of a divided working class in South Africa. Trade unions organized workers along racial lines. This weakened the solidarity of the working class as more emphasis was placed on racial differences rather than their common economic position in relation to the means of production. In other words, this Act further entrenched a dual labour market and, eventually, a dual industrial relations system in South Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> The 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act was later superseded by the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 28 of 1956. The comments that I make on this Act are directed to both the 1924 and 1956 Acts.



Although there was no legal provision for black African workers to organise, they successfully organised themselves. For example as early as, 1919 they formed the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in Cape Town and elected a charismatic leader Clements Kadalie as the union's General Secretary. Indeed the success of the ICU was limited owing to continuous state repression as well as poor organisational strategies (see Bonner 1978: 114- 120). Thus, the effect of Industrial Conciliation Act, eventually, was the fragmentation of the working class (broadly defined) and the deepening of the racialization of workplace relations. Consequently, white workers allied themselves with coloured and Indian workers in terms of unionism and industrial rights and citizenship but supported the maintenance of political 'white supremacy' (Ensor 1978: 216).

In 1948 the National Party<sup>7</sup> took political control in South Africa. Three years later, in 1951, the Black Building Workers Act, No. 27 of 1951 was passed. Its aim was to provide for and regulate the training and registration of black construction workers as well as their employment conditions. The passage of this Act revealed that, at least businesses recognized the need to train black African workers. Nonetheless, the fact that there remained strict restrictions regarding *where* those skilled black African workers could be employed reduced to almost nothing the recompenses of this Act. Skilled black African workers could only be hired to do skilled work in the so called 'black areas'. Ironically, under this Act no white worker could be employed in any 'black area' outside that of supervisor or instructor (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 84). Thus, skilled white workers could work in the 'black areas' as supervisors or instructors yet under no circumstance would a skilled black worker be hired to do skilled

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<sup>7</sup> The National Party of South Africa was a white only political party driven by Afrikaner nationalism. It is the National Party-led government that formalised and institutionalised apartheid in South Africa ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)).

work in 'white areas'. This racial division of labour crippled skills development among black African workers and contributed to the maintenance of racially divided workplaces (Von Holdt 2005: 52).

In 1964, at the onset of what is commonly known in South African industrial and labour studies, as the decade of industrial peace<sup>8</sup>, the Black Labour Act, No. 67 of 1964 was passed. Among other things this Act regulated employment conditions of foreign black Africans in South Africa. About such foreign workers the Act stated:

...must not enter, be, or remain in any part of any district outside a prescribed area, and no person must employ or continue to employ any such black [migrant workers] within any such district without the written permission...(Jones & Griffiths 1980: 143).

These restrictive conditions rendered foreign black African migrant workers more vulnerable to excessive exploitation. This also furthered the fragmentation of labour and, ultimately, fragmented the South African workplace not only along racial fault lines but also on the basis of nationality. Parallels can be drawn to the way control of such migrant workers is executed in post- apartheid South Africa.

The Black Employees in-service Training Act, No. 88 of 1976 made provision for the "recognition of schemes for training black employees"

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<sup>8</sup> The 'decade of industrial peace' came as a result of the 'collapse' of black trade unions and trade union federations. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in particular, that had successfully organised black African workers and challenged the apartheid state and white capital from 1955 was forced to go underground in 1960 as the state banned most of its leaders. Another generation of black trade unions would only emerge in 1973 beginning with what is known as the 'Durban strikes' where hundreds of workers reportedly took to the streets. These strikes culminated in the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979 (see Webster 1987 and Bhulungu 2009).

(Jones and Griffiths 1980: 186). This was in response to critical skills shortages at the time and in some ways became an important milestone in terms of empowering black African workers with critical skills. The benefits of the training, nonetheless, were limited by the fact that successful black trainees were still not allowed, to practise, legally, as artisans within the then 'white South Africa' (Jones and Griffiths 1980: 183-187). Nonetheless it is clear that the winds of change were blowing.

In 1977 the Wiehahn Commission was set up in the wake of the 1973 nationwide strikes to assess the state of labour or industrial relations in South Africa in search of revised or new forms of control. This Commission's report suggested several radical reforms. Its key recommendations were concerned with de-racializing labour relations.

As a result of the acceptance and implementation of the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations a new Labour Relations Act was passed in 1981. Black African workers were granted the right to organize and officially register trade unions opening the way for their participation in collective bargaining. This was a very significant milestone in the history of South African labour, but still, this Act was "silent on workplace rights" (Von Holdt 2005: 53; Webster 1987: 176-177). Much work still needed to be done to ensure workplace democracy and smooth workplace integration of black African workers in the country.

At this juncture it is crucial to briefly sum up the history of black labour unionism in particular. As suggested earlier, the racial ordering of the South African society in general was clearly reflected in the workplace and the nature of trade unionism that developed in the country. Black African workers nonetheless acted in terms of agency despite the state's use of force and legislation to repress them. Owing to state repression black trade unionism went through cycles. A wave of vibrant unions would arise

and after sometime fade away or collapse. During the 1920s the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was a formidable black trade union championing the interests of black African workers in South Africa. By the early 1930s the ICU had faded away. The second wave of black trade unionism saw the rise of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) in 1941. This union federation lasted only five years before crumbling in 1946. The 1950s saw the rise of yet another wave of black trade unionism, and the formation of the South African Congress of Trade Union (SACTU) in 1955 in spite of the dominance of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA)<sup>9</sup>. Buoyed by the political militancy and its links with the African National Congress (ANC), SACTU enjoyed significant successes in its fight for black African workers rights. However, it eventually succumbed to repression in the early 1960s when most of its leaders were banned by the apartheid state. A decade of industrial peace would follow until the 1973 Durban strikes which gave the impetus to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979. Careful to avoid the mistakes of SACTU, in particular forming open alliances with political parties, FOSATU grew rapidly benefiting from the state reforms, which allowed black trade unions to be officially registered and recognised by employers. In 1985 FOSATU affiliated trade unions as well as many other 'newly' formed trade unions joined to form the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). COSATU was eventually to play a key role in the political changes and negotiations that culminated in the 1994 democratic transition in South Africa (Webster 1987; Bonner 1978; Buhlungu 2009; Godfrey, et al 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> TUCSA was founded in 1954 by unions representing white workers and mixed unions of coloured and Indian workers. Although TUCSA supported mixed trade unionism, it can be argued that it did so in an attempt to contain the struggle for the political rights of coloured and Indian workers as well as to pre-empt the growth of a militant independent black trade union movement (Ensor 1978: 216).

As noted earlier, even though I have put more emphasis on certain pieces of labour legislation and subsequent forms of industrial relations the significance of the broader socio-political context should not be neglected. In fact, often, the broader socio-political context shaped workplace relations and vice-versa. This matter is elaborated on next.

## **2.2. Authoritarian workplace regime**

Hitherto, I have sketched the colonial and the apartheid moments of the history of labour in South Africa. In this section I discuss how this labour history can be used to facilitate understanding the current issues that face the post-apartheid South African workplace. The focus is especially on the intended and unintended consequences of the past and current labour laws on workplace relations and the relationship between workplace relations and the broader political and economic environment.

In order to do this I draw heavily on two path-breaking works on the South African workplace by two leading industrial and economic sociologists in the country; Karl Von Holdt and Edward Webster. These are, Von Holdt's (2003) book titled: *Transition from below: forging trade unionism and workplace change in South Africa* and a collection edited by Edward Webster and Karl Von Holdt (2005) titled: *Beyond the apartheid workplace: studies in transition*.

Von Holdt (2003: 5-8) uses the concept '*apartheid workplace regime*' to describe the workplace order that resulted intentionally and unintentionally from the host of race ordered oppressive legislation discussed earlier. Central to the concept of workplace regime is the idea that work is performed in a contested space. There are social processes that take place in the workplace which are subject to and create contestation (Von Holdt 2003: 5).

Furthermore, the contestation and resistance that characterises the labour process is mirrored by the general workplace order and workplace relations. This understanding is useful in comprehending the changes and continuities in post 1994 South African workplace relations. This is so because the allocation of rights and resources in the workplace is not a neutral or purely economic process devoid of power relations. Instead, it is regulated by particular social structures based on ideology and as a result, rights and resources are unevenly distributed in heterogeneous workplaces (Von Holdt 2005: 46). Furthermore, contestation and resistance develop because workers and managers are formally or informally constrained or empowered by social structures that define the code of conduct in the workplace (Moodie and Ndatshe as cited in Von Holdt 2005: 47). Thus those who see such social structures as empowering try their best to safeguard them but those who see them as confining seek strategic ways to challenge them.

The 'apartheid workplace regime' hinged on three supporting pillars namely; *the racial division of labour, the racial segregation of facilities and the racial structure of power in the workplace*. The racial division of labour ultimately determined that black Africans could only do unskilled or low skilled manual jobs or at most work as assistants to white artisans. On the other hand white workers monopolised the more skilled, artisan and managerial jobs. Black and white as well as coloured and Indian workers, working for the same employer, were on separate pay rolls with different rates and benefits. The racial segregation of facilities meant that black African workers and white (as well as coloured and Indian) workers could not share facilities such as change rooms and canteens. White supremacism was deeply embedded in apartheid law. Such practises continued, perhaps in subtle forms, even after such laws were repealed. The racial structure of power in the workplace was intended to ensure that racial ordering prevailing in the general society remained intact. Other

social control mechanisms apart from the law were used such as racial insults and assaults, frequent dismissals of resistant black African workers and violence or the threat of violence. This was made evident by the fact that even though not all white workers were managers any white employee could give orders to any black African worker; even non work-related instructions and expect or demand compliancy (Von Holdt 2005: 48-50).

The three key features of the 'apartheid workplace regime', discussed above, evidently reflected what was happening in the wider societal realm. According to Von Holdt:

The apartheid workplace regime had deep historical roots in the evolution of labour regimes, work practices and racial structures of power within settler colonialism, and was underpinned by the educational and labour market policies of apartheid. There were no mechanisms for workplace incorporation of black workers...the broader political and social exclusion of blacks was mirrored by workplace exclusion and oppression (2005: 48).

Social structures such as the education system and the labour market together with the broader policies of exclusion and inclusion were the bedrock of the 'apartheid workplace regime'. Simply put, the population group who had power in the wider societal realm had similar power and influence in the workplace. And the same can be said about population groups that were powerless in the wider societal realm. In fact:

...the workplace was a site of racial domination buttressed by racial segregation and by racist discourses and practices in which the distribution of occupations, skills, incomes and power was racially defined...It was further characterised by hierarchical and authoritarian management styles, extremely adversarial industrial relations, lack of skills- indeed suppression of skills- and numerous production inefficiencies that sprang from the conflicts, hierarchies, social distances and antagonisms that characterised a workplace with roots in the

social relations of settler colonialism and un-free labour (Buhlungu & Webster 2006: 248).

Every aspect of industrial and workplace relations was racialized. This inevitably led to intense racial antagonisms. It is important, here, to underscore the fact that workplaces that are characterised by such wide social distances and antagonisms are inherently inefficient. What's more, the whole economic and political system becomes unsustainable.

### **2.3. Post 1994: the transition**

Prior to the dismantling of apartheid as a political regime in 1994, the nature of workplace relations in the country could not be sustained. In other words, as the 'apartheid workplace regime' and its underpinning economic structures began to collapse the political system that rested upon it also began to fall apart (Von Holdt (2005: 47). The transition from apartheid has been viewed, by South African industrial and economic sociologists as a 'triple transition'. This transition involves three overlapping and contradictory processes namely: political democratization, economic liberalization and the de-racialization of society. Since in a capitalist society paid work is the primary means of distributing economic resources it is imperative for democratic societies to have democratic workplaces. Indeed, authoritarianism in the workplace often leads to authoritarianism in the wider societal realm. Thus the first democratic South African government made it a top priority to unmake or dismantle the contours of the 'apartheid workplace regime'. The reasoning behind this was that apartheid was made and sustained in the workplace through the 'apartheid workplace regime'. So the most effective way to deal with its legacy would be to build a strong workplace democracy as a counter to the previous authoritarian regimes (Bezuidenhout 2008: 179-180; Webster & Omar 2003: 194).



Hence, in order to unmake the ‘apartheid workplace regime’ and redress its legacy, specific policies and statutes were put in place. Examples include the Labour Relations Act, No. 66 of 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No. 75 of 1997, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and the subsequent Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act, No. 53 of 2003, the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act, No. 9 of 1999. These policies and pieces of legislation were put in place to “transform workplace practices and work organization toward equity, efficiency and productivity” (Webster & Omar 2003: 195).

These efforts were met with uneven success. There have been significant positive changes in workplace order in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, the racial division of labour and the racial segregation of facilities are confined to history. Still, new forms of racial structures of power informally operate in the workplace (Von Holdt 2003; Burger & Jafta 2005; Webster & Omar 2003, Bezuidenhout 2008).

For instance, in his discussion of the state of the labour market in post-apartheid South Africa, Moleke (2004: 205) argues that “job reservations automatically implied that training, when it took place, was limited and concentrated in the types of skilled jobs reserved for whites”. As a result of the past systemic exclusion of black Africans from key occupations in industry and government the pool of skilled workers and competent managers continues to be restricted today.

Thus in spite of the South African government’s efforts to structurally redress racial inequalities, “race continues to earn returns in the South African labour market” (Burger & Jafta 2005: 31). Indeed the present South African workplace is struggling to meet the competing demands of the *‘triple transition’*: some ‘remains’ of the ‘apartheid workplace regime’

infiltrate the new workplace order. Based on their analysis of three case studies conducted in three different industries, Webster and Omar (2003: 208) reached the conclusion that race remains a powerful fault-line in the workplace. Black African workers get promoted yet decision making remains in the hands of white managers. Thus power relations remain racially charged. This is also extended to relations with customers. In other words, despite efforts to de-racialize the workplace the contours of the apartheid workplace regime have not yet been eradicated.

One of the major barriers to workplace transformation in South Africa is the rapid increase in labour subcontracting and the outsourcing of noncore (and at times some core) functions and the increasing reliance on temporary and part-time workers. The restructuring of work in post-apartheid South Africa affect employment relations in fundamental ways. Consequently trade unions are facing difficulties. In fact unions' power is greatly undermined by these changes. For example, unions face numerous challenges organizing sub-contracted and casual workers. This has been described as the 'authoritarian restoration' of the 'apartheid workplace regime' by management and employers. New ways of inclusion and exclusion, inspired by the remains of the 'apartheid workplace regime', have emerged (Bezuidenhout 2008: 183-187; Von Holdt 2005: 61-63).

Furthermore, the desire to put South Africa on the "high road", the route that emphasizes skills through training and high wages, through effective collective bargaining, rewards and incentives schemes" carries with it a unique set of challenges (Webster & Omar 2003: 195). For instance, the economy becomes over-reliant on skilled workers and unskilled and semi-skilled jobs continuously diminish. Thus, South Africa continues to have very high unemployment rates (structural unemployment) despite plenty of opportunities in the skilled and professional job categories. This, in part,

has necessitated the importation of skilled workers from neighbouring countries and beyond.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

A brief look at the history of labour in South Africa reveals that there is a complex and significant relationship between the workplace and the wider societal realm. Under the colonial and apartheid rule the racial ordering in society was reflected in the workplace. At the same time the workplace regime also anchored the authoritarian political regimes. Thus workplace democracy provides the potential basis for broader political democracy. Post 1994, the democratic South African government continues to grapple with racial inequalities that are deeply rooted in the social order that prevailed under the past authoritarian political regimes. The workplace, therefore, plays a key role in redressing and averting the ills of the past regimes. The government's attempts are met with uneven success. Indeed, there are new and unexpected constraints and challenges to building a stable and sustainable workplace democracy.

## Chapter 3

# The construction industry: opportunities and challenges

### 3. Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on the subject matter of this study. Key features of the construction industry and its real or potential economic contributions are considered. This is followed by a brief discussion of the issues around the international migration of skilled workers in the era of *'flexible accumulation'*. The chapter concludes with a discussion on workplace integration of migrant professionals with the emphasis placed on the matter of professional recognition in the host country.

#### 3.1. Key features of the construction industry

Construction work is by and large a project-based activity. The construction industry is generally labour intensive and the amount of workers required to carry out a project vary according to the size and type of the project. In addition to this, labour is highly mobile in the construction industry thus employment relations are notoriously precarious (an in-depth discussion on employment relations is given below). End-products of construction works also vary extremely in size, appearance and end-use from roads, bridges, houses, offices, schools and so on. The end-products are usually heavy and expensive. A significant part of the components of the final product are manufactured elsewhere. Another key aspect of the construction industry is the separation of the responsibility for the design of the project from its production. Generally, demand tends to fluctuate particularly according the state of the broader economy and the socio-economic policies that are directly or indirectly related to the construction industry (Hillerbrandt 1985: 7-9; Wells 1986: 3-10; Goldman 2003: 1).

Despite the fact that many of the main principles of construction have remained the same for centuries, this is a very competitive industry. Construction projects are usually undertaken by large numbers of private companies in direct competition with one another. Depending on the size of the project there can be more than one subcontractor working at one construction site providing a variety of specialised services. Miles and Neale (1991: 1) argue that due to the industry's competitiveness and fragmentation construction companies are by and large reluctant to invest large sums of money in human resources development. This is usually driven by the employers' belief or fear that if they train their workers those trained workers will use their newly acquired skills to look for better jobs offered by rival firms. For that reason, "construction companies find it difficult to justify expenditure beyond the immediate demands of individual projects" (Miles & Neale 1991: 1). This partially explains the perennial skills shortages in the South African construction industry. Thus, as the South African construction industry entered a boom period from 2002 to 2010 it was faced with acute skills shortages. This, however, needs to be understood against the backdrop of a long period of low demand for civil engineering and construction services from 1980 to 2002 which 'decimated' the industry's skills capacity (Lowitt 2007: 4). In addition, the education system under the apartheid regime created 'artificial bottle necks' as far as skills production is concerned. Furthermore, the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' necessitated the shift of skills understanding from the emphasis on semi-skilled labour force to a highly-skilled labour force. Thus, the supply side of skills did not match the demand side. As a result of these factors, combined, the construction industry was caught off-guard as it were when it comes to matching the demand for skilled labour due to a prolonged boom period that reached its peak in 2009.

### **3.2. The construction industry and the economy**

The construction industry is a significant indicator of the GDP and is thus rightly referred to by many economists as the barometer of economic growth in many countries. For instance, in South Africa a total of R 275bn was invested in construction in 2009. That figure represented a significant 43% of the total gross fixed capital investment during that year. It was boosted mainly by the infrastructural projects built as part of the preparation for the 2010 FIFA World cup that was hosted in South Africa. Large sums of money were put aside for different construction projects such as roads, communication upgrades, stadium upgrades and the construction of new stadiums. For instance, the South African government invested about R10 billion on stadiums only (Maening and Du Plessis 2007: 581).

Due to its interconnectedness to other sectors of the economy the construction industry has high multiplier effects. In South Africa the construction industry has the second highest multipliers after manufacturing. This is largely because this industry is connected to, amongst other, "... capital equipment, finance, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), timber, cement, steel, bitumen, plastic and furniture sectors" (Lowitt 2007: 4).

Since the 1994 democratic dispensation in South Africa, the ANC-led government committed itself to spear-head and create an enabling environment for social, economic and political transformation in the country. This 'triple transition' is, arguably, contradictory and complex (Bezuidenhout 2008: 179; Webster & Omar 2003: 194). The construction industry has the potential to play a pivotal role in facilitating this 'triple transition'. During the first few years of democracy the ANC-led government recognised this and in line with its (now abandoned) Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), launched and

released a Green Paper in 1997 on the construction industry. The Green Paper which carried the title: “Green Paper on Creating an Enabling Environment for Reconstruction, Growth and Development in the Construction Industry” had, as its main objective, the aim to establish the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB). The role of the CIDB was to:

...exercise leadership and foster the cooperation of industry stakeholders to pursue development objectives, improved industry practices and procedures. This will enhance delivery, performance and value for money, profitability, and the industry’s long-term survival in an increasingly global arena (Rwelamila 2002: 443).

When the Reconstruction and Development Programme was the operating macroeconomic policy the construction industry was viewed by the South African government as one of the key sectors of the economy. It was identified as one of the industries that would play a leading role in social transformation and nation building or reconstruction. Indeed, in any country, the construction industry plays a key role in housing delivery, urban construction and reconstruction and in the economic empowerment of disadvantaged communities (Rogerson 1999). It is however important to note that in spite of its potential to play this important role the South African construction industry has been and continues to be plagued by skills shortages, corruption as well as poor regulation. These factors undermine the contributions that the construction industry makes towards social transformation and economic empowerment (Lowit 2007: 7; [www.sowetanlive.co.za](http://www.sowetanlive.co.za) 22/09/201). Thus poor communities continue to be deprived of key services such as water, sewerage systems, housing, roads and electricity. This has led to waves of service delivery protests in South Africa (Alexander 2010).

As suggested, post-Apartheid South Africa continuously contends with high levels of unemployment and poverty. “People are often desperate to work and earn an income, any income,” thanks to high unemployment (Goldman 2003: 10). In 2006 the South African government set itself a long-term goal to halve unemployment by 2014. In order to achieve that target employment needed to grow at 40% or about five million net new jobs to reduce unemployment from 26% to 13% by 2014 (Altman and Hemson 2007: 5). This is not materializing, according the quarterly labour force survey carried by Statistics South Africa’s (Statistical Release P0211), which uses a ‘strict definition’ of unemployment, the unemployment rate stood at 24.9% in August 2012. The construction industry has the potential to play a major role in the fight against unemployment. In the years leading up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, for example, South Africa’s construction industry had been creating new jobs. For instance, a massive 80 000 net new jobs were created between December 2004 and December 2006; a significant 21% increase. However, after the completion of the FIFA 2010 World Cup related projects thousands of those jobs were lost (MBSA 2007; Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release P0277). Thus, the challenge for South Africa is to find practical ways to turn around the construction industry from being a cyclical and volatile industry to a sustainable and stable economic sector. This will contribute to effectively addressing the unemployment problem in the country.

The construction industry can play a pivotal role in the social transformation of the country in yet another sense. Owing to the legacy of the colonial and Apartheid eras, the ‘new’ South Africa has deeply embedded structural economic inequalities rooted in the racial ordering of society. Capital accumulation during the colonial and Apartheid eras were racialised and highly uneven. To address this, the South African government has passed policy legislation that encourages and facilitates



the growth of small-medium enterprises (SMEs) owned by the new black middle class. The construction industry is an industry where SMEs can, arguably, be relatively easily established and sustained. As Goldman (2003: 2) for example notes, “the low financial requirements for entry, particularly as a labour-only subcontractor mean that the industry is also seen as an important avenue for the promotion of Black-owned business”.

Despite its self-evident importance, however, the construction industry in South Africa remains unstable. Its variability, volatility, irregularity and instability are all well documented (Lowitt 2007: 7). Considering the potential of the construction industry to move the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and facilitate the social, economic and political transformation these swings are by no means good news to South Africa. The condition of the construction industry has been further worsened by economic policies, after the abandonment of the Reconstruction and Development Programme as a macroeconomic policy, which do not prioritize it as a key economic sector. As suggested, the construction industry was viewed as a key economic sector when the RDP policy was operational but by 2006 when the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative-South Africa (ASGI-SA) was published the construction industry was not treated as a priority sector (Lowitt 2007: 7). That partly explains why the industry has been experiencing one crisis after another, from acute skills shortages to corruption ([www.sowetanlive.co.za](http://www.sowetanlive.co.za) 22/09/2011).

### **3.3. Employment conditions in the construction industry**

There is a general consensus that construction is not a particularly attractive industry to work in. Workers in the construction industry do dangerous and unhealthy work overall. Writing about the British construction industry, Ball (1988:11) had the following to say:

...exposure to the elements, the dirt, damp and dust of a construction site, and the speed at which heavy manual tasks have to be undertaken, all take a long-

term toll on building worker's health. And accidents are common; construction has one of the worst safety records of any industry.

The same can be said of construction work today. For example, in 2009 the Master Builders' Association in South Africa stepped up their efforts to improve the occupational health and safety of construction workers at construction sites throughout the country. This initiative was made necessary by the fact that issues of health and safety continue to haunt the construction industry in South Africa as well as many other countries (SA Builder, March 2009).

It is important though to note that "casual work and poor working conditions are not inevitable consequences of building work but of the way that the actual physical process of building is organised and executed" (Ball 1988: 15). For example workers are given strong incentives to work fast and meet very demanding targets which may encourage them to ignore safety precautions in exchange for performance bonuses.

Furthermore, because construction is project-based and construction projects are all fixed-term rather than continuous, employment in the construction industry is traditionally casual in nature. This does not only apply to unskilled labourers but also office workers and technicians (Goldman 2003: 1; Ball 1988: 11). In South Africa, and indeed globally, phenomena such as labour broking, externalisation, subcontracting and various forms of informalization in search of 'flexibility' in recent years make employment relations very precarious. The 'casualisation cancer' in South Africa has reached the point where most casual or temporary workers remain perpetually in this status and have thus become 'permanent casuals' (DOL 2005: 27-31; Bezuidenhout, Theron & Godfrey 2005: 39-43). The South African construction industry is well known for its reliance on sub-contracted labour and employers are said to be operating on an 'informal policy' of 'hire and fire' (Goldman 2003: 1, 12).

Furthermore, “at least 70% (of the South African construction workforce) work on a contract basis” (Mokoena & Mathimba 2006: 40-41). Commenting on the extent to which non-standard forms of employment have spread across the country, Bezuidenhout (2008: 183) argues that such forms of employment are designed by employers to deliberately undermine contracts of employment so as to “make regulations that are premised on standard employment contracts obsolete”.

Even though gross-average earnings in the construction industry in South Africa may seem fine, for example, on average, construction workers were earning more than R8 000 per month in 2010 (Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release P0277), a very wide salary gap exists between the workers who occupy the ‘core’ of the labour market and those in the ‘periphery’. Indeed, casual or temporary workers are known to accept whatever terms and conditions offered by employers as they hope to be given permanent contracts in the future. What’s more sub-contracted or brokered workers watch helplessly as their pay and working conditions are lowered by subcontractors (DOL 2005: 27-31).

High spatial mobility of construction workers (movement from one site to another) presents a formidable challenge to trade unions organising construction workers. The task becomes mountainous when it comes to organising labourers with elementary skills working in SMEs. Ironically, a significant proportion of these SMEs in South Africa are black-owned and a significant percentage of construction workers are employed in such SMEs and informal businesses. The challenge to organise workers in the construction industry is further complicated by the existence of a large number of foreign workers with low skills and many illegal migrants who view trade unions with suspicion (Goldman 2003: 2).

### **3.4. Skills shortages in the construction industry**

According to the SAICE report of the Management Information Survey (MIS) for the period June to December 2006, construction companies reported difficulties in finding adequate skills. The demand for skilled staff was focused on engineers with 92% of the firms looking for engineering personnel at the time. A further 93.5% of the respondents needed to increase staff in general, 91.3% found it hard to hire technologists and 80.8% of the surveyed managers were looking for technicians ([www.saace.co.za](http://www.saace.co.za)). This report confirms a very significant shortage of skilled labour in the construction industry.

Making the same point are the findings of a survey compiled by Allyson Lawless, a former president of the South African Institute of Civil Engineers, in 2007. This report claims that 79 municipalities in the country did not have civil engineers, technologists or technicians on their staff and there were more than one thousand vacancies for these skills at municipalities throughout the country ([www.saace.co.za](http://www.saace.co.za)). Little wonder there are service delivery problems in most municipalities throughout South Africa (Alexander 2010). Further evidence of the negative impacts of skills shortages in South Africa comes from the World Economic Forum's global competitiveness index (GCI) released in October 2008. This report suggested that "when surveyed, South African executives identified the country's inadequately educated workforce as being the single most problematic factor for doing business, followed closely by crime and theft" (Creamer 2008). The construction industry has had and is still facing a 'skills crisis' (Parker 2009; S.A Builder, January 2004; S.A Builder, March 2008). In other words, there is considerable reliance on the global skills market for experts in the construction industry (Copans 2008).

### **3.4.1. Governmental efforts to address skills shortages**

The South African government has and is taking various steps to reverse the effects of the racially skewed profile of skills development promoted by the Apartheid regime. The formulation of the Skills Development Levies Act, No. 9 of 1999 and the Skills Development Act, No. 31 of 2003 were meant to be giant steps in the 'right' direction. According to Martins (2005:34) twenty-five Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established to cater for skills development in the sectors for which they are responsible. For the construction industry, the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) were set up. This scheme started off on a positive note. During an international conference on skills development in the construction industry held in Cape Town in 2003, South Africa was praised as "an inspirational role model" in skills development (SA Builder, January 2003). This praise came after CETA revealed that it was making headway in redressing social inequalities by creating jobs and building small businesses in the construction industry through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) training system. The RPL is in principle a system "where skilled and experienced but non-certificated tradesmen and women are assessed and receive further training to bring them up to formal trade qualification standards which are in line with the National Qualification Framework (NQF)" (SA Builder, January 2003). Over 4 100 men and women were reported to have graduated from this skills development and training initiative in just two years at that time.

Despite a seemingly good start there are debilitating loopholes and problems in the system. For example, Martins (2005: 46) argues that the nature of training that is often offered by companies is 'on-the-job training'. This results in workers gaining 'tacit' skills. Such skills are only useful to a specific company and are not readily transferable. Furthermore, the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) is not successful. It has been continuously criticised and regarded as a 'step back' in skills

development in the construction industry (SA Builder, December 2008; MBSA Annual Report 2005: 3; MBSA, Annual Report 2008).

What is of much greater concern is that CETA is being mismanaged. It is corrupt and has become more or less dysfunctional. The beginning of 2008 saw CETA's major stake holders withdrawing their participation from the CETA council and all its committees, a major blow to the construction industry. During that year a number organizations affiliated to the CETA, including the Master Builders South Africa (MBSA), the South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors (SAFCEC), the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA), the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors (ASAQS) and Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA) appealed to the minister of labour to intervene to revive CETA. There were accusations of corruption and power misuse by the officials who were in charge at CETA. The above mentioned organizations contended that "due to lack of competent staff and systems at CETA, the issuing of certificates for qualifications obtained has been totally unsatisfactory" (SA Builder, December 2008). In 2010, CETA was finally put under administration by the Minister of Higher Education and Training (MBSA Annual Report 2010).

It is against this backdrop that both public and private companies are looking for skilled workers outside of the country. For instance, Copans (2008: 35) reported that in 2008 "fifty-six Cuban technical advisers, with experience in fields such as architecture, engineering and project management, arrived in South Africa...with the aim of providing technical assistance and expertise in the local construction and property industries" and more were due to come. The then Minister of Public Works, Thoko Didiza stated that "it had become clear that government and the private sector did not have sufficient local resources to deliver on the infrastructure and investment requirements for the next three or four

years, which necessitated the government seeking international resources” (Copans 2008: 35). She added; “the recruitment of the experts is an adequate way of dealing with the apartheid legacy of lack of skilled artisans, particularly taking into account all the major infrastructure projects on the go in South Africa” (Copans 2008: 35).

According to the National Manpower Commission (1987: 33) from the 1960s onwards there was a substantial net gain in migrants as a result of companies recruiting skilled workers from outside the country because there was a shortage of skilled workers. At that time the aim of the immigration policy was to ‘*relieve*’ the shortages of skilled workers and in so doing promote economic growth. Recruiting skilled workers from outside the country was viewed as a ‘*cheaper*’ option when compared to the training of people (National Manpower Commission 1987: 33). After 1994 the South African government began to move away from the narrow short term and voluntary model of enterprise training that predominated the late apartheid period. There has been a shift towards long term plans that involve greater co-ordination and planning, greater stake holder consensus and new improved funding arrangements (Kraak 2004: 116). As Paterson (2004: 71) noted, the education and training provisions for black South Africans equipped them with skills that were appropriate predominantly to rural agricultural contexts or the routine work of mines or the factory floor. The Apartheid regime was bent on skilling whites, especially white men. There is little wonder why even five years into democracy, in 1999, when the demand for skills was increasing rapidly, there was still too much reliance on white men to meet that demand (Barker 1999: 9). This situation has been made worse by the steady increase in emigration of highly skilled workers, who are predominantly white men, to more economically advanced countries in the global North (Bhorat, Meyer and Mlatsheni 2002: 1; Wocke & Klein 2002; Vollgraaf 2011).

As mentioned earlier the construction industry is not a particularly attractive industry in which to work largely because construction works are physically demanding and often dangerous. This, generally speaking, discourages locals from taking up jobs in the construction industry thus creating work opportunities for low skilled foreign migrant workers. In South Africa given the nature of the racial order historically speaking both skilled and unskilled foreign migrant workers are hired in the construction industry. Perennial skills shortages in the industry necessitate the importation of skilled workers into the country (Lowitt 2007: 5; Rogerson 1999; Goldman 2003: 10). The Gauteng province, where this study is located, is known to have large numbers of foreign migrant workers in its construction sector. Although there are no reliable figures on foreign migrants employed in Gauteng's construction industry, estimates range from 25% to 80% of the total labour force in this sector (Goldman 2003: 10).

### **3.5. International migration: the migration of professionals**

According to the IOM cited by Datta et al (2006:2) it was estimated that by the year 2000, around 175 million people resided outside their country of birth. Thus, potentially one out of every thirty five people in the world was an international migrant. In addition, just over half of these migrants were economically active, with the majority residing in industrialized nations. These industrialised/rich countries need and receive two types of immigrants; one set is low skilled and perform poorly paid, dirty and dangerous jobs which locals scorn. The second set is made up of skilled migrants or professionals who fill in skills gaps in professions such as engineering, technologists, doctors and nurses. As the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' requires a shift from relying on a low-skilled labour force to relying on highly-skilled people, skilled migration represents an increasingly large component of global migration streams



(Iredale 2001:7; Tevera & Crush 2010: 112; Lucht 2012: 28-65; Favell, Feldblum & Smith 2007: 15-16).

Salt (1997: 3) notes that “modern industries and services increasingly rely upon the acquisition, deployment and use of human expertise to add value to their operations”. As stated earlier, when this expertise is not available locally, employers frequently ‘import’ it from abroad. Thus there is fierce international competition for this scarce and crucial human capital. Khoo, Hugo and McDonald (2008: 481) argue that this global competition for skilled labour is intensified by the shortage of skilled labour in many developed countries that are facing an aging labour force. This leads to ‘brain drains’, especially, in developing countries. By 2008 it was estimated that 56% of the highly educated migrants in OECD countries originated in developing countries (Wickramasekera 2008: 1255). Furthermore, Vollgraaff (2011) reported that there were more African engineers in the US than in Africa itself. Skilled migrants made up 22% of the skilled labour force in Canada and in Australia they counted for 26% by 2011. Thus, skilled migrants contribute immensely to the GDP of receiving countries.

In addition to the ‘South-North’ skilled migration there is also an increase in the ‘South-South’ migration of skilled workers although this has been shadowed by rapid and rampant increases of undocumented migrants, frontier workers and refugees (Adepoju 2000: 383; IOM 2003: 15-16). For example, South Africa was the third major destination country, after France and the Ivory Coast, for skilled African migrants in 2010 (Vollgraaff 2011). Ironically, since South Africa’s ‘miraculous’ transition to democracy in 1994, she is faced with the issue of ‘human capital flight’ through the emigration of skilled workers. Among other reasons, the government’s affirmative action policy triggered the emigration of skilled white South Africans (Bhorat, Meyer and Mlatsheni 2002: 1-2). For instance, in 2008

the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) claimed that about 300 professional engineers were leaving South Africa every year. This claim was based only on the number of engineers who cancelled their registration with ECSA ([www.saace.co.za](http://www.saace.co.za)). Hence these figures might be lower than the actual number since some do not cancel their registration after emigrating.

To address their skills needs many countries are loosening their migration policies to allow for the smooth inflow of people with the much needed expertise. According to Khoo, Hugo and McDonald (2008: 196) in Australia “there has long been recognition that in order to be globally competitive the national economy must have an ongoing access to a highly skilled labour force”, and immigration has been a major source of such expertise. Khoo, Hugo and McDonald (2008: 197) argue that since 1996 Australia’s permanent immigration policy has become even more focused on skills recruitment and that, for example, new temporary migration visas were developed to attract skilled workers in particular occupations. This has been the trend across the globe especially in the developed countries.

Kofman and Raghuram (2005: 149-150) summed up this increased focus on attracting skilled workers through migration programmes by stating:

In the UK this is reflected in the introduction of the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme alongside the vast increase in the number of work permits granted (to non-EU migrants) from 48 180 in 1998 to 85 620 in 2002. In Australia there [was] a gradual diminution of family stream migration in comparison to skilled migration category and the later [accounted] for 61.1% of the Migration Programme in 2002-2003, up from 57.5% the year before. In Canada too skilled migration [accounted] for a large part of immigration. 137 119 out of 222 447 migrants coming to Canada in 2001 came through the skilled category.

The same can be said, with reservation about South Africa. South Africa's immigration policy has been loosened to some extent to encourage the flow of skilled migrants into the country (Financial Mail, 9 March 2001). The Immigration, Act No. 13 Of 2002<sup>10</sup> was aimed at "setting in place a new system of immigration control which ensures that" among other things "temporary and permanent residence permits are issued as expeditiously as possible and on the basis of simplified procedures and objective, predictable and reasonable requirements and criteria, without consuming excessive administrative capacity." In addition, this Act aimed and intended to ensure that the "South African economy may have access at all times to the full measure of needed contributions by foreigners".

In line with the aforementioned aims, subsection (1) of section 19 of the Immigration Act, No. 13 of 2002 made provision for the issuing of quota work permits to foreigners. It further gave the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Trade and Industry the powers to advise the ministry of Home Affairs, at least annually, of the categories that are in need of skilled workers. Furthermore, subsection (4) of section 19 of this Act states that:

Subject to any prescribed requirements, an exceptional skills work permit may be issued by the Department [of Home Affairs] to an individual of exceptional skills or qualifications and to those members of his or her immediate family...

Thus, in principle the immigration policy in South Africa, since 2002 was meant to attract skilled workers from other countries to fill in the skills gaps in the South African economy.

In spite of the immigration policy reform however, Lowitt (2007: 4, 5) for example, maintains that the importation of skills is largely viewed as a mere stop-gap measure to fill the skills gap. Thus only temporary

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<sup>10</sup> See the Preamble of the Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002

immigration is encouraged. Although, South Africa is not the only country that encourages the temporary immigration of professionals, its circumstances are unique and a different approach could result in bettering economic performance. Countries such as, the US, Canada, Australia and Sweden have similar immigration policies that favour only temporary immigration of skilled workers (Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2007; Wickramasekara 2008; Khoo, Hugo and McDonald 2008; Duvander 2001). However, South Africa being a developing country stands to benefit enormously from retaining skilled migrant workers. The developed countries mentioned above do not experience the acute skills shortages that South Africa has especially in the engineering field. Furthermore, as stated earlier, South Africa, along with other African countries, are losing skilled workers to the developed nations so it is economically sound for South Africa to set up policies that are aimed at retaining migrant professionals.

Under '*flexible accumulation*' regimes there is a need for countries to have sufficient supplies of skilled workers. As suggested earlier, there is a shortage of skilled workers locally therefore importing such skilled workers becomes a top priority. As Bernstein and Schlemmer (2000:25) have put it "every skilled or experienced legal immigrant is a package of foreign fixed investment because those skills and experience have been acquired at no cost to local taxpayers." If seen in this light skilled migrants are assets as opposed to liabilities. Nevertheless, locals and many politicians see immigrants, skilled or unskilled, as a threat to local people's opportunities of getting employment. In South Africa unemployment rates are high, reaching 24.9% (strict definition) in August 2012, even during times of significant economic growth and activities (Barker 2007:175). In 2009 Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, pointed to the "mismatch between the education and training outcomes and the needs of a fast modernising economy" as a root cause of structural unemployment

in the country (Parker 2009: 16-17). He added that “most of the gaps in the South African job market are not able to be filled, because those who are unemployed simply do not possess the appropriate, or any, set of skills that are in demand” (Parker 2009: 16-17). In other words, the old problem of structural unemployment is still common in South Africa notwithstanding 18 years of democracy.

In spite of high unemployment rates, Bernstein (2001: 18) argues that “it is a dangerous mistake to think that there is a contradiction between equal opportunities for all South Africans and active encouragement of foreign skilled immigration” and retaining them. Skilled foreigners increase the country’s expansion capacity and provide more job opportunities for all. Indeed, the availability of a large skilled workforce helps a country to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). This is so because international companies look at that as a precondition for investing in developing countries (Bernstein 2001).

In the same vein, Salt (1997: 3) argues that “although not straightforward, there appears, to be a positive relationship between flows of skilled labour and flows of investment.” Thus, there are economic benefits to the receiving country from skilled immigration. Furthermore, Zimmermann (1995: 46) argues that empirical studies have shown that it is a myth to see migrants as harmful to the labour market. Instead immigration helps to erode institutional constraints and make labour markets more competitive, with potentially positive employment effects. Thus, overall legal immigration in general and skilled immigration in particular helps to improve a country’s economic competitiveness and instead of exacerbating unemployment skilled migration actually increases job opportunities. It can thus be argued that the injection and retention of skilled migrant workers from the global skills market is essential for the capacity and competitiveness of South Africa’s construction industry.

### **3.6. Professional recognition in the host country**

The question of whether or not migrant professionals should be granted professional recognition generates heated debate in migrant receiving countries. This is complicated by the fact that transferring skills between countries is difficult. In Sweden for instance, Duvander (2001) found that the emphasis on skilled immigrants having to obtain country-specific skills by getting Swedish qualifications is only a smokescreen in a society that is simply anti-diversity. In Canada, Girard and Bauder (2005) found that there are institutional barriers to the recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience in regulated professions where independent regulatory bodies are responsible for the licensing of professionals. Furthermore, systemic discrimination results from the application of rules and procedures that are not designed to discriminate against anyone. This, however, results in the underutilization of skilled migrant labour. The same issues have led to intense policy debates in Australia. In Australia, due to the difficulties experienced by authorities to 'fairly' accredit qualifications of skilled migrants from non-English speaking countries, efforts were introduced to radically reform the accreditation process. Attempts to apply competency-based evaluation to assess foreign qualifications were made. The success of these reforms was uneven. For example, although there is reported success of this programme with regard to Nurses and Doctors, other professions still stick to the traditional evaluation procedures of qualifications and further tighten the requirements (Hawthorne 2002; Groutsis 2003; Hawthorne 1997; Chapman & Iredale 1993).

Hawthorne (2002: 58) identified the following problems with traditional accreditation process based on comparing academic qualifications obtained in different countries:

- It is difficult to obtain a full description of the scope, intensity and duration of the course of study or training.
- A paper description does not adequately reflect the quality of the course or the student's performance.
- Attainment of a qualification, particularly some years previous, does not necessarily reflect present competence.
- It is difficult to translate technical or other terminology.
- Unless clear criteria are applied and the judgements are open to scrutiny, there may be subjectivity and discrimination even if this is unintentional.

In South Africa, engineering became a self-governing profession in 1968. This did not happen overnight. Since 1890 there had been numerous attempts to make engineering a self-regulating profession. Failure to agree on many important issues within different strands of engineering as well as the existence of different and competing perceptions from the state, educational institutions as well as individual engineers, time and again derailed the efforts to establish an autonomous professional body. Finally, following the passage of the Professional Engineers Act, No. 81 of 1968 an autonomous professional body, the South African Council for Professional Engineers (SACPE) was established ([www.ecsa.co.za](http://www.ecsa.co.za)). The SACPE was renamed, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) following the passage of the Engineering Profession Act, No. 46 of 2000. Section 26 of this Act makes provision for the reservation of work exclusively for certain categories of registered persons. These categories are known and ranked as follows:

- i) Professional Engineer
- ii) Professional Engineering Technologist
- iii) Professional Certificated Engineer
- iv) Professional Engineering Technician
- v) Candidate Engineer

- vi) Candidate Engineering Technologist
- vii) Candidate Certificated Engineer
- viii) Candidate Engineering Technician

ECSA's jurisdiction to act in the public interest also extends beyond registered persons. Furthermore, accreditation powers are also extended to include accreditation visits and to accredit programmes offered by other institutions apart from universities and technikons<sup>11</sup>. Thus, although foreign trained engineers can be employed in South Africa without being registered with ECSA, they must be registered in order to perform certain engineering tasks. Without such professional recognition their labour market and workplace integration is negatively affected.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the construction industry in South Africa plays (and has the potential to do more) a crucial role in social, political and economic transformation in the country. This potential is limited by the skills shortages in this key industry. In order to deal with the debilitating effects of skills shortages both public and private firms in South Africa seek the services of migrant professionals. The broad question that this study seeks to address is how well do migrant professionals become integrated into the South African workplace. Smooth and efficient integration is very important if the country is to get maximum economic benefit from migrant professionals. Thus it is relevant and even crucial to look at workplace relations between migrant professionals and their South African workmates.

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<sup>11</sup>See the Engineering Profession Act, No. 46 of 2000



## Chapter 4

### Concepts and theoretical explanations

#### 4. Introduction

This chapter begins by introducing and unpacking key concepts used in the study. That is followed by a discussion of the two important theoretical frameworks that shape the study and the interpretation of its findings. The chapter concludes by illustrating the usefulness of these two theoretical approaches towards understanding the workplace integration of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

#### 4.1. Defining key terms

A number of key concepts underpin this study and thus a clear understanding of how these concepts are used and operationalized in this study is necessary.

##### 4.1.1. Skill

‘Skill’, ‘skilled workers’ and ‘skilled jobs’ have become buzz words, along with ‘flexibility’, in economic sociology and economic policy since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is ironic though that there is no universally agreed definition of what ‘skill’ entails. This is partly because the concept of ‘skill’ itself is a social construct thus its meaning largely depends on the context in which it is used. Consequently, what is known as ‘skill’ may differ from place to place and from time to time. As Standing (1999: 24) for example, points out, the notion of ‘skill’ is used in three different ways, namely; to denote a *technique*, *autonomy* and *status*. The notion of ‘skill’ as technique emphasizes the importance of both general and specific knowledge related to the job and hence education or training and working experience are key determinants of this kind of ‘skill’. The notion of ‘skill’ as autonomy is different from that of technique in the sense that more

emphasis is put on the socio-political aspects of 'skill' rather than the technical aspect. Here job autonomy and freedom or control determines 'skill' as opposed to technical competence. The third notion of 'skill' is that of 'skill' as denoting status. Here 'skill' is seen primarily in terms of social status accorded to persons who occupy the position in question. In line with the aforementioned; a worker is skilled depending on whether or not entry into the occupation is deliberately restrained or reserved not primarily because of the complexity of the job or the nature of the occupation itself necessarily. Indeed, all types of jobs require some kind of 'skill'. Thus the notion of skill is complex and needs to be used with caution (Standing & Tokman 1991: 23-26). The ambiguity that surrounds its usage has led some sociologists to question the reality of 'skill'. More (1980: 15) sums it up this way:

When sociologists cast doubt on the reality of skill, they are not necessarily casting doubt on the reality, or usefulness to industry, of mental or physical qualities which might be possessed by workers. What they are doing is questioning either the reality of particular qualities which certain workers believe themselves to possess, or which other people believe them to possess; or, while accepting the reality of these qualities, they are questioning their actual usefulness to industry.

In this study, the term skill is used in a general sense. All three notions discussed above are considered in determining skill and by way of extension skilled workers. It is also important to point out that more than one of these three notions of skill may apply to a particular individual.

#### **4.1.2. Skilled workers/professionals**

Just as there is no one fixed definition of 'skill', skilled workers do not constitute a homogenous group, although in broad terms they may be described as professional, managerial and technical specialists (Salt 1997: 5). Apart from their heterogeneity, it is vital to take into consideration the fact that not all skilled jobs are done by skilled workers rather some

complex jobs are done by unskilled workers (Standing 1999: 26-27). Once more the social construction of skill as a concept is highlighted. It is difficult to say whether it is the nature of the job itself that determines whether the worker who does it is skilled or not or is it a certain quality that the worker possesses. In this study skilled workers/professionals would be those with formal qualifications such as a degree, diploma or a higher national certificate and employed to do jobs that are regarded as 'skilled jobs' or 'high status jobs' in the construction industry.

#### **4.1.3. Workplace**

According to Van Jaarsveld and Van Eck (2005: 259) a workplace is a "place or places where the employees of an employer work". Furthermore,

...if an employer carries on or conducts two or more operations that are independent of one another by reason of their size function or organization, the place or places where employees work in connection with each independent operation, constitutes the workplace for that operation (Van Jaarsveld and Van Eck 2005: 259).

Thus, in the construction industry a worker may work in more than one workplace as he or she may be involved at more than one construction site. For instance a Civil Engineer may be tasked to supervise construction projects that are scattered all over a province or region. Moreover, a construction firm may have fixed central offices located in a particular place while its operations are spread across a wider geographical area, for example across a town, metropolis, country, continent, and even inter-continently. The complexity and temporary nature the workplace in the construction industry poses serious challenges and opportunities for workplace integration to migrant professionals.

#### **4.1.4. Migrant integration**

In general terms, integration is possible through either assimilation or multiculturalism or a combination of the two. Assimilation aims at the facilitation of 'indistinguishable' migrants from the local population. On the other hand multiculturalism implies "tolerating, or even promoting, ethnic and other differences in such a way that identifiable groups coexist and interact to produce a heterogeneous but stable society" (Stalker 1994: 72).

#### **4.1.5. Workplace integration**

In this study the term workplace integration refers to the whole process starting with the process of finding employment, developing smooth interpersonal relations with management and colleagues as well as developing a strong sense of belonging in the organisation. The following factors are seen as key indicators of migrant professionals' workplace integration:

- Membership of professional organizations,
- access to further training,
- long-term employment contracts,
- upward mobility through equal opportunities for promotion,
- active participation in production or work-related decision making as well as
- active participation in social activities and functions.

Regardless of how workplace integration is arrived at it facilitates the 'togetherness' or cohesion required for effective relations of production and the building of a democratic society.

#### **4.1.6. Regime of accumulation**

Amin (1994: 8) defines a regime of accumulation as a set of regularities at the level of the whole economy, enabling a more or less coherent process of capital accumulation. It includes norms pertaining to the organization of

production and work, relationships and forms of exchange between branches of the economy and common rules of industrial and commercial management.

#### **4.1.7. Flexible accumulation**

*'Flexible accumulation'* is a regime of accumulation that “rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption” Harvey (1989: 147). In other words, it is the reverse of *'Fordism'*, which is a regime of accumulation that is characterized by standardization of work, products, labour processes and patterns of consumption as well as strong working class organizations.

#### **4.1.8. Unemployment rate**

The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons taken as a percentage of the total labour force broadly speaking. There are two different ways of defining or calculating the unemployment rate namely the “strict definition” and the “expanded definition” (Barker 2007: 174). The official statistics prepared by Statistics South Africa uses the ‘strict definition’ of unemployment. According the ‘strict definition’ the unemployed are those within the economically active population who:

- did not work during the week prior to the survey
- want to work and are available to start work within the week of the survey
- have taken active steps to look for work or to start any form of self employment in the four weeks prior to the survey (Barker 2007: 174; Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release P0211).

The third determining factor listed above is the one that differentiates between the ‘strict’ and the ‘expanded’ definition of unemployment. A number of flaws can be identified with the use of the ‘strict’ definition. For

example taking ‘active steps to look for work’ is not always practical amongst the poor working class. In countries like South Africa that experienced dispersed urbanisation looking for work is costly. Without the means to meet costs such as transport costs employment seekers may end up not taking ‘active steps’ to look for work or have lost hope of finding a job though they are desperate to start working (Barker 2007: 174-176; [www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za)). Furthermore, the ‘strict’ definition of unemployment is informed by a broad definition of employment, which includes the engagement in any economic activity for at least one hour as employment (Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release P0211). Thus if truth be told, using the ‘strict’ definition is to understate the nature and the extent of the unemployment problem in South Africa. Barker (2007: 175) uses the 2005 unemployment figures to illustrate the difference between the ‘strict’ and ‘expanded’ definition. Using the ‘strict’ definition, the unemployment rate in South Africa was only 26.7% but when the ‘expanded’ definition was used the figures rose to a staggering 38.8%. Thus although in this research project the official figures, obtained via the ‘strict’ definition, are constantly cited, it is important to note that the unemployment problem is much worse than what the official figures reveal<sup>12</sup>.

#### **4.1.9. Structural unemployment**

According to Barker (2007: 177) such unemployment refers generally to the “overall inability of the economy, owing to structural imbalances, to provide employment for the total labour force even at the peak of the business cycle”. Structural unemployment may come about as a result of a mismatch between the skills imparted by the education or training

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<sup>12</sup> Although there is evidence that the ‘expanded’ definition arguably present a more accurate picture of the unemployment problem in South Africa, it is difficult to access credible and reliable figures that are calculated using the ‘expanded’ definition. For this reason reference is made primarily to the official unemployment figures in this study.

system and what is required by business. It may occur if educational policies intentionally or unintentionally make it difficult for particular population groups to attain the required skills. This is, given the history of South Africa still the most prevalent form of unemployment post 1994.

## **4.2. Theoretical explanations**

As mentioned earlier, Bonacich's (1972) *split labour market theory* and Harvey's (1989) '*flexible accumulation*' theory are the two key theoretical frameworks that shape the analysis and findings of this study. Though these two theoretical models are arguably autonomous they are by no means incompatible. They both offer plausible and comprehensive explanations of issues concerning labour markets and ultimately relations of production in the workplace in capitalist societies. It is my contention that using these theories as complementary theoretical frameworks is useful in attaining a better practical understanding of the subject matter of this study. To begin with I discuss the key insights from Bonacich's (1972) *Split labour market theory*.

### **4.2.1. The split labour market theory**

It is important to acknowledge, at the start of this discussion, that Bonacich (1972) developed the *split labour market theory* to explain the economic sources of 'ethnic antagonism' primarily. She argued that a split labour market can only occur when there are large disparities in the price of labour for the same occupation for two different groups of workers. Thus pivotal to the *split labour market theory* is the assumption that ethnic antagonism, first, takes root in a labour market that is patently split along ethnic lines. Understanding the nature of the dynamics of the existence of at least two groups of workers who are paid notably different wages for doing the same work is enhanced by making use of the *split labour market theory* in other words. The term 'ethnic antagonism', as it is used by

Bonacich (1972: 549), “encompasses all levels of intergroup conflict, including ideologies and beliefs, behaviours and institutions”.

The key to Bonacich’s *split labour market theory* is her conceptualisation of the notion of ‘*price labour*’. She uses this concept to denote the total cost of labour to the employer. This includes wages or salaries, cost of recruitment and hiring, transportation, accommodation, education, health care and indirect costs such as the costs of labour unrest or strikes as well as what it would cost to attract the prospective workers from competitors and competing activities. Therefore, the price of labour for particular groups of workers can be calculated in advance and comparisons made even though the two groups are not engaged in the same activity (Bonacich 1972: 49).

Owing to the unequal development of capitalism, international migrants have historically been used as cheap labour (see Siu 1952; Yarwood 1964; Boswell 1986; Datta et al 2006). When migrant workers enter the labour market for the first time, argues Bonacich, they usually lack some resources and this affects the initial cost of their labour. Bonacich identified three types of resources that affect the ‘price of labour’. The first is the level of living or economic resources that the migrant workers had in their home country. Migrant workers who come from a poorer economy generally need less ‘carrot’ to be induced to take up jobs in a host country. They thus tend to sell their labour cheaper than the prevailing rate. Moreover, with the intention of keeping migrant workers’ wages low, employers, by and large, prefer to negotiate and bind prospective migrant workers to contracts before they leave their home country.

The second type of resource noted by Bonacich is information. Prospective migrant workers usually lack information or are misinformed about the prevalent conditions and wages in the prospective host country.



Misinformed or uninformed migrants may agree to a wage whilst they are still in their home countries, which may be lower than the prevailing rate. Prospective migrants can also be lured by false accounts of life and opportunities in the destination country. The third and last type of resource noted is 'political resources'. Political resources refer to the power and benefits derived from either joining a trade union or professional organisation and home-government protection in the host country (Bonacich 1972: 549-550).

An additional determinant of the initial price of migrant labour is the motive of the individual migrant worker. Bonacich (1972: 550) suggests that workers, who do not intend to remain in the labour force permanently, generally cost less than those who plan to stay permanently active in the labour force in the country of destination. This is because temporary workers tend to accept lower standards of living since they see it as a passing phase. Furthermore, their main objective is to get immediate employment and for that reason they tend to avoid involvement in lengthy labour disputes. This is not the case with permanent workers who often think about future business-labour relations for their children. Thus, temporary workers see "little reason to join the organizations and unions of a permanent workforce, and tend not to do so" (Bonacich 1972: 551).

In summary, a split labour market can be spawned and maintained in this way:

Other factors constant (especially average productivity, skill and turn-over rates), employers will hire the lower-wage labour. As employers replace higher-paid (dominant) labour with lower-paid (minority) labour, class conflict between capital and labour is transferred to market conflict between dominant and minority workers, which in turn generates ethnic antagonism...faced with displacement or wage cuts, dominant workers attempt to exclude minority labour from equal competition, resulting in *segregated* labour markets (Boswell 1986: 353).

Thus according to the split labour market theory, if the cost of hiring migrant workers is less than that of hiring locals, employers would choose to hire migrant workers over locals and this leads to 'ethnic antagonism' in the workplace. Migrant workers are furthermore often viewed with scepticism by trade unions and vice versa. The same can be said about the relationship between professional organizations and migrant professionals.

Split labour market theory, though useful, has shortfalls. For instance, Boswell (1986: 353) argues that there are three areas in which this theory lacks clarity namely:

...the market dynamics of reproducing split labour market conditions are ambiguous, the effects of a racist discourse and of the state are missing or unclear, and the consequences of reproducing split labour market conditions and a racist discourse for labour market segregation are undeveloped.

The point is that, if the process of replacing dominant labour with minority labour continues unchecked, it should follow that the demand for minority labour rises and simultaneously the demand for dominant labour declines until there are no significant wage disparities. That, nonetheless, is not the usual case. In fact split labour markets tend to persist even after the initial causes of the split labour market are no longer operating. Thus, Boswell suggests that split labour markets are reproduced by nonmarket forces that are more complex than what Bonacich's arguments suggest (Boswell 1986: 353).

It is also important to note that Bonacich (1972) deliberately downplays the importance of skills difference in her discussion of factors that determine the 'price of labour' by arguing that:

...this [skills differences] does not in itself lead to that difference in price for the same work which distinguishes a split labour market. While a skilled worker may be able to get a higher paying job, an unskilled labourer of another ethnicity may be trained to fill that job for the same wage. Skills are only indirectly important in that they can be used to develop political resources, which in turn may lead to a difference in wage level for the same work (Bonacich 1972: 552).

Thus although the split labour market theory is primarily applicable to explain labour market issues involving low skilled migrant workers its main arguments equally applies to understanding labour market issues involving skilled migrants.

However, undermining the role played by skill differences in an analysis of the labour market is certainly problematic especially in an era where skills are so important that the scarcity of your skill may determine whether you get permanent employment or not. Indeed, in post-Fordist economies, skill does play a key role in determining the total cost of labour. Notwithstanding these shortfalls, it is my contention that the notions of the split labour market, with a few adaptations, can be very useful in exploring and considering the labour market and workplace integration of migrant professionals. Though skilled migrant labour is not necessarily cheap in terms of real wages or salaries, the total cost of their labour is generally considerably lower. Thus some important insights can be gained from the theoretical lenses that the split labour market theory provides. In order to supplement what an analysis based only on the split labour market theory may underemphasize or overlook, I turn to Harvey's (1989) theory of *'flexible accumulation'*.

#### **4.2.2. Fordism, post-Fordism and flexibility**

The debates around *'Fordism'*, *'post-Fordism'* and *'flexible accumulation'* dominated the field of economic sociology for most of the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were attempts by social scientists to explain the

rampant changes in capital accumulation that were triggered by the world economic crisis in the early 1970s (Edgell 2006: 76; Lipietz 1992: 14-17; Lipietz 1986: 13-32; Lipietz 1988: 10-43; Clarke 1992: 17). Before delving further into the nature of these debates it is fitting to highlight the fact that these concepts represent or describe *'ideal types'*<sup>13</sup> as opposed to actual realities. At least three schools of thought dominated these debates namely; the *'flexible firm' theory*, the *'flexible specialisation' theory* and the *'Marxist regulation' theory*. This study draws on the work of one of the key proponents of the *'Marxist regulation' theory*: David Harvey. Primary focus is placed on his use of the *'Marxist regulation' theory* to explain labour market restructuring that took place following the transition from the Fordist regime of accumulation to *'flexible accumulation'*.

In his book entitled; *'The condition of Post-modernity'*, Harvey (1989) comprehensively summarised the principles on which *'Marxist regulation' theory* is premised. He also provides a theoretical explanation of the transition from *'Fordism'* to *'flexible accumulation'*. Although the focus, here, is on his description and conceptualisation of *'flexible accumulation'* as a regime of accumulation, it is imperative to, first, briefly discuss the regime of accumulation that precedes it; *'Fordism'*.

*'Fordism'* is a concept used primarily to refer to the production system along with the regime of social regulation that was institutionalised by the

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<sup>13</sup> Ideal types are exaggerated versions of reality and are typically aloof from detail. In his classical piece: *"Ideal types and historical explanation"* Watkins (1952: 23) contends that an ideal type is "from the detailed complexity of the actuality to be analysed with its aid". Thus social scientists abstract the distinctive features of a historical complex and re-arrange them creating logical 'word-pictures'. The ideal type is, nonetheless, a yardstick through which complex social realities can be measured, analysed, explained and argued. Ideal types usually exist along a continuum, "rather than being a condition that is either present or absent" (Hall 1963: 33).

American car maker Henry Ford. As a regime of accumulation, *'Fordism'* required that high production levels be proportional to profit financed investments, coupled with high buying power for waged workers. In that way, mass production could be matched with mass consumption. Additionally, *'Fordism'* meant long-term or permanent employment, rigid limitations of redundancies and price indexed wage increments (Harvey 1989: 125-140; Lipietz 1992: 14-17; Edgell 2006: 78). This, in part, made and maintained rigid labour markets.

*'Fordism'* was also a fundamental determinant of socio-political regulation. A case in point is the "five-dollar, eight-hour day" principle and practise introduced by Henry Ford. Harvey points out that, it was more about creating a specific type of society than soliciting the workers' compliance or consent needed to run the assembly line system. Actually, *'Fordism'* provided workers with sufficient income to spend as well as the time to spend it in. This project was expanded to a national level when 'welfarist' states were created to ensure social security and to guarantee permanent jobs (Harvey 1989: 126). Thus, arguably *'Fordism'*

culminated not only in standardised production, standardised work, and standardised employment, but also in standardised consumption, and standardised life styles, even standardised politics, often referred to as the post-war consensus (Edgell 2006: 79).

Anchored by Taylorist principles of scientific management, *'Fordism'* mandated a separation of conception from execution and subsequently the breaking down of complex jobs into simple and routine jobs on an assembly line. This resulted in the alienation of workers from the final end-product and eventually 'deskilled' craft workers (Harvey 1989: 136-137; Edgell 2006: 59-60; Wardell 1999: 1-2). Work was also intensified, through the continuously moving conveyor belt which was used to control and standardise the pace of production, hence the mass production of

standardised goods. Notwithstanding, the ‘de-skilling’ effects of assembly line production workers were compensated with high wages, full-time/permanent employment, and minimal unemployment rates. Saying this, however, is not to suggest that the benefits of ‘*Fordism*’ were evenly distributed. For instance:

Fordist wage bargaining was confined to certain sectors of the economy and certain states where stable demand growth could be matched by large-scale investment in mass-production technology (Harvey 1989: 137-138).

In South Africa the dictates of the colonial and Apartheid regimes culminated in what Stephen Gelb (1991: 13-19) calls *racial ‘Fordism’*. Core Fordist principles were introduced and followed with some only partially applied. For instance, to achieve mass production, black African workers were treated as cheap labour and thus mass consumption was only possible for white South Africans. Black workers in general and black African workers in particular did not have full ‘workplace citizenship’; they could not legally join registered trade unions and were overall limited to taking up low-paying jobs. Black workers in South Africa did not therefore reap the benefits of ‘*Fordism*’ that were enjoyed by their white counterparts for they did not have sufficient disposable income to spend and they had very limited buying power. Gelb (1991: 16) aptly describes conditions ‘*racial Fordism*’ in South Africa as follows:

The situation of the white working class was institutionalised along very similar lines to that of working classes of the Western economies: an increased proportion of this group moved into skilled and supervisory positions in the labour process, with steady rises in their real wages making possible the spread of mass consumption of housing and locally consumer durables. Structures of collective bargaining, a social welfare system and very favourable subsidy and consumer credit arrangements all underpinned the process. In this fashion, under-consumption was made impossible at the same time whites captured the lion’s share of overall productivity gains.

Briefly stated, black workers were systematically excluded from mass consumption. Owing to the existence of the colour bar, white job reservation, the separate education system and the exclusion from collective bargaining, black African workers especially were largely low skilled and received lower wages compared to that of their white counterparts. Thus, under racial '*Fordism*', in South Africa, "both production and consumption were racially structured" (Gelb 1991: 13).

As suggested, under '*Fordism*', welfare states played a critical role in intervening to 'stabilise' the relationship between capital and labour. In South Africa, whether the apartheid state and its policies were good for the development of capitalism or not is a fiercely contested issue. Nonetheless, Gelb (1991: 17) argues that the apartheid state played an active role in the development of capitalism through its "direct and heavy involvement in extending the manufacturing sector, especially the growth of industries producing intermediate goods." Under pressure from its electorate, (the white minority), the apartheid state passed a number of Acts that protected white South African workers from competition from black African workers (see chapter 1 for a discussion of these laws). Whilst enhancing the living standards of a minority white population these laws impoverished black South Africans. Hence '*racial Fordism*' in South Africa was characterised by adversarial industrial relations. Militant black trade unions frequently disrupted production.

In the late 1960s to early 1970s '*Fordism*', began to crumble in the global North. There are many explanations put forward for this 'crisis'. For instance, capital argued that profits were too low because workers and raw materials suppliers were too strong and trade regulations were too rigid, which made it extremely difficult to restructure the instruments of production, consequently making technological revolution impossible (Lipietz 1992: 14-17).

Whatever the reasons for the ‘crisis’ were, capitalism went through a critical transformation. As pointed out earlier, there are many different approaches to theorize or describe the ‘new’ political and economic system that emerged from the crisis and the demise of ‘Fordism’. New theoretical conceptualisation of the changed and changing world of work followed including the notion of ‘Post-Fordism’, ‘Neo-Fordism’, ‘Neo-Taylorism’, ‘Not-Fordism’ and ‘flexible accumulation’ (Amin 1994:1; Hunter 2000: 74; Gertler 1988: 419-422; Wood 1991: 160-162; Oberhauser 1990: 211-212; Clarke 1992: 17).

#### **4.2.2.1. The rise of flexible accumulation**

Before looking at ‘Marxist regulation’ theory in general and Harvey’s (1989) ‘flexible accumulation’ thesis in particular, it is important to take note of the other two schools of thought mentioned earlier namely; the ‘flexible firm’ and ‘flexible specialisation’. This is important because Harvey’s work is shaped by the debates that raged in these schools of thought.

The ‘flexible firm’ theory was popularised by Atkinson and Meager (1986). A ‘flexible firm’ is an ideal type that captures and elevates crucial aspects of the changing employment practices. Central to this theory is the idea that ‘flexible firms’ tend to seek three types of economic flexibility. These are numerical flexibility, functional flexibility and financial and pay flexibility. Simply put, numerical flexibility is “the ability [of a firm] to change the size of its workforce quickly and easily in response to changes in demand” (Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 4). In contrast, functional flexibility refers to the “ease with which workers can be redeployed to different tasks to meet changes in market demand, technology and company policy”. The two above mentioned types of flexibility are made possible through financial and pay flexibility viz adjustments or changes in



the pay structures (Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 4-5). Thus, in summary, a '*flexible firm*' thrives on its ability to maintain numerical and functional flexibility by splitting its workforce into two different categories: core and periphery. The periphery segment is made up of employees without long-term employment security. Examples of these are short-term contract, part-time and casual workers. The core is made up of employees with high wages and a degree of security. This group makes possible functional flexibility for they are compelled to change tasks and to acquire and use new skills. In order to attract and maintain its core employees the '*flexible firm*' has to put up pay structures that match market rates for scarce skills (Atkinson 1984: 28-31; Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 4-5).

The '*flexible specialization*' school of thought advanced by Piore and Sabel (1984), focuses primarily on the process of production. In other words, this school concerns itself with the different and competing technologies of production responsible for craft and mass production. According to this school of thought, mass production was made possible by special purpose machines organised as assembly lines operated by semi-skilled workers to produce standardised products for mass markets. Flexible specialisation is seen as a form of skilled craft production made possible by easily adaptable and programmable technology. In place of standardized products these easily adaptable machines produce specialised goods for increasingly fragmented and volatile markets (Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 3; Sabel 1994: 101-156).

A third school of thought is '*Marxist regulation*' theory. The main proponents of this school of thought are Aglietta (1979), Boyer 1988) and Harvey (1989). This is a broader approach when compared with the so-called '*flexible firm*' and '*flexible specialization*' theory. This paradigm is an attempt to analyse the dynamics of social change within a framework

which links economic, political and ideological structures. In other words, it is concerned with explaining the stability of capitalism over long periods of time in the form of 'regimes of accumulation' (Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 2-3). Central to this theory is the Marxist idea that the transition from one regime accumulation to another entails a new spatial and division labour.

Harvey (1989: 121) argues that the changes that took place in the U.S and other developed countries in the 1970s represented a "transition in the regime of accumulation and its associated mode of social and political regulation." 'Fordism' as a regime of accumulation faced the crisis due to its 'rigidities' and as a result a more 'flexible regime of accumulation' emerged.

He describes '*flexible accumulation*' as a regime of capitalist accumulation that is:

marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterised by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation (Harvey 1989: 147).

These changes bring about a number of advantages in the capitalist world. Harvey (1989: 147) makes reference to what he calls "time-space compression" and argues that:

...the time horizons of both private and public decision making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space.

Due to the increased fragmentation of markets, mass production of standardised goods began to make no more business sense and thus small batch production, 'just-in-time,' for a specific niche market replaced mass production. Thus, the 'time-space compression' enabled companies to respond much quicker to the ever changing niche markets. '*Flexible accumulation*' is, thus, favourable for capital but labour receives mixed blessings. In fact it creates a small group of winners buffered by a big pool of losers (Harvey 1989: 150).

#### **4.2.2.2. Flexible accumulation and Labour markets**

To begin with, the quest for '*flexibility*' called for deep-seated restructuring of labour markets. Thus, inspired by the ideas of the '*flexible firm*' theory, Harvey (1989: 150-151) postulates that '*flexible accumulation*' ultimately splits the labour market into two main segments; the '*core*' and the '*periphery*'. The '*core*' consists of employees with full time or permanent jobs and is central to the organization's future. As a consequence, a small group of workers (the core) enjoy permanent employment, training and up-skilling as well as participation in decision making. The '*periphery*' segment is further divided into two subgroups. The first subgroup consists of full-time employees with skills that are readily available on the labour market and for that reason can be replaced with ease. The second subgroup provides even greater numerical flexibility. It includes part-timers, casuals, fixed term contract staff, temporaries and sub-contractors (Harvey 1989: 150). Thus, the crisis of '*Fordism*' and the emergency of '*flexible accumulation*' exert downward pressure on wages, creating unemployment in the traditional '*core*' labour force (Oberhauser 1990: 213). In other words, workers who used to have permanent full-time employment under '*Fordism*' are increasingly being pushed to the margins of the labour market.

According to Harvey (1989:152) this division of the labour market did not resolve the problems that arose in the 1960s of segmented or 'dual' labour markets but reshaped them according to a different logic. For instance, the declining significance of trade union power reduced the singular power of white male workers (in Western economies) in monopoly sector markets. Nevertheless, it did not necessarily follow that those who were excluded from those labour markets, such as women and ethnic minorities, achieved sudden parity. While there are some positive changes, the 'new' labour market conditions by and large re-emphasized and magnified the vulnerability of *disadvantaged groups* or minorities (Harvey 1989: 152).

Under '*flexible accumulation*', labour market restructuring is paralleled by equally significant shifts in industrial organization. For instance, organized sub-contracting, generally, opens up opportunities for new small business formation and in some instances "allows for older systems of domestic, artisanal, familial and paternalist labour systems to revive and flourish" (Harvey 1989: 152). Such small-medium companies have mushroomed in the South African economy especially in the construction sector (Goldman 2003: 14). Whilst this is arguably a noble achievement such small companies also often fail and are reluctant to invest in skills development. Moleke (2004: 207) observed, for example, that small-medium sized firms spend less on training, especially externally accredited training. This exacerbates the problem of skills shortages that the South African government is fighting to redress.

At this juncture it is important to mention that the '*flexible accumulation*' argument is not without controversy even amongst its proponents. In fact, as stated earlier, both '*Fordism*' and '*flexible accumulation*' are ideal types. There is not enough evidence to suggest that they are completely exclusive. Indeed there are certain characteristics that overlap between '*Fordism*' and '*flexible accumulation*'. Thus the objective here is not to

judge whether or not there has been a real break from *'Fordism'*. The point, however, is to highlight the impacts that the changes that took place had and have on labour markets and labour processes taking into account the role and impact of international migration (Amin 1994:1). *'Flexible accumulation'* appears to imply high levels of structural as opposed to frictional unemployment, rapid destruction and reconstruction of skills, modest (if any) gains in real wages and the squashing of trade union power (Harvey 1989: 147).

Harvey's (1989) theoretical model of *'flexible accumulation'* is, arguably, very useful in understanding the workplace integration of migrant professionals in the construction industry in South Africa. Hunter (2000: 67) contends that "although isolated internationally for decades, the notion of *'post-Fordism'* had great resonance within South Africa especially during the period of democratic transition". Thus, the *'post-Fordism'* debate had significant influence on the policies that were developed at that time and to date. In the early 1990s the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) was driven by such thinking. The Industrial Strategy Project suggested that "practices such as multi-skilling, team working and worker involvement initiatives could help chart a 'high road' for industry that would both increase productivity and redress South Africa's legacy of poor human resource development and a racially skewed labour market" (Hunter 2000: 74).

#### **4.2.2.3. Fordism, flexible accumulation and the construction industry**

The construction industry is both unique and similar to other industries in ways that I will discuss in-depth in the next chapter. For now, it is important to keep in mind that despite its uniqueness, the construction industry, in any capitalist economy, is driven by profit ultimately. Hence profit making is a central issue in analysing any economic activity in a capitalist economy and construction works is no exception. The fact that

“building firms are capitalist enterprises” who “invest money to make a profit” determines how production is socially organised (Ball 1988: 35).

At first glance, it seems impossible to think of the applicability of Fordist principles to the construction industry in view of the physical nature of the products produced in this industry. If one has a narrow view of *'Fordism'* it is easy to wrongly conclude that assembly line production is impossible in this industry since there are no conveyor belts. However, a broader view of *'Fordism'* shows that *'Fordism'* applies to the construction industry “in the reverse situation where workers, machines and materials move around a static product(s)” (Ball 1988: 30). Production in the construction industry occurs in stages, a particular stage should be completed before the next stage can start. Thus there is still a production chain similar to the assembly line production. Even though there are no conveyor belts to standardize and dictate the pace of production in some instances machines such as the concrete mixer can set the pace of production. Concrete needs to be spread as quickly as it is pumped. Thus it can be argued that the uniqueness of the construction industry only makes the application of Fordist and post-Fordist principles somewhat different in other words (Ball 1988: 30-33).

Additionally, managers in the construction industry often apply Taylorist principles of scientific management through which complex jobs are broken into numerous repetitive manual tasks. Further evidence of Fordist principles is seen in the fact that wages in this industry are often calculated in piece rates and bonuses are used as incentives (Ball 1988: 30).

That said there are perhaps two critical aspects of *'Fordism'* that are difficult to apply to the construction industry. They are; mass production of standardised goods coupled with mass consumption and the idea of

almost 'full employment' that is, low unemployment rates and life-long employment. This is where the notion of '*flexible accumulation*' in the construction industry becomes clear and very useful. To begin with the market for construction products is notoriously fragmented such that "contractors undertake contracts on a purely 'once-off' basis, with no knowledge or foresight of their future work-load and thus no ability to plan ahead or to invest for the future" (Wells 1986: 9). This makes mass production in the construction industry a rare possibility. Apart from that, the stop-go nature of production in this industry impacts significantly on the relations of production (between employers and workers) and the structure of the labour market at large.

The extensive reliance upon subcontracting and casual labour in the construction industry is well documented (Wells 1986: 9-10; Ball 1988: 11-15; Goldstock 1990: 14). This is partially in response to the volatile nature of markets for construction products and the general cyclical nature of the industry. Thus, Wells (1986: 9) argues that due to the unpredictability of markets in the construction industry:

...it is in their [construction firms] interests to make only the minimum of investments in fixed capital, to take on only the minimum of permanent staff, while maximising their use of subcontracting and casual labour.

As I have suggested earlier, it is important to note the fact that construction firms operating within capitalism emphasise the importance of making profits by continuously reducing the cost of labour. In fact, labour casualisation has a very long history as a means of reducing costs for employers in the construction industry. Commenting on the British construction industry, Ball (1988: 11) noted that "the epitome of casual work [was] a worker turning up to a site, getting a job, and then being laid off when it [the project at hand] is finished." Such is the extent of job insecurity for workers who fall into the periphery category of Harvey's

conceptual model of labour markets under '*flexible accumulation*' in the construction industry. It is clear moreover that in the construction industry it's not only subcontracted workers who face severe job insecurity but all construction workers depend, to a significant degree, on the project(s) at hand. Therefore, the threat and fear of being laid off is omnipresent. Migrant professionals, although after possessing critical skills can easily be marginalised in the construction industry.

Generally speaking, in many countries, the construction industry, in itself, is a huge and fragmented industry characterised by hundreds if not thousands of small firms and a significant number of large national or multinational companies. This makes it very difficult to regulate this industry. Issues of corruption and poor implementation or monitoring of health and safety regulations abound. Thus the existence of 'too many' players in this industry compounds its problems. Furthermore, construction workers subscribe to many, different trade unions and professional organisations thus further weakening the power of labour (Goldstock 1990: 14; Miles & Neale 1991: 1-3; Ball 1988: 114-125; Wells 1986: 7-10).

Taking into account what transpires in the construction industry, it is clearly evident, that there is no real break from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' in the construction industry. Rather there continuities and changes. For instance, although there are no fundamental changes in the way production is organised the idea and practise of permanent full-time employment for all employees is now a thing of the past. In the pursuit of flexibility employers rely on splitting their employees into two or more different segments. Indeed the 'core' continues to shrink while the periphery keeps on expanding. This practice makes possible both functional and numerical flexibility that businesses are in hot pursuit of in 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalist societies.



### 4.3. Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter has argued how both the *split labour market* theory and the '*flexible accumulation*' theory offer valuable insights in the exploration of workplace integration of migrant workers in the construction industry. The South African labour market is and has always been a split labour market. Furthermore, race has and continues to play a determinant role as a fault line along which the South African labour market is split. In addition to the racial divide, ethnic 'antagonisms', between locals and migrant workers render the South African workplace an even further contested terrain. A case for the divisions in the labour market caused by the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' can also be made. As I have shown above, policy making in post-apartheid South Africa is significantly influenced by the debates around '*post-Fordism*' and the general pursuit for 'flexibility' as opposed to 'rigidity'. Thus, although they address different aspects of the labour market both the *split labour market theory* and the '*flexible accumulation*' thesis complement each other and provide a wide-ranging practical approach to understanding workplace issues in South Africa than what either of them makes possible independently.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Methodology**

#### **5. Introduction**

I have outlined the objectives of this study and provided a background to the context and relevance of this study (see Chapter 2). I have also provided an overview of what we already know about the subject matter (see Chapter 3) and discussed the theoretical insights that steer this study forward (see Chapter 4). In this chapter I discuss methodological issues concerning this study. The first part of the chapter describes and justifies the use of qualitative methods in this study. What follow is a meticulous description of how the research was conducted and a brief discussion of the challenges I faced in the process of implementing the research project.

#### **5.1. Qualitative Research**

In broad terms Strauss and Corbin (1990: 17) define qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.” Qualitative research seeks to gain a deep or thick understanding of the phenomenon under study in its specific setting or context. Thus, a qualitative researcher aims to gain insight into the perceptions of the researched (Barnes 1992: 115-116; Alasuutari 2010: 141-148). In other words, qualitative researchers try their best to see and feel as the participants see and feel so as to understand the nuance. It is thus imperative that the researcher ascertains a clear as possible an understanding of the context and life worlds of his or her participants. The value of qualitative research lies in the method’s ability to illuminate, to enrich understanding and to explore as well as explain in a nuanced fashion the otherwise unknown or covert aspects of social life. Amongst other things, Hoepfl (1997: 49) highlights the fact that qualitative research relies on the natural setting as its source

of data and that the researcher acts as an instrument for data collection. Hoepfl (1997: 49) also adds that:

Qualitative research has an interpretive character, aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them and interpretations of those meanings by the researcher.

Behaviour and the meanings attached to it are by no means static, thus, qualitative research relies on an ongoing flexibility and adaptation at all levels and stages of the study research project. Considering the focus of this study, that is, workplace integration of skilled migrants, a qualitative approach is both suitable and plausible. A “thick description” of the experiences of these skilled migrants can thus be gathered and analysed. Denzin (1989: 83) describes a ‘thick description’ as a description that:

...does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.

Such rich accounts are crucial and necessary in understanding the issues at hand in this study. As suggested earlier, the indicators of workplace integration cannot be easily quantified hence the gathering of in-depth data is practically useful for this study. This is, however, not to suggest that useful insights on the phenomenon under study cannot also be achieved through a different approach. It is not my intention, here, to compare and contrast qualitative research to quantitative research for such an activity is futile. My position is informed by the idea that these approaches are both useful and can be used simultaneously as in multimethod research (Weed 2006: 13-28; Bryman 2006: 97-113). In other

words, they can be used to answer different questions in the same study. Thus neither of these research traditions is superior to the other in principle. Put differently and arguably these two research traditions are different sides of the same coin, and thus they should not be viewed as competing against each other but as complementary. Hence, choosing to follow a qualitative research approach in this study is both a pragmatic and rational decision. Here the term qualitative research is used in a very broad and general sense. I am conscious of the fact that there is no *one* qualitative research tradition (Flick 2007: ix). In fact, as Long and Godfrey (2004: 182) succinctly put it:

Even more problematic is the fact that within the qualitative tradition there is no single definition of, or approach to, qualitative research. Indeed, the 'qualitative' descriptor is sometimes used to refer to data collection techniques that generate non-numerical data (for example, a semi structured interview, in-depth interviews), in contrast to a more fundamental interpretation linked to a particular epistemological approach and research style (for example, symbolic interactionism, ethnography).

It is, thus, important at this juncture to briefly describe the research approach that underpins this study namely; the interpretive paradigm.

## **5.2. The interpretive approach**

A broad qualitative approach rooted in the interpretive paradigm informs this study. As has been suggested there are many strands or "communities" within interpretivism (Creswell 2007: 23-25). Nonetheless, this paradigm is generally concerned with the subjective view(s) of the researched or respondents. It is an approach that recognizes that social reality is both a function and a product of our perceptions. In other words, there are many subjective truths out there that can be measured or studied empirically. For that reason, what matters, are the viewpoints or perceptions of those who experience the phenomenon. The aim,

nonetheless, is not just to describe but to interpret and understand these subjective views. Explanation and or interpretations, however, need to be informed by the understanding of the context. This view partially owes its origins to Weber's notion of *Verstehen*, that is, the idea that the researcher needs to 'understand' or be able to perceive the world using the same lenses as the subject(s); to put him/herself into the subject's shoes so to speak.

Knowledge obtained through the interpretive approach cannot be blindly generalised. It remains context specific. Weber (1981: 151) wrote:

An understanding of human behaviour achieved through interpretation contains in varying degrees, above all, a *specific qualitative self-evidence*, (italics mine).

Therefore the researcher following this tradition needs, consequently, to be very familiar with the context in which the phenomenon under study occurs or has occurred. This, though difficult, is not impossible. As Weber (1981: 151) argues, "one need not be Caesar to understand Caesar," thus it is the intended meaning of the actor that is sought. In this particular case the researcher has familiarised himself with the context of the study (see Chapter 2).

The nature of qualitative research, its reliance on flexibility and reflexivity and seeking the specific, has been widely criticised and labelled non-scientific by proponents of some quantitative research traditions (Hantias 2009: 95-108). Questions around validity and reliability of qualitative research findings haunt qualitative researchers. Subsequently, diverse responses have been offered by qualitative researchers to such questions (Creswell 2007: 201-220; Angen 2000). Researchers assume different ontological positions generally and some measure or evaluate the validity and reliability of a study in different ways.

I am persuaded by the position taken by Long and Godfrey (2004: 188) that:

The researcher must grasp at a world that is constantly changing. The purpose is to identify the process and relations, which engender both continuity and change. Thus, appropriateness and adequacy reflect the extent to which we conduct research in a systematic and rigorous way to produce plausible accounts that reflect what is being examined in as accurate a way as possible.

Although the question of what is 'appropriate or adequate' remains there seems to be a general agreement in qualitative research that the researcher has to be 'honest,' and 'open' about the way in which the research was done. Simply put, the researcher is required to document meticulously all the steps followed and reveal his or her biases via reflexive and ongoing consideration, in so doing it should be clear for others to see how he or she reached particular conclusions in the study.

Qualitative researchers have a plethora of options when it comes to choosing a research design. Each research design has its advantages and disadvantages thus a qualitative researcher carefully chooses a design applicable and effective to investigate the particular questions or problem being considered.

### **5.3. Research Design**

A case study design is employed in this study. Case studies are generally described as in depth analyses that seek to go beyond the surface to look for meanings and to construct understandings on a small scale when compared to surveys (Knight 2002: 41). A case study can be seen as an "exploration or in-depth analysis of a *bounded system*" [italics mine] (Creswell in De Vos et al 2005: 272). The emphasis on a 'bounded system' speaks to a bounded 'case'. A case can be geographically, spatially or theoretically bounded. This small scale study is useful for

exploring the 'unknown'. It is manageable when compared to national surveys for it allows the researcher to concentrate on relatively few variables and explore them in-depth. Kumar (2005: 113) summed up his discussion of the usefulness of case studies with these words:

All data relevant to the case are gathered and organised in terms of the case. It provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details often overlooked in other methods. This approach rests on the assumption that the case being studied is typical of cases of a certain type so that, through intensive analysis; generalisations may be made that will be applicable to other cases of the same type.

I am, however, conscious of the fact that the results of a case study are not blindly generalisable; they remain specific to the 'case' but can be useful in formulating a hypothesis for a large scale study on this topic (King et al 1994: 45).

This study is geographically and spatially located in one branch of a state department situated in Pretoria and Johannesburg and it is focussed on qualified Zimbabwean engineers who are employed in the construction industry. There is no readily available official register or record of all the Zimbabwean engineers working in the construction industry in Pretoria or Johannesburg. If such a register exists it is not available for public viewing (see **5.4. sampling** for further explanation). As a result it is impossible to identify a 'universe' or population. Hence, I cannot ensure statistical representativeness of my sample (see **5.4. sampling** for additional information). In light of this, a case study approach is both suitable and useful technically in order to gather data and investigate the issues at hand in this study. With no reasonable doubt, it is an appropriate research design to answer the main research question raised in this study namely: are Zimbabwean engineers working in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg successfully integrated in their

workplaces? In addition, a case study is a suitable approach for this study considering financial resources available to the researcher.

Since it is impossible to identify or interview every member of the target population, it is imperative that a researcher selects a small group of people who would then participate in the research project. Initially the sample size, for this study, was twenty participants. Twenty interviews were conducted. Not all of these interviews are used directly in the final analysis (I will return to this later). Rather the findings draw on the experiences of twelve participants. This brings me to a very critical stage or process in qualitative research: sampling.

#### **5.4. Sampling**

Sampling is generally guided by two factors that is, the cost of the study and the demand for precision or accurate knowledge (Brewer and Hunter 2006: 80). Thus the researcher chooses a research site and recruits participants depending on the financial resources available and on whether or not the sample can arguably provide concrete evidence for certain conclusions.

Choosing to locate the study in Pretoria and Johannesburg was a pragmatic decision. The researcher lives and studies in Pretoria and thus the costs of the study and the time it takes to complete are held in check. Furthermore construction sites are a common feature of the cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg; it is not unusual to see roads closed for construction for example. Thus, these two cities, which are the economic and executive hub of South Africa, offered a good opportunity for exploring the issue at hand.

Initially this study was not focussed on a particular company, institute or organization. Attempts were made to recruit participants from various



construction firms in Pretoria. However, due to the difficulties faced in gaining access to participants as well as the unintended consequences of the snow-ball technique that I employed participants were, eventually, drawn from one organization (a government department). This organization has offices in both Pretoria and Johannesburg. It is important at this juncture to say that even though this organization has separate offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg these offices are coordinated as parts of a single unit. They both fall under the Gauteng provincial government. Thus some of the participants actually have offices in Pretoria as well as Johannesburg. In addition an individual may be based in Pretoria but run projects in Johannesburg and vice-versa. The connectedness of the Pretoria and Johannesburg offices is also highlighted by the fact that on a monthly basis they all come together for what they call 'planning meetings'.

Two non-probability sampling techniques, that is; judgmental/purposive and snow-balling were employed. Brewer and Hunter (2006: 93) describe purposive sampling as a "claim on the part of the researcher that theoretically significant, not necessarily statistically significant, units are selected for study". In this instance only qualified Zimbabwean engineers working in the construction industry in one particular provincial department in Pretoria and Johannesburg were considered.

Snow-ball sampling requires that the researcher recruits a number of initial participants and then asks them to identify or help to recruit other members of the study population. This sampling method is commonly used for studies where the study population members are not readily identifiable or when it is considered unethical to develop a list of the members. In other words, snow-ball sampling is very useful where and when gaining access to participants is difficult (Henry 2009: 83). This method of sampling is therefore both suitable and appropriate for

recruiting participants in this study. There is no readily available official register or list of names that specifically captures my target population; formally qualified Zimbabwean engineers working in the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg. The Gauteng Department of Labour's website, for instance, does not publish such information. This is not to suggest that such records do not exist at all but if they do they are treated as confidential hence drawing contact names or details from such official documents was not possible and would moreover have been viewed with suspicion by the participants. Digging up such information in the South African context at this time would also have fundamental ethical implications. For instance, it will be very difficult to ensure anonymity and hence protect the participants from potential disadvantage or even harm.

Snow-ball sampling, in qualitative research can in itself be a source of knowledge or information. As Noy (2008: 329) *inter alia* has observed, "snow-ball sampling relies on and partakes in the *dynamics of natural and organic social networks*" (italics original). Therefore, much can be learnt about the study population by observing, reflecting on and analysing these dynamics and networks. Given that participants are actively involved in identifying and recruiting participants power relations between the researcher and the researched need to be 'successfully managed'. Highlighting the role played by informants in snow-ball sampling and the power dynamics involved therein, Noy (2008: 335) writes:

...informants who possess social capital and are willing to share it-or to perform and embody-with the researcher are those informants who are members in social networks, who have more friends and acquaintances than others... and they are therefore located centrally.

In other words, informants may 'dictate' the research process by determining who might be contacted next and who is to be left out of the study. As mentioned earlier as a result of using this technique I ended up

interviewing participants from one organization contrary to my initial desire to interview participants from various companies. This, nonetheless, should not be necessarily seen as a weakness of snow-balling. In fact, reflecting on and analysing such dynamics actually enrich one's understanding and result in unique and, for analytical reasons, in-depth and more coherent knowledge. This is also in line with how most qualitative researchers go about their work. As Marshall and Rossman (1995: 1-5) argue: in qualitative research, the researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and focuses on the complexity of situational contexts and interactions as they occur in their every-day natural settings. This is by no means to suggest that the researcher has no influence on what is learned during the research process. Conversely, the point is that the researcher avoids intentionally creating artificial conditions as is the case with regard to the experimental method for example.

### **5.5. Data collection**

As has been suggested, qualitative research is chiefly concerned with understanding "meaning" from the participant's point of view or perception. Thus in-depth interviews are commonly used in such studies as data collection instruments. In-depth interviews can be done in the form of informal conversations with a purpose or a focal point. There are no predetermined response categories but the researcher opens up the conversation with a brief description of the general focus of the discussion. In fact, "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (Marshall & Rossman 1995: 80). An interview guide or broad schedule that lists general topics for discussion is useful in doing in-depth interviews. It is used as a guide or pointer for the researcher but should not limit or stifle the flow of the interview. In-depth interviews can be done with individuals or groups (Marshall & Rossman 1995:80-82). The subject

matter of this study, that is, the nature of integration of skilled migrant workers in the workplace, is complex. Thus, in-depth qualitative interviewing is useful and very appropriate for this study; it provides the researcher with “the opportunity to prepare a respondent before asking sensitive questions and to explain complex ones to respondents in person” (Kumar 2005: 131).

#### **5.5.1. Individual, face-to-face interviews**

Individual interviews in qualitative research can be said to be “*inter-view[s]*” where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between two people” (Kvale 2007: 13). The interviewer and the interviewee influence each other in their conversation. Power dynamics are involved in interviews. For example, the interviewer could be raising a set of questions that interest him or her and expect the interviewee to respond accordingly. The researcher asks questions and the interviewee provides expected answers. This, however, does not suggest that the interviewee is powerless, instead the interviewee as the source of the knowledge that the researcher is looking for, arguably, possesses agency and power. The interviewee decides what to reveal and what to leave out when talking to or answering the interviewer. These relationships (between the interviewer and the interviewee) need to be sensitively and well managed to obtain quality and useful data (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 33-35).

In this study interviews were done following Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) *responsive interviewing* model. This model:

...emphasises that the interviewer and interviewee are both human beings, not machines, and that they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer...the goal of the research is to generate depth of understanding, rather than breadth...[and] the design of the research remains flexible throughout the project (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 30).

The interviewer and the interviewee come into this relationship with their respective values, thus their perceptions, feelings, personalities, interests and experiences shape the interview process and the inter-subjective knowledge produced thereof. These “two human beings” interact and influence each other’s views and in so doing they create an inter-subjective reality. The researcher continually reflects on what he/she is doing; to consider his/her own understandings and reactions. This requires that at a certain stage the researcher seriously considering the interviews and evaluates them reflexively in order to see if the quality of the interviews can be improved in one way or the other. In this way the researcher becomes self-aware and consciousness. The latter reflexivity is a necessity required when analysing data and research findings. In other words, the researcher needs to conduct a few interviews first as a pilot study. (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 30-32).

#### **5.5.2. Group interviews**

An increasingly popular data collection tool in qualitative research, “focus groups provide a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of group members in the member’s own words” (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2009: 590). A topic, which is the focus of the discussion, is provided by the researcher. The size of the group may vary from four to twelve people and may last for one and a half hours to two and a half hours (Marshall & Rossman 1995: 84; Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2009: 590). This research tool offers a number of advantages that I will briefly outline. Focus groups are a flexible research tool that can be designed and adapted to obtain data about a wide variety of topics in a broad array of settings drawing on different types of individuals. It is useful for identifying qualitative similarities and differences amongst people. Focus groups can be done at any stage of the research process. Furthermore, it allows for participants to qualify their responses or identify important contingencies associated with their responses. The

researcher can interact with the participants and ask follow up questions for clarification. Participants can help each other to recall relevant important information that could have been overlooked in an individual interview. Most importantly, focus groups make room for participants to “respond in their own words using their own categorization and perceived associations” (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2009: 591-594). Marshall and Rossman (1995: 84) summarised the value of focus groups in qualitative research by stating:

...individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: people often need to listen to other's opinions and understandings in order to form their own.

Thus rich data and a deeper understanding can arguably be obtained simultaneously through this data collection technique.

Focus groups, like any other data collection technique, have some pitfalls. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2009: 594) note that information collected in focus groups and the knowledge gathered and analysed cannot be blindly generalised. Furthermore, very dominant or opinionated members might take over the discussion and if not properly managed the group interview may end up as an individual interview. In addition, more reserved group members may be hesitant to talk even when given the opportunity to do so. Thus the success of the group interview lies greatly with the skills capacity of the researcher (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2009: 594). Hence the researcher needs to create a permissive atmosphere or rapport and facilitate an ongoing conversation creating opportunities for all members of the group to feel free to participate. The researcher can do well by asking focused questions that encourage the expression of differing opinions and points of view, (Marshall & Rossman 1995: 84). It is also crucial to note that it can be very difficult to assemble the groups especially when dealing with “hidden populations”.

Nevertheless when successfully carried out focus groups can produce rich and nuanced qualitative data.

In this study data was collected through nine individual interviews and one focus group interview comprised of four participants. Of the four participants three are men and one woman. This focus group was conducted at the end of the individual data collection process. This was so because firstly it became increasingly difficult to find participants willing to take part. The main reason for rejection by prospective interviewees was that they were always too busy to find the time to do so. Thus it became more practical to arrange a focus group rather than to try and organize four different sessions with each participant. Secondly as the process of data collection proceeded I reached a point of saturation whereby there were no new responses or ideas to probe during the individual interviews. Hence, I decided to turn to a focus group interview in an attempt to tease out new or different responses.

### **5.5.3. Using a tape recorder and note taking**

Formal permission was asked for before recording the interview. This was clearly requested in the informed consent forms that were signed by participants. When a prospective participant was uncomfortable or unwilling to be recorded I requested permission to write brief notes during the interview. The researcher made sure that the recorder was functioning properly before an interview commenced. In addition to the tape recording, notes dealing with nonverbal communication and the surrounding environment were taken. These notes also included comments on the interview overall that were useful in shaping the next interview and ultimately during the writing up of the final analysis.

## **5.6. The insider/outsider dilemma**

As suggested earlier in this chapter, there are power relations matters involved in doing qualitative research. They shape and are shaped by the “positionality” of the researcher in relation to his or her participants. Whether the researcher is perceived as an insider or an outsider by the research participants influence the outcomes of the study. For instance, it may be much easier for research participants to develop trust with an insider rather than an outsider but there is no guarantee that that will always be the case. At times being perceived as an insider may result in research participants regulating and shaping the information they choose to share with the researcher. Conscious of these inherent dilemmas, Mullings (1999: 337) concedes that “knowledge is never pure but is situated in the complex and sometimes contradictory social locations of producers and audiences”.

The insider or outsider binary, however, is arguably an oversimplification of a much more complex and multi-faceted situation. In reality “no individual can consistently remain an insider and others remain complete outsiders” (Mullings 1999: 340). Different facets of the researcher’s identity render her or him an insider or an outsider in a much more fluid manner than determined by the insider/outsider binary. In this particular study, the researcher is a young Zimbabwean man in his mid twenties and a University student residing in Pretoria, South Africa. Being a Zimbabwean rendered me an insider with the participants but other facets of my identity nullified that. In addition being an insider did not guarantee their trust. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, it was not easy to gain access to the participants partly due to suspicion on their part. And the kind of knowledge that needed to be gathered in the interviews may have been shaped by other facets of my identity such as age, gender and ethnicity. As a migrant student I shared some social and political understandings with the participants but at the same time I lack understanding of their



profession and workplace experiences. One can be an insider or an outsider at the same time in relation to the same people in other words.

Thus, Mullings (1999: 340) suggests that:

...to acquire information that faithfully represent the real world, researchers must often seek, what I will refer to as *positional spaces*, that is, areas where the situated knowledge(s) of both parties in the interview encounter, engender a level trust and co-operation. These positional spaces, however, are often transitory and cannot be reduced to the familiar boundaries of insider/outsider privilege based on visible attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity or class.

This situation continually puts the researcher in a dilemma; to choose which aspects of his or her identity to emphasize in order to be trusted by the research participants. The whole process of identifying “positional spaces” is fraught with difficulties and raises important ethical questions. These dilemmas and difficulties and the decisions made by the researcher are unpacked below (see **5.9. reflexivity**).

### **5.7. Data analysis**

Data analysis is “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman 1995: 111). It is a search for general ideas and patterns about the relationship between different categories of data aimed at building grounded theory. In qualitative research, data analysis begins and continues simultaneously with the data collection process. Once an interview is completed it is examined to see what can be learned from it; to identify areas that need to be expounded on and hence the interview guide may need to be modified accordingly. The objective of qualitative data analysis is not to provide statistical summaries but to “discover variation, portray shades of meaning, and examine complexity” (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 202). When all the interviews have been completed, the interview recordings are played

back and meticulously transcribed and checked, after which the writing up of the data analysis commences. All the interviews were done in English even though participants were given a choice of language, that of Shona or English.

Qualitative data analysis may proceed in different and overlapping stages. Rubin and Rubin (2005: 207-208) describe four stages in qualitative data analysis namely: recognition, clarifying and synthesizing, coding and final synthesizing. Recognizing involves finding “concepts, themes, events and topical markers” in an interview. The next stage is when the researcher methodically examine[s] the interviews to elucidate what specific concepts and themes mean. Synthesizing follows as different versions of events integrated toward understanding narrative by and large (Rubin and Rubin 2005: 207-208). Finding themes in the narratives helps to sum up the debates and statements made by participants and can be useful in explaining concisely what is going on. Themes and categories for coding are set out in the literature reviewed for the study. This can make it relatively easy for the researcher to relate the findings of the study to the already existing literature review(s).

However, solely relying on the existing literature for themes may blind the researcher from noticing new or original insights from his raw data. By sifting out key themes emerging from the raw data collected one can make significant contributions to grounded theorizing about the phenomenon under study (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 209-210). Thus, it may be more productive to work with themes emanating from the existing literature in conjunction with those emerging from the raw data than either set. In other words, inductive and deductive methods are used to complement each other. Coding, also involves “systematically labelling concepts, themes, events or topical markers so that [he] can readily retrieve and examine all the data units that refer to the same subject across all your interviews”

(Rubin & Rubin 2005: 207-208). Coding furthermore concerns “attaching one or more key words to a text segment in order to permit later identification of a statement” (Kvale 2007: 105). Thus after printing out all the transcripts I worked through them all looking for the most re-occurring words, themes, ideas, opinions and phrases and highlighted them in different colours. To make this easier, Rubin and Rubin (2005: 204-205) suggest that one creates and keep memos that contain *notable quotes* throughout the research process. These quotes might provide important pointers or answers to the research question(s). Each set of words, themes, ideas, opinions and phrases are grouped and marked by different shades.

The last element of interpretation, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005: 208), is called the final synthesis. Here the researcher combines the concepts identified earlier to suggest how the overall phenomenon, under study, operates. At this stage I looked for possible patterns that emerged from the data and followed these patterns in order to link them. To substantiate some of my assertions I used exact extracts of quotes from the narratives as recorded in the interview transcripts.

### **5.8. Ethical considerations**

Researchers always struggle to clear their studies of *all* ethical questions. This qualitative study is no exclusion; however, careful steps were taken to ensure that this study is an ethical one. To start with, participation in this study was a hundred percent voluntary. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Participants were given consent forms, and they were asked to read them and sign if they agree to take part in the study. The right to privacy and confidentiality of participants were guaranteed and will be maintained. To protect these rights participants were given pseudonyms. Thus only fictitious names were used in the dissertation. In addition the companies or organisations they work for were not mentioned

by name. Participants were fully informed that they were free to withdraw at any time during the interview should they wish to. The researcher also told his participants that they should feel free to ask anything they would like to know about the study and the purpose of the study. I answered all the questions they had in order to ensure informed prior consent. All the information obtained from the participants was accurately transcribed and caution was exercised not to misrepresent the views of the participants in the dissertation. When playing back and typing out the interview the researcher also consulted the brief notes taken during the interview and made use of his memory to fill in any gaps that may have occurred when parts of the interview were not clearly audible. In addition, when using excerpts or quotes from the interview in the dissertation the researcher does not do so out of the interview context. The researcher was always reflexive; keeping in mind his own biases at all stages of the study and especially so when interpreting and analysing the data.

### **5.9. Reflexivity**

As a researcher I am conscious of the fact that my own values, perceptions, emotions and personality affected, including in very subtle ways, my research. In an attempt to demonstrate validity and reliability of this study, I turned to “self-disclosing”. This study is based on on-going negotiations and interactions with my research participants. Without a doubt what I wrote and the decisions I made during the course of the study as well as my interpretations and explanations of these are influenced and shaped by my own cultural, social, gender and personal attributes. In actual reality, “all writing is positioned within a stance” (Creswell 2007: 179). Consequently, I describe as openly as possible all the steps followed during the course of this study. All the dilemmas and the decisions made to solve them are meticulously documented.

Initially the study was meant to focus on *all* skilled migrant workers in the construction industry in Pretoria. However, due to difficulties encountered in collecting, organizing and analyzing data, which were not apparent before field work commenced, the focus was narrowed down. The decision to narrow down the focus was only made after I had already done eight interviews with three technicians and five engineers. It was clear that the issues that concerned engineers were fundamentally different from those that affected technicians even though they are all skilled. For example, technicians had problems with joining trade unions and most of them had acquired their skills informally. On the other hand engineers needed not join trade unions but professional organisations and they had all received a formal education. Such differences would have made it difficult to build a strong and insightful thesis for the differences in their experiences. The latter could merely be explained by making reference to the nature of their occupations and the conditions thereof. At the end of the day a decision was made to focus only on qualified Zimbabwean engineers who worked in the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

The decision to narrow down the focus of the study brought with it challenges that I had not envisaged. It was extremely difficult to identify and recruit participants in Pretoria. As I noted earlier the initial project was to carry out this study in Pretoria. Due to the lack of contacts I could identify in Pretoria I followed contacts to the neighbouring city of Johannesburg. This was not an easy decision to make since it seemed as if I was breaking or extending the boundaries of my case. Nevertheless this dilemma was solved by the fact that I had already narrowed the focus of my study to include only qualified engineers and also that all my contacts were in one organization. Thus although I extended the geographic boundaries of my case I tightened its theoretical boundaries.

As I have repeatedly noted in this chapter, gaining access to the participants was a formidable challenge. I made one initial contact in Pretoria. Further contacts I found without the help of my initial contact all turned me down because they did not trust me. Due to this problem three months passed with no interviews done. Prospective participants kept on cancelling and re-scheduling interviews. In the end I had to ask my initial contact to personally introduce me to them and only then did they agree to do an interview. At times it was not enough that I had been introduced by someone they already knew. To gain their trust I had to speak to them in their mother language Shona. It usually took more than one meeting before people would agree to be interviewed and to be tape recorded. I was fortunate that whilst following up the contacts I received from my first contact I met a 'good-hearted' woman who having given me an interview gave me the names of over twenty contacts to follow up. She personally called some of them to introduce me and my study. Some participants did not trust me to the extent that we had to do the interviews in their cars. They objected to my suggestions to interview them at their homes or offices.

Another challenge that I faced involved managing the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched. Most of the participants were men older than I am and in very senior positions. At times I felt intimidated especially when an interview was being held in the participant's office. In this context being an insider became a disadvantage. As a young Shona man I have been socialized not to ask an elder man too many questions let alone sensitive questions. It was an enormous challenge to overcome that part of the Shona culture and to make my participant feel at ease. Apart from my cultural values, the fact that I am a social science student interviewing senior qualified engineers also tilted the power dynamics to my disadvantage. Usually after reading the informed consent form participants asked me why I was interested in interviewing them seeing

that, in their own view, there was no relationship between sociology and engineering. This meant that I had to take some time to explain in great detail the relevance of my study to them. The conclusions I have reached in this study must be understood given the experience and context of the aforementioned in other words.

#### **5.10. Conclusion**

By way of summary, it is important to stress the fact that this study is aimed at reaching informed answers rather than hypotheses or formulating causal explanations. This is so because as suggested earlier, this study is embedded in the interpretive approach. As such, the emphasis, here, is on the viewpoints of the participants; their feelings, actions and the meanings they derive from their day to day activities. Thus, the final outcome of this research is based on the subjective understanding of social reality from both the participants and the researcher's view points. Indeed, the researcher and the participants interacted actively, during interviews, to produce the inter-subjective knowledge presented in this study. During the main phase of data analysis the researcher used existing literature and theory to insert both history and methodological and analytical tools into the experiences of the participants and thus built subjective interpretations and analyses.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Zimbabwean Engineers and workplace integration**

#### **6. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is twofold; to present the findings of this study and to provide a systematic analysis of the data collected. Both developing and developed countries are in need of the services provided by professionals (including professional engineers) but these professionals are globally in short supply. Due to the uneven development of capitalism, some countries have stronger economies than others, hence, creating uneven opportunities for professionals. Equipped with scarce skills professionals are mobile and thus, generally, those from economically weaker countries tend to migrate to richer countries. This movement of course is not limited to professionals. Thus questions about migrant integration into host societies are commonplace (see chapter 3).

Workplace integration is understood in this study as a process that occurs over time. Furthermore, underpinning the interpretations and explanations offered in this analysis is the idea that fully integrated workplaces are a crucial foundation for strong, stable and diverse democracies as has been suggested. In other words, democratic principles need to be applied in the workplace first before they can be successfully applied in the wider society. Indeed, people living in capitalist societies spend more of their time interacting with one another mostly in the workplace, relatively speaking (see Frenkel 2003: 135).

This study is focussed on the workplace integration of professional Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry. The analysis is based on the findings drawn from qualitative interviews that were conducted with twelve Zimbabwean engineers. It is informed by



two theoretical frameworks; the *split labour market theory* and the '*Marxist regulation*' theory<sup>14</sup>. The general context in which workplace integration for these migrant professionals has to occur is used to insert history into experience thereby informing the interpretations and explanations of the findings of this study.

The twelve participants were working for a large government department<sup>15</sup> which has offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg. The qualitative interviews were done by making use of an interview schedule(see appendix 2).The sample comprised of ten men and two women between the ages 29 and 43 who had been working in South Africa between three and five years. Nine of the participants are married and three are not married. The interviews were conducted between February and October 2011 (see appendix 1).

In my view, which is derived from the findings of this study, there are four main facets of the process of workplace integration, at least for the participants in this study. These facets are not mutually exclusive but are both interdependent and interlinked. Each facet of workplace integration is analysed thematically.

By and large these themes are directly linked to the questions that were asked and the themes introduced during interviews. They are however a synthesised and clustered differently from how they are organized in the interview schedule. This was done to accommodate themes that emerged from the interviews and those derived from already existing literature as well as the researcher's interpretation of the collected data.

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<sup>14</sup> Harvey's (1989) notion of flexible accumulation, in particular

<sup>15</sup>The identity of this organization is not revealed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Thus the first cluster *accessing the South African labour market* contains findings from the theme listed as 'getting a job' in the interview guide. The second cluster *employment and interpersonal relations*, reports on findings from six themes set out in the interview guide. These are relationships with top management; colleagues at the same level; subordinates; dealing with customers; team working and communication problems and remuneration and promotion. The third cluster *skills acknowledgement and professional growth* reports on findings from two themes; skills development and training and, joining professional organizations. Finally *exiting plans* discusses findings from two themes namely; reliability and loyalty to the organization, and future plans.

### **6.1. Accessing the South African Labour Market**

Migrant integration is generally viewed as a process that happens over time and across generations (Maxwell 2010: 27; Chiswick 1982: 64, 72). As a process, migrant integration certainly has to have a beginning and an ending. The beginning can be traced back from the pull and push factors that trigger and sustain migration. The end result can be either full integration or disintegration. For analytical purposes, accessing the South African labour market is considered as a point of departure. The point is, however, not to try and build explanations by looking for cause-effect relationships between the methods used by these migrant professionals to find employment and the outcomes of their workplace integration process. Instead, this is done so as to enrich interpretive/subjective explanations and understandings of their experiences as they go through the process of workplace integration. The challenges and opportunities they face and the methods they employ to deal with both structural and non-structural challenges are best understood when they are situated within context which includes the ways or methods they have used to access the South African labour market.

Zimbabwean engineers, in general, can look for employment while they are still living in Zimbabwe or alternatively one could come to South Africa as a visitor and then look for employment whilst in the country. Although these Zimbabwean engineers get information about jobs through media outlets such as newspapers and the internet, they rely mainly on their social capital in the form of family and friendship networks:

It was another guy, a Zimbabwean who works here, he met a Zimbabwean guy who was running his own company and they had a few projects so this guy gave us a call to say come and start working. So when I came the job was already secured (Forward: 04/10/2011).

It was through a colleague that I had worked with back in Zimbabwe they had vacancies then they called me for the interviews then I got the job (Nancy 04/10/2011).

...around 2005/2006 things were actually getting bad in terms of construction and civil engineering in Zimbabwe so most of the guys left Zimbabwe around that time. I happened to have a friend who came here and he managed to link me up with his employer, then I applied, then I was invited to the interviews and I made it through the interviews (Joe: 30/09/2011).

Thus in the host nation friendship and professional networks play a crucial role in the distribution of a key resource among migrant professionals; information. These 'networks' do not only benefit these migrant professionals but their employers too. Indeed, both private and public organization often use what I call '*snow-ball recruiting*' to fill in job vacancies that require scarce skills. Although, at times, participants talked about this as 'head hunting', the term '*snow-ball recruiting*' is more appropriate to describe this process. From their narratives it is apparent that employers simply asked them to identify their fellow Zimbabwean engineers and invite them to come and join them. Evidently, in doing so, employers exploit already existing friendship, family networks and social capital to recruit Zimbabwean engineers:

...we were quite a number of engineers, when we joined, I think about twenty or thirty Zimbabwean engineers (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

So we just also came through the same agent...It was sought of a head hunt actually... So they recruited an agent who was head hunting for skills like ours (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

Although the majority of the participants pointed out that friendship networks played a key role in spreading information about jobs, one of the twelve participants claimed that he did not use such networks to find a job in South Africa:

...I applied for a quota work permit while I was still in Zimbabwe, then I came here with the intention of going around looking for employment...it was basically through the newspapers, then I was called by some employment agent for an interview then they referred me to the interviews of the employers (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

Thus it is possible for a Zimbabwean engineer to get a job without having to use family or friendship networks. At the same time it is important to note that Nicky spoke of 'going around looking for employment' but he was reluctant to provide more detail about how he went about it. Therefore, he may have actually used some kind of a network which he simply did not wish to mention. Interestingly, his wife, who also participated in this study, said the following about how Nicky found his second job in South Africa:

...it was unfortunate for my husband because he had to quit his job and move here with me. But he also got a post with the government (Silvia: 20/09/2011)

It is plain that at some stage Nicky benefited from the same friendship network that his wife was privy to. Hence, although Zimbabwean engineers used 'formal' or 'impersonal' methods to look for employment it was usually coupled with informal methods. It is not surprising then that

these participants were connected to one another through family or friendship ties or had worked together professionally before they moved to South Africa.

This data confirms what migration scholars refer to as the network theory. It captures the notion that sets of interpersonal ties connect (in a systematic fashion) international migrants, former migrants and non-migrants (including prospective migrants) in their origin and destination countries through ties of kinship and shared community origin (Massey et al 1993: 448). Although Zimbabwean engineers do not settle in one residential area in Pretoria or Johannesburg and form a visibly 'well knit migrant community' they form a 'virtual' community where friendship networks are a critical channel for sharing important information (see also Jonston et al 2006). Although, these migrant professionals benefit from these social networks, it is important to also note that they intentionally or unintentionally leave out information particularly with regard to conditions of employment. Thus, new migrant professionals only realise that the 'grass is not as green' as they thought after arriving in Pretoria or Johannesburg.

However, it is clear that for most of these respondents, when they came to South Africa, job interviews were just a formality. Impressive performances by one Zimbabwean engineer could be used as a basis for recruiting more Zimbabwean engineers. No participant spoke about failing to make it in job interviews. This practice can also be seen as a strategy by companies to cut the costs of recruiting these migrant professionals. This is comparable to what (Rodriguez 2004) found in his study of skilled Mexicans working in America. He concluded that employers who rely on the social networks of their immigrant workers "save on the costs of managing and maintaining a labour force, as the labour costs are reduced to mainly paying for work performed" (Rodriguez 2004: 454-455).

Hernandez-Leon 2004 documents how both skilled and semi skilled migrant workers from Mexico rely on social networks to find employment in an occupational niche in the oil, tools and technology industries in Houston, Texas.

In some instances, prospective employers lured, using false promises, prospective migrant professionals to come and take up a job instantaneously. In such cases, employers present the prospective employee with an offer of employment before he or she actually comes to South Africa. Thus, conditions of employment and remuneration are negotiated whilst the individual is still in Zimbabwe. When that individual eventually arrives in South Africa they would realize that they were 'tricked' in to accepting a salary that is way below the prevailing rates. In some extreme cases the employer would actually refuse to pay what they had promised to pay. Consequently, these migrant professionals leave their first job instantly if they are presented with a better offer:

...I left the first company within a month...when they invited me here they made certain promises under the offer which they didn't live up to and when I got here I realized that actually I could get better from the other companies. So when the other company offered me a much better offer and better working conditions I simply moved to the next company (Keita: 01/10/2011).

This invokes Bonacich' split labour market theory discussed in chapter 4. Bonacich postulates that with the intention of keeping migrant workers' wages low, employers commonly try to bind their prospective employees to contractual agreements before they leave their home country. This is further compounded by the fact that prospective migrant workers typically lack information about the prospective host country. Misinformed or out of ignorance such prospective migrant workers may consent to a low wage or salary before migrating. Upon arriving in the host country it becomes apparent to the migrant worker that he or she is being underpaid.

Bonacich (1972: 550) contends further that employers also make use of false accounts of life and opportunities that would be open for migrant workers in the host country in order to lure them. This was true in Keita's case. The employers did not keep to their agreement. They refused to pay him what they had promised him despite the fact that the salary they had promised him was actually below the prevailing rate. This was done, although, it is against the immigration law<sup>16</sup> in South Africa to pay skilled migrants lower than what is paid locals to do the same job.

Some participants only managed to find employment when they were already living in the country. Silvia, a female participant, first came to South Africa using her husband's quota work permit as a spouse accompanying her husband. Even though she was equipped with very scarce skills as a qualified Civil Engineer, she spent her first few months in South Africa without employment and then took up a job for which she was overqualified for before finding a job as an engineer:

...the first time I came it was a bit tough because we were staying in Nelspruit. My husband had secured a job in Nelspruit. So when I joined him, I was jobless here. It was quite difficult to get a job I wanted with my qualifications so I had to settle for a CAD<sup>17</sup> operator for about six months...I had come from Nelspruit to Johannesburg...then I managed to get the job (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

Silvia's experience reflects gender bias and inequalities perpetrated against female migrant professionals with regard to gaining access to the South African labour market. Ten male participants spoke about how easy it was for them to find employment in South Africa whilst Silvia had to settle for a job that she was over-qualified to do. Her plight was also not

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<sup>16</sup>See subsection (2) (b) of section 19 of the Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002

<sup>17</sup>Computer Aided Designing (CAD) is computer software used by engineers for engineering designing.

helped by the fact that she was living in a small town of Nelspruit. She finally got a job that matched her skills six months after her arrival in South Africa when she moved to Johannesburg. The gendered nature of the migration of professionals is not peculiar to South Africa. It is a common global phenomenon. For instance, Kofman and Raghuram (2005) contend that skilled women are often not recognised as such because the notion of 'skill' is not gender neutral. This gender bias is intensified when skilled women move from one country to another, thus skilled migration is heavily influenced by patriarchal gender dynamics, which by their nature put women in a disadvantaged position (see also Kofman et al 2000).

In order to be fully incorporated into the South African labour market and later the workplace, a migrant professional needs to comply with the legal requirements to stay and work in the country. Under South Africa's immigration law<sup>18</sup> South African companies are not allowed to hire an international migrant worker without him or her first obtaining the necessary permits. At one fell swoop, in order to process and issue a work permit the Department of Home Affairs requires that an individual obtain a firm job offer from their prospective employer. This bureaucratic procedure complicates and delays the process of legally hiring a foreigner whether or not they possess 'scarce skills'. The following narratives show that a considerably long waiting period passes before an individual is actually issued with a work permit:

...I came here in May then I eventually managed to get my own permit in August (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

But for the papers, I worked for one year without a permit here and then when I moved to another company they helped me to process it (Nancy: 04/10/2011)

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<sup>18</sup>Section 19 of the Immigration Act No.13, of 2002



...when I came here it was 2007 February, by June I had a work permit (Keita: 01/10/2011).

It took about six months to get the permit; it was a challenging process (Forward 04/10/2011)

The length of the delays is shocking considering the fact that formally and in principle the waiting period is 21 working days. One of the main reasons given for passing a new Immigration Act in 2002 was to ensure that permits “are issued as expeditiously as possible and on the basis of simplified procedures and objective, predictable and reasonable requirements and criteria.”<sup>19</sup> Given delays and the pressure to urgently find skilled staff some construction companies allow staff to start working while the documents were being processed. In other words, in the strict sense of the South African immigration law such individuals were illegally employed. In extreme cases and despite being highly skilled people, they work under poor working conditions. They simply had no choice.

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight, at this juncture, that though they submitted themselves to work under adverse working conditions it was only temporary. Their agency is seen clearly in the fact that such individuals, look for a new job as soon as they obtain their work permits or even before they were issued with such work permits. Arguably, some of the construction companies try to take advantage of the delays in getting a work permit. They would try to make these migrant professionals feel as if they were actually being done a favour to be offered a job without the necessary documents. This is a line of thinking that is commonly used by employers in the construction industry to silence the voices of unskilled workers whether they are local or foreigners (Goldman 2003).

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<sup>19</sup> See the preamble of the Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002

By way of summary, the use of multiple channels to recruit Zimbabwean engineers speaks to two important issues about the South African labour market. Firstly the South African labour market is plagued by acute perennial skills shortages. At peak periods in the construction industry, firms frantically dash to recruit skilled workers including migrant professionals. Since there is no coherent national plan to import such skills when they are needed, employers do whatever necessary to fill vacancies that require professionals. Hence they revert to 'snow-ball recruiting'.

The second issue is that the South African labour market is a split labour market and ironically migrant professionals use 'split' (diverse) methods to enter this labour market. The South African labour market is split along a number of fault lines. Right from the onset of industrialization in this country the labour market and industrial relations were split along racial lines (see chapter 2). Along with the racial divide there are divisions along national and ethnic cleavages. In addition to this, following the transition from '*racial-Fordism*' to '*post-Fordism*' a new skills regime was set in motion in South Africa. As a result of this, the labour market is split into core and periphery segments according to the scarcity of the skill one owns. This heightened emphasis on skills is responsible for the high structural unemployment rates coupled with vacancies in skilled jobs in the country (see Kraak 2004; Webster & Omar 2003). This makes the South African labour market a fiercely contested terrain. Thus workplace integration can indeed be elusive. In order to counter these divisive structural forces Zimbabwean engineers form and maintain friendship networks where crucial information is shared.

As has been noted, gaining access to the South African labour market though crucial is just a preliminary step towards workplace integration for

Zimbabwean engineers. In other words, their journey would have just begun.

## **6.2. Employment and interpersonal relations**

This section deals with the employment and interpersonal relations that Zimbabwean engineers engage in, in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg. In my opinion, creating and maintaining smooth employment and interpersonal relations is crucial in building workplace democracy and a key indicator of workplace integration. Thus, a close look is taken at the day-to-day interpersonal relations between migrant professionals and locals at work. These relations are broken down into four separate categories namely; interpersonal relations with subordinates, peers, superiors and clients. An examination of the employment relations these migrant professionals are involved in is also carried out. Emphasis is placed on three aspects of employment relations that is; tenure of employment, remuneration and promotion.

At this juncture it is important to note that all the participants had been employed in the private sector of the construction industry in South Africa prior to moving into the public sector. Thus from time to time comparisons between the two sectors of the construction industry are provided. Furthermore, interaction between locals and these migrant professionals takes place both in their offices and at construction sites. These two spaces present different challenges and opportunities for migrant professionals' workplace integration. Hence, I also reflect on the similarities and differences of interpersonal relations in the office and at the construction site.

### 6.2.1. *Tenure of employment*

Employment tenure is a critical aspect of the employment relationship in the process of workplace integration. If the tenure of employment is not secure the whole process of integration becomes void. All the participants in this study joined this government department on five-year fixed-term contracts since the beginning to middle of 2009. Thus by the time of the interviews, in 2011, they were at least half way through these contracts:

...job security is not very good, its contract, they wouldn't employ foreigners on a permanent basis...so until I become a permanent resident and I get a South African ID that's when they can make me permanent depending on that time, because when we started our Zimbabwean colleagues who managed to change their ID [citizenship] got permanent jobs (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

It's not clear whether it's going to be renewed or not...our contracts are quite vague actually, because they say they will post us as and where there is need, so I am here at the moment and I don't know whether I am going to be posted tomorrow, so for five years we don't know where we stand (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

Currently we are employed on five-year fixed term contracts and nobody knows what's going to happen after those contracts lapse (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

It depends on whether they still need us or not. Of which I feel the problem is they want engineers they don't have professionals. So I think their aim was to get engineers, train the locals and get rid of them (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

As stated earlier the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' in South Africa, just like in other countries, resulted in the restructuring of the labour market. Following Harvey (1989: 150-151), it may be argued that the South African labour market is divided into core and periphery segments. The core is made up of employees with full time, permanent status and thus "enjoying greater job security, good promotion and re-skilling prospects" (Harvey 1989: 151). The periphery is made up of employees with no long-term job security. The positioning of migrant

professionals into either of these two segments is problematic. Their position is clearly not static for they have access to some of the opportunities and benefits offered to the 'core' group of employees and at the same time they share the same problems with the employees in the 'periphery' segment in terms of the precariousness of their jobs. Although they are employed on a full time basis like the core group, these migrant professionals find themselves in the periphery of the labour market because they are only hired on fixed-term contracts with no guarantee that they will be retained after the fixed contracts run out.

Harvey (1989) argues further that the scarcity of one's skills would put him or her in a strong position to access the core of the labour market. This changes radically when South African citizenship is factored in. Indeed, what is happening in the South African construction industry is more complex. Despite the fact that the participants in this project are equipped with scarce crucial skills they are marginalized. What matters the most, at least, in the public sector of the construction industry, is citizenship. South African citizens with scarce skills are offered permanent jobs. Some participants claim that Zimbabwean engineers who managed to get South African citizenship were also offered permanent jobs. Thus, although they were hired at the same time to occupy posts at the same level by the same organization; those with the South African citizenship were given permanent jobs while non-citizens were offered fixed-term contract employment.

Although this may seem to be a reasonable practice, carried out in many countries around the globe it is my contention that the principle behind this practise belies the building of stable diverse democracies. It is also contrary to liberal or neo-liberal economic principles. To be precise the notion of free market competition, which many countries including South Africa adhere to. Indeed the shortcoming of the practice in South Africa is

clear if one considers her position in global trade. South Africa is a middle income country and as such enjoys some benefits that developed countries enjoy and at the same face similar challenges that most developing countries are faced with. For instance, while South Africa has a strong and gradually growing economy she continues to grapple with high increasing unemployment, crime and poverty. Thus, the immigration of professionals and their retention has great potential to raise the productive capacity and employment opportunities within the economy (Edwards 2001: 67; Creamer 2008). In addition, the need for South Africa to both encourage the immigration of professionals and to retain them is apparent if one considers the acute skills shortages that the country has and the fact that South Africa continues to lose her experienced professionals to countries in the global North. For example, in the construction industry, reports suggest that over 300 professional engineers leave South Africa every year ([www.saace.co.za](http://www.saace.co.za)). A report by the CSIR claims that about 30% of registered quantity surveyors leave South Africa annually and about 80% registered engineers de-register per-year because they are emigrating (CSIR 2008).

The lack of job security for Zimbabwean engineers is worse in the private sector of the construction industry in South Africa according to some respondents. This is where the notion of a '*flexible firm*'<sup>20</sup> is useful. In the private sector foreign engineers are hired on very short term contracts:

It was for six months. Because they got a contract from the municipality, so it was on a contract basis so my contract was for six months (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

...the contract was just about to finish and besides that it was an individually owned company...it was a small company, we were doing some contract work

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<sup>20</sup> A flexible firm thrives on its ability to maintain numerical and functional flexibility by splitting its workforce into two different categories: core and periphery (see Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992: 4-5 for a summary).

for a certain big companies...and there were no jobs so I was only lucky to get a job in time, before things got worse (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

Migrant professionals in the private sector are evidently given job contracts that last only as long as the project(s). For instance, Silvia was given a job contract for only six months because her employers had secured a project that could only last for the same period of time. Thus in the private sector migrant professionals do not only provide functional flexibility but numerical flexibility as well. Little wonder then that all the participants in this study left the private sector around the same time in 2009 at time when construction projects that were related to the FIFA 2010 soccer world cup were coming to their conclusion. They viewed the five-year fixed contracts this government department presented as a better option. Tied to employment tenure is remuneration. Thus, this aspect was investigated.

#### *6.2.2. Remuneration*

The narratives of these participants indicate that local engineers earn more in the private sector than they would in the public sector:

...even the salaries that we are getting are, we cannot complain but if I was a local I would earn more if I was in private practice so they cannot use salaries to lure local engineers into the public sector...these salaries that they are offering to civil engineers in government won't be enough to attract people from the private sector...as soon as a local gets registered as a Professional Engineer, he forms his own company or joins a partnership (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

...from the engineers who are coming out of University, there are no big numbers of students coming to work in the government environment, they are going to the private sector where there are better opportunities and salaries but in the government environment there is lack of young people coming in to be mentored (Keita: 28/09/2011).

...most of the locals don't want to work for the government so as soon as they gain some experience they leave the public sector (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

According to Bonacich (1972: 549) the labour price of a group of workers can be compared and contrasted even though the two groups are not engaged in the same activity at the same time. Thus if local engineers prefer to work in the private sector rather than the public sector it can be deduced that the total cost of labour for these Zimbabwean engineers is significantly lower than that of local engineers. Indeed if the price of labour includes social reproduction costs and what it costs to lure prospective employees from competing activities then the price of labour of these Zimbabwean engineers is cheaper when compared to locals.

Although these participants do not report direct salary differences with locals in the same salary bracket with them in the public sector, it can be argued that the total labour cost of migrant professionals is lower than that of local professionals. To start with, while local professionals have access to and can claim grants to further their education migrant professionals do not enjoy such privileges:

there are some guys I was studying with, who are also from the department; they have bursaries paying for their fees but I was personally paying... it's very difficult to be considered for that bursary if you are a foreigner but the locals can continue their education using those bursaries (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

There are initiatives from the employer (government department) for further training but there are challenges as well, being from outside (foreigners), we are not allowed to apply for bursaries for further education (Forward 04/10/2011).

Thus, South African companies or organizations that employ migrant professionals do not necessarily pay for this aspect of social reproduction and migrant professionals cannot claim such financial benefits.



It is easy for South African companies to please Zimbabwean engineers given the economic conditions they were subjected to in their home country. Bonacich (1972: 549-550) explains why this is the case. There are two main reasons. Firstly, due to the uneven development of capitalism some economies are stronger than others. Thus, migrant workers coming from the poorer economies generally sell their labour power relatively cheaper than the prevailing rates in the host country. In this case these Zimbabwean engineers coming, as they do, from a crushing economy would accept anything that was better than what they were getting in their country of origin. This explains why these Zimbabwean engineers are generally 'happy' with their remuneration despite knowing that they could be earning more:

...no one is happy about their remuneration...but its fine. I think it's fair (Joe: 30/09/2011)

...sometimes you feel that it's not [enough] but, if you are coming from a situation like ours where things were worse, even if you are underpaid you still believe as long as you can feed your family...I think I am fine (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

...it could be a little bit more generous I think (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

According to Bonacich, in the second place temporary workers are more willing to put up with poor working conditions (including remuneration) and are keen to avoid lengthy labour disputes for their immediate goal is to get employment. In addition, since they see their current status as a passing phase in their lives they can put up with the adverse conditions that locals will not accept.

Directly tied to the two aspects of employment relations that are discussed above is the issue of promotion. A closer look at this aspect in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg is therefore in order.

### 6.2.3. *Promotion*

Participants were asked if they had ever been promoted whilst working in South Africa and whether or not they felt they had a chance for promotion in the future:

I don't fore see us being promoted, now that's where the issue of being a foreigner comes in. I don't think they really like us getting into administrative positions...that means we have a ceiling...and the ceiling is where we are...so we cannot move up... it's very difficult to get appointed, promoted to positions that are perceived to be political, you have to have political backing somewhere (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

I actually feel that I deserve it (promotion), it takes a very long route to get promoted and it is not based on merit it is political, in fact there is no procedure that is followed (Muranda: 02/10/2011)

I haven't been promoted, where you start is just where you remain...promotion is something else...the level that I am now, here that's normally where foreigners end. Above this it becomes political appointees...For the locals it's all fine. They can move up until the highest level (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

The fact that these migrant professionals 'glean' at the margins is further made apparent when one looks at the issue of promotion. In other words, none of the participants in this study had been promoted while working in South Africa. Evidently, opportunities for promotion are very limited if not nonexistent. The fact that there is a 'glass-ceiling' in terms of upward mobility for migrant professionals in government departments is worrisome. It constitutes the revival of the spirit that was behind the infamous 'job reservation' and 'colour bar' practices that curtailed skills development for black South Africans during the colonial and apartheid eras.

What's more, based on the findings of this study, promotion in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg is not

done on merit. Only political appointees get promotion according to the respondents. There is, in other words, no clear procedure that is followed for promotion. As a result there are no equal opportunities for promotion between locals and migrant professionals with or without South African citizenship.

If this trend continues unchecked, it will lead to the dismantling of any workplace democracy, the idea of equal opportunities to be more precise and by way of extension the general principles of democracy in the wider societal realm. This also discourages positive competition between employees or the drive for excellence and with time may result in ethnic antagonisms with more negative effects on productivity:

...when I got in, the Director resigned, it was a white Director and the acting Director who replaced him was from Mozambique...he was acting for two years...a month ago there was sort of a coup ...They said 'we don't want foreigners on top of us'...as from the first of October we will be having a new Director...he is still my subordinate but from next week he will be my Director (Chinotimba 27/09/2011).

...sometimes we report to somebody who earns less than what we earn...my line of work is technical and our managers are not qualified in the technical aspects of our job they are mainly administrators (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

...each section has its own budget and the section leader avails money for further training so it depends on who is the section leader, you might get a section leader who is not a trained engineer, because some of the section leaders are political appointees so he might not see the need for further training. Some of them actually think that further training is a waste of money (Tineyi: 04/10/2011).

These narratives reveal some of the problems that result primarily from the fact that promotions are not carried out based on merit. Evidently, this practice promotes a spirit of intolerance on the part of locals resulting in overt and covert 'ethnic antagonisms'. What's more, it is not good for

business and in the case of public organizations, it negatively affects service delivery. Tineyi and Nicky suggest that due to this 'irrational' practice there are general misunderstandings between migrant professionals and their superiors who were appointed to such senior positions mainly for political reasons. The incompetence on the part of these political appointees is highlighted by their ignorance or unwillingness to avail funds to support the further skills development of their subordinates. If opportunities for further training are blocked, engineers in the same position as the participants in this department will lag behind when it comes to understanding the use of new technologies in their profession resulting in increased poor service delivery.

This takes this discussion to issues around the interpersonal relations that Zimbabwean engineers experience in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Here, the focus is on their working relations with their subordinates, peers, superiors and customers. The role that these day-to-day interactions play in building first and foremost workplace democracy and by way of extension broader societal democracy cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, "work continues to be at the centre of our material and psychological life and is especially salient as economies come to rely more on intellectual and social capital as sources of competitive advantage" (Frenkel 2003: 135). If these interpersonal relations are characterised by resistance, confrontation, animosity and hostility then there is no workplace integration taking place.

The labour market incorporation of migrant professionals in South Africa is taking place at a time when the country is experiencing fundamental economic transformations. Previously economically disadvantaged South Africans are still being gradually incorporated or integrated into the labour market and subsequently the workplace. At the same time South Africa has and has had very high (structural) unemployment rate over time.

Employment opportunities for skilled workers abound but there are millions of South Africans without jobs because they do not possess the required skills. For instance, Von Holdt and Webster (2008: 335) reported that in 2004 South Africa had 20.3 million economically active people. Of these, only 6.6 million had fulltime employment, a further 3.1 million were either casuals or were involved in externalised work, while 2.2 million were working in the informal sector and a massive 8.4 million were unemployed. These factors together make the South African workplace a fiercely contested terrain. Thus, workplace integration of migrant professionals cannot be left to chance as millions of South Africans are also 'fighting' to be incorporated into the labour market. Indeed the environment favours ethnic antagonisms rather than workplace integration.

#### *6.2.4. Interpersonal relations with subordinates*

Interviewees were asked to describe their day-to-day interpersonal relations with their subordinates at work. Here, language skills on the part of migrant professionals are a crucial factor in their interpersonal relations with subordinates:

When I used to go to sites you see that these guys expect you to speak in isiZulu or any other local language, and some could speak Afrikaans....if you can't speak any of those then there was a problem (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

I have blended in very easily because I speak Ndebele. When I was working on project in the locations [townships] they thought I was a local every time I was speaking to them until I told them myself that I am from Zimbabwe...the pronunciation is not exactly the same but you can blend in easily when you are speaking their own language than when you are remaining foreign [in terms of speaking a foreign language] (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

All participants shared the view that those Zimbabwean engineers who could speak the local languages spoken by their subordinates had smooth working relationships with their subordinates. This skill becomes

especially important when these migrant professionals are at construction sites. Most construction labourers in South Africa are uneducated and thus prefer to speak in their local language because they struggle with or cannot speak English at all. The ethnic origins of these individual Zimbabwean engineers largely determine whether one can speak at least one of the three commonly spoken languages in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Zimbabweans who are members of the Ndebele ethnic group can easily speak isiZulu, isiXhosa and isiNdebele languages because these three languages share a common set of language roots with their home language.

Two of the twelve participants in this study are members of the Ndebele ethnic group and they both reported that they had smooth working relationships with their subordinates. It is also interesting to note that three participants who are members of the Shona ethnic group, including Orbet whose response is quoted above, had also learnt to speak some of the local languages.

Apart from language issues, the fact that power relations between these Zimbabwean engineers and their subordinates are skewed in favour of the former is also a source of contention. This is further compounded by the fact that locals who work under the supervision of these migrant professionals envy the salaries paid to these Zimbabwean engineers:

...when I started [working here] there was an issue to say 'foreigners are occupying more senior positions' but they now understand...there are challenges here and there but overall they take the instructions (Joe: 30/09/2011).

Most of them were on level nine, ten and the highest were on level eleven... when they were told that this guy is going to be on level thirteen and you are going to report to him it sort of created a tension...It's like 'you are getting our money' (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

...I wouldn't say I faced problems which had to do with my nationality. But you can't completely rule out that at times people feel that, okay, you are a foreigner...with the junior people sometimes you feel it, although they would not say it openly, you can see it, (Jones: 20/02/2011).

...sometimes it's okay but sometimes it's a little bit tense, because they are very few black skilled [local engineers] we are perceived to be earning more and some of our colleagues think we don't deserve it (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

These narratives indicate that South Africans who work under the supervision of these migrant professionals in the public sector of the construction industry generally harbour animosity toward these Zimbabwean engineers. As suggested earlier, the process of incorporating black South Africans into the labour market is ongoing. Thus, unskilled and semiskilled black South Africans who are supervised by migrant professionals envy these Zimbabwean engineers.

Although both migrant professionals and the unskilled locals are in the periphery segment of the labour market and share common challenges in terms of their employment relations, migrant professionals fare much better than the unskilled locals. This is a source of contention. For instance, although they are both employed on contract basis skilled migrants earn more than the unskilled locals. The plight of the unskilled South Africans who work in the construction industry is much worse than that of skilled migrants because they mostly work for labour-only subcontractors. This makes their employment more precarious and they generally work under adverse working conditions (see Goldman 2003; Chinguno 2009; Cottle 2008; Edwards 2001; Pedrina & Merz 2008). These factors together intensify the ethnic antagonisms in the workplace.

#### *6.2.5. Interpersonal relations with peers*

The focus, here, is on the day-to-day interpersonal relations between Zimbabwean engineers and their local counterparts (fellow engineers) in the public sector of the construction industry:

Quite well, we really value each other's contributions, we work as a team...I really feel as part of the team...they accept me as an equal...even when we are not there in a meeting here they would say, 'no we can't start let's wait for those guys' so that shows appreciation (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

We are not antagonistic toward anyone, maybe at times we just like being on our own to have lunch like you found us today but there is nothing wrong with that...in fact our local colleagues come to us for advice or tell you their personal grievances that they can't even go and tell their fellow South Africans (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

...the relationship is quite good; there is no problem at all...because in terms of age, it looks like most of the guys are younger than me and even the experience; they come to me to ask for advice and I am always willing to assist them...I am enjoying every minute, so that makes me feel that I am a part of the team; part of the family (Jones: 20/02/2011).

Ten of the twelve respondents described their interpersonal relations with their peers as good or smooth. They felt accepted and valued by their local counterparts. Even though there may be some misunderstandings and disagreements there seems to be mutual respect amongst local and migrant professionals. The 43 year old Jones, who is employed as a Deputy Chief engineer, felt that his age and professional experience gives him an edge when it comes to interpersonal relations with his peers. He believes that this seniority earns him respect from peers. Thus he could declare that he feels as an integral 'part of the family'.

In addition, the way this organization is set up demands that these people work together as a team otherwise they would not be able to meet their



targets. This helps both migrant professionals and their peers to cooperate with one another. Team working is one of the key aspects of the labour process in the era of '*flexible accumulation*' (see Hunter 2000; Nattrass 1994; Kaplinsky 1994). Thus, it can be argued that '*flexible accumulation*', as a mode of regulation, forces these professionals to put any differences they may have aside and work together to achieve the set goals. This, however, does not necessarily translate in to actual workplace integration but allows room for some degree of tolerance toward one another.

This cooperation between local and migrant professionals is relatively easy to establish because local engineers stand to benefit more from that relationship than migrant professionals. Since local engineers prefer to work in the private sector rather than the public sector of the construction industry, those who are working in this sector are still learning their trade. They are inexperienced and thus they benefit from the experience of these migrant professionals by working closely with them. Furthermore, these local engineers are more focussed on breaking through into the private sector of the construction industry so they do not see these migrant professionals as direct competitors for their ultimate goal.

#### *6.2.6. Interpersonal relations with superiors*

It is important to understand the nature of working relations when these migrant professionals are not in positions of power as in their relations with their subordinates or at an 'equal footing' as in the case of their relations with their peers:

...here the guys who occupy the top positions are not taken from among us (engineers), so the decision that you take as an engineer and recommendations you make can be overruled and in favour of political decisions and you cannot ask why (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

I really have problems with my superiors...they are nowhere to be found when I need them...when I call for a meeting...they don't even pick up their phones and when you send an e-mail it either bounces back or it is never responded to...that is happening quite a lot, it is a major concern to me (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

...when you know what you are doing usually you don't face many problems because you become some sort of a 'tool' which many people depend on, so you find that people seem to like you... When we meet in meetings [the director] is always full of positive comments (Jones: 20/02/2011).

Although all the participants in this study were working for the same employer their perceptions of interpersonal relations with their superiors differ significantly. This can be explained by looking closely at the organizational structure of this government department. It is divided into several sub-directorates and each sub-directorate has its own autonomous leadership. Thus the differences in the personalities and competence of individual leaders may account for the differences shown above.

Eight of the participants reported no squabbles with their superiors. Jones went as far as to say that his superiors are always full of positive approbation for the work that he and his colleagues are doing in the sub-section he works in. The remaining four were especially concerned with regard to the way in which top management posts are filled in the public sector of the construction industry. In this government department, top management or administrative positions can be given to people who may not necessarily be qualified engineers. They could be trained in public administration or management. Thus there were bound to be difficulties and differences in understanding and solving particular problems. This explains why, as Chinotimba's narrative reflects, decisions and suggestions based on technical expertise are overlooked in favour of 'politically' influenced decisions.

This is further illustrated by the following comments:

The environment that we work in is highly political so at times you find that your decisions don't matter in the larger scheme of things and there are certain things that you can't do anything about (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

...recently I sent out four projects for tenders and we evaluated the bids and everything and we made recommendations and we presented that to the acquisition committee to make the final decision and our decision as a committee was overruled...they overrule the technical expertise from professionals, especially us the engineers we are not taken seriously (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

Due to the biased selection procedure for hiring or promoting top managers in the public sector of the construction industry there are issues with the competence of some directors. As Silvia's case shows some of these superiors are always unavailable when their assistance is needed. At times they will not even answer their phones or reply to electronic mails which eventually create communication problems. Actually, allegations that public administrators in South Africa are generally incompetent are commonplace (see Iheduru 2004; [www.sowetanlive.co.za](http://www.sowetanlive.co.za) 22/09/2011).

#### *6.2.7. Interpersonal relations with clients*

This is an important relationship to look at for it sheds light on how the society at large views these migrant professionals. It is also essential to note that the clients of the public sector of the construction industry can be divided into two different categories namely; the general public and private consultancy companies and contractors. These two different types of clients pose different challenges for migrant professionals.

##### *6.2.7.1. Dealing with the general public as clients*

Working in the public sector of the construction industry means that these Zimbabwean engineers become accountable to the general public. The demands and pressure that comes from the expectations that South

Africans have with regard to public organizations makes it especially difficult for migrant professionals to build smooth relations with the public as clients:

...they expect immediate results...a job that was never planned which arose due to political pressure needs to be done. It may be that there is a service delivery protest somewhere, so in a bid to solve that problem we end up taking certain issues as matters of urgency (Jones: 20/02/2011).

...some of the demands from the clients, which are the public, are things you can't do over night, some of the things require us to plan maybe in one financial year then look for funding the following year... It takes a lot of planning and it requires a lot of financial resources and considering that this we use public money, you don't just use it, it requires a lot of approvals and there is a lot of protocol attached to the way we resolve issues (Keita: 01/10/2011).

...generally when people come to a government department, they have put a general blanket that people in the government do not do their work and everyone is incompetent (Forward: 04/10/2011).

...in most of the community projects they try to include the communities to participate, they call the whole community and then they start to speak in their language (Tineyi 04/10/2011).

As South Africa continues to hold together and negotiate her political and economic transition from apartheid to democracy, the general South African public has grown impatient with public organizations. They have been made to wait for, arguably, too long to see the benefits of democracy and now they demand immediate improvements in service delivery. In recent years there has been and are ongoing wave after wave of protests from various communities demanding better service delivery. Infrastructure development, which is the primary responsibility of the public sector of the construction industry, is one of the main reasons why these contentious politics arise in South Africa (see Friedman 2005;

Burger 2009; Sebugwawo 2011; Alexander 2010). Thus to represent such public organizations before communities is a massive challenge for anyone but worse for migrant professionals. Although the protests are not necessarily an angry attack on migrant professionals but the government as a whole, this adds further pressure on migrant professionals. Inability to speak the local language of the community in question when dealing with these generally disgruntled masses makes matters worse.

#### *6.2.7.2. Dealing with consultancy companies and contractors*

The primary role of engineers in the public sector of the construction industry is mainly to inspect and approve engineering drawings from private companies. This mainly involves the application of pre-set and well institutionalised government standards in the construction industry. Despite the fact that this work is heavily standardised there are still many grey areas that can easily cause conflict:

...they know we are there for their good because the more we write bad comments about them the faster they move out of the industry. So they really take our comments seriously...there is some cheating that happens in construction, you can find them using some sub-standard materials and you warn them, make them write something (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

...generally I don't really have any problems, but at one time when we were having a meeting, one contractor whispered that 'this is the problem with working with foreigners' but it was one isolated incident...generally there is no direct confrontation (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

...the guy who used to function from this post was white, so [now] when they come in they see a black woman and they say she doesn't know much...sometimes you just have to prove to them that you can do your job... Some of them end up walking out, well I let them walk out but they will come back because I am the only one who can help them...mostly the aggressive ones are white males (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

...some [consultancies] are mainly composed of whites...they don't feel that a black person can actually give them instructions...When you explain to them and show confidence that you really know what you are doing they end up streamlining themselves and even giving you respect...but a white client comes with that attitude of saying 'we know these things better' (Jones: 20/02/2011).

In dealing with private companies and contractors power relations are slightly skewed to the advantage of engineers (irrespective of their nationality) in the public sector. The fate of these private companies and contractors is in the hands of these engineers. This is primarily because private engineering firm's designs have to be assessed and approved by engineers in the public sector. The same goes for contractors at the construction site; their work has to be assessed and approved by the engineers in the public sector. Thus if contractors, for example, do not comply with the standards set by the government then engineers in the public sector can sanction them to stop construction work immediately and re-start the whole project. To avoid such repercussions private companies and contractors comply with government standards. That is why they can only whisper their discontent.

However, at times race and gender issues can be used to tilt power relations. As Jones put it, white clients approach black Zimbabwean engineers with a pre-conceived 'attitude of saying we know these things better', thus, they find it hard to take instructions from black African engineers. For Silvia, who is a black African female engineer, her race and gender puts her under severe pressure. Her position as a Deputy Director is a position that was, in previous years classified and reserved for white male engineers. So, when white male clients walk into her office and they see a black African woman they think that she doesn't know anything about her work and sometimes they even become aggressive. This racialized nature of relations with clients is not only observed in the public sector of the construction in Pretoria and Johannesburg. This trend is also

found in other sectors of the economy including call centres (see Webster & Omar 2003).

A strong diverse democracy is, arguably, built on well integrated workplaces (see Estlund 2003). In other words, democratic principles such as equal opportunities for all people regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, disabilities, and nationality have to be developed, first and foremost in the workplace. These findings from the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg are a good reason for one to worry about the nature and future of democracy in South Africa.

### **6.3. Skills recognition and professional growth**

The transition from '*racial Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' in South Africa meant a shift from a regime that was primarily based on a low-skilled labour force to a regime that is primarily premised on a highly-skilled labour force. Debates about how to negotiate this transition without throwing the whole economy off-balance continued to dominate economic policy debates after 1994 (see Kraak 2004; Padayachee 2005; Edwards 2001; Nattrass 1994; Kaplinsky 1994).

As a result of these policy debates the word 'skill' has become a buzz word in economic sociology and economic policies in post-apartheid South Africa and beyond. Paradoxically, the concept '*skill*' remains loosely defined for there is no consensus on what 'skill' is *really*. Indeed skills are socially constructed, thus, there are bound to be contradictory and competing understandings of 'skill'. Subsequently, there are different ways of measuring 'skill' (see Standing & Tokman 1991; More 1980). This theme reveals what employers in the construction industry, institutions of higher education, professional organizations and Zimbabwean engineers recognise as 'skill' or being 'skilled' and their interactions thereof.

### *6.3.1. Working/job experience*

In order to find employment in South Africa, these Zimbabwean engineers had to prove or demonstrate that they had established themselves in the construction industry. The focus here is on how employers and these migrant professionals viewed 'skill':

I had worked in roads extensively, from 2002 to 2008 [in Zimbabwe] I was a Regional Manager...covering two countries...about six offices in two regions...I was working in Botswana and Zimbabwe at the same time, I was actually travelling almost every week (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

I had been working in this industry for many years without qualifications...Here it's all about what you know. If you can prove that you know something, you can still earn much more than those with high qualification but no experience (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

I was working as a civil engineer at a road construction company for almost 17 years (Jones: 20/02/2011).

I was the Projects Engineer...we were doing projects in most of Southern Africa; Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia mainly, and here and there we would go into the DRC. I actually travelled there a lot... (Joe: 30/09/2011).

Evidently, Zimbabwean engineers and South African employers in the construction industry recognize time/years spent by an engineer in the construction industry as a reliable indicator of 'skill'. In other words, the more the years an engineer spend practising in the construction industry the more 'skilled' he or she becomes. That is, in my view, because engineering is an applied/practical science thus the more you practise the more proficient you become. Little wonder why Orbet, who is employed as a Deputy Director, claims that South African construction companies are more interested in the profundity of one's working experience more than academic certificates. Although, as I will suggest in further detail later, some of the participants had diplomas in civil engineering, that are not



recognized as such by ECSA, they were employed in very senior positions in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

For these migrant professionals, however, past job experience meant a little bit more than just gaining proficiency in their profession. Rather it equipped these individuals with the additional arsenal they need in order to perform in the public sector of the construction industry in a foreign country. For the individuals who had the experience of practising their profession in the public sector it was relatively easy to adapt to the way this organization is set up. Although there may be specific differences they could still draw on their wealth of experience to solve the challenges they faced. For those who were previously practising their profession in environments that required them to travel and work outside Zimbabwe that experience helped them to develop confidence in their ability to perform in a foreign country.

In a nut shell, employers value and readily recognise capacity gained by skilled migrants through job/working experience. This makes it relatively easy for experienced Zimbabwean engineers to access the South African construction industry. Despite having 'mastered' their profession through years of working experience, these Zimbabwean engineers and their employers nonetheless recognize that they require continuous work-related training in order to hone their skills.

#### *6.3.2. Work-related training/professional courses*

Respondents spoke about how their employer is keen to send them or sponsor them to attend work-related training:

...the department has made it compulsory, all [the] employees must go for training in order to improve on their service delivery...I appreciate it if there is

anything I need to learn...The idea is that whenever you are doing something the result must be perfect (Jones: 20/02/2011).

We are not saying we need training so as to enable us to do our jobs, we are qualified to do our jobs but because we strive for growth and excellence that's why we need further training, we don't want to become dinosaurs (Tineyi: 04/10/2011).

...we do different types of training not necessarily because you are not performing but... they need to make us aware of the finances, management... (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

When it comes to short courses it depends on the budget and who you know, it's a political organization, some people can go to as much as five training courses a year but if I apply I am told there are no funds (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

Although both these Zimbabwean engineers and their employer value work-related training, their motivations for doing so are not necessarily the same. For these Zimbabwean engineers, this kind of training is seen as a means to keep themselves up-to-date with new developments in terms of engineering standards and technologies in their profession. Knowing that engineering is a dynamic profession which keeps on evolving, they believe that without continuous skills development they may become 'dinosaurs'.

These migrant professionals also view professional short courses as opportunities for continued professional growth which can enhance their position in the labour market in the construction industry in South Africa. It equips them with some critical country and organization-specific skills. For these reasons they, generally, have a positive outlook towards work-related training or professional courses their employer requires them to attend.

Their employer, however, is motivated to grant these migrant professionals the opportunities to receive work-related training rather than

further academic training for a different set of reasons. To start with, employers make job related training compulsory in order to immediately improve the performance of their employees in completing specific tasks. As Jones aptly put it; 'the idea is that whenever you are doing something the result must be perfect'. Even this myopic view of human resources development is not shared by all top managers or directors of this organization. As Maromo's narrative, above, shows some of the top managers in this government department view the cost of further training as a waste of financial resources. As suggested earlier some of these top managers in the public sector of the construction industry are not trained engineers but they get these top jobs through 'political deployment'. No wonder they do not see the benefit of further training their subordinates.

Apart from the desire to improve the immediate effectiveness of their skilled workers employers have another goal in sight; achieving 'functional flexibility'. Participants reported that they are required to attend several short courses and workshops on many different aspects of their profession in order to diversify their knowledge. This invokes Harvey's (1989) proposition that under the regime of '*flexible accumulation*' skilled workers are also required to provide functional flexibility by acquiring and utilizing new skills. In other words, skilled workers are required to master multiple skills to enable them to carry out a multiple of skilled/complex tasks. In doing so they assist the '*flexible firm*' to respond quickly to the ever-changing market demands (Atkinson & Meager 1986; Gilbert, Burrows & Pollert 1992).

The danger, here, is that employers become solely focussed on work-related training overlooking academic training which is a very important aspect of human resources development. This is, already happening, at least for the participants in this study. The public organisation they work for does not provide funding for their post-graduate studies but when it

comes to work-related training funding is provided for. Although work-related training is an important aspect of up-skilling workers it often results in tacit skills that are applicable specifically to a particular organization. Thus, there is a need to balance work-related training and further academic training.

This general lack of interest, on the part of employers in the construction industry, in sponsoring further academic studies of their employees is consistent with Miles and Neale's (1991:1) assertion that construction companies are generally reluctant to invest large sums of money on human resources development once they feel that the workers may leave and offer their newly acquired skills to their rivals. This myopic view of training contributes to the skills shortages problem in the construction industry (see Moleke 2004; Lee 2002). Furthermore, it may lead to frustration on the part of migrant professionals which may in turn lead to poor workplace integration which may also result in low productivity. This is not something that public organizations in South Africa can afford to ignore given the current intense criticisms levelled against them. They have come under severe public scrutiny due to poor service delivery which has culminated in repeated waves of service delivery protests in South Africa. Alexander (2010: 25) described these protests as a rebellion of the poor in South Africa and claims that the intensity and widespread of the protests had reached "insurrectionary proportions in some cases".

Apart from work-related or professional courses the participants in this study took the initiative to enrol for post-graduate courses at local universities. Acquiring academic qualifications from South African universities with course contents that are tailored to meet the engineering needs of South Africa equips them with localised skills that can improve their chances of work place integration enormously.

### *6.3.3. Post graduate studies in the host country*

Participants reported that even though their employer does not take up the responsibility to sponsor or subsidize their post-graduate studies they still manage to enrol and individually pay for their studies:

I am studying towards a Masters degree in Civil Engineering... I have already enrolled... if all goes well I should finish this year (Joe: 30/09/2011).

I have a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Civil Engineering, but I am actually studying towards a Masters in Engineering (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

...now it's [highest qualification] BTech in Civil Engineering...I actually acquired that here in South Africa in 2009 (Jones: 20/02/2011).

I am doing a managerial course through UNISA. I intend to get into management...I want to equip myself with the requisite managerial skills (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

All the participants were either enrolled for or had recently completed a post-graduate course with a South African institute of higher education. There is a general consensus among these Zimbabwean engineers that they are able to excel in their postgraduate studies because the curriculum that they were taught in Zimbabwe is more or less the same with what is being taught at South African institutions. A case in point is Jones, who completed his studies for a B Tech in Civil Engineering in just under a year. After arriving in South Africa at the end of 2008 he completed his studies at the end of 2009.

This reported interest and success in post-graduate academic studies could be as a result of at least two reasons. Firstly, these migrant professionals took the initiative to enrol in post-graduate studies as an attempt to chip their way towards full workplace integration in South Africa by becoming registered professional members of ECSA. Membership of

this autonomous professional regulatory body, as I will explain later, potentially opens many opportunities for these migrant professionals. Indeed, an engineer in South Africa is only recognized as a professional when he or she becomes a registered professional member of ECSA. Thus, these Zimbabwean engineers take up further academic studies in order to increase their chances of attaining professional recognition in South Africa.

The second reason is closely linked with the first; these migrant professionals make this pragmatic decision with the view to strengthening their position in the labour market in South Africa. Realising that they cannot easily get full-time permanent employment they are convinced that investing in their own individual human capital prepares them for the next step when their fixed-term contracts come to an end in 2014/15.

Their attempts to further or upgrade their academic qualifications are at times stalled by challenges they face with some South African Universities. This applies especially to the participants who hold Zimbabwean diplomas obtained from Zimbabwean technical colleges, the equivalent of South African Universities of Technology commonly known as Technikons. These individuals are usually asked to re-do or take up bridging courses to up-grade/supplement their diplomas before they can enrol into post-graduate studies:

...re-doing my Diploma the way they want it here, which is just boring to study the same thing over and over again and they can't even see that these persons, in all the Universities where they re-do them, they are actually passing [with ease], something is not being evaluated well...they used to take previously but I think this thing of promoting locals so they would want to make it a bit difficult for foreigners to proceed (get ahead) (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

I was studying at one of the Technikons and I realized that the way our diploma is structured is such that you cover one subject for a very long period, so you find

that their diploma has so many subjects but if you look at the coverage it's the same, because I realized that nothing much was new. So I don't know the basis for them rejecting our qualifications because actually we are doing, performing at the same level even far much better than the locals (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

This frustrates these Zimbabwean engineers as they are systematically kept at the 'margins' of the labour market and they see their efforts to achieve workplace integration effectively stalled. Orbet claims that South African universities in the past used to recognize or accept Zimbabwean diplomas without questioning their worth but in recent times there has been a tightening of requirements.

This can be viewed as a re-cycling of history in post apartheid South Africa. Parallels can be drawn between what is happening and what was happening during the colonial and apartheid eras in this country. For example, apprenticeship laws<sup>21</sup> were passed during the colonial and apartheid eras that set unnecessarily stringent academic requirements for apprenticeship enrolment under the guise of maintaining 'high standards'. The application of such laws meant that only well educated white youths could qualify for apprenticeship training. At face value those laws did not appear to be discriminatory but only a few privileged black youth could afford the 'luxury' of schooling up to the level that was stipulated by such laws. Thus in practice they harshly restricted the odds for black African youth to be enrolled as apprentices.

One can argue that the tightening of requirements specifically for foreigners who want to take up post graduate studies in engineering is meant to limit their professional growth and the potential competition from such migrant professional. The effect of this is increased frustration for the migrant professionals who are affected. Another possible underlying

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<sup>21</sup>The Apprenticeship Act, No. 26 of 1922 and its successor the Apprenticeship Act, No. 37 of 1944

reason for the tightening of requirements for foreigners is to protect the interests of a group who has a stronghold in this particular profession.

Although this study did not include the perceptions of their superiors and their local counterparts, these Zimbabwean engineers rated themselves as highly competent in their profession. Paradoxically, for some of them, their educational qualifications are either downgraded or simply not recognized by local universities. This has led some, like Silvia and Orbet, to question the rationality of the basis or model used for evaluating qualifications obtained from outside the country. Orbet goes as far as to suggest a combination of certificate evaluation and competency based assessment to establish whether or not they do qualify for post-graduate studies and subsequently professional recognition. This also speaks to the fact that skills are socially constructed; hence there will always be competing and contradictory perceptions of 'skill'.

Linked to the issue of qualification evaluation and further academic studies is achieving professional membership with ECSA and becoming a legally recognised professional.

#### *6.3.4. Professional recognition and opportunities for growth*

Although ECSA was only established in 2000 following the passage of Engineering Profession Act, No. 46 of 2000, its roots as an autonomous statutory body goes back as far as the year 1968.<sup>22</sup> For the first time, in South Africa, engineering was officially recognised as a self-governing profession following the passage of the Professional Engineers Act, No. 81 of 1968. The following year, ECSA's predecessor, the South African Council for Professional Engineers (SACPE) was established. It appears, that some of the challenges that the SACPE was faced with at the time of

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<sup>22</sup> Succeeded by the Engineering Profession of South Africa Act, No. 114 of 1990 which was later replaced by the Engineering Profession Act, No. 46 of 2000



its inception, including the issue of differing standards for admission for professional recognition, continue to haunt ECSA<sup>23</sup> to date ([www.ecsa.co.za](http://www.ecsa.co.za); see also chapter 3).

As indicated earlier, membership of ECSA is seen by the participants as the ultimate goal in terms of career advancement. It is seen as the key that unlocks the doors to their professional advancement and upward mobility in general. However the process of joining ECSA is fraught with challenges and has left all of the participants in this study frustrated. Although further research is required on this matter, the participants believe that the ECSA acts as a 'gate keeper' protecting the interests of white professional engineers. They, generally view the ECSA as a vanguardist and exclusionary tool used to contain both foreigners and black African engineers:

... the problem is that it seems there is no clear criterion to be followed especially if you are a foreigner... You will see that a certain individual who went to the same college in Zimbabwe, for example, have been given membership and others coming from the same institution will be told that your qualifications are not good enough... it depends on who interviewed you and who did you submitted your papers to (Jones: 20/02/2011).

ECSA is an organization that is prohibitive of people that are trained outside the country. The whole idea is to try and protect a certain group... most of them are the ones that are forming these consultancies (firms) so they would want to limit the number of people that get registered and become professional so that they remain in ownership of the companies (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

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<sup>23</sup> For example, although the general standard for professional registration initially agreed upon was a Bachelors Degree in Engineering from a South African University, subsection (2) (b) of section 18 of the Professional Engineers Act, No. 81 of 1968 did not require a degree in engineering but permitted an individual with "a satisfactory qualification," subject to the opinion of the council, to be registered as a professional engineer (see [www.ecsa.co.za](http://www.ecsa.co.za)).

It's difficult to register with ECSA especially if you are coming with foreign certificates... although I feel that my experience is above their requirements there is always that difficulty to go through the system... it looks like there is a group of people who want to protect entry into a certain field so they make it a little bit difficult (Muranda: 02/10/2011)

Joining ECSA is like climbing mountain, it is not a foreigner friendly organization let alone a black friendly organization. It's an organization meant protect the interests of white South African professional engineers. It can take a black South African about ten years to be registered with ECSA where as a white graduate engineer can take about three years after graduation to register (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

Professional recognition is seemingly the most difficult structural barrier that the participants in this study would have to overcome in order to achieve full workplace integration. Participants reported a lack of a clear criterion for the registration of foreign trained engineers by ECSA. As a result discretionary powers are given to the panellists who interview migrant professionals to determine whether or not they have 'satisfactory' qualifications. This in turn results in 'differential treatment' or 'double standards' for registration at ECSA.

In addition, participants expressed frustration with the unusually long and inconsistent waiting periods to get the feedback on their applications:

...I applied (to ECSA) and I am still waiting for the feedback...I applied in mid 2010. They haven't given me any feedback, they just called to say we have received your application and we are processing it, that's all (Joe: 30/09/2011).

I made the application in 2008 and they took about one and a half years to respond...then they called to tell me that 'okay you will have your interview after six months...so that's two years after application to get my candidate membership, then I'm now working towards my professional membership (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

For these migrant professionals, this is a clear strategy used to frustrate applicants until they give up their pursuit of professional recognition to the benefit of white South African professional engineers who have a stronghold on the engineering profession. Needless to say, this practice does not help in terms of addressing the skills shortages in South Africa. Furthermore, it works against the development and growth of democratic workplaces that are crucial foundation stones for democratic societies.

What's more, working in the public sector of the construction industry locates Zimbabwean engineers at a further disadvantaged position with regard to joining ECSA. Government departments are bureaucratically organised and there is very little or no direct supervision done on officers. Yet one of the requirements for professional membership with ECSA is that a graduate or candidate member of ECSA proves his or her expertise while working, for a period not less than three years, under a supervisor who is a professional engineer registered with ECSA:

...you have to have an immediate supervisor who is registered with ECSA... the registered supervisors use their influence to have you registered fast (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

Respondents also reported that ECSA 'advised' them to register as either candidate members or any other category lower than a professional engineer:

I tried to register and they didn't want to register me as a professional engineer but as a professional technologist and I felt that is not what I wanted and that's not what I am. They were undermining my qualifications. They said our curriculum lacks certain things but when you take the two curriculums and compare them they are almost the same. These are not valid reasons it's just a smoke screen, in fact they are not legitimate reasons (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

...they just stated that my qualifications were not sufficient to meet the consideration. So they were advising me to register as an experienced practitioner. That's why I have decided to further my studies I just said well I will wait and try with their own qualifications and see what they say (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

...foreigners with more than ten years working experience after graduation are graded as candidates/graduates by ECSA. And if you check the conversion rate of those who are registered as candidates to become professionals it may be less than 1%. Most of them end up just getting frustrated because they make it unnecessarily hard to achieve. If you are black and foreign they make it hard to be registered (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

Understandably, for the participants in this study being asked to register as graduate candidates or technicians instead of professional engineers meant downgrading their statuses. In addition, all the participants in this study occupied influential positions in the public sector from 'specialist engineers' to 'chief engineers'. These are middle to senior management positions.

The apparent discrediting of the qualifications of the participants in this study is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, as indicated earlier all forms of construction work is regulated by respective government departments. This implies that, engineers who are employed in the public sector will have to approve the work done by private firms that are usually directed by registered professional engineers. Hence, engineers in the same position as the participants in this project who are denied professional recognition by ECSA have the authority to either approve or disapprove the work done by registered professional engineers. If they are denied professional membership because they do not hold 'satisfactory qualifications' or they are incompetent, then how is it possible that they can inspect and approve or disapprove the work done by registered professional engineers.

Secondly, given that, most white local civil engineers in general and registered professional civil engineers in particular open their own practices or work in the private sector of the construction industry. It becomes very difficult for foreign 'candidate members' of ECSA who work in the public sector to get the required supervision from registered professional engineers.

One cannot help but wonder whether what is transpiring here is not in reminiscent of 'job reservation' practices that characterised the apartheid era. This is a strong possibility since ECSA is mandated by subsection (26) of the Engineering Profession Act, No. 46 of 2000 to reserve certain types of engineering work exclusively for certain categories of its professional members. Frustrating foreign trained engineers from formal professional recognition, amounts to a form of systematic suppression of the professional growth of migrant professionals.

The fact that self regulated professional engineering bodies around the globe face difficulties to evaluate academic qualifications of migrant professionals and they invariably conclude that their credentials and work experience is inferior to local qualifications is well documented (see Girard & Bauder 2005; Hawthorne 2002; Groutis 2003; Duvander 2001). This happens despite the fact that "while local contexts and detailed knowledge required may differ from country to country, engineering competencies are increasingly being recognised as having a common baseline" ([www.ecsa.co.za](http://www.ecsa.co.za)). It is the social practices of professional bodies such as ECSA that result in barriers that discriminate against migrant professions. Without doubt engineering is a crucial profession and as such maintaining proper standards cannot be questioned for that is a way of protecting public interests. What needs to be looked at with the

view to change are the ways in which standards are determined and maintained.

As Girard and Bauder (2005: 8) concluded in their study of the labour market integration of migrant professionals in Canada, “systemic discrimination results from rules and procedures that are not explicitly designed to produce differential outcomes but do so through their applications.” A case for such actions can be made with regard to the participants in this study.

Comparisons can also be made to Duvander’s (2001) findings on the relevancy of country-specific skills, including educational qualifications, to specific jobs in Sweden. His study concluded that “immigrants who had invested in education during their time in Sweden had a higher risk of unemployment than other immigrants” (Duvander 2001: 227) This was because such country-specific skills had only a partial influence on migrants’ labour market position; they did not guarantee full economic integration. Thus, although professional bodies in Sweden encouraged immigrants to get Swedish qualifications in order to improve their chances of economic integration, in reality acquiring Swedish qualifications did not translate to economic or workplace integration. The major issue was the intolerance of diversity on the part of autonomous professional bodies and their office bearers.

Though the participants in this study expressed their frustrations with the structural forms of exclusion they face, they demonstrate their agency by pursuing South African degrees in engineering to try and ease their way past these barriers. In addition they have also attempted to build what Bonacich (1972: 552) refers to as ‘political resources’. They have established a subsidiary professional group called the Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers South Africa (ZIESA). This is a branch/affiliate of the

Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers. Through this institute they have attempted to voice their collective concerns in view of reaching a memorandum of understanding with ECSA:

...the Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers South Africa (ZIESA) branch has met with ECSA and we have listed a number of grievances from our members and we have taken that to ECSA and ECSA has promised to look into it, but at the end of the day with ECSA what matters the most is your skin colour (Tineyi: 20/10/2011).

This information arose in the focus group discussion that was conducted at the end of the individual data collection process by two participants, (of which one was a committee member ZIESA). Friendship networks to share this information need mobilizing arguably. It is in their interest to voice grievances as a collective.

South Africa and other countries can learn useful lessons from Australia's example in this regard. It reformed its programs for accrediting skilled migrants' qualifications to include competency based assessments. This has been praised as a way of democratizing skills recognition via a simple principle that; if you can do what is required-you pass and you qualify for professional recognition (Groutis 2003; Hawthorne 2002).

#### *6.3.5. Transfer of skills*

High on the agenda, at least from the government's standpoint, for the employment of skilled migrant workers was to ensure that the skills were successfully transferred to locals (Copans 2008). Yet, some of the participants report that in the subsections in which they work provided no systems for the transferring of skills to locals:

...that was the point of recruiting us so that we can transfer the skills but three years down the line I don't see any structures put in place to, we don't have people who are understudying us (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

I think there is lack of skills transfer. I wouldn't know in the private sector but from my experience where I am working there no skills transfer not because people are not just paired together but there is not even a person whom you can be paired with (Keita: 28/09/2011).

In some sections the only trained people you find are Zimbabweans and there are no locals to pass the skills to... if there is a chance to pass on the skills I don't think any of us would hold back (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

It is clear from the narratives above that there are challenges with regard skills transfer or sharing between locals and migrant professionals in this organization. There are no enabling structures and local engineers who could benefit from shadowing these migrant professionals prefer, as was suggested before to work in the private sector rather than in the public sector.

Furthermore, there is very little or no commitment on the part of these Zimbabwean engineers to impart their skills to locals and at the same time local junior engineers are not willing to be understudies of foreign trained engineering:

...we are trying to transfer skills but you know when they just want you to transfer skills and get rid of you, you are not motivated...the mentality here is that in the government you don't really have to work... we requested that we start do some designs of the small projects (Chinotimba: 27/09/2011).

In my view, the effective transfer of skills between migrant professionals and locals would take place when migrant professionals are fully integrated into the workplace. This integration can foster a sense of trust between locals and foreigners in the workplace making it relatively easy to share their knowledge and skills. As Chinotimba's narrative makes clear, the attitude that locals have is that when you are employed in a government department there is no need to be committed to your work let



alone to work hard. Thus when these migrant professionals try to encourage their subordinates to learn new skills and apply them they are faced with resistance.

#### **6.4. Exiting the South African labour market?**

This discussion offered the participants the opportunity to provide self-assessments of their progress in the process of workplace integration.

##### *6.4.1. Loyalty to the organization*

Participants were asked whether they are actively planning to stay with or leave the organisation in the near future:

Where they pay more is where you go (Maromo: 04/10/2011).

...it's a question of opportunities. If a better paying opportunity comes I will go for it...when you have such a chance they are times when you decide to leave (Jones: 20/02/2011).

...if I am registered as a Professional Engineer, I don't see myself staying long, I would rather join a consulting firm, I think I would earn more...so there won't be any point for me to work for the government if I am a registered engineer. I can even start my own company (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

... but if the contract is renewed well I might consider staying longer mostly for stability purposes because I am looking at my son and the way I have moved him around I don't think it's really fair on him (Silvia: 20/09/2011).

...when we joined it was on eh, five-year contracts, so I presume at the end of the contract...if nothing happens, which is sometime in 2014...I am half way through my contract...I will run it through to the end (Joe: 30/09/2011).

From these narratives, it is clear that the majority of participants are generally not committed to continue working for this government department. This is not surprising. In spite of the scarcity of their skills and

their self-reported high competence, they are only employed on fixed-term contracts. By the time of the interviews, two to two and half years of their contracts remained and there was no guarantee that the contracts would be renewed. Secondly, these participants were frustrated by the fact that they had little or no opportunities for upward mobility at work. Finally chances were restricted for continued professional growth because there is no funding for further academic training for these migrant professionals.

Silvia and Joe, though admitting that they were frustrated with the precariousness of their employment, nonetheless intended to see out their contracts. For Silvia, a married woman living with her husband and children, the decision to stay is influenced by her concern for her family's stability. She expressed concerns over the impact of continuously changing jobs on her son who was already attending school in Pretoria. The desire to stay despite frustrations also confirms the fact that, generally, first generation migrants often view difficult circumstances in a positive light; as a price they *must* pay for leaving their homeland (see Maxwell 2010).

Khoo, Hugo and McDonald's (2008: 222) found in their Australian study that given the opportunity, migrant professionals who are hired on a temporary basis prefer to stay longer in the labour market of the host country if they are convinced that there is a better future for them and their children than in their country of origin.

If this provincial department intends to retain these migrant professionals, there are well established ways of eliciting commitment from professionals that can be employed. These include; competence recognition (through bonuses and other awards such as employee of the year), training (academic and work-related), skills development and career management (see Legault & Chasserio 2009).

#### *6.4.2. Social functions/events*

Attending and participating in social functions is not mandatory. Individuals have the right to choose whether to attend or not. Thus, whether or not migrant professionals attend such functions is important for at least three reasons. First, social functions offer opportunities for migrants and locals to overcome perceived and real fears/suspensions they may have toward each other that may in turn aid to build trust between them. In my view, that kind of trust is important in building workplace integration. The second reason is directly linked to the first. Social gatherings involving locals and migrants offer migrants opportunities to gain and improve on local language proficiency, an important country-specific skill. Lastly, whether migrant professionals attend such gathering or not indicates if they personally want to integrate or are already integrated into the workplace:

...the organization has got social functions like games, we have got football and netball teams and at times they just call for a social gathering or party where they actually try to bring people together in a relaxed environment where people can enjoy refreshments... I participate in these things... I am now part and parcel of the family. Like a family we know how each and everyone behave so we interact with each other very well; we have got no problems (Jones: 20/02/2011).

...there is soccer on Wednesdays and there are other various games if you go in there (pointing) there is a pool table and darts so here and there I participate in those indoor games, there is darts, there is pool and table tennis (Joe: 30/09/2011).

...very little really...recently we attended a 'Funny Walk', that's all, there is not much that my employer does... Well maybe it just passes me (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

Those things (social functions) just take our money through contributions (joked) but we contribute in the end we never make excuses (Tineyi: 04/10/2011).

Only one of the twelve participants claimed that he was not aware of any social functions organized at work and for that reason he had not taken part in such events. The rest of the participants acknowledge that their employer offers the opportunity to organize such social events and they are organized from time to time. Clearly these migrant professionals do not attend all social functions that are organized at their workplace. Nonetheless, those who attend now and then reported that they encounter no problems with their local counterparts at such gatherings. In fact as Jones' account shows these events allow them to come together and have some fun and also allow individuals to interact with each other in a relaxed environment. Taking into account the potential of such a platform for building lasting friendships and unity, speeding up workplace integration, actively encouraging all their employees to take part in such events is beneficial. This may also result in increased tolerance for foreigners/outsideers in the society at large and in that way contribute to the development of a stable heterogeneous democracy in South Africa.

Finally, the future plans of these migrant professionals also provide a good measure/indication of migrant professionals' workplace integration.

#### *6.4.3. Future plans*

Here the focus is on the short to long term plans that these migrant professionals have set for themselves and their views about returning home.

##### *6.4.3.1. Short term plans*

Participants were asked one open ended question; *where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?* Their responses sheds some light on whether or not they have developed a sense of belonging to the

organization they work for and that is a good indicator of where they are in terms of workplace integration:

...it's difficult to predict but assuming the situation remains as it is I would not complain to be in SA for the next five years to come. But if things change for the worst we always want to look for better things elsewhere (Jones: 20/02/2011).

I would like to get registered as a Pr Engineer...then from there on, I think other things will fall into place...but I don't foresee myself going back to Zimbabwe in the next five years so I will be here... if I pass my management course...I will scout the industry to see if can get opportunities (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

...self employed, doing my own practice... it could be here or it could be anywhere (Joe: 30/09/2011).

Despite having only two and a half years left on their contracts of employment and their status as temporary residencies in South Africa, more than half of the participants in this study foresee their short term future in South Africa. Furthermore, in spite of the challenges they face with regard to general upward mobility in the South African economy, they were not about to give up their pursuit of such upward mobility. Some actually foresee themselves opening their own engineering firms in South Africa. Thus bleak social mobility combined with feelings of disappointment with a society that generally does not recognize their skills and abilities leaves self-employment as a more desirable option for these migrant professionals. This finding is in line with Mata and Pendakur's (1999: 380-381) argument that in many countries where upward mobility for economic migrants is difficult, often times, migrants turn to self-employment in the host country.

#### *6.4.3.2. Long term plans: returning home?*

Participants were asked if they had any plans to leave South Africa and go to another country or return home:

...it depends on a lot of factors. I would want to process my permanent residence if it's approved I may stay here forever. But I do have investments in Zimbabwe... That might pull me back, some of these things you never know until you see if you can settle permanently here. This country is volatile; things can change (Joe: 30/09/2011).

...in the long run if I have not fully integrated myself here and become a South African I would return to Zimbabwe (Muranda: 02/10/2011).

...home is home, you can't really say you are happy where you work the way that we work, I am telling you that you are bound not to proceed to the next level just because you are not local, even if you become a permanent resident still you will be limited to that movement (Orbet: 30/06/2011).

I would consider going back but then, my family is now based here...I will really have to evaluate the gains and opportunities for my children, those are the things I have to consider before I relocate them (Nicky: 28/09/2011).

...going back home is not an option given the situation that is still there... what made me move actually, was that I couldn't provide for the kids, I couldn't even provide for their education... even now the situation hasn't really changed...my kids deserve to have a decent education (Silvia: 20/09.2011).

It is crucial to note that during interviews, participants were particularly reluctant to talk about whether or not they would return to Zimbabwe in the near or far future. This is a sensitive subject and is made worse by feelings of mistrust on the part of the participants who generally feared, despite guarantees of anonymity, that their responses may be used to victimize them. They consistently emphasized that they loved their home country and that 'there is no place like home' for them but they would rather continue to 'glean' at the margins of the South African labour market than return to Zimbabwe and face the situation that forced them to leave. They are playing a wait and see game and the majority were

undecided about their future plans and were keen to leave their options open.

Having eye-witnessed the economic collapse of their home country in a relatively short period of time and with the memories of the resulting economic hardships still fresh in their minds, participants were uncertain about their long-term future. They were concerned that the economic situation in South Africa may also unexpectedly deteriorate and if it does they would have no choice but to be on the move once more. At the same time, none of these participants were willing to return home before the political and economic situation they fled changes positively. Their indecisiveness is also seen in the fact that, despite their fear that South Africa's economy may unexpectedly collapse, at the same time they are reluctant to return to their homeland if the situation there has not improved, they were not actively looking for opportunities to migrate to rich countries in the global north.

Participants who had children living with them in South Africa, like Silvia and Nicky, were more concerned about the opportunities and welfare of their children. They do not want their children to suffer the situation that led them to leave Zimbabwe, so for them, returning home was out of question until the economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe improved significantly.

In line with the aforementioned, Khoo, Hugo and McDonald (2008: 222-223) concluded that the decision to return home for skilled migrants is based on the conditions in their country of origin weighed against those in the destination country rather than the temporary nature of the migration program that was used to attract them initially.

In a nutshell, the results of the self-assessment questions asked in an attempt to tease out the subjective views of these migrant professionals' workplace integration shows that each individual has their own particular way of dealing with the uncertainties they face. This confirms already known facts about migrant integration in general. For example, migration research has already revealed that there are multiple pathways to integration and assimilation and this is a process that happens over time. Furthermore, first generation migrants tend to minimise the negative circumstances they may face in the host country and in doing so over time they become integrated economically, socially and politically in the host country (Maxwell 2010; Kesler 2010; Stalker 1994).

## **6.5. Conclusion**

South Africa's racial ordering during the colonial and apartheid eras institutionalised deep-seated racial divisions in the wider societal realm and the workplace. In post-apartheid South Africa the ANC-led government has set up and continues to put in place structural measures to undo the impact of the past political and workplace regimes. However, some of the measures put in place result in new, unexpected challenges. Thus, South Africa continues to battle with structural unemployment and critical skills shortages, which has necessitated the importation of skilled migrants. At the same time there has been labour market restructuring as '*racial-Fordism*' in South Africa gave way to '*flexible accumulation*'. These changes, however, too divide the South African labour market and workplace. These skilled migrants find themselves in a divisive environment and there are limited opportunities for their workplace integration. This study reveals that although migrant professionals and locals co-exist and work together there is still a lot more to be done to improve or facilitate migrants' workplace integration. There are structural barriers to migrant professionals' full workplace integration that need to be



addressed for well integrated workplaces form strong foundations for stable diverse democracies.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### 7. Introduction

The global development of capitalism and the transition from *'Fordism'* to *'flexible accumulation'* intensified international migration especially the migration of professionals. *'Flexible accumulation'* hinges on different forms of flexibilities mainly labour market flexibility, which is, made possible by dividing the labour force into 'core' and 'periphery' (Harvey 1989; Gilbert, Burrows & Pollert 1992). Generally, migrant professionals do not easily fit into either the 'core' or 'periphery'; they occupy an ambiguous floating position. They enjoy certain privileges that are accorded only to the 'core' group such as high salaries and fulltime employment and on the other hand they are faced with challenges that the periphery group is faced with such as short term contracts or temporary employment. This creates a unique set of both barriers and opportunities for their workplace integration.

The workplace has the potential to perform an integrative function that no other social institution can perform in heterogeneous societies (Estlund 2003: 104). Thus, it is imperative that the state, businesses, labour organisations and other social institutions work together to establish well integrated workplaces for they play important roles in establishing stable diverse democracies.

The contestation and resistance that characterises the labour process is reflected in the general workplace order and workplace relations. Under the 'apartheid workplace regime' the South African workplace was deeply divided along the racial divide between black and white (as well as coloured and Indian) workers (Von Holdt 2003: 5-8). In post-apartheid South Africa, however, added lines of division are reflected in the

workplace. To begin with nationality and ethnic cleavages are also reflected in the workplace. In addition to that, the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' resulted in the restructuring of the labour market thus the labour force is divided into a core/periphery binary based on skills or expertise. These factors put immense pressure on the relatively new democratic society.

### **7.1. Discussion of data**

This study reveals that migrant professionals, just like other migrants, use social networks to find information about and secure employment in South Africa. Employers of such migrant professionals also benefit financially by exploiting already existing social networks to fill in skilled job posts. In other words, migrant professionals unwittingly use their social capital in ways that subsidize the recruiting costs for their employers; hence employers only pay for the work done. This is neither new nor peculiar to South Africa (see Rodriguez 2004; Hernandez-Leon 2004).

A second key finding is that the information circulated through these social networks is not always 'true' especially the information dealing with employment conditions and career opportunities in the host country. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that migrant professionals can and should use these social networks to deal with their lack of 'political resources' which puts them, collectively, in a disadvantaged position in a split labour market such as South Africa's. This will allow them to raise their voices collectively in order to push for structural reforms especially with regard to the issue of skills recognition. They have established a platform for such collective action in the form of the ZIESA. However, this study reveals that the majority of the participants in this research project either do not know about the ZIESA or do not take it seriously. The construction industry presents a good starting point for promoting

workplace integration for this is a labour intensive industry that employs significant numbers of migrant workers.

Thirdly, the changing nature of work following the transition from '*Fordism*' to '*flexible accumulation*' and the subsequent economic restructuring continues to fragment the South African labour market. Many, new fault lines are emerging in addition to the racial divide that characterised '*racial-Fordism*' prior to the democratic transition. Indeed, some of the characteristics that existed such as the racial order continue to operate in post-apartheid South Africa despite structural measures put in place to abolish all racial inequalities. Therefore, it is important for policy makers to look beyond structural changes to include other seemingly minor factors such as strategies and programs to encourage and promote workplace integration.

The difficulties of attaining professional recognition for migrant professionals evidently stall workplace integration. The persistence of such structural forms of exclusion has negative ramifications on the engineering and construction of a plural democratic society. The tensions and ethnic antagonisms, whether real or perceived, overt or covert, that occur in the workplace can gradually extend to all forms of interaction between locals and foreigners or generally insiders and outsiders in the wider community.

It is thus imperative, at least for public organizations to think creatively about ways to fully integrate all their employees in the workplace and curb all forms of exclusion based on racial, gender, ethnicity, or national differences. As suggested earlier, given the fact that the construction industry is a labour intensive industry, increased levels of tolerance between foreigners and locals in this industry, will go a long way in reducing xenophobic behaviour and conflict thus contributing to the

building of a democratic South Africa. Improved tolerance within the public sector of the construction industry will also improve service delivery to communities. This will help the South African government, in general, to ease the masses that have grown impatient with the state because they do not see the benefits of democracy.

This study lays the ground for further research on this subject. More and further conclusive explanations and arguments on the issues highlighted in this study can be reached by conducting a large scale study. A larger scale study of comparative nature across migrant professionals from other countries, more than one organization, and the employers as well as officials of the concerned professional organizations, could yield more in-depth findings. In terms of data gathering, interviews can be coupled with workplace ethnography in order to observe the interactions between migrant professionals and locals including what happens at construction sites and social functions. And finally as it is clear that workplace integration occurs over time and across generations, a longitudinal study that covers an extended period of time would be useful.

It is clear that South Africa's transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy was aided by the struggle for workplace democracy. The reforms that were made in the workplace in the late stages of apartheid paved the way for the political transition. In other words, the workplace proved to be a vehicle for change and a platform for developing democratic practice and deliberations. In the post apartheid South Africa new issues have arisen that threatens the stability of workplace democracy and by way of extension the nature and state of political democracy. One of the key issues facing post-1994 South Africa is the existence of large numbers of foreign African migrant workers. This is coupled with high structural unemployment rate and acute skills shortages make the South African workplace a fiercely contested terrain. This study

reveals some of the undemocratic practices, regarding promotion and skills recognition that characterise the post apartheid South African workplace. Thus, considering the historical role played by the labour movement in general and the fight for workplace democracy in particular toward political democracy in South Africa it is imperative to take serious measures towards maintaining workplace democracy. One way to do so is by promoting migrant workplace integration. Strong, stable and well integrated workplaces are the foundation for stable political democracy.

## **7.2. Recommendations and Suggestions**

- South African policy makers should devise pragmatic ways to retain migrant professionals who have significant experience of working in the country. Considering South Africa's position in global trade, it is beneficial for it to 'hold on' to these migrant professionals. Migrant professionals compensate for the loss of highly skilled workers to developed countries. Furthermore, retaining experienced migrant professionals boost innovation, creativity and diversity in critical sectors of the economy such as the construction industry.
- Organizations that hire migrant professionals need to seriously consider shouldering part of the social reproduction costs regarding migrant professionals. For example, such organizations should consider subsidizing the costs of further educational training of their employees. This would contribute to workplace integration which in turn would help facilitate sustainable democracy in the country.
- This study reveals that very little skills transfer and knowledge sharing is taking place between migrant professionals and the locals in the public sector of the construction industry in this case study. It is imperative for organizations who hire migrant professionals to put in place structures that allow for and encourage

skills exchange and knowledge sharing. Such organizations should also introduce promotion systems that reward productivity and excellence more than political loyalty.

- There is an urgent need to further embark on progressive reforms of the skills and qualification evaluation and accreditation process with regard to foreign acquired academic qualifications in South Africa. The findings of this study suggest that the current evaluation system of foreign obtained qualifications in the civil engineering profession is dysfunctional. Literature in this field contain a plethora of examples that show that self regulated professional bodies such as ECSA face difficulties in evaluating foreign obtained qualifications. Invariably, such self regulated professional bodies wrongfully conclude that migrant professional's qualifications and experience are inferior to local qualifications (see Girard & Bauder 2005; Hawthorne 2002; Groutis 2003; Duvander 2001). As suggested earlier Australia's reform programs in the 1980s and 1990s provide an example that South Africa can learn from.

### **7.3. Endnote**

Stable and sustainable democracies cannot be built on shaky, disintegrating workplaces marred by ethnic and national antagonisms and cleavages. More effort must be put in to building democratic workplaces in post-apartheid South Africa.

This case study of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg reveals that migrant professionals are far from being fully integrated in the workplace. They are faced with structural constraints and barriers that need to be redressed. The matter of professional recognition can be solved by embarking on

progressive reforms of the accreditation process. This is central if South Africa is to retain migrant professionals over the long run.



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## Appendix 1

### Profile of Participants (1)

Pseudonym	Age in years	Sex	Marital status	Number of years in SA	Ethnic group	Languages Spoken
Jones	43	Male	Married	3 years	Shona	English, Chishona & IsiZulu
Orbet	39	Male	Married	4 years	Shona	English, Chishona, IsiZulu & IsiNdebele
Silvia	37	Female	Married	3 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Chinotimba	38	Male	Married	5 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Nicky	39	Male	Married	4 years	Shona	English and Chishona
Joe	35	Male	Married	5 years	Ndebele	English, Chishona, IsiNdebele, & IsiZulu
Keita	31	Male	Single	4 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Muranda	31	Male	Married	4 years	Ndebele	English, Chishona, IsiNdebele, IsiZulu, Xhosa & SeTswana
Tineyi	31	Male	Single	5 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Maromo	31	Male	Engaged	4 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Forward	33	Male	Married	5 years	Shona	English & Chishona
Nancy	41	Female	Married	5 years	Shona	English & Chishona

## Appendix 2

### Profile of Participants (2)

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Job title</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>ECSA Membership</b>	<b>Interview date</b>
Jones	Deputy Chief Engineer	Pretoria	Candidate member	20/02/2011
Orbet	Deputy Director	Pretoria	Non Member	30/06/2011
Silvia	Deputy Director	Pretoria	Non Member	20/09/2011
Chinotimba	Specialist Engineer	Pretoria	Candidate member	27/09/2011
Nicky	Specialist Engineer	Pretoria	Candidate member	28/09/2011
Joe	Acting- Chief Engineer	Pretoria	Candidate member	30/09/2011
Keita	Specialist Engineer	Johannesburg	Non Member	01/10/2011
Muranda	Chief Engineer	Johannesburg	Candidate member	02/10/2011
Tineyi	Chief Engineer	Johannesburg	Candidate member	04/10/2011
Maromo	Deputy- Chief Engineer	Johannesburg	Candidate member	04/10/2011
Forward	Chief Engineer	Johannesburg	Candidate member	04/10/2011
Nancy	Chief Engineer	Johannesburg	Candidate member	04/10/2011

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview Guide**

Dear. Sir/Madam

My name is Splagchna Ngoni Chikarara and I am a student in Industrial Sociology and Labour studies at the University of Pretoria. I am studying the experiences of skilled Zimbabwean migrants in general and their integration into the South African workplace in particular in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. In an attempt to maintain your anonymity, your name will not be recorded. Would you mind if I record the commentary of the interview? Furthermore, let me inform you that you have the right not to answer any question on the interview and you are welcome to withdraw from the interview at any time. Once again I thank you for agreeing to participate. I will begin the interview by asking you a few closed questions, and then I will ask you some open ended questions about specific spaces in society regarding your experiences with state institutions, the workplace and the community. If there is a question that you do not understand, please ask for clarification.

#### **Biographical Information**

1. What is your nationality?
2. Are you a permanent resident?
3. What is your ethnic group?
4. Which languages do speak?
5. What is your gender?
6. What is your marital status?
7. How long have you been living in South Africa?

### **Educational Profile and Working Experience**

8. Before you came to South Africa where you working and in what capacity?
9. What is your highest educational qualification?

### **Getting a job**

10. Please explain how you got a job here in South Africa?
11. Is this your first job here in South Africa? If not would you to tell me about your experiences on your previous workplace(s)? Why did you leave?

### **Relationship with top management**

12. How would you describe your experiences with your superiors at work?
13. Do you participate in decision making in the company? If so, do you feel that your superiors treat you and your suggestions in the same fashion as they would your South African colleagues?
14. Are there cases of misunderstanding between you and your superiors? What kind of misunderstanding should there be any?
15. In your opinion what are the main reasons for these misunderstandings and what can be done to reduce such?

### **Relationship with peers**

16. How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues, ie those at the same organizational level?
17. Do your colleagues accept you as an equal or do you feel discriminated against, if possible give examples?
18. Are there cases of communication problems or misunderstandings? Give examples and possible solutions?
19. Do you feel as an integral part of a team? If not what do you think should be done differently in this company?



20. Is there any outstanding incidence of misunderstanding with your colleagues that you would like to relate?

### **Relationship with subordinates**

21. Do you perform supervision or managerial duties? If so how many people on average do you supervise or manage?
22. How would you describe your ordinary day at work?
23. Do you encounter communication problems and subsequent misunderstandings?
24. If you supervise locals, do they readily accept you as their superior?
25. Are there any institutional provisions to help you stamp your authority?
26. Is there any particular incidence of misunderstanding between you and your subordinate(s) that you would like to relate?

### **Dealing with customers**

27. Do you deal with customers on behalf of the company you work for and why do you think you are asked to if you do? If not, why not do you think?
28. What are the challenges you face, if there is any?
29. Is there any particular incidence between you and a customer that you would like to relate?

### **Skills development and training**

30. Are your skills and qualifications readily applicable and accepted in this country?
31. Do you think you need further training and why?
32. Are you required to train your subordinates and what have you experienced doing so?
33. Does your employer think you need further training?

34. What do you think can be done to solve the skills shortage in the construction industry?

### **Adapting to a new organizational culture**

35. Are there any fundamental differences in the way work is organised and done at this company compared to your experience of working elsewhere?
36. How have you managed to adapt or are you struggling to adapt?
37. Are you satisfied with the ranking system employed at this company?
38. Would you recommend any changes?

### **Team working and communication problems**

39. Do you work in a team?
40. If you do, what are the challenges you face or faced and how do you go about resolving them?
41. Do you feel at ease working in a team?
42. Do you see yourself as an important member of the team?

### **Remuneration and Promotion**

43. Do you feel that your salary matches your skills and the duties you perform?
44. Are there any salary discrepancies between your salary and your South African colleagues who are at the same organizational level as you are?
45. Are there open opportunities for promotion and how do you feel about your position?
46. Have you been promoted at this company or any other company in South Africa?

### **Joining professional organizations**

47. Are you a registered member of any professional organisation in South Africa and what is your experience of joining the organization?
48. Are there any special benefits you are getting as a result of joining a professional organization?
49. Do you in anyway participate in the activities of your professional organization?

### **Social functions at work**

50. Does your company organise social functions for its workers and do you participate in those functions?
51. Social functions at work: do you feel like a part of the company or do you feel left out as an outsider?
52. How well do you get along with your fellow employees at such social functions?

### **Reliability and loyalty to the organization**

53. Do you intend to change your job anytime soon or in the future and why?
54. When did you join your current company and have you worked elsewhere in this country?
55. How many jobs do you hold currently and do you do private jobs or projects, if you do, can you tell more about that?

### **Future plans**

56. Where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?
57. If the Zimbabwean political and economic situation changes for the better would you consider going back?
58. Do you intend to move to another country in Africa or beyond and why?

**Thank you very much for your participation!**

## Appendix 4

### Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **CONSENT FORM: RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

My name is Splagchna Ngoni Chikarara. I am enrolled for an MSoc Sci Masters degree in Industrial Sociology and Labour Studies at the University of Pretoria. I have decided to study the workplace integration of Zimbabwean engineers working in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg. The full title of my research is: **Professionals 'gleaning' at the margins: the workplace integration of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.**

I am writing to you to ask for your participation in this research project. I want to find out what are your own lived experiences of being a migrant professional in the workplace(s) in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Your participation is voluntary and will be much appreciated. This means that you can decide whether you want to participate or not. If you participate you are free to stop at any stage. I would like to tape record the interview(s), which I will type out with your permission. If you prefer not to be taped, I will nevertheless like to interview you and write up our discussion after the interview has taken place.

Your participation is anonymous. I am not going to use your name or the name of the organization you work for in my analysis. The consent form (this letter) will be kept separate from the interview transcripts.

The information obtained from you in the interview will be safely kept, following the University of Pretoria rules. The data will be for my research

purposes only. That is my Masters Dissertation and academic research papers. Your participation is deeply appreciated; it will help me to understand this important matter sociologically.

Thank you for considering my request. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the attached form. If you require more information, please feel free to discuss it with me or you can contact my supervisor, Professor Janis Grobbelaar at the Department of Sociology of the University of Pretoria on (012) 420-3744

Chikarara S. N

## **Appendix 5**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Professionals ‘gleaning’ at the margins: the workplace integration of Zimbabwean engineers in the public sector of the construction industry in Pretoria and Johannesburg.**

I hereby agree to participate in the above mentioned research project. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage. I agree/ don't agree that the interview may be tape-recorded and typed out. And the information may be used for Mr Chikarara's Masters Degree in Industrial Sociology and Labour Studies and his academic research papers only. I also understand that my name will not be used in the research report in order to ensure my anonymity.

#### **PARTICIPANT**

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

#### **RESEACHER**

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

DATE: