

The opacities of Migration Management

“A nation is defined by how its people meet the gravest of difficulties – whether they work together and confront their challenges as one, united by a common purpose, or whether they surrender to the problems before them.”

President Cyril Ramaphosa, SONA 2023

Introduction

Amid tensions between Operation Dudula, an anti-migrant group and migrants, little effort has been made to caution the anti-migrant group. Silence looms and the public is left with questions than answers. In the State of the Nation Address (SONA), an annual sitting where the public expects to be addressed on all matters affecting the nation, some issues were overlooked. Surprisingly although migrants are often scapegoated into being responsible for the criminality in the country, there was no specific mention about better migration management plans in the SONA speech. Instead, the President’s speech highlighted some of the major challenges and victories that had been experienced and shared by the nation. Characterized by words of consolation and motivation for resilience and hope, it truly was a touching speech addressing citizen’s concerns. With the ongoing state turbulence affecting the nation’s economy, it is not surprising the country had been declared a state of crisis. Faced by the realities of unemployment, violence, crime, corruption, electricity shortages and ongoing pandemic effects, the state continues to be wounded mercilessly. The state of crisis comes at the backdrop of the load shedding. Businesses are shutting down, unemployment is rising, production is being delayed and while all this is unfolding stringent regulations are playing out at borders and social boundaries. Both officials and citizens are finding themselves hand in hand patrolling spaces in search of the ‘foreigner’. The major goal is expulsion.

A matter of rewinding

In late 2021, the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit which served Zimbabwean asylum seekers to be able to reside, work and study in South Africa was scrapped. A grace period of 12 months was granted in 2022 and later on, an additional 6 months was granted from January to June 2023. As a result, about 180 000 Zimbabweans risk being undocumented and consequently deported to a country they had fled due to socioeconomic and political unrest. What happens to those families? Some have children who were born in South Africa, what then happens to

their studies and futures? The opening of schools earlier in the year also saw migrant children being uprooted from some schools in the Gauteng Province by the anti-migrant campaign led by Operation Dudula. This was due to the limited pupil school placements. There were not enough spaces to accommodate all pupils. The matter was one of the resources, an issue that had to be addressed by the government.

With the looming court battle over Zimbabwean Exemption Permits scrapping by the Minister of Home Affairs, fingers continue to be pointed at migrants. They are believed to be responsible for the shortage of resources and levels of criminality. The criminality claims have since been rejected by the courts on the basis of lack of evidence. Such utterances paint migrants in the negative light negating their countless positive contributions within different sectors of the nation. Some are educators, industrial workers, professionals etc who have continued to fortify the states processes. The state's decision to scrap permits contributes to the crises we have today. In the event they are deported, employment positions may open up however the transition will be a shaky one. With the constant brain drain to the West by the youth, and loss of key migrant economic players, the state's economic downfall comes at a worser time when the country has been [grey listed](#). This presents detrimental effects to the economy.

Questioning resilience

Proven to be a strategic asset, resilience invites efforts of endurance, flexibility, and survival. The Presidents speech was one that pushed this narrative. Of the common issues within the state, unemployment, corruption, and crime topped the charts. To curb these, the government has tried implementing stringer policies and laws as well as planned on supporting small business owners to generate self-income. While commendable to a certain degree, the migrant population risks marginalization. Immigration remains trapped in the emergent with constant strife and tension building. The Operation Dudula continues to make its rounds 'cleaning up' communities of migrants in a bid to solve social issues. This is a practice of active citizenship however it has been weaponized to target migrants in its 'clean-up campaign'. What started off as a cry for attention from the government for the crippling social issues has since undergone morphosis to mimic Afrophobia. According to the South African Constitution, everyone has a right to freely express themselves however this does not extend

to the ‘incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.’ To survive does not translate to relentlessly eliminate the supposed competitors of resources. What would it mean to disabuse notions of humanity and conviviality? What kind of South Africa would it be?

Self-reflection

Despite the President’s need to rally together citizens against what is believed to be largely affecting the nation, his silence on the violences perpetuated against migrants is rather concerning. In his speech addressing the nation he mentioned the nation’s true character would be revealed in times of crisis. What is the true character being revealed here, when migrants are othered and the state constantly overlooks tensions between locals and migrants? In the words of Nelson Mandela, President Ramaphosa shared how *“our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.”*¹ Are the deeds emphasized by Nelson Mandela a true reflection of the contemporary South Africa? There is need to reflect as a nation, no nation is an island. To be human is to constantly negotiate and renegotiate the essence of being. That is the first step towards resilience.

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¹ http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS176&txtstr