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HUNGER, ANGER,
AND STRANGERS:
PRECARIOUS STATUS
AND FOOD INSECURITY
AMONG REFUGEES AND
ASYLUM SEEKERS
IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This discussion paper analyzes the impact of a multiplicity of actors, policies, and practices on the food security of refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa's urban spaces. Building on recent work that focuses on the legal production of illegality, institutionalization of precarity, and the reproduction of bordering practices by the state and citizenry, the paper reviews how South Africa's migration governance processes coalesce with societal xenophobic tendencies to shape food security outcomes for forcibly-displaced populations. The discussion paper aims to fill a policy and research gap through understanding the experiences of displaced persons at the intersection of food security, migration governance, and everyday life.

Keywords

food security, migration, forced displacement, refugees, precarity, Global South, South Africa

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Introduction

The relationship between forced migration and food security, a neglected subject until recently, is attracting growing interest from researchers and policymakers (Anderson et al 2014, Gichunge et al 2015, Haines et al 2018, Henderson et al 2017, Lawlis et al 2018). However, much of this and other literature has focused to date on the nutritional, dietary, and health impacts on refugees of migration to cities in the Global North. When researchers direct their attention away from western countries, they tend to focus on the food insecurity of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in camp settings in Africa (Gee et al 2018, Oliver and Ilcan 2018) or on urban settings in the Arab world (Abdollahi et al 2015, Ghattas et al 2014, Khakpour et al 2019). Those who have focused on African urban settings tend to embed the food security experience of forcibly-displaced communities within broader discussions of the food insecurity of all migrants (Chikanda et al 2020, Tawodzera et al 2015), or the urban poor in general (Crush and Frayne 2010, Dodson et al 2012). As recent studies show, the distinctive food security experiences of urban refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa therefore demand greater research and policy attention (Hunter-Adams 2017, Maharaj et al 2017, Napier et al 2018).

When migration and critical citizenship researchers study how governance policies and practices produce illegality and precarious status, they only rarely consider the specific food security outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers (Baban al 2017, Carney and Krause 2020, Ilcan et al 2018, Goldring et al 2009). While there is some interest in the role of entities other than the nation-state in mediating inclusion and exclusion, there is a dearth of literature generally on how the amalgamation of state and non-state actors utilize notions of citizenship to exclude those deemed outside the grasp of the state. Using South Africa as a case study, this discussion paper focuses on refugees and asylum seekers' experiences and illuminates the actors and forces that condition their lived food security experience. The paper explores how policies and practices

towards refugees and asylum seekers produce and sustain precarious status and how this status shapes the food (in)security of Congolese, Burundian, and Somali refugees.

Through this lens, we can better understand the various ways states produce illegality through legal processes and policy prescriptions institutionalize precarious migratory status, and create "spaces of non-existence" where unwanted others are located "between physical and legal presence" and rendered "legally absent" (Coutin 2008: 28-29, De Genova 2002, 2013, Goldring et al 2009). The paper conceptualizes the South African migration governance landscape as an "assemblage" of refugee exclusions in order to draw attention to the inter-relationship between the state and non-state actors that problematize legal presence, institutionalize precarious status, and induce restrictive bordering practices, resulting in conditions of food insecurity for refugees and asylum seekers. This approach illuminates how everyday experiences of illegality, precarious status, and bordering practices produced by the state and citizens are at the root of food insecurity among refugees and asylum seekers.

The paper uses the concept of assemblage to holistically consider refugee experiences and explore new ways of thinking about how the relations of state and non-state actors yield parlous and exclusionary outcomes for forcibly-displaced communities. The assemblage lens brings together elements of exclusionary citizenship, everyday spaces, bordering practices, and collective agency under the same purview, revealing the ambiguity and everyday negotiation and experience of precarity, differential inclusion, and limited access to citizenship rights. Ultimately, the production of illegality and precarity in South Africa occurs as asylum seekers navigate complex and lengthy registration and reception processes, asylum-renewal procedures, and refugee-status determination and decision-making, all of which have implications for food security.

The field research for this study was conducted in the South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria from October 2017 to March 2018. It encompassed a multi-methods qualitative

approach that included interviews, field observations and critical policy analyses. A total of 45 interviews were conducted in Cape Town with refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, and Somalia. The interviews were semi-structured, lasting 60–90 minutes, and took place at their place of business, the UNHCR Cape Town office, or public spaces. The interviews focused on the participants living conditions, access to documentation, social and political rights, employment, education, health care, food, humanitarian assistance, and their existence in a climate of violence and xenophobia. The research goal was to examine how one area of precarity exacerbates another, and how inadequate social and economic support and administrative bureaucracies exacerbate these experiences. In addition, interviews were conducted with government representatives, national and international non-governmental organizations, the UN, and community organizations aiding refugee populations in Cape Town, Pretoria or Johannesburg.

The paper unfolds as follows: the first section discusses how state and non-state actors converge to form an assemblage of refugee exclusions. The second explores how the state, through policy reforms and practices, produces illegality and precarious status and reinforces citizen xenophobic practices in South Africa. The next section considers how this environment shapes the food insecurity of persons with precarious status. The conclusion reflects on the implications of double marginalization for the food security of persons with precarious status.

Producing Illegality and Precarious Status

Some have argued that within the South African context, contemporary responses to migration are tethered to historical social, political, and economic realities embedded in apartheid policies and practices (Klotz 2016, Landau 2010, Ojong et al 2018, Peberdy 2009, Vigneswaran 2020). However,

South Africa's refugee protection regime is largely a post-apartheid phenomenon, as the apartheid state refused to recognize anyone as an asylum seeker or refugee. There is a fundamental conflict within South Africa's current legal framework which, in theory, provides progressive protection while simultaneously creating conditions that threaten the livelihoods of refugees and asylum seekers. The South African governance environment therefore mirrors Western discourses and approaches to migration restriction and exclusion (Ambrosini et al 2020, Menjívar 2014). Equally, it exposes how the state's failure to prevent and respond to xenophobic discrimination and violence creates conditions that reinforce vulnerability and have dire implications for livelihoods and food access. South Africa is therefore a microcosm of the global shift towards policy restrictions and extra-legal, arbitrary, and exclusionary migration-related practices.

This section of the paper explores how state and non-state actors produce illegality, precarity, and bordering insecurity in South Africa. These experiences of vulnerability shape refugees and asylum seekers struggle to gain recognition at various stages including entry into the country, access to reception centres and status, determination processes, the right to work and study, access to public social services and programs, and experiences of xenophobia and integration. Among their everyday experiences, refugees and asylum seekers are at risk of arrest, detention, deportation, and xenophobic violence. State institutions, through practices of policy implementation, and other non-state actors, due to organizational policies and practices, through limitations or complacency, play a crucial role in engendering the conditions of vulnerability, culminating in impacts on food security.

South Africa has some of the most progressive refugee legislation in Africa. It is a party to international and regional refugee conventions (such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 African Union Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa). Unlike many African countries, it has not restricted freedom of movement or established camps for refugees and asylum seekers. The

country's domestic law (the Refugees Act of 1998 and the Immigration Act of 2002), the Constitution, and other international human rights frameworks guarantee refugees and migrants' rights in the country. In practice, however, asylum seekers experience constrained access to these legal rights, and the lived experience of refugees and asylum seekers reflects a significant disconnect between the legal framework and their day-to-day reality.

Research on refugee governance in the country has drawn attention to the considerable irregularities in the asylum and broader migration management system (Amit 2011a, 2011b, Carciotto et al 2018). Recent policy shifts indicate increasing restriction, exclusion, deportation, and refoulement of asylum seekers (Amit 2015, Carciotto et al 2018, Crush et al 2017, Landau and Amit 2014, Tawodzera et al 2015). The state initiates exclusionary practices at the first point of contact. Carciotto et al's (2018) incisive and detailed report shows the inconsistencies, irregularities, and arbitrary restrictions imposed at external borders. These include limiting the issue of transit permits and deeming asylum seekers from specific countries inadmissible and "illegitimate". The recent policy shifts towards tighter restrictions has resulted in the institutionalization of these practices, increasing demand for border control in the name of security, denial of rights, and a new encampment policy for asylum seekers thus creating the real possibility of future camps for refugees and asylum seekers.

Beyond the point of entry, bordering practices and the production of institutionalized illegality and precarity are visible in the country's internal governance domain. Among other exclusionary practices, there is the normalization of processing delays at Refugee Reception Offices (RROs) run by the Department of Home Affairs. In 2011 and 2012, rather than increasing its capacity to meet demand, the Department instead closed two of its six RROs—Port Elizabeth (completely) and Cape Town (partially). The Port Elizabeth RRO closed due to the supposed exploitation of the asylum process by "economic migrants" from Southeast Asia (Carciotto et al 2018). Litigation by human rights organizations led to a court order mandating the

reopening of the Port Elizabeth RRO in October 2018. The partial closure of the Cape Town RRO means that it no longer accepts new asylum applications, only assisting asylum seekers who lodged their application before the closure (Carciotto et al 2018). In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the reopening of the Cape Town RRO, ruling that the partial shutdown was "substantively irrational and unlawful." To date, the Department of Home Affairs has defied the court orders.

These structural realities hamper access to the documentation that confers legal status for asylum seekers under the Refugees Act. For instance, it usually takes longer than the legally required two weeks for applicants to be registered and obtain documentation. The RROs' limited capacity, coupled with increased demand for asylum, has produced long queues that force people to camp out for nights on end at RROs (Amit 2015). In 2006, a young Zimbabwean man, Adonis Musati, died of starvation while waiting to get asylum papers at the Cape Town RRO. In response to this tragedy, the Adonis Musati project was established with the aim of empowering marginalized refugees and migrants in South Africa through "fostering sustainable support networks and encouraging personal development that achieves lasting change".

Chronic processing delays, administrative inefficiencies, and irregularities characterize the refugee protection system and have resulted in significant backlogs and bottlenecks (Amit 2011a). As a result, applicants for refugee status can wait from two to five years before a decision is made. One asylum seeker interviewed for this study had waited ten years. The lengthy wait periods compound the fact that asylum seekers must renew their permits every four to six months, which imposes substantial time and financial demands. One asylum seeker described his experience of the process as follows:

I must renew my papers every six months, and every single time I think of the process, I start feeling unwell. I feel stressed. The queues are long, and at times if you do not have money to pay, you do not get inside, or your papers are not renewed. At times, I go and do not get seen, or I am told to come back

another day. Those with money move through the process quickly (Interview with Congolese Asylum Seeker, Cape Town, October 21, 2017).

A father of five in Cape Town explained the implications for his family's well-being of permits having to be renewed at the office where they were issued:

We can no longer renew our permits here in Cape Town. So, we must travel thousands of kilometres to Musina [near the border with Zimbabwe] where we first applied, and this needs lots of money and time away from work and school for the children. At times, I do not have money to go, but if we do not renew, we will have problems. We might get arrested and have other problems at schools or going to the hospital. It is tough (Interview with Asylum Seeker, Cape Town, November 20, 2017).

Failure to renew asylum permits on time at the granting RRO can have grave consequences as refugees with expired asylum-seeker permits are unable to secure employment, register a business, or study. When caught by the police, they are fined and possibly arrested, detained, and deported. The risk of detention and deportation forces many holders of expired permits to become undocumented and hidden.

The opportunity costs of navigating the asylum system consume the refugee household's existing pool of cash and compromise potential livelihood gains. These costs include spending money for transportation and food to and from cities of residence to the relevant RRO, spending massive blocks of time in long queues, and utilizing limited resources to bribe gatekeepers to move them up the line. One asylum seeker described the loss of opportunity in this way:

You are tied to a certain point. You cannot say that you are in Cape Town and cannot find a job and decide to relocate to Limpopo or Gauteng. You cannot go easily, because you must come back within the six months or less to go and renew your paper. Suppose you are there, and you cannot get your salary on time, or it is insufficient money for you to move. You will become illegal (Interview with Asylum Seeker, Cape Town, October 30, 2018).

The institutionalized production of illegality and precarity not only undermines refugee protection and the right to seek asylum in safety and dignity but also has social and economic implications, including for food security. An NGO official explained the consequences of the onerous change in renewal procedures:

It is not fair. We have people that are sick, HIV-positive single moms, and they do not have the money, they can hardly survive, cannot pay rent, cannot buy food for their children. But now they expect to travel to Pretoria every three months and renew. Also, if they do not, then their grant lapses. So, they get no money, and they cannot take their medication without food. So, it is a violation of human rights. Even the courts have acknowledged that (Interview with Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town, November 23, 2018).

In addition to the financial drain on the limited resources of asylum permit holders, the frequency of renewal required by the system imposes administrative and quasi-legal restrictions on freedom of movement. These time frames—accompanied by livelihood precarity—make medium- and long-term social and economic planning extremely challenging.

The refugee status determination process is characterized by ever-growing wait times and irregularities in status decisions (Amit 2015, Crush et al 2017). With the government frequently exaggerating the numbers, statistics of asylum applications and figures remain a contested issue. In 2007, the backlog of pending asylum applications stood at 80,000, while the latest UNHCR Global Trends Report indicates that 191,3000 claims were pending at the end of 2017. Moreover, irregularities and deficiencies characterize the system's decision-making processes. These include errors in the application of both domestic and international law, reference to the wrong claimant or country due to haphazard copying and pasting, failure to provide adequate reasons, if any, for a decision, illogical conclusions and speculations, mistakes of fact, and selective use of internal relocation standards and country-of-origin information (Amit 2011a, 2011b).

Refugee status determination is subject to arbitrary decisions and claims are often adjudicated based purely on the state of origin information and not the individual experience of claimants (Crush et al 2017). As a result, asylum seekers from many countries have high rates of rejection. Overall, the refugee determination process has a rejection rate of 85-95% which, in turn, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that the state utilizes to advance the rhetoric that 90% of asylum seekers are “illegitimate” economic migrants who are exploiting the asylum system and South Africa’s culture of human rights (Crush et al 2017). As Amit (2011b) points out, although state rhetoric does not acknowledge the high rejection, it is evidence of a system that fails to fulfil its core administrative mandate and violates domestic and international refugee law.

The culture of corruption and bribery within the refugee status determination and documentation process, as well as within law enforcement, is not overtly state sanctioned but is certainly tolerated and forms a significant element of the state’s exclusionary logic (Alfaro-Velcamp et al 2017). Service providers frequently demand bribes before permitting refugees and asylum seekers to obtain documents or gain access to refugee reception centres or social services. Nor is it uncommon for refugees to have their documents confiscated or destroyed by police officers and migration officials if they are unable or unwilling to pay the bribe. As one refugee commented:

I always need to have cash on me if I need to give it to the police or immigration officers when I am threatened with arrest and detention. I sometimes do not have money, which makes things difficult (Interview with Somali Woman, Cape Town, February 2, 2018).

These abuses strain refugees’ limited financial resources, exacerbate their vulnerability (particularly for women and girls), and cultivate a culture of unfairness, corruption, and discrimination. Due to their vulnerable position, refugees and asylum seekers do not report these abuses, fearing that authorities might not address their claims or that officials will retaliate by frustrating asylum

applications or withholding documentation. One refugee woman concluded that “reporting does not help” (Interview, Cape Town, January 25, 2018).

As a result, refugees and asylum seekers suffer in silence. Reporting their concerns to the UNHCR and NGO actors does not yield favourable outcomes as these actors have limited power.

The impact of refugees and asylum seekers’ precarious status in South Africa is most visible in relation to physical security. Generally, refugees and asylum seekers are subject to the discretion of law enforcement and immigration officials. Law enforcement personnel often fail to inform refugees and asylum seekers in conflict with the law of their right to remain silent, the consequences of not remaining calm, and their rights to legal representation under Section 34 of the Constitution. Discriminatory practices such as xenophobic comments and explanations of rights in languages they do not understand are not uncommon. Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers with expired documentation are at highest risk. One refugee leader described the situation as follows:

It is not easy to work with the police here. Although I try to know the police in my area so that they can help members of my community or me when there are problems, police generally do not like helping refugees. They would speak to you in their local language even when they know you do not understand. If you tell them to talk in English, they would ask you to go back to your country and not welcome in South Africa. Police are generally hostile and easily corrupted with cash, and if you do not want to give them money, they refuse to help even though they must do so (Interview, Cape Town, November 28, 2017).

South Africans, both private individuals and government officials, generally have limited knowledge of the rights of different categories of migrant and the distinctions between different types of official documents. Police and other officials’ lack of knowledge and disregard of the distinction between refugees and other migrants are foundational to the xenophobic discrimination that shapes refugee

access to protection. One young refugee man, for example, described the reaction of health-care providers to his Section 24 asylum permit in this way:

Some of them have never seen a Section 24 document before. You know it could be their first time encountering a refugee [documentation]. Also, it is an A4-page document that looks unofficial, and the average South African may doubt its validity. So, when you present it, they sometimes think it is homemade and fake (Interview, Cape Town, January 24, 2018).

In addition to the various legal and bureaucratic processes that shape the status of refugees and asylum seekers, derogatory and dismissive concepts, such as *amakwerekwere*, parasites, disease agents, illegal immigrants, job-takers, asylum-abusers, and criminals, are pervasive in public discourse. These and other discursive exclusionary terms are used to describe refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants of African origin who reside in the country, regardless of their migratory status.

The state's unwillingness to effectively address the country's plague of xenophobia licenses continued violence and threats of violence on the ground (Crush et al 2015, Crush 2020). This governance failure is manifested in three distinct ways. First, despite pressure from internal and international human rights organizations—as well as the significant number of deaths, casualties, and destruction of property—the state has only convicted a few people for involvement or inciting outbreaks of xenophobic violence. Second, it has taken over two decades to finalize and adopt a National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which government committed to producing as long ago as 2001 at the Durban Conference of the same name, and there is considerable skepticism that it has the will to implement its anti-xenophobia provisions. Third, pending the adoption of the Plan, government did not establish any temporary mechanism for justice or interim measures to respond to the failures of the security apparatus to contain xenophobia. Akinola (2018) argues that, in the absence of such a political, economic, legal, and social

mechanism, gaps in addressing social ills continued to produce xenophobia. As a result, the normalization of xenophobic violence and discrimination has become an inadvertent state policy. Xenophobic discrimination and violence creates “spaces of non-existence” where people’s “presence is problematized” (Coutin 2003). This problematization hinders integration and creates various forms of precarity including livelihood precarity and insecurity, physical insecurity, social insecurity, and food insecurity.

Producing Food Insecurity

Any understanding of the food insecurity of refugees and asylum seekers needs to be located both in the state's failure to prevent and respond to xenophobic violence, and its contribution to illegality and institutionalization of precarity. The relationship between migration policy and practices and xenophobic violence is not only interactive but mutually reinforcing. The logic of xenophobia deems refugee and migrant bodies out-of-place and produces violent bordering practices delegitimizing their presence. What effects does this link produce on the food security for persons of precarious or illegal status? Sen's ground-breaking work conceived food security as a matter of entitlements. For him, entitlements are the “bundle of assets, relationships, resources, and livelihood strategies” (cited in Dodson et al 2012) legitimized by the legal system of society to command food. From this perspective, food insecurity is a product of the breakdown in a person or household's entitlements. In the spaces where migrant and citizen bodies clash and collide, entitlement bundles break down and collapse. This section of the paper is therefore concerned with the collapse in food entitlement bundles for asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa. The illegalized and precarious status of asylum seekers and refugees by the assemblage of exclusion is foundational to the collapse of their food entitlement bundles. The assemblage compromises access to income and livelihood security and disrupts safety nets and networks, restricting access to and the exchange of assets, resources, labour power, and

livelihood opportunities, all of which are necessary for food security.

Food security in urban areas is fundamentally tied to income. As Dodson et al (2012:16) note, “where food has to be purchased, income poverty is a significant determinant of food insecurity.” Status and documentation challenges hinder access to employment opportunities by refugees and asylum seekers. In a country with a high unemployment rate, competition for the limited opportunities in the low-skilled sector is fierce. Moreover, employers tend not to recognize refugee and asylum documentation or the accompanying right to work. One refugee recalled his experience in the private sector as follows:

Throughout my career, I did apply to RMB, which is an investment bank, and they were impressed with everything. But then, when it came to the fact that I was a refugee and they want a work permit, that sort of disqualified me. Even though it clearly states on the permit that you can enjoy socio-economic rights, the right to study and to work, like a South African would. I do not know if it is an issue of miscommunication or ignorance, but Section 24 (refugee status) is hardly recognized (Interview, Pretoria, March 23, 2018).

Many employers distrust refugee documentation and demand that they prove their right to work by showing work permits, which few possess. When employers hire refugees and asylum seekers, there is a tendency to take advantage of their status by offering below-market rates and long work hours. In low-skill jobs, such as in the service and security industries, refugees and asylum seekers cannot negotiate for competitive remuneration packages or demand conducive workplace conditions because they are not members of trade unions, nor do they have the resources to challenge employers in court:

They have no choice. Because they have nothing, they readily accept it [any job offer]. You see, what they want is something to survive on. Because they are disadvantaged, they are open to receiving lower offers (Interview with Congolese NGO Manager in Cape Town, November 30, 2017).

The precarious employment status of refugees and asylum seekers shapes access to food:

I have no work because I am an asylum seeker. It is difficult to get a job with my papers. So, I struggle to provide food for my family. It is hard when you have children and a wife depending on you. I leave home in the morning and see what I can find for my family. Today, I am spending the day here hoping that when I go, she [an informal vendor friend] will give something to take home (Interview in Pretoria, November 12, 2019).

Due to these barriers to formal employment, refugees and asylum seekers are forced into the unregulated informal economy to survive. Many have resorted to self-employment including opening small shops that sell essential items and necessities in townships and city centres (commonly male Somali and Ethiopian refugees), serving as informal parking attendants at parking bays (mostly male Congolese and Burundian refugees), and working as hairdressers in hair salons (predominantly female Congolese refugees). South Africans generally perceive refugees and asylum seekers as an economic threat and there have been widespread xenophobic attacks on informal refugee businesses (especially those owned by Somalis), including looting, murder, and burning down properties (Steinberg, 2018). Very typical was the account of one refugee in Cape Town:

I was also a victim of xenophobia. Once my small shop was broken into, I was beaten, and my stuff was looted. They took about R20,000. Another time, in the place where I was working, they came and beat us. They say we take their jobs and sisters (Interview in Cape Town, February 2018).

The attackers aim to forcefully remove these businesses and their owners and employees. Xenophobic violence produces livelihood precarity, physical insecurity, and food insecurity by depriving asylum seekers and refugees in the informal economy of income, destroying their means of livelihood, and excluding them from income-generating spaces.

A significant number of refugees and asylum seekers live in poor neighbourhoods with high

susceptibility to xenophobic violence and poverty. In South Africa income poverty for refugees and asylum seekers is a substantial determinant of food insecurity and is linked to both the institutionalization of precarious status and the xenophobic creation of spaces of nonexistence. All the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed for this study purchase their food from supermarkets or informal vendors. To sustain themselves with limited income, refugees undertake price comparisons across supermarkets and vendors to get the most value for money. One refugee described his family purchasing habits as continuous calculation, as they need to carefully manage their total income of ZAR3,000 per month (ZAR2,000 from social services and ZAR1,000 from small business income) for a family of six:

We will check where the food is cheap. Pick n Pay is expensive, so we have to go to Shoprite or else we go to the townships of Philippi or Gugulethu, where supermarkets sell food cheaper (Interview in Cape Town, December 4, 2017).

A refugee with an informal business echoed this approach to comparison shopping:

Like now, I am working at my small shop. I can buy my food. However, it is not easy to do so. I buy food from the [informal] market where it is cheap, especially where I live in the location. The food is cheap. Five-rand potatoes there (Interview in Cape Town, December 5, 2017).

Securing the food basket is challenging and complicated when there are other demands on meagre and irregular income:

Every point of living in Cape Town poses a worry. Let's say, for food security, there was a time I decided to go back to school to upgrade my qualification and to be more marketable in the employment market. I went to UCT, and I could not find opportunities and work at the same time. You see, and it was terrible, being a married person, I have a wife, and by that time, I only had one child, and now I have two. It was very terrible, I tell you. I had to be at school, and then I had to find a part-time job that only paid me 100 or 200 Rands at the end

of the week. At times, I could not even afford to pay my rent at the end of the month. I remember twice, or three times, I went to the Cape Town Refugee Centre, and they managed to pay R1,500 for accommodation once and then gave me a R350 voucher for Shoprite to eat something (Interview in Cape Town, December 4, 2017).

Social grants have a demonstrable impact on mitigating food insecurity in South Africa. Through the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the government provides social grants for South African citizens, permanent residents, and refugees. Social grants cover older persons, persons with disabilities, foster children, care-dependent children, children between 7–18 years, and allow temporary social relief for persons in distress. Registered refugees with status in South Africa are legally entitled to social grants. However, SASSA only recently “took time to make amendments to its database to accommodate the specificities of refugee ID and thus enable refugees to be registered” (Interview with UNHCR staff, Pretoria, March 22, 2018). Even then, refugees face discrimination and documentation challenges when trying to access social grants. Poorly-informed officials cannot distinguish between refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants, or they do not know that refugees qualify for social grants. Even when refugees receive social grants and support from the state, xenophobic discrimination and violence disrupt networks, create physical insecurity, and cause trauma, all of which hamper food entitlements.

Conclusion

South Africa provides a useful site for studying how assemblages of state and non-state actors converge to shape refugee experiences including their food security. This assemblage functions at various levels with malfunctioning policies and refugee protection practices interacting with and reinforcing the xenophobic practices of citizens. At one level, food insecurity emerges through the contradictory nature of South Africa’s legal and policy framework that provides protection in theory while creating precarious

status in practice. Despite the country's progressive Constitution and refugee legislation, South Africa impedes refugees and asylum seekers' entitlement to rights. Although the refugee legislation provides access to health care, education, and employment, precarious migratory status, discriminatory practices, xenophobic violence, corruption, and language barriers prohibit them from thoroughly enjoying these rights. Policy implementation practices and xenophobic realities place refugees and asylum seekers in a limbo where they struggle to integrate into urban South Africa. These practices push displaced populations to the periphery of society and create double marginalization that hampers integration and restricts food security in at least three ways. First, asylum seekers and refugees find their movements restricted, but they are forced to frequently spend time and resources on unnecessary travel to renew permits. Second, they are inhibited from full social and economic participation, which reduces their income-earning capacity. And third, a xenophobic environment disrupts community structures and networks. These three areas impact on all four dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability (Lawlis et al 2018). In sum, precarious migratory status and an exclusionary state and citizenry shape the food insecurity experience of marginalized refugees and asylum seekers.

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