

# Street trading and the experience of migration: the role of street trading in migrants' lives

Research conducted in the CBD of Pretoria

Elsa Burzynski, MA applied anthropology (Universite Lumiere Lyon II, France)

[elsaburzynski@gmail.com](mailto:elsaburzynski@gmail.com)

May 2010



## **Part I – Presentation of the research project**

### *From street trading to non-national street traders: shifting the focus of the research*

The focus of this research was street trading in and around the inner city of Pretoria, in accordance with previous research projects already completed for Urban LandMark<sup>1</sup>. Initially, the research would investigate either the implications of the World Cup for street trading, or the connections between formal retailers and informal retailers, in terms of whether they compete, how they share customers and whether they target different consuming practices. The latter seemed the most feasible.

Two areas were initially chosen for the field work – Hatfield and an area in the inner city. After the first few weeks of field work, it was found that most of the street traders interviewed in the CBD were from other African countries (so-called “non-nationals” or “foreigners”). This led to a shift in the research focus –from a study of street trading and its interactions with formal trading, to a study of “foreign” street traders.

### ***Fieldwork area and population targeted***

#### ***1) Areas covered***

The fieldwork was conducted between 15 February and 4 May 2009 in the CBD of Pretoria; more precisely in two small areas – X St (six street traders) around Pretoria Station, and Y and Z streets (14 street traders, excluding those who helped them or their partners). It also included two former street traders now selling from “formal” shops – one near Pretoria Station (who had been trading in the street near her current shop) and one in Marabastad (who had been trading near Pretoria Station in the past).

The areas covered were small, for two reasons:

- It was difficult to cover wider areas, as the fieldwork was carried out by a single individual
- To obtain as much (relevant) information as possible, it was necessary to build good relationships with the street traders interviewed – which meant fewer of them could be engaged during the period available.

The fact that there is a huge difference in the number of traders in each area does not reflect a choice or the reality. It was simply easier to conduct the fieldwork near Pretoria Station, as it was less busy except during rush hours, and traders were more easily approachable.

#### ***2) Population***

All the interviewees were so-called “non-nationals”, from

- Democratic Republic of Congo (three traders)
- Tanzania (three traders)
- Uganda (four traders)
- Zimbabwe (three traders)
- Cameroon (three traders)
- Nigeria (two traders)
- Benin (one trader)
- Rwanda (one trader)
- Mozambique (one trader)

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Masonganye, M. (2010) Street trading in Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality: realities and challenges, Urban LandMark, Pretoria, January; and Demacon Market Studies (2010) Impact of Township Shopping Centres. July.

- Ethiopia (one trader)

Once again, these traders were not selected according to country-of-origin representation (see methodology for further detail on this), thus the composition of the panel of interviewees does not reflect the distribution of nationalities amongst street traders.

The fieldwork also allowed the interviewer to get to know other people occupying the streets, although they were not included in the research focus – car guards, house guards, street hairstylists, other street traders, individuals helping the traders informally, customers, street traders' partners / business associates /employees, and people working in shops or salons located near street traders.

It eventually also allowed the interviewer to meet professionals whose areas of work were related, in some way, to this research, including the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Local Economic Department (Formal and Informal Business Regulations), Lawyers for Human Rights, the Tshwane Informal Trading Forum (the street traders' association and its secretary and president).

#### *Research guideline*

*What role does street trading play in migrants' daily lives? And beyond this, what space does this activity occupy in their broader migrant itineraries?*

Street trading can play a variety of specific roles, whether it be in everyday life, in the daily experience of a foreign country, or in migrants' broader itineraries, from their home country to South Africa and to other places. In this respect, "foreign" street traders use and perceive their activity in different ways than nationals would.

The core hypothesis is that street trading has an ambivalent place in migrants' lives, between life "here and now", and an expected life "there" or "afterwards".

Furthermore, examining the role and place of street trading in migrants' itineraries and experiences reveals specific issues when it comes to this category of the population – their specific difficulties and the obstacles they encounter, as well as the particular uncertainties they face. Focussing on such specific issues allowed the researcher to make recommendations and to identify specific relevant interventions.

In this respect, the researcher focussed on:

- Identifying research gaps regarding non-nationals and street traders (for further research, perhaps carried out in a more organised and systematic manner than this project allowed, including both qualitative and quantitative methodologies)
- Making recommendations or identifying areas of possible positive intervention for potential stakeholders (such as the public sector, civil society including NGOs and associations, and the private sector).

## *Methodology*

### *1) Research techniques*

- *Choice of informants:* the informants were first selected randomly, by talking to traders and explaining to them what the fieldwork was about. However, quite rapidly, the interviewer started to use what is sometimes called the “snowball technique” – having the traders already engaged introduce the interviewer to other traders they know, or simply meeting other traders at a particular trader’s stall.
- *Informal conversations* with the street traders and with people around them (such as customers, people working in shops or salons in the area, car guards, etc.). The interviewer’s first exchanges with the street traders more closely resembled formal interviews (although a pre-defined grid of questions was never used); as the engagements progressed, these exchanges progressed to informal conversations – about their trading activities but also about other topics which were not always related to the investigation. This allowed the interviewer better insight into the traders’ personalities, daily lives and experiences in South Africa.
- *Observation:* the interviewer spent many hours around the traders’ stalls, observing their interactions with their customers and with other people (such as car guards, street hairstylists, etc.). The interviewer also accompanied some of the traders when they went to buy stock, went to the bank with them when they had to buy airtime for their public phones or to deposit money, and attended their meetings (such as the Cameroonian traders’ “micro-saving” meetings).
- *Participation:* When sitting at the traders’ stalls or accompanying them in the activities they had planned, the interviewer was never completely passive. Once a deeper engagement was established, some of the traders would let the interviewer run their business while they were away, help them with banking procedures or with buying and transporting supplies.
- *Formal interviews,* structured through an appointment and the recording of a formal conversation if the interviewee agreed or the circumstances allowed it. The interviewer found that conducting formal interviews with “professionals” (such as individuals from Lawyers for Human Rights) often rendered these conversations very dense and quite technical.

### *2) Taking and giving back? The research process as an exchange*

It is nowadays assumed that the anthropologist should not be someone who only collects data by interacting with interviewees. Respondents are to be considered as “subjects” who also influence and participate in the research, and who can even use the researcher or the research process for their own purposes.

- It is obvious when it comes to professionals – they would be interested in the research findings.
- When it comes to street traders, they also might have an interest in accepting the researcher’s presence:
  - The fact that someone takes interest in what they do and how they do it enhances their feeling of being legitimate and recognised.
  - Some of them also feel the need to talk about their experience, and then the researcher becomes more like someone you can confide in, putting words to what they have experienced and think about these experiences.
  - More concretely, some of them could be interested in getting some information from the researcher, for example regarding licensing or other administrative matters. A number of the individuals interviewed for this project were also interested in getting information on how they could travel to Europe, and even asked the interviewer’s help in getting there.

- Some of the respondents could also benefit from the researcher's presence, when the latter is willing to help them to run their businesses and informally work for them as part of his/her research.

Where possible, ethically and practically, it is the researcher's responsibility to "give something back".

### *3) Ethical concerns and limits of the research*

- **Protecting the interviewees**

Any research implies getting into people's lives and getting information which can sometimes be private or even secret. It was especially the case here, as street traders told the interviewer about their legal situation, how they arrived in the country and for which purpose. It was also especially valid in terms of this project, as dealing with the information received meant engaging with some immigration issues in South Africa, which are quite sensitive. As a consequence, some ethical concerns arose from the research process, including the following:

*What information does the researcher/interviewer have the right to reveal?* Street traders can be involved in, or have planned to be involved in, illegal activities. A number of them do not have the legal status required by their situation, and have 'lied' regarding the reasons for their stay in South Africa.

*How far can you 'push' when it comes to controversial, sensitive issues like immigration?* This specifically emerged when meeting professionals, who sometimes were not willing to talk about issues which could compromise them or make them sound too critical. It is the researcher's responsibility to respect their position and to protect them.

It is important to protect people's anonymity, which is the reason why respondents' names have not been used in this report or the accompanying presentation. Rather, the interviewer chose to call street traders by the initials ST and a number, and the former street traders by the initials FST and a number, so they cannot be identified. The researcher could have gone even further, creating fake "cases" from fragments of real stories – a method some researchers use when they deal with very sensitive matters – but this was not found to be relevant or necessary for this research.

- **Applied research and ethics**

Another ethical concern arises from the fact that this research aims at formulating recommendations, hence at engaging with professional practice and policy-making. Some information or data collected can always be used in a manner the researcher had not planned or do not agree with.

- **Limits of the research**

- Representativeness of the interviewees: the 'snowball technique' is quite limiting, as one gets to meet only those street traders whom other street traders know; they often have similar experiences, come from the same country, etc. The information this research is based on was thus gleaned from a small panel of interviewees, with no attempt made to reflect the distribution of nationalities.
- Some quantitative data should be collected to complement the qualitative information.

- Only two small areas were covered in terms of where the interviewed traders operate and how many could be interviewed.
- Under-representation of women (although there is indeed more male foreign street traders than women).
- Under-representation (or absence of representation) of some nationalities.
- Some aspects of these traders' experience in South Africa were difficult to access directly. The interviewer thus had to rely on what they said and not on what the interviewer saw regarding some issues such as xenophobia, their journey to and experiences in South Africa. However, there are obvious limits to relying on discourse and narration.

## **Part II – Key findings**

We first examine how interviewees travelled to South Africa, in relation with their situation back home. This seems important, as before being “foreign street traders” they were migrants – street trading only became an option afterwards, as we will see.

We then examine the role of street trading in their everyday lives, focusing first on street trading as an economic activity (how they started such an activity, how they run it, etc.) and then on street trading as a social activity.

We eventually broaden our perspective, looking at the place of street trading in migrants’ itineraries – their relation to street trading and to their host country, their expectations and intentions, and how and where they project themselves.

### *Going south: the migrants’ journeys to South Africa*

#### **1) A variety of situations before getting to South Africa**

##### **a. Education**

Regarding the level of education of the street traders interviewed, the majority has completed high school (14 traders), with only five not obtaining Matric. The interviewer was unsure whether the remaining three traders interviewed obtained Matric.

A few of these traders studied at university (ST9, FST2...), with two completing a degree (ST4, ST15). Some of the younger traders are still studying and intend to complete their degrees (for example, ST13).

##### **b. Family background**

Some street traders have benefited from a stable family environment, with their families able to provide them with what they needed (for example, ST10 and ST13). Others come from poorer families (like ST17 and ST11) or, quite frequently, have experienced trauma – the loss of parents (ST20, ST11), mistreatment (ST1<sup>2</sup>, ST3<sup>3</sup>) and financial losses (ST2). As we will see somewhat later in this report, such trauma has been part of the reason that led them to leave their home country.

##### **c. Activities back home**

Regarding interviewees’ activities before getting to South Africa, four types of situations should be outlined:

- *Studying (or trying to)*

Four interviewees were studying or trying to do so when they left their home country. One was trying to complete his first year at university in Lubumbashi, studying medicine; however, he had to

---

<sup>2</sup> ST1’s father had two wives, with the second trying to “put her children first”. ST1, born from the first wife, was often ill-treated, and eventually fled his home and spent some time on the streets. He survived through small jobs, including street vending, and with the help a British NGO provided. This NGO also helped him to complete high school.

<sup>3</sup> ST3’s parents were not married, and he was born from their ‘affair’. His mother apparently had seven children from different men. He first lived with his mother, but then his parents started quarreling over who should raise him. He ended up with his father who ill-treated him and did not give him the opportunity to go to school.

work at the same time to pay his tuition fees, and eventually had to stop studying as it was too costly. FST2 had to stop attending university because civil war flared up in his province when he had just started his first year.

ST13 obtained his Matric in Ghana (where he was living after his family moved from Benin), and then studied accounting for two years in Nigeria.

ST15 studied medical biochemistry for four years in Nigeria.

- *Working as an employee*

Four street traders were actually working, although not as own-account workers or as informal workers.

ST4 was working as a financial administrator in a workers' union in Lubumbashi, after having obtained a university degree. ST16 was working for a local NGO which was dealing with the political turmoil in Rwanda. ST1 was working for a British NGO helping street kids. ST8 obtained her Matric in Cameroon and then worked for a large company, although she did not have any other qualifications (her uncle was working in that company and had recommended her).

- *Own-account workers*

Nine of the street traders met and interviewed were running their own businesses, whether a small business or a more 'important' one, a street business or a more 'formal' one. Having a business implied selling goods or providing services.

More important businesses: ST7 did not obtain Matric but was involved in selling clothes in Ngaoundéré, where he owns a shop and a restaurant. He bought the clothes in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon.

FST1 and her husband were wealthy business people in Ethiopia, buying clothes and jewellery in other countries and selling them in Ethiopia, and travelling regularly for business purposes. They had several shops there.

Smaller businesses: only one trader (ST2) was involved in street business, selling radios in the streets of Kampala together with a friend.

Six traders owned shops or workshops. ST3 had a storage place where street traders could store their goods (he stopped when some traders started selling other traders' goods). ST11 was working first in a salon, as an employee, before he started his own business, selling clothes. ST14 had his own workshop, working as a mechanic. ST18 had a small place where he was repairing motorbikes. ST19 was working as an own-account welder, and was benefitting from a comfortable financial situation. ST20 was renting a small shop in Kampala where he was selling rice, lentils, sugar etc., and still owns the shop today.

It must be added that some traders whose main activity was studying or working as employees before travelling to South Africa could either have been involved in own-account businesses in the past (ST1 who survived through small jobs and businesses when he ended up in the streets, and ST13 who used to run a small shop in Ghana when he was still in high school), or they could have been working as own-account workers at the same time as pursuing a second activity (like ST9, to be able to pay his tuition fees when he was trying to complete his first year at university).

- *Not working nor studying*

Three traders were not “active” when they left their home country, for specific reasons.

ST5 did not obtain the Matric and was not working but taking care of her two children. Her husband was working in a government department and was earning enough money for them to live comfortably.

ST10 comes from a middle-class family in Dar Es Salaam. He obtained Matric but did not have the required grades to start studying medicine (his father’s wish). He was then selected for an exchange programme to study mechanics in Italy, and spent one year there. But when he came back to Tanzania, he did not find a suitable job; the only opportunity he could find was to repair cars in the streets but he did not want to do this job. He intended to join the army but his father refused. He finally worked for a company selling farming products but never got paid, so he quit. After that he spent many years not working, depending on his parents.

ST17 comes from a poor family; his father died early, while his mother gave birth to 12 children but not from the same father. She was involved in small business, selling cigarettes or cakes she was baking at home. He did not have the opportunity to attend school for a significant period of time, as he was helping his mother with her business. He travelled to South Africa when he was only 19 years old.

The interviewer was unsure of the activities of two street traders, ST6 and ST12, before they arrived in South Africa – ST6 did not give an indication of what she was doing in the past, while ST12 related that he was involved in a variety of small jobs in Nigeria, some more formal (working for a company), while others were of a more self-employed nature.

## **2) *Moving to South Africa: reasons and first intention***

### **a. How did they get the idea to travel to South Africa?**

We can broadly outline two types of circumstances which led these traders to decide to travel to South Africa:

- *Getting the information from an acquaintance*

The vast majority of traders conceived of the plan to travel to South Africa after having obtained information about the country from people they knew, friends or relatives who had already been to South Africa or who were actually living there (and talked about South Africa when visiting their home country).

This was the case for –

- ST1 (information from an Ugandan friend who was in South Africa at that time)
- ST2 (his business associate in Uganda had a brother who was living in South Africa at the time)
- ST3 (ST1, his cousin, talked to him about it)
- ST5 (her elder sister was living in South Africa and ST5 had visited her in 2001, after which she started going to South Africa on a regular basis, although temporarily)
- ST6 (ST5’s elder sister who was ST6’s best friend back in Zimbabwe)
- ST7 (one of his friend’s family based in Joburg sent him an invitation for a visiting visa)
- ST8 (her husband was already in South Africa)

- ST13 (his uncle)
- ST14 (a Zimbabwean friend)
- ST19 (his elder brother was working in South Africa)
- ST20 (a high-school friend who was based in Bloemfontein at that time)
- ST12 (a fellow Nigerian based in South Africa and with whom he was supposed to work).

Going to South Africa thus seemed to depend, for these traders, on the information they had obtained from their communities, acquaintances or relatives. A number of them were also helped, when they arrived, by the people who suggested to them that they should come to South Africa, whether it be in terms of accommodation, adaptation to the country, or, as the reader will see later in the report, to start their current businesses.

Finally, those traders themselves then suggested to relatives or friends to come to South Africa, like ST1 who suggested to ST3 to join him, ST7 who suggested to an old friend to come too (the latter is now helping him with his business), ST8 (who helped her nephew to come to South Africa and had him work with her until he started university).

- *Personal initiative*

Other traders did not have any contact with the country before coming to South Africa. This is especially the case for those who fled a particular situation in their home country (and are now awaiting, hold or have refugee status); for example, FST2, FST1, ST4 and ST16. These four interviewees came to South Africa without any contact, and only met people who could assist them after they had arrived in South Africa.

However, some traders did not have to leave their home countries because of a particularly dangerous situation but still came to South Africa without any previous contact or preconceived plans, for example ST9, ST18, ST17 and ST10. They relied on the image they had of the country, an image which was conveyed by the media as well as through “rumours” (indirect information).

#### **b. Reasons for going to South Africa**

We must distinguish between reasons (economic opportunities, fleeing political turmoil, etc.) and “intentions” or projects. Intentions here refer to what the trader had planned to do when in South Africa.

Four types of reasons can be outlined:

- *Economic opportunity*

The first and most recurrent reason given by the street traders was related to the quest for better economic or career opportunities.

Some stated that their home country did not provide sufficient opportunities – they were not making enough money through their previous activities (ST11), or the economic context was disadvantageous (because of war, in the case of ST4, or because of an economic crisis, in the case of the Zimbabweans, ST5, ST6 and ST14).

Others explained that travelling to South Africa was part of a strategy to accumulate more money (ST8 and ST18, who said that the Rand was stronger than the Tanzanian currency), to “win big” in a short period of time (ST7 and ST12), or to undertake or pursue studies at “better” universities in order to be able to make more money (ST13 and ST10). In this last case the interviewees did not

necessarily state that their home country did not provide enough opportunities; some of them were even benefitting from comfortable situations (ST7, ST12 and ST19). In these cases, South Africa was viewed more as a “hunting ground”.

In both cases, going to South Africa meant that the interviewees could improve their own economic situation but also, in most cases, that of their relatives, whether those were relatives (or even friends) who stayed in their home country (ST5, ST12, ST7, ST3 and ST4) or relatives who were born in South Africa (ST8 and ST6, whose children were all born in South Africa).

- *Political reasons*

The second type of reason is related to the political context, especially for those street traders who obtained refugee status and were actually fleeing conflict or political turmoil (even though economic reasons were also important in their choice to leave their home country) – ST16 (who felt threatened in Rwanda because he is part Hutu / part Tutsi); FST1 (she and her husband had been arrested and caught in political conflict, which led her to flee Ethiopia on her own with her children); and FST2 and ST4 (who both came from regions of the DRC which were becoming conflictual when they left).

This is also the case for individuals who believed that their home countries did not provide enough political freedom and transparency (for example, ST20).

- *Personal reasons*

The third type of reason is more individual in nature (specific to people's situations and their lives back home). Some traders have fled painful personal situations (ST1 and ST3) or traumatic events in their personal lives (for ST5 it was the loss of her husband, although her going to South Africa was also linked to the necessity to sustain her family). Others were joining loved ones in South Africa (ST8, ST4's wife who rejoined him in Pretoria) and thus, even though they could also have been seeking better opportunities or fleeing tense political contexts, the main reason for them to travel to South Africa was linked to their personal lives.

Finally, others saw travelling to South Africa, and travelling in general, as a way to escape a variety of pressures, for example, having to sustain an extended family back home (however, ST7 was the only interviewee to make a comment related to the will to “individualise” oneself).

- *For the sake of the experience*

Finally, some traders conveyed the wish to discover new places, to experience new contexts and to adapt to and learn from them. This was mostly the case for those who benefitted from stable situations back home, like ST7, ST19 and ST12. Then again, this is never the only reason for travelling to South Africa, but is linked to the image of South Africa as a “developed” country, providing good opportunities for those who know how to adapt and take advantage of new contexts.

However, it is obvious that in many cases reasons overlap and are intertwined. Economic reasons might be linked to political reasons, while an individual quest or curiosity is often linked to the hope of making more money. Leaving a country where an individual does not feel (s)he fits in might also be linked to the economic aspect of the journey. There is never a single, unique reason, but different layers of reasons that are all linked to the experience of the individual.

### c. Intentions regarding what they were to do in South Africa

In most cases, the traders the interviewee met initially had only very vague ideas of what they were to do to make a living or improve their livelihoods when arriving in South Africa. This was obviously

the case for those who had to flee their home countries, but it was also the case for those who actually made an informed choice (based on what other people were saying about life in South Africa, watching TV or using the internet). These traders came to South Africa relying in the main on the image they had of the country rather than on concrete plans for their future in the country.

Nevertheless, some street traders had a precise idea regarding what kind of job they wanted to undertake in South Africa: ST15 thought he could find a job related to his qualifications (medical biochemistry), either in a hospital or at a university; ST12 came with the intention of being involved in “drug trafficking” (his first plan); and ST14 thought he could work as a mechanic (but says he left his diploma at home and thus cannot complete this project).

Others had a specific plan regarding studying in South Africa – ST10 (wanted to start studying at UNISA); ST13 (a relative who was staying in South Africa told him universities were better here than in Lagos and that he should complete his accounting studies in South Africa); and ST8 (who did a two-year course in information technology at a college upon her arrival) and her nephew (who currently helps her and is about to start studying “agricultural techniques” at UNISA).

Others thought they might more easily find employment in South Africa, but very few had a precise idea in terms of the kind of employment they were looking for. The only street trader interviewed who started a business according to his original intention is ST1. The others were more vague, only mentioning “looking for money”, “making a living” or “finding a job”.

Importantly, none of them saw themselves as street traders – no-one had planned to end up selling in the streets.

However, one must be careful when analysing reasons and intentions several years after the street traders’ arrival in South Africa. Indeed, one always view their situations from where they are now, with their experience of life in South Africa and of their street trading activity. They could have decided to hide the real reasons for their stay in South Africa; they could “reconstruct” their stories *a posteriori* when telling them, or they could involuntarily forget or refuse to remember some things in trying to convey a positive image of themselves.

### **3) The journey to and arrival in South Africa**

#### **a. How did they get to South Africa?**

The majority of the street traders interviewed used the road (buses and trucks) to cross the borders. However, some of them made use of air travel (ST12, ST7 and ST8).

Regarding the journey itself, the situations are diverse. Some went directly to South Africa (including necessary halts in the countries they might have crossed if they were using the road). Others stopped in various countries before settling in South Africa, and thus South Africa was not necessarily the place they were targeting from the start. This was the case for ST18 who worked in Maputo for eight months and for ST9.

## CASE STUDY ONE: ST9's journey to South Africa

ST9 travelled on his own and went through several countries. It was thus a long journey, characterised by several phases. When telling his story, he likes to emphasise the difficulties encountered, the way he finally managed to find his way to South Africa and the miracles he witnessed during his journey, often saying that some things which happened to him were not "earthly" but rather signs of God's protection.

*Zambia* (closest country to Katanga border): He had no previous contact whatsoever there, but when he arrived he met an old man in the streets, also a Congolese, who was speaking Lingala. As ST9 had no money and no place to stay for the night, this old man invited him to stay at his place. ST9 spent some time there. However, he was not planning to stay in Zambia, and thus he did not try to find a job or to make money. When he met a Tanzanian who was planning to go back to Tanzania, he thus decided to travel with him.

*Tanzania*: ST9 and this Tanzanian man crossed the border together. ST9 had no passport or documents, but borders are known to be porous and he could always use the war alibi if immigration officers were to be encountered. When in Tanzania, the Tanzanian man gave ST9 some money to get to Dar Es Salaam. ST9 arrived in Dar Es Salaam alone, not knowing anyone, feeling a bit disoriented and lost. He thus walked around a bit and arrived at a market – but he couldn't hear anyone speaking Lingala or French. He sat down, not knowing what to do. Finally, a man who seemed to be mentally handicapped began to talk to him and ST9 told him he just needed a place to sleep and something to eat. The "insane" man took him to a food trader he knew, who gave ST9 food, and then to a place where ST9 could sleep on a cardboard. The following day, this man came back to ST9 and took him to the Congolese embassy. The Congolese officers said they could not do anything for ST9, except sending him to a refugee camp or him back home. ST9 accepted the second solution, thinking that he would be given money and he could run away with it. But this was not the case, so he refused, and went back to the streets trying to figure out something. The "mentally handicapped" man, who had come back again, took ST9 to a street where he could find food, as there were many restaurants. The man told ST9 to go to a specific restaurant which seemed to be a "rich people's restaurant" and to ask for food there. ST9 did not think this was a good idea, and told the man to go away. In the end ST9 who so hungry that he decided to go to this restaurant anyway. He met someone who told him to wait and he would be given food – which happened. It also gave ST9 the opportunity to meet the restaurant manager, who suggested that ST9 should work with them. That is how ST9 ended up working in a restaurant for the duration of his stay in Tanzania. But he did not have any identity documents (in Tanzania if you obtain refugee papers it means you are sent to a camp and cannot stay and work in urban areas), and people were getting jealous of him and apparently denounced him. He thus had to leave Tanzania, although he really liked the place and could make a living there.

*Mozambique*. He arrived there on his own but rapidly met fellow Congolese with whom he was able to stay. One of them taught him how to shave and cut hair. As ST9 did not like Mozambique, he decided to travel to South Africa with a Congolese friend, to look for work as a barber.

Not all the traders interviewed came directly to Pretoria. It depends on the border they crossed (which city was closer) but also on personal choices – what they had heard about the different cities, and where their friends / relatives / "homeboys" (their contacts in South Africa) were located – in most cases the cities they travelled through were based on a combination of these factors.

For example, ST9 crossed the Mozambican border and first spent three years working as a hairdresser in Durban before getting to Johannesburg. In Johannesburg he started selling in the streets and then worked in a security company. When the company closed, he decided to start selling again in Pretoria, which was a personal choice although he did not know anyone there, as he thought there would be less competition than in Johannesburg.

ST20 first arrived in Bloemfontein, as his contact was living and working there. He was only going to Pretoria for asylum procedures, but when his friend moved there ST20 followed him.

Like ST12, ST4 first settled in Johannesburg. Both of them, after having experienced life in Johannesburg (ST4 for 3 months; ST12 for 10 years), chose to move to Pretoria, where they felt safer and “less stressed”.

#### b. Date of arrival

ST1	ST2	ST3	ST4	ST5	ST6	ST7	ST8	ST9	ST10
2004	2003	2007	2001	2005	2003	2009	2005	2003	2009
ST11	ST12	ST13	ST14	ST15	ST16	ST17	ST18	ST19	ST20
2006	2010	2009	2009	2009	2008	1994	2006	2009	2008
FST1	FST2								
2003	2001								

#### c. Securing their stay in South Africa: street traders' legal status

Once in South Africa, these individuals have to secure their stay in the country by getting a permit which would allow them to stay legally.

Of all the traders (including those who now own shops):

- 14 currently hold an asylum-seeker's permit (Section 22 permit), which they received upon their arrival in the country. This is a temporary permit which is issued after an individual applies for refugee status at one of the Home Affairs offices. It is supposed to give the individual the right to work and study in South Africa. It has to be renewed every one to three months at a Home Affairs Office. Even though it is supposed to be temporary, many people actually use it for years (more than 10 years sometimes), as the status determination process can be long and onerous (hence the backlog of asylum seekers in South Africa) and hindered by several shortcomings<sup>4</sup>.
- ST9 and ST16 are currently recognised as refugees, after having used the Section 22 permit for several years.

<sup>4</sup> “It’s quite complex because we have a system, a legal framework which would work to some extent, but then we don’t have the competencies and resources to actually make it work, to make sure that the process is made in the actual time limit (...) Administrative failures hinder the whole process”. *Government official interviewed*

- ST1 says he holds a working permit (the owner of a company he used to work for obtained and renews this permit).
- FST2 and ST4 have obtained permanent residence (after going the “refugee” route).
- The interviewer has not been able to determine the current legal status of four of the traders interviewed.

11 street traders have shifted from one status to another during their stay in South Africa. Some came with a visiting visa (ST7, ST12, ST19, ST1 and ST3) and then moved towards either an asylum-seeker permit or a working permit. One came with a study permit (ST8) and then shifted to an asylum-seeker permit. Others shifted from the asylum-seeker permit to refugee status, and two of those later obtained permanent residence.

There is a very noticeable tendency among these street traders to use the asylum-seeker permit. However, not all of them can be described as qualifying for refugee status. Some of them gave false reasons for their stay in South Africa when completing forms or being interviewed at Home Affairs; for example, ST4, ST16 and ST9, who currently hold refugee status or used to hold it, did not only come to South Africa because they were threatened in their home country.

These people are often considered as “economic migrants” disguised as asylum seekers or refugees – the UNHCR website mentions the “large number of economic migrants who abuse the asylum procedure to legalize their stay”. Furthermore, there is no such thing in South Africa as “economic refugees” (even for those people who have fled the economic collapse in Zimbabwe a few years ago).

This tendency is confirmed by the Lawyers for Human Rights. One interviewee from this organisation explains: “On their side, the asylum seekers have different notions of that permit, depending on where they come from and what they get from their community. You see, for example, Congolese clients often have that problem, they stay years, and they just think it’s an end in itself. Once you have it you’re ok. So they never seek to get their final decision (...) They [these migrants] just think it’s a permit you can get if you cannot get any other paper; it’s the easiest paper to get. (...) most of them just want to use it for a couple of months.”

The asylum route is thus used by many people who actually do not “fit in the system” in terms of their situation and the reasons for their stay in South Africa. For Lawyers for Human Rights, it partly explains the fact that the asylum route is as “backed-up” as it is, that there are a lot of confusion as well as numerous flaws in the asylum procedures, and that the status determination procedures are too long. As our one interviewee from this organisation says, “it clogs the system and it confuses the genuine asylum seekers because they get a lot of different advice, wrong advice and eventually they don’t understand what the purpose of the permit is”.

However, one must be careful not to generalise this finding. Only the specific individuals and situations the researcher encountered allowed her to make this comment; however, one cannot consider the majority of street traders as asylum seekers who are disguised as economic migrants, nor consider the majority of asylum seekers as economic migrants:

“Despite the fact that many applicants at the Refugee Reception Offices may not acquire refugee status in the end, it is misleading and unhelpful to characterize the majority of asylum seekers as ‘economic migrants’ seeking to exploit asylum-seeker status” (Access to Refugee Reception, FMSP special report).

## **1) Becoming a street trader**

### **a. A viable alternative?**

We have seen that none of the traders the interviewer engaged had planned to start trading in the streets. How did they get to do so then?

We know that the majority of the traders were expecting better economic opportunities, possibilities of a career or employment. But whatever they would have liked to do in South Africa, most of them regard street trading as one of the few opportunities which were accessible to them.

Some feel xenophobia and protectionism prevent employers from giving jobs to non-nationals, even if they are qualified (this is the case for ST16, ST4 and ST15), and prevent nationals from giving them chances as, according to many traders, South African workers are scared of “foreigners”. In a context where unemployment is very high, people would compete for jobs and feel threatened by any non-national who would be likely to “take their jobs”.

As a consequence, a number of traders, like ST4 or ST1, for example, develop a negative discourse about employment and South Africans: to them, South Africans are lazy and averse to self-employment because it takes a lot of time and energy and is more risky, and would prefer to work for someone and getting paid at the end of the month. Many traders depict South Africans as non-business-minded, and they even feel that South African street traders do not know how to improve their businesses, unlike non-nationals. This leads ST18, for example, to state that “foreigners” were the first to start to sell in the streets, and South Africans only imitated them.

However, there is a wider problem related to immigration and employment. Even though refugee- or asylum-seeker status gives the individual the right to work and study, most companies do not want to hire people who hold such statuses. Another interviewee from Lawyers' for Human Rights gives two possible reasons for this – a lack of awareness regarding refugees and asylum seekers, which leads many people to think that they are “illegal migrants” (also because the asylum seeker's permit does not look very official in terms of format and appearance), and the fact that asylum seekers' permits are very temporary, thus they do not want to hire someone who might have to leave very soon.

Only a few of the traders the interviewer spoke to tried to find a formal job.

Those who actually found a job (non-self-employed): ST1, ST7 and ST9 worked in security companies; ST19 worked in a company as a technician but ended up being exploited and not paid enough; FST2 worked in a bakery for a few months; ST18 did several small jobs (for example, putting up ads for a Ugandan witch doctor for R20 per day, and then handing out flyers in the streets for R35 per day).

### Those who looked for a job but did not find any: ST15, ST16

As for the traders who were planning to study, they ended up selling in the streets either because they had not been able to register at a university (ST10), which meant trading was a back-up plan when they did not want to go back home straight away, or because they were waiting to register and start studying (ST8's nephew, ST13) and wanted to earn some money in the mean time.

For all of them, street trading was thus a viable alternative.

#### **b. The learning process**

The street traders the interviewer met learnt how to run their current businesses in different ways:

- *They met people who taught them back home or during their journey*

ST11: before he started selling clothes in Dar Es Salaam (the activity before he left), he was working in a salon as a barber. He had therefore learnt to shave hair before getting to South Africa, and that allowed him to open a small street barber shop, in addition to his stall which sold sweets and cigarettes.

ST18: before getting to South Africa, ST18 spent eight months in Maputo where he met an old disabled man who taught him how to repair shoes. At that time he had no money left and needed a skill which would allow him to make money quickly to leave Mozambique.

- *They knew / met someone who was a street trader in South Africa*, and who showed them how to do the same or employed them informally (which allowed them to open their own stall later on).

#### **CASE STUDY TWO: The Zimbabwean ladies**

ST5 had never sold anything back in Zimbabwe; she had even never worked. She arrived in South Africa because her elder sister was already making a living there selling fruit and vegetables on Y Street (she still does – her stall is very close to ST5's) and showed ST5 how to do the same. ST5 then taught another Zimbabwean girl how to do it, so that the latter could work with her.

The same happened to ST6, who was ST5's elder sister's best friend: when she arrived in South Africa, she started working for ST5's elder sister (helping her with her business) and learnt from that. Afterwards she started working for ST5, and did so for some time until in 2009 (six years after her arrival) she decided to open her own business.

What is interesting is that the three of them, ST6, ST5 and ST5's sister are connected, and now all have their own stall on the same street, almost touching one other. A kind of network was therefore built through which they could each secure a living.

### **CASE STUDY THREE: The Ugandans**

ST2 was the first to arrive in South Africa. In front of his flat, a Cameroonian man was running a public phone business and hiring a Zimbabwean lady. He started staying with her and helping her out, until she left. ST2 took her place and started working for the Cameroonian (at R100 per week). Eventually he asked the latter if he could also sell sweets at his stall (besides the public phone) and the Cameroonian accepted. But when this man realized ST2 was making some money of his own with the sweets, he refused to keep on paying him. ST2 thus left and met a Ugandan who was selling where he sells today – the latter wanted to go back to Uganda, and he sold his stock to ST2. ST2 thus acquired his own business.

At that time, another Ugandan man arrived and asked ST2 if he could sell next to him. This is the person who hired ST1 when the latter left his security job. The Ugandan man was paying ST1, who already had experience of small businesses in Uganda, R100 a week to run the stall on his behalf. After some time the man returned to Uganda and left his stock to ST1, who became the owner of the business and tried to improve it / expand it.

ST1 then suggested to his cousin ST3 to come to South Africa too, with the intention of having ST3 work for him. In this way, ST3 learnt the business, and in 2009 he was able to open his own stall opposite ST1 and ST2's.

Finally, also in 2009, a young Ugandan man, related in some way to ST2, arrived in South Africa. ST2 decided to hire him, and now the young man works for him. At the same time he works informally for ST1 when needed. However, he does not plan to open his own stall, although he has learnt how to run such a business.

Here again, a sort of network was built, and ST1, ST2 and ST3's experiences of business are intertwined.

### **CASE STUDY FOUR: ST4**

ST4 randomly met O. from Cameroon who owned a small business in Y street and hired him. O. was repairing shoes and selling sweets and cigarettes at the same place where ST4 trades today, and taught ST4 to do so. However, according to ST4, they had a very unbalanced agreement – ST4 was supposed to run the business on his own and give the owner R200 per week. If he managed to make more than R200 (taking into account the money which had to be reinvested in buying stock, etc.), he could keep it for himself. Eventually ST4 managed to save some money (R160) and with this money he obtained a trading permit for the very location where O. was selling (at the time when the Local Economic Department was issuing permits for the CBD). ST4 insists on his cleverness, and how he managed to dupe O. when the latter thought he could easily exploit him. One day O. and ST4 quarrelled and ST4 started his own business opposite O's stall. Only when O. decided to stop selling and repairing shoes ST4 took his space and started trading there (legally, as he had the permit). He observed and imitated what other traders were doing. This is also the case for ST7, ST8, ST14 and FST2.

## CASE STUDY FIVE: ST7

ST7 first found a job as a security guard for Shoprite. At that time he met a man who was repairing shoes in front of Shoprite (ST17) and he started learning how to repair shoes when observing the latter, after work. With the money he was earning as a security guard, he bought everything he needed to start his own business, and started repairing shoes first on Bosman Street, then on Y street. This location he obtained after another man, from Ghana, who was also repairing shoes, left. At the same time, he started learning how to sew from a Cameroonian tailor working in Sunnyside. He then bought a sewing machine and started mending clothes, in addition to repairing shoes. Eventually he decided to start selling a few items which would provide additional money (that was linked to the fact that he knew a Cameroonian woman who had a shop in Johannesburg selling clothes, bags, belts, cosmetics, etc.).

Not all the street traders were selling in the streets from the start; some shifted from one activity to another (ST9, ST18, ST19, FST2...), allowing them to get enough money to work for their own account. We also see that not all of them had their own stall from the start, which allowed them to earn enough money to start trading (either buying someone else's business, or starting their own).

### **2) Running a street business**

#### a. Goods sold

ST1	ST2	ST3	ST4	ST5	ST6	ST8	ST9
Soft goods Phone Clothes / belts	Soft goods Fruits Veggies Phone	Soft goods Cosmetics Phone	Soft goods Fruits Veggies Phone	Veggies	Veggies	Soft goods Hair salon	Soft goods + misc
ST10	ST11	ST12	ST13	FRST1	FST2	ST14	ST15
Soft goods	Soft goods + barber	DVDs	DVDs	Grocery Soft goods Phone	Supplies for traders (soft goods)	Soft goods Phone	DVDs
ST16	ST17	ST18	ST19	ST20	ST7	Shoe repairs Clothes mending Cigarettes Cosmetics Belts, wallets	
Soft goods Phone Fruits Veggies	Shoe repairing	Shoe repairing	Soft goods Phone	Soft goods Phone (DVDs)			

*Soft goods: cigarettes and snuff, snacks ("Simba chips", popcorn, etc.), lollipops, sweets, cakes and chocolates.*

*Misc: random items (batteries, airtime, lip gloss...), not sold permanently.*

#### b. Size of the stalls

It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of stall size (volume of goods sold), so we use slightly vague categories, including the following:

Small (easily removable, basic infrastructure, few goods sold): ST9, ST10, ST14, ST18. We can add those who sell pirated DVDs, as their business only consists of a cardboard onto which they have glued cover images of the DVDs they sell (easily removable, also because not legal). They usually store the real burnt DVDs either in a nearby shop (ST12: in a nearby salon), either in a bag they keep with them (ST15 and ST13).

Medium: ST3, ST17, ST19, ST20, ST7, ST2, ST11 (very few goods sold but has a barber tent).

Important: ST1 (variety of products, several tables); ST4 (variety of products, complex infrastructure); ST5 and ST6 (volume and variety of vegetables sold); ST8 (stall in itself not too important but salon near it); and FST1 and FST2 (shops).

*c. Several businesses?*

Some street traders run two businesses at the same place. This is the case for ST11 and ST8, who both started with selling soft goods and then saved enough money to diversify their street business, adding either a barber tent or a hair salon. The hair salon cannot really be considered a street business, as it is actually a little shop that ST8 rents near the station hall (where there are many small premises like this rented out to street traders).

Other street traders (ST1 and FST2) have managed to expand their businesses, either acquiring additional stalls in other locations or owning other businesses.

ST1 owns the stall where the interviewer met him, plus another one further on (but still in the CBD), and a hair salon in the street where he sells. He has therefore hired several people to keep these businesses running – three people for his salon (a barber from Burundi and two South African ladies), and one person to run his other stall.

FST2, although he is not a street trader anymore, used to sell around Pretoria Station. We will examine later how he expanded his business. Now he owns two shops in Marabastad, and he has hired three Congolese men to help him with the shops. The shops sell the same type of goods (cigarettes, snacks and sweets, mostly addressing street traders' supply needs) but at different places in Marabastad.

*d. Partners, employees, helpers*

Although many traders work alone, some of them do have partners or employees. A number of them also have informal helpers (people who do not work for them but who help them when needed).

▪ **Partners**

A partner is a person with whom the trader is associated in a balanced relation (they all have the same rights in terms of the business and they share the profit).

ST16 says he has a South African partner, but the researcher never saw him and is of the opinion that he is rather referring to someone who has obtained a permit on his behalf. He works with this wife, though, which can be considered as a kind of partnership (and not as informal help, as his wife is at

the stall most of the time), although, because they are related, they do not share profit but rather hold it in common.

The same can be said about ST4, who works with his wife (who arrived in South Africa in 2007). She is always at the stall, and sometimes even runs it on her own for a day or so when her husband is away or busy. They have decided to share responsibilities – ST4 is responsible for selling soft goods and the public phone (and buying stock and airtime at the bank), while his wife is responsible for the vegetables and fruit sold on other tables. She also goes to buy their fresh produce stock in Marabastad. They even count the money made separately, even though, obviously, they put it into a common pool afterwards.

- **Employees**

An employee is a person whom the trader hired to help him / her, both when he is not present at the stall (days off, or when he / she has to go to buy stock), and when he is present. It is quite different from subletting.

ST8 pays her newly arrived nephew, who came to South Africa to study, to work with her. He had completed two years of a chemistry degree in Cameroon but then stopped to learn German (he initially planned to go to Europe). He then finished his degree and is now interested in applying his knowledge of chemistry to agriculture. He believes universities are better in South Africa and will provide him with better opportunities (he talked about it with a friend who came to South Africa straight after Matric). But since the first semester of the next academic year has not started yet, he in the mean time works for his aunt, who pays him for helping her at the stall. As she might acquire a new location near the station (where infrastructure has been built to accommodate traders), she wants to send him to sell there.

ST2 has a young Ugandan man working for him.

ST5 has another Zimbabwean lady who works for her part-time, as she had serious health problems (tuberculosis) and was not able to work at the stall consistently. This woman also works as a house cleaner in Sunnyside.

ST7 has an old friend who recently arrived in South Africa working with him. Before that, he was selling arts and craft in Bandjoun, Cameroon. He came to South Africa to assess the opportunities in selling arts and craft, leaving his wife and children behind. ST7 taught his friend how to repair shoes, and he already knew how to mend clothes as he had been a tailor in the past. They now are working together at the same stall, with ST7 paying his friend for the assistance.

- **Informal helpers**

This is the most interesting and unexpected way in which traders get help from other people to run their business. In such situations, the street trader does not necessarily pay the helper (although they generally do when these informal helpers run the stall for a longer period of time, such as several hours or a day).

Traders get help, from time to time, from people they know (mostly friends) whom they call when they have to be away for a while (to buy stock, for example), or whom they send to buy stock. This is the case for ST1 and ST3.

Traders also get help from other traders they know. This was specifically observed amongst the Ugandan traders. When the interviewer accompanied ST1 to Marabastad, he stopped at a bank to

not only deposit his own money, but also that of ST1 and ST3 and another Ugandan trader selling in a nearby street. Other traders left their stalls to be managed by their immediate neighbours (ST17, ST5 and ST6) when they had to be away from their businesses.

Traders moreover get help from other people who work in the streets, like car guards or house guards, or street hairdressers (this is the case for ST9, ST1 and ST20).

Another interesting observation was that even when the trader is at his / her stall, and even when the trader has not required help explicitly, any person who is around the stall when a customer arrives and who is familiar with the trader can conduct the transaction on his / her behalf. The interviewer could do this if she were at the stall; a regular customer who was there when another customer arrived could do it; the house guards could do it; as well as the traders who were selling close to the stall. Anyone who knows the trader and his/her prices would do it spontaneously when at the stall and when the trader was, for example, busy or talking to someone else.

#### *e. Buying stock and equipment*

- Fruit and vegetables

ST4's wife, ST5, ST6, ST2, ST16 are fruit and vegetable traders. Some of them, like ST6, ST5 and ST4's wife sell bags of vegetables which they pack themselves. ST2 and ST16 sell fruit and vegetables individually.

All of them buy stock in Marabastad. They usually go several times a week, depending on how much they have sold / how much stock is left, the freshness of the remaining stock, etc.

They use a taxi to go to the market (which costs R6R) and they use either the taxi or a bakkie to take the goods back to their place, depending on the quantities bought.

These bakkies can be rented in front of the fruit and veggies market in Marabastad, for R60, but if a trader shares the bakkie with other traders, they pay less. The bakkies drop each trader at his trading place, and the driver usually helps to unload the goods (he generally also helps the traders to load their goods onto the back of the bakkie).

Traders also have to pay someone to transport the boxes they buy on a trolley at the market (usually about R15).

Unlike other types of goods, buying fruit and vegetables requires complicated calculations and strategies (which is why some traders, like ST1 and ST7, refuse to sell fruit and vegetables). The main problem relates to freshness – if fresh produce goes off, it has to be thrown away and the trader loses money. Unlike other traders, none of the fruit / vegetable traders the researcher engaged lowered their prices when the produce became less fresh. This means they have to buy the exact quantity of fruit / vegetables they think they might be able to sell until the next time they buy stock, so they do not waste money or products. Sometimes this implies choosing to buy greener fruit or vegetables so they would last longer.

Prices in Marabastad fluctuate significantly, depending on the particular day but also amongst sellers. That means a trader who wants to maximise his / her profit has to walk around the entire market, checking prices, and the quality and quantity of the goods for a certain price. He then has to make a choice, combining all these factors, as well as the quantity of goods he thinks he needs / can sell.

As prices in Marabastad vary, so do the traders'. They have to count the number of fruit / veggies they have bought (how many per box), and then check the price they paid for them before fixing a unit price (for those who sell them "individually") or before deciding how many units they can put in a bag and what price they can ask for such a bag. The trader has to ensure he / she makes a sufficient profit in terms of the price paid and the quantity of goods bought.

Finally, going to Marabastad to buy stock is costly in terms of both money and time. The trader has to find someone to look after the stall, or, like ST6, close the business for a while or go very early, before opening the stall (to avoid losing customers).

- **Soft goods**

Street traders who sell soft goods do not buy stock at the same place; sometimes they buy some items in one place and other items in another. The places where they buy stock (snacks, cigarettes, sweets, lollipops and chocolate) include:

- Marabastad (and the various "hawkers" shops, including those run by FST2): ST1 and ST4.
- Retail and wholesale shops in the CBD: ST10, ST11, ST3, ST20 and ST16. Sometimes it is a choice, even though these shops are generally more expensive than Marabastad, but it is costly to go to there.
- Retail and wholesale shops in Johannesburg: ST9 is the only one to do this because he lives in Johannesburg.

Many traders use different suppliers. ST1 buys cigarettes when needed in shops near his stall (in the same street where he sells or in Andries St) and so does ST4 –if they run out of a product before they have planned to go buy stock in Marabastad. Others, like ST3, buys stock mostly in retail and wholesale shops in the CBD, but there are some cigarettes they know they cannot find in such shops, which is why they sometimes go to Marabastad. And even if ST9 buys the bulk of his products in Johannesburg, there are times when he needs to buy supplies in Pretoria, mostly in Sunnyside (for example, if a particular cigarette brand is sold out).

With soft goods, as with fruit and vegetables, street traders have to calculate the profit they are to make when selling x product at y price, having bought it at z price. However, not all of them rely on such calculations. Only the more "entrepreneurial" street traders, and especially those who run bigger businesses, are aware of the necessity to check prices in various shops before buying, and of calculating the potential profit. ST1, ST4 and ST16 are those who insist the most on such matters.

ST16 states that he often reads the newspapers to find out when shops are advertising major discounts.

He and ST1 add that prices vary according to the money spent by the street trader to obtain the products – if the trader had to pay a lot for transport, prices are likely to rise, and one has to take into account such factors when fixing prices. They both say that their prices vary from one day to another, according to what they pay to obtain their goods. Finally, ST1 and ST4 say that it is important to take demand into account – you have to sell different products to those sold by other traders (innovation and diversification), and you also have to know what goods customers prefer (even if such goods are more expensive to buy, they will be sold out quickly).

However, it is very rare to find a significant difference in the prices fixed by various traders, and it is also very rare to find traders who sell unique products.

- **Airtime**

Those street traders who own one or more public phones have to first acquire the telephones and then buy airtime on a regular basis. They have to go to the bank with the amount they wish to load on their phone and complete a deposit slip, indicating the phone number and the amount of airtime needed. The airtime is then sent to them directly on the phone.

- **Shoe repairs, barbers and hairdressers**

These activities do not require the buying of stock; rather, the trader has to acquire the necessary tools/equipment (such as shaving machines, hairdryers etc.) – the initial investment – and then invest in items such as shampoo / hair products, hairpieces, the fabric used to repair shoes, glue, etc. on an as needed basis. The equipment / materials are bought in the CBD, most of the time very close to the place where the street traders work (there is a retail / wholesale shop which provides shoe repair equipment on the same street where ST7 and ST17 work, and very close to where ST18 is located). There is no transport or other costs involved, only the price of the equipment.

The only difficulty regarding such activities is the initial investment, especially for salons and barber shops.

*f. Profit*

The money a street trader has in his pocket at the end of the day obviously does not correspond to his profit, because he has to take into account stock or the equipment he will need to buy to maintain his business.

Most traders the researcher met were not reluctant to talk about their profit. However, it was difficult to get accurate figures, partly because some do not keep record of their profit, arguing that the money they save is “too small” (however, several of them do keep track of profits, amongst others ST4, ST1, ST5 and ST14). But the main reason was that street traders’ profit fluctuates significantly, depending on the prices at which and the days on which they buy goods, and on the season (ST5 says that she sells more vegetables during winter when people are more willing to buy some to cook hot meals). Several traders mentioned that they experience a lot of “ups and downs”.

Finally, the figures street traders gave did not always seem plausible (sometimes because of the language barrier) – there were huge differences in these amounts between traders who sold the same goods and whose businesses was the same size.

*g. Other income sources*

- Some streets traders, like ST1, have several stalls or other businesses, which allow them to earn more money (even though they have to take into account their employees’ wages). They can also be involved in other activities (like ST5’s employee who is also cleaning houses).
- Some street traders also count on their relatives’ (husband/wife’s) income, like ST8 whose husband is a part-time teacher and ST6 whose husband is also a street trader.
- Some traders try to obtain loans – although none of those the researcher met ever did so. ST4 tried to obtain financial help from the Jesuit Refugee Service, which provides help for refugees and asylum seekers in Pretoria. Since this organisation knows many refugees and asylum seekers are involved in street businesses, they provide some of them (those who hold trading permits) with money to buy stock. ST4 went to the Jesuit Refugee Service office with the researcher, but such financial help was suspended at the time.

- Micro-saving associations (stokvels) – both ST8 and ST7 belong to an association of Cameroonians based in Pretoria (for which members pay R90 a year). They organise meetings every two weeks, which present an opportunity to socialise, exchange news and ideas, and produce a sense of community, but also to save money. Each member of the association gives money every two weeks, and can then collect a larger sum of money when it is his/her turn. Most Cameroonians involved in this association are self-employed and active in micro/small businesses – some own salons or barber shops, others own small shops, car repair workshops, internet cafes or street businesses. The money they collect can be used for business purposes (buying a new shaving machine, helping to rent a shop, buying stock when one is short on money) and for personal purposes (children's school fees, for example). The association can also provide its members with insurance, which is activated in special circumstances (disease, the loss of a loved one, etc.).
- Finally, it often happens that, when a street trader is stranded, he borrows money from acquaintances (like ST11 stated).

#### *h. Expenses*

The profit the street traders make (the money which is not reinvested into the business) is used for several purposes:

- Daily life – food, clothes, rent, transport (though most of them live in the CBD, close to the place where they sell) and children's school fees.
- Returns to their home country
- Remittances (money sent to relatives and friends in their home country).

Most traders send money back home, whether it be on a regular basis or on specific occasions.

On a regular basis: ST4 and his wife send money to their two daughters in the DRC, paying for their school fees and catering for their daily needs. So does ST5, whose children are in Zimbabwe, and her employee, who left her disabled husband and her daughters in Zimbabwe.

When they can afford it: ST3 sends money to his daughter in Uganda and ST12 sends money to his girlfriend and baby in Nigeria, while ST18 sends money to his girlfriend and two children back in Tanzania. However, they cannot do it on a regular basis; it depends on the money they are able to make.

On specific occasions: ST8's father has cancer, and she supports him financially; and ST7.

Some street traders said they could not afford to send money back home, as they were making too little – this was the case for ST10 and ST11.

- The rest of the profit, if any, is saved. Some traders put it in a bank account, either in South Africa (ST4) or in their home country (ST8). In any case, most of them wish to save some money to take with them when they go back home.

### **3) Foreign street traders and the right to trade in the CBD**

Running a street business in the CBD of Pretoria implies occupying an urban space and securing such space as one's trading place. Are foreign street traders able to secure trading spaces? And how? If not, what are the obstacles they encounter or the choices they make regarding the occupation of urban space?

a. *Who has a permit and who does not?*

Among the traders the researcher met, seven hold a trading permit which gives them the right to trade at the location they chose. Twelve of them do not hold a trading permit. Among those, three could not obtain one anyway, as they sell pirated DVDs. Two other traders sell in shops, hence the licensing procedure is different and does not pose the same problems in terms of occupying urban spaces.

We might think than those traders who arrived earliest would be more likely to hold permits, but the research does not reveal this.

b. *Current legislation*

The City of Tshwane is divided into three types of areas – prohibited areas where no one is allowed to trade, restricted areas where one is allowed to trade (most of the inner city is a restricted area), and non-declared areas<sup>5</sup> (not recognised as prohibited or restricted; one has the right to trade but whether you need a permit depends on the goods sold).

Street trading regulation, in restricted areas and non-declared areas, is based on Item 3 of the Business Act of 1991. The Local Economic Department (informal trading regulation division) is entitled with the right to promulgate by-laws from this Business Act. Such by-laws determine where one can sell, how and when. Street traders also have to comply with the traffic by-laws, the latter depending on the Metro Police. Eventually they have to comply with town planning schemes and Health and Fire regulations (those who sell foodstuffs). Four authorities therefore which collaborate in regulating street trading – the LED, the Metro Police, Town Planning, and Health and Fire.

In order to legally sell on the streets, one has to obtain a trading licence from the LED. Such a document gives the “right to trade in a public space which is municipality-owned” (public space can also be owned privately). When applying for this licence, one has to determine the location where one wishes to trade. The LED examines the application and, if it agrees with its terms, sends it to the Metro Police to determine if the location chosen complies with traffic by-laws. However, it is still the LED that makes the final decision.

One then has to sign a “lease agreement” (a 12-month contract) and pay a monthly rental (of about R97). To be fully legal, traders who sell perishables, including fruit, vegetables and prepared food should also obtain and pay for a specific business licence. This is not being implemented at the moment, though, except for those who sell prepared food, as it is costly to the traders.

---

<sup>5</sup> “It has not been recognised restricted or prohibited... a trader can trade, right? But then it becomes a little bit more complicated... for example you see a trader selling plants, he cannot come and apply for a licence. But if a trader sells foodstuff in a non-declared, he has to apply for a licence, under Item 3 of the Business Act, irrespective of where you are trading in a restricted area or a non-declared area. But if you are selling any item beside foodstuff in a non-declared area, it's not our baby, we have nothing to do with it, we cannot assist you” LED interviewee.

A non-national, if he / she is legal in South Africa, has the right to obtain a trading license. Refugees and asylum seekers, as their permit normally allows them to work and study in South Africa, thus have the possibility to trade legally in Tshwane. The LED says there is no discrimination in the allocation of permits and no preference for nationals, although this might have been the case with previous administrations:

"The Business Act doesn't discriminate, it doesn't talk about different people, it doesn't really talk about South Africans, everybody who comes to South Africa should have access to fair opportunities. That's what I'm practising here. If a foreigner comes here, we say 'yes we are willing to assist you and help you, provided that you have a work permit<sup>6</sup> that is legitimate'. If you have a temporary passport it must be legitimate. ...so we don't segregate, we don't give South Africans first opportunities. No we don't do that... I know past management did that..."

Therefore, in theory and according to national legislation as well as municipal by-laws, non-nationals should have access to trading licences and be able to trade legally.

- *How legislation is implemented, understood and used*

However, the majority of traders interviewed by the researcher trade illegally in the CBD.

During the interview with the LED, it became clear that at the moment the LED refuses to issue trading permits to traders who wish to sell in the CBD, arguing that "the town is full" and overcrowded. Reducing the number of traders in the CBD is a major goal for the LED, which believes street trading contributes to degradation of the area, and that it should be turned into a safe and aesthetic space. From this perspective, a trader, whether a South African or not, cannot be issued a permit for the CBD anymore. As the research was conducted in two small areas which indeed welcome many street traders, this could explain the fact that most traders did not have a permit. A gap therefore exists between current legislation and what is actually implemented, and partially explains the presence of illegal foreign traders in the CBD.

We can also assume that, although officials might not admit it, there can be a form of discrimination regarding non-nationals, especially when it comes to areas already filled with traders. Many street traders themselves think this is the case, especially those who tried to apply for a permit and did not obtain it, or those who decided to use a South African to obtain a permit. This could warrant further investigation.

- *The traders' point of view: understanding and using current legislation*

If one focuses on what street traders think and experience, it appears quite clearly that it is also a matter of understanding current trading legislation, as well as a matter of individual strategy and intentions. The street traders the researcher met all had opinions about why they did not get or hold a permit, and whether they regretted or chose this situation.

- *A question of information*

Information is not necessarily available and equally shared by everyone. Very little is done to inform street traders, and more precisely non-nationals (very few of them belong to associations which can

---

<sup>6</sup> The LED interviewee seemed confused about migrants' permits for South Africa. He talks about a "work permit" and a "temporary passport", none of those being relevant for the question discussed.

help spread information regarding legislation, for example), about their rights, what their status as asylum seekers or refugees allow them to do, etc. On the other hand, very few traders tend to seek out such pieces of information. And when they have the information, they also interpret it in different ways.

For example, ST7 (Cameroon) thinks he does not need a permit to repair shoes and mend clothes, and even to sell his goods. There are therefore two reasons why he did not even try to get a permit – he thinks he is not bound by this legislation, and he does not wish to stay in South Africa. ST18 (Tanzania), who also repairs shoes, has a similar kind of view – he believes that shoe repairing is not an activity for which it is necessary to have a permit (although the by-laws include services provision in the definition of street trading, like barbers and shoe repairers), and he does not feel threatened regarding this activity. He feels more threatened because he also sells cigarettes. That is also why he stopped selling sweets, which he was doing in the past.

Other traders, like ST10 (Tanzania) and ST6 (Zimbabwe), think they do not have the right to get a permit because they are not South Africans. ST6 does not have a licence as she believes her legal status in South Africa does not allow her to work here – she only asked the owner of the shop in front of which she sells if she could do so. She is eager to find a South African national to apply for her. ST18 (who believes he does not need a permit for shoe repairs) also believes he cannot obtain a permit to sell soft goods (like cigarettes) as he is an asylum seeker; he thinks you have to be from South Africa, or you have to have spent a lot of time in South Africa, to be able to get a permit.

Others, like ST1 (Uganda) who used a national to obtain his permit, and ST20 (Uganda) think they might have the right to get a licence, but that xenophobia and administrative failures will prevent them from getting it. ST1 says that he tried for three years to get a licence on his own but never managed to obtain it. He thus sold goods without a permit for four years, and eventually asked a friend of his, a South African woman, to apply for him in 2008. ST20 believes he could obtain a permit as an asylum seeker but says it is a very long and costly process (as he believes he has to bribe people to obtain one). He also fears being sent to trade in an area where there are no customers. He adds that he believes that the LED and the Metro Police have an interest in not issuing permits to all traders, as they make extra money with the fines they collect. These last cases, where traders know they have the right to get a permit but emphasise the various failures and obstacles, show how they interpret information regarding legislation and build their own opinion about it.

- *Individual strategies and intentions*

Some street traders who do not hold a trading permit do not wish to obtain one, for several reasons:

They do not wish to stay in South Africa and hence do not see why they should go through such a long and costly process to sell when they will not be trading here for a long period (for example, ST7). This is also the case for ST19, who came to South Africa on a visiting visa and worked as a welder until he quit, realising he was being exploited. He therefore started selling on the streets, but wishes to go back to Cameroon soon – street trading is only a means to help him make a living in the mean time.

They do not wish to keep selling in the streets in South Africa, although they might want to stay in South Africa for some time (and find another job). ST14 from Zimbabwe's goal is to work as a mechanic; he has learnt this trade in his home country and would like to shift to such an activity when possible. This is also relevant for those who came to South Africa to study and ended up selling

on the streets, either because they did not manage to register at a university or because their courses have not started yet (ST13, ST15 and ST10).

In these cases, not having a permit is a choice, depending on intentions and individual strategies. It is not necessarily something traders feel they need to obtain, although it still is a document that provides traders with more stability and legitimacy in conducting their activity.

- *Strategies to overcome difficulties and obstacles in the occupation of space*

- Subletting and partnerships

Among the traders who actually hold a trading permit, some used South African citizens to obtain these permits. Two of them had a South African citizen apply for the permit, hence the permit does not bear the traders' names – the researcher could not find out whether they actually pay the South African citizen more than the actual rent of their space. One of them chose to be the business partner of the South African citizen, and the permit bears the latter's name. These are two viable strategies for foreign street traders to secure their location and right to trade, although it can be very costly (in the case of subletting, foreign traders often have to pay extra money to the South African citizen for the service he / she provides). The LED is well aware of such subletting practices:

"And you know what is sad for informal trade? You know when we issue you [SA citizen] a permit, you know what you do? You go sublet it. You give it to a foreigner! We are charging you R97 per month, you are charging the person R1000; we had a lot of cases like this (...) and that's illegal! That's in contradiction with our by-laws. (...) I'm paying rent [of] R97 per month, I give it to you, you don't know nothing, you're a foreigner! You give me R1000, you don't care, R1000 is nothing, you can afford it".

- Having a small stall to be able to remove it when the Metro Police come around, like ST18 and ST9
  - Choosing the place where to trade according to what one knows of the Metro Police's presence and frequency of controls, like ST7 and ST14, who say there are very few controls in X street compared to Y street. ST9 says that in "his" portion of Y street there are fewer police controls than in other parts of the street.

Street trading is thus an opportunity as well as one of the few alternatives these migrants have to make a living in South Africa, to secure their livelihoods as well as that of their relatives. Such an activity allows them to earn enough money to live in their hosting country; however, it is characterised by uncertainty – profits can vary greatly, they are often only enough to survive on, and no trader can be sure to have enough to live comfortably at the end of the day. It is also characterised by uncertainty, as not all the traders have a secure location from where to trade, which can lead to recurrent controls and confiscations by the Metro Police.

This generalised uncertainty is common to both national and non-national street traders, whether it be regarding their profit or their security of tenure. Nevertheless, the difference between them lies in the fact that non-nationals have strong links with their home countries as well as obligations towards their relations back home. For them, street trading plays a role in their daily life in South Africa (making a living) as well as in the lives of their relatives back home (sending money home, supporting relatives and friends).

## *Street businesses, social life and integration*

Street businesses seem to be playing an important social role. Indeed, street trading involves occupying a public, visible space. It is thus not only about selling goods; it is also about interacting with an entire social environment. Street traders are in contact with many other urban dwellers, either for business purposes or for social purposes.

### **1) Street businesses as social places – from supply interactions towards personalised relationships**

#### **a. The customers**

Obviously, street traders interact with their customers, who can be passers-by, people living in nearby buildings or working in nearby shops and people driving by their stall – some of whom they know personally. Indeed, there are two broad types of customers when it comes to social interaction:

- *Those who are anonymous, passers-by or people driving past the stalls who need a specific service or good at a specific moment.*

It is very rare that the trader interacts significantly with such customers. The interaction is limited to completing the transaction. For example, when it comes to buying one cigarette or “loose draw”, the customer will stop at the stall, greet the trader (or sometimes not), take a cigarette without asking the price (if he does not know the price, he will ask a simple “how much?”, pointing his / her finger at the product he wants) and then give the money to the street trader or put it on the table, light his cigarette and leave.

The same can be observed regarding the use of public phones: the customer stops at the stall, points his / her finger at the phone or simply says “phone” or “I want to phone”, and gives the money to the trader. When the trader owes the customer small change after he / she has made the phone call, the customer can choose to take a few sweets (of more or less the same value as the change owed). In this case, he can point his / her finger at the sweets, and the trader would reply “take one” or “take two”.

- *Those who are regular customers, or even people who have become friends with the trader over time.*

In these cases, interactions are longer; they will exchange greetings, news about themselves and family and friends, etc. Sometimes, regular customers who do not even need to buy something drop by the stall to chat for a while with the trader. When a trader manages to build such a relationship with a customer, it allows him to secure his situation, as the customer will deliberately buy from him rather than from other traders nearby.

For example, ST4 and his wife know a Congolese lady who always buys her vegetables and fruit from them. Whenever she comes to buy, she stays for a while, chatting with ST4’s wife in Lingala, and her little girls are often offered sweets or fruit for free.

Furthermore, when a street trader knows a customer very well, he will give him credit (let him take goods without paying immediately), or sometimes offer him some goods for free.

In such cases, the interaction is more personalised. It is about turning what E. Goffman calls “traffic relationships” (characterised by anonymity, brevity and indifference, like with passers-by) and “supply relationships” (characterised by the will to complete a transaction) into personalised relationships, characterised by loyalty (buying from the same street traders) and a certain knowledge (although often superficial) of who the other is. It is both a commercial strategy and a means to broaden one’s social spectrum.

### *b. People hanging around the stalls*

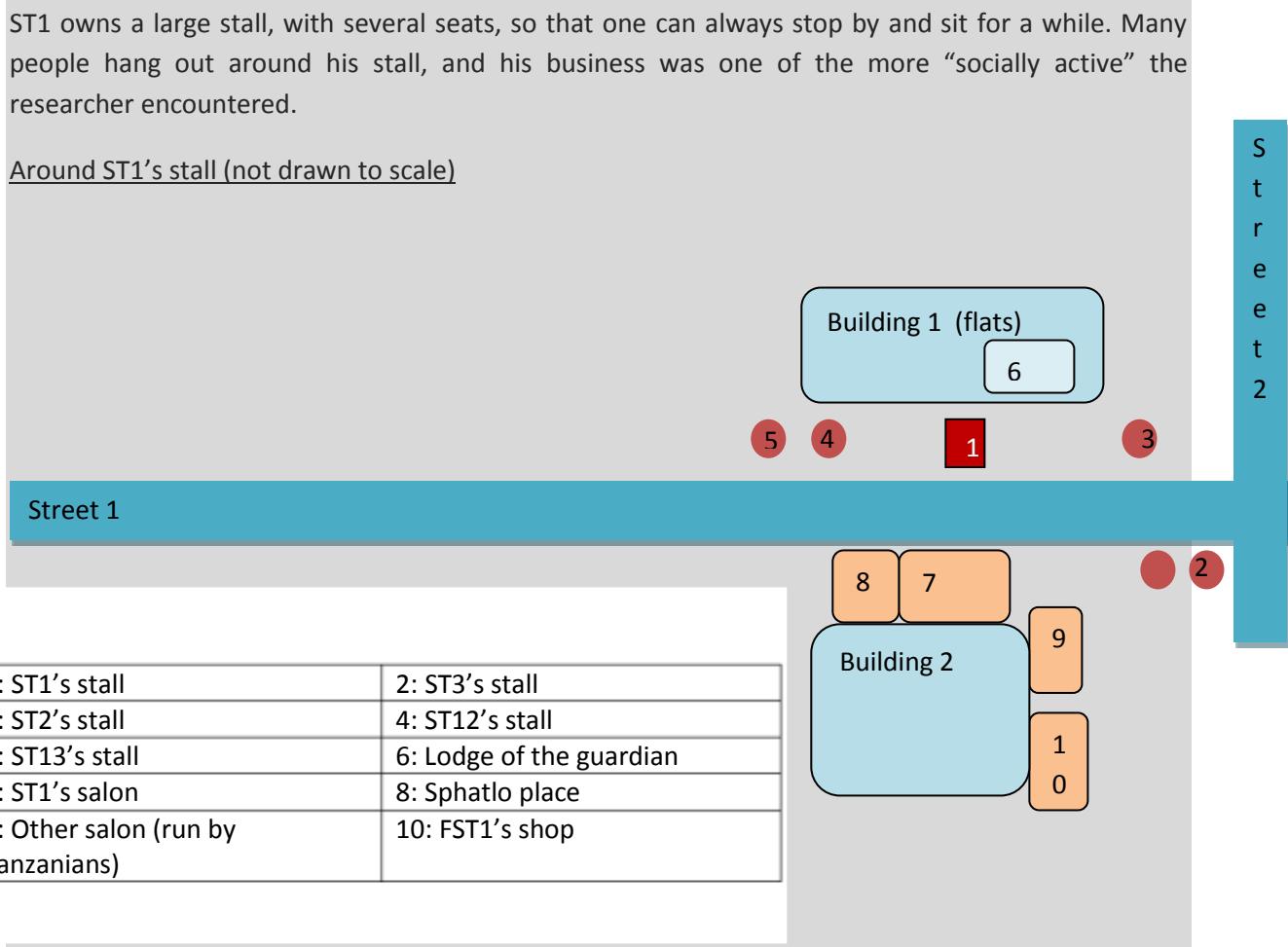
People other than regular customers sometimes stay a while at a street trader’s place. In such cases, there is no transaction implied (even when the person is also a customer). It is merely about sitting a while, exchanging news, etc. Stalls thus become not only the place where people stop by and complete transactions, but a sort of social node or social landmark.

Such people can be customers, car guards, house guards, other street traders, street hairdressers, or people working in nearby shops or salons. They are also the ones who informally help the street trader at his / her stall.

#### **CASE STUDY SIX: ST1's stall as a place of socialising**

ST1 owns a large stall, with several seats, so that one can always stop by and sit for a while. Many people hang out around his stall, and his business was one of the more “socially active” the researcher encountered.

#### Around ST1's stall (not drawn to scale)



The diagram above shows where ST1's stall is located in relation to nearby shops, buildings and other street businesses. People spending time at his stall mostly came from one of those shops / buildings / stalls (the others were regular customers or friends):

ST12 (4) and ST2 (3) often spent time with him, as they are his direct “street neighbours”. ST2’s employee was also often at ST1’s stall, as the latter often needed his “informal” help.

We know that ST1 and ST3 (2) are relatives. They often go from one stall to the other.

ST13 (5) decided to erect his stall near ST12’s, as both have extensive experience of Nigeria (ST12 is Nigerian, while ST13 has spent several years in Lagos). They thus became friends and ST13 was indirectly introduced to ST1’s “immediate social environment”.

J. is a young man from Burundi who works as a barber in ST1’s salon (7), opposite the latter’s stall. He also often stays around ST1’s stall when he has no customers.

ST1 knows FST1 (10) very well, from the days when FST1 was still selling in the streets at the very same corner where her shop is now located. Even though she does not stay around FST1’s stall, she often drops by.

The first building accommodates many people who have become regular customers of ST1’s. In addition, its security guards also spend some of their time outside their lodge at ST1’s stall (as it is located in front of the building’s gate).

#### **CASE STUDY SEVEN: ST9’s stall**

ST9 owns a very small business in another street. However, many people stay around his stall, sitting behind it and chatting, including –

- a couple of street hairdressers from Zimbabwe, who walk around proposing their services to passer-bys and when tired of standing or walking around, sit at ST9’s place
- a number of car guards helping people park their vehicles, as there is a lot of traffic in this street, also come and spend time at ST9’s place
- employees from nearby shops, including a South African who works at the shop in front of which ST9’s stall is located
- other traders, such as a Zimbabwean who sells cheap jewellery close to ST9’s stall, and a Nigerian who sells “juice” walking in the streets.

#### **2) Street trading, xenophobia and integration**

##### **a. “They don’t like foreigners”**

As stated earlier, street traders operate in public, open spaces. There are thus visible and accessible. If it is an asset in order to attract customers, many street traders also feel this makes them vulnerable, first to crime (especially for those who run their businesses at night, like ST1), and secondly to xenophobia.

Indeed, most of them picture South Africans as people who are not open and welcoming to non-nationals, especially when it comes to employment and self-employment. Regarding self-employment (including street trading), they say that South African street traders feel threatened by non-national traders, and there is thus competition for scarce resources, customers, and urban space (cf. the trading permit issue). Feeling threatened, South Africans would develop xenophobic feelings, according to many non-national traders.

Street traders, as they are visible as non-nationals when selling in the streets, thus feel vulnerable and are likely to be marginalised, insulted, despised or even attacked.

In this respect, when I asked ST5 to identify the main problem she had in South Africa, she immediately answered that it was the fact that South Africans “do not like foreigners, especially Zimbabweans”. She then added that South Africans call them “kwere kwere” – although she does not know exactly what this term means, she knows it is a negative tag given to non-nationals.

Regarding the meaning of the expression “kwere kwere”, T. Winkler (2006: 1) writes: “Kwere Kwere is a derogatory term used by South Africans to label other foreigner Africans. It literally refers to the sound of African languages now “flooding” [South African] cities”.

F. B. Nyamjoh (2007: 39) confirms this view: the term “kwere kwere” (or makwerekwere) would refer to the “lack of intelligible language” other Africans would suffer from, it would be an “onomatopoeic reference to the strange ways they speak”. He adds: “Makwerekwere means different things in different contexts, but as used in South Africa it means not only a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages but also one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa”.

However, for several traders, like ST1, this term would refer to an insect which literally “lives in people’s shit” (as ST1 explains), and which would feed from garbage.

This fear of being categorized as a “foreigner” (a term which is in itself derogatory, referring as much to people’s nationalities as to their “strangeness”, their “alien” condition) explains why, whenever someone tries to take advantage of some traders, they feel it is because they are not South Africans. During my stay, ST2 was attacked by two South Africans, one wanted a cigarette but did not want to pay, and when ST2 insisted on payment, they beat him up, which actually landed him in hospital. ST1, who tried to intervene, ended taking the case to court, and at the end of the researcher’s stay the case was still discussed. It is however significant that ST1 immediately explained this incident by xenophobic feelings and nationals trying to take advantage of non-nationals.

This fear also gives rise to “urban tales”, especially ahead of the World Cup. The majority of the traders, like ST16, ST5, ST9 and others told me that after the World Cup xenophobic attacks would occur, just like in 2008. They say they have heard customers and other South Africans talking about it, or even telling them straight out that “they would come back for [them]”. As a consequence, some traders and other non-nationals (like J., the street hairdresser), were trying very hard to save some money to go back home before these anticipated events.

### ***b. Towards integration?***

If street trading generates a feeling of vulnerability, paradoxically it also allows street traders to adapt to their social environment, to learn how to behave in South African cities and thus to feel part of it. One of the social roles of street trading would be to allow non-nationals to feel part of the city in which they live – it would produce a “sense of belonging”.

- *Learning how to speak, learning how to behave*

In order to protect themselves and to reduce their feeling of vulnerability, street traders can develop specific strategies. Building good relationships with customers is part of these strategies. The main strategy, however, relates to local languages.

Some street traders did not speak proper English before coming to South Africa – they thus learnt English in the streets, when interacting with local people and customers. Learning English is a first step towards feeling integrated in South Africa.

However, many street traders state that whenever they speak English, one immediately knows that they are not South Africans. South Africans are believed to speak almost exclusively their mother language, whether it be Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, etc. As a consequence, most street traders tried to learn local South African languages in the streets, listening to South African people talking.

Languages thus can either exclude people or help them be less “visible”, less vulnerable. It functions as an excluding / including mechanism. This also confirms what T. Winkler and F. B. Nyamjoh stated about the term “kwerekwere”: learning a South African language means adapting to the South African environment, claiming to be part of it, becoming “intelligible”.

Furthermore, not only does it allow street traders to be less visible as “foreigners”, it also allows them to run their businesses more efficiently. They can talk to their customers in the latter’s own language, which they often do. It facilitates interactions and access to the customers.

ST4 insists a lot on the necessity to learn such languages, to facilitate his integration in the South African society. He thus learnt Zulu and Sotho, in addition to English which he also learnt in the streets upon his arrival in South Africa, and his mother languages, French, Lingala, and Kisongue.

As for ST1, he insists on the fact that he knows the majority of South African languages, except Zulu which he chose not to learn (he says that Zulu people are the most inclined to xenophobic feelings, and thus he does not like them).

ST17, who has been in SA for 16 years now, mastered a lot of South African languages, including Afrikaans (and he is the only street trader I know who actually learnt this language).

Even the street traders who arrived recently, like ST15, often state that they can understand and speak a little bit of some South African languages.

Finally, some street traders from Zimbabwe (like ST5 and ST6) did not have any problem with local languages, as some languages which are spoken in SA are also spoken in some regions of Zimbabwe, like Zulu or Shangaan. ST5’s grandmother, for example, was speaking Zulu as a mother tongue, and she knew this language before coming to South Africa. ST1 adds that, indeed, for some African nationals it is easy to adapt and behave like a South African citizen as some South African languages are also spoken in their home countries.

Street trading thus is an activity which allows individuals to access to some South African ways of behaving, to learn South African languages, and thus to be partially integrated. Street trading is an ambivalent activity: it can make people feel vulnerable and “alien”, but at the same time it can be a means to learn how to behave in the South African context. It can also be, paradoxically, an integration tool.

- *Street stalls as landmarks*

Street businesses can function as places which are not only social places, but landmarks for fellow nationals, and even for nationals of other countries – for them to meet people, to adapt, to feel as though they belong in their new environment.

For example, street businesses can be a place to welcome newcomers and to help them adapt. This is the case for those street traders who decide either to bring someone deliberately from their home country in order to help them (ST1 was trying to find someone like that), or to have someone from their home country (or from another country) help them upon this person's arrival in South Africa.

Indeed, ST8 is now hosting her nephew who arrived in April and who now helps her with her business. Similarly, ST7 welcomed his childhood friend R.: he has been putting the latter up and working with him since April. Both R. and ST8's nephew were (and still are) a little bit disoriented as they have just arrived, and they do not know yet how to speak English properly, how to behave and to make their way in Pretoria. Participating in a friend's or relative's business thus helps them to secure a living as well as to adapt to their new environment.

In the same way, ST8 also had helped two Zimbabweans who had just arrived at the end of March. They had got off the bus which had taken them from Harare to Pretoria, and they had nothing, no luggage, no acquaintances in South Africa, etc. They immediately talked to her and asked her to help them out. Even though she says she does not like Zimbabweans (she says they are thieves), she agreed to accommodate them for a few days, to give them food, and to have one of the two work for her (for a small wage). However, something occurred which led the latter to leave her: two shaving machines belonging to ST8 had disappeared, and she immediately accused him of having stolen them. He tried to give some explanation (as it appeared he had gone with the machines for real). ST8 would not believe him and was threatening to call the police and have him deported back to Zimbabwe. Eventually the man brought the machines back and had to leave ST8's employ. Although the story did not end too well, we can see how street businesses can offer opportunities for newcomers to adapt during the first weeks of their stay.

This is even more the case as street businesses are, as we saw, social places, where people can stay, chat, spend some of their spare time. People from the same country thus tend to regroup themselves around stalls run by fellow nationals (although there are also South Africans and other nationals). For example, around ST18's stall, several Tanzanians often spend some time talking in Swahili, sitting on a rock or a chair. The same goes for ST11's stall, where ST10 and fellow Tanzanians often spend time. The same goes for the Cameroonian's stalls. Street businesses thus can sometimes function as socializing places, not only in general, but for fellow nationals or other foreigners who seek to adapt to new contexts, exchange ideas and news regarding their experience in South Africa, exchanging information, sometimes helping each other.

Street trading can create a feeling of being "alien", of being visible as a foreigner, and thus vulnerable. But it also provides solutions to the "uncertainty" linked to the status of foreigners. As social places, social landmarks and learning spaces, street businesses can participate in creating a "sense of belonging" to a new context, and in minimizing the uncertainties and difficulties one faces when in a new country.

Street trading is thus a paradoxical activity, shifting between exclusion and integration. However, it seems that the social role of street trading overcomes the possibility of exclusion. It is indeed a way for newcomers to adapt to their new environment, for street traders to learn how to behave and to relate to people in South Africa, for them to meet people, including South African citizens, expand their social network, and even to feel "at home" when meeting fellow nationals.

## *People in transit? Replacing street trading in migrants' broader itineraries*

It is important to broaden our perspective and to replace street trading, as practiced by migrants in South Africa, in their broader itineraries and experiences. This implies looking at their intentions and expectations regarding street trading as well as regarding their hosting country. This implies looking at their relation to both this activity and this country.

### **1) A transitional activity?**

We first draw a distinction between two street trader profiles: those who present themselves as entrepreneurs, and those who do not wish to expand their business and do not use it as a stepping stone for developing more important businesses. This allows us to examine people's relation to their business as well as people's intentions – and, beyond, to consider street trading as a temporary, transitional activity.

#### **a. Street entrepreneurs: street trading as a transition towards formal businesses**

Some of the street traders interviewed by the researcher stress the fact that they are business-minded people, knowing how to run a business efficiently and productively, knowing how to expand, develop and diversify their activities. They tend to consider street trading as a business, however small it is, and to emphasize the legitimacy and significance of such an activity, expecting some kind of recognition.

#### **CASE STUDY EIGHT: ST1**

We have seen that ST1 was the only street trader interviewed to state that he came to South Africa for business purposes. Whether it is true or not (people always reconfigure their first intentions in relation to their current experiences and activities) does not matter; what matters is that he tends to consider what he is doing right now as a real professional activity and as a commitment.

For this reason, he was proud to explain to the interviewer how he started working for this other Ugandan man who had a very small stall (he emphasises that aspect), and how, when the Ugandan man left, he managed to make this business grow. Indeed, if he started by selling sweets and cigarettes for another person, he then succeeded in becoming self-employed and even in hiring other people (cf. he had ST3 work for him for a while). He also went from selling sweets and cigarettes to selling sweets, cigarettes, chocolates, lollipops, cakes (a large variety of each of these products), snacks and peanuts, airtime, public phone access, and even clothes, belts and shoes. He buys some of the clothes and belts in Marabastad – one day, when the researcher was with him, he spent one hour searching for clothes to sell in a thrift shop. But he also emphasised the fact that he imports some of the clothes and shoes that he sells: he says that he has a Ugandan friend buy clothes and shoes abroad (in Europe even) and then bring it back to Uganda, and send it to South Africa from there.

He also went from selling in one place only to acquiring another place in the CBD and to having a fellow Ugandan work for him. He eventually went from selling in the streets only to opening a salon. Now, he aims at opening a formal shop in order to sell clothes, belts and shoes. He is waiting for the moment when he will be able to afford it. Whether he plans to keep on selling in the streets or not, he did not divulge to the interviewer. But for him, street vending is an activity which he tries to improve and from which he tries to evolve towards bigger, more formal businesses. Street trading,

and the first stall he opened, thus were stepping stones in order to access more business opportunities.

It also shows in how he runs his business. He explains that he always calculates the potential profit he can make when selling x or y product: when the researcher accompanied him to Marabastad, he took a lot of time to demonstrate how he was checking different shops and products before buying, and how he was always calculating what profit he could make when selling x product, using a pocket calculator which he was ostensibly carrying around.

#### **CASE STUDY NINE: ST4**

ST4 also presents himself as an entrepreneur. He insists on the fact that he has studied a lot at university back home, which makes him a qualified person or even an intellectual – at least someone who has a relevant background for becoming a successful businessman. Just like ST1 (how they got into street business is actually kind of similar), he emphasises the fact that he started working for someone who was exploiting him, and he explains proudly how he managed to dupe this person who was not business-minded and clever enough to expand his activity. He also stresses how he diversified the products he sells. Interestingly, he eventually emphasizes his knowledge of the South African context: he says that he observed a lot what was happening around him when he arrived, and that he now knows “South African people better than they themselves do”. He adds that he learnt local languages on purpose in order to improve his business and his integration. He finally says that he is also knowledgeable about his rights and the administrative procedures in SA (to get a street trading permit, a license for a shop, to move from one status to another), and that he always looks for the relevant information. However, he never tried to open another stall. His plan is to move from the streets towards a shop, and he says that this will happen very soon, in the course of 2010. He has already found the information regarding licensing for formal shops.

#### **CASE STUDY TEN: From street businesses to formal shops**

FST1 and FST2 are both examples of how street traders who were trying to take the best out of this activity managed to move from street trading towards bigger businesses successfully.

FST2 started selling sweets, cigarettes and snacks in Schubart St (after having worked a few months in a bakery). When he tried to apply for a trading permit he was told there was no space available where he wanted to sell, and was given a space near Bosman Station. He thus went to sell there. After 4 years he had saved some money and, after having talked with a Congolese friend, he conceived another project: he was planning to import goods, jewellery and clothes, from Thailand, and sell them in a formal shop. With the money he had made with street trading he started renting a shop in Andries St, and started selling sweets and cigarettes in bigger quantities there in order to make money to go to Thailand. In 2007 he went there and brought goods back which he started to sell in his shop. At the same time, he had made enough money to open another shop in Marabastad. When he realized his shop in Andries St was not very viable, he sold his stock to a Congolese lady, and acquired another shop in Marabastad (in 2008). He still owns the two shops in Marabastad today. When asked about how he managed to evolve positively from the streets to several shops, he explains that if one remains focused and does not waste money, one can make it without too many difficulties. It would be a matter of focus, “vision” (intentions) and discipline.

FST1 had a very troubled start in South Africa. When she arrived in Pretoria, after having experienced several difficulties, she had nowhere to go and no more money. She then asked the UN for help, even sleeping in front of the building to beg for this help. That is how Somalian people found her and decided to accommodate her for a month, giving her R300 for food. She decided to use this money to start a street business, as selling was something she was good at and had been doing a lot in her home country. She started selling soft goods and some fruit at the intersection where her shop now is. She did that for 2 years, trying to save some money while making a living and supporting her children. She managed to save enough to start renting the shop where she now sells (rent R2000 per month) and to buy the first stock. Her shop has expanded since then, and she now hires another Ethiopian to help her with running it, as she is currently sick and very tired. She now lives very close to her shop with her 2 sons and her daughter, and manages to make ends meet. She emphasises the fact that many people who used to know her when she was selling in the streets now come to her and are surprised to see how successful she is. She says even researchers, university teachers, social workers and journalists come to her as they are curious about her success. She is thus very proud to answer to each and every one, and has built a whole discourse about how she struggled to leave her home country, how she got to South Africa, how she suffered during her first years here, and how she eventually found her way out.

Both FST1 and FST2 started in the streets and, thanks to the money they were saving and a strong will to change their conditions, developed their activity and then accessed other business opportunities.

In conclusion, one can say that some street traders (like ST1, ST4, or FST1 and FST2 when they were selling in the streets) consider themselves as real business people and project themselves in trading, wanting to evolve from street trading towards bigger, more profitable activities. Street trading is a stage in their itinerary, it is a means to save the money needed in order to open bigger businesses. It is a stepping stone for starting other activities – in this sense it can be considered as transitional.

#### *b. Street trading as “non-project-driven”: a temporary activity*

In most cases, street trading is not part of such an entrepreneurial project. Officials and even traders' associations are not interested in what they call "survivalist" street traders as they do not seem to represent economic potential, as they do not seem to be likely to evolve towards bigger, more formal businesses. Indeed, both the Local Economic Department and some street traders' associations (like the Tshwane Informal Business Forum) focus a lot on the more "entrepreneurial" street traders. Their ultimate aim is to support such traders, and to provide them with facilities and infrastructure, in order to help them formalize, to move from street trading towards small enterprises:

"In Tshwane our strategy is: let informal traders move to SMEs... but it's not happening" (D. L).

The LED is thus trying very hard to implement projects in various parts of the municipality, with specific trading spaces and infrastructure to accommodate existing street traders. They also try to implement small businesses incubators:

"We have built a building for SMEs, we are accommodating I think about 20 SMEs (...) and they're doing very well (...) and the idea is that in a few years, maybe two, three years, they start going into more formalized industries. So we are giving them a helping hand" (*ibid*)

In this respect, street traders who do not conform to this view, who fail to display a strong will to expand and then formalize their business, are simply ignored by stakeholders.

Most of the non-national street traders interviewed by the researcher are not planning to expand their current businesses, nor to move towards more formal businesses. Almost all the street traders interviewed had not planned to enter street trading, and if some later on decided to expand such an activity and to use it as a stepping stone, the vast majority of them are more doing it as a result of the lack of alternatives or as a consequence of the failure of previous plans. This lack of alternative and failures do not generate more precise intentions and plans regarding street trading. It is thus still viewed as “better than nothing”, as “something to do at least”, and not as an activity you project yourself into.

For some street traders, street trading is related to a gap in their South African experience, and is thus viewed as temporary:

- We know that ST9 entered street trading in Pretoria very recently, in January 2010. He thus has undertaken several jobs before: working in a salon in Durban, street trading temporarily in the CBD of Johannesburg, working in a security company, then street trading again (in Pretoria) when the security company closed. He thus shifted from one activity to another, and street trading filled gaps in-between other jobs. Street trading is seen as a temporary activity, which is also why nothing is done in order to get legal (obtain a trading permit for example).
- We know that ST10 had planned to study in South Africa. When it appeared he could not achieve this goal, he decided to remain in South Africa anyway, thinking that things might improve for him in the end. He met a Kenyan person who introduced him to street trading, and started selling sweets and cigarettes as a means to secure a living while waiting for other opportunities.
- Same goes for ST19, who first worked, in keeping with his qualification, as a technician in some company. When it appeared that he was being exploited, he quit, but he did not want to go back to Cameroon immediately. He thus also started selling in the streets, thinking he might find something else to do in the end – and, if not, he could always go back to his home country.
- For those like ST13 and ST8’s nephew who will be starting their studies soon, street trading is an activity which allows them to make extra money (even though their parents send them enough money) while waiting for the academic year to start.
- ST14 had planned to work as a mechanic, in keeping with the trade he learnt back home. While waiting for a possibility to achieve this plan, he entered street trading. In addition, during the interviewer’s stay, he suddenly disappeared, along with his stall. The interviewer does not know what happened to him: did he find another job? Did he go back to Zimbabwe according to his plans, to prepare another trip, better organized, to South Africa?
- ST12 went to South Africa planning to get involved in drug trafficking. He had all the necessary contacts. He told the interviewer that he soon realized drug trafficking in South Africa was way too risky, and, as he did not want to go back to Nigeria immediately, he started selling pirated DVDs.

Others, like ST5, ST6 or ST11, do not have the same relation to their business: they have been involved in it since their arrival, they might do it for the whole length of their stay, it does not fill a gap in their stay. However, they do not wish to expand it, either as they do not see it as a relevant, legitimate activity, or because they know they are doing it as a result from a lack of alternatives (“better than nothing”). They might also plan to go back to their home country and start another

business, which explains why they do not commit themselves to their South African activity. In this sense, even though they can be selling in the streets for years, they still see this activity as temporary.

In both cases, whether street trading fills a gap in one's life in South Africa or not, street trading is seen as a temporary option, and most traders have other plans and intentions regarding their future in South Africa or elsewhere. Street trading is "non-project driven", hence, transitional.

## **2) Street traders on the move**

### **a. Relation to their host country**

If street trading is transitional for some non-nationals involved in this activity, it is partly due to their relation to their home country, and to their intention regarding remaining in South Africa. Even among those who try to expand their businesses and those who seem settled in South Africa, there is often a possibility to be "on the move" again.

- Some traders know they are in South Africa for very little time. They never planned to remain in South Africa and have sometimes even planned the moment of their departure. Their project is explicit: going to South Africa for a few months, a few years maybe, try to make the best of it and benefit from the possibilities they would encounter. This is the case for ST7 (the most explicit), but also for ST12.
- Others may have planned to remain some time in South Africa, but the difficulties they encountered, and the fact that they have not been able to achieve what they dreamt of achieving (study again, find formal employment, earn more money), have led them to consider staying only a few months or years. They would then leave, especially if they have not improved their situation in the meantime. This is the case for ST15, but also ST10, ST19 and ST14.
- Others may have planned to remain some time in South Africa and may be acting according to this initial plan: like ST5, ST11, ST20, ST8 or ST18. However, this does not mean they intend to settle permanently in South Africa, even though they can spend many years in the country.
- Finally, some traders may seem to be settled, like ST1, ST17 (who has been here for 16 years) or FST2 (even though he is not a street trader anymore). Still, it does not mean they wish to remain in South Africa permanently (and FST2 says so explicitly, even though he holds permanent residence). This can seem paradoxical, especially as their status can imply long-term residence in South Africa or as the size and improvement of their business can make one think they intend to stay. It is however not that paradoxical, as they may have intentions and projects they want to achieve "after South Africa".
- Only ST4 expressed the explicit intention to remain permanently in South Africa.

There are thus a variety of "shades" in the relation street traders have with their host country: it can be more or less loose, more or less tight. However, most street traders can be considered as "on the move", hence, geographically transitional (just like street trading has been defined as a potential transitional activity). They can either intend to go back to their home country in the end, or to travel to another country whether it be in Africa or outside Africa.

### *b. Dreaming about home*

- *Many street traders express the will to go back to their home country after a while.*

ST18 explains that he wants to make enough money in South Africa before he goes back to his home country. Indeed, the Rand is known to be a stronger currency than other countries' currencies. If he can save some money and take it home with him, he and his relatives would benefit from a more comfortable situation in Tanzania.

ST8 has a similar project: going back to Cameroon with her husband and children after having saved enough, and using this money to buy a piece of land and build a house in Douala. Working in South Africa thus is a means to "think about her family's future" and to invest for this future. She is also thinking about what she would be doing when in Cameroon: she might open a shop to sell clothes and fabric at the Central Market in Douala, using some of the money she saved from South Africa and some of the money she already has in her Cameroonian bank account.

ST3 and ST7 expressed their intention to go back to their home country after the World Cup. ST7 has a very precise intention as for what he wants to do in Cameroon: start a bigger clothes business, importing clothes from other countries (Nigeria, and even China) and selling them in Cameroon.

ST11 also wants to go back to Tanzania, but he says he lacks the money for the transport right now. He would like to open his own salon there, and might ask one of his elder brothers for help in order to start this business.

ST17 would like to go back to Mozambique, even though he does not know when. He thinks about opening a small shop in the location where he grew up, a convenience store which would be lucrative as he says there are few shops in these areas, and such areas are quite far from the inner city. Thus people often have to pay for transport to buy products.

Even FST2 plans to go back to the DRC after a while, even though he seems settled in South Africa, having his wife and kids there, holding a permanent resident status, and owning several shops.

- *In addition to wanting to go back home, many traders maintained a close link with their country. Such a link materializes in different ways:*

We have seen there are often money remittances and money flows between home and host countries.

There also are frequent returns to home country (ST17, ST5) to visit family and friends, often bringing gifts and money. However, it remains unclear how asylum seekers and refugees can return to their home country without losing the benefit of their temporary permit. ST9 explained to the researcher that, if he were to return to the DRC (and he would like to return soon for a visit), he would cross the Zambian / DRC border without going through passport control, so that no one would know he had returned. As borders are porous and controls easy to avoid, such a strategy can be used for asylum seekers and refugees to visit their home country, in the cases where their lives are not really threatened back home. This aspect of migrants' lives (returns to home country) generates specific patterns of circular migration, especially between southern African countries, with people coming and going, as D.C and N. from LHR pointed out.

Some traders also invest in their country while being in South Africa. It often means acquiring land and houses back home, and sometimes renting them in the meantime (which creates another income-generating source).

FST2 has acquired two pieces of land, one in Goma and another in a neighbouring town. ST17 acquired a piece of land in a suburb in Maputo, and he built a house there – while he is absent a friend of his lives in this house. For him this house represents security, as he knows that, whatever happens, he can always go back to Mozambique and have somewhere to live and to re-start from. ST2 had built 3 houses in Uganda, and he is renting them, which allows him to secure more money.

Finally, some traders still have businesses running in their home countries, for example, in the case of ST20 and ST7. They still generate money back home while being in South Africa.

- *South Africa as a stepping stone to other countries*

Other traders (and sometimes even those who say they want to go back home) also plan to move from South Africa to another destination. Most popular are of course the US, Canada and Europe. If they get the opportunity to go there, they would leave South Africa quickly. Sometimes it is because they want to experience the “western” world (like ST8, ST7, ST1, ST11), sometimes it is because they feel that it would be a necessity to earn more money to support their loved ones, like ST18 or ST5.

ST5 indeed would like to go to Dubai, even though right now she lacks the money: she believes she could make more money there, and she knows a lot of Zimbabweans who went there looking for better opportunities. South Africa is considered as “not sufficient”, and one has to move again to improve one’s situation. She would also like to go to the UK, as she has a friend there who now lives comfortably. This friend told ST5 she should try to get permanent residence in South Africa, so that she can travel more easily to Europe afterwards.

In some cases, South Africa can be seen as a stepping stone in order to access other countries.

However, planning to travel to another country is often a vague plan, more like a dream (see all the street traders who asked the interviewer how they could get to France, or to help them get there). Furthermore, it does not mean that in the end they do not wish to settle back in their home country. There is no contradiction between these two projects, first because both projects are not always precise, second because “home” always seems to be the final destination, whatever countries one crosses or lives in, wherever one travels for the sake of experience or for seeking a better life.

We can thus say that in most cases non-national street traders are “on the move”: they may shift from one activity to another or not commit themselves to their current activity, considering street trading as a transitional activity, or they may use street trading as a stepping stone towards other activities and bigger businesses. They may plan on going back home (or dream of eventually going back home when this project is not as precise) or to reach another destination, and not project themselves in South Africa even though they have been there for a while and have invested in their current business. They are kind of in “in-between” situations, being “here” but dreaming of “there”, doing “this” but thinking about doing something else.

Street trading thus has an ambivalent place in their broader itineraries: it is a way to survive “here” and “now”, but it also represents a stage, a phase, a stepping stone towards other activities or destinations. It can allow someone to make money to secure a living in South Africa, as well as to

send money home, and then to return home with enough money to start another activity. It can allow someone to save some money and to get papers to facilitate travel to other destinations. It can allow someone to accumulate more money and to invest back home. It can allow someone to make enough money in order to start another activity in South Africa – although even this other activity can be temporary if one plans to eventually go back home. For these reasons, a street trader can disappear suddenly, either travelling again or shifting to another activity: this was the case with ST14 and ST12 during the researcher's stay.

Such matters are obviously specific to foreign street traders. Their relation to space (South Africa, home, other countries) and time (length of stay in South Africa, how long they are to be involved in street trading) determines the role and place of street trading in their itineraries..

## **Part III – Conclusion and perspectives**

### *Identifying issues and uncertainties to tackle*

This study investigated the role and place of street trading in migrants' lives in South Africa, drawing on field work undertaken in the CBD of Pretoria. We first examined the situation of these migrants back home as well as the circumstances of their arrival and of their stay in South Africa. We then saw that street trading plays an important role in making a living in a new country, as well as in helping relatives to make a living elsewhere. Furthermore, street trading is also an important aspect of foreigners' social lives and integration in their host country.

Eventually we replaced street trading in their broader experiences and itineraries: street trading and street traders are often considered as transitional, and street trading plays an ambivalent part in their lives, as it is temporary and does not represent a project in itself. Street trading thus coexists with a variety of other intentions, opportunities and possibilities: going back home, travelling elsewhere, investing back home and supporting relatives back home, shifting to another activity either in South Africa or in their home countries, etc. Street trading cannot be considered as a stand-alone element, but as an activity which is linked and intertwined with other expectations and intentions, which can make such expectations and intentions come true, or which can allow someone to secure a living while waiting for such expectations and intentions to come true.

Examining the role and place of street trading in migrants' lives reveals the specificity of the foreign street traders' situations and experiences, as compared to national traders – and specific issues and uncertainties they face. Indeed, regarding the street traders interviewed for this study (and there are obviously issues of representativeness), many of them can be considered as experiencing specific uncertainties. These uncertainties can be imposed (and street traders suffer from them) or they can be chosen as part of a strategy or as part of a broader project.

What are the uncertainties revealed by this research?

- **Uncertainties regarding their legal status**

Many traders do not hold a permit which is suitable for their individual situations and intentions. This puts them in a singular situation where they may not have many rights or be recognized by South African citizens, where they are not considered as what they are, and where they do not fit in any framework or category: are they asylum seekers or refugees, "fake" asylum seekers or refugees (and this discourse about "fake" asylum seekers and refugees can be damaging for them)? Economic refugees (knowing that those are not recognized by the South African legal framework)? Economic migrants? Are they even migrants, as their presence in South Africa can be very temporary?

However, the legal status of many of them results from both the lack of alternative and choice – hence an "in-between" situation. Lack of alternative because the South African immigration policy does not provide solutions regarding temporary economic migrants and non-skilled workers – therefore people who fit in such categories do not have any other alternative than using the "asylum route".

- **Uncertainties regarding their trading spaces and trading rights**

There is a major problem relating to the diffusion and understanding of information regarding non-national street traders' rights, and a major issue regarding their occupation of urban land. Indeed, occupation of urban land is often conflictual, and given the alleged overpopulation of the CBD of Pretoria, the need and struggle for urban space are even more acute. Non-national street traders are often likely not to obtain or to look for a trading permit, hence their precarious situation regarding securing a trading space. However, they may also choose not to obtain a trading permit, especially when they do not wish to persist in such an activity.

- **Uncertainties regarding their livelihoods, which is common to all street traders**

Street trading, for non-national as well as for South African citizens, is an activity characterized by risk, uncertainty, fluctuations. It does not always provide individuals with the opportunity to earn more than what they need daily. Regarding foreigners, it is even more tricky as many of them also support family in their home countries, have to call them, travel back home sometimes, and also, think about what they will be doing next, where they will go next – and save enough, anticipating for when they would leave their host country (for those who plan to leave).

- **Uncertainties regarding their integration and adaptation to their host country, and sometimes even anxieties – although street business provides them with a social platform and opportunities to feel “part of” South African urban life.**

- **Uncertainties as it is a transitional activity**

Indeed, as most street traders do not plan to remain in South Africa, or to keep selling in the streets, they need to picture themselves doing something else or being somewhere else. They also need to anticipate, according to their intentions and projects for the future: for example, they need to save enough money to be able to go back home and even to start another business there, they need to accumulate enough money in order to be able to secure their situation when back home (like ST8 who wishes to accumulate enough to buy a piece of land and build a house for her family), etc. They thus face specific constraints.

#### *Research limitations and gaps*

These findings, however, have to be confirmed or contradicted by further research, especially as a number of topics were not covered or studied in depth.

There is room for further research along the following lines:

- Broader research, including quantitative and qualitative methods, should be undertaken, in order to cover larger geographic areas and to take a greater number of street traders into account. This would allow researchers to find more relevant commonalities and regular patterns, which could form the basis for the formulation and implementation of projects / policies directed towards this population.
- One could focus on the areas non-national street traders choose to occupy (to live and trade) and how they occupy them, and more specifically on the networks they use and build, the “communities”, materialized in space, they generate. The first section of this report shows how some of them learnt to trade, who helped and assisted them, and how they developed social networks around their businesses.

- One could also focus on the distribution of nationalities among street traders, the relevant differences between nationalities, their preference (if any) for x or y activity (for example, the preference of West Africans for going into clothing businesses), the networks they use in order to get supplies (more especially regarding clothes and bags, or arts and crafts, for example: do they import supplies? From their home country?).
- One could ask if street traders use skills they acquired back in their home countries, and if and how they transfer these skills to other people (other non-nationals or locals).
- One could focus on the competition between street traders, including the competition between South African and non-South African vendors. This is something the researcher did not have access to.
- Research should be undertaken into whether or not non-nationals face discrimination when going through administrative procedures (allocation of space, as well as allocation of financial help for example).

### *Towards recommendations for informed interventions*

#### 1) Policy gap

This research revealed a policy gap regarding immigration and street trading, and more broadly regarding immigration and local economic development. The immigration issue should be taken into account in other fields of intervention, including local economic development (and street trading legal and policy framework).

Indeed, South Africa has a tradition of controlling and policing immigration, selecting very carefully those who can come to the country and those who are not wanted, the “undesirable”. Very little is done in order to promote a positive view of immigration when it comes to low-skilled migrants, although this kind of migration is a reality in South Africa, as people come from neighbouring countries in search of better opportunities. Many researchers and workers in the field (like N. from LHR) state that many policy fields are still filled with xenophobic feelings. They also state that the South African Immigration Act seems to be concerned primarily with controlling and regulating immigration in an “apartheid-like” way (D.C from LHR), rather than with acknowledging its positive effects and with providing a positive framework. Controlling immigration (low-skilled immigration) should not mean denying it or criminalizing it.

This leads to the conclusion, like L. Landau, that there is a need to “develop policy frameworks recognizing that migration and immigration are critical to South Africa prosperity” (positive vision of immigration vs xenophobic policies) and second, that it is crucial to “mainstream [the immigration issue] through all policy arenas” instead of addressing it as “a stand-alone issue”.

This is particularly important when it comes to immigration and self-employment, the subject of this research.

Regarding this research, the main concern, linked to advocacy and policy making, is the following:

Street trading has a specific place and role in migrants’ lives in and beyond South Africa. Besides securing livelihoods and playing a role in migrants’ social life and adaptation, street trading is considered by the street traders themselves as a transitional activity, just like South Africa can be considered as a place of transit. Yet, such a specific place and role generate specific uncertainties.

How can we minimize such uncertainties in order to improve foreign street traders' participation in the South African urban, "informal" economy? How can we improve their contribution to the urban economy, especially when they are often temporary, transitional, or in various uncertain situations?

Very little is done in this respect. The legal framework (Immigration Act, Business Act, Refugees Act, street trading by-laws) seems to separate the immigration issue from the local economic development issue. Although it is not desirable to marginalize non-national informal entrepreneurs or informal workers by considering them separately from national informal entrepreneurs and workers, it is still important to recognize and take into account their existence and the specificity of their situations.

## *2) Recommendations and possible interventions*

From this research a few possible interventions have been identified, which could improve non-national street traders' contribution to the urban economy, recognizing their positive input as well as taking into account the specific uncertainties they encounter.

### **▪ A relevant policy framework**

The most important issue to be addressed, and which is currently being considered by many people, (including the Department of Home Affairs, according to some who work there) is related to the refugee and asylum system. We have seen that many street vendors hold asylum-seeker permits, which results partly from a choice (such a permit is flexible enough to suit their intentions regarding their stay in South Africa) and from a lack of alternative.

Indeed, as stated earlier, South Africa is not keen on welcoming low-skilled "foreigners", especially from other African countries. Such migration flows are seen as "negative" flows, unlike qualified people coming to South Africa. And even though there is no such thing as an "invasion" of South Africa by foreign Africans, low-skilled Africans do come to South Africa, seeking better opportunities.

Reasons and motivations for migrating to South Africa are rarely unique, and many of these reasons are intertwined – which is why refugee flows and low-skilled migrant flows sometimes merge. However, the quest for improved livelihoods is often part of these key reasons – and cannot and should not be denied.

Recognising that low-skilled migrants from other parts of the continent will keep on coming to South Africa for intricate and complex reasons is the first step towards a positive vision of immigration and towards integration.

It should be expressed in more effective and applicable immigration policies, which recognise the reality of intra-continental migration, instead of denying it.

More precisely, there should be an alternative to the asylum-seeker route which low-skilled migrants or migrants seeking better opportunities, including "informal" ones, could use to enter and stay in South Africa legally, and find employment or self-employment. One could think of a kind of temporary permit which would not be as formal or as long term (thus more flexible) than the existing work permit and business permit. This could also be part of the SADC project – indeed, the SADC relies on the will of a few countries to simplify exchanges between countries from the southern African region, but does not specifically address migration and circular migration.

#### ▪ **Educating civil society and the professionals**

We have seen that many non-national street traders feel threatened because of an alleged tendency among South Africans to marginalize non-nationals.

Something therefore needs to be done regarding education and awareness campaigns, both in civil society and among professionals and policy makers in all fields. This would be an important step towards making integration possible for non-nationals.

Workshops, training, courses at school, etc should be organized in order to fight prejudice and xenophobia, but also to make people (and it is all the more important when it comes to potential employers) aware of migrants' rights, obligations and situation.

#### ▪ **The role of street traders' associations**

Having met the president and the secretary of an association of street traders in Tshwane, the researcher noticed that they do have rooted prejudices and fears regarding their non-national counterparts, although they started by denying it. Such mixed feelings – recognizing that non-national street traders are like them, South African traders, and at the same time considering them as "others" – appeared implicitly during the interview conducted with them. They first stated there were a number of non-South African street traders in their association, but they afterwards said, in a contradictory way, that it was difficult for them, South African street traders, to socialize with non-national street traders, and that most non-nationals did not go to their meetings. They added they felt there was very strong competition, which they found unfair, between South African street traders and non-South Africans. To them, the latter were benefitting from unfair advantages, like getting goods back home and selling them in South Africa (when it comes to electronic materials, clothes, bags, etc.), or like having other income sources back home and thus not being in the same state of "need" as South African street traders (cf ST7, who indeed has a comfortable situation in Cameroon).

However, street traders' associations, when they are well organized, can be an interesting platform for exchanging ideas and information, and for initiating changes regarding street traders' conditions. The Tshwane Informal Trading Forum, for example, has direct discussions with the municipality (and more precisely with the Local Economic Department), negotiates on current projects and legislation, and submits projects and propositions to it. It can also negotiate with the private sector (good suppliers, formal businesses) and help street traders (for example in order to get permits). It also informs street traders, during meetings, on legislation, by-laws and ongoing projects which are linked to street trading, and on street traders' rights.

As a consequence, it seems important that non-national street traders are represented in such associations, and that their presence is taken into account. Associations' public meetings could be used to inform non-national street traders of their specific rights and to educate national street traders on their counterparts' rights and situations. They could also be used to facilitate discussions between nationals and non-nationals on matters that concern them all. It would eventually help reduce the gap between these two categories of street traders.

#### ▪ **Minimising discrimination?**

A study should be undertaken around potential discrimination against non-national traders and the allocation of trading spaces. If, like some traders think, such discrimination indeed exists, such a study would provide an incentive for more transparency and equity in the allocation of space. This

should be undertaken together with training courses and workshops for those who are involved in the process of space allocation (Metro Police, LED, Health and Fire, etc.).

- **Improving newcomers' integration**

There are initiatives which could help newcomers to adapt to their host country and to improve their integration. We have seen street businesses can function as a node for people to meet other non-nationals, to socialize and discuss their experiences, and to learn how to behave (especially in terms of interacting with nationals, using local languages, learning common English...).

Organizing short-term training for newcomers would also improve their situation. The Jesuit Refugee Service was, at some point, organizing such training, especially in order to teach newcomers basic English skills (as some do not even speak English), and in order to have them meet people and be less isolated. This seems an interesting formula, and could be more systematic (organized by an NGO or even by the Local Economic Department).

- **Taking into account non project-driven street trading**

We have seen there is a tendency among street traders to formalize and move towards bigger businesses – this is the option favoured by both the Tshwane Informal Traders Forum and the Local Economic Department.

However, this research has shown that many street traders do not aim at expanding their business, especially those for whom it is a transitional activity and those who do not plan to settle in South Africa. Those traders, often called “survivalist”, are ignored by current policies and projects regarding street traders, whereas they should not be – because they exist and are most probably a long-term reality.

Professionals from the relevant fields should thus be brought together in order to discuss this matter, and find solutions and means to improve these street traders’ activities – solutions and means which would be suited to their “transitional” situation. This means looking at other alternatives than allocation of formal trading spaces and small shops, and at other perspectives than formalization and evolution towards SMEs.