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Masters by Coursework and Research Report in Migration and Displacement

ABSTRACT

Seeking goals in the urban estuary: How a personal migrant subjectivity is reified into productive strategies and generative social effects

Using a micro-level frame of analysis, and working from in-depth interviews in Johannesburg's migrant-rich 'urban estuaries,' this research report considers participants' personal, subjective, understanding of their own migrant-ness. The paper argues that theirs is a migrant subjectivity linked to the praxis of goal seeking, rather than the achievement of belonging. The goal seeking subjectivity is reified into pragmatic social strategies of network building, trust, and opportunity creation that undermine the concepts of generalized trust, communal social capital, and the host/migrant dichotomy. Personal subjectivities are rendered social. Denizens fill the social space with presentations and assessments of 'mutual beneficence,' and seek out demographically ambivalent networks of commonality.