

Christian M. Rogerson / Jayne M. Rogerson

Women Informal Business Tourists in Urban Southern Africa: Circuits, Drivers and Challenges

Abstract

Across sub-Saharan Africa, a substantial economy benefits from informal business tourism. In Southern Africa, the central element in informal business tourism is women's activities as informal cross-border shoppers and traders. The article investigates this neglected aspect of informal business tourism and unpacks the organisation of the key circuits of informal business tourism in urban Southern Africa. Major findings disclose that Johannesburg is established as the pivot of these regional shopping circuits. In the post-apartheid period, an infrastructure emerged in the inner city of Johannesburg to facilitate the operations of informal business tourists. The entrepôt operates as a transit tourism space, a conduit for channelling mainly Chinese products to destinations elsewhere in Africa. It is a space that connects the formal to the informal and the local to the global. Arguably, the practices of these informal business tourists are shaping new economic spaces in urban Southern Africa. The drivers and multiple challenges of women participants are explored through a synthesis of the recorded experiences of Zimbabwean women.

Keywords: informality, informal business tourism, women cross-border traders, Johannesburg, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Informality is a distinguishing trait of the economic landscape of the Global South in general and sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Indeed, informality is a critical defining element in the growth and complexion of most Global South cities and transcends and modifies all aspects of urban livelihoods (Grant, 2023). Bromley and Wilson (2018, p. 4) clarify that in terms of the definition of the informal economy, one of the most widely cited is that it constitutes “a process of income generation characterized by one central feature: it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in the legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated”. Although the precise definition of the term ‘informality’ is contested, it usually is applied to “a range of behaviours and practices that are not regulated or controlled by the state or formal institutions, including those related to income generation, service provision and settlements” (Chen et al., 2016, p. 336). Over the past 30 years, a substantial expansion has been recorded in the economic landscape of informality and poverty across much of the Global South. For La Mantia (2018, p. 53), informality is the prevalent mode of urban production and a critical defining element in the growth and complexion of most Southern cities.

According to Zhanda et al. (2022, p. 43), the informal economy “has now become the unofficial backbone” of African economies. Over the past 30 years, substantial expansion has been evidenced in the economic landscape of informality and poverty. In African cities, the informal economy is a central mode and logic of urbanisation intrinsically linked to the formal economy and assumes a vital role in

Christian M. Rogerson, PhD, Full Professor, School of Tourism & Hospitality, University of Johannesburg, South Africa;
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1306-8867>; e-mail: chrismr@uj.ac.za

Jayne M. Rogerson, PhD, Corresponding Author, Full Professor, School of Tourism & Hospitality, University of Johannesburg, South Africa;
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3494-1311>; e-mail: jayner@uj.ac.za

residents' everyday lives and livelihoods (Finn & Cobbinah, 2023; Grant, 2023). The informal economy is estimated to account for as much as 80.8 per cent of all employment in urban Africa (Carmody et al., 2024). The term 'informal' is conventionally understood as work or labour outside formal state regulations and tax systems. This said, it does not mean that such work is illegal or beyond the reach of the state "given that much of the urban informal economy operates in plain sight of the state and is by-and-large accepted as an essential provisioner of goods and services to consumers" (Carmody et al., 2024, p. 92). As a whole, informality pervades all economic sectors in the resource-constrained environments of the Global South.

The existence of a substantial informal sector of tourism encompasses mobilities for leisure, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), health and business (Cohen & Cohen, 2015). Only recently has there been recognition by tourism scholars that much (if perhaps even the majority) of travel and tourism in the global South is of an informal character (Gladstone, 2005; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). The emergence of an informal business tourism economy challenges Northern concepts of business tourism with its associations of convention centres and upmarket hotels (C.M. Rogerson, 2015; J.M. Rogerson, 2016). Extant scholarship on business tourism concentrates on the Global North. It is focused on the attraction of business events, MICE tourism, convention and exhibition centers, upmarket business hotels and recently, the ramifications of COVID-19 for a 'new normal' of business tourism (Davidson, 1994, 2019; Marques & Pinho, 2021; Marques & Santos, 2017; Rogers & Wynn-Moylan, 2022). It is acknowledged that this form of (formal) business tourism is observed across the Global South in major cities and most especially in capital cities (Makoni & Rogerson, 2023; J.M. Rogerson, 2016; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b, 2021c). The mainstream Western literature on the 'business traveller' excludes an enormous group of people who travel for business, either for international or domestic travel, but experience little leisure and rarely are counted as tourists (Rogerson, 2015; Timothy & Teye, 2005). For informal sector business travellers, the business hotel is not the focus of the accommodation. Instead, many tourists stay with friends and relatives, sleep on buses or rent cheap accommodation in their business tourism destinations.

2. Aim, method and structure

This paper aims to move the focus beyond a form of business tourism, which is a replica of Northern business tourism, and instead investigate the distinctive phenomenon of informal business tourism as manifested in the activities and circuits of international cross-border traders/shoppers. Specifically, the task is to unpack the organisation of the key circuits of informal business tourism in Southern Africa.

Methodologically, an integrated synthesis of a rich vein of scholarship, which has accumulated over the past 20 years on cross-border trading within Southern Africa, is undertaken. The synthesis is a product of a systematic literature review. It incorporates the results from several large-scale rigorous (mainly quantitative) surveys commissioned by the Southern Africa Migration Project (later renamed Programme) as well as the scoping of an additional 44 independent academic studies, including several qualitative studies exploring the lives of cross-border actors to understand how they 'stitch together a living' from the economy of informal business tourism. These recent independent academic research investigations mainly involve the authorship of scholars based in South Africa or Zimbabwe.

Four further sections of material are presented. In the next section, the organisation and geographical circuits of informal business tourism across the region of Southern Africa are reviewed. This is followed by a detailed examination of the workings of these circuits through Johannesburg, a city that has developed a specific infrastructure related to this informal business tourism. The following section moves to analyse the structural drivers and challenges of women's involvement in international cross-border trading by focusing on the case of Zimbabwe. The conclusion elaborates on the key contributions made by this study.

3. The circuits of informal business tourism

Across sub-Saharan Africa, a substantial informal cross-border shopping/trading business economy coexists with a formal retail economy (Kahira & Kadirov, 2020; Tichaawa, 2021; World Bank, 2020). The dominant involvement of women in this informal economy is widely recognised in countries in the sub-regions of West, East and Southern Africa (Salia et al., 2020; Zhanda et al., 2022). In Southern Africa, the primary element in informal business tourism is the activities of these informal sector shoppers and traders, who are mainly (but not exclusively) constituted by women entrepreneurs. The most widely cited estimates are that women represent 70 per cent of participants in the economy of informal business tourism across Southern African countries (Moyo, 2022). Undoubtedly, since the 1990s, there has been a massive burst in small-scale cross-border trading in this region, especially connecting Zimbabwe to South Africa and between South Africa and Mozambique. It is well-documented that for the past 30 years this kind of informal business tourism has been a common phenomenon between South Africa and other countries in Southern Africa (Ama et al., 2014a, 2014b; Bamu, 2017; Dzawanda & Matsa, 2021; Makoni, 2024; Makoni et al., 2023a; Moyo, 2017, 2020a; Muzvidziwa, 2012; Peberdy, 2000a, 2000b; Peberdy & Crush, 2001; Peberdy & Rogerson, 2003; Peberdy et al., 2015; Piscitelli, 2015; Rogerson, 2018).

The kinds of goods that are bought currently by these informal business tourists vary (often seasonally) but include electronics, groceries, clothing, shoes, beauty products, household goods, building materials, and office equipment (Makoni et al., 2023a; Moyo 2020a). During local shortages, foodstuffs were essential trade items for most Zimbabwean shoppers (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017). In addition, Bamu (2017) points out that these informal business tourists have played a crucial role in ensuring the supply of essential commodities such as soap, cooking oil and flour when such goods were in short supply or completely absent from the shelves of formal retail outlets. Cross-border traders can adapt their business model and operations to meet customer needs and demand signals. The rhythm of cross-border trading shows a complex array of business mobilities that varies through crossing points into South Africa (Peberdy et al., 2015). The length of stay in South Africa is determined by whether women traders primarily crossed borders simply to shop for resale in their home country or were visiting to sell goods from their home country. This practice requires more extended visitation. As a rule, the length of stay tends to be as short as possible because of cost (and safety) considerations, especially concerning accommodation (Rogerson, 2018; Makoni, 2024). Public transport is used overwhelmingly to move goods and people (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017). Buses are the preferred mode of transport for Zimbabwean informal business tourists travelling to and from South Africa (Makoni, 2024; Makoni et al., 2023a).

Arguably, the practices of these informal business tourists are shaping and reshaping new economic spaces across Southern Africa. Moyo (2017) shows that informal cross-border traders travel between countries to buy and sell other goods, resulting in economic integration in various spaces. Examples are the cross-border activities between Francistown in Botswana and Plumtree and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe or between Johannesburg and Musina in South Africa and Beitbridge and Harare in Zimbabwe. Between these spaces is a “functional interdependency” (Moyo, 2020a, p. 5), with the operations of shops and flea markets in Zimbabwe critically dependent on the movements of these informal business tourists. In Mozambique, the growth of the *mukhero* (‘May you carry this bag to the other side’) trade refers to the thriving informal cross-border trade from Mozambique to surrounding countries and, most importantly, to South Africa with Johannesburg, its central hub (Chikanda & Raimundo, 2017; Piscitelli, 2018). As recorded by Piscitelli (2015), the socio-spatial practises of mukheristas are an example of ‘transnational urbanism’ as women traders use movement as a livelihood strategy by travelling to South Africa twice or three times a month mainly via buses and minibuses to purchase goods for resale in the markets of Maputo.

Figure 1
Major cities in the circuits of informal business tourism in Southern Africa



Source: Authors.

The entire history of the development of informal business tourism in Southern Africa remains to be written. It is recorded, however, that in the period of apartheid during the 1970s and 1980s, groups of Zimbabwean women travelled to South Africa regularly to sell crocheted goods and returned home with a range of South African products (Bamu, 2017; Simba & Nziku, 2022). Organised by churches and other faith-based groupings, this movement is historically noteworthy, although it occurred only on a small scale (Bamu, 2017). A critical moment in shifting the mobilities for business travel was the demise of apartheid in South Africa. Arguably, South Africa's transition to democracy and the country's re-integration into the global economy post-1994 after years of international boycotts and sanctions created a radical shift in the socio-political environment which impacted regional mobilities as it inserted South Africa into regional and trans-continental informal trade networks (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000). Over the past 20 years there are continuities and changes as reflected in the circuits and economy of informal business tourists in Southern Africa (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, one central thread in the last two decades of informal sector business tourism is its domination by communities of women cross-border traders with the most significant flows occurring to South Africa and originating from Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Chikanda & Raimundo, 2017; Chikanda & Tawodzera, 2017).

The cities of Johannesburg, Harare, and Maputo are leading spatial nodes for the activities of informal shoppers and traders, which include international cross-border traders from surrounding countries across the region (Makoni et al., 2023a; Piscitelli, 2018; Rogerson, 2018; Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017). Secondary nodes

include Gaborone in Botswana, Lusaka in Zambia, and Windhoek in Namibia, which are also interconnected with this geographical network of informal business tourism. The practices of informal cross-border traders have been styled as a form of 'mobile urbanity' and turning a survival strategy into a phenomenon well-blended with the global logic underpinning contemporary urban processes (Piscitelli, 2018, p. 33).

4. Johannesburg - The pivot

Across Southern Africa, the spatial organisation of informal business tourism is articulated through the networks and flows of women traders and shoppers, which link these cities together and with Johannesburg, the pivot for the regional circuit of travellers. South Africa's largest city is overwhelmingly the critical axis for contemporary Southern Africa's vibrant informal business tourism economy. Post-apartheid Johannesburg has been described by Mbembe and Nuttall (2008) as the 'premier but elusive African metropolis' and by Murray (2008) as the 'disorderly city'. Under apartheid, Johannesburg was designed as a cosmopolitan ordered European city in Africa, albeit only for a small (predominantly white) segment of its population (Simone, 2004). It is a city that has been restructured, re-shaped and radically impacted by 'informatisation' since the fall of apartheid, with the most dramatic changes evidenced in and around the CBD or inner-city (Murray, 2011). Zack (2015, p. 133) stresses that the "promise of this city, located in a region of highly variable economic opportunity and much poverty," draws people from vast distances" in search of opportunities. Among those groups are the cross-border traders from neighbouring countries (as well as from countries further north) who undertake regular travel to Johannesburg as part of the transnational movement of people creating and retaining social, economic and political linkages between South Africa and the host country (Chikanda & Raimundo, 2017; Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000, 2003; Piscitelli, 2015; Rogerson, 2018; Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017).

The cohort of women-dominated shoppers perforce navigate the dangers of inner-city Johannesburg - an inhospitable space for international visitors - to conduct their businesses (Lewis & Zack, 2017; Moyo, 2020b). In a 2017 large-scale survey of cross-border shoppers in Johannesburg, 71% of the sample were women (Rogerson, 2018). Typically, shoppers travel to South Africa for short periods (usually 1 to 4 days) to buy goods from formal sector retail and wholesale outlets for resale in the home country, variously on the street, in markets, to individuals and formal sector retail establishments. (Peberdy & Crush, 1998; Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000, 2003; Piscitelli, 2018). The length of stay in South Africa is more significant for those who also are taking goods to sell, such as handcrafted curios, artworks or lace goods (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017). These international informal business tourists come mainly from Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe and eSwatini. Others travel far from Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rogerson, 2018). It is recorded that 85 per cent of international shoppers buy for their businesses rather than own shopping, with trips described as "commando-style exercises" solely focused on securing the correct goods at the right price and returning home safely and as quickly as possible (Zack & Landau, 2022, p. 2338). Many informal business tourists buy in bulk; others purchase only for specific orders of goods made in their home country. The collective estimates of the value of this trade from the shoppers put the annual turnover at US \$680 million, or double the estimated value of Africa's (until recently) most significant shopping mall - Sandton City in Johannesburg. In addition to Johannesburg's role in these international circuits of informal business tourism, there is a complex of (mostly unresearched) domestic circuits of informal business tourism as local shoppers come to the city from surrounding towns, more distant provinces, and rural areas. This underscores the existence of local circuits of informal business tourism operating within African countries; one documented example is Lesotho, which concentrates on Maseru, the capital city (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013).

The emergence of an organised support infrastructure in Johannesburg, which lubricates the mobilities of informal sector business tourists, is a vital aspect of this regional economy. Moyo (2020, p. 6) identifies an "informal architecture" that supports informal business tourists travelling between the major cities of Southern Africa. In Johannesburg's inner-city has emerged what Zack and Landau term as 'an enclave entrepot'. This

urban space is geographically situated in Park Station's environs on the CBD's north-eastern edge. The Park Station precinct represents an entry point to Johannesburg, the terminus of long-distance and commuter trains, Rea Vaya (the city's high-speed bus network) and most importantly, long-distance cross-border buses and short- and long-distance mini-bus taxis. Here, an agglomeration of accommodation providers, transport, storage, and security services has evolved, which forms a complex migration infrastructure of informal logistics services that support the needs of cross-border shoppers (Zack & Landau, 2022). It is pointed out that, unlike ethnic enclaves or neighbourhoods that function as *reception or arrival zones* for new migrants, this enclave entrepôt provides a means for shoppers *to move through* (transit) rather than into the city. Zack and Landau (2022) described the entrepôt as a form of migrant space claimed by vulnerable and mobile people wishing to be *in* but not of the city. It is a portal into, through, and beyond South Africa's national space. Further, it represents what Simone (2004) defines as *people as infrastructure*, an informal urban network that has contributed to the remaking of Johannesburg's inner city.

The entrepôt functions as a transit tourism space and supports a form of 'low-end globalisation' to channel mainly Chinese products to destinations elsewhere in Africa (Dittgen & Zack, 2018; Zack, 2015). The support infrastructure includes bus depots, low-budget hotels, and network services such as storage, packaging, and security, facilitating shoppers' work. The transport companies – buses – are more than just carriers of passengers and goods. Traders bring their goods to bus depots for packaging, storage and loading. Some transport companies link passengers with low-budget guest houses in the inner city and to safe local taxis (Zack & Landau, 2022). The supply chain for these informal business tourists includes 20 China Malls established in Johannesburg, mainly on the city's periphery "owing to a lack of space and the inner city's bad reputation" (Dittgen, 2017, p. 982). This network of Chinese malls functions as wholesalers to a raft of small shopkeepers – many migrant-owned businesses – close to Park Station (Rogerson, 2018; Zack, 2015). The area offers a dedicated network of mobility infrastructures, cartage, storage and accommodation facilities to serve the needs of cross-border shoppers. However, the precinct is not only a site of exchange and storage. It also offers a degree of protection for African migrants who are shopping and transiting in South Africa through one of the most xenophobic, sometimes violent and insecure urban environments (see Murray, 2011).

The shopping environment comprises high-rise buildings with vertically stacked arcades linked by stairwells that maximise display areas and several trading spaces with mini-retail outlets (Zack & Govender, 2019; Zack & Harrison, 2020). The informal business tourists from surrounding countries shop in the multiple small spaces that fill the CBD's alleys and high modernist towers, many of which are former medical chambers or have served as corporate headquarters (Lewis & Zack, 2017). The well-networked shoppers buy and move largely Chinese-made goods from the precinct to these surrounding countries. Johannesburg, therefore, has become a hub for these Chinese goods destined for cross-border trade. The dominant flow of merchandise to inner-city shops run by migrant entrepreneurs and patronised by cross-border shoppers is from Chinese wholesalers operating from the malls or wholesale operations close to the inner city (Dittgen & Zack, 2018). The importance and linkages of Chinese spatial markers and spaces of Chinese capital in Johannesburg illustrate the dynamic interplay between formal and informal economies traversing through Johannesburg's inner city (Dittgen, 2017).

Johannesburg is, therefore, an interconnecting space on the African map for Chinese economic penetration across multiple countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Lewis & Zack, 2017; von Pezold, 2023). The circuits of informal business tourists are functioning to connect the local with the global. The role of the infrastructure services in Johannesburg's inner city is critical to its success. The entrepôt "is exquisitely tailored to Johannesburg's specific challenges" (Zack & Landau, 2022, p. 2341). It supports the vast network of informal business tourists by individuals with limited legal rights to visit and conduct business in South Africa. Indeed, the entrepôt and its multiple services connect "people who are on the move – shoppers from various countries – with people who service the trade and its supporting infrastructure" (Zack & Landau, 2022, p. 2346).

5. Drivers and challenges of women participants: The Zimbabwe experience

The drivers for informal business tourism encompass a range of factors, some enduring, others changing. The essential forces that underpin these international circuits of informal business tourism centred in Johannesburg must be understood based on the specific structural conditions of the economies in the surrounding countries of the region. The absence of formal wage employment opportunities in home countries is the core reason for participating in this trade. A narrowed focus on the case of Zimbabwe, the source of the most significant flows of informal business tourists, is instructive in this regard.

Tawodzera (2023, p. 86) highlights that the informal economy is critical for sustaining livelihoods in Zimbabwe, mainly because of “the absence of growth in the formal sector in the past two decades”. According to Zhanda et al. (2022), the formal economy has been disrupted in Zimbabwe by a combination of government mismanagement, international economic sanctions, a programme of chaotic land reform, nepotism and rampant corruption. Based on recent international comparative analysis, in relative terms, Zimbabwe’s informal economy is one of the largest in the world, alongside those recorded for Georgia and Bolivia (Moyo, 2022; Tawodzera, 2023). The Zimbabwean experience illustrates that at the heart of informal business tourism is the economic necessity for women to undertake this form of livelihood due to the unavailability of opportunities for formal wage work. Moreover, it exemplifies more broadly the critical observation made by Bromley and Wilson (2018, p. 5) that in the experience of the Global South, women enter “informal entrepreneurial activities primarily because of necessity related to exclusion while men are more likely to become informal entrepreneurs because of the opportunities offered”.

Zimbabwe secured formal independence from Britain in 1980. The first decade of independence was a period of relative growth with economic as well as political stability. During this period of the relative prosperity of the formal economy, there was little role for the informal economy, especially in leading urban centres (Chirisa, 2009). By 1990, however, the national economy exhibited signs of distress as unemployment levels had escalated from 8 per cent at independence to 26 per cent a decade later (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017). The mushrooming of the informal economy in Zimbabwe and a trigger for the burst of informal business tourism is attributed to the adoption and implementation between 1990 and 1995 of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank-financed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). The austerity measures implemented in these adjustment programmes occasioned significant job losses in the private sector and cuts of 100-160,000 public sector jobs, forcing a search for alternative income/livelihood strategies (Bamu, 2017). Factory closures, deindustrialization and resultant spiralling unemployment, produced rampant poverty and necessitated the take-up of informal economic opportunities for livelihood strategies after the ESAP failed to reboot the economy (Dzawanda & Matsa, 2023). A further stimulus for participation in the informal business tourism economy came from the radical contraction of the economy due to the implementation of the “fast-track land reform” programme implemented by President Mugabe. This was enacted hurriedly in an uncoordinated manner and resulted in violence, which alienated Zimbabwe from the international community and precipitated economic sanctions. In accounting for the country’s burgeoning informal economy, Zhanda et al. (2022) attach much importance to the disastrous consequences of Zimbabwe’s forcible repossession of farms owned by the community of white commercial farmers. They note that the “departure of these farmers led to the closure of almost 40 % of agro-processing companies, and economic sanctions worsened the situation” (Zhanda et al., 2022, p. 39).

Put simply by Chirisa (2009, p. 66), the chief reason for the explosion in the size of the informal economy in Zimbabwe “is nothing but the plummeting economy explained in terms of high unemployment rates and consequential urban poverty”. Ngwenya (2023, p. 4) stresses that poverty, lack of educational opportunities, unemployment, and inadequate health care have “left citizens scrambling for resourceful and innovative

methods to earn a livelihood”. Most of these are informal livelihoods, with women using their resilience to care for the household unit (Zhanda et al., 2022). Traditionally, this form of informal entrepreneurship has been viewed almost exclusively in the domain of women channelled into this as “a survival strategy because of labour market discrimination” (Peberdy et al., 2015, p. 212). It is recorded that women in Zimbabwe have historically experienced marginalization in the formal labour market and, therefore, pivoted to seek opportunities in the informal economy (Bamu, 2017). Women, as the primary actors, “have taken it upon themselves to take a leading role in sustaining their families and protecting them from poverty” (Chiukura, 2022, p. 59). Ngwenya (2023, p. 4) points out that the role played by Zimbabwean women in informal business tourism through cross-border trading “is very significant” as they “make up the majority of the traders and they contribute to the household earnings and become co-breadwinners, or in some cases, they become sole breadwinners of the household”. With the emergence of hyper-inflation, a liquidity and banking crisis, as well as massive shortages of foreign currency and essential commodities, Dzawanda and Matsa (2023, p. 205) observe that as the socio-economic meltdown continued, large segments of the “urban poor resorted to informal livelihood pursuits such as informal cross-border trade”. Chiukura (2022, p. 59) contends that cross-border trading “intensified at the turn of the millennium” when the country entered a period of persistent political and economic downturn that pushed most of the employable population into the informal economy.

In addition, in the context of this escalating economic crisis and increasing hardship in Zimbabwe, many people (especially men) in formal employment – especially civil servants and teachers – sought to combine cross-border trading with their formal jobs to supplement salaries inadequate for household needs, particularly after 2008. In Zimbabwe, the entry of better-educated people into cross-border trading, either as a primary occupation or as a supplementary household income source, is a direct consequence of the persistent economic hardships which were experienced in the final chaotic years of rule by former President Robert Mugabe. From the beginning of the 21st century, Zimbabwe has been struggling with grinding poverty. Poverty levels have been intensified by high unemployment, hyperinflation, poor service delivery and acute shortages of essential commodities. It is Zimbabwe's “new millennium crisis” (Dzawanda & Matsa, 2023, p. 204). The activities of informal business tourists often provide the primary household income or supplement income to improve household food security, catalyse employment and improve – even if only marginally – local living standards (Berner et al., 2023). The responses to qualitative interviews with Zimbabwean informal business tourists confirm this broad picture of the essential drivers for women participants in the informal economy of business tourism in Southern Africa (Dzawanda & Matsa, 2021; Ngwenya, 2023). Overall, the rise results from a combination of deteriorating socio-political and economic climate caused by international pressures and weak and mismanaged government policies, the ramifications of which have been exacerbated by corruption.

In analysing the business challenges confronted by the community of women informal business tourists, it is helpful to make a distinction between those related to border management, customs and immigration on the one hand and others related to everyday business operations both in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017; Makoni et al., 2023b). The long queues, delays, congestion and customs duties imposed at the Beitbridge crossing between Zimbabwe and South Africa border are challenges disclosed in several investigations linked to the Southern African Migration Project (Peberdy & Crush, 1998; Peberdy et al., 2015; Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017) and confirmed in other recent research studies (Ashe & Ojong, 2022; Bamu, 2017; Moyo, 2022; Makoni et al, 2023b; Makoni, 2024). Beyond the corruption and bribery at the border post, high duties imposed, cumbersome border processes, and often the unwarranted confiscation of goods, women informal business tourists frequently confront also the danger of physical and verbal harassment both by border officials and police officials. Moyo (2022) points to the emotional stress and mental health issues experienced by women engaged in this economy as a result of discrimination, harassment, and coercion.

The difficulties and multiple disadvantages these women cross-border traders face support Moyo's (2020a, 2023) argument that various existing trade facilitation programmes to ‘open borders’ in Southern Africa have

favoured formal actors and ended in closing them off to informal actors like informal cross-border traders. Moyo (2023, p. 1) writes of the “vacuity” of informal cross-border facilitation strategies in Southern Africa. Indeed, even in situations where there are trade facilitation initiatives to promote informal cross-border traders, there is reluctance by states in the region to respond and implement such initiatives with the consequence of continual harassment of women traders (Moyo, 2023). The fact that they are “constructed as informal suggests that they are placed on the margins of the socio-economic space” (Moyo, 2020b, p. 213). Arguably, therefore, ‘ordinary people’ such as informal business tourists require ‘decolonised borders, which might enable them to enjoy freedom of movement by formal actors. Nevertheless, informal economic actors “are the ones who appear to suffer the impacts of borders”, which are “open but not yet decolonised based on issues of power and class” (Moyo, 2020a, p. 6). Such a situation prompts Chiukura (2021) to describe the borders in Southern Africa, especially the Zimbabwe-South Africa border, as “thick and unresponsive” to the needs of women engaged in cross-border trading.

Of the multiple operational challenges that impact women informal business tourists, among the most critical issues are difficulties in securing finance for start-ups, competition from other traders, and theft of money or goods (Rogerson, 2018; Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2017; Makoni, 2024). For Zimbabweans in South Africa, there are also threats arising from xenophobia, as South Africa exhibits high levels of high levels of xenophobia, with attitudinal surveys revealing that Zimbabweans are among the most disliked (Crush et al., 2017). In Johannesburg, this is manifest in additional concerns about safety amidst threats of harassment and physical abuse. One must record the business challenge to women of the increasing levels of competition often from men who have entered the economy of informal business tourism both based on a voluntary movement into the informal economy as well as for reasons of ‘exclusion’ or forced entry into the economy as an outcome of the eviscerated state of formal wage work in Zimbabwe. Finally, the devastating implications of the COVID-19 imposed lockdowns for the operational economy and livelihoods of informal business tourists have been documented in several scholarly investigations (Chiukura, 2022; Makoni & Tichaawa, 2021; Zhandu et al., 2022). There is recent evidence of significant recovery in informal business travel to near pre-pandemic levels, which once more incorporates a primary role for women entrepreneurs (Makoni et al., 2023a, 2023b).

6. Conclusion

Informal business tourists must be understood as an element of what Timothy et al. (2023) recently styled as “unconventional tourism mobilities”. Further, informal business tourism is part of the Global South's little-recognized ‘other half of urban tourism’ (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). This paper has sought to open a window on the circuits of informal business tourism, a widespread phenomenon across many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and a women-dominated activity. Although Timothy and Teye (2005) drew attention to these cross-border travellers as an essential element of the African tourism system early, they have received limited attention in tourism scholarship. This systematic review of recent scholarly work addresses this knowledge gap in Southern Africa.

It has been elaborated that within sub-Saharan Africa, the region of Southern Africa emerged as the most significant focus for cross-border traders/shoppers, with the city of Johannesburg being established as the pivot of a series of regional shopping circuits. It was demonstrated that a distinctive infrastructure that emerged in the inner city of Johannesburg in the post-apartheid period serves the operations of this economy of informal business tourism. The *entrepôt* operates as a transit tourism space, a conduit for channelling mainly Chinese products to destinations elsewhere in Africa. It is a space that connects the formal to the informal and the local to the global. In neighbouring Zimbabwe, economic collapse and the absence of formal wage-work opportunities have been the essential underpinnings for the large-scale participation of women in informal business tourism since the 1990s. Dzawanda and Matsa (2021) contend that in Zimbabwe, informal cross-border trading can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals through income/livelihood creation

and food security, especially for poor households. This said, the observed challenges confronted by women at the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe point to severe shortcomings in the existing implementation of regional trade facilitation agreements (Moyo, 2023). In the final analysis, the findings underscore the need for tourism scholars of the Global South to engage more extensively with concepts of ‘informality’ and ‘informal business tourism’.

References

- Ama, N.O., Mangadi, K.T., & Ama, H.A. (2014a). Exploring the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in cross-border trade in Botswana. *Gender in Management*, 29(8), 505-522. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-02-2014-0018>
- Ama, N.O., Mangadi, K.T., & Ama, H.A. (2014b). Characterization of informal cross-border traders across selected Botswana borders. *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, 7(1), 85-102. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2456398>
- Ashe, M.O., & Ojong, V.B. (2022). Border management and gender issues in sub-Saharan Africa's cross-border trade under COVID-19. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, 11(1), 33-53. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_jgida1_v11_n1_a2
- Bamu, P.H. (2017). An analysis of the role and regulation of Zimbabwean cross-border traders. In C. Nshimbi & I. Moyo (Eds.), *Migration, cross-border trade and development in Africa*, (pp. 125-158). Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Berner, E., Gomez, G.M., & Knorrinda, P. (2023). ‘Helping a large number of people become a little less poor’: The logic of survival entrepreneurs. In P. Golart, R. Ramos, & G. Ferritu (Eds.), *Global labour in distress, Volume 1: Globalization, technology and labour resilience* (pp. 341-361). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bromley, R., & Wilson, T.D. (2018). Introduction: The urban informal economy revisited. *Latin American Perspectives*, 45(1), 4-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X17736043>
- Carmody, P.R., Murphy, J.T., Grant, R., & Owusu, F.Y. (2024). *The urban question in Africa: Uneven geographies of transition*. John Wiley and The Royal Geographical Society.
- Chen, M., Roeber, S., & Skinner, C. (2016). Urban livelihoods: Reframing theory and policy. *Environment and Urbanisation*, 28(2), 331-342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247816662405>
- Chikanda, A., & Raimundo, I. (2017). Informal entrepreneurship and cross-border trade between Mozambique and South Africa. *African Human Mobility Review*, 3(2), 943-974.
- Chikanda, A., & Tawodzera, G., (2017). *Informal entrepreneurship and cross-border trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa* (Migration Policy Series No. 74). Southern African Migration Programme.
- Chirisa, I. (2009). The geography of informal sector operations (ISOs): A perspective of urban Zimbabwe. *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*, 2(4), 66-79.
- Chiukura, I. (2021). *Thick borders and women in informal cross-border trading in Africa*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3909441>
- Chiukura, L. (2022). COVID-19 impact on women in informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2(1), 58-69. <https://www.doi.org/10.52589/JARMS-KPAOP2BD>
- Cohen, E., & Cohen, S.A. (2015). A mobilities approach to tourism from emerging world regions. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(1), 11-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.898617>
- Crush, J., Tawodzera, G., Chikanda, A., & Tevera, D. (2017). *Living with xenophobia: Zimbabwean informal enterprise in South Africa* (Migration Policy Series No. 77). Southern African Migration Programme.
- Davidson, R. (1994). *Business travel*. Pitman.
- Davidson, R. (2019). Research into business tourism: Past, present and future. *International Journal of Tourist Cities*, 5(2), 117-118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-06-2019-111>
- Dittgen, R. (2017). Features of modernity, development and ‘Orientalism’: Reading Johannesburg through its ‘Chinese’ urban spaces. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43(5), 979-996. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2017.1332899>

- Dittgen, R., & Zack, T. (2018). The many lives of a Chinese mall in Johannesburg. In M.T. Myambo (Ed.), *Reversing urban inequality* (pp. 82-92). Routledge.
- Dzawanda, B., & Matsa, M. (2021). From millennium development goals to sustainable development goals through informal cross-border trading: An escape for the poor in a suffocating national economy in Gweru, Zimbabwe. In W.L. Filho, R. Pretorius, & L.O. de Sousa (Eds.), *Sustainable development in Africa* (pp. 613-632). Springer.
- Dzawanda, B., & Matsa, M.M. (2023). Strategies for survival in an informal economy: Illegalities of Zimbabwean informal cross border traders at ports of entries in Southern Africa. *International Journal of Community Well-Being*, 6, 203-221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42413-023-00191-z>
- Finn, B.M., & Cobbinah, P.B. (2023). African urbanisation at the confluence of informality and climate change. *Urban Studies*, 60(3), 405-424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980221098946>
- Gladstone, D. (2005). *From pilgrimage to package tour: Travel and tourism in the Third World*. Taylor & Francis.
- Grant, R. (2023). Informality. In J.T. Murphy & P. Carmody (Eds.), *Handbook of African economic development*. Edward Elgar.
- Kahira, E. & Kadirov, D. (2020). Informal cross border trade as a substratum marketing system: A review and conceptual framework. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 40(1), 88-109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146719897115>
- La Mantia, C. (2018). Humanizing urbanism: On embracing informality and the future of Johannesburg. In A. Petrillo & P. Bellaviti (Eds.), *Sustainable urban development and globalisation* (pp. 49-63). Springer.
- Lewis, M. & Zack, T. (2017). *Wake up, this is Joburg: Johannesburg – Made in China*. Fourthwall Books.
- Makoni, L. (2024). *The nature of business tourism economy in Harare, Zimbabwe* [Doctoral dissertation, Tourism and Hospitality Management]. University of Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Makoni, L., & Rogerson, C.M. (2023). Business tourism in an African city: Evidence from Harare, Zimbabwe. *Studia Periegetica*, 43(3), 25-48. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1306-8867>
- Makoni, L. & Tichaawa, T. (2021). Impact analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector business tourism economy in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 10(1) 165-178. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-93>
- Makoni, L., Rogerson, C.M., & Tichaawa, T. (2023a). Harare as a destination for informal business tourism: Perspectives of the cross-border traders. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 50(4), 1555-1562. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.50434-1152>
- Makoni, L., Tichaawa, T., & Rogerson, C.M. (2023b). The drivers and challenges of informal business tourism in Southern Africa: Evidence from Zimbabwean cross-border traders. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 12(5SE), 1754-1764. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.463>
- Marques, J., & Pinho, M. (2021). Collaborative research to enhance a business tourism destination: A case study from Porto. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 13(2), 172-187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2020.1756307>
- Marques, J., & Santos, N. (2017). Tourism development strategies for business tourism destinations: Case study in the central region of Portugal. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 65(4), 437-449. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/191475>
- Mbembe, A., & Nuttall, S. (2008). Introduction: Afropolis. In S. Nuttall & A. Mbembe (Eds.), *Johannesburg: The elusive metropolis* (pp. 1-33). Duke University Press.
- Moyo, A. (2022). A critical analysis of problems encountered by informal female cross border traders in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6(7), 716-722. RePEc:bcjournal:v:6:y:2022:i:7:p:716-722
- Moyo, I. (2017). Zimbabwean cross-border traders in Botswana and South Africa: Perspectives on SADC regional integration. In C. Ntshimbi & I. Moyo (Eds.), *Migration, cross-border trade and development in Africa* (pp. 43-62). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moyo, I. (2020a). On decolonising borders and regional integration in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. *Social Sciences*, 9, 32. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9040032>

- Moyo, I. (2020b). African informal migrant traders in Johannesburg: Experiences on the ground and implications on human mobility in the SADC In I. Moyo, C. Ntshimbi, & J.P. Laine (Eds.), *Migration conundrums, regional integration and development* (pp. 213-225). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moyo, I. (2023). The vacuity of informal cross-border trade facilitation strategies in the SADC region. *Political Geography*, 101, Article 102816. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102816>
- Murray, M.J. (2008). *Taming the disorderly city: The spatial landscape of Johannesburg after apartheid*. Cornell University Press.
- Murray, M.J. (2011). *City of extremes: The spatial politics of Johannesburg*. Wits University Press.
- Muzvidziwa, V. (2012). Cross-border traders: Emerging, multiple and shifting identities. *Alternation*, 19(1), 217-238.
- Ngwenya, L.L. (2023). *Women informal cross-border traders vs the socio-economic challenges in Zimbabwe* [Master's paper, Development and International Relations]. Aalborg University, Denmark.
- Peberdy, S. (2000a). Mobile entrepreneurship: Informal cross-border trade and street trade in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 17, 201-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713661400>
- Peberdy, S. (2000b). Border crossings: Small entrepreneurs and informal sector cross-border trade between South Africa and Mozambique. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 91, 361-378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713661400>
- Peberdy, S. & Crush, J. (1998). *Trading places: Cross-border traders and the South African informal sector* (Migration Policy Series No. 6). Southern African Migration Project.
- Peberdy, S. & Crush, J. (2001). Invisible trade, invisible travellers: The Maputo corridor spatial development initiative and informal cross-border trading. *South African Geographical Journal*, 83, 115-123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2001.9713727>
- Peberdy, S., Crush, J., Tevera, D., Campbell, E., Raimundo, I., Tsoka, M., Zindela, N., Tawodzera, G., Nickanaor, N., Mulenga, C., Green, T., & Msibi, N. (2015). *Calibrating informal cross-border trade in Southern Africa* (Migration Policy Series No. 69). Southern African Migration Programme.
- Peberdy S. & Rogerson C.M. (2000). Transnationalism and non-South African entrepreneurs in South Africa's small, medium and micro-enterprise (SMMME) economy. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34(1), 20-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2000.10751183>
- Peberdy, S. & Rogerson, C.M. (2003). South Africa: Creating new spaces? In R. Kloosterman & J. Rath (Eds.), *Immigrant entrepreneurs: Venturing abroad in the age of globalization*, (pp. 79-99). Berg.
- Piscitelli, P. (2015). Translocal urbanism in Southern Africa: Between Johannesburg and Maputo. *Czech Journal of Social Sciences, Business and Economics*, 4(4), 6-16. <http://hdl.handle.net/11159/564>
- Piscitelli, P. (2018). Mobile urbanity in Southern Africa: The socio-spatial practices of informal cross-border traders between Johannesburg and Maputo. In A. Petrillo & P. Bellaviti (Eds.), *Sustainable urban development and globalisation* (pp. 33-48). Springer.
- Rogers, T., & Wynn-Moylan, P. (2022). *Conferences and conventions: A global industry*. Routledge.
- Rogerson, C.M. (2015). Unpacking business tourism mobilities in sub-Saharan Africa. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(1), 44-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.898619>
- Rogerson, C.M. (2018). Informal sector city tourism: Cross border shoppers in Johannesburg. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 22(2), 372-387. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.22209-296>
- Rogerson, C.M. & Letsie, T. (2013). Informal sector business tourism in the global South: Evidence from Maseru, Lesotho. *Urban Forum*, 24, 485-502. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12132-013-9196-y>
- Rogerson, C.M., & Rogerson, J.M. (2021a). The other half of urban tourism: Research directions in the Global South. In C.M. Rogerson & J.M. Rogerson (Eds), *Urban tourism in the Global South: South African perspectives* (pp. 1-37). Springer.
- Rogerson, C.M., & Rogerson, J.M. (2021b). City tourism in Southern Africa: Progress and issues. In M. Novelli, E.A. Adu-Ampong, & M.A. Ribeiro (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of tourism in Africa* (pp. 447-458). Routledge.

- Rogerson, C.M., & Rogerson, J.M. (2021c). Africa's capital cities: Tourism research in search of capitalness. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 10(2), 654-669. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-124>
- Rogerson, J.M. (2016). Hotel chains of the Global South: The internationalization of South African hotel brands. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 64(4), 445-450. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/170579>
- Salia, J.G., Sidat, M., Dias, S.F., Martins, M.R.O., & Craveiro, I. (2020). High mobility and STIs/HIV among women informal cross border traders in Southern Mozambique: Exploring knowledge, risk perception, and sexual behaviors. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, Article 4724. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17134724>
- Simba, A. & Nziku, D.M. (2022). Women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. In M. Dabić, L.P. Dana, D.M. Nziku, & V. Ramasani (Eds.), *Women entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 251-269). Springer.
- Simone, A.M. (2004). People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16(3), 407-429. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/4/article/173743>
- Tawodzera, G. (2023). The role of the informal sector in Epworth's food system, Zimbabwe. In L. Riley & J. Crush (Eds.), *Transforming urban food systems in secondary cities in Africa* (pp. 85-102). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tawodzera, G., & Chikanda, A. (2017). Linking Harare and Johannesburg through informal cross-border entrepreneurship. *African Human Mobility Review*, 3(2), 910-942.
- Tichaawa, T. (2021). Informal business tourism in Cameroon. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 38(4), 1289-1298. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.38437-771>
- Timothy, D., & Teye, V.B. (2005). Informal sector business travelers in the developing world: A borderlands perspective. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 16, 82-92.
- Timothy, D.J., Michalko, G., & Irimias, A. (2023). Is unconventional the new normal in tourism? *Sustainability*, 15, Article 5366. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065366>
- von Pezold, J. (2023). Co-constructing fashion in a South-South context: Selling Chinese-made garments and textiles in Mozambique. *Critical African Studies*, 15(1), 73-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2022.2133735>
- World Bank. (2020). *Monitoring small-scale cross-border trade in Africa: Issues, approaches and lessons*. The World Bank.
- Zack, T. (2015). 'Jeppe' – Where low-end globalisation, ethnic entrepreneurialism and the arrival city meet. *Urban Forum*, 26, 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12132-014-9245-1>
- Zack, T., & Govender, T. (2019). Architectures of visibility and invisibility: A reflection on the secret affinities of Johannesburg's cross-border shopping hub. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 42(1), 29-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2019.1575250>
- Zack, T., & Harrison, K. (2020). The role of informal economies in transforming the space economy. In South African Cities Network (Ed.), *Urban economies papers* (pp. 28-39). SACN.
- Zack, T., & Landau, L.B. (2022). An enclave entrepôt: The informal migration industry and Johannesburg's socio-spatial transformation. *Urban Studies*, 59(11), 2333-2351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211012632>
- Zhanda, K., Garutsa, N., Dzvimbo, M.A., & Mawonde, A. (2022). Women and the informal sector amid COVID-19: Implications for household peace and economic stability in urban Zimbabwe. *Cities & Health*, 6(1), 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2021.2019967>

Submitted: January 19, 2024

Revised: September 10, 2024

Accepted: September 13, 2024