



Interview with: Michelle (19)
Interviewed by: Gcina
Date of interview: 14 March 2017
Travel: Zimbabwe – South Africa

Gcina: Okay, perhaps we can do the interview in English or isiZulu or whatever?

Michelle: You will do the interview so that you can write it down.

Gcina: Yes, I am able to write down what you are saying—I don't have a problem. Maybe we can start with you telling me your name, surname and where you stay. Please share with me your life and your story.

Michelle: Okay, my name is Michelle. I am from Zimbabwe.

Gcina: Michelle, you are speaking very softly (laughs).

Michelle: Okay, my name is Michelle. I am from Zimbabwe. Right now I stay in Beatrice Street, Durban, but I came to South Africa in 2009. I first went to Pretoria because my uncle lived there. He lost his job. His girlfriend lived in eThekweni, at KwaMakhutha. He asked her if I could live with her while I looked for a job. So I stayed at KwaMakhutha for one month. I found a job with an Indian person from Summerdale at Morningside. I worked there but, eish, it was difficult because they never gave me time to rest. They would give me rest time only when it suited them.

Gcina: Did you live there?

Michelle: Yes, I lived there.

Gcina: Oh, okay.

Michelle: I left there and I found another job at a salon in Beatrice Street. I met with a South African guy and we fell in love.

Gcina: Which year was that?

Michelle: 2009.

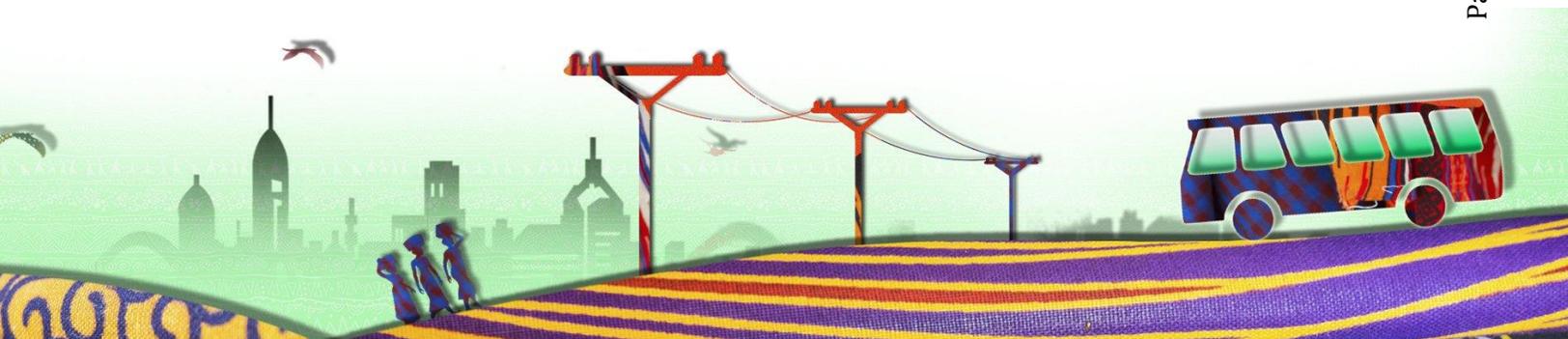
Gcina: Okay.

Michelle: We fell in love and he told me that I could not live with him because his family did not understand this thing of foreigners. He told me that he loved me and he would do everything for me. I wanted him to come to my home and I also wanted him to invite me to his home, but he didn't want to do that. That really hurt me and I told my sisters about it. I have a sister who came here in 2010, before I had the child. When she came I was pregnant and she said it would be better if we looked for a place to stay together because my boyfriend was useless.

Gcina: Was that before you had his child?

Michelle: I had not yet had the child. So I deleted his number because I told myself that I do not need him anymore and I started living with my sister. While the child was still small I was involved with a guy from home, from Zimbabwe, and we lived together. The father of my child knew where I lived with my boyfriend from Zimbabwe. He would come and talk to our child as he was playing on the road and ask him: "How is my wife doing?" You know, I took good care of his child. I am taking good care of my child. My boyfriend was irritated by that and he told me to finish my stories first with my ex. He said I should go back to him when I was done. Hmm... so I went back into staying with my sister.

Gcina: Was he supporting your child at that time?





Michelle: Yes, he used to give me some money. Sometimes he would give me R500. But the flat I was living in here in Durban cost R1500 for a room and I could not afford that. I looked for a job here in Grey Street and he helped me do that.

Gcina: Who did the father of the child?

Michelle: Yes. I got a job. There was a Nigerian guy who worked there and [my ex] helped me look for a job. I started working there, and he said he wanted us to get back together. But he had his stories and there were also other women involved. So I told him that I could not do that because he had a lot of stories. I went with him to my home and when my mother passed on, leaving my grandmother. She said it would be better that I leave my child with her while I go to work so I would not have to worry about the child. So I left my child at home and I came back here. Then we started fighting a lot.

Gcina: In what year did you leave the child at home?

Michelle: It was in 2001. Yes, it was at the end of 2001 when I left the child at home. We came back and started fighting. He was saying he would get me arrested because I stole his child... blah, blah, blah ...

Gcina: Wait, if you say you left the child at the end of 2001, how old is the child now?

Michelle: He is six years old. He will turn seven.

Gcina: That means it was not in 2001. It must have been in 2011 (laughing).

Michelle: Oh, sorry, it was in 2011, because I only came here in 2009. In 2011 I left the child and I came back and we started fighting. He told me to go and fetch the child and he told me that he would not be giving me maintenance anymore ... blah blah blah. His child started to get sick at home. I fetched the child and we returned here to live. He started again to give me money for the child to go to crèche and everything else. He said we should get back together, and I said I wouldn't because of his stories. I had had a fight with one of his girlfriends also. She used to provoke me and called me a foreigner ... hmmm ... She really looked down on me.

Gcina: How did you know about this girl?

Michelle: I found her at his place. They lived at Mayville.

Gcina: So he lived at Mayville at that time?

Michelle: Yes. I said that I did not like this [situation]. I did not want a fight so I told him it would be better if he continued with his life. He said he was just starting out his life and he wanted me back in his life. He wanted me to live with him with the child because he would not be able to take the child and live without me. I told him that I would not be able to do that. So, again I took the child and sent him back home where he stayed with my brother. I continued to work at the salon in Beatrice Street, doing braids. That's how I moved on with my life.

Gcina: Wait, are you now self-employed?

Michelle: Yes.

Gcina: When you came here from Zimbabwe, you went to your uncle in Pretoria?

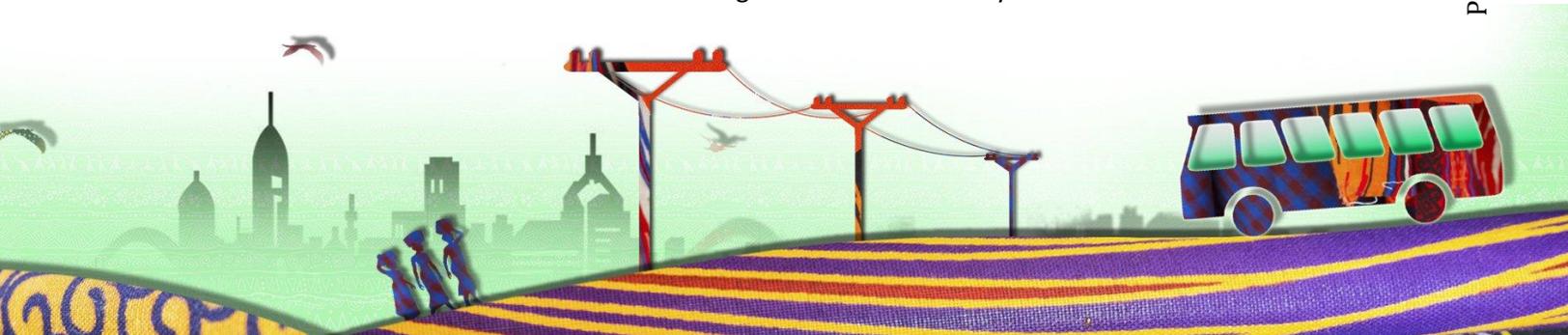
Michelle: Yes.

Gcina: What made you leave Pretoria to come down here by the beach?

Michelle: Yes. When I went to Pretoria, my uncle used to pay rent and he would buy groceries and I had not found a job. Then he lost his job. Then he went to live with his friend. He sent me here to stay with another lady so that I could look for a job and live with her while I was doing that. That's how I came here.

Gcina: So when you left Zimbabwe, was it part of your plan to go to Pretoria and then move on?

Michelle: Yes. I planned that I would arrive in Pretoria, look for a job and be able to look after my mother because she was still alive at that time although she was not well. My uncle said that it was better that





I come here—perhaps I would find a job and be able to look after my mother because she was still alive.

Gcina: How many are you in your family?

Michelle: There are two of us: my brother is in Cape Town and I am here in Durban.

Gcina: So who do you live with here?

Michelle: Right now I live with my friend.

Gcina: You guys are renting a flat? You are sharing a flat?

Michelle: Yes.

Gcina: How much are you paying in rent?

Michelle: R2200 per room.

Gcina: Sharing one room?

Michelle: Mmmm.

Gcina: Does each one pay R2200 or do you divide it?

Michelle: She pays half and I pay the other half, so I pay R1100.

Gcina: How long have you been there?

Michelle: I have been living in Beatrice Street for two years.

Gcina: Where did you live before coming to Beatrice Street?

Michelle: I lived in Alice Street. They closed down the room we lived in. The municipal people said it was not in a good condition because it was constructed from planks or wood.

Gcina: Oh, it was not in good condition. So how do you find the living conditions where you are based now? How safe is it? What challenges do you encounter? What are your wishes for it? Sometimes we say that if we had more money we would be doing things differently.

Michelle: I wish that I had money and could have a new place. Here I am renting just a corner. It would be nice to have money to get a licensed place when I can do my work—my own place. I am able to work here but there are things I can't do as I work under other people. For example, if I would like to fix this space and make it look better and nicer, I can't because it's not my place. I have to find a place and I would have to save up for this as it is very expensive. So that is why I am renting a little corner.

Gcina: How much are you paying in rent here?

Michelle: R3000 including lights and water.

Gcina: Are you sharing this with other people?

Michelle: Mmmm.

Gcina: Are you paying the rent alone?

Michelle: Yes. The other one is my brother and I pay him.

Gcina: Oh, so he works under you?

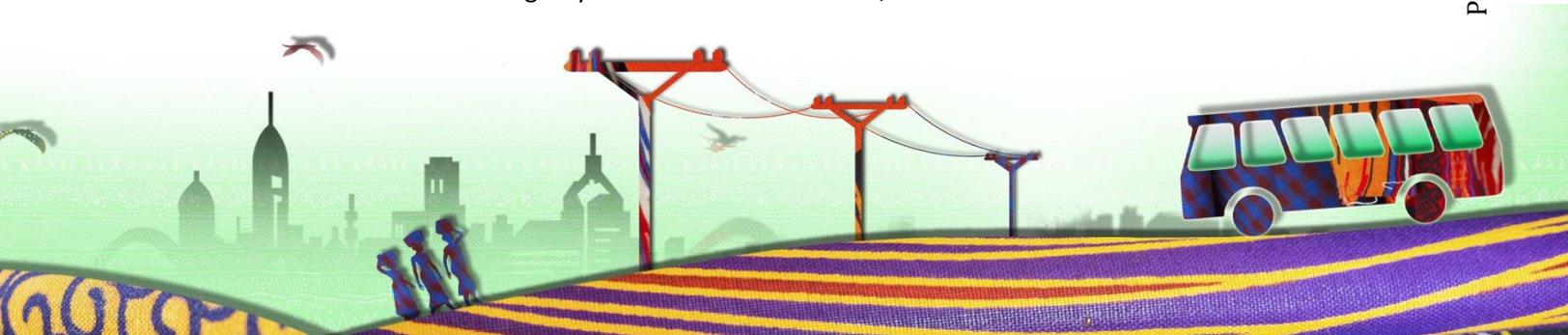
Michelle: Mmmm.

Gcina: You are renting for R3000? Do you even see the money you are making here?

Michelle: Eish ... it's difficult. In seasons like December one is able to work and make money. You can make up to R10 000, but that money finishes soon because you may not perform so well during January. Then you find that the money you make is even less than what you need for rent. So when you get money, you put it in the bank to pay rates. It's not easy at all. You also need to buy food and you must also send money home.

Gcina: Yes. So how many of you (siblings) are there here?

Michelle: There are three of us here. I have a brother who lives with my child at home. Then there is this one who is in Johannesburg. My father has other children, two of them after me.





Gcina: So what made you choose to come here to South Africa when you could have gone to Swaziland or Botswana or Lesotho?

Michelle: I came here because my uncle was here. He said I should come here because I was very young at that stage. My mother agreed that I could come here because she knew that my uncle was here as an older person.

Gcina: Where do you live in Zimbabwe?

Michelle: Harare.

Gcina: While you were at school that side, what made you want to leave that place?

Michelle: When I finished my schooling, I wanted to further my education but there was no one to pay for my studies because my father had passed on. I found a job there, but there are many educated people at home, people who have a tertiary education. When you only have matric it really gets difficult to find a job, a permanent job.

Gcina: Okay.

Michelle: So at home I did temporary teaching and I stopped. I did that so I could get money to further my studies. I got a job at National Foods, but they retrenched us and that was the end.

Gcina: Why did you stop the temporary teaching?

Michelle: The reason I stopped is because at that particular time the value of our currency was continuously going down. So when you do temporary teaching you find that you work and perhaps only get paid after three months. You find that you do not get good value for your money from the work that you do, and you are be able to buy anything with it.

Gcina: Okay.

Michelle: So I realised that this job was a waste of time.

Gcina: If you had the opportunity, if you had all the money you needed, what would you like to do with your life?

Michelle: I would like to study or I would like to do something that will promote my business. I would pay for my school fees. I studied at Intec College here in Durban but I dropped out because I was not able to pay off the fees.

Gcina: What were you doing at Intec?

Michelle: I was doing security management.

Gcina: If you could get money you could do something that will make your business generate more money.

Michelle: Yes.

Gcina: Why did you choose the college? Most people choose traditional universities or universities of technology?

Michelle: You mean to do security management? When I was growing up I wanted to become a police officer. I realised that I would never be able to become a police officer here. With my age too, I realised that it was better for me to do security management.

Gcina: So would you like to work further on your business? Is that it?

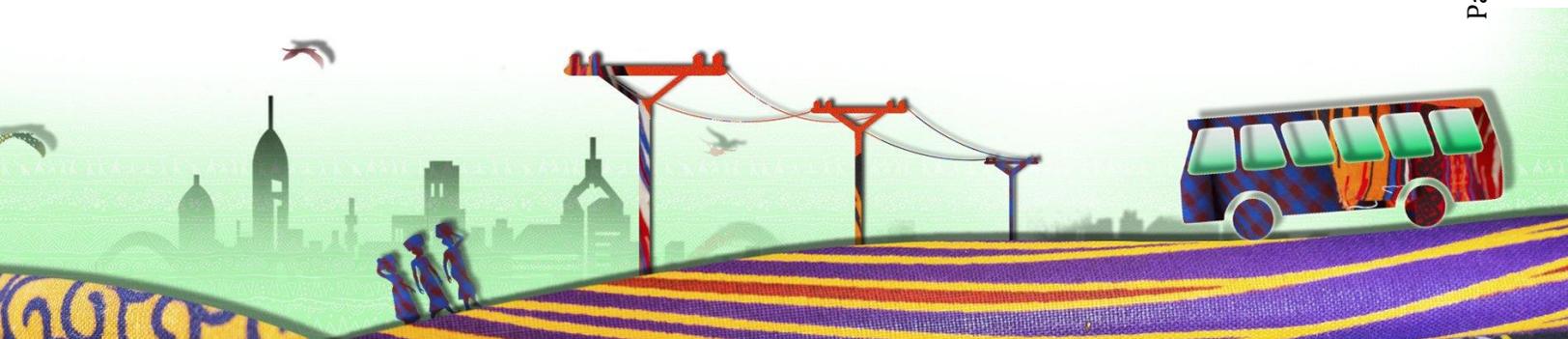
Michelle: Yes. Once I am educated I would be able to work and take care of my child. For this I need a good and stable job.

[Knock, knock!]

Gcina: I don't know if you want to open for them.

Gcina: So you say you came here in 2009/2010. This means that you have been here for about 6/7 years?

Michelle: Yes.





Gcina: You left Pretoria and came to Durban; you lived in Alice Street and then came to Beatrice Street. Have you lived in any other places than those you mentioned?

Michelle: I have lived at KwaMakhutha. I left there because I wanted to work in Morningside. I realised that it was going to be too far to live at KwaMakhutha and work in Morningside. I would not be able to afford the bus fare every morning and every evening. So that is why I looked for a place to stay in Alice Street. There was a place made out of boards. We stayed there but left because it was not in good condition.

Gcina: It was made of boards?

Michelle: Yes. They were maroon boards. It was a warehouse.

Gcina: Oh, it was divided by planks?

Michelle: Yes.

Gcina: Where is that place?

Michelle: It does not exist anymore. It has been closed. There is a bar now at Alice Street.

Gcina: Okay.

Michelle: It was at 66 Carlisle Street. When that place closed I went to live near Moses Mabhida stadium. This is where I live now with my brother—the one I was telling you about. He started fighting with the father of my child. He told me that I should break up with him because he was rude and disrespectful to me blah, blah, blah. So I came back to live here at Alice Street.

Gcina: You said that the municipality said it was not in good condition so you decided to come and stay here. So how was your life at KwaMakhutha?

Michelle: I don't want to lie ... the people that I lived with over there were really nice. I still visit some of them there.

Gcina: Okay.

Michelle: They did not have a problem with the fact that I am a foreigner.

Gcina: Where you are living right now, how safe is it?

Michelle: I had a problem when there was xenophobia.

Gcina: What year was that?

Michelle: 2014/2015. They came and I was still working in the corner, but the Pmb people from the taxi rank, protected me. They advised that it was better that I closed for some time and come back to work when things were cooler.

Gcina: So you worked from the corner. What made you move? Was it rent?

Michelle: Mmmm. Yes they raised it and I realised that I would not be able to afford it.

Gcina: How much was it?

Michelle: I was paying R3500 and they raised it to R5500 in January this year January. So I said I would not be able to continue.

Gcina: Ha! They raised it by R2500?

Michelle: Maybe they wanted to bring in their relatives, I don't know, but now their sister works there.

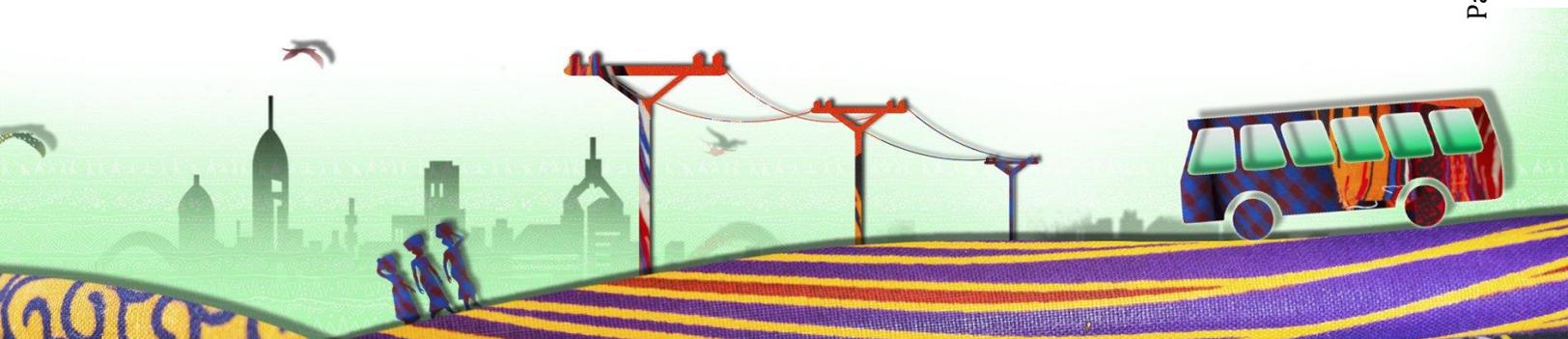
Gcina: Who are those people you were renting from? Are they from DRC? Oh! It's their place and then you shared with them? So is the equipment there yours or did you find it there?

Michelle: I put up the cabinets. I put in everything, even the mirrors.

Gcina: Okay. When do you go home and how long do you normally spend there?

Michelle: December.

Gcina: Every December?





Michelle: Yes, but if there is someone who has passed on, I go, even if it is in the middle of the month. But I usually go every December.

Gcina: You said you were once affected by xenophobia. There were xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008 and 2011. Where were you at that time?

Michelle: I was living by Mabhida stadium. I was not working at that time and I did not witness anything.

Gcina: Okay. So now you only have one child. How old is your child?

Michelle: He will be seven this year.

Gcina: He lives with your mom at home?

Michelle: My mother is late. He stays with my brother.

Gcina: When did your mom pass on?

Michelle: In 2010.

Gcina: And your father?

Michelle: My father died ... even before I finished school.

Gcina: Thank you for your time. I am very interested in finding out about women who migrate from other countries, and also women who migrate from one province to another, that is, internal migration. I wanted to speak to you for a perspective from somebody who comes from outside South Africa. I want to know how you experience things.

Have you ever needed to see the ward councillor about any particular services that you need? Do you even know where to find the ward councillor? Are there particular communities that you associate yourself with? Are you part of any organisation? Why? What are your expectations from it?

Michelle: I do not know any ward councillor. I [joined] ASONET because I saw that their vision is to provide social welfare support for foreigners. I think that if we can try and do things together as Africans, things will come right one day. So that is why I wanted to be part of this organisation.

Gcina: What do they do which gives you hope of a better future?

Michelle: When there was a wave of xenophobia attacks, they tried to negotiate with government so that [foreigners] could remain here. They try to see that South Africans are educated so that they are able to live together with foreigners in peace.

Gcina: Michelle, thank you for all your time. I hope that you succeed. I hope you find another place where you can work because it seems that the rent you are paying here is too much. It takes all the money you make. Maybe one day you can consider looking for another place. Maybe you can go to a township.

Michelle: I would like to. I am still looking for a place that would be favourable. When I find it I know it would be fine. Possibly I could go to KwaMakhutha because I have found myself a home over there.

Gcina: I was about to ask if you are not scared that one day xenophobic attacks will start again?

Michelle: The thing is people are not the same. You see, it is the same as in the place where I was working—the taxi people protected me. I think that if I can go to KwaMakhutha, at least I have good friends there as well. I have sisters and brothers who will be able to protect me. So I don't know what I will do if I get a place where I will be paying R4000 for rent and have to pay for water and electricity because I will be left with nothing.

Gcina: Thank you, sisi.

Michelle: Thank you too.

