

## **Shadows of Apartheid Linger, By Prisca Udensi**

The excursion to the workers museum in Johannesburg was a time of reflection, it was a reflection on some of the topics we've discussed in class during our labour migration seminars. But only this time we were able to not just read about them but to actually see the realities of what and how black migrant workers were subjected to de-humanising conditions during the apartheid era.

A walk through the various exhibitions on display gave a clear picture of the lived experiences of these workers who were recruited through formal and informal channels from throughout southern Africa to work on the mines and in towns and factories during apartheid. Although their work conditions were highly precarious and deliberately dehumanising, what was worth remembering was the resilience and strength these workers had in the face of their sad realities. However, over 22 years since apartheid was defeated, the shadows of that era still lingers in the present South Africa. The precarious condition of workers (both migrants and locals) during the apartheid era, continues to exist for workers in post- apartheid South Africa and are mostly recorded in the informal sector of the country.

Vulnerability in the labour market can take many forms and is often associated with the term 'precarious work' (Bhorat et al., 2016). Ways in which workers can be vulnerable include working in the informal sector; earning low wages relative to the cost of living; not having a written contract; working in adverse conditions; not having access to benefits; and a lack of job security; amongst other examples (Bhorat et al., 2016).

In a research conducted by Nnaeme (2017), on newspaper companies in Durban. He found that the lack of employment security and benefits, such as unemployment insurance fund (UIF), sick leave, benefit in case of hijacking and death, among others, are a major source of concern for all the companies' contractors and their employees. For instance, one of his participant who was a home delivery contractor, narrated the change in benefits and entitlements from when she started to till date: 'Around 1995,

Newspaper Company A saw the writing on the wall. And they saw that they would have to start paying more. So what did they do? They got rid of us. They put us unto contract, where we cannot claim anything. They give us the contract and say: 'sign it or don't sign it'. What can we do? But we got nothing, no leave, no sick leave, we got nothing. The day you stop working, the day you stop earning' (Nnaeme, 2017). 'Nobody cares. It is so cold. It really is. I mean sellers take their lives into their hands every morning. One of the guys was shot down at Checkers a year or so ago. He was selling newspapers early in the morning. We are distributing their newspapers but we cannot claim from them. We are doing the job, we take the risk. The same with me, I was hijacked here in the garage two years ago, my car was taken, my hand bag was taken, my pay was taken' (Nnaeme, 2017).