

**Immigrant workers' experiences and perceptions of tensions, identity and social  
resources within the Port of Durban, South Africa**

**By**

**Sarisha Padayachee**

**Student number: 208520279**

**Supervised by Mr N. Ramjuthan**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters of Social Science (Industrial Psychology) in the School of Applied Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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**Sarisha Padayachee**

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is argued that the tensions facing foreign workers in the South African labour market should be seen against the background of the recent history of migration in which it has been primarily workers with low educational and vocational qualifications that have arrived from neighbouring countries and who have been employed within the informal sector doing fairly dangerous and poorly paid work.

**Aim:** In light of this, the purpose of this study was to explore immigrant worker's experiences and perceptions of tension, identity and social resources within the Port of Durban, with an overall focus on the construction of a positive work identity.

**Methodology:** The broad paradigm of this research study is located in the qualitative research field. The researcher specifically used an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) following the guidelines of Smith, Jarman and Osborne (1999). The IPA was used because the researcher was interested in identifying, describing and understanding the subjective experiences and cognitive interpretations of immigrant workers in respect of their subjective experiences and perceptions of tension; identity and social resources; and because the researcher intended to make sense of the participants' worlds through a process of interpretative activity. Semi-structured interviews using a non-probability sampling technique were employed to purposively select 10 participants from within the container terminal division of the Port. The IPA as suggested by Smith et al. (1999) was then used to identify the connections and themes in respect of shared meanings and references and /or in respect of hierarchical relationships in each transcript. Themes that were found to be common were

grouped together i.e. clustered by the researcher. The researcher then derived a master list of superordinate themes and sub-themes from the clusters of themes.

**Findings:** The thematic analysis unearthed eight themes : (1) interpretation of what it means to be an immigrant; (2) causes of tension at work; (3) causes of tension outside of work; (4) mechanisms for managing tensions; (5) individuality versus belonging; (6) factors leading to a positive work life; (7) identifying social resources; and (8) overcoming tensions using social resources. The participants' lived experiences of tension indicated that a number of barriers had impacted and were continuing to impact on their everyday work experience. Overall, tensions, such as disrespect, violence and inequality, made it difficult for immigrants to identify positively with their work and fellow South Africans. Notwithstanding the fact, participants additionally managed to identify key aspects and positive experiences, such as training and learning opportunities that served as potential social resources that workers could rely on in order to help them overcome some of the above mentioned tensions and attain a more positive immigrant work-related identity.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and outline of research problem

As the most developed country in the South African Development Community (SADC) region, South Africa experiences a significant proportion of immigrant workers entering the country in all sectors, particularly its informal sector (Mosala, 2008; Polzer, 2010; Tansey, Muteerwa & Hartnack, 2010). Recent extrapolations from census data estimate the total foreign population (including documented and undocumented) to be between 1.6 to 2 million or alternatively 3-4% of the total national population (Polzer, 2010). Today, key reasons for migration include large differentials between SADC member states in terms of wages, standards of living and unemployment rates, political upheavals as well as reduced government investment in social services (ILO, 1998; Fenwick, Kalula & Landau, 2007).

Immigrants constitute a vital source of skills and labour for informal sectors in countries, developed and less developed, across the world (Mosala, 2008). The types of employment generated by these sectors in turn provide an important source of work for immigrants seeking temporary or permanent employment opportunities away from their homelands (Mosala, 2008). However, despite the various challenges that immigrant workers encounter during this transition, there are only a handful of studies that seek to comprehensively grasp and conceptualise these tensions as they are experienced and perceived by immigrant workers themselves (Mosala, 2008; Benner, LoPresti, Matsuoka, Pastor & Rosner, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). This is troubling given that tensions, such as Xenophobia and racism have widespread and often disabling effects on both individuals and organisations

at large. Mosala (2008) cites these tensions as major contributors of disproportionate strike action, violence in the workplace and sub-optimal, negative workplace experiences on the part of immigrant workers. Herein lays a gap in the current literature, which requires better understanding of how such tensions may affect an immigrant worker's identity and the implications this may have for the organisations that employ them.

April and April (2009) state that “resonances of the social discrimination and exclusion suffered by the Black population, and women (Black and White), during Apartheid still remain, and is therefore one of the chief focus areas for transformation of the South African workplace” (p. 217). From this statement, one may reasonably argue that such a context ought to constitute an integral part of immigrant-related research as well. However, little to no attention is given to the impact and undesirable properties of South Africa's history on immigrant workers in the country. This underdeveloped area is coupled with a lack of research dedicated to improving the quality of life of these workers. In view of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the notion of positive identity construction amongst immigrants has been widely discounted. Thus, a further gap in the literature stems from the paucity of research studies conducted within the South African context, particularly in terms of informal sectors, such as the Durban Port, where migration trends appear to be on the rise (Mosala, 2008; Polzer, 2010). Apart from being the busiest and largest container terminal in the Southern Hemisphere, the Port of Durban is currently undergoing major infrastructural changes intended to boost the Port's global competitiveness (Hutson, 2012). This has culminated in the creation of new jobs, which in turn has attracted and spurred on the recent influx of immigrants to the Port (Transnet, 2009).

In a recent press release, the Transnet Port Terminal (TPT) chief executive officer Karl Socikwa stated that “Human capital development is going to be at the forefront of our plan and our programme because we have to make sure that as we create sustainable jobs through this level of investment and heightened level of activity, we are developing our people to be able to operate the infrastructure,” (Hutson, 2012, unpagged). From the above, it may be seen that Port’s emphasis on skills development and sustainability are closely aligned with the aims of the present study in terms of developing workers and constructing pathways to positive work identities such that workers become more committed and productive. This premise may hold added value for immigrant workers, who although represent a growing population at the Port, face additional and often inimitable barriers to attaining a positive work identity. Thus, in order to achieve this task, it is important to first identify and understand the tensions that these workers experience as immigrants within South Africa’s informal sector. Secondly, it is necessary to explore the theme of identity as it is perceived by immigrant workers. This serves to provide a solid foundation on which the concept of positive work-related identities may be explored.

A further rationale lies in expounding the misconceptions surrounding the supposedly rudimentary and insignificant work performed by immigrant workers within the informal sector. Such views have led to a plethora of studies focusing on immigrants within *formal sectors*, wherein international experts are sought out and recruited to address South Africa’s ‘brain drain’. In response to this, the present study poses the question ‘What becomes of those immigrants who occupy important, often dangerous and degrading jobs that no one else is willing to do?’ In light of these misconceptions, this study aims to privilege the voices of immigrant workers – by heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped the study

can unravel the complexities and nuances of the lived experiences and tensions of immigrant workers, which in turn, may generate new insights into (1) developing the important roles that they play and (2) enhancing their experiences and perceptions of work at the Port.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding and account of the lived experiences of immigrant workers within the Port of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. Upon exploring tensions, identity and social resources as they are understood by immigrant workers, the study's focus will then turn to the construction of a positive work identity, which may contribute greatly to the development of both immigrant workers and their organisations.

## **1.3 Research questions**

1. What is the nature of the lived experiences of tension amongst immigrant workers in South Africa?
2. What does it mean to have an identity as an immigrant worker within the Port of Durban?
3. What are the ways in which immigrant workers live with the tensions of a workplace that is both liberatory and limiting?
4. How is it possible to identify positively as an immigrant worker within the Durban Port?

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The primary contribution of this study relates to the creation of localized awareness at middle and senior management level regarding the workplace experiences of immigrant workers at the Durban Port. Particular reference is made to the experiences of tension and the ways in which immigrant workers can identify positively with their work. The researcher posits that having a clear department specific picture about immigrant workers' experiences in the container terminal will facilitate the development of interventions to invest in and improve the quality of work experiences of immigrants throughout the Port. It is envisaged that the solutions and recommendations as derived from suggestions put forth by the participants and from the researcher's interpretation of their subjective experiences, will further aid the development of these interventions. In sum, the researcher argues that if the work experiences of immigrants are enhanced, then their work-identities are likely to be more positive and the quality of their work efforts improved. Further, the study's findings may contribute greatly to the positive psychology framework with better understanding of what makes immigrant workers in South Africa lead more fulfilled, happy and positive lives.

#### **1.5 Operational definitions**

**Migration:** is the process of moving either across an international border or within a state. It encompasses any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people and economic migrants.

**Labour migration:** is the movement of persons from their home country to another or within their own country of residence for the purpose of employment.

**Immigrant:** is a person who freely chooses to move location or enter another country (within a country or across an international boundary) for the reasons of ‘personal convenience,’ without intervention of an external compelling factor and with the intention of making one’s permanent life and home there.

**Immigrant worker:** is a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a national.

**Tensions:** are likened to strain, barriers or stress that arise in multiple experiences and that cannot be contained in one definition, such as the conflicting role requirements at home and within the workplace or the conflicting importance placed on particular identities within different contexts. What might seem to be freedom on the surface may be a form of compliance whereby individuals restrict their life choices to fit socially sanctioned options or pre-determined discourses of power/knowledge.

**Identity:** is conceptualised as the meanings that individuals attach to themselves. These meanings might be represented as self-schemas that capture features or attributes that individuals associate with themselves or they might be represented in a narrative form (individual life stories). Further, it is acknowledged that people’s identities are multiple and dynamic, making identity a complex and changing representation of self-knowledge and self-understanding that is associated with a broad range of self-relevant feelings and attitudes.

**Social resources:** refer to the number, diversity, and quality of relationships that an individual has at work. In this study, it is assumed that employees who have more social

resources acquire other resources (e.g., information, access, trust) that strengthen them to endure stress and tension and/or to take on new and more demanding challenges.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

In this introductory chapter, the principal aims and objectives, research questions, rationale, and context of the research problem were discussed. It was noted that tensions had been identified as a precipitant to the negative work experiences of immigrant workers in South Africa. Further, it was noted that little headway has been made to address the effects of such tensions on the identities of these workers. Given that the Port is likely to receive larger numbers of immigrants in the near future (due to renovations and expansion), a specific picture about the experiences of existing immigrants would facilitate the development of interventions to enhance the quality of working experiences, and ergo boost the quality of work performed by all immigrant workers employed throughout the Port. The following chapter presents a review of literature in relation to the research objectives and questions outlined above.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

As the most developed country in the South African Development Community (SADC) region, South Africa experiences a significant proportion of immigrant workers entering the country in all sectors, particularly its informal sector (Mosala, 2008; Polzer, 2010; Tansey et al., 2010). From the late nineteenth century, South Africa received large numbers of migrant workers from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique (Polzer 2010; Fenwick et al., 2007). To a lesser extent, other countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania, have also historically attracted labour migrants from neighbouring countries. South Africa, however, remains the region's most dominant, sophisticated and diversified economy and continues to attract the highest numbers of both formal and informal labour migrants (Fenwick et al., 2007). Recent extrapolations from census data estimate the total foreign population (including documented and undocumented) to be between 1.6 to 2 million or alternatively 3-4% of the total national population (Polzer, 2010).

Today, key reasons for migration include large differentials between SADC member states in terms of wages, standards of living and unemployment rates, political upheavals as well as reduced government investment in social services (ILO, 1998; Fenwick et al., 2007). While previous studies have highlighted some of the tensions experienced by immigrant workers during their transition into South African companies (Mosala, 2008; Benner et al., 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002), the concept of 'tensions' is inherently broad. Given that it

encompasses a wide range of behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects including negative stereotyping, xenophobia, job insecurity, language barriers, feelings of unworthiness and so forth, it is perhaps unsurprising that little headway has been made to transcend beyond merely identifying tensions. Herein lays a rationale for the present study as the proposition of exploring tensions in relation to the construction of positive work-identities has been scarcely dealt with, particularly within the context of South Africa's informal sector. Indeed, the prominence of labour mobility is a 'melting-pot' of complexity that requires further acknowledgment and exploration of the common experiences of immigrant workers. It has also become necessary, perhaps even more so, to privilege the voices of immigrant workers, who often find themselves immersed in the contextual tensions of being 'outsiders,' - outside of familiar social institutions, cultural practices, often family/community support and other resources. Given this background, the literature will proceed to discuss in-depth, some of the tensions experienced by immigrants workers in South Africa.

## **2.2 Immigrant workers' experiences of tension in South Africa**

Montgomery (2006) defines tensions as "those little acts of degradation to which others subject us... those little reminders that we need to know our place in the world" (unpaged). Implicit in this definition is an underlying state of uncertainty with respect to how immigrant workers are perceived and received by others around them (Benner et al., 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Mosala (2008), a major source of tension for immigrants is the worldwide phenomenon, Xenophobia. To this extent the author emphasizes two important points, the first being that immigrants are likely to be viewed with suspicion and distrust and secondly that many South Africans firmly believe that every job given to a foreign national is one less job for a South African; this is exacerbated by the formal unemployment rates,

currently in the range of 30–40% (Black et al., 2006). These negative attitudes and perceptions have been largely responsible for the brutal xenophobic attacks, which started in Alexandra in May 2008, and spread rapidly nationwide (Black et al., 2006; Mosala, 2008).

In light of the above, a brief discussion on migration movements to South Africa will follow. The discussion will also highlight further tensions experienced by immigrant workers, including the practice of labour broking in South Africa, which has come under scrutiny and has resulted in heated debates within the South African Labour context.

### **Migration to South Africa**

Worldwide, migration may be seen to be pushed by several political (violence, oppression, war and persecution) and/or economic factors, the latter of which accounts for the greatest influx of migrant workers, who cross national borders in order to escape poverty, unemployment and inflationary costs of living (Mosala, 2008; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002; Tansey et al., 2010). Subsequently, migrant workers are more inclined to target countries with relatively stable or booming economies that also experience labour/skill shortages, such as Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Additionally, South Africa's geographical location at the southern tip of Africa renders itself a leading host country of origin, destination and transit for immigrants (Mosala, 2008). To the north of South Africa lies Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana; to the east lie Swaziland and Mozambique; while Lesotho remains an independent country, surrounded entirely by South African territory (Mosala, 2008). Many immigrants descending from these neighbouring countries enter South Africa without the necessary papers and documentation (Mosala, 2008). As a result, most immigrant workers

enter the country illegally by way of paying bribes to police or border officials, truck drivers, bus conductors or other ‘people smugglers’ to give them permission and passage to enter South Africa (Mosala, 2008; Tansey et al., 2010). South Africa has however, relaxed its visa requirements for certain countries, including Zimbabwe. The result of this change has been twofold. Firstly, it has enabled migrants to cross the border more freely through legitimate means and procedures (Tansey et al., 2010) and secondly, it has meant that South Africa continues to be affected by internal, regional and international migration (Mosala, 2008).

Worldwide migration trends have further revealed that migrants are more willing to take on jobs of a low-status, low-wage and often seasonal and high-risk nature attached to them (Benner et al., 2005; Mosala, 2008). Upon arrival in South Africa, many immigrant workers are desperate to secure some form of employment and income. Thus, it has become almost mandatory for these workers to be better adapted to atrocious working conditions in order to fill the gaps in the labour market that locals are not willing to occupy. Embedded in this notion is the reality that immigrants and undocumented immigrants in particular, constitute a very vulnerable segment of the labour market that is prone to exploitation.

South Africa’s recovery from the recent recession has left the country’s economy in a rather volatile state. Of particular relevance to the present study, is the growing trend of casual or atypical types of employment amongst immigrant workers within informal sectors (Fenwick et al., 2007; Mosala, 2008; Benner et al., 2005). In an attempt to remain competitive and economical at the same time, many employers seek to justify their procurement of workers through temporary employment services (TES). This is notwithstanding the fact that labor

broking essentially circumvents the procedural and administrative obligations imposed on employers by the Labor Relations Act, 1995 (LRA).

TES, commonly referred to as 'Labor Brokers', are governed by section 198 of the LRA, which defines a TES as, "any person who, for reward, procures for or provides to a client other persons who render services to, or perform work for, the client and who are remunerated by the temporary employment service." This relationship is being called into question due to the preferential position it affords clients in terms of having no obligations or commitments towards the worker (Benner et al., 2005). This fundamentally equates to the exploitation of basic human rights enjoyed by workers under the LRA and it is for this reason that the researcher argues against overlooking the fact that workers in general and immigrants in particular, are being cornered into vulnerable positions without adequate job security (Benner et al., 2005).

An increased reliance of major companies on labour broking services has also resulted in a highly mobile workforce with seasonal employment contracts becoming the norm (Benner et al., 2005; Mosala, 2008). Within the informal sector, immigrant workers are being moved from one construction, mining, farming or domestic site to another. Subsequently, workers employed under a TES seldom join trade unions as they are not active in a particular industry long enough to categorize themselves - this significantly diminishes their bargaining power (Mosala, 2008). The future of labour broking in South Africa is indeed a controversial debate that fluctuates from the total banning to the regulation thereof. The tensions mentioned herewith are coupled with widespread views that immigrants are in fact better workers than

locals, in terms of productivity and availability (Mosala, 2008). While this may appear to be a positive element, the term “better” in this case really means “pliable” with employers rarely investing in the long-term development of immigrant workers despite clear evidence of talent and skill. Rather, employers tend to perceive immigrant workers as a short-term solution to maximizing productivity at a minimum cost (Mosala, 2008).

Hitherto the conceptualisation of tensions has served to capture and reflect the challenging lived experiences of immigrant workers in South Africa. However, one should remain cognizant of the fact that South Africa’s economic lure, promise of employment and international image of democracy and freedom has resulted in positive experiences for some immigrant workers. This serves to highlight the important fact that despite preconceived notions of what it means to be an immigrant worker, we know very little about what immigrants themselves have to say; or how they perceive their own work roles. On the balance, however, the literature favours a strong association between the concepts of ‘tension,’ negative psychological states and the consequences thereof. Indeed, recent research conducted in the UCT Graduate School of Business (2009) has confirmed earlier sentiments that xenophobia is rife within the South African workplace – and that many immigrant workers, especially workers from other African countries, suffer discrimination on a daily basis. The study further revealed that many South African organisations have, on the one hand, failed to create the necessary opportunities for individual/self- and group reflection and, on the other, failed to increase flexibility and capacity in the system for appropriate action (April & April, 2009). As a result, “the necessary generative, recursive and inclusive psychological learning” (April & April, 2009, p. 217) have been discounted. This has rendered many organisational environments combative for immigrant workers and finally

static from a sustainable competitive point of view (April & April, 2009). The consequences of such a stagnant work climate were expressed as tensions captured in the 243 interviews conducted with immigrant workers from various South African workplaces. These themes of tension will be explored below.

### **Theme 1: I am not treated as a human being in the workplace**

For many interviewees, the language barriers and cultural differences at their workplace resulted in them being labelled as company workers with set tasks to fulfil (there was much emphasis on a 'production line' mentality) (April & April, 2009). As a result, their work-identity steadily began to replace their sense of individuality and in many cases immigrant workers began to doubt their own self-worth and ability (April & April, 2009). A male interviewee stated that 'the lack of respect in my work environment resulted in me not actively contributing to the work environment, and feeling psychologically disconnected'. This ultimately thwarted his motivation, efficiency and increased feelings of isolation and resentment towards his work (April & April, 2009).

April and April (2009) further posit that a lack of support and help from fellow workers and managers in bridging the cultural gap are likely to result in superficial and inauthentic social mixing. This argument was supported by several interviewees, who found it exceedingly difficult to modify their behaviour and identity to fit the culture of their South African organisations without losing chunks of their individuality (April & April, 2009). One immigrant worker claimed that he had lost all connection to his 'core' and could no longer be true to himself (April & April, 2009, p. 222). Similarly, the Centre for Southern African

Studies (CSAS) at the University of the Western Cape argues that one's perception of identity features as an important survival mechanism for immigrant workers (Sinclair, 1998). Reference is made to a Basotho migrant song, which illustrates this point well: "Mokohare: Now I assume another blanket...In crossing the river, I become a new man different from the one I was at home. At home I was secure. Now that I am on this side, I assume a different attitude from the one where I was soft with other men... this side I have to be tough and assume manhood," (Moodie 'Mine Culture,' p. 177 in Sinclair, 1998, p. 344). Sinclair (1998) believed that such findings "confirm the emerging idea that identities are constructed in response to context, that they shift as conditions shift, and that they are self-conscious creations," (p. 345). The study also highlighted common stereotypes held by many South Africans. These included perceptions of immigrants as criminals, who exacerbate existing rates of unemployment, and who steal jobs opportunities and men/women from South African citizens; that is, "they are a drain on already stretched social services," (Sinclair, 1998, p. 345).

In direct contrast to these findings, research studies have also suggested that tensions may in fact be a source of motivation for immigrant workers as evidenced below (April & April, 2009).

### **Theme 2: I learned that you can use your 'being different' in a way that works for you**

For many interviewees, being different meant that they were able to contribute to organisational issues in fresh, innovative and distinctively unique ways (April & April, 2009). A male immigrant worker claimed: 'My different perspectives and ways of doing

things has already led to two major innovations in my company . . . they are now seeing my value as far as creativity is concerned,' (April & April, 2009, p. 222). It was also reported that many female immigrant workers turned the negative aspects of being a woman, in a male dominated workplace, into an advantage, by working harder than men to prove themselves and thrived in their companies as a result (April & April, 2009). Thus, while there has been much discussion regarding the negative aspects of being 'different' in the South African workplace, the above findings suggest that immigrant workers may in fact construct a positive work identity amidst the inimitable tensions that they experience. This requires a conceptual framework that ratifies the concept of building upon one's strengths and virtues so that human flourishing leads to more positive experiences and positive identities. For these reasons, a positive psychology framework has been selected to guide the study.

### **2.3 Conceptual framework: Positive Psychology**

Post-World War II, psychology relied predominantly on the disease model of human functioning, which saw the field evolve into a science largely devoted to healing and repairing damage (Maddux, 2008; Seligman, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). With its almost exclusive focus on pathology, psychology overlooked the possibility of building upon one's strengths as a more potent weapon in the arsenal of psychotherapy (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Consequently, the prospect of positive psychological states - fulfilled individuals and flourishing communities- has not received due recognition (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). An electronic search through psychology abstracts illustrates the disproportionate emphasis on negative psychological states, which outnumbered that of positive emotions by a ratio of approximately 14 to 1 (Myers, 2000; Field & Buitendach, 2011). As the underlying conceptual ideology of psychology informs the type of

research and the applied component of this field, it is not surprising that most psychological research is focused on negative, maladaptive states (Field & Buitendach, 2011). However, criticisms of the field's fundamentally negative and disease-driven philosophy has led to a shift in the direction of a more 'positive psychology,' wherein the prime focus is on positive psychological states and harnessing the best qualities in life (Maddux, 2008).

Positive psychology embraces those conditions and practices that contribute to the flourishing and optimal functioning of individuals and communities (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Accordingly, treatment and interventions acknowledge that human strengths and positive qualities have the potential to serve as buffers against pathologies and other problems (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Of important relevance is that in the relatively short time that it has existed, that paradigm has accrued many notable achievements. One of its chief areas of success has been its ability to raise public awareness around the issues of happiness and well-being, for example the cover story on positive psychology in Time Magazine (Wallis, 2005). Positive psychology has also become well represented by a range of academic publications, including a dedicated journal - The Journal of Positive Psychology - various handbooks (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Lopez & Snyder, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002), introductory texts (Compton, 2004) and scores of journal articles and special editions devoted to the topic. However, notwithstanding the growing success of positive psychology, it has not been without its detractors.

Sundararajan (2005) warns against the paradigm's overly simplistic polarization of the positive and the negative, claiming that it cannot be taken seriously as an innovation in

science - “If the whole thing is a matter of shuffling research agendas, then the pendulum is bound to swing back to the negative, when in the foreseeable future the positive side of the coin has generated silos of data,” (p. 35). Taylor (2001) maintains that positivist experimental psychology should not dictate what is and is not first rate science and contends that the paradigm has failed to acknowledge its philosophical and psychological antecedents. In a similar vein, Barbara Held (2004, 2005) has called into question the tyranny of the positive attitude, positive psychology’s separatist stance (Held, 2004), and positive psychology’s attempt to present itself as virtuous (Held, 2005).

In response to these critiques, positive psychologists reason that the paradigm is fundamentally a call for psychological science and practice to be as concerned with strength as with weakness; as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst; and as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology. Such advocates are also quick to point out that positive psychology does not involve ignoring the very real problems that people face and that other areas of psychology strive to treat. Rather, the value of positive psychology is to complement and extend the problem-focused psychology that has been dominant for many decades (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, taking into account both arguments put forth by renowned advocates and detractors of the framework in question, the researcher concluded that the aims of this particular study, which include exploring the construction of positive identities amongst immigrant workers, would be ideally suited to positive psychology. A further reason for adopting a positive psychological framework is that it provides an appropriate conceptualisation of concepts such as optimal distinctiveness, flourishing and

social resources, all of which are central to understanding positive identities of immigrant workers. As such, the literature will now proceed to discuss the concept of identity below.

#### **2.4 Identity of immigrant workers**

According to Erikson, identity results from “a dynamic interplay between individual and context,” (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006, p. 5). Due to his detailed account of the multidimensionality of identity and its embeddedness within cultural contexts, the work of Erikson (1968) will be used for the theoretical analysis of identity in the present study. Although Erikson (1968) classified this interplay as a universal phenomenon, he further posited that the ‘historical actuality’ of the broader cultural context determines the parameters on what an individual may rely upon during the process of identity development. This statement has implications for the ways in which immigrants ‘interact’ with South Africa’s Apartheid past and democratic present and the tensions that exist thereof.

In conceptualising identity, distinctions are generally made between personal and social aspects, the former of which is comprised of the *goals, beliefs, mores, and values* that an individual adopts and upholds (Brown, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2006). Social identity on the other hand refers to (a) the groups of individuals that one identifies with (in-groups), this includes the group’s self-identified conventions, values, labels, and norms (Erikson, 1968) and (b) the degree to which such identification prompts one to favour the in-group while simultaneously distancing oneself from out-groups (i.e. groups other than the in-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Brown, 2000). In addition to this, the researcher is of the opinion that

the cultural aspects of identity should be included. Cultural identity is drawn from parts of one's social identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001) and may be defined as the interface between the person and the *cultural* contexts in which they find themselves immersed (Phinney et al., 2001). This aspect of identity may be particularly useful in solidifying the ideals of a given cultural group with the attitudes and behaviours expressed towards one's own (and other) cultural groups attributable to this solidarity (Jensen, 2003; Phinney et al., 2001). In principle, an 'adaptive' identity (a synthesis of personal, social and cultural self-conceptions) will be adopted and discussed in further detail below (Schwartz, 2001).

#### **2.4.1 Functions of identity**

The present study aims to explore the benefits of having a positive work identity for immigrant workers. Building upon Erikson's ideas, Adams and Marshall (1996) posit that identity is "a psychological structure, is a *self-regulatory system* which functions to *direct* attention, *filter* or *process* information, *manage* impressions, and *select* appropriate behaviours," (p. 433). Serafini and Adams (2002) add that through processes characterized by (a) imitation and identification or (b) exploration, construction, and experience; individuals are able to adopt certain identities. In applying the ideas of Adams and Marshall (1996, p. 433) to the present study, identity may function to provide immigrant workers with (a) a structure to help one *understand* who one is; (b) *meaning and direction* through ideals, commitments and goals; (c) a sense of *personal control* and free will; (d) *consistency, coherence, and harmony* between values, beliefs, and commitments; and (e) *recognition of potential* through a sense of future, possibilities, and alternative choices. These postulations suggest mechanisms through which identity guides the life course (Schwartz et al., 2006).

This may be particularly pertinent to immigrant workers and their experiences of tension during the process of acculturation, wherein the changes (or lack thereof) in behaviours, goals and beliefs have clear implications for the ways in which they form, revise, and maintain their identity - either through the process of imitation and identification or through exploration and construction (Schwartz et al., 2006).

While personal and social identities (including cultural identity) are perceived as separate concepts, in reality, they function and are dependent upon one another (Schwartz et al., 2006; Adams & Marshall, 1996; Serafini & Adams, 2002). As immigrant workers are exposed to and interact with different individuals, institutions, and customs from their new receiving society, aspects of their social identity and therefore cultural identity are likely to change (Schwartz et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001) The magnitude of this change is dependent upon the degree to which traditional (heritage) cultural beliefs, customs and values are acquired and retained as well as the extent to which the receiving and traditional cultures diverge (Phinney et al., 2001; Rudmin, 2003). As immigrant workers reflect upon the incongruities between their receiving and traditional cultures, they may experience what Hernandez, Montgomery and Kurtines (in press) call identity distress (a tension), which results from a divided sense of loyalty to the two cultures (Schwartz et al., 2006). Thus, it may be seen that changes in social and cultural identity can be potentially dis-equilibrating for immigrant workers. Personal identity, however, has the capacity to function as a stabilizing and/or protective force that guides immigrant workers during their transition into South African workplaces (Schwartz et al., 2006). With the presence of a coherent set of ideals, values, and beliefs, immigrant workers may feel more grounded in their decisions on how to proceed in the face of such incompatibilities (Schwartz et al., 2006).

The ways in which immigrants use personal identity strategies to evade inter and intra-subjective tensions in negotiating social and ethnic identity changes has captured the attention of qualitative researchers worldwide (Schwartz, 2005.) Indeed, this is a new and important direction for future identity research, particularly within the *work context* (Schwartz, 2005). This has relevance for the present study, which recognises that work is a salient source of meaning and self-definition for most people (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Carlsen, 2008; Gini, 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Individuals form, transform, and alter the ways in which they define themselves as well as others under work-based circumstances and activities (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006). As a result, the construction of positive work-identities has also received increased attention in recent years (Schwartz, 2005). However, this concept has not been sufficiently extended to include the different types of work performed by immigrants within the informal sector - jobs which are often a-typical, low-skilled and low-wage in nature. It appears that there exists a growing need to explore work-related identities amongst *immigrant workers* within *informal sectors*, both internationally and locally.

#### **2.4.2 Work and identities**

Studies that focus on work-related identities assume that individuals strive to build positive identities within their work domain (Gecas, 1982; Turner, 1982). While this core assumption remains consistent in organizational literature and research, the word “positive” has been loosely defined, particularly when applied to identity construction processes (Gecas, 1982; Turner, 1982; Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010). Subsequently, this study seeks an answer to the question, “What makes a work-related identity positive?” A second question also arises:

“How can a positive identity reveal new insights into how employees gain strength through defining themselves in particular ways?”

The researcher’s aim to deepen understanding of positive work-identity construction rests on several core assumptions. Firstly, it is assumed that individual’s identities are multiple (Cooley, 1902), multifaceted (Gergen, 1991), and dynamic (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This implies that identity is a complex and dynamic representation of self-knowledge and self-understanding, and includes a wide range of self-relevant emotions and attitudes (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). The modifier “work-related” is used to ensure that the study focuses on the aspects of identity that are linked to participation in work activities or membership in work-related groups, that is This conceptualisation is appropriate as it incorporates a variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups, and memberships that immigrant workers can use to construct a work-related self (Dutton et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.3 Why focus on positive work-related identities?**

As a pervasive domain of human life, employment constitutes a significant ‘pull factor’ that attracts immigrant workers to South Africa. For many immigrants, however, work assumes a deeper meaning; one that guides their decisions and actions in other related aspects of their lives. Literature has shown that positive work-related identities may enhance individual’s capacity to deal with stress and adversity (Caza & Bagozzi, 2009; Hobfoll, 1989), facilitate greater access to different knowledge domains, foster resourcefulness and creativity (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2008), provide greater means for learning from diverse cultural

experiences that enhance work processes (Ely & Thomas, 2001), and promote adaptation to new working conditions and environments (Beyer & Hannah, 2002).

In view of the tensions that immigrants experience, particularly within the work domain, the researcher is of the opinion that there is great value in investigating whether a positive work-related identity has a ‘spill-over’ effect into other aspects of an immigrant’s life. This proposition feeds into the notion that a happy worker is a productive worker (Dutton et al., 2010). Specifically, the researcher proposes to explore positive identity construction using a *structural theoretical perspective*, which highlights the multifaceted ways in which work-related identities can be positive for immigrant workers (Dutton et al., 2010). The structural perspective has its foundations in the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991), which provides a useful theoretical framework from which to conceptualise the tensions that immigrant workers face in terms of two opposing needs that govern the relationship between the self-concept and membership in social groups (Brewer, 1991, Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

## **2.5 Theoretical framework: Optimal Distinctiveness Theory**

According to Brewer (1991), individuals’ identification with social groups simultaneously serves their needs for similarity (through within-group comparisons) and uniqueness (through between-group comparisons). Furthermore, she theorized that people tend to identify with those groups that provide them with the optimal compromise between these competing needs (Brewer, 1991). The ODT posits that people who are made to believe that they are highly similar to others will reassert their uniqueness by identifying with small, exclusive and distinctive groups more than large, inclusive and indistinctive ones (Leonardelli, Pickett &

Brewer, 2010). The opposite is true when people are made to believe that they are highly dissimilar to others. Several researchers have produced evidence in support of such postulations (Jetten, Spears & Manstead, 1998; Pickett, Silver & Brewer, 2002; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Gollé & Scabini, 2006).

Essentially, immigrant workers' identity is one aspect of their social identity; it is the meaning they attach to their membership in the category "immigrant". Identification with this category can be associated with positive, negative, or ambivalent feelings, depending on the salience and nature of comparative distinctions between non-immigrants and immigrants in a given setting (Correll & Park, 2005; Pickett & Brewer, 2001; Ely, 1995). For example, if an immigrant worker joins a team of South African (non-immigrant) workers, his or her need for belongingness may be activated if (1) their ideas or contributions are publically rejected and (2) they associate this rejection with their foreignness (Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999). These distinctions and the value attached to them, in turn, affect his or her group- and self-attributions, including stereotypic attributions. Thus, it may be seen that these processes of comparison and attribution, as they occur in organizational settings, help to shape immigrant's work-related identity (Ely, 1995).

Diversity scholars have similarly found that certain demographic groups (e.g. racial minorities, immigrants and women) are presented with fewer opportunities to belong to esteemed groups, such as those groups that occupy higher level positions in the organisation. This may be due to their unique features and characteristics relative to the individuals (e.g., white-South African-men) who hold the top positions (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips,

2008). In response to such concerns and in accordance with the ODT, Shore et al (2011) highlight the need for inclusion, which may be defined as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). In terms of the role that organisations can play in addressing this issue, Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands (2004) favour a multicultural, inclusive organization wherein “the diversity of knowledge and perspectives that members of different groups bring to the organization shape its strategy, its work, its management and operating systems, and its core values and norms for success” (p. 249). In cognisance of this, the structural perspective used in the present study explains how the structure of an individual’s identity may be used to create a positive work-related identity for immigrant workers. Using the ODT as a framework, this perspective will be explored in relation to the study sample.

### **2.5.1 Structural perspective on positive work-related identity**

Dutton et al. (2010) posit that if the multiple facets of one’s identity are balanced and/or complementary to one another, an individual is more likely to enjoy a positive self-concept. Hence, identities are able to foster a “sense of meaningful, guided existence” created through “reciprocal role relations” (Thoits, 1983, p. 176). There are two primary processes that appear in the literature regarding positive identity structures and which fall under the structural perspective. These are the optimal balance and complementarity structures, each of which will be discussed below.

## **Balanced identity structure**

As mentioned previously, many researchers maintain that the positivity of one's identity depends upon the relationship between personal identities and social identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). According to Dutton et al. (2010) "these two types of identities create structural "torsion" or tensions that require individuals to balance inherent desires for inclusion and belonging against the desire for uniqueness and differentiation, (p. 273). Those individuals who are able to achieve a balance between assimilation and differentiation are said to be optimally distinct (Brewer, 1991). Moreover, this state of optimal balance is reflected positively as it allows the individual to satisfy competing identity needs (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006, Dutton et al., 2010).

According to Kreiner's et al. (2006) model of optimal balance, identity demands toward the collective will result in individuals responding with differentiation strategies, which entail placing greater emphasis on one's personal identities (uniqueness/individuation). Conversely, identity demands toward individuation will see individuals placing greater emphasis on their social identities through more integrative tactics (belonging) (Kreiner et al., 2006). In terms of immigrant workers, it may be that their need to acknowledge and embrace their personal identities as foreigners and distinctly unique individuals competes with their need to fit into their work environment and identify with the larger group of non-immigrant workers, who comprise the bulk of the workforce. Thus, immigrant workers are in a constant process of working to structure their identities to achieve optimal balance. Achieving greater balance between their collective and personal identities implies that their work-related identity is more positive (Kreiner et al., 2006; Dutton et al., 2010).

## **Complementary identity structure**

The second stream of research on identity structure looks at the perceived complementarity between differing role identities as a measure of positivity (Dutton et al., 2010). This approach draws attention to how the antagonistic needs associated with various aspects of identity can generate internal tension or identity conflict (Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004; Settles, 2004). Recent organizational literature highlighted the benefits of increasing one's complementarity through establishing linkages among the various facets of the self, while also ensuring that one facet of identity does not subsume the another (Bell, 1990; Dutton et al., 2010).

For example, Ely and Thomas (2001) discovered that when minority group members acknowledged and embraced both their cultural and professional identities at work, they were more inclined to contribute valuable ideas and learn from differences than groups whose members alienated or suppressed parts of their cultural background while at work. Thus, positive psychological states may be derived from complementarity between identities, which essentially allows for individuals to derive meaning from the disparate aspects of their lives (Caza, 2009; McAdams, 1993; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Cheng et al., 2008) while simultaneously constructing a more coherent sense of self that promotes well-being (Downie et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Embedded in the structural perspective and closely aligned with a positive work-related identity are the concepts of social resources and employee strengthening. These concepts and their relation to one another will be discussed below.

## **2.6 Social resources and employee strengthening**

Dutton et al. (2010) perceive employee strengthening as a process of increasing individuals' capacity to endure stress, adversity and hardship and/or increasing their capacity to undertake new challenges and demands. Fundamental to employee strengthening is the creating or building of resources. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), individuals strive to "retain, protect and build," (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516) key social and psychological work-relevant resources. Hobfoll (2002) further defined resources as "entities valued in their own right" or "entities that act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends," (p. 307). However, given that the present study aims to focus on work-related identities, the following definition provided by Dutton et al. (2010) will be adopted: "social resources are the valuable assets that inhere in the structure, content, and quality of the connections individuals have with others at work," (p.275). Drawing on the findings of social network theorists (e.g., Baker, 2000) and developmental process researchers (e.g., Ragsin & Kram, 2007), it can be assumed that immigrant workers who have more social resources are likely to acquire other types of resources, such as information, access, and trust, all of which act as buffers against tensions, stress and hardships (Dutton et al., 2010).

In their article, Dutton et al. (2010) further introduced the idea of positive identity construction as a mechanism that may help to build and sustain the social resources that are critical to employee and organizational functioning. Accordingly, the discussion will now explore the proposition of connecting the content and structure of employees' work-related identities to their social resources at work. This proposition is based on the assumption that identity construction is relational as the changes in an individual's self-concept affects social

resources, in part, through how an audience or in this case employer, responds to the identity construction efforts (Dutton et al., 2010).

### **2.6.1 Structural perspective and social resources**

Immigrant workers with a balanced or complementary identity structure may enjoy more frequent interactions with diverse groups of otherwise unconnected individuals (e.g., senior managers and community leaders) (Bell, 1990). Furthermore, flexibility in managing multiple aspects of identities may allow immigrant workers to build larger networks and to develop more interracial and intercultural relationships than those who “compartmentalize their work and cultural identities,” (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 279) and hence feel socially alienated and estranged from others at work (Bell, 1990; Dutton et al., 2010). If immigrant workers are able to establish relationships with diverse groups of people at all levels of the organisation, they will be well positioned to tackle tensions in that they would be able to identify and access career opportunities and gain greater social support through their network of resources (Bell, 1990).

Further, research proposes that a complementary identity structure supports the building of social resources in that it affects the quality of personal and social relationships (Dutton et al., 2010). Firstly, if immigrant workers effectively draw on various aspects of their identity at work, they may also disclose more information about themselves and their ideas, which in turn, will expand opportunities for discovering common experiences or perspectives (Dutton et al., 2010). Disclosure of personal and valuable information may enhance their existing relationships with co-workers, so that the label of co-worker encompasses multiple types of

relationships (e.g., co-worker, mentor, friend etc.) and therefore promotes greater exchanges of resources (Dutton et al., 2010). Secondly, complementarity has the potential to enhance the depth and breadth of self-disclosure (Dutton et al., 2010). According to Kahn (1990), a complementary identity structure is central to increasing one's psychological presence, whereby people "employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances," (p. 694). In terms of personal engagement, Kahn (1992) maintained that complementarity increases one's sense of wholeness, which subsequently translates into building intimacy with others. Thus, complementarity promotes feelings of sincerity and trust, which may help immigrant workers safely work through differences and tensions at work (Kahn, 1992).

Upon reviewing the existing literature, it is evident that the conceptualisation of positive identities lies predominantly within a corporate, organisational setting. Minimal studies have explored these postulations in relation to casual, informal and low-skilled types of employment. Thus, workers within the informal sector, a significant portion of which is comprised of immigrants, are often overlooked in this regard. For this reason, I propose to understand and describe the experiences of these 'invisible' workers. Implicit in this and contrary to popular belief, is the assertion that immigrant workers play key roles in the daily upkeep of organisations. Specifically, there lies great value in discovering ways of constructing positive identities for immigrant workers amidst the various tensions they experience. Bearing this in mind and given the influx of immigrant workers to the Durban Port, this setting will provide an appropriate sample for the study's aims.

## **2.7 Port of Durban**

Durban Port is well renowned for its container capacity, which is the largest on the African continent, also making it the busiest Port on the continent (Tansey et al., 2010). The status enjoyed by the modern day Port of Durban may be attributed to its geographical location as the nearest port to the Natal sugar-cane plantations as well as the Witwatersrand's mining and industrial hubs (Dubbeld, 2001). The Port generates a significant amount of employment, particularly for unskilled and immigrant workers. A recent study (Van Coller, Maasdorp & Mavundla, 2007) revealed that approximately 25,000 workers form part of the Port's workforce; however, Transnet estimates there to be an overall number of 30,000 workers employed at the Durban port (Transnet, 2009). At least a third of these jobs are comprised of atypical forms of employment and majority of the employees occupy non-managerial positions (Transnet, 2009; Van Coller et al., 2007). Although the Port's workforce is predominantly comprised of migrants from surrounding townships in rural KwaZulu-Natal, (e.g. Umlazi and KwaMashu), the 1990s saw more and more immigrant workers, particularly from Mozambique, Congo and Nigeria, flocking to Durban Port in search of employment (Transnet, 2009; Van Coller et al., 2007). Hence, this is an appropriate sample and setting that will enable the researcher to answer the research questions.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The study proposes to explore in-depth, what it means to be an immigrant employee within the Port of Durban (the container-terminal sector). Specifically, we need to better understand the tensions that immigrant workers encounter, particularly regarding their work roles (including the tensions between their social and personal identities). As such, the literature review has provided an extensive overview on some of the tensions that immigrant workers

typically encounter in the South African labour market. In line with the positive psychology paradigm and using the optimal distinctiveness theory as a foundation, the literature then proceeded to discuss the functions of a positive work-identity in enhancing work experiences. It is proposed that once these tensions have been identified, light can be shed on the prospect of employee strengthening and the building of appropriate social resources as a way of dealing with such tensions in the workplace.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) research design of the study, the sample of immigrant workers who were included in the study, the data collection process involving interviewing, the procedures that were followed in order to obtain the sample and the mode of data analysis. Further, the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques and their appropriateness for this study are outlined. The chapter concludes by addressing several ethical considerations as well as the difficulties encountered in conducting the research.

### **3.2 Research design**

A research design may be described as the framework of how the researcher intends to carry out the research study. It serves as the connection between the study's research questions and the actual implementation of the study. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the aims, paradigm, methodology and context in which the research study takes place should be cohesive. The aim of the present study is to explore immigrant worker's experiences and perceptions of tension and identity within the Port of Durban. Accordingly, the type of research questions require that this study follow an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative research methodological framework as the reality to be studied involves participants' subjective experiences of the external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Furthermore, a qualitative research design will allow the researcher to obtain a complex, detailed understanding of sensitive issues, which may only be established through direct contact with the participants- in this case, going to their places of work and allowing immigrant workers to express their opinions (Creswell, 2007). In accordance with the study's aims, a qualitative design may be used to empower and privilege the voices of immigrant workers and to minimize the power dynamics that often exist between a researcher and participants (Creswell, 2007).

While acknowledging the heterogeneity of qualitative research approaches, the researcher specifically used the IPA following the guidelines of Smith et al. (1999). The rationale for using the IPA to conduct this study was twofold. Firstly, it ideally suited the researcher's interest in identifying, describing and understanding the subjective experiences and cognitive interpretations of individual immigrant workers in terms of their own encounters and perceptions of tension, identity and social resources. Secondly, the IPA was foundational to the researcher's aim of making sense of the participants' worlds through a process of interpretative activity (Smith et al., 1999). These two aspects of being concerned with an individual's personal perceptions and the process of interpretative activity are foundational to IPA (Smith et al., 1999).

Smith et al. (1999) note that the specific aim of the IPA is to: "explore in detail the participant's view of the topic under investigation ... [and] ... that it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or an event... [and that the researcher] ... makes sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (p.

218). From this, it may be understood that interpretative phenomenological method uncovers the meaning of human experience in its situated context, and that the approach enables a researcher to describe and interpret the meaning of each of the study's participant's subjective experiences in relation to their individual contexts ) (Smith et al., 1999). Thus, in this study it was the lived experiences of tension of immigrant workers at the Durban Port that the researcher intended to make intelligible in relation to identity and social resources.

### **3.3 Sampling method and sample**

The sampling design of this study involved a deliberate choice of participants; hence a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed by the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Willig (2001) argues that data collection in interpretative phenomenology is “usually based on purposive sampling, whereby participants are selected according to criteria of relevance to the research question” (p. 58). Merriam (1998) adds that purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher requires more insight and understanding of a phenomenon and must, therefore, purposefully select participants who are rich in information regarding the phenomenon. In view of this, a non-probability purposive sampling was used to ensure that the research participants met the following inclusion criteria for the study:

- Immigrant workers (preferably from neighbouring African countries)
- Currently working in the container terminal division.
- Casual and/or low-skilled workers (not in a line management position).
- Able to speak and understand English.
- Willing to meet with the researcher and be interviewed.
- Experience of being an immigrant worker within the informal sector in South Africa.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed biographical sketch of each of the participants, listed in the table below are the participants and some basic demographic details that may be pertinent to their interpretation of tensions, identity and social resources. Each individual was allocated a pseudonym by the researcher, which served to identify the participants whilst still ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity.

**Table 3.3.1 showing participants and demographic details of participants**

<b>BIOGRAPHIC DETAILS</b>								
<b>No</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Number of months in South Africa</b>	<b>Number of months employed in South Africa</b>	<b>Type of work Contract</b>
1.	Victor	African	Male	28	Malawi	36	34	Casual
2.	Canaan	African	Male	24	Zimbabwe	60	20	Casual
3.	Ray	African	Male	26	Congo	36	30	Casual
4.	Precious	African	Female	25	Zimbabwe	35	30	Casual
5.	Jose	African	Male	25	Mozambique	28	25	Casual
6.	Nehanda	African	Female	22	Zimbabwe	12	9	Casual
7.	Shakira	African	Female	34	Malawi	36	28	Casual
8.	Fred	African	Male	30	Congo	35	33	Casual
9.	Ibrahim	African	Male	32	Swaziland	30	30	Casual
10.	Sonia	African	Female	24	Mozambique	18	16	Casual

The table indicates that a total of ten participants partook in the study. The sample was standardized in terms of racial grouping as all ten immigrants were African. Six of the participants were male and four female. Majority of participants featured in the 20 to 35 year age bracket with the youngest participant being 22 years old and the oldest being 34 years old. All ten participants migrated from neighbouring African countries, with three participants originating from Zimbabwe, two from Congo, two from Mozambique, one from Swaziland and two from Malawi. Upon comparing the number of months in South Africa to the number of months employed in South Africa, one may reasonably deduce that these individuals were able to find employment relatively easily. However, it is equally important to note that during the period of data collection, all ten participants were employed on a casual contractual basis.

### **3.4 Data collection methods and instruments**

Given that the researcher intended to provide the participants with an opportunity to freely share their personal experiences, it was decided that data would be collected by means of face-to-face interviews. The nature of these interviews allowed for such expression and presented the researcher with the opportunity to engage with, challenge, observe and listen to respondent's views and opinions. According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research interviews are used to acquire as many nuanced descriptions from the various qualitative aspects of the interviewee's life-world as possible. They further permit interviewees to use their own words and develop their own thoughts (Kvale, 1996). In this study, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted amongst immigrant workers using a self-developed interview schedule (see Appendix 1), which is essentially a compilation of open-ended questions directed at the respondents (Huysamen, 2001).

According to Mason (2002), “The types of questions an interviewer asks, and the way they listen to and interpret the answers they are given, undoubtedly shape the nature of the knowledge produced,” (p.231). During the interviewing process, a set of predetermined questions were asked to all interviewees as per the interview schedule. The questions were asked in a systematic way such that each participant was guided through the same procedure (Patton, 2002). This was done to reduce the possibility of bias and allowed the researcher to organise the data more efficiently for the process of data analysis (Patton, 2002). The aim of this study entailed exploring immigrant worker’s experiences and perceptions of tensions, identity and social resources. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews proved to be valuable in eliciting this information and maintaining the spontaneity of the interview (Patton, 2002). Through the permitted use of unscheduled probing, the researcher was able to access a deeper level of understanding of each participant’s experiences (Berg, 2001; Huysamen, 2001).

There are several ways in which an interview may be recorded (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1998). In this study, the interviews were audio recorded using a tape recorder with the permission of the participants. Tape recording is widely considered to be the most efficient and effective method. Firstly, it allowed the researcher to focus her attention on the participants and maintain steady eye contact. Secondly, the use of a tape recorder meant that the researcher could observe both verbal and physical cues as opposed to having rapidly take notes, which can often be distracting (Blaxter et al., 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### **3.5 Field notes**

Field notes were compiled during and immediately after the interview. The field notes were used to capture the key verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of the participants as well as the quality of the rapport established. The field notes additionally included basic demographic information regarding the age and gender of the participants, and information such as the time, place and duration of the interview.

A synthesis of the field notes with regard to the verbal and non-verbal communications of the participants evidenced that the majority of the participants were comfortable discussing matters pertaining to experiences of tension, their perceived identities and access to social resources. This comfort was conveyed through frequent eye contact, by means of a relaxed body posture, and non-fidgeting. With certain participants, discomfort was conveyed by means of giggling, inappropriate laughter /jokes and silences when awkward situations were discussed. In these instances, the researcher asked the participant if she would like to halt the interview, withdraw or reschedule the interview. None of the participants opted to withdraw or to reschedule their interview. Despite the discomfort and tension conveyed by the non-verbal communications of certain participants with regard to specific matters, the majority of the participants were enthusiastic about taking part in the study and wanted to have their opinions and voices heard. The researcher attempted to create a good rapport with the participants by utilizing a basic listening sequence (attending and listening behaviours) that included maintaining appropriate eye contact, summarizing, paraphrasing, and the mirroring of verbal and nonverbal patterns.

### 3.6 Procedure

Having obtained ethical clearance for the study from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix 3), permission was requested from the management of the container terminal for access to the site and study sample (see Appendix 4). Upon receiving a letter confirming permission to conduct the study, the researcher scheduled a meeting with the manager at the container terminal. Here, the researcher discussed in detail the nature, aims and requirements of the study and answered any remaining questions posed by the manager. Furthermore, the researcher requested that a Human Resources Practitioner serve as a “gatekeeper” with the following responsibilities:

- (i) To inform immigrant workers within the container terminal about the research study.
- (ii) To identify and generate a list of possible candidates who met the inclusion criteria for the study.
- (iii) To schedule individual interviews with the participants according to their availability and specific shifts at the container terminal. In this way, the interviews were conducted at times that were convenient for both the participants and the organisation.

Prior to commencing with the interview session, the researcher clearly outlined the aims and nature of the study, issues of anonymity and confidentiality and what participation in the study entailed. Written permission to record the interviews and written consent pertaining to

their taking part in the study was further obtained from each participant by means of a completed and signed consent form (See Appendix 2).

The interviews were conducted in a private office on site the Port's container terminal over a period of three weeks in August 2012. A concerted effort was made to ensure that interruptions were kept to a minimum and that the privacy of each interaction was guaranteed. Where possible the researcher placed a notice on the door to the venue advising that a 'meeting' was in progress. By conducting the interviews in a familiar environment, it was hoped that participants would be more forthcoming with information. Further, participants were able to return to work immediately after their interview, thereby minimising any disruption to their routine. The interview sessions were approximately 45 minutes to an hour in duration and were tape recorded. Upon completion of the interviewing process, these audio recordings were transferred onto a recordable compact disc in order to enhance the quality of the recording for accurate retrieval of information.

### **3.7 Data analysis methods**

Data analysis may be described as the systematic search for meaning as the process involves making sense of data (Merriam, 1998). While Kvale (1996) posits that the analysis of qualitative data evidences a continuum between description and interpretation, Smith et al. (1999) argue that data analysis in IPA is primarily a dynamic and interpretative process. Notwithstanding this, Willig (2001) argues that any description and interpretations that arise from the data, e.g. themes, clusters of concepts, and categories, must be grounded in the data itself.

Generally, there are three phases of qualitative data analysis: first, the structuring of the interview transcript; second, clarification of the material by eliminating superfluous items, e.g. repetitions, digressions and anything regarded as irrelevant to the research question; and third, the analysis 'proper' (Kvale, 1996). In this study, the qualitative data, including research questions, field notes, participants' responses and the researcher's experience in the interviews, used content analysis, which is a "technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within text" (Hardy & Bryman, 2004). A highly common approach to content analysis is *thematic analysis*, which is a coding scheme based on categories and is designed to identify and capture the prevalent themes within the text (Hardy & Bryman, 2004).

In terms of structuring the data to be collected in this research, the researcher personally transcribed each of the interviews from the taped recordings made, which were transferred onto a compact disc. Each transcription (hard copy) was then checked against the relevant recording and "cleaned" of obvious speech hesitations or repetitions. This process, together with the reading and re-reading of each text facilitated the researcher in becoming immersed in the text and in each participant's narrative. When conducting the analysis 'proper', the researcher read and re-read each transcript several times and used the left hand margin to record initial thoughts, observations, associations and preliminary interpretations in response to the text, and the right hand margin to document emerging theme titles and/ or key words that captured the "essential qualities" of the material. The themes that emerged from each transcript were then entered into the NVIVO 9 programme. The researcher proceeded to examine these looking for connections. Themes that were found to be common were grouped together, i.e. clustered by the researcher. Having reduced the data for each transcript in this

way the researcher then produced a master list of themes which contained both superordinate themes and sub-themes. The master list of themes and the researcher's interpretative analysis of them was then used by the researcher as the basis for describing immigrant workers' experiences of tension and their perceptions of identity and social resources (see Table 4.1.1).

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

In qualitative research, ensuring that standards of quality and verification are met involves conducting the research in an ethical manner. In this study, the researcher first obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Applied Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, (see Appendix 2). Thereafter, special permission was obtained from the management of the organisation for access to the site and sample to conduct research (see Appendix 5).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) emphasise the need to consider the following ethical considerations: informed consent, voluntary participation, accurate information, and confidentiality. In this study, signed informed consent regarding participation was obtained from all research participants upon their agreement to partake in the study (see Appendix 2). Before the process of data collection began, willing participants were duly informed about the nature of the research study, the research procedure and what participation in the study entailed. Additionally, participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time from the study as participation was voluntary. In this way no form of deception was used to obtain information and all participants were treated equally. The researcher's contact details, and

credentials were recorded in the informed consent letter, this gave all of the participants the opportunity to contact the researcher if they wished to do so.

Moreover, prior to the research interviews, participants were alerted to the fact that any information gleaned during the research process would remain completely confidential. Any and all personal information was kept anonymous through the use of pseudonyms; participant's identities were not divulged in any discussion or presentation of the study and in terms of accuracy of information, the researcher did not falsify or fabricate any results in any publication of the research findings. The results of the study will be kept in the Psychology Department for a period of five years after which the interview transcripts will be deleted electronically and printed versions shredded; cassette recordings will also be deleted and personal observation/field notes shredded.

### **3.9 Limitations of the study and methodology**

It was decided by the researcher and several of the participants that it would be easier to interview them at their place of work. This meant that some participants were interviewed immediately before and some immediately after their shifts. This arrangement proved to be problematic at times as those who were interviewed immediately before their shifts found it difficult to relax fully and were constantly watching the time to ensure that they were not late in getting back to their duties. On the other hand, those who were interviewed after their shifts displayed greater signs of exhaustion, restlessness, frustration and fatigue. Thus, these factors had to be taken under consideration as possible detractors to the quality of the interviews. To add on, the office in which the interviews were conducted was subject to

several noise disturbances due to the blaring work activity at the Port and container terminal in particular. The researcher did however, attempt to minimise any further interruptions by placing a note outside the office door requesting that noise levels in the vicinity be minimised.

A further problem encountered by the researcher was that many of the participants - although eager to participate, initially regarded the study and the researcher with a degree of apprehension - as if the study was part of a 'spying operation'. This may have been attributed to the sensitive nature of the questioning process regarding their very personal and often unspoken experiences of tensions, identity and social resources – issues that uncommonly provoke interest. As such, the researcher found that she had to spend time allaying participants' fears, and had to repeatedly emphasize the fact that she was not aligned to any of the institutions or their management structures, that participation was voluntary and that all material was confidential. Once this had been established, the participants were more at ease with being interviewed and with discussing their experiences of tension, identity and access to social resources at work as well as other relevant matters.

A further limitation involved the task of establishing good rapport with the participants in spite of the language barrier. This proved to be challenging as English was not the preferred language of many of the immigrant workers. To this extent, the researcher responded by exhibiting patience, phrasing the questions differently to facilitate greater understanding, listening without judgement and not rushing the interview process.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter considered the methodology that was employed in the study by discussing the qualitative IPA research design, semi-structured interviewing as a method for collecting the data, and thematic analysis as it was used to analyse the transcripts. It was further described how the data was collected (procedure) and the motivations driving specific decisions regarding the collection and analysis of the data and the type of data collected. Having provided the reader with an explanation of the methodological considerations of the study, in the following chapter, a detailed and thorough account of the findings and analysis of the data is presented.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEMATIC FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the thematic findings of the study. These findings will be interpreted, discussed and contextualized in relation to the research questions and reviewed literature in Chapter Five. Given that a thematically semi-structured interview schedule was used, themes that were found to be common were grouped or clustered; and other themes appeared in a more emergent way. Having reduced the data for each transcript, the researcher then produced a master list of superordinate themes and sub-themes. The list of eight superordinate themes and associated sub-themes is presented and discussed in this chapter. A summary is presented as Table 4.1 below. The eight themes are clustered as follows: (1) interpretation of what it means to be an immigrant; (2) causes of tension at work; (3) causes of tension outside of work; (4) mechanisms for managing tensions; (5) individuality versus belonging; (6) factors leading to a positive work life; (7) identifying social resources; and (8) overcoming tensions using social resources.

**Table 4.1.1 Superordinate themes and sub-themes**

<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<b>Interpreting what it means to be an immigrant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Push factors</li><li>• Pull factors</li><li>• Mixed feelings</li></ul>
<b>Causes of tension at work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Territoriality</li><li>• Dangerous and undesirable work</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disrespect and poor treatment</li> <li>• Inequality</li> <li>• Victimisation</li> <li>• Exclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Causes of tension outside of work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence and xenophobia</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Poor work-life balance</li> </ul>
<b>Individuality versus belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I tried to be like them</li> <li>• I could be myself and still feel accepted by others</li> </ul>
<b>Mechanisms for coping with tensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidance and withdrawal</li> <li>• Keeping the peace, keeping quiet and stoicism</li> <li>• Hardiness and tough-mindedness</li> <li>• Enlightenment</li> </ul>
<b>Factors leading to a positive work life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial independence</li> <li>• Opportunities for learning, training and development</li> <li>• Supportive boss and co-workers</li> </ul>
<b>Overcoming tensions using social resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling and health care services</li> <li>• Social support</li> </ul>

#### 4.2 Interpreting what it means to be an immigrant

While not everyone described being an immigrant in great detail, there was consensus that it entailed leaving one's home to begin afresh in a different country. However, participants were also careful to point out that their time in South Africa was not unlimited:

*“To me been an immigrant means that I have left my country from where I stay that is Mozambique and I have come to live in this country for some time” (Jose)*

*“It means that I am here in the country only for work and am not a citizen of South Africa” (Fred)*

The researcher was interested in contextualising three aspects that participants frequently spoke about that contributed to this content domain. Participants expressed each of these aspects as the reasons for leaving their homelands, reasons for coming to South Africa and the nature of their decision to do so; categorised as push factors, pull factors and mixed feelings respectively.

#### **4.2.1 Push factors**

The researcher noted that all ten participants expressed poverty, a lack of job opportunities and an overall need for survival as key determining factors in their decision to leave their homelands. These sentiments are illustrated in the following excerpts:

*“In Malawi all is very poor and no work for the people. I don’t have money to buy food for children” (Victor)*

*“... there is lots of poverty because there is no jobs for people then for that reason many people are leaving the DRC everyday and going to other countries to look for work...” (Fred)*

While these push factors were commonly experienced by all the participants, unemployment woes emerged twofold for female immigrants. In consort with a general shortage of job opportunities, three out of the four women expressed inimitable difficulties in competing with men for these positions:

*“Malawi is not very good and not very easy to find work that pay you well. Most of the jobs in Malawi is also given to the men and for ladies not easy to find work”* (Shakira)

Of particular interest is the fact that all three Zimbabwean immigrants spoke passionately about the political and economic strife in their country. In addition to the ‘push’ factors noted above, it may be seen that the experience of war and violent killings in Zimbabwe were such that it has remained firmly etched in these participants’ memories. Indeed, violence was the common thread for these Zimbabwean immigrants and the factor that differentiated their circumstances from other immigrants:

*“Before I left Zimbabwe to come to South Africa I have seen many people die because they did not want to leave the country for us the situation in Zimbabwe make it acceptable to be an immigrant it means that we have an opportunity to live a life without poverty”* (Precious)

*“I wanted to make a better life for me and knew that because of the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe I would not be able to do so”* (Canaan)

While there were only two Congolese participants in this study, the following excerpt strongly suggests that like many Zimbabweans, immigrants from Congo are often exposed to violent and war-like conditions:

*“If you know what is happening now in the DRC there is too much of fighting...Sometime in my area where I live there is fighting by the soldiers every week I lost some people in my family and also some friends in the fighting”*

#### **4.2.2 Pull factors**

The rationale for deciding to come to South Africa may be traced back to the push factors that initiated participants’ search for an economically and politically stable country. For all ten participants, the prospect of employment as a means of providing for one’s family back home proved to be the main attraction in coming to South Africa. Essentially, it was South Africa’s economic lure and promise of employment that “pulled” immigrants in:

*“In Congo I was working on the farm but money on the farm is not too much to look after my children and family so I leave farm and come to South Africa. In this Durban I find work in the Port some casual work then I send some money for my family home” (Ray)*

According to several participants, South Africa symbolised a new start, one in which self and professional development and learning was possible:

*“When I left home I was strong about wanting to make a better life for myself and my future here” (Sonia)*

*“I wanted to improve my skills...and needed more work experiences in a bigger Port like Durban” (Jose)*

*“I come to South Africa because in Zimbabwe there was no place I could go to study after I finished my school” (Canaan)*

#### **4.2.3 Mixed feelings**

It was not uncommon for participants to express mixed feelings regarding their experiences of working and living in South Africa. According to several individuals, the conquest of economic gain was over-shadowed by the longing for one’s family and the imminent threats posed by unfriendly locals:

*“I most of the time miss my home in Zimbabwe and want to go back there but I know that if I go back then I will not have work and would have to live in poverty. For me to be an immigrant is hard because I leave all my family, friend and my home country to come to stay here for work. In this country while the money is good for me when I work it am not treated by all the people with whom I work with fair. Also when you are an immigrant it is not easy life because you can be killed by some local people if they don’t like you. Life is not very easy but at least I have a job” (Precious)*

*“Also been an immigrant in South Africa is not easy because it does not feel like home I most times get the feeling that the local people here are not happy with so many people from Zimbabwe that are now living here” (Nehanda)*

In view of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that despite the dire and volatile state of their countries, nine participants remained hopeful that the very “push” factors that drove them to leave their homelands would eventually disappear such that they would be able return to their families and homes:

*“I not want to stay in South Africa till I go old only want to work for some money for my children and go back home to my country” (Victor)*

*“However I am positive that one day the situation in Zimbabwe will be different and all of us will be able to go back and help to build up the country again” (Nehanda)*

The remaining participant, Fred, favoured the idea of relocating his entire family to South Africa and building a permanent life here. However, he was equally aware of the challenges embroiled in such an undertaking:

*“I have two children and my wife still in the Congo and I worry for them all the time they live with my father and I want to bring them here to South Africa but it is not easy to get all the papers for them to come here and also it will cost lot money” (Fred)*

### **4.3 Causes of tension at work**

A variety of meanings, possible reasons and explanations were given by the participants in accounting for their experiences of tensions associated with their workplace. Consistent with Montgomery’s (2006) definition of tensions as “those little acts of degradation to which others subject us... those little reminders that we need to know our place in the world” (unpaged), the following sub-themes reflect the nuanced ways in which participants narrated their accounts of tension:

#### **4.3.1 Territoriality**

Six participants attributed their experiences of workplace tension to the territorial attitudes and behaviours of fellow co-workers and bosses. It was felt that territoriality increased levels of tension and stress at the container terminal, increased locals’ insecurity when having to work with immigrants and predisposed these participants to being on the receiving end of verbal threats and accusations. Territorial behaviour may be extrapolated from each of the following accounts:

*“Some people they tell me that I must go look for work in my country and not take jobs from South African people” (Ray)*

*“In the workplace it is not easy being an immigrant because the local people here think that we are here to steal their jobs and earn the money that the local people should earn and lots of time they don’t like us for this” (Nehanda)*

*“It is not easy because you have to deal with the local people here that think I left my country to come here to increase their unemployment” (Sonia)*

Three participants articulated that they felt threatened by their superiors to do as they were told or risk being terminated or deported. Thus, the perception of stealing local jobs was exacerbated by territorial bosses who exploited the situation to suit their needs:

*“To be an immigrant at work means that I must do any job that my boss give me even though I don’t like to do it because if I tell him that I don’t like the job and am not happy to do it then he will tell me to go find another job” (Precious)*

*“In the work when bosses know we come from Zimbabwe to work here they tell us that if we come here we must do what we are told otherwise go back and die in Zimbabwe like animals and when people tell me this I don’t feel good because they know what the problems in our country is and that is why we are forced to come here...So I get scared and just listen no matter what” (Nehanda)*

### 4.3.2 Dangerous and undesirable work

Five participants attributed the occurrence of tensions in the workplace to the unfavourable types of work designated to immigrants. In line with the territoriality mentality of co-workers and bosses, there was a general consensus amongst participants that immigrant workers were forced to perform the difficult and often dangerous tasks that locals refused to do. Of concern to the participants was the fact that they were expected to do so with little to no training, supervision or experience:

*“I have to climb on the big machines and for a lady it is not very easy and I fright about my safety for working on the machine. Sometimes I feel that because I am an employee who comes from Zimbabwe that they use me to do the hard work”* (Precious)

The researcher noted that these participants possessed a fairly good understanding of the power dynamics at play. Contradictions regarding role disparity were emphasised throughout the interview process by a number of participants. For example, it emerged that even after refusing to do the work, locals still expected to be rewarded and recognised for the end-product. Furthermore, their territoriality attitude resulted in continued threats directed towards the very individuals who afforded them the privilege of being able to turn down such work. The following accounts are an extension of the participants’ interpretations:

*“It is always difficult to understand why the locals don’t treat immigrants well and feel threatened by immigrants that work hard yet the locals don’t want to do the work we do. If*

*the locals did the work on the machines at the terminal then some immigrants would not be employed” (Canaan)*

*“Sometimes the people from South Africa also make us do all the hard work we must move the engine parts and they don’t want to do the hard work but want to earn lots of money also” (Victor)*

*“In the container terminal been an immigrant is not very easy to deal with the pressure from my South African colleagues, most of them expect for us to do all the hard work and they take the credit. I also sometimes think that people here at the terminal don’t want immigrants to work here but the local people also don’t want to do the work we do” (Canaan)*

Furthermore, a number of participants made a direct link between the role disparity and the predisposition to label immigrants according to widely held and often uninformed beliefs in society. In other words, participants were fully aware of how society portrayed immigrants - as lazy, low-skilled and ‘stupid sponges.’

For Canaan, this realisation invoked an expressive response. The researcher discovered that he was the highest qualified participant; thus the idea of having to accept these low-skilled responsibilities saddened and frustrated him. The following excerpt illustrates his understanding of the situation as well as the implications thereof:

*“As a young and clever immigrant from Zimbabwe it is very difficult being a worker here in the Terminal. Many of the local South African people at the terminal think that because I am an immigrant that I am not clever. When they hear that I come from Zimbabwe they think that most people from Zimbabwe can only do low level work that don’t need any qualifications. I am also looking for full time work anywhere else because I now have completed by engineering diploma but most places where I apply for work when they hear I am from Zimbabwe they don’t want to offer me full time employment. I guess as a young graduate the greatest challenge I face is getting a full time job, some of the South African people with whom I studied with have better full time jobs even though I did better them in studies. Also at work it is always that you have to do the most work because you are an immigrant as if to say to the people that you are worthy of having to be employed”.*

Similarly, Victor and Nehanda reported having to work and perform that much harder in order to dispel these stereotypes and prove themselves worthy of their positions:

*“It is not easy being an immigrant worker at the Container Terminal because lots of time you have to deal with the local South African people who think I am not good at my work and that I don’t work hard and that I am very lazy. I learnt that I have to be very strong in my mind to work here. Lots of time I must work very hard to show them that I am not lazy that I can also do work” (Victor)*

*“Also sometimes for me I feel that people look at me like I am stupid because the local people here think that all people that come to South Africa from Zimbabwe are not clever people and that we are stupid” (Nehanda)*

### **4.3.3 Disrespect and poor treatment**

An overall lack of respect was additionally cited by all of the participants as being a key variable in heightening tensions caused by poor treatment of immigrant workers (such as those evidenced in the sections above). This is illustrated in the accounts of Ray, Nehanda and Shakira:

*“...people here don’t have respect for me because I am immigrant and they also rude to me and treat me badly...they don’t talk properly to me and even shout at me also when I am working they say that I must only take a short lunch break when the other people take a long lunch break” (Ray)*

*“Sometimes they really treat us very bad and at work some people have also made comments like we should go back home and they call immigrants by funny names” (Nehanda)*

*“They don’t talk to me like I am good person they shout don’t clean the machine now when I am busy but I am tell them my boss say that I must clean all the machine before I go. Sometimes I sit one side and cry because they scream too much at me then I want to leave this work but I need the money so I do leave the job the money is important for me otherwise*

*then I must go back to my country. Also when I go to my boss and tell him people they shout at me he don't do anything to help me” (Shakira)*

#### **4.3.4 Inequality**

It was noted by several participants that the South African staff employed in the container terminal received preferential treatment. Aside from male-female considerations, it was noted that there were further divisions when it came to the staff as a whole. It was felt that this differentiation in terms of opportunities, benefits and representation underpinned certain incidents of workplace tension. Specifically, all ten participants felt that immigrant workers were unable to compete equally for promotions or vacancies. Further, participants felt that they were unfairly disqualified from enjoying equal rights to medical aid, insurance and pension benefits:

*“I don't get the same benefits that the people employed full time get like medical aid and pension. As a casual employee it is also very difficult for me to make a career in my field of engineering because I don't get the same opportunity as the people from South Africa get. This also means that it would not be easy for me to get a medical aid and if I need medical treatment then I need to pay for it myself. Also I am not on the pension fund like my other colleagues. Also sometimes when I am sick it is not easy for me to stay away from work because when I stay away when I am sick I don't get paid for sick leave. Also I want to buy my own car and when I go to the bank they tell me that I must have a full time job” (Canaan)*

For three participants, it was apparent that immigrants were overlooked when it came to skills development and training opportunities. Substantial wage differentials between locals and immigrants as well as unequal access to and representation by trade unions were further cited as causes of tension:

*“Also because I am from Zimbabwe I think I don’t earn the same amount of money that the local people earn because some of the local people that work with me they have nice cars. At the container terminal I work as a casual and cannot join the union so there is nobody that will take my case if I have a problem at work. Also as immigrant I don’t always get a chance to go for all the training courses that the local people go on because my boss tells me they don’t want to spend money training me because I am a casual employee and will leave when my contract ends”* (Precious)

*“Also the local people they get favoured when the Supervisor is looking for people to work overtime and the local people they also get to move all the good in the warehouse with the machines and I have to carry it. When the new machines come I don’t get to use them to do my work”* (Fred)

#### **4.3.5 Victimisation**

Feeling victimised was more common among foreign female interviewees, as their gender was often perceived as more vulnerable and less capable within the male-engendered South African workplace. During Apartheid (and still currently in many organisations), women had

to contend with, not only racial, xenophobic, ageist and disability-related prejudices but also discrimination due to gender. Thus, aside from having to compete with their chauvinistic male counterparts, these female interviewees articulated that being an immigrant heightened the tension between local males and themselves:

*“It is a mostly men dominated sector and when a women enters into it there are very many difficulties and challenges that she needs to face sometimes I need to climb up on the straddles to do the checks and I ask the men that work with me to help me move the ladders because they are too heavy for me to carry as a lady and then they refuse to do so and make comments like you want to work in a workshop then you should be able to do everything on your own otherwise you should stay home and cook and have babies” (Sonia)*

In contrast to the above, Precious expressed a deep sense of fear and anxiety concerning her physical well-being at work. She felt compelled to endure such treatment and danger in order to keep her job and assert herself as an equal. Indeed, the researcher noted that female immigrants often talked of “swallowing pride and keeping quiet” in an attempt to divert attention or diffuse the moment:

*“The greatest tension for me is that as a female I sometimes don’t feel safe and secure in a work environment that has mostly men working especially as a young women. Sometimes I feel that some of the men want to take advantage of me because they know that I am an immigrant. I have some men that also make remarks about me....my supervisor tells me that*

*if I want the job then I must also work night shift as well and if I don't want to work night shift then I am going to lose my job and it is not very easy to find a good job again and I need the money” (Precious)*

#### **4.3.6 Exclusion**

It emerged that cognitive constraints resulting from intercultural misunderstanding interfered with workplace relations. One key dimension of such misunderstanding and feelings of exclusion emanated from language and its subsequent communicative outcomes. It sometimes was the case, in the experience of the participants, that what was offensive in their culture, was normal in the South African culture. Four participants referred to their unhappiness with regard to feeling victimised as a result of their suspicion that South African co-workers were discussing them in a language they could not understand:

*“However the one thing that really is difficult to deal with as an immigrant is when the local people that you work with speak in the South African languages that I don't understand. Also sometimes it is nice to socialise with the people that you work with but I don't have any local people in my team that I work with that I socialise with” (Canaan)*

*“Sometimes they also talk to me in Zulu and I tell them that I don't understand the language... Sometimes I don't understand when people don't talk in English and I feel that maybe they talking about me” (Ray)*

*“People always treat me different because I am not from South Africa and I also hear them speaking mostly in their language that I don’t understand and then I know that they must be talking about me. All the people here they know how to speak in English” (Fred)*

#### **4.4 Causes of tension outside of work**

Participants’ experiences of general tensions were additionally noted in each of the transcripts. The nature of such barriers or challenges varied:

##### **4.4.1 Violence and xenophobia**

Six interviewees had witnessed or experienced first-hand the severity of violent crimes directed towards foreigners in their districts. It was apparent that these individuals were fearful, anxious and sceptical of their community members’ intentions. As a result, little to no communication was initiated and/or accepted and this was thought to be linked to feelings of rejection from their communities:

*“I also sometime fright for my life in South Africa because I am worry people will kill me when they know I am from Malawi. Last year was lots of fighting with people from Africa in Kwa Mashu... They want to steal our things sometimes they also make trouble for us... No I don’t feel part of the community we don’t mix with the people because we fright for trouble... When we come home from work we stay in the room my brother and I” (Victor)*

*“As a young man I also knew that when I came to this country that it was not going to be easy for me because I knew that many South Africans did not treat people from Zimbabwe very well. Even when I was studying there were some students in the class that did not like me because I came from Zimbabwe. Also when the xenophobic attacks took place I could feel that lots of the students in my class hated me...No I don't feel part of the community in which I live because I am made to feel like an outsider” (Canaan)*

#### **4.4.2 Loneliness**

Given that participants often felt unwanted and unwelcomed in their own communities, it was unsurprising to discover that many interviewees felt lonely and alienated which in turn, increased their longing for their lives and families back home:

*“I miss my home in Malawi and this is not like home because in our country we like all the people that come there...I think about my children and my family all the time and wish I could go back... There is no one here I am able to speak to in my language or people here they don't understand how my life is back at home. The only time I can feel like I am home is when I speak to my brother who also stays with me here” (Victor)*

An extreme case of loneliness was reported by Fred, who stated that his yearning for his ‘old life’ interfered with his ability to concentrate on his work:

*“...I miss my family very much and only talk to them every two weeks I also worry about their safety back home all the time and this make it difficult for me to focus on my work sometimes...Sometimes when I am here and think about all these things then I am cannot work properly but there is nobody here that I can talk to about such problems” (Fred)*

For some participants, the tensions associated with loneliness resulted in them ‘feeling trapped.’ With no one to confide in, these individuals felt burdened with having to act indifferent and happy despite feeling miserable, in order to reassure and uplift their families back home. This was case for Shakira as evidenced below:

*“...I don’t tell my parents how I sometimes get treated here in Durban because then they tell me to come back home I can’t go back home because otherwise then in my family no one will earn money for food” (Shakira)*

#### **4.4.3 Poor work-life balance**

Several participants admitted to leading a poor quality of life in that most of their time, effort, motivation and attention was spent on work matters, resulting in a poor or non-existent social life:

*“I guess for me the greatest issue is that I don’t have a good work and life balance because I try to work as much as I can so every time they ask for people to work overtime I give my*

*name. I said you this will help me to save money much more quicker for my studies also I can then have some money that I can send back home to my parents” (Nehanda)*

For one participant, tensions around an unbalanced lifestyle were aggravated by perceptions and expectations of what a woman’s role should be:

*“As a women I think it is not easy for me because I must sometimes work the night shift and also still I must look after my house work and cook for my boyfriend. This make it very difficult for me because I also don’t have time to take rest as well because when I come home from working shift I must cook and clean and then I don’t have enough time to sleep”*  
(Precious)

#### **4.5 Individuality versus belonging**

In addition to identifying causes of tension, the researcher was further interested in understanding how these factors may have altered interviewees’ needs for individuality and belonging. In this sense, the bout between these two competing needs presented itself as a form of tension.

#### **4.5.1 I tried to be like them**

The researcher noted that many participants found it very difficult to adjust their behaviour to fit with the culture of the Port's terminal without losing much of their individuality. While many attempted to do both, the majority encountered clashes of culture which forced them to choose one approach in their workplace:

*"I sometimes feel that when I come here to the terminal to work I cannot be myself but I must try and keep trying to be like them but most time it is very hard for me to fit in without losing myself"* (Victor)

*"I wanted to be like them and feel normal but it is difficult and I remember that I have just one main goal and that is to save money for my studies so I don't try to be part of the groups at work I just keep to myself and do my work and when I am finished I go home cause it easier that way"* (Nehanda)

*"You need to be a strong person and don't let anyone get you down otherwise they can then break you as a person and kill your spirit"* (Sonia)

*"For me I think that the balance is about been able to maintain my identity of my country that is why I make sure I try to get some newspapers about the news in my country also I try to keep some friends from my country and we are able to talk about our home"* (Ray)

The above suggests that interviewees' needs for belonging were initially heightened but slowly gave way to tensions faced in overcoming perceived differences. In other words, these individuals opted to stay true to their individuality, thereby strengthening the personal facet of their identity and discounting their need to feel socially accepted.

#### **4.5.2 I could be myself and still feel accepted by others**

On the rare occasion, participants articulated that it was 'easy' for them to feel part of their communities and workforce without forsaking their need for distinctiveness. The researcher further noted that these interviewees understood the significance of nurturing both needs as opposed to choosing one over the other:

*"I also try to live my life in South Africa that is why sometimes I go to a bar in the area and have few drinks with the South African people I also like soccer and go to the bar and watch the South African games on the tv so I can feel like I can make friends with some people in my area that I stay but I still know who I am and where I came from and I'm the same" (Ray)*

*"I don't see the difference in my identity as a Swazi or local South African I consider myself to be a local person" (Ibrahim)*

One participant disclosed that work represented a source of connection and a shared common interest with locals. He also revealed that others looked up to him as a leader, which suggests that both his needs for belonging and individuality were met:

*“In my workplace with the gang that I work they don’t look at me like an immigrant but they all call me their teacher because I teach them all and also pass on what I know about the machines to them especially the young workers in the gang...I think all of the people they have most respect for me for teaching them...They see me as one of them I think mainly because of my knowledge of the machine so I feel accepted for who I really am” (Jose)*

Of particular interest, the researcher noted that this interviewee listed all but one source of tension and appeared to enjoy and celebrate his life and work:

*“There are no tensions that I face in the Port with the people I work but I guess that is because all the people with whom I work like me because I know my work very well” (Jose)*

#### **4.6 Mechanisms for managing tensions**

Participants utilized a number of strategies to cope with their experiences of tension.

#### **4.6.1 Avoidance and withdrawal**

For several participants avoiding and withdrawing from perceived sources of stress were used as defence strategies to circumnavigate situations where tensions were more likely to be experienced:

*“The best way that I manage the tensions that I feel at work is that I keep to myself and don’t mix up with the other people from work in that way I don’t get involved with people”*  
(Canaan)

*“The most tensions is about being a young girl working in a mostly male environment but I deal with it by keeping to myself and I only speak to a very few people in the team that I work with also I don’t socialise with the people I work with after work. At the lunch time in the canteen I also just sit alone and sometimes when people come to join me I don’t talk much to them”* (Nehanda)

#### **4.6.2 Keeping the peace, keeping quiet and stoicism**

For a few participants, a stoical keeping of the peace was the coping mechanism of choice:

*“It is not easy for me to deal with the Supervisor who favour the other people because I need this job for the money so I just don’t say anything and carry on with my work. If I make any*

*trouble then I might lose my job and then I would have to go back to the DRC so I just bear with it to keep the peace and I am extra careful when I speak now” (Fred)*

In contrast to the above, the ‘keeping quiet’ as a means of coping further appeared to be a passive-aggressive means of coping with difficult interpersonal relationships - as illustrated by the following excerpt:

*“I manage the way that I am treated by the men by not been very friendly with them then they can’t get the wrong idea about but sometimes they still make remarks and I report it to my boss and when I am working night shift I always make my supervisor aware where I am in the terminal...but then I leave it and think its not worth all the trouble and I’ll just always try to be busy so that I don’t have any free time to talk to anyone” (Precious)*

In both of the above situations the participants concerned had elected to keep the peace, to keep quiet and not to confront their sources of tension thus avoiding further confrontation and/or unpleasantness on the one hand, but abdicating responsibility for resolving the conflict on the other.

#### **4.6.3 Hardiness and tough-mindedness**

Three participants verbalized that staying focused on the end-goal and bigger picture is what got them through the day. Not only did these participants perceive themselves to be highly

motivated, goal-orientated and purposeful individuals, but they also admitted to having little choice or control over the matter, pinning it down to survival instincts:

*“I learnt that I have to be very strong in my mind to work here and survive this stress. I don’t allow anything they tell me to make me upset or get me angry” (Victor)*

*“As a worker here in the Port I am enjoying what I am doing because I tell myself if I don’t make the most of my work then I am going to find it very hard to deal with been away from home and sometimes the local people here that I work with don’t make it easy for me. I guess through focussing on my work and giving it the best and not allowing people to put me down also I think by nature I have a strong character, after all I am living so far away from home all alone at this young age” (Sonia)*

#### **4.6.4 Enlightenment**

The researcher noted that two participants attributed their ability to manage tensions to learning more about the South African culture, language and ways of improving their work through further training. Thus, the term ‘enlightenment’ refers to the belief that tensions may be eliminated through gaining the relevant insight needed to negotiate difficulties:

*“I am learning some English and also some Zulu from a book so that I can understand”*

(Ray)

*“I am learning some English to read and write also I am going to the training school to learn how I can do my job better”* (Shakira)

#### **4.7 Factors leading to a positive work life**

In keeping with ways of managing tensions, participants identified a number of factors that contributed to an overall positive work experience. These varied from motivational factors and interpersonal factors to developmental influences:

##### **4.7.1 Financial independence**

For two participants, being employed at the Port meant that they no longer had to depend on their parents financially. These participants welcomed the responsibilities concomitant of living away from home and viewed their jobs as an opportunity for personal-growth:

*“Being an employee means that I can be independent at a young age and I don’t have to rely on my parents for financial support for my studies in the future”* (Nehanda)

*“I also am now more independent and can live on my own away from my parents...I now can earn my own money” (Sonia)*

For six interviewees, financial independence assumed a deeper meaning as it meant being able to support and provide for one’s family back home. In fact, several participants admitted to using this aspect of their work to justify their resolve to immigrate to South Africa in the first place:

*“I am very happy experience of being a worker in this country I can earn some money to save for my family when I go back to my country it would have been worth it” (Victor)*

*“I am happy and look after my job and work very hard because I don’t want to be unemployed then it is very hard to look after my family” (Ray)*

#### **4.7.2 Opportunities for learning, training and development**

Enmeshed with this finding was the realisation that many participants actually enjoyed their work despite the challenges and tensions faced. The researcher noted that interviewees would often become excited, animated and passionate when relating their personal stories regarding their boss’s investment in their long-term development, opportunities to have learnt more about their craft, and future prospects:

*“My first job is in this sector and I am very happy to work in this sector because I think there is a lot of potential for me in the future in the Port Sector. The greatest positive experiences for me are that I have been exposed to different aspect in the engineering field and am learning new stuff all the time. I enjoy the work that I am doing here because I am getting a lot of experience in the mechanical field. For me I am still very young and all the experience I get now will help me find a good job” (Canaan)*

*“I also had the opportunity to go to the School at the Port and learn many things about the work I am doing such as safety and how to use the equipment that I work with and also I got a certificate for attending the course. Another good thing about working here at the Port is that I am allowed to work many hours of overtime and I get a good rate of pay for the overtime work this will help me save quicker for my studies” (Nehanda)*

Furthermore, a number of participants viewed these opportunities as invaluable since it allowed them to share and transfer their new knowledge and skills to unskilled workers in their homelands. This sustainability dynamic is evidenced in the accounts of Jose and Victor respectively:

*“The positive side of what I do is that I am learning a lot about working with the cranes in a big Port like Durban also that when I came here to work I was sent on training to learn how to use the cranes. This is a skill that I can take back with me when I go back to my country and also I can also teach other people in Mozambique how to operate the cranes. So I feel good that when I go back home I can also then be a trainer” (Jose)*

*“I like working in the Port because I learn a lot about the containers I also went on training and I know how the machines in the Port work. When I go back home I can then work on the machines. The company also send me for some training in English also in HIV and safety in the work” (Victor)*

#### **4.7.3 Supportive boss and co-workers**

Two interviewees articulated that having a caring and understanding supervisor allowed them to feel more accepted and safe at work:

*“The man that employ me he looks after all the people that work for the company” (Victor)*

*“The man who hire me to work is also good to me and he helps me when I need to send money back to my country” (Ray)*

It was also apparent that many participants valued the support of their co-workers. This suggests that despite tensions, immigrant workers were still able to form healthy, beneficial and caring relationships with their South African co-workers and community members. For Ray, the opportunity to meet different people and establish a diverse network of friends made his work an enjoyable and fun experience:

*“In the section that I work in for the Container terminal I get to work with people from all over the world so I have made lots of friends from everywhere and I like my job for that reason. There are some people also at my workplace that I am friends with and can talk to them about things and when I have some problems” (Ray)*

Similar positive experiences were articulated about co-worker’s acceptance of immigrants, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Ibrahim. However, it was also noted that Ibrahim originated from Swaziland, his physical appearance resembled that of a typical Black South African male and his ability to speak Zulu masked his foreignness. It further emerged that Ibrahim viewed himself not as an immigrant but as a South African citizen:

*“I enjoy working at the Port and am treated very well by the local people I guess most people consider me to be South African because my surname is XXXX that is very close to a Zulu surname and I can speak Zulu well...Because of the close proximity between the two countries Swaziland and South Africa there are many people who work across the borders and for me I don’t consider it much as been an immigrant when I work here in South Africa. In the workplace people don’t think that I am not local and most people don’t know that I am not South African so I don’t feel any different from the local people here...Yes I feel very much part of the community here and it is very much like home...I can socialise with the people there freely and go to the shopping malls and even the bars and people don’t treat me any different from the local people” (Ibrahim)*

## **4.8 Overcoming tensions using social resources**

Consistent with the idea of identifying positive work experiences, interviewees were also asked to evaluate the social resources at their disposal. For the purpose of this study, social resources were defined in terms of the number, quality and diversity of relationships that an individual has at work:

### **4.8.1 Counselling, health care services and unions**

Three participants viewed the counselling services offered at the Port as a key social resource. It was evident that having someone to listen to concerns and provide useful feedback increased participants' capacity to deal with tensions and/or increased their capacity to take advantage of opportunities:

*“I know in the terminal there is an Employee Assistance department where there are nurses and also psychologists who can help you if you have a problem and want to talk to somebody so that is good” (Precious)*

Notwithstanding this, it later emerged that immigrant workers were often denied access to such services, including access to unions:

*“There are not many resources to help but it would be nice if there was someone in the Company that I could go to and talk about my problems I know that there is some people in the Union that the people go to and the Unions help them with the problems but for me I am on contract and I can’t join the Union” (Fred)*

Aside from counselling, participants recognized that medical health care was an additional key social resource. Interviewees were distressed about receiving little to no attendance at private hospitals. Thus, having carers at the Port allowed participants to share quality and meaningful interactions with others:

*“At work when I am feeling sick I can go to the clinic at the container terminal there the sister she checks me and gives me some medicines for free. Also when I once had an accident on the machine they give me time from work to get better and they also pay me my wages in full cause she understands what it’s like and tries to help” (Victor)*

#### **4.8.2 Social support**

A number of participants listed their interpersonal relationships with friends, partners, families and communities as important social resources:

*“Some of the friends that I made here I spend time with them sometimes going out and letting lose all the work tensions...My friends allow me to forget about work and just have a good*

*time so that helps otherwise I am not sure if I would be able to deal with some of the men at work” (Sonia)*

*“For me is that I can go back to the home that I share with other immigrants from my country and know that I can talk to them and we are like family and we do things together in the evenings when I am not working overtime we all cook together and then we make fun and jokes when we sit down to eat...They help me to be do my work better and also that I don’t have to be afraid of anyone at work” (Nehanda)*

*“I guess if there was somebody with whom I could talk to it would be much easier especially when I am thinking about my children and father and I worry about their safety back home with all the fighting that takes place in the DRC this thing sometime make me want to leave this job” (Fred)*

For the majority of interviewees, it followed that having a large and diverse network of social resources helped them to deal with work tensions – firstly, they were able to feel part of a home away from home and concentrate on work as opposed to continuously longing for their lives back home; and secondly, female interviewees were able to socialise outside of work and this provided a good distraction and way to relax, which in turn boosted their confidence to face patriarchal tensions at work.

While it was clear across all of the accounts that the participants were aware of the positive aspects of their work, it was evident that not all of the participants were aware of how or

when these factors could be used as resources to overcome tensions. This is illustrated by the following excerpts:

- **How would having these social resources help you overcome some of the tensions that you face?**

*“I am not too sure”* (Canaan)

*“I don’t know”* (Jose)

*“Not sure”* (Ibrahim)

## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Introduction

This study involved developing a broad picture of contemporary immigrant experiences with the aim of beginning to explore the perceptions of immigrant workers regarding the tensions that they face, their identities, and the ways in which social resources could contribute to a positive work identity. Though identity is an issue of growing concern within South and Southern Africa, little recent work has been carried out on identity construction in migrant communities. While research addressing immigrant miner communities has increased, the largest immigrant population, which falls outside the formal mining context, remains largely unaddressed.

In this study, four broad research questions were explored with each of the study's individual participants by means of thematically semi-structured interviews. The participants were not asked the research questions; but an initial trigger question and prompts (see Chapter Three and Appendix 1) were used to explore the following four broader research questions:

1. What is the nature of the lived experiences of tension amongst immigrant workers in South Africa?
2. What does it mean to have an identity as an immigrant worker within the Port of Durban?

3. What are the ways in which immigrant workers live with the tensions of a workplace that is both liberatory and limiting?
4. How is it possible to identify positively as an immigrant worker within the Durban Port?

While the thematic findings described in Chapter Four have addressed the first four of these research questions in detail, this chapter interpretively considers the thematic findings along several dimensions related to the research questions and the previously reviewed literature (in Chapter Two). The researcher has made specific reference to two local studies in the discussion, namely the work of Sinclair (1998) and April and April (2009). In this way, the study's findings are contextualized in cognizance of earlier as well as contemporary contributions, engendering greater relevance for understanding within the South African context.

## **5.2 Experiences of tension amongst immigrant workers in South Africa**

This area of questioning broadly examined the difficulties and barriers facing immigrants within South Africa's informal sector. The researcher was particularly interested in understanding how these tensions unfolded and interacted with each other in different contexts, that is, the synergy between work and non-work related barriers. The findings showed that various incidents of tension had occurred and were continuing to occur, with causes/sources ranging from territoriality, dangerous and undesirable work, disrespect and

poor treatment, inequality, victimisation, exclusion, violence and xenophobia, loneliness to poor work-life balance.

The above findings are similar to those of April and April (2009) and Sinclair (1998) who note that immigrants are generally viewed with suspicion and distrust and that many South Africans harbour feelings of resentment towards them for stealing jobs deserved of locals. For example, a Nigerian academic in Sinclair's study (1998) commented that "When I go to a supermarket my fellow blacks immediately start watching me. I cannot understand that. The impression is that all the foreigners are criminals. Maybe they get this impression from television, but it is very wrong. And that's what they're doing, generalizing to all Nigerians that they're crooks whether you're a lecturer or whatever". It is widely agreed upon that these negative perceptions often trigger acts of violence and xenophobic attacks intended to drive foreigners out of the country and back to their homelands. While no specific incidents of workplace violence were reported in this study, several interviewees revealed that they often felt threatened at times by their co-workers for these exact reasons. Participants did however mention cases of petty crime committed against them and other immigrants in their communities, particularly within the Kwa-Mashu area (I also sometime fright for my life in South Africa because I am worry people will kill me when they know I am from Malawi. Last year was lots of fighting with people from Africa in Kwa-Mashu...They want to steal our things sometimes they also make trouble for us). From the above, it may be understood that the work domain encompassed threatening behaviours stemming from territoriality attitudes, which contributed to experiences of tension for immigrant workers. It was further evidenced that this mentality intensified and transmuted into actual acts of crime directed at immigrants within contexts excluding work.

April and April (2009, p. 220) discuss the potential influence of a “paternalistic, Christian-National dominant mode of leading” by South African managers on immigrant workers. It is argued that some managers assume a ‘fathers to the organisation’ role whilst workers are expected to behave as children. In other words, it is believed that leaders are in the know and that followers should act without question. The researcher felt that this phenomenon emerged as form of intimidation in the present study whereby participants reported having to do things against their wishes (“In the work when bosses know we come from Zimbabwe to work here they tell us that if we come here we must do what we are told otherwise go back and die in Zimbabwe like animals.... So I get scared and just listen no matter what”). In accordance with April and April’s (2009) findings, the fulfilment of such expectations contrary to one’s wishes commonly resulted in a victimisation mentality (almost an externalisation of one’s locus of control), where participants felt that speaking up and being assertive would expose them to further discrimination in the workplace - ultimately leading to a form of learned helplessness (“To be an immigrant at work means that I must do any job that my boss give me even though I don’t like to do it”).

Furthermore, April and April (2009) argue that the lack of nurturing of and support for employees in general and immigrants in particular, may be partly attributed to the attitude of manufacturing and production companies. The job specifications are basic and wages relatively low. As such, foreign interviewees stressed that companies regarded them as dispensable and liable to do messy jobs (‘take it or leave it and somebody else will fill your shoes’). Similarly, in this study, the researcher found that participants were forced to do dangerous and undesirable work that South Africans refused to do (“I have to climb on the big machines and for a lady it is not very easy and I fright about my safety for working on the

machine. Sometimes I feel that because I am an employee who comes from Zimbabwe that they use me to do the hard work”). This lack of respect often resulted in participants not actively contributing to the work environment, and feeling psychologically disconnected. Furthermore, while this led to a lack of motivation and isolation from one’s work, in many cases feeling undervalued contributed to interviewees doubting their own self-worth and ability. A young engineering graduate stated that “As a young and clever immigrant from Zimbabwe it is very difficult being a worker here in the Terminal...When they hear that I come from Zimbabwe they think that most people from Zimbabwe can only do low level work that don’t need any qualifications”.

The researcher also discovered that immigrant workers were of the opinion that locals viewed them as ‘stupid,’ and ‘lazy’. One male participant stated that “It is not easy being an immigrant worker at the Container Terminal because lots of time you have to deal with the local South African people who think I am not good at my work and that I don’t work hard and that I am very lazy...Lots of time I must work very hard to show them that I am not lazy that I can also do work”. These findings mirror those of April and April (2009) who report that interviewees often spoke of negative experiences involving their feelings of inadequacy, and their consequent need to (over) prove their ability and worth. The researcher further noted that the overall lack of respect shown by South African co-workers and the blatant bias in favour of locals, left interviewees feeling less comfortable in, and less attached to, the organisation. This often resulted in (dysfunctional) communicative and behavioural affects (“It is not easy for me to deal with the Supervisor who favour the other people...so I just don’t say anything and carry on with my work...I am extra careful when I speak now”).

As discussed in Chapter Two, many companies, particularly within the informal sector, are increasingly relying on labour broking services. This has resulted in a highly mobile workforce dominated by seasonal workers who are forced to move from one site to another in search of employment (Benner et al., 2005; Mosala, 2008). In this study, it was noted that all ten participants were casual immigrant workers, a major consequence of which involved a diminished to non-existent bargaining power. To this end, interviewees cited a number of perceived inequalities and benefits afforded exclusively to locals, as major causes of tension. One interviewee commented that “Because I am from Zimbabwe I think I don’t earn the same amount of money that the local people earn because some of the local people that work with me they have nice cars. At the container terminal I work as a casual and cannot join the union so there is nobody that will take my case if I have a problem at work. Also as immigrant I don’t always get a chance to go for all the training courses that the local people go on because my boss tells me they don’t want to spend money training me because I am a casual employee and will leave when my contract ends”. These remarks correspond with previous literature publicised in Chapter Two, stating that immigrant workers constitute a vulnerable and exploitable segment of the labor market. Indeed, immigrants are often denied basic rights, job security and protection from worker unions. Moreover, employers tend to overlook foreign employees when it comes to training and skills development. As such, it is incredibly difficult for these workers to dispel stereotypes labelling them as ‘pliable workers’ or to engage in any form of professional advancement, without access to social resources (such as networking, mentors etc.) to help alleviate such inequalities.

In addition to the tensions discussed above, common experiences (direct and indirect) of victimisation and sexism were reported amongst female participants. While April and April

(2009) found that female interviewees spoke of feeling unimportant in decision making (as they were rarely consulted), the present study revealed serious concerns regarding interviewee's physical and emotional well-being. Aside from having to deal with sexist and racist remarks ("you want to work in a workshop then you should be able to do everything on your own otherwise you should stay home and cook and have babies"), female participants often reported incidents of sexual harassment, which April and April (2009) referred to as a 'double whammy' (p. 221). One female interviewee stated that "I feel that some of the men want to take advantage of me because they know that I am an immigrant. I have some men that also make remarks about me....my supervisor tells me that if I want the job then I must also work night shift as well and if I don't want to work night shift then I am going to lose my job". Thus, it may be understood that patriarchal tensions often intensified due to the lack of voice and negotiating power of female immigrants.

Feelings of victimisation often resurfaced when interviewees spoke of how language barriers and cultural differences meant that they were not regarded as individuals but company workers, with set tasks to fulfil (there was much emphasis on a 'production line' mentality). Such barriers contributed to the de-individualisation of both male and female immigrant workers, leaving them feeling unwanted, invisible and excluded ("Sometimes they also talk to me in Zulu and I tell them that I don't understand the language... Sometimes I don't understand when people don't talk in English and I feel that maybe they talking about me"). These findings are consistent with those of April and April (2009) in which interviewees claimed to have taken offence to a number of comments, jokes and banter – thereby admitting to not understanding the contexts in which they were made. Ultimately, these efforts to exclude immigrants often resulted in participants withdrawing from social activities and

interactions. It was therefore unsurprising to learn that loneliness featured strongly amongst interviewees' responses as a source of tension.

Aside from work, many participants felt rejected and estranged from their community members ("No, I don't feel part of my community, I'm an outsider"). Pronounced feelings of loneliness often resulted in participants missing their homelands and families that much more. For some, this adversely affected their ability to concentrate on work tasks (I miss my family very much...Sometimes when I am here and think about all these things then I am cannot work properly but there is nobody here that I can talk to about such problems), whilst others proceeded to throw themselves into their work to avoid dealing with feelings of loneliness and emptiness. However, this resulted in what participants called an unhealthy work-life balance ("...I don't have a good work and life balance because I try to work as much as I can so every time they ask for people to work overtime I give my name). The researcher believed that by focusing all of one's attention on what was already considered to be a fairly low-skilled and mundane job riddled with tensions; immigrant workers exposed themselves to further negative work experiences. Thus, despite the fact that viewing work as a detached and objective entity as opposed to a source of deep subjective, personal meaning made it easier to block out uncomfortable feelings, this approach failed to provide a sustainable and healthy way of dealing with issues going forth.

### **5.3 Identity as an immigrant worker**

While the main focus of the study involved understanding the concept of identity as perceived by interviewees, the researcher noted that participants frequently spoke of the

circumstances leading up to their decision to immigrate. This was deemed relevant for contextualisation of an immigrant identity, corroborated by the fact that all ten interviewees described being ‘pushed’ out of their countries for varied reasons. In accordance with Mosala (2008) and Sinclair (1998), Zimbabwean and Congolese interviewees cited war, violence and political strife in their countries as unbearable conditions under which to survive and the main reasons for their leaving. The remaining interviewees of Swaziland, Mozambican and Malawian descent indicated poverty, lack of employment and shortages of developmental opportunities as key ‘push’ factors. Consistent with Sinclair’s (1998) report, many interviewees shared their conviction that while they were grateful to be employed in South Africa, their presence was temporary and that their intention was to use their time to make and save money, and then to return home (“I not want to stay in South Africa till I go old only want to work for some money for my children and go back home to my country”). Such comments allude to the disillusionment of immigrants regarding South Africa’s promise of “economic and social democracy”.

Upon considering these contextual factors in conjunction with the tensions previously discussed in section (5.2), it is plausible that new immigrants become overwhelmed, that their personal and collective identities might be shaken. Tajfel (1982) showed that, in forming identities, people desire to be associated with groups that build their self-esteem, and Turner (1982) postulated that individuals use social and personal characteristics such as race, age, gender, regional origin, or organisational membership to create their self-identity and define their own groups. The capricious nature of identity described above, was reaffirmed in comments made by immigrants concerning the new approach of South Africans to foreigners (Sinclair, 1998). One participant stated that “Long time ago we were never

treated like foreigners because everybody, I am referring to blacks, was not allowed to identify himself as an urban resident. South Africans were all entitled to Homelands and they regarded us as being better off since racial segregation was not as harsh as it was in here. This made them to treat us with respect. Again the fact that we were all called "kaffirs strengthened our bond. Only now that South Africans are allowed to live in towns they have begun ill-treating their fellow African brothers". This suggests that identities are constructed in response to context, that they shift as conditions shift, and that they are self-conscious creations.

It was further revealed that immigrant workers felt torn between their two perceived identities, namely their true selves characterised by memories and feelings of their homelands and their immigrant selves marked by tensions and adversity. Correspondingly, Sinclair (1998) deduced that immigrants made distinctions between their identities and preferred to keep these two selves separate ("When I go home at first I am hard and then after some time, maybe a week, maybe sometimes a month, then I become myself again"). As such, the ODT – the theoretical framework of this study – posits that people are more inclined to identify with those groups that provide them with the optimal compromise between needs for individuality and belonging. The researcher noted that when immigrant workers were made to believe that they were highly dissimilar to locals, they were more inclined to reassert their similarities by identifying with large and indistinctive groups more than small, exclusive ones (Leonardelli et al., 2010). The opposite occurred when interviewees were made to believe that they were highly similar to locals ("For me I think that the balance is about been able to maintain my identity of my country that is why I make sure I try to get some

newspapers about the news in my country also I try to keep some friends from my country and we are able to talk about our home”).

The ODT framework further supports the postulations put forth in the structural perspective, which holds that when the multiple facets of one’s identity are balanced and/or complementary to one another, that person is more likely to enjoy a positive self-concept (Dutton et al., 2010). To this end, the researcher was interested in understanding how the benefits of increasing balance and/or complementarity - through establishing linkages among the various facets of oneself whilst also ensuring that one facet of identity does not subsume the another - could assist immigrants in attaining a positive work-identity. It emerged that participants who felt a divided sense of loyalty to the two cultures ultimately favoured their need for individuality over their need for belonging. Interviewees explained that this was an easier option for them given the numerous tensions and barriers involved in gaining acceptance and being viewed as equals by South Africans (I don’t try to be part of the groups at work I just keep to myself and do my work and when I am finished I go home cause it easier that way). Furthermore, the researcher noted that these participants found it difficult to identify positive aspects of their work and were more inclined to focus on stressful factors and distancing themselves from tensions (“I wanted to be like them and feel normal but it is difficult and I remember that I have just one main goal and that is to save money for my studies so I don’t try to be part of the groups at work I just keep to myself and do my work and when I am finished I go home cause it easier that way”).

In accordance with the structural perspective and ODT, the opposite was true for those participants who made the necessary links between their multiple selves and attempted to nurture both needs. These interviewees reported more positive and productive experiences at work, they typically enjoyed their time and role(s) in South Africa and expressed being free to be themselves whilst still feeling accepted by the locals. One participant stated that “I also try to live my life in South Africa that is why sometimes I go to a bar in the area and have few drinks with the South African people I also like soccer and go to the bar and watch the South African games on the TV so I can feel like I can make friends with some people in my area that I stay but I still know who I am and where I came from and I’m the same”. Comments such as these reaffirm previous findings in Chapter Two where a balance between one’s identities was found to enhance one’s capacity to deal with tensions better than most, to facilitate greater access to different knowledge domains, provide greater means for learning from diverse cultural experiences that enhance work processes and to promote adaptation to new working conditions. In other words, immigrant workers are better positioned to capitalise on the positive aspects of work and use these opportunities to share their knowledge skills, insight and cultural with locals. Likewise immigrants may grow and enrich their own understandings through learning and exchanging of information and resources with locals.

While previously discussed tensions emerged as clear factors limiting the realisation of inclusion in the workplace for most, another participant was reported to have nurtured both his need for belonging as well as his need for individuality. He commented that “In my workplace with the gang that I work they don’t look at me like an immigrant but they all call me their teacher because I teach them all and also pass on what I know about the machines to them especially the young workers in the gang...I think all of the people they have most

respect for me for teaching them...They see me as one of them I think mainly because of my knowledge of the machine so I feel accepted for who I really am". Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in 1997 among Nigerian and Congolese migrants in Johannesburg - Alan Morris commented that in some ways the Nigerians and the Congolese in South Africa are equivalent to the immigrant minorities in the United States described by Ogbu (1983). Referring to the Chinese community in the US, Ogbu (1983) showed that despite the enormous discrimination directed at the Chinese, they did not internalize their inferior status individually or collectively. Their strong networks and sense of family commitment together with their history and the fact that they had come to the country voluntarily and so could return if they wished, protected them from the ravages of discrimination and prejudice. Notwithstanding these similarities, the findings differ in that unlike the Chinese, participants often felt "pushed" out of their homelands and their decision to return home as well as the illusion of freedom proved to be convoluted due to the contextual "pull" factors previously discussed.

#### **5.4 Ways in which immigrant workers live with the tensions of a workplace that is both liberatory and limiting?**

This line of questioning was intended to firstly identify the mechanisms that participants employed to manage tensions and secondly understand what immigrant workers enjoyed about their work.

## **Mechanisms for managing tensions**

The findings indicated two distinctive patterns of managing tensions, namely avoidance and submissiveness and hardiness and enlightenment, the former of which was cited as less effective and unhealthy. April and April (2009) reported that anxiety distancing by the foreign employee towards the South African employer was not uncommon. Likewise, the researcher noted that interviewees physically and, more significantly, mentally distanced themselves from their bosses and co-workers for numerous reasons - especially when distrust, in authority figures, was exacerbated by previous (Apartheid) and recent unfair treatment of themselves and/or others like themselves, that is fellow immigrants (“The best way that I manage the tensions that I feel at work is that I keep to myself and don’t mix up with the other people from work in that way I don’t get involved with people”).

Such wariness of South Africans in the workplace explicably resulted in participants sometimes working anti-social hours in lonely environments where they did not feel intimidated by the power imbalance. This was typically the case with female immigrant workers, many of whom reported feeling threatened and unsafe, especially during nightshifts (“The most tensions is about being a young girl working in a mostly male environment but I deal with it by keeping to myself and I only speak to a very few people in the team that I work with also I don’t socialise with the people I work with after work. At the lunch time in the canteen I also just sit alone and sometimes when people come to join me I don’t talk much to them”). This arguably widened the gulf between South African and immigrant workers, fortifying the position of locals as the ‘territorial/authority figure’ and legitimising the command and- control relational hierarchy. Similarly, it emerged that many interviewees elected to keep the peace and conceal tensions so as to avoid any confrontational encounters

with locals. This approach of managing stress may be compared to denial mechanisms in that participants convinced themselves that things would improve and that the identified tensions and stressors were only temporary. One interviewee stated that “It is not easy for me to deal with the Supervisor who favour the other people because I need this job for the money so I just don’t say anything and carry on with my work. If I make any trouble then I might lose my job and then I would have to go back to the DRC so I just bear with it to keep the peace and I am extra careful when I speak now”.

Contrary to the above, several participants exhibited a greater sense of locus of control in the form of hardiness and tough-mindedness. One participant explained that “I learnt that I have to be very strong in my mind to work here and survive this stress. I don’t allow anything they tell me to make me upset or get me angry”. Another interviewee stated that “As a worker here in the Port I am enjoying what I am doing because I tell myself if I don’t make the most of my work then I am going to find it very hard to deal with been away from home and sometimes the local people here that I work with don’t make it easy for me. I guess through focussing on my work and giving it the best and not allowing people to put me down also I think by nature I have a strong character...” On a similar note, April and April (2009) argue that when followers and leaders are from different cultural or gender groups, such as female foreign workers in South African organisations, ethnicity and gender may become salient demographic characteristics that can influence their relationship. For example, the authors (2009) noted that female interviewees attempted to turn the negative aspects of being a woman in a male-dominated workplace into an advantage, by working harder than men to prove themselves and thriving in their companies as a consequence. This further led to managers giving them more discretion over their work and ultimately resulting in faster

promotions. Unfortunately, the researcher noted that female immigrants at the Port relied mainly on avoidant, withdrawn and stoic mechanisms to cope with patriarchal tensions. That is, they did not perceive being different in the workplace as beneficial to them and as such failed to capitalise on opportunities to further their careers or to provide fresh perspectives and insight.

Finally, two interviewees reported furthering their understanding of the South African culture and training as a way of dealing with specific language barriers and discriminatory tensions (“I am learning some English to read and write also I am going to the training school to learn how I can do my job better”). Overall, the researcher noted that those participants who employed avoidant and submissive strategies identified fewer positive aspects of work. The opposite was true for those interviewees who exhibited a greater sense of control and efficacy.

### **Factors leading to a positive work life**

Younger participants cited financial independence as an important contributing factor to their happiness. It emerged that work afforded them the opportunity to be self-sufficient, ‘free’ to do as they please and the space to growth both professionally and personally (“Being an employee means that I can be independent at a young age and I don’t have to rely on my parents for financial support for my studies in the future”). Older participants, including breadwinners, family care-takers and leaders, felt that financial stability was more important. Being employed at the Port meant being able to provide for their families back home. This gave their work and their roles greater meaning and substance (“I am very happy experience

of being a worker in this country I can earn some money to save for my family when I go back to my country it would have been worth it”).

Mosala (2008) argues that while immigrants are perceived as better workers than locals, in terms of productivity and availability, the term “better” actually means “pliable.” Essentially this means that employers rarely invest in the long-term development of immigrant workers. Instead, they are typically perceived as a short-term solution to maximizing productivity at minimum cost. Furthermore, South Africa is undergoing a transitional and transformational period aimed at redressing previous discrimination and past injustices against Blacks. As such, legislative policies including the Employment Equity Act (1998), affirmative action and black economic empowerment, signify that foreigners are given that much less attention and priority when it comes to developmental opportunities. It is for these reasons that the researcher was surprised to learn that all ten participants described their training and developmental experiences as one of the best parts of their jobs. Contrary to Mosala’s (2008) postulations, the interviewees were pleased to learn that their company valued their long-term development as workers, offering them admittance to several training workshops (“I like working in the Port because I learn a lot about the containers I also went on training and I know how the machines in the Port work. When I go back home I can then work on the machines. The company also send me for some training in English also in HIV and safety in the work”). Interviewees also felt positive about being able to transfer and share their newly learned skills and knowledge with their fellow workers back home (“This is a skill that I can take back with me when I go back to my country and also I can also teach other people in Mozambique how to operate the cranes. So I feel good that when I go back home I can also then be a trainer”).

Finally, participants attributed their positive experiences at work to their supportive bosses and co-workers. Despite facing various barriers to inclusion and acceptance into the company, several interviewees were able to establish healthy, beneficial and caring relationships with certain locals. For some, it was easier to identify with their superiors (“The man that employ me he looks after all the people that work for the company”). Another participant stated that “The man who hire me to work is also good to me and he helps me when I need to send money back to my country”. Others appreciated being able to meet diverse groups of individuals from different parts of the world. For several participants, talking openly with fellow immigrants who shared similar fears, hopes and feelings, made dealing with tensions more bearable and the work experience, more positive.

Overall, participants were able to identify the tensions and positive elements associated with their work. Notwithstanding this, participants often relied on ineffective and faulty coping mechanisms that hindered their ability to firstly overcome tensions and secondly to capitalise on the positive aspects identified above. Thus, the researcher was interested to see how immigrant workers perceived it possible to attain a positive work-identity.

### **5.5 Attaining a positive work-related identity as an immigrant worker**

The notion of building on one’s strengths and positive experiences is central to the basic premise of the positive psychology framework of the study. In Chapter Two, the prospect of employee strengthening was also explored in relation to the creation or building of social resources. For this study and in accordance with the Conservation of Resources Theory

(Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), social resources were defined as valuable assets that “inhere in the structure, content, and quality of the connections individuals have with others at work” (Dutton et al., 2010). It was also assumed that immigrant workers with more social resources were likely to acquire additional types of resources, such as information, access and trust (Dutton et al., 2010).

As such, participants were questioned about access to social resources that were perceived as crucial to their self-development. In response, it emerged that counselling, health care services, access to unions and social support were beneficial in terms of assisting immigrant workers to endure stress, and hardship and/or increase their capacity to undertake new challenges and demands. The researcher noted that these social resources were closely aligned to the positive factors identified in the previous section.

With regards to the counselling services offered at the Port, participants articulated that having a safe space to voice their frustrations, concerns and fears helped them gain new insight and resolve to deal with tensions. Participants with a balanced or complementary identity structure enjoyed more frequent interactions with diverse groups of otherwise unconnected individuals (e.g., younger employees, psychologists) (Bell, 1990). Thus, it was noted that complementarity enhanced the depth and breadth of these participants’ self-disclosure, promoting feelings of sincerity and trust, which in turn helped them to safely work through differences at work (Dutton et al., 2010; Kahn, 1992). One interviewee stated that “I know in the terminal there is an Employee Assistance department where there are nurses and also psychologists who can help you if you have a problem and want to talk to somebody so

that is good”. Another interviewee stated that “In my workplace with the gang that I work they don’t look at me like an immigrant but they all call me their teacher because I teach them all and also pass on what I know about the machines to them especially the young workers in the gang they all call me ‘teacher’ I think all of the people they have most respect for me for teaching them”.

Several other interviewees ascribed their interpersonal relationships with family members, friends, co-workers and partners as important sources of support and motivation to deal with tensions (“For me is that I can go back to the home that I share with other immigrants from my country and know that I can talk to them and we are like family and we do things together in the evenings...we make fun and jokes when we sit down to eat...They help me to be do my work better and also that I don’t have to be afraid of anyone at work”). Another interviewee reported that “In the section that I work in for the Container terminal I get to work with people from all over the world so I have made lots of friends from everywhere and I like my job for that reason”. Essentially, these participants found it easier to disclose personal and valuable information that allowed for greater quality interpersonal relationships with co-workers, who later assumed the titles of friend, advisor and ally. Again, this can be traced back to interviewees’ abilities to effectively draw on the various aspects of their identities at work, which encouraged otherwise, disconnected or divided individuals, to engage in a meaningful exchange of resources (Dutton et al., 2010).

While participants were able to identify valuable social resources and positive aspects of their work, many were perplexed when asked how these resources could be used to reduce or

eliminate tensions. Many replied: “I am not too sure”; “I don’t know”; “Not sure”. These responses indicate a divide in understanding of how positive experiences and valuable resources at work could result in the construction of a positive work-related identity and how this in turn, may help to build and sustain the social resources that were identified as critical to employee and organizational functioning. Reverting to the structural perspective, it was shown that in order to attain a positive identity structure, flexibility in managing multiple aspects of identities was required. This allowed immigrant workers to build larger networks and to develop more interracial and intercultural relationships than those who compartmentalized their work and cultural selves (Dutton et al., 2010) and hence feel socially alienated and estranged from others at work. Unfortunately, majority of the participants fell into the latter category as they found it increasingly difficult to marry their identities. This resulted in many workers feeling defeated and hopeless in overcoming the tensions and barriers cognisant of the immigrant worker experience at the Port. In response, the researcher has proceeded to list appropriate recommendations as a way forward. These propositions are explored in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The recommendations are interpretively based on several substantive sources. Firstly, from literature reviewed. Secondly, from suggestions put forth by the participants and from the interpretation of the participants' subjective experiences by the researcher (see Chapters Four and Five). There are two broad goals of the recommendations listed below. Firstly, to foster awareness and/or the raising of individual, group and organisational consciousness of the tensions facing immigrant workers today. Secondly, to identify possible ways of reducing these tensions by means of establishing a positive work-identity.

### **At an organisational level, management should:**

- Not tolerate or endorse xenophobic or territoriality behaviours. Instead, there is a need to visibly demonstrate their support and valuing of their immigrant workers, which should be clearly evident to the local workers at the Port.
- Adopt policies that promote transparency regarding the management of workplace tensions as well as the nature of work, benefits and opportunities allocated to workers. Implement programmes that educate immigrant and South African workers about tensions and which promote assertiveness training, anger management and conflict resolution.

- Provide a support structure for immigrant workers to assist with the containment and management of workplace tensions, e.g. support groups and psychological services.

**At a group level, South African co-workers should:**

- Unite and demonstrate a visible solidarity - both within and outside of the workplace. This may be achieved through joining an appropriate union that efficiently and adequately represents the interests of all workers at the Port or by participating in an inclusive recreational or sporting activity. Take time to share and learn about each other's cultures, insight, techniques etc.
- Be supportive of each other and not condone abuse of immigrant workers by fellow locals, demeaning jokes, gossip, slander and innuendo - silence both condones and perpetuates such tensions.

**At an individual level, immigrant workers should:**

- Take part in communication training, e.g. assertiveness training, education re conflict resolution skills and understanding the South African culture and language better. Proficiency in these skills is intended to boost self-esteem and perceptions of self-efficacy/social resources, which in turn impacts on the individuals' behaviour when it comes to balancing their needs for belonging and individuality, e.g. actually being assertive whilst still welcoming of others' insights.

### **Recommendations for further research:**

- The researcher is of the opinion that there is a need to understand immigrant workers' experiences and perceptions in relation to those of the accused perpetrators of such tensions - that is local superiors and co-workers. Thus, the researcher is aware of the bias in the present study that focuses exclusively on immigrant workers and recommends that future studies incorporate a wider sample population in order to contextualise these findings better.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, the participants' lived experiences of tension in South Africa indicated that workplace tensions had impacted and was impacting on their everyday work experience. It was also shown that participants often felt excluded and removed from their communities, thereby culminating in a series of tensions unrelated to work. These experiences of tensions/barriers/adversity as precipitated and perpetuated by South Africans (specifically bosses, co-workers and community members) included territoriality, dangerous and undesirable work, disrespect and poor treatment, inequality, victimisation, exclusion, violence and xenophobia, loneliness and poor work-life balance. Overall, participants articulated that these barriers resulted in them feeling overwhelmed and torn in different direction. For some, this meant rebuffing their need to fit in with locals, thereby resulting in the saliency of their personal identity (individuality) at the expense of their need to feel socially accepted (belonging). The opposite was true for the remaining participants with the exception of three immigrant workers who reported being able to satisfy both needs for individuality and belonging. It was further noted that these three participants reported fewer

tensions and more positive work experiences. Thus, in accordance with the ODT and structural perspective, it was argued that a balanced and/or complementary identity structure allowed for greater exchange of social resources between participants and South Africans, which in turn helped to build and sustain a positive work-related identity.

In sum, the study has provided a clear, department specific picture about the experiences of immigrant workers in respect of tensions, identity and social resources. A number of ways to facilitate and retain a positive work-related identity for immigrant workers the Durban Port have been suggested.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview schedule**

### Section A: Biographical information:

- What is your age?
- What is your race?
- What is your first language?
- What is your country of origin?
- How long have you lived in South Africa?
- How long have you worked in this company in this position?
- What is your highest attained qualification?
- What is your marital status?
- Do you have any dependents?

### Section B: Interview questions:

- Describe what it means to be an (1) “immigrant” (2) “worker” living in South Africa (probe: elaborate the meaning of the different roles/identities; examine particular examples and encourage the participant to share his/her lived experience)
  - E.g. What is your experience of being a worker or employee?
  - What does it mean to be an immigrant in your community/home/workplace?
  - What traits are important to balance being both an immigrant (retaining one’s distinctiveness/uniqueness) and an ordinary worker (establishing a sense of belonging to the dominant group) in South Africa? (Identify tensions and contradictions in roles and identities)

- What tensions do you experience around the different roles you play as an immigrant e.g. mother/father, husband/wife, worker/breadwinner, young/old black/Indian/coloured/white worker at the Durban Port?
  - What are the positive experiences you have had as a worker in this sector?
  - What barriers have you experienced as an immigrant worker in this sector?
  - Are there any tensions around race/ age/ gender/ ethnicity/ culture/ illegibility/ language/ skills/ roles in the workplace – elaborate?
  - Point out contradictory roles/identities as discussed and examine the meanings associated with contradictions? Are they aware of the contradictions/ imbalances?
  
- How do you manage these tensions? (examples of particular tensions that have been overcome and that participants struggle with, particularly at work).
  
- What are some of the social resources you perceive can help you in overcoming the tensions you face? (explain how, give examples).
  
- How would having these social resources affect the way in which you view and conduct your work?

## Appendix 2: Letter of informed consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, state that I agree to participate in a research project conducted by Sarisha Padayachee who is an Industrial Psychology master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

I understand that the research being conducted will provide insight into my perceptions and experiences of being an immigrant worker within the Port of Durban. Such information will be used to improve the company's programs and policies. I agree to participate in an individual interview/focus group discussion.

I acknowledge that Sarisha Padayachee has explained the task to me fully; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice or penalty; has offered to answer any questions that I might have concerning the research procedure; has assured me that my participation will be anonymous and that I will remain anonymous in any writing, presentation and publication of this work; that I will also be given a pseudonym in the recording of the interview as well as the transcription developed from my interview; and that the information will be confidential; I have also been assured that upon collection of the data, the results will be stored away in a safe and private place within the psychology department and will be disseminated after a period of five years.

_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Signature of Participant	Supervisor
Sarisha Padayachee		Neeran Ramjuthan
Cell: 078 265 3144		Cell: 078 174 3602

*If you wish to obtain information on your rights as a participant, please contact Ms*

*Phumelele Ximba, Research Office, UKZN, on 031 360 3587.*

## Appendix 3: Letter of ethical clearance



23 August 2012

Ms Sarisha Padayachee 208520279  
School of Applied Human Sciences

Dear Ms Padayachee

Protocol reference number: HSS/0783/012M  
Project title: Immigrant Worker's Experiences and Perceptions of Tension, Identity and Social Resources within the Port of Durban, South Africa.

### EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
/pm

cc Supervisor: Neeran Ramjuthan & Prof Johanna Hendrina Buitendach  
cc Academic Leader: Prof Johanna Hendrina Buitendach  
cc School Admin. Mrs Doreen Hattingh

Professor S Collings (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sc Research Ethics Committee  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3587/8350 Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za  
Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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## **Appendix 4: Letter to the organisation requesting permission for the study**

30 May 2012

### **Attention: To whom it may concern**

I, Sarisha Padayachee, am a full-time student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal currently completing my Master's Degree in Industrial Psychology. I am currently conducting a research study to explore and understand the experiences of immigrant workers in relation to tensions, identity and social resources. I further wish to explore ways of constructing a positive identity amongst immigrant workers such that they feel more positive and committed to their work roles. Given the growing number of immigrant workers employed by the Durban Port, my research supervisor, Mr Neeran Ramjuthan (business associate of Transnet) and I are of the opinion that this research study could be of significance to your company.

In order to achieve our goals, we require the cooperation of personnel from the container terminal of the port. In particular we would like to request assistance with the following:

1. A brief description of your company, indicating the main activities related to the port and number of employees, specifically, the number of immigrant workers within the container terminal.
2. Contact details of your HR Manager to assist us in setting up meetings with the Port's immigrant workers.
3. Any other information that you think may be relevant.

Please be assured that all information will be kept in the strictest of confidence and no company will be identified in the report without their permission in writing.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Ramjuthan or myself.

Yours Faithfully,

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Ms Sarisha Padayachee

(078 2653 144)

[sarisha14@gmail.com](mailto:sarisha14@gmail.com)

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Mr Neeran Ramjuthan

(078 174 3602)

[ramjutn@telkomsa.net](mailto:ramjutn@telkomsa.net)

