

URBAN LIVELIHOODS BEYOND INDUSTRIAL RUINS: THE BIRTH OF AN INFORMAL NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY IN NORTON, ZIMBABWE

MEIOS DE SUBSISTÊNCIA URBANOS PARA ALÉM DAS RUÍNAS INDUSTRIAIS: O NASCIMENTO DE UMA ECONOMIA NOCTURNA INFORMAL EM NORTON, ZIMBABUÉ

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Norton town, Zimbabwe, which was left in ruins after its industry succumbed to deindustrialisation as key industries closed. With rising unemployment and urban poverty, residents innovated and devised alternative livelihood strategies. This study explores several informal and innovative night-time economic activities: night vending, home-based industries, informal fishing, sand and quarry mining, transport, and the night-time leisure economy, among others that residents in Norton adopted. It unpacks the organisation of these activities and the logics behind going nocturnal. For their courage and ability to re-invent their livelihoods, we present the residents using the lens of Long's Actor-oriented theory by framing them as social actors and agents of change working hard to find solutions to their challenges. Data was collected using ethnographic methods of interviews, night-time observations, and informal conversations. Our results show that Norton became a nocturnal hub of informal entrepreneurial innovation and creativity. This was a result of governance factors, due to daytime load-shedding (energy cuts), night-time leisure activities and as a way of working hard to survive in a difficult economic environment.

Keywords: nocturnal economy, informal economy, informal livelihoods, deindustrialisation

Resumo

Este artigo centra-se na cidade de Norton, no Zimbabué, que ficou em ruínas depois de a sua indústria ter sucumbido à desindustrialização, com o encerramento de indústrias-chave. Com o aumento do desemprego e da pobreza urbana, os residentes inovaram e conceberam estratégias alternativas de subsistência. Este estudo explora várias actividades económicas nocturnas informais e inovadoras: venda nocturna, indústrias caseiras, pesca informal, extração de areia e pedreiras, transportes e economia de lazer nocturna, entre outras, que os residentes de Norton adoptaram. O estudo analisa a organização destas actividades e as lógicas subjacentes à sua adoção nocturna. Pela sua coragem e capacidade de reinventar os seus meios de subsistência, apresentamos os residentes usando as lentes da teoria orientada para os actores de Long, enquadrando-os como actores sociais e agentes de mudança que trabalham arduamente para encontrar soluções para os seus desafios. Os dados foram recolhidos através de métodos etnográficos de entrevistas, observações nocturnas e conversas informais. Os nossos resultados mostram que Norton se tornou um centro de actividades económicas informais nocturnas como inovação e criatividade empresarial, por factores de governação, devido a cortes de energia durante o dia, actividades de lazer nocturnas e como modo de trabalhar arduamente para sobreviver num ambiente económico difícil.

Palavras-chaves: economia noturna, economia informal, meios de subsistência informais, desindustrialização

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the growth of the informal night-time economy in Norton, a secondary Zimbabwean town located near the country's capital, Harare. Once a thriving industrial centre, the town's industry was left in ruins after over two decades of deindustrialisation, economic collapse, and the consequent job losses which led to a livelihood crisis among most households. To survive in such an economically precarious environment, residents had to innovate and devise alternative livelihood strategies, and this led to the rise and growth of informal economic activities as the sector took over as the main economy (Magidi, 2019). However, the informal sector has its share of challenges, including competition from within, compounded by a lack of support, strict regulations, and the crackdown by the government/local authorities that favour formal sector growth (Chirau, 2014). This further left informal businesses vulnerable, making the sector a highly competitive and contested space. Informal entrepreneurs thus must be vigilant, creative, and innovative to survive. As this paper portrays, one such strategy was the birth of the informal night-time economy that has turned Norton into a nocturnal town. The study deployed Norman Long's Actor-oriented theory and Robert Merton's deviation thesis to theorise the growth of the informal nocturnal economy in Norton. It identified the different actors (agents) participating in the night-time economy and the motivations behind going nocturnal. Data was collected using ethnographic methods of interviews, informal conversations, and night-time observations.

THE RISE AND FALL OF ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMY

Zimbabwe was one of Africa's biggest economies before the 1990s (Murisa, 2010). It had a thriving manufacturing sector which contributed up to 25 % of its GDP (Chirau, 2014) after achieving a long period of continuous growth in manufacturing, mining, agriculture, and food and services sectors between 1938 and 1991 (Sachikonye, 2002). With a well-maintained infrastructure, Zimbabwe attracted investment which promoted rapid urbanisation, and its cities and towns became employment hubs that created many jobs. Most households thus relied on formal jobs for their livelihoods (Magidi, 2019). However, it was not long before the country's economic fortunes reversed as its manufacturing sector started experiencing premature industrial decline in the late 1980s. A combination of factors has been linked to this decline. These include the Matabeleland and Midlands massacres (Gukurahundi) (Teuten, 2015), the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) in 1990

(Chirau, 2014; Sachikonye, 2002), the violent land reform program which disregarded property rights (Matandare, 2017; Moyo, 2014), and taking part in the unbudgeted Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war (Chigora, 2008). Other factors include public sector corruption (Moyo, 2014), severe recurrent droughts (Tawodzera, 2011), economic sanctions by the US and European Union (Chingono, 2010), and the indigenisation policy which forced foreign-owned firms to cede 51 % of their stake to black Zimbabweans (Chigora, 2008).

Deindustrialisation compromised the livelihoods of most urban households as many lost jobs which were their only source of livelihood (Sachikonye, 2002). This prompted urban residents to explore other ways of surviving, and the informal sector is one such alternative. While the informal economy has been widely studied in Zimbabwe and the developing world, this paper notes that the informal night-time economy has not received much attention as the following sections demonstrate and is thus the rationale for this study.

LOCATING NORTON TOWN

Norton is a secondary town located 40 km west of Harare. The town started as a farming compound which grew into an industrial town taking care of the rising demand for agricultural inputs and equipment by its growing farming community (Magidi, 2019). It later gained town status and was set aside for decentralisation by the government to cater for an industrial overflow from Harare (Norton Town Council, 2014). At its peak, Norton hosted some big engineering, farming, agro-processing, and mining firms like Hunyani, the Grain Marketing Board, Rio Tinto, Dandy, Karina Textiles, and others. These created jobs and attracted more people, and the town's population rose from 12,000 in 1982 to 88,000 in 2022 (ZimStats, 2022). Before the 1990s, Norton produced surplus jobs which lured labour from Harare, Chegutu, and Kadoma (Magidi, 2022). Thus, unemployment was not a huge problem then as jobs were available in the industrial, agricultural, and emerging commercial sectors. However, decades of industrial and economic collapse left Norton's industry and economy in ruins, resulting in severe job losses. This compromised the livelihoods of most households which used to rely on formal jobs (Magidi, 2019). The need to survive in such an economic environment pushed most households to resort to informal economic activities as the town's informal sector grew rapidly over the years. Some of the challenges in the informal sector have led to some opting to work at night, which is the basis for this study. The following section gives an overview of the informal economy in Zimbabwe and Norton.

THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN ZIMBABWE

As Zimbabwe's formal economy continued to decline following severe deindustrialisation, the informal economy took advantage and expanded to become the major source of urban livelihoods (Chirau, 2014). The sector has been growing over the years, from constituting 10 % of the total national labour force in 1980 to 20 % in 1987, 27 % in 1991 and at least 50 % by 2000 (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013). As a result, Tamukamoyo (2009) argued that the sector is more than a secondary economy but the unofficial backbone of the national economy, contributing over 60 % of the GDP (Chekenya, 2016). With designated vending sites becoming overcrowded, some vendors occupied the streets and recreational and car parks in the CBDs in a bid to get closer to their customers (Mahiya & Magidi, 2022). Zimbabwe's informal economy hosts a range of activities: manufacturing, retailing, construction, repair and maintenance, services, recycling, farming and cross-border trade among others (Magidi, 2019). However, the informal sector in Zimbabwe has its fair share of challenges. These include a lack of recognition by both central and local governments resulting in frequent raids, lack of funding and infrastructure, high competition, and accusations of illegality, littering, and driving unsustainable urbanisation (Chirau, 2014).

While a lot of research has been done on the informal economy in Zimbabwe, it seems not much has been done to research the informal night-time economy, and attempts to locate such literature did not yield many results. The few available studies include Dube and Chirisa (2012), Chirau and Chamuka (2013), and Gunhidzirai (2023) who, without digging deeper, noted an increase in night vending in Harare CBD and Mbare market as a way of evading police raids. In Masvingo (Zimbabwe), Shoko and Dziva (2019) found that some vendors were going nocturnal as a solution to the shortage of vending space in the city. Dzawanda and Matsa (2023) studied Zimbabwean informal cross-border traders, but their only link with the night is the observation that cross-border traders travel at night to and from neighbouring countries where they get their products. Bolt (2012) noted that Zimbabwean vendors in Musina (South Africa) traded until late at night using candles and battery-powered lamps for lighting and then slept in the open next to their stock when trading ended.

Scoones and Murimbarimba (2021) noted that small mining towns (Mvurwi, Chatsworth and Maphisa) are alive at night due to the influx of artisanal miners. Related findings were also noted in Ghana, where informal miners work at night to evade state security since artisanal mining is banned in the country (Bansah, 2019). In Nairobi, Kenya, Thieme

(2021) realised that youth in informal waste work started collecting waste at 3 am. Shand, van Blerk and Hunter (2016) highlighted how street boys in Zimbabwe, Ghana, and DRC engaged in predatory activities like theft, while girls carried out sex work during the night to earn some income. In South Africa, the night-time economy is mostly linked to the formal economy and is dominated by entertainment, food and beverage, tourism, Airbnb sectors and Uber taxis which provide mobility to night-goers (Henama & Sifolo, 2017; Visser, Erasmus & Miller, 2017). While these examples offer good insights into the nocturnal economy in selected contexts, Norton's case is novel because it is a highly informalised town with little formal economic activity. Moreover, the informal night-time economy has been driven by a severe industrial collapse that led to job losses and high urban poverty, ultimately pushing residents into devising alternative survival strategies which include informal nocturnal economic activities.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

The paper deployed the Actor-oriented theory (Long, 2003) supported by the Deviation thesis (Merton, 1972) to understand the informal night-time economy in Norton. The Actor-oriented theory was of particular interest because of its emphasis on the concepts of 'social actors' and 'agency' which lie at the core of this paper. It seeks to identify the different actors' practices, their rationales and strategies, the conditions under which they operate, and to understand their struggle to access and control the available limited resources (Long, 2003). This resonates well with the objective of this paper, which is to understand the different actors (agents) participating in the informal night economy as a strategy to circumvent the challenges that restrict their work. For their innovative and creative abilities, the paper therefore frames informal entrepreneurs as agents of change who exercise agency to confront situations that threaten them (Long, 2003). Faced with the threat of poverty because of unemployment, residents simply invented their economy and jobs. Complementing the Actor-oriented theory is the Deviation thesis (Merton, 1972), which gives an interpretation of how people respond when faced with uncertainties. It argues that when faced with social structures that systematically block their path to success, social actors opt instead for deviant alternatives. The ability of social actors in Norton to bypass the systematic barriers that block their participation in the informal economy relates to the deviation thesis. The Actor-oriented theory and deviation thesis have been used in researching several areas including civil society, political, and social movements (de Nardis & Antonazzo, 2017; Rucht, 2023), the informal economy in general

(Magidi, 2019), development research (Bosman, 2004) and human rights (Nyamu-Musembi, 2005). We however failed to find studies that have used the two theories to understand the informal night economy. The ability of this paper to test the two theories in a new context is a strength that makes the study unique.

METHODS

The paper combines findings from two different qualitative studies done in Norton over different periods (2017-18 and 2020-21). Both studies employed ethnographic methods of observations, interviews, and informal chats. A total of 25 informal business owners involved in activities like welding, carpentry, vending, food hawking and others were interviewed, and up to 30 informal chats were conducted. Participants were selected using purposive and convenience sampling and were drawn from a pool of informal entrepreneurs engaged in different activities and organisations interested in the informal economy (Norton Town Council, Ministry of SMEs, and Ministry of Fisheries). Data was collected at Katanga and Ngoni shops and in low-income townships such as Katanga, Ngoni, Johannesburg, Maridale, and Marshlands where informal night activities are high. Night-time observations were conducted in these areas and data from all sources were reconciled and triangulated. Results from both studies were compared after thematic analyses and notable similarities in the results, leading to this paper.

RESULTS

Prolonged daytime load-shedding

Long hours of load-shedding emerged as one of the major reasons why some informal sector workers were working at night. Respondents noted that Norton has been experiencing excessive load-shedding for a long time. They highlighted that they experience over 14 hours of power cuts every day. Because load-shedding is largely implemented during the day, this affects the operations of informal sector workers whose work relies on electricity. For context about Zimbabwe's energy crisis, it is crucial to highlight that as the country's economy deteriorated, its power production capacity dropped significantly. Power generation was affected by obsolete infrastructure, brain drain and lack of maintenance, which led to the national electricity generation falling to 984MW against a daily minimum demand of at least 2,000MW (Mawonde, 2015; ZimLive, 2022).

The study found that power is switched off as early as 5 am and restored later after 10 pm. The work of informal sector workers engaged in electricity-based trades like metal fabrication, carpentry,

baking, printing, photocopying, videography and garment making is severely affected. To compensate for time lost during power cuts, some of them resort to working at night when power is restored. This entails resting/sleeping during the day and starting work at night when the power comes back on. They then work all night until the power is cut again the following morning. Others noted that during the day they focus on those bits of their work that do not require electricity and then shift to those that require power at night when power is restored. Night-time observations in low-income suburbs like Katanga, Johannesburg and Maridale observed that there is a lot of night-time manufacturing activity mainly by home-based manufacturers. This is also supported by the different noises generated by different activities which can be heard throughout the night. The following are some of the responses that we obtained through interviews:

Since the long power cuts started, I have been working overnight when the electricity is back. This way I can cover for lost production time due to power cuts during the day. Many others in my trade are also doing the same (welder, Johannesburg).

We experience most of our power cuts during the day, so I do manual tasks during the daytime. At night when electricity is back, I shift to tasks that require electricity. I have been doing that for a long time. Many carpenters are working at night (carpenter, Katanga).

I do videography, printing and photocopying. Since the electricity is off during the day, we collect orders from clients during the day and work on them at night when the power is back. I have been doing this for over ten years, and others offering similar services are also working this way (videographer, Katanga).

Informal sector governance factors

The study found that there are various attempts by the Zimbabwean government and local governments across the country to regulate informal economic activities. In Norton, the local authority (Norton Town Council) requires informal businesses, regardless of size, to be registered, licensed and pay a levy, operating fee, or subscription to use public services/infrastructure. Informal entrepreneurs were also supposed to be allocated operating space at designated points. Respondents however noted that there is a lot of bottlenecking in the registration and licensing process. Some complained that the fees charged were too high for them to afford because some ran petty businesses and survived

from hand to mouth. Some pointed out that there was no reason to pay any fees to the town council because the services that were purportedly meant to be paid for were not available for informal sector businesses in the town.

Consequently, some entrepreneurs resort to evading these regulations. Their defiance attracted some crackdowns that led to punitive measures which included arrests, confiscation of products and evictions. To evade these restrictions, some informal entrepreneurs indicated that they were opting to go nocturnal. By operating at night, they take advantage of the poorly resourced local authority. We learned that the municipal police department is understaffed and can not afford to monitor the town for 24 hours a day. Most of their staff work during the day and skeletal personnel take care of critical municipal properties at night. It is thus difficult for them to oversee all night activities and hence some entrepreneurs take advantage and ply their trade with few or no restrictions.

Among some of the informal entrepreneurs who have taken this deviant path are informal fishermen, sand and quarry miners, and food vendors who operate near/at nightclubs. The study discovered that getting a fishing licence is difficult and expensive. There are at least three licences from different departments required for one to legally operate a small fishery. These included the licence (issued by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority [ZimParks]), a cooperative or business licence (from the Ministry of SMEs) and an operating licence (issued by Norton Town Council). Fishermen highlighted that the cost of acquiring these licences was beyond their reach. They raised concerns that the application processes were time-consuming, which motivated some of them to bypass the bureaucracy and work without any licences. To achieve this, they have resorted to fishing at night and transport their catch into the town before dawn. Fishing in Norton is done at Chivero and Darwendale lakes which are located on the edges of the town. Informal fish markets are normally full of fishers and fish buyers by 3 am.

The study also discovered how informal sand and quarry miners are also resorting to nocturnal operations. Norton is a fast-growing town where a lot of house construction is taking place, meaning sand and quarry is in high demand. As in the case of fishing, extraction of these resources has been criminalised, since it has the potential to compromise environmental sustainability if left unchecked. To extract them, one must be registered and licensed with the relevant authorities and must also observe environmental regulations as required by national and local governments. Since registration and licensing cost time and money, some miners defy these regulations and choose to access the resources through 'other means' and one such means involves

working at night. The study encountered several of these miners as they transported and delivered sand and quarry in the town's residential areas at night during observations. The following are some of the responses that we got from interacting with informal fishers and sand miners:

Zimparks licences are expensive, that's why we choose fish poaching under the cover of the night when they cannot fight us (fisherman, Ngoni Market)

Zimparks and Norton Town Council are too under-resourced to operate 24/7, so we work at night when our chances of being caught are minimal (fisherman, Maridale)

Norton Town Council requires us to register with them and the EMA (Environmental Management Agency) but most of us can't afford their fees. Instead, we work at night because council police are stretched at night and cannot monitor all of us (sand miner, Marshlands)

The local authority (Norton Town Council) also confirmed that its policing department is understaffed and under-resourced and can not fully execute its duties, especially at night, further confirming that many people are taking advantage of this to work without complying with regulations.

Entrepreneurial innovation and competition

The study discovered that engaging in the informal nocturnal economy is a strategy used by some entrepreneurs to maximise business returns and overcome competition. With rising unemployment in Norton, the informal sector is increasingly becoming a livelihood option for more residents. Consequently, competition for clients is high, which demands innovation and creativity to gain a competitive edge and earn more income. One such method that stood out was the 'informalisation of time' which entails working beyond normal working hours into the night. A kiosk owner revealed:

I operate until 11 pm or even beyond. I cater for late shoppers. If you go around the townships at night, you will see many other tuck shops open late at night (Tuckshop Owner, Johannesburg)

Another factor that has seen increased informal night activity at shopping centres like Katanga and Ngoni is the high uptake in sports betting by young men, not just as a hobby but also as a way to earn some income. Popular football competitions like the English Premier League (EPL), Spanish La Liga, UEFA

Champions League (UCL), and the World Cup, which attract most of the fans and betters, are played at night. As such, many young men frequent betting shops and nightclubs at night to place and closely follow their bets. With the high cost of internet data, many of them rely on manual betting which requires them to place their bets in person and to collect their money should their bets win. While nightclubs have always promoted nightlife, observations showed that football and sports betting multiplied the number of people who participate in night activities in Norton. Football betting has created a very vibrant 'informal night-time leisure economy' as young male football lovers regard watching football as more than just a hobby but also a chance to earn some income through betting. The following are some of the responses from interviews with betting shop workers, bar keepers and football betters:

There is a growing number of people getting into football betting, and because competitive matches extend into the night, our shop is always fully packed until late at night (bet shop worker, Katanga)

Many football betters prefer watching football here (Katanga) close to the betting shop so that they can collect their money if they win. That's why most pubs are full even late at night (barkeeper, Katanga)

Sometimes there is load shedding and some of us don't have backup power at home, so we end up crowded in betting shops and pubs even late at night (soccer fan, Katanga)

Most UCL, Euro, and World Cup matches are played at night, so football betters and fans like me frequent pubs and betting shops, sometimes until after midnight. For example, in Brazil's (2014) World Cup, matches ran from 9 pm to 5 am the following day...this kept us in pubs many nights (Soccer Better, Katanga shops)

The study further noted that hawkers also take advantage of the increased volumes of people at major shopping centres at night to maximise their profits. We encountered several hawkers selling such foodstuffs as snacks, roasted maize, groundnuts, cooked/braaiied chicken/meat, popcorn, soft drinks, and fruits near/at night clubs during our night observations. One of them confirmed:

Business is good at night, most young men found in nightclubs and betting shops late in the night are not married and don't have time to cook. They get something to eat here

and that's where we come in (food hawker, Katanga shops)

We observed other hawkers trading items like cell phone chargers, earphones, power banks, shoes, clothes, belts, and other items, doing business at or near nightclubs in Katanga and at shops in Ngoni. A vegetable vendor told us that late-night clients used to knock at her house, seeking to buy vegetables until she decided to work late into the night to serve such customers. Night observations at some vegetable markets in the town's high-density residential areas also noted that some vendors work until as late as 10 pm to cater for late-night buyers. This way they boost their sales and income. We also learnt that following the collapse of farming/horticultural estates located on the town's outskirts after the land reform, vegetable traders now travel to Mbare market in Harare for stocks. They leave Norton early in the morning to travel to and from Mbare on time. Observations confirmed that commuter operators in Norton start touting for passengers going to Mbare at around 2 am. An interview with vegetable traders confirmed the following:

We now get most of our orders from Mbare, so we wake up very early in the morning. We leave Norton around 2 am and by 7-8 am we should be back (vegetable trader, Maridale)

It also emerged that the informal night economy is not only made up of unemployed people. The study learned that some actors in this sector are formally employed and run some 'side hustles' to supplement their income. With the worsening economy and decreasing consumer purchasing power, most salaries in Zimbabwe are below the poverty line, hence the need to supplement their income. Since they spend their day at work, the only available time to push their hustles is during the evenings and weekends. A high school teacher, for example, noted how he spends the day at school and then goes on to conduct private tuition sessions from 6 – 9 pm. He underlined that he knows of fellow teachers who also had similar arrangements. Other examples include a shopkeeper who sells airtime and forex at Katanga after work and a policeman who uses his car as a taxi at night after a day at work. Many other employed people are also resorting to informal night-time economic side hustles to cushion their depreciating salaries.

As suggested above, another sector that is benefitting from the increasing night activity in Norton is the informal transport sector, which has turned out to be an enabling factor that encompasses most informal night activities. People who do business at night require mobility and logistics, and commuter operators and private taxi drivers are mostly avail-

lable to offer these services at night. Fishers and fish traders require transport to carry them and their stocks/orders to and from the market early in the morning. Similarly, food hawkers and football fans/punters also need transport to travel home after late kick-off matches which sometimes end after midnight. Transporters have thus joined the growing number of informal night-time entrepreneurs as they seek to boost their businesses, survive the competition and maximise their income. Below are some of the responses we received from interviews and informal chats with transport operators and other informal sector night workers:

My first trip of the day is normally around 2-3 am when I ferry vegetable traders to Mbare (commuter driver, Katanga)

Business is good during weekends/midweek when there are late-night matches. Pubs are full until midnight and people from Marshlands, Darwendale, and Maridale need transport (taxi driver, Katanga)

Some matches end around midnight and to get home quickly, we sometimes use commuter buses or small taxis (better, Katanga)

However, for some, starting their workday early in the morning and ending deep into the night is nothing more than a way of working hard. Their logic here is that to survive during periods of severe economic shocks, one must make maximum use of all their energy and resources to work towards their survival. One taxi driver operating from Katanga, during an informal conversation, intimated that: "If you enjoy sleeping, your family will starve and die of hunger."

Hard work thus also featured prominently as one of the motivations behind the rise of the informal night-time economy in Norton.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The prolonged economic crisis that Zimbabwe's urban populace has been enduring has led some of Norton's residents to devise alternative livelihood strategies to sustain their lives (Magidi, 2019). The paper notes that in the face of high unemployment and increasing urban poverty, informal enterprises have become a livelihood and employment option for many. Residents are undertaking various initiatives as they try to build resilience to recover from challenging situations. The study discovered how, through their agency and urgency, informal-sector actors transformed Norton into a hive of informal nocturnal economic activities. Residents involved in informal work are resorting to working during

the night because of prolonged power cuts during the day, governance restrictions imposed on the informal sector, and above all, as an innovative and creative strategy to increase income and diversify livelihoods. Daytime power cuts affect entrepreneurs whose work is powered by electricity. Our results demonstrated how actors (agents) in metalworks, carpentry, garment, videography and other trades that require electric power are effectively barred from working during the day. To recover the lost time, some opted for what we refer to as the '*informalisation of time*' by working at night when power is restored. By doing this, informal sector workers are confirmed as active social actors or agents who can devise new ways of addressing their problems on their own, as the Actor-oriented Approach (Long, 2003) suggests. Faced with severe daytime power cuts, they responded by working at night when power was restored.

Informal entrepreneurs in Norton have also gone nocturnal to evade the restrictions imposed by responsible authorities on their sector. As noted, exploiting natural resources like fish, sand and quarry, for example, is beset by many regulations that restrict and limit access to them. To avoid paying huge licences, penalties, or bribing authorities, and to dodge punitive laws that can lead to their imprisonment, actors in Norton have resorted to stretching the municipal police by operating at night. Theoretically, this is consistent with Merton's deviation thesis which argues that when the legitimate path to success appears to be structurally or systematically blocked through restrictive laws, social actors take the deviant alternative (Merton, 1972). Some informal sector workers in Norton have thus chosen to survive 'through other means' (Magidi, 2019) by resorting to the nocturnal route to evade the many hurdles that they cannot escape during the daytime. This finding also resonates with other studies that found that informal workers in sectors like artisanal mining and street vending work at night to evade security officers (Bansah, 2019; Bolt, 2012; Chirau & Chamuka, 2013; Scoones & Murimbarimba, 2021).

The study also highlighted the growing informal night-time recreation sector as one of the major drivers of the night economy in Norton. This included the high uptake of football watching and betting as a hobby and an opportunity to earn some income. Agents dominating this sector are young men whose love for football has seen the increasing popularity of international football competitions such as the domestic European Leagues, the Champions League, the World Cup and the Europa League, among others. Football watching and betting have kept betting shops and nightclubs packed most nights and have attracted other actors from other sectors such as food vendors and transporters who have

taken full advantage of this chance to benefit their businesses. The role of transport providers in aiding the night economy was also emphasised in South Africa where Henama and Sifolo (2017) highlighted how the Uber sector was promoting night food, beverage and entertainment activities.

Also driving the informal night economy is the desire to earn more income. Cases of kiosk owners and vegetable traders opening until as late as 11 p.m. and teachers engaging in evening classes for a fee are testimony to the 'informalisation of time' as a survival strategy by informal sector workers in Norton. We therefore frame the idea of a night-time informal economy through the lens of the popular sentiment 'hard work pays off'. By stretching their working schedule deep into the night, or by starting work very early in the morning, the understanding is that the longer you work, the more likely you are to make it. While a study like this should ideally produce some policy suggestions, we felt that there is a need for additional data and further consultations with different stakeholders to come up with comprehensive, informed and high-quality recommendations. We therefore thought it was premature to make any recommendations at this point and set this aside as an area for future research. We conclude by restating that the night-time economy is growing in Norton town as an innovative and creative strategy by residents who are using their agency in their quest to build and strengthen resilience in the face of severe economic hardships that are threatening their survival.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that this work does not have competing interests associated with it.

Contribution of authors

Martin Magidi: conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing.

Tawanda Jimu: writing – review & editing; validation.

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