*From dependence to conviviality: unaccompanied youth and host communities at the Zimbabwean–South African borderland**

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ABSTRACT

Unaccompanied child and youth migrants negotiate with local host communities in
their attempts to find a place to belong to, yet research has generally neglected their
participation in the making of relationships with the people around them. Providing
a perspective of the *longue durée*, the Zimbabwean–South African borderland teaches
us that time is critical in young migrants' ability to negotiate their positioning and
actively shape relationships with host communities, based on mutual interest.
While at the beginning of their stay, unaccompanied children and youth were at
the mercy of others, time enabled them to accumulate knowledge and develop
skills that were in demand, shifting their place in society and setting the ground
for conviviality.

Keywords – unaccompanied minors, migration, borderland, Zimbabwe, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of my stay at the South African–Zimbabwean borderland,[1] I
used to look at youths at the border checkpoint and was not able to find the
courage to initiate a conversation with them. This was not only an ethnogra-
pher's process of adjustment and familiarisation. They seemed to me like the
kings of the border. They were poor and unhealthy, but they had a confident
appearance and people seemed to be treating them well, with fondness,

appreciation and respect. I was no stranger to the strength, dominant presence and socioeconomic power of unaccompanied youths, particularly male youths. I had worked with unaccompanied child and youth asylum seekers in Israel before, and had no expectations of meeting helpless-poor-little-children. Nevertheless, I did not expect unaccompanied and undocumented youths to be setting the tone in public spaces. I did not expect to see them as well established as they were, while being surrounded by border control. I ended up asking for help from others in initiating conversation with them, not because of language differences or laziness, but because of my own insecurity in the face of their confidence. Their positioning at the border checkpoint and in the border town Musina, spurred questions about the process that unaccompanied children and youth go through as they navigate local socioeconomic dynamics.

This research aims to unveil the roles of unaccompanied boys and male youths in the making of conviviality at the South African borderland. While there is a consensus regarding unaccompanied children and youth's agency, their active participation in the formation of relationships with host communities has been marginalised. Studies that focus on unaccompanied minors and host communities tend to emphasise the latter's active role in shaping either excluding or protective environments, yet the role of unaccompanied children and youth in building relationships with local populations has been missing.

By looking into children and youth's role in the formation of relationships with host communities, this paper argues that with time, unaccompanied child and youth migrants cultivated knowledge and skills that were in demand by local communities. This enabled them to mitigate against their vulnerabilities, gain power, and offer their knowledge and expertise to others, fostering relationships of reciprocity and mutuality, and paving their way into conviviality.

This article begins with a review of current literature on unaccompanied child and youth migrants and host societies. It addresses, in short, fieldwork and methodological considerations, followed by a literature review about Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, focusing on the Zimbabwean–South African borderland. The paper then discusses the relationships between unaccompanied minors and host communities at the initial stages of migration and the formation of conviviality over time. It focuses on two spaces – the first is an informal business area on the South African side of the border checkpoint, and the second is schools and shelters in the South African border town of Musina. After discussing the initial stage of migration and the formation of conviviality over time, this article concludes with insights about the value of researching conviviality among young migrating populations, the importance of time as a critical facilitator, and the limitations of conviviality in migratory contexts.

UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG MIGRANTS AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Relationships between host communities[2] and migrating populations are often characterised in migration discourse by different levels of inclusion and

exclusion. Immigrants, especially those who cross borders in unregulated manners, are often perceived as a threat to public order and stability (Lazaridis 2016). They are blamed for competing with local, marginalised populations over the same resources, and are viewed as a threat to identities (Harris 2002). Seen as a burden and as a hazard, it is clear why, as Okello (2014: 70) notes, 'hosting communities have become increasingly hostile to refugees'. Nevertheless, there is much more to these relationships than hostility, as mutuality often evolves. Host societies come to rely on resources and vital contributions provided by unregulated immigrants and therefore assist them in finding ways around excluding migration regimes (see Ambrosini 2013; Burchardt & Michalowski 2015).

Conviviality has provided an alternative conceptualisation for relationships between host and migrant communities. Nyamnjoh (2017) views conviviality as the recognition of incompleteness of ourselves and of everything and everyone around us, and the act of complementing ourselves and the world we live in with the incompleteness of others. Treating the incompleteness of ourselves and of others as a source of potency allows us to carefully negotiate collective interest in a way that empowers the individual and the group, and accommodates togetherness without compromising one's autonomy (Nyamnjoh 2017). In migratory contexts, Chekero & Morreira (2020) argue that conviviality transcends multiple dualisms between foreign and local, legal and illegal, xenophobia and social acceptance. It is the socialisation of citizens and migrants beyond co-existence, 'stressing interconnections, dialogue, collaboration, interdependence and compassion' (Nyamnjoh 2017: 266), though without the disappearance of boundaries between the locals and the foreigners. As Elias & Scotson (1994) suggest, conviviality among migrants and locals is entrenched relationships between those considered to be established and those considered outsiders.

Agency is at the core of conviviality among migrant and local populations (see Nyamnjoh 2002; Hay 2014), since conviviality is built upon migrants' ability to express and perform their agency and actively form relationships with host communities. Yet agency is not a static concept. It is everchanging and influenced by space and time, by structures and people. According to Nyamnjoh (2002: 256), 'Agency is not a birthmark or permanence, but something to be discovered, cultivated, nurtured, activated and reactivated to different degrees of potency through relationships with others'. Thus, agency is elastic. It evolves and reshapes. It requires and reactivates potency through connections to others and depends on the active participation of both migrants and locals.

Yet what happens when the migrants are young and unaccompanied? Is it possible to imagine conviviality when the migrants are children on the move? As young, unaccompanied and undocumented, they are highly vulnerable. They are positioned in a precarious setting and thus are extremely dependent on others. Nevertheless, they are crossing borders on their own, making decisions, taking actions and surviving despite the precarity of their lives. Therefore, viewing them only as helpless and fragile does not do justice.

Contemporary childhood studies reject modernist characterisations of children as silent or dependent subjects (Mayall 2013) and seek to reposition them as agents that take an active part in the world. Led by the new paradigm of childhood, a vast body of knowledge challenges characteristics such as irrationality and helplessness as child-like. It shows that children are deprived of the ability to speak, to have an impact over their own lives and to be regarded as political subjects. This scholarship promotes children's agency and demands a space for children's voices in the so-called adult-world (Jenks 1982; Mayall 2013). As Prout & James (1997: 8) articulate, 'Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live'. Since childhood shapes agency in particular ways, children's participation in the world should be studied, analysed and conceptualised as such (See Jenks 1982; Prout & James 1997; Mayall 2013).

The new paradigm of childhood influenced scholarship focusing on unaccompanied child and youth migration. In the past, unaccompanied child migrants were identified as one of the most precarious and vulnerable populations. Quite justifiably, the need to protect them was emphasised in research and policymaking (Goździak 2010). At the same time, it has been widely claimed that the representation of unaccompanied children as traumatised victims of exploitation leaves little room to consider their agency. According to Ensor (2010), the depictions of their passivity have flattened out their experiences and overlooked the immense complexities of their lives. Recent scholarship reacts to these critiques and emphasises child migrants' resilience, decision making, and ability to navigate their lives within the constraints of their worlds (see Punch 2007; Hashim & Thorsen 2011).

The vast interest in unaccompanied migrating children's agency, however, has been insufficiently applied in the study of their relationships with their host societies, leaving little room for imagining conviviality. Two central scholarly tendencies overshadow thoughts about mutuality and reciprocity in this context. First, the literature depicts a rather dichotomous attitude of host societies toward unaccompanied minors, as either protective or rejecting (see Bhabha 2000; Goździak 2010; Kohli 2011). Second, the existing literature overemphasises host societies as determining the nature of the relationships with unaccompanied children and youth, while marginalising the latter's active role in their formation (see Bernard & Gupta 2008; Sloth-Nielsen & Ackermann 2016). The dichotomy of rejection versus protection and the marginalisation of children's roles in forming sociality within their host communities, push aside thoughts of conviviality.

This article argues that unaccompanied child and youth migrants play underappreciated roles in shaping conviviality with their host communities. Their gradual participation in local socioeconomic dynamics shifts relationships which are initially based on protection or rejection, to be mutually rewarding. Focusing on the experiences of young Zimbabweans at the South African borderland, we see that while unaccompanied children and youth were extremely

vulnerable in the face of violence and xenophobia at the beginning, they acquired knowledge and skills over time. Making considerable efforts to become contributing participants in their environments, they built reciprocal socioeconomic dynamics with their host communities. By identifying opportunities, becoming knowledgeable, developing skills, and using their acquired expertise for the wellbeing of others, they played a key role in forming conviviality at the borderland.

The article is based on ethnographic research conducted during two visits to Harare during 2014–2015, and a nine-month stay at the Zimbabwean–South African borderland in 2016–2017, in Musina, South Africa, and in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe.[3] Ethnographic work was conducted in two shelters in Musina, one for boys and one for girls;[4] each hosted 30–40 unaccompanied children and youth at the time. Fieldwork was also conducted in public spaces in Musina, mostly with children and youth living in the streets or with their employers, and at the South African side of the border checkpoint, in a small informal business site.

The target population was children and youth, 12–24 years old, who migrated independently before the age of 16. Data collection was based on ethnographic work that included various forms of interviews according to participants' age, and willingness.[5] In addition, participatory observations and deep hanging out were carried out throughout my stay at the borderland, mainly in the shelters, the streets, the border checkpoint, youths' workspaces and my apartment[6] which some participants visited on a regular basis. Participants' names were changed for their protection and wellbeing. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with NGO and community-based organisations' staff, shelters' staff and management, transporters, employers and teachers. A thematic data analysis method was employed. Throughout my fieldwork at the borderland, I had the privilege of working with two research assistants in different periods, Nyasha Vuranda and Peter Uledi, who both played a vital role in this research.

There are numerous ethical considerations in research such as this. Age and status are prominent categories that intersect when working with unaccompanied minors, emphasising participants' hyper vulnerability which must be considered (see Kohli 2006). My foreignness and whiteness were influential, and numerous layers of mistrust had to be worked through to create a comfortable setting for the participants (see Mackenzie *et al.* 2007). I found ethnography to be the best form of engagement setting since it provided the participants and myself time to get to know one another. It enabled the participants to decide the level of interaction and closeness, and to change their participation decisions according to their own will (see Swartz 2011).

MIGRATION TO THE ZIMBABWEAN−SOUTH AFRICAN BORDERLAND

Zimbabwe has long been at the centre of migration flows. Families that spread and extend across Zimbabwe's national borders, commercial and labour dynamics in Southern Africa, droughts and famines, have all shaped regional migration as a commonplace phenomenon (Tevera & Zinyama 2002; Crush & Tevera 2010). From the end of the 1990s, Zimbabwe suffered negative growth, inflation, unemployment and deepening poverty (Sachikonye 2002; Ranger 2004). The socioeconomic and political crisis peaked in 2008–2009, with hyperinflation and skyrocketing unemployment. The health and education systems nearly collapsed. Alongside the HIV/AIDS pandemic and violent election campaigns, Zimbabwean society experienced an unprecedented national trauma, expressed, among other things, in mass migration. Much of that migration was directed to South Africa (Crush & Tevera 2010).

There are no reliable estimates of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, and data seem to be influenced by political agenda rather than by facts (Crush & Tevera 2010; Stupart 2016). It has been commonly estimated that 1.5−3 million Zimbabwean migrants live in South Africa (Crush & Tevera 2010; Segatti 2011), among them unaccompanied children and youth who cross the border looking for work, education opportunities, or a way to reunite with family members. According to a former IOM representative in Zimbabwe, unaccompanied minors constitute 1−3% of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, indicating that tens of thousands of unaccompanied children crossed the border to South Africa since the early 2000s.

Following the fall of the apartheid regime, South Africa became a continental destination for people fleeing political conflicts, wars, violence, poverty and unemployment, which created one of the most volatile migratory collisions of our times (Landau 2005; Segatti 2011). The South African government adopted a narrow interpretation of the Refugee Act concerning Zimbabwean migrants, making refugee status determination inaccessible to most of them (de Jager & Musuva 2016). There seems to be a gap in the case of unaccompanied minors, between South Africa's constitution that expresses obligation towards their wellbeing, and the reality in which migrating children are often neglected and rights are being overlooked (Chiguvare 2011). As the country has been struggling with its own alarming rates of child abuse and neglect, and as HIV/AIDS and poverty take a grave toll on the South African family structure (Seedat et al. 2009),[7] migrating children's rights are being overlooked.

In addition to excluding policies, South Africa has been acknowledged as one of the most hostile destinations in the world for African migrants (Claassen 2017). Rejection and exclusion are experienced daily, through alienation and hostility of local populations towards Zimbabweans, including xenophobic attacks, abuse and murder (Crush 2001; Landau 2005). Among the victims are also unaccompanied children and youth who experience violence and rejection during border-crossing, in public urban spaces and in schools (see Fritsch et al. 2009; Nyuke 2013; Crush & Tawodzera 2014; Morreira 2015).

Yet there are different tales of migration to be told. Supported by alternative views from other parts of South Africa (see Hay 2014; Chekero & Morreira 2020), the Zimbabwean–South African borderland also shows more complex dynamics. While the findings from this study support previous arguments concerning xenophobia and violence, they also reveal that after a certain period, children and youth were able to form other relationships with local communities based on mutual interests and reciprocity. Since most of the participants in this study have been staying at the borderland since 2008, when Zimbabwe's socioeconomic and political crisis hit rock bottom, it was possible to investigate the formation of their connections with local host communities as a process. Their long presence at the borderland provides a unique analytical point of view into the implications of time on relationships between unaccompanied young migrants and host communities.

While the borderland was a migratory space historically, during the crisis of 2008, thousands of people were crossing the border from Zimbabwe to South Africa daily, turning the borderland into an emergency zone. The municipality of the border town of Musina designated the town's concert outdoor space called the Showground to serve as a refugee settlement from July 2008 to April 2009. The conditions at the Showground were tough, and the area became dangerous as crime and health hazards increased (Mahati 2015). After the haphazard refugee camp was closed in May 2009, the local community was confronted with what the media called 'a human tsunami' of Zimbabweans. Extensive media coverage attracted international NGOs who intervened in the crisis and provided assistance to undocumented migrants (Elphick & Amit 2012).

Community-based organisations undertook a leading role in addressing the specific needs of children and youth (Elphick & Amit 2012). The most significant response was initiated by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa[8] (URCSA) that established a shelter for unaccompanied minors in 2009, managed by the Christian Women's Ministries (CWM). With the assistance of the UNHCR, CWM opened another shelter in 2010, separating the girls from the boys. Save the Children, the South Africa Red Cross Society (SARCS), IOM and the Department of Social Development (DSD) have all been involved in this project in various forms and timeframes, yet it is the CWM congregation that has kept the shelters operational throughout the years. Jacob Matakanye, the manager of Messina Legal Advice Office (MLAO) and a board member of CWM, reflected on the establishment of the shelters: 'Musina is a small town. We have street kids in big towns like Jo'burg, Pretoria, but Musina didn't have that … We had seen them in town in any open space begging and they were sleeping in the streets. We came together and said, "how can we help these kids who are sleeping at open spaces and they are open for abuse, for anything?" We negotiated with the churches to accommodate these kids' (Matakanye 2016 Int.). In retrospect, the shelters were far from providing adequate places of safety. With acute lack of funds and unprofessional staff, children's basic needs were often neglected

(Chiguvare 2011; Mahati 2015). Chiguvare (2011: 10) describes the living conditions at the shelters as 'inhumane'. Mahati (2015) argues that politicised decision-making processes led to children's resentment towards the staff of the shelters. Nevertheless, by examining children and youth's participation in forming relationships with various members in their host communities, we come to see other facets of interaction in monitored environments, such as schools and shelters, and unmonitored environments such as the border checkpoint area.

BOUNDED BY PROTECTION AND REJECTION

In their journeys from their homes in Zimbabwe, unaccompanied children and youth reached the border with plans to settle down in different locations. Some wished to reunite with family members in South Africa, others wished to find ways to resume their education, and many were desperate to find employment. Since migration was common, almost everyone knew someone who 'made it' in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, and other cities. Children and youth arrived at the border area with an idea of going to these cities, without knowing how distant these cities are from the border checkpoint and without having any means to pay for the journeys. While many managed to find ways of moving on to other places, others were stranded at the borderland, where they had to find ways to survive.

Stuck at the borderland, many young Zimbabweans went to work in farms while others continued walking to the nearest border town (Musina) (Figure 1), where they lived in the streets, in shelters or with employers. Some stayed at the South African side of the border checkpoint, where an informal business area had sprung up to provide various services to travellers, truck drivers, officers and soldiers. Regardless of the differences in each location, young participants shared common experiences of vulnerability and dependency during the initial stage of their lives across the border.

The vulnerability that children experienced was mostly expressed in violence and abuse, and the inability to fight back or stand up for themselves. Crossing international borders often entails life-threatening risks such as trafficking, violence, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), abuse and exploitation (see Bhabha 2000; Seugling 2004). Natural hazards, abusive intermediaries and various nefarious agents shadow those who migrate without proper documentation. For children, most of all girls but also young boys, these unprotected spaces are particularly threatening. They are threatening not only when trying to cross them but simply by being in their surroundings (see Baldwin-Edwards 2005; Helleiner 2013). Young migrants must hone survival coping mechanisms and endure violence as a matter of routine (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian 1999).

The Zimbabwean–South African borderland is a hyper-violent space that has been widely acknowledged as particularly dangerous for women and children on the move (see Fritsch *et al.* 2009; Nyuke 2013; Mahati 2015; Morreira 2015). Both at the border checkpoint and Musina, many young participants
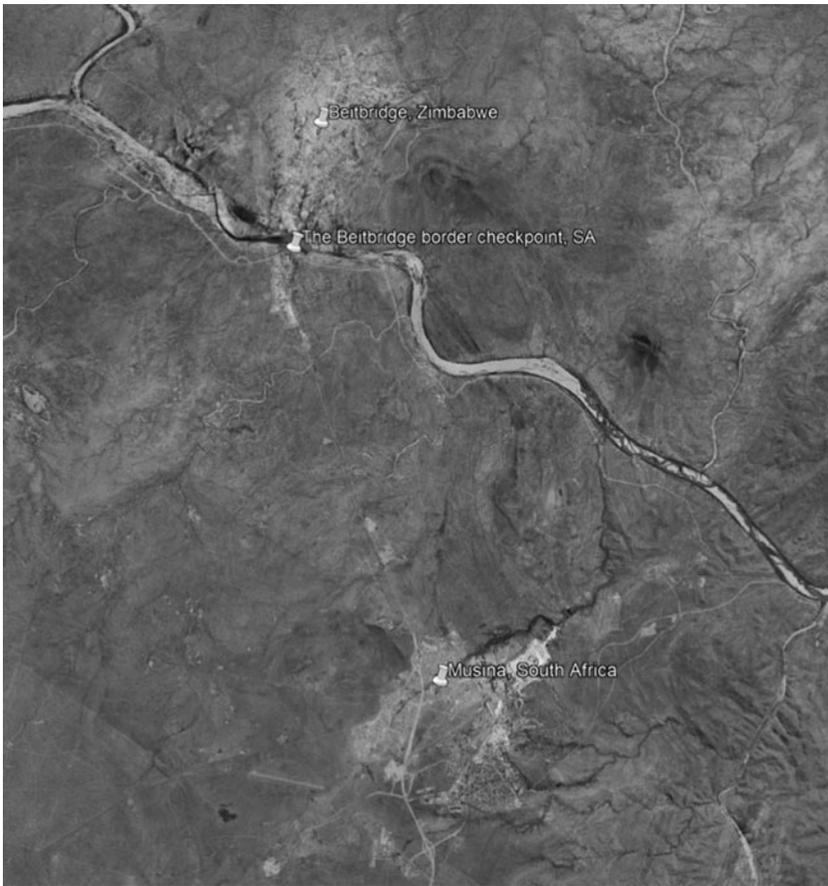
Figure 1. The Zimbabwean–South African borderland (Google Earth 2021).

were exposed to violence at the hands of state representatives, employers, local community members and peers. They were at risk of being arrested and deported, and experienced constant physical threats, harassment and beatings. Since their stay in South Africa was illegal, they could not turn to the police and reach out for help or protection.

I met 21-year-old Adam in the Musina shelters, two years after he graduated from high school. After crossing the border for the first time, he spent three months at the border checkpoint when he was 14 years old. When he realised that I was also working at the border, he told me: 'It's very tough because if the police catch you, they will beat you … I was beaten up several times … Sometimes they can even beat you that when you go, you can't sit down. You will lie down on the stomach for two days' (Adam 2017 Int.). Violence was not only carried out by the police and the security forces but also by locals, as 23-year-old Jimmy, who has been living at the border checkpoint since he was

15 years old, said: 'It's very dangerous … That's where people are getting robbed … raped, killed. They ambush you. They can even hide behind rocks, behind trees, sneaking, so when they see people – you can't run away … You just stand there and let them do what they want. Then they release you. Sometimes, if you have bad luck, they can even kill you' (Jimmy 2016 Int.). The ongoing potential for violent encounters shaped the everyday life at the border checkpoint. As young, newcomers, foreign and illegal, children and youth felt helpless and at times had to endure whatever was coming their way.

Violence and rejection were also characteristics of the initial stay in the streets of Musina. Melvin, Tavonga and Ray had lived on the streets for less than a year when we met, and they were surviving by begging and doing piecemeal work. In a group interview, they painfully described locals' negative sentiments towards them: 'People think we are bad people because we are street kids … We will die here because people think we are delinquents … They can do anything to us' (Melvin, Tavonga, and Ray 2016 Int.). Exposed to maltreatment, abuse and violence carried by locals and by the authorities, they felt helpless and were afraid for their lives.

Participants were exposed to violence and robbery even at the shelters. Bongani, aged 17, who had been living in the shelter since 2009, shared his views about the violence, robbery and helplessness he felt when he was a young child: 'Somebody could come and say, "you are a Zimbabwean", and steal something from you because he knew that you have nothing to do … They used to beat us because they knew that we didn't have back-up … They hate foreigners. Once they saw that I have a phone – they took it … They knew that if I go and report the case to the police … they can arrest me.' (Bongani 2017 Int.). While the shelter was safer than the streets or at the border checkpoint, abuse, exploitation and violence took place there as well. Similar to other spaces, as newcomers, children and youth felt that there was nothing they could do to stop it.

Xenophobia was discussed often among the participants in this research. It was not only the violence of it but the humiliation and the hatred. It was especially hurtful when it was expressed by people who were supposed to provide protection and assistance, particularly in the schools. Thirteen-year-old Ryan had arrived at the shelter a year before our conversation. He recounted: 'Sometimes the Sepedi[9] teacher doesn't treat me well … During the reading time, I fail to read, and she can say "you Zimbabweans came here to trouble us"' (Ryan 2017 Int.). The classroom, particularly the home language class, was often experienced as a space of rejection, where Zimbabwean children's academic difficulties were responded to by anti-immigration expressions of teachers and students.

Children and youth's testimonies shed light on their initial encounters with the local host communities as one-sided. Since they were foreign, unfamiliar and extremely vulnerable, they were in the hands of locals who either protected them, as in the case of the CWM, or abused them, such as in the cases of the violence and rejection they had to endure from various people around them.

Their stories support the general tendency to depict relationships between unaccompanied migrant children and their hosts as a dichotomy of protection versus rejection and as actively shaped by host communities and not so much by the children and youth themselves. As demonstrated in the next section, the difference in young people's ability to participate in these relations was time, perseverance and calculated use of their stay at the borderland. By accumulating knowledge, developing skills and mobilising opportunities to engage with the local communities, they were able to offer some services in return to their host communities, changing the initial one-sided dynamics and making room for conviviality.

FORMING CONVIVIALITY

Unaccompanied young migrants are known for their productivity and innovativeness. Research from various parts of the world, including South Africa, shows that they generate independent lines of work, operate business initiatives, take care of their families and search for better education opportunities (see Punch 2007; Huijsmans 2008; Hashim & Thorsen 2011; Nyuke 2013; Mahati 2015). They have been widely acknowledged to be active and resourceful, not only in their decisions to migrate and their journeys, but also in rebuilding their lives across national borders. Examining boys and young men's engagements with securitisation and cross-border trade at the border checkpoint and their academic proficiency in Musina, sheds light on their ability to mitigate against their disempowerment through mobilisation of knowledge and skills.

Securitisation and cross-border trade

Skills and expertise at the border checkpoint were often related to children and youth's acquaintance with the dangerous physical and social space. The familiarity was a matter of time and practice. Upon arrival, unaccompanied children and youth had to get to know their environments for survival. They had minimal choices in terms of employment and made a living mostly by vending. As vendors, they became acquainted with the residents and the workers at the border area, but it was hardly sufficient to keep them well fed. It also exposed them to exploitation and abuse by other residents and the police.

Eager to find more profitable and respectable occupations, some worked to become cross-border transporters. Getting involved with informal cross-border trade was a way of moving up the socioeconomic ladder at the border checkpoint. It was a profitable line of work, yet it was hazardous and required constant cross-border mobility. Therefore, it was vital for children and youth to foster alliances with key actors who were able to assist them in crossing the border without passports on a daily basis.

The initial encounter between young Zimbabweans and security forces was often violent. However, some deeper connections were formed over time, as children and youth began providing small favours and services to police

officers and soldiers, such as cooking, washing clothes, shining shoes and running errands, either for a small fee or for free. In return, young migrants were protected in their cross-border mobilities or police raids. Forming relationships with law enforcement at the borderland (see also Palmary & Mahati 2015), made children and youth's participation in informal cross-border trade possible. This was the case with Morris, who arrived at the border when he was 16 and was still there eight years later. In his interview at the border checkpoint, he explained how he keeps himself safe when practising informal cross-border trade: 'Most of the time, the soldiers are roaming the bush, so when you come, you go straight to the soldiers to protect yourself … They know me. They can walk with me from Zim to South Africa, so it's safe' (Morris 2016 Int.). Richard, who arrived at the border when he was 15 years old, shared similar experiences: 'It became very easy for me at the border. I was crossing each and every day without a passport … The soldiers, they would say, "those guys stay around here" and just let us pass' (Richard 2017 Int.).

Morris, Richard and others relied on their connections with security forces while engaging in informal cross border trade. There was a trial-and-error process. They were arrested and deported several times. Nevertheless, as they mastered the informal paths and learned how to avoid robbers or unfamiliar police officers, they became experts in their line of work. Not only did they become actively involved with the border economy, but they carried out responsibilities that adults were reluctant to undertake, which made them essential participants in informal cross-border trade.

After a certain period of engaging with the young Zimbabweans, police officers, security guards and soldiers realised that these youths were capable of doing much more than shining their shoes. Twenty-year-old Daniel who has been living at the border checkpoint since he was 12, said in his interview: 'We were beaten by some cops, but with other cops we got along. Those people who were chasing us (security forces) were afraid of people who were stealing or robbing and stuff. So, the group of the guys who was not stealing, like us, started helping the cops, trying to find some thieves. That's how we got along' (Daniel 2017 Int.). The border checkpoint was highly violent and criminal, as many porous borders are, and people who resided there suffered greatly from its lack of security. Since protecting the area required a profound acquaintance with the physical surroundings and the people, the youths living there for years became an asset to local policing forces. Recognising the exceptional knowledge they had of the border area and the people living there, officers had started involving some youths in their operations.

The joint operations were organised by the police and executed by the police and youths. The youths were often luring robbers while the police were waiting to catch them. Jimmy recalled his first operation: 'I still remember in 2010 … We used that bush road, so the robbers didn't know we were with the police. They came running towards us … One guy pulled out a knife. That's when the police attacked them' (Jimmy 2016 Int.). Unfamiliar with their surroundings and unable to conceal their identity, the police needed the youth's

expertise and knowledge, even though the youths themselves were considered as outlaws. On the other hand, it is the illegality of their status, their foreignness and lack of caregivers, that enabled the police to use them as a bait and put their lives at risk.

Unique relationships were also developed between the youths and truck drivers who were the economic driving force of the informal business area near the border checkpoint, as they spent days and sometimes weeks there, waiting for customs clearance before entering Zimbabwe. Young people often made a living from washing trucks and running errands for the drivers, and over time, formed personal relationships with them. Since the drivers were older, earned decent pay, were not criminals and provided for their families, they became role model for the youths. With time, the youths embraced a protective role for "their" drivers and viewed themselves as responsible for the drivers' safety in the criminal environment of the border. Since the drivers typically carried large amounts of cash, they were frequently the targets of robbery. Jimmy described the dynamic: 'We used to go to the bush looking for those robbers … We started beating them … We wanted to kill them because they were troubling us. They are robbing the drivers … Drivers are the ones who give us money and they do everything for us, so we don't want them to be robbed' (Jimmy 2016 Int.). Jimmy revealed the inverted power relations between vulnerable drivers and knowledgeable unaccompanied youth. The truck drivers had money, a profession and social recognition, but they were also vulnerable and needed protection. After spending years at the border checkpoint, unaccompanied youths were the ones who were able to provide that protection and make sure that the people who were providing for them would be able to stay there safely.

Becoming protectors of the border, connected to traders and police, drivers and soldiers, unaccompanied youth's roles in the local community transformed. While the initial stage at the border checkpoint was characterised by violence and helplessness, relationships between the youths, truck drivers and police officers became mutually beneficial. Youths' expertise made them instrumental to the drivers they protected and to the police officers they assisted. These collaborations enabled the youths to move freely across the border, make a better living, contribute to their host community, and become an unofficial part of the state's attempt to make the border safer, despite being young, unaccompanied, and without a legal status.

School performance and tutoring

Knowledge and skills were instrumental in young Zimbabweans' ability to engage with their host communities in Musina, in another unexpected way. Upon arrival at the shelters in Musina, children and youth were enrolled in local schools and were often held back two or three grades or more. As they had already missed school for some years, this was viewed as yet another setback. With time, however, some participants learned to leverage this

situation. After adjusting to the local school system and getting acquainted with the local languages Sepedi and Tshivenda, some of the unaccompanied youths managed to become top students. Tracy Mafutsa, a mathematics and science teacher who left Zimbabwe during the 2008 crisis and has been working in Musina High School, described her experience: 'I remember one South African teacher on an Award Day commenting that "the Zimbabwean children are putting the school on the map". Of course there was murmurings, attitudes, but it's a fact. You would see that the best learner of each subject was Zimbabwean … They can even become the best learners in a native language of South Africa because they put a lot of effort into whatever they do … I remember a Sepedi teacher who was commenting in the staff room that the Zimbabwean children are better in Sepedi than Sepedi's themselves' (Mafutsa 2017 Int.). Zimbabweans living in the Musina shelters became known for their high performance in the schools and the neighbourhoods. Excelling in school was considered by many as the best means to improve their starting point in life. They hoped to matriculate with high grades and obtain scholarships for tertiary education.

Like cross-border trade and securitisation, children and youth's ability to develop their academic skills relied on time, self-motivation, and the host community's willingness to assist. Local communities in Musina singled out school achievements as the main goal for the young residents of the shelters. This message was promoted by the shelters' staff and management, teachers, foster parents and members of the congregation (see also Mahati 2015). Working hard and becoming good students, obviously depended on the will, effort and self-discipline of the students, yet being encouraged to do so by the people around them had a tremendous impact on their everyday struggles with the poverty in the shelters and enabled some of them to resist the temptation of leaving school and finding a job.

The youths' acquisition of skills, knowledge and high performance also rubbed off on their neighbours, peers and schools. In a group interview at the shelter's yard, 14-year-old Gideon, Lovemore and Matt were discussing:

Lovemore: 'Some of the South Africans are coming here and we teach them.'

Gideon: 'They come to Zimbabweans, to learn from Zimbabweans … and say, "Hey guys, how can you solve this?" and we just help them.' (Lovemore, Gideon & Matt 2017 Int.)

The boys took pride in the fact that they were helping local students with their schoolwork. They had study groups at the shelters, and local children came to study with them.

Zimbabwean students' success in school had a significant impact on their social status. David, a South African youth leader, recalled the complex dynamics between South Africans and Zimbabweans at school when he was younger, pointing to feelings of alienation and closeness, friendship and jealously: 'we would have kids in categories depending on where they come from, but … I

have encountered intellectual experiences with people whom I thought I would never learn from … There is an element which gives most of the unaccompanied minors in our school, I can't say special treatment but a privilege … I understand that the background of their education is more advanced than ours which gives them an advantage when they come to our schools. Educationally, that element brings us together … We even have role models from them. Zimbabwean kids are smart, hey?' (David 2016 Int.). David recalled being surprised that he was able to learn from his Zimbabwean fellow students, and discussed how Zimbabweans' good performance at school challenged stereotypes and xenophobia. He expressed a mixture of feelings, including compassion, anger, admiration and affection, and emphasised how academic abilities and achievements brought them together.

These dynamics were discussed in a joint interview with Vusi, a private tutor from Malawi, and Amon Chinata, a Zimbabwean teacher, who pointed to the social and institutional value that Zimbabwean children brought to the schools: 'They were actually instrumental in the upliftment of the pass rate in Musina High … They were like pull factors to other learners … who ended up actually picking up their pace' (Chinata 2017 Int.). The teachers, both foreign, pointed to two significant contributions of Zimbabwean students to the community. First, they contributed to the performance level and pass rates of local schools in Musina. Second, there seemed to be productive competitiveness between Zimbabwean and South African students. To empower themselves, invest in their future, and change their position at school, Zimbabweans wanted to be considered as the best students. Their aspirations motivated South Africans to work harder, as Chinhata explained: 'The jealousy is always there … But usually, it is something that actually pushes many of the local kids to work harder' (Chinata 2017 Int.).

Neighbours who were living around the shelters also benefitted from the shelter residents' academic skills. As youths from the shelters began tutoring, local families living in poverty were finally able to afford tutors for their children, as the Zimbabwean students were willing to teach local children for a small fee. In this way, unaccompanied children and youth living at the shelters used their knowledge and skills to earn some pocket money and assist their neighbours. They felt valued and appreciated. Their motivation, high achievements and willingness to contribute were embraced by schools, peers and neighbours, creating a mutually beneficial environment.

Coming from the strict Zimbabwean education system and being held back in their integration within the South African education system proved to be of value for children and youth who were able to turn this context of migration to their advantage, and to the advantage of the people around them. Since they were attending local schools in large numbers, they had an impact on their surroundings. They were still perceived as foreign migrants, even after a decade of living in Musina, but they were able to use their skills in order to shift the initial dynamics of rejection/protection, and become more powerful,

respected and valued, as they made meaningful contributions to the local community, setting the stage for conviviality.

YOUNG MIGRANTS AND THE POTENTIAL OF CONVIVIALITY

The Zimbabwean–South African borderland provides two distinct and unique arenas of conviviality among unaccompanied young migrants and their host communities. One is a space of illegality, informality, extremity. It reveals a radical shift in power relations in which unaccompanied migrants with illegal status became protectors of the space and of the people who assisted them. The second is a monitored space of so-called normalcy, in which children and youth were able to provide academic assistance for locals, despite being unaccompanied and foreign. They changed the perception that foreignness comes with lack of knowledge, raised the regional school pass rates, and assisted local struggling families. In both spaces, children and youth were acting in their own interest and for the wellbeing of others. They were able to do so because they had local counterparts who were doing the same. Together, they were gradually forming conviviality in unexpected manners.

Conviviality is necessarily relational, and thus, to see its potential, it is necessary to take a step back from common protection/rejection discourses that overlook the complexities and marginalise children and youth's participation in forming relationships with their hosts. Conviviality requires that we embrace the idea that children's worlds are not separate from the worlds of adults. Rather, they are intertwined. Conviviality serves as a framework that brings vulnerability and agency together in a manner that does not overshadow one or the other, since it is based upon acknowledging incompleteness. All are vulnerable and all are potent. All cope with their vulnerabilities by joining others in a way that maintains the self, facilitates togetherness, and provides a way of complementing one another.

Time has multiple functions in conviviality among young migrants and local communities, and not only because of the obvious aspects of growing up. Naturally, it is expected that when unaccompanied children and youth grow up, they learn new things and develop skills (see Kohli & Kaukko 2017; Grabska 2019). Yet this research reminds us that age is only a part of it. At the borderland, children at the age of 13 were living in conviviality with their host communities while some 18-year-old youths were not, since it takes acquaintance, understanding of the space and the people, and acquiring local knowledge. As Costa (2019) acknowledges, conviviality is a process that constitutes and transforms over time. The case in point provides a living example of this meaningful understanding, as it shows conviviality in the making. Time enabled those with very little power to accumulate knowledge, develop needed skills and contribute to the people around them, while supporting and empowering themselves and shifting power relations. Respectively, time was functional in reshaping locals' perceptions of unaccompanied child and

youth migrants, from viewing them as dependent, needy, poor and estranged to people who have much to offer.

In this spirit, it is easy to become enamoured with the idea of conviviality. Conviviality brings comfort and faith to realities that are often portrayed as exploitative, unjust and cruel. But the view from the borderland explicitly shows that the foundations of conviviality among unaccompanied child and youth migrants and local populations are economic and social interests. It does not, in any way, suggest a disappearance of boundaries. Chekero & Morreira (2020) rightly argue that conviviality among migrants and locals influences the strict distinctions between outsiders and insiders, yet we should be sceptical about its ability to erase or even blur these distinctions. It may lessen the distance and provide access to social, economic and political spaces, yet its ability to transcend the core distinctions between the self and the other, the local and the foreign, the insider and the outsider, should be considered cautiously.

CONCLUSION

The Zimbabwean–South African borderland reveals a complex and gradual process of the making and remaking of relationships between unaccompanied children and youth and their host communities into those of reciprocity, framing time and knowledge as game-changers for young migrants. Upon arrival, being young, undocumented and unfamiliar with their surroundings, migrating children and youth were dependent on the protection and assistance of the host communities. They were highly exposed to exploitation and abuse at the hands of individuals and institutions who held sway over borderland economic and social networks. They struggled to navigate between the various hierarchies of power and had little influence on their connection with people and institutions.

Time was an essential component in shifting this dependency into conviviality. By staying put, accumulating knowledge and becoming skilful, whether in becoming border-experts or excellent students, unaccompanied young Zimbabweans became more autonomous and powerful. Supported by protective institutions and people who provided them with assistance, children and youth were able to use their time to accumulate knowledge and hone skills that were in demand, thus, not only taking care of themselves but assisting the people around them. Their knowledge and expertise were instrumental in earning respect and forming mutually beneficial bonds. As the host communities enjoyed children and youth's expertise, the children and youth in question led a transformative process, turning spaces of dependency into spaces of conviviality.

NOTES

1. Drawn from the understanding that borders are more than indicators of where countries begin and end, scholarship offers more holistic terms such as Frontiers (Hennessy 1978; Chappell 1993),

Borderscapes (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr 2007; Brambilla 2015) and Borderlands (Baud & van Schendel 1997; Agièr 2016). I use the term *borderland* as a point of departure, similarly to other scholars of the Zimbabwean–South African border (Daimon 2010; Pophiwa 2017; Nshimbi & Moyo 2017), emphasising both sides of the border area as a unit of analysis (Hansen 1981; Asiwaju 1993). Since Zimbabwe and its proximity to the South African border area was highly present in unaccompanied children's economic and social negotiations with host communities, I find the term 'borderland' fitting in this context.

2. There is a lack of scholarly discussion about the definition of host communities. In this article, the term 'host community' refers to the entire scope of institutions and persons in the host country that are in any form of contact, official or unofficial, permanent or random, ongoing or one-time, with immigrants.

3. The ethnographic work was conducted on both sides of the border, yet this article draws on data collected only at the South African side of the borderland since its main concern is the encounter between local populations and unaccompanied and status-less children and youth. While local communities in the Zimbabwean border town Beitbridge had conflicts with unaccompanied children, they did not refer to them as foreigners, outsiders or migrants, and the children themselves had legal status.

4. Girls and young women played a key role in this ethnographic research. However, their relationships with host communities in Musina were quite different and will be the theme of a separate study. Unlike Musina, where there were many unaccompanied girls and young women, the border checkpoint was a highly masculine space and the few unaccompanied girls who were there did not wish to participate in this research.

5. Most interviews were individual life story interviews. However, children and youth living in the streets preferred group interviews, as well as some of the participants living in the shelters. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young participants or participants who struggled with the openness of life story interviews.

6. Future Families kindly hosted me in their volunteer apartment throughout my stay in Musina. I appreciate their assistance and thank them for their generosity.

7. According to South Africa General Household Survey, in 2018, more than 450,000 South African children were orphaned by both parents, 55,000 were living in a child-headed household, and nearly 9 million children were living below the lower poverty line (Hall & Sambu 2019).

8. The URCSA was formed in 1994, after the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) were united (URCSA 2017). In literature focusing on unaccompanied child migrants in Musina, the URCSA is still occasionally referred to as DRMC (see Elphick & Amit 2012). The church is locally known as both 'The Dutch Reformed Mission Church' or 'The Uniting Reformed Church' (URCSA 2017).

9. Students in Musina were required to learn Sepedi as their home language. This was one of the main challenges for Zimbabwean students in the local education system.

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