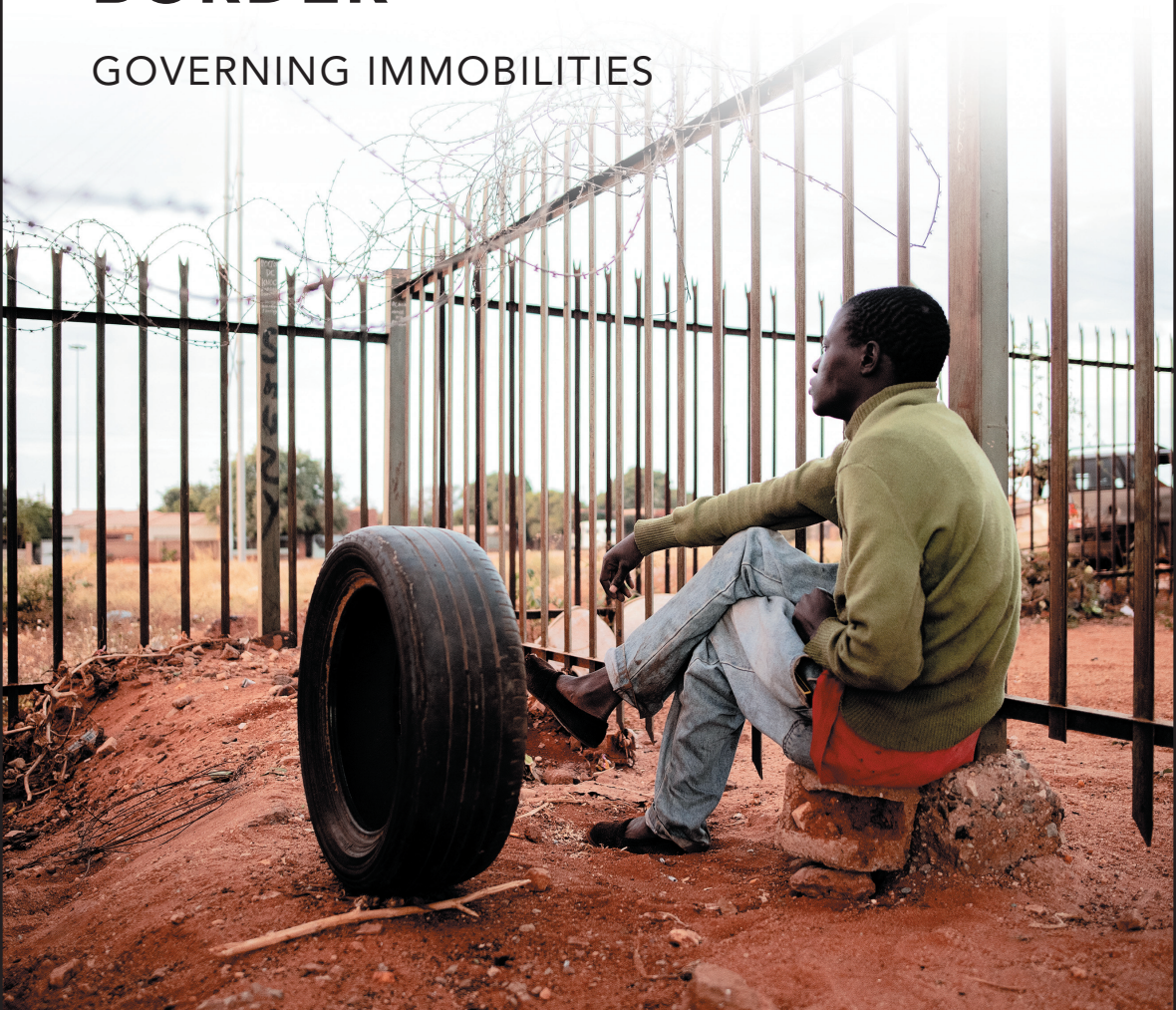


KUDAKWASHE VANYORO

MIGRATION, CRISIS AND TEMPORALITY AT THE ZIMBABWE–SOUTH AFRICA BORDER

GOVERNING IMMOBILITIES



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Governing Immobilities

Kudakwashe Vanyoro

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Front cover image: Luca Sola, 2019, Musina temporary shelter for migrants

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In loving memory of my departed
grandmother and grandfather who gracefully
defied the Zimbabwe–South Africa divides.

Dedicated to your great-granddaughter
Ncumo, your great-grandson Mzwandile
and their beautiful mother, whom I have no
doubt you would have adored.

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List of Abbreviations

A level	Advanced level
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CZCCS	Concerned Zimbabwe Citizens Campbell Shelter
DoH	Department of Health
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DOL	Department of Labour
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSD	Department of Social Development
DZP	Dispensation Zimbabweans Project
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
EU	European Union
FO	field office
GDP	gross domestic product
GNU	Government of National Unity
ID	identification document
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGOs	international non-governmental organisations
IOL	Independent Online
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LHR	Lawyers for Human Rights
MC	master of ceremony
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MHF	Migrants Health Forum
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
N1	national road
NGO	non-governmental organisation

OAU	Organisation of African Unity
O level	Ordinary level
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
POC	person of concern
RRO	Refugee Reception Office
RSD	refugee status determination
RTP	responsibility to protect
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANDEF	South African National Defence Forces
SAPS	South African Police Service
SARC	South African Red Cross
SCUK	Save the Children United Kingdom
SEZ	special economic zone
SMG	Soutpansberg military grounds
SOP	standard operating procedure
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
Wi-Fi	wireless fidelity
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZDERA	Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZSP	Zimbabwe Special Permit
ZEF	Zimbabwe Exiles Forum

About the Author

Kudakwashe Vanyoro is Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the university's African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) (2021–3).

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Series Editor's Preface: Bordering Mobility

Nando Sigona (University of Birmingham, UK)

Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that defies disciplinary boundaries. The *Global Migration and Social Change* series was conceived as a platform for new scholarship in refugee and migration studies that welcomes diverse disciplinary perspectives, theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. The world of migration studies has evolved to encompass a rich tapestry of voices and viewpoints, and this series aspires to capture the essence of this evolving field.

Migration, Crisis and Temporality at the Zimbabwe–South Africa Border: Governing Immobilities by Kudakwashe Vanyoro stands at the intersection of empirical investigation and theoretical inquiry, offering a unique perspective into the constitution of migrants as immobile political subjects at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border.

The border is a place of policing and caring – a site of ambiguity and ambivalence – where migrants encounter not only the state but also non-state actors, particularly humanitarian agencies. The book highlights the contentious and negotiated nature of humanitarian interventions, and their contribution to produce Zimbabweans as immobilised migrants.

Through an in-depth examination of the coping strategies and tactics of Zimbabwean migrant living in the border town of Musina, Vanyoro's book draws attention to the nature of borders not just as geographical markers of territorial and political boundaries, but also as temporal and historical ones. To understand Zimbabwean migrants' immobility, Vanyoro argues, it is essential to locate their experiences spatially but also temporally in the Zimbabwean crisis, and the significant transformations in livelihoods, welfare and status they have experienced since the country realised independence from the British in 1980. By doing so, the book invites a more nuanced understanding of how power operates across and through borders. Delving into the material and symbolic function of borders in everyday state-making processes, the book shows how borders translate into a multitude of practices of boundary making that are differently experienced by migrants crossing them.

Introduction: Zimbabwe's Crisis and Immobilities

Introduction

Within African border studies, it is the norm for scholars to conceive sovereignty in a binary framework that uses opposing formulations of the workings of power within African states. This is evident in analyses interested in examining the constitution of postcolonial subjects at the margins of African states when exploring the function of postcolonial borders for border dwellers. A dominant part of these works shifts between depictions of African borders as a space that allows border dwellers to resist the postcolonial bureaucratic state and a space that provides room for the state to separate and marginalise them. Indeed, a focus on these people's lived experiences can provide answers to the types of subjectivities that African borders animate. However, there is a risk that such paradigms return to a binary question of power because they seem to insist on asking whether African states facilitate human agency or work against it.

Research from different parts of the African continent has answered this binary differently. A large corpus of it is in the field of border studies, and not necessarily that of migration. Some researchers have established that the boundaries of certain African states largely appear to be spaces that allow border dwellers to be defiant to state power – represented by militarised borders, strict visa regimes and so on – through the use of the borders for commerce, cross-border migratory flows, informal economies, labour, contraband and criminal networks. Others are convinced that African borders contain human agency because they are at best securitised boundaries and obstacles marked by limited permeability of human and goods movement, which all points to a conception of sovereignty as arbitrary. Meanwhile, others have found a middle ground by reading borders as paradoxes that cannot be captured in one singular binary framework.

However, there is limited focus on contexts in which African states' attempts to securitise their borders to keep displaced populations outside their territory coexist with humanitarian interventions to save the lives of those afflicted by the border's securitisation effects. [Inka Stock's 2019](#)

book *Time, Migration and Forced Immobility: Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Morocco* helps challenge these binaries to the extent that they lose their presumed opposition to a temporal framework. Indeed, this shows that these binaries can become constitutive and co-productive under certain conditions by working together to produce a functional sovereignty that effectively governs the lives of migrants who are left with little option but to wait. This appreciation adds immense fecundity to our imagination of the political subjectivities of border dwellers.

Yet, like other vast literature in Africa before Stock's book, the dominant focus on immobility is mostly related to the dire consequences of borders on Africans seeking to migrate to Europe. With the exception of an established corpus of work focused on the experiences of African refugees residing in the continent's camps, we still know little about immobility in the context of the emerging concern with temporality in migration literature and contexts of regional migration taking place within the borders of the African continent itself that is not necessarily considered as forced migration. This focus opens new lines of enquiry into migration studies now increasingly focused on South-South migration in Africa to move beyond concentrating on national regulations and policies that regulate cross-border mobility or camps.

One such possibility is a focus on the invisibilisation of boundaries through local daily behaviours, actions and practices that often go unnoticed within spaces that are not designed as camps. These can be useful in reflecting the coming together of time and space as well as state and non-state in migration governance practices and border regimes. As temporality, in this context, also provides an alternative idea to theorise on migrants' potential to evade border controls and challenge the goals of migration policies, this focus aids in contesting the dichotomy of agency–structure. While attentive to the duality of African borders, critical African border studies that perceive them as paradoxes still need to deepen this paradigm, especially because they rarely engage with concerns of temporality and immobility. A temporal engagement takes us to a place of understanding that this paradox occurs through an intricate entanglement of practices of government and subversion, even if it is in ways that may not always allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government, particularly as they look to the future for other possibilities.

This reading is allowed by moving beyond the geographical perspectives and dominant thinking about the interplay between African borders and immobility that remain in such studies on border governance. Because they emphasise the relevance of place, it is easy for these views to reduce immobility to an existential crisis of victimhood that is resolved, even if for a moment, when borderlanders respond with whatever is deemed innovative. A temporal view offers a middle ground akin to [Scheel's \(2017\)](#) 'appropriation of mobility', where, applied to this case, migrants appropriate

immobility in the context of hostile border controls by waiting until they get what they want. In this way, it is possible to imagine how forces of domination and resistance feed off each other and charter a context-specific and ongoing contestation between power and agency that is productive but also does not offer a resolution to the structural issues at hand. This remains the case even when this ‘vast machine of illegalisation’ provokes ‘dangerous forms of border crossing’ and conduct that the ‘very phenomena of tough border enforcement is supposed to forestall’ (Scheel, 2017). In this way, although temporality and appropriation appear to be contingent frameworks to resolve the conundrums of domination and subordination in the footing of the clock, the former takes place in ways that appropriate time through immobility without necessarily allowing the governed to shape and transform regimes of government. For Mbembe (2001), thus, power is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be described as ‘illicit cohabitation’. This describes a relationship made fruitful by the very fact of the state and its subjects having to share the same living space. As Mbembe (2001) argues further, this results in the ‘mutual zombification’ of both the dominant and those whom they purport to dominate, meaning that each has robbed the other of vitality and has left them both impotent. So, in summarising, the postcolonial state and its subjects reside within the same episteme in which wars are temporally waged, won and lost.

This makes the border regime at play in this book – the one between Zimbabwe and South Africa – a timely focus area to address the topic of immobility in relation to wider questions about migration governance, borders and temporality that have emerged in anthropological migration studies. It is not unusual for Zimbabwean migrants to encounter both state and humanitarian actors as they navigate their irregular and precarious entry into South Africa. These experiences can be traced back to the early 2000s when thousands of displaced and undocumented Zimbabweans escaping the Zimbabwean economic crisis sought refuge in the bushes and streets of the small border town of Musina due to its placement near the border crossing between Zimbabwe and South Africa (see Figure 0.1 [map]).

While the topic of immobilities gained centre stage as the media brought Musina, formerly a small and unrecognised town, to a prominence that presided the surge of humanitarian workers assisting mostly immobile migrants from unprecedented displacement, academic focus remained aloof from the subject. Transit shelters and informal camp-like arrangements grew out of desperation in a country that has a non-encampment policy. Out of the Zimbabwean crisis grew a body of literature that offered a complete account of the crisis and the political history that led to it. Another body of work took interest in the experiences of displaced Zimbabweans in the border farms between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Meanwhile, the influx of humanitarian actors and its impact on the daily lives of Zimbabwean

Figure 0.1: Map of South Africa and its borders



Source: Nations Online Project (www.nationsonline.org/oworld/map/south_africa_map.htm)

migrants who continued to arrive in South Africa yet were unable to travel further into the interior remained marginalised. This left an empirical gap in understanding these experiences. This gap is of wider significance to theorising on migration governance and borders within South–South mobility contexts and those of crisis, not to mention thinking through appropriate methods to use in this endeavour.

The argument of this book

This book is an empirical and theoretical enquiry into the constitution of Zimbabwean migrants at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border as political subjects. This focus is situated in a dynamic context of crisis where state and non-state perspectives on the situation in Zimbabwe have varied since Robert Mugabe’s demise from power and Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa’s subsequent ascent. This enquiry necessitates taking an interest in the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants – men in this particular instance – crossing the Zimbabwe–South Africa border through irregular means who end up waiting in transit shelters under the care of humanitarian actors. The focus allows this book to make three arguments which contribute to wider theorising of migration governance and borders, challenging a) binary understandings of how power operates on the lives of Africa’s border dwellers, and b) the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders.

First, this book argues that the making of the Zimbabwe–South Africa border and migration governance regime is not merely a territorial process but one situated in time and space. The book offers a perspective on the border and state attempts to regulate migration that move beyond binary thinking about power by revealing, throughout history, its polymorphous performances as an exterior geographical frontier and an interior mechanism of social categorisation. Polymorphous performances indicate that state boundaries extend into social, political and other processes beyond physical lines on the outskirts of nation-states. This manifests itself in everyday actions (see [Nshimbi and Moyo, 2020](#), p 6) such that beyond the lines demarcating the territories of sovereign nations, the state fabricates and displaces borders on to a multitude of differentially experienced boundaries and discriminatory criteria ([Frassinelli, 2019](#), p 2). This phenomenon attests to the material and symbolic function of borders in everyday state-making processes.

[Musoni \(2020, p 4\)](#) has illustrated this possibility by imagining, throughout history, the Zimbabwe–South Africa border as more than simply a marker of territorial and political boundaries between the two states. Working from such theoretical conceptions, this book extends itself to analyse everyday encounters immobile Zimbabwean migrants in contemporary times have

with time-based dimensions of controlling migration that create and sustain immobility.

Second, the book argues that what we are seeing in the context at hand, as elsewhere, is not merely direct regulation of mobility by the state but also through bureaucratisation of displacement in humanitarian institutions that have stepped into matters regarding the management and care of migrant lives. This trend is clear from the responses of different non-state actors along the Zimbabwe–South Africa border to Zimbabwe’s economic and political turmoil.

These humanitarian projects are not politically innocent, value-free or outside state-making processes, in as much as they may be intended to be just that. Therefore, I am not arguing here that, for example, the assemblage of transit shelters in Musina forms part of a consistent assemblage of governance together with the formal state. Even if they were to be constituted by accident, I am more interested in the alignment of the discourses informing these assemblages with humanitarian and political conceptions of crisis that are expedient to the state’s securitisation goals and the political work these humanitarian workers do in constituting Zimbabwean migrants as subjects. However undeliberate, it is clear from my assessment that these interventions tie themselves to a productive relationship with the South African state that is governmental in serving political goals of selecting between migrants and asylum seekers.

In turn, problematic funding mechanisms informed by this binary have shaped behaviour such that different humanitarian workers appear to represent and advocate for various public interests that, whatever the intent, provide material benefits associated with instrumentalising the lives of Zimbabwean migrants. Humanitarian matters regarding the welfare of Zimbabwean migrants are contested and negotiated around them bearing in mind their expendability as objects of suffering. In this way, what we see in this border regime is the unstable bureaucratisation of a humanitarian crisis through various managerial mandates meant to offer services and protection to a population widely, yet variably, regarded as illegible for refugee protection.

This ambivalent response entails that humanitarian actors are entangled in trying to work in a context where the framing of the Zimbabwean crisis that created the sentimentality necessary for their presence has shifted to one that suggests that the crisis is no longer as torrid under the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe. This regime of truth functions as a governmentality tool by transforming the border space into an anomalous regime that classifies and reclassifies migrants across a dynamic temporal scale. The classificatory system that emerges from this dialectic reshapes Zimbabwean migrants’ institutional ties through the determination of the kinds of protection and recourse available to them.

This has had lasting effects on the question of the making of Zimbabwean border dwellers as subjects and also, as this book lastly argues, the knowability of the border as either this or that. This book contends that the Zimbabwe–South Africa border is not as knowable as the common power–agency binary may suggest. It is, rather, a site of ambiguity that produces paradoxical effects for immobile migrants in different places and times, culminating in ambivalent political subjectivities. Establishing the indeterminacy of these political subjects that emerge under conditions of immobility requires taking an interest in the meanings migrants attach to their situation by looking at the everyday relationships they forge in the spaces in which they become contained after crossing the border. Therefore, my focus in this book is on the dextrous and contradictory, yet constitutive, perceptions and actions of Zimbabwean migrant men dwelling at a border transit shelter for men.

This shelter is in Matswale, and houses men over the age of 18. It has a capacity of 350 people, but stranded Zimbabwean migrants and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi arrive on an ad hoc basis, resulting in a population of even double the capacity per night. The men were initially allowed to stay for 72 hours, but due to modifications at the refugee reception office (RRO) that limited applications to certain days based on nationality, the shelter has modified these limits.

When I began my fieldwork in 2019, Zimbabwean migrant men stayed at the shelter for as long as they needed to save money to travel further south into the interior of the country. The space was administered by Bishop Jonas, a church pastor involved in the humanitarian cluster made up of several local and international humanitarian organisations who relied on their contributions to keep it running. The situation had changed compared with 2008, when residents were provided with food, as they now had to fend for themselves. The only exception was during the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020–2, when they were fed once or twice a week, but this was short-lived such that by 2023, it was no longer happening.

While the clock would act as an instrument to discipline the men that resided here through the norms and rules instituted by the shelter management, like curfews and times to attend church, the men were also inventive enough to appropriate it in order to attain their own objectives through their emphasis on the importance of social time. This challenge meant that although the state of being immobile would threaten the men's life trajectories and sense of autonomy as they endured emasculating religious disciplines enforced by multiple actors in charge at the transit shelter, they could also manipulate the institution of religion, as well as its beliefs and practices, to reorganise, reimagine and ultimately reshape the remaining migration journey. Others, by acting on other residents, would lay new claims to belonging on the basis of trust forged with Bishop Jonas, sometimes

through a blatant turn to violence, which would enable them to reclaim their autonomy and maximise their deliberate attempts to remain at the shelter.

While engaged in some discussions about religion, and while these debates are difficult to evade as faith-based organisations are an area of focus in the book, this book is not explicitly about migration and faith. This literature is engaged to the extent of only problematising popular conceptions about the relationship between beliefs and ritual, which helps labour the book's argument about the border's unknowability.

These three arguments are organised within the book's proposed framework of governing immobilities in an attempt to raise important considerations for the broader landscape of migration and border studies and the African border studies literature.

Zimbabweans becoming displaced

The Zimbabwean crisis

The Zimbabwean crisis is an important context for this book as it reveals how Zimbabweans have been displaced and, in the process, why immobility at the border may be a preferable condition in their life trajectories. Zimbabweans have experienced significant transformations in their livelihoods, welfare and status since the country realised independence from the British in 1980. For a country with great prospects then, the events that followed were as if out of nowhere. In the last two decades, this has forced many people to leave the country to escape political and socio-economic turmoil.

While the crisis that has given rise to this tidal exodus was for the most part surprising, it was for some a ticking time bomb that they had foreseen. Following Zimbabwe's independence, Samora Machel and his Harare agent Fernando Honwana counselled Robert Mugabe to avoid 'revolutionary zeal' and learn from Mozambique's experience in 1974–5, when the country chased out the Portuguese and nationalised the economy (Bourne, 2011; Kanyenze et al, 2011, p 1). They warned that a mass exodus of White people would be terrible for the economy. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere similarly pleaded with his friend Mugabe to 'preserve the jewel in Africa' that he had inherited.

Zimbabwe succeeded in becoming Africa's envy until 1995, with the continent's best educated and most literate population, a sophisticated health care system, bustling tourism and wealthy and fertile farmland that fed the region (Bourne, 2011; Rogers, 2019). This, however, was not the entire story. Zimbabwe had already begun to experience migration, which surged in the 1980s initially influenced by ideas of race and ethnicity. This exodus consisted of White people fleeing the former colony after it gained independence, aided by guaranteed pension packages established by the Muzorewa government and used as an incentive to leave.

Ethnic tensions between Shona and Ndebele, which were once useful in the administration of colonial divide and rule and an alternate history advanced by British, South African and Rhodesian historians in the 1950s, and taken up by Shona historians as well (Ngwenya, 2017), were exacerbated by state massacres in the 1980s. Ndebele communities were deeply outraged as a result of the genocide (McGregor, 2008). They retaliated with a military insurrection headed by enraged former fighters, as well as destabilisation actions in the Midlands and Matabeleland by armed organisations that the apartheid government allegedly supported. South African intelligence took a vested interest in inflaming tensions between the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in order to cut off supply lines to the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the African National Congress' (ANC) guerrillas, and spark a civil war. Bandits and ex-Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) combatants were thrown together with innocent Ndebele people by the newly constituted Zimbabwean government, which crushed the uprising mercilessly (Hammar, 2008a). This genocide, which took place in the early post-independence years between 1982 and 1987 and was dubbed Gukurahundi after the name of the Fifth Brigade that coordinated it, claimed the lives of 20,000 people in Matabeleland and left 7,000 individuals suffering from the torturous after-effects (Alexander et al, 2000).

These measures forced the ZAPU to sign an uncomfortable unification accord on 22 December 1987 with the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), essentially forming a single party and formally transforming Zimbabwe into a Shona-dominated, one-party state (Beremauro, 2013). Between 1983 and 1987, many Ndebele people escaped the genocide and killings in Matabeleland and the Midlands, with many entering South Africa in unauthorised ways (Jager and Musuva, 2016).

Other Zimbabweans relocated to the farms in northern Limpopo province to join several generations of Zimbabweans who had already settled there due to declining economic possibilities in Zimbabwe (Rutherford, 2008a). Others travelled to Botswana, and some to the United Kingdom. These individuals were displaced as a result of Zimbabwe's 1990 adoption of a structural adjustment programme (Rutherford and Addison, 2007). When it became clear that the economy was not generating enough jobs due to a lack of investment, the government, like many other African countries, adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991, on the advice of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012). The ESAP signified a dramatic shift from the 1980s' state-led economic development policy to a more market-driven approach (Kanyenze et al, 2011). As a result of better and more job prospects in care and nursing, the Zimbabwean movement extended and feminised throughout the 1990s (McGregor, 2008; Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012).

The ESAP was also a colossal failure that resulted in the cataclysmic collapse of the Zimbabwe currency on 14 November 1997. This date, known as ‘Black Friday’, marks the start of the country’s ongoing financial crisis.

The government’s unbudgeted payment of gratuities to liberation struggle war veterans only contributed to exacerbating the financial crash and its consequences (Kanyenze et al, 2011, p 40). War veterans sought their part after seeing the political elite living large, forcing Mugabe to offer them cash handouts in 1997, which triggered hyperinflation because it necessitated the printing of money (Rogers, 2019). Attending to this group’s grievances related to land ownership: Zimbabwe also launched a fast-track land reform programme (FTLRP) in June 2001, which involved the occupation of White-owned commercial farms by war veterans and a violent youth militia known as the ‘Green Bombers’. All this resulted in a lengthier economic and political crisis marked by high inflation and unemployment.

The government was soon confronted by aggrieved opposition from members and supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC),¹ labour union and non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists and other social groups like teachers, to whom it responded with political violence (McGregor, 2008). Mugabe embarked on a campaign of physical persecution and official media attacks against the MDC, branding them as puppets of the British and Western countries collaborating with British Prime Minister Tony Blair to bring about regime change. Overall, Zimbabwe’s relationship with its development partners deteriorated to the point where it was designated as a high-risk country (Moyo and Yeros, 2007). Direct aid to the government was halted, and the country was denied access to loans from international institutions such as the World Bank (Moyo and Yeros, 2007; Moyo, 2012). Zimbabwe became a Western pariah. The results were that the value of salaries eroded because of hyperinflation,² and there were commodity shortages and lengthy lines, job losses, violations of human and property rights and an increase in the number of immigrants (Willems, 2011; Kadenge, 2012; Chitando et al, 2015).

Mugabe did not help matters by going to war in the Congo to produce income. This had the opposite effect: the expense of the conflict was US\$27 million per month, which further ruined the economy and enraged many (Rogers, 2019). Agriculture, which had been the country’s backbone,

¹ The MDC was a popular opposition group led by Morgan Tsvangirai that had risen to confront Mugabe by winning a referendum in February 2000 on a state-sponsored draft constitution, only four months before vital parliamentary elections in June (Moyo, 2012; Musila and Moyo, 2012).

² To the point where it was bantered that a wheelbarrow heaped with billions of notes would be required to buy a loaf of bread.

failed, and the West applied sanctions, sending the economy into free fall (Moyo, 2016).

The tidal exodus

These events account for the tidal exodus of Zimbabweans. By 2008, men and women who could no longer rely on their husbands' earnings left Zimbabwe in search of work in Europe, the United States, Australia, South Africa, Botswana and other parts of the world (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012). Four million Zimbabweans fled the country between 2000 and 2010 (Rogers, 2019). According to the Solidarity Peace Trust (2004), a total of three million Zimbabweans have been displaced, accounting for nearly 25 per cent of the country's population (Musoni, 2020). The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) state that there are up to 1.5 million Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, both regular and irregular (ZIMSTAT and IOM, 2009). According to the 2011 national census, there were 2,188,872 foreign-born persons living in South Africa, with 672,308 of them from Zimbabwe (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Unofficial estimates claim that three million Zimbabweans, out of a population of 15 million, are now global 'economic refugees' in various African and non-African nations (Asuelime, 2018).

A substantial number of these Zimbabweans have crossed the border to live and work in the Limpopo province. Reasons for leaving are economic and political. While they may have other goals in mind, such as reuniting with relatives in Gauteng or elsewhere, or seeking better-paying positions outside the agricultural industry, many end up working on border farms in Limpopo as seasonal pickers, pack-shed workers or permanent employees (Rutherford and Addison, 2007; Rutherford, 2008a). Others may choose to stay in the border town of Musina and save money in order to travel further south (see Rutherford, 2008a; Moyo, 2017). Many perceive vocational niches on the border as a potential route to socio-economic and personal mobility.

The majority, however, face unexpected delays after crossing the border since not everything goes as planned prior to their crossing. They find themselves in situations and areas of immense ambiguity and utter negation, which have a significant impact on their goals and life paths. Border towns like Musina frequently serve as safe havens for Zimbabwean migrants who have experienced disruptions. The disruption, as well as the feelings that come with it, is frequently gendered. Because Southern African women are often denied access to the knowledge and resources that would allow them to be classified as 'highly skilled' under state standards, immigration eligibility generally discriminates against them in practice (Dodson, 2001). This is due to a significant male bias in most African countries when it comes to access to income, property, resources and education (Dodson, 2001). Men,

on the other hand, may take up the masculinised duty of providing for their families and become imprisoned in a vortex of loss of dominance, virility and control that comes with it. Those with limited education and generally from rural backgrounds are often obliged to migrate under the 'low skills' labour migration criteria.

This type of mobility is usually irregular. As a result of patriarchal norms, masculinities, beliefs, practices and institutions, both men and women are vulnerable to unsafe border crossings, which are often accompanied by disruption and violence, albeit in different ways. Migrant women are subjected to sexual and gender-based violence both before and after crossing the border into South Africa (Elphick and Amit, 2012). Women, especially those travelling with children, may have different intragroup experiences. Bus drivers, for example, may be more sympathetic to migrant women who are stuck at the border by offering to make exceptions for a 'pay forward' if the person has relatives further south in the interior who are willing to help. At the same time, this may make them exposed to unscrupulous male transportation providers. All these migrants frequently encounter what Robertson (2019) calls contingent migratory paths, in the sense that they are involved in unforeseeable, unpredictable and unforeseen circumstances, as well as the fact that they become dependent on unfolding events or conditions. This means deviating from their original objectives and goals to pursue new and unexpected goals (see, again, Robertson, 2019).

Conducting an ethnography of immobility and time at the border

The first time I ever stayed in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border town of Musina was in 2016 when I was conducting research about the experiences of health care providers interfacing with migrants in public primary health care facilities. At that time, I had little knowledge about the living conditions of migrants in the border town. I then came across an assessment of life in the town, which accounted for the experiences of those who encounter contingent migratory paths. *The Polokwane Observer* (2016) suggested that no one wants to stay there because crime is rampant, even in broad daylight. It described Musina as 'the most hazardous area to live in', as outside latrines are the norm of the day, laundry is hung on driveways to dry, spaza stores compete with ordinary residences, a neighbouring river has the look of a waste dump and a former change house serves as a creche.

When I registered for my PhD at Wits in 2018, I was by then firmly intrigued about why Musina was still providing housing quarters for scores of families who experience disruptions, such as the one presented earlier who may have no choice but to live in cramped quarters. I framed my

research project around two interrelated questions. How do the disruptions at the border affect the experiences of these migrants? Ultimately, how do these experiences alter concepts of migration governance and borders? In addressing these questions, I adopted an ethnographic approach. This was chosen because I felt it allows for a rigorous critique of approaches that overlook the duality of borders.

This oversight often emerges when researchers focus solely on marginalised groups or governance institutions, ignoring the interaction(s) between these institutions and citizens/non-citizens. As Findlay and Li (1999, p 53) have suggested, migration scholars can break out of the strictures of either perceiving migrants as independent individuals behaving in a voluntarist fashion or as puppets whose behaviours are fully dictated by structural forces through working from the worlds of structure and subjective experiences (Findlay and Li, 1999, p 53). These are studies that focus on the confluence of 'power' and 'vulnerability' within border zones, as Tevera (2020, p 19) puts it. Ethnography is adequately equipped to engage with this nexus through its focus on practices which desist from a single perspective of reading borders from below or above.

With the necessary conviction to conduct an ethnographic study, one relative helped me discover the social network of Zimbabwean migrants as well as the Musina areas where they frequently ended up after crossing the border. The first Zimbabwean I engaged was her friend Emelder, whom she introduced me to. Emelder ran a fruit stand in town. This is where I had an experience that put me in a position to know about the men's shelter, the site of my research, while spending time with her and talking to her co-workers to begin making sense of my fieldwork.

I had just finished interviewing Emelder when I observed a young man sitting on a rock between her and the next vendor's stall while I sat on a crate adjacent to her stand. At first, I assumed he was there for some vending-related business. Tinashe was an 18-year-old boy from Zvishavane, as I later discovered through Emelder. 'Where are your parents?' I enquired, to which he replied that they had died. Tinashe stayed with his grandmother, and he explained that he had left Zimbabwe to look for work since they were out of food. Emelder had discovered him sleeping opposite the Spar along the N1 while she was putting up her selling booth early that morning. The N1 is a national route in South Africa that stretches from Cape Town to Beitbridge at the Zimbabwean border via Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Polokwane. For the night, Tinashe had wrapped himself in plastic bags for warmth. Emelder had fed him and was now arranging for him to stay at the boys' shelter for unaccompanied minors.

I called a long-time colleague based in the Musina humanitarian arena, and asked her to aid him with shelter. The first thing she enquired about

was his age. When I told her he was 18, she told me he did not qualify for the children's shelter because he was too old. She suggested that I contact Bishop Jonas, the head of the men's shelter.

Bishop Jonas proclaimed that his mother was from Zimbabwe, despite being born to a South African father. This was the professed source of his allegiance to the Zimbabwean cause. He had set up the shelter in response to an incident he had witnessed when he was attending a church service and saw the body of a man from Zimbabwe who had been killed lying in the red dust opposite the yard of the shelter where there once stood a bush before he cut down all the trees. "I had bought this stand for church but then I saw my relatives being beaten by the community. They did not have anywhere to go and the police would just ignore them." This conviction was still present in him as he picked up my phone call and expressed his willingness to assist with Tinashe's situation.

I escorted Tinashe to the shelter in a taxi. Emelder had two bananas, scones and oranges packed for him. She also advised him to be cautious and diligent in avoiding the police because he lacked papers. She concluded by advising him to apply for asylum. Tinashe was wearing a shabby pink jacket, a blue shirt, pink shoes and dirty torn pants as we walked to the taxi. He barely had one night's worth of clothes in his little Nike backpack. Tinashe appeared to be so young and in need of immediate assistance that the taxi's conductor suggested I take him to the children's shelter after I explained his situation to him. He appeared to be far too young to be living with the men. Not only were there no meals provided but petty crime and bullying were also rampant. Unable to enter the boys' shelter because of his age, Tinashe was also adding to the numbers in a place where the lives of the people who lived there were quite precarious.

I left him there in the care of Joseph, who I learned was the senior security guard. He occupied the guard room where he sat on a yellow plastic bucket he used as a makeshift stool, watching over numerous phones that were charging belonging to some of the residents. In the room was a small two-plate stove and a curtain cordoning off a single bed from the view of those entering as new arrivals or to charge their phones at a cost of R5. I made plans with Tinashe to check on his welfare the next morning.

I met Bishop Jonas for the first time the following day. Tinashe was not there and I never saw him again. Sensing my worry, Joseph gave me comfort when he said, "This place is just like a bus stop mdhara. It is not surprising that Tinashe, the young man you dropped off here, has already found a well-paying job". It is also possible that he could not withstand the conditions of the shelter, I thought, while trying my best to conceal the debate streaming in my head. Bishop Jonas cut it short as he complained there and then that, "The men here just sleep badly like this". Making reference to his junior colleague Pastor JoJo, who I was to meet for the

first time at the service that Sunday, he said they had debated letting the project go as they had been writing to donors for them to donate to them with limited success.

This situation pointed to a shifting terrain in as far as humanitarian support for Bishop Jonas' cause to protect Zimbabwean migrant men was concerned. The only relief was that unlike Zimbabweans who the state considered to be 'economic migrants', at least those it saw as genuine asylum seekers like the Congolese and Burundians were receiving direct legal and social assistance support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through its two implementing partners. Also moved by the prevailing situation at the shelter, I quickly left my post at Emelder's vending stand in town to devote all my time to understanding what life was like at the shelter, where I supplemented my observation and interviews with diary approaches. I also spoke with humanitarian workers and senior representatives from faith-based organisations in Musina more widely. I interviewed 80 people in total: 55 Zimbabwean migrant men, 15 Zimbabwean migrant women and ten humanitarian workers. Our discussions ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. Except for a handful who could speak better English and were willing to deviate into any language, I conducted most interviews with Zimbabwean migrants in Shona. All the interviews with humanitarian workers were conducted in English. I obtained permission to conduct and record these interviews through verbal consent.

It was vital to supplement interviews with observation in order to create a knowledge of the qualitative data beyond text to incorporate pictures, sounds and sensual life that could potentially strengthen my representations of these men's social world (Baker and Edwards, 2012). As a result, I accepted the role of a participant observer looking for anything to make a case for improvements to the shelter's living circumstances. This was to be a tenuous identity.

During my first week in Musina, I attended my first church service at the shelter, and Bishop Jonas began his speech by inviting me to the church's altar. He recommended that I sit at the front of the church before the service, which was traditionally reserved for church officials such as pastors, elders, bishops and deacons in the Pentecostal church tradition. As I stood before the altar, he introduced me by convincing his church and the few migrant men present that I might easily be Jesus, sent by God to the shelter to save the migrants from starvation. He painted me as someone who could make a significant difference to the lives of the migrant men at the shelter if they showed restraint, discipline and 'respect for God'. From that day on, the migrant men from Zimbabwe began to see me as a moral authority figure. Some of the people I spoke with expressed optimism my study could aid them in obtaining asylum-seeker permits from the RRO in Musina. The office had since stopped hearing Zimbabwean migrants'

asylum petitions because of the idea that the majority, if not all, were ‘economic migrants’.

Bishop Jonas’ ‘initiation’ into the church gave me the moral authority I needed to visit the shelter at any time of day and use any space I required. It also meant that the men saw me as a member of the church leadership, making it difficult to persuade them to communicate with me about anything that could harm the shelter or Bishop Jonas. I would witness the men’s everyday activities as they prepared for the day, cooked, waited for piece jobs at the ‘robot’ and even just hung out in the yard.

I was also fascinated by the religious services, rituals and traditions, as well as the procedures of the humanitarian inter-agency working group meeting that I attended. At the church, I was interested in the message being preached, just as I was interested in the humanitarian discourses about Zimbabwean migrants and transit shelters at the humanitarian inter-agency working group meeting. Outside the shelter, my other observations focused on the actions of other Zimbabwean migrants. These took place in places like the town, the mall, local and cross-border taxis, lodges, *bhodha bhodha* cars (small regular vehicles, often old, that park in town to ferry people [shoppers, commuters, informal workers] to the Beitbridge border post and surrounding locations), *rokesheni* (the local term for Nancefield’s high-density area) and key sites for migrants like the RRO, which I walked past every morning on my way to the shelter.

Diaries helped me observe in a non-intrusive way because I did not have to be present when the men filled them out, which was usually late at night. I requested Zimbabwean migrant men to keep a notebook in which they could record how and where they spent their time during their stay – their daily routine – and highlight significant moments and feelings. I employed the paper-and-pencil method, providing exercise books and pens to participants. These detailed reports were able to capture daily experiences in the natural surroundings of participants, resulting in narratives that were temporally close to the events (Iida et al, 2012).

A note on ethics and positionality

The question of anonymity

A few issues related to ethics arose in the field, but the most important one that needs addressing here is about revealing and protecting identities of participants. By looking at the role of non-state actors, this book inevitably grapples with a challenge regarding the question of anonymity.

While naming plays a key part in addressing power relations and should not be reduced to ‘personal stories’ or ‘intimate complaints’, as Kilomba (2010) would call them, but serious accounts of discrimination, it is also important not to jeopardise people’s livelihoods or put their reputations at risk. For

these reasons, in this book, I do not use participants' real names. While all participants are not identified by their real names but by pseudonyms, this does not preclude the risk that they could be recognised by places and family details. Also, there is still a possibility that humanitarian professionals can be identified by their role and relationships with renowned international agencies like the UNHCR.

To minimise this risk, I have desisted from using the real names of local faith-based organisations and NGOs in this book, but use descriptors in describing real events as some of them are controversial and unverified allegations that take place in a context of contestation and politicisation. In the case of presenting individuals, in addition to using pseudonyms, this book desists from using specific dates to avoid risk of identification when describing participants in such a way as to make them potentially recognisable.

My place as a Zimbabwean researcher

My place as a Zimbabwean researcher in the field was complicated by the fact that I was embraced as an advocate for the shelter, when I was in fact a researcher. This issue continued to fester in the fieldwork as it reinforced my positionality as someone occupying an 'in between' space of protean researcher identities. Being a Zimbabwean mediated easy access into the spaces of both the men's and women's shelters. Like Zaman's (2008) presence in a hospital ward in Bangladesh, my presence in Musina and the shelters 'did not indicate anything unusual, unlike what would be the case of a white anthropologist in a colored population' (Zaman 2008, p 150). Perhaps the most unusual thing for me was the living conditions of the men and women at the shelters. Thus, I was caught up in the complexity of researching the 'other' as the 'other' and navigating challenges related to my privilege and my ultimate positionality. The nature of ethnography did not prepare me to deal with questions around conducting research on poor, marginalised groups that I ostensibly belong to.

My access to these two spaces was culturally defined and structured by gendered dynamics, although class also played a more specific role. My male researcher status meant that I was able to conduct more detailed ethnographic research at the men's shelter than at the women's shelter. The women at the women's shelter warily gazed at me as a male figure, and being Zimbabwean meant that they would treat me as a group/community member. This membership simultaneously entailed that the social codes of dress, forms of addressing me and gendered performances applied in our relationship. This would have made opening up to a Zimbabwean man about topics such as sex work difficult for the women because this is socially frowned upon in Zimbabwe. My male body represented the hand of patriarchy that many women are on the receiving end of back home. It also meant that

I was not comfortable observing their daily routine in the intimate space of the church, where they also bathed in proximity in the small, crowded churchyard. It was difficult to ask certain intimate questions that were pertinent to my understanding of their experiences, particularly those related to the 'management' of female bodily issues like access to sanitary towels.

These unspoken social codes prevented me from developing any profound or intimate relationships with these migrant women when compared to the ones I developed with the migrant men at the men's shelter. While conducting this research, my position as a Zimbabwean 'insider' allowed me to ascertain within the first week at the women's shelter that I would not be able to develop the kinds of relationships that would allow me to get 'thick' ethnographic material. The localised notions of morality and being a good, responsible and considerate man/woman acted as a barrier to my access.

Besides these gendered norms, there were times when other experiences challenged the assumption that I was a cultural insider by virtue of being a Zimbabwean migrant, particularly those related to class. The notion of insider–outsider is very intricate to social scientists carrying out ethnographic research and entering the field. Yet, the line between what constitutes the 'inside' or 'outside' in ethnographic research is often blurred (Zaman, 2008). Because of my privilege, I was an insider–outsider. Sometimes, people would address me in Shona, my mother tongue, since I was visibly a Black person in Musina. However, I would, in another moment, walk past Zimbabwean migrants and hear them whispering, "this man has the skin of people with money", despite my best attempts to be dressed casually. These migrants drew on their own unspoken codes of well-being to interpret individuals' bodies in a bid to determine their socio-economic status.

It was also commonplace for the men at the men's shelter to address me in English, only to reciprocate in Shona once I had initiated conversations in the dialect. Most would be pleasantly surprised, and the mantra "So you can speak Shona?" became all too familiar, as it reflected certain presumptions they held about my identity in relation to class. Indeed, I stayed in a hotel that had everything from laundry services to Wi-Fi. In contrast, many Zimbabwean migrants in Musina either had to return to their homes in the township or the rudimentary corrugated iron shelters in the men's case.

It was, therefore, imperative, as Turner (2000) suggests, that I also involved myself in the critique of privilege: acknowledging my own privileges of class. I did not neatly qualify as an insider or an outsider within a research community; therefore, my subsequent analysis benefitted from not assuming any kind of membership and making assumptions about boundaries. Like Zaman (2008), I was both an insider and an outsider who embodied both the advantages and disadvantages of this position. By suspending myself in between these innate boundaries, I allowed myself to be critical of the role of the religious actors representing me as a kind

of Jesus who was sent by God. This would allow my analysis and writing to be mindful of reinventing the same hierarchies of knowledge that I was trying to dismantle, including the common perception that religious interventions in matters of human welfare are politically innocent and averse to matters of governance.

Yet, I still had to grapple with how my presence at the men's shelter generated expectations and hope about the possibility of me bringing changes that required the political authority that I did not necessarily possess. Therefore, throughout the course of my stay, I had to correct some of these assumptions in order to get the pastor and the migrant men to understand my role and what I envisaged as possible change. I had to constantly remind the participants that I could not change the asylum system in Musina to work in their favour. Nonetheless, through sharing their stories, they could help me show 'people out there' that these hidden spaces, in fact, existed so that something could be done in the future. Indeed, writing these stories and participating in different engagements has helped spread the word and raised awareness about neglected and 'invisible' spaces such as the transit shelters in this border zone.

Owing to the material disjuncture that divided us, it was morally wrong for me to simply go about conducting interviews with hungry migrants. Even though traditional conceptualisations of research stress that you cannot compensate participants for their time as it compromises objectivity, I ended up reflecting on this limitation and adapting by using my own money to buy some groceries for the migrant men when I could.

In response to the gendered challenges associated with my work at the women's shelter, I carried out less ethnographic research there since I could not afford a woman research assistant. I conducted a few interviews and scrapped the possibility of observation altogether. I conducted the interviews with the help of my partner, which neutralised the interaction and made participants comfortable to open up to another woman. As a South African, the limitation was that she does not speak Shona, so these interviews had to be conducted in English and Shona simultaneously. This was the most ethical thing to do, as opposed to insisting on making each other feel socially uncomfortable. Nonetheless, in my subsequent writing up of this work, I felt it was best to write more extensively on the experiences of the migrant men at the men's shelter not to misrepresent the experiences of the migrant women at the women's shelter because the interviews with the women were not as rich as I would have wanted. This has meant that aspects of women's immobility and its attendant politics and consequences are discussed in thinking about the separation of shelters, for instance, but these seldom feature in the analysis that characterises the rest of the book. This presents a limitation in extending a robust gender analysis that is evidently needed in this border space.

Anatomy of the book

There are six chapters in this book. The first, *Critical Perspectives on African Borders*, situates the Zimbabwe–South Africa border in the predominant binary interpretation of African borders, which has endured over time in studies that take inspiration from Giddens’ structuration theory. It departs from these interpretations by arguing that the Zimbabwe–South Africa border is better read as a configuration of polymorphous performances that serve as an exterior geographical frontier and an interior social categorisation mechanism. This means that its main function extends beyond spatial characteristics to the deployment of multiple techniques of reinforcing the border through categorising migrants, in ways that also show the centrality of time in migration governance. This relationship reveals a novel interpretation of borders that contributes to challenging the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders. Temporality in this context also provides an alternative idea to theorise on migrants’ potential to evade border controls and challenge the goals of migration policies, which aids in contesting the dichotomy of agency–structure. In this way, it is possible to imagine how forces of domination and resistance feed off each other and charter a context-specific and ongoing contestation between power and agency that is productive but also does not offer a resolution to the structural issues at hand. Temporality and appropriation hence appear to be contingent frameworks to resolve the conundrums of domination and subordination in the footing of the clock, although the former takes place in ways that appropriate time through immobility without necessarily allowing the governed to shape and transform regimes of government. For Mbembe (2001), thus, power is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be described as ‘illicit cohabitation’, resulting in the ‘mutual zombification’ of both the dominant and those whom they purport to dominate. This means the postcolonial state and its subjects reside within the same episteme in which wars are temporally waged, won and lost.

Contesting and Politicising the Zimbabwean Crisis, [Chapter 2](#), argues that there is a productive relationship between humanitarian interventions, moral/religious politics and migration governance at the border that emerges from the discursive acts of (de)legitimising humanitarian crisis through public discourse. This politics, in turn, shapes humanitarian and protection procedures, as well as conduct to migration, that are productive yet dangerous at the same time because of their fluidity and (re)dichotomising effect. The humanitarian sphere thus takes governmental authority over migrants to the extent that it becomes a site of power in the context at hand, as it constructs the legible figure of the suffering migrant through moral sentiment. It is argued here that this sphere of political discourse has become a novel site of governing immobilities in border regimes because it gives rise to practices

that are capable of excluding Zimbabweans by their classificatory nature, particularly as regimes of truth and moral sentiment regarding the crisis that gave rise to their legitimacy become contested. This situation is complicated by the outsourcing of the management of immigration enforcement to third parties who offer, in equal measure, remedies and complications to issues of corruption and fraud at the border. It allows religious actors, humanitarian organisations, senior migrant men and the state to be involved in an economy of turning the misery of the abject into profit, as they run with ideas that allow them to realise margins from the reality of mobility.

Chapter 3, *Governing the Crisis at the Zimbabwe–South Africa Border through Humanitarian Interventions*, argues that humanitarian activities have transformed the Zimbabwe–South Africa border into a space that is aligned with current and dominant migration governance practices and official discourses that emphasise migrant management, categorisation and containment. Indeed, it would be unfair to suggest that these are deliberate attempts or that the assemblage of transit shelters in Musina forms part of a consistent assemblage of governance together with the formal state. However, it is clear in this assessment that attempts to administer their work in a technical and administrative manner enhances some humanitarian workers' autonomy over migrants' lives in ways that maintain the legitimacy of the bureaucratic state and its logics of classifying people as insiders and outsiders, victims and agents. This analysis pushes us to view immobilities as part of a broader typology of power that represents a novel way for humanitarian institutions to manage the lives of migrants. In the context of this book, it is central in showing the importance of going beyond binaries of state–non-state evident in African border studies' understanding of sovereignty, particularly when considering the role of moral sentiments, like discourse, in the conduct of conduct.

Humanitarian Politics: Ambivalence and Undecidabilities of the Border is the fourth chapter of this book. The contestations that would sometimes occur at the humanitarian meetings are the focus of this chapter's analysis. The chapter argues that the Zimbabwe–South Africa border is a place of ambivalence and indecision, allowing humanitarian personnel and faith-based actors to protect lives but also exercise political authority over migrants in transit shelters. Humanitarian workers' autonomy over migrants' lives established in 2008 justified the development of transit areas which required management while working with limited resources. This took place through an agreement between humanitarian actors and faith-based actors with the municipality, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and the police to allow illegalised migrants without documents to reside in the transit shelters while they waited for their papers. There was a clause not to arrest those residing in the transit shelters. This agreement provided security to shelter inhabitants, although it came with certain restrictions that dictated

their conduct as well as their timetable. The police would, from time to time, also violate the agreement when they deemed it necessary, which was instrumentalised by a discourse of criminalisation. Another source of ambivalence emerged from the further deterioration of resources in Musina, which led humanitarian workers and faith-based actors to be caught up in political squabbles over providing basic necessities at the men's shelter. An example is how supporting the payment of a water bill was reduced to a question of not just what was ethical but also what was realistic within humanitarian organisations' mandates, goals and budgets. This reveals the troubled yet productive relationship among humanitarian organisations, faith-based actors and the state that makes it difficult to know exactly what to expect from the border, revealing the limits of essentialising borders in humanitarian contexts.

“Laughing at Them in Silence”: Life in the Men's Transit Shelter, [Chapter 5](#), dives deep into life in the men's transit shelter and some of their encounters with the management's practices, set tasks and ceremonies. It focuses on the space and living conditions in the transit shelter, which reveals the daily impact of humanitarian politics related to contestations over water as well as pastoral strategies and discourses. This chapter argues that there is a relationship of governmentality between the men and humanitarian actors, highlighted by the production of the shelter space as a negotiated settlement between state and non-state actors, regulatory mechanisms meant to keep transit shelter inhabitants in the good books with police and the religious activities of the space, the rents of occupying it and other factors that altogether contribute to the penetration of power into individual discipline. This chapter is organised around the concept of ‘minimalist biopolitics’, which helps to describe a regulatory technology of life concerned with an emerging care for life itself, as opposed to a mere emphasis on the state's sovereign power to take life ([Rozakou, 2016](#)). This minimal biopolitics is driven by religious ritual and politics that is, in and of itself, inseparable from religion's use of a mechanism to instil behaviour that is not at odds with the state's attempt to police criminality associated with migrants, and to ensure that the informal agreement between humanitarian actors and the state is upheld. In this border regime, these all come together as forms of governance connected to state power in one way or another, without the actors themselves always being attentive to it.

[Chapter 6](#) is titled ‘This Place Is a Bus Stop’: Temporalities of Zimbabwean Migrant Men Waiting at the Transit Shelter. Given the humanitarian situation and power relation discussed in the previous chapter, it may be easy to conclude that the everyday control of migrant bodies transforms them into Giorgio Agamben's concept of ‘bare lives’. This chapter explores how disruptions shape the waiting modes of irregular Zimbabwean migrant men who have arrived in South Africa but are unable to travel further into the

interior. This chapter argues, using Lauer's (1981) temporal framework of social time, that while waiting is one aspect of regulating these migrants, it is also a feature of them seeking agency by appropriating immobility in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border regime. This demonstrates how immobilities can be conceptualised in both time and space. In this chapter, the intersections of immobility and agency indicate that the relationship between resistance and control in waiting is ambiguous. This casts doubt on the idea of immobility as an experience that causes people in humanitarian camps to recognise the state of bare life.

The book concludes with a call in *Bringing Time to the Study of Migration Governance and Borders in Africa*. The Conclusion summarises the important points in order to make a case for the ever-increasing relevance of time, as well as to speculate on the implications of the results of this book on how we understand borders. It emphasises the importance of pushing beyond traditional resistance analysis by focusing on the limitations of any single analytical or theoretical viewpoint in presenting the deep complexity and paradox that African borders present. As temporality, in this context, also provides an alternative idea to theorise on migrants' potential to evade border controls and challenge the goals of migration policies, this focus aids in contesting the dichotomy of agency–structure. Anthropology and temporalised approaches' importance is also emphasised by discussing how anthropologists of migration interested in a temporal perspective to migratory processes might apply innovative social science research methodologies to examine people with limited mobility at African borders and how they experience government.

Critical Perspectives on African Borders

Introduction

This chapter situates the Zimbabwe–South Africa border in the predominant binary interpretation of African borders, which has endured over time in studies that take inspiration from Giddens’ structuration theory. It departs from these interpretations by arguing that the Zimbabwe–South Africa border is better read as a configuration of polymorphous performances that serve as an exterior geographical frontier and an interior social categorisation mechanism. This means that its main function extends beyond spatial characteristics to the deployment of multiple techniques of its reinforcement through categorising migrants in ways that also show the centrality of time in migration governance. This relationship reveals a novel interpretation of borders that contributes to challenging the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders, particularly in contexts of South–South migration.

As temporality, in this context, also provides an alternative idea to theorise on migrants’ potential to evade border controls and challenge the goals of migration policies, this focus aids in contesting the dichotomy of agency–structure. It offers a middle ground akin to [Scheel’s \(2017\)](#) ‘appropriation of mobility’, where, in this case, migrants appropriate immobility in the context of hostile border controls by waiting until they get what they want. According to [Scheel \(2017\)](#):

The need for such an alternative concept [appropriation] resides in the shortcomings of the two concepts that are usually invoked in border and migration studies to grasp migrants’ capacity to challenge and subvert border controls. These are the concepts of agency and resistance. The main problem with the concept of agency is that agency, understood as ‘the socioculturally mediated capacity to act’

(Ahearn 2001: 112), always presupposes a structure as its counterpart. The result of this structure–agency divide is a static analysis in which structures and individual and collective forms of agency are analysed separately and consecutively (for a more detailed account of this argument see: Scheel 2013b). What the notion of agency thus fails to capture is what we often find on the ground: An intricate entanglement of practices of government and subversion. The notion of resistance is in turn problematic because resistance is an inherently reactive concept: it suggests an already existing formation of domination that is to be opposed in a reactive manner. Due to its conception as a responsive act (Rose 2002: 387), the notion of resistance fails to register the constitutive role that practices of contestation by the governed play in the transformation of regimes of government (O'Malley et al 1997).

In this way, it is possible to creatively imagine how forces of domination and resistance feed off each other and charter a context-specific and ongoing contestation between power and agency that is productive, even if it does not offer a resolution to the structural issues at hand. It remains the case even if this 'vast machine of illegalisation' provokes 'dangerous forms of border crossing' and conduct that the 'very phenomena of tough border enforcement is supposed to forestall' (Scheel, 2017). Temporality and appropriation appear to be contingent frameworks to resolve the conundrums of domination and subordination in the footing of the clock, as they reveal an intricate entanglement of practices of government and subversion, although in this book, it takes place in ways that do not necessarily allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government.

In the postcolonial African context, these ambivalences can be captured in Mbembe's notion of 'mutual zombification'. As illustrated earlier, what often happens within critical African border studies, outside the literature on African borders as paradoxes, is that we often have a debate about whether it is that African borderlanders have agency or that they are purely just subject to being dominated. What we find in Mbembe's book *On the Postcolony* (2001) is a critique of dichotomous and oppositional ways of thinking through issues of African subjectivity. He calls for a move away from binary categories to interpret social relations such as resistance versus domination. Rather than a knowable entity, Mbembe is thinking about the state as a specific system of signs that are being constantly contested and renegotiated. He is not arguing that there is no such thing as a state or that the state does not have power but that power is not fixed. That power is constantly being challenged in its own existence par excellence in that people can accept a specific system of signs, specific rules and particular ways of conducting themselves to make those signs familiar. It is only by

attaining that familiarity that people proclaim the right language to strip power, to mock it, to transgress taboos about the body and to use it as a way of speaking back.

So, to labour the point, it is not a question of whether power lies in the state or not but about what it is exposed to such that it is not simply enough to talk about domination versus resistance in postcolonial relations. It is also about Nyamnjoh's (2006) idea of conviviality or the familiarity of one with the other, as well as the knowledge of how to conduct oneself in what space, what to say and not say in what context. For Mbembe (2001), thus, power is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be described as 'illicit cohabitation'. This describes a relationship made fruitful by the very fact of the state and its subjects having to share the same living space. As Mbembe (2001) argues further, this results in the 'mutual zombification' of both the dominant and those whom they purport to dominate, meaning that each has robbed the other of vitality and has left them both impotent. So, in summarising, the postcolonial state and its subjects reside within the same episteme in which wars are temporally waged, won and lost.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the most prominent ways in which scholars of borders in Africa have come to understand them. This exercise is important in two ways. First, it shows the strengths as well as the limitations of current approaches in relation to their treatment of time and questions of power vis-à-vis agency. Second, it reveals, through a Foucauldian approach, the importance of focusing on sentimentality and ways to think of it as a governmentality tool in African borders. This chapter, then, presents a historical and contemporary overview of migration governance at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border. This helps us when we consider the implications of the fact that responses in this situation are not always neatly refined enough to be given a certain extreme in the dichotomy of resistance and domination in our thinking about political subjectivity. This is outlined in the following section of the chapter through a discussion of three major paradigms from the (im)mobilities literature. These are important in advancing a more ambivalent understanding of the way agency and power operate in African borders. A few concluding remarks and pointers about implications of this chapter for the rest of the book are then offered.

Dominant understandings of power and agency in African borders

Binary of power–agency in the African border studies literature

Several attempts at analysing African borders are in relation to the relationship between power and agency, which goes back to the continent's history of colonial partition. Pre-colonial African political societies were

composed of systems that were nomadic, between/among empires and city-states, and, in some cases, stateless (Nanjira, 2010). Africa was, however, never still or stationary since it was defined by movement and circulation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The so-called Bantu peoples of Western and Central Africa are said to have moved south, resulting in the formation of new socio-political formations. It was colonialism that enclosed African people into colonies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p 34). After colonialists created city-states and permanent settlement and marked out sovereign territory, their interactions developed into cross-border relationships. This necessitated a political system that could manage the movement of people within and outside their borders. In the period November 1884 to February 1885, at the Berlin Conference, which marked the apex of the Scramble for Africa, borders were drawn up without African participation, providing the basis for the subsequent partition, invasion and colonisation by various European powers. Missionaries and agents were sent out to negotiate treaties with African chiefs and kings who signed away their sovereignties to European powers. By 1900, seven European nations – Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy – had conquered a large portion of Africa. These European powers began creating colonial state structures after conquering African fragmented and centralised nations. Hence, borders were fortified and internal and cross-border migration alike regulated.

In doing this, colonialism brought together disparate communities that it paradoxically kept apart and disintegrated (Deng, 1993, p 34). This method of conquest allowed colonial rulers to establish a law-and-order superstructure to maintain relative peace and tranquillity. With the ultimate rise of nationalism, many African countries gained independence. For example, in Portuguese Africa, resistance against colonial rule intensified from the late 1950s onwards, culminating in an armed liberation struggle (1961–74), which started in Angola and spread to Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, leading to the collapse of colonial rule (Dhada, 1998). Yet, even though Africa's independence movement was a fight for self-determination, it also reinforced the idea of unity within the artificial framework of the newly formed nation-state (Deng, 1993). Since traditional colonial economies were perceived as extractive and exploitable – in the service of the Western powers – many independent African states envisaged achieving development through 'nation building' and nationalism with a common sense of identity/citizenship, common language and symbols, national holidays and celebrations, within the borders imposed by the colonial regimes. Most African leaders essentially embraced the function of borders in the struggle for control at independence. Sovereignty became the name for this spatial and social division (Howarth, 2006) and a buzzword for pan-African leaders like Robert Mugabe.

This process involved postcolonial African borders that divided individuals and communities that belonged together (Zeller, 2015), which were, by and large, maintained from colonial ones. For example, people on both sides of the Namibian–Angolan border, between Oshikango and Santa Clara, belong to the same family, speak the same language, have a common history and live extremely similar lives (Dobler, 2009). The Zimbabwe–Mozambique border also has vivisected or partitioned homogeneous Shona ethnic populations straddling and coexisting in either nation-state (Daimon, 2016, p 464).

Yet, these same ‘colonial boundaries’ are largely a barrier to economic viability and regional integration. Zeller (2015, p 254) has argued that African borders are a problematic legacy of European colonisation that continues to stymie the continent’s social, economic and political growth. The category ‘migrant’ is at odds with African socialities because it is a problematic outcome of this history that unfortunately justifies the securitisation of African borders through the fortification of political boundaries with electric fences, increased patrols, electronic surveillance systems as well as everyday mobility practices that disrupt and delay migrants. This is what makes borders like the Zimbabwe–South Africa one an unwelcoming space of waiting for migrants, which often leads them to resort to risky border crossings (Pophiwa, 2020; Tevera, 2020).

The defence of sovereignty via the referent of the border is now also being used in justifying political decisions that create crisis, which in turn displace people who are then confronted with the problem of the border. As colonialism employed boundaries not merely to demarcate the empire’s properties but also to establish confined areas for Africans to see themselves as countries, these types of colonially managed physical borders have become a prism through which to perceive Africa’s prospective futures. This is true for Zimbabweans who have been plagued with anxiety, uncertainty and a sense of precariousness since the early 2000s because of a lengthy economic crisis in their own country, which has led them to look for a future in other countries.

Many of these ‘human beings who eat, love, and dream about beautiful tomorrows’ (Chitando et al, 2015, p 1) have created and implemented visions of a better existence abroad. However, due to a variety of restrictive bureaucratic systems, border patrols and barriers as well as deportation, they have been denied the right to move legally to neighbouring Southern African Development Community (SADC) nations such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, or to continue their legal stay there. South Africa’s migration policies establish militarised borders that are not welcoming sites of transition but unfriendly spaces that are typified by unanticipated interruptions in movement for several hours or days in a determined effort to regulate migration (Tevera, 2020, p 19). The Zimbabwe–South Africa border has served as a major impediment to the vast outflow of thousands

of mostly illegalised Zimbabweans compelled to migrate clandestinely (see [Nshimbi et al, 2018](#); [Moyo, 2020](#); [Musoni, 2020](#)). Here, we see illegalisation taking place through processes that make people illegal, including those that make certain bodies illegal in specific spaces within the globalising nation-state system ([McDonald, 2009](#); [Bauder, 2013](#)). It is a clear example of the limits the colonial border exerts on people's agency.

But African border studies have also established that border dwellers have evolved in such a way that there is now a form of regional integration taking place on the periphery of official institutions through socio-cultural solidarity and interstate business networks. This offers a challenge to the postcolonial African state's state sovereignty ([Mbembe and Rendall, 2000](#), p 262). Such borderland processes, as well as the consequences they have within and beyond borderlands, help to correct the imbalance of state-centred societies ([Connor, 2003](#)). These processes define borderlanders as citizens of a political state whose authority they recognise but also as free agents who are not irreversibly bound by political processes over which they have no control (see [Connor, 2003](#)). Residing in these border spaces thus entails having access to diverse opportunities to be autonomous and make independent decisions from those made for them by officials of the state ([Connor, 2003](#), p 102). Some border dwellers establish their own cross-border community without emphasising their dual citizenship. Instead, they develop their own border theory based on social practice, which deconstructs the traditional state imagination and asserts citizenship claims that cut across borders ([Coplan, 2010](#), p 2). In so doing, borderlanders transcend the tabula rasa designation by successfully inscribing new postcolonial national identities.

Some scholars term this the 'centrality of the margins' ([Nugent, 2012](#)) or the 'creativity at the margins', where residents of the margins can 'colonise' behaviours in the centre ([Das and Poole, 2004](#), p 19; [Zeller, 2010](#)). This is evident in contemporary cross-border economic activity in the border markets of Niger, Benin and Nigeria described by [Walther \(2009\)](#) as evidence of the foundations of 'mobile space' in which 'circulation' is the most appropriate technique of coping with the instability of Sahelian border life. Border trade, in Walther's opinion, takes advantage of the colonial split to the extent that national boundaries are not so much a divide as they are a condition of current economic dynamism. [Hüsken and Klute \(2010\)](#) have also argued that many postcolonial African states' peripheries and borderlands contribute to the formation of local stateless forms of power, which appear to signal the end of the 'globalised statehood utopia'.

In the Southern African region, [Daimon \(2016\)](#), p 464) has found that, despite the fact that Shona ethnic communities living adjacent to the border in Zimbabwe and Mozambique are aware of the border's legalities, they consciously and systematically choose to ignore them in order to take

advantage of the various socio-economic and cultural benefits available on both sides. Moyo (2016) has contended that interactions between Venda-speaking individuals on both sides of the Zimbabwe–South Africa border defy the split, posing a challenge to the rigid territoriality of citizenship on both sides. It would appear that the political realities in many postcolonial African states’ peripheries and borderlands seem to contradict state ideas of sovereignty, territoriality and citizenship, according to most of these scholars.

This chapter argues that reading African borders as a configuration of polymorphous performances that serve as an exterior geographical frontier and an interior social categorisation mechanism may yet still offer a novel interpretation to understandings of how power operates on the lives of border dwellers. The first step in such an undertaking is moving beyond an interpretation of the state founded on the postcolonial institutional framework that would suggest that it consists solely of the bureaucratic structures, networks and actors that make up government. This appears to be in line with Weberian ideas of the state that conceive it as a rationalised administrative form of political organisation that can be powerful or completely present, or weaken or become less fully expressed along its territorial or social boundaries (Das and Poole, 2004). This concept of statehood codifies the assumption that territories belong to states and that only states have the unassailable right to hold and rule them (Herbst, 1992; Clapham, 1999).

Tshabalala (2017, p 3) has shown the opposite. He has claimed that smuggling tactics call into doubt the South African state’s internal coherence and ideological goal. Tshabalala’s understanding is more pronounced in other African border contexts as well when we look at responses beyond border dwellers to those of non-state actors. Using the Adagh, who inhabited a mountainous area on the Mali–Algerian border, Hüskén and Klute (2010) concluded that chiefs had reclaimed the power that the rebels had taken away from them, and have even expanded their position into a type of regional ‘para-sovereign rule’. The writers have used the terms ‘para-state’ and ‘para-sovereignty’ to indicate how relevant NGOs have taken over aspects of the central authority’s sovereignty or fundamental administrative responsibilities. In Hüskén and Klute’s (2010) case, the position of non-state actors is posed as a competing sovereignty to that of the bureaucratic African state. These kinds of margins, according to Zeller’s (2010, p 7) assessment of the Namibia–Zambia border, are sites and everyday circumstances where borderland residents on the one hand and frontline state representatives on the other are routinely engaging with each other. This results in the blending of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ in everyday practice, as well as the transcendence of the supposed state–non-state divide to produce ‘twilight institutions’ (Lund, 2006; Zeller, 2010).

Using sentimentality and a Foucauldian approach in theorising on African borders

This book situates itself closer to the perspective of scholars like Tshabalala, Hüskén and Klute, Lund and Zeller by employing a Foucauldian theoretical interpretation of power. This is used by linking humanitarian interventions at state borders to actions that control human life according to a differentiated categorical value calculus that is determined by sentimentality. In its loosest and general philosophical use, sentimentality relies on moral sentiments or emotions to determine what can be called ‘truth’. By its association to regimes of truth, sentimentality is a means of transmitting power, aligned to ‘governmentality’ – a term that was coined by Michel Foucault as an analytical paradigm for conceptualising government as the conduct of conduct that: ‘designates not just the activities of the state and its institutions but more broadly any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment’ (Foucault in [Inda, 2005](#), p 1). In other words, sentimentality, like discourse, is all about the conduct of conduct. It can be generated in public spaces that serve as a stage where all the actors of the entire spectrum meet ([Geenen, 2009](#), p 349). A governmentality approach effectively aims to comprehend the way power constitutes its subjects: how people see themselves in the environment, what motivates specific behaviours and how knowledge supports that endeavour. As a result, governmentality allows for a wider, more pluralistic and polymorphous understanding of the state, which comprises ‘institutions, procedures, actions, and reflections that have people as their object’ ([Fassin, 2011](#), p 214). This brings into question the role of humanitarian actors as they are driven by the humanitarian imperative to save lives.

Sentimentality is carried through different kinds of narratives that use particular discourses. This is an important element of governmentality, which is why ([Fassin, 2012](#)) used the phrase ‘humanitarian government’ to describe how moral feelings are deployed in contemporary politics. While the state has not been overly passionate about its border enforcement, humanitarian workers have depended on images of suffering (and occasionally dead) asylum seekers trying to cross into Europe by boat to provide a moral impetus for helping them. This is well documented in the case of the Zimbabwe crisis where [Makunike \(2008\)](#) observes that ‘It is not easy these days to find calm voices on either or any side of “the Zimbabwe crisis”. Everyone seems to be competing to be louder and more emotional than the other’.

The public frequently misinterprets this emotiveness to suggest that humanitarian workers are operating in opposition to state governance norms and solely for the benefit of migrants, although this may not always be the case. For example, several humanitarian operations only serve to

reinforce the ‘border spectacle’. This spectacle, according to [De Genova \(2013, p 1181\)](#), sets a scene of ‘ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified, validated and legitimated, redundantly’. I take this to mean two things. First, humanitarian interventions have come to justify militarised borders in the name of acting in the best interests of ostensibly unyielding African migrants who are not equipped with sufficient knowledge of the dangers of the journey ahead of them by protecting them. In these instances, a European state positions itself as having a humanitarian and moral duty to act on behalf of the passive African migrant subject who can only be a pitied or grievable victim, at best. The examples of border externalisation and deaths in the Mediterranean and European responses such as the Charter of Lampedusa attest to the interplay of constructing victims and mourning them with the re-emergence of an appearance of Europeans as civilised, enlightened subjects ([Saucier and Woods, 2014](#)).

Second, the cause of these humanitarian atrocities has been expelled from the popular imaginary. To use [De Genova’s \(2013, p 1182\)](#) exact words, the law that produced the terms and conditions for the ‘illegality’ of the migrants in question is ‘utterly naturalized and vanishes from view’. In both scenarios, human suffering and its sources are neutered and depoliticised, necessitating and validating humanitarian border interventions, which are in and of themselves problematic (see [Scheel, 2013a](#)) in so far as they can enable Teju Cole’s (2012) ‘white saviour industrial complex’ that reinforces racial hierarchies. We see this in the perfect example of one Niger mission chief for the IOM who was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying, ‘of course, we cannot match their [Niger youth] dream of being in Italy, but we can give them a local development project’ ([Sengupta, 2015](#)).

Hence, from a Foucauldian perspective, the concept of ‘government’ moves beyond speaking of the state as a unitary actor ([Landau, 2007](#)). It is about recognising the state as arising from all these distributed origins and enfolded in a vast and dynamic collection of disciplinary procedures that bind and affect popular behaviour and elite strategies ([Landau, 2007, p 3](#)). A focus on governmentality entails identifying what Sending and Neumann refer to as the mentality or rationality that characterises the systematic thinking and knowledge that is integral to and renders possible different modes of governing and replacing a focus on institutions with a focus on practices ([2006, p 657](#)). Applying this form of reading to borders also brings us closer to [Walters’ \(2010\)](#) concept of ‘humanitarian borders,’ which he defines as a mode of governmentality in which humanitarian government rationalities are deployed at borders, reinventing them as humanitarian government spaces. This novel border is a construct that describes humanitarian measures taken to care for irregular migrants through zones of humanitarian government along the territorial edges of nation-states ([Walters, 2010; Williams, 2015](#)).

It is a 'zone of qualification' that exists when the qualities of objects or practices are assessed in order that they meet more or less common standards of criteria or categories (Barry, 2006, p 240).

The humanitarian border is not something universal but rather something specific, manifesting only in certain regions and under certain conditions (Walters, 2010). The manufacture of a 'crisis' through various frames, which legitimises the break from regular government, is one of the predecessors to humanitarian governance. This concept provides the tools to interpret how current processes of state territorialisation are being negotiated via the emergence of humanitarian aid and services located in border regimes (Sending and Neumann, 2006; Walters, 2010; Fassin, 2011; Olivius, 2016; Mavelli, 2017).

Migration governance at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border

This chapter now situates the Zimbabwe–South Africa border in a wider historical and political context, with the goal of showing its function as a site of immobility that reveals the imbrication of time with sovereignty. The Zimbabwe–South Africa border has a long history of attempts by the state and private corporations to not only define the South African country, citizens and aliens through territorialised government but also to clinically manage labour, migration and recruitment to farms and mines, only to let them go, sometimes to die when they have contracted tuberculosis. These emplacement processes create 'migrants without status' who cross borders in expectation of labour contracts that offer no stable employment or the hope of getting the official documentation required to settle in the destination country. The character of 'the white farmer' who is often a racist sovereign authority in northern South Africa as well as individuals and behaviours defending national sovereignty are all linked to this history (Rutherford, 2008b).

The commercial farms in the north of South Africa demonstrate how the colony attempted to industrialise the control of undocumented migration from Rhodesia (Tshabalala, 2017). This place is referred to as the 'vestige of this colonial/ apartheid edifice' by Tshabalala (2017, p 32).

It is worth stating up front that although there is a growing corpus of empirical research on the Zimbabwe–South Africa border (see the work of scholars like Jo Vearey, Thea de Gruchy, Innocent Moyo, Duduzile Ndlovu, myself and so forth), there is very limited writing from a historical perspective. Considering this difficulty, it is hard, in tracing the border's morphology, to rely on a multiplicity of sources. Hence, this section of the chapter is largely based upon the scant work of scholars who have attempted to dedicate their research to digging the historical archives of the space.

These include, notably, two books: one by Maxim Bolt titled *Zimbabwe's Migrants and South Africa's Border Farms: The Roots of Impermanence* (2016) and another by Francis Musoni titled *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa* (2020). Other such works outside these two books include published articles by Blair Rutherford, as well as a thesis by Nedson Pophiwa.

The Pretoria convention between the United Kingdom and the Transvaal on the 3 August 1881 first established the Zimbabwe–South Africa border as the South Africa–Southern Rhodesia border (Pophiwa, 2018). The Limpopo River would formally demarcate the border, according to the treaty. Until then, the river had merely functioned as a natural border between Transvaal and Matabeleland, running all the way to the Luvuvhu River's confluence. A follow-up convention in 1884 between the British High Commission in South Africa, the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope and representatives from the Transvaal reaffirmed the Limpopo boundary. As Nedson Pophiwa writes, following the defeat of the Ndebele forces in Southern Rhodesia in 1894, the British government issued the Matabele Order-in-Council, which recognised Zimbabwe's current borders. The Beit Bridge (named after Alfred Beit) was completed in 1929 and included a dedicated control post. The Union of South Africa's Secretary for External Affairs and the British High Commissioner for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland decided in 1957, after years of talks, that the Limpopo River would be their common border.

For the first time, the two colonial governments were able to restrict and control activity across the Limpopo River. Much of the physical presentation of the border was practically non-existent prior to these advancements (Bolt, 2016; Pophiwa, 2018). For much of that time, Southern Rhodesian authorities employed legal and quasilegal tactics to restrict cross-Limpopo mobility. Their South African peers tended to favour an open border policy by not aggressively attempting to restrict immigration from colonial Zimbabwe and other places in the region (Musoni, 2020). According to Southern Rhodesia, anybody who left the nation without travel permits during this time was breaking the law. As a result, in Southern Rhodesia, as Francis Musoni shows, state authorities, business owners and ordinary colonists referred to such people as unauthorised migrants. These migrations, on the other hand, did not always run foul of Transvaal or South African immigration laws. This movement could be referred to as illegal emigration rather than unlawful immigration (Musoni, 2020).

The South African state and national territory, which had before been an abstract concept, had become tangible. The apartheid state severely restricted cross-border migration in the 1970s. It enticed farmers to Musina to join the local commando in the struggle against the ANC military wing, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) (Spear of the Nation). Landmines were planted on White border farms by the ANC's military wing, which labelled them as

acceptable military targets. In response, the Rhodesia–South Africa border was militarised and secured by planting sisal between fences and electrifying the fence west of Musina (Musoni, 2020).

Bringing White farmers to the area to improve the state's capability also resulted in the creation of an agricultural area that would become prominent in the post-apartheid era (Pophiwa, 2018). Because of its remote location in South Africa, the Limpopo Valley served as a 'buffer zone' to shore up the apartheid state's territorial control during the late 1970s and 1980s border war, as well as becoming a new centre of production, a place around which local lives became oriented through its farms (Bolt, 2016, p 70). This resulted in the rise of a migrant labour regime that met the human resource needs of farmers, mining owners and other employers in both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, as well as the decline of prior cross-Limpopo activities such as hunting and trade exchanges. This surge demonstrates how migrants can quickly become disposable labour excess, trapped and dangerously located within a national space.

This, as Maxim Bolt reveals, was a border contradiction, as farmers began to rely on the same simple, unrestricted transit across the Limpopo that the government was trying to prevent. The new inhabitants both reinforced the boundary – which would soon be tightened with an electronic fence – and relied to some extent on its porosity (Bolt, 2016, p 71). Musoni (2020) also points out that state officials purposefully placed barriers at the front entrance while leaving the back door open. They were aware that some immigrants were coming in through the back door, but they did nothing to stop it. This is in line with Tendayi Achiume's (2019, p 1537) view that colonial migration was essential to establishing and preserving colonial advantage because it was necessary to project metropolitan political power and construct colonial empire.

Mining, in addition to farming, has played an important part in the territorialisation of the boundary. According to Bolt (2016), farming was more of a pastime among successful White Messina Mine workers who would acquire land for part-time farming. The Limpopo Valley's Messina Mine became a major economic centre. Messina was founded in 1904 on a farm called Berkenrode, after British Lieutenant Colonel John Pascoe Grenfell launched mining operations on the same site (Pophiwa, 2018). In Bolt's assessment, Messina's location – the Limpopo Valley – has been a site for the South African authorities to police (with limited success) rather than govern. The mine's management strove to construct territorial administration that went beyond border enforcement and allowed it to ensure labour without interfering with the state's nation-building efforts. Controlling territory and labour helped Messina grow from a mine camp to a mine town to a municipality. This necessitated establishing Messina as what Bolt calls a place in its own right. This was eventually accomplished by

focusing on health through the formation of a Messina Health Committee (see Bolt, 2016, p 82 for a more detailed analysis). The Health Committee was given jurisdiction over an area over which the mine already had some control before soon expanding its authority beyond sanitation and assuming control of the town government in 1957. This committee was only replaced by regular municipal structures in 1968 (Bolt, 2016).

While farming, the farmers interviewed by Bolt (2016) indicated that their agreement with the state compelled them to perform the duties of the army and police, who were issued rifles and ammunition that they kept at home. Despite this, Transvaal and Rhodesian border patrollers shared responsibility for policing movement over the boundary (Pophiwa, 2018). Given several circumstances, this was not an easy task, as Pophiwa (2018) shows. First, state officials encountered technological challenges in successfully monitoring, controlling and prohibiting unlawful entry and leave across the Limpopo River. Second, despite existing legislation, officials found it difficult to control unauthorised movements due to competition for labour among firms on both sides of the border. Finally, African labourers travelled from as far as Nyasaland to work on the Rand or on farms in Southern Rhodesia. As a result, while the border's electric fence served as a deterrent to would-be farm workers, the fence was an imperfect barrier, and labour recruits found their way through.

This dynamic shows a tense agreement between farmers and the government, which has become the persistent pattern in government attempts to manage labour procurement. This solution involved finding a balance between enabling the essential mobility for migrants to meet strong labour demand while also achieving the state's goal of officially discouraging migration. For example, between the 1910s and approximately 1950, leading officials in state institutions strove to balance labour issues with territorial control declarations. Migrants and private recruiters were limited and avoided interference into labour dynamics due to the same lack of state capability that made the border ungovernable in the first place.

Due to the lack of a bilateral agreement in the early 1980s, as shown in the work of Blair Rutherford, farmers north of the Soutpansberg hired Zimbabwean labourers under a special exemption provision in the Aliens Control Act (Rutherford, 2008a; Rutherford, 2010). This system had evolved into a distinct special employment zone by the 1990s. Zimbabwean migrants could legally enter South Africa if they had a special permit (a BI-17) that linked them to a specific farmer. This arrangement created a distinct border agricultural sector in which producers were able to determine their own conditions, bolstered by the area's remoteness and White agricultural standards. Farmers did not have to go through the typical bureaucratic processes to hire people as a result of this, Rutherford shows. Recruits went to the farms without papers, which was normal practice at the time. When

migrants arrived at the farms, their chances of being deported decreased since the estates were deemed protected ground by the local police, who would not arrest them.

In the late 1990s, this agreement was ended in reaction to media and NGO calls for the enforcement of national sovereignty, especially against what they saw as an outrageous prolongation of the control of White (Afrikaner) farmers in post-Apartheid South Africa (Rutherford, 2008a; Rutherford, 2010, p 69; Bolt, 2016, p 102). In this case, we can observe how non-state actors' actions backfire on outsiders by supporting imperatives of further securitising colonial borders. This is especially true in a situation where border control, or the lack thereof, is seen as a facilitator of White settler autonomy. Ivor Chipkin (2007) demonstrates how such racialised contestations are widespread in defining a common South African national identity in his book *Do South Africans Exist?* Regardless, the special employment zone's legacy has continued to impact border farming, as the area is both a border zone and a special employment zone, according to the local police. Farmers on the border have continued to play a key role in governing local territory and movement.

In this border zone, as the historical analysis shows, border farmers rely on the legal and moral authority that past regimes (apartheid, colonialism and the Transvaal state) granted White farmers over their land and labourers (be they servants, labour tenants or slaves). A 2004 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Zimbabwe and South Africa allowed farmers in the Limpopo province to employ Zimbabweans with the same labour rights as South African workers (Rutherford, 2008a). At the height of the Zimbabwean crisis, Zimbabwean farmworkers were handed emergency travel documents (ETDs) instead of passports. Farmers had to apply for company permits starting in 2005, which permitted them to hire a set number of foreign workers in accordance with immigration legislation. The reinforced imbrication of farmer sovereignty in national sovereignty is attested by these actions (Rutherford, 2008a, p 409).

Despite this imbrication, land and labour have joined with established local arrangements to give White landowners substantial autonomy from border authorities, as well as the flexibility to ignore them (Bolt, 2016, p 102). Border farmers have succeeded in fighting the bureaucratic state's attempt to view the Limpopo Valley as a frontier for border enforcement in a struggle over the meaning of territory by establishing the Limpopo Valley as a bureaucratic entity in its own right (Bolt, 2016). Border farmers have been able to profit from the inexpensive labour of Zimbabwean migrants who are stuck because the government refuses to recognise them as citizens. This surplus labour settles for the basic security that border farms give, as farm work provides a measure of safety in everyday life, whose workings are well detailed in Bolt's book.

On these farms, for example, the level of protection provided by farm employment varies depending on length of stay, as locally dominant seniority standards grant Zimbabwean farmworkers access to roles such as personnel manager and foreman, separating their rights from the rest of the workforce (see Bolt, 2012; 2016). Border farmers have also reaped the benefits of having control over labour recruitment throughout the annual harvest. Long recruitment lines at agricultural estates characterise this period, as Zimbabwean farm labourers compete for temporary jobs. The ensemble of border control tactics has also found expression in the metaphor of the queue (Pijpers, 2011, p 431). The bulk of people who crossed the Zimbabwe–South Africa border through unofficial channels during the time period studied in Musoni's (2020) book regarded it as a method to make a better life.

This symbiotic link between ruling territory and supplying White capitalists with labour has persisted. Frontier capitalists have asserted control over territory and labour on a significant migration route, despite state efforts that portray the area as merely a border to be policed (Bolt, 2016, p 68). The army and police's capacity to control movement in the area is severely hampered. Those who transgress the border regime are breaking the law.

This illegality also has an impact on migrants' perceptions and experiences of time, particularly their daily and weekly rhythms (see Willen, 2007). The temporality of everyday danger (Willen, 2007, p 22) is, for example, reflected in how Zimbabwean migrants attempt to circumvent border security by comparing risk levels at different times of the day or year when it is safer to 'border jump'. They enlist the assistance of smugglers who are aware of when security personnel are on their scheduled breaks. Several experienced smugglers have information of police schedules, such as when familiar policemen will be on patrol, thanks to their ties with officials (Araia and Monson, 2009). Amateur smugglers have a harder time anticipating shifts in police patrol patterns (Araia and Monson, 2009). During the wet season, the river can be extremely perilous to cross, and it is likely that at least some migrants have drowned while crossing (Araia and Monson, 2009, p 19). The river water, on the other hand, is comparatively low during the dry season and may be waded through more readily in certain areas.

Implications for interpreting power and agency

In the earlier context, it is clear that the border is characterised by great uncertainty and liminality related to precarity and immobility. I argue that people's responses in this context are not always neatly refined enough to be assigned a specific extreme in the binary of resistance and domination. There is a significant range of situations in which their behaviour makes little or no sense in terms of the society's naturalised meanings and practices, and appears to be counterproductive, even disruptive, to socially powerful groups

(Campbell and Heyman, 2007, p 3). People, migrants and humanitarian workers included may impede the regular functioning of a power relationship by acting in ways that make sense in their own frameworks but are detached or clueless to the power connection's construction or assumptions (Campbell and Heyman, 2007, p 4). Hence, we are just as likely to see seemingly innocuous occurrences that are not purposely resistant or understood as so by individuals who perpetrate them. This is an important issue because it touches on the point I labour in this book that the humanitarian assemblage in this border area is neither consistent nor deliberate to the extent that one cannot really speak of humanitarian interventions as akin to the enactment of African borders.

That some authors have combined the two prominent border paradigms by understanding African borders as paradoxes where patterns of alienation and coexistence coexist, each depending on specific circumstances (see Alvarez Jr, 1995; Flynn, 1997; Balibar, 2002; Campbell and Heyman, 2007; Rutherford, 2008a; 2011; Doevenspeck, 2011; Nugent, 2012; Tandia, 2012), is indeed valid. However, critical African border studies still need to deepen this paradigm, especially because these perspectives rarely engage with concerns of temporality and immobility. A temporal engagement takes us to a place of understanding that this paradox occurs through an intricate entanglement of practices of government, even if it is in ways that may not always allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government. This reading is enabled by moving beyond the geographical perspectives and dominant thinking about the interplay between African borders and immobility that is still retained in these studies on border governance. Because they emphasise the relevance of place, it is easy for these views to reduce immobility to an existential crisis of victimhood that is resolved, even if for a moment, when borderlanders respond in whatever innovative ways. Temporality allows us to creatively imagine how forces of domination and resistance feed off each other and charter a context-specific and ongoing contestation between power and agency that is productive (Scheel 2013a; 2017), even if, as is the case here, it does not offer a resolution to the structural issues at hand. Hence, the intricate entanglement of practices of government and subversion can also take place in ways that appropriate time through immobility without necessarily allowing the governed to shape and transform regimes of government.

In arriving at this possibility, it is important to reveal how to wait is to form a unique relationship with time and space. Three major paradigms from the (im)mobilities literature feature in advancing this kind of understanding of borders. This is an elaborate assessment of immobility that allows us to think about African borders differently, because perhaps we can appreciate its productiveness in shaping human agency in increasingly restrictive migrant contexts.

Waiting as a different model of border subjectivity

When it comes to theorising on waiting as a special form of temporality, one of the primary challenges that social scientists have grappled with is how to reconcile the relationship between agency and structure (Ibañez Tirado, 2019). Each demonstrates that waiting can mean multiple things: it can mean being subordinated, exercising agency or both. This conclusion, however, is difficult to reach, and researchers have proposed various paradigms to explain the relationship between immobilities and the constitution of people as subjects.

Waiting is now sufficiently mapped and thoroughly documented in the social sciences (see Uehling, 2002; Bayart, 2007; Bissell, 2007; Jeffrey, 2008; Hage, 2009; Auyero, 2011; Gray, 2011; Oldfield and Greyling, 2015; Elliot, 2016, for example). There is also a growing corpus of work in Africa concentrating on temporalities of waiting (see Beek, 2020; Debele, 2020; Dobler, 2020; Grabska, 2020; Hultin, 2020; Kumsa, 2020; Mujere, 2020; Oldenburg, 2020; Stasik et al, 2020). With a few notable exceptions (see Camminga, 2020; Debele, 2020; Grabska, 2020; Machinya, 2020, for example), however, this literature does not always examine these temporalities from the standpoint of migration and borders.

The focus on camps has significantly shaped ideas about the relationship between immobility and political subjects in Africa. Waiting defines the experience of refugees confined to camps, and time itself appears to be suspended (Barber and Lem, 2018). The obviously brutal impacts and situations that people who wait experience are clear. The situation in Libya exemplifies some of the dangers that immobile migrants in the North African region face.

Those who do not fancy waiting, notably in the literature on mobilities, have emphasised the performative embodied qualities of the body in action (Bissell, 2007). Waiting was not commonly considered as an important or productive kind of time in human relations, and, as a result, it was not recognised as such in the literature (Geibler, 2002). The interpretation of waiting as victimisation stems from a conception of being a subject as a condition that can be deduced from the subject's relative physical pace. Indeed, speed and acceleration are seen as the sole productive factors in economics (Geibler, 2002). The appeal of speed is a prevalent feature of modern culture (Parkins, 2004). In today's environment, speed is associated with decisiveness, whereas slowness is associated with weakness (Parkins, 2004, p 365). It puts high emphasis on communication and transportation speed, which is linked to the importance of time management and timeliness (Parkins, 2004). The mainstream mobilities literature, according to Bissell (2007, p 278), presents more productivist ideas of waiting and subjectivity as examples of slowed and even deadened rhythms moving alongside quicker occurrences and practices.

A sense of lost time and being left behind exacerbates or replaces temporal suspense (Jeffrey, 2008). With the fall of the welfare state, this has become increasingly widespread among youths who are unable to progress into socially defined age groups such as adulthood. These young individuals are unable to marry, obtain an education or attain financial independence, or are simply unable to conform to dominant conceptions of how people should behave in relation to time (Jeffrey, 2008). Waithood, a phrase that alludes to the notion of waiting for adulthood, is equivalent to this type of waiting (Honwana, 2014). The term refers to a prolonged period of suspension during which youths experience a delay or denial in reaching social adulthood as a result of issues such as poverty, underemployment, access to education and, more broadly, social and political marginalisation, which deny them access to the resources required to achieve social adulthood markers (such as stable income, marriage, family and household formation) (Stasik et al, 2020, p 2).

Chronic waiting produces a situation in which those with excess time, such as refugees in a camp, feel oppressed by the passage of time and stuck in an endless state of waiting (Jeffrey, 2008). Their activities become timepass as they are 'trapped' in an unending present of sorts (Jeffrey, 2008). Scholars such as Bauman and Agier primatise an economic reason for waiting by imagining it as essentially static and thus invariably useless. The view of waiting as a deadened rhythm can be found in Bauman's (2002, p 347) text, in which he conceptualises the refugee camp as an ideal type of total institution, offering, by commission or omission, a total life from which there is no escape and where refugees are stripped of their identities and turned into zombies. This viewpoint is consistent with Agamben's (1998; 2005) notion of refugees in camps as the ultimate biopolitical subjects of 'bare life' regulated by a permanent state of exception (Andersson, 2014).

Refugee camps are nothing like this, though, at least in their totality. As a result of this observation, the other viewpoint is that waiting is a subjective experience that provides many opportunities for agency. Others consider relative embodied activity or inaction as a differentiator when examining immobilities, rather than relative velocities (Bissell, 2007, p 278). Bissell (2007) presented a conceptualisation of the waiting event through the lens of embodied corporeal experience. This goal can be achieved by rethinking bodily practice in such a manner that researchers view the event of waiting from the perspective of activity or inactivity rather than immobility. This reading allows for a more non-linear examination of the various modalities of what it means to wait, ranging from active waiting characterised by intense pushing and being-in-the-world to a more still feeling of waiting (Bissell, 2007, p 278).

This is in line with Schweizer's (2006) concept of a culture of temporal diversity which is more than just a reading of how people make the best

use of their time as shown by the clock. Instead, it encourages us to value the ability to distinguish between individual and systemic times, with individual times defined as those driven by people's particular rhythms and requirements. Some may think that temporal diversity resonates with Kant's rejection of Newton's idea of absolute, objective time, which cannot be experienced, and reconciles the universality and subjective character of time (Kern, 1983). Others would see it as more akin to Heidegger's or phenomenological time theories.

Waiting as a form of anticipation and a promise of the event to come provides an epistemological space for animating an alternative model of subjectivity (Bissell, 2007, p 282). It is not a slower or deadened rhythm because waiting requires effort and some sort of deliberate movement (Bissell, 2007). While waiting for the next bus or train, for example, people frequently engage in a variety of humdrum activities such as reading, drinking, eating and listening to music. Waiting for/to is a type of temporality that, despite appearing to be passive, involves intentional actions that modify people's perceptions of time and place (Ibañez Tirado, 2019). Waiting is an active endeavour to realise a collectively conceived future in terms of time (Kwon, 2015; Ibañez Tirado, 2019).

Having said that, reconciling the agency and subordination waiting signifies can be quite challenging. As a result, the final set of thoughts emphasises the ambivalences of waiting. It is in this conception and genealogy of thought that waiting must be understood not only as the capacity to ride out the passage of time (resistance) or as the absence of action (domination) (Jeffrey, 2008, p 957). Rather, it is an active, conscious, materialised practice in which people forge new political strategies, in which time and space frequently become the objects of reflection and in which historical inequalities manifest themselves in new ways (Jeffrey, 2008, p 957). Waiting for housing in South African cities, according to Oldfield and Greyling (2015), is characterised by a combination of official authority and individual agency, rather than a simplistic notion of being a state patient, as Auyero (2011) viewed it. Waiting is a practice and a politics that impacts citizen encounters in subtle but significant ways (Oldfield and Greyling, 2015).

Waiting, on the one hand, emphasises the state's primacy by requiring applicants to be present and accountable while on waiting lists. On the other hand, it necessitates remaining in unofficial communities and backyards that the state overlooks, as well as ignoring planning norms and processes (Oldfield and Greyling, 2015). In many parts of India, the concept of timepass, which describes any activity that passes time and usually denotes relatively meaningless, light, trivial activity as opposed to serious action, signals dissatisfaction with poor schooling, unemployment, restricted mobility and financial stress for lower-middle-class youths (Jeffrey, 2017, p 407). Timepass also connotes a notion of being entitled to a more interesting

existence elsewhere, as well as separation from one's current situation. The use of timepass by teenagers is relatively beneficial. Young people sometimes claim membership in a group based on their timepass (Jeffrey, 2017). Standing at bus stops and playing cards can be used to hear news, exchange ideas and form social institutions or political protests (Jeffrey, 2017). Overall, timepass has evolved as a window into India's societal evolution and a venue where transformations might take place (Jeffrey, 2017, p 409).

Ghassan Hage and Shahram Khosravi have also simply shown the ambiguity in the link between resistance and dominance for those that wait. Hence, rather than embracing Agamben's totalising state of exception, these authors choose to concentrate on the existential control over futures that distinguishes specific forms of sovereignty (Ramsay, 2017). This type of sovereignty is thought to produce a temporal state of exception, or a situation of living in a social tense that does not correspond to the governing organisations' hegemonic timescapes (Ramsay, 2017, p 532). These complex political subjectivities are also at play in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border regime, which is set in a context of crisis and uncertain futures. Their specificity lies in how these subjectivities are productive, even if they are being forged in ways that do not necessarily allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government.

Conclusion

This book uses the framework of 'governing immobilities' to go beyond binaries of African border studies presented in this chapter. This concept effectively allows migration researchers and anthropologists interested in modern African border regimes to explore the paradoxical elements in ever-shifting border contexts of humanitarian crises and care. Although almost similar to approaches of authors that have combined the two African border studies binaries by understanding African borders as paradoxes where patterns of alienation and coexistence coexist, each depending on specific circumstances, governing immobilities goes a step further by branching into a focus on time as well as immobility. The value of looking at these tensions and contradictions through the optic of temporality lies in how it reveals political subjectivities to be productive, even if they are being forged in ways that do not necessarily allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government. This is the case in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border across history and extending into the current moment, where non-state actors have entered the scene of migration governance.

Contesting and Politicising the Zimbabwean Crisis

Introduction

South Africa's two domestic migration governance frameworks are in line with global migration governance frameworks aimed at a migration management approach. In this regard, there is a 'nice fit' between South Africa's migration regimes and international law, particularly in relation to the intransigent emphasis on the dichotomy between migrants and refugees. The normalisation of the ostensibly clear distinction between migrants and refugees not only protects some but also denies protection to deserving asylum seekers, which is productive in serving the political interests of the South African government.

This is a deliberate decision on the part of the political class to exploit local tensions between Black South Africans and foreigners as an excuse for the failure of the ANC government to deliver on its promises to the majority Black population. This has necessitated a political response that relies on two things: first, the scapegoating of Zimbabweans in the media, which is characterised by singling them out for different social ills. This begins with an understanding by South African citizens that links Zimbabwe's woes with subsequent 'invasion of other countries in search of better economic conditions and standards of living' (*Saturday Dispatch*, 2021, p 14). This perspective is expressed in a letter to the editor by a concerned citizen in 2021 which stated that: 'The problems in Zimbabwe are indirectly affecting other countries which host Zimbabwean migrants who are fleeing economic meltdown, poor governance and grave abuses of human rights. The main countries picking up the pieces of the failure of Zimbabwe's government are SA with an estimated 6-million Zimbabwean migrants' (*Saturday Dispatch*, 2021, p 14). This number (that is not actually substantiated) goes on to account for the ills. For example, Eric Naki reported that allegations of health care facilities being overwhelmed were rife, purveyed by an 'official

report' that showed that 'for every 10 patients admitted at Gauteng neonatal health care facilities, six were foreigners. The bulk of migrants who entered health care facilities were Zimbabweans'. This was accompanied by a fear that 'some of the immigrants are involved in crimes such as cash heists, murders, rape and stock theft within South Africa, especially in the border areas' (Naki, 2020, p 4).

Second is South Africa's reluctance to categorise Zimbabweans as asylum seekers. For example, the Refugees Act adopts both definitions of a refugee set out in international and African regional refugee law. This means that while the Refugees Act includes the narrow definition of a refugee contained within the 1951 Refugee Convention, Section 3(b) of the Refugees Act also permits claims from people fleeing 'events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order', meaning people experiencing human rights violations because of an economic collapse and a failed state, like Zimbabweans in the early 2000s, could potentially qualify for refugee status (Maple et al, 2022). Yet, in practice, the state has been very hesitant to implement the extended regional definition within refugee status determination (RSD) processes, especially since the mid-2000s (Amit, 2011). Rather, the RSD process in South Africa has slowly changed from one that relies on an individualised consideration of persecution into a system that establishes general categories of eligibility depending on country of origin, effectively creating a set of refugee- and non-refugee-producing countries (Amit, 2011). This change is due to the widespread reliance on general country conditions rather than individual case histories (Amit, 2011). For Zimbabweans, this has meant falling back on the migrant-refugee dichotomy, with the DHA persistent in viewing most Zimbabweans as economic migrants.

It is important to highlight here that the fields of migration and refugee studies are ripe with debates about the increasing tendency to highlight the apparent distinction between 'migrant' and 'refugee' in migration discourses as a means of assigning differential privileges to the two categories, with others finding them more functional than this view suggests. It is not the intention of this chapter to settle these debates. Bearing the historical and geographical context in mind, the presumption that labour migration governance and its 'object(ive)' (labour migrants and labour migration) can be neatly separated from 'forced migration' (asylum seekers, refugees and their attendant protection regime) does not necessarily hold. Here, the lines between force and volition are blurred as migrants face risk to physical security associated with violations of basic human rights, discrimination or persecution. De Wet (2008) has suggested that many people in southern Africa are displaced not just because of more traditional reasons for displacement arising from some form of coercion (such as law or violence) but as the outcome of 'displacement' (those who are no longer able to stay and are increasingly uprooted, insecure and 'displaced' must move

to survive). Bolt (2016) has acknowledged this blurriness to be valid in the context of Zimbabwean displacement.

This distinction is clear from the perspective of the South African state and well documented but not from the viewpoint of the humanitarian sphere. This chapter argues that there is a productive relationship between humanitarian interventions, moral/religious politics and migration governance at the border that emerges from the discursive acts of (de)legitimising humanitarian crisis through public discourse. This politics, in turn, shapes humanitarian and protection procedures, as well as conduct to migration, that are productive yet dangerous at the same time because of their fluidity and dichotomising effect. The humanitarian sphere thus takes governmental authority over migrants to the extent that it becomes a site of power in the context at hand as it constructs the legible figure of the suffering migrant through moral sentiment. This is tied to various contestations around the definitions of crisis that facilitate the instrumentalisation of Zimbabwean migrants in a sphere of contentious politics. It is argued here that this sphere of political discourse has become a novel site of governing immobilities in border regimes because it gives rise to practices that are capable of excluding Zimbabweans by their classificatory nature, particularly as regimes of truth and moral sentiment regarding the crisis and figure that gave rise to their legitimacy become contested. This situation is complicated by the outsourcing of the management of immigration enforcement to third parties who offer in equal measure remedies and complications to issues of corruption and fraud at the border. This allows religious actors, humanitarian organisations, senior migrant men and the state to be involved in an economy of turning the misery of the abject into profit as they run with ideas that allow them to realise margins from the reality of mobility.

This chapter begins by presenting the competing discourses about the Zimbabwean crisis and identifying different actors and their role in it. The main argument pursued here is that accepted definitions of the crisis mainly revolved around the figure of Robert Mugabe and the governance problems he presided over. The chapter then discusses the perils of such an understanding to the humanitarian protection of Zimbabwean migrants after Mugabe's demise and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe. It shows how this has resulted in the doubling down on the argument that Zimbabweans are economic migrants. To make the connections between crisis and protection clearer, the chapter discusses the hostile, securitised environment, which also helps to show the expedience of the South African state accepting and acting on particular conceptions of the Zimbabwean crisis. Traces of this can be found in the xenophobic practices which are presented before brief conclusions are offered. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that the incompatibility of crisis conceptions with the protection of Zimbabweans

raises eyebrows about the motivations of all involved, especially as the consequences are so obvious.

Competing discourses about the crisis

The Zimbabwean crisis refers to the era from 1996 to mid-2004, which marks a significant distillation of a number of issues (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004). Others have referred to it as Zimbabwe's lost decade (1998–2008), a period during which the country saw the worst political and economic disaster in living memory (Chikowero, 2015, p 16). Coltart (2008) described Zimbabwe's position as a 'humanitarian catastrophe' that has resulted in 'decades of agony'.

Since the beginning of the crisis, a considerable number of Zimbabweans have looked for methods to make ends meet outside the nation (Rutherford, 2008a; Bolt, 2016, p 17). The New Dispensation refers to the time beginning in 2017 in Zimbabwe, when the army deposed Robert Mugabe in 'Operation Restore Legacy', opening the way for Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa to become president (Moore, 2018; Rutherford, 2018; Beardsworth et al, 2019).

Different narratives about the Zimbabwean crisis have collaboratively established and fuelled a divide between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'patriots' and 'traitors' (or 'sell-outs'), 'heroes' and 'villains' and 'we' and 'them' (Moyo, 2012). The Zimbabwean crisis has been mediated to the point where it now has numerous dimensions that span national, regional and global areas, resulting in multiple versions of the crisis' reality (Moyo, 2012, p 176). The Zimbabwean state has often argued, using anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric, that the land reform programme was at the root of the crisis because it triggered international backlash and sabotage to subvert radical nationalism through sanctions and institutions such as the MDC ('evil puppets of imperialism') (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004; Moyo and Yeros, 2007). This perspective indicates that 'taking back the land' was at the heart of the Zimbabwe crisis, and everything else was secondary.

In this perspective, the crisis was precipitated by Zimbabwe's efforts to redress the problem by embarking on a comprehensive and 'revolutionary' land reform programme that displaced a tiny but powerful domestic constituency that had powerful allies and enjoyed racial affinity to the British and the White global community. It is this dimension – as the argument goes – that raised the profile of the issue to the rank of an international one, where it was framed as a threat to international peace and security (Masunungure and Badza, 2010, p 211).

The Zimbabwean state's interpretation of the crisis as an acute result of land seizures and foreign responses led it to pursue knee-jerk solutions, focusing on the apparent symptoms rather than the underlying issues in order to

avoid deeper concerns such as those about governance. Several economic measures taken by the government (farm mechanisation, indigenisation, the ten-point plan, the Control of Goods (Price Freeze) order, the Draft Prices and Incomes Stabilisation Protocol and so on) were only a partial solution to the economy's problems, which required a more holistic approach focusing on rule of law, policy issues, political processes, the economy and governance (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004).

This interpretation of the Zimbabwean 'crisis' clashed with the viewpoint that opposes the 'land as key issue' school. According to this viewpoint, the crisis was rooted in a governance dilemma, and so resolving the governance issue solves the other concerns. For example, this frame views the eviction of Britain's 'kith and kin' from their land as objectionable because it occurred without recompense, raising bigger issues about inadequate governance. To put it another way, poor governance or failure of governance is the major or core issue, while other issues, such as the land question, are secondary (Masunungure and Badza, 2010, p 212). When the problem is examined in historical, chronological order, there is strong disagreement over the claim that outside forces, enraged by the takeover of White farms, were to blame (Kanyenze et al, 2011, p 43). The land grab really got underway after the vote in February 2000, when the crisis had already begun, as shown by the economic slump from 1997. The US Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) did not actually take effect until 2001. Zimbabwe also stopped receiving balance-of-payments assistance from the IMF in 1998, primarily due to its inability to pay off its existing debt.

Hence, the land issue could simply have been only one of many issues that have arisen as a result of a long-running governance crisis. What remains unaccounted for, though, is the role of sanctions in exacerbating the land problem, as well as the moral, political and economic imperative for successful land redistribution (Moyo and Yeros, 2007; Hammar, 2008b). Yet, as Moyo and Yeros (2007) put it, Zimbabwe's robust and vocal civil society, the 'internationalist Left' – a collection of single-issue NGOs with a human rights ideology – popularised this governance viewpoint. It was also embraced and promoted by the European Left and Western international community (Western governments, their development agencies, the European Union, the Commonwealth and the international media) (Moyo and Yeros, 2007; Masunungure and Badza, 2010, p 212).

Mugabe and his centre dismissed this as a 'regime-change agenda' advocating a speculative discourse of 'crisis', chaos and tyranny in order to force him to resign. They took task with how this discourse only acknowledged the land question in so far as it violated property rights and agricultural productive capacity. Hence, they saw it as a means to justify the West's sabotage of the FTLRP (through 'imperialist sanctions'), which

it saw as a threat to international peace and security (Moyo and Yeros, 2007). Robert Mugabe was successful among some of his local constituents, the East and fellow Southern African countries (with exceptions such as Botswana) in portraying the Zimbabwe crisis as externally generated and driven based on the land question and the Western-funded civil society reich serving a regime-change agenda. Mugabe successfully exploited the country's state-owned media to spread a very selective discourse about the Zimbabwean people, which was meant to stoke pan-African fervour across the continent in the struggle against Western foes aiming to destroy the country's hard-won independence. This interpretation is compatible with the work of scholars such as Sam Moyo, who see Zimbabwe's predicament as a challenge to Western neoliberalism rather than a crisis. The Zimbabwe dilemma, according to these historians, is framed by two historical questions: national and agrarian (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012). The economic, social and political crises of the 2000s, according to this assessment, were caused directly by imperialism, neoliberalism and periphery capitalism, which have characterised post-independence Zimbabwe (Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012).

The effect of the governance crisis narrative was to mobilise moral sentiments in the public sphere of dispossessed White commercial farmers, MDC supporters, internally displaced Zimbabweans, emigrants who needed protecting from a rogue regime through 'external interference' (Moyo and Yeros, 2007). Assigning the blame to a single person served to spark a concerted humanitarian response, bringing together various players in complicated, unequal and intertwining multiscalar social, political and economic processes to work together, some with hidden political aims. This shared concept of the Zimbabwean 'crisis' is the same framing that appealed to funders and donors in Zimbabwe who supported civil society and the MDC. According to Moore and Raftopoulos (2012), the dialectic between regional and global powers as well as a 'global civil society' infiltrating the country and its affairs via 'humanitarian plus' aid schemes became the bearers of democratic reconstruction options. After all, NGOs in the so-called 'third world' (those that provide social services or protect human rights) are intricately and irrevocably linked to political fights centred on state authority. In this setting, civil society arose from a battle based on the belief that the collapse of one man may signal the end of a whole socio-political order, making the distinction between 'civil' and 'political' society extremely complex (Moore, 2006). This gave rationality to a certain type of intervention to deal with an apparently brief circumstance that was dubbed a governance crisis. This 'obsession', according to Ndlovu-Gatscheni (2012), is known as 'Mugabe-centrism'. Its ramifications are what this chapter turns to next.

“Now that Mugabe is gone you are free”

Mugabe’s demise and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe purveyed the doubling down on the argument that Zimbabweans are economic migrants. “Now that Mugabe is gone you are free” were the words of one humanitarian worker acting on behalf of the UNHCR as a legal implementing partner. These words reflect the world’s response to the events that took place in 2017 when the situation fundamentally altered in Zimbabwe, with humanitarian reasoning for limited forms of protection and the use of special measures like the Zimbabwe Exemption Permits (ZEP) being removed.

That South Africa manages excess labour through accommodation in extra-constitutional ‘exemptions’ is theoretically and historically important. It raises again the centrality of time as a mode of governing Zimbabwean migrants. These people with statuses are lent a degree of hope, only for the state to take it away by refusing uncertainty when the exemption has expired, and one joins the back of the queue again. These statuses are characterised by legal impermanence, with no permanent residence in sight. Such exemptions are themselves unstable arrangements that can be easily shaken by unravelling political events. Hence, there is productiveness too to what the category of exemption reveals time to be, that is, a mode of governance, that arises from unstable instances of crisis to equally produce unstable and unfinished lives.

The DHA had launched the Dispensation Zimbabweans Project (DZP) in 2009 as a way of compiling a list of Zimbabweans living in South Africa without the documents required by the state and giving amnesty to individuals in possession of South African ID cards that were not on the DHA system. The Zimbabwe Special Dispensation Permits (ZSP) took their place when they expired. Some permit criteria and application costs were waived (Moyo, 2017). In order to expedite the procedure, even individuals without passports were allowed to apply. The permits had a four-year validity period from the date of issuance. Since 2009, a total of 245,000 people have gained access to any of the exceptional dispensations. Even for these people, certain restrictions on these permits arose, perpetuating migrant precarity.

Under the DZP and ZSP systems, a permit holder does not qualify for permanent residency based on their temporary presence in South Africa (Moyo, 2017). In addition, the application process was plagued by a number of discrepancies. There was no clear appeal route for those whose petitions were not accepted, and the application and adjudication process was lengthy. The South African government finally opted not to renew these permits in 2021–2, giving holders a year to apply for another type of temporary residency visa.

I argue here that the reasoning for this may have been related to the shift in power that occurred in Zimbabwe on the night of 15 November 2017. The

country witnessed the first change in leadership since independence in 1980. Major-General Sibusiso Busi Moyo went on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) to give a speech that announced a coup described as a military intervention ‘in sanitised and couched language’ (Asuelime, 2018). As a result, Robert Mugabe left the position of Zimbabwe’s president through resignation, which he opted for over the humiliation of a parliamentary impeachment. At this point, some hoped the country would quickly recover from years of economic turmoil and authoritarian rule.

Since 2017, Zimbabwe has been led by Mugabe’s former ally-turned-opponent President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa (BBC, 2019). Mnangagwa returned from his short-lived exile in South Africa as the president-designate and as the national president after his inauguration on 24 November 2017, and then won a contested democratic election that was upheld by the compromised courts of law. Mnangagwa purveyed an image of himself as an agent of change, to root out corruption and election fraud and transform the economy. Yet, since the election, the Mnangagwa administration, the New Dispensation, has done little to convince that real change has occurred. Indeed, many Zimbabweans continue to come to South Africa for a combination of political, humanitarian and economic reasons. Others regularly travel back and forth between Zimbabwe and South Africa as cross-border traders and farmworkers or to visit family, as has always been the case since the crisis began (see Elphick and Amit, 2012). The images of congestion and even death at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border in the festive season of 2020 at the height of a global pandemic bear testament to this (Louw-Vaudran and Ringisai Chikohomero, 2021).

This shift in power created new political motivations relating to how migrants would be welcomed that arose from the bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and South Africa. The phrase “now that Mugabe is gone you are free” expresses the idea that over and above not fleeing war, Zimbabwean migrants since 2017 have had no legitimate claim to seeking asylum because the main reason, or perpetrator, behind their troubles related to economic deprivation and human rights abuses left office. This situation has led to the retreat of South Africa’s policy response to Zimbabwean migration from an ‘ad hoc, incoherent, and somewhat schizophrenic policy response’ that shows ‘some degree of tolerance of Zimbabweans but certainly not full stretching of the refugee norm to incorporate them’ (Betts, 2013) to one that is less ambiguous about its lack of concern for them.

These political motivations also explain the country’s retreat from the ZSPs. The interpretation that centres Mugabe belies how the displacement of Zimbabweans is not removed from the wider political context and goals. It cannot be separated from how South Africa’s responses to the coup also gave legitimacy to this New Dispensation. The coup took place at a time when South Africa was the chair of the regional body of the SADC.

President Jacob Zuma issued a statement in which he called for ‘calm and restraint’ and ‘expressed hope that developments in Zimbabwe would not lead to unconstitutional changes of government as that would be contrary to both SADC and African Union (AU) positions’ (eNCA, 2017). This led to lip service like actions from the SADC, while to some, this statement sounded like a reminder to the army to act with the SADC and AU rules in mind (Asuelime, 2018). The AU could have taken punitive measures that would have sent a clear message that it did not support any changes of government involving military pressure on a civilian leadership, but it chose not to (Asuelime, 2018).

The element that changed in Zimbabwe after the 2017 coup was the person (Mugabe), not the ZANU-PF culture and administration (Asuelime, 2018). By not condemning these actions, external actors taking this position further marginalised Zimbabweans by enabling their continued oppression that carries on through a regime that the international community has recognised as legitimate (this legitimacy has, of course, been contested, especially since 2020, and is in greater question now with significant human rights abuses, corruption and election fraud well documented). This shift on the Zimbabwean question is expedient for external actors like South Africa who have long provided a safe haven for Zimbabweans, as it allows them to focus on responding to their own citizens’ forgotten futures, particularly the urban poor (Hammerstad, 2012).

By legitimising the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe, the South African government has reinforced pre-existing symbolic boundaries for categorising Zimbabweans as ‘economic migrants’ whose country’s ‘governance crisis’ has been resolved, bringing to an end their vulnerability. In a context where Robert Mugabe has emerged as ‘this larger-than-life political figure who was midwife to the birth of the nation before becoming its undertaker’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012), this legitimation leads to a presumption that all is well for Zimbabwean migrants in their home country since the source of this problem is gone (Bourne and Compagnon, 2011). This perspective focuses on Robert Mugabe as responsible for the collapse of Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). However, prominent lawyer and MDC member Fadzayi Mahere suggests an alternative interpretation of events, noting that ‘Life in Zimbabwe was better under (former president) Robert Mugabe’ (BBC, 2019). Further, economic data has suggested that Zimbabwe’s economy had actually been shrinking since 2018 as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Through its support for the ‘new’ ZANU-PF-led government as a legitimate expression of sovereignty and the right to self-determination, South Africa has disregarded ‘the credible cries of long-suffering Zimbabwean citizens’ (Mhaka, 2019). This kind of context enables South African society to perceive representations of Zimbabwean migrants experiencing physical and sexual harm – or death in the most extreme

cases – as instances of indigence that must be punished through more robust criminalisation by means of more concerted border militarisation. This ‘vast machine of illegalisation’, as [Scheel \(2017\)](#) refers to it, in the EU context leads some disgruntled South African citizens to end up thinking that these strangers are deliberately exerting pressure and disregarding South Africa’s borders while transforming border areas like Limpopo into places of horror and chaos. It reinvents De Genova’s border spectacle proper.

There is a danger that humanitarian actors have been acting on these political constructions of crisis, yet they do not always fit the complexity of displaced Zimbabweans’ identities and experiences as victims and agents. What is peculiar is how they have missed this, as the consequences are self-evident. For example, humanitarian actions involving UN humanitarian agencies and others in the transnational humanitarian community often employ a technical managerial approach. They have a goal to solve humanitarian problems as rapidly as possible by restoring the normal order of things. This response is, however, unsustainable because it is based on a political-economic model that assumes Zimbabwe is experiencing a governance crisis, which does not adequately account for the nature, scope and profile of the Zimbabwean situation on its own ([Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004](#); [Masunungure and Badza, 2010](#)).

Several scholars have warned against this. [Raftopoulos and Phimister \(2004, p 357\)](#), for example, believe that this political crisis must be understood in the context of the postcolonial state’s developmentalist project’s restrictions. ‘Move away from the deterministic ways of looking at the Zimbabwe crisis’, as [Chiumbu and Musemwa \(2012, p ix\)](#) put it, or what [Moyo and Yeros \(2007, p 182\)](#) termed the simplistic conflict between ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘human rights’. It is plainly simplistic, if not reductionist, to view and characterise the political situation in Zimbabwe as a mono-crisis because this does not allow enough space to get at the diverse everyday experiences arising out of the diverse and immediate constituent crises engendered by the political maelstrom in Zimbabwe roughly between 1998 and 2009 ([Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012, p ix](#)). Each of these crises requires ‘an independent internal analysis’ as well as a critical evaluation of its link to previous crises in terms of the time and space in which they occurred, as well as their individual and collective impact on Zimbabwe’s inhabitants ([Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012, p ix](#)).

Political expediency of accepting the governance crisis narrative

Traces of the political expedience of the South African state accepting and acting on particular conceptions of the Zimbabwean crisis can be found in the country’s xenophobic practices and immigration policies. This analysis

is informed by [Hammerstad's \(2012\)](#) observation that there is a complex and important link between South Africa's domestic response to the Zimbabwean immigration inflow and its foreign policy towards Zimbabwe. This section mainly contends that accepted framings of the Zimbabwean crisis maintain and reinforce historical borders that have existed between South Africans and migrants from other parts of the continent, especially in the context of the New Dispensation. To show this, it is important in the first place to reimagine these borders in time.

Anti-migrant immigration policies

To limit permanent urban settlement and ensure that the Black African population remained in their 'homelands', the apartheid administration of South Africa enacted racial pass laws ([Bakewell, 2008](#); [Castles, 2010](#)). The Aliens Control Act of 1991 formed the cornerstone of South Africa's immigration policy throughout the 1990s. After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the Aliens Control Amendment Act (1995) revealed a reluctance to welcome migrants. Official opinions towards immigration tended to fall into one of two categories: migrants versus national interest or xenophobia and racism ([Landau and Segatti, 2008](#); [Hammerstad, 2012](#)). Immigration policies in the immediate aftermath of 1994 favoured highly talented migrants at the expense of their less-skilled colleagues ([Peberdy, 2009](#); [Moyo, 2017](#)). Following laws, such as the Immigration Act (No. 13 of 2002), as revised by the Immigration Amendment Act (No. 19 of 2004), and the Immigration Amendment Act (No. 3 of 2007), made immigration less limited ([Moyo, 2017](#)).

Despite this, the Immigration Regulations of 2005 and 2014, as well as the White Paper on International Migration (2017), have produced an immigration climate that resembles the Aliens Control Act's two-gate system. By selecting only highly skilled migrants as desirable (although the extent of this desirability is currently contested with current amendments to immigration legislation),¹ these legal devices exclude a large percentage of migrants. "We are mindful that many people from across the globe make a valuable contribution in the country, such as captains of industry, scientists, sporting personalities, and academics, and thus the changes we see in our new visa regime," said Director-General of Home Affairs Mkuseli Apleni

¹ Since 2016, foreign students who graduated from a South African university in a field of critical skills would automatically qualify to apply for permanent residency without work experience ([Daniel, 2022](#)). Foreigners seeking employment with critical skills would also qualify to apply for a critical skills visa. The Minister revoked these waivers earlier this year, which has marginalised skilled migrants who are looking to work in South Africa if they do not possess up to five years of post-qualification experience ([Daniel, 2022](#)).

(Department of Home Affairs, 2015). Many migrants who do not match these crucial skills requirements are forced to enter South Africa as border jumpers or through the help of human smugglers.

In line with South Africa's two pieces of migration legislation, this immigration legislation creates categories of asylum seekers and economic migrants. South Africa's two domestic migration governance frameworks are in line with global migration governance frameworks aimed at a migration management approach. In this regard, there is a 'nice fit' between South Africa's migration regimes and international law, particularly in relation to the intransigent emphasis on the dichotomy between migrants and refugees. Two sections of legislation govern migration in South Africa. Asylum seekers and refugees' rights to enter and settle in South Africa are governed by the Refugees Act. South Africa signed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention in 1995 and the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1996. The Refugees Act became a domestication of international legal instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the OAU Convention, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. As noted by Amit (2011, pp 462–3), drawing on international and regional law, Section 3 of the Refugees Act defines three categories of persons qualifying for refugee status:

1. A person forced to flee his country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, tribe, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group and who is unable or unwilling to seek the protection of his or her country of origin.
2. A person who is compelled to leave his or her place of habitual residence as a result of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either a part or the whole of his or her country or origin.
3. A dependent of a person described in the previous two categories.

An asylum-seeker permit allows asylum seekers to remain in South Africa and work or study while their claim for refugee status is processed by the DHA. The Refugees Permit (Refugees Act 130 of 1998), often known as a Section 24, recognises an asylum seeker as a refugee in South Africa. Refugees have access to the majority of the same rights as South African citizens (except the right to vote). Because a person with refugee status is protected by the South African government, the state cannot force them to return home until it is deemed safe to do so.

On 1 January 2020, the Refugees Amendment Act 2008 (RAA, 2008) came into force, which also triggered the coming into force of the Refugees Amendment Act 12 of 2011 (RAA, 2011) and of the Refugees Amendment Act 2017 (RAA, 2017). These pieces of legislation, along with their

accompanying regulations, include the loss of refugee status for voting or participating in any political activity in their countries of origin, as well as seeking any consular services from their countries of origin (for example, requesting a birth certificate at a consulate); tightening administrative rules for applying for asylum; and limiting asylum seekers' rights to work and study in South Africa. These changes aim to match South Africa with many other countries' more exclusionary and restricted treatment of asylum seekers and refugees (Crush et al, 2017). This is detrimental for migrant entrepreneurs because refugee status is necessary for refugee entrepreneurship and long-term livelihoods. It also furthers the possible marginalisation of asylum seekers and refugees who already can become illegalised from problems and barriers they face in renewing permits and the long waiting time for RSD and appeals (Betts, 2013).

Meanwhile, 'voluntary' migrants are regulated and regularised by the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 and the Immigration Regulations to the Act (2014). In support of the White Paper on International Migration on 29 March 2018, Immigration Services started drafting changes to the Immigration Act in 2018–19 (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). This process is yet to be concluded. Those who are not refugees, or who are not deemed refugees by the state, must apply for one of the permits listed in the Immigration Act (for example, Study, Business, Work, Critical Skills, Spousal and so on), which are usually referred to as temporary residency permits (TRPs). In practice, it is not easy to get a work permit in South Africa because any person who employs a foreign national must ensure that there are no persons in the Republic, other than foreign nationals, with the requisite skills to fill the vacancy according to labour law in the Employment Services Act (ILO, 2022).

Also, officials at the DHA have been accused of sabotaging immigrants in need of documentation in a subtle and purposeful manner. They will use illogical rules to purposefully make people illegal in some situations, such as denying them entrance to buildings, creating long line-ups and failing to produce required identification (Klaaren and Ramji, 2001, p 43; Amit, 2015). This has resulted in the establishment of a corrupt institution over time that is networked into other state agents like the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Lindela Detention Centre, who, with the DHA, are occasionally xenophobic (Amit, 2010). This culture of animosity for their clients to turn in a profit frequently encourages foreigners to engage in acts criminalised by the state to gain access to the documents they require to be deemed legal by the South African government. While the day-to-day work of interacting with migrants has been outsourced to VFS Global, DHA fraud and corruption remain quite pervasive (BusinessTech, 2022). This is another part of the assemblage of those concerned with how to realise margins from the reality of mobility.

The procedures put in place for hiring foreign nationals are frequently laborious and dysfunctional, involving an excessive number of levels of skill and qualification verification as well as poor interdepartmental coordination between the national and provincial Departments of Health (DoH) (in the case of health professionals' recruitment specifically) and between DoH and the DHA, as well as between the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) and the DHA (Segatti, 2014). The DHA still imposes restrictions on the number of work permits it issues to foreign skilled migrants, and in cases where it issues these, it does not do so timeously (Amit and Kriger, 2014). For instance, securing a permanent residence certificate in South Africa takes anywhere from one to five or more years (Hoag, 2014, p 416). The DHA has set out to speed up visa processing times for temporary and permanent residency permits by migrating from the manual adjudication system to a more advanced electronic one (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). However, little seems to have changed, with the DHA recently issuing an initial blanket waiver of 30 September 2022 to migrants whose permits have expired and whose renewals are still being processed, which was later extended to March 2023 (Polity, 2022). At the time of finalising this book, this waiver had been extended to December 2023.

In terms of documenting Zimbabwean migrants, the two migration governance regimes have never been adequate. South Africa is moving towards a first comprehensive national migration policy, with some of the proposals made in the new Draft National Labour Migration Policy Framework (ILO, 2022) including the quota proposal to reserve a 'proportion generally be fixed at 60 percent' of total staff complements for South African citizens and permanent residents, in view of the high unemployment rate in South Africa (International Commission of Jurists, 2022). This is likely to reinforce restrictions placed on documenting migrant workers.

The limitations in South Africa's migration management approach to providing documentation to low-skilled migrant workers has meant that South Africa has resorted to ad hoc policy measures to regularise them (Carciotto, 2018). These include several special permit (visa) regimes that have been implemented in previous years to several nationalities other than Zimbabweans. The limitations in the formal regimes have also meant that Zimbabwean migrants have had to rely on humanitarian assistance from organisations like the UNHCR and the IOM as they have reached the borders of South Africa. However, as this book shows in later parts, de facto governance dictates how the UNHCR and its implementing partners respond to these migrants' needs, due to the organisation's relationship with the government, which prompts the agency to label them as 'economic migrants'.

These two broad categories counteract each other by allowing the South African state to distribute rights and protection in a flexible and timely

manner across time and space. The South African government, for example, treats Zimbabwean migrants as ‘economic migrants’ rather than real asylum applicants. There was evidence of exploitation of the Refugees Act, with over 90 per cent of applicants just seeking economic possibilities, Mkuseli Apleni claims (Department of Home Affairs, 2015). Zimbabwean asylum seekers had a near zero refugee recognition rate, according to official figures (Hammerstad, 2012). Ultimately, the asylum space in South Africa has been reduced to the point where many see the national refugee regime as no longer relevant because it fails to fulfil its primary protective function (Amit, 2011). Instead, it now serves as a control system for economic migrants (Amit, 2011). Similarly, the labour migrant regime is not necessarily open to low-skilled Zimbabwean migrants because, albeit with some bilateral mechanisms existing, most are outdated and require extending, while there are no provisions to provide work permits for those working in sectors like domestic work, agriculture or hospitality (Jinnah and Munakamwe, 2015). Thus, you have two migration regimes both failing to perform their core mandates.

As a result, many Zimbabweans have resorted to border jumping across the Limpopo River, aided by either *izimpisi* (or, on rare occasions, *omalayitsha*), as passports have become prohibitively expensive in Zimbabwe. In 2012, Zimbabwe and South Africa signed an MOU to eliminate visa restrictions for nationals of both countries visiting the other (only as visitors). As a result of this respite, Zimbabweans were able to enter South Africa and get a visitors’ visa that allowed them to stay for up to 90 days. However, immigration authorities from the South African DHA at the border used their discretion in awarding the visas. They have been known to offer Zimbabwean visitors as little as seven-day visas because they are hesitant to give the full 90 days (Vanyoro, 2019). Because of the DHA’s well-documented pervasive corruption, bribes are frequently used to get around this tight visa allocation. This visa policy has a time frame attached to it. To keep certain groups of migrants temporary, the state intends to use visa durations, a (dis)allowed number of working hours and other state-designed measures. The amount of time ‘newcomers’ are allowed to stay in the host country promotes irregular movement of people who do not qualify (Cwerner, 2001; Cojocar, 2016; Robertson, 2019).

The visitors’ visa is just as good as Zimbabweans who do not use ‘border jumping’ to enter South Africa have it. This visa, on the other hand, imposes limitations. Visitors, for example, are not permitted to apply for work visas. It is forbidden to apply for a work permit or any other permit while in the nation on a visitors’ visa, according to the Immigration Regulations (2014), with a few circumstantial exceptions. As a result, many migrants frequently ‘overstay’ their visitor visas because they are unable to return home to file for work permits. In 2014, the DHA modified the Immigration Act to

include the blacklisting of migrants who overstay their 90-day stay in the nation. Those Zimbabwean migrants who can afford to may avoid the consequences of this by paying a fee or bribing Home Affairs authorities at the border, who will offer a backdated stamp in exchange for a bribe. They have also devised a new strategy for navigating legal constraints and avoiding the costs and hassle of going back and forth in order to remain in South Africa. This method of evasion entails moving travel documents across the Zimbabwe–South Africa border in the absence of the document’s owner, at the payment of a fee (see [Vanyoro, 2019](#) for a more detailed description). This strategy has given rise to the phrase ‘ghost passports’, which refers to this method by which Zimbabweans with passports are able to reside in the country without a visa, outside the knowledge of the state that presumes they have left ([Tshabalala, 2017](#)).

Xenophobic violence

The policy context presented previously has been characterised by some as a perfect example of the institutionalisation of xenophobia in state institutions. Xenophobia is said to have become institutionalised in practices of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ like immigration officers, health care providers, police officers and policy makers since 1994 because of the perceived ‘threat’ foreigners pose (see [Dodson, 2010](#); [Landau, 2011](#); [Vanyoro and Ncube, 2018](#)). [Neocosmos \(2008\)](#) also argues that, although state institutions have never condoned violence against migrants and have regularly condemned it, ‘they have provided an environment wherein such xenophobic violence has effectively been legitimized by the state’ (p 589). This observation resonates well with [Adjai and Lazaridis’ \(2013\)](#) argument that, under xenophobia, institutions have been used to exclude the ‘other’ through practice and not by design.

Foreign migrants are also constant targets and victims of violent xenophobic attacks, which is egregious on Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s vision of South Africa as a rainbow nation. On 27 April 1994, South Africa had its first non-racial democratic elections, ushering in a new era guided by the constitution’s daring principle that ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it’. This is referred to as a ‘discourse of African solidarity’ by [Hammerstad \(2012\)](#). At the same time, the majority of the country’s Black population believed that their economic woes would be alleviated as a result. Despite this, South Africa remains one of the world’s most unequal societies.

Violent crime, violent service delivery demonstrations, community violence and vigilantism inside South Africa’s townships and informal settlements are all part of the country’s long history of violent conflict ([Misago, 2016a](#)). That xenophobic attacks are common in South Africa, with indigenous South Africans blaming ‘foreigners’ for their social and

economic woes, is very well documented (see Harris, 2001; Black et al, 2006; Crush, 2008; Neocosmos, 2008; Crush and Frayne, 2010; Landau, 2010; 2011; Polzer and Takabvirwa, 2010; Misago, 2011; 2016a; 2016b; 2017; Adjai and Lazaridis, 2013; Caitlin Blaser Mapitsa, 2016; Klotz, 2016; Monama and Landau, 2016; Mupotsa and Kreutzfeldt, 2016; Vanyoro and Ncube, 2018). According to some scholars, xenophobia arises because impoverished South Africans believe their own futures have not been realised, and that foreigners have contributed to this stalemate. High expectations for jobs, housing and other social amenities, coupled with the realisation that delivery is not instantaneous, are believed to culminate in frustration focused on immigrants (Lerner, 2009, p 16). In other words, xenophobia is a by-product of political scapegoating, in which the urban poor blame migrants for the country's unemployment troubles, a precarious present and a bleak future. From the early 2000s onwards, for example, sectors of South Africa's poorer citizens saw Zimbabwean immigration as a threat to their jobs, health and welfare (Hammerstad, 2012).

A survey found that South Africa had the most negative attitudes towards immigration of all Global South countries (Crush, 2021). The country has indeed found it difficult to contain xenophobia as it has been marked, aggressive and long-standing (Cornelissen, 2009; Choane, Shulika and Mthombeni, 2011). Foreign migrants are routinely targeted for violent xenophobic attacks at various moments. Such instances can be traced to as far back as the 1980s and the early 1990s and have been well documented (Monson and Misago, 2009; see Choane, Shulika and Mthombeni, 2011). Furthermore, in 2008, 62 people lost their lives, a third of whom were local inhabitants, and at least 670 were wounded while dozens were raped and more than 100,000 displaced as a result of xenophobic violence (Steenkamp, 2009). Subsequently, there were attacks in 2009, where thousands of foreigners in the Western Cape were forced to abandon their shacks, and in 2015, in which seven people were killed in the violence, three of whom were South Africans, while a thousand more were displaced (over 5,000 foreigners were displaced in the KwaZulu-Natal province alone) (Bekker, 2015; Naicker, 2016). Attacks have also taken place in 2016 and 2017, with those on truck drivers becoming more pronounced over the last three years. Altogether, Xenowatch has recorded 796 incidents of xenophobic violence that resulted in at least 588 deaths, with at least 121,945 displaced and an estimation of at least 4,693 shops looted in the period of 1994 to 21 April 2021 (Misago and Mlilo, 2021). Xenophobic violence is spread across South Africa but it occurs primarily in the country's major cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Ekurhuleni (Misago and Mlilo, 2021). COVID-19 has also increased levels of xenophobia in the region because of deteriorating economies and negative perceptions of migrants as vectors of the virus. Beyond humanitarian needs like shelter, food, clothes and documentation,

xenophobic violence extends concerns around the protection of migrants like Zimbabweans as a physical issue.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the competing discourses about the Zimbabwean crisis and identified different actors and their roles in it. The main argument I have pursued here is that accepted definitions of the crisis mainly revolved around the figure of Mugabe and the governance problems he presided over. I have then discussed the perils of such an understanding to the humanitarian protection of Zimbabwean migrants after Mugabe's demise and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe. This has helped to show how this has resulted in the doubling down on the argument that Zimbabweans are economic migrants. This sphere of political discourse has become a novel site of bordering because it gives rise to practices that are capable of excluding Zimbabweans by their classificatory nature, particularly as regimes of truth and moral sentiment regarding the crisis and figure that gave rise to their legitimacy become contested.

To make the connections between crisis and protection clearer, I have also briefly discussed the hostile, securitised environment, which also helps to show the expedience of the South African state accepting and acting on particular conceptions of the Zimbabwean crisis. Traces of this can be found in the xenophobic practices which I have outlined briefly. I have done this in a bid to demonstrate my argument that there is a productive relationship between humanitarian interventions, moral/religious politics and migration governance at the border that emerges from the discursive acts of (de)legitimising humanitarian crisis through public discourse. This politics, in turn, shapes humanitarian and protection procedures, as well as conduct to migration, that are productive yet dangerous at the same time because of their fluidity and dichotomising effect. The incompatibility of crisis conceptions with the physical and humanitarian protection of Zimbabweans raises eyebrows about the motivations of all involved, especially as the consequences are so obvious. This puzzle is an important point of departure for the following chapter's concerns.

Governing the Crisis at the Zimbabwe–South Africa Border through Humanitarian Interventions

Introduction

Between 2009 and 2013, South African president Thabo Mbeki mediated the Government of National Unity (GNU) power-sharing arrangement between the MDC and ZANU-PF. While this provided some economic stability, it was temporary because the MDC never won elections; thus, those who returned from the diaspora soon found themselves in similar situations, because the stability was so short-lived. As a result, the crisis in the border space would continue to be managed as a temporary problem that was projected to disappear with the demise of Mugabe and the governance crisis he created. As detailed in [Chapter 2](#), the South African government presented temporary relief in the ZEP, which must be renewed after every four years with no guarantee of permanent residency based on length of stay.

However, the disappearance of the crisis has never fully happened and South Africa appears to have a chronic problem at the border. In this context, humanitarian operations at the border have morphed themselves into a perplexing management system centred on indefinitely managing an ostensibly temporary crisis by normalising and bureaucratising it inside a governance environment characterised by a rapidly dwindling right to asylum. Humanitarian actors at the border are now entrenched within much more complicated social, political and economic processes as well as discourses related to the Zimbabwean crisis.

This chapter argues that humanitarian activities have transformed the Zimbabwe–South Africa border into a space that is aligned with current and dominant migration governance practices and official discourses that emphasise migrant management, categorisation and containment. Indeed, it would be unfair to suggest that these are deliberate attempts, or that

the assemblage of transit shelters in Musina forms part of a consistent assemblage of governance together with the formal state. However, it is clear in this assessment that attempts to administer their work in a technical and administrative manner enhances some humanitarian workers' autonomy over migrants' lives in ways that maintain the legitimacy of the bureaucratic state and its logics of classifying people as insiders and outsiders, victims and agents. This analysis pushes us to view immobilities as part of a broader typology of power that represents a novel way for humanitarian institutions to manage the lives of migrants. In the context of this book, it is important in showing the importance of going beyond binaries of state–non–state in African border studies' understanding of sovereignty, particularly when considering the role of moral sentiments, like discourse, in the conduct of conduct.

The chapter begins by returning to the period around 2008, at the height of Zimbabwe's crisis, albeit this time at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border. It shows how aid workers' response to and framing of the crisis coincided with existing ideas and approaches, resulting in the catastrophe becoming bureaucratized in the coding of the figure of the 'outsider' in the name of the bureaucratic state's migratory governance discourses, methodology and legislation. Much like the historical imbrication of state with farmer sovereignty at the border, the state's limited efforts at regulating the border on its own are complemented with concepts of migration governance that have been normalised into 'meaningful' humanitarian categories that influence protection. Interpreting migrants' needs and rights in often dichotomous categories related to gender and migrant/asylum seeker strengthen the physical border on the lives of shelter residents as it makes them aware again of its existence.

This chapter acts more as a descriptive account that offers important backdrop for the argument at hand, which is extended in following chapters, by demonstrating the coming together of this odd regime. Hence, the chapter proceeds as follows. The first part describes the influx of humanitarian actors in Musina at the apex of the crisis. The second part introduces the setting up of an assemblage of shelters across categories of men, women and children in Musina. How this development ushered the UNHCR to formally begin assisting religious organisations in establishing temporary transit shelters for those awaiting the processing of their asylum–seeker permits is the third area of focus. This leads to a discussion on humanitarian migration management across binaries, which begins with the UNHCR's role in fomenting the asylum seeker/refugee category, before an outline of gender and age.

The early days: Musina, 2008

Musina is a town located 10 km from the bustling border. Due to Zimbabwe–South Africa migrant flows, Musina is one of the busiest

Southern African migration corridor towns, ranking tenth among the top 20 migration corridors involving African nations. The town is about 520 km from Johannesburg, which is a popular destination for both domestic and international migrants (Mahati, 2015). Many people use the town as a stopover on their way to Johannesburg, while others work on farms to supplement their income and send money to relatives across the border (Leong, 2009). Those from the DRC travel to Zimbabwe via Zambia or Mozambique, then to South Africa. Some people from the Horn of Africa, particularly Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania, migrate to South Africa via Zambia or Malawi.

The border town of Musina was characterised as being in the coalface of a humanitarian disaster in 2008, with people and humanitarian organisations battling to deal with a deluge of sick, broke and hungry Zimbabweans (IOL News, 2008). The majority of migrants arriving in Musina were Zimbabweans, but there were also large groups from the DRC, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, Burundi and Malawi (Elphick and Amit, 2012; Jinnah, 2012). ‘Musina at breaking point as refugees pour in’ was the title of a media story that reflected the humanitarian crisis in Musina and the role humanitarian organisations were beginning to play (IOL News, 2008).

The economic and political low point in Zimbabwe, when thousands of desperate Zimbabweans were fleeing, resulted in a humanitarian inflow in Musina from a number of international organisations delivering services. This humanitarian response was exacerbated by a lack of government aid. During the peak of the Zimbabwean exodus in 2008, much of the humanitarian help and presence began. To accommodate the needs of cross-border migrants, many local NGOs and faith-based organisations also started or expanded their activities in that area. For example, one NGO providing a pro bono legal service to Zimbabwean migrants began as a voluntary effort to provide free legal assistance to Africans detained by the apartheid state. Its direction evolved in 1994 because of a change in the manner in which the organisation operated previously, as apartheid issues were no longer as much of an issue. It shifted its focus from dealing with the victims to providing guidance and help on labour and socio-economic concerns in the community.

When the Zimbabwean crisis reached its pinnacle in 2008, the organisation began to focus on migration issues rather than dealing with specific difficulties involving citizens. In 2007, the organisation was awarded a large grant by a prominent international philanthropy to help fund a response to an impending influx of Zimbabwean migrants to Musina. It had a staff of 14 at the time, all of whom were focusing on the refugee issue, as the grants had set the NGO on a new path of stability. Most of its work was completed during this period when the office was at its busiest. Prior to this, migration difficulties were not as prominent, but the crisis highlighted the need for physical security, legal protection and case management. In this way, Musina

became a hub for many other local NGOs supported by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) looking to create a presence in the border town by opening their own local offices and developing capacity.

These national and international agencies focused on Zimbabwean migrants in Musina, the number of which had increased more than threefold between 2004 and 2009, primarily because the town was unprepared to deal with the growing migrant population due to its small population and remote location from major urban centres. The municipality's resources had been overburdened by Zimbabwean migrants as a result of the country's turmoil (Fritsch et al, 2009, p 628). Musina Mayor Caroline Mahasela remarked in 2008 that the town's resources were being strained by the increasing influx of residents. "We never expected to care for more than a thousand people, so there are challenges. We are currently in the process of finding a suitable place for the people to stay, where there will be sufficient toilets," she said (IOL News, 2008).

Because there was no institutional experience to draw on in designing and implementing responses to this first large-scale in-migration post-apartheid, Zimbabwean migration put South Africa's legal and institutional infrastructure for migration management and refugee protection to the test (Polzer, 2008). In response to probable migratory triggers such as Zimbabwean elections, Limpopo province and the border town of Musina established a national disaster management contingency plan. This plan lacked a larger framework for assisting Zimbabweans in settings where the negative consequences of their presence had not yet reached crisis proportions (Polzer, 2008). The establishment of humanitarian offices and operations at the border became a harsh indictment of the municipality, local government and national government's inability to properly respond to migration.

During this time, one humanitarian worker, Steelo, who had previously worked for two renowned INGOs as the head of family placement unification and the child protection database, was there. He had become a key source in recounting to me the events of over a decade ago and perceived the humanitarian influx as a result of state capacity constraints. In his words, the survival migration of Zimbabweans into South Africa started, in early 2008, to become visible. While the traces of displacement started earlier in 2006–7, it became very obvious around 2008 when residents started seeing a lot of children on the street and then somebody had to raise a concern.

When the whistle for help was blown and news travelled as fast as it often does, local responders started getting capacity building from international organisations who came in to support the South African government with dealing with the migration. A number of existing organisations which did not implement anything related to migration had to be capacitated and equipped by international organisations to respond. It is clear that news of

the state's incapacity had spread quickly, especially when children began to be spotted on the streets.

Musina did not have a DHA office to process prior Zimbabwean asylum petitions. Soon after, the South African authorities began to put in place a few ad hoc structures to manage the rising destitute Zimbabwean migrant population, owing to the increased visibility of children on the streets and media coverage. The DHA first established a tiny local office in the town of Musina at a local hotel (Limpopo River Lodge), which eventually proved unsustainable due to an increase in the number of people queuing and sleeping there. But the hotel was also sharing the same space with the restaurant and the queue was moving around the hotel, and around a street which leads to the restaurant. People would queue with the first person somewhere at the restaurant, which was being renovated with even a new lawn and flowers. When their turn came, would-be applicants would be called to use the back entrance of the hotel into Home Affairs and this restaurant. The numerous people that were coming started sleeping there as well, trampling on the new lawn and the flowers, which disturbed the work that was going on. As people were just sleeping wherever they felt like, business people started complaining about waking up every morning with the town dirty with cardboard boxes everywhere and people looking for jobs. The hotel restaurant's business suffered as a result of this. Eventually, the owner complained to the DHA, who had to find a space to process their asylum applications far away from town using mobile vans. A mobile unit was dispatched from Polokwane, working from the showground compound that was now the refugee reception mobile office. The newly constituted RRO within the showground began processing asylum petitions in no time.

In July 2008, the RRO began processing asylum applications and migrants with or without asylum permits converged here and in the surrounding area, with many camping in the nearby bush (IOM, 2009; *Médecins Sans Frontières*, 2009; Rutherford, 2011). The processing centre at the showground was in reality a temporary solution. The government thought they would be able to provide assistance but resolve the situation within a short period of time. Unfortunately, the situation did not normalise and, with time, other Zimbabweans who had been hiding from the police began to come in large numbers to seek asylum. They were now able to stay in Musina for extended periods of time while waiting for their asylum documents to be processed without fear of being arrested. This resulted in a slew of new requirements and obstacles, particularly in the areas of shelter, sanitation and food. They had access to a variety of service providers, including local and international NGOs, religious organisations, legal service providers, local civil society organisations, humanitarian organisations, health care providers and governmental organisations and INGOs (Elphick and Amit, 2012, p 8). They were living in deplorable conditions and were

dependent on food aid from organisations such as the United Nations, Save the Children and the South African Red Cross (SARC), while Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) provided them with medical care (IOL News, 2008).

The matter of shelter remained unaddressed, though. The showground has a large area of sandy parking where people just started sleeping until it festered into a camp. With nowhere else to go, many Zimbabwean migrants began showering in the showground camp's adjacent bush area, where an informal ablution area had been created around an existing public tap (IOM, 2009). The majority of people slept outside, and the region quickly became a camp, with activities like food preparation, water collection, shelter seeking and ablution often occurring in close proximity to where people used the 'bush system' (IOM, 2009, p 24). In one newspaper story, the following was described as the awful humanitarian situation:

More than a 1,000 Zimbabweans are living on the streets of the Limpopo town, scrounging for food and looking for work, just kilometres from their home country. ... Most sleep in the open field with no shelter or mattresses, and have turned the area into a refugee camp. Nine portable toilets and four taps service the nearly 1,000 people. (IOL News, 2008)

Clearly, this posed a risk of cholera transmission and other health issues. It was critical now more than ever for people to know about the difficult life at the border because the situation deteriorated to the point where Save The Children UK (SCUK) proclaimed Musina an emergency zone in November 2008 (Fritsch et al, 2009, p 632). But the government resisted the idea of creating a formal refugee camp because it believed such a facility would attract additional Zimbabweans to the country (Fritsch et al, 2009, p 632). Recourse to shelter would have to come from somewhere else.

Establishing an assemblage of shelters across categories of men, women and children

The situation at the showground and the state's response of insisting on removing occupants necessitated a humanitarian reasoning to advocate for the safety of this group across diverse political categories of protection. While Zimbabwean migrants were being killed, abused and harassed, sleeping in the bush, and women were being sexually assaulted, the state provided no shelter for those seeking permits. The majority of them waited for days, if not weeks, on the bare yard of the showground. Transit shelters began haphazardly at the Methodist Church, which was run by a late Zimbabwean pastor who welcomed Zimbabwean refugees regardless, at this

time, of gender or age. Because it was not set up as a real shelter but just a place to sleep, individuals were crammed into a small church structure on the first night, while others slept inside and outside the yard. Since there was no separation, everyone slept wherever they pleased. Obviously, the surroundings were not ideal, as there was little to no privacy and some men reportedly exploited women.

By the third night, people started complaining about men conducting sexual transactions with women for money and food inside the church. This was something that had started at the showground already. Some locals had been to the showground to buy sex for as little as R5 or a plate of food, knowing full well that the women were desperate. The UNHCR, with Steelo's assistance, stepped in to separate the group, with a new model of having all the men and boys designated to sleep outside, while women and children would remain inside the church. Pregnant women would be separated into another room.

Congregants complained after a few days about the eyesore caused by blankets and bags when they were having their church service. It became clear that the people had to go somewhere more sustainable and suitable. After consultations with churches, one pastor from Zimbabwe who was running his own organisation took in the boys and men. Women and girls were moved to another shelter, creating two binary shelters for the first time in Musina: one for men and boys and one for women and girls. After a while, the boys at the new shelter would complain that whenever there was food, the men would push them out of line, that they ate a lot of the food and so they did not receive meals. Other complaints pertained to the men stealing the boys' blankets and bullying. In 2008, Bishop Jonas stepped in and moved the men to the men's shelter.

Here emerged another notable religious leader by the name of Pastor Dungere. He was gentle and personable yet spoke charismatically and passionately during our meetings. He proudly declared himself to be the "founding father" of Musina's transit shelters. He was well known in the town for this work and enjoyed the reputation even a decade later when I had the privilege of hearing him recount what had happened then. While he was instrumental in the establishment of one of the first transit shelters and pressing the DHA to build an office in Musina during the height of the Zimbabwean crisis in 2008, he had since resigned from any role in Zimbabwean-related topics in 2019. He was now solely focused on running his church and a refuge home in one of the border's old mining 'locations'. He took pride in this shift, stating that he was only supporting high-profile migrants fleeing Zimbabwe's political persecution.

Following the violent protests in Harare after ZANU-PF was declared the victor of the presidential elections in 2018, he aided several runaway MDC members who were facing persecution from ZANU-PF loyalists. Through

his extensive network of contacts, he would provide them with lodging and transportation to Johannesburg once they had crossed the border. He had ties to high-ranking MDC officials, as well as to exiled human rights lawyer and Zimbabwe Exiles Forum (ZEF) Chairman Gabriel Shumba. Pastor Dungure now worked out of a modest office at a nearby truck stop, not far from the border, on the N1. He was the one who took the boys to the Concerned Zimbabwe Citizens Campbell Shelter (CZCCS) in 2008, for which he rented space in a hall on someone's property (this shelter was subsequently closed).

Both with Zimbabwean ties, Pastor Dungure and Bishop Jonas put up tents and rented bathrooms to begin operating as transit shelters for men and boys. Bishop Jonas and Pastor Dungure had a significant fight with the municipal authorities just two days after they set up about how the shelters were in breach of local by-laws. Pastor Dungure became active in a public campaign to advocate for a more sympathetic response to Zimbabwean migrants' needs in Musina, particularly shelter. Pastor Dungure took advantage of the widespread media exposure that Musina was receiving in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis to help overturn this unpopular decision. Women and children were important as objects of suffering to evoke sympathy, which he believed was desperately required:

‘That day when we were shut down by the municipality, I saw journalists from all over. SABC, Al Jazeera, everywhere. I don't know how they heard of it or how they came but now I was like fighting the municipality in the media. And we were not even knowing each other but some of them were now talking to me. I was pointing out that these people who want us to close, I understand their concern that South Africa does not have refugee camps. But can we then say women and children are staying in the bush because in South Africa they strictly say that there are no refugee camps? Does that protect people; does it protect their integrity?’

Indeed, Musina had rarely reached national South African headlines before the Zimbabwean crisis, according to [Rutherford \(2011, p 1303\)](#), let alone been the focus of worldwide attention. The aforementioned campaign placed the municipality in an ethical bind, forcing it to reassess its morally flawed stance. However, the boys' shelter was eventually closed down by the local council, who expressed concerns that they did not want their tents. The municipality relied on the claim that there were no refugee camps in South Africa.

At this point, the UNHCR and the IOM formally began assisting religious organisations in Nancefield in establishing temporary transit shelters for those awaiting the processing of their asylum-seeker permits.

The role of the UNHCR

One actor that came into Musina at this time – when the global, dominant vilification of the Zimbabwean crisis was beneficial in protecting Zimbabweans at the border – was the UNHCR. The UNHCR is an international organisation that separates asylum seekers and refugees from migrants. Its presence in South Africa is relatively new as the country's refugee regime only emerged from around 1991, when the UNHCR set up a branch office in Pretoria, which later expanded to be a regional office, with coverage extending beyond South Africa. Under the terms of a Tripartite Agreement between the South African government, the UNHCR and the government of Mozambique, Mozambicans in South Africa were retroactively recognised as refugees (on a group basis) for the purposes of a UNHCR-coordinated repatriation programme (Handmaker and Scneider, 2002). Following the Tripartite Agreement between Mozambique, South Africa and the UNHCR regarding the repatriation of refugees, South Africa signed a Basic Agreement with the UNHCR (Landau, 2006).

Much like the state, the UNHCR responded to Zimbabwean displacement in a rather ad hoc manner, expanding the refugee regime to some extent but offering the Zimbabweans only a minimal amount of assistance (Betts, 2013). In 2008, the UNHCR opened a field office (FO) in Musina. It also became the humanitarian cluster's secretariat. Initially, the organisation provided humanitarian relief to Zimbabwean migrants in two transit shelters, one for men and another for women, as well as shelters for children, in 2008 (food and remuneration for staff such as security, matrons and managers). By 2010, the UNHCR had acknowledged that there was a significant protection vacuum for Zimbabwean 'survival migrants' who left their country because they could not support themselves and their families there. However, because they never had refugee status or any other kind of formal status, the UNHCR never made any adjustments to guarantee any regular distribution of aid, and its policy for Zimbabweans living in the country was never consistent (Betts, 2013). Hence, assistance in Limpopo's border regions was sporadic and limited on the grounds that everyone from Zimbabwe can initially be treated as an asylum seeker while their refugee status is being determined (Betts, 2013).

Humanitarian migration management across binaries

The migrant–asylum seeker dichotomy

The functions of the UNHCR in Musina

As the Zimbabwean crisis continued even into 2019, the UNHCR's humanitarian policy on the Zimbabwean migrants in Musina seemed clearer, just as much as it was accepting of Congolese and Burundian asylum seekers.

At that time, the UN agency also started ‘decentralising’ its approach, by working with implementing partners to give social and legal assistance, with these partners moving into the UNHCR FO – and UNHCR officials leaving Musina. When the provision of relief-oriented material assistance became increasingly ad hoc to the Zimbabweans after 2017, the UNHCR insisted that it was not mandatory or guaranteed but based on an ‘assessment of needs’. The agency’s support for the transit shelters also started dropping with the perceived ‘waning’ of the Zimbabwean crisis. Due to a peculiarity in the way asylum seekers were granted permits, the UNHCR had been given the authority to only play a little part in connection to the people of Zimbabwe (Betts, 2013).

However, the rejection rate for all refugee applications in the country was now over 90 per cent and the DHA currently has a backlog of processing applications, with over 153,000 people waiting for as long as ten years for their claims for refugee status to be heard. Of the 266,946 refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa, two-thirds of them had asylum-seeker status (UNHCR, 2021). This meant that the UNHCR’s role would be more pronouncedly reduced in a context where Zimbabwean migrants were one of the leading groups no longer receiving asylum permits or even applying for them as asylum-seeker applications in South Africa have also been declining consistently since 2009 (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). The reluctance to even apply was a response to a border RRO that has developed de facto gatekeeping measures to prevent Zimbabweans from seeking asylum.

Implementing partners was a funding system that, according to the UNHCR, would boost the organisation’s efficacy by maximising grassroots coverage. This is debatable because its legal partner is scarcely a ‘grassroots’ organisation, with pro bono lawyers. The social assistance partner focused on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in South Africa, as well as HIV/AIDS-infected and -impacted persons. Their mandate as a UNHCR implementation partner in Musina was to provide social support (food vouchers and transportation subsidies) to newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees, as well as psychosocial counselling to all migrants. While their material aid is designated for UNHCR’s persons of concern (POC), in rare cases like COVID-19, they also provide blanket aid to ‘economic migrants’ in shelters once they have provided incentives to their funder. Other partnerships with the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the Catholic Church allow them to meet the specific needs of migrants, particularly women and children.

The legal partner is an organisation with law clinics and advisory offices in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Musina, Durban, Cape Town and Upington that provide legal services. It provides legal assistance in the form of strategic litigation, advocacy, law reform, human rights education and community mobilisation and support in the field of human rights law. It also conducts

community-based outreach, lobbying and rights education to increase the impact of crucial legal outcomes, as well as aggressively seeking out and forming alliances with other civil society actors and communities for whom it serves as a legal representative and advisor. While engaging in different community outreach programmes and the humanitarian cluster, the organisation provided legal support to asylum seekers and refugees, such as writing appeal letters.

Differentiating migrants and refugees in practice at the border

One of the effects of having the UNHCR bureaucracy collaborate with the government in managing South Africa's refugee regime in response to regional displacement is the formalisation of distinctions between migrants and refugees. This was especially evident in practice, like in the situation where African migrants with nearly identical legal and social demands were staying in the same space but were granted distinct types of protection due to their refugee status. This humanitarian approach is more akin to biopolitics, which requires repeatedly dividing these populations into those who received assistance and those who did not, resulting in 'bio-inequalities' (Feldman, 2012).

Those people receiving assistance were able to obtain asylum documents from the state as well as the funds they required to depart Musina for better employment prospects further south from the UNHCR. Meanwhile, Zimbabwean migrants would persist until they could respond with enormous resources. The main reason Zimbabwean migrant men now stayed in the transit shelter was no longer to wait for refugee permits but to find part-time jobs that would allow them to save enough money to continue their migration travels. This was a difficult undertaking as there was stiff competition for dwindling jobs, so the greatest amount one could earn in a week was R200. These migrants were thus unable to progress due to their inability to raise funds, compounded by the need to use them for everyday personal expenses like food and soap.

Since the men's shelter now housed recognised asylum seekers from countries like the DRC and Burundi and Zimbabwean migrants, there was a situation in which the UNHCR provided food vouchers and transportation subsidies through its social assistance partner to the former, while they resided in the same space. Sometimes, this created tension but it followed the instruction from their funder, the UNHCR, that these were economic migrants and "this has been communicated to us by our funder". "But when you look at them, they are equally vulnerable," admitted the social worker in charge of implementing this mandate on behalf of the UNHCR. On a sad note with a sad face, she surmised, "The shelter manages this. The UN maybe should come in and assist Zimbabweans too but the UN has said no".

This differentiation had consequences for Zimbabwean migrants' experience and length of immobility. The asylum seekers who received food subsidies did not struggle as much as the Zimbabweans to make ends meet. They were also able to proceed with their journeys as soon as they had received their asylum permits, as I will now illustrate.

I stumbled into Rovixi in Musina's taxi stand at the local rank one morning when I was taking a taxi to Johannesburg. Rovixi was a Congolese asylum seeker who had been staying at the shelter for almost two months while he was waiting for his papers. In that time, he had overseen translating the Sunday sermon from English to Swahili for his countrymen because he was one of the very few fluent in both languages. From an early age, Rovixi had learned English as a recipient of Catholic missionary schooling in South Kivu, DRC. On the morning in question, he was on his way to Cape Town to try to start a new life in South Africa. The UNHCR's social assistance implementing partner had subsidised his transportation costs with R200, allowing him to go on this long and costly expedition.

Later that week, I spoke with him on WhatsApp, and he claimed he was settling in well in Cape Town, where he was currently staying with a friend while seeking work. "So far, so good," he said. "All I require now is employment." Granted, this support did not make his journey or the experiences that lay ahead any less difficult. When I asked Rovixi how he was finding Cape Town a few weeks later, he said it was "tougher than I expected", but that things were moving "slowly but surely".

One could not say the same of the Zimbabwean migrants who remained behind at the shelter. They would wake up at 5 am to clean the yard before exiting at 6 am to go and look for work in Musina. Locals from the surrounding residential areas would also come to hire them for piece jobs such as yard cleaning or bricklaying from the robot (see Figure 3.1). These employers also recognised the men as an exploitable source of cheap labour since they were desperate for anything. Incidences where employers would report these migrants to the police when they were due to pay them were common.

Aid for them was a rarity. They did receive a blanket each on Mandela Day. The other time Zimbabweans received support was with a travel subsidy from the social assistance programme at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The social assistance organisation lobbied for blanket assistance from the UNHCR, which saw the need for an exit strategy due to overcrowding, which was now posing a risk to public health as the municipality increased pressure. This itself seems an expedient reason. On a normal day, Zimbabweans just "worked for their own things".

'We look for ourselves. If we put together R5 each amongst the five of us, we can get to buy a small bag of mealie meal. Your friend that

doesn't have you just call them and say come let's eat *sadza*, because if you leave him, he will also just die of hunger.'

In this case, humanitarian involvement did not always reflect an overt aim to police the populace or administer refugee camps. Rather, these acts were geared towards the defence of particular causes while ignoring others (Fassin, 2007). It was a way of managing life through binaries of migrant–refugee. These practices reflected a belief held by some humanitarian workers in the cluster that the shelters needed to be more precise and systematic in registering and counting residents. The UNHCR saw these mechanisms as standard operating procedures (SOPs) that would allow them to understand exactly what was going on because, after all, the shelters were supposed to host those who were recognised by the government as vulnerable and asylum seekers. Hence, they also tried to guarantee that the transit shelters followed these rules in order to control who was allowed to use them. They could, for example, question the presence of Zimbabwean migrants in the shelter. On 3 February 2016, a meeting of the Migrants Health Forum's (MHF) stakeholders was held at the Musina local municipality. "I wanted to know what the criteria were for people staying at the shelters," one of the participants said. The response from those involved in managing the

Figure 3.1: Image of migrant men waiting for work at the 'robot', a stone's throw away from the shelter's yard



Source: Author

shelter reflected the view that it was difficult to put down a criterion as such, as some individuals would have arrived in grave need, such as having no clothing. Hence, they appeased the question by stating that they are only allowed to stay for three months; hence, when they arrive, they are asked to sign (MHF meeting, 2016).

Managing the shelters across gender and age

The need for a formal pact with state and municipal actors was clearer after the closure of the boy's shelter. This would not only help prevent confusion but also the replication of services through coordinated efforts. The humanitarian cluster that emerged thus identified itself as a local inter-agency working group of NGOs and UN agencies dealing with cross-border migration. Through the coordination in the humanitarian cluster, the shelters were officially divided into categories based on age and gender. This arrangement was functional at first but by 2019, it had become a source of frustration at the men's shelter as the UNHCR had not been as keen as before to provide support to the shelter. Some said it was because of a lack of accountability in prior aid, but Bishop Jonas denied these claims, insisting that organisations such as the UNHCR were simply not carrying out their mandate in the same way they were at the women's shelter.

These groups were constituted differently as subjects due to a variety of variables. The intention here is not to speculate about the reason but just to state that the living conditions in both spaces were different. For example, one meal was served to each resident each day. Pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and women who were staying with babies and small children were given two meals.

There are independent explanations outside the bureaucracy related to the funding models of each shelter. The church running the men's shelter is tiny in stature as an autonomous and relatively new Pentecostal church. Out of desperation of a lack of funding, and getting none from the UNHCR, Bishop Jonas approached the lottery, ambassadors, ministers and organisations such as the Motsepe Foundation and the Ramaphosa Foundation for assistance. His shelter was reliant on sporadic donations from the community and local businesses such as Shoprite and Boxer, who periodically gave food, as well as the kindness of the women's shelter, whose manager occasionally supplied some assistance if they had any leftover items. The women's shelter to which he was referring is located in an old church in Nancefield, not far from the men's shelter. It is overseen by Sister Mukewa from afar, while an administration officer named Pretty manages the day-to-day operations in collaboration with a matron in charge of meal preparation.

The boys' shelter for unaccompanied minors was partially funded by the Department of Social Development (DSD) (until 2020, when the DSD

stopped supporting the shelter due to various administrative errors that the shelter was disregarding – the case is still pending in the courts). It did not get government funding in 2010, depending instead on infrequent gifts of blankets and hygiene materials from international humanitarian organisations. The shelter was also caught in a ‘double bind’ with the government: it could not get a licence (and hence could not get money) because it was substandard, but it could not get the funds to fulfil requirements until it got a licence. The shelter had met the basic parameters required for it to qualify for a licence that allowed it to receive government money per child thanks to the help of IOs and church members. The shelter drew on some of the state’s provisions in the South African Children’s Act (38 of 2005). According to the Act, if an unaccompanied minor is found in need of care, the minor shall be placed in a place of safety, his or her personal circumstances evaluated by a social worker and a Children’s Court inquiry begun, conducted and finalised, just like a South African child (Fritsch et al, 2009 p 645).

This is not to say that the legislation’s implementation will be without difficulties. As mentioned, funding has been withdrawn until a legal resolution is obtained. Whatever the true narrative is, the bureaucracy’s tensions are clear. When these activities are combined, they provide additional problems to Weberian views of the South African state as a unitary actor, as well as controversies about the nature of its borders. Through fluid binaries of victims and agents, they also portray humanitarian assistance as a site of governance through careful and well-conceived management of migration.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the influx of humanitarian actors in Musina at the apex of the 2008 Zimbabwean crisis. I began by introducing the setting up of an assemblage of shelters across categories of men, women and children in Musina. I traced how this development ushered the UNHCR to formally begin assisting religious organisations in establishing temporary transit shelters for those awaiting the processing of their asylum-seeker permits. This then led to a discussion on the humanitarian migration management across binaries, which began with the UNHCR’s role in fomenting the asylum seeker/refugee category, before I presented an outline of gender and age. While not entirely deliberate, this genealogy suggests that humanitarian activities have had a transformative effect on the management of migration at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border. This leads nicely to a focus on the contestations that would sometimes occur at the humanitarian meetings, the object of the next chapter’s analysis.

Humanitarian Politics: Ambivalence and Undecidabilities of the Border

Introduction

I met Pastor JoJo of the men's shelter at the local Spar in Musina one sweltering morning in 2019. Pastor JoJo, a Zimbabwean junior pastor of the church, had been assigned to represent the church at the humanitarian cluster meetings at the UNHCR FOs that served as the cluster secretariat at the time. He was not as much of a visible figure of authority at the shelter as Bishop Jonas as he mostly came on Sundays for church. Bishop Jonas' wife, Mai Bishop, would occasionally attend these gatherings as well. Pastor JoJo and I took a walk together to this event.

The contestations that would sometimes occur at these meetings are the focus of this chapter's analysis. The chapter argues that the Zimbabwe–South Africa border is a place of ambivalence and indecision, allowing humanitarian personnel and faith-based actors to protect lives but also exercise political authority over migrants in transit shelters. In responding to the 'unfamiliar', humanitarian workers' autonomy over migrants' lives in 2008 justified the development of transit areas which required management while working with limited resources. This took place through an agreement between humanitarian actors and faith-based actors with the municipality, the DHA and the police to allow illegalised migrants without documents to reside in the transit shelters while they waited for their papers. There was a clause not to arrest those residing in the transit shelter. This agreement provided security to shelter inhabitants, although it came with certain restrictions that dictated their conduct as well as their timetable. The police would, from time to time, also violate the agreement when they deemed it necessary, which was instrumentalised by a discourse of criminalisation. Another source of ambivalence emerged from the further deterioration of resources in Musina, which led humanitarian workers and

faith-based actors to be caught up in political squabbles over providing basic necessities at the men's shelter. An example is how supporting the payment of a water bill was reduced to a question of not just what was ethical but also what was realistic within humanitarian organisations' mandates, goals and budgets.

This chapter is organised as follows. The first part is divided into two sections. The first one positions the chapter within Giorgio Agamben's idea of the state of exception. It reveals how useful Agamben's sophisticated theorisation is as a point of entry into the local arrangements in the context at hand, then proceeds to identify a few ambiguous areas for consideration when applying the theory to practices at the border. The second section returns to 2008 when humanitarian organisations arrived in Musina and initiated a process that resulted in the creation of transit shelters. It sets out the enabling and restrictive parts of this arrangement in relation to temporality and immobility, which point to the simultaneous deployment of securitisation and humanitarianism logics at work. The second part of the chapter touches on another hazy area in the construction of transit shelters: the issue of water availability and who would be responsible for paying for amenities, including electricity, in these transit shelters. The final two parts of the chapter discuss how the humanitarian workers were able to couch the tensions arising from these ambivalences in a discourse of migration management, and the tensions that arose from categorising migrants. All this material points to how the ambivalence and indecision characterising humanitarian interventions would allow humanitarian and faith-based personnel to protect lives but also exercise political authority over migrants in transit shelters. This is meant to contribute to the book's challenge of dominant conceptions of sovereignty found in African border studies. It reveals the troubled yet productive relationship among humanitarian organisations, faith-based actors and the state that makes it difficult to know exactly what to expect from the border, revealing the limits of essentialising borders in humanitarian contexts.

“People must not feel very comfortable or stay too long”

The state of exception and its limits

The state exerts its authority on the most peripheral portions of its subjects, develops increasingly sophisticated technologies at its borders and prefers to construct laws of exception when it is targeting immigrants, according to [Fassin \(2011, p 217\)](#). As the South African state distanced itself from the welfare of people residing in transit shelters, the gathering of humanitarian workers led to the creation of spaces that they would now oversee through

forums like the humanitarian cluster. They could easily be essentialised as falling under Agamben's state of exception.

The Zimbabwe–South Africa border's ambiguities have long been recognised, but they have yet to be investigated in terms of humanitarian interventions. Farms on the Zimbabwe–South Africa border have been described as being positioned in this geographically and symbolically equivocal border zone or 'zone of exception' by Blair Rutherford (2008a, p 404). Such border zones are sites where the state exercises hegemonic forms of sovereignty while remaining ambiguous (Rutherford, 2008b) by ensuring that borders deploy technologies that separate while allowing some movement.

Extant observations on the treatment of aliens have suggested that it readily comes within this 'domain of the exception', in the name of sovereignty. Immigration is gradually becoming a 'no man's land' between public law and political reality, as well as between the legal system and everyday life (Agamben, 2005; Fassin, 2011). Starting with a Schmittian definition of the sovereign as he who determines the condition of exception, Agamben (1995) states that the sovereign establishes and ensures the circumstance, which consists solely of the suspension of the rule, through the state of exception. The exception is a type of exclusion that occurs as a result of the order being suspended. According to Agamben (1995), what cannot be included in any other way is included in the form of the exception. It is like a contradictory membership inclusion in which

The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included. What emerges in this limit figure is the radical crisis of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and inclusion, between what is outside and what is inside, between exception and rule. (Agamben, 1995)

Rutherford (2008a) defined the 'state of exception' as the exclusion of individuals, groups and others from the political community by a sovereign power to constitute the political community itself. While Agamben's interpretation is useful, the overarching assumption that the 'state of exception' automatically transforms the 'unwanted' into a humanitarian situation of 'bare lives' (see Fassin et al, 2017 for a similar critique) merits re-examination, particularly by extending temporal aspects into the analysis. Spatial immobility is not synonymous with a lack of agency, nor can it be reduced to present-moment experiences. Given the temporal dynamics that influence the application of law, the workings of the state and the practices of sovereignty, Agamben's theoretical conceptualisation of the 'state of exception' cannot be taken to adequately represent the experiences of Zimbabwean migrant men at the border.

There are a few other ambiguous areas. To begin with, the marginalisation of Zimbabwean migrants cannot be reduced solely to the state's aims to form a 'specific political community'. There are several additional capitalist interests at play in this border zone that compete with state sovereignty. While political constitution is important, it is difficult to imagine Zimbabweans' 'inclusive exclusion' in only that sense when other migrant groups are included in the humanitarian protection regime, who the bureaucratic state does not necessarily perceive as political members but as equally, if not more, problematic bodies in the larger scheme of things (Congolese or Burundian asylum seekers, for example). In other words, the states of exception when considered in places like the men's shelter are not homogeneous to a monolithic 'figure of modern life' ensconced in clean instantiations of the embodiment and acting upon of bare life in modern forms of statehood (Das and Poole, 2004, p 13). Because there are several levels, dimensions and interests at stake, the categorical line and rationale for separation is not as clear. The exception in this frontier is not always a circumstance that is in some way in opposition to normal forms of state power (Das and Poole, 2004).

A state of exception does not bind the state machinery to the direction of a small group of elites or a single ruler but rather allows authority to be delegated to a variety of sub-state actors, such as interdepartmental bureaucratic cliques, corrupt networks, private agencies and vigilante groups (Landau, 2006; Sutton and Vigneswaran, 2011). As a result, if we shift away from seeing the state as 'that thing' characterised by a set of normative bureaucratic norms, we may see how the events at the border show that what we could call the exception is actually a 'necessary component of the rule' (Das and Poole, 2004, p 13). It is for these situational reasons that I argue that Agamben's theorisation is a useful entry point into analysing sovereignty activities at the Beitbridge border and not objectionable, although it must not be essentialised to cover every possible scenario. Hence, the ideas of the ambivalences and undecidabilities of the border appear to be another way to interpret the 'vague and undetermined place' that is the border and how it is in a constant state of transition (Anzaldúa, 1999, p 3). This is also articulated in Bauman's (1990, p 147) suggestion that boundary crossing that is difficult to avoid leads to the creation of 'grey areas' inhabited by 'unfamiliar': 'the not-yet classified, or rather classified by criteria similar to ours, but as yet unknown to us'.

Responding to the 'unfamiliar': the humanitarian-faith-based-bureaucratic state agreement

When humanitarian organisations arrived in Musina in 2008, they, with faith-based actors at the centre of mobilising moral sentiment, initiated a process that resulted in the creation of transit shelters. Following Pastor

Dungure's appearance in the international media to make a case for the need for shelter, the municipality was forced to make a deal with humanitarian workers and faith-based actors to find ways to accommodate Zimbabwean migrants who had been ejected from the showground 'camp'. "We fought a good battle in the media," said Pastor Dungure. This cleared the door for a meeting with several organisations and the municipality to the point that they decided to give them permission to have a transit shelter for persons applying for asylum. There was no formal documentation establishing the existence of the agreement with local authorities not to arrest and imprison persons in certain locations who were engaged in gaining temporary asylum. It was referred to as a 'gentlemen's agreement' by a number of sources. According to Pastor Dungure, there was just nothing to show on paper. However, according to Pastor JoJo, it was something that was officially known in the long term, so much so that when border patrol soldiers would find stranded Congolese migrants, they would bring them to the church. Similarly, if the police would come across a woman with a child and they were both illegalised through a lack of documentation, they would not arrest them but take them to the women's shelter.

The informal nature of the arrangement establishing legally recognised transit shelters at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border also put Zimbabwean migrants' lives under the management of humanitarian organisations in Musina while under the care of faith-based actors on a daily basis. Initially, the churches maintained the transit shelters with the help of humanitarian organisations – the IOM and the UNHCR in the main – which provided them with food, clothing, mattresses and water. Because the national and local governments were not legally obligated to pay financing for the upkeep of migrants staying in these shelters, migrants became less of a burden to them. In this sense, humanitarian spaces began to be associated with 'islands' of ambiguous security within a larger town of insecurity (Rutherford, 2011, p 1315). The vast majority of migrants who stayed in transit shelters did so until they acquired their work permits, after which they moved on to find work elsewhere. Indeed, this shows that although police regimes may win out over rights regimes, some room is often allowed to the rule of law via the minimum presence of an NGO (Fassin, 2011, p 219). Faith-based actors too feature markedly and more intimately in this equation.

Because there was no official policy and no buy-in from government stakeholders, there were a number of issues with the shelters as a result of this arrangement that became a daily headache for faith-based actors. With the buy-in into the narrative that the Zimbabwean crisis had gone with Mugabe, by 2019, support for the transit shelters had begun to dwindle. The unwritten agreement offered humanitarian organisations the freedom to respond to a crisis. With such authority came the ability to manage Zimbabwean migrants and outsource their care and management of their

daily activities to faith-based actors, as well as the ability to determine, in close liaison but governed by organisational mandates, how long they may stay in transit shelters. Under this exception, Zimbabwean migrants were permitted to stay in the shelters for 72 hours (three days) while waiting for their asylum documents from the DHA. The agreement around this was made in the cluster informed by the number of days it would take to process an asylum-seeker permit, at least at the time. South Africa's policy of mandatory detention and deportation for illegalised migrants in Musina who did not have papers was now tempered thanks to an informal understanding with local authorities not to arrest and imprison those in certain regions who were engaged in gaining temporary protection (IOM, 2009, p 19). This was a positive step in protecting such migrants who had been rogued by a deportation regime that was deporting Zimbabwean migrants on a daily basis (Rutherford, 2008b; 2011).

In response to the increased number of migrants coming into Musina, the SAPS had begun detaining them at a detention centre on the Soutpansberg military grounds (SMG) in early 2007. Although this exercise was not authorised as such under law, the SAPS had been using this site as a detention centre to detain migrants from a range of nations awaiting deportation just across the border to Beitbridge. The facility's conditions were substandard, with insufficient restrooms and sleeping spaces to suit the demands of detainees. Migrants surveyed at SMG by IOM (2009) either did not have the necessary permissions for their stay in South Africa or claimed to have misplaced or destroyed their documentation. These were usually people whose asylum requests would have been denied by the South African government. According to DHA estimates, almost 30,000 Zimbabweans applied for asylum in Musina alone between July and December 2008, with only 53 (0.1 per cent) receiving refugee status (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2009).

Detainees were processed and loaded on to deportation vehicles on a regular basis early in the morning during these deportations (IOM, 2009). Thousands of Zimbabweans were forcibly evicted from the showgrounds in March 2009, before the DHA ordered the showgrounds to close and dismantle all semi-permanent buildings. Initially, Zimbabwean migrants approached a Methodist Church in response to their eviction. Many more people began sleeping at that church while still coming to the showground for services when a Zimbabwean pastor helped one of these migrants with food. During this time, local churches and communities began to take matters into their own hands, intervening in the form of soup kitchens to provide food and shelter to Zimbabwean migrants sleeping in the bush and on the streets.

Therefore, the agreement was akin to what Ticktin (2006, p 33) refers to as an 'ethical configuration' which made the shelters spaces that were in

theory immune from deportation of Zimbabwean migrants who resided there without papers. While the state allowed migrants to stay for 72 hours in theory, due to modifications at the RRO that limited applications to certain days based on nationality, the shelters ended up loosening these limits. The authorities eventually realised that the 72-hour time limit did not correspond to the logistical reality of seeking asylum.

As the DHA processed the applications, Zimbabwean migrants waiting for asylum began to wait longer in Musina. However, individuals staying in the transit shelters were not permitted to leave the yard since per the agreement, the SAPS was in its right to arrest those who were not in possession of documents if they were seen in town looking for work, for example. The agreement only prohibited the SAPS from arresting migrants who were in the vicinity of any of Musina's transit shelters. Spaces of transit, such as the one for men, came to emerge as manifestations of what Pastor JoJo referred to as an 'embassy' with 'diplomatic immunity'. "If you know the refugee laws, it's like an embassy. When you're inside that church, it seems like you're in an embassy. Because it is a refugee centre, the police are not supposed to enter and say, 'Hey, where are your papers?' Whether you are documented or not," he had noted.

At the same time, the agreement created an ambivalent kind of hospitality by putting Zimbabwean migrants who were governed by the host state's laws under the full responsibility of humanitarian organisations while restricting their time, freedom to move and access to productive spaces within Musina through arrest, detention and deportation, all within justifiable limits.

This informal agreement also included a verbal stipulation stating that the transit shelters must be comfortable enough to keep people secure, but not to the point where they feel at home. In the space's architecture, there had to be a balance of security and discomfort. The meeting that had resulted in the informal agreement to set up transit shelters was made under the strict instruction from the municipality that the tents should never be closed. "That is why you see at the men's shelter that the buildings are not closed. It's according to law," remarked Pastor Dungure, before adding that

'A shelter is only meant for three to four days. People must not stay there. It is not a home. The reason of leaving them open is not for ventilation. The idea is they do not want to make it a home. People must not feel very comfortable or stay too long in that place. People must be only there for security reasons. Not to make it a home.'

Humanitarian operations at the border have been marked by trade-offs that create scenarios that limit the amount of time and living conditions available to Zimbabwean migrants in transit shelters. However, in some cases, religious leaders would raise objections to strict mandates from humanitarian

organisations like the IOM and the UNHCR. Bishop Jonas claimed that he had once informed “this person in charge of the UNHCR field office” at a cluster meeting that he could not kick people who had been there for more than three days, as the UNHCR had allegedly wanted them to go. He and his church clashed with the UNHCR on this.

Churches frequently aim to respond to people’s social needs by providing a long-term solution to their problems, rather than simply being a bandage that provides a temporary fix (Hankela, 2014, p 149; Chisale, 2016). The contradiction raises the possibility that Bishop Jonas also wanted to keep the representations of suffering that kept the men’s shelter alive and visible by refusing to expel individuals who exceeded the time limits. This is evident in one controversial incident. Bishop Jonas was negotiating with the UNHCR for assistance with new pots for the men. He had been making little progress, and so he committed to an ultimatum that if the UNHCR’s social assistance implementing partners arrived at the shelter that afternoon with no pots, as they did each week to provide English training lessons to Congolese and Burundian asylum seekers, they would have to “find another place to keep their people”. The pots were a health issue because the men used them frequently and cleaned them with no soap at the tap. In these types of situations, his go-to solution was to barter for humanitarian aid with the lives of shelter residents.

Bishop Jonas had also asked me to contact numerous major actors on my journeys to Johannesburg over time, including the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi, whom he had seen in the news on his two-day visit to South Africa (October 2019), President Cyril Ramaphosa and other embassies. His call intended to remind them that there were suffering migrants at the shelter, since he suspected they had forgotten. Grandi only met with a group of refugees and asylum seekers at a community centre in Johannesburg’s Hillbrow area, who highlighted a number of concerns in the wake of then recent violence against foreigners in other parts of the nation.

The earlier responses by faith-based actors show how it is difficult to know exactly what to expect from the border, revealing the limits of essentialising borders in humanitarian contexts. In turn, the police, who did not have the legal right to arrest anyone who was in the shelter, according to the agreement would, nonetheless, overshadow, at times, this immunity with a securitisation discourse. The SAPS would invariably conduct raids in search of wanted offenders. Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) officials asked Joseph on several occasions to “exorcise” the space of criminals from the Beitbridge side of the border, often accompanied by images of alleged culprits. Joseph was the right man for the job because he kept a daily record of the occupants in an A4 counter book that they had to sign in and out of every time they came and went from the shelter. The residents of the space had come to embrace the idea that criminals needed to be apprehended

at the shelter, something with which several humanitarian workers I spoke with oddly seemed to agree.

The SAPS would thus sometimes raid the men's shelter, typically in the hope of apprehending fugitive criminals. This demonstrates that, in line with South Africa's current criminalisation of migrants, a modicum of hospitality could not dispel the bureaucratic state's fears about Zimbabwean migrant men, whom it illegalised in the first place, as possible criminals. Migrants' legitimacy and inclusion within the spheres of 'the political community' may be jeopardised if they are criminalised in this way (Hammar, 2008a).

Some of the locals I spoke with saw the men's shelter as primarily a crime hotspot. When I asked the taxi driver to drop me off there on my first visit to drop off Tinashe, he had told me that he knew the shelter for people who stole each other's possessions. However, it seemed to me they were in fact navigating and responding to a robustly restrictive visa regime that illegalised them to the point of destitution. Bishop Jonas also carried this conception as he insisted that anyone living at the shelter have career possibilities, fearing that they might end up committing petty thievery like stealing from the rest of the neighbourhood, as had some of the individuals he alleged had previously stayed there. In one way, he was aware of the potential, but in another, it is possible that he had accepted the claims and determined that it was best to portray an image of hardworking citizens in order to protect them and his project from criticism. This framing may have also been advantageous to him since, by separating criminal activity from economic labour, it instrumentalised the idea that the men needed to work to feed themselves in order to survive by couching it in moralised language, whereas there was simply no food.

The men's labour relieved the shelter and its sponsors of the burden of providing food, concealing ingrained structural problems. The criminal rhetoric obscured the underlying structural reasons that illegalised the migrants and contributed to the current shortage that drove some of them to engage in alleged illegal acts. Bishop Jonas was now in a better position to strengthen his influence over the men by enacting a rule requiring residents to leave and enter the shelter at specific hours. The gate was kept locked at all times, except when the men finished cleaning at 6 am, in accordance with these standards. This was only until it closed again at 6 pm, the time by which everyone was supposed to have returned from their piece jobs. This enacted 'time discipline' was used, on the one hand, to structure the operational needs of the shelter and, on the other hand, as a form of disciplining anyone found to be out of sync with 'shelter time'. In not providing men fundamental requirements such as food, humanitarian workers, whether intentionally or not, created a climate in which it was difficult to avoid illegality, forcing the adoption of regulations that aided lockdown and bodily management. This enabled the state in controlling and seizing the men's 'time sovereignty' as

well as producing political subjects who, by avoiding the police or being put in precarious positions, embodied these discourses.

Under this ambiguous regime, these subjects' vicarious insecurity is analogous to that of Zimbabwean migrants on farms along the Zimbabwe–South Africa border, where police raided and had to remind farmers of the restrictions they had worked out with them regarding farm-issued IDs. We also see the simultaneous deployment of securitisation and humanitarianism logics at work, which is a major manifestation of humanitarian governance. In extraordinary regimes of regulating migration at state borders, these modus operandi are compelling manifestations of a non-binary connection between the state, the religious and the humanitarian, as well as agency and domination.

Paying for the water

Another hazy area in the construction of transit shelters was the issue of water availability and who would be responsible for paying for amenities, including electricity, in these transit places between the state, humanitarian organisations and faith-based actors. I will now return to the events of that August afternoon when I attended the humanitarian cluster meeting with Pastor JoJo, as mentioned in the prefatory narrative to this chapter, because they are crucial in demonstrating how seemingly little issues that arise in the interactions of key actors in the humanitarian sphere are, in fact, life politics.

“Can we get a statement from the men’s shelter now?” noted Sumit, the meeting chair who was also in charge of the UNHCR FO, after a few rounds of information from others. All of the attention in the room had now shifted to Mai Bishop. She was without a doubt the perfect person to speak to because she was much softer than her husband, and if anyone could persuade these humanitarian officials, it was her. She began by thanking the chair for the opportunity to talk, speaking in English before requesting permission from the meeting chair to speak in Venda. A male legal representative from a legal NGO, who was also a powerful person in the local humanitarian community, offered to interpret her statements into English so that the rest of the humanitarian working group could understand them. In these words, worth quoting at length, Mai Bishop pleaded with the humanitarian working group:

‘We have a problem because those people [migrant men residing at the shelter] are using water. And water is a basic social service, which causes them to not eat or bath. That is the only thing if you can help us with the issue of paying water. We still need the Department of Health to come and check people for issues of diseases. We are still short of food items and blankets. The toilets are not functioning

properly – they don't have a flushing system – so it's still a challenge. United Nations are going and we don't know who is going to help us with water because we are always trying to get help from them. United Nations is going and if ladies like Miriam are going, who is going to help us? You were supporting us United Nations. Me and my husband, we have a problem of water shortage. Please help us, we have a problem, all sorts of different organisations, can you help us? I am humbling myself as a parent. It's been years. We have been humbled by this situation.'

In 2012, the UNHCR had provided financing for electricity and water to the men's shelter. Now, the disputed water bill at the shelter had devolved into a long-running resource battle, mostly between the shelter management and the UNHCR, over the years. Management would occasionally insinuate that other NGOs were implicated in the bill not being paid. Organisations are made up of individuals who, like any other social actors, operate in their own best interests by making the most of their options. Formal norms and procedures are not always adhered to. Hence, if there was any water agreement to speak of, it was suggested that either the men's shelter misinterpreted it or the UNHCR had gone off track. The UNHCR played down any allegations that they had made a long-term commitment to pay for the water bill, saying it had simply agreed to pay a set percentage of it (amounting to approximately R2,500 every month) for a year. The package would also include the payment of salaries for security guards and the shelter manager. A breach, it was alleged, occurred when the shelter could not stick to their end of the agreement. Although my informant was unsure about the UNHCR's likely role in paying for water, he was eager to point out that the UNHCR could not have been at fault because they would have been forced to honour their commitment by default. My repeated attempts to contact the Pretoria headquarters for comment and clarification on the situation went unanswered. As a result, I was forced to rely on the frankly speculative observations and claims made by others on the ground.

One of the people working for the UNHCR's implementing partner said that an agreement had been reached in which the UNHCR would cover a portion of the fee and the shelter would cover the remainder. "The United Nations has stated unequivocally that it will not assist with the water bill. They said that if any help is required, it will be based on individual case assessments," she claimed. "That's why we have the issue of water," Pastor JoJo said. "They say that long ago, before I joined, the United Nations agreed to pay for that bill of water, as well as another organisation." Pledges are a popular binding form of vocally promising to donate to a specific initiative, either in cash or in kind, within the Pentecostal church tradition. These

religious agreements are treated seriously. Bishop Jonas had his own larger theory about what had happened:

‘Since the woman who managed the UNHCR field office left after staying for two years, the UN does not even set its foot here. The management has been changing a lot in that office. They were just lying about this shelter and the water bill. The water bill, blankets, sponges for people to sleep on. To be honest with you, the UN does not assist us here at all. They brought 27 sponges [mattresses] last of last year. Here, we have 802 people. That’s why you see them running away. They are running away because a lot of money was misused there.’

While Bishop Jonas had also promised to send me what he called a “piece of paper” to verify that the UNHCR had agreed to pay the fee unconditionally, he never did. Therefore, what became unresolved was the conditions of the agreement between the two parties, which would have been useful in determining whether the UNHCR was well in its rights for defaulting on the basis of a predetermined breach.

The UNHCR, according to my sources, had stopped paying the debt several years ago. In November 2019, this situation had gradually led to an ever-increasing bill, which was now over R183,000 in arrears. The humanitarian workers and religious leaders in town were aware of this debt. “You know they have almost R200,000 in credit for water? That bill has been on the books for a long time,” Pastor Dungure had questioned, so casually. In turn, I was made aware that the UNHCR alleged that the shelter management misused funds and spread lies about the terms of the agreement as a scapegoat. It is important to emphasise that all these assertions are unverified. Hence, the focus should not be on their veracity but on simply showing how the local arrangements in place created tensions that would become a source of insecurity for those they were meant to protect. The ambiguities that resulted from this would also require a cursory discourse to parade itself as something elaborate and functional.

Couching ambivalence in migration management

At the humanitarian cluster meeting, Mai Bishop expressed her gratitude that the shelter had at least the minimal necessities. This was preferable to the ragged tents that had previously filled the space that the MSF-erected corrugated iron structure currently occupied, which was only a month old in September 2019. However, it is also possible that this was the best they would ever get. Regardless of who was telling the truth, the ugliness of it all was that discussions over water soon translated into a problem for the shelter inhabitants. The local municipality had disconnected electricity at the church

premises because one of the municipal services had become outstanding. I had to be reminded by Pastor JoJo of the law which says electricity should be turned off if you do not pay your water bill.

Residents were forced to ‘bridge’ power – a form of illegal connection – from neighbours in the community while waiting for the MSF to install solar panels, which was unlawful. In order to keep the lights from next door on, the inhabitants also had to pay Joseph a daily electricity charge of R10 per day. This was a burden in of itself because they had other duties like purchasing food and soap, which the shelter did not provide. In our conversations, the men would repeatedly complain that this arrangement imposed additional financial obligations on amenities such as electricity.

For some humanitarian workers, the ambivalence described previously amounted to apathy couched in language that concealed its own political and economic objectives, reasons and rationalities. Two sources working closely with the UNHCR already stated that it does not mind if this men’s shelter closes. They perceived the UNHCR as having a problem with the men’s shelter management allowing Zimbabweans, read ‘economic migrants’, to stay for too long. This approach had ramifications for managing the amount of support the organisation would have to offer and the UNHCR’s legal status as a refugee agency. One of these two informants remarked:

‘UN has said categorically it’s fine they can close the shelter. Because what the UN doesn’t want is to be blamed by the government. Because if you look at that place, it’s now like a camp and in South Africa, we don’t have a camp. You’re supposed to get into the country, present yourself at Home Affairs, integrate into the community.’

The UNHCR’s position, as it is articulated by this source, implies that the enforcement of South Africa’s legal instruments takes precedence. While maintaining silence on many concerns, the UNHCR had a desire to go towards doing capacity development workshops for enforcing officials through trainings in the future. Some scholars interpret this as acceptance of the country’s deteriorating refugee protection (Zanker, 2021). On the topic of refugee camps, the UNHCR did not want to violate the state’s legal standards, which was crucial to its own legal legitimacy. The UNHCR office took pleasure in its amicable working connections with the state, as they worked closely with the DHA and the government at large. A key source from the organisation stated:

‘I can quietly say I am proud about this current administration. We have an understanding with the government. We sit regularly on a number of meetings in order to try to find common ground in certain issues like forums, like your cross-border meetings, like your provincial

working group meetings, so the Department of Home Affairs has an open-door policy. We have the manager on speed dial. If there are any challenges, we can be able to call him.'

Zanker (2021) goes further in explaining that, while the UNHCR in South Africa strives to be neutral and provide the greatest possible help to people seeking asylum, they are forced to collaborate with the Home Affairs department by design. Technical tropes like maintaining an open-door policy and having the manager on fast dial neutralise relationships, turning them into a stable affair that sustains the institutional links that keep migration governance in place. This approach had left a lasting imprint on the humanitarian operations in Musina. For example, there were also calls among members of the MHF, whose minutes I had access to, to move towards management of migration at one of the meetings. There was a proposal to modify the name of the Vhembe District Migrant Health Forum to the Vhembe Migration Management Forum after the task team presented the draft forum founding document. Others were alarmed by this call. In response, one of the IOM forum members stated that

'in other municipalities, they don't have the experience and expertise to "manage" migration as such and it may put the forum in an awkward position to call themselves managers of migration, as it is a politically sensitive issue. On health, we have all the necessary information, but can address all issues and it is a safe space. We can also include something to show that there will be evolution. Migration Health also includes things like access to food security, safety, education, identification etc. and not necessarily only means health.'

As a result, the forum opted to stop using such words in its name because health was a more neutral and less politicised idea that provided a 'safe environment' for everyone. Minutes from the same MHF meeting on 3 February 2016 at Musina local municipality (08H30–12H30) show the tensions of operating in a context of humanitarian autonomy. In times of running out of resources, humanitarian actors urged the shelters to seek support from relative government departments. A quick look at these minutes is enlightening. The management of the men's shelter met with the IOM to prepare for the arrival of the Director of Stakeholder Management on 11 November 2015. An IOM representative stated at the meeting that the Director had requested an updated report that included the shelters' improvements. Humanitarian workers from the UNHCR and the IOM expressed their dissatisfaction with the shelters' funding models. These humanitarian organisations, as early as 2015, were hesitant to continue supporting the shelters. At the occasion, an IOM

representative stated that they could not continue to provide aid to the shelters due to many priorities and limited resources. According to the minutes of that day's meeting,

X from IOM explained that they are a funded organisation and donors give money for certain activities. It is not that we sit on money that is available. The shelters should also contact the necessary governmental departments for assistance. We will have to look at projects for the shelters to sustain themselves but it looks like the shelters do not want to go that way. People should realise that donors see there are other critical issues elsewhere and take the little that we have to assist elsewhere. Shelters should be educated to sustain themselves and not just blame people for not assisting. ... As an organisation we should not be blamed for not being able to assist one another. We should present on ideas on how we can assist.

This echoed a similar statement made previously in the discussion by another participant, who said, "We shouldn't imply that organisations aren't doing anything. We're talking about past-due electricity and water bills. Let us instead consider a path ahead".

Ambivalences of categorical approaches

While the movement patterns of 2008 that had prompted the UNHCR to open a FO in Musina persisted, and the men continued to fill up the shelter beyond capacity each night, minutes from the humanitarian cluster meeting on 11 June 2019 said the 'UNHCR FO will close down in December 2019'. Bishop Jonas was concerned, if not more convinced, that the IOM would also close its local office in the very near future. Sumit formally verified everyone's dread when he answered to Mai Bishop's plea in a rather courteous tone after she had finished presenting her update on the water situation at the men's shelter. This response is worth quoting at length:

'We are happy that the structure [men's shelter] has improved. We hope that at some point there will be donors and well-wishers who will be able and willing to help. Keep knocking the door, someone will answer. As you know, UNHCR is closing office. Just to update the members who did not attend the last meeting. The office will be closing down by the end of December 2019. So UNHCR will no longer have an office in Musina after 2019. We will maintain our presence through our partners, especially our legal and social assistance partners. We hope they can continue here after 2019. So that's just for your information. Otherwise, we will continue our activities as

usual. We plan to have more capacity-building workshops for enforcing officials through capacity building trainings.’

The UNHCR’s presence through its legal and social assistance implementing partners would be reinforced by having a focal point responsible for Limpopo addressing protection issues that would remain in Polokwane. Motions were already being tabled to ‘gift’ some of the office furniture to local humanitarian organisations remaining behind.

Pastor Dungure was the least surprised in his assessment. He recounted to me, in one of our many meetings at the local Wimpy over breakfast, a conversation with a top UNHCR official in 2018 in which he walked away with the impression that “they don’t see the refugee anymore”. Countering the UNHCR’s position on its reasons for wanting to close the FO on 31 December 2019 (that its closure was about maximising constrained budgets), he said, “I don’t think it’s an issue of budget. It might be that they think there is no more work for them here. Or they are no longer seeing the refugee. They are no longer seeing their relevance here”. He recounted a conversation with “one guy” from the UNHCR who was telling him that “we will close because you know what, those people who are funding us, they want to give their money to places which really have problems. So South Africa, no, in the sub-Saharan, is no longer their concern or priority. They are focusing on people who have got real problems”. Hence, the closure of the FO due to budgetary restrictions was largely seen by the religious fraternity as a ruse to hide the fact that they were simply ‘closing up shop’.

The UNHCR, on the other hand, maintained the framing of its exit in a technical management approach, claiming that it was necessary because it was going through a regionalisation and decentralisation process. Summit downplayed any implications of the shutdown on refugee protection, claiming that the UNHCR would still be present through their implementing partners. However, one managerial requirement from the UNHCR was that those migrants seeking social assistance were legally in the country to receive that assistance. There was a clear communication from the UNHCR management to the social assistance partner to assist only those already documented in the country. This meant, by proxy, the cessation of Zimbabweans from the UNHCR protection mandate, which, in all honesty, had already started to happen. Exceptions could be made in cases when the social assistance partner would have needed to help with medication for persons with chronic illnesses. The UNHCR stressed that this type of ad hoc, relief-oriented, material assistance was not necessary or promised but rather based on a blanket evaluation of requirements. This means they would have really needed to be persuaded.

During the COVID lockdown, the UNHCR social assistance partner was able to motivate for a budget that sustained the men’s shelter until October.

It was unfortunate that in circumstances like the cases of the men's shelter, the UNHCR did not necessarily provide material support to individuals, so they would do a blanket assessment and provide it to the shelter itself but not to the individual person. This was one way of circumventing concerns about whether the beneficiaries were documented or not, as a large population there were men illegalised by the state by way of lacking documentation. However, in other instances, when they were not persuaded, the UNHCR would say to their social assistance partner, "You can choose to assist but not with our resources".

At least these tensions were not lost on humanitarian workers in local organisations in as much as they used these mandates in their own work. These tensions are meant to show how the same people who would use these categories in their daily practice would do so even if they considered these ways unproductive. They would do it because they have to do it, even if it resulted in something they or others did not necessarily desire.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented Giorgio Agamben's idea of the state of exception and positioned it to reveal its usefulness as a point of entry into the local arrangements in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border context. I have also identified some ambiguous areas for consideration when applying the theory to practices at the border, which necessitates being wary of essentialising its use and need to look elsewhere for explanatory concepts. This theoretical exercise has allowed me to extend to the usefulness of the language of ambivalence and undecidabilities of the border. These became more evident as the chapter returned to 2008 when humanitarian organisations arrived in Musina and initiated a process of trying to respond to 'unfamiliar' that resulted in the creation of transit shelters through an informal agreement between state and non-state actors. I set out the enabling and restrictive parts of this arrangement in relation to temporality and immobility, which I have argued point to the simultaneous deployment of securitisation and humanitarianism logics.

Another hazy area in the construction of transit shelters I have presented is the issue of water availability and who would be responsible for paying for amenities, including electricity, in these transit shelters. I then discussed how the humanitarian workers were able to couch the tensions arising from these ambivalences in a discourse of migration management, and the ambivalences that arose from categorising migrants. All this material has allowed me to point to how unfinished local arrangements would allow humanitarian personnel to protect lives but also exercise political authority over migrants in transit shelters. This, in a context shrouded by the UNHCR's premature exit, is meant to contribute to this book's

challenge of dominant conceptions of sovereignty found in African border studies. More importantly, it reveals the troubled yet productive relationship among humanitarian organisations, faith-based actors and the state that makes it difficult to know exactly what to expect from the border, revealing the limits of essentialising borders or the nature of sovereignty in humanitarian contexts.

“Laughing at Them in Silence”: Life in the Men’s Transit Shelter

Introduction

This chapter dives deep into life in the men’s transit shelter and some of the men’s encounters with the shelter management’s practices, set tasks and religious ceremonies. It focuses on the space and living conditions there, which reveals the daily impact of humanitarian politics related to contestations over water as well as pastoral strategies and discourses. As highlighted in the [previous chapter](#), the local arrangements in place would allow humanitarian personnel to protect lives but also exercise political authority over migrants in transit shelters. This ambivalence suggests that a conception of power that leaves room for appreciating migrants’ agency is needed.

The chapter argues that there is a relationship of governmentality between the men and humanitarian actors highlighted by the production of the shelter space as a negotiated settlement between state and non-state actors, regulatory mechanisms meant to keep transit shelter inhabitants in the good books with police and the religious activities of the space, the rents of occupying it and other factors that altogether contribute to the penetration of power into individual body discipline. The chapter is organised around the concept of ‘minimalist biopolitics’, which helps to describe a regulatory technology of life concerned with an emerging care for life itself, as opposed to a mere emphasis on the state’s sovereign power to take life ([Rozakou, 2016](#)). This minimal biopolitics is driven by religious ritual and politics that is, in and of itself, inseparable from religion’s use of a mechanism to instil behaviour that is not at odds with the state’s attempt to police criminality associated with migrants, and to ensure that the informal agreement by humanitarian actors and the state is upheld. In this border regime, these all come together as forms of governance connected to state power in one way or another, without the actors themselves always being attentive to it.

The migrant body is an important object of reflection in this chapter as, according to Foucault, the body is a place where cultural symbols, values and authority are invested and contested (Muchemwa and Muponde, 2007). The body is thus immediately implicated in a political sphere of power relations in which it is invested, trained, tortured and forced to execute duties, perform ceremonies and emit signals (Epstein and Straub, 1991). Foucault's biopolitics was mainly organised around the imperative of life and concentrated on the productive worth of individuals and populations (Foucault and Ewald, 2003). Sovereignty took life and let it live, Foucault contended. And now, in contrast, there is the growth of a force that he terms the 'power of regularisation', which consists in making live and letting die (Foucault and Ewald, 2003, p 247). The biopolitics presented in this chapter (minimal biopolitics), however, entails the state, humanitarian actors and faith-based actors making and allowing existence in such a way that life is wrapped in resignation as well as some allusions and metaphors about death. Yet, it is not yet drastic to the point of letting die.

The building of spaces is a central part of this kind of biopolitics. Space, according to Lefebvre (1992, p 341), is always political and strategic, rather than being a scientific object separated from ideology or politics. The subject is positioned in this equation as someone who has been hurled into this world of languages and rules already existing and finds themselves caught in its phenomenological contingency and social structuration (Rebughini, 2014, p 2). In this sense, space and the spatial are socially and politically constituted (Massey, 2013). This means that power and the constitution of subjects are always at work in the link between space and bodies.

This is seen in the making visible of working-class individuals staying in housing estates in the 19th century (Foucault and Ewald, 2003). The normalisation of behaviour at the time meant that a sort of spontaneous policing or control was carried out by the spatial layout of the town itself. The space was constituted by a series of disciplinary mechanisms applied to the population such as to encourage patterns of saving related to housing, to the renting of accommodations and, in some cases, their purchase (Foucault and Ewald, 2003). Although less productive in a material sense, the spatial characteristics of the men's shelter, emerging directly from the uneasy alliance represented by the local arrangement between the state, humanitarian and faith-based actors, are disciplinary too. For example, this chapter shows that although the tap had not been turned off, it was a subject of contention to such an extent that the men lived in an atmosphere where they were aware of the need to conserve water and practise basic cleanliness when sharing the few available toilets. They rarely washed their pots properly and there were numerous instances of men not flushing toilets (leading to all sorts of conflict).

Individual sanitary facilities within such establishments not only instil sentiments of pride and ownership but also reinforce messages of care and respect for the individual as part of a larger philosophy towards good and humane living considerations (Turner and Moran, 2019, p 210). Such seemingly innocuous techniques of managing transit shelters are significant and akin to, in Pastor Dungure words, “laughing at them in silence”, as they undermine the dignity of inhabitants and reduce their autonomy and sense of security. This forces them to save precariously in a bid to have enough transport money to proceed with their journeys further south. These seemingly innocuous politics relate to the construction of spaces of everyday governance by giving life and visibility to objects that order the lives, relationships and welfare of migrants within an existential framework of forced dependence and social isolation under infantilising and degrading conditions (see Canning, 2020, p 214).

Because this minimal biopolitics is constitutive, this chapter shows that religious ceremonies play an important role in this biopolitical relationship. Pastoral care would administer life in ways that resemble the state citizen–non-citizen relationship, using the concepts of ‘the protector’ and ‘the protected’. This relationship reveals pastoral care as being directed by linear, pastoral time, with a future filled with goals to be achieved and reasons for suffering to be endured and faced with discipline (Geertz, 1993). The prevalence of a scarcity discourse in the transit shelter would also influence how Zimbabwean migrant men conduct themselves on a daily basis as humanitarian subjects living under pastoral care. These different kinds of regulation add to the violence they already experience as humanitarian aid recipients (see Agier, 2010, pp 33–4) whose male bodies were accustomed to disciplining other bodies. This body was now confronted by the demise of its virility and the collapse of the life-supporting fictions of its indomitability. This ‘attack’ was more profound because, for the men, fatherhood was associated with the performance of hyper-masculinity related to domination and being in control (Muchemwa and Muponde, 2007, p xvii). Hence, these contestations with self and between men and their carers are the hallmark of living between care and control in the shelter.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first part presents the tensions of living between care and control in the shelter. In the first section, this part describes the space and living conditions of the shelter as well as the uncertainties that were part of the humanitarian condition of staying there. A great deal of interest is taken on the relationship between spatial features related to issues like sanitation and the constitution of men as disciplined subjects. The men’s relationship with death is also invoked in a context of shrinking job opportunities. In the act of labouring the relevance of minimal biopolitics as a framework for analysing life at the shelter, this chapter also

insists on how the men were not just in a woeful state, as they relativised their suffering as being better to being in Zimbabwe.

The second section of the first part then uses the experiences of a Zimbabwean by the name of Sigauke to exemplify how humanitarian efforts have altered the lives of Zimbabwean migrant men waiting for new beginnings in such a way that immobility has entrapped the male body, which is used to disciplining other bodies. This is tied to the history of his upbringing as a man in Zimbabwe as well as a modernist life course developed during Zimbabwe's early years, which set lofty goals that were ultimately unreachable.

The second part of the chapter argues that pastoral care fosters minimalist biopolitics by threatening individual ejection and using infantilising comments to regulate water consumption, with Bishop Jonas as the embodiment of all these manifestations of disciplinary power. It infers on the ways that pastoral care turns to that power which enters bodies and causes subjective actions. The final part offers brief concluding remarks.

Living between care and control

“Those things are still in bad shape”

At the Zimbabwe–South Africa border, transit shelters like the men's shelter are the geographical heart of the humanitarian assistance regime. The shelter is located a few kilometres outside of Musina, in a place called Matswale by locals. I could hear a loud mix of Shona, Swahili, French and English when I first entered the yard. Since men of Zimbabwean origin coexisted with Congolese and Burundian asylum seekers and had to find an amiable middle ground of greeting each other, the men used the Swahili word *mjomba* regularly as a term to name each other around the yard. Two large corrugated-iron constructions stood in the middle of the yard, flanked by a few permanent brick structures and hidden tents that could be seen from the street. One was used as a church, while the other was used as a shelter.

In 2018–9, the MSF erected a corrugated-iron building in the same location where a big tent that had functioned as the main shelter for several years had originally stood. The tent had become uninhabitable, posing a health risk to people sleeping on the floor, which had begun to overflow during periods of heavy rain. Residents would lose the majority of their belongings as a result of the floods. On my first visit, two builders were putting the finishing touches on the iron rooftop, including installing solar panels. For some, the new structure's suitability for human habitation remained in doubt. Bishop Jonas mocked the building by saying, “If they had built this shelter using bricks, it would have been better. I don't understand this way of doing things”. Pastor Dungure, in his office sitting on his desk under the air con in the sweltering heat, stated that the men's shelter still

did not meet human rights standards even with the new upgrades, calling the shelter the worst place in Musina. He laughed at the absurdity of the possibility and declared, at great length:

‘Man, those structures are still in bad shape. If it was that I was given that programme, the first thing I would do is to destroy all they have built and start building something better. Something a little better for people. Those things are not good for people. How do you build such zinc places? Musina is too hot. You came at the right time and we are in an office so we have air con. You won’t be able to go outside. Musina is very hot. It’s scorching hot here even in the night-time. Zinc structures are uninhabitable. Zinc is not appropriate, man, to build a shelter for people and then claim to be assisting them. You will be laughing at them. It’s the equivalent of laughing at them in silence.’

The soon-to-be-built structure did not give the appearance of being a shelter in the true sense of the word. It was evidently a product of the uneasy alliance between state and non-state actors expressed in the ambivalent settlement explored in the last chapter. A protected kitchen was built in the shelter yard, with drywall to shield the men from the winds. A square drywalled bathroom was accessible from the kitchen. The MSF had constructed a toilet and bath, but had switched from flush to bucket to save water, despite the fact that the flush mechanism had never worked well to begin with. The men would take turns bringing buckets in and out. The situation was difficult due to a lack of showers and kitchen space (see [Bornman and Haffejee, 2019](#)). Although not ideal, this arrangement was significantly improved compared with the prior situation when the shelter had terrible sanitation and was not walled, making security a major concern.

“Right now we are just staying at the church, which is not the hope I had,” one of the Zimbabwean men living there wrote in his diary to express how the living arrangements were. “My people, I’m dying of hunger here. Many of us are staying here, and we are being bitten by lice while sleeping, as if we were in prison. This will result in several diseases,” he added (see Figure 5.1).

The shelter’s tap had not been turned off, but the men lived in an environment where they were aware of the importance of conserving water and practising basic cleanliness when sharing the few available restrooms. They rarely washed their pots properly because they did not always have soap (see Figure 5.2), and incidents of some men not flushing toilets were common, causing all sorts of interpersonal strife. Water infrastructure and bureaucratic politics are fundamentally life politics as water is essential for a healthy existence free of dangerous communicable diseases including cholera, typhoid and COVID-19. The

Figure 5.1: Image of the sleeping area in the new corrugated-iron shelter MSF built at the men's shelter



Source: Author

Figure 5.2: Image of the cooking shade that the men at the men's shelter referred to as a kitchen – next to it are the pots they cooked in each day



Source: Author

Sphere Minimum Standards for water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion (WASH) emphasise the relevance of the right to access water and sanitation in humanitarian circumstances.

Water scarcity also robbed residents of the autonomy over the most basic of resources they had grown up with, even in the most remote of locations, which is linked to the erosion of their dignity. After all, personal sanitary facilities within such establishments not only instil sentiments of pride and ownership but also reinforce messages of care and respect for the individual as part of a larger philosophy towards good and humane living considerations (Turner and Moran, 2019, p 210). It follows that compromised access to water and sharing sanitation facilities like toilets and showers infringed on the men’s right to a decent existence.

Water shortage also led to systems of administration geared towards physical discipline, as will be seen by several examples of ‘senior men’ supervising the newly arrived men discussed more in the [next chapter](#). Suffice to say here that one of the shelter’s senior men-turned-security guard spoke about the challenges of monitoring sanitation and conserving water by describing the shelter as “a place of confusion” as they were coming across different characters of people sharing the toilets. “This is something that is making it hard for us to stay together because some of the people, they are so careless in using those toilets.” These would also emerge from the noble intention of wanting to use water sparingly. “And then if another person gets in after them, it’s something that causes problems because he will say ‘you, why are you leaving it like this?’ This is our problem and it’s causing sometimes toilets to block and the people to contract diseases here.”

Uncertainty in precarious immobility

Zimbabwean migrant men also had to deal with the long-term uncertainty that came with their immobility, especially because it was situated in this contested and ambiguous space. With waiting came insecurity, which Giddens (1984) describes as a response to the interruption of one’s life trajectory, leading to anxiety. Individuals’ future goals and life- and place-making projects are affected by these radical and long-term uncertainties.

Individuals who are marginalised from mainstream communities may experience a disconnection between their expectations and reality when they face a distinct temporality, contributing to an altered perception of time in which the future is unknown and existence is unpredictable. Words like “Today I didn’t even get a piece job; therefore, I don’t have anything to eat. Things are getting difficult for me, and I’m not sure what I’ll do if things continue as they are. How is my life going to turn out?” capture these kinds of unsteady experiences. One Zimbabwean migrant man expressed

his insecurity by saying, “We went three days without eating or drinking anything. As a result, life has become harder. If only we could receive help in this place where we’re staying”.

These waiting times were filled with instances when the lines between life and death blurred. With references to death and incarceration metaphors, the following three diary extracts from Zimbabwean migrant men waiting at the shelter during the same period are worth quoting at length as they are quite poignant:

‘The little that I have found is not enough. For me life is tough. Even if life could be borrowed, I could take my life and give it to others. Guys, this thing called life is something that is important. Such that if others were me, I would be hanging myself by now because of poverty. Because there is no one who can be able to live with poverty. Surely, there is no one.’

‘In this present moment, I am living like a prisoner and there is no work to do. I do not have the papers required to feel free to work even if there is a job I am qualified to do. My family is now suffering even more which means that I am not any different from a dead person.’

‘We are staying at the church in Musina where we are hiding from the police. At the place we are staying, we also don’t have any food to eat. This place only keeps people who are suffering who don’t have anywhere to stay when they arrive. Some of us go forward into the country. Others are lucky enough to be given jobs there. You will be one of the lucky ones. We ask the police to give us permission to stay here so that we can find some work because things are not looking good for us. We could die.’

Waiting for transportation money while living in an uninhabitable location entangled existence, to the point of pondering the value of death (without necessarily being drastic enough to take life away). On a typical morning, all of the men would be cooking over an open fire. For the Zimbabweans, cooking was a privilege, as there were times where the men could have simply eaten the leftovers of others who would instruct them to wait and only eat when they were full. One man who did not find any piece job for the whole month was able to live by being saved by others who would give him leftover food when they were full. But this was contingent on who these men knew and how long they had spent at the shelter, as staying longer became the prominent sense of security available.

But Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter were not just perceiving these circumstances as being in a woeful state. One of them had resigned to the simple relief of being in South Africa because there was a chance of finding

leftovers in the bin. He stated emphatically that this was not conceivable for him in Zimbabwe. He was scratching himself frequently because he had not washed in several days due to a lack of soap and was clad in his unclean clothes. In a casual tone of resignation, he said to me, lazily:

‘Here, life is better. The suffering here is better because if you get hit by hunger and go search in the bin, you can find something like bread and eat that. Go to Zimbabwe, where do you think you will find bread to eat [chuckling]? Who throws away bread in the bin in Zimbabwe?’

The notion that eating from the garbage was a viable alternative, as well as the fortitude to laugh at it, exemplifies how Melusi cannot be so easily interpreted a modern emblem of bare life. He relativises his misery by separating his current circumstances from the bare life of suffering in Zimbabwe. Melusi makes it apparent that he is in a better place with less pain, even though he has abandoned his grooming, which is a fundamental marker of his dignity and humanity. Melusi’s example demonstrates how the relationship between immobility and agency can be ambiguous and unpredictable. In [Chapter 6](#), this will be a significant reference point and one of refrain. For this chapter, it is useful in stressing that the coexistence of uncertainty with a relativised view of suffering reveals the relevance of minimal biopolitics as a framework for analysing life in the shelter.

Entrapped masculinities

Returning to the centrality of the body, the figure of being a man and the performative weight it carries became a point of disciplining the Zimbabweans at the shelter as they tried to conform to certain beliefs and standards that were mostly unrealistic in relation to their situation.

Masculinity is a set of beliefs and standards formed by the dominant group to include and exclude its members and help in assuming hegemonic positions. Hegemony, according to Antonio Gramsci, is the ability of certain groups to gain power in society and hence impose definitions, norms and normalcy, such that masculinity is essential for achieving hegemonic positions of power. In most societies, the social construction of male labour has replicated images that give men both the burden and resources to provide. This has resulted in visions and measures of success that link manhood to labour, not just any job but work related to a specific heteronormative male identity. If males use wage labour to perform masculinity, in accordance with this social construction, then their lack of work places them at a disadvantage in obtaining social status for themselves and their families.

I built a strong bond with Sigauke during my fieldwork. His experience is shared by several other Zimbabwean migrant men waiting at the South

Figure 5.3: Outside image of the corrugated-iron shelter (right) next to the church (left) at the men's shelter



Source: Author

Africa–Zimbabwe border, considering they come from a context that would insist on similar social values regarding gender roles. Sigauke’s story exemplifies how humanitarian efforts have altered the lives of Zimbabwean migrant men waiting for new beginnings in such a way that immobility has entrapped the male body, which is used to disciplining other bodies (although with some, albeit limited, room for manoeuvre).

I overheard one of the Zimbabwean men in the corrugated-iron shade that served as the church (see Figure 5.3) exclaiming loudly in Shona, “I am really hurt. I believed I had landed a job. This is extremely unlucky”. This man, Sigauke, exited the bunker and made his way to the church entrance, where I was waiting to listen to the men’s stories while also observing. He was dressed in a grey overall pant and an orange overall jacket. He had grey hair and a cigarette-like scent. In Shona, we exchanged greetings. Unprovoked, he said, “I just arrived from the robot”, with an intense face highlighted by his crimson eyes. “I was cooking over there [referring to the cooking shade] when a young man advised me to come here and chat to you if I wanted to tell you my story, you know, get a few things off my chest”.

Sigauke, as I learned later, was 47 years old. He spoke the ChiNdau Shona dialect, whose accent was hard to miss. He was born and raised in the remote village of Chipinge in the south-eastern Zimbabwean province

of Manicaland. He was only somewhat educated, having barely completed Form Two and speaking only a limited amount of English. This, according to Sigauke, was due to what he called his father’s “war mentality”, which meant he prioritised “masculine, hard labour” such as herding cattle over formal education. “Because of this attitude, some of us were only sent to school when we were too old,” Sigauke recalled about his upbringing. “My parents did not understand the significance of education at the time, which was one of the reasons I dropped out of school despite enjoying it.” Despite these disappointments, Sigauke was determined that his children would not have to go through what he had. In Chipinge, he was married and trying to educate his five children and three orphans under his care. He had left Zimbabwe because he was unemployed and sitting at home unable to pay his children’s school tuition. Cyclone Idai wreaked havoc on his land that year, exacerbating the problem.

Tropical Cyclone Idai made its landfall at the Mozambican port of Beira on 14 March 2019 before making its way across the region. It was the largest natural disaster to strike Southern Africa in at least 20 years, with a significant impact on millions of people in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. 2.5 million people, half of them children, were left in need of humanitarian services, while 603 people lost their lives, with 1,641 injured. The crops damaged accounted for 715,378 ha, with Sigauke’s crop forming part of the statistics.

Sigauke was born only eight years before Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, and the government promised him and his generation a brighter future. The Black majority in Zimbabwe saw significant socio-economic mobility in the decades following independence. In postcolonial Zimbabwe, some of the Black majority’s social mobility was predicated on colonial notions of status and modernity (McGregor, 2008). In a late colonial environment, the Zimbabwean state cultivated and perpetuated these middle-class beliefs through mission schools. Moving into a house in the former White suburbs of Zimbabwe’s cities was seen as the epitome of achievement by many upwardly mobile Black Zimbabweans (McGregor, 2008). Harare’s new elites were dubbed ‘nose brigades’ (referring to Europeans and Americans who speak English through their noses) and ‘*masalad*’ (‘salad eaters’). This can be viewed as a modernist life course developed during Zimbabwe’s early years, which set lofty goals that were ultimately unreachable. Within some government departments, a new Black professional class supported middle-class norms by upholding public service traditions that nurtured respectability while placing a high importance on education as a means for social mobility (McGregor, 2008). With such modernist conceptions of development, the state had likewise institutionalised social time.

Those who, like Sigauke, did not complete their secondary education often struggled to advance. Others with university degrees or professional

qualifications entered the shelter, but they tended to be younger and thus belonged to the so-called ‘born free generation’ born after independence of 1980. Sigauke married out of passage as he lacked a formal education and worked as a contract worker for many years in Zimbabwean firms. This meant he had “work for six months and then stop, then a year and then stop”. Sigauke had never left Zimbabwe, even during the 2008 crisis when he was barely surviving. The ensuing crisis, which erupted well after the 2009 GNU, demoted him to stitching shoes, a position that was far worse than contract work. “The only thing that compelled me to come here is the possibility of building on what I already have,” he said. Sigauke travelled with a limited amount of money due to the tough economic conditions in Zimbabwe, which were becoming more severe under the New Dispensation, only to be tricked by the smuggler who was assisting him to cross the border.

Sigauke’s erratic travel was caused by the high cost of passports in Zimbabwe, which the government blamed on high-priced paper. The cheapest passport would cost USD120, including the application fee. This amount is out of reach for many poor Zimbabweans who take less, the equivalent or just over that in income per month. Sigauke arrived in Musina forlorn after being forced to spend transportation money he had wanted to utilise to stay with his relatives in the interior. Strangers pointed him in the direction of the shelter. The majority of the men’s shelter inhabitants shared this experience. Others would have been robbed by *maguma guma* in more extreme conditions. I encountered one man from whom they had taken clothes, who was now dressed in their filth and wearing their worn-out shoes. Eight men revealed how they were caught by the police in Polokwane and held for up to three months before being deported.

All these often violent experiences robbed the men of their control over other bodies, especially male bodies, with whom they could have fought if they had been in a different situation. At the same time, some of the men considered these experiences as part of what it meant to be a ‘true man’. Even if some viewed the shelter as being like a prison, the place was always portrayed as an unavoidable aspect of their trip. The shelter was a venue and rite of passage for Sigauke and many others like him, and it served as a springboard to something better. Such biographical timelines emerge in societies where cultural expectations place different pressures on men and women, with varying social and economic repercussions. Waiting is one of the ways to experience the gendered impacts of power in this sense. These responsibilities were represented in Sigauke’s statement that leaving the house is difficult, yet “there is nothing to do. I just had to strengthen myself as a man”. Other men’s viewpoints, which included the following, exemplified the internalisation of some of these gender roles:

‘Here in South Africa, I am here to look for work. Because sitting down does not get anything done. The death of a man is seen only by the spilling of his guts. The feet can take you wherever you want. As I am here, I am a person with a family that needs to be taken care of. Life is like a game called “grow up and see for yourself”.’

‘You know, as a man my friend, when you arrive in a new place and find people being able to survive there, you also stay there and do what’s there at that time. You work with what is there at that time.’

‘The living conditions back home are indeed better but when you enter the jungle you must begin to practise manly behaviour. You can no longer continue behaving like a woman. When you enter a situation like this, you must resort to manly behaviour only. You must begin to behave like a man by even sleeping in the bush. Even in the bin, you must dig deep to look for food until you get what you want. Because there is no other plan.’

Despite this conviction, the men were justifiably distraught over their loss and confinement. Because the shelter created a system of rules and expectations based on ambiguity, there was a conflict because it was, after all, a realm of uncertainty. As a result, this created ‘temporal disorientation’ in which time became discontinuous and disorganised as migrants’ ambitions for social mobility in both places did not fit with the prevailing conditions. These circumstances ran counter to Sigauke’s expectations, as he had believed his migration would allow him to reclaim his standing and social mobility to avoid ‘social death’ among his kin. The concept of social death refers to members of a family being kicked out and losing all their social rights or claims because of the social benefits they fail to deliver (Kankonde, 2010). Sigauke’s oncoming social death was based on the following conceptions of his responsibility and sense of progress:

‘The children need to go to school. I can’t say that I didn’t go to school and then put them in a similar situation where they can’t go to school too. There must be a difference in their lives because I am alive. It shouldn’t appear as if I am dead. So, since I’m not dead, I try to do something to help my children. Or else these things will turn me into a mockery in the future.’

Death analogies were once again recurring themes. One of the men had also just linked sitting at home to death when he remarked, “I don’t know what kind of fathers there are in Zimbabwe killing their children. Please, South Africa’s government, assist us before people start dying”. Indeed, ideal tasks like breadwinning, family protection and community prestige (Turner, 2019, p 599) were impossible to embody and accomplish, which made life as good as interpreted through its opposite.

Sigauke had been residing at the shelter for a month and a half when I met him for the first time that day. He was raising money to sponsor his move forward. Simultaneously, he encountered several limitations in these tactics. Sigauke longed for more work as the piece jobs at the robot were shrinking. In former years, trucks would hire labourers on a large scale to pick oranges and potatoes on farms. Three weeks would not pass before a truck arrived at the robot to hire men. Because there was now such a great demand for labour, November–December was the only time to locate such lucrative work, as many people would have returned home. Those returning to Musina from Zimbabwe would have similar difficulties, as the Limpopo River would be flooded at this time. During this wet season, the river can be highly perilous to cross, and at least some migrants are likely to have drowned while attempting to do so.

The absence of documentation via illegalisation hampered Sigauke's ability to look for jobs outside of the robot. When the SAPS raided the areas, even standing at the robot was dangerous. When they saw a police van approaching, the men would usually retreat into the shelter for protection. Sigauke was so afraid of getting arrested and deported that he equated it to "being like a dead person", signifying the retreat of his masculinity to a similar state as doing nothing in Zimbabwe. For what good could he be if he was detained and deported?

Unfortunately for him, at the time I met him, things were not going his way. He would hang out in the yard on days when he could not find a job, which made him unable to pay his children's school tuition in the second term of that year. In the act of confiding in me, he started crying because his wife had told him that his children had been chased out of school that morning. I was at a loss for what to do or say. All I could do was try to reassure him that things would improve, even though the environment around us suggested the exact opposite.

“What’s a house without discipline?” Religious ceremonies and pastoral care

‘You as a parent must say, “Lord, start by giving my children order”. The Lord says, “I can’t give blessings unto your children before I give law unto your children”. That’s why I say there is no house without laws. Last time we were speaking about the youth, as a child without discipline. Some of them we see them here in this church. Even parents we see them here. Even Pastors and Bishops we see them here. You can see that this person is not disciplined. But if I speak of people without rules you get angry!’

As if the conditions and experiences I have documented earlier were not perilous enough, the shelter managers wasted no time in developing their

Figure 5.4: Image of a pastor praying for congregants at the church service while the migrant men and Bishop Jonas look on



Source: Author

own simple but deep pastoral tactics for managing Zimbabwean migrants. This way, as the final part of the chapter argues, pastoral care from faith-based actors would foster minimalist biopolitics by threatening individual ejection and using infantilising comments to regulate water consumption, with Bishop Jonas as the embodiment of all these manifestations of disciplinary power.

The relationship between Bishop Jonas and shelter inhabitants was that of ‘the protector’ and ‘the protected’. While confined to the domain of pastoral care, this relationship mirrored the state citizen–non–citizen relationship. This interaction reveals pastoral care as being directed by linear, pastoral time, with a future filled with goals to be achieved and reasons to endure suffering (see [Geertz, 1993](#)). Guyer defines this form of pastoral time in the following way, based on Maurice Blanchot’s work:

Prophetic speech announces an impossible future, or makes the future it announces, because it announces it, something impossible, a future one would not know how to live and that must upset all the sure givens of existence. When speech becomes prophetic it is not the future that is given, it is the present that is taken away, and with it any possibility of a firm, stable, lasting presence. ([Guyer, 2006](#), p 258)

Pastoral care and discipline remove the present by prophesying impossible futures through the obedience of one individual to another that characterises pastoral power (see [Biebricher, 2011](#)). For individuals whose fragile present forces them to invest in that prophetic revelation, this causes subjective effects of dependency and subjugation crafted as discipline.

Bishop Jonas mostly accepted those who agreed to follow a Christian ethos of what it meant to be a good member of the shelter community. This was something I learned during my personal inclusion and acceptance into the shelter community, which was based on Bishop Jonas' religious sermons about what it meant to be a good member of the shelter. In the absence of Bishop Jonas, Pastor JoJo and his son Evangelist Sevenzo, these religious talks mediated my positive acceptance by placing me in the shelter's hierarchy. I recall attending my first church service on a Sunday (see Figure 5.4). Bishop Jonas entered the room shortly after I did. The woman leading intercession knelt to hand him his bible. The congregation then greeted me as a visitor, when the MC pronounced that it was time to welcome visitors. She asked me and three other visitors to raise our hands until we went to the front so they could welcome us. The MC then asked the church to come and greet us with a shake of hands, complemented by Evangelist Sevenzo who shouted charismatically, "Hallelujahhh!" escorted by loud shouts of "Amen" and a clap of hands.

As soon as I sat down, one of the ushers imposed church rules on me, directing me to turn off my phone during the service, despite the fact that I was merely using it to take notes. I tried not to take offence and continued listening to the sermon. Bishop Jonas, before preaching, gave me a special welcome, emphasising to the congregation the necessity of discipline once more. Only that this time, I was its prime example, as he remarked:

'I'll ask my brother [me] to come up front. The law of Jesus is very nice. Do you see my brother who is here? He is following the law that he was also given. Today, he came for me and you. Because he wants to see if you are disciplined in this church. There is no discipline. He is a visitor. Better for you to greet them and introduce them because the bible says a house without law cannot welcome visitors. If we are not disciplined, we cannot welcome visitors. If we are, we can welcome them. It's natural. We don't know if he is Jesus or not. The Lord says welcome visitors so that you can be blessed.'

While this did not sit comfortably with me, a discomfort I have shared in my introductory chapter when discussing issues of ethics and positionality, I introduced myself and my role at the church. Bishop Jonas called visitors up again to the altar shortly after his sermon. I joined the other visitors at the front, and he handed each of us a bottle of anointing oil. He then walked

over to hand me another bottle, instructing me to massage the oil on my feet to avoid mishaps and on my hands if I wanted things to go well. He encouraged visitors to drink it and ladies to put it in their husbands' meals. Another woman drank it and claimed that her stomach pains had vanished. This oil was on sale.

I use these examples to show how pastoral regulation and discipline discourses at the shelter were a central feature of life there. They resulted in rewarding of positive behaviour but also the punishing of any transgression. Bishop Jonas had kicked several people out of the shelter because their behaviour was incompatible with the shelter's Christian ethos. They were now renting shacks in the local community. He even showed me on one occasion a tall Zimbabwean who was avoiding him. He said, “Now that one, he is a problem. All those ones you see outside, we chase them away; they are smoking and wasting water”. In his defence, he also said he did not stop them from smoking but that “They can smoke but they should have their own time to smoke their cigarettes and drugs”.

Bishop Jonas had ostracised people like this tall lad for their failure to become ‘Christian subjects’ by disobedience to accepted Christian behaviour. Those who stayed had to be highly disciplined enough to use cigarettes and marijuana away from Bishop Jonas' sight. During his presence, he would frequently scout the entire yard to check that everyone was behaving properly. During these sessions, he would spot all kinds of behaviour that he would condemn in his sermons. For example, he would dismiss residents as boisterous in one of his many sermons.

But the topic of water was perhaps the most repeated. It was no longer confined to the humanitarian arena's debates, as Bishop Jonas made certain that the men at the shelter were aware of the situation. When he spoke this via his yellow cordless microphone during another one of his sermons, it reminded everyone present of their part in the church's ordeal:

‘You are good at playing around the water tap but you do not have faith! This water is very expensive. We owe hundred and eighty-six thousand. All you are doing is playing with the water. You are men that wash their feet like women. You go there and come back only to wash them again but you don't even have a figure. You just want your legs to be seen while you are misusing the water here at the church. Do you all pay for this water? [Murmurs of concern and some of disapproval, whispers all around the church] Hallelujah [Amen].’

Bishop Jonas linked too much cleaning with a lack of masculinity by equating this type of behaviour with femininity, as described in the parts of his sermon earlier, perhaps to limit water use at the shelter. He confronted the men for allegedly abusing water. In turn, the water bill conversation either made the

men more aware or also made some feel terrible, prompting them to flee the shelter as quickly as possible. Even though no one had specifically asked him to, one Zimbabwean migrant added the necessity to pay for water to his list of essential issues, which already included purchasing himself food and clothes. This was one of the ways that power would enter the men's bodies and cause subjective actions.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by presenting the tensions of living between care and control in the shelter by describing the space and living conditions as well as the uncertainties that were part of the humanitarian condition of living there. I have demonstrated how minimal biopolitics is driven by religious ritual and politics that is, in and of itself, inseparable from religion's use of a mechanism to instil behaviour that is not at odds with the state's attempt to police criminality associated with migrants, and to ensure that the informal agreement by humanitarian actors and the state is upheld. In this border regime, these all come together as forms of governance connected to state power in one way or another, without the actors themselves always being attentive to it.

I have explored the relationship between spatial features related to issues like sanitation and the constitution of men as disciplined subjects. Sigauke's experiences were also helpful in revealing how immobility has entrapped the male body, which is used to disciplining other bodies. This is tied to the history of his upbringing as a man in Zimbabwe as well as a modernist life course developed during Zimbabwe's early years, which set lofty goals that were ultimately unreachable. Pastoral care, I argue, also fosters minimalist biopolitics by threatening individual ejection and using infantilising comments to regulate water consumption, with Bishop Jonas as the embodiment of all these manifestations of disciplinary power. Pastoral care turns to that power that enters bodies and causes subjective actions. In lieu of using a purely biopolitical approach, I have also used this exercise to show the relevance of minimal biopolitics as a framework for analysing life at the shelter as I also insist on how the men were not just in a woeful state as they relativised their suffering as being better to being in Zimbabwe. Hence, what is important to underscore in this chapter is that, indeed, there is a relationship of governmentality between the men and state, humanitarian and faith-based actors. However, this entails the making and allowing of existence in such a way that life is wrapped in resignation as well as some allusions and metaphors about death. Yet, it is not yet drastic to the point of letting die. Instead, as I show next, this relationship still permits the men to appropriate time through immobility, even if it is without necessarily allowing the governed to shape and transform regimes of government.

“This Place Is a Bus Stop”: Temporalities of Zimbabwean Migrant Men Waiting at the Transit Shelter

Introduction

Nearly 60 Zimbabwean migrants staying at the men’s shelter gathered at the ‘robot’ shortly after 6 am to market themselves to piece-work recruiters. These men began to refer to an open space near to a four-way junction about 50 metres outside the shelter as a robot – a Southern African term for traffic lights – where they would wait in the hope of finding long-term employment. Although there was no actual traffic light, the term was used to represent the waiting for one’s turn to be picked by recruiters. On this particular occasion, a vehicle was parked and the owner was a contractor who had hired only five workers to work as *dhaka* boys on a modest construction project in Matswale. All of the men were vying for a few piece jobs. This was their chance to earn money for food and soap, as well as acquire funds for transportation to Polokwane, Johannesburg or Cape Town in the long term.

Around the truck, as expected, there was a flurry of activity. One of the senior men, Gogwe, walked out of the yard and told the men to keep order. He got into the vehicle and began a friendly conversation with the truck owner. He quickly gathered four other men for the job, and they all piled into the back of the truck. This was all done with complete disregard for the long line that many others had patiently waited in. Patronage and seniority surpassed the length of time spent waiting in the yard’s informal order.

Given the humanitarian situation discussed in the [previous chapter](#), it may be easy to conclude that the everyday control of migrant bodies transforms them into Giorgio Agamben’s concept of ‘bare lives’. This chapter explores how disruptions shape the waiting modes of irregular Zimbabwean migrant men who have arrived in South Africa but are unable to travel further into

the interior.¹ The chapter argues, using [Lauer's \(1981\)](#) temporal framework of social time, that while waiting is one aspect of regulating these migrants, it is also an aspect of them seeking agency in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border regime. This demonstrates how immobilities can be conceptualised in both time and space. In the chapter, the intersections of immobility and agency indicate that the relationship between resistance and control in waiting is ambiguous. This casts doubt on the idea of immobility as an experience that causes people in humanitarian camps to recognise the state of bare life. It also demonstrates how immobilities can be conceptualised in both time and space.

There is a growing body of evidence that links humanitarian space and its concomitant immobility to migrant agency constraints. Some people associate immobility with impotence ([Agier, 2010](#); [Bauman, 2002](#)). Overall, the research indicates that the humanitarian camp is a closed environment or a lonely world stuck in a desert with control over life (see [Agier, 2010](#)). This view implies that humanitarian interventions frequently reduce those it attempts to assist to mere victims or bare lives ([Agamben, 1995](#); [Bauman, 2002](#)) – objects of compassion with limited potential to act as full persons ([Feldman, 2012](#)). The lives of these people are defined by their rootedness in the immediacy of the present in this idea ([Feldman, 2012](#)). For the residents of a refugee camp, the notion of long-term sequels and consequences is not part of the experience, as [Bauman \(2002, p 345\)](#) adds. The contents of life are undisturbed by the understanding that days aggregate into months and years for the occupants of refugee camps, who live practically from day to day.

However, the awkward links between resistance and domination, spatial immobility and victimisation and the false dichotomy between securitisation imperatives and humanitarian care serve to highlight, in turn, the ambivalences in the political subjectivities of Zimbabwean migrants in this chapter. The terms victim and victor are insufficient to describe everyday experiences, as the realities of this border system show a more complex picture. While imposed factors make predictions about the future shaky, the future's shakiness also opens up a slew of fresh possibilities. This ambivalence also calls into question traditional spatial logics in analyses of political subjectivities at African borders, which tend to frame them in neat binaries of resistance and dominance, rather than acknowledging the complexities and temporalities of migration and border regimes.

Navigating this line typically necessitates confusing and sometimes conflicting responses, which can lead to ambiguous and sometimes

¹ Parts of this chapter are based upon my 2022 article 'This place is a bus stop': temporalities of Zimbabwean migrant men waiting at a Zimbabwe–South Africa border transit shelter.

contradictory outcomes (see [Kihato, 2009](#)). As a lens to comprehend their temporal meanings, this chapter examines the dextrous ways in which these migrants viewed and acted on distinct temporalities. Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter use their immobility as a resource for action. They are thus not just humanitarian victims or zombies. Rather, they have agency in the innovative ways in which they organise and shape the entire migration process through the institution of religion and its beliefs and practices (see [Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003](#), p 1147). Their temporal migration tactics bring order to the unknown, allowing them to reduce risk, uncover new possibilities and plan in the face of significant uncertainty and a lack of time sovereignty (see [Elchardus, 1994](#); [Cojocaru, 2016](#), p 15). Temporal tactics also enable the men to rethink their migration plans and extract cash that they would not have had otherwise in Zimbabwe. They do not just pass the time in a well-organised and well-defined place ([Turner, 2005](#), p 312). Instead, they use their disruption, temporal suspension and resulting immobility as a method in and of itself for planning for the future ([Turner, 2016](#), p 37). Indeed, the lives of these waiting groups, such as refugees, are not reducible to the present tense's times and spaces ([Ramadan, 2013](#); [Ramsay, 2017](#)).

This chapter begins by outlining the significance of social time as a lens to conceptualise power and time by highlighting how the relationship between people's social activities and clock time reveals a particular relationship with power. The second part presents the men's temporal strategies while residing at the shelter. It does so, first, through an analysis of practices that are amenable to two similar classifications of social time: temporal orientations and perspectives. These classifications aid the chapter in suggesting that there are those waiting for new beginnings and waiting to lay claims, in light of their relationship with time. Second, the chapter looks at practices that are amenable to a classification of social time called temporal patterns, which are all useful in the interpretive work of this chapter: periodicity, tempo and perceived duration. These are related to a mode of waiting related to 'living for the future'. Finally, concluding remarks are offered.

Power and agency vis-à-vis social time

The temporal is the essence of human existence. While the term of time conjures up images of clocks, social time refers to the patterns and orientations associated with social activities, as well as the conceptualisation of social life's ordering. This means that some people may have a social time that differs from clock time, to the point that they may even be hostile or dismissive of the latter. For example, [Lauer \(1981\)](#), the main scholar that informs this chapter's framework of time, describes a group of Algerian

peasants who are unconcerned with the passage of time and hate haste in human affairs. The scholar describes them as having no concept of exact appointment hours, lacking exact mealtimes and referring to the clock as ‘the devil’s mill’ (Lauer, 1981, p 23).

This rebellion as it were stands in stark contrast to environments such as the West, where clock time has become something of a tyrant, by ordering social phenomena that could previously only be analysed in terms of a social time according to the clock. Rather than being analysed in terms of meaningful events or stages, human life is here reduced to a long series of minutes and hours, and the individual’s existence is reduced to a compulsive and frenzied endeavour to avoid wasting time (Lauer, 1981, p 23).

However, not everyone in society is subject to this kind of ‘tyranny of the clock’, as it may be a minor aspect of their daily lives (Lauer, 1981). Humans may create social time symbols to legitimise their social existence. What is clear, though, is that the relationship between people’s social activities and clock time reveals a particular relationship with power. Therefore, an analysis of how people make sense of time, or what this chapter calls ‘social time’, is instructive. Since time is a slick and tangled idea that is everywhere and everything by nature but difficult to pin down analytically, precisely because of its pervasiveness (Robertson, 2014), social time can be broken down analytically such that it has features that may be studied empirically (Lauer, 1981; Bender and Wellbery, 1991).

These can be called chronotypes: models or patterns that give time meaning in a practical or intellectual sense (Bender and Wellbery, 1991). The three major features of social time that can be examined are temporal patterns, temporal orientations and temporal perspectives (Lauer, 1981). These are classifications of time as it is lived and experienced in general, with its social foundation in how communities organise their lives to generate rhythms that are then consistently imposed as a framework for all temporal activity in that society (Kern, 1983, p 19). How these rhythms are established and imposed as frameworks for temporal activities at the shelter is important and is made according to the following understanding of these three features.

When these ideas are combined, they reveal that meaning can be drawn from instances where, for example, Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter were unable or unwilling to commit vital resources like time, energy and money in religious activities since they regarded their stay there to be temporary. It becomes instructive to draw conclusions about their subjectivities from their preference to instead put their time into labour while they stayed there. In this section of the chapter, I document how we can interpret this as a future manner of existence and attach meaning about power and agency.

Temporal strategies of Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter

Temporal orientations and temporal perspectives

The phrases ‘temporal orientations’ and ‘temporal perspectives’ are used interchangeably by different scholars, so in this chapter, they are classified together. Individuals’ temporal orientations refer to how they order the past, present and future (Lauer, 1981). The vision of the past, present and future that prevails in a community, a social group or for an individual is referred to as temporal perspectives. This refers to the images that people associate with various temporalities such as the past, present and future. Individuals’ and groups’ relationships with time can thus be classified based on whether their actions during the migration process are largely oriented to the past, present or future, allowing for an understanding of the prevailing condition of subjectivity.

Orientation and perspectives allow us to look at the value people attach to different temporalities and how they believe they have influence over their lives (Cojocar, 2016). In this chapter, this chronotype is used to understand the phenomena of ‘waiting for new beginnings’ and ‘waiting indefinitely to lay claims’ at the men’s shelter. Those whose actions fall in the category of waiting for new beginnings had usually lived at the shelter for less than three months. Their activities and imaginations were more future-oriented, as they placed significant value on the power of the future by insisting on finding a conceptual realignment to allow them to reimagine its multiple possibilities in spite of the disheartening conditions around them.

Those whose actions fall in the category of waiting indefinitely to lay claims are men who had mostly been at the shelter for a period exceeding a year. Their stay in a temporary space had no end in sight, and they appeared to accept that they were locked between an unfathomable future, or one they were no longer interested in acting on, and a difficult past. These men reacted to this tension by engaging in survivalist activities centered around their well-being on a day-to-day basis. This was reflected by their investment in making immediate claims and retaining their authority at the shelter. Faced with personal problems that made it difficult (or, for some, impossible) for them to return home or move to other parts of South Africa, they invested their energies in gaining Bishop Jonas’ trust, which allowed them to achieve a higher level of security than individuals who had been there for a shorter period of time.

Waiting for new beginnings

Immobility and agency have a potentially dynamic and contradictory relationship. For many, their living conditions in Zimbabwe were far better

than at the shelter, where they slept on the ground with old blankets or none, eventually covering themselves with a sack. As they realised, this was their only option, but it took Sigauke some time to realise that until he took matters into his own hands, no one would aid him. He, like many others, arrived with the hope that the government or humanitarian organisations would assist him with his daily upkeep and documentation. As a result of his realisation, he shifted his perspective from a negative to a positive one, realising that he needed to make the best of his situation. Seeing his expected life path morph further into economic precarity was also a source of tension that necessitated a shift in time, especially as it had already been economic precarity that made him flee Zimbabwe and end up at the shelter in the first place. Indeed, he confessed that when he arrived, he did not have even a single cent on him and took pride on how now he could even eat with the others. He professed now being able to know where to go or how to go from this point to that point. He added that:

‘These days, I can say they even come here to hire us with their cars. If you are lucky, someone will come and say, “Let’s go. I want you to make some bricks for me. I have my four bags of cement. Once you are done, I can give you a hundred Rand or hundred and fifty”. I’ll just do that so that I can find something to eat until something else comes up in the near future.’

Sigauke had modified his perspective in this way, cognitively repositioning himself inside space time. Through this type of realignment, many other men had been able to exercise their agency in the past. Some former inhabitants of the shelter were now prosperous residents of Musina. Tafadzwa, a former resident, was now doing his PhD at Vaal University. This confirmed the popular view that most Zimbabwean men go to the shelter to start up, as they know that recruiters from farms come to get them for part-time work – a great way to get started.

This was so much so that others had been coming to the shelter for up to ten years and would organise their visits around the place while working in the adjacent farms and communities. “I travelled through here in 2009, and that’s when I first heard about the church,” one added. “Then I stayed here for two days and received my asylum. After that, I left and was hired by a bricklaying contractor. I’ve known this church for a long time. This week, if I manage to obtain money that goes up to 200 Rand, I can go further,” he continued, demonstrating that he had devised a mental plan or image of how he would realign himself with his delayed goals. The R200 would allow him to be able to return to work as in that present, the only issue was a lack of funds for transportation.

The Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter had to learn how to navigate their situation with little to no help from the authorities or humanitarian workers. Despite these obstacles, things were picking for Sigauke. In September, he had become less available and, on the morning, he told me about a two-day piece job he found in Matswale that paid him R100 each day. Sigauke called me on 14 September to say he had arrived in the township of Soweto that morning. It seemed that he had reaped the benefits of his journey in the end, just three months after arriving at the shelter. By beginning with a reorientation of his position vis-à-vis space time, he had successfully used the shelter as a space to turn his unfortunate experience at the border into a resource for action.

Sigauke remained focused on his journey and had worked hard and saved enough money to travel, and he was staying with one of the shelter residents with whom he had travelled. “However, there is nothing to do,” he bemoaned. He asked me to assist him in his job search. I was never able to aid him in finding work. Ultimately, Sigauke was able to find work in welding and save enough money to travel to Cape Town in January 2020, where he was then assisting a family member with a construction job. Sigauke’s trip parallels the experiences of a few other Zimbabwean migrant men at the shelter who have been there for up to three months in search of a new beginning.

Waiting indefinitely to lay claims

While others were waiting for new beginnings by looking ahead to the opportunities that lie ahead, a few of the men were living in the moment by waiting indefinitely to make claims. Their behaviour was geared solely at surviving the present. Despite their differences, both ways of waiting still demonstrate how immobile populations can transform their condition.

Those who had stayed at the shelter for more than a year were responsible for making it feel like a jail to some. The living arrangements were such that

‘You sleep here and then there is another person right next to you, like you are in jail. You see. That time when you are sleeping, someone else has the gift of stealing. They will steal from you while you are sleeping. Because you have no proper place to keep your money. It’s just like if you leave your bag right here. You will find everything taken out or even that the bag is no longer there. When did that person take it? Maybe they have even gone with it and sold it for 20 Rand and bought *sadza*. His only concern is if he has eaten or not.’

Because they had established long-term ties with labour recruiters, contractors and employers, these select few men were able to have substantial influence

over the hiring process. Staying in this space for so long needed a level of endurance that not everyone possessed. It was thus frequently rewarded with a position as a security guard. In this sense, length of stay was a sort of social capital that influenced one's rights, claims and level of authority. The length of residence in turn had an impact on life experiences, indicating that time does play a role in the shelter's politics of living.

The life of Gogwe

Gogwe, with whom we have already met at the start, was one of them. His commanding presence was complemented by his lofty build and massive size. Gogwe was born in the city of Bulawayo in 1982. He studied until he finished his O levels. He wanted to continue his secondary education but had lost both of his parents, which meant he did not have enough money. In a rural area, he was placed in the care of his grandmother. She covered the remainder of his fees from Form Two to Form Four. Gogwe was unemployed after finishing his O levels and was caring for his grandmother at home. This lasted until 2007, when one of his uncles invited him to work in Johannesburg. After his uncle died, he decided to return. Gogwe came to Musina in 2013, describing it as a good period at the shelter because there was never a significant wait for employment at the robot. He obtained an asylum-seeker permit and was hired as a building contract worker by a White company, where he worked until 2017. When he returned home to see his grandmother that year, he discovered that his contract had been terminated. "I've been sitting since 2017," he explained. "There is nothing, and jobs are hard to come by," he grumbled. While still at the shelter, he had been doing odd jobs. He would aid Joseph, the chief security guard who was closest to Bishop, with cleaning and security when he was not doing piece chores. He emphasised that he was someone who was close to Joseph as a security person.

Gogwe's uncle taught him how to be an electrician while he was in Johannesburg. He claimed he was looking for a job that would match his qualifications. "If I obtain that position, I'm going to stay there until I achieve and can help others," he continued. But it had been difficult for him to get work in Musina, and he had only done electrician work three times. He resorted to being a *dhaka* boy, mixing cement to manufacture bricks at other times. While he acknowledged that the only way to gain this job would be to relocate to a larger city, he said that his constraint was that he did not have a family to welcome him and look after him while he looked for work in a big city like Johannesburg since his uncle died. Gogwe had two children, but due to his circumstances, he had not sent money home since he returned in 2017. In countries like Zimbabwe, such behaviours are frequently met with the harsh consequence of social death (see [Dzingirai et al](#),

2014). Gogwe was so ashamed of his absence that he had stopped contacting his friends and family. “I have not interacted with my children since the last time I had that connection [in 2017]. If I phoned, I’m not even sure what I’d say to them. They are staying with their mother”. Gogwe’s condition meant that he could not simply return home with nothing to show for it, and he admitted that it was tough to do so in his “empty” state.

When one of the men, Sigauke, remarked that some employers already had their own employees, so they would just come to fetch them at the robot, he was referring to Gogwe. Sigauke added that these individuals were so familiar with each other that some of them were now calling each other. Gogwe verified his influential position when he said that there was this old man in town who has a bakkie (pick-up) and specialises in collecting trash in people’s yards. He would say to him on certain Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays that he should come at five in the evening to help him out. So this was a job that he would get every other day and he seemed to be living off it.

He was relatively comfortable at the shelter because this work paid him R70 every day. Gogwe also had government and Cashbuild contacts who would contact him when they required labourers to dump cement at a more lucrative wage of R105 per day. He also considered himself as a defender of fellow Zimbabweans against employers who just paid them enough money for bread only. While his asylum-seeker permit had expired, Gogwe was unconcerned about the police catching and deporting him since he planned to utilise his proficiency in Sotho and Venda to pose as a South African as he went around.

Gogwe would boost his income through the security operations at the shelter. The security team was supposed to ‘institute the law’ by preventing conflicts and other behavioural issues like reminding inhabitants to flush toilets.

Fortune

Fortune was born in the city of Bulawayo in 1985. He attended school until Form Two and was reared by his grandmother in Zvishavane after an uncle who was paying his fees died in 1999, and he did not know his father. When his grandmother died, he moved in with his aunt, who was married to his uncle, a presidential guard member. Fortune moved to South Africa in 2009 and stayed at the shelter. He subsequently moved to Gweru to work as a gold panner until 2010. In 2012, his aunt died, and his uncle reminded him that he was not his son, threatening to “plant him in the earth” – a metaphor for murder. This uncle had also raped his cousin, and he related how, after the encounter, he walked into the house to find her screaming and wailing. Fortune was unable to bring a case against the uncle because of his political

power and influence. Despite the fact that the residence belonged to his aunt, his uncle asked him to leave. Fortune had no idea who the rest of his family was, so he had no choice but to flee back to South Africa.

In 2012, Fortune returned to the shelter and had not left Musina since. His previous job had been for four months, and he would only leave the shelter for long-term contract work such as construction and cutting trees for electricity projects. To make ends meet, he would take on short-term work of up to three days. Fortune would also take advantage of the November–December time frame to find more profitable, long-term jobs, as he had never gone home. His life goal was to locate his father, raise funds for a birth certificate and identification and obtain a Class Two driver’s licence. Staying at the shelter was strategic for him because he had expressed no interest in travelling to Johannesburg due to xenophobic fears. “I’d rather be here and closer. I don’t want to have to fight to keep my hard-earned property,” he explained. He chose to stay at the shelter indefinitely rather than return to Zimbabwe, which was neither simple nor safe.

Joseph

Joseph was the man in charge of security, and he always made the final decision on issues like making residents clean toilets for three days.

The security team’s conduct

As soon as a new resident entered the gate, security would give them an instruction on how to use the space. Senior men, like Gogwe, took advantage of their positions of power all the time. In the name of keeping order and security, Fortune, Joseph, Khulekani (one of the senior men) and Gogwe tormented locals and dominated every aspect of their lives. One example was Gogwe’s contempt for the line of persons waiting for prospective employers to hire them for the work mentioned in the introduction. Bullying of the robot was a typical occurrence. One stubborn resident narrated his encounter with these men at the robot:

‘They were out there [pointing towards the robot] and they gave us the impression that they wanted to claim that the cars that were parking by the roadside to hire people belonged to them. They say the cars belong to them. They claim to own the cars on the basis that they are well known in Musina because they have been staying here for long. They are bullies.’

The senior men’s attitude frequently contrasted with those of others who were there to see what may happen in the future. But the men would

keep grudges against anyone who defied them at the robot and resort to “drinking and smoking for you” to show others that they were in power. This is a phrase that describes a situation in which men reluctantly drink beer or use marijuana in order to prepare for a physical altercation to settle an unsolved quarrel.

They also kept the best quarters for themselves. They slept in the two brick guardrooms in the front (see Figure 6.1), while others slept on the floor or on hard wood without beds in the corrugated-iron framework. Joseph had even purchased a bed where he could hide his lover from the Bishop during visits. According to one witness, these individuals acted as if the place was a prison “where bandits are caged in and are always fighting from dusk till dawn” with their unnecessary competition.

Gogwe valued the shelter, and treated it as if it were his own home. However, people who came to stay at the shelter for a few weeks, he claimed, had no appreciation for the space because it was just used as a short vacation. Hence, some short-term residents did not flush the bucket toilet because they were from a rural background and assumed it was a Blair toilet (pit toilet), according to Fortune. As a result, Gogwe did not hide that violence was his resort in these instances when he remarked, “For me to drill the point

Figure 6.1: Image of the guardroom where some of the senior men at the shelter slept, right next to the corrugated-iron structure the newer arrivals slept in



Source: Author

home that they should get into the toilet with a bucket to flush, I have to slap the person with my hands for them to comprehend; I have to slap the person with my hands. And in certain cases, these are older people". This mindset, as one defiant immigrant described it, would frequently elicit anger and retribution, to the point he contemplated, "I can easily pick up a brick and crush your skull and that will be your demise. And you will surely die. That is inevitable".

The men were fighting behind the shelter building one afternoon. The fight featured one of the security guards, and because he was losing, the others had to join in because the loss risked making the security appear 'weak' to others. This could easily have worked against the authority of the security guards that was the main source of their security. "He has a knife!" exclaimed the guard in Shona. "Knives are not permitted on the premises. He has to leave." Fortune had a baton stick in his hand. The mood grew intense almost immediately. A joint of marijuana was passing hands from Fortune to Khulekani, then to the next person and so on, in the midst of all the turmoil. It was now a one-on-one battle between this one man and the 'big eight'. The few non-nationals present (the majority had gone looking for part-time work) disregarded the brawl, as did the other four or so who were outside playing drafts.

The senior men were also accused of stealing in the community and from others in the shelter and selling them for personal gain. One disabled short-term resident felt disenfranchised, and complained about senior men taking advantage of him. He got a brain tumour that affected his right side and blinded one of his eyes. Due to his infirmity, he had to rely on begging and assisting a local Venda woman in selling on days when she was not available. Depending on the day's sales, she would pay him up to R40. Some of the men had taken advantage of the fact that he was unable to wash his own clothes by pretending to want to help him to wash his clothes and use his washing powder to wash their own.

Several Zimbabwean migrant males complained of losing their belongings, and those who were brave enough to say so blamed senior guard members. On one occasion, while standing at the church door, Khulekani was selling two cell phones. They were old and did not have internet connectivity. He told himself, "Let me pawn this," and eventually sold it for R50 to a Burundian. This thievery system fostered instability, which provided even more motivation for the senior men, who also collected a 'security levy' to keep people's belongings safe in the guardroom. People had to leave their baggage with Joseph in his room, according to Gogwe, if they did not want to lose them. If such a security levy was not paid, some people's belongings would be stolen when they returned from their piece work.

These men's lives and how they live in the shelter are akin to what Mazrui (1999) refers to as 'cultures of presentism', or ideals that are driven by the

here and now. The devotion to the here and now that such presentism embodies can even be nihilist. It may be typified by a reckless disdain for long-term environmental, social or ethical conditions, the welfare of others and an embrace of consumerism, which the senior men themselves resorted to, in the pursuit of short-term economic gain. Their survivalism exhibited all the hallmarks of a presentism temporal orientation.

Temporal patterns

‘Living for the future’ (Turner, 2016) is another mode of waiting discussed in this chapter, based on Lauer’s (1981) concept of temporal patterns. This chronotype is used to denote individuals’ spatial actions throughout the migration process. Lauer provides three characteristics of temporal patterns which are all useful in the interpretive work of this chapter: periodicity, tempo and perceived duration.

Periodicity describes the many rhythms of social life and activities that are tied to people’s wants and activities (Lauer, 1981). This could include their social activities, vocations and hobbies. Tempo is a term that relates to the frequency of activities in a unit of social time or the rate at which a phenomena changes (Lauer, 1981). This refers to how frequently people engage in specific activities. Tempo is a variable that determines how often people in a place like the shelter go to work or church on a given day, week or month (that is, their use of time). Perceived duration is a component of temporal patterns that speaks to people’s perceptions of time in relation to their experiences. This is how people in a place like the shelter perceived time during the migration process, as well as the subjective meanings they ascribed to activities like piecework and church attendance like worry, excitement or boredom.

Living for the future at the shelter

This part of the chapter shows how some men used temporal patterns to exercise their agency. ‘Temporality plays a role in the sense that refugees living in camps and clandestinely in cities are living for the future more than for the present,’ writes Turner (2016, p 38). The Zimbabwean migrant men who, unlike the senior men, only stayed at the shelter for three months rapidly realised their rights, power and claims were limited, and they adapted to their condition. They placed a high emphasis on ‘basic’ human requirements like food, housing and soap, which they required to survive in the present until they could save enough money to go elsewhere to a better future. The majority claimed to have previously visited the shelter and to have used prior knowledge of the facility to plan their perilous excursions. Others were newcomers to Musina who relied on

‘word of mouth’ to find the religious leaders and institutions they needed for physical safety.

They used their immobility to avoid worsening hardship in Zimbabwe, much like Melusi who recalled eating from the trash can. These men would argue that their living arrangements back home were significantly better and far more comfortable after sleeping on the floor or hard wood at a shelter where people had to compete for access to water and petty theft and bullying were rampant. Nonetheless, they viewed living in Musina as preferable than ‘doing nothing’ at home or earning the Zimbabwean currency with no actual market value. They described their experiences in terms of a brighter future in South Africa. Through the metaphor of the robot, they began to work out possibilities and to carefully manage their time, energy, money and expectations in order to improve their prospects of a successful relocation.

In rhythm, they learned which locations they could and could not visit, the risks and opportunities that lay ahead and the limitations of the privileges granted to them by the South African government. Unlike Gogwe and others, these men were not willing to risk eviction or devote precious resources such as time, energy and money for something they saw as temporary. They turned to a ‘futuring’ way of waiting as a result. This entailed turning migration into an interval from life sacrificed for the sake of achieving goals such as starting a business in Zimbabwe (farming, grinding mills, shops), reaching Johannesburg, buying a house, getting married, paying for children’s education, supporting family and so on.

Bishop arrived in the yard one Sunday in his white Toyota Hilux bakkie (pick-up). Mai Bishop stepped out of the vehicle and walked over to where I was situated, dressed in an African outfit with a print of Bishop’s face on it. Bishop followed, and I got out of my chair to meet him before accompanying him into the church. He was dressed in a purple outfit. As if to excuse the empty seats at the time in a yard so full of people, he explained that the men were typically unavailable on Sunday. “Where are they going to be?” I enquired. He said, “They’ll be doing piece work”.

The church was Pentecostal; thus, it promised inhabitants a comprehensive answer to their problems in exchange for spiritual blessings if they gave generously to their religious leaders (Núñez, 2015, p 151). The faith proclaimed a healing and deliverance gospel. Like many Pentecostals, it believed that God gave people spiritual gifts that allowed them to heal and deliver people. Hence, I was surprised to find that the men were not taking advantage of this. After all, the congregants accepted that once someone came into direct contact with the Bishop’s Holy Spirit, they could be cured, delivered or blessed. A linear understanding of time was implicit in this religion, where the future appears as a bright promise born of enduring hardship and being disciplined in the present (observing rules, attending

church regularly and on time, paying tithes and so on). Because its demands were not matched with the long-term goals which most of these individuals had, this linear sense of time was vulnerable and fragile.

The absence from Sunday church services did not entail that the bulk of the Zimbabwean migrant men were not Christians who believed in God and the church's role in sustaining their hope, healing, blessing and delivering them. Some of them cried to God in the hope that things would get better. One wrote in their diary, “God, intervene and answer my prayer. God intervene! There is a saying that if the jungle refuses to give you what you are looking for, do not be angry, sit down, look to the ground and look to the sky then ask and pray.”

This kind of hope should, however, not be confused with a temporal pattern characterised by a tempo of going to church on a regular basis, if at all. This is more of a religious symbolism that focuses on the subject of human suffering and tries to deal with it by putting it in a meaningful context and providing a form of action through which it can be communicated, understood and endured (Geertz, 1993, p 105). It does not guarantee that a person will engage in religious activities or enable the institution of religion to dictate how they should conduct themselves daily. Because these migrants saw themselves as only temporary residents, they were more concerned with saving money, working time and keeping relationships with their home countries than with integration or consolidating local forms of authority. Despite their Christian beliefs and the censure and criticism that followed with this behaviour, they tended to credit the future with more worth than the actual current time by mortgaging religious acts. “This place gives me optimism that anything can happen at any time,” one of them added. “That's something I'm looking forward to. God has the ability to change things at any time.” Another praised the future's promise above the present, saying:

‘The last minute is dangerous. Even in soccer when there are ten minutes remaining, the opposition that was leading by one goal can lose. So that is what I am looking at. The last minute is dangerous. I will keep persevering because I don't know the day I will die. Right now, I am thirty something years old; I still need to reach fifty and still seventy years.’

The last comment reflects a sense of security that it was necessary to lag behind the opposition of the senior men in charge of the shelter's spatial politics because the future held better opportunities for a better life elsewhere.

Time and money appear to be key to migrants' views on the value of religion, since they frequently regard both as a sort of capital that they may invest in future-oriented activities such as labour. Most of the time was dedicated towards looking for work. Relaxing was the exception:

‘A few of those times I can say to myself let me relax and look for a spot where I can watch TV and then we start watching games. Just to keep the mind preoccupied. But most of my time I’m struggling and wishing that I can find a job. You will find us sitting at the robot waiting for people who are able to give us jobs.’

No one I spoke with mentioned religious services as a primary activity. This challenges scholarship on religion and migration that portrays a linear relationship between belief, religious practices and place making. Still, it required more effort than simply sitting and doing nothing at the robot, which the men believed was work compared to active waiting such as going to church to sing hymns or simply watching sports on TV. Many stated that companies would occasionally hire people on weekends, including Sundays, if they had never attended a service or gone to such places of relaxation. In this respect, religion was a luxury that these migrants could not always afford, much like leisure.

This is understandable when we realise that access to the word of God at church is not inexpensive, both financially and in terms of time. Pentecostal churches performed a variety of rituals in addition to preaching hope, joy, healing, deliverance and prosperity. Tithing, selling anointing oil and holy water and asking congregants to pay for prayer requests using a sealed envelope were all methods used to raise funds. Because services lasted the entire day, the church also made the best of their labour time. Bishop Jonas told me when I first arrived that Sunday services always started at 10.30 am. He also invited me to their weekly services, which were held at 6 pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The Sunday service, on the other hand, was always later than stated. Men, on the other hand, were frequently engaged with cooking, cleaning clothes and bathing in preparation for the day ahead. Only Khulekani, a member of the senior cabal, was involved in the playing of instruments, but not in their set-up. His involvement was confined to singing and playing the keyboard on a more regular basis, and he always arrived and left on time. His motive was that he was paid R20 every service by the church. The other men were housed in the shelter in such a way that they had limited time and resources to participate.

When it came to the time to take up a ‘special offering’ for Bishop Jonas, the MC said that adults should pay R50 and minors R10. This was gathered every Sunday before the Bishop took the pulpit to usher him to preach. There was a time after that for ‘regular’ offerings. A tiny bottle of anointing oil with his face was priced between R75 and R100, while anointing water cost between R15 and R20. As Bishop Jonas subsequently explained, one had to buy this water and oil for healing or wealth:

‘Whatever that you are going to touch with this water it will work for you. You women and migrants at this church, you must have faith that the Lord will save you with this water. If you take this water and spray it and you have faith. If you take this water and wash everyday, your body pain will go away.’

These goods were equated by Bishop Jonas with the progress required to prevent the social death that migrants like Sigauke were attempting to escape. What one did with their time and money in the present had long-term ramifications. Prayer requests were also taken. A prayer request had to be wrapped in an envelope and written on a sheet of paper. Envelopes for prayer requests, on the other hand, cost R5. For R15, the church also sold stickers. Following the sermon, the MC called for a new round of special offerings. Castigation about water was at times connected to the lack of offerings.

‘You say “Eh, Bishop and Joseph, there is not enough water here”. Hey! Just pray to God. We say get inside the church so that you know that water is expensive. Do you give an offering even, no? I can see you are dressed smart. After church, we will see a queue, a line of people washing their feet. Why can’t you wait to use that water to cook instead of washing your feet? Am I lying? Even at your own house, would you allow your own children to play with water? But look here, at this church, these grown men who stay here waste and misuse water more than children.’

The men were more concerned with maintaining their strength in order to engage in work-related activities. In this sense, religious engagement was a transaction or investment that they simply did not see as being helpful to them for the future. There was no compensation for their time when they went. In non-spiritual terms, well-off churches are better positioned to repay migrants’ efforts by giving practical aid, and migrants get many social and economic benefits from religious engagement (Hirschman, 2004). Migrants have a lot of needs and few resources; therefore, this component of religious participation is important to them in other countries. At the shelter, however, things were different because there was no financial benefit to attending a service because the church was in financial trouble. Attending services, on the other hand, placed unnecessary material pressure and strain on migrants like Sigauke, who did not feel complete because they would be hungry and/or ‘unclean’. In as much as he sometimes “did this Seventh Day Adventist thing”, he would not go because he did not have nice clothes to wear; sometimes, he wouldn’t even have washed because there was no soap to wash, making it difficult to be among other people. Sigauke went as far as saying,

‘This thing of coming to sit down in church without knowing where the next meal is coming from is useless. Or sometimes you see someone outside cooking and say, “if I stick around there, maybe if he eats he can leave me some food when he is full”. Sometimes, that is all someone here is just waiting for. Because they would have gone to bed for two days on an empty stomach. So now to pick yourself up and get into the gospel in church and sit down, the hunger will be attacking them and getting worse. So the work of God is not acceptable when the situation is like that. Even the train of thought won’t be normal.’

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have revealed that it can be difficult to reconcile the agency and subordination waiting signifies. Waiting can be conceptualised in time as much as in space as an experience of marginalisation and possibilities. I argue that this produces ambivalent political subjectivities at play in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border regime, particularly at the men’s shelter. I conclude with a challenge to the literature that suggests that disruption is a moment where migrants passively experience the effects of power. This position concurs with [Turner’s \(2016\)](#) view that disruption and displacement can indeed produce a powerful position stemming from migrants’ ability to manage their time, energy and money to get what they want in life and remain in control of their futures. The intersections of immobility and temporal agency I explore in this chapter contribute to a growing body of work that shows that the relationship between resistance and domination in waiting is an ambivalent one. The immobile individuals in this work are ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ at the same time as their actions do not readily follow the axis between resistance and naturalised domination. They are better seen as ‘slantwise’, as such actions intersect the axis of these dualities from an ‘oblique angle’ ([Campbell and Heyman, 2007](#)). This troubles the assumption about immobility as an experience that leads the inhabitants of humanitarian camps as well as carceral time spaces to realise the status of ‘bare life’ or the statuses of the ‘exception’ state. Seeing as it is that immobility is relational to space as well as time, it is rather more befitting to begin from the ‘temporal state of exception’ ([Ramsay, 2017](#)). This state can produce ‘a condition of bare life that results from existential rupture: that is, having assumptions about the future made precarious by imposed forces’ ([Ramsay, 2017](#), p 532). Yet, even in their ‘temporal states of exception’, these migrant men are not necessarily reduced to bare life. While imposed forces make their assumptions about the future precarious, the precariousness of the future also creates multiple and new possibilities, even if prevailing structural conditions remain unaltered.

Conclusion: Bringing Time to the Study of Migration Governance and Borders in Africa

Introduction

This book has highlighted the relationship between time and space in the Zimbabwe–South Africa border regime. It examines these issues from an empirical and theoretical approach, aiming to complement existing studies on African borders by providing in-depth insights of a novel type of diffused governance. It shows how a focus on immobility can disclose significant characteristics of power and agency through the constitution of migrants as subjects. For the men, navigating the border necessitates a balancing act of exposing themselves to current conditions and suspending time, while also utilising the humanitarian protection that influences this condition to transform their immobility and suspension into something else. By revealing how Zimbabwean migrant men ambivalently employ immobility as a strategy for planning and managing many elements of their lives in order to achieve specific states, this book challenges a) binary understandings of how power operates on the lives of Africa's border dwellers, and b) the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders.

This chapter summarises the important points in order to make a case for the ever-increasing relevance of time, as well as to speculate on the implications of the results of this book on how we understand borders. It emphasises the importance of pushing beyond traditional resistance analysis by highlighting the limitations of any single analytical or theoretical viewpoint in presenting the deep complexity and paradox that African borders present. Anthropology and temporalised approaches' importance is also emphasised by discussing how anthropologists of migration interested in a temporal perspective to migratory processes might apply innovative social science research methodologies to examine people with limited mobility at African borders and how they experience government.

Challenging binary understandings of how power operates on the lives of Africa's border dwellers

Within African border studies, it is the norm for scholars to conceive sovereignty in a binary framework that uses opposing formulations of the workings of power within African states. This is evident in analyses interested in examining the constitution of postcolonial subjects at the margins of African states when exploring the function of postcolonial borders for border dwellers. A dominant part of these works shifts between depictions of African borders as a space that allows border dwellers to resist the postcolonial bureaucratic state and a space that provides room for the state to separate and marginalise them.

Research from different parts of the African continent has answered this binary differently. Some of it has established that the boundaries of certain African states largely appear to be spaces that allow border dwellers to be defiant to state power through the use of the border for commerce, cross-border migratory flows, informal economies, labour, contraband and criminal networks. Other researchers are convinced that African borders contain human agency because they are at best securitised boundaries and obstacles marked by limited permeability of human and goods movement, which all points to a conception of sovereignty as arbitrary.

However, the ambivalence of agency mentioned previously at the Zimbabwe–South Africa border points to a larger set of structural variables operating through hybrid sovereignty. Humanitarian actions at the border, from a governmentality perspective, do not necessarily appear to undermine the ‘Westphalian’ sovereign state aims but rather extend the administration of migrants and movement. Therefore, the legitimacy of the sovereignty standard is not endangered by the conduct of seemingly non-state entities. Humanitarian organisations in the context at hand have an uneasy collaboration with the state to manage migration through logics, norms, rationalities and categories which validate the coding of the outsider in the name of the state's legislation. This would sustain a regime of ambivalent hospitality in which securitisation and humanitarian imperatives diverge and converge.

For example, while providing security and shelter to the men, an informal agreement between these players managed their time, ability to move and access to productive locations. There was a clause in the agreement that stated that the transit shelters had to be habitable enough to keep people safe, but not to the point where they began to feel at home. This meant that in the space's architecture, there was an uneasy balance of security and discomfort. Furthermore, rather than always being subjected to heavy-handed policing, humanitarian workers in Musina distinguished migrants as political subjects using concepts such as ‘forced’ and ‘economic migrants’ as

well as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘powerful’ subjects. In short, this hybrid sovereignty operated through a variety of categories which were, in themselves, fluid through their variability across shifting constructions of the Zimbabwean crisis in the public domain that informed the legitimacy of categories that humanitarian workers employed to manage their interventions.

It is also vital to place this scenario in the context of current global migration management standards, which tend to produce an individualisation regime that allows authority to maximise its reach through individual conduits. As a result of these measures, emergencies quite easily become management issues, with aid being carefully distributed, which is functional but also serves to normalise and bureaucratise the crisis.

This bureaucratisation may create a regime of reframing humanitarian beneficiaries when a group of individuals no longer generates the same level of donations as funding priorities shift, which means exceptions become scarce. The paradigm change on crisis may be also strategically beneficial for states who would, in any case, shift the focus from migrants to their own populations, particularly the urban poor. In this book, for example, South Africa is able to turn a political issue into a governance strategy by supporting the ZANU-PF-led government as a legitimate expression of sovereignty and the right to self-determination. In this interpretation, hostile immigration policies and xenophobia might be regarded as different types of governance. These interactions all encapsulate the temporality and ambivalence of governance revealed by this study’s perspective of the border. Temporality in this context provides an alternative idea to theorise on migrants’ potential to evade border controls and challenge the goals of migration policies, which aids in contesting the dichotomy of agency–structure. While attentive to the duality of African borders, critical African border studies that perceive them as paradoxes still need to deepen this paradigm, especially because they rarely engage with concerns of temporality and immobility. A temporal engagement takes us to a place of understanding that this paradox occurs through an intricate entanglement of practices of government and subversion, even if it is in ways that may not always allow the governed to shape and transform regimes of government, particularly as they look to the future for other possibilities.

Challenging the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders

This study is also based on the idea that critical border studies in Africa are not appropriately temporalised. Such work emphasises ‘spatiality’ and ‘stasis’, but it frequently misses the significance of time in moulding people’s responses. This is inadequate as migration that is ‘staggered’ is becoming more common, with paths that are complicated, circular and varied in terms of stages and duration. While unidirectional and linear movement

and permanent settlement trajectories persist (see Robertson, 2019), migration scholarship must acknowledge the diversity of possible paths. These are frequently insecure and are often followed by changes in legal and social standing. People sharing the same area often have significantly different trajectories and temporal situations, resulting in a complicated concentration of destinations and places. These temporal dimensions have not been properly tracked in African critical border studies to date.

This book demonstrates that thinking about the meaning of immobility solely in spatial terms is insufficient. The main line of separation, according to Agamben, is the distinction between bare life and political existence, or between a human being's natural existence and their legal position (Lemke, 2005). He contends that the establishment of sovereign authority necessitates the creation of a biopolitical subject via the institutionalisation of law, which is inextricably linked to exposure to bare life (Lemke, 2005, p 5). Inclusion into a political society appears only possible by the simultaneous exclusion of some human beings who are not allowed to become complete legal subjects, writes Agamben. Political relations begin when a frontier is drawn and a space devoid of legal protection is established. The camp, according to Agamben, is the biopolitical paradigm of the modern.

Temporality, on the other hand, reveals the various spatiotemporal implications of immobility and the ambiguities of waiting. While some scholars think of subjectivity in spatial terms and in relation to the ability of locations such as borders to produce new forms of trading, governance, solidarity and interactions, not all forms of subjectivity and politics are inextricably linked to space and territory. This insight needs a close examination of power's temporal modalities, which allow us to imagine how immobility is appropriated by migrants in a context where the present structures offer nothing and cannot be transformed through their agency.

In this regard, this book suggests that Zimbabwean migrant men living in the transit shelter have a complicated connection with time and space, and hence do not fit neatly into any clear definition of agency or dominance. They have all arrived in Musina for various reasons. The majority of them express a desire to use the transit shelter as a springboard for their future ambitions. Such migrants arrive in Musina with the goal of waiting because they are familiar with the shelter's function from previous encounters. They abandon their homes with sufficient funds to bribe immigration officials or hire smugglers to get them into South Africa. Knowing that help is available, they go to places like the men's shelter for part-time work, which allows them to save money and migrate deeper into the interior. When those who frequent Musina return to work in South Africa after the holidays, for example, they will use waiting as a technique. Men with responsibilities at home are left with little money to work with for their return travel because the situation in Zimbabwe is so precarious.

Then there are those who encounter unanticipated delays while crossing the Zimbabwe–South Africa border. Even if there are exceptions, most of these migrants are arriving in South Africa for the first time. They may have enough money, but *maguma guma* mug them or smugglers trick them midway through the passage by inflating the fee. Others, on the other hand, seriously underestimate the cost of the passage. When these people become stranded in Musina, they learn from others in the community that they can seek refuge at the transit shelter. This group of migrants remains in the area in order to raise funds for transportation to continue their journeys.

The disruption these migrants experience is thus not just a spatial but also a temporal experience. Zimbabweans are often filled with fear, uncertainty and a sense of precariousness as a result of their country's long-running economic crisis, which leads them to place their hope in a future in South Africa. They dream of a better life there, but due to a number of restricted bureaucratic processes, they are unable to move lawfully to neighbouring South Africa or preserve their legal status. South Africa's migration policies and securitised borders, in a determined effort to manage migration, create staggered paths that proliferate their limbo. Scholars who see waiting as victimisation, on the other hand, interpret migration as a spatial act of mobility that involves a change of domicile on a regular basis. What this view overlooks is the fact that migration is more than just a change in place. Rather, it is a huge biographical event that generates disorder in one's timeline, which is akin to a disruption of normalcy and requires tremendous resources to deal with.

As the book argues repeatedly, to suggest that the experience of waiting is not always one of victimisation is not to minimise the difficulties and suffering that waiting people face. Furthermore, implying that waiting is a temporal experience does not imply that temporality is solely a site for agency. Waiting is, in fact, a violent experience. To lay claim to various types of facilities and forms of authority that allow them to access productive space and labour, men resort to overtly violent behaviour. Waiting undermines Zimbabwean migrant men's hopes to send their children to school, provide for their family, earn social standing at home and eventually retire in relative comfort and dignity. This leads to social death.

However, the links between the immobility that results from disruption and bare living are not always apparent and obvious. Zimbabwean migrant men respond to the degree to which they are victimised by humanitarian governance by employing dextrous methods. One of these techniques is apparent in their interactions with religious institutions. The individuals in this study combine future-oriented conceptions of hope with principles of uncertainty and acceptance, both of which are influenced by current circumstances. Many people are disappointed when they arrive because the shelter's assistance is not extensive enough. The majority of the men come from Christian families and believe in God and the church's relevance. While

spiritual hope exists in their immediate surroundings, the men's new life makes the religious hope sold by the church a luxury that they cannot afford. They learn to suffer while distancing themselves from religious institutions. The men must balance their time to retain their personal hope without necessarily investing their time or money in religious rituals or activities due to the immediate requirement to work to avoid going hungry. While the church preaches a message of future hope, joy and prosperity, the men are unable to dwell in this temporal realm. This is due to the fact that a) they have limited time, and b) the church demands resources that they do not have right away, such as tithing and paying for prayer requests, which are religious taxes imposed by the church.

Even though the men are optimistic, maintaining hope through religious traditions they are familiar with at home is too costly. This leads people to nostalgically reflect on a happier past while focused with living in the present, as they prepare to go forward by relying on tangible, everyday socio-economic security, material conditions and outcomes. As a result, the potential to gather resources now rekindles their enthusiasm. Even if the living circumstances at the shelter are worse than at home, many claim that they are in a better temporary situation because South Africa can at least provide them with employment. Others become more at ease and take advantage of their extended stay to improve their daily security.

The ambiguous link between resistance and domination in waiting is confirmed by the intersections of immobility and these kinds of action. This ambiguity creates a state similar to Ramsay's (2017, p 532) temporal state of exception rather than constituting the men as bare lives. This temporal state of exception is not bare life in the Agambian sense but rather a condition in which imposed forces render certain future assumptions fragile. This existential rupture victimises, but it also creates space for agency. In short, waiting disrupts the migrants' trajectories but it can also be used to strategically position migrants for a future full of many alternatives.

Implications on methods of reading African borders

The conclusions of this book have ramifications for how we interpret African borders and how we capture them. Challenging binary understandings of how power operates on the lives of Africa's border dwellers and the dominance of spatial perspectives in thinking about African borders has implications on methods of reading African borders. Extending time to the study of African boundaries also necessitates the use of new research tools beyond classic, linear ethnographic procedures like interviews. Alternative ways for anthropological scholars of migration to capture notions of temporality, particularly in border zones, are not necessarily explored in this book due to a lack of space.

To better understand how agency and structure interact in novel ways, anthropological researchers of migration should incorporate methodologies that examine the border from multiple perspectives, rather than reading borders from below or above or from any single perspective. This enables research to connect with the multiplicities in our ways of seeing (Findlay and Li, 1999) and necessitates method mixing. This can help us learn more about those who govern, as well as the motivations, dreams and desires of individuals who risk their lives across guarded borders across time and space.

This can be accomplished by letting go of a concentration on one epistemic perspective in order to make room for another, or even their possible complementarity. It is instructive to consider the border as more than just a line on the ground but also a manifestation of social practices and discourses (Brambilla, 2007). In this way, the border becomes more than a physical marker or an artificial colonial barrier; it becomes part of communal identities and shared histories, forming a foundation for various types of social connections (Brambilla, 2007). To allow for this, the African state should not be conceived as a homogeneous or monolithic institution but rather as an enfolding that arises from state-making processes. The African state is temporally diffused since it is also manifested through other non-state actors and their behaviours.

There is, though, limited instruction on how to conduct a temporal analysis. Traditional ethnographic methods of interviewing and participant observation have great potential for uncovering how time functions in migrants' daily lives, but they frequently take place at fixed locations, at fixed times and for fixed lengths of time, failing to engage with the complex questions surrounding international migration and time (Robertson, 2014).

Reconsidering interviews in a temporal study

Under a temporal context, how interviews are done may thus need to be reconsidered. The typical interview's linearity, especially when narratives of migration begin and end, may need to be reframed. Unlike standard semi-structured interviews, temporal methods can benefit from serial qualitative interview procedures, which are less formalised, more situational, more ad hoc and unstructured. Because they allow the researcher to create an ongoing relationship with participants, serial qualitative interviews are a convenient and efficient strategy. This enables the examination of the participants' evolving needs and experiences, as well as the discussion of sensitive and personal matters (Murray et al, 2009). Furthermore, once saturation has been attained, serial qualitative interviews allow the researcher to go on to a research question based on the data acquired, and then sample theoretically in reference to that question (Baker and Edwards, 2012). Doing temporal research necessitates dynamism and the flexibility to adapt to altering priorities and study questions in this way.

Serial interviews are appropriate for research that attempts to investigate changing and complex processes or when time is required to establish a rapport between the researcher and the participants. These links are crucial when it comes to making conclusions regarding waiting as a form of seeking agency, as time is the core focus of the study. At the same time, this method is difficult since it requires the researcher to mix sampling, data gathering and data analysis rather than treating them as separate stages in a sequential process. This problem highlights the value of having a larger research team to handle various components of the study, which is not always possible in contexts where resources are limited.

Self-documentation strategies

By adding self-documentation and virtual or digital tools, traditional ethnographic methodologies should be reframed in a temporal framework (for example, diaries, social maps, photo voice). A combination of these approaches may be the most effective way to capture temporality. There has also been a push for ethnography that takes a temporal approach to go beyond oral data and look at participant self-documentation through existing texts and the creation of new texts, which commonly take the shape of diaries and journals (Robertson, 2014). They enable people to rapidly register their reactions to events. They can record a lot of detailed and sophisticated data throughout time because they do not have the aspect of retrospective reflection that interviews have. These nuances cannot be captured in an interview or observation context, but they can provide the researcher with insights into the participants' internal worlds, including their timelines, tempos and rhythms, without physically intruding into these places (Robertson, 2014, p 10).

Traditional diary approaches may need to be reconsidered as well. A time-based design, which analyses events as they unfold through time, is a regularly used diary technique. Fixed-interval schedules, in which individuals report on their experiences or events at predetermined intervals, and variable-interval schedules, in which participants are prompted to report at random intervals, are both common (Iida et al, 2012). This approach involves completing a set of questions regarding participants' experiences and feelings from a protocol each day in a specific order. When doing research in environments where participants have limited time or are not permanently rooted in that site, researchers interested in studying the temporalities of migration must rethink this technique.

Construction of 'cognitive timeliness' to visually establish a sense of social time, including its diversions, cycles and interruptions, is also vital for study on migratory temporalities (Robertson, 2014, p 9). Another approach to understanding how irregular migrants interact with time and geography at the border is participatory social mapping. However, in order to investigate

marginalised and hidden populations like migrants, this self-documentation technique would need to be rethought in a temporal context. These people's illegalisation, tactical obscurity, deportability and lack of freedom make it dangerous for them to leave humanitarian zones, which are the only places they are safe from arrest and deportation. These constraints have ramifications for how researchers who want to use temporal approaches from the start should frame their research so that it may respond to local needs and concerns. It could imply that the intersections of the research participants' precarious lives, the humanitarian settings they inhabit and the method's requirements make conducting this type of study difficult.

Conclusion

The majority of African migrants awaiting deportation live in confined and makeshift humanitarian settings resembling refugee camps, where their freedom to move and work is restricted. With the externalisation of boundaries in many parts of North and West Africa, these kinds of encounters have become increasingly evident. Social time becomes a significant component of migrants' temporality in this context. African migrants occupying these precarious areas must establish new routines, develop time management methods and reduce the danger of arrest and deportation, all while exploring new opportunities and making plans in an environment of considerable uncertainty and limited mobility. African migrants' objectives and life trajectories are all time-dependent as they become dependent on specific unfolding events or conditions as a result of the disruption they face. For them, time is easily transformed into a central variable and a tool for personal control. Time, on the other hand, also becomes a source of agency.

Researchers studying African migration have not fully investigated these developing, unique and dispersed forms of humanitarian governance at the continent's borders, particularly as time is increasingly becoming a political realm. As a result, we know relatively little about the patterns through which different components of time take on practical or conceptual meaning in ways that can help us better comprehend the temporal and spatial governance of African migrants living in border areas.

The temporal approaches we can employ to examine populations with restricted mobility at African borders and how they experience governance are mostly neglected in social science research methods. Such a methodological perspective is required to capture the many different interpretations and meanings of immobility and its limits. Anthropologists working on migration and refugee studies and others working on similar topics and situations can only investigate these complexities, ambivalences and conundrums if they are also methodologically qualified to do so.

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