

**Children who cross borders: Unaccompanied migrant children in
South Africa**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the experiences and perspectives of unaccompanied migrant children in Johannesburg South Africa. The children are between the ages of thirteen to nineteen and are all from Zimbabwe. The research focuses on how the young immigrants undertook their journey managing to find ways around the spaces and people they met along the way. The research demonstrates how the vulnerability which research participants feel was not constant. It oscillated depending primarily on spaces and social relationships which children encountered. Through ethnography and the life history approach, the daily experiences of the young people are looked at to provide an understanding of the way they dealt and are still dealing with their vulnerability. The intention being to show that vulnerability is always shifting and being shifted by young people.

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DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife and my lovely daughter, for all the time you allowed me to be away from you whilst working on this thesis.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of MA Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university

(Simbarashe Nyuke)

_____ day of _____ 2013

Introduction

The pupils at Albert Street School are well clad in their school uniforms, playing in the school yard, laughing and everything seemed so normal to me. But there is a lot that goes on in the lives of the pupils at the school which can only be understood by getting to know their stories and precisely how they got to be at the school. Apart from featuring on the *3rd Degree* television documentary as having defied all the odds by recording an impressive pass record in the Cambridge O'level examinations, there is a lot that the pupils have experienced which cannot be grasped by merely observing them. The pupils play, they laugh, they have cell phones and some of them have earphones glued to their ears and they also buy snacks on the street like the rest of the students from other schools. What is not revealed by merely looking at the young people in their school uniforms at their school is that they crossed the border to South Africa on their own and are without their parents or guardians. When I first saw them I was not aware that these young people were unaccompanied migrants. It was not until I went to the Central Methodist church in inner city Johannesburg that the Bishop of the church referred me to the Albert Street School.

The above description is what meets the eye when one visits Albert Street School or passes by. This study presents a story about young people at the school that is different from what meets the eye or that which is often taken for granted. This research explores the lives of unaccompanied Zimbabwean migrant children in Johannesburg, South Africa. The children who participated are all from Zimbabwe. In particular, the study focuses on a group of young people between the ages of thirteen and nineteen years who are under the care of the Methodist church

in Johannesburg. The broad question that the thesis attempts to address is what are the children's experiences of migration as unaccompanied migrants? In addition and related to the above question, the thesis examines why the young people act as they do in relation to how they experience spaces and relationships. These two questions are the focus of the empirical chapters 2 and 3.

The number of unaccompanied migrant children in South Africa has been on the increase over the past six years with most of the children coming from Zimbabwe followed by those from Mozambique (Palmary, 2007). In Musina, for instance, the presence of unaccompanied migrant children from Zimbabwe has resulted in the establishment of new institutions and homes which are meant to shelter and care for this group of young people. Some of the institutions are run by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and donor agencies such as Save the Children, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Medicines sans Frontiers (MSF) and churches such as Uniting Reform Church (URC) of Musina and Roman Catholic Church of Musina, which provide food and accommodation.

My interest in migrant children arose when I spent three days and two nights in Musina while waiting to receive an asylum seeker permit, which was required as part of the requisite documentation for me to register as a post graduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I went to Musina, the border town between Zimbabwe and South Africa as I believed that it was the place where I could easily access the asylum seeker permit. In this border town Zimbabweans were given first preference in lodging asylum seeker applications. At the time, the Zimbabwean political and economic situation was considered critical and in Musina the Department of Home Affairs often made an effort to expediate the issuance of asylum seeker permits. At night, I slept at a place called "the Showground", out in the open with only a make

shift bed made from cardboard-boxes. Within the Showground area, I noticed that there were a number of children who slept out in the cold and alone without their parents or any adult to look out for them. I spoke to a vendor who was selling snacks, sweets and cigarettes and gathered that these young people were alone and had crossed the border on their own coming mostly from Zimbabwe. Some of these young people were still on their way to Johannesburg, their final destination.

The Methodist Church in inner city Johannesburg is involved in a humanitarian project of providing shelter and food for the very young. For the adults accommodation is the only thing they offer besides church services and sermons with food in the form of Holy Communion only. There is also a school run by the church in Albert Street, in the heart of the city. The school is accessible to those who are interested in schooling. The school also accommodates destitute South African children who wish to pursue academic studies. The school pupils from the Albert Street School were the main participants for this research.

The presence of unaccompanied migrant children in South Africa brings into question certain ideas or perceptions about childhood and the authority their parents have over them. In embarking on this study and specifically through the lives and experiences of unaccompanied children, I intend to bring out a better understanding of adulthood. The majority of the children I spoke to implied that they were the ones who made the decision to move from their homes to South Africa. One of the children I spoke to, Glenda stated that:

I just told myself that it was high time I take care of myself than to sit and wait for my struggling relatives. So I just left home without telling anyone

Glenda's statement illustrates that young people are calculating individuals who do not have to necessarily wait for their parents to inform them that things are not well. Explicitly,

Glenda's statement also highlights that children possess the ability to assess their situations and having no future to look forward to in their own homes these young people took on the challenge to do something about their future. The idea of young people making their own decisions is not a well celebrated view. This emanates from the different ideas held on the nature of childhood. MacGaffey and Bazenquissa-Ganga (2000) argue that agency in current anthropological theorizing is at the centre of analysis. When it comes to the anthropology of migration and the anthropology of children at the juncture of children and the state, the perspective is less celebrated and more constricted. This is due to the fact that in such situations vulnerability is more celebrated. More focus is placed on the vulnerability of young people rather than on how the young people deal with vulnerability, which some recent anthropological studies have been addressing. It is the view of vulnerability that has dominated the anthropology of migration. This view of vulnerability is highlighted by the emergence of organisations aimed at assisting the children in Musina.

This study traces the journey of unaccompanied migrant children from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg. In essence, it explores the ways in which the vulnerability of the children 'shifts' between spaces that young people pass through including the relationships they engage in from the beginning of their journey to their destination. The study attempts to provide an insight and to make a contribution to an understanding of childhood and vulnerability.

A note on terminology

The terms ‘young people’ and ‘children’ appear throughout this thesis. ‘Unaccompanied migrant children’ and ‘teenagers’ are also other terms that feature in this thesis. I use all these terms, interchangeably, to refer to boys and girls from the ages of 13 to approximately 19 years.

There is an overlap between the terms, ‘young people’, ‘children’ and ‘teenagers’ which reflects the shifting nature of the terms. ‘Young people’ are in some instances referred to as youth who can be from the ages of 16 to 30 depending on the context. Teenagers are between the ages of 13 to 19 years but this often creates a complication. Those who are 16 to 19 are considered in this instance youth and teenagers at the same time. In terms of international law being below the age of 18 means that one is regarded as a child. This also applies in migration issues whereby anyone who is below 18 years is considered a child. If he or she crosses the border without the company of the parent or guardian they are considered an ‘unaccompanied migrant’.

I am aware of the debates on the use of the terms ‘teenager’, ‘young people’, ‘children’ and ‘youth’. For this thesis, I use the terms, ‘young people’, ‘children’ and ‘unaccompanied migrant’ interchangeably to refer to all research participants who are 13 to 19 years of age. I include those who are 19 because they crossed the border whilst they were below 18 years. Since I am dealing with migration which is an international issue I will abide to the use of the international standard of referring to those who are 18 years and below as ‘children’ and ‘young

people’. In some cases, I use their pseudonyms which they chose and when writing about them as a group I use the terms ‘children’ and ‘young people’.

Shifting vulnerabilities

From the data that I gathered for this study there has been a consistent concept of shifting vulnerabilities that connects the thread for this thesis. The ‘shifting’ vulnerability is the concept that engages with all the themes in the thesis. The major themes this thesis looks at are the relationship between space and vulnerability and the relationships the youngsters engaged in during their journey. In the two themes, what was striking for me was that the spaces and the relationships the young people engaged in had an effect on the vulnerability of the young people. The vulnerability of the young people did or did not disappear or end but it just shifted in different spaces and in different relationships. Their vulnerability did not just shift in different spaces or with different relationships but even within the same place or within the same association. The young people experience vulnerability less in other circumstances but more in others and this is what the concept of ‘shifting’ vulnerability conveys.

I use the term *shift* rather than *change* because of what the two terms implies though the difference is slippery. The term change implies that there is something new, which is fixed, that differs from the original state, which is not what I want to bring into this discussion. For the purpose of this research I take ‘shifting’ to imply something that is there but always fluctuating. The vulnerability of the young people is always oscillating with the different relationships and spaces. This is like shifting weight from one foot to the other; the weight is still there it does not

change. Children are vulnerable due to the fact that there are children. Children on the move have their vulnerability ‘shifting’ in the different places in their journey and in different associations they are engaged in. Vulnerability in children has no single centre but various or multiple centres which shifts or fluctuates but still remains. In focusing on young people in this thesis the concept of ‘shifting’ vulnerabilities brings better understanding to the experiences and perspectives of children. ‘Shifting’ vulnerability as a concept challenges the discourse around vulnerability which takes it as something that is removed and in some instances brought back. Vulnerability and children is inseparable but is always fluctuating or being fluctuated as the experience and perspectives of young people will show.

Thesis outline

The main idea which foregrounds this thesis is that of ‘shifting vulnerabilities’. The idea draws attention to the ways in which the children recounted their journey and to the relationships that they formed. In **chapter 1** there is a general discussion on the literature on childhood which foregrounds this thesis bringing in some of the concepts and theories that have been at the core of childhood studies. This chapter focuses on some of the major talking points on the work of children thereby situating my own study in that whole debate. There is selective review of literature from the different disciplines and fields which deal with childhood.

Chapter 2 and 3 take as points of departure an interview and a conversation respectively. These serve to ground the ideas and theories into what is really taking place in the lives of the young people. In chapter 2, I argue that children feel different emotions in different spaces and they are not always vulnerable. Chapter 3 looks at the different people the young people encounter and how they affect their migration experience. **Chapter 4** concludes the thesis by drawing all the arguments and data together.

The following chapter looks at the work that has been done on childhood studies. The section draws from anthropological literature on childhood and in the social sciences as a whole. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the foundation for this thesis which is focused on understanding the experiences of children who are crossing the border on their own.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Childhood and Adulthood

Today the notion of a universal period of childhood, grounded in biological and psychological reality pervades both Western scholarship and international efforts to regulate and protect child welfare (Boyden, 1990). Because this model of childhood is essentially medical, it tends to assume that the period of childhood is delineated by biological changes. What this has done is to impress the view that childhood is biologically determined and therefore equally applicable across all cultures.

Kendall (2008) and Bourdillon (2006) concur that many current state and international models of childhood and vulnerability are based on a set of assumptions central to late 20th and 21st century. Western concepts of childhood and well-being that codify the age of adulthood at 18, assume that childhood is a time that is different from adulthood and that requires special protections (why: due to their physical, cognitive emotional vulnerability?). Some, especially from the fields such as anthropology and history have argued that there is a need to take into account the multiplicities of factors that affect the perceptions that have led to dominant notions of childhood in the world today (Kamp, 2001; Hemrica and Heyting, 2004; Boyden, 2001; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Hendrick, 1997). This has led to a lot of debates among scholars in the social sciences, international organisations working with children, and the media on what the

basis of childhood should rest on (Taylor, 2011; 421). There are those from the fields such as psychology and biology who advocate for the biological nature approach which is universal and on the other hand there are those who are of the nurture approach, which entails social construction and relativism (Taylor, *ibid*). The advocates of the biological approach take childhood as universal, which means that children are the same everywhere hence they need to be treated the same way. The social constructionists, especially in anthropology and sociology, advocate for the relativity and respect for contexts which children are coming from. They argue that childhood is not the same everywhere but varies in different contexts, which have different needs forcing them to have different childhoods. Even in the same context but in different historical periods childhood has not been fixed or natural. The biological approach assumes that childhood as a domain presents shared essential traits which differentiates them for the adults regardless of their location or context.

Kamp (2001; 3) highlights that, ‘historians have shown that in Europe and the United States, perceptions and definitions of childhood have changed considerably over time, probably because of changes in economic organization, political climate, and patterns of family organization’. ‘In some parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, children may have been viewed as miniature adults’ (Aries, 1962 cited in James, Jenks and Prout 1998)- which meant that children were seen as “human becomings” rather than human beings, who in the process of socialization would be shaped into fully adult beings. This thought has been influential to date especially in policies and responses to young people who are thought to be treading on the territory of adults. The unaccompanied migrant is a category that is perceived as having encroached adult territory.

Kamp (2001) further posits that although the West through most of this time considered it natural for children to work, reformers, primarily of the elite classes for whom children's labour was not economically critical, enacted mandatory schooling and child labour laws during the 19th century. It is now considered natural for children not to work but to be in school in the West, although working was part of what children did. Biology is now employed as the basis of why children should not work but tracing back through history biology is not the basis of what has kept children out of work but there is also a socio-economic and political angle as well. It is from the growing and changing dynamic and historical trends in the different communities that have led us to understand and perceive childhood. Looking at a number of substantial ethnographic works on children and young people, it is evident that young people have traditionally played a vital part within household and agrarian livelihoods in most parts of Southern Africa and in specific regions (Gelfand, 1973; Bourdillon 1976; Parsons, 2010; Lan, 1985; Moore, 2005 and Mupande 2005). Parsons (2010), for example, highlights how social change and historical epochs have affected childhood in urban Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. In this study, this is evident through the ways in which young people stated how the decision to migrate was in search for greener pastures of which work is the highest priority.

In Africa, very few children and young people enjoy the luxury of being taken care of by parents or by the state until they reach the age of eighteen (Kamp, 2001; Honwana, 1998; Reynolds, 1996). It is part of the African ideology to see young people as strong and resilient (Honwana and De Boeck, 2005; Reynolds, 1991, 1996; Gibbs, 1994; Bourdillon 2000). In kin-based societies children are also part of the wealth within the household as they play a part in economic and agrarian production. Children are not a burden or an expense as they too are given a responsibility in the procurement of wealth and supply of labour. In such societies, children are

synonymous with wealth because of the contribution they make to the productive work of the family (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). Kamp (2001; 2) asserts that, 'In many subsistent economies throughout the world and throughout the ages, children have contributed their labour to the family livelihood insofar as they have been able'. Children have always assisted their families in subsistent economies in terms of freeing the older people for productive labour by herding cattle, caring for siblings, helping in the shops in cases where the family owns one and if the family have special skills such as healing, music or some craft (Bourdillon, 2000; Reynolds, 1991; Nieuwenhys, 1996; Kamp 2001; Parsons 2010). The logic in this is that the adults have to work in order to survive, so children too must be introduced to work gradually as they grow so as to be able to grow up into adults who will be in a position to prosper.

The fact that children are now differentiated from adults who are perceived as responsible for looking after young people makes children more vulnerable. In such instances, they are alone without the adult who is legible to have access to employment and this pushes them into dangerous hidden spaces where they often have to work in difficult conditions and relationships. However, sometimes children may become less vulnerable because such differentiation may place them in advantageous positions over adults. I discuss such possibilities in the coming chapters.

The point I make here is that the differentiation between childhood and adulthood affects children's experience of migration. The thesis, through the accounts of young people's, illustrates that young people encountered a lot of challenges at the border due to being assigned certain attributes which have been categorized as children's. There are certain spaces and certain things that children are not expected to get or do without the adults because of the differentiations. Childhood is associated with innocence, vulnerability and in need of care, which

is the opposite of adulthood- a phase young people are yet to graduate into. This explains the presence and activities of a number of organisations, which focused on assisting young people in Musina and in Johannesburg. The dichotomy between adulthood and childhood forms part of the structures which affect the young people's experiences of place. As will be developed in the thesis young people had different experiences compared to adults. This was especially more pronounced at the church, where adults and children were treated differently. The treatment in the different spaces and relationships had much to do with them being considered children and not adults. It is therefore imperative to understand the adult and child dichotomy.

Duhn (2006; 4) argues for example that, the domain of childhood is perceived as an:

....incomplete and unstable subject and thus in need of adult-governance, strengthens adulthood as the domain of the self-governing adult-subject. The child represents all that which either complements or opposes the idea of the adult: the child is innocent/the adult knows, the child is dependent/the adult is autonomous, the child creates fantasy/the adult lives in reality...

Such perceptions as articulated by Duhn, have led to certain structures being put in place in a bid to protect young people. Of particular salience in this regard, is the discourse on children and child rights, which I discuss below.

Children and child rights

The assumption of children's need for protection from adults; their inability to participate in "public sphere" activities such as politics, economics, and marriage; and their need to gain rights through adults are expressed and codified in international declarations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and many state legal frameworks as well as in research approaches and academic disciplines (see Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan 2004). These

measures are attributed to the ways in which biological explanations and their inherent assumption of universality have neglected historical and cultural approaches as to what constitutes childhood.

Dalhbeck (2010) notes that, childhood historian Hugh Cunningham relates a Western discourse on childhood with claims on universality, where the image of the child is understood chiefly through its dichotomous relation with its adult counterpart. He argues that, children's rights, from this perspective, entail that children are to be protected from the threats or spared the responsibilities that any well functioning adult is expected to be able to deal with. Hemrica and Heyting (2004) posit that, when the discourse of universal childhood is conceived of as representing a unified category, where children are understood primarily as non-adults, a presentational problem is made visible as it entails that every individual child, no matter how different from one another, is understood as representing a homogenous community defined by certain preconceived notions concerning what childhood is.

White (1999) cited in Dalhbeck (2010), highlights that, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is formulated as a universally applicable document primarily aiming to direct the attention of governments and state parties towards the vulnerability of children, but in doing this every child has to be subordinated to a more or less uniform and static identity. Dalhbeck (2010) then argues that, in this context, difference is being used as an instrument by which to separate childhood from adulthood and by which the entrenched identities of child and adult are being continuously confirmed and enforced.

Though many NGOs targeting children for humanitarian intervention purport to follow children's rights mandate, Valentin and Meinart (2009) argue that, these NGOs have also taken on the role of second guardian in order to cultivate 'proper' children and parents. In the perspective of the NGOs, these children are supposed to be able live up to the supposedly universal ideals of a 'good childhood' in a 'neo-colonial civilizing mission that infantilizes African children, parents and nations in the name of children's rights' [Valentin and Meinart, 28]. Nieuwenhys (1996; 241) notes that similar views are evident in the documents produced by the international charities devoted to the welfare of children, such as the International Catholic Bureau, Save the Children, Defence of Children International, Anti-Slavery International. Typical of these publications, Nieuwenhys (1996; 241) argues, is 'a moral preoccupation with abolition through legislation and a zealous belief in the desirability of extending Western childhood ideals to poor families'.

The values of play and training have been made part of the modern child. This child, who is to be cared for, pampered and always in the proximity of the home has been regarded as the standard by the West. This has dominated the crafting of the intervention strategies which have been adopted in almost the whole world as most of the nations providing funds and expertise in rescuing childhoods which they assume to be skewed from the standards comes from the West. The response according to Sircar and Dutta (2011), is always to 'restore' and 'rescue' the innocence of these suffering children by creating opportunities for playing and learning, through a fixed set of normative principles which are put in place to care for those who have lost their childhood. Those who do not comply are the ones who are said to have lost their childhood and in need to be rescued and given special care. Most fascinating is the fact that children are being

put into a category which has tended to ignore the different context or the relativity of the different circumstances and contexts they find themselves in.

The preoccupation of most western journalists and reporters with the children at the Methodist church in Johannesburg shows how politicised the issue of childhood is. The children who migrate on their own are perceived to have lost their childhood by taking on adult duties and responsibilities. By raising the voices and showing images of children without childhood the sight is meant to evoke a reaction from the West who have taken the role of rescuing the lost children by restoring back their childhood. The young people are aware that there are certain standard which are put in place to protect and rescue them. This the young people use when they see it beneficial to them hence 'shifting' their vulnerability. When the boys go to sell and distribute newspapers they appeal for caring and protection from the rich people in the suburbs. This act by young people is in harmony with Tsing's concept of friction. Tsing (2005) note that the friction is as necessary as the ground is to the wheel which moves because of the friction of which without there is no movement. The global ideas on childhood clash with the local ideas of childhood which is highlighted by the action of the young people and their newspaper distribution activities. They are working which is something the Western concept of childhood is not in agreement with whilst they are using their work to appeal to their need of protection and care which is in conformity with the ideal perception of childhood for the West. The ideas are in friction but something is coming out as the global and the local ideas are rubbing against each other. These young people are working in order to have a decent childhood, which to them is normal as their childhood is one not of play and pampering. They are also taking advantage of

the Western ideas of childhood, that of care and protection to achieve good childhood by making sure that they get food, school uniforms and fancy gadgets like any other children.

The next section is specific to the work that has been done so far in childhood studies in the discipline of anthropology. This will give an understanding of the way in which this subject has been handled, the shortfalls and successes including the areas of improvements.

Anthropology of childhood

Anthropologists have for a very long time focused on adults as the main research participants at the expense of children even in areas that concern the children themselves. The neglect of a childhood centred research in anthropology has been as a result of an impoverished view of cultural learning that overestimates the role adults' play and underestimates the contributions children make to cultural reproduction (Kamp, 2001; Cheney, 2007; Jones, 1993; Reynolds, 1991). This led to the suppression of young people into a state of becoming which can only be looked at in subjection to what they can be not what they are. It also explains why most of the early ethnographies produced by anthropologists have been about adults or if they were on children it was about what it means to be an adult rather than what it means to be a child. This left children as only a source of inquiry into the operations of the adult institutions and the cultural logic that drive with adults and adult culture remaining the real subjects of study. This has however changed as anthropology has been among the first disciplines to take seriously children as subjects of study. The earliest study has been the classic study of the pubescent girls in Samoa in 1928 in which Margaret Mead treated children as informants.

The situation changed particularly from the late 90's up to date. More anthropologists are now working with young people taking them as serious subjects of study. Pamela Reynolds in 1991, 1995 and 1996 has done extensive work with children in Southern Africa, Patti Henderson in 1999 and 2006 worked with rural children and youth in South Africa, Parsons worked with children in Zimbabwe, Levine (1999) has worked on child labour, Hecht (1998) worked with street children in Brazil, Cheney (2007) and the list goes on. All this work has been done in the past fifteen years. Anthropological research on children has indeed increased but I feel that much still needs to be done and focus on children remains a priority to me.

My ambitions and research interests on children stem from the observation that most of the early anthropological work on children has focused on socialization. Cheney (2007) in his introductory remarks highlights that ethnographies that concern themselves at all with children in Africa often focus on 'societal models of personhood rather than specifically on children's subjectivities'. The socialisation approach attributes to children a passive status because it views them developmentally hence cannot give an accurate account as they are still not yet fully grown in order to have a full understanding of culture. This is the kind of thought that has dominated anthropology and the social sciences hence the voices of young people have been sidelined. Although there have been a lot of monographs by many anthropologists on young people the main focus was not an inquiry into childhood but it was about-childhood in culture and not culture in childhood (Jones; 1993). Jones further argues that the trend in anthropology has been more on; 'what does children exhibit about adults or what can adults tell us about children? It has seldom been: what can children tell us about themselves?'

Currently though, anthropology has been among the few disciplines which have done much in terms of representation of children. The discipline has done immensely well with the aid of ethnographic methods in capturing the perspectives of children thereby representing them well. In embarking on this study I also intend to carry on with the work of making young people collaborators in knowledge production taking them as subjects in their own right. The following section takes up the issue of children and agency which coupled with vulnerability, have dominated most of the discussions on childhood studies.

Children and agency

The concept of "kids at the crossroads," provides a rich thematic to explore the various kinds of borders, intersections and decision-making points embodied and experienced by children as they encounter the state. Hess and Shandy (2008; 767) assert that:

The semantic (or categorizational) crossroad encompasses the idea that children are defined in and out of semantic categories most often by legal and judicial processes and institutions, as the state applies a range of policies to children that swings, pendulum-like, from protecting them as the most vulnerable members of society to disciplining, policing or expelling them as risks to the body politic.

The role of young people particularly their role in the resistance against Apartheid in South Africa (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Reynolds 1995; Marks 2001), their participation in armed conflict and their post-war rehabilitation especially in Uganda, (SWAY, 2008), participation in economic development and the labour market in West Africa particularly in Burkina Faso and Ghana (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011) and their participation in politics in Kolkata's Somagachi red-light district in 2005 (Sircar and Dutta (2011), and the social movements led by young people in Senegal in the 1980's and 1990's (Honwana and De Boeck,

2005) has led to the interrogation of the place of young people in the world today. The active role played by young people in many movements leading to change has led to many in the academic realm to rethink the notion of childhood. This resulted from the active participation of young people proving that they have agency too.

Irrespective of what children do and what they think of what they do, modern society sets children apart ideologically as a category of people excluded from the production of value (Nieuwenhys, 1996; White and Brinkerhoff, 1981; Kamp, 2001). Marx (1867) and Thompson (1967) concur that the exclusion of individuals from production of value in a highly market oriented society affect self worth and means of having a respectable livelihood. The dissociation of children from the performance of valued work is considered a yardstick of modernity, and a high incidence of child labour a sign of underdevelopment. This way of defining children's roles is that it denies the agency of children in creation and negotiation of value. This denies young people the ability to speak and decide for themselves as they are removed from opportunities of decision making.

Mahati (2012) notes that unaccompanied migrant children working in Musina resorted to the use of gangs when dealing with people who did not pay them after they had worked or those who paid less than they had agreed after the work was done. The gangs comprised unaccompanied migrant children who organised themselves in order to protect their own interests. Although the humanitarian workers labelled these acts as criminal, leading to further stigmatization and marginalization of these young people from work, they still showed that they could take initiative and take control of their lives.

The regional seminar on Children who Cross Borders in Southern Africa held in Johannesburg in 2009 found that the reason why some young people are not using the legal channels to air their grievances is that the people who are supposed to assist them end up abusing them. They found that in Musina a border town in South Africa a concern was raised by young people who said that they were some nurses who reported them to the police when they approached them for medical assistance. Jacob van Garderen, cited in Park (2008; 18) argues that, the nation building policies of the new government of South Africa after 1994 have failed to teach citizens about refugees, immigration and the nation's international obligations. Although there are frameworks that are put in place by non-governmental and children's right organisations to assist unaccompanied migrants, the officials themselves are not familiar with some of these laws and legislations which have also affected the way in which children are handled and hence they have come up with their own ways of taking charge of their lives.

Even with the challenges of having structures against young people's opportunities to exercise their agency they manage to find innovative ways around their circumstances. In the moments of vulnerability there are flashes of agency which children exhibit even when they cross the border getting to places where they have to compete with adults in order to survive. They manage to create associations which 'shift' their vulnerability as they intentionally in most cases select relationships which they benefit from. They have knowledge of what is best for them regardless of having their interests being misrepresented at times. In the following section I examine the agency of children.

Best interests of the child

Taking away the agency from children leads to adults oftentimes making decisions for children. If children are taken to be without the ability to know and decide as to what is necessary for them there is then need for someone who can think on their behalf and act on their behalf as well. This distancing of agency from children pushes them into vulnerability as structures are put in places which sometimes act in opposition to their interests.

The approach that has been taken by NGO's has tended to go as far as taking over part of parental responsibilities. All the parents or governments who are seen not to be adhering to the principles or standards proposed by these NGO's are labelled as 'barbaric and backward' (Valentin and Meinert 2009). Governments and parents in that category are then seen as in need of being rescued from such a state. They base their approach on the premise that there is a standard when it comes to the needs of children and so what they do is to just look out for, 'the best interests of the child'. This challenges the differences in the local discourse on childhood as the standards applied by the international community takes after that which the Western experts put in place for the rest of the world which need to receive light on how childhood should look like.

The children themselves have also been victims in circumstances where they are found outside the Western category of the standard of childhood. Those who are seen to be 'out of place' (Connolly and Ennew, 1996 in Honwana and De Boeck, 2005), who do not readily fit into Western cultural fantasies of children are treated with mixed reactions from the state to the

populace. They are in some instances treated with caring hands where the states try to provide and care for them but in some instances they are treated as nuisance, criminals and a threat to the moral fibre of the family hence are punished. This has seen some of the young people being detained or deported which is discussed in this thesis. The states also in most instances want to portray a good image by making sure that they adhere to the demands of the Western standards of childhood. The multiplicities of childhood are not regarded or tolerated by the West who imposes what good childhood entails as they tend to universalize the standard. Although the African charter on children's rights has been drafted it is in most cases superseded by the standards of the West since they have the much needed funding. This affects children who are caught in between what they want and what their interests are prescribed to be, thereby 'shifting' the way the young people experience vulnerability.

Dependency on foreign aid, combined with a number of human rights declarations and conventions, put pressure on governments of the independent, post-colonial nation states to comply with internationally defined standards such as in the field of children's rights, which has been nurtured by a powerful global civil society, with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) functioning as important agenda-setting institutions (Valentin and Meinert, 2009; Ennew, 2002). The standards advocated for in the global agendas all adopt the view of the powerful and wealthy West because failure to comply will result in labelling of nations as bad hence aid and funding will be cut off until the nation in question 'behaves'.

On the 1st of April 2010, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (amended by the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2001) was put into law in South Africa. The Act reinforces the constitutional principle that the best interests of a child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. Section 9 says that in all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child, the best interest standard must be applied. The problem with this 'best interest' of the child is that it tends to homogenize young people into a single category without looking at the particular context in which these children find themselves in. The tendency to universalize and force all the young people to fit into the Western category of children has been problematic to both non-Western governments and children themselves as their experiences and orientations are very different, particular and unique.

The way in which states are responding to unaccompanied migrant children depends much on global and local debates on what constitute childhood. Much of the debates have been shaped by the Western view of a universalized childhood in which children are portrayed as weaker and vulnerable which is the total opposite of what adulthood is assumed to represent. Shandy and Hess (2008; 768) highlight that, 'New Barbarians at the Gates of Paris? Prosecuting Undocumented Minors in the Juvenile Court' illustrate how the state, when faced with an influx of children as primary migrants, attempts to manipulate and transform the category of 'child' in order to detain, discipline or protect individual children.

Having looked at the way childhood and adulthood are perceived and debated, it can therefore be argued that there are a lot of contradictions in the way the global and local ideas shape the way in which children or childhood is treated. Children have for a long time been moved out of the picture especially in terms of their voice and participation in most of the things

that are of interest to them. There is evidence to suggest that some of the things which were being decided for children have to be reconsidered taking into account the voices of the children as they too are human and do have agency to make sound decisions for themselves. This has been slow as the dominant ideas still pervasive in the world today are Western ideals and notions. These ideas have tended to treat children as vulnerable, half humans who are still on their way to becoming full human beings—adults.

The way in which the South African government social workers responded to the young people at the Methodist church confirms the dominant ideology on childhood. One of the young people Tendai stated that there was a call to clear all the streets of street children and take all children to shelters outside the city because of the 2010 soccer world cup. The pressure that the governments have of portraying an image of good parenting to the West who defines the standards is too great that it affects children's experiences. Being labelled a bad parent as a state can mean the cutting off of the supply of funding which is why some states comply at the expense of what the children want. This affected the relationship between the young immigrants and the social workers even their experience of the city during the raid and migration as a whole. The notion of the influence of the West on the spaces of children is also highlighted by the presence of organisations mostly sponsored by the West in trying to assist young people in the border town of Musina. The idea of the spaces of young people is in the school and shelters which care for the young people which is what the organisations in Musina tried to do. Even with their assistance most young people did not stay or join the schools or shelters in Musina but moved to Johannesburg which is what they wanted. The best interest of the child principle is also

responsible for the way in which the vulnerability of the young people ‘shifts’ as will be discussed in the later chapters.

In the next section I look at how I got to do the research with the young people. This will include how I got interested in working with unaccompanied young people, how I got to them including the methods I used to gather and present the data.

Establishing common ground

My interest in exploring the lives of unaccompanied migrant children was born out of the observations I made during a stint of three day and two nights I spent at the Showground area in the border town of Musina. The sight of children sleeping out in the cold, selling cigarettes and snacks got me to ask questions as to why these young people were in such a place. Meeting more young people in Johannesburg who had left Musina then made it more apparent to me that I needed to know more about this group of young people.

I heard about the Central Methodist church in Johannesburg and their involvement in caring for young people. I went to the church to seek permission from Bishop Paul Verryn who directed me to their school to speak to the principal. When I got to Albert Street I even thought I was lost because the pupils at the school looked just like any other school children from the schools I had been to in my previous research. There was nothing that could separate these children from pupils from other schools because they were well clad and were seemingly looking after themselves. I had envisaged children at the school to be different because I still had in mind some of the young people I met in Musina who were not well clad. As I got to the principal’s office, I felt very comfortable because the principal was not only a Wits student but

was also my compatriot hailing from Zimbabwe. He called the Bishop to confirm that I had sought permission from him and after that he escorted me to the young people who were in the midst of their classes. The principal granted me permission to do research during break and lunch times as well as after school.

The principal requested Mike who was the head boy at the time and Shepherd, another pupil at the school to provide me with practical assistance such as showing me around the school or assisting me in accessing potential research participants in different classes. Conducting the research was not as easy as I initially thought it would be. Although the principal had introduced me to the pupils, some of them requested written proof before the commencement of any interview or conversation to ascertain my identity. Some of the young people were wary of speak to me in the first instance because they thought I was sent either by the South African government as a social worker to investigate them. My position as a Zimbabwean also created an additional challenge. Young people were reluctant to speak to me because they thought I was one of the Central Intelligence Officers from Zimbabwe sent to spy on them and entrap back to Zimbabwe. Such insecurities arose due to their lack of legal documentation allowing them to stay in South Africa. Some of them had run away from home and they feared that they could be followed and taken back.

The main challenge was on paying the research participants. The school was often inundated by journalists and researchers who wanted to produce documentaries and publish news articles using the accounts and experiences of the children. Most of the journalists and some of the researchers conducted their research for relatively short periods of time and they often paid research participants for their accounts. This made it challenging for me to inform them that I

was bound by University research ethics and since the research was for academic purposes I could not pay them.

An additional difficulty emerged from the work of the journalists and the intense attention the church attracted. Some of the documentaries made about the children at the church run school were posted on the internet, much to the dismay of the children, hence they were often wary of the information they gave me.

As a trained counsellor I was however comfortable having dealt with a lot of young people in previous researches to offer counselling to the young people whom I spoke to.

The fact that some of the children, the likes of Judah, expected some form of payment made it difficult for me in terms of research methods as well. I had thought of using diaries but I failed to do so because the participants were not very cooperative on keeping diaries. They said they did not have time to make diary entries but instead they could have conversations with me rather than to spend time writing because they needed time to look for money. The spare time they had at their disposal was productively used to complete school assignments, study and look for money and unless I could pay them for their time they could not write in diaries. In order to make up for the failure to conduct diary studies, I trained two boys and one girl to do interviews among their peers. I gave the trio recorders so that they could record each other's stories in interviews but this was ultimately unsuccessful because no one cooperated with them. As a result of these challenges I decided to spend more time with them, getting to know them and in the process I made them feel comfortable having me around them. The ethnographic approach adopted and my migration story came in handy in interviews. The more time I spent with them

and shared my migration experiences, the more our conversations became more open and they shared their experiences more openly.

Some of the young people who participated in the study had smart phones, which made it easy to become close to them. I maintained constant contact with them through sending messages and chatting with them as well as calling them which made them more relaxed. I have maintained contact with some of them up to now. Some of the pupils who wrote their final exams sent me their results for 2013.

Although my Zimbabwean nationality aroused a few suspicions it however, made it easier for some of the young people to trust me. I communicated with the young people using a common language and we often spoke about the situation back home. Over the course of time, the children became good friends of mine because they looked up to me due to the fact that I knew where they were coming from and I also slept at the showground area, which to them was hilarious considering that I was a student at Wits. In certain ways, they saw me as one of their own but also as a success story from those who had at some point slept at the showground area but eventually getting admitted for postgraduate studies at Wits. Some came for career guidance and assistance with their assignments and this made it easy for me to ask them questions about their own experiences. The close relationships I enjoyed with the young people enabled me to track changes in some of the stories the young people told me as they could not keep on holding on to some of their 'crafted' stories.

In total I managed to interview 28 young people all of whom I interviewed in Shona, which is one of the local languages in Zimbabwe. I translated the interviews into English and transcribed the entire interview material. Although this process was generally arduous, it made

me more intimate with my research data. In the thesis I give the stories of the young people priority and prominence in the presentation so as to give them a voice in this research. By doing interviews and starting the chapters from this same premise, I make an attempt to accept children as persons who have similar rights to those of adults.

Chapter two

Space and shifting vulnerability

Memory Chimuti

My name is Memory Chimuti and I am turning seventeen this year. I decided to come to South Africa in 2009 in June. I decided to move because of the way I was experiencing life in Zimbabwe. It was after *Operation Murambatsvina*¹ took place, which affected my whole life. Since the area we were staying was an informal settlement we were ordered to evacuate the area. I was staying with my brother who was working hard to make sure that I get educated and get a better life. My parents died when I was very young and our relatives did not want anything to do with us. Because of *Murambatsvina* our property was destroyed. We did not know where to go. Many other families in that area also had nowhere to go. I decided that it was time I helped my brother rather than being a burden to him. He was struggling to take care of me even before the Operation. A few of my friends and I decided to look for work as domestic workers to raise money so that we could go to South Africa, buy goods such as cooking oil to sell back home in Zimbabwe. One of my friends knew about cross border trading because her mother was earning a living through that work. Although we were young, in need of education we just looked at our situation and we saw that there was no other way. We left school and worked for two and a half weeks to raise the money because we knew that it was not possible to travel without money. We did not have passports so we just boarded a bus to Beit Bridge where we met the *guma gumas* or the pay forwards whom we talked to about our problem. The *guma gumas* assist people to cross the border illegally via the Limpopo River. The journey was not successful as we were with many people who also wanted to cross the border with the assistance of the *guma gumas*. It was a matter of risking your life. We had to hold hands and cross the river in a single file which was risky because there are crocodiles in the river. We had heard about people who had their things stolen by some of the *guma gumas* but we were lucky because we had many women with us who protected us and said these are children. We had to pay 250 rands each and we had nothing left which meant that we had no money to get to Johannesburg. It took us a day to walk to Musina where we went straight to the Showground area. We stayed there for almost three weeks. At the Showground, it was an open space where the only thing one could do was sell food. We met this young guy who told us that we cannot stay in Musina because we could not do much there. He ordered bread and polony for us to sell and made an agreement that when we had profits we had to pay him back. He told us of the Methodist church in Johannesburg, about the school and Bishop Paul Verryn. He was always going to Johannesburg and coming back to Musina where he came to sell food staff at the show grounds.

After three weeks we made our way to Johannesburg. We went to the church since we had heard of the Bishop's generosity we had no problems approaching him. That is how we got accommodation at the church and the opportunity to get into school. When we first got to the church it was difficult because there were a lot of people but I can't complain, we just had to adjust to the situation. When we first got to

¹ This is an operation that the Zimbabwean Government called '*Operation Clean up*' which was conducted in urban cities and towns to remove all informal settlements

the church people stared at me saying, 'ooh poor little child, ooh poor little child'. It was okay though because we had somewhere to stay and taken to school especially when you were my age, you are a child. We were given food because we were children. When you are a child you really have advantages over older people. Children had their own separate apartment in the fourth floor. The place was not very comfortable at first because of many people who were there but we got used to it. People sometimes stole our things since everyone will be at school with no one to look after our belongings. Things are now much better since the bishop decided to move us to Soweto where we have our own space as children. We now have separate places for girls, our own showers, tubs, mattresses and blankets. Even though we have a place to stay, we have to look for money because one needs to get clothes. Sometimes you feel that maybe you need to eat something different like a pie. This means that you had to do part time work, like selling ice when it's hot. By doing that we get to have money to buy clothes and toiletries- as a human being you need these things. I can say that things are different from the way there were at home because I can now get to work selling ice snacks after school and during weekends we also as girls get to go and do part time work, washing clothes, ironing and cleaning houses. The boys who work for Sunday Times talk to the rich people in areas such as Sandton and Midrand about us and we then get hired for part time work during weekends. I am now more independent here because I do not wait to get things from my brother I can work on my own if I need something.

I chose the story written by Memory as the starting point because it illustrates the changing vulnerabilities that most of the young people went through in different spaces. Her story, like many other stories narrated by young people, provides a chronology of their journey to South Africa. It begins at the border proceeds to the show grounds and ends at the church. Although Memory managed to cross the border she calls the journey a failure because she was expecting it to be without much difficulty. Her aim was to cross without experiencing violence and go straight to Johannesburg. Musina was not in her plans including losing all she had saved.

The chapter highlights how the vulnerability of the children shifts in different spaces. The spaces, in which these young people live, work and pass thorough on their journey to Johannesburg expose them to certain vulnerabilities. I argue that certain spaces play an active part in the creation and perpetuation of structures of vulnerabilities. It is also in these spaces of vulnerability that the young people defied the odds by actively taking it upon themselves to

challenge some of the problems that were posed by these spaces or manipulating them to their advantage.

Memory's story sheds light on some of the prominent spaces where children felt vulnerable and the ways in which they managed to deal with their vulnerabilities in those places. In dealing with the different spaces which presented multiple vulnerabilities that the young people faced also speaks to the agency that these children have. The border, show ground and the Central Methodist church in Johannesburg were spaces within which immigrants including unaccompanied migrant children were excluded from mainstream political power. The exclusion left the immigrants at the mercy of those who had the means and those desperate enough to take advantage of the situation. The state did not intervene to aid immigrants in some spaces like the showground and rarely came to aid immigrants in some instances at the forest route used to cross the border through the services of the *guma gumas*.

Crossing the Border

The border is a place of surveillance, maximum security and control. It is a place where some people are allowed entrance whilst others are denied. Because of the demands of the border which require one to have the right documents to cross over most of the young people are at a disadvantage. The young people in this research do not possess the required documents because most of them ran away from their homes. Some were escaping political persecution, poverty, with some travelling in search of greener pastures. When they left their country things were tough economically and-, obtaining a passport was difficult and costly. Getting to the border under such circumstances presents challenges for the young people considering the requirements of the border. This makes the border a scary place which has to be avoided at all costs. The

young people try to make themselves invisible at the border. They try to cross over to South Africa by hiding in trucks, bribing officials or the most common way which involves the use of the services of the *guma gumas*. These *guma gumas* are an organised network of illegal cross border assistants. They take advantage of their mastery of the Limpopo River and the whole forest of the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa to make money from people who want to cross via the forest.

The legal entry points at the border, because of the conditions that operate at this space shape the way in which the young people perceive the border in its entirety, be it the formal or informal passage via the Limpopo River. The border becomes a place of surveillance and gaze from the state officials who track down the young people who do not belong to that space but have to be prevented from crossing over. All the children I spoke to see the border as a space which was against them and never positive in their experience. This was compounded by the way in which the policies on children have been structured especially in terms of crossing the borders. By regarding anyone below 18 years as a child it becomes difficult for young people at the border. Young people who are under the legal age of majority need consent from the parents or the guardians to cross the border even if they have the required documents. Because they had left on their own without telling their parents or guardians, the young people were at risk of deportation if they were caught at the official border.

The strict nature of the border pushed young people to rely on the invisible space by crossing through the Limpopo River with the aid of the *guma gumas*. Not many young people were fortunate enough to get assistance from truck drivers or had the money to bribe the border control officials. This meant that young people had to seek the services of the people they had heard about. In this section, the border I refer to as invisible is the Limpopo forest route which is

used by people who want to avoid the home affairs because of their lack of proper documentation. This route is a forest which is between the Zimbabwean border side and the South Africa border stretching deeper into South Africa. Most of the young people who used this route went through the Limpopo River under the bridge into the forest until they got to South Africa. I refer to this space as invisible because of hidden activities that take place in that area of the border. This is one of the places that Delaney (2011) describes as spaces hidden from daily lives - places where one does not often think of unless we have to go there. Such places include hospitals, mental institutions, prisons and the graveyard which people only go to because they really have to not because they have any choice unless they work in these places. In what follows I use the word border not to refer as much to the formal space of the border but to the informal Limpopo forest route which most young people used, unless specified.

Crossing the border through the bush presents one of the places that are hidden from our daily lives including the activities that happen in this place. The border then becomes one of the invisible places where the people who are working in this area are also invisible to the public. There is limited surveillance in this space excluding the sporadic patrols from the police and the army. This explains why the *guma gumas* continue operating in this space and why only a few young people had an encounter with the police or the army whilst they were crossing. The people who work in this space mostly the *guma gumas* are also invisible from the public because of the nature of the space they operate in including the type of activities they are involved in.

The border as a space presents challenges to the young people. They do not have the required documents to cross the border. This leaves them with only one option which is to engage the services of the *guma gumas*. The lack of legal documents granting children the right to stay in South Africa makes them susceptible to deportation if they manage to cross. This leads

them to avoid the public spaces which are safer than the private hidden spaces they rely on to cross the border. The stringent immigration measures that are put in place by the receiving countries including the harsh border controls push the young people into the hands of the *guma gumas* who are their only hope for making it across. Since the legal border spaces were not open to the young immigrants who had no documents; they sought the services of the *guma gumas*.

Mike, whose brief account I give below illustrates this point:

I left home then boarded a train to Bulawayo then to Beit Bridge where upon my arrival I heard some people who were looking for people who wanted assistance to cross the border. Because I had no documents and I also did not know anything I went to them and we were taken to a car. When we got into the pickup van we were told to pay 20 rand each (Tendai). When I got to the South African Border that is when I heard that the Temporary Travelling Documents were no longer valid and the Zimbabwean Home Affairs had to be notified of these changes. They had changed from Temporary Travelling Document to Emergency Travelling Document (ETD). I could not go back to the bus because they check again before the buses leave. I just went outside and as I was walking back I saw some guys who were sitting round a fire along the way so I joined them. I could not go back to where I was running from. While I was still deciding what to do I met this other guy who asked me if I wanted to cross to the South African side and I thought maybe he also wanted to cross over.

The gangs take people from one part of the forest to the next one, handing over illegal travellers into the care of a different group of *guma gumas*. They become more aggressive as they get to the darkest and deepest zone of the forest. From crossing the rivers there is a handover and take over by another group which is more aggressive. The fact that these people are being moved from one section to the next which is more out of sight away from the public spaces the environment in those hidden places then allows the *guma guma* to be more powerful as the geographies of power become more uneven. One of the study participants, Tendai revealed that:

When got to the other side of the river we were told to pay 10 rand because they said we were paying the guys who were to take us to the wire separating the Zimbabwean side from the South African side. I was already running out of money by then since I had to

use some of the money I had to buy food to eat on my way from home all the way to the border. When we crossed the fence I told the guys that I no longer had money. They then said that those who did not have enough money should go to one side whilst those with money should be on the other side. A lot of people went to the side of the people without money and that is when the shock of my life began. They started searching all the people, women were searched even in their pants, men were also searched including in their stockings. Those who had lied were brutally assaulted as they were slapped and whipped with huge whipping sticks. They took all the money that people had with them. Those who really had no money like me had our new clothes and shoes taken away, I also had my nice jacket I loved taken away. We were then taken to another wire where we met another group of people who took us to cross the other electric wire.

In such instances like the one recounted by Tendai, children are helpless when they use the forest route and are at the mercy of the gangs. The forest is a space where the power rests in the hands of the gangs with the young people including the adults crossing having no control of what takes place. The border is for them the most vulnerable space because the police and border officials also form a group of people that are against them. As the young people escape the officials from the formal border they walk into the hands of *guma gumas* who are more dangerous than the officials at the border. Since the young people are determined to cross over and know some of the risks, they are prepared to take their chances.

I had heard stories about how the *guma gumas* rob people but I had no choice because I wanted to be in South Africa (Frank).

I knew about the dangers of crossing the border through the forest. People back home used to talk about it but I did not want to pay lots of money bribing the border officials to cross the border (Funwell).

The border did not provide many options for the young people who could do nothing much when it came to the abuse they suffered from the *guma gumas*. The journey was short taking a few hours during the night. It took young people by surprise leaving them without any opportunity to comprehend what was really taking place. The power in this space was entirely in the hands of the *guma gumas* who knew the route very well.

I saw a lot of people who were coming to the show grounds who made me forget about what I went through when I crossed the border. People came in with blood all over having been attacked by the *guma gumas*. Women, girls including boys were raped when they were crossing. This made me realise how fortunate I was though I lost money and clothes from the *guma gumas* they did not physically harm me (Mike).

What allows these kinds of activities to take place at the border post in the bush is the invisibility of the space. The space which is out of sight or away from the gaze of the state security including the public gets to be a place of exploitation, persecution and subjection. The fact that the space as described by Tendai below is surrounded by three different divisions separated by electric fences meant to exclude people from using it shows that this was a place deterring anyone from passing through.

We went past the first electric fence using a log to lift up the electric wire so that we could crawl underneath... we proceeded to the next electric fence where the *guma gumas* used a thin log to separate the middle wire and the bottom one where he just had to crouch and pass through. The last fence leading us to the South African side was also another electric fence with barbed wire which crawled underneath (Tendai).

Certain power relations are created in these spaces as the *guma gumas* become the bearers of power. They possess the knowledge of this forest, they work there. The people they assist are only passing by their territory and cannot do anything to defend themselves in a place of a network of gangs even running away is no option because they do not know which direction to take. They cannot call for help nor do they expect anyone to come to their rescue because at this moment they are running away from the army or police who might have been the source for help if they were in a public space.

When children are in the forest they are at the mercy of the *guma gumas* but it was mostly the adults who were beaten up and targeted by the gangs. The children were a little less likely to get beaten but they did witness people being beaten up. Children, I suggest, were seen as less vulnerable because they have fewer material things such as money and the gadgets that

the gangs are looking for. As a result they are subjected to less abuse than the adults. A child is vulnerable in these spaces as much as the adults but because they are children having valuables is not attached to their youthfulness hence they are less exposed to brutal assaults. Children mostly told me that in the raids they lost clothing and shoes.

I told them I had no money left on me as I had paid the other two groups we met in the forest. They did not insist on me giving them money but told me to take off my shoes and clothes which were still new. They took away good clothes from all the children who had no money or who were left with just a few dollars. They searched all the adults beating them up saying they were hiding money asking them where they were going without money (Lesley).

The gangs expected the adults to have prepared for the journey hence they assumed they had money with them. They targeted mostly the adults because they did not expect young people to be in possession of more money than the adults or carrying valuable things other than the clothes they were carrying and putting on. These assumptions that valuable material things are associated with the adults acted in favour of young people on many occasions although some who were unfortunate and were physically abused.

A man offered to carry my bag which had books and clothes because I was thinking of going to school when I get to South Africa which I had heard that there was free education. I heard a lot of people who were telling stories of how beautiful South Africa is and a lot of greener pastures so I thought I can also go and have a good life in South Africa. So we walked me and this guy and upon walking under the bridge crossing the river he then demanded that I give him a hundred rand. I told him that I had told him before that I did not have any money. We started arguing and the noise reached the ears of some soldier from the South African Army who came and caught us. They let the other guy free telling me to stay whilst they questioned me as to where I was going and if I had any relatives waiting for me. I lied to them that I know where I was going and that a relative of mine was waiting for me in Johannesburg. The soldiers told me to walk to their camp which was only 800 metres from where we were and as I walked alone the place I was told to go was dark and marshy so I just saw *guma gumas* surrounding me. They pulled me leading me away to a group of other people who were also abducted. They removed all my clothes asked me to give them money but they found nothing at all. They had a knife on my private parts threatening to kill me if I did not give them money and since I had nothing they took all my clothes which were nice because I had only taken the best for the journey including my shoes leaving only my books. A group of girls and women were raped and had their private parts searched as well. As all this was happening the soldiers fired shots in the air forcing the *guma*

gumas to run away. I also tried to run but more shots were fired so I stopped because I had heard that the South African soldiers beat up illegal border jumpers. They shouted at me saying that all they want to do is to assist us but we wanted to run away-.... I was still very young and looked very innocent which is why the first *guma guma* thought he could make easy money from me ... the police officers who came to my rescue believed my story when I lied to them that I had someone waiting for me in Johannesburg hence they let me go (Mike).

In the above scenario Mike was denied entry to South Africa, sent back to the Zimbabwean side. He was tricked by a *guma guma* into believing that he had found someone willing to assist. It was his body that made him an easy target and this *guma guma* thought that he was going to make easy money from this young boy. The soldier was also lenient with the boy even letting him go easily. The interesting thing here is the way in which the vulnerability of Mike shifts. Mike is made vulnerable by being denied entry falling into the hands of the *guma guma* then he gets protected by the police and then falls into the hands of the *guma gumas*. It did not end there as he is again protected by the police within a short space of time at the border.

The show ground

The show ground in Musina was designated by the Municipality as a place that was meant for people who were crossing the border without documents. This is a waiting place for immigrants such as asylum seekers to get documents to legalise their stay. The place is an open area, a ground without a roof. People slept outside in the sun, rain and the wind. There was no privacy and people used a bushy area surrounding their ground to relieve themselves. The immigrants were not allowed to leave this place and if found outside the demarcated space they were arrested and deported if they had not acquired the asylum seekers permit. The showground was a space of exclusion. It was a place of exclusion in the sense that it was an invisible space to

the local community because even if they knew about its existence they did not even go there. It was even located on the outskirts of the town. Most of the children I spoke to referred to the showground as a concentration camp. Hecht (1999) looked at children as subjects who could be trusted to give their own perspective and they proved to be social actors in his portrayal of Brazilian street children in the way they were making choices about their lives rather than as helpless and exploited victims. He showed that they were articulate, well informed rich in experience and capable of complex and innovative survival strategies. Children's innovative, complex survival strategies are apparent in lives of children at the show ground.

I owe my life to my friend. He fed us and looked after us. He had to go to town every day, work and bring food for us to eat since we looked older than him which meant that going into town we risked being deported. We found him at the showground already, he came ten months earlier than us and he was very familiar with the town. He just could not get an asylum because he was too young just like us. He just looked younger in appearance than us. He had already built a little shack using card board boxes which he invited us to share with him. The showground was very crowded and we had to watch people die of cholera which was my first experience of seeing a person die right in my face. I now know how cholera kills an individual because it did not take long to see people dying of cholera. They will just be losing water from rapid diarrhoea and if help does not get to the person quickly he just died in our sight. It was better because we had guys from EMS who would then hurry to spray the place where the person was dying or died at spraying chemicals to stop it from spreading because it was very dangerous. It was also a dangerous place as the '*guma gumas*' (illegal border jumping assistance) forgot too early that some of the people they raped and stole from got to the show grounds where they had to stay and mourn their misfortunes. I had to witness three people being beaten to death. These were accused of being members of the *guma gumas* and had raped other people's wives and girl friends painfully in front of their husbands and boyfriends. The police only came to pick up the dead bodies and not to protect or ensure safety. We saw people who were coming to the show ground some of them having blood all over having being mugged by the *guma gumas*, some of them saying that they had been raped and these are boys having being raped. This made me compare the way I crossed the border to these other unfortunate people and made my worries less significant than when I got there.

My friend used to bring card board boxes which we began to sell to people and we used to market them saying, 'your bed is here come and get one, your bed is here come and get one'. We were no longer shy because we needed to survive. We sold each box for 20 cents and if you sell five you have one rand and you could eat because one fat cake was going for 50 cents. We also became marketing people for these women who sold thick porridge (*sadza/pap*) and at the end of the day we could get a free meal from the left over's.

I don't forget the day we went to this church which was always conducted during the night and on that particular day it started raining but what surprised me was that the pastor from that church told everyone to go out. He could not even allow people to sleep in the church for a night because it was raining. We went back and the card board boxes were useless because the rain just soaked us the whole night we just slept while standing because there was nowhere we could seek shelter on that open space where there were many people. When you slept at the show grounds you had no blankets or anything just the boxes and if you wake up during the night you saw bodies of people just lying on the ground as if they were dead bodies. It so happened this one evening when one taxi came in whilst people were sleeping and ran over a lot of people who were sleeping and I could not even bear to relate what the sight was like because a lot of people died on that day. It's a place where there is no security or protection from anyone so it was dangerous. There were gangs occupied in that space as well and a lot of people even changed when they got there joining these gangs. They would mug you and rob you off your asylum which they would sell and get money. Some of the people even after getting their asylum decided not to leave because they wanted to benefit from the activities at the show grounds such as stealing and selling asylums. Some of the people were part of the *guma gumas* but most of these people died at the show grounds because they were identified and beaten to death.

I even got sick not only me but a lot of people and we had to drink the sugar salt solution for we had stomach pains and diarrhoea. I thank God we survived this ordeal. I managed to get an asylum when this other organisation that took children, fed them, and took them to school called us and gave us a written exercise to get us asylum seekers permits. So those who were serious and submitted the assignment got the chance to be enrolled but not many wanted to stay with a group of boys who were in the shelters because the boys in the shelters had become bullies and also sniffed glue. When we got the asylum seekers we had to hide them because the gangs could come during the night when you were sleeping and ask you to give them your asylum (Mike).

The episodes recounted by Mike provide an idea of the kinds of things that happened at the show grounds. Stewart (2005) notes that 'Homo sacer', a concept derived from ancient Roman law where life could be killed without impunity. This is a person outside the law; a bio-political subject whose life is stripped of the cultural and political forms and that an asylum seeker can also be defined as 'homo sacer'. This can also be said of the immigrants at the show grounds because of the way in which they were excluded from the rest of the citizens. Immigrants at the showground did not have the same rights as the citizens. They could not leave this place to access employment, buy food or access the hospitals because of their status. The environment in this place is unliveable according to young people I spoke to, depriving the people in it a normal life and the only way they could avoid this was to leave this place. The

people in this space wanted to move on to places where they could have a life, it was a place they did not want to stay in because they were at risk of being attacked by the gangs, starving to death, abuse and their health was threatened too. The state was not treating the cases with the required urgency with some spending almost a year staying in this confinement.

The showground provided a place of waiting and safety for the young people; however it was also a space of insecurity and fear. The young people were safe from the long arm of the police when they were at the show grounds but they were within the reach of the violence, hunger, cold, heat, and diseases. That is why Memory was told that there was nothing much that could be done. It was just a place of waiting, uncertainty where detention was exercised by the state as a way of deterrence as well.

The young people were in constant struggle for their rights and freedoms at the show ground. They struggled and negotiated for the most basic rights and freedoms including food, space to sleep, work. Young people were not mere victims in this struggle but managed to adapt to the changing nature of challenges they had to face in their daily lives. Not only did they adapt to the challenges they were exposed to but they always sought to negotiate options that made it possible for them to overcome. In Mike's account, he was able to think of selling cardboard boxes as he saw that they had access to them. He knew that because people were not allowed to leave this place so bedding was crucial with the cardboard as a much needed resource they started selling them in order to get a few rands. Therefore even though they were vulnerable in this space they managed to alter their vulnerability.

Thulani was twelve years old when he got to the show ground. He told me the show ground was like a concentration camp and a prison. The place was overcrowded, there was no

privacy, and there was nothing that could be done there. People at the show ground were not allowed to be five metres away from the demarcated area. Thulani stated that:

Obviously it's impossible! How can you survive if you are stuck in one place? We needed to just move out and get something to eat and have a bath.

For this young person and many young people including the boy who assisted Memory, the showground is just one of the places where nothing meaningful could be possible. The place stood against all the freedom, security and prosperity that the young people anticipated to find in South Africa. The show ground presented young people with a difficult task- that of fighting for their survival with little or nothing at all to work with. The young boy who assisted Memory and her friends told them that there was nothing much they could do at the show grounds. There is a sharp contrast in the life the young people were experiencing at this particular place, to the life that they had envisioned when they left their homes for South Africa. Crossing the border they had endured the pain and suffering they encountered to get to South Africa. The environmental and material conditions at the show ground made it difficult for the young people to do something that would give them something to look forward to. They spent all their energy just trying to survive each day they stayed at the show ground.

Under such circumstances the young people managed to deal with the challenges they faced in complex ways. They did not wait for the state to rescue them but came up with their own ways of dealing with their situation. This included using their innocence and vulnerable bodies as enabling objects to try and connect with the community. The showground had other challenges which the young people could not do anything about such as diseases like cholera.

The boys in particular managed to create an opportunity for themselves to get food from the women who were selling thick porridge as they offered to work for them as marketing

agents. What is paramount in the lives of these children is the fact that they are not only helpless victims at the show ground but they are involved in making daily decisions and engaging in very complex mechanisms such as looking for ways to get food, clothing, avoiding being attacked by gangs. In engaging in these activities at the show ground they involved themselves in making choices knowing what they were getting themselves into.

The Central Methodist Church

The church is located in the city of Johannesburg in Small Street along the high court and buildings housing law firms as well as clothing shops and food outlets. The church building is a six storey building which houses thousands of refugees. It has different floors housing different age groups with the fourth floor housing young school going children. When I first got to the church, I was greeted by a strong stench. Walking up the stairs was difficult as the dark corridors were blinding. There were few blankets stashed in the corners along the stair cases with unpleasant view of empty plastic bottles filled with urine. Moving up to the third floor was one old man who happens to be the care taker sweeping and mopping the floor alone. It was difficult to breathe as the air was heavy on my first visit but it all changed with a couple of visits. Although the church was overcrowded it was safer for the young people compared to the other spaces like the forest route at the border and the showground. The management of the church made sure that certain rules were put in place to protect and care for young people and all the people who stay there. This gave the young people a sense of security and confidence compared to the other spaces which were invisible.

The Methodist Church is and has been a place of hope for the children. It became a haven for children who had travelled through challenging circumstances to get to Johannesburg. The

church became the space which gave the children a means to experience South Africa. This was not what they had hoped for when they left their homes like Mike, Tendai and the other young people who thought almost everything was free in South Africa. Their experiences in their journey prepared them for the church as they found it better than what they had experienced at the border, show ground and in the other spaces they passed through. The church offered shelter, education and other opportunities such as work. It was not all easy at the church as it had some unique challenges calling for different strategies. Tendai revealed that:

When I got to the church I was really shocked by the number of people who were at the church. I asked myself where I was going to sleep or stay with such numbers of people. I just walked in and slept on the stairs. I spent two weeks sleeping on the stairs and just waking up to drink water without anything to eat. I say anything to eat because I just survived on food from the bins and the rotten food that the vendors left lying on the streets.

It was almost September when I came to know of the school. I just saw school children going and coming out in school uniforms and heard people talking about the school. I asked around and I was referred to see the Bishop. I was really shocked to learn that there were even a first, second, third and fourth floor because since I got to the church I was just used to sleeping on the stairs in the ground floor and going out in the morning when were told to move out because the cleaners cleaned every morning. That is when I went to the third floor, saw the Bishop and spoke to him. I was taken to the fourth floor where school children stayed, the following morning I was taken to school, registered and here I am. I then experienced improvements because I was able to learn, eat and drink water.

From the show grounds, most of the children proceeded straight to the church where they experienced different forms of vulnerability. Starting from sleeping on the stairs and going outside early morning without any knowledge of where to get the next meal. Sleeping on the stairs was challenging they said. They said that people passing by could step on you, spit on you or just throw some rubbish on you especially those who were drunk. There were a lot of disturbances on the stairs because a lot of people used the stairs at any time while the young people wanted to sleep. Because some of them had even tougher experiences from the show

grounds they had learnt to survive even in the direst conditions. Some children were able to survive by scavenging the dust bins. Those who had met people at the show grounds already had some information about the school and the Bishop but those who did not have that knowledge had to find out for themselves.

Upon arrival I just slept on the stairs. Things changed for me because I was used to asking for everything from my mother but I had to fend for myself. I had never worked for a sangoma before but I just had no choice because they used to come at the church asking for people who wanted to work for them. I worked for sangomas distributing flyers and I had to stand the whole day only to get 30 rand and sometimes they would tell you that they had no customers for the day so they will pay the following day. When you work for them they would promise to pay 50 rand for the day but they would only pay you 30 rand if you are lucky and if you sit down or leave the distributing point they deduct money from the 30 rand. It was from this 30 rand I had to buy food and get something to put on since I had clothes which only on my body and nothing else, the shoes were torn. I only got to hear about the school when a refugee meeting was held at the church. I saw one boy who was putting on a school uniform and I asked him where he learnt that is when he told me of the school which was still being started. The school was still being held at the church and since I slept on the stairs on the ground floor I had no idea that there was something going on in the other floors. I was used to working up early going out and distributing pamphlets only to come back in the evening to sleep on the stairs. When I heard about the school that is when got to be accommodated where children were staying, got food, stopped working, had a form rubber to sleep on including a blanket and attended school until now. When I was sleeping on the stairs people could step on you and just say sorry, spit on you but all that changed when I went to the fourth floor. I was free from distributing pamphlets for sangomas something which is against my Christian values but because I was vulnerable I had no choice, a beggar is no chooser (Mike).

Mike had to work and not only was he working but the work he was doing was against his beliefs. Though the church had provided shelter but the conditions he first found himself in made him open to abuse because he was not aware of the space in which he was in. The only thing that was there at the church was the opportunity to distribute pamphlets which he could get in order to get something to eat and put on. The church is well known for accommodating desperate people who can work only for food and this was the way in which Mike and many

others had to survive on especially in their first weeks at the church. Mike worked not because he wanted to but because it was a matter of survival, he needed to eat.

I once worked for this other Ethiopian guy who was selling all sorts of jewelleries from earrings, necklaces, rings and other small things in Small Street. He did not pay me the money we agreed each day so I just came up with a plan. I had a track bottom which I put on inside my trousers which had pockets with holes. I started slipping inside my track bottom through my trousers pockets money which I got from customers which I saw fit as my payment (Funwell).

The young people from the church were sought after by different people who needed cheap labour. The people came to the church for they knew that the church had young people who were desperate for work. The young people who were working were sometimes not paid the full amount of what they had agreed upon with their employers. To deal with such deceit they started stealing money from these employers to get back at them. The spaces which young people work in especially when they are unaccompanied place them in uneven geographies of power. Within the same spaces the young people managed to shift their vulnerable situations by coming up with ways to deal with the challenges. Shepherd for example, revealed that:

We used to have our cell phones even money robbed by guys who *bambi inkhunzi* (taking by force) at the church. We got tired of that so we organised a gang of all the school children at the church and went around on a rampage beating up all who we identified as having robbed one of ours.

The young people shifted from being victims of the thieves from the church to being feared by these dangerous people. The young people I spoke to referred to the above incident and they said from that day on there have been no incidents of young people who are robbed by these gangs. They did not wait for anyone to come to their rescue but they took it upon themselves to make sure that they were safe. The space of the church according to the young people was used by some of the adults including young gangs who made the church “an office of criminals”. They said that these gangs could go out steal and then run to the church which many feared even

to enter. That is why they felt they needed to deal with this problem which they managed to do because they say they have never been bothered by these gangs since they did that.

The spaces in between

The journey to Johannesburg is not an easy transition for most young people. The research participants did not have the same chronological journey that is from the border, show ground then to the church. Tendai and Mike's journeys were not linear but they managed to get to Johannesburg. Tendai had to go from the border to the farms around Musina to the Truck drivers then Johannesburg. He first had to go to a place called Kamsusi then to Bandrikorp, then to Sweet Mercary. In all these places he made sure that he avoided all the public spaces but followed the hidden farms where he worked. The farms are more of private spaces where the police do not always patrol which made them safe places. Tendai was abused and exploited by the different people whom he worked for in these hidden spaces. From this place he found himself along the main road, the N1, where he was assisted by a truck driver. He had walked to as far as Petersburg when he met the truck driver.

Mike also had a different route which got him to Johannesburg. He went from the border to SMG another detention prison like camp where those who were without asylum seekers permits were taken to and held in custody. His story shows how some young people managed to get to Johannesburg in equally challenging episodes but not following the same chronology as others. Fear of detention and deportation pushed some young people to take other routes leading to spaces which presented challenges as well. Mike recounts that:

After that we were taken to a place called SMG in Musina which is like a prison where they gave us food and blankets to sleep. After three days we were taken to another place which is like a

home affairs department where they asked us where we were going. We were given a paper which is not an asylum but just had an abbreviation for where you want to go such as JHB for Johannesburg or CPT for Cape Town. There was just your name and the abbreviation only allowing you to get to the place you want to go and then apply for an asylum at that place. The problem was then the transport money to get to Johannesburg and as I was still thinking on that one guy who was also given the same paper told me that he was also going to Johannesburg. He told me that I could go with him and then work for his sister in Johannesburg. For the money he just told me that I do not have to worry for his sister would pay for them when they got to Johannesburg. The guy talked to the taxi driver that my fare and his were to be paid forward which meant that the fare was to be paid by someone who will be waiting for us in Johannesburg of which the price for that kind of arrangement is double the normal price. The driver agreed and when we got to park station in Johannesburg the guy I was with asked the driver to be allowed to go to the toilet and he was allowed since the driver thought that we knew each other so there no chance of this Malawian guy I was with could run away and leave me behind. The guy left and never returned that is when I realised that this guy was used to this trickery leaving me in the hands of the taxi driver. So when the taxi driver discovered that he had been cheated he started relating his story to the other taxi drivers some of whom started beating me up and I could not cry at all, I just said to myself 'Welcome to Johannesburg'. The taxi driver stopped these other drivers from beating me up explaining to them that I am from Zimbabwe and the other guy is from Malawi and that they was no way I was part of the plan. The driver tried calling the number that the Malawian guy had given him saying that it was his sister's number who was to pay the fare but to no avail. The taxi driver was angry with me because he had to buy me food for he felt pity for me because I was too young. He went with me to Alexander gave me a blanket to sleep in the taxi. The following morning he took around and he kept on explaining to the other taxi drivers what had happened and when he would leave me with them they would beat me up, insult me and force me to wash their taxis. The driver then told me that he was going to take me back to Musina since there was no one who would take care of me since Johannesburg is dangerous, cold and without food or a place to stay I would not survive. It was late in the day and was on a Friday, I just told him that I am a Seventh Day Adventist so if there is an Adventist church nearby he could take me there. When he heard me say that he then said, 'ooh now I remember there is a church for Zimbabweans right here in town'. I just said yes because I thought the Adventist church was the church for Zimbabweans, he gave me a hundred rand and told me to look for someone to escort me to the Methodist Church.

In the context of migration, children do not experience vulnerability qualitatively the same in the different spaces they find themselves in. Their vulnerability shifts and changes within the same context that is when the children start realizing and creating opportunities for themselves. In different contexts their vulnerability also shifts as they move to the different spaces where they experience different challenges. In most cases from what I have shown from

the above stories, children though objectively vulnerable negotiate some of the vulnerabilities through their bodies.

The border presents a tough challenge for children as they are mostly at the mercy of the *guma gumas* who are the people whom they mostly trust to assist them in crossing over since they do not have legal documentation. In that space of the border the children have nothing much they do in order to negotiate their vulnerability because the space does not allow much of that to even happen. It is only unconsciously that sometimes their bodies do come in to magnify their vulnerability compared to the adult counterpart. The space of the border because of its invisibility makes the space more dangerous because the power is placed in the hands of the *guma gumas*. The forest of the border via the Limpopo is an invisible space within the visible space of the public border which puts both the young people and the old people in danger. The illegal cross border assistants help them through the forest in which they later on turn against these people robbing and raping some of them. The young people are seen as innocent, vulnerable and in need of care hence cannot be left to travel alone. This is suggested and supported even in the legal structures which do not permit children under 18 to cross the borders without the consent of the adults. Young people have been invisible in the migration studies for a long time because they were seen as just tagging along with their parents. This meant that the official border have not been making it easy for young people to cross unaccompanied hence they tried to make themselves invisible by taking the route which made them unseen but placing them in great danger at the same time.

The spaces provide certain chains of influence which creates certain vulnerabilities which the young people are subjected to. The places such as the border, showground and the church stand out as some of the spaces that create certain situations that act as deterrent or incitement of

vulnerability and agency. The spaces that most of the young people end up getting to are a result of the failure of the state in its preoccupation with trying to control or restrict young people from migrating. The assumption of children's need for protection from adults and their inability to participate in "public sphere" activities such as politics, marriage, and work further places young people in vulnerable positions. The border is amongst the places where the young people are seen as having trampled on restricted zones unless they are in the company of adults. In order to deal with such situations the young people avoid the public space of the border following the hidden path to their destination. The young people come up with strategies not only resulting from fear but are part of their innovative ways of dealing with challenges at the border. They try and make themselves invisible from the public spaces in which the adults dominate. They do this by taking the forest route avoiding the patrolled border with some fortunate young people getting assistance from the truck drivers who hide them in their trucks. This shows that there is need to look at the larger context which includes even the spaces which are responsible for some of the vulnerabilities young people encounter. The routes that were taken by Tendai provide rich ethnographic evidence showing how the young people are forced by the larger structures to use the hidden places in a struggle to get to Johannesburg. His journey is full of difficulties which can be attributed to the spaces that he used on his journey.

Within the show grounds children are placed in a dangerous space where they are vulnerable to a lot of different things but the space did allow for some space through which children manoeuvred around their vulnerability. Children have not only been invisible conceptually but also physically. Because of that fact some of the children had an advantage over the adults as they consciously played around their invisibility by using their bodies to cross the boundary of the restricted spaces in order to survive. There was certain work they could do

within the show grounds because of their youthfulness, they could go out of the show grounds and back making themselves more valuable in their vulnerability. Vulnerability in a way is shifting and not static and can also work as the flip side of agency and vice versa.

Lastly the church provides a place of safety for the children but the place also has its flaws. Children in that space even had some spaces within the church where they were exposed to certain vulnerabilities. The over crowdedness and lack of proper funding puts the children in other forms of vulnerability which are different from the border and the show ground. They had a roof over their head, a school, food and some other things like clothes. All these things were good but lack of consistence pushed children back to working in order to survive not because they loved working. Although migrant children cannot be looked at separately from work which is the desire of many when they leave in the time of crisis to either assist the family back home they found it difficult to work since the work only gave them relatively little, barely enough to survive. The school became the long term solution to their problems and whilst they worked on a bit-part basis for purposes of sustenance as they pursued studies. The lives of children are not simple but are quite complex in a way that placing them under one term like vulnerable or agency does not begin to explain and give an understanding of what goes on in their lives. Looking at it in the lens of shifting vulnerability in different spaces brings out their vulnerability and agency not in a fixed or simple way but in a complex and dynamic way.

Chapter three

Social relationships

I am waiting in the corridor of the second floor at the school of my interlocutors. I am feeling out of place because the corridor is filled with school children who are on a lunch break. I cannot decide whether to go to the form four's classroom to look for one of the boys I am supposed to meet today. A young boy comes to me and says, 'How are you, sir?' I take my time to respond because I cannot put a name to the face of this young boy who looks familiar. He is slim, tall and is well clad in grey trousers, a white clean shirt, striped neck tie and shiny pointed shoes. "You spoke to us the other day remember?" He continues. "When you were talking about this research of yours, you are from Wits right?"

The boy seems to know who I am, however I am very certain he is not one of the boys I spoke to. Since I do not want to be rude, I decide to take this opportunity to strike up a conversation. I let the boy lead the conversation. The boy asks me a lot of questions. I realise that this is not the first time he has spoken to researchers like me. He wants to know what my research is about, what I want to use it for. Is it going to be a documentary? Is the university paying me? How different am I from the BBC or the foreign and local journalists that have come to the school before?

What he really wants to know is what is in it for him? "Most of these people have made a lot of money because of our stories. What are you going to give us in return for our stories?" He pauses and looks me straight in the eyes in a piercing and anxious way. He expects me to answer him but I wait to hear what else he has to say. I can tell he is not yet through.

He goes on, “Are you not a secret agent sent by Mugabe sent to investigate us?” He pauses again. “Can I see your ID then?” This young person’s courage and boldness surprises me. I just take out my Identity Document (ID) and show him. To escape the loud noise, I ask him to come with me to the other side of the corridor. He follows me without hesitation because he has seen my ID. The principal of the school had also informed them about my visit to conduct interviews at the school. Once we are in a quiet space, I then tell him of my research, that I am a student and begin telling him about the research. He does not look impressed when I tell him I am a mere student and that I will not be paying for interviews.

He says to me, “You know what Simba; I would rather keep my story. I will write a book about my experiences so that I can sell it and make money. People have made a lot of money with our stories”. I thanked him for his time and he told me that his name is Judah then we parted ways. From there I make my way back to the form four’s class. This time I walk straight into the classroom and go up to the boy I had made an appointment with for my first interview.

Most people might interpret Judah’s assertiveness as cheeky. I understood Judah’s attitude as that of someone who was just looking out for himself. The journey to South Africa for the young unaccompanied migrant children that I spoke to was not easy. They met a lot of people along the way who treated them badly. As shown in the previous chapter, most were betrayed, used and had to stay in appalling conditions. Their encounters with different people had made them very wary of the people they meet. Most of the young people I spoke to first wanted to establish who I was. Their experiences with different people toughened them. Starting from the border and their encounters with the *guma gumas*, all the children who entered into agreements innocently ended up being abused and or having their belongings taken away from them.

The previous chapter looked at the shifting vulnerabilities of unaccompanied migrant children in the different spaces that the children found themselves in as they were on their way to Johannesburg. In this chapter I build on the ways in which the children were involved within the larger networks of social relationships that include both young people and adults. In doing this my focus will be on how social relationships shaped the vulnerabilities of the young people as they interacted with people in the different spaces. My argument in this chapter is that children are involved in social relationships as they make their journey to Johannesburg which shapes and shifts the vulnerabilities of these children. Their social world is not simple and straight forward neither is it existing outside other relationships. They meet people who make them feel and react in certain ways which are not always feelings of gratitude but sometimes fear and pain. Even with the odds pitted against them in some of these relationships the young people are not just docile players in the interaction but direct the outcome of the associations in creative ways.

Hunted and preyed upon

This section is born out of the kind of relationships that the young people encountered. The young people met different people along the way relating to them in ways that can be better understood by incorporating the Amerindian perspective idea as presented by Viveros de Castro. Viveros de Castro (1998; 477) notes that, ‘Animals impose the same categories and values on reality as humans do: their worlds, like ours, revolve around hunting and fishing, cooking and fermented drinks, cross-cousins and war, initiation rituals, shamans, chiefs, spirits. In all this the main idea is on the relationships that people engage in, which are influenced by the Amerindian perspectives. The Amerindian perspectival thought suggests that the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons which are at play in the social relationships. The subjects he

argues are created by the point of view which activates or gives agency. The way in which people relate depends on the way they perceive each other of which in the animal kingdom according to the Amerindians one is perceived to be either a hunter or prey. The relationships are not dependent upon appearance because it may be deceptive for no one is certain as to which view is at play in different times and places. Viveros de Castro (1998; 478) argues that, 'The visible shape of the body is a powerful sign of these differences in affect, although it can be deceptive since human appearance could, for example, be concealing a jaguar-affect'. The journey of the young people was full of mixed challenges which emanated from the different people they met who perceived them in certain ways and whom they also perceived in certain ways.

The metaphor of the hunt is useful in showing some of the relationships that the children had with some of the people they met along the way and in Johannesburg. A hunter preys on both the weaker and strong animals in different circumstances. Journalists and researchers from different organisations have been flocking in to get stories and make documentaries from the experiences of unaccompanied migrants at alarming rates. They, like the hunters which have discovered a hunting ground full of game, are scrambling to get the game. The animals that are preyed upon are not all helpless. They have mechanisms or ways of defending themselves. Judah's behaviour draws attention to the relationships that developed between the children and the researchers. Judah chose to negotiate his position with me by trying to dictate the way things should be. Judah had learnt from his experience that there are always three positions one is either the hunter, prey or just an equal.

In most of the relationships that young people are involved in there are two positions. In some instances there are however in between position in which the relationship is based on

mutual, genuine respect for each other. In most instances there is still the hunter who is more powerful in the relationship meaning that the hunter is stronger and in control. The hunter always takes away possessions be it material or harming the physical body of the prey. The prey conversely is the weak, powerless having no control. In this relationship, the shift is all about who becomes the hunter or the hunted upon. The prey might be stronger than the hunter but the circumstances under which the relationship might occur put the weaker prey at an advantage than the stronger. This all rests upon the Amerindian perspectivism on which the view plays an important role in the relationship. How are the people within the relationship viewing each other? Is one among them perceiving one to be prey or the hunter or as a subject, who is an equal? That is what affects the vulnerability of the young people in the relationships they encounter along the way.

Some children tell stories which emphasize their vulnerabilities in the hope that some of the stories appeal to the researchers who they expect to feel pity and give them something in return. Judah, for example, did not wait to be approached because he did not want to miss out on an opportunity to entice the prey. He knew that he could trade his story for some form of payment. In his calculations, I was someone who had some resources to spare and he had something important that I needed from him.

Judah did not stop coming to me even though he refused to take part in the research. He would come to me whenever I went the school and he would say, “Hey Simba! How is your research going, did you get some people to interview?” I would just smile at him and reply, “No, not yet my friend, I want to start with you”. He would say, “You are not serious, I told you, if you want my story then I have to also get something in return otherwise I will keep my story and

write a book one day”. Judah did not let up about the payment he thought he deserved. He even managed to convince a group of his friends not to take part in the research.

The relationship of the children with the researchers had become that of a reciprocal rapport in which they told the story and they got paid for their effort. What they were trying was to shift the centre of power to say that they were the ones who have the story hence the power to decide on who gets the story and at what cost. The first time I got to their school, the headmaster introduced me to the young people instructing them to cooperate with me. They listened to what the principal had to say but afterwards not all of them agreed to what he said. Some set their own conditions. This is what had become the relationship of these children and the researchers. The fact that the people who were flocking to the school used to pay them shaped the way in which they related to anyone who comes to their space as a researcher.

The children try shifting their vulnerability in order to create opportunities for themselves. Their encounter with different associates along their journey or in their daily encounters enables them to understand the dynamics of hunter-prey encounters. The centre of power is not fixed but is always shifting and so is vulnerability embedded in the social relationships that children find themselves in.

Some of the stories and documentaries that the children took part in brought some things in return, like the reports on BBC and 3rd degree which put the school and the children on television resulting in funding and a lot of donations. This has led to a different relationship between young people and those from universities or media houses including NGOs and private institutions such as the banks that are part of the groups sponsoring the school. Being a student researcher placed me in an awkward position because to them I was still someone with resources.

So I had to be careful because I was at risk of being preyed upon and not get to really understand the lives of these young people. Unaccompanied migrant children in this case had certain social relationships which shaped and shifted the vulnerability which these young people experienced.

Eeh, Mr Simba. I am sorry; I totally forgot that we had an appointment. Can you come back tomorrow or if you can manage, you can wait for me here because I want to go and see a friend in town. Eeh, do you have ten rand? I am really hungry I need to get something to eat (Lucas).

Lucas is 16 years old. I never got to interview him as he was always late for our appointments. He would arrive late and try to get some money from me. In Luca's eyes, I was prey because what he was after was not for me to waste his time doing the interview but to give him what he wanted. He agreed to do the interview but never kept his promises. However he was insistent in asking for money for food, airtime or books.

Shepherd who became one of my first interlocutors came from the same area with me in Zimbabwe. He warned me about some of the stories his peers were using. He and I developed a relationship of trust having established that I knew exactly where his home is back in Zimbabwe. This made him more open to me on issues concerning his life and the lives of his friends. One day I went with him to Shoprite in Eloff Street where the principal had sent him on an errand to send money to a friend of his. As we were in the queue he said to me, "You should know that not all these guys know what crossing the border through the forest is like. They just lie to people like you. Some of them crossed the border with the assistance of the truck drivers". He warned me of young people who preyed on researchers. He told me that they can tell researchers who come, well calculated accounts even when they did not give true accounts of their lives. He also told me about the popular stories about crossing the border through the forest. These stories proved to be very marketable to the researchers who were coming to the school because it is not every day that people get a real story of a real child surviving a raid from a dangerous group.

Crossing the border through the forest was also something that the young people placed a value on rather than crossing with the assistance of the truck drivers or bribing the border officials. When the young people say someone has “an interesting story” it was because he or she had crossed the hard way which was through the forest. Shepherd’s warning made me wary of some of the stories that some of the young people wanted to tell. I decided to take my time and get to know the young people. This enabled me to develop different ways of trying to get to their ‘truthful’ accounts.

The young people draw upon limited structures of feeling and possibility of actions; they have come to know over their journey. In the case of Judah and his friends they had become powerful negotiators and holders of knowledge about themselves. They have become some sort of gate keepers to the information or studies conducted at the school. Making sure that they get what they consider to be the value or compensation for giving out information on their experiences. In most instances the young people have loved to be presented as innocent and vulnerable especially to journalists who to them are more generous in terms of gifts and compensation for the time rendered. The way the young people perceive the researcher or the journalist is what determines the way they present themselves which might be as innocent and vulnerable or powerful negotiators and holders of knowledge.

In what follows I discuss the relationships that are popular amongst most young people who used the forest in crossing over to South Africa. Their relationship with the *guma gumas* comes out in most of the stories with a lot of detail on what transpired when they encountered this group.

The guma gumas

The *guma gumas* thrive on robbing people of their possessions whilst crossing the border via the bush. These gangs operate in the invisible space of the border which is a place far and excluded from the public sphere. They prey on the people they assist in crossing the border through this route but whilst in these invisible spaces they then turn against the people robbing them of their possessions, assaulting and sometimes raping them. These gangs are invisible, operating in the hidden space of the border where people only go when they do not have an option. It is only through the people who have been in contact with these gangs that get to see them.

There is a complex relationship between the unaccompanied children and the *guma gumas*. The children in the hands of the *guma gumas* are undoubtedly like the helpless prey as they are at the mercy of these gangs. Their money, clothes and all the other possessions are often taken away from them. Those who are unfortunate are subjected to sexual assault, rape and having their genitals searched or threatened with mutilation. The encounter between the unaccompanied migrants and the *guma gumas* is short lived. It can be over within a few minutes or within a few hours but the encounter leaves a lasting impression.

The encounter exposes the children's vulnerability because there are no rules of conduct. While each child had a unique experience there were certain similarities in their narratives that show how the *guma gumas* operated. This part of the journey is usually during the night. In that space children do not have time to think or do anything as there is a lot of rushing, action, panic which creates fear. The *guma gumas* capitalise on the confusion and fear. The relationship of the

guma guma as the hunter and the people who are being assisted as the prey is revealed as those in their guidance have possessions taken away from them. When the hunter attacks it creates an element of shock and it is usually at that very moment that the prey gets caught or midst the terror created by the hunter. When the tiger or the lion roars, it is to create fear and intimidation upon the prey which becomes fearful giving in or running towards the hunter due to confusion. To the *guma guma* the fear and confusion they instil on the people they prey upon also works in their favour making it easy to rob and or harm their prey. The perception that the young people have of the *guma guma*, the very moment they meet is wrong as they are deceived. This goes back to Viveros de Castro 1998's argument that the view or perspective is what matters because it is responsible for creating the subject. The moment the *guma gumas* see the young people they see easy prey which is their view in their relationship with the children.

When we had crossed the first fence we were handed over to another group and they led us deep into the bush and more of their associates appeared from the bush carrying knives and all sorts of weapons. I was scared not knowing what was happening they took away all our money. I could not even do anything because these guys were really fierce and looked dangerous (Tapiwa).

Almost all the children told me that they took their best clothes to South Africa because they heard rumours of how beautiful and nice the country was. They imagined a country in which they have to be presentable because they would meet nice and smart people so to blend in one has to be well dressed. The kinds of relationships they were anticipating were disrupted by what they experience right from the border.

I thought my troubles were over when I met the *guma gumas* who said they would take us to South Africa. I never anticipated that these guys were there to rob us. I had thought that from the border into South Africa things were going to be glamorous but the people we met changed the whole picture I had of the nice country I was running to (Mike).

Some endured the harassment of the *guma gumas* they even thought their troubles were over because they never thought that they would experience anything more than their encounter with this group of people.

They took away all my clothes and my nice jacket which I really loved. I had taken all my best clothes since I was going to South Africa. They just left me with my books which I had taken with me because I had heard of free education in South Africa. I gladly gave away my clothes because I thought that my worries will be over as soon as I get to South Africa (Mike).

The *guma gumas* were not all hard all the time. They were sometimes flexible and considerate. Some of the *guma gumas* did not beat up children but treated them with a little bit of leniency which is what most of the accounts of the children show:

We had heard about people who had their things stolen by some of the *guma gumas* but we were just lucky because we had many women with us who just protected us and said these are children (Memory).

The *guma gumas* took my friend's shoes, there were still new and we had bought them in Harare the shoes were very nice and were still in fashion. He was told to put on the shoes that the *guma guma* was putting on and I tell you the shoes were old and tattered there were really bad. I really don't even know what made him change his mind; he just gave back the shoes and took back his shoes. I think he felt sorry for us because they had taken a lot of money from us. He then took us to the taxi rank just outside the South African border where there were taxis to Musina (Mike).

I told them I didn't have any money left, they told me to carry bags for one of the women who had child and three big bags. From there they never asked for money from me..... They took my clothes and my shoes. One of them told me to look for a pair of shoes which I can fit into because they were a lot of pairs of shoes that were lying on the ground (Lucciano).

In all these accounts by the young people they even mentioned some of these acts of compassion from the *guma guma* who are always portrayed as people without sympathy. Tendai one of the young people I spoke to also told me of how he was even directed to Tick farm where he could look for work by one of the *guma gumas* when he told them he did not have any money to get him to Johannesburg. The fact that they cared for what happens to some of the young people in their near future like whether they really get to cross over as shown by their concern

that Tendai gets a job, Mike and his friend get to the bus stop, they had their shoes, they were not beaten up reveals that they had various views about these children. Viveros de Castro argues that there are no boundaries but angles in the way people perceive. The *guma gumas* also in some instances had different angles from which they viewed and related to the young people.

Tendai had an unfortunate encounter with the people he met with when he first crossed over to the South African side. When he was running away from the police he met a man who was driving his truck in a place called Kamsusi. The truck driver was going to Musina so he told Tendai to wait for him and that he was going to come for him. He was taken to this man's plot to herd goats and sheep. He was given food but the money for the food was deducted from his wage. At the end of the month he was only given 80 rand and considering what he was getting in terms of food he ran away. From that place he just took off in his gumboots and followed the rail line until he got to a place called Bandrikorp close to Sweet Mercary. It took him almost a week to walk to Bandrikorp which is close to the first toll gate when travelling from Johannesburg to Musina.

So as I got there I met someone who was from the same area I come from in Zimbabwe and even though we were not related he got me a job where I worked as a garden boy. I was working for a Boer and he really was good at assaulting. So when I had worked for him and it was now towards the end of month he started beating me up. He used to clap me real hard that month end. I was still fifteen during that time so I just decided to leave again. I walked to a place called Sweet Mercary and got a job which was to herd cattle (Tendai).

He had worked at his plot where he was staying alone looking after this farmers cattle who when he came always wanted to see all his cattle. He worked for six months without getting paid as the man he was working for insisted that he would give him a once off payment when he is ready to go back to Zimbabwe. The man who was once a police officer had a gun. When Tendai asked for his money after six months of work, the man said;

‘Ooh you want your money? Come on lets go to the bank and I will give you your money’. We drove off his property until we got to N1 road near a place called Toks, as we got there he told me to get out of the car pulling out his gun telling me to walk away and if I give him any problems he would kill me. I became powerless and could not even say anything so I just walked following N1 (Tendai).

Most of the young people were unfortunate in their encounters with the *guma gumas* whom they had trusted to help them cross the border. They could not discern properly the characters of these guys who ended up robbing them. In this encounter it was one of the first painful experiences for some who had thought that meeting these guys meant the end of their problems. They thought the *guma guma* were better understanding than the other officials at the border. To these gangs the young people were just viewed as prey and nothing much which made them innocent and vulnerable to the *guma gumas*.

Merciful hunter

There is a group of people who have been painted as child hijackers for a long time by most human rights activists and organisations working with children who in the stories of the children I was working with were actually not harming but helping young people. The truck drivers put themselves at risk of been accused of child trafficking considering the report by the Human Sciences Research Council (2010). They report that human trafficking has been a problem in South Africa especially in borders like Musina. They put themselves on the firing line from the police officers and the immigration officers. They assisted some young people to cross the border by hiding them in their trucks and bribing the immigration officers and the police in an effort to assist the young people cross the border. Hashim and Thorsen (2011;17) note that the Palermo Protocol distinguishes between smuggling and trafficking in which smuggling refers to the movement of individuals where the individual has consented, while trafficking involves the

threat and use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception or abuse of power. The danger the truck drivers put themselves in, is great because they face charges of trafficking. The protocol states that those under the age of eighteen the issue of consent is irrelevant. O'Connell Davidson cited in Hashim and Thorsen (2011) states that the implication is that those under the age of eighteen are incapable of exercising meaningful choice, in the process inextricably linking the status of 'child' with that of 'victim' or 'potential victim'. This does not however save them from the law as they are regarded as trafficking in assisting these young people. Innocent, one of the study participants noted that:

While at the border the police officers were asking for passports. I despised the sound of the word passport as I did not have one. The driver told me to hide under the bed. I heard someone saying he wanted to search inside the truck and the driver promised to pay three hundred rand. There was no search conducted and we safely crossed the border. When we were in Musina there were a lot of road blocks and the driver was paying the police for me not to be arrested. We arrived in Johannesburg around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The driver dropped me and gave me twenty rand. He told me to be vigilant as life is not easy in a foreign land. I thanked him and we parted (Innocent).

The truck drivers helped some of the children who crossed the border without any hassles like the ones who crossed with the assistance of the *guma gumas*. The fact that children are thought of as not having the capacity to make their own personal decisions Hashim and Thorsen (2011), in crossing the border this assumption places the drivers in an awkward situation as they are forced to bribe the police officers all the way to Johannesburg. Helping the young people then turns against them because they are then perceived as the ones who are behind the idea of children crossing the borders, the idea of coercion is added to the whole situation as O'Connell Davidson states above. Such ideas places children in a more vulnerable position as they are then forced to turn to other means and people who can abuse them.

Mike left his home in Zimbabwe because he was afraid of persecution from the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change which is the biggest opposition party. His father was a prominent ZANU PF member and a war veteran at the same time. He used to instil fear on the members of the opposition also organising groups of people to beat up the members of the opposition and when he died of a natural cause the opposition members wanted to take the vengeance upon Mike's family. Since it was only Mike and his mother, he decided to flee for his life because the opposition members had started attacking and killing their cattle from the grazing fields and one day they even got to their kraal killing more cattle. They sent a message that they were after his father's children that is when he ran for his life. He went to his sister's place in the capital Harare from his home area of Rusape. That is where he also heard rumours that the members of the opposition in the city knew about him forcing him to obtain an Emergency Travelling Document (ETD) at the home affairs only to be denied entry at the South African side at the border. This took him to the *guma gumas* whilst running away from the persecution from his own country only to be rescued by the police who let him free. He said, "When the police came after hearing the noise from the argument I was having with this *guma guma* who wanted me to give him hundred rand, they asked me where I was going and if I had anyone in South Africa waiting for me and I just lied and I said yes. They asked me for his number and I told them that he is well known at Park Station, where he works so when I get there people will show me where he will be and they let me go". The reason why the children and other old people use the forest in the first place is to avoid being arrested by the police and home affairs officials. The police officers are figures of the law and authority which the young people are running away from. Police officers pose the threat of arrest and deportation so the

children try and avoid them at all cost. Young people find it surprising and confusing when the police treat them with sympathy. Bright recounts:

I never forget this other day when I was in Musina. I and my friend went to work for this white man and when we were done on our way back to the show grounds the police caught us and put us in their van. They drove and got to town near spar and they opened the van and just went into the shop. We were shocked because they just let us go and did not deport us but gave us lift instead (Bright).

The police officers who these young people have learnt to fear and are well known for deporting them actually assisted them in some instances. The police officers are the reason why the young people are confined to the show grounds. The only time they see them is when they are only there to take away dead bodies and not to protect them but in the instance above they defied the young people's expectations. They were not the only ones who had this experience with the police officers but Tendai as well. He met the officers who took him from the forest where they caught him only to drop him off near the main road. He said that he had no hope of staying in South Africa when the police took him away but he was surprised when they let him go.

I owe my life to my friend. He fed us and looked after us. He had to go to town every day, work and bring food for us to eat since we looked older than him which meant that going into town we risked being deported. We found him at the show ground already, he came ten months earlier than us and he was very familiar with the town. He just could not get an asylum because he was too young just like us. He just looked younger on appearance than us. He had already built a little shack using card board boxes which he invited us to share the place with him (Bright).

Amongst the children they have very close relationships which are cemented by the shared experiences from back home to the way they crossed over to South Africa. Tendai says that the young people whom he is staying with know him even better than the way people in his own family back home know him. He and most of the young people shared their food during lunch and toiletries with those who did not have. They also mentioned that they regarded each

other as brothers and sisters. They call themselves a family consisting of brothers and sisters in mutual relationships protecting and providing for each other. The more experienced young people take care of the needs of the new ones coming in to join them like in the case of Kelvin below.. In this instance there is an in between where it is not the case of hunter-prey relationship but a mutual relationship based on trust among the young people. When they have associations amongst themselves it is based on trust and shared experience in which they become very loyal to each other setting their own mutual rules. Failure to abide by the rules would mean expulsion from the group. Bright ended up parting ways with his friend whom he had crossed the border with because he refused to share the food he had got with the young boy who had been looking after them whilst at the show ground. This shows how the young people valued their imagined family.

...when the issue of taking children to the shelters came about and we didn't want to be taken to these shelters. For the time we had stayed together with other children we could scold each other, fight each other but with all this we were already taking each other as brothers and sisters. If I happen to get sick, they would know what was wrong with me and we got to know each other even more than the people back home would know each one of us. I can say we know how to take care of our own better than anyone else. So what these people were saying was that they would separate us taking us to different shelters. (Tendai)

During my field work I had an opportunity to witness what happens to the new arrivals. Shepherd told me of the new boy who joined them whilst I was still conducting my field work. The young boy had left home because he was having problems with his father. He told me that his father and mother were not poor people but they had everything that they wished for in their family. His parents were working, the father is an electrician and the mother is a teacher. He said, "I know I disrespected my father because he always wanted us to be home by six everyday and I did not want that. I had friends whom I wanted to hang out with. I used to argue a lot with

my father. The time I decided to come to South Africa, I had gone home late one night and my father did not open the gate for me so I just left”.

Since he left home in 2010, he had been working in farms until he moved to Johannesburg in 2012 and it was in July. When he got to the Bishop he had nothing with him and I was introduced to this boy named Kelvin during the same week he arrived. I saw him in school uniform and he told me that he got the uniform from his roommates. The following week they had a civic day in which they come to school in their own clothes. He was also well dressed, in trendy tennis shoes, big t-shirt, almost new jeans and fancy sunglasses. I also asked him where he got these things so quickly considering that he was less than two weeks at the home. He told me that he got clothes from Shepherd and the other roommates.

Young people find strength in their numbers and use their unity to break through their vulnerability. Most of the young people told of how they united to deal with the problem of gangs and thieves who were robbing them off their possessions. They said that they just looked for weapons organising themselves and going after all the gang members they knew because most of them were staying at the church. They beat them up and from that day they are feared and have no problems with the gangs. This was not the only incident but they also organised themselves in the same way in Soweto to beat up the gangs of people who were coming at their flat making noise, drinking and throwing stones at them. This shows that the young people have multiple ways of dealing with the complex experiences in their daily lives. They learn throughout their journey that they need to unite for their own benefit in order to survive.

The government social workers

The relationship which the young people have established with the government social workers is a difficult one since they got to Johannesburg. What the government social workers thought was the solution to the young people staying at the church was actually acting against what the young people regarded as their answer. What they did not realise was the fact that the young people had established relationships that they could live with and did not want any disruption to. Being moved to other shelters meant cutting ties with a group of people who had become the source and strength of their identity. Like what some of the accounts above show, they had what they called a family with them which they considered more caring and understanding to their individual and collective situations.

So what these people were saying was that they would separate us taking us to different shelters and we had to do matric. During that time all they were doing was so complicated for us and the way they were telling us about this was not even a nice way but was rather a very painful way. They even took other children saying that they were going to show them the shelters they were supposed to go to but as soon as they got into the vans they were taken to places where they did not even want to go never to come back. The other thing was that the schools were about to close and were happy that we about to travel to Botswana since we were the winners of the inner city arts festival. There was a paper which the people from social development were supposed to sign for us to make this trip since we were unaccompanied minors but they refused to sign the papers because we had refused to go to the shelters. The social workers came whilst we were at school three days before the trip whilst we were preparing to go for the competitions with their vans. They told us to get into the school hall where they started telling us of the conditions at the shelters and informing us that we were leaving for the shelters. They were told to go and sit in the office of the principal to give us time to have our lunch. This was a plan made by our teachers and the principal since they loved us and were from Zimbabwe they just opened the door at the back which the social workers were not aware of. We all ran away jumping over the barbed wire. We spent the whole day away from school and the church because we only used the church for sleeping whilst we had our lunch, supper, studied and bathed at school. When it was evening we wanted to go to sleep at the church but we were informed that they are already waiting for us at the church. We were taken to SAWIMA then to Rivonia because the Bishop did not want us to be found and taken by the social workers to places we did not want to go. That's how we got to be taken to Soweto by the Bishop and then a curator was appointed to look into the interests of the children although I did not see what exactly he did but we were happy that were not taken away (Tendai).

All the young people I spoke to who were at the church during the period the social workers raided the church building at dawn spoke about this invasion. The children were not happy with the actions of the social workers as well as what they intended to do. The hopes and aspirations of the children were predicated on both the school and the relationships they had established within the city. They trusted their teachers more than the social workers and this was expressed by Memory:

Our teachers are good to us though they are tough when it comes to school work. They stood by what we wanted and what was good for us when the government social workers came for us. They created an opportunity for our escape. They come from our country and most of them are asylum seekers as well so they understand us better (Memory).

The teachers at the school all came from Zimbabwe and some of them stayed within the confines of the church. They come from a country where the education system is similar to the Cambridge system which the teachers value immensely. In my conversations with the teachers they revealed that their school made headlines for achieving good grades and for defying the odds. The children had a good relationship with the school and the teachers who helped produce the best Cambridge examination results in the country; coming only second to St Georges, a well-resourced, private institution. The children therefore placed faith in their teachers and the Cambridge examination system which to them were ticket to success. Though the young people come to South Africa with the hope of success through work, education has always been a source of inspiration and a means of success in the Zimbabwean context they come from.

In contrast to the teachers, the government social workers were seen by the young people as individuals whose main focus was to make life difficult for them. The children felt that social workers had placed them in a difficult position by demanding their relocation to shelters. They could not trust the social workers because they were coming from a nation where their own

government had failed to protect them from negative impacts of the political and economic conditions. Such mistrust was worsened by the fact that the social workers were denying them the right to take part in the competitions taking place in Botswana; an opportunity they had rightly earned by winning the arts festival competition in South Africa. Tendai, one of my informants complained that:

We had packed our bags ready for the Botswana trip and competitions. We had worked hard to earn the position and we thought this was going to be a new beginning in our disrupted lives.

The fractious and distrustful relationship the children had with the social workers shattered the vision the children once had of South Africa, as a land of opportunities where they could realize their ambitions. One of the good and positive things to ever happen to them after crossing the border was taking part in the regional competition and the failure to realize this dream complicated their relationship with the social workers hence they did not want to leave the church for the shelters. Shepherd for example, stated that:

The government social workers wanted to take children by force. They were unreasonable and very ignorant of what was happening; we stay in different floors with from the adults and girls. We were staying in the vestry and had adult care givers who made sure we had no one who bothered us; we were inside by 7:30 and had time to study without being disturbed. Some of the students had already registered, were about to write their exams and moving them to go to other homes meant going a step back and one had to start doing matric which is different from Cambridge which we are familiar with even at home we have such a syllabus. They only wanted to force us into doing what they thought was the right thing for us.

The complex relationship the children have with other people and their surroundings is important to them. It was important for the young people to continue being among people they shared similar experiences with. One of the main objectives many of the children had in moving from their homes was to seek work and the intervention of taking them into institutions away from the city also meant new rules and which meant there was a possibility of being separated from the opportunities they had managed to create within the inner city. At the show grounds and

within Musina in general, schools admitted unaccompanied migrant children and provided them basic amenities such as shelter as well as food. While this seemed favourable, the children had still left Musina to get to Johannesburg where they believed opportunities were more diverse and better. The Central Business District (CBD) where the church and the school are located was imperative for the children to the extent that they were willing to resist relocation away from the church. Tendai asserted that:

But now came this issue of the 2010 soccer World Cup. This really gave us a hard time because there were campaigns to clean up the cities as they wanted to get rid of all the street kids. It was around November 2009 and we were still staying at the church during the early morning around five when we were still sleeping. The police came with their armoured cars with one of the MEC but I do not quite remember from where, they were a lot of journalists with their cameras. I was really embarrassed because the police were also holding their guns. They just walked straight to where the school children were sleeping and did not even bother to go to where the adults were sleeping but just proceeded to where we were.

Furthermore, the CBD seemed to have made it possible for a growing relationship of the children with their work at the Sunday Times which was a means to their association with the wealthy white people in the affluent Northern suburbs. The young boys who are working for Sunday Times distributing and selling newspapers on Sundays have essential relationships with the wealthy white people in the Northern suburbs who they say are very generous people. Shepherd attested that working for the Sunday Times

...Is not about the money we get from selling the newspapers we get around 80 rand and you also have to remove the transport cost. It is more to do with the interaction we have with the white people in the suburbs.

The young people take the white clients as sources of the so much needed resources to pay their fees, buy school uniforms, food and clothing.

The question of what made their interaction with white customers more special than that which obtained between the children and adults at the church is imperative. The relationship that the migrant children are concerned about was one that was productive and beneficial for them. The children often stated that they preferred going to work on Sundays distributing newspapers because they met white people who were very kind. The white clients' gave the children tips, food, piece jobs and some of their friends were even adopted by some of the white people who are now paying for their school fees and staying with them. The girls also got to benefit from these kind wealthy people because the boys also put in a good word for the girls so that they were called during weekends to wash, clean houses and iron clothes. In many of the accounts and narratives of the young people, the relationships that they mentioned and were proud of involved people who gave them assistance and these included truck drivers and female vendors at the show grounds. The adults at the church, who together with the children faced profound hardships and struggled to survive, are rarely mentioned in the accounts given by children. The adults at the church did not have much to offer the children because they were also striving to survive.

I suggest here that children who are in this particular situation privileged relationships with people from whom they derived material benefits rather than those with little or no material things to offer. They mostly came to seek success and they see it potentially actualized through selling their vulnerability to the people who are in a position to give something in return. The children in this case mobilise and maximise the self expressed identities of helplessness. When Bright explained what they do in the suburbs, he calls it 'hustling' which places them in the position of resourceful entrepreneurs. The phones, uniforms, food and all the other things they need to survive they get from hustling in the suburbs. The children present themselves to the

white people in the affluent northern suburbs of Johannesburg as innocent and vulnerable young people trying to earn a life in the most respectable way.

For the young people their interaction are not only about having people to talk to but there had to be material things attached to the relationships especially with the whites from the suburbs. A successful interaction is the one in which a thriving material transaction has taken place which is why the Sunday Times job is important to them. Working at the Sunday Times is a means to seek surrogate parents, possibly earning a ticket to finish school successfully and getting to college. The Government raid meant a potential end to all these dreams. Contrary to what the children in Reynold's study of the Tonga in Zambezi Valley, in which children used work as a means of gaining respect, recognition, being accorded positions of dignity and worth, the young people are using work as a means of exposing their vulnerability and selling it. They go to work posing as innocent victims who need care and protection that is they need surrogate parents to take care of them. This emphasizes the point I made earlier that, in the context of migration working for children differs from working at home in that in the context of migration it is about survival and not socialization. Working, for these children, was less to do with the position of dignity and esteem but a lot to do with position of vulnerability. Pursuing a livelihood in the affluent neighbourhoods created much needed hunting ground for their prey who in this case is the wealthy white people.

Young people go through a complex web of social relationships which make their journey to South Africa painful and in some instances smooth. The relationships they find themselves in complicate their vulnerabilities, which are not static but always shifting. Children are involved with people who in a way define their position with regards to relations but this

chapter shows that young people are not passive recipients of these situations but also speak back or redefine these relationships as well.

The chapter has shown that young people behave the way they do guided by certain perceptions of some of the relationships they encounter. Sometimes their perceptions are wrong which leads them to some relationships with people like the *guma gumas* who give them a torrid time. Some view the police as working against their interests which is why they get surprised when they are sometimes given help by the police.

In other instances, the children trust the right people like the truck drivers who help them cross the borders until they get to Johannesburg. Meeting different people along their journey and at the place of destination shapes the way in which the young people chose to relate with people around them including the people they meet in their everyday life. The encounters they have had with different people have given them certain knowledge about the nature of human beings and how they should approach them. People like researchers or journalists who have formed part of a larger group of people who have come to them whilst at the church and at the school have made children more suspicious of the intentions of the people who approach them.

From the border young people encounter people who make their life difficult and in those situations children often surrender to the hands of these people who are like hunters in their operations. This is affected by how people view each other in these relationships hence creating different kind of subjects.

In this chapter I used the metaphor of the hunter-prey relations to explain and give an understanding of the relationship that the young people had with those people who waited upon them to take advantage of their innocence. In looking at that situation, I did not end by looking at

the young people from the lens of vulnerability but to their creativity in negotiating these relationships which are often pitted against them. In some instances, young people were just helpless hence they decided to flee or walk away from such relationships whilst on the other hand they decided to stand their ground and deal with the challenges they encountered. In certain cases some of the children turned their situations into assets in order to overcome some of the vulnerable positions that they found themselves in. Young people in their journey and everyday lives have to deal with some abusive relationships, which have put them in unpleasant situations because some of the people who are supposed to protect them, in the case of the government social workers have also acted to the young people as those who are against them. Although the social workers are doing their job in trying to assist the young people they approach them as victims who cannot know or consent to what is in their best interest.

Some people whom the young people come across in their journey and daily lives offer these young people relief from the painful experiences in their life. The people who have for long being accused of being coercing and trafficking children the truck drivers are among the people who understand young people in their sight. They went out of their way in assisting the young people in getting to their destinations despite the challenges they had to go through in order to achieve this. They also risked being arrested, paid bribes from their own resources in order to assist the young people. The other group which the young people still look for and up to are the white residents in the Northern suburbs who also have come to assist the child migrant strangers working in their neighbourhoods. Although white residents take the young people as just innocent passive victims they do not realise that they are in a way being preyed upon. The young people know their situation well, selling their vulnerability in order to benefit from their

relationship with the white clients. In such instances, the young people have viewed themselves as entrepreneurs trading on their innocence and vulnerability which is how they opt to be viewed.

Understanding the vulnerability in the lives of the young people is not simple but rather complex and requires that vulnerability be viewed as shifting rather than fixed. Viewing vulnerability as fixed may obscure some of the things happening in the lives of the children. Allowing children the space to speak and explain the relationships they have had throughout their journey gives a better insight into their lives. Their vulnerability is not stable but always shifting as has been shown by the kind of relationships these children have encountered and still continue to encounter. The other thing is that children are not only recipients in these relationships hence the need to follow the young people through the constantly shifting positions and centres to comprehend the shifting vulnerabilities. Young people are able to resist the stereotypical categories by proving that they are active decision makers even in cases where the odds are pitted against them they are able to fight and shape the existing structures.

Conclusion

The recent focus and discourse on childhood studies in different fields in the social sciences has enriched dialogue about children. The dialogue has been dominated by efforts to conceptualize and define childhood in various ways. Due to an increase in the number of unaccompanied migrant children migrating to South Africa from various parts of Africa even from as far afield as West Africa, there have been concerns and pertinent issues on the nature of childhood. By focusing on the lives of young immigrants from Zimbabwe this study is an attempt to contribute to the body of literature on children. This chapter, drawing from the data presented in preceding chapters, will discuss and emphasize the ways in which space and relationships that children enter into, affect their vulnerability. The chapter will conclude the thesis by pulling the main arguments raised in the thesis together.

In most academic discussions on children, the focus has been either to emphasize their agency at one extreme or their vulnerability at the other. These two concepts have been at the centre of analysis in childhood studies. While the two concepts are useful analytic tools, in most discussions these concepts have been fixed. It has been either the child is vulnerable or has agency with nothing in between. There still remains a gap in coming up with multiple ways of discussing agency and vulnerability. The more young people step out of the fixed categories they are boxed into the more complex ones and it becomes difficult to understand and define childhood. Hashim and Thorsen (2011) note that the easiest thing to do is to represent the migration of young people as entailing only danger and deviance. The negative perception on

child migration is partly to do with the dominance of the Western conceptualization of childhood which treats migrating children as out of place. In trying to get beyond these ideals there is also need to come up flexible concepts which take account of emerging complexities in childhood experiences.

The distinction between adulthood and childhood which I looked at in the first chapter highlights how this has affected children. The distinction is what has led to the growing concern on children who are moving across international borders. The ways in which the host nations and international organisations craft and treat young people is determined by the views held on the nature of children and childhood. The experiences of young immigrants are impacted by this distinction which often influences the responses aimed at addressing the ‘problem of unaccompanied migrants’ as their movement is labelled. The response by the state and the adults impacts on the vulnerability of young people and how they experience migration in general. The way they come to view and relate with other people and spaces is also affected by this distinction. As I have shown, the young people’s relationships and their experiences of space are affected by being both children and unaccompanied immigrants at one and the same time.

The sudden interest by the South African government in attempting to take out all the young people from the inner city church to children’s shelters out of town was taken as a political move and was not in the best interest of the young people. Tendai, one of the young people said that the government wanted to take them to the shelters because of the world cup which was being hosted by South Africa in 2010 and their presence was perceived as potentially attracting bad publicity for the nation. Although some of the views held by children may be inaccurate they realize and they are knowledgeable that there are other larger contextual factors that affect their lives locally. This confirms Stewart’s (2005) argument that immigrants are in

some instances 'homo sacer' as their lives are dispensable. The state can afford to provide police and home affairs to detain and deport rather than services for the upkeep of the immigrants. In this study, most of the institutions that came to the aid of the immigrants were mostly the churches and the non-governmental organizations. The state in a way was mostly preoccupied with detaining and deporting migrants and worrying about the statistics of those coming in and going out. It is within such larger contexts, situations and chain of influences that the vulnerability of the young people is always shifting. The concept of the best interest of the child is drawn from the larger global context which tends to universalize childhood disregarding context specificity. Without taking into consideration the way in which context shapes the way in which children experience vulnerability there is much injustice inflicted to the local childhoods. That is what led to a clash of interests between the government social workers and the young people as they had their own interests which were different from those defined for them. Even if these young people wanted shelter, education, food, clothing and many other things that came with being in a home or shelter meant for children, they wanted these things on their terms. They had specific goals and interests which they wanted to achieve within the spatial context of the inner city, which interests were threatened by relocation to shelters.

Children have been restricted to some spaces and not welcomed in other places. Spaces play a vital role in understanding the vulnerability and agency of children. The young people were driven to use the forest route into South Africa because of the restrictions that are imposed on children at the border. Unaccompanied young people are not even welcome at the border because of the international laws on migration which restrict all those below the age of 18 to cross a border without the guardian or parent's permission. Even if these young people possess the requisite documents, most of them would not have qualified to cross the border legally

because they left their respective homes without the permission of the parents or guardians. This rendered young people more vulnerable as they were left without any other option but to engage the services of the *guma gumas*. In conventional and sometimes dominant thinking children's spaces are defined as the home, school and the playgrounds in the vicinity of the homes. Children are to be in places where they can be monitored and controlled which is why the spaces they are allowed are within the sight of the adults. The places which are far from the homes and considered invisible are all considered dangerous spaces for the young people.

Spaces affect how vulnerability is measured or defined in children. As the children were moving from the border to Johannesburg they pass through different spaces in which their vulnerability is qualitatively different. Although they remained vulnerable their vulnerability 'shifted' in the different places they passed through. Taking the young people who used the forest and those who got help from the truck drivers the vulnerability in both instances was different. The way children are perceived is also dependent on the nature of the spaces young people are staying or passing through. In Musina, although organisations provided young people shelter and schooling, the town did not become the destination for most young people. The space did not provide the young people what they envisioned hence they moved to Johannesburg. Looking at the reasons for this decision can answer some of the questions as to why the young people left their homes for South Africa. Spaces are therefore important in understanding children's perspectives of the world and their situations. The young boy who helped and advised Memory at the showground showed a concern for place. He understood that when they left Zimbabwe for Johannesburg the aim was to make money rather than just play or being looked after which is why he said that there was nothing much to do at the showground. The important

thing was not just being in South Africa but rather to be in Johannesburg- a space which offers a lot of opportunities to pursue meaningful livelihood options.

Relationships are important in understanding children and their vulnerability. Children can only be understood within relationships and not outside relationships. They are social beings who find themselves wherever they may be in associations. It is within these different relationships that young people occupy certain positions which affect what they do, say or feel. Viveros de Castro (1998) shows that human life is driven by relationships just like in the animal kingdom with focus on hunting, feasts, hierarchy and many other things. In all these relationships the view or perspective of the subject is the one that determines how the people relate. The vulnerability of the young people is and has been dependent upon how they perceive and are perceived in their different encounters. The position in which they find themselves in was often determined by associations and their perceptions of them. Tendai was very unfortunate in his journey as he trusted the farmers he met and he thought they really wanted to help him not knowing how they perceived him. He was exploited and worked without getting paid. In this kind of relationship the farmer views this young boy Tendai as destitute given his immigrant status which influenced the way he treated Tendai. Tendai innocently took the jobs in the farms out of desperation but he trusted the farmers taking the job offers as gestures of kindness. Encounters with different people shifted the subject position of the young people who in some instances were more vulnerable or less vulnerable depending on the association.

This thesis asserts that young people, even with odds pitted against them are capable of coming up with complex and innovative ways of dealings with the challenges they encounter. The young people show a lot of innovativeness and resilience within different spaces and relationships. Although they were vulnerable in certain situations and relationships, in most

encounters they drew upon limited structures of feeling and possibility of actions which they have come to know over the journey. The young people were not just passive in all their fortunes and misfortunes but they acted in ways they could in order to make to their destination. The way they acted and reacted in different spaces and relationships shows how their vulnerability is always shifting extending beyond the boundaries set for children. They show a continuity between adulthood and childhood which is something that can be further developed.

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