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THE REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND VULNERABILITY: INDEPENDENT CHILD MIGRANTS IN HUMANITARIAN WORK

by

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents (Edward and Edith) and *living* ancestors

In memory of *ambuya* Naomi Mahati

All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Abstract

This study is about understanding the constructions of and meanings behind aid workers' and independent migrant children's representations of the category of childhood and vulnerability. A cross-cutting theme is concerned with expounding the ways in which aid workers construct the characteristics and worlds of meaning of independent adolescent migrants from Zimbabwe, partly through a kind of dialogic interface between local and global ideas of who these children are and the ideas that independent adolescent migrants have of who they ought to be. Exploring insights on the diversity of independent children's experiences and varied representations in humanitarian work is at the centre of the investigation. The study challenges dominant and homogenising discourses about independent migrant children in migration and humanitarian work contexts.

Based on fieldwork in Musina, South Africa, the study uses traditional ethnographic methods. This methodological approach is appropriate for studying the lived reality and lifeworlds of different social actors. This study is anchored mainly on "the New Social Studies of Childhood", social constructionist and actor-oriented ethnographic approach developed by Norman Long. It employed thematic analysis and discourse analysis to understand the various discourses in child migration and humanitarian work.

The study contributes to a growing body of literature in New Social Studies of Childhood, anthropology of childhood which documents and theorises the gap between aid workers' representations of independent migrant children and the lived experience of these children in a humanitarian context. With childhood and adulthood boundaries often being de-emphasised or fading, this thesis , which provides situated accounts of the lives of social actors, underscores the prominence of social context, lifeworlds, power and shifting interests of different social actors in producing multiple, contradictory, negotiated and contested representations of independent migrant children. The representations of independent children tended to vary depending on the lifeworlds of the different actors and the context in which they operated. Focusing mainly on child mobility, sexuality and work, I argue that contrary to homogenising representations, there are formal and informal representations of independent migrant children. Thus, the study provides a critical antidote to the danger of taking dominant representations of childhood for granted. The complexities, ambiguities and contradictions in the representations of independent children which also generated different childhoods for different children, were a result of the significant tensions but also complementarity of local and global understandings of childhood. The study observes that childhood in humanitarian work is gendered, classed, nationalised and economised. Thus it challenges the discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability which dominate humanitarian work. The varied and conflicting childhood discourses often led to exclusion and pathologisation of independent children by humanitarian workers. The study also revealed how the dominant discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability was sustained through reminders of childhood and vulnerability. Noting that there are exclusionary and pathologising discourses at some moments, the study argues for critical, reflexive and nuanced representation of independent migrant children in migration and humanitarian work.

Key words: independent migrant children, childhood, vulnerability, agency, social actors, social contexts, lifeworld, discourse analysis, New Social Studies of Childhood, actor-oriented and interface approach, humanitarian work, formal and informal representation, child work, mobility and sexuality.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



(Stanford Taonatose Mahati)

2nd day of February 2014

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In September 2008, as the political and economic challenges mounted in Zimbabwe despite the two major political parties signing a Global Political Agreement, under the auspices of Southern African Development Community (SADC), to set up a Government of National Unity, I received a PhD scholarship award from the University of the Witwatersrand with joy and also a heavy heart. I was happy that I was going to do what I have always wanted to do in life – study for a PhD and get international exposure - but I was also concerned about leaving my family and country in a precarious state. Zimbabwe was experiencing hyper-inflation, serious shortage of basic commodities, political and economic sanctions, public services like schools and hospitals had virtually collapsed, there was a cholera outbreak, hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans were using any means necessary to migrate to other countries, and there was serious political tension as the country had just had a disputed presidential election re-run in June 2008. It is against this background that I started my studies in October 2008 and carried out the study. I received support in doing this study from many individuals and organisations. It is my pleasure to thank them.

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Table of Contents

Dedication ..... **ii**
Abstract ..... **iii**
Declaration ..... **iv**
Acknowledgements ..... **v**
Table of Contents ..... **ix**
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms ..... **xii**
CHAPTER 1: Introduction **1**
Introduction 1
Study Rationale 7
Framing the Zimbabwe and Musina Context 14
Situating Zimbabwe 15
Musina Town and the Border Post Area 17
Summing Up 25
Thesis Lay-out 27
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Study's Conceptual Foundations **31**
Introduction 31
Conceptualising Childhood 32
The New Social Studies of Childhood 36
The Social/Minority Group and Social Constructionist/Tribal Child Approach 36
The Actor-Oriented and Interface Approach & Child Agency 38
Gendered Nature of Vulnerability and Childhood 45
Childhood in the 'African' Context 48
Zimbabweans' Migration to South Africa 50
Independent Migrant Children's Vulnerability 52
Role and Response of the South African State to Independent Children 53
Role and Response of Civil Society Organisations to Independent Children 60
Some Conclusions 64
CHAPTER 3: Methods, Ethics and Positionality **66**
Introduction 66
Ethnography 67
The Interview-In-Situ and Serial Qualitative Interviews 69
Semi-participant Observer 70
Researching on Children 72
Site Rationale 79
Kicking Off the Fieldwork 81
Selected Service Providers 89
Christian Women Ministry (CWM) 90
Save the Children UK 92
Study Participants 94

Researcher as an Actor 97
Data Analysis 99
Thematic Analysis 101
Discourse Analysis 103
Negotiating Ethical Issues and Reflections on Ethical Challenges 106
Humanitarian Crisis: Reflections of the Researcher as an Actor 118
Some Conclusions 122
CHAPTER 4: Formal and Informal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Mobility and Work in Context, Contest and Paradox 124
Introduction 124
Representations of Independent Migrant Children on the Move 126
The Official Discourse: Negative Representations of Child Migration 126
The Unofficial Discourse: Positive Representations of Child Migration 139
Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Work 141
The Official Discourse: Anti-Child Work Approach 143
The Unofficial Discourse: Pro-Child Work 161
CHAPTER 5: Formal and Informal Representation of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality in Context, Contest and Paradox 179
Introduction 179
The Sociological Context of Children's Sexuality 181
The Formal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality 183
The informal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality 189
Representations of the Sexuality of Independent Migrant Girls' Sexuality 201
CHAPTER 4 AND CHAPTER 5: SOME CONCLUSIONS 216
CHAPTER 6: Reminders of Childhood and the Economy of Childhood 220
Introduction 220
Reminders of Age and Vulnerability 221
Reminders of Child-like Behaviour 235
The Formal and Informal Economy of Childhood and Vulnerability 246
Some Conclusions 259
CHAPTER 7: Different Childhoods for Different Independent Migrant Children 261
Introduction 261
Gendered Childhoods 262
Classed Childhoods 271
Different Spaces and Different Childhoods 283
National Childhoods 285
Some Conclusions 290
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion 294
Introduction 294
Summary of Findings, Arguments and Contributions 295

Representations of Childhood in Context and Paradox 295
Representation of Childhood: Consequences in Humanitarian Work 301
Methodological Contributions 306
Theoretical Contributions 307
Practical Implications for Practitioners 310
Future Research 313
WORKS CITED **.....315**

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACMS	African Centre for Migration and Society
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
BRTI	Biomedical Research and Training Institute
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWM	Christian Women Ministry
DFID	Department for International Development
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DoE	Department of Education
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRCA	Dutch Reformed Church in Africa
DRMC	Dutch Reformed Mission Church
DSD	Department of Social Development
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GNU	Government of National Unity
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LHR	Lawyers for Human Rights
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MLAO	Musina Legal Advice Office
MMC	Musina Ministry of Compassion
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEP	Post Exposure Prophylaxis
RCP	Refugee Children's Project
RRO	Refugee Reception Office
SAPS	South African Police Services
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCUK	Save the Children - UK

SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMG	Soutpansberg Military Grounds
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNCRC	United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child
URCSA	United Reformed Church in Southern Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children and Education Fund
VAT	Value Added Tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZDP	Zimbabwean Documentation Project

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing national and international interest in 'out of home' childhoods, including independent migrant children who are beyond their national borders. The idea of children on the move, without their parents and guardians, conjures thoughts of victims of abuse, deviancy and neglect. The representation of these children by humanitarian workers has been analysed from a few angles, for example: independent children and livelihoods (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Heissler, 2010; Hoffman, 2010); independent children and their rights (Schreier, 2011); and independent children and vulnerability (Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010). I define representation as a particular way of understanding, speaking of someone or portraying an independent migrant child or group of these children. Representations of independent children by humanitarian workers and the children themselves, which I argue can be formal or informal, tend to be produced during encounters between these different social actors with different ideas and experiences (see Long, 1999). According to Norman Long, social actors are those "'entities (individuals or groups) that can be regarded as having agency" (2001: 241). They tend to be seen as possessing "the knowledgeability and capability to assess problematic situations and organise 'appropriate' responses" (Long, 2001: 241). Uncovering representations of independent children by aid workers and these children's own representations sheds light on understandings of childhood and vulnerability. This study also enriches the debate on the theorisation of childhood and offers some practical insights into development work with child migrants in resource poor and violent society.

Drawing from a social constructionist paradigm (James and Prout, 1990; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Woodhead, 2009), the objective of my study is to provide an understanding of the constructions and meanings behind the predominant representations of the childhoods of Zimbabwean children, who have migrated from Zimbabwe to Musina – a border town in South Africa – without their parents or guardians. Specifically, I seek to explore the interplay of humanitarian workers' understandings of independent migrant children's lives, and the latter's own representations of their lives. It is important to observe and talk to these children and humanitarian workers so as to explore their interactions as this can be a useful way to understand the representations of independent migrant children whose lives appears

intertwined with local and global ideas in dynamic humanitarian and migration milieus. Both these groups of social actors seem to being influenced by local and global ideas on childhood in different ways. As such, this thesis also set out to explore how the representations of independent children appear informed by global as well as local understandings of childhood (notions that are unpacked later) and the related consequences. This is important, as Finn, Nybell and Shook (2010: 247) argue, because "Global processes are infiltrating local contexts in different ways, with varying effects, but their force is felt nonetheless." The moments and ways these global principles, (for example, the child's right to participate in decisions that affect him or her) tends to be evoked, contested and function in the context of independent migrant children in Musina is a further subject of later chapters. As Holloway and Valentine (2000: 769) observe, "An analysis of the importance of 'global' influences" and children's 'local' worlds enriches childhood studies. Drawing on ethnographic research that I conducted for ten months in Musina, I analyse the 'social interface' between independent children and humanitarian agencies, global and local understandings of childhood, and implicit or explicit model(s) of childhood used by service providers with the central concern being how they understand children and childhood as well as make sense of the competencies, responsibilities and privileges of childhood in the contexts of migration and humanitarian crisis.

A social interface is:

> …a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found…Such discontinuities are characterized by discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power. Interfaces typically occur at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social fields intersect (Long, 1989: 1-2).

Of note is that interface analysis centres on understanding the interaction between social actors and not just actions of individual actors. Thus, as I unpack the actions of different actors, discourses that social actors draw from to represent independent children, I pay attention to the social context and social actors' different 'lifeworlds' as well as their multiple realities. Life-world is defined as a "lived-in and largely taken-for-granted world" (Schultz and Luckmann, 1973 cited in Magadlela, 2000: 15). Magadlela (2000: 16) defines multiple realities as "the co-existence of different social actors and their diverse world-views, their varying perceptions of their common situation, based on their background, their networks,

knowledge, and social status". These concepts tends to be important as the "universalising ideal of childhood may not capture the reality of children's lives in diverse contexts" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 38). Thus, I will be able to appreciate why social actors mobilised, highlighted, emphasised, de-emphasised or manipulated certain ideas or social processes which shape the representations of independent children.

The other specific objectives of the study are to understand how environmental factors, social context, and the choices made by independent children affect aid workers' understandings of childhood, and in the process deconstruct representations of child vulnerability (Hoffman, 2011) and images of deviant behaviour associated with independent children. Orgocka aptly observes that "independent child migrants are often conceptualised within a discourse of vulnerability" (2012: 3). Orgocka adds that this way helps in the prioritisation of assistance.

Focusing on child migration in order to unpack the conceptualisations of childhood and vulnerability, my study goes beyond documenting the basic things independent migrant children need or have. In addition, the purpose of the study is neither to define independent children's "real needs", nor to critique the provision of support to these children or romanticise what aid agencies appear to be doing. I probe assumptions made by aid workers about childhood and vulnerability, debate why aid workers act in the way they do: their constructions of the other (independent children), how the environment that they live and work in structures their views, actions, and how they themselves rationalise their actions either in relation to the law, local and global practices. I also discuss local practices which define childhood and how children as social agents (see Ensor, 2010) make meaning of their engagements with service providers, and contribute to the construction of the way they tend to represented. Consequently, in this study I go beyond the categorisation of independent children that only understands them as fixed categories or homogeneous groups and instead attends to the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities that surround the construction of their representations. I reject "essentialist perspectives that treat all migrant children as a vulnerable category" (Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010: 9).

I consider the influence of social factors like age, gender, nationality and class in powering various discourses and their functions. Following Kitzinger's (1990) observation that an analysis of power, which shapes children's position, is often rejected in favour of a paternalistic approach to children, I also see the need to question the structural power imbalances which characterize the relationship between adults and independent migrant

children. The paternalistic approach limits children's autonomy since it sees them as immature and needing protection from adults.

Thus, evidence and arguments I present in this study are built on the premise that children are social actors who have the ability to analyse multiple social worlds, create meaning about themselves, construct and shape their experiences and those of others including adults as well as the societies they live in (see O'Kane, 2008; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). I also assume that children negotiate their social world (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998) to resist and shape it.

Although I recognise independent children's social competencies or agency, I also sought to understand the different structural factors that sometimes constrain children's autonomy, access to services or undermine their agency to deal with different challenges in their everyday life. This point echoes Clark-Kazak's argument that "analysis of structural constraints and asymmetric power relationships provides nuanced insight into dynamic (social and) political processes" (2011: 20).

A cross-cutting theme is concerned with elucidating the ways in which independent children constructed their own identities and worlds of meaning, partly through a kind of dialogic encounter between their own ideas of who they are and the ideas that others, especially service providers, have of who they ought to be. Also explored are the understandings and responses of independent children to paternal and maternal controls or protectionist approaches of service providers towards them.

Several studies have revealed that independent migrant children occupy an important but precarious social position in cross-border movements (see Mann, 2012; Clark-Kazak, 2011; Wernesjo, 2011; Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010; Palmary, 2009; Hillier, 2007; Setien and Berganza, 2005) as a result of being in foreign lands without their parents (Halvorsen, 2002). There appears a plethora of possible discursive frames for representing independent children but I will advance Cheek's (2004: 1143) point that "which discursive frame is afforded presence (at any moment) is a consequence of the effect of power relations". This then allows me to reflect critically on the frames of representation put forward by children and aid workers.

I specifically also consider the different discursive frames for thinking and speaking about independent migrant children that aid workers bring to bear on their interactions with these young people. Like Clark-Kazak (2011) in her research on the political narratives of Congolese young people in Uganda who challenged the homogenising discourses about migrant children, I also analyse how the diverse representations tends to be generated,

mediated, lived with, made sense of, reproduced, disseminated and served the different children, individuals or groups within the humanitarian and child migration contexts. Of note, childhood is culturally specific (Chin, 2003). Different cultures have different understandings of childhood. I reflect on the social processes and dynamics of independent children's relationships with aid workers and environment which produces these understandings of independent children, "the power imbalances that shape them and the ideological contexts which inform their production and reception" (Spyrou, 2011: 151). Basically, I investigate the representations in a culturally sensitive way. Through the "analysis of how different discursive practices produce different childhoods, each and all of which are 'real' within their own regime of truth" (Prout and James, 1990: 27) this thesis contributes to understandings of complex and contradictory discourses which portray independent children positively or pathologise them.

This thesis, which is partially inspired by Bornstein's work that highlighted "the moral struggles of development workers and donors" (2005: 2) and the beneficiaries, should not be read as an indictment of the work of humanitarian agencies (see also Burman, 1994) nor as a charge that their possible reproduction of vulnerability and legitimation of practices which pathologise independent children are conscious acts. It is also not about the correct way for adults to raise a child or aid workers to care and support children. Rather, the thesis is concerned with the discourses that tend to be generated as aid workers try to understand independent children and how these representations (and the consequent predispositions toward youth that they imply) affect the mode and outcome of interactions between these children and those service providers. In fact, I interrogate the ways in which different aid workers engage with and make sense of the life of independent children in relation to their representations. I am also concerned with how these children engage with these representations, whether they challenge, manipulate, negotiate or accept them. I explore how a critical engagement with existing different representations of migrant can yield insights into the problems of independent children, aid workers and help generate more appropriate and effective service provision for these young people. Though it is not my primary concern, I also envisaged that this study will contribute to the improvement of care and support practices following the persuasive argument put forward by Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith who studied children in war-affected areas, that research results "have to lead to outcomes and measures that will benefit the children in some way or another" (2008: 203).

Moreover, I do not propose to present an exhaustive study of the experiences of autonomous migrant children in South Africa or attempt to establish "the truth" of what was

happening or what happens when children interact with aid workers, even if this was possible. Rather, this study is an attempt to gain a better and in-depth understanding of linkages between meaning, power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980) when aid workers interface with independent migrant children. In addition, the study does not address the impact of interventions targeting independent children or number of children receiving assistance.

I locate my study within the new field of anthropology of childhood (Hoffman, 2011; Lancy, 2008; Bock, Bluebond-Langer and Korbin, 2007), child migration (Ensor and Gozdiak, 2010) and humanitarian aid. I seek to deconstruct ideas of childhood vulnerability (Cheney, 2010) by examining how the concept of childhood vulnerability which is dominantly rooted in universal discourses of children's rights, functions at local levels. At the centre of the study is the interface of the representations of independent children as vulnerable (see Wernesjo, 2011) and the lived realities of the children who demonstrate agency in negotiating problematic and challenging situations in their lives (see Hoffman, 2011).

Researchers' understanding of children and childhood has a bearing on how they conduct research (Kellett *et. al*., 2004 cited in Lundy and McEvoy, 2011). My standpoint in this study is that there is a multiplicity of childhoods; children are beings who as social actors possess agency (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) and have different degrees of vulnerability in different contexts and moments, and this vulnerability is produced and reproduced by a complex set of structural factors (see Bluebond-Langer and Korbin, 2007). Following Bluebond-Langer and Korbin (2007: 241), I "recognise that these attributes manifest themselves in different times and places, and under particular social, political, economic, and moral circumstances and conditions".

In this ethnographic study I draw centrally on the New Social Studies of Childhood (see O'Kane, 2008) and the actor-oriented and interface approach (Long, 2001; Long, 1992; Long 1990) as a theoretical as well as a methodological approach. I also use discourse analysis (see Long, 2001; Parker, 1999; Lupton, 1992) to identify competing, multiple and contradictory discourses in the perception, treatment and representation of independent migrant children as well as the functions of these discourses. Furthermore, I employ the non-dichotomous understanding of James, Jenks and Pout's (1998) framework of social/minority group and social constructionist/tribal child approaches as enunciated by Holloway and Valentine (2000) as a theoretical device to unpack the different representations of childhood and vulnerability and treatment of child agency by service providers. Of note, the above

theoretical devices share an interest in discursively constructed subjectivities (meaning making), power and knowledge (see for example, Foucault, 1980), which are key resources that drive the study as will be elaborated later in this chapter. Central to understanding the various representations of independent migrant children in this study are the workings, interface of local discourses, and major discourses in the conceptualisation of children and childhood in the West (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Kehily, 2009).

Study Rationale

The overriding justification for this study stems from my observations that child migration, particularly by independent children, has received fair attention in the media and humanitarian aid sector but empirical work with a much more refined, nuanced understanding and analysis of different aspects of their lives remains scarce (see these examples of the scarce studies: Wernesjo, 2011; Hashim and Dorte Thorsen, 2011) particularly in Southern Africa. Generally, child migration work in both policy and academic literature is in its infant stages (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). Some researchers in West Africa have tried to attend to this under-researched area but it has tended to focus (largely) on children in particularly difficult circumstances, for example, child soldiers, street children, AIDS orphans (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011), independent children' experiences of migration and work (for example, Howard, 2012; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Thorsen, 2006).

My interest in children's well-being and development dates back to my childhood years, when I grew up in Zimbabwe where many children lived in a state of political conflict and abject poverty. Then through my work as a researcher in Zimbabwe (for example, Munyati, *et al*., 2009, Mahati *et al*., 2006; Magome *et al*., 2006) I came face to face with how the above mentioned factors were devastating the lives of children across Zimbabwe. My close interaction with a number of child related service providers as we conducted operations research solidified my interest to understand how ideas on childhood and interventions, conceived locally or elsewhere, were interfacing, being understood and responded to by the beneficiaries, particularly children who are widely assumed to be immature and vulnerable. One of the common messages to service providers from the children interviewed was for the children to be at the centre of interventions targeting them. Their message is anchored in the children's rights discourse. I realised that children felt marginalised by service providers from the design to evaluation of programmes that targeted them. All this made me strive for, but also critically appraise, children's participation in research and eager to understand their

lifeworlds regarding understandings of childhood and how they are being represented in aid work.

With regard to the situation of independent children, my interest in understanding their lives arose in 2007 through research I participated in on "*responses to HIV and AIDS, and gender based violence needs of Zimbabwean cross border mobile populations from South Africa*" in Beit Bridge town, on the Zimbabwean border with South Africa. The town is adjacent to Musina town in South Africa. This study exposed me to the existence of Zimbabwean children who risked their lives by illegally crossing the crocodile infested Limpopo River which divides the two southern African countries and evading gangs of violent criminals, commonly known as *magumaguma,* who patrol both sides of the river. I will elaborate on the interface between *magumaguma* and independent migrant children later in this chapter. The returnees, including independent children, narrated horror tales about how they crossed Limpopo River. They said a number of Zimbabweans including children had drowned whilst crossing the flooded river in the rainy season (see Rutherford, 2008b). Then looking at these children from the child protectionist discourse (see James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) as well as the abolish 'child labour' perspective, a fellow researcher and I were both amazed and shocked that independent boys and girls under the age of 18, and some as young as seven years old were going to South Africa to work, something which I and my peers had never dreamt of doing as children. I grew up thinking that one cannot dare cross an international border without the right documentation. I never imagined that children could leave home without a parent or guardian even to travel to the next village, suburb or town in Zimbabwe to seek employment. Together with my peers, I had childhood fantasies of going outside the country but after finishing school when we envisaged that our competencies to eke out a living even under difficult circumstances would have developed. In fact, when we were growing up, we were continuously advised that child work and schooling were diametrically opposed, a view which is dominant in both the global north and south. Taking a cue from our parents, we, to use Bourdillon's words, basically structured "the world into binary categories, such as children and adults, with binary sets of characteristics and appropriate behaviour" (2006: 1203). Thus, it never crossed our minds to transform our dreams into reality, particularly by going to South Africa which was and is still perceived by many Zimbabweans as economically prosperous but very violent.

Independent children's stories of crossing the border and living in a foreign country without their parents or guardians fascinated me. I became curious about their lives. Of note is that during the study in Beitbridge, I noted what seemed to be a gulf in thinking between

independent children who had been repatriated from South Africa and aid workers who received them in Beitbridge as the latter questioned and admonished children for thinking that, as young as they were without having finished school, they could live and work in South Africa, especially without passports or required documentation. Children, on the other hand, seemed to dismiss these criticisms. During that time South Africa's Department of Home Affairs (DHA) working together with SAPS in contravention of their national laws was deporting undocumented minors in large numbers. What struck me was that much to the chagrin of aid workers who wanted to freely assist these children that they officially depicted as vulnerable to go home to their parents and guardians, independent children soon after being dropped off by vehicles hired by the South African government quickly trooped back to South Africa, leaving Norway's Save the Children well-resourced, neat and 'child-friendly' temporary shelter in the border town. They quickly retraced their footsteps back to South Africa without the required travelling papers or having contacted their parents or to migrate with their parents or guardians. Together with my research colleagues, we wondered about the children's motivations for rejecting the advice and spurning the 'nice' aid which they were being given (for example, hot meals, children's games, temporary good and safe accommodation, free transport to their parents or guardians' door steps among other forms of assistance) and also how these minors, who appeared poor and vulnerable, were being understood by service providers. I wondered whether the expectations of these children and the services they were being offered matched (see Settien and Berganza's paper in 2005 on how Spain's official institutions reacted to independent minors).

Thus, this experience of seeing a disjunction between the lived realities of aid workers and independent children on understandings of child migration planted in me an idea that an in-depth study could be carried out to have a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon of independent migrant children and the interactions between them and humanitarian agencies.

There has been scant attention and fragmented exploration of how understandings of childhood shape everyday representations of independent children by aid workers. According to Finn, Nybell and Shook, "viewing childhood as a socially constructed category, as opposed to a biologically determined one, opens up new possibilities for understanding contemporary experiences and representations of young people" (2010: 248). Consequently, in this study I try to make sense of the representations of independent migrant children in the context of their lives and realities.

From my observation and conversations with aid workers in Musina, a number of local and global humanitarian agencies are galvanising resources and have expended huge amounts

of money, time and energy rolling out different interventions targeting the multitudes of Zimbabwean independent children assumed to be running away from the debilitating political and economic morass, under the banner of protecting them. These children are considered "out of bounds" (Chin, 2003: 309-325) – meaning they are in spaces where they are not supposed to be and not fitting into the bracket of normal childhood. So far, however, there is little said on contrasting ideas of local and global understandings of childhood in the everyday practices of aid workers and of the children themselves in the contexts of humanitarian work and migration respectively. Ideas of local and global understandings of childhood are discussed in chapter two. In this new global economy, how these universal ideas function in local environments is very important for understanding children and childhood. The research (for example, IOM, 2009) and media articles (for example, Ngwenya, 2012; Lombard, 2010)[1,2] on independent children to date have tended to repeatedly focus on and stresses the drivers of migration, the needs and vulnerabilities children experience (see IOM, 2009), what is being done by humanitarian agencies and the government, the problem of child trafficking (see Palmary, 2010; Howard, 2012; Dottridge, 2002), and the resources which need to be mobilised rather than, for instance, revealing the ideas or motivations behind the aid workers' actions towards independent children. Hashim and Thorsen (2011: 111) note that "until recently, most of the engagement with the subject of children who move without their parents has been at the level of policy and/or advocacy on behalf of children". In addition, it is important to heed Burman's (1995a) call that the discourses of children's rights be analysed to check whether they can fully promote the interests of children. There is need to understand how the discourse of children's needs operates and is deployed by different social actors.

Under critique in this study is the re-production of discourses of childhood (see Burman, 2008; Walkerdine, 2001), children's innocence (see Archard, 1993; Burman, 2008; Kitzinger, 1990), dependency (see further critiques of this notion in these books: O'Connell Davidson, 2005; Qvortrup, 1987 cited in Iversen, 2002: 831), passivity (see Morrow, 2008; Kitzinger, 1990), immaturity (see Burman, 2008) and vulnerability of children (see Skinner, 2004; Kitzinger, 1990) and their purposes in different contexts of child migration and humanitarian crisis. Qualities of dependence and powerlessness are dominant in defining childhood

[1] See, Ngwenya Kaizer "A rising tide of Child Refugees" Drum 12 July 2012, number 29.

[2] For example, Anna-Maria Lombard "Unaccompanied migrant children at risk as funding dries up" http://www.citypress.co.za/SouthAfrica/Features/Unaccompanied-migrant-children-at-risk-as-funding-dries-up-20100627 (Date of access: 2010-06-26).

(Burman, 1994). Consequently, efforts to protect and free children from responsibilities are legitimated.

Contrary to research on children which has not paid much attention to structural analysis (class, gender, age, knowledge and so on) (see Qvortrup, 2007), this study I do not underplay the effect of structural factors on children. I recognise the problematic situation which is produced by this analysis as, for example, Bograd (1999) points out that if these social factors which differentiate people are negated, some people may not be considered 'genuine' victims and consequently may not be given adequate protection from violence. Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007) note that children, like adults, are subject to structural constraints. Thus, attention to social, economic and cultural constraints facing children will shed light on how children are being understood.

Furthermore, the characteristics of individual and structural factors that give rise to autonomous behaviour or inhibit it have to be explored. These and other issues such as analysing the inherent, assumed understandings of childhood and vulnerability, are important to advance, for example, Burman's (2008) point that an understanding of the limits of the current models of childhood used by service providers will provide guidance about ways in which more realistic assumptions about agency and the representations of childhood and vulnerability can be made.

The notion of child protection is one of the common themes running through much of the literature on independent children. I will interrogate what assumptions underpin child protection and how it functions. The concern about child protection emanates from the idea that children are relatively weak and therefore have to be protected. There is little analysis of the structural power imbalances surrounding child protection and the discourses they draw from. For example, Kitzinger (1990) notes, in her comments on childhood studies, that an analysis of power, which shapes children's position, is often rejected in favour of a paternalistic approach to children. In attempting to plug this gap, this study will go beyond a categorisation of vulnerability that reduces the discussion to questions of which children are vulnerable and which are not, and instead, brings out the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities that surround this discourse in the field of child mobility.

I am of the view that there is need to extend existing knowledge on child participation particularly by researching children in a humanitarian aid context. A neglect of independent migrant children's own understandings is not helpful as Spyrou (2011) argues that accessing the silenced voices of children is key to understanding childhood. However, it has been argued, as the literature on child participation shows, that giving voice to children is fraught

with challenges (Bourdillon, 2008b; Naker, 2007; Fanelli, Musarandega and Chawanda, 2007). As independent children interacted with aid workers the core question in this study was: what determines who "… speak[s], when, and with what authority, and, conversely, who cannot" (Ball, 1990 cited in Cheek, 2004: 1142). The study also highlights how the silencing of independent children's voices and social constructions of childhood and vulnerability are both gendered, nationalised, spaced and classed amongst other factors.

Away from the discourse of child participation, another key area of interest is the portrayal of children in humanitarian discourses. One of the few academic works that comes close to this analysis is a paper by Erica Burman (1994) which explores how Black children in the global South were being represented in charity appeals. She argued that the image of a poor starving Black child is very important for charity organisations to successfully mobilise donations as well as that there are attempts to universalise the Global North's understandings of childhood. With anti-child migration and more generally xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners prevailing in South Africa, it is important to explore how independent children are being perceived and assisted by people in an environment under the influence of different global and local ideas on childhood.

Following Setien and Berganza's (2005) point about matching the expectations of independent foreign children and services for them, it is imperative to explore and reflect how the representations of childhood and vulnerability function in practice in a developing country as well as in 'humanitarian crisis' context. For example, Isabel Rodriguez Mora (2010) argued that during the 1999 floods and mudslides in Venezuela support for children, together with women, slid into surveillance and generated reproduction of exclusionary practices against the same.

Thus, the study contributes to the concerns which Burman (2008) raises that the globalization of the Global North's definition of the child, which tends to see a child as innocent and dependent on adults, can lead to the pathologization or demonization of children whose behaviour contradicts the conventional norms. I follow the point made by Burman (1995a) that it is important to re-conceptualise how we see children in the Global South and also make an assessment of the socio-political practices that determine their position. The subjectivities that characterise their actions and the power relations inherent in their interactions with service providers still need to be understood. Burman (1995a) warns that failure to do this will result in current models of development which are propagated by globalisation through international legislation gain false authority. It is also worth noting that the implementation of these models has implications for the general well-being and

development of children. Thus, this study interrogates the constructions of childhood and vulnerability as they circulate within service providers, local and international, so as to contribute to efforts of understanding independent children and improving programmes aimed at them.

There seem to be a number of lessons that can be transferred from feminist writing for this study. For example, there is literature which shows that "women can negotiate and renegotiate strategies and alternatives within abusive relationships in order to cope within their immediate constraints" (e.g. Baker, 1997 cited Boonzaier, 2006: 146) and "also to allow them to gain some small amount of power and control in their relationships" (Kirkwood, 1993 cited in Boonzaier, 2006: 146). Kitzinger writes that efforts by survivors to "resist and endure abuse (exploitation) remain largely uncharted and unheard" (1990: 162). More than two decades later, this gap in literature still exists in child migration studies. In fact, and of interest to this study, very little was found in the literature on the discourses which service providers draw from when portraying child migrants and how these discourses are functioning. It is hoped that these gaps will be closed somewhat in the pages that follow.

Writing about the state of anthropology of childhoods, Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007) observes that past anthropological works focused on asserting and documenting children's agency. However, Bluebond-Langner and Korbin notes that "What is less clear is the degree of agency, the impact of that agency, let alone the nature of that agency… singly or in groups" (2007: 242). They argued that children like adults, their actions are restricted by structural factors. The effects of various social factors on the way children or groups of children express themselves needs to be problematized and understood. Following their argument I say not much is known about what people like service providers think of children's agency, for example, in a humanitarian aid context and the discourses they draw from.

As will be argued later, attention to independent children, agency, and vulnerability also requires engagement with the gendered nature of representations of childhood through programmes or activities which aim at controlling the type of work children engaged in, sexual behaviour and so on. In this study, attention is paid to any gender differences in the representations of both boys and girls as they can either reinforce the dominant patriarchal system or be mediated and transfigured in a humanitarian context.

This study is anchored on the assumption that humanitarian agencies' work is being informed and guided by universalist policies like the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

(ACRWC) of 1990, which "recognises that the child is both a self-determining subject and in need of protection" (Nieuwenhuys, 2001: 540). According to Abrahams and Matthews (2011: 28) the UNCRC and the ACRW seem "premised more on the rights of the child than the powers of the parent over the child". The UNCRC established children's rights to exercise some life choices and asserted that actions concerning children should have their best interests as their primary concern. These ideologies have widely circulated and have been in vogue in child development discourse for many years. A lot of literature has been produced emphasising the importance of regarding children as autonomous beings (see Invernizzi and Milne, 2002; Bourdillon, 2008b; Arnold, 2000).

This study offers critical reflections on global (or other) models of childhood. At the centre of the study is the presumption that there is tension between international and local values which inform child care practices, and that aid workers and children have different and often competing interests and values. Notions of childhood from the West are widely seen as problematic if applied in the South (see Burman, 1994). The study aims to understand how the global ideas on childhood are being mediated and transformed in a migration and humanitarian setting in the South.

Framing the Zimbabwe and Musina Context

As this study is concerned with different discourses, this section gives background information on the different social actors and the often fraught and contradictory social, economic and political milieu in which the representations of independent children are shaped and presented. This is important as it lays the base for understanding how childhood is being conceived and perceived. In other words, it clears the ground for understanding how representations of independent children from Zimbabwe are being produced, mediated and re-produced.

Emphasising the importance of understanding the social context, Michael Bourdillon writes:

> Attention to context is especially important if we want our studies to assist in attempts at intervention and to offer practical support to underprivileged people. Context includes the macro-economic environment, but it also includes the way people think and speak, i.e. their culture (Bourdillon, 2011: 98).

Robert Levine emphasise the importance of grasping the temporal, social and cultural contexts in which children live:

> The ethnography of childhood, then, is based on the premise – constantly re-examined in empirical research – that the conditions and shape of childhood tend to vary in central tendency from one population to another, are sensitive to population – specific contexts, and are not comprehensible without detailed knowledge of the socially and culturally organised contexts that give them meaning (Levine, 2007: 247).

Alldred and Burman (2005: 176) also point out that "discursive work insists that analysis is similarly grounded in the context in which it is produced…" This is even important as "childhood is lived and experienced contextually' (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 114). Thus, this section lays the ground for understanding the social, political and economic environment and social actors' multiple realities.

Situating Zimbabwe

The socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe has a bearing on how independent children were represented. Due to actors' different life-worlds and interests, the construction of Zimbabwe's socio-political situation is contested. So in this section I just give a sketch of Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political situation in order to shed more light on how independent children's representations are constructed in different social contexts, for different functions and their consequences of representations.

Despite its early successes, Zimbabwe's economy has been in a perilous state since the late 1980s and it severely deteriorated from 2000 when the Government embarked on the 'fast track' land re-distribution programme (see Raftopoulos, 2009) and faced economic sanctions by some Western countries. A combination of poverty (characterised by hyper-inflation[3]), a high rate of unemployment, inequality, the HIV and AIDS epidemic, corruption, incessant droughts, economic mismanagement, governance crisis[4], Economic

[3] IRIN News (Wednesday 18 February 2009 Zimbabwe) reported that the official Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe figure, dating back to July 2008, put year-on-year inflation at more than 231 million per cent. http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82500. The hyper-inflation devalued savings, income and impoverishment of the majority of the Zimbabweans.

[4] Mandivamba Rukuni and Stig Jensen (2003) argued that besides the land crisis, Zimbabwe was also faced a "serious governance crisis, which in turn has precipitated a major food crisis.

Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP)[5], political instability (see Raftopoulos, 2009) has severely battered the economic, social and political fibre of the Southern African country. Some of the lowlights of the crisis include: serious shortages of basic goods particularly food, the near collapse of the once illustrious educational and health service delivery system, and collapsed social security schemes. In 2009 one independent migrant child in Musina reflected on life in Zimbabwe:

> Life was very hard in Zimbabwe when I came here [in 2008]… It was difficult to get things including school fees and food. Life was hard there but here it's better. We get food and go to school. We also get money and other things.

As the political contest between Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) ZANU (PF), which ruled Zimbabwe from 18 April 1980 to 13 February 2009, and the factions of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) intensified, there was political polarisation amongst Zimbabweans. The ZANU (PF) led Zimbabwe government was widely accused of gross human rights abuses. Many of its nationals including minors left and claimed asylum in neighbouring and distant countries like the United Kingdom and Australia.

As people battled to cope with the economic hardships, a number of families and the Zimbabwean State faced a mammoth task of supporting vulnerable children and the growing number of children orphaned by the AIDS epidemic who were in a state of destitution (Munyati *et.al.*, 2009). There was also an increase in the number of children living and working on the streets. The stressed extended family system failed to assist orphans and vulnerable children (Munyati *et.al.*, 2009; Mahati *et al*., 2006; Foster *et al*, 1995). The State and non-governmental organisations were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the population in need of assistance. As the hardships took their toll, a number of people of all age groups responded by abandoning their homes, and left en masse with or without proper travelling documents, to neighbouring countries particularly South Africa and Botswana in search of livelihoods and access to social services like education and health (see Rutherford, 2008). This situation is captured by Crush and Tevera's (2010: 1) who observe that "[w]hen modern [S]tates go into terminal decline or fail altogether, the predictable response of ordinary people is to get out, as soon as they can, to wherever they can go".

5 ESAP was introduced in 1990 and it negatively impacted on Zimbabwe's economy (see for example, Marquette, 1997).

On 13 February 2009, under pressure from an economic and political crisis, the general populace in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), ZANU (PF) and the two factions of MDC formed the Government of National Unity (GNU). But the heavily battered economy saw little revival under the shaky GNU. The majority of households remained very poor, the political situation volatile and future uncertain. The GNU's term ended on 31 July 2013 with ZANU (PF) winning the election but these results were disputed by the dominant faction of the MDC. Economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe remain in place. Thus, the exodus of Zimbabweans of all ages, class and both sexes to other countries which continued during the GNU period is continuing unabated.

Though this study is not about why Zimbabweans were migrating to South Africa, it is important to note that the question of why Zimbabweans migrated is highly politicised – as the reasons put forward range from the socio-economic hardships to governance issues. South Africa claimed economic migration, thereby denying many Zimbabweans asylum. However, other countries like the United Kingdom allowed asylum applications. This shows the different understandings and responses to the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political situation.

The next section presents the study site to clarify the context.

Musina Town and the Border Post Area

Located in the northern province of Limpopo and in Vhembe District, Musina town is on the major frontline of migration into other parts of South Africa. It is situated 520 kilometres from Johannesburg in Gauteng province, the most common destination for foreign migrants and also local people. The border town is surrounded by commercial farms employing a number of Zimbabweans. Zimbabweans' migration to farms during the 2000s economic crisis had precedence. Zinyama (2002) notes that the Zimbabweans who in the 1990s came to work in the farms in northern Limpopo province were mainly pushed by the limited economic opportunities in Zimbabwe as a result of the economic austerity measures implemented by their government.

Through exploring the different spaces independent children lived and socialised in, I will understand how these children were represented. The area under study in Musina can be divided into four zones. The first zone covers the town centre and the affluent suburbs. The second zone comprises the residential areas for the poor and middle income households.

Some of the dwelling units were *mkhukhu*[6]. The third zone covers the bushy area between the Musina Border Post[7] and the low income residential area. It also includes the border post area and the bushes around the border post where the *magumaguma* mostly operate. The border post area has several dealers in re-conditioned cars, several *spazas*[8], a few shops, a police post, houses for border officials, a small taxi rank and truck stops. The fourth zone is the area after the town centre en route to Johannesburg. This is where the detention centre for irregular migrants, Soutpansberg Military Grounds (SMG), is located (see chapter two).

Although the dry and hot town appears dormant as it has few shops, no big industries and a small (official) population of about 57 000 people (Statistics South Africa, 2007)[9], there was never a dull moment in Musina during my time there. As Zimbabwe's economy melted[10] and its service delivery system collapsed from the start of this new millennium, Musina grew rapidly in terms of the number of new retail shops. The number of people, particularly Zimbabweans in transit, those conducting various businesses on the streets, and those buying groceries in shops, increased exponentially. Most shops in Zimbabwe were empty of groceries and the few goods in a few select shops were unaffordable to the majority of the population. Such was the huge presence of Zimbabwean shoppers with very few South African registered vehicles along one busy street in Musina that one senior local authority official commented that it was commonly called "Robert Mugabe Street", after the President of Zimbabwe. Anecdotes have it that the street was named after Robert Mugabe as it is heavily populated by Zimbabweans and he is widely accused by his critics of causing such a presence of Zimbabweans in Musina. His government and political party, ZANU (PF), are accused of mismanaging the economy, corruption and committing human rights abuses.

Due to the collapse of Zimbabwe's health service delivery system, many Zimbabweans were also coming to Musina to give birth and to access other health services (see Elford, 2009; Musina Local Municipality, 2009). One of the consequences of the failure of Zimbabwe's health service delivery system was exemplified by the cholera outbreak in

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6 Shacks in Zulu are often called *mkhukhu* (chicken run). They are shacks usually made up of different sheets of corrugated iron, plastics and wood. They look like chicken runs hence the name *mkhukhu*.

7 The 24 hour border post is one of the busiest ports of entry in sub-Saharan Africa.

8 A *spaza* is an informal shop, which is usually located in the South African townships.

9 Statistics South Africa's Community Survey 2007.

10 In 2009 Steve Hanke reported that "as of 14 November 2008, Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate was 89.7% Sextillion per cent".

Zimbabwe which spilled into Musina in November 2008 (see Musina Local Municipality, 2009; Elford, 2009).

Musina is a melting pot of many ethnic groups but *TshiVenda* and *Sepedi* (Northern *Sotho*) are the dominant ethnic groups and languages. The *TshiVenda* language is also spoken in Beit Bridge district in Zimbabwe. As obtains in other South African towns, ethnic tensions simmer amongst people in Musina. The mass exodus of Zimbabweans to South Africa[11] has resulted in a heavy presence of the *Shona* and *Ndebele* speaking people in Musina.

In 2008 a number of South African towns, particularly in poor communities, were engulfed by xenophobic violence (see Tafira, 2011; Landau, 2010). However, Musina remained surprisingly peaceful. A female humanitarian worker, born and bred in Musina, attributed the absence of xenophobic attacks in Musina to a huge population of South Africans in this former mining town who had parents, grandparents and other relatives of foreign origin. The attacks on foreigners and 'other suspect outsiders' (Landau, 2010) were sparked off by South African citizens' anger that foreigners were frustrating their social and economic interests (see Hassim, Kupe, and Worby, 2008). Although migrants including children freely spoke *Shona* and *Ndebele*, they found it strategic to learn and speak the local languages in order to negotiate for livelihoods and ensure protection of their rights through representing themselves favourably to the police and the community.

Contrary to its appearance of tranquillity, Musina town is suffering a near disaster in the bushy area around the border post. I present a detailed description of the nature, prevalence of violence and crime in this area as it has a bearing on independent children's actions and how they are represented. Every day irregular migrants including children are violently robbed, attacked, threatened and murdered by *magumaguma*. *Magumaguma* (in *Shona*) or *amagumaguma* (in *Ndebele*) are mostly male criminals who way-lay undocumented migrants using illegal entry points on both sides of the Limpopo River and violently rob people of their valuables like mobile phones, clothes, and money in Beitbridge and Musina towns. They are also accused of conning people, sexually abusing migrants particularly women and girls (see Mahati, 2012). *Magumaguma* use dangerous weapons like guns and machetes. They often take beautiful and fashionable clothes that migrants, including children, are wearing. Owing to the numerous reports of crimes being committed by *magumaguma* at night, the police

[11] MSF head of mission Mickael le Paih in 2009 said: "We have been told by the DHA (department of home affairs) that there are 300 people per day arriving at the DHA to apply for asylum (in Musina)," http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/300-arriving-from-Zim-per-day-20100512 (Date of access: 12 May 2010)

sometimes scaled up their night patrols at the border post area. Periodically, *magumaguma* engaged in running battles in the bush with SAPS working together with the South African Defence Force, Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Zimbabwe National Army. Fierce running battles occurred in a bush nicknamed "DRC" where many key informants including children said *magumaguma*'s rule was supreme. The bush on the eastern side of the South Africa border post was named DRC after the Democratic Republic of Congo which hosted arguably the largest war in modern African history from August 1998 to 2000 (see Horace Campbell, 2003). The bush surrounding the border post and along the Limpopo River was littered with torn women's panties, brassieres, purses and bags. According to Takudzwa, an independent child aged 15, who temporarily worked at one of the farms along the border before he stayed at a boys' shelter, he and his friend, an independent minor like him, saw several dead bodies on the farm whilst herding cattle. He and other children who had used illegal entry points or worked as human smugglers reported being traumatised by what they had seen and experienced in this bush.

During field work I witnessed some of the violence and social suffering of migrants, including children. For example, in March 2010 I witnessed at the border post a *magumaguma* in his 20s being severely punched, kicked and thrashed by security guards, truck stop owner and a 16-year-old unaccompanied migrant boy working at a truck stop. The *magumaguma* was apprehended by the security guards soon after he had robbed two Zimbabwean boys in their late teens who had used an illegal entry point to cross the Limpopo River. After brutally assaulting the *magumaguma* they set him free as they said reporting to SAPS was a waste of time. Despite this worrisome situation, I exchanged pleasantries with some of the *magumaguma* almost every day as we shared the same working space and nationality. Nevertheless, it came with risks.

Migrants, including independent children, also experienced frequent police brutality. Members of the South Africa Police Services (SAPS) were widely accused by aid workers and migrants of being perpetrators of violence, crime and xenophobic attacks. Whilst doing fieldwork, I experienced first-hand, the hostility of some of the members of SAPS. I recount my encounter with the police in order to show the abuse which is prevalent in this area and is faced by children every day. On 26 March 2010, I arrived at the border post at 11pm to do fieldwork. Soon after I parked the South African hired and registered vehicle I was driving at a fuel station, about ten armed police officers surrounded my car. They aggressively demanded to know why I had driven a South African car to within less than a kilometre from the border with "your country" (referring to my country of origin, Zimbabwe). Fully

cognisant that police officers have the right to stop and search anyone within a radius of 10 kilometres from the border I tried to explain my mission. However, without giving me an opportunity to speak, their leader, who pompously told me that he had the rank of an inspector after I had asked for his name, accused me of intending to smuggle "our country's car to your country". As I protested against his slander and untoward behaviour, the police inspector forcibly took my prescription spectacles making it extremely difficult for me to see. Spewing expletives at my nationality, he expressed xenophobic statements and manhandled me. When I explained to him that I was legally studying in South Africa he reproached me for not studying in my country. He derisively asked me why foreigners were coming to study in South Africa. When I told him to treat me with respect as I had rights as a migrant, he was incensed. He retorted, "This is not Zimbabwe. This is South Africa you have no rights. How dare you come into my country and tell me that you have rights? What rights?" After harassing me for almost twenty minutes, the law enforcement agents finally asked to see the registration papers of the car and my passport. They inspected the car. After finding everything in order, they walked away leaving me shell-shocked and angry. Moments later, I shared my experience with some independent children and instead of being shocked they unanimously said I had been "treated well" by that group of police officers which they described as brutal. These boys revealed that they had lost count of the number of times they had been unceremoniously picked up by the police officers and subjected to brutal treatment, for example, their heads being put into toilet bowls and water flushed, assaulted particularly at night, and cold water poured on them regardless of the time of the day and weather. They described police officers as "cowards" since they often arrested and beat them thoroughly "until they are tired", then released the boys without laying any charges. The boys argued that if police officers thought they had genuine cases against the children then they should charge them so they could appear in court. Independent children's labelling of police officers as 'cowards' served to delegitimise their actions and claim victimhood.

Apparently what was happening in Musina was not unique as *The Mail & Guardian* (June 3 to 9, 2011), published the results of its investigation which indicated that across the country, the South Africa Police Service uses heavy handed and military style approaches. It also reported Independent Complaints Directorate figures which showed that there was an increase in the number of police assaults from 1380 in 2007-2008 to 1667 between 2009 and 2010 (The Strong arm of the 'force' by Kamvelihle Gumede-Johnson, 2011: 4).

Amidst these hardships, independent children often showed their mastery of the art of evading arrest, deportation, and self-protection. However, they did so at a great cost to their physical and emotional well-being, a source of concern for aid workers informed by the discourses of rights and child protection. Melusi, aged 15, explained:

> We are used to these raids which often happen either when a new group of police officers which is not child friendly arrive to police the border or when they receive directives to weed out migrant children. We have several 'gate-ways' or escape routes, and hideouts like trees and rooftops.

These children weathered the police's heavy-handed blitzes against undocumented migrants and child workers. Reports of the abuse of independent migrant children worried the civil society in Musina, resulting in their campaigning against these practices.

Independent children's Encounters with Crime

Illegally crossing the border into South Africa is often a toilsome, dangerous and expensive journey for many Zimbabwean migrants. However, reports have paid scant attention to independent children's encounters with *magumaguma* (see Kropiwnicki, 2010; Rutherford, 2008b). Independent children often left their homes without telling anyone, hitch-hiked in buses or trains and walked on foot carrying very few items. Having no change of clothes or money was described by many of the children as "no big deal" as they imagined easily getting a well-paying job soon after arriving in South Africa. Looking at the bright lights of Musina at night from Beit Bridge town, which contrasted greatly with urban centres of Zimbabwe which rarely had electricity due to the constant load shedding, they had a strong feeling that they were about to reach *Egoli*[12]. A number of them confessed that they had mistaken Musina for Johannesburg. They reported that dreams of a better life across the border had spurred them to overcome one last hurdle of crossing the border either through the crocodile infested Limpopo River or at the formal entry point without the required documentation. The majority of Zimbabweans are unemployed and cannot afford a passport. For instance, in 2010 it cost US$150 to get a passport (see MSF, 2010). Under these conditions, human smugglers and *magumaguma* who included women and youths (some

[12] Literally, "The Place of Gold," which is a popular name for Johannesburg. In fact, the whole of South Africa is popularly referred to as "*Egoli*" or "*Joni*".

under 18 years) deceived migrants without proper documentation that it was safe to use pathways in the bush to cross the border (see Rutherford, 2008b).

The *magumaguma* had a reign of terror along the banks of Limpopo River (both sides), in the bush surrounding the border post, at the border post, Musina town, and in residential areas[13]. A number of independent children including those who socialised with *magumaguma* had horrific encounters with them when they were crossing the border or escorting irregular migrants through illegal entry points in the bush. Independent children recounted harrowing stories of being stoned, stabbed by knives, savagely beaten up, robbed of all the money they had, raped, gang raped and hearing that migrants were killed by *magumaguma*. Some children had been kidnapped for hours and sometimes days and forced to witness or participate in crime by *magumaguma*. A number of independent migrant boys who made a living through illegal activities such as smuggling migrants and goods like cigarettes, narrated ordeals of often witnessing women being raped and migrants being robbed of their possessions. For example, "Women will sleep on top of you (men will be the 'beds'). They will then rape the woman", said Ford, aged 17, describing *magumaguma's* behaviour. On a number of days I heard the screams of migrants being attacked by *magumaguma* near the houses of South African border post officials. Some members of SAPS expressed frustration at continuously attending to many irregular migrants who had been robbed or brutalised by *magumaguma* and hearing cries for help. Nevertheless, several times I saw them rescuing migrants with children and then interrogating the visibly disturbed migrants about why they used dangerous illegal entry points.

Migrants and local adults often accused independent migrant boys of being criminals conniving with *magumaguma* to rob them. The boys on their part denied these allegations arguing that there were a lot of hostilities between them and *magumaguma*. I witnessed many of these hostilities (see Chapter one and three). In situations like these, boys felt unprotected even by the police. This was evident when I asked why they did not furnish the police with the names of the robbers. They replied that the police would accuse them of being accomplices of the robbers when all they would have done was witnessing the *magumaguma* committing crimes or hearing stories of crime from the robbers' colleagues.

[13] Two years after fieldwork, the problem of *magumaguma* was continuing unabated. At a public meeting with members of the Musina community in August 2013, one-middle aged woman passionately appealed to SAPS to seriously clamp down on the activities of *magumaguma*.

Magumaguma's terror was also sexualised and gendered. They carried out humiliating sexual violence against migrant women and girls in the bush. *Magumaguma* often searched for money on every part of girls and women's bodies including inside their vaginas[14]. Women and girls being raped by *magumaguma* in full view of everyone were common narratives. As they were being raped, other migrants were forced to cheer on this criminal and dehumanising act. The sexual violation of women and girls' bodies at the South Africa – Zimbabwe border is not unique. For example, according to one report, "Up to 80 percent of migrant women and girls are raped during their border crossing (U.S.-Mexico border), by the traffickers smuggling them across, other migrants, or corrupt U.S. Border Patrol officials" (Merlan, 2014; see also a 2010 report by Amnesty International).

Magumaguma often forced, at gun or knife-point, a number of migrants including children, to commit heinous crimes including rape, sodomy and incest against fellow migrants. In one incident of incest, *magumaguma* brandishing *knives* forced a sick HIV positive man who entered South Africa through an illegal entry point to have sex with his sister in her early 20s. The ailing man's pleas to *magumaguma* to let him not have sex as he would infect his sister were ignored. The sister who was based in South Africa had gone to Zimbabwe to fetch her brother so that he could easily access anti-retrovirals (ARVs) in Musina which were, at that time, difficult to access in Zimbabwe. In another example, a boy aged 15 was forced to have sex with his mother as the other siblings and irregular migrants watched. Overwhelmed by shame, the boy soon after arriving in Musina disappeared from his family. Other migrants heard him vowing never to see his mother again. This encounter with *magumaguma* turned him into an independent migrant child.

The common targets of rape were girls and young women, particularly those considered 'beautiful'. Attempts by these women to negotiate condom use or ward off rape by giving the *magumaguma* valuables like mobile phones and money were often futile. Women who were spared from rape because they were menstruating were often verbally abused, beaten up, stabbed with knives and released. As a consequence of this, a number of women and girls were impregnated and some later gave birth whilst staying at a shelter for survivors of sexual gender based violence in Musina. Several independent migrant girls also stayed at this shelter

[14] See "One woman, they stripped her down, and searched inside her vagina (for valuables and money). All this took place in front of children". http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/300-arriving-from-Zim-per-day-20100512 (Date of access: 12 May 2010)

where I conducted the study[15]. Some girls terminated the pregnancies. According to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), some of the survivors were infected with HIV during these acts. Only a small proportion of them sought Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) within the required period of 72 hours after exposure to HIV through unsafe sex. Reasons for not quickly seeking medical assistance included ignorance about the existence of PEP, fears of being arrested and deported for having crossed the border without proper documentation, fear of stigma and discrimination for having been raped (see Kropiwnicki, 2010:67). These findings are similar to what is reported to be happening at borders in South American countries (see a 2010 report by Amnesty International).

On 12 May 2010 MSF revealed that:

> When these severely traumatised people seek help, police in Musina are often unwilling to open a case of rape or indecent assault, saying the incident did not occur in South Africa but on the Zimbabwean side of the border and that the opening of the case would amount to a waste of resources as the survivors often move on to other parts of South Africa within days of the incident (MSF, 2010).

The incidents cited here shows how violence was a central part of everyday life in Musina. It shaped the research questions, the places visited and most importantly for this study, the ways that migrant children were represented. However, recounting these stories of violence and presenting images of human suffering both pose a dilemma because on the one hand the stories, and I too as the narrator, risk a kind of 'disaster pornography' (see Omaar and de Waal, 2007; Burman, 1994) turning reading about them into an act of voyeurism. On the other hand few people understand how incredibly violent Musina is and how much violence shapes the everyday life in the town. That being the case, understanding the types and nature of violence in the area is an essential part of understanding the analysis to follow and hence the necessity to relate such stories.

Summing Up

The movement of independent migrant children is a phenomenon that is becoming prominent in local and international discourse but remains under-researched (Settien and Berganza, 2005). There have been a few studies on independent children in South Africa. Notably absent from this literature and public discourse has been the experiences of

[15] See article by Ngwenya Kaizer, "A rising tide of Child Refugees" in Drum 12 July 2012, number 29

independent children (see Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010: 623) particularly their interactions with service providers including humanitarian agencies.

The huge population of Zimbabwean independent children in South Africa and in contact with humanitarian agencies presents an opportune context to study the discourses which aid workers are drawing from to represent these children and how these discourses are functioning. It also presents a challenging situation to understand the tension between local and universal understandings of childhood and vulnerability. In fact, there is a growing realisation, though it is still in its infancy, that the situation of independent children in Southern Africa deserves scholarly attention similar to other groups of children living outside their homes, such as street children.

In the main, available writings are concerned with the occurrence of independent children *per se*, migrant children's participation in research, children's rights, gaps in legal and policy frameworks covering migrant children, causes of child migration, their socio-demographic profile, their needs and vulnerabilities. Issues to do with understanding the inherent model(s) of childhood and discourses being used to inform programming, how the service providers represent childhood and vulnerability, is still to be interrogated. Much still remains to be learned about the experiences of aid workers in interacting with these children – their understandings, prejudices and tolerances. There is silence on how interventions or humanitarian programmes are crafted, implemented, perceived and responded to by both children and aid workers.

This thesis is not about whether aid workers are right or wrong when rolling out interventions, whether they are portraying independent children correctly or not, or a summary of 'how to implement programmes for independent children' Rather, it is an attempt to answer these questions: How do aid workers and independent children generate, negotiate, ward off and take up varied representations of independent children within humanitarian agencies? What discourses are being invoked to understand independent children and how are they affecting the mode and outcome of interactions between these children and those service providers? How are different social actors engaging with these discourses? In answering these questions, I am cognisant of the humanitarian agencies' efforts to alleviate the problems independent children are faced with.

Through examining some everyday interactions between aid workers and independent children, I draw attention to the multi-layered contexts, and ambiguous ways in which independent children were being represented. I show the shifting interests of the social actors and different meanings they attached to different social issues at particular moments.

Advancing the view that "Different social issues tend to be marked by the predominance of different discourses" (Meyer, 2007: 87), I argue that there is a deployment of competing and contradictory discourses about children, childhood and vulnerability within a humanitarian setting. In fact, one of my objectives in this thesis is to bring to light the different discourses through which childhood and vulnerability are understood in a humanitarian context and what these discourses served to do in the real lives of independent migrant children.

Musina is a complex and challenging area for the many hopeful and poor independent children Zimbabwean children. A number of these children found South Africa's 'bright lights' and thriving economy very deceiving as their plans were quickly ruined or threatened by violence and limited livelihood opportunities. I described independent children's experiences of crime in order to foreground the hardships they faced and how crime shaped the way they were perceived by aid workers. Independent migrant children interacted with State and non-state actors responding to various migration challenges. Both tension and spirit of co-operation prevailed amongst the social actors. Thus, the need to understand the social, economic and political context that generates different and contradictory representations of independent children in Musina is very important.

Thesis Lay-out

This thesis has eight chapters. In all of them I discuss, in slightly different ways, the main themes of how local and global understandings of childhood are bound together and/or conflict, the different discourses which are being produced and reproduced to understand independent migrant children, and the discursive practices that position different actors in relations of power at particular times. I understand that conceptualisations of childhood and acceptable actions of children vary over age, "gender, class, and space and need to be examined at the crossroads of local and global forces" (Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010: 9). The exploration of the concept of 'agency' and its relationship to structural inequality is one of the common threads that unify the chapters in this thesis.

To facilitate understanding of the representations of independent children, **Chapter One** has provided the background of the thesis. I introduced the study by stating the aims of the study, posing the research questions, presenting the study's rationale, the problematic context of the lives of independent children and aid workers, provided a detailed account of the study setting to set the scene for understanding the social actors' lifeworlds and their interactions.

Chapter Two presents a critical literature review and the study's conceptual foundations. It discusses these theoretical approaches: the New Social Studies of Childhood; actor-oriented and interface approach; the non-dichotomous understanding of James, Jenks and Pout's (1998) framework of social/minority group, and social constructionist/tribal child approaches as enunciated by Holloway and Valentine (2000). Social actors' actions which shape the different representations of independent children are firmly embedded in a wider context of relations and social structures. Independent children are active social actors in their households and communities (see Clark-Kazak, 2011). To understand the social environment in which independent children lived and interacted with aid workers, I briefly look at the migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa in context, roles and response of the South African government and the civil society organisations to the presence of independent children in Musina.

In Chapter Three I provide information on the ethnographic methods and techniques I used to collect data. I discuss, justify and explain my use of ethnography. For example, I explain how I employed ethnography to understand the multiple realities of independent children and aid workers in Musina, particularly their life-worlds. I argue that to have a productive fieldwork one has to tactfully invest in social relationships (see Clark-Kazak, 2011) and treat children as competent social actors when doing research on migrant children (and with them). I also discuss how my social position as a Zimbabwean and male researcher influenced field experiences and results. I explain why as an social actor in the research, I situate myself in a reflexive manner going beyond the data collection process to include the social, political and economic issues which have effected my interpretation of the results (see also Alldred and Burman, 2005). Furthermore, I reflect on ethical challenges of researching independent children. In this chapter I also explain how I analysed the data. I then reflect on the daunting task of researching in a humanitarian setting. I argue that in such a space, a researcher has to strive to remain conscious of the need to strike a balance between being a researcher and a responsible human being. However, I am convinced that doing so is contestable.

Chapter Four to **Seven** are my central chapters in the sense that I present and discuss empirical findings with regard to representations of childhood and vulnerability. Aid workers' concerns about child mobility, sexuality and work revolve around their safety and development, which they say is threatened by a range of factors from economic exploitation to denial of fundamental human rights (Palmary, 2009; Clacherty, 2003). Consequently, service providers in Musina were providing or trying to provide a number of services to

eliminate these threats as well as, paradoxically, facilitate independent children's participation in the adult world of work and mobility. The ideas they use or the way aid workers then go about representing independent children deserves particular attention in this thesis as it sheds light on the understanding of childhood in this humanitarian and migration context. In **Chapter Four** and **Five** I present the formal and informal representation of independent children in Musina. I focus on children's mobility, work and sexuality, which are sensitive and divisive issues in studies on children and childhood, to show the complexities in the context, contests and paradoxes in the representations of these children. A salient feature of this chapter is problematising the binary analysis of portraying child work, sexuality and mobility as either good or bad. I therefore look at the situatedness, competing and contradictory understandings of childhood. Migration, work and sexuality are examples which I used in this thesis to understand childhood in Musina. The chapter calls for aid workers to have a clear understanding of childhood, the local realities (particularly their own and others' social world), competing discourses on the depiction of independent children and how they are function. I look at the local and global discourses which are mobilised to shape the different representations of independent children. This is important for understanding the intersection between childhood, vulnerability and situated representations of independent children. **Chapter Six** shifts the focus to a discussion of the reminders of childhood used by aid workers in order for independent children not to transgress boundaries as well as to be consistent with state of childhood and vulnerability. It also explores the formal and informal economy of childhood. The discussion provides further insight into the contextual nature of the representations of childhood in migration and aid work. **Chapter Seven** deals with the consequences of the representations of independent children. Key features of this chapter are the different childhoods for different independent children. I focused on gendered, classed and national childhoods to show some of the ways in which independent children were affected by the different representations of childhood and vulnerability. I demonstrate that gender, social class, space and nationality are important determinants as they produce expectations, roles and responsibilities that are essential in how childhood is conceived and perceived

Chapter Eight is the conclusion and provides a summary of findings, arguments, research contributions and leads for future research on childhood and child migration. I also present some practical implications of this study for practitioners. The chapter emphasises the importance of contextualising the representations of independent children in various situations. The argument is that due to ever changing contextual factors there is fluid dualism

between formal and informal representations of independent children, local and global understandings of childhood, all of which create different childhoods.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Study's Conceptual Foundations

Introduction

In this chapter I review relevant literature on the conceptions of childhood in the western and global South literature. This lays the base for unpacking the social interface between local and universal understandings of childhood in Musina. It has been suggested that the concepts of vulnerability and agency, a dense theoretical area, are often treated as mutually exclusive (see Kitzinger, 1990; Levine, 2004) and tension usually characterises their application. Although it is not the primary goal in this study, as I discuss the representations of independent children I will show that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive (see Orgocka, 2012). I look at the discourses that operate in humanitarian work in relation to childhood, as well as how these discourses function. I begin the chapter with a review of the concept of childhood at both the global and local levels. Within this section, I present the theoretical frameworks which inform the analysis of the results. After this, I do a critical overview of child agency. Then I discuss and justify other theoretical influences. I then reflect on the major issues covered in literature on child migration and emphasise the gaps in understanding migrant children.

Migration literature and media organisations have used various terms to describe a child who "has either crossed a border alone or has subsequently found him- or herself living in a foreign country without an adult caregiver (not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, has a responsibility to do so)" (Hillier, 2007: 8). For example, they have been called child migrants, refugee children, separated minors, unaccompanied minors, unaccompanied migrant children, and unaccompanied foreign minors (see Wernesjo, 2011; Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010; Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010; Hillier, 2007, Setien and Berganza, 2005; Halvorsen, 2002). Since I concur with Orgocka's point that terms like unaccompanied minors and separated minors "strip child and youth migrants of any agentic capacities to determine the path of their development and individualisation" (2012: 4), I use the term 'independent migrant children'. This is line with my recognisation of the agency of children and their position as active social actors (James and Prout, 1998).

In this chapter, I also seek to provide an insight into the social context of child migration and related aid work in Musina. Painting a picture of the social environment in which the children interfaced with aid workers is important as "[p]articular conceptualisations of childhood need to be understood in relation to the social conditions that gave rise to them" (Heywood, 2001 cited in Ansell, 2005: 10). In that light, I briefly review literature on Zimbabweans' migration to South Africa. I then provide more information on the political and economic problems which this southern African country has experienced in recent years. This background is important as independent children's lives in South Africa are intertwined with their country, Zimbabwe, and its socio-economic and political events. I also describe the roles of and responses by the South African government and civil society to the huge presence of independent children in Musina and South Africa in general. Here my emphasis is on the interventions of service providers and laws related to migrant children. This places in perspective the actions of all the social actors.

Conceptualising Childhood

In this section, I review literature on the construction of the 'The Child' in western literature. This is important as the work of child related service providers in Musina and other parts is heavily informed and guided by global understandings of childhood which are rooted in the global North. In western literature, childhood is frequently depicted as a time of innocence and vulnerability, (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). According to Aries (1962), this state of innocence makes children weak and vulnerable which calls for their protection (see UNDP, 2006). Consequently, Stephens notes that "Modern children are supposed to be segregated from the harsh realities of the adult world and to inhabit a safe, protected world of play, fantasy, and innocence" (1995: 14). How this idea of the child has evolved over time and context and influenced the social construction of childhood in post–colonial African countries is very important but remains by and large unknown.

Although theorists differ in their interpretations, childhood is largely accepted as "socially constructed by adult society in different ways in different times and places" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 764; see Shamgar-Handelman, 1994; see Chin, 2003). Of note, "childhood is both constructed and reconstructed both for and by children" (James and Prout, 1990). Acknowledging Aries' (1962) contribution in conceptualising childhood, Stephens writes that "the particular form of modern childhood is socially and historically specific" (1995: 5), while Lowe (2012: 269) adds that childhood is a "product of values, discourses and

practices" (for a discussion of childhood as a social construction, see Kehily, 2009, and James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Adults use power to shape or re-shape children's lives at various levels but this position is not fixed due to contestations and negotiations between the two groups (see Mayall, 2008).

It is important to review literature on the construction of "The Child" in western literature as the work of agencies providing some services to independent migrant children tend to be guided and informed by global understandings of children, which are rooted in western understandings of childhood. The 1989 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is very central in the policies and operations of organisations working with children. One of the service providers under study, Save the Children UK, is a global organisation whose work is heavily influenced by the UNCRC (see chapter 3). In addition, children in Zimbabwe and South Africa are being sensitised about their childhood status and rights which are also anchored on western understandings of childhood. My assumption is that the representation of independent migrant children by aid workers as well as by these children themselves is also influenced by western understandings of childhood.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) note that there are three dominant discourses of children and childhood in the Western culture: the discourse of evil (The evil child), the discourse of innocence (The innocent child) and the discourse of rights (The immanent). James, Jenks and Prout argue that the discourse of evil "assumes that evil, corruption and baseness are primary elements in the constitution of 'the child'" (1998: 10; also see Kehily, 2009). This is also called the puritan discourse (Kehily, 2009). Consequently, it calls for children to be disciplined and punished but in a tolerant way. With regards to observation by some writers that there has been an evolvement of the discourse of evil to discourse of purity and innocence, and recently to the discourses of rights, Meyer (2007) observes that this has not been clear. "The discourse of evil persists, and the discourse of rights has not displaced the discourse of innocence or gained status supremacy. Different social issues tend to be marked by the predominance of different discourses" (Meyer, 2007: 87).

Clarke (2004a) writes that the Enlightenment view regarded children as inherently innocent. The Enlightenment view was linked with the growth of Romanticism, which in some sense saw children as uncorrupted. The Romantic discourse, drawing upon the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), claimed that children's innocence "is only contaminated on contact with the corrupt outside world" (Kehily, 2009: 5). The romantic discourse wants children's innocence to be protected and not violated (Kehily, 2009). However, this knowledge was largely confined to the upper classes. For the great mass of the population,

children's lives, like the lives of adults, were characterised by poverty, hard labour and exploitation. This situation gave rise to calls that children need to be protected by all including the State (Briggs, 1999 cited in Clarke, 2004a). The notion of childhood purity led to a proliferation of efforts to respect and protect children's innocence (Clarke, 2004a; Kehily, 2009). In stark contrast to this view, was the Puritan perspective which postulated that children are born evil-minded and that their sense of what is right or wrong is warped (Kehily, 2009). From this perspective, if children are left to their own devices, they will think and perform evil deeds. In addition, Kehily (identifies the tabula rasa discourse which is rooted in John Locke's "idea that children come into the world as blank slates who could, with guidance and training develop into rational human beings. This discourse positions children as "in the process of becoming an adult in the making" (Kehily, 2009:5).

Then there was the growth in humanitarianism which set the foundation for the European Welfare State and child related humanitarian agencies. The understanding of childhood which is framed as a universal period of life shielded from dangers and tasks (Burman, 1994) is constructed as representative of a global child. Consequently, these ideas have functioned in the South in varying ways. For Burman (2008), and other authors, Global North's ideologies categorise children as innocent victims who are not to blame for their situations. Such ideas justify intervention programmes aimed at protecting children.

In the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, a variety of perspectives on childhood have been developed (Clarke, 2004a). One such perspective sees childhood and adulthood occupying a single continuous world, with individuals moving gradually from childhood to adulthood (Bourdillon, 2008). This stands in stark contrast to the idea of the 'death of childhood' associated with writers such as Neil Postman, (1994). Concerning the latter idea, "the divisions between childhood and adulthood have been undermined, especially by media" (Clarke, 2004b: 81) threatening the 'innocence of childhood'.

If we concede that childhood and adulthood occupy a single continuous world, children are understood as subjects with rights and as agents in shaping their own lives (UNCRC, 1989; James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998). People who hold this view seek to support the resilience of children, rather than treat them simply as the recipients of care and support. However, emphasis on the agency and competence of children can also be used to justify the withdrawal of institutions from responsibility toward vulnerable children (Nieuwenhuys, 1997 cited in Bourdillon, 2008) and thus, like all knowledge, this approach creates its own exclusions.

Generally, childhood is "primarily a social construct, and, like race or gender, a social fact in the Durkheimian sense" (Chin 2003: 311). It is constructed as a "privileged domain of spontaneity, play, freedom, and emotion" (Stephens 1995: 6). This emanates from the idea of childhood innocence and as a phase for growing up. Consequently, children were seen as free from economic responsibility and accountability.

As mentioned earlier, I utilised the social constructionist paradigm (see Aries, 1962; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) to argue that childhood has no rigid set of characteristics (Clarke, 2004b). Rather, it is subject to different discourses and has been conceptualised diversely at different times and in various contexts by different actors. Thus, I concur with Boyden's (2003) point that a universalist understanding of childhood, for example, as espoused by UNCRC, that constructs the world as homogenous in terms of social circumstances might not do justice to show the diversity of children's experience, adults' perception of childhood and the characteristics it should exhibit. The social constructionist paradigm (Burr, 1995) allows for a reflection on childhood as a cultural construction rather than a natural state. Below, I explore the forms of accommodation and opposition that arise between local and global understandings of childhood.

In theorising the representations of independent children I concur with Mayall's (2008) use of the word "knowledge" instead of words like "perspective" and "opinion". Knowledge implies:

> Something derived from experiences in the past; people reflect on these, build on them and arrive at a body of understanding, commonly in the process of revision… It is part of our conceptualisations of children, therefore, that we credit them with knowledge, rather than with the relatively transient and flimsy 'perspective', 'view' or 'opinion' (Mayall 2008:109).

The heterogeneity of independent children has the potential to generate differential patterns of how they are handled and represented by service providers, how they perceive and respond to interventions. As Burman (2008: 187) points out, the contemporary question pre-occupying women's studies is "which women?" and there is equally a need to ask "which children?" Thus, for example, some of the questions can be: Which types of children are being represented in certain ways at particular times? Answering these questions helps understand different childhoods for different children in aid work.

The New Social Studies of Childhood

With some of these questions in mind, this study also utilised what has been referred to as 'New Social Studies of Childhood' which emerged in 1990 as a result of growing interest in the concept of agency and context in the Social Science field (Ansell, 2005). The expression of agency, its meanings and form needs to be understood in existing knowledge and power relations. The 'New Social Studies of Childhood' approach sees childhood as socially constructed (see Ansell, 2005; Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Emphasising that children are capable social actors who exercise agency even in difficult situations, this approach argues that they should be studied in their own right as it views children as actively involved in shaping their lives (Prout and James, 1990: 8-9).

The Social/Minority Group and Social Constructionist/Tribal Child Approach

I seek to identify and unpack the differences in the representations of childhood and vulnerability through showing that "the social/minority group and social constructionist/tribal child approaches" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767) developed by James, Jenks and Prout (1998 cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000) "can be combined, which is the non-dichotomous conceptualisations of global/local to our understanding of young people's lives" (Massey, 1998 cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767). As Holloway and Valentine (2000: 767) point out, "An analysis of the importance of 'global' influences" and children's 'local' worlds enriches childhood studies". Indeed, studying the intersections of local and global understandings of childhood, which I find persuasive and useful, becomes unavoidable when one wants to understand the various representations of children by different social actors. Through the lived realities lens it is important to understand how global and local ideas on childhood are interfacing in shaping the ways independent children are being represented by aid workers and the children themselves.

The global /local divisions have been the subject of some debate. For example, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) identify a split between childhood research which is global in its focus and that which has more local concerns. For them, the child is conceived in four different ways, which can be split into two pairs. In the social structural approach, childhood is seen as a structural category, a social structure which is present in all societies. Despite the acceptance that the conditions of childhood vary between times and places due to differences in culture, social and economic situations across societies, childhood itself is seen as a universal category. Then there is the minority group child which is an embodiment of the

empirical and politicised version of the "social structural child" (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). In this approach, a child is politicised. Thirdly, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) refer to the socially constructed child which is informed by the social constructionist perspective that which rejects common assumptions about childhood and the existence of social structures which construct a common form of childhood. Finally, James, Jenks and Prout add that the "tribal child, in a parallel move to that made above (social structural approach/minority group child), is the empirical and potentially politicised version of the socially constructed child" (1998 cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 765). The tribal child approach posits children as different from adults. It sees adults and children's social worlds as different. Punch explains that this approach "sees the child's cultural world as separate from that of adults, where children act autonomously with their own rituals and rules" (2003: 280). It is an appropriate approach to explore the different representations of independent children. In addition, it sees the social action of children being structured in a way that is incomprehensible to adults. This suggests that independent children could be in a social world different from that of adults such as aid workers. This possibility and how such a situation produces different representations of independent children have to be explored.

Holloway and Valentine's (2000) argument against James, Jenks and Prout's (1998) point that "the dichotomies global/local, universal/particular and continuity/change firmly remain intact" is very important to this study focusing on the universal/local dichotomy in the representations of childhood. Holloway and Valentine argue that this artificial analytical separation of global/local can be bridged by placing the local and the global in context (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Both the ''global' and ''local'' are made by "mutually constituting sets of practices" (ibid: 767). On one hand, the ''global'' processes are shown to be both global and local – they operate in particular local areas, thus shaping that area, but also themselves being reconstructed in the process (Hall, 1995 cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767). On the other hand, understandings of local social relations as locally produced systems of social interaction and symbolic meaning which are fixed are also critiqued. Massey (1998 cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767) emphasises that local cultures must be regarded as products of the interface between local and global influences. This means that local cultures are neither closed nor entirely local, nor are they divorced from global influences. This leads Holloway and Valentine (2000: 767) to argue that the global and local are not separate but closely intertwined. Holloway and Valentine (2000), in a statement which is central to the exploration of how childhood and vulnerability are represented, further advance an interesting argument that global studies which do not take into cognisance local

outcomes and responses to global processes, and local studies of children's worlds of meaning which exclude an analysis of global economic and cultural influences cannot provide a holistic understanding of children's lives. Holloway and Valentine (2000: 767) stress that the "lack of cross-linkages which James et al. (1998) identify is problematic" as it leaves us with "macro studies which can tell us a great deal about the relative social position of different countries, and micro studies which help us understand children's social worlds, but few studies which link the two levels of analysis" (2000: 767). Consequently, "all macro studies are placed in the global-universal side of the theoretical field" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767) while all micro studies placed in the local–particular. This situation prevents the formation of productive cross-linkages.

As discussed earlier, considering that aid workers' formal understandings of childhood are usually informed and guided by this idea of a universal state of childhood, which is promoted by the UNCRC and governments through Acts like the Children's Act in the case of South Africa, it is important to explore the social interface between this idea and local understandings of childhood. Assumptions that global ideas on childhood promoted by powerful institutions like humanitarian agencies and government are dominant over local understandings during service delivery are problematic and likely to be misleading. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that local understandings on childhood are also influenced by global ideas. Lifeworlds of social actors are also shaped by ideas and experiences. Local and global understandings of childhood closely interact but the contexts in which each dominate or is silenced by the various social actors need to be analysed as they have a bearing on the representations of independent migrant children. The non-rigid social/minority group and social constructionist/ tribal child theoretical framework allows for understanding the concept of child agency and the influence of structural factors in producing and reproducing different understandings of childhood.

The Actor-Oriented and Interface Approach & Child Agency

I do not intend to homogenise or collapse the multi-faceted characters of independent children from Zimbabwe into one representation. So I deploy Norman Long's actor-oriented and interface approach as it provides a good framework and a better context within which to understand the representations of independent children in a context where there is external intervention in their lives. The actor-oriented and interface approach is being used as both a theoretical and methodological perspective to read cultural diversity and social differences

inherent in interventions targeting independent children. Long (1999) points out that interfaces usually occur where different and divergent lifeworlds intersect, or in social situations in which interactions focus on having a common position. The actor oriented and interface approach links well with a non-rigid application of the 'social/minority group and social constructionist/ tribal child' theoretical framework. They all recognise the existence of differences in social worlds and some connections of these social worlds. In addition, they are all located in social constructionism, which informs this thesis.

I will situate points of confrontation and social differences between children and service providers within broader knowledge/power domains. Interface analysis gives weight to the importance of knowledge processes. As actors' lifeworlds interface, knowledge is constantly being generated (Long, 1999). Long (1999: 3) argues that "Knowledge is present in all social situations and is often entangled with power relations". The knowledge of service providers will be contrasted with that of children regarding how childhood and children should be understood, categorised and handled. Of note is the point Long (1999: 19) makes, that "the interface analysis grapples with 'multiple realities' made up of potentially conflicting social and normative interests, and diverse and contested bodies of knowledge (such as the universalist conceptualisation of childhood and vulnerability versus the local one)".

The interface analysis provides a useful tool for identifying areas where there are social differences in understanding issues (Long, 1999) when analysing and explaining the common or different representations of childhood and vulnerability. It will help to explore how the perception of independent children's childhood and vulnerability varied by age, gender, social class, space and nationality. It will also explain the differences amongst aid workers in dealing for example, with working children who view work as an act of agency.

Questions have been raised about child agency, its manifestation and how it is understood by adults in each social context. The interplay between structure and individual "agency", a term described by Hitlin and Elder (2007) as slippery, is central to much sociological and anthropological understanding of social processes. This debate is still raging even in migration studies (Bakewell, 2010). Agency has been defined differently, for example, Ahearn (2001: 20) defines it as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act". However, Hitlin and Elder (2007: 173) argue that Ahearn's definition's "abstractness does not help us develop ways to identify agentic action". Motivated by the need to capture the differences amongst independent children in expressing agency (see Hitlin and Elder, 2007), in this study I utilise Norman Long (1992), Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008) and Orgocka's (2012) definitions of agency. Long (1992: 22) describes agency as the "capacity to

process social experience and devise ways of coping with life" while Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith describe it as the "ability to shape one's own life and to influence the lives of others" (2008: 202). According to Orgocka (2012: 2) agency is "the ability to exert one's will and to act in the world through setting goals, agency includes aspects of independence and autonomy". Crucial to understanding agency is the point made by Bourdillon that "agency operates not only in practical decisions, but also in developing knowledge and perspectives on the situation they (children) face" (2012: 5).

According to Ritzer (1992) there are notable differences among European writers involved in the agency and structure debates. For example, there is no unanimity in literature on the nature of the agent. Some "treat the agent as an individual actor (for example, Giddens in 1979, Bourdieu in 1977) whilst others like Torraine's "actionalist sociology" treat "collectives such as social classes as agents" (Ritzer, 1992: 448). Giddens adds that there is a third understanding, espoused by Burns and Flam (1986), which takes a middle-ground on this debate as it regards either individuals or collectivities as agents.

There is no consensus among those who focus on the individual actor as an agent (Ritzer 1992). For Bourdieu (1977 cited in Ritzer 1992:448) an actor does not have the free and wilful power to act. However, "while Giddens's agents may not have intentionality and free will either, but they have much more wilful power than intentionality and free will than Bourdieu's" (Ritzer, 1992: 448). Ritzer further explains the difference between Bourdieu and Giddens' agents as follows:

> Where Bourdieu's agents seem to be dominated by their habitus, by internal ("structuring") structures, the agents in Giddens' work are the perpetrators of action. They have at least some choice, at least the possibility of acting differently than they do. They have power, and they make a difference in their worlds…. Most importantly, they constitute (and are constituted by) structures (1992: 448).

My position on the conflicting accounts of Bourdieu and Giddens is that a social actor's ability to act with free will constantly shifts as it is dependent on the social context he or she is operating in. I see at times these actors being dominated by their habitus and other times having power to shape their lives. This scenario has the potential of generating complex and contradictory representations of social actors.

When studying children, the interaction between agency and structure features prominently given that they are generally regarded as passive (see for example, Morrow, 2008). Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008) dispute the construction of children as "passive subjects of social structures and process". Considering that they are understood to be constrained by so many factors in foreign lands, it is important that studies be carried out to explore how independent children may be finding ways to capitalise on their predicament (see Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith, 2008).

Working with both service providers and orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe (the latter group lived in their parents' households or communities), I traced some of the problems which children faced in their lives to failure by adults to harness children's knowledge, listen to and respect their knowledge. This situation can also be attributed to studies that rely heavily on adults' knowledge and in the process children becoming "muted voices" in Social Science research (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008: 11). However, the idea of giving voice to children is a subjective process (Alldred and Burman, 2005) and runs the risk of reifying childhood as a universal state. That act of 'giving a voice' is also subjective, for example, the politics of 'giving a voice' such as which children get to talk, listened to, why and at what moments. The other challenge is that even when children are being heard it does not mean that they are being listened to by the adults. I identified the actor-oriented approach, usually applied in rural development studies (for example, Magadlela, 2000; Kujinga and Manzungu, 2004), as "appropriate for the analysis of social relations and their role among local actors" (Magadlela, 2000: 11) and also the representations of children on the move. Turnbull, Hernandez and Reyes (2009) in their study of street children in Mexico successfully used this approach[16]. They managed to see things from the perspectives of both children and their helpers. However, the focus of that study was not on understanding the discourses the different actors drew from.

The actor-oriented approach argues that actors are knowledgeable, capable of re-interpreting and re-orientating interventions to suit their own understandings of their needs (Long, 1992; Long, 2001). Long and van der Ploeg credits a social actor with agency, which makes it possible for him or her to "devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme conditions of coercion" (1994: 66). Due to differences in knowledge, power, experiences in life, among other social factors, social actors respond to or view situations or

[16] Stephen Biggs and Matsaert (2004: 2) observed that the actor analysis is increasingly being used to understand the role of donors and non-governmental organisations in the same 'framework as looking at actors at the village and national levels'.

issues differently as they attach different meanings to them. This approach further argues that in situations which appear to be uniform, actors respond differently to similar structural conditions. Long (2001: 13) argues that “people are not simply disembodied social categories or passive recipients of interventions” and that they are not “powerlessly constrained by the larger structures within which they operate” (Bakewell, 2000: 108).

The actor-oriented perspective is in line with the new paradigm that gives priority to the 'personhood' of children, to their 'lived experience' (James and Prout, 1995: 92 cited in Mason and Steadman 1997: 35). It sees children as 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings' (Waksler, 1991 cited in Mason and Steadman, 1997: 35; see Qvortrup, 1994: 4). This paradigm sees children as acting on, as well as being acted upon, by the social world. It posits that they are “possessed of individual agency, as competent social actors and interpreters of the world” (Mason and Steadman, 1997: 35). These two scholars further note that:

> This alternative paradigm considers children as having conceptual autonomy, being subjects rather than objects, and able to contribute actively to decisions. Individual children are placed within contexts which take account of age, gender, class, race and ability (Mason and Steadman, 1997: 35).

The actor-oriented approach recognises human agency as it notes that people do not take interventions as given. Biggs and Matsaert (2004) in their paper on how to strengthen poverty reduction programmes using an actor-oriented approach, urge us to be aware of the possibility of different social actors analysing situations differently and that the analysis might be driven by political considerations. They argue that in the past, the analysis of actors’ interactions was “often ‘deinstitutionalised’ and ‘depoliticised’” (2004: 12) as well as “depersonalised” (ibid). Other key social actors were excluded and their work not well analysed. This study contends that interpretations of acts or actors, for example, representations of social actors seem also fuelled by other motivations. In order to have a holistic understanding of the complex and often contradictory representations of independent children I also depart from the “depersonalised, depoliticised and deinstitutionalised frameworks of analysis” (Biggs and Matsaert, 2004: 12).The approach also seeks to clarify how actors attempt to create space for themselves amidst interventions in their lives and “to determine which elements contribute to or impede the successful creation of such space for manoeuvre” (Leeuwis, Long and Villarreal, 1990: 19). Thus, as a person interested in the interactions between aid workers and independent children, “constraints on and processes of agency” (Hitlin and Elder, 2007: 173) are central, and not whether agency exists.

I see social actors including independent children as active agents in constructing and shaping their life-worlds and this is in line with the New Social Studies of Childhood. In fact, I see independent migrant children having the ability to exercise power, make some choices at some moments during the course of migration and interaction with aid workers. Children have a different way of perceiving reality. They can act in ways which can be interpreted as expressions of powerlessness. However, a close analysis of their actions and choices can reveal that their acts are "based on a different appreciation of the situations they encountered" (Long, 1999: 18). In fact, their acts can be calculated strategies. But I do not romanticise children's agency. I recognise the limits of agency. Consequently, as I look at the agency of independent children, I do not divorce the analysis from the wider social structures (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Holloway and Valentine write:

> Recognition of children's agency does not necessarily lead to a rejection of an appreciation of the ways in which their lives are shaped by forces beyond the control of the individual children (2000: 6).

At some moments, structural factors like social class, traditional practices, nationality and gender determine or limit independent children's agency to make own free choices. Since I see childhood as a heterogeneous and fluid category which changes with situations, I take the middle ground of "recognising the importance of finding the balance between structure and agency" (Bakewell, 2010: 1690). This is the reason why I will unpack and understand the representations of independent migrant children in context.

Thus, as I seek to understand the discourses social actors draw from when representing children as weak or resilient, I follow Ensor (2008:13 cited in Ensor and Gozdiak, 2010: 7) who points out that

> It is important to acknowledge that children's agency, and their ability to overcome the challenges of migration, is framed by their evolving capacities and reflects their own individual and socially generated vulnerabilities and resilience.

In seeking a deeper understanding of how independent children's agency is constructed and functions in an "emergency" situation, this study employs and reflects on the actor oriented perspective as a theoretical and methodological approach (Long, 1992). Its positioning of actors and recipients of external interventions, at the hub of development work

appealed to me as I have seen people as social actors manipulating, challenging, accepting, partially accepting or totally rejecting external interventions.

I am cognisant of some of the limits of agency, particularly that not all children have room to make choices, some have to give up ambitions and some have shortened, difficult and desperate lives (Whitehead, 2007). Qvortrup (2008: 68) cements this argument by observing that children are "born into economic and cultural circumstances which cannot be explained away". Considering Mayall's observation that children's experiences of life are boxed within "childhoods constructed for them by adult understandings of childhood, of what children are and should be" (1996 cited in O'Kane, 2008: 126), it is interesting to unpack the discourses which reproduce this state. It is also important to analyse how child agency manifests in practice and how children drawing from a number of discourses respond to the different ways they tend to be represented by service providers and by themselves.

Cockerham (2005) and Dunn (1997) cited in Hitlin and Elder (2007) observe that there is increasing consensus amongst most theorists who have participated in the agency and structure debate that the rigid dualism between agency and structure is flawed. They add that the majority of these theorists "understands the need to include both freedom and constraint while also noting the ways that free actions reproduce structures" (Hitlin and Elder, 2007: 172). Hitlin and Elder (2007) also cite the criticism which is directed at Western sociologists that they amplify and romanticise Western conceptualisation of individual agency. In the Global North, where the discourse of individual freedom prevails but in a much more complex way than is often represented in the media, individuals are constructed as having the power to drive various social actions (Hitlin and Elder, 2007).

Qvortrup (2008) argues that discussions of either structure or agency are not very helpful since it is obvious that children are actors. Of interest is exploring the "variability of childhood as a macro-phenomenon" (Qvortrup, 2008: 68). Still to be understood is at what moments independent children exercise agency and with what intentions as well as how the variability of their agency shapes the understanding of children on the move.

An actor oriented analysis, will also show how social actors actually strategise to deal with the many challenges, how they manipulate (if so) and thereby create space for themselves (in an attempt to reduce their vulnerability or assert their autonomy). The social structural factors that might be constraining child agency will be identified and views about them analysed.

According to Bourdillon (2004) past studies have negated the knowledge of children and their agency in shaping their own lives. The construction of children as passive human beings or recipients of adult socialisation (see O'Kane, 2008) can be attributed to the "traditional relegation of children to the world of the muted – along with groups such as women, the disabled… and minority peoples" (Twum-Danso, 2004:1) and the prevalent construction of children as passive and immature (Burman, 2008). However, there has been an increasing respect of children's viewpoints from the late 1980s. This development is rooted in the children's rights discourse, which is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The response of service providers to child agency has not been interrogated in resource poor settings where adults are not able to support children, and there is enormous pressure for children to contribute to family incomes (Bourdillon, 2008). Though the ACRWC (1990) asserts the responsibility of children to assist their families in case of need, and to place their physical and intellectual abilities at the service of their communities (Article 31 a, b), the way they are treated when they exercise this (e.g. decision to work) can be understood differently by service provision workers. Bourdillon (2003) argues that the general competence of children is underestimated and they are not afforded opportunities to make a difference in terms of material contributions to their families and communities as many careers, and packages of humanitarian aid, are anchored on ideas which see children as weak and in need of support and protection. However, since agency appears in unpredictable ways, which sometimes forces adults to re-think the way they view children (Bourdillon, 2008: 1a), it is important to understand the discourses adults draw upon to represent independent children.

Gendered Nature of Vulnerability and Childhood

Considering childhood as embedded in broader relations of power and constantly a subject of negotiation by children and adults (O'Kane, 2008), of interest also to this study is the gendering of the representations of independent children. Within this, a focus on how work, movement, HIV and sexuality are dominant in South African gender discourses provides a good opportunity to analyse the different representations of childhood and vulnerability. One of the most significant current discussions in migration and health is the high prevalence of HIV and high risk of infection. Generally, sexuality plays a vital role in popular thinking about childhood largely because part of the ideal of childhood innocence is the idea of the asexual child (Archard, 1993; Burman, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Archard

(1993) argues that even if young children are given all the information about sex, they are simply incapable of making informed sexual decisions. This construction has been prevalent in the West since the Victorian era. Archard argues that the idea that before Freud children were understood as sexless creatures is contestable (see Foucault, 1980). Archard (1993) adds that the assumption that we are now readily prepared to see children in sexual terms is misleading. Consequently, sexual abuse of children is condemned as first and foremost a violation of their innocence (Archard, 1993) threatening the very state of childhood (Kitzinger, 1990).

However, the notion of children as asexual is always threatened by the representation of girls as seducers (see Walkerdine, 2001). For example, girls are accused of wearing clothing deemed to be sexually explicit, or 'rape provoking' mini-skirts in conservative parts of South Africa (see Wojcicki, 2002). In Musina there are reports of independent children being involved in sex work and "voluntary" sex (for example, Clacherty, 2003; IOM, 2009). The question is: what are the different discourses aid workers and independent children themselves draw from when children express their sexuality and what do they serve?

Burman notes that "(Global) Northern images of the child link categories of the natural with innocence (often signified as the girl child), thus setting up an opposition between innocence and experience that is supplemented by discourses of child care and child protection, and reflected in the cultural polarisation of naivety and damage" (2008: 190). She then points out that it becomes very problematic when children in any part of the world act in a deviant manner against the acceptable practices and this situation might lead to the withdrawal of privileges which are normally given to one who is regarded as a child. This problem can be traced back to the portrayal of poor people as "psychologically lacking and pathological and can be related directly to the kind of assumptions that became taken for granted in work on children of the poor in general" (Walkerdine, 2001: 18). Burman (2008) notes that this situation results in problems of reconciling the fact that children are not passive sexual beings with the need to protect them from abuse. For Burman, "since the dominant definition of childhood is a Northern model rendered global, [then] children of the South who of necessity deal resourcefully with the conditions they live in may thus invite further stigmatisation for their failure to conform to the image of the innocent, helpless child" (2008: 190-191). This in gender analysis is what Walkerdine (2001: 23) identifies as "femininity becomes the Other of rational childhood". Walkerdine adds that a deviant girl, one who does not behave as expected of a child, is labelled a social misfit and a threat to normalcy and morality. Adolescent girls who cross international borders alone particularly

using unorthodox ways like crossing borders illegally are often stereotyped as having loose sexual morals and thus do not deserve help. The assumption is that these girls expected sexual violence from using illegal entry points. The notion of deserving independent children generates a lot of consequences for children who do not conform to expected social norms.

Walkerdine (2001) notes that very often young girls themselves, especially working class girls, are accused of being complicit in sexual abuse, which raises challenges about the relation of childhood to adult sexuality. Walkerdine (2001) adds that the portrayal of little girls as eroticised is an issue that touches on a number of very difficult and often taboo areas. The "topic of little girls and sexuality has come to be seen as being about the problem of the sexual abuse of innocent and vulnerable girls by bad adult men, or conversely, less politically correct but no less present, the idea of little girls as little seductresses" (Walkerdine, 2001: 22). Walkerdine's argument above, whilst useful, is based on British children and in the South African context, sexuality and its relationship to vulnerability and agency has been shaped, at least in part, with a concern for HIV infection and the process of migration (rightly or wrongly) as central to its spread (Brummer, 2002).

The concept of life-world, which Magadlela defines as "the way actors view their situation in a particular place, together with the constraining and enabling factors around them, in their world" (2000: 15), will also be used to understand how the issues of child abuse shape the way that discourses of vulnerability are mobilised. It focuses on actors' understanding of themselves and their situation, their everyday lives, and encompasses how they see the outside world and interventions (for example, campaigns against child labour, children's involvement in sex) using their conceptual tools acquired in their world view. Independent children are most likely to have different life-worlds from service providers with regards to how their agency is being dealt with by service providers and how childhood and vulnerability is being represented. The concept of life-world can explain the differences in strategies children adopt to manage 'abuse', exploitation and other related challenges.

In the next section I give a brief overview of the sociological context of children's sexuality given that sexuality is an important issue that is widely seen as marking the boundary between children and adults.

Childhood in the 'African' Context

Taking into cognisance the fact that aid workers are working in a context where traditional and cultural understandings of childhood also influence the representations of independent migrant children, I briefly review literature on childhood in the 'African' or local context. It is instructive to note that aid workers are also community members and part of the social cultural context of Musina, whose perceptions of and interpretation of the world is influenced by local traditions and culture. When working with independent migrant children, aid workers are not only influenced by the organisations they work for; they can potentially influence their organisations' practices towards children. Concerned that the 1989 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) had not taken into cognisance important socio-cultural and economic realities particular to Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was developed and adopted. In other words, the argument was that the UNCRC is ethnocentric and dominated by Western knowledge on childhood, and therefore an African approach was needed. Contrary to the assumption that childhood is homogeneously experienced by having common age criteria, there is heterogeneity of children's childhoods and vulnerability as a result of differences in class, time, space, social and cultural constructions of this concept (Ensor and Gozdiak, 2010; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Be that as it may, the claim that the ACRWC represents Africa's understanding of childhood in totality is equally problematic in its homogenising and essentialising assumptions.

Twum-Danso (2005: 12) writes that "Unlike the Western viewpoint, childhood in the African context is not necessarily a stage of incompetence. On the contrary, children are viewed as being competent and capable". Opposing the UNCRC which sees children as leading individual autonomous lives, the ACRWC acknowledged that in African societies "children are seen as having a responsibility, like adults, to contribute to the subsistence of their families and wider communities" (Twum-Danso, 2005: 12). Despite expecting children to make a contribution in their households and communities, the tasks they perform should be consistent with their age, strength and competencies (Twum-Danso, 2005). Emphasis is placed on making sure that the duties they perform do not harm their growth and development. However, in the chapters to follow, I question this idea that there is such a thing as an "African child' in this essentialised way.

There is a dominant view, particularly in the Western media that African children have poorly protected childhoods due to a number of factors like armed conflicts, diseases (particularly HIV/AIDS, malaria and diarrhoea), poverty and 'cultural' practices like female circumcision (for example, see Arnfred, 2004). They are seen as having "abnormal" childhoods whilst "First World children tend to experience more privileged, protected childhoods compared to most of the world's children" (Punch, 2003: 277). Consequently, this justifies interventions targeting African children. However, there is need to question this characterisation of African children's childhoods in the context of child migration and its functions.

Generally, African children are socialised to contribute to household economy and doing household chores (see Bourdillon, 2006). The idea that they have a responsibility to help their families, and elders in communities, "in case of need", is captured in the ACRWC's Article 31). However, Article 15 of the ACRWC emphasises that a child should be protected from exploitation and harmful work. Arguably, it positions children as 'human becomings' (Waksler, 1991 cited in Mason and Steadman, 1997: 35; see Qvortrup, 1994: 4). It frames children as lacking the competency to protect themselves against exploitative and dangerous work. The question is how childhood is understood and contextualised in child migration. Another question is whether this thinking is also extended to other activities children engage in besides work and with what consequences.

In addition to work, the ACRWC shows contestations of culture. Van der Zalm (2008) points out that though the ACRWC acknowledges the value of cultural heritage and history, Article 1 clearly states that "[a]ny custom, tradition, cultural or religious practice that is inconsistent with the rights, duties and obligations contained in the present ACRWC shall to the extent of such inconsistency be discouraged" (OAU - ACRWC, 1990). The tensions between local practices, national laws and international treaties like ACRWC and UNCRC are likely to present challenges to service providers. Van der Zalm writes that "mere constitutionalisation of children's rights in South Africa was insufficient" (2008: 899). These are at least two ways in which the ACRWC shows the failings of universal notions of childhood and seeks to distinguish African children through their work and culture. Yet in doing so it relies on an equally generalised notion of the African child that glosses over diversity and difference within the continent.

This is not to deny that there may be common factors that impact on African children disproportionately, such as HIV and economic challenges. However, these social factors tend to impact differently on different children. Across the continent, thousands of children are

working in the formal and informal sectors. By so doing they are challenging the Western knowledge that childhood necessarily implies passivity in livelihood issues. However, they are seen by people who are steeped in the discourse of anti-child labour as victims of abuse and exploitation. All in all, people or international conventions often define what a child is but these definitions are constantly being challenged and negotiated by various actors including the children themselves who are using a multiplicity of discourses. In some ways, the ACRWC tries to be local but fails because it cannot fairly accommodate the diversity of childhoods and power dynamics which characterise social relationships.

Zimbabweans' Migration to South Africa

Like the thousands of adults in Zimbabwe who used various avenues to escape from the economic and political melt-down, a huge population of independent children responded to these challenges by moving to neighbouring countries like South Africa (Palmary, 2009; Clacherty, 2003). However, situating these children in migration is a contested matter due to a number of contextual factors. Consequently, the representations of these children are located in a myriad of discourses and social contexts. In this section I briefly present the historical context from which I make sense of their migration. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to revisit the history and debate on the push and pull factors to South Africa, it is important to understand some of the reasons why children migrate as it has a bearing on the nature of their interactions with aid workers in South Africa.

The migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa is not a new phenomenon. There is a long tradition of Zimbabweans migrating to Africa's second biggest economy especially to work. It dates back to the colonial days when people used to be recruited by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), popularly known as "WENELA" to work in Johannesburg's gold mines (see McNamara, 1985). What is likely to be new are, for example, the socio-economic and political reasons for migrating, the scale and speed of movement as well as that this migration is increasingly being feminised and children are also participating on a large scale.

Migration has become a norm among the people in the Western regions of Zimbabwe, who formed a significant population of the migrants to South Africa (Mahati, *et al*, 2006). For decades South Africa, particularly Johannesburg, has been seen as the 'land of milk and honey' (see Worby, 2010, Mahati, *et al.*, 2006). In this research and previous ones in Bulilima and Mangwe districts in Zimbabwe, I established that the appropriate trajectory of a

Zimbabwean migrant to South Africa requires a man, an adult one, as migration is highly gendered since the colonial era, to attend school, complete at least Form four and then reach adulthood before heading to *Egoli* or *Joni* to work in the mines, farms and hospitality industry. Many migrants including independent children imagine realising their fantasy of driving an expensive car within a very short period of time (a point I shall return to).

Through circular migration, which is a key feature of southern Africans' livelihoods for decades (see Pott, 2011 on circular migration in Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa), this myth about South Africa as a land of riches is popularised by returnees and migrant workers to Zimbabwe who are popularly known as "*injiva"* (*Ndebele* for a rich person). During major holidays like Christmas and Easter, *injiva* wearing the latest fashion and with an aura of elegance and flamboyance, travel to Zimbabwe. They bring lots of groceries, clothes, money and buy a lot of alcohol. However, drawing from the discourse of formal education being key for success in adulthood – probably a result of the "overestimation of the benefits of school" (Bourdillon, 2013: 2) – *injiva* were perceived as having abandoned schooling and were associated with crime (Mahati, *et al*., 2006; Maphosa, 2004), particularly violent crimes, an activity which aid workers feared that children might end up engaging in.

Generally, child migration is seen as "detrimental to children's education as children drop out of school in order to migrate for work" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 117). These two scholars add that:

> It is on this basis that many interventions aimed at preventing children from migrating are justified, in addition to the assumed inherent dangers associated with children's movement away from their immediate families (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 117).

Holding values about the importance of migrating early in life that clearly diverge from those of aid workers and other adults, a number of independent children indicated that they had been inspired by people, including those who had dropped out of school, left Zimbabwe as destitutes but returned driving nice cars bearing 'GP' (Gauteng Province) number plates (see also Mahati, *et al*., 2006). In separate interviews many independent children expressed the hope to quickly own and return home driving expensive cars. This finding backs Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White's observation that "the decision to move can arise from unrealistic hopes of a better life elsewhere and a lack of awareness of the risks involved" (2010: 141). Though sometimes scorned by locals for their profligate life-styles

and perceived involvement in crime among other factors, *injiva* do leave an indelible impression on their compatriots based in Zimbabwe prompting further movement to South Africa. Being an *injiva* has been, with varying degrees over time, a status symbol associated with prosperity. For example, households with family members in South Africa (and also in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America) who receive remittances in the form of money, clothes and groceries are usually economically better than households with no one in the diaspora. Relatives of *injiva* are highly regarded in these communities. *Injiva* were also said to be popular with women in Zimbabwe, something a number of local boys and men envied. Whole villages particularly in the Western provinces of Zimbabwe, and increasingly in the south eastern provinces as well, have been deserted by young people, especially males, in their quest to improve their lives. With the socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe deepening, a number of children saw themselves as having no chance of improving their socio-economic position in Zimbabwe. They saw migration as their chance for social mobility.

The economic aspect of migration aside, migration to South Africa is also associated with being elevated from boyhood to manhood. It is considered as a 'rites of passage' (Maphosa, 2007; see Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). In fact, there is an underlying belief that if a boy does not migrate to South Africa, the boy is not 'normal' (Maphosa, 2007). Not migrating, then, put some boys in difficult positions. Thus pressure is often applied, directly or indirectly, to young men to "act like a man" by following other men to South Africa. Those who have not been to South Africa in the South Western regions of Zimbabwe are often derided or described as *ibhare* (unsophisticated or stupid) (Maphosa, 2007). Following the hierarchy of masculinities in the pre-colonial (see Shire, 1994 cited in Uchendu, 2008: 9) and post-colonial period in South Africa, boys want to transit from boyhood to manhood. Chiuri describes masculinities "as methods that men use to justify their superior and exploitative positions in any society" (2008: 163) and masculinities feature prominently in this study.

Independent Migrant Children's Vulnerability

The debate on children's vulnerability and its qualities has been ongoing for some years and is strongly connected to the above discussion on agency. According to Western literature, the two central qualities of the model European construction of childhood are innocence and vulnerability (for example, Christensen, 2000 cited in Meyer, 2007; Kitzinger, 1990). But vulnerability is difficult to define and apply to actual situations (Skinner, 2004; Levine, 2004;

Delor and Hubert, 2000) as the indicators are contentious. Children's vulnerability in different contexts has been studied but not much is known about children's vulnerability within the context of migration and the tension between the global and local understandings of childhood. The issue has grown in importance in light of the increase in the population of independent children. Independent children are seen as physically and psychologically vulnerable to many dangers associated with migration like high risk sexual behaviour, exploitation and they are perceived as requiring "special protection appropriate for their situation" (Schreier, 2011: 62). Children's resilience is often neglected or silenced. The discourses which are mobilised at particular moments and their purpose remain to be understood. For example, Save the Children UK (SCUK) studies from 2003 (see Clacherty, 2003) have buttressed the notion of the girl child being vulnerable when they drew attention to the many migrant girls that were allegedly having sex with security guards manning the South Africa and Zimbabwe border.

Role and Response of the South African State to Independent Children

Consistent with the international agreements it signed, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by South Africa on 16 June 1995)[17] and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ratified by South Africa on 7 January 2000), the South African government has in place various laws (for example, the Children's Act, which came into effect in 2010; the South African Schools Act, 1996; National Education Policy Act, 1996), policies and structures, which also protect the rights of migrant children. For example, South Africa set up children's courts that deal specifically with children's matters, and determine whether a child is in need of care and protection. Every magistrate's court is a children's court, and magistrates receive training on the provisions of

[17] Among other things the UNCRC emphasises that: States must respect and ensure the rights set out in the Convention of all children within their jurisdiction, regardless of nationality (Article 2); The best interest of the child is a primary consideration in any actions involving children (Article 3); States have an obligation to provide the child with the requisite protection and care necessary for his or her well-being, and to guarantee that all institutions and services dealing with the care of children meet the minimum standards of safety and health, and have sufficient, properly trained staff (Article 3); Children deprived of their family environment must be given special protection, including the provision of alternative care (Article 20); For children seeking or in need of refugee protection, States must take measures to provide appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance, and also assist with family tracing where applicable (Article 22); Children have the rights to health (Article 24), social security (Article 26), an adequate standard of living (Article 27), and education (Article 28).

the Children's act. The Children's Act lays out the relevant procedures under the Children's Court. According to Section 155 of the Children's Act, before the children's court proceedings, a designated social worker must investigate and submit a report within ninety days assessing whether the child is in need of care and protection. The child may be placed in temporary safe care during this period. Then, Section 155-156, says that the court must consider the social worker's report in reaching a final decision, and make an order in accordance with the best interests of the child. If the court finds that the child is in need of care and protection, the court can order that he or she be placed in temporary safe care until a permanent placement is made (Section 156). Section 159 indicates that the court order lapses after two years and cannot extend beyond the child's eighteenth birthday. The court must review the order every two years and either extend it or release the child.

Section 28 of South Africa's Bill of Rights focuses on children's rights. It explicitly protects the rights of all children, regardless of nationality. Independent migrant foreign children fall within the Children's Act. This Act, which constructs independent children as children "in need of care", makes it very clear that it seeks to preserve and promote families. So it is under the umbrella of this Act that interventions like placing them in home like places (places of safety) and re-uniting them with their families are carried out. In addition, independent children are covered under the Refugees Amendment Act (No. 33, 2008). Amongst other things, this Act states that independent children who appear to qualify for refugee status must be brought before the Children's Court in accordance with the Children's Act and may be assisted in applying for asylum. However, this differs from the current statutory position which refers broadly to a 'child in need of care' and not to independent children specifically. The amendments to the Refugees Act are still to come into force.

To ensure children have access to education, the South African Schools Act, No. 84, 1996, requires public schools to admit all children without unfair discrimination (Section 5). Thus, independent children's access to education is supported by this Act. One of the major driving factors of child migration is pursuit of educational opportunities (Palmary, 2008; SCUK, 2010). However, at the time of fieldwork, only a tiny population of the children were enrolled in the local schools in Musina. School authorities demanded the following papers from these children who left their home countries under difficult situations: letter of transfer from the previous school, last school report and a permit to be in South Africa (a temporary asylum permit or passport with a study permit). The majority of independent children had problems in producing these documents. Through concerted efforts by some officials of humanitarian organisations a small proportion of these children were enrolled in some local

schools.

The other key piece of legislation that governs migration in South Africa is the Immigration Act (No. 13, 2002) which addresses the issue of the Detention of Unaccompanied Minor Children. Under the Immigration Act, the detention of an illegal foreigner is discretionary, must be weighted towards liberty, and must be based on a reasonable consideration of factors and a foreigner can be detained for 180 days. Of note is the observation made by Kaajal Ramjathan-Keogh, LHR's head of the Refugee and Migrant Rights Programme, who observes that "the South African Children's Act prevents the detention of children for immigration purposes and states that they cannot be removed without a court order". She adds:

> Section 138 of the Children's Act prohibits the unlawful detention of children as well as their removal without a court order…The Children's Act is applicable to all children living within South African borders. It does not exclude children who have entered the country through irregular channels (Ramjathan-Keogh, undated)[18].

The Immigration Act (No. 13, 2002) states that if detained, minors should not be mixed with adults; rather, they should be put in accommodation appropriate for their age.

These laws were and continue to be violated by the State actors (see LHR, 2013)[19] and implementation is very poor. For example, South Africa set that there should be social workers to protect and support vulnerable children. However, like the rest of the country, Musina had a shortage of social workers. A number of key informants including the social workers themselves said they did not have the technical and material capacity to deal with hundreds of independent children. Another example is that despite having some posters, numerous meetings and representations by non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental agencies against the detention of minors at Soutpansberg Military Grounds (SMG), children were often mixed with adults which further raised concerns about their safety and well-being (Lawyers for Human Rights, 2013)[20]. The SMG detention centre for irregular migrants was managed by SAPS, yet according to the Immigration Act, a detention

[18] http://www.lhr.org.za/news/2013/zimbabweans-ordeal-sas-detention-centres (Date of access: 15 March 2013).

[19] http://www.lhr.org.za/news/2013/zimbabweans-ordeal-sas-detention-centres (Date of access:15 March 2013)

[20] http://www.lhr.org.za/news/2008/lhr-launches-report-monitoring-immigration-detention-south-africa (Date of access: 15 March 2013).

centre should be under DHA. Inside the detention centre migrants received a barrage of verbal abuse and some would be beaten up by the police, for example, for being disorderly. There were numerous cases of children who had been detained and 'deported' illegally. These cases were common at the border post particularly at night.



Photo 1: Messages on the wall inside SMG (male section). Tashupika munyika yaZuma (JZ) (We have suffered in President Jacob Zuma's country). Photo taken by author (14 January 2010).

Concerned about human rights abuses at the SMG, humanitarian agencies and the Department of Social Development introduced monitoring visits. They also removed and placed minors in temporary places of safety, particularly the shelters under study. Other agencies like the UNHCR and the Refugee Children's Project (RCP) regularly visited the centre to sensitise detainees about their rights. MSF went there to give health assistance to detained migrants and to apprise them of the availability of medical services they could access, including PEP.

In February 2009, the Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) issued a media release which stated that it had

> … lodged an urgent High Court application challenging the legality and conditions of the Soutpansberg Military Grounds detention centre in Musina. Further, the application challenges the blatant violation of the constitutional provision against the detention of children (LHR, 2009: *page not stated*).

According to LHR (2009) in November 2008, the DHA had denied responsibility for SMG and had withdrawn its staff from that place. The official reason given was that the "DHA could not continue to expose their officials to the unhygienic conditions at SMG, and could not be seen to condone keeping people in such a place" (LHR, 2009: 1). In a report released by Save the Children (UK) (SCUK) in 2010, this organisation claimed that as a result of their frequent visits to SMG, "children's right to protection from abuse and neglect" (SCUK, 2010: 26) had improved. However, a number of other aid workers and children claimed that these gains were quickly eroded when SCUK stopped working directly in communities in December 2009. The facility was closed down in 2012.

Children recounted numerous incidents in which they had been detained, beaten and left on top of the Limpopo Bridge on 'no man's land' by SAPS. For example, Alex, a 17-year-old boy and one of my key informants was arrested at the border post, taken to some farms and savagely beaten up and then dumped on the bridge on 29 March 2010 at night. He labelled one senior police officer who beat him, a "coward". This label was generated by the police's practice of not wanting to follow the laid down procedures of dealing with people suspected of breaking the law. Another example is that of a 16 year boy who was thoroughly beaten by SAPS and then dumped on the Zimbabwean side of Beitbridge but the Zimbabwean soldiers forced him to go back to South Africa as they were angry over the state he was in. He returned to South Africa but the South African police did not take him to hospital. Some police officers and children discouraged him from reporting the case arguing that it would make their lives even more difficult.

Some boys indicated that cases of beating by police at night were common. Some boys particularly those living at the border post said they were often wrongly accused of robbing local people and irregular migrants, attacking police officers and collaborating with *magumaguma*. Children said they were often subjected to torture, for example, having their heads put inside toilet bowls and water flushed. To my shock they also revealed that police

officers regularly assaulted them for hours in their offices after making sure that surveillance cameras were switched off.

Children complained that some police officers often menacingly told them that they should not make the South African people and their government responsible if their parents and their "Mugabe government" could not provide for their own children and citizens. Police officers were quoted as frequently saying that South Africa should worry about "its own children" and not other countries' children on its soil. Generally, there was consensus among the independent children I interacted with that reporting abuse cases to SAPS was useless. In addition, these children discouraged one another from reporting abusers like *magumaguma* to the police. They feared either being assaulted or killed when the criminal was released on bail or when the case was dismissed.

Although the relationship between independent children and police officers was generally based on fear and dislike of one another, some of the officers were very kind and friendly towards migrant children. Children mentioned various cases of children who had been assisted with food, accommodation, clothing and protection from abuse and physical assaults by members of SAPS as well as the South Africa Defence Force (SANDF). In May 2010 the Government re-introduced members of SANDF to patrol the border. SANDF took over from the SAPS.

South Africa's migration regime to manage and protect Zimbabwean migrants who constituted the bulk of the migrants in South Africa, is unpredictable which makes undocumented migrants including minors, vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and illegal deportations[21]. The process of applying for Asylum Seeker Permits and other documentation under programmes like the Zimbabwe Documentation Programme (ZDP) were fraught with serious administrative challenges and corruption. Between September 20 2009 and 31 December 2009, South Africa implemented the ZDP which allowed Zimbabweans the right to reside in South Africa without documentation. During this period, Zimbabweans under the programme were supposed to regularise their stay. Unlike other nationals, Zimbabweans were denied the opportunity to claim Section 23 Asylum Permits at the port of entry. This permit protects the asylum seeker from arrest and detention by the South African Police Services and authorises asylum seekers to report to the Refugee Reception Office (RRO)

[21] South Africa deported Zimbabwean migrants "46,000 in 2000, 74, 765 in 2004, more than 97, 000 in 2005, and almost 80, 000 between May 31 and December 31, 2006" (Human Rights Watch, 2007:18). In 2007 Anel Powell reported that 127,097 Zimbabweans were deported in 2006. In the first half of 2007 at least 117,000 had already been deported.

within 14 days to apply for a Section 22 permit (Asylum Seeker Permit). The tightening of entry into South Africa for Zimbabweans forced many to resort to entering South Africa through the many dangerous informal entry points. In 2009 Sabelo Sibanda, a lawyer working in the Musina office of Lawyers for Human Rights told IRIN News that:

> There was an understanding that when people get to the show grounds [where an informal shelter for migrants was set up] (even they [migrants] won't get deported [by the police]…But migrants still had to negotiate a 20km gauntlet and risk arrest and deportation on the way (Sibanda, 2009: *page not stated*).

In fact, many were arrested between Limpopo River and the Musina Refugee Reception Office in Musina town. Efforts by organisations including Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) to let Zimbabwean migrants access these permits at Beit Bridge Border Post were fruitless when I did the fieldwork.

During the time of fieldwork, the hundreds of Zimbabwean migrants including women and children in Musina, spent many days sleeping on the streets and in poor shelters waiting to get Asylum Seeker Permits. It was illegal and risky for them to leave Musina and proceed further into the country without temporary asylum permits. There were several police road blocks along the N1 road which links Musina and Johannesburg, the dream destination of many local and foreign migrants. Many migrants without proper travelling documents were arrested while walking towards Johannesburg and deported to Zimbabwe. However, some avoided these problems by bribing law enforcement agents until they reached their destinations (see Araia, 2009).

The unprecedented surge in independent children happened at a time when there was a crisis in social service delivery due to factors like lack of capacity by government departments especially shortage of human and material resources to redress social inequalities. For example, South Africa has a critical shortage of social workers in the country as a whole. At the time of study, Musina had only four social workers, too few to follow the proper procedures for independent migrants as laid down in law[22]. South Africa's situation is not unique as Orgocka (2012) points out that resource poor countries particularly in the Global South are finding it hard to support foreign children as they are finding it

[22] The social workers dealing with migrant children were increased from four to eight in April 2011. The South African Broadcasting Authority (SABC news 2) on 17 August 2009 revealed that the ratio of a social worker in the population is 1:160 000 people.

difficult to meet the urgent needs of their own populations.

Role and Response of Civil Society Organisations to Independent Children

The influx of Zimbabweans, described through an emotive metaphor as "human *tsunami*" (Peta, 2007)[23], which brought the border town, Musina, to the forefront of local and international concerns, started in 2000 and the peak period was in the last quarter of 2008. This is the period when the phenomenon of independent children emerged as a 'humanitarian problem' in Musina. In 2009, UNICEF revealed that between 1,000 and 2,000 children in Musina (Duncan, 2009: *page not stated*) needed humanitarian aid. A child protection rapid assessment conducted in Musina Municipality between July and August 2008 by the SCUK and the International Red Cross indicated that there were a number of protection issues affecting migrant children (Save the Children, 2009). This crisis marked a turning point in the roll out of interventions in Musina.

The concerns highlighted during the child protection rapid assessment exercise fostered an interest in social protection of independent children. The civil society, including churches, rose to the occasion and set up services in Musina on the basis of what they described as a "humanitarian crisis" or an "emergency".

A huge population of poor Zimbabwean migrants including independent children were living in the streets. In the first week of March 2009 the temporary shelter at Musina Show Grounds which sheltered over 3000 Zimbabwean migrants was closed. The Musina Municipality and the DHA were concerned that the place was attracting more people and was infested with disease and generally had unhygienic conditions (Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010; Langa, 2009). A number of humanitarian agencies protested against this action arguing that it was going to have the effect of worsening the humanitarian crisis in the town. A number of key informants in these organisations and also from some government departments were of the view that service providers were not prepared to deal with this "crisis". A few organizations and churches responded by hosting as many migrants, particularly women and independent children, as possible in their offices and back-yards. A number of migrants were stranded with no money to buy food or to call their relatives in South Africa after being robbed by *magumaguma*. As of March 2009, 13 drop-in centres had been established in

[23] This was said by one border official interviewed by Basildon Peta: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/zimbabwes-desperate-people-flee-across-border-to-escape-mugabe-457709.html

Musina. However, Musina did not have a registered place of safety for children. Some of the temporary places of safety supported children who were 'interested' in going to school.

Due to lack of support from the South African government a number of independent children in Musina were forced to temporarily rely on the local and international humanitarian agencies for food, access to medical care, education and shelter. Even adults did the same at places like the Roman Catholic Church in Nancefield and at the "*I Believe in Jesus Church*" located in Matswale. The Roman Catholic Church shelter temporarily accommodated women and girls aged 18 and above, waiting to be documented, whilst the "*I Believe in Jesus Church*" through the Musina Ministry of Compassion (MMC) provided shelter and meals to men also waiting to be documented. Despite these efforts, the service providers found it difficult to cope with the situation, leading, for example, to hundreds of migrants waiting for asylum seeker permits sleeping on the streets close to the Musina Refugee Aid Office.

The donor-dependent community based organisations were plagued by funding constraints, high staff turnover, lack of capacity and management challenges – issues that had plagued them from the moment they were established. For example, some of these problems at one time led the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to stop giving the Uniting Reformed Church's Women and Girls' Shelter, funding for food. It proposed that the shelter get cooked food prepared at the *El Shadai Church*. The founder and leader of the shelter, Professor Pastor Matsaung rejected this proposal charging that the UNHCR's action was racially and colonially motivated, a reminder that humanitarian aid in South Africa, like elsewhere, is a politicised matter. In August 2012 the Pastor recounted the story he had told me in early 2010:

> There was a time when the United Nations (UNHCR) wanted to give Pastor… of *El Shaddai* money to cook food there and deliver it to the shelters… I said 'look we are not going to allow you to micro-manage us'. They wanted to micro-manage us… Then they (UNHCR) withdrew from supporting us. We said 'If you withdrew with pleasure'. They withdrew 100 per cent and up to day.

He further argued that this plan would put the health of migrants at risk as the food could be affected during the storage and transportation processes. *El Shaddai Church* is about five kilometres away from this shelter. After the UNHCR's withdrawal from funding the shelter, it experienced great hardships in providing migrants, including independent children, food[24].

Working together with the Department of Social Development (DSD), which gave some technical support, humanitarian agencies' missions were to care for and support independent children as espoused by the South African constitution. Some humanitarian agencies were further guided by Christian practices and *Ubuntu* principles. Horace Campbell explains *Ubuntu* as "…an old African philosophy, which means reconciliation, forgiveness, love and sharing" (2013: *page unstated*). Indeed, religion and humanitarianism converged and shaped the representations of these children in complex ways that need to be studied. Barnett, Kennedy, Stein and Thaut observe that "The relationship between humanitarianism and religion mimics a defining narrative of contemporary globalization" (2009: 2).

On a different matter, efforts by one humanitarian agency to support children living in the streets through running a drop-in centre were short lived. At the end of December 2009, SCUK suddenly withdrew from directly assisting children in Musina including those living in the street arguing that the 'emergency period' was over and they had to revert to their original mandate of working through local partners. No organisation immediately took over its work. SCUK had been responsible for supporting many independent children with food, protection, psychosocial support, life-skills, home-work supervision for school going children, referrals to services like health centres, documentation, family tracing and re-unification. The poorly funded, under-staffed and inexperienced faith based organisation that they worked with remained with the sole responsibility of directly caring for and supporting over 200 independent children. A number of key informants working for other service providers indicated that SCUK's action worsened the suffering of independent children.

At the time of fieldwork, Musina had a large presence of humanitarian agencies which were focusing on migrants - rolling out different interventions for them. The agencies included International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, Red Cross, LHR, Concerned Zimbabweans, Roman Catholic Church, Agape Church, Musina Legal Aid Office (MLAO) and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF). For example, for some, particularly in 2009, MLAO funded by the UNHCR provided a train ticket and R30 to migrants who wanted to

[24] The situation was different at the shelter for migrant men under the Musina Ministry of Compassion as up to September 2012 the UNHCR was still continuing supporting it this way: having its food prepared at the El Shaddai Church about 7 kilometres away and delivered to the shelter every day.

travel further inland. The LHR monitored the asylum application processes in the Refugee Reception Office and assisted detainees at the SMG who were at risk of deportation. However, they were not heavily involved in supporting independent children. This followed an agreement they had made as intervention agencies responding to migration challenges in Musina that they had different mandates and also to have an effective coordinated response to the crisis. Given SCUK's vast experience of supporting children worldwide, it took the responsibility of being the lead organisation in partnering with the government regarding caring for and supporting independent children. Thus, support to independent children by other agencies was sporadic and very minimal compared to the magnitude of the problem particularly after SCUK stopped direct implementation of programmes.

Despite the growing crisis, the NGOs, for a long time, continued to operate with little support and supervision from the South African government which has a constitutional obligation to support independent children. Lack of financial and material resources like vehicles constrained the activities of NGOs. This situation created uncertainties over the continuity of their programmes.

Aid workers had a mixed profile. The majority of them were local Black South Africans who belonged to either the *TshiVenda* or Northern *Sotho* ethnic groups. Taking into cognisance that the majority of the independent children were from Zimbabwe and had difficulties in communicating with local people, the humanitarian agencies saw it prudent to also employ a number of Zimbabwean nationals as aid workers. However, most of the Zimbabweans lost their jobs when SCUK stopped direct implementation of intervention in December 2009. Only a few of the aid workers, particularly the top management, had received some training in child care. The majority of the workers who worked directly with children had very little training and prior experience in assisting vulnerable children particularly migrant ones. Aid workers were recruited hurriedly as it was an "emergency" period. The agencies had constant structural problems regarding roles and responsibilities. Following the traditional thinking that care work especially for children is the domain of women, the majority of aid workers except the security guards, were females. Of note is that all the aid workers at the boys' shelter were females. Aid workers' ages ranged from the early twenties to over 60 years. Some of them were church members of the United Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)'s Christian Women Ministry (CWM) which had its roots in Christianity. A few of the workers were close relatives of members of the management and this had great implications on how some of them later related with independent children and fellow workers.

Some Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed literature on childhood, agency and vulnerability. This knowledge informs subsequent chapters. Much has been written about the vulnerability and agency of children in contemporary Africa, particularly focusing on children orphaned by AIDS, working children and those living in the streets. However, little is known about the different discursive frames for understanding independent children, the discourses – local or global which are afforded authority at a particular time, and how the discourses function in shaping the representations of independent children who interface with humanitarian agencies.

Another key gap in the literature concerns the predominant representations of independent children at different moments during their interactions with aid workers, who themselves are informed by the local and global understandings of childhood. In addition, how these children who are usually portrayed as immature and vulnerable are negotiating the discourses used by aid workers, needs exploration. The central argument being that there is a dynamic and complex relationship between the representations of independent children – at times contradictory – and the social, economic, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which these representations are produced (see Cheek, 2004).

This chapter situates the study in these theoretical approaches: the New Social Studies of Childhood; actor-oriented and interface approach; the non-dichotomous understanding of James, Jenks and Pout's (1998) framework of social/minority group and social constructionist/tribal child approaches as enunciated by Holloway and Valentine (2000). These theoretical devices facilitate a nuanced understanding of the workings of child agency, power, the meaning made by different social actors who have multiple realities and the interface between local and global discourses.

In line with my understanding of children as social beings with agency, I assume that independent children have the competency to deal with challenges at their workplaces, create meanings about themselves and through their relations with adults (Woodhead, 2007). Analysing children's views may bring to the fore issues such as how these children make sense of their marginalization and exclusion from the workplace. Some of the critical areas which are interrogated in this chapter include whether the children see things the same way as aid workers. Interpreting how independent children perceive the world is pertinent to understanding how they interact with interventions.

The Musina humanitarian community emerged out of the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe such that its workings, including how independent children are socially constructed, cannot easily be understood without a fair knowledge of Zimbabweans' migration story to South Africa. Consequently, in this chapter I introduced some structural factors in the political-economic social environment which contribute in shaping the representations of independent children.

Recognising that childhood is lived and experienced contextually (James and Prout, 1997), I gave a background to the phenomenon of Zimbabweans' migration to South Africa. This placed the discussion of Zimbabwe's child migration in context. As I will discuss in other chapters, independent children interact with their family members in Zimbabwe and these interactions also shape the way the latter were portrayed. Then I discussed how the State (government of South Africa) and non-State actors (the local and international non-governmental organisations) have responded to the huge presence of independent children mostly wallowing in poverty and living under life threatening conditions. The review of the existing laws backs Palmary and Mahati's (2015: 1) point that "how the migrant child is imagined in South African law is a fantasy of the western child imagined in international child rights regimes". I summarised the laws governing this field, type of services being provided and the challenges faced. Thus, in this chapter I have set the stage for analysing how independent children tend to be represented.

CHAPTER 3: Methods, Ethics and Positionality

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the research methods which I used to explore the contexts, the lifeworlds and practices of the different actors that shape the representations of childhood and the vulnerability of independent child migrants from Zimbabwe. I show how I arrived at the choice of the research site and selected the research participants. I describe how I negotiated community entry, established rapport with the various actors and sought answers to the research questions with reflexivity (elaborated later in the chapter) both during the fieldwork and after I completed it (see Grant, Rohr and Grant, 2011). Thus, I reflect critically on how I, as a childhood researcher (see Spyrou, 2011), utilised ethnography and its various techniques to research children and dealt with the challenges of doing so, for example, generational inequalities (Mayall, 2008), upholding of children's participation rights in research (see Powell and Smith, 2009) and how I analysed the data. Since my study focused on a population living under difficult conditions I give details about why I placed high value on empathy during fieldwork in order to contribute to closing the gap identified by Lavanchy who comments that "[t]he debates on how to deal with negative feelings in the field and with the debts after fieldwork remain under-addressed" (2013: 685). This is a consciously drawn-out chapter as methodological and ethical issues as well as the position of researcher were some of my primary pre-occupations during this research.

As stated earlier, my research is rooted in the understanding that children are social beings with agency and subjectivity, and are competent research participants (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; James and Prout, 1990). I show how my social position influenced fieldwork processes as well as the lens I used to view social events and processes. I conclude the chapter with a section on how I negotiated ethical issues and give an overview of the challenges inherent in being a researcher in a humanitarian crisis.

Ethnography

Since this study is about the lived experiences of childhood, I found it most appropriate to situate it within the field of ethnography (see Rosen, 2008)[25]. The ethnographic approach has great utility as it has a number of methodological tools which enabled me to explore various childhoods. It is increasingly being used in exploring the social worlds of children (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Kehily, 2009). Ethnography generates "rich data about how people build meaning into their work" (Lavanchy, 2013: 678) and it also "…allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research" (Prout and James, 1990: 8-9). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco concur with this view by writing that "ethnographic observations sensitize us to the power of social context in shaping the lives of immigrant children" (2001:11 cited in Ensor, 2008: 285). Much as this is the case, I also share Qvortrup's (2008:67) critical point that there is no single method which can generate all the knowledge on a particular subject.

In keeping with the principles of ethnography I did not seek to produce generalisable results but getting detailed accounts of the everyday social practices, events, processes and effects of the representations of childhood and vulnerability. I wanted to capture in detail the social actors' behaviour, the socio-economic raptures, hopes, fears, turmoil and tenacity of the lives of children in a foreign land, where many encountered aid workers. To have an in-depth understanding of the social actors' experiences, I, like Mann (2011) during her research on experiences of Congolese refugee children in Dar es Salaam, could only develop close relationships with a few people.

Following the works of anthropologists like Malinowski (1961) who immersed themselves in the societies they studied in order to have an in-depth understanding of the lives of the social actors, I spent nine months, from August 2009 to April 2010, at the research site conducting interviews and observations during daytime, at night, weekdays, weekends and public holidays. I also spent the whole of August 2012 in Musina. An immersion in the group under study allowed me to give a textured life of the interactions between aid workers and independent children. In other words, it provided me with an opportunity to fully experience the life in that setting and contextualise research participants' responses to questions (Grant, Rohr and Grant, 2011). It also allowed me to capture the

[25] I first used ethnography when I conducted my postgraduate research from 1998 to 2000 in Nyanyadzi, Zimbabwe.

mundane aspects of aid workers and independent children's life as well as get nuanced details of their experiences, actions and lifeworlds. Furthermore, it afforded me an opportunity to identify recurring patterns of behaviour related to the different representations of childhood and vulnerability, which participants might have been oblivious to. A long period of time in Musina also enabled me to map changes in interactions amongst the actors and responses to different situations. Given the aim of the study to look at workers' as well as the independent children's constructions, I spend a lot of time with members of these two groups. I spend more time with young people as aid workers separated work and their personal lives. They did not want to discuss work issues after work. Independent children were usually available.

In order to gather data on the representations of independent children by aid workers and the children themselves, access the social actors' "everyday lived experience" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 294), multiple realities and also to test the robustness of my findings, I employed a multiplicity of techniques: interviews, group interviews, participant observations, situational conversations, case studies, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Group interviews and FGDs were only conducted with independent children. It was difficult to organise group interviews and FGDs with the aid workers as it was logistically difficult to do so. They were also very busy to meet as a group. Interviews were mainly conducted with key informants (mainly service providers) in order to have views on certain issues, like children who wanted to focus mainly on doing paid work instead of attending school. Participant observations and situational conversations were held with both aid workers and independent children at formal and informal settings. Cases provided important insights or inside glimpses (Long, cited in Vijfhuizen, 1998), however limited, into the lived realities of independent children interfacing with humanitarian agencies. Of note is that there were also negative cases which are those "cases that do not fit within the pattern" (Patton, 1999: 1192) of results. After I had been deeply immersed in the life of the setting (Lowe, 2012), I conducted a total of six focus group discussions with migrant boys (at the border post only) and girls (those living at the shelter). Two focus group discussions were held with girls and three with boys. Due to logistical challenges, I failed to hold focus group discussions with boys living at the shelter and children living in the streets. I also used field notes which had "comments made in the heat of the moment" (Flower, 1987: 4). In the field notebook I recorded direct observations during the field visits, interviews and informal talks with participants. It also contained analytical notes and issues or events I had to follow up on or pay more attention to.

Each technique has its weaknesses and these weaknesses might be the strengths of another (see also Stewart, *et. al.*, 2008; Patton, 1999; Peil *et. al.*, 1982). According to Powell and Smith (2009:139) "some methods are respectful, address the power differential and reflect the diversity of research topics, aims and contexts". Participant observation and interviews-in-situ, for example, eroded greatly the power differentials between the children and I as well as aid workers and I. I am convinced that obtaining information in settings research participants were very familiar with empowered them to express themselves well. Furthermore, varied methods make it possible to get a deeper understanding of the social processes and events (see James, Jenks and Prout, 1998: 189).

The Interview-In-Situ and Serial Qualitative Interviews

I obtained the bulk of the information through the less disruptive technique: the interview-in-situ, described as "conversations where practices that were the focus of the research 'took place'" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 298). The inter-linkage of the "social and spatial distance" between the actors and the site made it possible for the actors to "to talk about their more mundane or ordinary experiences" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 300). For example, it became easier to understand independent children's challenges of sustaining hopes and aspirations whilst interacting with aid workers who had different life-worlds. I felt the weight of the problems the actors were battling with. For instance, when SCUK went back to their original mandate of not intervening directly without much notice to other service providers and smooth hand-over of its programme the shelter for boys became a place of hunger, abuse and indiscipline. A number of boys often requested me to buy them food and I heard disturbing stories of violence amongst the children. At one time I consoled a boy who had been badly assaulted by another.

Through the use of the actor oriented approach's concept of life-world, I was able to understand how independent children defined their world (what matters, when, how as well as the choices they made), and how this in turn formed part of their opportunities and challenges. I also harnessed data on how and why independent children responded differently to similar structural circumstances. Using interview guides, which were revised throughout the fieldwork based on observations, changing social context, experiences (see Corbin and Strauss, 1990) some in-depth interviews were conducted with aid workers. Some of these interviews were tape recorded and others not. As I had already obtained their informed

consent which covered audio recording them with their full knowledge, I sometimes audio recorded the situational conversations.

In addition, I conducted cumulative, serial qualitative interviews (Murray, *et al.*, 2009) with participants including independent children. Murray *et al.* (2009) observe that "Serial qualitative interviews are a convenient and efficient approach to developing an ongoing relationship between the participant and researcher, thereby facilitating discussion of sensitive and personal issues…". Using this type of interviews also helped as my interviews were frequently interrupted given that participants were either working or looking for work. Besides the on-going interviews shedding more light on how independent children were represented, their stories tended to be developing ones, characterised by twists and turns. I had individual interviews (with aid workers and workers working for other organisations) and several group interviews (scheduled and unscheduled) with children since some uninvited children would join discussions. They would leave and re-join the minimally guided discussions any time (see Waikato, 2010). This data collection technique minimised disruption of their activities. Although informal, these interviews yielded great insights into their lives. For example, children would discuss the pros and cons of participating in activities organised by aid workers.

Semi-participant Observer

Though I wanted my research to access children directly, I was a semi-participant observer, as it is difficult to carry out ethnographic research with children by fully adopting either a wholly observational or complete participation position (Emond, 2005). For example, it was difficult to be a participant observer when independent children engaged in illegal activities like human smuggling or to behave like an adolescent so as to fully fit into their circles. I recorded observations and situational conversations soon after they ended only when I was alone so as not to interfere with the social events and processes.

Taking into cognisance issues of safety in this society characterised by violence and that I could not stay in a place of safety for children, I resided in some lodges in Musina town. The fact that I was not living among independent children restricted me from 'participating' in some of their everyday activities or directly experiencing some of the challenges they faced. For example, I missed events which happened at night inside the shelters. Despite these limitations, I was able to observe independent children in various situations and at various sites. Almost every day I visited the boys' and girls' shelters which are located 3 kilometres

and 5 kilometres respectively from the town centre. As children are conceptualised as vulnerable there were time restrictions at the shelters, particularly the one for women and girls which I only visited during the day. I drove to the border post which is 15km from Musina town four to five times a week. I also often visited the border post at night and spent hours there as it is a hive of activity. I also visited the SMG about two to four times a week (see Chapter two). Besides not wanting to be bored by routine, my visits and times at these sites were not regular as I did not want criminals to predict my movements. I also visited the homes of those children who were staying in private homes on a few occasions as they were not usually at home.

During fieldwork I tried to spread my time evenly at the two temporary shelters, the streets and border post in a very flexible way to accommodate unpredictable events at these sites. This issue of unpredictable events is explained by Lavanchy:

> Unpredictability is a central feature of ethnography as a method resting on dynamic interactions: it draws its strength, interest and relevance from the impossibility of anticipating all situations, of knowing beforehand what will emerge from fieldwork and how research participants might be affected by the research (Lavanchy, 2013: 680).

Unplanned events made it difficult for me to anticipate various developments by different actors and organisations. I sometimes found it hard to meet participants at the agreed times and places.

Cumulatively, I spent many hours and days at the premises of the selected service providers. During service providers' outreach programmes, I listened to and observed their interactions with children. Although access to other service providers was very restricted, a number of them volunteered to brief me about their work activities and the situation in Musina, furnishing me with a lot of reports and orienting me to their systems such as the IDTR programme (see Bonnerjea, 1994). I alternately spent time at these sites in order to reduce research fatigue by participants. In addition, the periodic withdrawal or detachment from each site and the unfolding social events, usually a few hours every day, allowed me to engage in reflexive writing (see Wilkinson-Weber, 2011). This did not affect my study as the participants usually voluntarily briefed me on what had happened in my absence.

Initially I met children at the border post in groups as they did not trust me much and subsequently on a one-to-one basis. With regards to those living in shelters, I initially talked to them in the presence of their adult caretakers who wanted to protect them from negative consequences (O'Kane, 2008). I would chat for many hours with these children in places of safety, at their various favourite hang outs and workplaces but without interfering with their work or activities. I also walked with them in the streets of Musina, accompanied them to health centres and schools, attended social events like soccer matches together, church gatherings, political rallies, and watched television in restaurants among other activities. Consequently, I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of children and the service providers' worldview on how and why they make meaning or negotiate the different representations of childhood and vulnerability.

Researching on Children

Gold's (1958 cited in Fine and Sandstrom, 1988: 13) observation that the American society's structure of age roles made it difficult for one to position himself in a complete participant role when researching on children, also applied to me. Power and age disparities, particularly the continued perpetuation of patterns of age segregation among the *Ndebele* and *Shona* people, meant I as an adult was expected by children, service providers and including myself to maintain "respectable" social boundaries with children. The educational and social network differences between me and the children led to perceptions by the latter that I belonged to a different social class and sort of widened our social differences. Children saw me freely interacting with senior aid workers and government officials, people they either feared or held in high regard. Although I discussed various social issues including sensitive ones like the quality of humanitarian service, joked and laughed with them, the children and I always remained conscious of our age and social class differences. Ann Oakley calls on researchers to "to be aware of and respect the imbalanced power relations of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched…" (1994: 26). In heeding this call, I, in fact together with the children and service providers, usually spoke in cultivated voices which showed mutual respect but without compromising the need to understand the reality. Behaving like this helped as children facilitated access to their peers and spaces. For example, for those who

slept on the street and in the bush, I had access to sleeping places (places where a number of aid workers feared to go[26].

Children affectionately and respectfully called me *"mukoma"* (brother), *"vaMahati"* (Mr. Mahati) and "*dhara redu*" (a slang word for 'our old man'). Girls respectfully called me "*mukoma*" (brother) as they noted that I was in the same age group as their brothers. By taking up the role of *"munin'ina"* (younger brother or sister) the majority of them tended to or tried to behave well. I noted that during the first days of fieldwork a number of children were under pressure to be seen to be behaving well or maintain social desirability (see Randall and Fernandes, 1991). Examples of issues that were sensitive to the actors' interpretations of social desirability were: reasons for migrating, sexual behaviour, survival strategies, financial state of the organisations, participation in illegal acts like human smuggling, and stealing among other things.

Independent children did not only relate to me respectfully but with other adults as they had been socialised to respect adults in general. I accepted this framing of our relationship as I grew up the same way – being taught to respect elders. Occasionally some children, particularly boys, rebuked other boys who overstepped the line of proper child and adult behaviour by telling them to behave well in my presence. Some felt that their peers who were calling me "*dhara*" (old man) were being disrespectful of me and asked them to stop it. However, considering my friendly relationship with these children I concluded that they used the word not in a derogatory way[27]. Furthermore, some boys would stop those who wanted to beat up others in my presence, arguing that doing so translated to disrespecting me. The majority of the boys at the border post smoked. "If you smoke you get along very much [with other boys] and your relationship will be till death. They will not abandon you. But if you do not smoke then *unogara wakavimbikana waya waya kana uri chitumbu* (under attack and lonely)", explained Thabo. He added, "They will beat you and steal all the money you would have worked for". However, some boys like Victor said this was no longer happening. Children did other activities which are regarded as un-child-like but tried very hard to avoid being seen by me and aid workers doing so. However, since most of my visits were unplanned ones, for example, I used to see them smoking and they would hide, shyly continue smoking or laughingly justify their actions by saying "*dhara* you caught me... I have

[26] Some of the sleeping places were: in water drains, under bridges, along the railway line, crop fields, at an open hill behind the *spazas* at the border post, abandoned buildings, market stalls, inside *spazas*, on top of *spazas*, in trees, bush, on the streets, at street corners, in and under new and old vehicles.

[27] Mate (2012: 115) discusses the changing meaning of the word '*madhara'*.

too much stress... I do not smoke a lot". Moments like this often provoked laughter from all of us but I would always make it clear that I was not judging them. We often quickly and tactfully changed the topic to get past awkward moments like these.

I did not fully conform to Mayall's broad observation that researchers within the anthropological traditions "seek to suspend notions of generational and status difference, in the attempt to reach out understandings of children's take on social life" (2008: 110). As much as I tried to be friendly to the children, I also strived not to be their peer. I adopted the 'least adult-role' (Mandell, 1991 in Mayall, 2008: 110) although it was difficult to sustain. In any case, I did not want to make both the children and aid workers uncomfortable by violating the acceptable adult-child relationship. Thus, for example, when they wanted to talk amongst themselves or did not want me to observe what they were doing, I would tactfully withdraw from the scene or from joining in the conversation. This included times when independent children were privately talking about "hot and juicy" stories of what would have happened in their lives. Ironically, this disadvantageous position made me conform to Bushin's call for researchers to "be flexible when interviewing with children in their homes" (2007: 236). Allowing children to exclude me from their conversations or seeing what they did not want me to see "shifted the power in the adult-child relationship into the hands of the children" (Lowe, 2010: 272) somewhat. Interestingly, without me making any effort they often encouraged each other to "tell the old man what happened", and I would be told. This tactic of voluntarily withdrawing from hearing children's conversations or observing them was also based on my understanding that it would have been futile for me to either force them to give me an insight into their lives or allow me to enter into their worlds of understanding (Mayall, 2008) if they did not want (see Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley, 2008). Thus, children participated in the research on their own terms, thus enabling me to learn more of their lives (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998).

During the introductory phase, for tactical and cultural reasons, I used to call any boy "*munin'ina*" (my younger brother) and a girl "*hanzvadzi*" (sister). Similar to what Magadlela (2000) experienced in his study of irrigation farmers in Zimbabwe, my use of these titles helped me relate with study participants in a respectful manner but also proved a bit challenging as my behaviour had to be consistent with these titles, especially during moments of mirth. As I interacted with independent children I remained conscious of the need to behave appropriately.

With older girls, like Enguix in her paper titled, “Negotiating the field: rethinking ethnographic authority, experience and the frontiers of research”, “gender was central in the definition of myself in research contexts” (2012: 8). My own traditional and cultural prejudices told me that these girls would be uncomfortable to freely interact with a man or express their views, particularly regarding their sexuality. The familial titles really helped in easing the sexual tension or mistrust which I noted existed initially, even if they had been told that I was a researcher and not of their generation. Though aid workers perceive migrant girls as sexually immoral, I learnt that a number of girls upheld very conservative moral values. Through socialisation and experience, most of the girls had learnt not to trust any man. Thus, there was mutual keeping of distance as well as giving each other ample time to trust one another.

Once our relationship had been defined as “brother and sister”, a relationship which alleviates fears about sexual inappropriateness, both of us found it easier to talk freely and being seen in conversation. I then started calling them by their first names and this deepened our relationship. However, “relationship” constrained me from talking to some girls about their sexual behaviours or talking to them in the evening. During the first days, I noted that some of them were visibly uncomfortable with being seen talking to me alone. Others, as I was later told by one of the girls who became a friend of mine, suspected that I was sexually interested in some of the girls and tried to avoid being seen talking to me as they feared conflict with other girls. Besides de-sexualising our interactions, to overcome this problem, I engaged a female research assistant to help me get stories from the girls. In some instances, during the first month of fieldwork, I was a bit apprehensive spending considerable time with some of the girls as I had heard numerous cases of their alleged promiscuity. I did not want my interactions with them to be misconstrued by anyone fearing that it could potentially affect my research and their livelihoods.

I interacted with children living outside shelters at all times of the day (particularly boys) including well after midnight. To increase rapport and access to children I adopted some of the behaviours of the children I was studying when I felt I could do this unashamedly or without provoking people, including children, to question my conduct, both as a researcher and an adult. For example, I spoke their slang, ate the food they liked to eat, and spent considerable periods of time socialising with them at their favourite hang outs, like the entrance to a truck stop at the border post, and the *posto* (a small rocky hill near the entrance to the border post which is behind the *spazas*). During fieldwork, I dressed casually in order to reduce the social distance between us. However, I did not overdo it – for example, I

changed clothes every day unlike the children - as my identity was evident. Then I participated in as many of their activities as I could like discussions, organising events and playing soccer. However, I did not participate in some of their activities like gambling, one of their favourite ways of earning money as it is against my beliefs but observed them gamble. Much to my relief, they never invited me to participate. I think they did not expect me to participate in illegal activities or raise money through means like this, a point they also often made during lighter moments. I believe my appearance and behaviour contributed to my being accepted in the field (Enguix, 2012; Goffman, 1989). During all these activities, to use Ngugi *wa* Thiongo's words in his book *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir* – "bits and pieces, gleaned from whispers, hints, and occasional anecdotes, (detailed stories), gradually coalesced into a narrative" (2010: 12) of the independent children's lives.

Maintaining social roles was not an easy process as time and again the children called on me to reconcile their differences or asked for my opinion as a senior person. At times I also felt morally compelled to socialise them into becoming responsible members of society. For example, one boy who worked in the streets picked up a cell phone and kept it. I politely advised him to look for the owner and he did not object. Unfortunately, his efforts to identify the owner proved fruitless. My strategy of keeping social norms in place, maintaining a culturally acceptable social distance and "without having any explicit authority role" (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988: 17) paid dividends as several children frankly told me that they opened up to me as I "behaved like an adult" (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988: 16). They told me that one of the reasons they did not respect some care workers is that they breached the social boundaries between adults and children, for example, sharing sexual jokes with children, verbally insulting children which forced them to hurl insults back at adults, borrowing money from children and not returning it, engaging in *chikudo* (mock fighting) with children. Some children had lent some aid workers as much as R2000 (approximately US$200) to make ends meet after negotiating repayment terms favourable to the borrower. Lending money to aid workers helped independent children save money and safely keep it as they did not have bank accounts or secure storage places.

As a strategy of "encouraging the children to express their own perspectives" (Bourdillon, 2012: 9), avoiding monotony and irritating the children by continuously talking about my research, our talks often digressed from my research questions or themes. Acknowledging children's perspectives in research about their lives (Laoire, Carpena-Mendez, Tyrrell and White, 2010) and following methods which treat children as 'active participants' instead of 'objects of concern' (James and Prout, 1990), independent children often controlled "the pace

and direction of the conversation, raising and exploring topics with relatively little of researcher input" (Mayall, 2008: 121). This participatory approach functioned well as it gave them space to speak on multiple issues including those that were important to them which helped shed light on the issues I was investigating.

Departing from the common practice of adults, that of excluding children from process of setting the research agenda (Powell and Smith, 2009), I made it possible for the children, who I had thoroughly briefed on the issues I wanted to understand, to make an input in broadening this agenda. Children, for example, often pointed to me stories which I needed to follow up and events I had to witness. But they did not decide on the research questions. This strategy allowed me to understand children's priorities (Mayall, 2008), lived realities including on things I had never imagined or thought were important.

The process of children telling their personal experiences provides a good avenue for them to represent themselves (see Kiguwa, 2006; Engel, 2005). Recounting stories also enables the children to reflect and unpack their experiences. In this study, for example, the independent children reflected on their interactions with different service providers in terms of how they have been received and how these representations have impacted on their lives. Children also expressed their thoughts, attitudes about their actions and those of others with whom they interacted. Thus, narratives blend well with the theoretical devices in use in this study as they pay attention to the study's central concepts of power and agency.

Although Nieuwenhuys (1996: 54-5) argues that drawings can help unpack the complex experiences of children, I only used them with very few children. I made this decision after discussing with some of the children on how they wanted to present their experiences (Hart and Tyrer, 2006). Most of the children had reached grade 7 at school in Zimbabwe and had long stopped drawing at school. With the exception of a few children, they considered narrating their stories through drawing childish. Like what Weckesser (2011) experienced in her work on young people's care experiences in South Africa, most independent children only wanted "just to talk". In fact, they heavily criticised one of the humanitarian agencies for belittling and infantilising them, for example, buying them art books for drawing. They associated these books with very young children.

Furthermore, besides showing the weight of social relationships in methodology, I also paid attention to the effect of the "where of method" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 292). As Anderson and Jones (2009: 292) note, "place as a location, or positionality – of both researchers and their respondents – has been acknowledged to make a difference to the research encounter". I concur with their observation that the location of the study is often a

neglected issue but has a large bearing on the nature of the knowledge which will be produced. Amongst other things, the border land and humanitarian crisis context as a place of research makes interesting study in our efforts to understand: the power relationships between independent children and aid workers; the power relationships between the different study participants and me as a researcher; the different behaviours of the two groups; the tension in aid workers and independent children's spatial practices; child agency; the choices actors make; the appropriate information gathering technique to use at any given time and moment of research, and how actors represented each other. Anderson and Jones (2009: 293) characterise places as "politicised and cultured". The Musina borderland and humanitarian crisis context (see Chapter two) to some extent influenced how I "formulated, accessed and articulated" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 293) knowledge. Emplacing methodology promoted "reciprocal understanding and rapport-building" (Anderson and Jones, 2009: 294) between respondents and me as a researcher. For example, I accessed some of the independent migrant girls' sexual experiences through a female research assistant. However, I did discuss with those who willingly expressed their sexual experiences.

Some migrant boys volunteered to show me places where irregular migrants passed through. Carefully not putting themselves at risk, they also tactfully showed me the criminals and described to me the types of crime each of them specialised in. In this way, they showed me some of the *magumaguma* who liked to rape their victims and a notorious criminal who attempted to hijack my car between the border post and Musina town[28]. At first, the criminals, some of them Zimbabweans, regarded me suspiciously as I interacted with the children but with time, they started greeting me. Through the children, these criminals sometimes asked for a car ride from me, from the border post to Musina. I often tactfully avoided giving them a lift in my car as I did not want to give the impression that I had an inappropriate relationship with criminals. In between their criminal work, the criminals would sometimes join in my conversations with independent migrant boys. Such sessions were very revealing in terms of the criminals' lives, including their interactions with independent children and aid workers working with these children. During a group discussion with some independent migrant boys at the border post, the criminals unanimously agreed that most of them were involved in crime like stealing, human and goods smuggling. Maybe

[28] One night in March 2010 around 10 pm at night when I was coming from the border post going to Musina town I narrowly escaped from an attempted hijack. A driver of a car behind me tried to stop me at a secluded area I sped off but he hotly pursued me up to a police road block. I reported to the police but they were not interested in questioning the man who had also stopped at the road block. The children alleged that this criminal works closely with the police.

noting my position as an outsider the accused boys felt safe to admit their involvement in crime and that they knew the *magumaguma* as "we spend time together", as one of the children said.

It is worth mentioning that my presence might have had a deterrent on the criminals who sometimes wanted to physically beat some of the boys. The criminals would say: "You are very lucky that *bhigaz* (slang word for an older and respected person) is here. I would have beaten you"; whilst others would say to fellow criminals, "It's disrespectful for you to beat a young person in the big man's presence". Some of the criminals were actually older than me but they generally respected me. Despite this, by and large the criminals did not hide their criminal practices from me as they seemed to have concluded that I was just an observer.

Although I remained vigilant and many boys constantly reminded me to do so, even with some children whom I often socialised with, I did not really feel threatened by criminals or children who were pick-pockets. Almost throughout the study, I spent many hours at the border post chatting with the boys well after mid-night. This usually happened before the introduction of a group of police officers which patrolled the border post from around 9pm to dawn. My attempts one day to spend a little while early in the evening with a few girls living in the streets failed as young men in their late 20s and early 30s who regarded these girls as their 'wives', sent me away from their territory. I saw it prudent not to be confrontational. This position helped as we maintained cordial relations.

Site Rationale

I first travelled to the Beitbridge borderland in 2008 to participate in a research on returnee Zimbabwean migrants in Zimbabwe's Beitbridge town, which is on the Zimbabwe-South Africa border. This trip was my first exposure to the challenges migrants faced when crossing this border. I gathered from various reports (for example, SCUK, 2008), interviews with various service providers and returnees including independent children, that Musina was hosting hundreds of migrants in transit to other areas in South Africa. Understanding that this border impacts on children's lives and that the children themselves are active social actors in this dynamic community, I saw it as a good site to unpack different childhoods in different spaces.

Although I had never been to Musina to physically survey its humanitarian work landscape, factors such as it being a border-land with a significant population of independent children[29], the humanitarian context (see Chapter two) and the rapid increase in service providers both local and international, made researching in Musina very appealing to me. In terms of language, I also envisaged that it would be easier and better as a researcher to conduct research with people that I shared a language with. To use Berger's words, "it allowed me to approach the study with some knowledge (i.e. having 'cultural intuition' and insight) about the subject and to address certain topics more easily or even be aware that I should address them" (2013: 5). The majority of Zimbabwean independent children spoke *Shona*, which is my home language. With regards to *Ndebele* speaking participants, most of them were bi-lingual, they also spoke *Shona*. The few *Ndebele* speaking children who could not understand clearly a few of the *Shona* words or had difficulties at times to express themselves, were in a friendly way either taught by other children how to say it in *Shona* or their words were translated by other children. My experience in doing research with children from these dominant ethnic groups in Zimbabwe proved very helpful. I usually conversed with most of the *TshiVenda* speaking people in English. But a number of them also spoke a little bit of *Shona* as there are similarities in the languages.

Using child centred methods, enabled children to converse proficiently (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). Zimbabwean children, like their adult compatriots, often mixed *Shona* and English. Children, particularly those living in the streets, generally speak in slang, which I am conversant with it. On the few occasions I failed to understand some words, I would in a friendly way ask them to update my street lingo, which they would happily do. As a 'national insider' as well as a person who had done research with them I also understood Zimbabwean children's life situation. However, during fieldwork I was of course never totally an insider as the independent children and I had many differences, for example, on dress.

Though Musina was the ideal site for me to answer my research questions, I feared that potential respondents, including migrants, might be experiencing research fatigue given the many foreign researchers from all over the world coming to research on migration and the unfolding humanitarian crisis. A key informant working for a refugee related non-governmental organisation, which collaborated with the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), who regularly travelled to Musina, informed me that most of the studies in that border town were short term and conducted by foreigners from the Global North and that

[29] During of the Migrant Health Forum held at Musina Municipal Building on 5 May 2010 SCUK said Musina had a population of about 1000 independent children.

the latter did not participate in any other migrant related activities. I reasoned that since I was going to live in Musina for a long time using ethnography, the study participants were not likely to view me as an outsider for long. However, I later learnt that my fear of Musina being over researched was unfounded as very few studies had been conducted on migrant children and those that had been, focussed entirely on documenting human rights abuses and migrants' access to services (for example, Palmary, 2009; Hillier, 2007; Clacherty, 2003). During my fieldwork, I did not find evidence of research fatigue amongst the participants. I attribute this situation to the ethnographic method I was using. It allowed research participants to lead their normal lives whilst I collected information. In addition, the lack of fatigue, I perceived, could have emanated from the fact that many of the independent children I interacted with were highly mobile. A number of independent children had little experience of participating in research. As for the aid workers, they found my research different from others as it focused on their interactions with children.

There were several border-lands and towns with high populations of migrants (including Johannesburg where I live) that I could have researched. Though I was based in Johannesburg and living with my family there, I discarded the idea of conducting my research in Johannesburg as the influence of some of the factors which I was interested in studying, like the humanitarian crisis were diffused there. I assumed that independent children had more livelihood opportunities in the big city than in a small town like Musina. As I had little background on the social contexts, language, and cultural practices which existed in South Africa's other border-lands, I did not give much consideration to them. As stated earlier, the Zimbabwe and South Africa border land was familiar to me as I had done research in this area before, albeit on the Zimbabwean side only. After setting up in Musina, in June and July 2009, I started laying out fieldwork plans: establishing contacts, enquiring after the names of child migrant humanitarian organisations operating there and getting permission to study their activities from their management.

Kicking Off the Fieldwork

My entry point into the humanitarian aid community in Musina was through Save the Children UK (SCUK). I first made contact with SCUK during the side-lines of a Regional Seminar on Migrant Children jointly organised by ACMS and SCUK in June 2009 at the University of the Witwatersrand. I sought permission from SCUK to carry out a study focusing on the activities of their Musina office. A senior official with that organisation

expressed interest in the study and tentatively agreed as she envisioned that my study was going to answer some of their "burning questions about unaccompanied minors" particularly what was happening to girls as they were "not visible in Musina". This expression of hope that my study was going to contribute to understanding and helping independent children was later echoed by many aid workers and children themselves during the course of fieldwork. Their statements motivated me to pursue this topic and pay attention to detail as the study results could potentially be used to inform policy making and programming which would affect independent children's lives. I followed up the request for permission by writing a formal letter to SCUK. Verbal consent was granted by their South Africa head office in Pretoria, followed by the Musina office.

Upon arrival in Musina in the second week of August 2009[30], I was warmly received by the SCUK Musina office management and quickly introduced to their field staff. The fact that I had been given permission by their head office to work with them aside, my acceptance by SCUK staff can also be attributed to their interest in research and their experience of hosting researchers and facilitating research work on migrant children and migration in general. In addition, it proved easy to quickly build cordial relationships with humanitarian workers as a number of them, particularly the fieldworkers, were fellow Zimbabweans.

I initiated fieldwork at a time described by SCUK as an "emergency period" (SCUK, 2010: 14). When I arrived in August 2009, the "emergency period", as defined by SCUK, was approaching its end as, at the end of December 2009, SCUK withdrew from direct implementation. It was 2008 that marked the beginning of "the emergency period", characterised by mass arrival of Zimbabweans in Musina fleeing from political violence, deepening economic crisis and a cholera outbreak (SCUK, 2010)[31]. Hundreds of destitute and hungry migrants including children lived in the open for days in the town waiting for their asylum permit applications to be processed. Realising that the Department of Social Development and other governments' responses were sluggish and inadequate, SCUK quickly intervened by "shifting from providing technical support and capacity building to rendering direct services" (SCUK, 2010: 4).

With regards to negotiating access to Uniting Reformed Church run temporary shelters, the founder of the Christian Women Ministry (CWM), who was an academic at a local university and a pastor at the local church, was very receptive to research. CWM, like SCUK,

[30] I arrived in Musina on 11 August 2009.

[31] Musina town recorded its first case of cholera on 15th November 2008 (Musina Local Municipality, 2009). The Government of South Africa declared the Vhembe district a disaster area on 11 December 2008.

allowed me to be embedded in their programmes and social life. This meant joining them in their everyday work, participating in some of their meetings amongst themselves as well as with independent children and socialising with them. Being embedded in their programmes helped make the study rich as this position also enabled me to study aid workers' interface with independent children at a very close range like during food distribution, meetings to discuss "in house issues", and unforeseen events, for example, confrontations between independent children and aid workers. In addition, close interactions with children enabled me to reduce, to some extent, the likelihood of me not seeing "through a child's eyes without to some degree projecting their own anxieties, values or needs" (Green, 1998: 6). This was a daunting thing to do. I heeded Green's call for an end to adults' practice of imposing answers to the plethora of challenges faced by children instead of understanding "their lives, choices and desires" (Green, 1998: 7).

Taking into cognisance that the activities of NGOs and United Nations agencies assisting migrants in Musina were intertwined as they collaborated in many activities, soon after starting fieldwork I set out to quickly inform all of them about my study. The task of introducing me to a number of aid workers and government officials from child related departments like DSD was mainly facilitated by an aid worker. This anonymous aid worker proved to be a useful source of information as she gave me formal and informal insights into the workings of the humanitarian sector in Musina. Besides alerting me to events related to migrants, including meetings of service providers, she also gave me background information on some social processes and events during the fieldwork.

Though the relationship between government departments and the civil society organisations was tense due to differences in opinion regarding how best to respond to the humanitarian crisis, some members of the United Nations and non-governmental organisations working in the Musina municipality invited me to be a participant observer during their periodic UN-Inter-agency meetings and meetings with government departments. The UNHCR hosted and chaired the UN-Inter-Agency meetings which were usually held every Wednesday afternoon at the UNHCR offices. I got the impression that they felt that as a student, researcher and coming from ACMS I was neutral. Concerned by the complexity of the socio-economic and political dynamics in the arena of migration in Musina some of them emphasised that the situation which was developing in the border town needed to be documented, studied and lessons drawn from it.

Besides allowing me an opportunity to develop connections with aid workers in Musina, Inter-agency meetings later proved very informative. The discussions which were lively and frank gave me some insight into the humanitarian agencies' work and understanding of the independent children. Representatives of humanitarian agencies discussed the challenges they faced as service providers. They would then draw action plans and assign each other some roles and responsibilities. For example, they regularly plotted how to take to task various South African government departments on matters they were not happy about. Listening most of the time to their experiences and resisting making rushed analysis or stating my reading of the situation, I quickly grasped the gravity of the situation, the socio-political dynamics in Musina as well as the actors and debates among the service providers. The act of suspending judgement was important for me to "understand what their (aid workers) lives [felt] like from the inside" (Green, 1998: 4). I also used these opportunities to note some of the critical areas I needed to pay particular attention to during the fieldwork and their meanings. Later on during these meetings, I occasionally made contributions when I thought it was necessary. I took the position that it was unethical for me not to contribute on matters I am knowledgeable on. Sharing my experiences with them proved helpful as they opened up and broadened our discussions (see Enguix, 2012).

On a separate matter, I went through gate keepers to access the independent children. The gatekeepers were both senior aid workers and other independent children. Taking heed of O'Kane's (2008) call to take into cognisance power relations amongst independent children when researching on them, I first introduced myself and the study to some friendly children who appeared to be group leaders, and they in turn introduced me to their colleagues. The independent children I am describing as gatekeepers did not have power to bar me from talking to their colleagues but were either trusted leaders or opinion makers amongst children. They included both younger and older children, boys and girls, physically strong and weak children, new arrivals and old arrivals. However, the opinion makers amongst children were often old arrivals nicknamed "Retired Generals" for having seen it all and survived many hardships in this area, which is similar to a war zone.

I quickly discarded my initial thoughts that some children, especially the clever, educated or older ones, were more powerful amongst others as I did not want to introduce or strengthen hierarchies which I was still trying to understand (see O'Kane, 2008). Through my interactions with independent children, I observed that power amongst them was diluted, diffused and could be appropriated or lost by any child at any time. For example, a child, regardless of his age, sex or length of stay in Musina who had money or had a friendly

relationship with a member of the South African Police or fearsome community member was powerful.

Although my access to independent children was enhanced by the fact that I was working closely with service providers, I faced the methodological challenge that some children might assume that I was working for these service providers and not participate fully in the research. The service providers had introduced me to some of the children under their care in temporary places of safety, in the street, and at the border as working with them. In order to dispel any suspicions amongst children about the nature of the work I was doing, in the presence of aid workers I quickly, in a polite way emphasised to them that I was not a staff member of any of the service providers but was an independent researcher. Considering that this was on-going work, and that it might have taken time for the children to believe me, I frequently reminded them of my position in Musina.

Whilst I was very eager to forge close relationships with all study participants including children as interpersonal relations are central in ethnography (Lavanchy, 2013), I was also very careful to balance my relationships by being close to everyone. There was often conflict between children and aid workers as well as within each of these groups. This situation called for me to tread carefully. I wanted to send an unambiguous message to all of them that I was a "neutral" person. This approach worked well as the majority of them seemed comfortable in telling me some sensitive information without any fear of being reported to the authorities, to their colleagues. I expressed my opinions without criticising anyone. However it was not always easy. Negotiating with the conflicting interests of aid workers and independent children sometimes put me in awkward situation like been seen as powerful by aid workers during moments they assumed they had power over others including me. An example of a tricky moment where I had to 'choose sides" was when I advised a group of independent migrant boys at the border post to participate in the production of a documentary focusing on the lives of independent children but under conditions which protected their identities as minors. Independent migrant boys had asked me as their "*dhara redu*" (their old man) whether they should entertain questions from an Al Jazeera news crew. The crew was in the company of two senior staff members of SCUK. My point is that at times a researcher can have power over the research participants, in this case, aid workers but during moments like that one has to tactically use he or her power.

Although aid workers and independent children had cordial working relations, there was also some tension between them. This tension sometimes complicated my position as an 'insider' (my being a Zimbabwean and foreigner in South Africa like the independent

children) and ‘outsider’ (my role as a researcher). Finding the balance between being an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ was a daunting task. As an actor, I participated in shaping some of the events during fieldwork. For instance, tension between these two groups dramatically exploded when a large group of independent migrant boys refused to be interviewed by the *Al Jazeera* television news crew. SCUK which ran some programmes targeting these children had, without consulting the children, come with the journalists and told independent children to participate. Possibly drawing from the discourses of parental rights, aid workers felt entitled to make the decision. The disagreement came after one of the two senior aid workers told children who were expressing their unhappiness over the work of the organisation that they should only speak positively about how they were being assisted by his organisation. He warned the boys that being critical of his organisation’s work would work against them since donors would not be willing to give the organisation financial resources. He warned the boys that if that happened they would suffer. His attitude exposed the fault lines in the agency’s work. What also angered a number of children was that these two senior aid workers rarely visited the border post and were not known by most of the independent children. In addition, children were not pleased when one of the aid workers brushed aside their concerns about being identified by their relatives in the documentary and told them not to worry as *Al Jazeera* television did not broadcast in Zimbabwe. This was a falsehood as several households in Zimbabwe had and still have access to satellite television. His interest in showing their faces contradicted local practices against identifying minors when doing work like this which can lead to their stigmatisation and discrimination. Children were not convinced and made it very clear that they did not trust these aid workers, a situation which greatly embarrassed the aid workers in front of the television crew. A member of the television crew confided in me that the aid workers had briefed them about the ‘outstanding work’ they were doing at the border post. Visibly agitated by the conduct of these boys who were also setting conditions under which they were prepared to participate, for example, hiding their identities from their parents, and other viewers, freely talking about their experiences with this organisation, and demanding that they be interviewed near their favourite place, one of the aid workers loudly said, “small brain works against the person who possesses it”. This depiction of independent children as people who do not have the capacity to think rationally was common and was particularly evident during moments when the children questioned the actions of aid workers.

These independent children shocked me, the aid workers and the television crew when they frankly told the humanitarian worker: “We don’t know you. We know this one (pointing at me). He is always with us”. Concerned about my role as a researcher and not wanting to antagonise the aid workers but also mindful of the best interest of the child principle, I responded by translating and making it clear to the aid workers and the television crew the concerns of the children and their conditions for participating. I advised the independent children not to misrepresent their experiences of working with SCUK at the border post when they were being interviewed. One of the senior aid workers implicitly wanted to influence independent children to misrepresent their experiences and paint a more positive picture of the assistance they were receiving than the children planned to.

In a subtle way, in order not to embarrass the aid workers by exposing their lie that *Al Jazeera* television did not broadcast in Zimbabwe and fuel the tension, I advised that humanitarian workers should disguise the identity of these children when filming them and that they should interview them at their place of choice. When the parties finally agreed on the time and conditions for their participation, the most senior of the aid workers visibly angered and embarrassed by the children, menacingly said to me, “We need to talk. I’m not happy”. However, we never talked about this incident. I continued doing fieldwork which included getting the perspectives of aid workers who worked with this senior aid worker.

Fearing that the trip was going to be a failure the aid workers and the television crew succumbed to the children’s demands. This situation can be explained by Foucault who argued that “where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95-6). However, some of the children particularly the opinion leaders and the more experienced ones in dealing with this humanitarian agency openly refused to participate arguing that this humanitarian agency had nothing to offer them but simply wanted to exploit their desperate situation to access donor funding in order to continue earning a living. This situation besides dismissing the notion that independent migrant children are powerless or passive when they interface with aid workers, independent migrant, informed by their lifeworlds, demonstrated that they had the capacity to negotiate with powerful intervention agents and influence social events and processes (see Long, 2001). This example also shows that balancing the interests of aid workers and independent children was very difficult for me. The tendency by aid workers to maintain the discourses that children including the independent children are immature – “children lack the strength and skill of adults and the wisdom of the elderly” (Lancy, 2008: 373) – and therefore are not able to make choices, often put me in awkward situations.

That aside, given the theoretical underpinnings of this study and the need to understand how the knowledge and responses of children are rooted and then shaped, during the first weeks of fieldwork I sought to have an overall picture of the independent children's situation in Musina. Through talking to both aid workers and children I mapped the town in terms of common places where services for children were offered, independent children lived, socialised and worked. I quickly established that after arriving in Musina from Zimbabwe, Zimbabwean independent children, due to various factors which will be explained in this thesis, temporarily settled in different locations: temporary shelters, streets, at the border post, rented shacks in Matswale and Nancefield, and farms. Consequently, I considered it prudent to include independent children living outside shelters as some service providers had programmes targeting this group. These children's experiences were likely to be different from their colleagues' living in shelters. Methodologically, closely studying these four groups of children was a challenge as they were dispersed. I decided not to widen the scope of the research area by focusing on a single locality as it was going to make it possible for me to immerse myself fully in the research site. In order to include children from a broad range of backgrounds without compartmentalising their lives or widening the scope of the geographical area and to have ethnographic depth of children's interface with humanitarian agencies, I selected the following locations: high density, streets, SMG and the Musina border post (see Chapter one). These areas were close to another. I could see independent children and aid workers every day. Although this further limited the scale of the study in terms of geographical spread, I was content as micro studies offer immense insights into social processes and events. Although there was a lot of mobility and mixing of the children living in these locations, each location produced a different population in terms of behaviour, plans in South Africa, understanding of life experiences of migration and interfacing with humanitarian agencies. At times the different spaces children lived in shaped the way they were represented.

During the introductory phase of the fieldwork, I also made use of secondary sources like the mission statement of the service providers, history of independent children in the town and type of services for migrant children. I also devoted time to collecting general information about the history of the area, local culture and beliefs. At the same time, I was cultivating relationships with independent children and some aid workers in preparation for conducting detailed interviews. Though some children had experience of interacting with researchers before, during the first weeks of starting the fieldwork, I concentrated on establishing rapport and clarifying my role as a researcher. This did not take long as most of

the children had at least finished grade seven[32] so they quickly appreciated research and its potential implications for mobile children.

Through these introductory engagements, what emerged was a state of affairs in which the service providers were battling to assist the increasing population of migrant children, develop sustainable interventions as well as roll them out in an efficient and comprehensive manner. Clearly, it was also a borderland overwhelmed by the high number of poor undocumented migrants including children and had many security concerns which demanded one to be vigilant at all times.

I set out to do fieldwork without an exhaustive and final schedule of the questions I intended to ask the social actors. Additional questions were generated as the social events and processes unfolded during the fieldwork. As I had anticipated, many of these situations were difficult for me to have forecasted.

Selected Service Providers

Consistent with the dictates of an ethnographic study which pays much attention to detail and nuance, I focused on the work of two non-governmental organisations in Musina: United Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)'s Christian Women Ministry (CWM) and Save the Children UK (SCUK). I selected these two service providers as they had different ideologies and operated under very different discursive conditions. They were subject to different ideological and funding regulations. They represent spaces of contestation between global and local understandings of childhood. The shelters they managed or supported were grossly underfunded and struggled to support independent children. For example, in March 2010, independent children at one of the shelters were very dirty and the aid workers asked for help from some international organisations working with foreign migrants in Musina. Surprisingly, they were given four kilogrammes of washing powder yet they had over 200 children. As expected, the aid workers had a terrible time distributing this limited washing powder. The nucleus of the study was at CWM which assisted the majority of independent children. Religious non-governmental organisations are increasingly playing important roles in political and economic issues in Africa (Bornstein, 2005) but they are often misunderstood. To understand how aid workers represented children, one needs to know who the aid workers were, where they came from, what the sources of their tacit assumptions about 'normal' childhood and 'normal' children came from, what motivated their work with children and

[32] The highest level of primary school education in Zimbabwe.

profile of the agencies.

Christian Women Ministry (CWM)

> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I'll pay you'. So the woman took the baby and nursed him" (Exodus Chapter 2 verse 9)[33]. I said to my congregation take these children (independent migrant children) and care for them, said Professor Pastor Lesiba E. Matsaung.

Inspired by these words from the Bible about how the daughter of the King of Egypt Pharaoh instructed one woman to care and raise baby Moses who had been 'abandoned' by his mother, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, formed in 1994 after the merger of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (Matsaung and Seloana, 2007) decided to intervene and support the independent migrant children in Musina. The shelter was opened on 1 September 2008 with the assistance of the UNHCR to help migrant women who survived sexual gender based violence as well as those who were pregnant. With a capacity to accommodate 20 women and their children, it assisted them with spiritual counselling and food amongst other services. With support from congregants, several humanitarian NGO donors, in March 2009 it scaled up providing food and shelter to migrant girls and boys who were re-displaced after the closure of the temporary shelter at the Showgrounds in Musina. To illustrate the gravity of the problem, at first more than 120 independent migrant boys were accommodated in a garage at the church's premises in Nancefield. Professor Pastor Lesiba E. Matsaung drew similarities in the lives of independent children and Moses, portraying both as vulnerable and in need of rescue. He also reminded the congregants about the inter-connectedness of Christianity as a religion and humanitarianism: "We (church members) have a mandate from God to care for humanity". His position supports Barnett, Kennedy, Stein and Thaut's observation in a report on religion and humanitarian work that "religious forces have been instrumental in spreading an ethics of care" (2009: 1).

[33] The Holy Bible, New International Version: Student Companion Bible. International Bible Society, 1973.

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), which is rooted in the 16th century when Jan van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape in 1652, is "committed to the biblical demands of love, reconciliation, justice and peace" (2014: date unstated)[34]. A senior Uniting Reformed Church staff member stated that their primary interest was not returning children to their homes in Zimbabwe. URC aid workers were seen by other service providers as not very enthusiastic about the Identification, Documentation, Tracing and Re-unification (IDTR) programme. A senior aid worker at URC argued that it was un-ethical, illogical and unchristian for them to send the children back to Zimbabwe when the living conditions were still bad. A senior aid worker said his dream was to first educationally empower the children. This thinking compelled this organisation to make concerted efforts to secure schooling places for these children in South Africa.

The church's Christian Women's Ministry (CWM) shelter for boys in Matswale, located in a high density area, by all accounts at the time of field work was a poorly resourced and overcrowded shelter. It housed between 150 and 250 boys daily when it was meant to only accommodate a maximum of 150 children (Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010). The number of resident independent children decreased considerably to around 100 in April 2013. At the time of fieldwork some children slept in tents. The number of independent migrant children fluctuated everyday as some arrived in Musina from Zimbabwe and others left Musina for other areas in South Africa. Beds and blankets were often insufficient for the children and they usually wore dirty clothes. Ablution facilities were insufficient and unhygienic. There was age mixing of boys, a situation which raised child protection concerns. Cases of theft and violence amongst the children within the shelter were very high. The shelter which is located near a bar, had inadequate access control and insecure fencing. Children were often attacked especially at night by criminals (see Lombard, 2010). In response to these poor living conditions, in 2012 IOM built new and refurbished shelters for unaccompanied boys and vulnerable female migrants[35]. Launching the project on the 13th of July 2012, the IOM's acting Chief of Mission in South Africa, Erick Ventura said, "For a long time independent

[34] http://www.vgksa.org.za/Default.asp (Date of access: 19 June 2014).

[35] See: http://appalblog.wordpress.com/2012/10/12/iom-south-africa-hands-over-new-shelters-for-stranded-vulnerable-migrants (Date of access: 27 March 2013)

children… endured humiliating living conditions in Musina. By improving the shelters… we can restore some of their dignity and basic human rights"[36].

The other shelter in Nancefield hosted independent migrant girls and adult migrant women who were survivors of sexual and gender based violence. Some of the 'abused' women were under 18 years and lived with their children born from sexual abuse. At the time of conducting fieldwork, on average 25 girls below 19 years old were living at this shelter.

The founder of CWM explained how they set up the temporary shelter for children. Seeing a lot of independent children sleeping and suffering at the show grounds, on the streets and along the railway line without eating anything, a group of women who belonged to women's fellowship started intervening by preparing food and distributing it to children at the various places in town. Due to the difficulties of walking all over the town looking for children and noting that the children were not safe where they were staying, they decided to invite them to sleep at the church. The number of children quickly grew and they housed them in a garage. With permission from Musina Municipality, they later moved the boys to their own shelter in Matswale. During fieldwork, the CWM shelters were not receiving any funding from the government of South Africa. They depended on funding and material support from UNHCR, SCUK, MSF, the congregation and community members. However, this support was often erratic and was far from adequate which resulted in both independent children and aid workers struggling to make ends meet.

Save the Children UK

Save the Children UK (SCUK), an international charity organisation, aims at creating a better world for children. Following its founder, Eglantyne Jebb, who is credited for founding children's rights (Save the Children, 2009; Ansell, 2005) and the UNCRC, SCUK's principles and programmes aim to promote these ideals. From the time I started fieldwork to December 2009 it shared the same space with Christian Women's Ministry's boys' shelter in Matswale, Musina because it did not have a shelter of its own.

SCUK's workforce in Musina, numbering 42 in August 2009, was drawn from diverse backgrounds in terms of educational qualifications, age, sex, experience of working with children, ethnicity and nationality. "People were employed voluntarily. We had no time to get expertise since it was the first time to have a situation like this", said one worker explaining

[36] http://iom.org.za/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127&catid=19&lang=en) Date of access: 21 July 2012.

how aid workers were at first recruited and selected in Musina. They tried, however, to recruit people who had experience and background in working with children. Consequently, a significant number of these aid workers were trained teachers. Some of the aid workers were trained nurses. However, a senior worker lamented that "some of the nurses had no training on how to work with children".

As part of its work in South Africa, the organisation set up "the Musina Response Programme with the goal of establishing effective coordination and service delivery mechanisms in order to protect children on the move and other vulnerable children from harm, abuse, exploitation and neglect" (SCUK, 2010: iii). SCUK's response in Musina can be categorised into three operational phases. Firstly, between 2003 and 2008 they worked through the Centre for Positive Care, a local NGO and this resulted in the setting up of Children's Advisory Councils. SCUK also facilitated a number of stakeholder meetings. In the second phase (June 2008 – June 2009), a busy, eventful and controversial period, which SCUK named an emergency phase, the organisation intervened directly through offering direct services to children (for example, protection, food, psychosocial support, tracing and re-unification), capacitating local service providers and coordinating child focused responses in the Musina municipality. Acknowledging the importance of efficiently coordinating intervention efforts as well as SCUK's vast experience in mobilising resources and expertise in assisting children, particularly in emergency situations the world over, the local service providers including non-governmental organisations tasked SCUK with leading in assisting independent children. Consequently, SCUK often hosted stakeholders meetings which included the education cluster and the women and children cluster group at the SCUK office premises. The terms of reference for the Women and Children's Cluster stated that its overall objective was to:

> Promote, protect and fulfil women and children's rights to protection from abuse, exploitation and violence in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights, humanitarian treaties and conventions, as well as the national laws and constitution of South Africa (Musina Women and Children's Cluster, 2009).

Other key stakeholders in these meetings included the SAPS, Department of Social Development, MSF, UNICEF, and the Refugee Children's Project.

In the third and last phase (July 2009 – June 2010), called the post-emergency or transition phase, SCUK pulled out from direct intervention to working with local service providers. The common saying amongst SCUK staff as they rolled out their "exit strategy", which saw over thirty fieldworkers dismissed, was in their words: "we are going back to our original mandate". The original mandate was working through local partners, capacitating their partners' systems and monitoring these organisations' interventions. This situation was necessitated by the termination of funding from the Department for International Development (DFID). As will be discussed later, the Transit Centre which had been established at the Uniting Reformed Church between July and August 2009 was handed over to CWM. Of significance is that I started my fieldwork soon after the establishment of the Transit Centre at the Uniting Reformed Church's Boy's Shelter, and witnessed its hand over to Uniting Reformed Church in December 2009. I was also there when this community based organisation started being indirectly assisted by SCUK.

Study Participants

The inclusion criteria for children in this study were that they should be independent migrants, and both boys and girls should be included. To reach some degree of theoretical saturation, approximately 100 Zimbabwean independent adolescents were approached and interviewed with the majority being boys, reflecting the gendered nature of migration and street life. It is difficult to state the actual number of children I interacted with during the many months of fieldwork. That time Musina was receiving hundreds of independent migrant children and every day (during the day and at night) I interacted with many of them, getting information on different issues. I met children in the streets, at the offices of various service providers including shelters. My interaction with these children ranged from having detailed one on one conversation to brief greetings. I told them that I would be using a multiplicity of data collection techniques like interviews, observations, case studies and focus group discussions. I explained how I would use each method.

The state of being an independent migrant child is not static as some children migrate with parents/guardians but end up alone either for a short or long period of time due to various reasons. Contrary to their policies, most of the government and NGO workers did not work with a rigid understanding of a child as someone aged below 18 (UNCRC 1989;

ACRWC, 1990; Skinner, 2004). “In modern Western society … 18, as reflected in the UNCRC, has become an arbitrary cut-off point for childhood”, observes Twum-Danso (2005: 11). Twum-Danso explains the implication of this age boundary: “for those who fall under the age of 18, this period is categorised as a special and precarious phase of life when one needs protection and care if complete and responsible adulthood is to be achieved” (2005: 11). The under 18 are seen as immature to exercise autonomy in many matters concerning their lives. As I will discuss later, this universal definition of a child has been found to be problematic in both Western and non-Western cultures. According to Twum-Danso (2005: 12) “childhood refers to a position in the social hierarchy than to biological age”. Thus, it was continuously being constructed and negotiated. So keeping with the understanding that childhood is socially constructed, I did not restrict my understanding of childhood to only young people under the age of eighteen (Bourdillon, 2006) but also included those slightly above 18 years provided social actors like aid workers and some children below 18 years categorized them as children.

While many African nationals have been migrating to South Africa, Zimbabweans account for the majority. As discussed in chapter one, I focus on independent children from Zimbabwe because an overwhelming majority of the independent children I observed in Musina were Zimbabweans. I approached and interviewed independent children, at times with the assistance of service providers as they constituted a hard-to-reach population fearful of talking to adults in case this led to deportation. Recruiting participants was fairly easy and I can attribute the high response rate to a number of factors. Firstly, a number of children in Musina had talked to or seen researchers previously. Secondly, the humanitarian settings, created a feeling that a lot was being done or would be done for migrants including children in Musina. This humanitarian social environment facilitated actors’ access to participation but also created an ethical dilemma as it raised expectations that were difficult to meet. Thirdly, my identity as a Zimbabwean also enhanced the recruitment process as they identified with and trusted me. Fourthly, all the participants including children, even those who had little education, effortlessly understood the nature of the key research questions and the relevance of the study[37].

[37] Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate in Africa. See The African Economist http://the africaneconomist.com/ranking-of-african-countries-by-literacy-rate-zimbabwe-no-1/(Date of access: November 25, 2014).

I employed snow-ball sampling techniques since independent children particularly those renting shacks (*imikhukhu*) and those staying and working on the streets were sometimes difficult to identify and locate (see Mann, 2011; Peil, *et.al*., 1982; Baker, 1988). This technique was effective as it enabled me to be introduced easily to people in this high crime and securitised area. In addition, Musina has a close humanitarian community meaning that it was very guarded as far as releasing information about their activities or what they thought about migrants and the workings of other organisations. While stationed in Musina, I often had situational and interesting encounters with different children. Since the independent children were very mobile and most of them were in transit, the dropout rate for follow up interviews was high. But this did not affect my study as recruitment of these children continued until I was satisfied that I had a clear understanding of their lives. I remained open to gathering experiences of those children who had left Musina and come back. This approach enriched the study as the children reflected on their migration experiences including their encounters with humanitarian agencies. All the interviews and FDGs with independent children were conducted in vernacular with a few statements in English.

On a different note, having key informants working for these two organisations and also other NGOs working with the migrant population (see chapter 2, section on "Role and Response of Civil Society Organisations to Independent Children") and a few from relevant government departments like the police, social development, education and home affairs, enriched my understanding of the interface between independent children and workers working for the two humanitarian organisations. A total of three community members were interviewed mainly to get an understanding of the local conceptualization of childhood and vulnerability. Over 20 key informants working in the two service providers, other NGOs and relevant government departments (mentioned above) were interviewed. In order to get more insights into the work of aid workers and the lives of independent children during my meetings with service providers' staff and independent children, I often asked them to suggest independent children, aid workers and community members who could also be key informants in the study. This way, I identified some key informants with the assistance of common acquaintances.

Researcher as an Actor

The standpoint from which I collected and analysed the data in an effort to understand this social phenomenon is very important and I work from the assumption that there is no knowledge that is value-free (Lupton, 1992). In other words, I also subscribe to the idea that a researcher is a co-producer of discourses (Parker and Burman, 1993). As an active social agent, particularly one employing ethnographic techniques, it was not possible to be detached from the research process itself (Connolly, 2008). This is particularly difficult when one is dealing with poignant issues like child protection and rights. In fact, over the years as a researcher, I have come to the conclusion that it is not possible to remain impartial as one is affected in one way or another by the people or events we research. This situation becomes even more difficult when the researcher has some social ties to the people under study. Thus, it is important for me to describe my social position as a researcher. I do this through the process of reflexivity, "a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research" (Berger, 2013: 1). I outline below and throughout the thesis, my gender, nationality, personal and professional experiences, values and motivations to carry out this study. These factors have an influence on the research process including shaping my interpretations (see Berger, 2013; Grant, Rohr and Grant, 2011) of childhood and vulnerability. I also analyse how the meaning my gender, nationality and other social factors mentioned above shifted and changed since these are not stable categories.

According to Brendan Gough, reflexivity makes it possible for the researcher to have:

> A critical attitude towards locating the impact of the research(er) context and subjectivity on project design, data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings…which facilitates insights into the context, relationships and power dynamics germane to the research setting (Gough, 2003 cited in Obasi, 2012: 2).

Berger (2013: 2) adds that "the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective".

Taking cognisance of the above points, it was significant that I have a part-shared and not-shared, national identity and history with the independent children under study. As a researcher, parent and Zimbabwean national, I carried out the study with keen interest and heightened attention to detail in order to fully understand the situation from different standpoints. This experience enabled me to understand the perspectives and experiences of the social actors at some moments. Being a Zimbabwean shaped my ability to work with

Zimbabwean children whilst my training and experience as a social anthropologist influenced the way I consciously or unconsciously interacted with research participants, read and analysed social events and processes. In addition, following Merton (1972) who argues that researchers are both insiders and outsiders, I remained aware throughout the fieldwork that as a researcher, even as a Zimbabwean national, I represented a certain class of migrants – skilled and employed – what the children I worked with aspired to become and had come to South Africa for.

Though I had interest in researching the lives of independent children from Zimbabwe, I constantly took a few steps back (Bourdieu, 1990) as I carried out the study, reminding myself of the study objectives as well as trying to grasp the meanings of the unfolding events or social interactions. This was possible as I was investigating social actors in different spaces which gave me opportunities to hear different interpretations of events. As part of critical reflexivity, I also reflected, on the one hand, on how I was shaping and re-shaping social processes and on the other, being shaped and re-shaped by the issues understudy (see Grant, Rohr and Grant, 2011; Connolly, 2008; Palmary, 2006).

Distancing myself from the dominant view of seeing independent minors as "passive victims who are inherently 'vulnerable'" (Clark-Kazak, 2011: 6), I acknowledge children's competencies and ability to shape their lives, social structures and events. I was fully cognisant of the argument that:

> [i]n the process of research, power moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child and adult to adult in the local settings of the research (Christensen, 2004: 175).

Though it might appear contradictory, I remained conscious of my responsibilities to children, both as a researcher and adult, that they must not be harmed during the course of the study (Morrow and Richards, 1996) whilst recognising their choice and agency. As I argue elsewhere in this chapter, not treading carefully during fieldwork had the potential of undermining my social position as a researcher as well as a responsible adult.

Am I a 'neutral' observer? No, I am not. Whilst I greatly appreciated the great work which is being done by child related agencies and other service providers, I have a soft spot for independent children and children living under difficult conditions in general. In doing this I share and agree with Ladegaard's view that:

> Several scholars have argued that a sharp distinction between research commitment and social commitments cannot be upheld in projects involving underprivileged and marginalised groups (Ladegaard, 2013: 6).

Despite this, I strived to have a balanced analysis.

Data Analysis

My fieldwork produced the following types of evidence: field notes from participant and non-participant observations, transcriptions and notes from interviews with independent children and service providers, notes from focus group discussions with independent migrant children and secondary material, for example, media reports. I used two approaches to analyse the ways in which the representations of independent migrant children were constructed: thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Aronson, 1994; Patton, 1999) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis used by Parker (1999), Alldred and Burman (2005) as well as by Lupton (1992).

Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006: 6). They add that "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 10). Thematic analysis is appropriate for my study as this approach "Suits questions related to people's … views and perceptions…. It suits questions related to understanding and representation…. It also suits questions relating to the construction of meaning" (University of Auckland's School of Psychology, year of publication and the page number unstated)[38]. After doing thematic analysis, I found it important to extend the analysis to include understanding the discourses which were at play, their functions as well as the relationship between discourse and practice as it shaped the representations of independent migrant children.

Basically, discourse analysis focuses on "the organization of texts and talk in practices, and with the discursive resources that those practices draw on" (Potter, 1996a). Put differently, discourse analysis unpacks text and below I explain how it does that. Text can be observations, interview transcripts, field notes, documents, pictures or "any representation of

[38] http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis/about-thematic-analysis.html (Date of access: 8 January 2015)

an aspect of reality" (Cheek, 2004: 1144). The term 'discourse' has been used to ''emphasise the organised way in which meanings cohere around an assumed central position, which gives them their value and significance'' (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000: 14 cited in Boonzaier, 2006: 143). There are different types of discourse analysis, for example, Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1993), Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Parker, 1999; Alldred and Burman, 2005). Since my study is about understanding the representation of independent migrant children during the interface between these children and aid workers I decided to utilise the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis which focuses on understanding power relationships amongst different social actors seen through the workings of language and practices. Arguably, the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is also located in social constructionist framework (Potter, 1996b), as an analyst focuses on understanding how language shapes or constructs the society in a way which shows the knowledge and power dynamics among different social actors. Language is value laden (Fairclough, 1992) and as Gavey (1989) argues, it is located in discourse (cited in Boonzaier, 2006: 143).

The importance of utilising discourse analysis and focusing on the role of language in the text is its flexibility in unpacking loaded information. For example, a statement like "girls from your country like men a lot" which was made by one of the aid workers (see Chapter five) is loaded and needs unpacking. It is not only the meaning one should focus on but it is also important to understand why the aid worker said that statement at that particular time. Who is being silenced by this statement, and what actions arise from taking up such a discourse. Evident in these questions is the need to undertake discourse analysis so as to be able to look at the function of language in that text, including how such language performs actions. For instance, using the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, language can express how some social actors dominate, silence other social actors and compel other social actors to take on particular discourses. Thus, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis enabled me to analyse the various texts I collected in Musina. Instead of just getting the meaning of the text or themes, it is also important to both analyse within the text and outside the text (in the wider society). For example, with regards to the framing of independent migrant Zimbabwean girls as immoral, the question was: where did that perception come from? Was it a discourse that was circulating? and what were the reasons for this? How was it working? What did it say about the wider context in which it was said? As one goes outside the text and looks at the functions of various discourses, it is interesting to find out what the discourses make the different social actors do. If aid workers viewed independent migrant Zimbabwean girls as immoral, for example, what were the consequences of such representations? According to Parker (1999),

the meanings of experience are not inherent in language but are shaped by broader systems, institutions and relations of power and as such meaning related to the representation of independent immigrant girls as immoral may be shaped by either institutional or wider systems of power at play within the contexts they exist in. One of the criticisms of discourse analysis is that it focuses on the text and sometimes forgets the meaning. It means that an analyst can keep on analysing the text and sometimes the real experiences of people are left out or it abandons "an account of the real conditions that make texts possible" (Parker, 1999: 6). A combination of thematic analysis and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis thus enabled me to fully unpack the different social worlds or lifeworlds in broad social contexts and minimised the weaknesses in both approaches.

Thematic Analysis

During fieldwork, guided by the study's research objectives, I was conscious of how I would analyse the data – noting contextual meanings of data, writing down ideas of how the data fitted together and noting patterns of behaviour. As field work progressed, the moment I noted an emerging pattern (Braun and Clarke, 2006) I captured the different social actors' lifeworlds. This practice generated questions I needed to ask the social actors. I wrote fieldwork notes soon after interacting with the social actors. I filed indexing notes and references so that they could be easily accessed during the write up (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Peil, *et al.*, 1982). I developed some themes (Aronson, 1994) guided by my research questions. I did provisional thematic analysis, identifying patterns during the fieldwork but remained open to other understandings of the issues under study. In addition, the data analysis process included the production of many drafts of the empirical chapters and presentation of preliminary study findings at workshops and conferences. Braun and Clarke (2006: 9) observe that:

> Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a contextualist method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism… thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality

The thematic analysis used the social constructionist method rather than the essentialist method as my objective was to have an understanding of the socially constructed representations of different independent migrant children in aid work and migration regime. It enabled me to understand the functions of the discourses and the consequences generated by these discourses. On the ideological front, this allows one to see the effects of language (Parker, 1994).

After completing fieldwork and transcribing some of the interviews, I read the transcript notes and fieldwork notes multiple times in order to be very familiar with the data, and then generated coding categories through a constructionist approach. According to the University of Auckland's School of Psychology, a constructionist way "focuses on looking at how a certain reality is created by the data" (year of publication and the page number unstated)[39]. The information for the categories came from what actors directly said, their silences and observations (Aronson, 1994). Of note is that the coding of data process was influenced by other social factors as "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 12). Following the study objectives or research questions, noting the relationships between categories and capturing the social context (or social conditions which gave rise to this category), I then grouped categories into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). When it was problematic to code an event or theme, I re-read my field notes to fully understand the social context and at times I also asked some of the participants to clarify the situation under which the act had taken place. I also identified areas which were saturated with data. The search for themes involved "examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning" (University of Auckland's School of Psychology: year of publication and the page number unstated). Patterns of experiences in the representations of independent migrant children were then categorised, for example, the formal and informal representations. I then followed Aronson's advice that, "The next step to a thematic analysis is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns" (1994: page unstated). These themes were then broken down into sub-themes like classed, nationalised, gendered childhoods, formal and informal economy of childhood. I also constantly revised the themes. I contextualised the analysis in relation to existing literature (University of Auckland's School of Psychology: year of publication and the page number unstated) in an attempt to make sense of the

[39] http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis/about-thematic-analysis.html (Date of access: 8 January 2015).

different representations of children. Reading related literature worked to locate the themes I had chosen in the existing literature and make meaning of the actors' experiences I had collected (Aronson, 1994).

As I previously stated, data analysis was not blind to "negative cases" (Patton, 1999) "that do not fit within the pattern" (Patton, 1999: 1192) of results. Patton (1999) points out that "where patterns and trends have been identified, our understanding of those patterns and trends is increased considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the pattern" (1999: 1191-1192). I established the reasons why some social actors represented independent migrant children somewhat differently than others. This is important as "These may be exceptions that prove the rule. They may also broaden the "rule," change the "rule," or cast doubt on the "rule" altogether" (Patton, 1999: 1192). This enabled me to understand the nuance in the complex and contradictory representations of independent migrant children.

Discourse Analysis

Aware of the point made by Braun and Clarke that "thematic analysis does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use, or the fine-grained functionality of talk" (2006: 28), I decided that within thematic analysis I would do discourse analysis in order to enrich my understanding of the representations of independent children interfacing with humanitarian agencies. Discourse analysis is increasingly receiving attention in childhood studies (see Alldred and Burman, 2005; van der Riet, 2009) as this qualitative research approach is resourceful in understanding discursive frames for thinking, perceiving and speaking about children's lives. Norman Long (2001: 242) describes discourse as "sets of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, narratives and statements that advance a particular version of 'the truth' about specific objects, persons and events". Consequently, discourse works to either legitimise or delegitimise certain ideas and meanings. Nevertheless, these ideas and meanings which can be dominant are at times questioned and constantly challenged. Contributing to this matter, Lupton defines discourse analysis as a "A group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can both be identified in textual or verbal communications and located in wider social structures" (1992: 145). Since discourses perform action, they are taken up in wider society and used. A discourse does not necessarily have to be true but shows the ideologies which are circulating, prevailing or being silenced at certain times. Although discourse analysis has its problems like being seen by positivists as too subjective – that it is observer- specific, dependent on the particular scholar's

understanding of the text/situation[40] - and not telling "us what is `correct` or not" (Parker, 1999: 6) its usefulness is that

> …it does alert us to the intimate connections between meaning, power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). We are drawn into relations of power when we make meaning and it makes us who we are" (Parker, 1999: 6).

Parker (1999: 3)adds that "The term `discourse` is sometimes used to refer to patterns of meaning which organize the various symbolic systems human beings inhabit, and which are necessary for us to make sense to each other". For example, a 'children's rights' discourse says children have fundamental rights which have to be protected and promoted by society. A violation of children's rights generates and justifies condemnation against such practices across society. Discourse is not restricted to language (Parker, 1999). Parker (1999: 3) writes:

> Foucault`s (1969: 49) maxim that discourses are `practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak` is useful here, for it draws attention to the way these `practices` include patterns of meaning that may be visual or spatial, that may comprise face-to-face interaction or the organization of national boundaries. The `objects` that such practices create (or `form` in Foucault`s words) will include all the things that we see, refer to and take for granted as actually existing `out there`.

Discourse analysis asks questions like: What are the objects and subjects in the text? What is this text performing? What kind of action is this text performing since language performs action? Of interest is, outside this text what do we know? What is its intended purpose? How does it achieve its objectives? Who is it silencing? Who is not silenced? (Parker, 1992). What is it trying to bring up? What is remaining hidden in the text? There are a plethora of discourses but they do not have the same weighting (Cheek, 2004). Discourse performs a function. However, discourses function at different times or situations, either to "marginalise or even exclude others" (Cheek, 2004: 1143). Discourse analysis also looks at the ideas which are being promoted or opposed. Cheek (2004) notes that the discursive frames which are deployed are determined by power relations. When I analysed the various texts I asked these questions. Aid workers depicted independent migrant children within a

[40] This situation prompted Cheek to write that "Discourse analytic research also gives great power to the analyst to impose meanings on another's text" (2004: 1146). Text can be observations, interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents and pictures.

context, not only in Musina but also within the aid work or migration regime. Discourse analysis pays attention to the social context which produces the data (Alldred and Burman, 2005). The Foucauldian Discourse Analysis allowed me as an analyst to consider a broader view of the society and its different lifeworlds. Discourse analysis helped me to understand representations of independent migrant children within the fluid social and politicised context. Instead of focusing much on the 'message' which is typical of traditional content analysis, discourse analysis pays attention on the "elements and influences in the discourse process as a who1e" (Lupton, 1992: 145). It makes it possible to "reveal the hidden layer of signification lying beneath the obvious, taken-for-granted surface" (Lupton, 1992: 147). Discourse analysis enabled me to unpack dominant and less dominant understandings, the different meanings at work, contradictions in meaning making or "between different significations" (Parker, 1999: 6), negotiations over meanings and how these meanings functioned (Parker, 1999).

Alldred and Burman (2005) indicate that Parker (1992, 1994) and Burman (1992, 1996) suggest that when conducting discourse analysis on children's account, the analytic stages can be as follows:

1. Produce a written text (e.g., transcript), and reflect on processes involved in its production.
2. 'Free associate' with the text. Consider surprising and unsurprising connections and reflect upon the perspectives from which they derive.
3. Identify 'objects' constructed by elaborating the nouns in the text. Consider the meanings and values implied.
4. Examine the relations between objects.
5. Explore to whom the text is addressed and how the reader is positioned.
6. Identify the different subject positions within the text and elaborate the rights and responsibilities that accompany each. Consider what can be said from each position and how this might function.
7. Examine the relations between subjects.
8. Examine the understandings that form connections between and among subjects and objects. Consider whether there are alternative versions of these relationships (discourses) in the text.
9. Consider the values and institutions that are reinforced or undermined by these discourses.

10. Consider who gains and who loses within each discourse, and map any relations of hierarchy, including of knowledge or authority.
11. Consider whether these discourses allude to alternative accounts and what this suggests about how they function culturally.
12. Reflect upon the political values and relations (discourses) that enabled articulation of the last three stages, and the personal investments in these perspectives and this particular analysis.

Discourse analysis is not a method but an approach. Consequently, I did not follow the above steps since discourse analysis, an on-going activity in an ethnographic study, is subjective. It varies "with the type of text, the aim and focus of the analysis" (Alldred and Burman, 2005: 186). As I analysed the social structures and ethnographic data generated by unfolding social processes and events in Musina during fieldwork, I constantly engaged in reflexivity (Alldred and Burman, 2005). My first phase of data analysis was thematic analysis and in the second phase of data analysis I did discourse analysis in order to deepen the analysis.

In summary, discourse analysis allowed me to understand the broader discourses which were evoked at each particular moment to frame independent migrant children, their utility, how and why they were challenged or accepted by different social actors. In addition, it proved useful in also drawing different meanings from silences by social actors and understanding the actors' actions. Thus, the 'speaking subject' was situated within a social, economic and political context (Lupton, 1992).

Negotiating Ethical Issues and Reflections on Ethical Challenges

The issue of ethics in research involving children is very important but contentious (Hill, 2005). There are difficulties of gathering information amidst human suffering, how to answer ethical questions and how to deal with ethical dilemmas. This section deals with how I negotiated ethical issues during the course of my fieldwork.

One of the established practices for research with children to be ethically compliant is getting consent from parents or those '*in loco parentis*' (that is, a substitute parent). However, it is impossible to obtain parental consent on behalf of independent children (see Hopkins, 2008). There were few social workers in Musina, so I obtained verbal consent instead from care workers who were looking after children in their shelters, who insisted that I do so.

Soon after meeting every participant regardless of their age and other variables, I, "clearly and unambiguously" to borrow Morrow and Richards's words (1996: 101), introduced my study, how it was structured, my professional background and purpose. I told them that I would be using a multiplicity of data collection techniques like interviews, observations, case studies and focus group discussions. But I could not always control how people understood my motives. The ethical principles of informed consent, the costs and benefits of participation, anonymity, confidentiality and rights of withdrawal were meant to enable independent children to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the study or not. The majority of people I approached to participate in the study agreed but made it clear that their verbal consent was "good enough". As a result, I had very few participants, both adults and children, who agreed to sign consent forms. On a number of occasions, in the initial stages of the fieldwork, when I suggested the use of consent forms, it often created a situation of distrust or suspicion. Some of them, including senior and literate service providers, responded: "What do you want my signature for? Let's just talk." Migrants and aid workers associated signatures with official documents. Migrants' experiences with official documents are uneasy, if not negative. They are often associated with authorities determining their rights (to stay in South Africa, to earn money, etc.). They were wary of law enforcers, particularly SAPS which often arrested undocumented migrants. Similarly, service providers were not comfortable signing consent forms. As a result, I did not often request written consent as I did not think it was the appropriate approach, given the context.

In return, I promised to keep their identities anonymous. However, keeping the identities anonymous proved not possible for organisations or in focus group discussions as I could not control what other people who would have participated in the focus group reported later. In the same vein, I promised not to release their identities to law enforcement agencies and other service providers (see Turnball, Hernandez and Reyes, 2009). For that reason, I used pseudonyms for all the informants. Consequently, in this thesis I identify participants by their sex, age, life situation, affiliations, links and role in the humanitarian work or Musina community in general.

On a separate issue, study participants including children usually did not put me under pressure to take position(s) on various matters as they understood that my role was to interact with everyone and gather data from many sources. A number of participants, both independent children and aid workers, often said to me, "You hear a lot of things". A statement like this at times put me in an awkward position when I knew the answers to questions they had posed but due to need to maintain confidentiality, I could not reveal what I

had heard. Following the adage that knowledge is power, both children and humanitarian workers at times regarded me as having some power as they realised that I had access to information they did not have easy access to. However, in reality, I did not always have the sort of information they suspected I had. In a way, this – not having such information – helped me as an individual to deal with this moral dilemma of whether to tell them or not.

The aid workers noted with both admiration and envy the way I had cultivated friendly and "older brother" relationships with children under their care as well as those living in the streets or at the border post. However, some aid workers tried to capitalise on my closeness to children by periodically trying to use me to do their work, get information from children or spy on children. Below is an example of an account which captures a moment aid workers asked me to help them achieve their objectives.

Abigail, a 17 year old girl and Matric student at a local school, was not feeling well but resisted pressure from aid workers that she go to clinic or hospital. Twice they called a car from MSF, which assisted migrants to access health services, to take her to hospital but she refused. The aid workers suspected that she had measles which is a highly contagious disease. They feared that the disease would spread to other children at the shelter. Two female aid workers, one of them a nurse who was in-charge of health issues at the shelter, noting that I often chatted with the girl, appealed to me to talk to the girl and convince her to urgently seek medical help. My attempts to convince the trained nurse to use her nursing skills, particularly counselling to persuade the girl failed. The aid workers claimed powerlessness to deal with the situation mentioning that it was within that girl's right to refuse going to clinic or hospital. Due to the health concerns they had raised, I promised to talk to Abigail. Fortunately, she visited the hospital on her own before I talked to her.

Another major challenge I faced was dealing with issues to do with confidentiality in situations where adults expected, as Thomas and O'Kane write, "to be told about the private lives or thoughts of children for whom they are responsible" (1998: 337). At times aid workers found it difficult to accept the idea that the children were opening up to me instead of, as one humanitarian worker put it, "us who are giving you food, shelter among other things". For example, some boys told me that one senior humanitarian worker whom all along I had regarded as friendly to me had actually rebuked these boys for telling me about the shelter's internal affairs. They quoted her as follows: "Why are you telling Stanford? Stanford is interested in getting his degree. He is using you. You are going to remain here and you need assistance". She used the rhetoric of aid workers being more concerned about their welfare than anyone else to try to alienate me from the children. Despite some tense moments

like this, I believe I did not put the lives of children in danger as these aid workers soon realised that I was not competing with them but was solely interested in understanding children's lives in detail. Ironically, many of these aid workers later became my most useful key informants who gave me sensitive information.

As I explored how independent children were being represented, I got to know many secrets, including of a criminal nature. I heard intimate details about the sexual activities of some of these children and also aid workers. To deal with the ethical dilemma of how much secret information I should reveal, I strived not to cause harm to both individuals and organisations which participated in the study. A significant population of independent children were vulnerable and a number of the service providers' workers were under severe stress as a result of prolonged periods of working under pressure, long hours with limited material resources, and with vulnerable children. In addition, they were living in a violent world. Like Sylvia Tamale (2005) who researched on the sexual secrets of Baganda women of Uganda and found it difficult to decide how much to reveal, I was also troubled by this situation. Tamale (2005: 14) dealt with this situation by being "careful in selecting what information to reveal, the goal being to contribute to existing knowledge…" This is the position I also take in this study and will elaborate on it later.

Permission to interview staff from relevant service providers was sought from the organisations and then individual consent was obtained from each worker regardless of their position in the organisation. Not seeking the consent and participation of the relevant service providers might have led to a lost opportunity to include the ideas of those whose interventions are impacting on children's daily lives (Twun-Danso, 2004).

Before any information was collected from participants including children, verbal informed consent was sought. Since they were independent children, it was not possible to follow the Declaration of Helsinki (1964) which recommends that in case of legal incompetence, consent be obtained from the legally authorized representative as well as the young person. Careful attention was paid to inform the children in a language which they could easily comprehend. In a research like this, which discusses sensitive issues such as sexual abuse, children's assent/consent was treated as on-going (Clacherty and Donald, 2007). I paid great attention to verbal and non-verbal communication signs of the actors to understand how they were feeling (see Lowe, 2012) at each moment. This often helped in guiding my interactions with them, for example, whether to continue talking to them or not, or ask whether they wanted assistance from aid workers.

Whilst aid workers as gatekeepers play an important role in ensuring children's safety and seeking their consent of the former is recommended by many researchers, on several occasions they constrained children's participation (see Cree, Kay and Tisdall, 2002; Hill, Davis, Prout and Tisdall, 2004). The barriers to participation tended to be greater when the issues under discussion were sensitive (Powell and Smith, 2009). Examples of sensitive issues included who has access to donated goods and the quality of care and protection. As one 15 year old boy said about aid workers, "They do not like us. They are using us and our presence to get a lot of money from donors". This view was shared by many children regardless of sex, age, class, ethnicity, level of education and whether they were living in shelters or not.

Children made a number of allegations against the aid workers which ranged from them abusing a child to corruption and perfidy. For example, a 16 year old boy said:

> A lot of goods are donated to this place. We are the ones who off-load the goods from the vehicles and store them in the storeroom but we never use or eat those goods. They always tell us that this place has no food. We cannot question them about what happened to the food stuff we stored.

Children wanted to speak out about the difficulties they were experiencing under the care of the humanitarian agencies but could not easily do so as they feared victimisation. While service providers can have "genuine concerns for children to be protected from any possible adverse consequences of participation" (Butler and Williamson, 1994 in Powell and Smith, 2009: 129), ulterior motives could be behind the strong protectionist stance. Adults can be sensitive over the implications of what children might say or reveal if they participate in research processes. They might actually want to constrain the voices of children in order to protect their own interests.

Despite these constraints, independent children, through employing a number of strategies, sometimes found a way to narrate their stories. For example, instead of telling me about their concerns with regard to the conduct of aid workers whilst at the shelter fearing being overhead by the aid workers, these children would often stop me in the street and pour their heart out. Some of the children claimed that the aid workers often systematically made sure that independent children did not get the opportunity to talk directly with visitors, who could be journalists and donors. In a very calculated way, which did not arouse the suspicion

of the watchful aid workers, some of the children would draw the attention of the visitors, who could be researchers, journalists and donors, and tell them about their concerns. These situations created an ethical dilemma for me on how to inform the aid workers about the concerns children had regarding some of them or towards the organisation(s). On several occasions, I felt powerless to report these issues to the aid workers as I was, to use Aldgate and Bradley's (2004: 91) words "completely dependent on the goodwill of agencies to access respondents", particularly those who were living in the shelters. In view of this situation, I was forced to think seriously on how I was going to tactfully present the independent children's concerns to aid workers without making them angry towards the children or even myself, for daring to criticise them. I feared that they would accuse me of being too intrusive. I discuss how I dealt with this challenge in the next section.

I also took measures to protect the data and make it anonymous in order to protect confidentiality of study's participants. Children are potentially at risk of experiencing, for example, recrimination, if their views and identities are revealed (see Thomas and Byford, 2003). I use pseudonyms to conceal their identities as well as to protect the identities of aid workers. Data will be kept for five years in secure places and will only be accessed by the study supervisor and myself.

On a different matter, I stressed to children that participating in the study was not a condition for participating in programmes targeting migrant populations. Before starting the fieldwork, I was cognisant of the risk that some independent children might think I was either a service provider or potential donor. Thus to avoid creating a crisis of expectations about the outcome of the research to children (see Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008) I explained to all, including children, that the study was an academic exercise, and if the results were later to be taken up by service providers or donors the participants might not directly benefit from those interventions. In addition, I was very careful not to raise unrealistic expectations amongst the 'abused' and poverty stricken children through the way I questioned them, for example, when asking questions related to the quality of humanitarian aid they were receiving.

I extended and built upon the point made by Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008: 201) that "researchers should make sure to formulate questions about painful or ordinary everyday experiences carefully, so that the children understand the implications, especially if there is not the capacity to provide adequate support". I phrased my questions in such a way that independent children understood that I was not going to remove and place them in better resourced places of safety or make the police stop physically abusing them but

simply wanted to document and analyse their everyday experiences with regards to how they were represented in aid work. Besides carefully formulating the questions as advised by Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008), my responses to their answers were also well considered. This was aimed at not reinforcing the point that they were in a precarious situation. I noted that they were already aware of their terrible existence and I thought reminding them or telling them would be insensitive. In addition, I did not want to fuel the tension which often existed between independent children and service providers over the quality of aid. I took heed of Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith's (2008: 203) advice that "researchers always need to make sure that research does not interfere with children's possibilities to obtain necessary care". I also made sure that I crafted my questions to aid workers which were related to quality of service and responses in such a way that I protected independent children and other key informants (see Roberts, 2008). This was necessary as some of the aid workers were seen by children as vindictive and intolerant to "constructive" criticism, especially from children they thought should be very grateful for the aid they were receiving. The generally long-term time frame of my study made it possible for me to see that children had genuine fears as I have discussed earlier.

Related to this issue is the point raised by Thomas and Byford (2003) that although all research should be done in a confidential manner, researchers have a duty to report child protection issues if the young person reports that they or others are at risk. They found out that children occasionally take the opportunity to disclose such information to someone they trust and is outside the social care system. Thomas and Byford (2003) argued that if this occurs, the researcher has a duty to discuss this with the child and, when appropriate, inform his or her care giver. I often found myself in similar situations. On several occasions, children reported very sensitive information to me, for example, that they were being exploited, were being denied access to donated food at the border post's drop centre but *magumagumas* were benefiting from this aid. Independent children also often said they were subjected to all kinds of violent indignities by SAPS, a thing I found distressing to hear in post-Apartheid South Africa. Police brutality experienced by children in Musina is similar to the way Reynolds describes Apartheid police (Reynolds, 1995: 232-233).

Following up on reports of independent children who needed assistance or were in perilous situations, I often presented their problems to senior representatives of caring service providers and other responsible authorities, but only after obtaining the concerned child(ren)'s consent. The aid workers' response to my reports ranged from appreciation, surprise and expression of intention to investigate the cases or assisting the concerned

children to denial and anger. Concerning denial and anger, there was concern about which child was telling lies or being ungrateful for what service providers were doing for them. Without betraying my sources I maintained the stories but emphasised that I had an ethical obligation to pass on information that had implications for the well-being of children to responsible authorities. I diplomatically argued that independent children only wanted aid workers to know what was happening in their lives. Unless asked, I did not suggest how the latter should respond. On a number of occasions, the service providers acted on the reports I gave them and this enhanced my relationship with both aid workers and children. Actors' participation in the research was maintained and improved as the research progressed because they directly benefited from interacting with me. All the participants including children whose lives on the surface had appeared idle, were very busy and did not want to waste time participating in activities which did not benefit them.

I conducted interviews at places participants regarded as private and where they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. I requested permission from children and service providers to allow me to attend some of the meetings and events that they held or places of interest that they visited within the study site. Wherever possible, I also either observed or participated in some of the activities they were doing. Spending time with independent children allowed me to understand how child agency manifested itself, the social context and how they make meaning of the different representations of childhood and vulnerability.

Whilst recruitment of research participants in a humanitarian setting, similar to educational settings as observed by researchers like Powell and Smith (2009), provided a large pool of children "ready" to participate, it also generated ethical issues with regards to independent children's participation in research as well as the aid workers. For example, children who participate in research in educational settings might feel obliged to comply and the other consequence can be the inclusion of children who only have the "desired" characteristics (Ireland and Holloway, 1996; Powell and Smith, 2009). Considering the gravity of problems aid workers were shouldering, mainly the critical shortage of resources, and the enormous challenges the children were facing like food shortages and inadequate protection, I felt that the aid workers might feel obliged to participate in the study. In fact, some of them indicated that they participated in research as the results might lead to more humanitarian assistance being mobilised and channelled to them. This group of participants seemed not to want to close that possibility of receiving humanitarian assistance through not participating in a research. Besides encouraging children to participate in the research, aid

workers encouraged each other to participate. “Talk to researchers maybe your lives will be better. Donors and the government listen to researchers”, said one female aid worker. A senior aid worker urging participants to talk to researchers said:

> We want to be international people. Our stories are being reported all over the world. People have to know what we are doing for migrants. We are in a border town and we have to welcome foreigners. It is important to talk to researchers and other international people who are visiting Musina as you will broaden your mind.

Thus, aid workers were motivated by a multiplicity of factors to participate in the study. The children also encouraged each other to participate. As such, there is a thin line between voluntary participation and “involuntary” participation by participants, both children and adults in a humanitarian situation. To deal with this challenge, I always emphasised to all the participants that they should feel free to exercise their right to participate or not.

It was also clear from the onset of the fieldwork that poverty, violence, unemployment, heavy workload and uncertainties concerning the continuation of the assistance to independent children were weighing heavily on the aid and government workers dealing with independent children. Without compromising the data gathering process, I tried avoiding putting them at risk, for example, by not asking them to accompany me to the border post at night as some *omalayitsha*[41] who worked closely with *magumaguma* could take advantage of darkness to attack them. As I will elaborate later, aid workers worked closely with the police and this resulted in them having frosty relations with *omalayitsha*. As stated before, police take away independent children from *omalayitsha* and placed them in shelters. *Omalayitsha* often tried to take these children from the shelters without following the laid down procedures, action which was met with resistance by aid workers.

In this, study I am also interested in the variedness of independent children and aid workers’ experiences and life-worlds. Whilst researchers have noted that children with the “desirable” attributes can end up being the only ones who are recruited, and whilst I accept this point, I make the point that the participants themselves, children and adults, might want

[41] *Omalayitsha* are informal cross border transport operators and some of them worked with *magumaguma*. *Omalayitsha* are often accused of kidnapping, abusing including sexual, migrants they will be transporting. They often smuggle foreign migrants including independent children on a ‘pay forward system’ which meant that they will be paid when they arrive at their destinations. However, this system presented a lot of dangers to migrants including children being smuggled as failure by their relatives to pay the *omalayitsha* in time or the agreed amount of money often resulted in them being physically, sexually abused and kidnapped for days until the money is paid, usually with interest. “The *omalayitsha* sometimes request additional money for transporting migrants and keep them in servitude until additional payments have been made or the women are sold into prostitution” (IOM, 2007: 5).

to exclude themselves from the research. My experience in Musina indicated that some children felt that they did not have the "desirable" characteristics to participate. They also did not think that their stories or experiences were worth studying. During the first weeks of doing fieldwork children who felt this way would quickly give me the names of other children I could talk to or directed me to where the children they considered to be 'better' participants were. Aid workers' behaviour was similar to that of children. It was clear to me that these aid workers hesitated or were reluctant to participate not because they were not authorised to talk to me but that they felt they could not make meaningful contributions to the research. Aid workers had been authorised to talk to me by their management on many subjects with the exception, for example, of financial matters of their organisations. I emphasised to all participants that I was interested in multiple realities in order to reach out to potential participants who might be marginalising themselves.

Aware of the fact that I did not have the resources to assist the independent children who requested me to assist them, for example, with money to buy food, school fees, transport to Johannesburg or Zimbabwe, prior to the commencement of the study, I identified service providers operating in the research site that could assist migrant children with transport, school fees, protection, materials (for example, food and clothing) and psychosocial support. I gave independent children a list of names of service providers they could approach for assistance and gave research participants my contact details in case they wished to ask further questions or needed some help. Children who participated in focus group discussions were given some food when discussions ended. The type of food was determined after consulting key informants including independent children.

On a separate issue, on several occasions I did not want to risk losing credibility by not intervening independent children expected me as an adult or as someone with a car to help during emergencies like taking a child to hospital. Thus, during situations I thought I could make a difference in their lives I made every attempt to proffer some suggestions. To avoid causing conflict with aid workers, I usually waited for them to ask me if I had anything to say. Independent children and aid workers often expressed happiness to hear my thoughts or see me intervene. On several occasions I was caught up in situations where I had to make some intervention. For example, one night, one of the workers and I rushed a boy who had been viciously kicked in the stomach by another to the clinic. The nurse had already finished work at 4pm. She was not reachable when the other workers called her on her cell phone to immediately return to the shelter to attend to the emergency. Respecting their authority, not wanting to create suspicions about my intentions and fearing antagonising my relations with

aid workers, I always quickly explained my actions to the management of these agencies and to the other children. I quickly realised that social actors always discussed my actions amongst themselves.

At other moments, there was no time for me to follow the official protocol before I could urgently assist an independent child(ren). These situations, usually informed by the idea of protecting children, were also many and can be illustrated by one case. Independent children who had phone numbers of their relatives working and living in South Africa were connected to them. However, some of the relatives refused to take them in claiming that they did not have accommodation or that the child was mischievous. For example, Dumisani's, (age 15) brother did not honour his promise to pick him up from the border post and take him to Johannesburg where he was working. The brother made the promise when he was going to Zimbabwe for a visit. After failing to see his brother on the date and time of appointment, one of his friends called the brother on his mobile phone and the brother said he had already passed through Musina and was at that moment, in Polokwane, about 150 km away. Looking at the tearful Dumisani, I decided to call his brother on my mobile phone. When I called the brother, he claimed that the call was not clear and I re-dialled. After several re-dials we managed to speak and he said, "What's the problem?" I explained the situation and before I could get his response, the call ended abruptly. When I tried again to call him, his phone was no longer reachable. Dumisani cried and other boys who were aware that he had anticipated going to the much celebrated city of 'Joburg' with his brother, struggled to console him. A fellow independent migrant child called Khumbulani felt that Dumisani should have gone as "the living conditions at the border post are very bad".

Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008: 200) in their paper on research with children in war-affected areas point out that one of the biggest ethical dilemmas that can be raised when studying minors in war-affected areas can be stated this pertinent question: "Why would you want to do any research with these children when it is so clear that they grow up in horrible circumstances, and are in need of support, not research?" In response to this question, they argue that if no research is carried out to understand the needs and problems of children in war-torn areas, it will be very difficult to determine whether the humanitarian assistance given to them is appropriate and helpful. The situation described by Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith (2008) and their response can also be applied to justifying the study of independent children in Musina, which is devastated by violent crime among other challenges.

Talking to and reminding independent children and even aid workers about their pain and suffering was a very difficult thing for me. I responded by showing empathy towards social actors who re-lived the pain they experienced. Though researchers may remind participants of their traumatic experience and leave them more vulnerable, many actors including children, indicated that talking to me had a cathartic effect on them. They indicated that in me they had someone they could talk to without running the risk of being judged. A number of children claimed that they respected me. In fact, this respect was mutual. My respect of their children's competences was a "methodological technique in itself" (Morrow and Richards, 1996: 100) and was consistent with my understanding of children; that they are 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings' (see Waksler, 1991 cited in Mason and Steadman, 1997: 35). Many of these children saw me as their 'brother' they had left behind in Zimbabwe or were searching for in South Africa. As for some of the stressed and poorly remunerated aid workers, they appeared to have found someone who understood the burden they carried or could engage with academically on matters of child development and humanitarian aid. Though this relationship advanced my research, this was a difficult situation for me to be in – people offloading their burdens on me. I always made an effort to direct them to organisations or people that could assist them in Musina. I also skilfully resisted being pulled into intervening as I did not want to compromise my role as a researcher.

Avoiding conflicts with research participants is a challenge. Though the service providers collaborated in various programmes, I noticed that there were incredible tension and conflicts amongst them. These conflicts often spilled into personal relationships. Besides affecting my methods, the challenge was how to behave ethically during these moments. I stayed clear of airing my personal understanding on many issues, particularly the contentious ones as I feared to be embroiled in humanitarian agencies' local politics and web of gossip. For example, after December 2009, a number of aid workers expressed anger at SCUK's action of not working directly with the affected children. They felt betrayed and disrespected as partners. They accused SCUK of neglecting vulnerable migrant children, tarnishing the image of humanitarian agencies among the stakeholders including children, by not having briefed stakeholders in time and not putting in place a system to quickly fill the vacuum in services created by SCUK. There were counter-accusations and misunderstandings between SCUK and the other service providers regarding roles, how to better implement programmes and the gravity of the problem. There were accusations that some aid workers lacked the technical competency, commitment and dedication to improve the lives of children.

In writing this thesis, I also faced a political and moral dilemma in recounting the horrific stories I heard including those of survivors of sexual violence and abuse at various work places. Some independent children either confided in me or I was reliably told by their colleagues that they were participating in criminal and violent acts. By doing so these children risked reproducing 'disaster pornography' (see Burman, 1994) which shaped the representations of these children. But without them opening up it was going to be difficult to appreciate the way that violence is so pervasive in this area. Unambiguously positioning myself as a researcher who was not there to judge them, was a difficult task as the stories they recounted were scary and horrific.

Critiquing the service providers and then publicising results which can be deemed negative can jeopardise their chances of securing funding. There is also the risk that the results can be misinterpreted and consequently demotivate the aid workers who are working so hard under difficult circumstances (Euwema, de Graaf, de Jager and Van Lith, 2008). The names of the organisations are not anonymous as it is very easy for anyone to identify which organisation participated in the Musina study as the town is small and the organizations few. Nevertheless, to maintain anonymity, the names of the workers and the exact organisation they worked for are anonymous. As I indicated in the introductory chapter, the aim of this study is not to pass judgements about the practices of service providers or call for the dispensation of the humanitarian aid system but to understand the social processes and social dynamics which occur during the construction of the representations of childhood and vulnerability. The research results will be shared with the participating service providers. This was explained fully to service providers prior to the commencement of the study in order to assure them of the sincerity of the study.

Humanitarian Crisis: Reflections of the Researcher as an Actor

Independent migrant girl:	You speak *Shona*?
Stanford Mahati:	Yes. My home is in Zimbabwe but I am a student in Johannesburg.
Independent migrant girl:	So you are *our* (my emphasis) relative. You *must assist us* (my emphasis).

In another incident, one senior humanitarian worker from Zimbabwe after a meeting of humanitarian agencies working in Musina requested a meeting with me saying the two of us needed to talk not just about the research and how his organisation was responding to the

situation but talk as Zimbabweans about "what we should do with *our* (my emphasis) children (referring to independent children)". He thought that I and other Zimbabweans had a moral responsibility to intervene and assist these children. I accepted his invitation for a meeting as I saw it as an opportunity to understand what was happening in Musina as well as not wanting to be regarded as hostile. However, I quickly set a different agenda for it, emphasizing to him that I was in Musina as a researcher.

The above exchange is an extract from an encounter I had with a newly arrived independent migrant girl who was in the company of another girl and was visibly troubled after being placed at a place of safety by the South African police when what she wanted was to quickly go to Johannesburg where her uncle was waiting for her. These situations mirrored the nature of the many encounters I had with independent children from Zimbabwe during my fieldwork in Musina. They emphasised the term 'our relative' to validate their appeal that as a Zimbabwean I was morally obliged to assist them. These two situations reveal the problems associated with a researcher researching people he has a shared experience with (Berger, 2013). Being positioned by the children as an "insider" "granted me more occasions for research than exclusions" (Enguix, 2012: 10). In fact, it facilitated the quick establishment of rapport which proved key, particularly when we discussed sensitive issues. They believed that I was going to represent their situation well as they used inclusive words like, "you are one of *us* (own emphasis)". Being taken as an insider who also had relatives in poor Zimbabwe, seemed to have excused me from bringing gifts, like what they expected other Western researchers to do. Weckesser (2011), an American researcher, had this experience during her research in Agincourt, South Africa. However, I was also an outsider to some of the independent children since I was a newcomer, had not experienced the challenges they faced and had overcome the challenges of staying in South Africa legally. This enabled me to gain a new understanding of my Zimbabwean identity.

I found it very hard and distressing to observe poorly remunerated and resource poor aid workers battling to assist independent children. For example, CWM did not have a car yet they had over 200 children living in their two shelters and the SCUK vehicle was often not available. DSD also had shortages of cars and manpower especially during after-hours and weekends. On three occasions, I was asked by the aid workers to take some boys who needed urgent medical attention to a local clinic. A nurse at CWM did not work at night and due to transport problems, could not come to attend to cases. However, I heard that the first time I intervened after being requested to do so by a very senior humanitarian worker at one of the shelters, another senior humanitarian worker who works for an organisation which was

funding that shelter without asking me to explain what exactly had happened, interpreted my action as “unbecoming of a researcher”. She thought that I was assuming their responsibility of caring for children and became hostile towards me. I later clarified the matter to her junior officer who had raised the issue with me, seeking clarification on what had exactly happened. Soon afterwards my relationship with the senior aid workers thawed and I believed the other aid worker had explained my conduct. Fortunately, this incident did not affect my relationship with the aid workers.

The situation was compounded by the fact that Musina had a huge presence of aid workers who were closely networked but had competing personal and organisational interests. It was fertile ground for rumours, spreading of half-truths and falsehoods about the goings on in the town’s refugee community. Thus I, like everyone else, was the subject of gossip and discussion. For example, a rumour once circulated that I was in or was interested in developing a sexual relationship with one of the aid workers who was one of my key informants. The rumour was bolstered by the fact that I spent considerable amounts of time with that key informant. I politely dismissed this rumour. However, the two female aid workers, former friends, who worked in different organisations clashed over this rumour. One accused the other of peddling falsehoods that she was having an affair with me. Not interested in fuelling the conflict, I discussed the matter separately with each of them and advised them to make peace. Though I maintained a good working relationship with both of them, the two women’s relationship became distant despite their claims that they had reconciled their differences. Thus, during field work, it is important but sometimes impossible to mark a boundary between professional matters and personal relationships (Enguix, 2012). Similarly at another time some aid workers misrepresented what I had done. One senior humanitarian worker misrepresented to another senior worker working for another organisation that I had taken it upon myself to take a child to hospital when in fact, I had been requested to do so by another humanitarian worker. Despite this misrepresentation, as far as I know, many aid workers and children represented me positively to one another or to others, both in my presence and absence, on what I would have done or said. For example, I successfully negotiated with the highly feared *omalayitsha* not to beat up a female humanitarian worker at the boys’ shelter who had tricked them to accept to provide transport to a 17 year old boy from Musina to Johannesburg without paying for the fare. After this deal collapsed the female aid workers failed to strike a deal with *omalayitsha* who were demanding to be compensated the money they had used to buy fuel and transport the boy to the shelter. Aid workers appealed to me to assist them diffuse the explosive situation (the

case is discussed in detail in chapter six). I persuaded *omalayitsha* to abandon plans to beat up the humanitarian worker and instead accept financial compensation, equivalent to 10 litres of fuel they claimed to have used to drive to the shelter. Since this humanitarian worker claimed to have no money, I persuaded a senior aid worker to compensate *omalayitsha* and later claim her money back from the worker who had caused the conflict.

The other challenge was constantly engaging the poorly motivated aid workers regarding how they were assisting children. The workers were poorly remunerated and overworked. As one who had worked with humanitarian agencies before in a humanitarian and economic crisis, I sometimes tried to share my experiences with them and offer some technical advice on how they could manage some situations. Again, I usually offered advice when they specifically asked me. In fact, like Begonya Enguix who researched Lesbian, Gay, Transsexual and Bisexual activists in Spain, I was "not only invested with authority but required authority too" (2012: 4). Some of the aid workers believed that as a researcher, a Zimbabwean adult male, I had the legitimacy, knowledge and experience on how best to tackle the challenges they faced when assisting Zimbabwean children. For example, on numerous occasions aid workers requested me to intervene and talk to independent children they regarded as "difficult".

Though my fieldwork was progressing well, the suffering children and the aid workers' experiences demoralised me. A number of children were not eating, had no clothes and were being denied a number of their rights. Observing them and listening to their narratives of violence, vulnerability and resilience was emotionally difficult. For example, children took great risks to eke out a living – working as informal pimps, working the whole day for very low payment such as R10, going to Louis Trichardt to look for shopping receipts[42] but sleeping in the dangerous streets, and working as human smugglers where they were regularly brutalised by both the South African police and *magumaguma*. In response to these challenges, I tried to help the children by regularly alerting aid workers to these problems. Due to a plethora of challenges, which will be discussed in detail in this thesis, the service providers were not able to deal with most of the children's problems. The children who were most affected by poverty and destitution would ask me to explain the situation, to which I mostly had no answers to. I learnt that honesty and empathy were key words in my responses to their enquiries and prolonged suffering respectively. I made it clear that I had no power to

[42] A refund of value added tax (VAT) can be claimed by non-resident travellers when they leave South Africa. Migrant children sold these shopping receipts to some 'non-resident travellers' who claimed the VAT money back.

influence the service providers' decision-making but that I could relay their enquiries to the service providers. However, touched by their miserable state and as a form of reciprocity for sharing their experiences with me, I passed used clothes and English novels which had been donated by a church in Johannesburg to the CWM's management for distribution to independent children. The pastor had told me and I also had noticed that these children were idle and novels would reduce their boredom and improve their proficiency in the English language.

I was very aware of the pressures (shortage of food, police brutality, poor housing conditions etc.) which were being exerted on children as a result of the humanitarian crisis and that adults generally had a negative attitude towards children who moved without parents or guardians. I found out that these factors could also impact on the voices of adults. For example, as much as they had experience in hosting researchers, some aid workers sometimes seemed to lose confidence in what they were doing when they noticed that they were being observed by researchers, people they regarded as very educated. I usually responded by making it clear, in a light hearted manner in order to diffuse the tension, that I was not there to judge their work performance but learn about their experiences. As the fieldwork unfolded, the study participants became less and less self-conscious about their behaviour, what they said in my presence and I also sharpened my skills of maintaining or establishing rapport with independent children in Musina.

Some Conclusions

Employing appropriate methods is very important for a study involving minors and people in a humanitarian context. This chapter has detailed the rationale in selecting the Musina site, the study participants, humanitarian agencies and different methods employed to understand the representations of independent children from Zimbabwe. I also presented the myriad challenges I confronted during the study.

I gathered information on the representations of independent children through various ethnographic techniques like participant observations, focus groups, document analysis, in-situ conversations and interviews. They enabled me to understand the nuances of the everyday lives of the social actors. The methodology was appropriate to garner the different social actors' voices during fieldwork. Acknowledging children's competency and agency, I involved them in research.

Although the ethnographic study was spread throughout Musina town, the epicentres of the research were the two shelters housing independent children and the border post. I immersed myself in the humanitarian community and managed to unravel different experiences of social actors.

As I expected, researching independent children in a humanitarian context proved to be challenging but also enlightening. During fieldwork, I continuously negotiated my social position and reflected on how I was negotiating ethical issues. Thus, I provided a reflexive account of my research experiences including how I gathered information and impacted the research. I used thematic analysis to understand the representations of independent children, and their meanings in context. Though there is no consensus on how to do thematic content analysis, it is a good resource for identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns in experiences of the social actors (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, it does not focus much on how the representations of independent children are socially constructed, what is not talked about, the functions of different representations of children and the discursive practices at work.

Noting my particular interest in "micro-politics of power", I used discourse analysis to understand what discourses are there when representing independent children, how different perspectives on independent children are framed, how discourses are functioning and being reproduced. Blase (1991 cited in Smeed, Kimber, Millwater and Enrich, 2009: 27) describes micropolitics as "the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organisations … both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics". I wanted to capture the meanings behind the different portrayals of independent children, practices of aid workers and understand the social conditions which shape understandings of these children's everyday lives. In addition, I am interested in knowing what the different discourses deployed at different moments are doing. With a good grasp of the social context I will be able to understand the motivations and 'politics' involved in the different ways of viewing these children. Let me now focus on the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: Formal and Informal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Mobility and Work in Context, Contest and Paradox

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the formal and informal representations of independent migrant children navigating the humanitarian terrain. I am exploring the lives and lived experiences of independent migrant children as represented by themselves and aid workers. Through examining closely some everyday interactions between aid workers and independent children, I draw attention to the multi-layered social contexts, lifeworlds, multiple realities of social actors and ambiguous ways in which independent children were being represented. Contextualising the representations of independent migrant children I also look at how these representations were disputed and the contradictions surrounding them. It is important to interrogate the representations of independent children at different moments and in resource-poor settings, where adults are not able to support children, and there is enormous pressure for children to contribute to household economies (Bourdillon, 2008b). In this study I follow and expand Nieuwenhuys' call that future research be "based on the idea of work [mobility and sexuality] as [some] of the most critical domains in which poor children can contest and negotiate childhood" (1996: 238). Given the limited space to unpack the many different representations of independent children in all their nuanced detail, in this study I narrowed my focus to three "arenas" (Long, 2001: 242): child mobility, work and sexuality. Norman Long defines arenas as "spaces in which contests over issues, claims, resources, values, meanings and representations take place; that is, they are sites of struggle within and across domains" (2001: 242). I believe these are some of the key arenas in which children were seen to confirm or transgress dominant notions of childhood and vulnerability.

Whilst human mobility is sometimes seen as contributing to development, I observed that the presence of independent children in South Africa often provoked deep negative emotions amongst humanitarian workers, triggered heated debate amongst themselves and between them and these children. Thus, I present and analyse the negative and positive representations of independent children in relation to migration. I argue that child migration tends to be understood through the discourse of seeing children as immature, dependent on

their parents for survival and compelled to behave “appropriately” or in child-like ways. I then consider the work world of independent children in terms of the ways in which representations of working independent children are constructed by humanitarian workers and how children represent themselves. In this chapter, I will show that humanitarian workers seemed to have contradictory understandings on child mobility and work. Focusing on these three activities contributes to understanding the complexities and paradoxes in the representations of independent migrant child in Musina and associated consequences. I focus on sexuality in the next chapter.

I am going to call what humanitarian workers said during their formal interactions with independent migrant children the formal discourse. I call it the formal discourse because this is what they were officially expected to say, do, as well as what is unwritten or written in the policies and mission statements of their organisations and government. This is what they reproduce in public fora, in discussion with service providers, and State officials. The informal discourse on the other hand is what aid workers said in informal settings which coincides with or contradicts the formal position of the organisation(s). Both the formal and informal discourses are contested, utilised by different social actors and prevail at different moments. The formal and informal representations define and structure “the ways in which the world, or parts of it, is to be understood and talked about” (Finnstrom, 2006: 206).

Advancing the view that “Different social issues tend to be marked by the predominance of different discourses” (Meyer, 2007: 87), I show the different discourses being invoked when independent children encounter aid workers, how they are expressed and how these discourses function. I argue that there are competing and contradictory discourses about children, childhood and vulnerability. I show the shifting interests of the social actors and different meanings they attached to different social issues at certain moments. In this chapter I present evidence from Musina, which disturbs dominant representations of children on the move.

The Official Discourse: Negative Representations of Child Migration

There is a *Shona* proverb: *Kusina amai hakuendwe*[43] , literally translated to "Don't go to a place where your mother is absent", which echoes the Westernised discourse of childhood as it counsels children from independent movement. Adults in a number of societies also subscribe to this idea, which sees migration as a venture into the wilderness (Dougnon, 2012) and family as the ideal place for children. The common assumption is that family (particularly mothers) protect children, assumed to be vulnerable, from possible harm or dangers. Faced with a prevailing anti-child migration discourse in Musina, I remembered the above mentioned *Shona* proverb, which I learnt as early as primary school and used to guide my own behaviour. So soon after I began fieldwork I became interested in pursuing both anti- and pro-independent child mobility viewpoints.

As I carried out fieldwork in Musina, I observed that amongst the earliest statements and questions which an independent migrant child from Zimbabwe (with a struggling economy) was subjected to by any adult in Musina included: "What are you doing in South Africa?", "Go back to Zimbabwe", "Your parents are looking for you", or "You should be in Zimbabwe living with your parents and attending school". These adult responses framed independent child migration as problematic. In fact, the mere mention of independent children from Zimbabwe in South Africa often evoked negative emotions in aid workers. A number of aid workers told me that when they thought of these children a few images came to their minds. Drawing from the idea that children depend on adults, the most popular and formal image was that of poor and vulnerable children who had been failed by their families and government.

While points of emphasis and nuances differed from aid worker to aid worker, the generally shared view, particularly during official moments, was that independent migrant children were a problem. Discussions of childhood and migration were influenced by ideas of protecting children from danger and the adult world (Ensor, 2010; Lancy, 2008; Stephens, 1995). The state of childhood was often seen "as weakness itself" (Christensen, 2000: 42) and children on the move were seen as 'in need of protection'. The discourses supporting the anti-

[43] Ghana has a proverb which is close to this one which says "The grasshopper which is always near its mother eats the best food". It advises children against being away from their mother.

child migration approach are about childhood as a time of freedom from economic responsibility and the need for children to be located in the domestic sphere.

During formal interactions with independent children, migrant children's image was seen as embodying child vulnerability. During these moments child migration is not seen as a necessity. Aid workers' position validates Heissler's point that "child migration is often treated as an aberration" (2010: 209). Clearly reproducing notions that 'normal' childhood is essentially a period of 'becoming' (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011), being in school (Boyden, 1990) and dependency on parents and guardians, a common implicit assumption amongst aid workers was that all was not well with independent children in South Africa. This characterisation of independent children ignored the economic imperatives for migration and their impact on children's lives.

Aid workers' objection to children migrating independently ran deeply. This was despite at some moments, aid workers' anti-migration stance softening due to acknowledgement of the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. On numerous occasions I also heard a number of aid workers openly chiding independent children for daring to cross *"an international border"* without their parent or guardian. Aid workers constructed the act of crossing an international border alone as symbolising adulthood. A common statement of rebuke by aid workers said directly to independent children was: "You take yourselves as adults and decided to cross the border". Basically, aid workers depicted independent children as people who were transgressing childhood and appropriating adulthood. The following account by one male aid worker from Zimbabwe is instructive in capturing the generally negative perceptions which some aid workers had about independent children and migration:

> Some of us we grew up afraid of going to local towns [in Zimbabwe]. We first set foot in South Africa recently and it was because of hardships in Zimbabwe. What these [independent children] are doing [migrating to South Africa] is strange. They are so young.

In explaining why child migration was a problem, it became clear that aid workers were concerned that these children would adopt bad practices during the migration process. They often told me that when these children were being advised in the absence of their parents, they were proving "stubborn and rude". Thus, one 'inappropriate' behaviour (migration) was seen to be a precursor to others (for example, rudeness, stubbornness and criminality). For example, aid workers complained that some independent children dismissed the notion of

family the aid workers were trying to preserve. Some of the children were heard saying: "When I crossed the Limpopo River, I didn't cross with my mother, sister or aunt".

Another way in which aid workers argued against child migration was by seeing independent children as people who were "running away". In fact, one recurrent theme in the study was that independent children were constantly seen as "running away" from one thing or another. Specifics of this theme included comments that independent children "ran away from their parents", "ran away from crimes they committed at home"[44], "ran away from [their] country", "ran away from school", "ran away from shelters", "ran away from programmes" and many other activities and places. This choice of words – "ran away" – underscores aid workers' sense that independent children were not confronting challenges but were cowards. Implicitly, independent children were framed as irresponsible family and community members. In moments like this, the discourse that childhood is about having fun and freedom from economic responsibility did not prevail. This idea of "running away" is often associated with troubled youth like street children (see Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003). Independent children were aware that the majority of adults, including aid workers usually made these statements of disapproval and the children often found these statements very discomforting and contemptuous.

At certain moments, aid workers' concerns about what independent children were doing in South Africa were also shared by some independent children who maintained that independent child migration was wrong for certain children. For instance, an 18 year girl from Masvingo town in Zimbabwe during a conversation with me soon after she was placed at a shelter by social workers saw other independent children who lived at the shelter wondered: "Do these children think about their parents [that they hurt their parents]?" This judgement was premised on the fact that this girl did not see herself as a child because she had "finished school". She regarded other children as inconsiderate or insensitive to the feelings of their parents. This view, which opposed the dominant and official discourses of children as defined by age (18 years and below) and innocent, was echoed several times by many aid workers during informal times. Finishing Form 4 in Zimbabwe, is generally

[44] Having been told by a group of independent children that some of them did not want to go back home due to crimes that they had committed at home, I asked the boys to list the criminal offences which made it difficult for some of them to return home. One of the boys listed some of the crimes as follows: house breaking, raping children, practicing bestiality with goats, stealing goats and chickens and stealing family's financial savings. He claimed that some of his peers "ran away to South Africa after committing serious crimes which deserve to be punished by life in jail".

considered as '*kupedza chikoro*'' (having finished school) by most Zimbabweans. These children were ready to work. The act of finishing Form 4 emancipated many children from some forms of childhood behaviour. Educational attainment was considered by both aid workers and some independent children who had "finished school" as critical to social mobility and economic development (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011) of people including children in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Contesting the South African laws and the UNCRC (1989) position which also guides the work of aid workers in Musina, this independent migrant girl who was travelling together with her cousin aged 17 regarded herself and her cousin as no longer fitting into the common definition of a child. Noting that education, like work, was one area in which children were seen to be transgressing notions of childhood, these girls like many other independent children in a similar situation used the notion of having "finished school" in Zimbabwe to normalise their mobility. Also noting that society places high value on education and that aid workers portrayed children who had not "finished school" as lacking legitimacy to be migrants, they emphasised that the other girls had not completed Form 4. Formal education is associated with 'normal' childhood (Boyden, 1990). The importance of education can be illustrated by the case of one budding musician, an independent migrant boy aged around 16 who expressed an interest in continuing with his education and at least completing Form 4 as "people laugh at an uneducated person and it doesn't matter whether this person has money. People tell the whole nation about this person's lack of education". A few days after I interviewed him he, using the money he had been given by aid workers, bought school stationery and with the assistance of Save the Children voluntarily returned to Zimbabwe but vowing that:

> I will come back when I am old enough. Life is tough if one is not educated. Even if I am to be a musician I still need to be educated in order to be able to run the music business. Fans often mock uneducated musicians. I don't want that to happen to me.

Supporting the notion that childhood is socially constructed, the act of finishing school was a mark of adulthood to some actors including aid workers. Based on the 'normal' life trajectory of a person, it sets persons who are ordinarily defined as children and have finished Form 4 free to migrate. In the context of children in Zimbabwe or South Africa, the dominant trajectory is: children being reared within a nuclear family, complete education (Form 4, Form 6 or tertiary education), leave home to work (within or outside the country) and finally

get married. This 'linear thinking' generally overlooks the fact that independent children often face challenges which cause them not to pass through these stages smoothly or even follow these stages. Some pragmatic children were often forced to respond accordingly which often meant not passing through each stage. This situation backs arguments by researchers like Punch (2007) that migration aids children's transition to adulthood. However, this view is contested.

The depiction of independent children as outsiders in the migration process by aid workers also emanated from aid workers' view that a foreign country and any other outdoor space is a public space – space that children, particularly girls, should not be located in as they are "sites of risk and danger" (Sirriyeh, 2010: 219). This validates Chin's point that "dominant notions of childhood assume that children are domestic" (Chin, 2003: 310). So evoking the idea that independent children need for to be located in the domestic sphere, there was agreement among service providers that , as soon as they were identified in Musina, the children should be placed under the custody of responsible adults, in this case, aid workers running places of temporal safety. The notion of childhood as associated with vulnerability and dependence, and migration with adulthood meant that once the independent migrant child was put in a place of safety, he/she would only be allowed to continue with his or her journey if the parent(s) or guardian(s) physically came to fetch the child(ren).

However, the emphasis on children's place being the domestic sphere contradicts the reality of many independent children's lives, to use Hashim and Thorsen's words:

> …because it ignores children's role as producers and therefore places working children on the margins of what is perceived as proper childhood, despite the normality of their contribution to family activities (2011: 5).

For example, as discussed in the forthcoming chapters, a number of independent children in this study were economically active in the public space and some of them were contributing to their household economies, behaviour which challenged their understanding of children and childhood.

Parental Controls and Child Migration

The emphasis on children's place being under the care of parents, begs discussion of parental controls. Aid workers often claimed parental rights and responsibilities over independent children. The notion of the "best interests of the child" was often used by aid workers to intervene and protect these children. As a result, aid workers, together with other service providers, tried to put measures to restrict the movement of independent children, for example, not allowing them to be outdoors after sunset. This situation prompted one aid worker to say "shelters are operating as cages". Following child protection laws, child-related service providers in Musina, like police officers and social workers, often picked up independent children including those who claimed to have "finished school" and were looking for jobs, and placed them in the temporary shelters for children. Their thinking can be situated in Holloway and Valentine's (2000) argument that the notion of the home as the ideal place for children emanates from assumptions that there are too many dangers for children outside the home environment and that children lack self-control if left alone.

The emphasis on children being under the care of adults resulted in a tension between protection and excessive control. Much to the chagrin of aid workers, a number of independent children hardly stayed in these places of safety, a practice which resulted in these children being labelled misguided and lacking discipline. The following extract from my discussion with Ruth, a girl aged 13 who was in October 2010 living at the girls' shelter but had a long history of running away from places of safety, encapsulates this point:

Stanford:	How many days did you live at the border (Musina border post)?
Ruth:	I spend two days. Save the Children took me again (laughing).
Stanford:	They saw you there and called you?
Ruth:	Yes. *They told me that I was not going anywhere* (my emphasis). I know that woman. She said "You and your sister Chido you are not going anywhere. You are naughty". We spent some time there and then the car, a Toyota Quantum came and I was happy to go away as I knew several boys and girls (independent children) who had also boarded it.
	We were returned here (referring to the girls' shelter). How many times did I run away from this place? (Ruth asking an aid worker)
Aid worker:	I think two times. I can't remember.
Ruth:	I ran away again. I went to live there (pointing at the near-by Roman Catholic Church's shelter, which provides temporary accommodation to tens of migrant women and infants).
Aid worker:	At Roma (Roman Catholic Church's shelter) she couldn't stay. They can't stay at Roma. They don't want girls.

Ruth decided to end the nomadic life-style as she was tired and wanted to attend school. Ruth described Chido, her sister, as intelligent but highly mobile, very naughty and not receptive to advice from adults, practices which opposed discourses of childhood that privileged adult guidance and control. In separate conversations, independent children often criticised some of their peers who had similar unchild-like behaviour.

This case shows the determination by aid workers to ensure that children like Ruth should not be mobile. Ruth's actions should be considered within a context in which independent children were highly mobile and under some peer and indeed family pressure, to be on the move, looking for jobs and a good life. Some of the independent children had a history of mobility and living in the streets in Zimbabwe. Inadvertently reinforcing the discourse of childhood as a period characterised by naivety and play (Jenks, 1996), some independent children told me that they easily got bored with living in one place for a long time. On several occasions, aid workers pathologised children with backgrounds of living on the streets, describing them as a difficult group to work with. They argued that these children were not used to appropriate family life, characterised by order maintained by parents through great restrictions on children's movement. The differences between children who lived in the shelters and those in the streets were often highlighted by aid workers and other children to enhance the legitimacy of interventions like the placement of children in shelters. Different childhoods functioned to emphasise social hierarchies and stigmatised children who did not embrace humanitarian aid. Children who lived outside shelters were cast as 'misguided' and unchild-like.

On several occasions I heard aid workers telling independent children they accused of behaving 'inappropriately' – including not listening to adults and coming back into the shelter late in the evening – that they should listen to them since they were their parents and aunts and had the responsibility of assisting vulnerable children. Deploying the familial discourse gave them the authority to assume the rights of parenthood. Aid workers also legitimised their interventions by saying that their efforts would certainly be appreciated by these children's own parents and guardians, a point which a number of independent children could not dismiss since they had been raised in an environment where adult community members had a "licence" to care for and protect any child.

Ironically, aid workers tended to tolerate this form of child migration and limited these negative representations when they were speaking with outsiders like journalists, other service providers or donors about the poor living conditions and lack of educational opportunities in Zimbabwe. They also did the same when appealing for support from donors.

Though they did not approve of these children's acts of migrating without the company of their parents and relatives, some of the aid workers described these children as "very caring and loving". They made these remarks after observing children sending remittances to their families in Zimbabwe.

Representation of Independent Migrant Children as having 'no plan'

By evoking the discourse of children as playful or after fun, aid workers did not take independent children's reasons for migrating seriously. Their position is similar to Setien and Berganza's assertion that "[c]hildren leave their families and countries of origin and embark on adventures with uncertain aims" (2005: 64). This perception that migrant children are adventurists (Thorsen, 2007) or drifters with no well thought out plans was widely shared by aid workers in Musina. Contradictorily, it was also shared by some independent children, particularly those who felt that they were focused and behaving responsibly either at work or in doing school work. Speaking in an interview with a South African newspaper on why independent children were migrating to South Africa, one aid worker working in Musina said "They come for job opportunities, and some travel for adventure…"[45]. Similarly, an aid worker from Zimbabwe said, "We saw children as uninformed about the situation in South Africa as they think that all is rosy". Of note in his statement was the view widely shared by aid workers that independent migrant children did not make an informed decision about migrating to South Africa. Depicting independent children as immature (evidenced by statements like "they only think about the current situation" said by one aid worker) and having no plan in South Africa – a view rooted in the discourses about childhood fun and the need for children to be located in the domestic sphere – reinforces the belief that they need adults, including aid workers, to direct their lives or give them a plan. In addition, by suggesting that these children's migration was simply for adventure, aid workers erased the economic and structural difficulties children faced. Related to the open and frequent criticism that independent children 'did not have a plan' in South Africa, aid workers further portrayed these children as gullible and naïve to believe that they would easily and quickly earn a lot of money in South Africa to buy items such as nice clothes and cars without any educational certificates. Thus, naivety was another discursive strategy. To aid workers, migration was not a direct vehicle to wealth creation, education was. Consequently, they saw independent children as having misplaced priorities in life. Depending on the context of interaction, aid

[45] See Namhla Tshisela "More foreign in South Africa", Wednesday June 23 2010 SOWETAN

workers often rebuked independent children in either a friendly or unfriendly manner, for living in a fantasy world and being immature. In fact, I observed that during clashes between aid workers and independent children, the former sometimes labelled the latter “impatient”, “immature” and “shallow thinkers”. These rebukes served to silence independent children, delegitimised the act of child migration, framing it as a futile exercise. It also cast them as true children: poor decision makers and not yet responsible enough to engage in the adult world of migration and work.

Independent children’s responses to the disparaging representations depended on the situation. For instance, during informal situations especially when they were interacting with friendly aid workers and when they were on their own without aid workers, independent children at times laughed at themselves for being naïve and thoughtless, thus cementing the discourses of childhood innocence and children being unknowledgeable. For example, independent children often laughed at themselves for having mistaken Musina for Johannesburg when they first arrived in South Africa from Zimbabwe, as well as thinking that they would quickly get high paying jobs. This self-representation as naïve, functioned to show that they accepted responsibility for subjecting themselves to suffering in South Africa and that they sometimes acknowledged the superiority of adults’ knowledge.

However, some independent children regarded themselves as competent actors who understood their life situation and dismissed views by aid workers that they had “no plan” in South Africa or away from their home. The view that children have no plan is rooted in the idea that children are not active decision makers regarding their mobility (Orgocka, 2012). Aid workers made these disparaging remarks despite some studies (for example, Gozdziak, 2008) having found that independent children have concrete plans when they set off to foreign lands. Children accused aid workers of often misrepresenting their decision to migrate to South Africa, for example, their portrayal of independent children as adventurists. An example in point was James, a 16 year-old boy in grade eight at a secondary school in Musina, who said he was inspired to migrate by his cousin who worked in South Africa as an engineer and had a good life. Despite experiencing a lot of hardships, like not having a school uniform and at times going to school without having eaten anything, he continued attending school and excelling in his studies. Another example is that of a 16 year old boy who told me about his dreams in life:

> My dream is one of the reasons which made me leave my home country. I want to be a Hip-hop music star, a rapper, loved all over the world. To date I [have] written 31 songs … and I am planning to record [the songs]. But my toughest challenge is where will I record now that in Musina there are no recording studios? Who will help me pursue my dream? But my interest in Hip-hop, rap music made me get into this mess and it will fish me out.

Aid workers' emphasis that independent children had no plans about what they wanted to do in South Africa, served to delegitimise child migration and maintain migration as a domain for adults only. Positions like these resulted in aid workers, social workers and police officers working together to repatriate these children to Zimbabwe instead of making concerted efforts to assist independent children realise their objectives in South Africa. In addition, this discursive construction of independent children as having no plan in South Africa led, to use Harris's words – to them being seen as "both passive victims of circumstance and wilful risk-takers who are responsible for their own self-destruction" (2004a in Watson, 2011: 645).

The risk taking mentality of some independent children seemed to emanate from the Christian discourse which convinced them that it was not really important for them as individuals to take protective measures. They believed that if something bad happened to them during the course of migration, for example being sexually abused or getting pregnant, it was God's will and no human effort, including by State agents and aid workers would have prevented that from happening. This finding seems to be consistent with Hulton, Cullen and Khalokho's (2000) findings which showed that some young people attribute some events in their lives including accidents, to 'God's plan'. Consequently, some independent children in Musina were not hesitant to take risks as they believed that God determines whatever happens in any person's life. They saw their agency as limited. This was evident, for example, when I interviewed a 16-year-old independent migrant girl on why she and her cousin were contemplating leaving the girls' shelter without obtaining permission from aid workers to proceed to Johannesburg without any travelling documentation. The girls were impatient to proceed with their journey to Johannesburg. As I had heard numerous stories of women and girls being sexually abused and exploited, I thought it appropriate as a responsible adult to warn them that they risked exposing themselves to dangers like rape. The following is an extract of the discussion I had with one of the girls who regretted not having claimed to be an adult (above 17 years) so that she could have been allowed by the South African police to proceed with her journey to Johannesburg with the *omalayitshas*:

Girl: I should have said I am 18. I thought I was going to be treated favourably [as a person below 18 years].

Stan: Still you were 'favoured' because you might have proceeded but then become unfortunate [faced problems]

Girl: It's just the same as you can be raped whilst you are 20 years old. *Life is given by God* (my emphasis). There are young girls [younger than her] who left [Zimbabwe] for Joburg [Johannesburg]. They were very young [and were not raped].

The above extract shows that independent children's acceptance of being minors and its associated privileges was not static but situational. Independent migrant children tended to mobilise and emphasise the childhood or innocence status when they wanted protection and other services from service providers. The girl's counter argument to my statement above, that aid workers protected her by placing her in a shelter demonstrates the interplay between religious beliefs and discourse of childhood vulnerability which dominated the official discourse.

With regards to framing children as having no plans, aid workers emphasised the notion that generally, "children lack… the wisdom of the elderly" (Lancy, 2008: 373), "adult qualities of rationality, risk aversion and reason decision making" (Palmary, 2010: 54). Mobilising the 'Dionysian' view that "children need protection from themselves" (Ansell, 2005: 11) aid workers intervened and tried to direct or shape the lives of these children so that "they can have a good life when they grow up".

Religion and the Representation of Independent Migrant Children

For some independent children and aid workers, there were times when migration was socially constructed as a powerful and even mystical force which renders people passive in the face of it. The interaction between migration and various beliefs, which also shaped the representations of independent children by aid workers and the children themselves, is complex and contradictory. It exposed some negative representations of these children as well as ideas which depicted these children as victims of evil forces. This was evident in the case of a boy aged 16, who was a budding musician. I met this boy when he approached a group of female aid workers seeking assistance to be repatriated to his home in Zimbabwe. As they probed him on why he came to South Africa, he revealed that he was a musician and had wanted to pursue a music career in South Africa where there were better opportunities to

record in studios[46]. The aid workers challenged him to prove that he could sing very well. Without any hesitation, he agreed and performed one of his songs very well. The women and I were convinced that the boy was talented. Aid workers requested the boy to sign autographs and he obliged. The boy said some of the songs he had composed in Zimbabwe were recorded by a popular musician in Zimbabwe and were at the time of fieldwork receiving generous air play on radio stations in Zimbabwe. He further revealed that his brother was also talented in singing but "when the spirit of going to South Africa possessed him he abandoned his promising career in music [in Zimbabwe]". He said his brother's migration was driven by *mamhepo* (evil spirits). Looking demoralised, he added: "in our family we have bad luck [meaning *mamhepo* were affecting them]". As in this example, a number of independent children in separate interviews claimed that *mamhepo* were wreaking havoc in their personal and family life[47]. They also revealed that their fear of *mamhepo* at home had contributed to their decisions to migrate. Migration was a strategy of escaping these dark forces. But it was more than this. For the children, migration primed social actors to be possessed by evil and was, in itself, a form of evil. But contradicting his view that *mamhepo* were affecting him, the budding musician proudly told me that God protected him when he crossed the border without any passport and managed to stay in South Africa without experiencing any difficulties yet other migrants including children without proper documents, were either being stopped by border officials or abused by *magumaguma*. Interestingly, some aid workers shared this view about the role and effect of *mamhepo* in some children's lives. The influence of *mamhepo* on independent children's decision to migrate revealed why some children challenged the notion of home as place of safety. It also reinforced the discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability.

The connectedness of migration and religion is also highlighted by the account of one old man, in his late 50s, whom I encountered at the boys' shelter negotiating with aid workers for permission to enter the premises and look for a boy who had run away from his parents'

[46] During fieldwork I met several Zimbabwean unaccompanied migrant children who indicated that they migrated to South Africa to launch their careers, for example, to be recording musicians. One of them was a 14 year-old girl who performed at South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress' 98th Anniversary celebration in Musina on 16 January 2010. Impressed her talent, Arthur Mofokate, a popular South African *kwaito* musician and producer who also performed during that event together with other high profile musicians, invited this girl to contact her so that they can discuss possibilities of working together.

[47] For example, Mukundi, the boy who was injured in a car accident, said that after the death of his parents he and his brother were supposed to have inherited a big house and a herd of several cattle at their rural home in Zimbabwe but they failed due to "*chivanhu*" amongst other factors. Noting that he could not overcome these forces he and brother left for South Africa at different moments.

home in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The man had been sent by the boy's father who worked as a pastor in Zimbabwe. Endorsing the discourse which circulate in the wider society that economically struggling people are the ones who migrate, this man kept on telling the aid workers and I that the "boy had everything at home". Therefore, this man wanted this boy to go back home. He claimed that the boy had run away from a boarding school in Zimbabwe[48]. In a view shared at different times by some of the independent children, particularly those who were struggling to survive in South Africa, some aid workers were convinced that whatever the circumstances were, children should not separate from their parents. This man together with aid workers was explicitly arguing that migration was resulting in downward social mobility for independent children. This man attributed the movement of independent children including the boy he was looking for, to the work of *mamhepo.* He claimed that they were possessed by evil spirits. He explained:

> Many years ago our forefathers came to South Africa to work and many of them died here [referring to South Africa]. They [referring to spirits of the fore-fathers] are calling others [in Zimbabwe] to come [to South Africa]. Their spirits call their blood relatives to come. Generations later their spirit can possess these young children and influence them to also migrate to South Africa to join them. Traditional rituals have to be performed to set these dead people's spirits free [in order to stop them from pulling many others to go to South Africa].

He added that "The boy's father [a Pastor in Zimbabwe] must have defeated these evil spirits as he prays and believes in God. The spirits possess weaker characters who in this case are children". Besides sustaining the idea that children are weak, this man's account explicitly or implicitly suggests the dismissal of ideas that children consciously leave their Zimbabwean homes or that they are in search of adventure. It represents independent children as victims of *chivanhu* (African traditional religion), a view shared by a number of aid workers particularly during informal moments. "The fact that most children ran away from home influenced workers to view them not as normal…or view them as driven by some (evil) spirits of some sort", said Peter, one of the aid workers. He added that "According to African culture it is not normal for a child to be far away from home and never dream of going back even after facing some hardships". Consequently, most aid workers tended to see these children as being in the wrong place. Although they acknowledged that most Zimbabweans'

[48] Generally, in Zimbabwe families with household incomes which are above average are the ones who usually send their children to boarding schools.

livelihoods were shattered making it difficult for them to survive, aid workers insisted that 'normal' children remain at their homes. Normal children are expected to be "afraid" and to be always within the confines of their homes or countries where their kin look after them. In addition, the dominant thinking amongst aid workers was that independent children must be at school and "not in foreign lands where nobody feels sorry for them", explained one senior male aid worker. According to these aid workers' understanding of childhood, children are vulnerable and therefore should be in spaces where they can readily be pitied, loved and supported. The establishment of places of safety for independent children, placement of these children in these centres, efforts to reunite or repatriate them to their families are rooted in this understanding of childhood. Next I discuss the positive representations of child migration. This is an unofficial discourse.

The Unofficial Discourse: Positive Representations of Child Migration

The exploration of aid workers' representations of independent migrant children revealed that there were times when independent children were showered with muted or loud praises for their act of migrating alone, motivated by the desire to improve their lives. Independent children, risking harm during the course of migration, were cast as brave and self-sacrificing. Opposing the representations of independent children as bad because they were not living with their parents and not attending school, some aid workers and independent children, particularly those who were working, argued that their lives had actually improved since they started living in South Africa. "These children are very courageous… They were not really attending school in Zimbabwe but now they are regularly attending school. There schooling [in South Africa] is not being disturbed", said one aid worker. Due to the poor socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe, a sizeable portion of teachers between 2007 and early 2009 reported for duty irregularly (see for example, Pswarayi and Reeler, 2012). In this context, child migration was seen positively by aid workers. I turn to the story of Ford, aged 17, in order to give substance to the point that migration was also seen as beneficial by some children. He wondered one day when I was discussing with him the benefits of living in South Africa, why one independent migrant boy, considered very clever by many children, was "still very thin, yet he has been living in South Africa for a long time". Ford happily told me that when he arrived in South Africa from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second capital, he had been very thin. To gain weight, Ford decided to eat half a dozen of boiled eggs every day,

soon after arriving in Musina. He also ate roasted meat and ate a lot of *sadza/pap* every day. In his words:

> I was very determined to gain weight. Later when I returned home [Bulawayo, Zimbabwe] many people wondered who this young man was. They failed to recognise me. That's why they allowed me to come back [to South Africa].

This finding that his family in Zimbabwe allowed him to go back to South Africa supports Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White's (2010) point that during times of hardship, parents might encourage their children to eke out a living away from home. Narrating his story in a hilarious manner, and dismissing the stereotypical framing of independent children as poor, struggling to survive, passive and dependent on adults, Ford said he had gained weight and was no longer able to run when police chased after him[49]. Judging from his tone he seemed not to regret having gained weight as it is seen as a positive development. There is a dominant idea in this society that associates gaining of weight with prosperity or "good living". Reinforcing the point made by Morrow (1994 cited in James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) that children themselves should be asked about their motivations for working, Ford said, "I came to SA to look for money and not to sit". As evidence of their prosperity through migration, some of the independent children pointed to things like their access to basic food, clothes and school. Ford proudly revealed that he ate "good food". Of note was that in Zimbabwe, 'good' food was rare in most households at the time of interviewing Ford. He further said, "working helps as I left my home with nothing. Now I have clothes and a new bed. I am planning to buy a generator[50] and a radio when I get paid". This finding collaborates other researchers' findings that when confronted with the notion that they should not be in South Africa and away from their families as well as the view that they are being exploited, independent children produced evidence which seeks to re-cast them positively, challenge the discourses of exploitation (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013; Burr, 2006) and anti-child migration.

[49] Police officers regularly chased after independent migrant children. They illegally deported to Zimbabwe or severely beat them for being in South Africa without proper travelling documents.

[50] A generator for generating electricity for household consumption. That time and years afterwards Zimbabwe was experiencing severe power cuts. Very few households had power generators.

In the next section I examine the two competing approaches to child work: the official anti-child work approach and the u-official pro-work approach. Actually, these two epitomise how child work is usually framed (see Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013; Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010). These approaches generated mixed representations of independent children. They served either to legitimise or delegitimise child work and operated at different moments.

Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Work

The practice of children working is one of the most debated topics and remains contentious (Bourdillon and Spittler, 2012; Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010; Bourdillon, 2006). A dominant argument particularly in Western societies is that children are not yet ready to work and therefore the "best way of protecting children from harmful work is to keep them out of employment below a certain age" (Bourdillon, 2006: 1201). According to Fyfe, "Child labour is work which impairs the health and development of children" (1989 cited in James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:108). The discourse of child labour, which is embedded in the discourse of children's rights (Ennew, Myers and Plateau, 2005) is widely used by both children and humanitarian workers to delegitimise children's work. It is connected to ideas of childhood innocence and vulnerability. Much of the debate and effort focuses on highlighting the negative effects of child labour, stopping child work and "the rights and wrongs of child work" (see for example, Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010). In this study, I use Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White's definition of work as "activities performed to achieve a purpose, usually to satisfy a need and often under some kind of necessity, whether or not they are performed for payment or rewards" (2010: xv). Child work is contextual (see for example, Ekpe-Out (2009). Since what constitutes exploitative and non-exploitative child work is a contested issue, I am working from both children and aid workers' different, situational understandings of work and childhood.

Soon after independent children crossed the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe many had their minds fixed on getting a job in South Africa. A significant population of independent children, including those attending school, were doing or seeking menial jobs[51].

[51] Independent children with no work permits worked as porters, farm workers, collectors and sellers of shopping receipts with Value Added Tax (VAT), which could be claimed by non-resident travellers when they leave South Africa, hunters of wild animals like warthogs, beggars, thieves, human smugglers, vendors, collectors and sellers of firewood, domestic workers, car and truck washers, security guards (Some children paid for safe accommodation through guarding *spazas* at night for no pay), shop assistants, barbers, and hair dressers.

Every day, they walked from door-to-door in the scorching sun, in residential areas, in the streets of Musina and environs of the border post, looking for temporary jobs, popularly known as “piece jobs”. Since jobs were scarce, they learnt to be multi-skilled and versatile in the work they could do. It was common for a boy, for example, to be very knowledgeable about the sexual behaviour of adults as he worked as an informal pimp; heavy vehicles as he washed many at the truck stops; running a business as he worked as store keeper, bar man, or vendor. Their eagerness to work resulted in independent children at times being constructed by aid workers as very intelligent people with a strong work ethic. “These children are hard-working” was a common statement said by aid workers. Arguably this construction of children led aid workers to sympathise with and tried to assist them in various ways like giving these children advice on how to negotiate for fair work conditions. However, this behaviour opposed discourses that see childhood as about childhood play, freedom from economic responsibility (Jenks, 1996), schooling and exclusion from the public sphere. During my fieldwork, I constantly observed that this recent phenomenon of many independent Zimbabwean migrant children, working or looking for work, provoked discomfort or even outright anger among aid workers and other service providers, particularly under formal settings. The meaning of this tension is that the representations of independent working migrant children are fluid and can change with context.

Thus, there were two polarised positions taken by aid workers towards child work: pro and anti-child work. In the following sections I am going to look at both. These discourses with different purposes and consequences functioned at different times. As such, I discuss the moments each discourse prevailed, was deployed and withdrawn. I will show that the contradictions in the discourses rest on context and socio-economic realities.

By far the dominant and official approach by aid workers was anti-child work. I analyse this approach, and how it contrasts with the pro-work stance which is also popular but often officially silenced. The anti-work position mainly rests on official discourse whilst the pro-child work discourse often prevailed during unofficial encounters between independent children and aid workers. There were some discourses that served to support the anti-child work position: criminality, education and exploitation. These discourses justify practices like deportation, dependency on the shelters and police harassment. These discourses did not allow for action like flexible schooling which accommodate child work and recognition of the role independent children play in supporting families. In addition, these discourses did not

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Some of the boys were being used in criminal work. A few boys harvested *Mopane* worms (*Gonimbrasia belina*) for sale. Some boys particularly those living in the streets earned some money through illegal gambling.

allow support to be given to working children. Then I will discuss how and why the pro-work approach is often connected to the non-official discourse. I will also discuss the effects generated and interventions resulting from these.

My argument departs from what has been observed by Hoffman (2011), that a lot of literature on child agency (for example, focusing on child labourers) emphasises gaps "between the subjective realities of child labourers and representations of them that emphasise their victimisation at the hands of adults" (2011: 6). Instead, I explore how children were claiming space to work against a dominant discourse against child work. In addition and importantly, there is need to reflect on and challenge, from the perspectives of aid workers and children, the discourse of 'child labour' as antagonistic to human capital formation.

Whilst there is abundant literature on the discourse about 'child labour' and the larger phenomenon of children's work (Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010), this chapter specifically focuses on understanding the "scaffolds of discursive frameworks" (Cheek, 2004: 1142), the discourses, which allow certain views about independent working migrant children to be formed, to prevail, dominate and determine how they were represented and treated by aid workers. Analysing working independent children within the context of a humanitarian crisis, I explore the discourses that operate in ways that might be promoting, marginalising, excluding or silencing other discourses. In analysing the representations of these children, I apply Cheek's point that "Which discursive frame is afforded presence is a consequence of the effect of power relations" (2004: 1143). This information facilitates the understanding of the multiplicities of the representations of working independent children and the subjectivity of aid workers' relations with these children.

The Official Discourse: Anti-Child Work Approach

The anti-child work discourse, very dominant in donor funded agencies and the notion that children are passive victims at work places (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Whitehead and Hashim, 2005) dominated official interactions between independent children and aid workers. This resulted in a number of independent children expressing lack of confidence in the commitment of aid workers to help them deal with exploitation since they saw them as entrenched in the anti- child work discourse. A 14-year-boy, in sentiments widely shared by other independent children commented, "We are on our own". Contrary to the idea of child protection, aid workers often did not follow up on the reported cases of abuse and

exploitation in the workplace. Actually, during my fieldwork, very few children said they were assisted by aid workers to receive payments owed to them. Generally, children accused aid workers of not being supportive when they reported problems they were experiencing with employers. Aid workers said lack of resources like cars hindered them from assisting independent children at their workplaces. In addition, aid workers often told independent children to stop assuming adult roles and that they should be in school, not looking for money. Evoking the idea that childhood is "a special phase" (Clarke, 2004a: 9) that frees one from economic responsibility, this discourse emphasises that work, particularly monetised work, is not an arena of childhood. As a result, working independent children were seen as out of order as they challenged the established social order which separated childhood and adulthood.

Drawing from the discourse of formal schooling as the 'rightful' activity for children, aid workers officially sought to keep children on the periphery of the economy and support them to go back to school either in South Africa or in Zimbabwe. This was a way of correcting the situation or preparing independent children to have a "better future when they grow up". Child work was seen as going against the acquisition of education by children. It opposed aid workers' ideal state of childhood. As a result, conflict often brewed between children and aid workers on whether children should work or attend school. Some aid workers, many of them graduates from tertiary colleges and universities, were convinced that education was very central in the lives of children. Their position can reflect, as Hoffman (2011: 2) says, "the values and assumptions of a culturally bound and class-based discourse of childhood". Although they did not belong to the very wealthy class either, aid workers were drawing on this class based idea. Drawing from a discourse that views children as immature, aid workers often assumed that working children did not have clear objectives in life or that their objectives bordered on fantasy. With much disappointment, aid workers observed that whilst a number of independent children wanted to continue with schooling, a significant proportion of them did not. In 2009, a number of independent minors who enrolled in local schools dropped out soon after gaining some confidence of living in South Africa, having figured out how to survive without receiving help from the resource poor humanitarian agencies. However, in 2010 there was an increase in the number of independent minors attending school in Musina, including some who had dropped out in 2009 and who expressed interest to go to school. Pressure from aid workers and some ordinary people (including employers) to attend school, posed quandaries for independent children. During a conversation, a 14-year-old boy explained, "Saying you attend school results in less verbal abuse against you by

every adult. Every day we are told about the importance of education". Children who were attending school were generally viewed in positive ways and treated in friendly ways. For instance, the latter were usually selected to visit other places like the city of Polokwane especially during the school and public holidays. My point is that independent children sometimes expressed interest to attend school or attended school in order to gain social capital. These children calculated that being seen as "children who like school" – a positive representation by aid workers, was strategic. This reinforces Norman Long's point, through this example, that some children living in the streets made it possible for the police to capture as they "considered co-operation with or submission to the police and other authorities as, in some instances, convenient" (1999: 18). This indicates that some representations of independent migrant children were sometimes produced by the children themselves in order to advance their interests or help them manage realities they faced as children on the move. It also showed that sometimes these children were capable of exercising agency under difficult conditions.

Aid workers reinforced the discourse of formal schooling by either using subtle threats or making disparaging remarks about those children who were not attending school. For example, they often warned the independent children who were out of school that their future was likely to be doomed and that they were "lost". One aid worker issued an ominous statement to an independent migrant boy who had been absent from school for a number of days and often spent time looking for piece jobs:

> So what type of work do you think you will do when you grow up? You will regret not having listened to us. You will remember my advice [when you are struggling]. You will say 'mother' was right. You will have time to go wherever you want to go after finishing school.

This case which shows aid workers' understanding of childhood as a time for learning serves to reveal that working children were alienated from the ideal state of childhood. The naivety and irrationality of independent children is contrasted with the visionary perspectives and rational thinking of the adults represented by aid workers. Howard (2012: 5) writes that child migration is generally viewed "as a negative phenomenon per se, particularly as it is seen to work against individual and local economic and social development". Children seen as undermining their chances of having a better life were again portrayed as immature – a

position that functioned to silence children's views and legitimised the imposition of adults' views.

Independent children faced a plethora of challenges at their workplaces: poor remuneration, not being compensated after working, being underpaid[52], delays in receiving payment, long working hours, doing dangerous work (for example, working as security guards in a crime ridden area, usually in return for only accommodation which was very poor, or smuggling undocumented migrants and goods, including contraband from Zimbabwe like tobacco), doing strenuous work, language barriers, verbal and physical abuse. In the words of a 16 year old paternal orphaned girl, "Most people do not want to employ children and those who do, do that with the intention of exploiting them".

Almost every mention of independent children in Musina during formal situations was preceded by reference to the above mentioned abuse and exploitation they were facing at various workplaces. This added weight to service providers' calls to intervene in the lives of independent children. For example, on 24 March 2010 whilst I was at the boys' shelter, two men driving a twin cab arrived at 5:40 pm and dropped two independent migrant boys who were less than 18 years and some boys who were older than 18. As they were very dirty – their faces and clothes full of dust – I became curious to know the type of work they had been doing and the whereabouts of their workplaces. One of the boys approximately aged 19, regarded as a child by aid workers, told me that they had been making fake fertilizer at a near-by farm by mixing sand and fertiliser. They claimed that the fertiliser would be exported to neighbouring countries. This type of work was dangerous and illegal. That workplace was very dusty and handling fertilizer (especially if it is petrochemical fertilizer) needs protective equipment which the boys did not have. They worked from 7am to 5pm and were paid R60 a day[53]. There were also concerns by aid workers that sex work was ripping through Musina's moral fabric and presenting a risky environment for children to live in and work. Some boys worked as informal pimps for long distance cross border truck drivers and some sex workers. Some sex workers often reneged on their promise to pay children who referred clients to them, claiming that they had been underpaid or that the client had refused to pay them. When business was low, particularly during the week and middle of the month, sex workers who operated at the border post on the South African side devised an incentive of rewarding the

[52] For instance, Victor once worked with another boy for a whole day carrying a lot of soil at a construction site and they were paid R20 instead of R50 they had agreed on before they worked.

[53] This is approximately US$6.00

boys who worked as informal “pimps”. One 15 year old boy explained how the deal worked: “If you give a sex worker three clients, you get free sex”. It was experiences like these that led aid workers to express anti-work sentiments, and to say “this environment (Musina) is not right for children”, and to depict these children as vulnerable. Generally, aid workers saw children as passive actors in these dealings and having an uncritical approach to life. “These children are very simplistic about life” was a common statement used to describe independent children.

Indeed, it was experiences like these, seen as exploitative, which justified the aid workers’ anti-child work sentiments. However, as one 14-year-old boy, who did odd jobs like carrying bags across the bridge dividing South Africa and Zimbabwe rationalised: “Poverty forces us to accept being exploited. It’s either you accept the little money or you die from hunger”. Within the dominant discourse of childhood vulnerability, like many other social actors, he saw child work as exploitative but necessary in his and other independent children’s lives.

It is worth noting that exploitation slipped into claims of children being ignorant or naive. It seemed exploitation was understood as a consequence of naivety and not poverty. Seemingly echoing Valentine’s point that “Focusing on the North it is possible to argue that childhood is imagined as a time of innocence and freedom from responsibilities of adulthood” (2003: 37), aid workers officially often evoked the discourses of children having freedom from economic responsibility, and fear of disappearing childhoods (Postman, 1994) urged working independent children to abandon the practice of working. “Leave the responsibility of working to adults. What do you want to do when you grow up?” said one aid worker. Arguably she was reinforcing middle class-class Western notions that construct childhood as a period of dependency (see Orgocka, 2012). Aid workers castigated work as irrelevant to young children’s lives and also reinforced the idea that work like is “‘an adults only’ site of knowledge, from which children, perceived to be too young to understand such knowledge, should be protected through the denial of access” (Robinson, 2008: 121). Statements like this were commonly made by aid workers regarding working children. Reinforcing “the idea of childhood as a special phase” (Clarke, 2004a: 9) in which “play” is the most appropriate activity for children (Jenks, 1996), a discourse very dominant in the global North, one aid worker, like many others, chided some working independent children for trying to appropriate what were described as adult responsibilities. Using the victim blaming approach, which often prevailed during informal interactions between aid workers and independent children, aid workers often argued that children were not physically fit to work, adding that children should first grow up. Emphasising that the act of working is the

domain of adults is aimed at telling independent children that their behaviour of working is inappropriate for children. This common view by aid workers shows that structural factors which force some children to work were either dismissed or marginalised. In addition, as I will discuss in the next section, just as Hashim and Thorsen observed in West Africa, "this conceptualisation of childhood as a period free from work does not capture the reality of childhood" (2011: 21) when applied to the Southern African context as well.

The thinking that children are not supposed to work reinforces the point made by Kehily (2009: 5) that "[t]he idea that childhood innocence should be preserved is a pervasive one". This claim about children losing childhood also operated in aid work particularly during official situations. The depiction of working children's childhood as 'abnormal' (see Bourdillon, 2006) which circulated amongst aid workers was rooted in a certain understanding of work as a matter of choice, as freely available, and depoliticised. In other words, by stressing the non-linkage of childhood and work, aid workers constructed those children who linked the two as people who were thinking inappropriately. This thinking allowed aid workers to charge that working children were responsible or to blame for any problems in their lives as workers.

Sustaining the discourse of childhood innocence, the reasons for independent children's exploitation were blamed on migration. This situation can be illustrated through Sally, a girl aged 16 when she said:

> The common causes of abuse, exploitation and violence in migrant children especially girls are that we are foreigners. We don't know the rules of this country on how foreigners should be treated. We are children, who are powerless and if anything is done to us we cannot retaliate, particularly when these abuses are mainly done by adults. We also don't know our rights as children whether in our own country or in a foreign country.

What is also evident from Sally's narrative are the structural constraints that allow children's exploitation. She highlights the challenge of labour exploitation which is widely faced by migrants in South Africa and Africa in general. Sally, like her peers, said that failure by migrants to have proper documents to live and work in South Africa compromises their ability to negotiate a fair wage. At the time of fieldwork, none of the working migrant children in Musina had these legal documents allowing them to live and work in Musina. Thus, by virtue of their poverty as well as lack of proper documentation, children were seen

as ‘at risk’ of experiencing exploitation and abuse. Local employers and aid workers knew that many migrant children did not report to the police as they feared arrest and deportation.

Independent children’s work was often devalued by aid workers. Actually, Elson’s (1982) argument that seniority explains why children’s work is valued as inferior is evidenced in this study. This view was articulated firmly by one humanitarian worker when he criticised working children as follows: “They claim that they are doing piece jobs. Theirs are not piece jobs. They are being exploited”. The belittling manner in which aid workers often described independent children’s work and why they were working suggests that, to use Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White’s words, “work is somehow unusual for children and so needs an explanation” (2010: 35).

One of the ways the aid workers justified an anti-work sentiment was by saying working was an unprofitable venture for children. They did so by investing in exposing and highlighting children’s failures as workers. Children’s failures were used as tools to delegitimise the outcome of child work or show the non-utility of child work as well as to dissuade children from working. “What comes from selling sweets? They cannot even look after themselves”, said one aid worker dismissing child work. Nieuwenhuys explains situations like this by writing that “the dissociation of childhood from the performance of valued work has been increasingly considered a yardstick of modernity” (1996: 246). It also revealed the different life-worlds (Arce and Long, 1992) between aid workers and independent children with the latter valuing their work. Evoking the discourse of childhood as a state of immaturity and children’s work as characterized by playfulness, aid workers criticised children’s tendency to buy “childish stuff like radios, food, snacks and sweet things”. It justified aid workers’ claim that children should not work, based on the idea that they are immature to handle money. These sentiments, which devalue child work, were shared by some children, particularly those who saw attending school as the main activity for children and not work.

Besides maintaining symbolic boundaries between adults and children, the demeaning of the type of goods children bought served to justify why children should not work. Humanitarian workers exploited children’s purchase of ‘wrong kind of goods’, “un-child like” goods, delinquency and “failure to support themselves” to prove that independent children were irresponsible. This justified their efforts to teach these working children to be responsible and guide them on how to spend the money they earned. Although independent children wanted to be considered as responsible workers rather than children, aid workers sometimes strongly advised children on the type of goods they should buy for themselves and

their families. By so doing, aid workers' behaviour reinforced the dominant constructions of children as immature or less rational (Burman, 1994). Thus, it was not only children's work which was viewed as inferior or marginalised but "the person who performs it as well" (Nieuwenhuys, 1996: 243).

Another way in which aid workers argued against child work was that independent children were ignorant about the work environment, and by implication, assuming that adult migrants were knowledgeable about it. They described independent children as too naïve and immature to expect that they would get jobs without qualifications. Aid workers often mocked one of independent children's common practices of starting to look for jobs as soon as they arrived in Musina, thinking that they could easily be found in spite of having no academic certificates or tertiary qualifications. This finding again supports Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White's point that sometimes a migrant's "decision to move can arise from unrealistic hopes of a better life elsewhere" (2010: 141). In any case, the emphasis on formal qualifications to access jobs mirrors the general thinking in Musina and other areas that place great weight on formal education to the point that anyone without a professional qualification is seen as a failure in life, hopeless and only fit to do 'dirty' jobs, mainly in the informal sector. Thus, this point is in agreement with Bourdillon's argument that "Western ideas of childhood with their middle-class idea of a successful trajectory through formal education leading to well-remunerated work, [is] an ideal that marks most of the world's children as failures" (2013: 1). These ideas were replicated in Musina as children who were not attending school were seen as having lost childhoods.

Though appreciative of some of the work of humanitarian agencies, some children working and living at the border post also drew from the anti-child work discourse to criticise aid workers for allowing children living in places of safety to go and work after school. They accused aid workers of having no interest in the welfare of children but simply protecting their jobs. "There is no way a child would pass in school when he or she attends school from Monday to Friday but in the afternoons of these days would be working carrying heavy things and also thinking about piece jobs", said Mukundi, explicitly dismissing aid workers' work and claims of being interested in the welfare of independent children[54]. Throughout my

[54] Though some aid workers emphasised the point that independent children were young and vulnerable to migrate without their parents, some aid workers were, at times, accused of thinking otherwise. For example, whilst I was at the boys' shelter one day in 2010, three *omalayitshas* driving a twin cab vehicle arrived with a 17 year old boy who wanted to get money R150 from an aid worker. What had happened was that soon after he

fieldwork he and his peers, particularly when challenged by aid workers on why they were not attending school, constantly expressed their desire to go back to school but vowed not to live at the shelter in Musina due to the poor living conditions there which included fear of being bullied by other children. Mukundi's comment suggested that he was aware of the importance of school as it served to ward off potential criticism of not attending school.

The idea that children should not work was also justified through the argument that it led to delinquent behaviour, including crime. A female aid worker, for example, said, "Some children doing odd jobs get money but go back to the streets. They buy glue and other drugs. They create another challenge". Though they opposed the anti-child work position, some children also criticized the glue-sniffing behaviour of their peers. "We did not cross the border to sniff glue but improve our lives", explained one 15-year-old. Anti-child work and migration marginalises viewpoints like this which show children as competent social actors. Instead, it seeks to portray migrant children as losing their childhood and in urgent need of

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arrived at the shelter from Zimbabwe a few days before he had handed over the money to the aid worker for safe keeping. The money was for his bus fare to Johannesburg where his relative lived. The boy had picked up by police and placed in the shelter. In fact this aid worker had advised the boy to give her the money. After the boy had been cleared by the government's social workers to proceed with his journey to Johannesburg the boy requested the aid worker to give return the money. Instead of returning the money, the aid worker made arrangements with the *omalayitshas* to take this boy to Johannesburg for R450. She claimed that she had given the *omalayitshas* R150 and told the *omalayitshas* to get the balance (R250) from the boy's aunt in Johannesburg when they arrive there. When the boy arrived at the shelter together with *omalayitshas* to take his luggage a senior aid worker stopped him from going with *omalayitshas* as she felt it was not procedural and safe for the boy. The *omalayitshas* demanded R50 for the fuel they had used to drive to the shelter. The aid worker who had made these transport arrangements refused to pay the *omalayitshas*. Attempts by other aid workers to persuade her to pay the *omalayitshas* failed. As they argued it merged that the *omalayitshas* had not received R150 from this aid worker, information which shocked the boy and other independent children. "*Vaida kuchekeresa mwana*" (She wanted to sacrifice the life a child), commented one independent migrant boy. As pointed out in chapter one, *omalayitshas* are known for ruthlessly dealing migrants after botched deals. The *omalayitshas* threatened to beat this aid worker as she was not honouring their deal. It seems that the aid worker had calculated that with the boy now in Johannesburg she was going to avoid paying back the R150. As the case had attracted a lot of independent children and creating a volatile situation and some aid workers had failed to pacify the *malayitshas*, I decided to intervene. I negotiated with *omalayitshas* to reduce the amount from R50 to R20 because the distance was less than 10Km. I argued that at most they had used 2 litres (R8.60/litre). They agreed and left but after threatening the aid worker not to try to cheat them in future. As disturbing as it is, what is important here is that this confrontation between the *omalayitshas* and the aid worker exemplifies not only the unscrupulous nature of some aid workers who abused the money children gave them for safe keeping, but also the rhetoric of the discourse of charity and independent children being vulnerable.

adult guidance in life. They had to be saved since, to use Davidson's words, "like the child at the heart of the Western ideal of childhood, they are passive, biddable, weak, and breakable" (2011: 472). Anti-child work views were therefore connected to the general assumption that children are reckless with money. I now consider this in more detail.

Exposed to various forms of abuse and exploitation as they are not always well protected (see Fritsch, Johnson and Juska, 2010; Palmary, 2009), independent children learnt how to advance their interests and protect themselves at their workplaces. But the way they did so was sometimes outside of the law. For instance, independent children who smuggled undocumented migrants across the border often paid money to border officials and *magumaguma* in order to be allowed to pass through the bush safely. *Magumaguma* demanded to be paid money *yeburi* (for having opened 'holes' in the border's security fence), used by migrants to enter into South Africa. Consequently, contrary to their official characterisation as victims, aid workers cast these independent children as criminals and they were treated as such.

Independent children who worked as human smugglers resisted being marginalized and excluded by *magumaguma* and other adults from this lucrative but dangerous work. Challenging their assumed passivity, these boys charged R250 per person to those who wanted to be assisted to cross the border from the Zimbabwean side. If they found a person who wanted to be smuggled at the "no man's land"[55] they charged him or her R100. Challenging the view that children are passive victims "who are inherently 'vulnerable'" (Clark-Kazak, 2011: 6) one of the boys explained:

> We tell them [undocumented migrants] to give us money to bribe the security guards. We pay some *magumaguma* money for the 'hole' on the security fence as they say they are the ones who opened the fence. We tell the (migrant) women to give us their money to keep because the *magumaguma* would rob them. We run away with the money if we meet soldiers [they know all the pathways and would later give the migrants their money at the bus station at the border post on the South African side]. Some women refuse to give us money for safe keeping and sometimes end up being robbed. When charging people to cross they [including himself] look at "the face" (referring to social class) and can even charge up to R700 per person.

[55] It's the land, neutral space, between Zimbabwe and South Africa on the Limpopo Bridge.

Migrants who appeared to belong to the economically privileged social class were charged a lot. I will discuss the issue of social class and the representation of independent children in detail later on.

Like adult human smugglers, some independent children used deceit, fear, violence and intimidation tactics like *kutinhira* (‘herding’ migrants). *Kutinhira* is the practice of confusing migrants including those possessing valid travelling documents about how to negotiate entry into South Africa and misleading them into using the illegal entry points allowing the children to extract the highest possible fee. The human smugglers lie that it is difficult to cross the border into South Africa even if the person has all the required documentation. Many migrants would be afraid of crossing the border through the bush. Using childhood as social capital and the discourse of childhood innocence, some boys capitalized on their young ages and assumed innocence to get undocumented migrants as clients from adult smugglers in a context where adult human smugglers were widely suspected to be *magumaguma* (this point is elaborated on later in this section).

Human smuggling as part of children’s work was officially silenced as it clashed with the dominant understandings of childhood which see children as victims and innocent. However, this type of work earned these children labels like *magumaguma* during unofficial times. Through the discourse of criminality, children’s practices at work served to delegitimise all child work and withdrawal of aid to these children. Labelling children *magumaguma* served to stigmatise and discriminate against these children, barring them from accessing assistance which included protection from aid workers and the police. Calling children *magumaguma* opposed the official understandings of children as innocent and put a lie to the notion that independent children have always been victims of crime. A number of their fights were very violent. Associating independent children with criminality marginalised children from various workplaces. It implicitly endorsed the harsh treatment children often received from the police and members of the public.

In response to their criminalization, some children fulfilled aid workers’ prejudices against them and engaged in criminal acts. Tindo, aged 15 years feared that “If people associate us with those beasts (referring to *magumagumas*), we will end up consciously or unconsciously imitating their behaviour”. Tindo revealed that if he saw an opportunity to steal, he would do so, since it would be pointless to refrain. He pointed out that as independent children, they would still be accused of stealing that thing and then be beaten thoroughly. In his view, which shows that discourse produces certain behaviours, “It’s better to be accused and punished for something you have done". Situations like this, Box (1983:

184) observes, usually happen when the "sense of injustice becomes so inflamed that deviance becomes the chosen instrument of revenge". He further points out that "if the experience of being labelled deviant and the consequences of that are mediated in these or similar ways, then further delinquent activity is predicable" (Box, 1983: 184). As Box argues, this argument is not proposing a deterministic process that a person who is labelled automatically becomes more deviant. In fact, the majority of boys, particularly living in the shelter, claimed that they remained law-abiding migrants. This claim tended to be supported by a number of aid workers and it challenged the portrayal of children living in shelters as deviants.

Another example which supports the claim that work led children into crime is that of independent children who collected and forged shopping receipts with value added tax (VAT), which could be claimed by non-resident travellers when they left South Africa. They sold these receipts to adult dealers such as Zimbabwean women who then illegally claimed VAT at the border post. Children could not claim money directly since they did not have valid passports, were too young, and were perceived to be too poor to buy goods. Independent migrant boys who were involved in this illegal business complained that dealers used a sharing formula which underpaid them. For a long time children failed to arrest this exploitative arrangement.

Dealers usually refused to buy shopping receipts with small amounts of VAT saying they were often rejected at the border post by the South African officials. To overcome this problem, children sold a receipt with a big value of VAT together with receipts of small amounts. Dealers were usually forced to agree. In addition, some children forged shopping receipts by erasing that part which showed that they were copies of the originals. They also scratched off the total price of the goods on the receipt and would then write a new false amount on it which was higher than the original total amount. This fraudulent practice was introduced to them by an adult man. In a mocking but advisory manner**,** he had asked the boys, "You do not have a razor? Why do you move without your work tools? If you do not know your work [of selling shopping receipts] you must resign". Children sold these receipts to buyers not known to them so that if these receipts were rejected, they would not be found.

However, aid workers' characterisation of independent children as criminals revealed that children were not as powerless as they often portrayed them. Actually, some independent children were knowledgeable about the vulnerabilities of the feared *magumaguma* and 'the rules of engagement' in their dangerous work environment, like lying about their identity, using blackmail and intimidation, and seduction (see below) as survival strategies. However,

as said above, outsiders from children's reality like aid workers were either ignorant or condemned these criminal tactics.

Working children's exposure to crime and abuse led some aid workers, including those who labelled independent children criminals, to at times view these children as victims of crime. Crime was seen as affecting independent children's work. Working children were seen as very vulnerable to the machinations of *magumaguma. Magumaguma* often harassed and forced working children to handover the money they had earned from doing 'piece jobs'. To eliminate this threat to their livelihood, some children demonstrated ability to impact the dangerous environment through their own agency by conniving with the police to arrest the criminals.

The relationship between independent children and *magumaguma* was ambiguous. For example, at one point when I asked Mukundi why he and other independent children seemed not to be afraid of being robbed by *magumaguma* as evidenced by their often playing betting games with *magumaguma,* he revealed a close but ambiguous relationship with *magumaguma.* Smiling, he explained that *magumaguma* did not often rob them since "it is like if your father is a thief he will not steal from you". His example of father and child relationship was revealing as some of these children were protected and sometimes assisted with basic things like food and shelter by some *magumaguma*. Aid workers and some independent children at times accused fellow independent children of being friends with *magumaguma* and sometimes tasking *magumaguma* to threaten to beat them and aid workers they would have clashed with. However, some independent children's engagements with *magumaguma* were for their own protection. To avoid being harassed by *magumaguma*, some children particularly based at the border post sometimes agreed to run errands for *magumaguma* like buying food, beer, and cigarettes. They were fully aware that *magumaguma* were criminals but said they had no option besides assisting them in their criminal activities since they were desperate to survive. This behaviour supports Norman Long's (1992) point that even under very difficult conditions, social actors can find ways of managing a situation. Some independent children demonstrated competence to analyse their vulnerable situation and devised strategic responses.

In another example, children learnt that they had some power over the *magumaguma*, reportedly feared even by State security agencies like the police. For instance, some children including girls, at times tipped the police on the whereabouts of *magumaguma*, particularly those who were terrorising them. Using their knowledge and experience of working with and living in the same environment with *magumaguma,* the children advised the police on how to

trap and arrest the criminal(s) they had conflict with. “We know where they operate, types of crimes each of them usually commits, where they socialise, sleep, live in Musina or Beitbridge and the times when they are drunk”, said Mukundi. Children observed that some *magumaguma* were aware of the power the former had through the knowledge they had about their movements and work. This knowledge amongst other factors, often deterred some *magumaguma* from harassing children, and befriended them instead. However, acts like these resulted in aid workers and law enforcement agents associating independent children work practices with criminality.

The conflation of child work with criminality, it can be argued, justified the use of criminal tactics against working independent children. For example, one day as I was discussing with independent migrant boys who were in the business of smuggling migrants about the challenges they faced, they revealed that they were not only robbed of the money they had by *magumaguma* but were also often robbed by South African Police Services officers. A 13 year-old boy, called Chris, told me that at one time the police took R1150 from him, money he had earned from smuggling undocumented migrants, and gave him R10 only for his efforts. “I failed to walk!” (He felt too weak to walk as he was too devastated by the loss of money), said Chris about this relatively big sum of money he had earmarked to use to buy groceries for his family in Zimbabwe. Several independent children who worked as human smugglers recounted similar experiences with police officers in the bush. Child work was producing crimes against children, a situation which generated concern from some aid workers and led them to lobby against these illegal acts by law enforcement agents.

Children were seen by aid workers as not calculative in taking dangerous and exploitative work. Once more this was seen as naivety by children. For instance, some children guarded business premises and vendors’ stalls at the border post in return for a sleeping place. Using the discourse of advancing “children’s best interests” aid workers justified why they had to intervene and protect these children. Whilst acknowledging that this work was dangerous, children argued that it contributed to solving their monetary and accommodation problems.

Aid workers often characterised working independent children as misguided in business dealings, not having the right or capacity to be far from their parents, views which these children contested. This situation can be illustrated by the constant and official critic of independent children who periodically went to Louis Tritchard, 100 km away to look for shopping receipts with VAT. After receiving the receipts, these children sold them to dealers operating at the Beitbridge border post. One of the boys called Chris said:

> Receipts which enabled us to earn money from shops like SPAR in Musina are no longer wanted at the border post (cannot claim VAT from them). So we decided to go to Louis Trichardt before that practice spreads there. You decide on what is better. You can get receipts because most people there do not know this business. In this area the *Venda* and *Sotho* now know this business. They also sell the receipts.

This practice, which they ironically often supported during unofficial times when they gave children their shopping receipts, was in conflict with organisation's child protection systems.

I included the above mentioned quotation because it is very revealing. Working children showed an ability to adapt to changed circumstances by taking responsibility for their lives and extended their work, even if it was criminal. This is evidenced by independent children who created space for themselves when they faced competition at their workplaces. Though their work was criminal, by going to work in other areas where business was high, these boys showed competence in reading the business environment, an ability which some aid workers thought by virtue of their young ages and limited education, the boys did not possess. Here I want to consider another example. Since independent children were living in a high risk environment, some children often made arrangements with respectable and apparently trustworthy adults at their workplaces, like elderly women who worked as vendors, to keep the money they earned and the goods like groceries they wanted to remit to their families in Zimbabwe. This strategy was particularly adopted by independent children who had not lived in Musina for long enough to be in a position to protect their possessions very well. However, some of these adults (including aid workers) abused this trust. To minimise this risk, children avoided dealing with adult migrants who were planning to visit their families in Zimbabwe in the near future. According to the children, such adults were under pressure to go home (Zimbabwe) with a lot of goods. Thus, children were learning the importance of scrutinising people's behaviour and not simply trusting anyone, and of understanding one's environment and how to derive a living within it. Independent children's ability to negotiate livelihoods supports the observation made by Finn, Nybell and Shook that children are "critically engaged in their social worlds, grappling with the realities of their lives, and taking individual and collective action to challenge and change their life circumstances, no matter how constrained they might be" (2011: 251). Ironically, it was such behaviour and challenges that were used to legitimise restrictions on independent children's movements at Musina and Beitbridge.

Though the practice of illegally claiming value added tax refund (VAT) was profitable, it presented many problems to children. Nonetheless, they were not 'broken' (see Honwana, Alcinda, and De Boeck, Filip, 2005). As Vespas explained:

> The problems which I experience as a child are that at times when I am asking for receipts I am physically assaulted or chased away. Some say 'you want a receipts so that you can commit fraud and what, what!' I am also insulted in a way which is very painful. At times you get this feeling that 'let me just stop dealing with receipts' but I cannot stop as it is my source of living.

Contrary to popular images of independent children as passive victims of adults who engage their services, these children sometimes considered themselves clever and stressed that they had power over these adults. Some children who worked as human smugglers viewed irregular migrants as fools. They called irregular migrants, regardless of their age or sex, "border jumpers", "*zobhas*" (stupid people) or "*magame*" (easy prey). These migrants were clearly afraid and ignorant of the process of crossing the border, including the required legal documents. A number of migrants, both children and adults told me that they were not aware of the risks of crossing the border at illegal entry points (see Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010). Indicating that the actions of some independent children and *magumaguma* were identical, children as young as 14 years exploited this situation to hoodwink and strike fear into the hearts of migrants, including adults. For example, Thabo aged 15, said if some "*zobhas*" tried to refuse or reduce the amount they were supposed to pay him, he often responded by speaking in a menacing voice that contrasted sharply with his small physique to browbeat migrants. His peer, aged 13, who was also involved in human smuggling, accused these migrants of "trying to be knowledgeable and tough". Thabo also revealed that sometimes in the spirit of bravado, he took on the persona of *magumaguma* and threatened to stone migrants refusing to co-operate. The undocumented migrants not sure of their surroundings in the security zone, would immediately honour the deal. Like street children, as observed by Droz, under such circumstances and environments, independent children's behaviour fell "outside traditional moral values and social structures, and [they] develop[ed] violent and illegal strategies to survive" (2006: 352 in Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010: 137). These children teased undocumented migrants who looked down upon them or ignored their advice when using illegal entry points, but also felt pity for them. 'We might be children but we live at this border. We know how to survive here,' explained a 13-year-old boy. Opposing the discourse of children as weak, this boy and his

peers did not construct themselves as weak. Often, undocumented migrants who ignored children's advice were violently robbed, raped, and even killed by *magumaguma*. These behaviours resulted in aid workers at times casting independent children as deviants they feared and should not support and associate with in spite of the official position that they were victims of the political and economic circumstances in Zimbabwe. Based on the idea of protecting children's "best interests", this situation also led aid workers to justify their efforts to help these children and remove them from an environment they viewed as corrupt and dangerous.

Ironically, some independent children capitalised on the dominance of the discourse of childhood innocence in this environment and used it to advance their criminal interests. Conversations with children who were smuggling migrants and also with several irregular migrants detained at the SMG revealed that some irregular migrants, informed by the discourse that children were innocent and not associated with criminality, saw children as trustworthy. Each migrant paid the smugglers R50 to be assisted to enter into South Africa using informal entry pathways. However, contradicting the notion that children are passive and innocent, some boys indicated that they sometimes ran away with items such mobile phones belonging to undocumented migrants when they were ambushed by *magumaguma*. The Zimbabwean based human smugglers were usually not allowed by the South African smugglers to escort their clients to the taxi rank on the South side or into Musina. Consequently, very few independent children who worked as human smugglers operated on both sides of the border. One of them who did was Caleb, an orphaned boy aged 17 who had an elder brother who at that time was a fearsome *magumaguma*. The Zimbabwean based smugglers including boys were paid in full, R300, by irregular migrants who wanted to cross the border. However, at the 'no-man's land' (area between South Africa and Zimbabwe on the Beitbridge) they often "sold" the irregular migrants to the South African based human smugglers who also included some of the boys who participated in this study. The irregular migrants were usually kept in the dark about these negotiations. Much to the surprise of the irregular migrants, their new escorts sometimes demanded more money from them in the bush or as they were crossing the Limpopo River yet the Zimbabwean based smugglers would have promised to escort the migrants to the South African side. As discussed in chapter one, wanting to reach the famed *Egoli* and fearing for their lives, irregular migrants often paid criminals and in the process ended up entering South Africa with no money and other valuables like mobile phones. Aid workers used practices like this to informally justify

the withdrawal of services from children participating in human smuggling or not treating them as innocent particularly at night when a lot of crimes were committed.

In response to perceived criminal behaviour, aid workers drawing from the discourse of child protection crafted interventions to control certain behaviours of independent children, for example, their sexuality and school attendance. One female aid worker who was at pains to convince one boy, aged 15 that he must not play truant from school, said, "If we do not intervene [for example, telling the children to attend school and reminding them not to miss school] the same children when they become adults will blame us". The aid worker's response provides valuable insights as to why aid workers, drawing from the discourses of parenthood, felt morally obliged to intervene in these children's lives. It also sheds light on why some of the aid workers viewed independent children negatively. Aid workers anticipated that these children would blame adults like them for having failed them as children. She emphasised that though they as aid workers were aware that these children were free to make a choice about attending school or not, aid workers "*sevanhu vakuru*" (as adults) were duty bound to dissuade children from "wasting time looking for money through migrating when time for that is going to come".

Opposing the view that they were villains or dangerous criminals, independent adolescent migrants represented themselves as petty criminals. They tried to normalise their criminal acts by moralising and downplaying them. These children said that they engaged in crime just to survive, for example, shoplifting and stealing shopping receipts from people holding shopping bags. Some of them dismissed allegations that they were involved in serious crime. "We are not criminals. That is why SAPS usually do not take us to court but just beat and release us," Thabani insisted. In a separate discussion, Chris, a 17 year old boy who had been brutalised by police officers in a nearby bush and then abandoned there for allegedly having robbed an illegal migrant added that, "They (police officers) are cowards. Usually they do not open a docket against us. They just beat us based on lies". Citing State-sponsored violence, unlawful detention and deportations made it possible for children to reproduce the discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability. It allowed independent children to challenge the idea that they are criminals. The State's failure to try children for the alleged crimes resulted in the dominant discourses of human rights and migration becoming largely invisible.

Although children engaged in illegal work activities, they also insisted that they upheld moral standards, something they were considered to be lacking. Questioning the much touted point that children act irresponsible away from their parents and guardians, some independent children represented themselves as people whose behaviour was still heavily influenced by

traditional and cultural practices. For example, Emmanuel, a boy who worked as a human smuggler, remarked, “When passing through the bush with undocumented migrants... *magumaguma* can rob or rape undocumented migrants but not my relatives”. Thus, a moral code existed among the children based on what kinds of crimes were accepted and what kinds were not, as well as who was an acceptable crime victim. Another example is that of three boys who aborted a plan to have sex for fun with a woman aged approximately 45 who shared the same work space with them. They had plotted to sexually arouse her by secretly putting an aphrodisiac pill called ‘Silver bullet’ in her soft drink. Although some of the boys had done this before to adult women, they decided to respect this woman after considering that she was a mother of three grown up children. This example, it can be argued, shows how, contrary to the thinking of a number of aid workers, there was a morality that guided independent children’s work and criminal activities.

The Unofficial Discourse: Pro-Child Work

South African law prohibits children who are 15 years and below from employment, and all children from dangerous and harmful work. While many aid workers formally approved of the government and non-governmental organisations’ policies against child work, the anti-child work discourse generated controversy and contestation amongst social actors at different times. This situation emanated from competing and conflicting discourses on child work in Musina. Bourdillon and Spittler comment that “the widespread view in African cultures is that work is essential to rearing children and preparing them for constructive adult life. According to this view, work provides necessary discipline and experience of responsibility (2012: 11)”. This view, which contradicts the dominant discourses in official interactions of children’s rights and anti-child work, was widely shared by aid workers during informal situations. A number of aid workers backed children’s argument that they had to work to alleviate poverty in their Zimbabwean households. Taking into cognisance that the major push factor was poverty, which service providers did not have resources to address, some aid workers questioned the utility of efforts to stop migrant children from working. This stance allowed them to endorse child work.

Working independent children, (except those suspected of being involved in crime), were perceived as respectful, trustworthy, disciplined and hard-working when interacting with employers, clients, and adults in general. Their childhood was cast positively and aid workers often tried to assist them, for example, on how to negotiate for better remuneration. On their

part, independent children often claimed to be respectful, honest, well cultured, vulnerable, but hard-working. They used these representations as social capital to get protection, jobs, to be allowed to work, for example, as porters who crossed the border illegally many times a day.

The fact that independent children including those living in shelters continued to experience a myriad of problems like food shortages and felt they had a responsibility to assist their families who were living in abject poverty provoked the question of whose interests were being served when aid workers and organisations stopped children from working. The discourse of best interest of children which is utilised in anti-child work remains contentious (Terrio, 2010). This point echoes the comment made by Horton in 2004 that "a preoccupation with rights ignores the fact that children will have no opportunity for development at all unless they survive… The most fundamental right of all is the right to survive" (cited in Einarsdottir, 2006: 196).

"We cannot provide them with most of their needs and buy things like sweets for them", said a senior aid worker. In this construction, independent children were expected and encouraged to partially fend for themselves. Explicitly or implicitly, aid workers were recognising children's potential to take some control of their lives despite the many constraints they faced in this context (see Long, 1992 on the actor oriented approach and human agency). This indicates the limitations of the idealised global notion of childhood which views children as dependents and free from work except play. Thus, failure by aid workers to adequately provide independent children with most of their needs forced the former to 'accept' or endorse child work. This is the case as ideally, "in a childhood seen as legitimate, adults must provide for children's needs", write Andre and Godin (2013: 8).

a. Independent Working Children Countering Anti-child work Discourses

Working children countered the anti-child work discourses in various ways. For example, Moses, aged 15, dismissed the popular idea promoted by aid workers and other adults that they knew what was best for children as 'parents' and adults. Aid workers felt children should not focus too much on working. On the contrary, Moses, like many other children declared: "I did not come to South Africa to attend school or to be idle at the shelter like a chicken on a feeding scheme. I am here to work". This suggests that attempts to stop children from working neglected the interaction of the child with society (Ekpe-Otu, 2009). Contrary to their portrayal during formal interactions as immature people and free from work, these

children were conscious of the societal problems, their responsibilities and wanted to contribute to improving their lives. It is worth noting that these children dismissed efforts to make them focus on education alone as the service providers were not providing most of the things they needed. One 12-year-old boy highlighted the tension between 'appropriate' childhood (focusing on education only) and poverty, two antagonistic aspects in the lives of independent migrant children, whose tension they had to negotiate. As the 12-year-old boy further said, "Attending school is good, but my family and I cannot live on education alone". He liked the intervention of being assisted to access education in Musina by aid workers. But he continued working whilst living at the shelter. His response, which was similar to those of other school going children, reinforces the point made by Norman Long and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (1994) that social actors informed by their lifeworlds at times do not take intervention as given but can also mediate and transform it. Showing that they are not passive recipients of intervention, some school going children often went to school in the morning and did "piece jobs" in the afternoon after school. They also worked during weekends and holidays. However, some days especially month-ends when business was good and when they wanted to raise money to buy something (like school uniform) or to send some crucial items home, they absented themselves from school. These acts were criticised by aid workers who wanted a perfect school attendance record. The actor-oriented and interface approach allows us to identify this point of "discontinuity between the different (and often incompatible) actors' lifeworlds, including not only 'local' actors but also 'intervening' institutional actors or other stakeholders" (Long, 2001: 240). Both aid workers and independent children appreciated the importance of education but had different views on the role of paid work in children's lives.

The children felt that their portrayal by some aid workers as people who had a negative attitude towards education was unfair, misinformed and an over-generalization. Poverty, erratic opening of schools in Zimbabwe and abuse at home forced many of them to abandon school. Only a few children were attending school in Musina while many either failed to enrol in South African schools due to administrative and xenophobic challenges or simply did not have the desire for schooling. Some children dismissed aid workers' argument that continuing with school was in their best interest by arguing that not continuing was actually in their best interest as they did not have the capacity to do well academically. Some independent children dodged several attempts by aid workers to enrol them in local schools. However, they pointed out that their self-image was being battered by the dominant rhetoric of formal schooling being good for every child.

Besides work being a survival strategy, work generated social capital to working migrant children. Mukundi like other children who opposed the popular and official representation of children as victims of work commented:

> As I see it, if I am told to stop working, people will donate their clothes to me as they would be saying I do not have money and I am not working. They will say 'Give him as he has no money to spend'. They do not buy (new) clothes for them [children who do not have money]. You can also fail to get food when you come back [to the shelter]. You would be forced to sleep on an empty stomach as you would not be having money since you cannot look for money. That situation is not good. I work so that I can get money to buy clothes and also be in a position to visit my home [(in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe] among other things.

Working independent children's claim that they had a social responsibility to support their family echoes the ACRWC's Article 31a. Independent children's behaviour was in line with a number of authors' observations that it is a common practice in Sub-Saharan Africa for children to be involved in the economic activities of their households (Mann, 2012; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Clark-Kazak, 2011; Hillier, 2007). A number of children claimed that they shouldered the responsibility of supporting their poor families, including siblings. Independent children's sense of obligation to support their families echoes the point made by Boyden in her study of how Ethiopian children contributed to their household's livelihoods, that "coping with adversity is a collective rather than an individual responsibility" (2009: 129). Actually, children in many societies compliment their parents and guardians in raising their younger siblings (Lancy, 2008). Aid workers often reminded children about their poverty stricken parents, siblings, relatives and country and encouraged these children to send some remittances to their families. Children who were perceived as neglecting their responsibilities were derided by aid workers. They were seen as lacking social intelligence. Some children thought they were being belittled by these aid workers as they had long assumed the responsibilities of looking after their ailing parents, guardians, grand parents, siblings and themselves.

Of note, child work generated social capital to independent children. For example, children often expressed their plans to work in order to return home with dignity. As discussed in chapter one, Zimbabweans coming home from South Africa often invest in a façade of financial prosperity. Timothy (13 years) expected that "After the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the South Africans will be at it again, attacking foreigners and chasing them from

this country. When that happens I don't want to go back to Zimbabwe without even a pair of underpants. If I do that, people will laugh at me". The shame of failure would be too much to bear and consequently it facilitated the agency of children. Contrary to ideas that they are immature and are not under social pressure to do well economically, Timothy and other child migrants worked towards earning reasonable amounts of money to help out their families..

According to Davidson (2011: 468) "dependence is a crucial discursive marker of the child's difference from the rugged adult individual". When I asked Victor aged 16, who lived in a shelter for boys, about what made him happy about living there he said, "I am happy that we are allowed to go and look for money in town". His happiness of being treated as a competent person who could work was shared by many children who lived in the shelters. As will be discussed, this freedom to work was limited or at times withdrawn on the grounds that the children were being protected from exploitative, harmful and dangerous work. However, it is important to point out that children's happiness was not often shared by the aid workers who assumed that work and school were mutually exclusive. This assumption was recently challenged by Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010).

b. Demeaning Working children's Spending Patterns

Embedded in the discourse that children should contribute towards household economy, aid workers were very interested in how children spent the money they earned. Though they acknowledged that some children were helping their families, there was also a view which circulated amongst some aid workers and children – anchored on the discourse of children as immature – that left to their own devices, they were wasteful. For instance, they criticised children for buying sweets. Evidence that aid workers held this view is shown by their argument that some children's practice of buying their own food was imperative as the food which was served in shelters "did not taste nice and the diet [was] very rigid". In response to criticism that they bought useless stuff, independent children deployed their childhood status to justify the choice of goods they bought. For example, a 14-year-old said that childhood was a period of freedom from responsibilities and argued: "Care workers forget we are children. We also want to eat those things their children are eating. They expect us to use every cent we get to buy serious stuff like cooking oil, sugar etc. for our families". This position which they at times expressed during informal interactions, allowed independent children to spurn adult responsibilities. Working children felt that as minors, they should not be constrained by the responsibility to work, a position which was disputed by aid workers

expected the children to support their families. This view reinforced the idea that adults know what is good for children and therefore children should obey them. But situations like this revealed that the invoking of discourses that see childhood as fun and freedom from economic responsibility is very situational.

Some of the children initially refused to lower their standards of life or the work they were prepared to do; but the need to be with their working friends, maintain their social status like wearing expensive clothes (see Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010) and their suffering, such as having a rigid poor diet, forced them to do so. Children who spent their days idle were met with disapproval by both aid workers and other children (see Boyden, 2009). Working children sometimes managed to buy their own food, clothes, and goods to support their families in Zimbabwe – something which a number of children greatly wished to do. Within a few days, these children's resolve not to do dirty work was eroded as they joined others in looking for any type of 'piece job'.

The portrayal of children as responsible family members is contrary to their portrayal as people who have "self-destructive agency" (Gigengack, 2008: 216), no capacity to make rational socio-economic decisions and who are gullible to peer pressure. Indeed, it could be argued that in this case, child work is one of the strategies of avoiding 'self-destructive agency'. "People (children) should be allowed to go outside and do some small business so that they can generate money for their needs so as to avoid prostitution", said Lulu, aged 17, who left the shelter to stay with her boyfriend in Mutshongo, one of the high density areas in Musina town. Another example which shows that independent children make calculated decisions is that of 16-year-old, Thabani, who narrated his story of being teased by other children and adults, including criminals, for working as a herd boy. One *magumaguma* mockingly asked him, "How can you come to South Africa to herd goats?" He countered his critics who considered his work dirty, which was not consistent with the popular image of South Africa as having "honourable" and highly paying jobs by saying, "Money earned from working as a herd boy or fetching firewood for sale is still money". Dismissing the discourse of exploitation at workplaces, he emphasised that the most important thing was earning an honest living, extricating himself and his family from poverty. Some aid workers supported this position. Thabani rationalised that since his move to South Africa to work, he had been well nourished but not as a consequence of eating food provided at the shelter. He claimed that his grandmother in Zimbabwe took this as a cue that he was living well in South Africa and should continue working. Thabani's statement worked to delegitimise aid workers' efforts to stop child work.

From Mukundi's statement, it is also clear that some children in this humanitarian context did not want to be reduced to charity cases, deserving to be given second hand clothes. This position was shared by a number of independent children particularly from relatively economically well-off households in Zimbabwe. They opposed the dominant discourse of anti-child work as it did not allow them to meet their basic needs like food and fulfil important social obligations like visiting family in Zimbabwe especially during major public holidays like Christmas and Easter. As a result although working children acknowledged that they were being grossly exploited, they rationalised the situation by commenting, as Thabani did: "at least I am able to roast some meat and do not sleep on an empty stomach like what most children from Zimbabwe periodically experience. Every week I get paid". As Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010) observe, paid work provides children with a sense of achievement. Coming from a country where jobs were scarce, having a job was a mark of success on its own. These social events or factors were of great symbolic value to many of these children.

Independent children were very determined to change their economic circumstances. Consequently, efforts by aid workers and police to stop them from working failed. For example, within a few days of the police launching a heavy campaign against child work at the border post, the police relented and turned a blind eye to working children. Although Thabo, aged 14, claimed that the police listened to their pleas for mercy, Melusi aged 15, and other children attributed this quick loss of enthusiasm to stop child work to fatigue of dealing with the multitudes of migrant children from Zimbabwe, many of whom had been apprehended and deported by the South African Police several times but continued to come back. It is this behaviour that led aid workers to characterise these children during informal interactions as strong and resilient on the work front in spite of contradictorily describing them as victims in formal interactions.

Aid workers and independent children acknowledged that the latter's agency to change their economic circumstances was limited (see Bourdieu, 1977 cited in Riter, 1992) as they could not defend themselves from arrest by the South African police. Mukundi explained: "When they are serious like soon after cases of robbery have been reported to them…they round us up, beat us thoroughly and then simply let us go without detaining us". At such times, the children represented themselves as powerless and vulnerable. Ironically, they revealed that soon after committing these brutal acts against children, the police officers would apologise to them by claiming that "It was a mistake". Children claimed that the police officers often injured children during these operations. Actually, I saw some of the wounds

children had after being viciously assaulted by the police. As stated elsewhere in this chapter, aid workers on their part also offered sympathises to working children who were victims of police brutality, a position which contradicts their anti-child work position.

Drawing mainly from the notion that children have a responsibility to contribute to improving their families and communities during difficult times, aid workers framed independent children as victims and often sympathised with them. So despite the anti-child work laws' existence, several aid workers moralised the practice of working by some working children, and by so doing rejected the discourses that framed childhood as fun, freedom from economic responsibility and the need for children to be located in the domestic sphere. For instance, one of the aid workers argued that "the child labour law is not relevant to people who have left [behind] orphaned siblings to fend for". He supported aid workers' often non-intervention position against child work for children below 16, saying, "As long as it is not strenuous, exploitative and in unfavourable working conditions". This reasoning buttresses the discourse that children can work as long as the work does not threaten their well-being.

After finding out that the better South African life they had imagined whilst they were in Zimbabwe was a mirage, independent children usually found themselves struggling to find food, temporary jobs, fair compensation and safe accommodation. This precarious situation forced children to adapt. The need to be self-reliant and self-employed was heightened. A number of children revised their thoughts on how to earn a living after experiencing exploitation at various workplaces. Some of these children even lowered their standards of the type of work they would accept and the amount of money they expected. Some, who had had privileged backgrounds in Zimbabwe, and no history of working to support themselves, quickly realised that they had to learn to work under these difficult conditions. These children found working life taxing but necessary in their lives. Some aid workers argued that their inability to provide children with all their needs like clothing, school uniforms, pocket money, a varied diet, and material support for their families in Zimbabwe had a debilitating effect on their campaigns against harmful and exploitative child work. "When we try to stop children from working, they accuse us of wanting to make them vulnerable and for frustrating their efforts to help themselves and their families," said one aid worker. So situations like this resulted in aid workers shifting their understanding of these children from passive to active actors who moralised their precarious situation in order to persuade or force aid workers to accept child work.

A number of independent children dismissed a group of aid workers and police officers who argued against child work as not basing their argument on evidence and being ignorant of children's needs. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, the aid workers and police officers demanded that children stop working. One 10-year-old boy who lived with his parents in Beitbridge, rejected these adults' denigrating remarks about children's work and argued, "I don't have a problem. I only want money to buy sweets". Showing how children negotiated the value of their work, something which Nieuwenhuys (1996) called for in anthropological research, the boy invoked notions of childhood as a period of fun and freedom from economic responsibility. He regularly crossed the border without any valid travelling document to do odd jobs in Musina and spend some days at the border post on the South African side. Undermining aid workers and police's efforts to stop children from working, he nonetheless supported the dominant discourse of schooling as one of the best sites for child rearing and argued that he usually visited South Africa after attending school in Zimbabwe in the morning and during school holidays. He further criticised aid workers and police's efforts to stop child work by claiming that his parents supported his efforts since work was not interfering with his school work.

During an encounter with aid workers and members of SAPS, independent children argued that staying at a shelter without being allowed to work was counter-productive. One of them argued that "it's the same as going back to Zimbabwe". Though a considerable number of children admitted that they had blundered in coming to South Africa when they were still young and without any educational qualifications, independent children often vowed that they would rather endure the suffering at various workplaces in South Africa than return home as failures. Their position is in line with the dominant idea that associates migration with economic success and also the fear of being seen as failures, often evoked by migrants to avoid or postpone returning to their countries of origin (Kankonde, 2010).

Dismissing service providers' claims that they knew the needs of children and that children were being exploited and abused, children drew on the discourses of survival and child participation to counter efforts by aid workers to exclude them from the workplace. A 15 year old boy who had been living in Musina for two years spoke for many independent children when he emphasised remarked: "We didn't come to South Africa to eat and sleep. We crossed the border to work." Consequently, the discourse that children should make a contribution to the improvement of the lives of their families and their own worked to successfully frustrate aid workers' numerous efforts to stop independent children from working. For instance, many independent children, particularly boys, defied efforts to have

them placed in shelters as doing so would limit opportunities to work. Similarly, a number of those living in shelters often left in the early hours of the morning to work or look for work and returned very late at night, a behaviour which raised child protection and discipline concerns amongst aid workers.

Though a number of independent children were pro-work, they were very critical of how some of their colleagues, and other independent children, were spending the money they earned. They did not see childhood as being about childhood fun and being free from economic responsibility. For example, I asked Terrence aged 18, who had lived at the shelter for boys for a long time and was widely respected by both aid workers and independent children to tell me what people were thinking about Edson who was working but was in a wheel chair. I told him that I had heard that Edson bought a lot of goods. Terrence responded by asking me a rhetorical question: "It's like I'm paid R15000 but do a R1000 budget every month. What does it reveal?" He felt that this boy and some other working children were wasteful and not making progress in life. He further criticised independent working children including adult migrants who had been in South Africa for three years but only owned a radio by concluding, "It means they don't think". He described some children who admire these children as ignorant. He added:

> These young boys like Edson made a lot of money a long time ago. They used to spend R300 on computer games. I don't appreciate that. He does not think. If he was clever he would have bought things like a home divider [a piece of household furniture which hosts, for example, a television set, radio, plates etc.]. He spend money [he does not save money] and is stubborn [does not listen to advice on how to spend money]. It differs the way we think but I have no respect for him. He used to earn a lot of money.

Despite being pro-work, a reading of Terrence's statements shows that he and other children who described themselves as responsible, partly shared the dominant representation of working independent children as immature. An important point to note is that some independent children and aid workers conditionally disapproved of children working. Child work was generally considered fine if aid workers perceived that child as spending money on "*zvinhu zvine musoro*" (meaningful things). The ease with which aid workers dismissed children's competency to know valuable from worthless things indicates the levels of adult superiority over children regarding the ability to think constructively and also shows the challenges working children faced when they bought goods of their own choice.

Working had important social and economic meanings for independent children as reflected in how family backgrounds shaped independent children's perspectives and options on how to eke out a living. Their priority was to raise any amount of money by any means necessary to buy basic things for their families in Zimbabwe. Observations confirmed that they were buying these goods, stored them and later took or sent them home to Zimbabwe. The children's agency, value of children's work and the joy they experienced when they made a contribution or bought things they wanted, was not fully appreciated by aid workers who usually emphasised that child work was wrong. As I will discuss below it is attitudes like this, of devaluing children's work, which resulted in lethargic responses to calls by working children for protection at workplaces.

Aid workers who believed that children should make an economic contribution sometimes portrayed independent children as competent people with a high sense of responsibility. They constructed children as having the ability to actively determine their lives (see Prout and James, 1990). One care worker made this remark: "I am impressed by their ability to save money and their unselfishness to use their money to buy basics for their siblings, parents and even grandparents". Of note these images of migrant children as responsible members of communities with the financial competence to manage the money they earned were not circulated during formal interactions. They opposed the aid workers and other service providers' understandings of childhood, which is against the promotion of child work. Consequently, aid workers, contradicting their official position of clamping down on child work, tacitly supported children through allowing and encouraging them to work, helping them find work, negotiate working conditions[56], sometimes assisting working children having labour disputes with their employers, keeping their earnings and groceries. Representing working independent children as "naïve and vulnerable" (Meyer, 2007: 89) they sometimes assisted to negotiate for fair employment remuneration and work conditions. Some sick independent children were given advice on how to negotiate to be released from work for a few hours in order to seek medical help. Ironically, some of the aid workers themselves employed the independent children.

Some aid workers went further to advise independent children on how they could successfully eke out a living in South Africa. For instance, when socialising with independent children particularly the ones they were close to, aid workers at times advised children to visit their homes or to phone their parents in order to turn around their fortunes in South Africa.

[56] Some were given advice on how to negotiate to be rseleased from work for a few hours to seek medical help.

Aid workers argued that if these children's parents and guardians missed or were worried about them, that would not auger well for their well-being and development. Following a local/traditional belief that one can only prosper with the support of parents and the ancestral spirits, they attributed the success which some independent children and also some adult migrants enjoyed, for example, getting well-paying temporary jobs to "their parents and ancestors being happy". Generally, *mamhepo* (evil spirits) were blamed for constraining migrants' efforts to successfully negotiate livelihoods. At one time, Daniel, one of the independent migrant boys told me: "I am struggling to get casual work and get paid. When I get paid, I quickly lose the money. My relatives must be complaining in Zimbabwe. Every time they complain they invite *mamhepo* to wreak havoc in my life". The way he explained his misfortunate in the world of work corroborates the findings of Mangena and Mupondi (2011) who found out that some workers in Zimbabwe blamed bad spirits for causing them to lose their jobs. In Musina, on several occasions some children who experienced a spate of misfortunes in their lives also tended to either blame *mamhepo* or their ancestors for allowing unfortunate incidents to happen. As such, regularly phoning home was a ritual of appeasing the ancestral spirits from attacking the migrant. Aid workers keen to see independent children protected and succeed as migrant workers warned or sensitised them about the dangers posed by *mamhepo*.

One of the unanticipated findings of this study was that contrary to the official and dominant discourse of anti-child work and in support of the idea that children should help their societies if the situation demands, some aid workers celebrated working migrant children who were making a difference in their lives. Aid workers had no kind words for children they perceived as lazy (who spent their days doing nothing at the shelter) and depended on aid. Aid workers' behaviour served to embarrass but also teach and motivate other boys to emulate the hard working boys who often had money and regularly remitted money or groceries to their families (see Lancy, 2008: 169-171). This situation further reinforces the point that the disapproval of children's work was complex and situational.

Supporting the point made by Norman Long that actors have "capacity to process social experience and devise ways of coping with life" (1992: 22), independent children often attempted to create opportunities for themselves to overcome challenges in their working lives. This point was acknowledged by many aid workers. Realising that they would save a lot of money if they did not continue to live in 'comfort' in temporary shelters far away from their workplaces, a number of children opted to live near their sources of livelihood. However, these were unsafe places. This can be illustrated by the case of Molife, aged 17,

who during the week lived in the open or under bridges at the border post, where he worked as a vendor, porter and human smuggler. He minimised the discomfort by spending the weekend in the shelter for boys. Due to weak monitoring of the movements of boys in and out of the shelter, a cause for concern among aid workers and other service providers, Molife had dual 'homes' in Musina for over a year. Ironically, this behaviour resulted in children being framed as adaptive people, an idea which opposed the view that they were victims.

Aid workers' practice is inconsistent with their rhetoric on child work. Though aid workers often officially portrayed independent children as victims, they also tried to disassociate these children from victimhood in order to represent their work positively. They acknowledged that working children made meaningful contributions to their family economies (see Bourdillon and Spittler, 2012). For example, though humanitarian workers usually, particularly during official interactions, criticised children for being incompetent to face many adversities and underrating them at work, in line with the discourse of childhood innocence, that children are immature, disempowered, lacking protective agency, they in private acknowledged that working was providing these children with some competencies like saving and making a differences in their lives (see Boyden, 1999). One female worker, extolling the competence of working children opposed the orthodox discourses that frame childhood as lacking competence or skills of adults (Lancy, 2008) and said, "These children can save money better than many of us adults". Viewing children as such allowed aid workers to informally and formally support child work, for example, safely storing working children's groceries, keeping their money and assisting them to get paid by exploitative employers. By not undermining what working children were doing with the money they earned, the aid worker quoted above, like other aid workers, also opposed the view that children's work is characterised by playfulness.

Aid workers often recounted stories of these children working hard to contribute towards supporting their poor households and often without any parent or guardian monitoring the type of work activities they were engaging in. Many had these responsibilities thrust upon them by circumstances beyond their control like death of parents – meaning they had transited from the childhood category to adulthood. Thus, during these informal times, aid workers represented independent children as responsible children.

In addition, aid workers contested the idea that children lack legitimacy as workers and that the coming of children to South Africa was an unmitigated disaster. They accorded active agency to working independent children and shifted the boundaries of childhood. They opposed the ideas that children are immature and cannot work. They implicitly urged adults

not to despair when they see working children. These children were accorded respect and credibility. Thus, in this context, when children demonstrated an ability to save money or handle their earnings prudently, the discourses of childhood innocence, children having freedom from economic responsibility and the need for children to be located in the domestic sphere, were silenced. Of note also here is the reinforcement of the point made by Turnball, Hernandez and Reyes (2009) that the competency of a person, irrespective of age, is connected to the setting in which the person is located.

Drawing from their personal experiences as well as those of other children, working children were learning that employers seek to maximise their profits and reduce labour costs by any means available. For instance, some local people often refused to honour their pledge to pay children fairly after they had finished doing the work. After children had finished working without having agreed on the amount of payment, the unscrupulous employers who would have appeared friendly before the children started work often turned cold, threatening, and simply dictated the amount they were going to pay for the services they had received. A number of children complained that on several occasions they had not been paid at all. Some employers gave children working for them some food, usually very little; afterwards they would give the children very little money claiming that they had also spent money on their food. It was often a herculean task for the hungry children who were also under pressure to support their families, to negotiate for fair remuneration.

However, some of these children's responses to such exploitative tactics stood in contrast to the dominant idea that children are powerless to avoid exploitation. They developed plans to minimise exploitation. For example, they refused to work before having finalised with the employer the specific amount of money they were going to earn. In addition, some children, regardless of being very hungry or urgently looking for money to buy groceries to send/take home, refused to eat any food offered by the employer in order not to weaken their bargaining power. The more confident children claimed that they would first ask whether food was part of the payment for their labour before they ate what they were being offered. These practices lent credibility to the assertion that independent children actively strategise against exploitative practices but that their efforts need to be supported so that they benefit from their labour.

Some working children were countering the dominant narrative amongst aid workers that they are passively being subjected to abuse and exploitation at workplaces. As discussed above, they developed strategies to minimise exploitation. Another example: if the employer insisted that they "first work and discuss payment later or that we will be paid later", some

children refused to work. Such employers usually did not honour these agreements. Children also shared information of the names of people who exploited them. Another strategy children used was to, “Accept the work but you don’t apply yourself in doing the work”, said one boy. However, desperation for money often undermined their negotiations for a fair deal. Many ended up working for persons with history of exploiting workers. Another example of a strategy children used to counter exploitation was revealed by one 18 year old girl who worked as a shop assistant for a *magura* (Asian shop owner). She revealed that she earned R600 per month, which was not enough. “Because they don’t pay me well, I steal clothes from the shop every day and sell them so that I have extra cash to compensate the low salary that I earn”, she said. Her action challenges representation of independent children as passive victims of exploitation. Giddens (1979: 72) writes, “All social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them”. This statement applies to some independent children in Musina working under difficult conditions. But this evidence also lends support to the discourse that work is destructive to children as they are immature.

In stark contrast to the dominant and official construction of independent children as too young to contribute economically to their households and communities, aid workers often rejected the discourses of childhood being about play, freedom from economic responsibility and being restricted to the domestic sphere. They often asked independent children about who was assisting their parents/grandparents to do household chores or work in the fields and who was developing their country now that they were in South Africa. The latter question was usually asked during those moments when aid workers were thinking or discussing the state of the politically and economically troubled Zimbabwe or the negative impact of the massive emigration of people from this country. During these moments, aid workers did not value child migration but saw it as a costly exercise which disturbed household economies and a national economy. Aid workers framed independent children as people who were not contributing to dealing with the many pressing issues in their specific homes and country in general. Aid workers’ negative casting of these children was in sharp contrast to how they usually and officially portrayed them as victims of adult and government behaviour. Consequently, aid workers tried to prevent independent children from “running away” from interventions by insisting that they listen to them. For example, when they urged children to return home or be reunited with their parents and relatives in order to have proper childhoods.

However, at times the discourse that children need to work also prevailed. Some aid workers argued that work empowers children to support themselves. This can be illustrated by the case of Victor who was taking control of his life:

> There is no one who can buy clothes for me. My grandmother and aunt are the only ones [close relatives] who are still alive. There is no one who can give them money even for grinding maize [to make mealie meal[57]]. So I said to myself if I work I will be able to give them money for grinding maize. If I am working I will be able to go home and leave them with some money for the grinding mill service as well as buy things which a child needs like a radio, television and so on. I can also buy a phone which will enable me to communicate with my relative in Cape Town. I work so that I can get some money but I also want to balance issues [like attending school].

This context of children's lives in which they have a heightened sense of responsibility to economically support themselves and contribute to their households as called for by the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of Children was often officially obscured by aid workers whose practices towards children were mainly informed by anti-child labour ideas. Clearly conscious of the power of the discourses of anti-child labour and the pro-schooling for minors (discussed earlier), the children themselves as revealed by Victor above when he talks about "balancing issues" also wanted to attend school.

Contrary to the notion that child work was disempowering children and therefore should be stopped, children learnt to take calculated risks at their workplaces. This can be illustrated by the case of Kumbulani who one day in August 2009, early in the evening around 6pm refused to carry a cross border trader's blankets to Zimbabwe for R15. He wanted to be paid R20 as he said it was late to cross the border and then be able to cross back to South Africa that day. "It is very difficult that time to cross the border without papers. To cross that time one has to cross through the river which is very dangerous. It is also dangerous to cross on the bridge as *magumaguma* will be fully operating".

"One finger-nail cannot crush a louse" (Chimhundu, 1980: 42). This *Shona* proverb suggests that it is impossible to solve some problems alone. Following the Western discourse which is often emphasised to children through cartoon characters like Barney, that 'sharing is caring' (see Fountain, 2008), independent children were often accused by aid workers of not sharing problems and assisting one another. As stated earlier, contrary to their

[57] This mealie meal is used to prepare *sadza* (thick porridge). *Sadza* is called *pap* by South Africans.

characterisation as social misfits, particularly when they used unscrupulous means to support themselves, children often acted with a high degree of altruism to support each other by sharing food (see Swart, 1989 in Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010). Although some new arrivals from Zimbabwe were reluctant to seek the help of others to deal with their work problems as they did not trust other people, a number of children with time learned this wisdom. They were consulting others, including aid workers, on how to negotiate for fair compensation before or after working, how to deal with anyone who was not willing to pay them for the services they had rendered and many other problems they faced at the workplace. For example, children who worked as vendors were often accused of failing to account for all the money they had received from selling goods. One of them was Brighton, aged 13, whose highest level of education was grade three. He had difficulties in accounting for the eggs he sold. Other boys often assisted him to do so and showed him how eliminate short falls. They also assisted him to claim his wage from one local adult woman who had been refusing to pay him for many months. Using their social capital as children who needed protection, these children threatened the woman with reporting her to humanitarian workers. Fully aware of the discourse of children's vulnerability, these children used it against this woman who, fearing accusations of child abuse, grudgingly paid Brighton a portion of his wage.

The 'incompetence' associated with the state of childhood is an ideological construction. This was evidenced by children also learning to take control of their lives through acknowledging their weaknesses and seeking help from others. After bitter experiences of losing their hard earned money, some acknowledged their incompetence in handling money. For instance, they regretted wasting money on sex workers and "buying useless things like expensive food and clothes". Children learnt to consult their colleagues or other adults (including aid workers) on what to buy, the cheapest place to buy goods, and where to safely store their goods. It was common to hear children advising each other on how to live within their means and to stop spending money on women, through serious talk and teasing each other. "Some people are there to use you… When you have money you just have to be careful", said a 14-year-old boy as he urged other boys to remain focused on why they came to South Africa. Children's ability to devise coping strategies to deal with challenges like exercising financial prudence and drawing lessons from their daily experiences show that they were acting on, as well as being acted upon, by their social world (see Christiansen, *et al*., 2006).

Though aid workers often associate childhood with economic dependency, aid workers' understandings of childhood tended to shift during official interactions with children. Faced with a critical shortage of food in the shelter, girls as young as ten were at times forced to look for food. Every day, particularly after SCUK stopped direct interventions, as evening approached, a high number of children became visibly desperate and restless about where they were going to find vegetables or meat (*pap* was provided through the shelter). Marginalising the consequences of inadequate support to these children, some aid workers and some girls buttressed the notion that migrant girls are immoral and vulnerable. This shows how the structural aspects of child migration tend to be ignored, which allows for an understanding rooted in children's qualities.

CHAPTER 5: Formal and Informal Representation of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality in Context, Contest and Paradox

Introduction

On 12 August 2009, my first day of fieldwork in Musina, an anonymous man dropped a letter at the Christian Women's Ministry's run shelter for women and girls complaining of being "abused" by a young migrant woman who lived there. He accused the woman in her 20s of "liking money so much". He appealed to the church and the church management to intervene before his pay day and put a stop to the woman's practice of "only loving him when he [had] money". As the female aid worker and I were discussing this case, she became incensed when she saw some independent migrant girls dressed in tight fitting jeans and mini-skirts leaving the shelter, claiming that they were going to do some 'piece jobs'[58]. She remarked to me, "Children from your country like men a lot". A few days later another female humanitarian worker but working for another NGO which provided legal advice to migrants weighed in pathologising these children: "They like boys too much. They are too young but they enjoy having sex". Their statements, which oppose the image of the asexual child and implicitly upheld the idea, which circulates in the Global North that "African women are licentious" (Fassin, 2012: 172) shows that there appeared to be a regime of childhood morality, which became increasingly prevalent during my fieldwork. The then researcher at the African Centre for Migration and Society, Tesfalem Araia, during a working visit to Musina, was told by one NGO official, "we believe that almost all of the migrant women are involved in prostitution" (2009: 6). This representation of young Zimbabwean migrant women and girls as lacking sexual discipline was in sharp contrast to my perception of this population. It turned out that the aid workers' representation of the sexuality of Zimbabwean girls which opposed dominant way of seeing childhood as a time of innocence was common amongst both local people and foreign migrants who claimed that immoral sexual practices were the norm amongst migrant Zimbabwean girls (see Araia 2009). It reinforced the stereotype that migrant girls and women are "morally weak and lacking in self-control in relation to sex" (Lalor, 2004: 452).

[58] 'Piece jobs' are temporary casual jobs.

The frequent reference to sexuality made it difficult for me to ignore the subject of understanding independent children's sexuality and examining the discourses that frame their sexuality in the humanitarian context. So through drawing attention to the tension between moral ideals and pragmatism in the perceptions of sex generally, I show how sexuality is one of the central sites through which one can understand the lives and lived experiences of independent migrant children as represented by themselves and aid workers. I explore how aid workers disciplined sexually active children or rein scribed expected adult/child behaviours.

However, and contrary to the often stated concern about sexuality of children, I initially had problems in gaining access to children and aid workers' views on children's sexuality. My experiences are not unique as other researchers had also experienced this (see Goldman and Goldman, 1982). I was only able to lift the veil of secrecy surrounding independent children's sexuality months after starting fieldwork. Interestingly, it happened one night at the border post in the presence of commercial sex workers, people frequently deemed morally corrupt by independent children. Secrecy was broken when some boys who were gambling overheard commercial sex workers who also worked as vendors during the day, exchanging insults and sexual obscenities after a misunderstanding. I decided to use the occasion to casually introduce the subject of sexuality and asked them how they coped with this type of life, implicitly referring to the sexualised talk. Amidst some muted laughter, as they were conscious that this was a taboo topic for them as children, there was a chorus of agreement amongst them when one of them responded by saying, "*dhara* (old man) this is the order of life at this border and what you are hearing is very light. We often witness sexual acts involving these adult women". These boys exemplified this point by recounting the sexual escapades of sex workers, some of their friends and colleagues' with adult women, including commercial sex workers. The way they positioned themselves seems to reproduce the view that children start as "noble, unselfish and joyous creatures until society crushed or corrupted their spirit" (Takanishi, 1978: 11 cited in Valentine, 1996: 584). Concerned about the state of the moral order in this sexualised environment, aid workers tried to remove these children from this environment as they conceptualised childhood as a period that "needed to be nurtured and conserved" (Valentine, 1996: 584).

In this chapter I critically analyse the social constructions of independent children's sexuality and try to understand how they interacted with power structures. I try to understand the ways in which ideas about childhood sexuality were represented and circulated in humanitarian work, unpacking how multiple "knowledges" about childhood sexuality and

sexual meanings were contested in interactions between children and aid workers as well as the "strategies" pursued by individual actors. In addition, I raise a number of questions in this chapter such as which discourses were used to reinforce, silence or challenge independent children's sexualities? I highlight the contradictions in the representations of independent children – their de-sexualisation and re-sexualisation.

The Sociological Context of Children's Sexuality

The social milieu of independent children in Musina had a bearing on the representations of their sexuality. Ahmadi defines sexuality as a "sociocultural construction and is subject to change and transformation" (2003: 317). Ahmadi observes that "the construction of an individual's sexuality takes place, therefore, within many different arenas and contexts" (2003: 317).

With respect to children, sexuality is often a highly moralised, contentious issue (Robinson, 2012; Burman, 2008; Clarke, 2004d; Kehily and Montgomery, 2009; van der Riet, 2009) and "contingent upon time and place" (Kehily and Montgomery, 2009: 6). For many adults the state of being a child is associated with sexual innocence (Clarke, 2004d; Archard, 1993). Acknowledgement of sexual interest and practice is a common but unofficial marker of the distinction between a child and an adult (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Robinson, 2012). Among adults, there is a common contradiction between moral ideals of confining sex to marriage and widespread practice of casual and recreational sex. Guardians often fear expressions of sexuality by their children as it is "considered an 'adults' only' domain, dangerous to children" (Robinson, 2012: 257). This motivates them to protect children who are participating "in the social, economic and political worlds of adults" (Robinson, 2012: 260) including the sexual one, as they see them as morally weak and potentially corruptible (see Moran, 2001; Foucault, 1978 discussing the governing of the child and sexuality). The regulation of children's sexuality is, among other things, enforced by age of sexual consent laws, formal and informal rules which control sexual behaviour and restrictions to accessing sexual knowledge (Jackson, 2006 cited in Robinson, 2012). A lot of effort and resources, at family and national levels, have and continue to be channelled towards promoting and maintaining the sexual innocence of children. Consequently, research on children's sexuality has tended to have a narrow focus on their behaviour and teenage pregnancy.

In most societies, “Associating children with sexuality breaks significant social taboos” (Clarke, 2004d: 90; see Bragg, 2011). Children who do not have the attributes of a ‘proper’ childhood, which includes not having sex, are often seen as deviants (Walkerdine, 2001) and various sanctions are usually imposed on them. However, the extent to which sex interplays with the child and adult divide, influences aid workers, and impacts on different migrant children’s lives remains poorly understood (Bragg, 2011). This is consistent with the marginalisation of the topic of sexuality in childhood studies (Clarke, 2004d). Accordingly, the question of what is appropriate childhood sexuality remains controversial including for those outside the care of their parents.

Even though most governments and humanitarian organisations have adopted the global age-based conception of a child as defined by UNCRC of 1989, which states that a child is a person under the age of 18, the question of what constitutes a child and the limits of their sexuality remains problematic and contradictory. For example, it is not clear what a ‘normal’ or innocuous sexual act which is part of the development of adolescents’ sexuality is. The age criterion has received a lot of criticism, for example, from researchers like Bourdillon, White and Myers (2009) who recently called for re-thinking of the universal minimum-age approach to problems of child labour. That age of consent laws are also different to age of majority, suggests some tolerance of sexuality in older children. The major criticism of this criterion is that it homogenises the category of childhood across the world by neglecting to consider its social and cultural constructions.

Having a chapter focusing on how independent children’s sexuality is represented is important, as most studies on childhood sexuality are “overshadowed by images of abuse” (Burman, 2008: 118) or children’s ‘powerlessness’ in sexual issues. Jane van der Riet (2009) observes that in South Africa, research on childhood sexualities tend to be restricted to dangers associated with sex instead of focusing on how sexual discourses take into cognisance children’s experiences. In other words, there has also been a tendency to discuss subjects such as the sexual experiences of children without nuance and this goes beyond independent children. It is however crucial to develop the discussions in a more critical manner. Chapter five, for example, considers aid workers’ investment in the moral condemnation of child sexuality and its origins in discourses about ignorance and victimhood.

The Formal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality

It is important to first understand the social context which generates the different representations of independent adolescents' sexuality. Adolescents were living in a highly sexualised environment where the official discourse of sexuality, abuse and morality permeated everyday life. Forms of sexuality like sex work, sexual and gender based violence and survival sex were part of the everyday life. Consequently, every day in this sexualised environment, aid workers were confronted with the challenge of how to construct the sexuality of independent adolescents and respond to their expressions of sexuality that are deemed inappropriate.

Though Musina is highly sexualised, there was an aura of mystery, secrecy and contradictions surrounding the sexual behaviour of independent children. To some extent, this situation can be attributed to the moralisation of sex which results in silence around sexuality among those who are expected to be asexual. However, this silence was very loud and often created an uncomfortable situation during my interactions with both independent children and aid workers. The silence over children's sexuality, which tended to dominate official interactions, served to stop any further discussion on this taboo topic and in the process, reproduced children as innocent. Official definitions of childhood and adulthood were often evoked during official interactions whilst personal or local understandings of these concepts tended to dominate informal interactions. For example, officially, children were seen as sexually passive but during informal times, childhood in this context was associated with sexual activeness.

In the context of desperate conditions in Musina, sex is connected to survival (see Clacherty, 2003). Money is an important enabler and mediator to understandings migrant children's sexuality. In other words, sex and money contribute in framing the representation of independent children. The migration mediated combination of sexuality and money provokes questions on children's morality. Access to money or increased pressure to have money in some instances, was seen as an inroad to sex and implicitly to adulthood by independent children who periodically earned some money. Access to money was making it possible for them to take control of their sexuality. For instance, some children spent money on sexual partners or bought or sold sex. Aid workers and the independent children themselves also mentioned that some of the independent migrant boys, particularly those living and working at the border post on the South African side, were in the habit of going to Beitbridge town in Zimbabwe whenever they had money to buy sex. In a group interview,

some independent migrant boys revealed that sex workers in Beitbridge were cheaper than in Musina. This situation generated the discourse that access to money corrupts independent children sexually. Commercial sex workers who worked at the border post often charged lower rates for children. For example, one day in April 2010, a migrant boy who wanted sex paid R20. Commercial sex workers said a number of independent migrant boys could only afford to pay for short time sex. They charged R150 for the whole night. Aid workers not impressed by independent migrant children's sexual practices concluded that these children had inappropriate childhoods. Behaviour like this also reinforced the anti-child work and mobility discourses as children were seen as immature to handle money and be away from their parents, respectively.

In this sexualized context, independent children were often portrayed by adults as victims of adults' world, which made it difficult for childhood sexual innocence to obtain. They argued that daily exposure to sexual acts made it difficult for many children to resist engaging in sex. Independent migrant children were portrayed as victims of environmental factors. Aid workers and independent children focused on the structural aspects of migration and argued that the sexualised environment of Musina promoted immorality. For example, commercial sex workers based at the border post employed various strategies to earn money during days when the demand for their sexual services was low, usually during the week and in the middle of the month and when competition amongst them for clients was very high. Commercial sex workers offered independent migrant boys sex on discount, R20 for a short time (usually not more than five minutes). Adult men paid R50 for a short time sexual act[59] (this matter is elaborated in the next section). In addition, sex workers also sometimes rewarded the independent migrant boys who worked as informal "pimps" with "free" sex. One 15-year-old boy explained how the deal with commercial sex workers worked: "If you give a sex worker three clients, you get free sex" (from that commercial sex worker). Aid workers indicated that against a background of poverty, peer pressure, lack of recreational facilities, virtual absence of behavioural change and sex education programmes amongst other factors, some boys found these incentives very attractive. In this sexualised environment sex was monetised and de-linked from social factors like age, which usually determine who can have sex. The pressure for children to survive from poverty and 'enjoy life' was seen as making the sexual boundaries between childhood and adulthood blurred.

[59] Adults were charged R150 for the whole night.

The characterisation of these independent children who had left their homes and parents as having an inherent deviant behaviour was not done during formal situations. Rather the sexualised environment was blamed. Deviant children were still considered as belonging in the category of childhood as aid workers often attributed their behaviour to bad parentage and the corrupting effects of being away from home. This situation, it can be argued, allowed aid workers to intervene, for example, through removing children from what they considered as immoral and unsafe environments. This intervention sustained the discourses of childhood sexual innocence and victimhood.

There was strong resistance to acknowledge children's sexuality in Musina. Constructions of sexual innocence in childhood were not restricted to pre-pubescent bodies. Goldman and Goldman (1982: 2) write that "their sexuality is also diminished by referring to adolescents, even those fully post-pubertal and with obvious primary sex characteristics, as "children". However, some aid workers practised a mixed code of morality. Independent migrant children accused some aid workers of taking liberties with some of them. A 16-year-old boy felt that some female aid workers lost their moral compass as they "can actually propose to you. They say 'Let's go to my home'. You go there late at night and come back in the morning. It's happening". A 15 year old boy living at a shelter for boys gave an example of this paradoxical situation but which besides evoking the discourse of disappearing childhoods (Postman, 1994) also emphasises the discourse of children being victims of adults' sexuality that influences them to be sexually active or according to aid workers, to be morally corrupt. The 15-year-old boy went further and said:

> Some of them [female aid workers] come to work wearing mini-skirts and tight fitting jeans. They will be looking hot [meaning sexually attractive]. Who do they want to impress by dressing like that? Of course men who are here. Surprisingly when compliment them on their dressing they are quick to remind us that we are children.

It is important to understand the social context in which children appeared to be expressing their sexual agency and looking at women as objects of sexual pleasure. This boy like other children, explained this situation from the perspective that views the "domain of childhood as threatened, invaded, and "polluted" by adult worlds" (Stephens, 1995:9). Of interest to me and indeed what is contestable here is the question of appropriate behaviour of childhood, adulthood and claims of adulthood from the point of view of children. Situations

like this, in which adults' point of view dominated, positioned children outside the paradigm of childhood innocence and generated moral dilemmas for children. They exposed the power relations skewed in favour of aid workers' understanding of children's sexuality.

Of course, the above example about the dressing of aid workers highlights men's tendency to draw on the contested idea that women should dress demurely in order not to invite sexual attention (see Worthington, 2010 describing Jacob Zuma's defence when he was being tried for rape). According to some boys, they as children were out of bounds as objects of sexual desire. But they stressed that the onus was on aid workers not to dress in sexually suggestive ways when in the company of men. Appearing to draw from the discourses of childhood sexual innocence and the idea that adults should not expose children to inappropriate sexual behaviours (Aries, 1962), boys cast themselves as victims of sexual expression by some female aid workers who had lost their moral compass as adults, a view which was shared by some aid workers who condemned the dressing of their workmates, among other practices. The practice of sexualising children but at the same time regarding them as asexual people who needed to be protected from being sexually corrupted, created confusing images of childhood. This situation can be attributed to shifting interests and understandings of childhood and adulthood with regards to how children and adults should relate sexually.

As stated earlier, sex usually defines adult - child boundaries (Clarke, 2004d). This matter again revealed the differences in lifeworlds between aid workers and independent migrant children (Long, 2001). Aid workers saw independent migrant children they suspected of blurring the boundaries between childhood and adulthood in terms of sexual activity as children. This was despite attempts by some independent migrant children to re-define their peers who were sexually active, as adults. For example, at one time when I described one young boy aged 13 as a child when we were discussing the sexual behaviour of independent children, his friend quickly challenged the implicit idea of childhood as a period defined by age and characterised by sexual naiveté. "Chris a child? He is no longer a child. He knows women", said Mukundi, a boy aged 15. Chris did not object to being described as an 'adult'. The older boy portrayed his friend and other children who had sexual experience as lacking legitimacy to claim childhood status. He added, "There is no child at this border. They all know women. If they ask for sex from women, usually sex workers, they are given". The dominant idea in this society is that virginity is the most superior and hence the most defining form of bodily integrity. According to some minors, the border space eroded the sexual boundary between children and adults. This point was disputed by aid workers who

maintained that no space could ever erode sexual boundaries between children and adults. They contended that childhood remained static even if the minors had experienced sexual intercourse. In other words, the state of childhood was constructed as not affected by locality, a position which is in line with the universal view of childhood (see Boyden, 2003). However, there is a sub-text to this discussion, which suggests that migration renders children not to be quite children. Mukundi's statement that within the border space there were no categories of adulthood and childhood echoes Kehily and Montgomery's (2009) point that attitudes about children's sexuality are also determined by the setting. Different spaces shape different responses and representations of children's sexuality.

Aid workers often tried to maintain notions of childhood as being characterised by sexual immaturity. During moments when independent children were suspected of having entered the sexual world of adults, this was seen as a terrible taboo. They characterised these children as sexual deviants. Some independent children, including a 17 year old girl, attested to the correctness of such representations. She said the "[sexual] behaviour of some of us is despicable, disrespectful and embarrassing". Her statement and the acknowledgement by some aid workers that some children were sexually active pointed to the limits of the romantic discourse of childhood innocence. In other words, this situation reinforced one of the dominant narratives of children living without their parents – that they were out of control. The 17-year-old girl's narrative reflects the 'victim is to blame' mentality (see Koss, 2000; Miller and Porter, 1983) as part of her and other independent migrant girls' reality. Victims of abuse blame partly or fully themselves for their suffering.

Interestingly, though aid workers saw the sexuality of children as a moral problem, organisational and personal interests at times led them to officially uphold the idea of children as innocent. A dominant view amongst aid workers was that any negative report about the behaviour of independent children under their care could potentially reflect badly on them as care givers and probably affect their source of livelihood. Consequently, aid workers tended to conveniently cast these children as sexually innocent. However, during one-on-one interviews with migrant boys and informal discussions with aid workers, when performative pressure not to say something which might be detrimental to their organisation's interest was low, statements like "without considering work interests" and "if we are to tell each other the truth", they painted a picture of independent children being involved in risky sexual activities. These contradictory representations of children's sexuality exposed the politicisation of children's sexuality and confirmed that childhood as a time of innocence is situational. Sustaining or emphasising the discourse of childhood sexual innocence worked to

either promote or suppress certain interests related to how they constructed childhood and even access to donor funding. Unpacking the reasons or motivations behind certain representations of adolescents or particular understanding of childhood at each given moment is always very important.

Despite the widespread condemnation of these forms of transactional sex, aid workers also sustained the discourse of childhood sexual innocence. At some moments aid workers toned down their criticisms of the sexual behaviour of children. This usually happened when they were talking to donors and journalists. Within the dominant discourses of childhood sexual innocence, aid workers in this context at times absolved children they suspected of being sexually active, of moral blameworthiness, arguing that they were doing so in order to survive. “They are having sex with local men and some are cohabiting as they want to have money to buy food, send home and a place to sleep. We must scale up our interventions and have a shelter for girls”, said one humanitarian worker. De-pathologising children as “victims”, aid workers defended the moral integrity of children. In these contexts, aid workers positioned these children as victims of abuse and called for the improvement in their control and protection. The representation of independent children is closely intertwined with the dominant understanding of the situation in their social milieu (see for example, Ladegaard, 2012 writing about the identity construction in domestic helper narratives in Hong Kong).

Also evident in the above quotation is that particularly in a context where sex is connected to survival, aid workers were able to project the notion of childhood sexual innocence. Aid workers attributed children’s sexual immorality to poverty, the pressures of being mobile, living in difficult environments and away from one’s guardians, peer pressure, lack of sex education and good role models and failure of the family system to effectively function as an agent of socialisation. Not blaming independent children (officially) for being sexually active allowed aid workers to uphold the dominant idea of children as innocent and in need of protection.

Independent migrant children’s stated moral failings or inappropriate sexual conduct was to some extent attributed to absence of proper families in their lives. “With no aunt, no mother what does she know or do?” asked one aid worker as she explained independent children’s sexual activeness and high prevalence of teenage pregnancies. Inadvertently, her explanation acknowledged the limitation of the ‘family’ they were offering as aid workers. Though they often emphasised their role as “parents” in the lives of these children, it seems they did not fully extend their parenting to imparting values and norms. Aid workers drew

from the idea that independent children had lost their moral compasses when they left their parents or guardians. Consequently, this situation justified the idea that children should be under parental control. This is evidenced by efforts to place children in shelters and re-uniting these children with their parents and relatives. The assumption was that home is very protective of children and that parents and guardians have good child rearing practices.

The informal Representations of Independent Migrant Children's Sexuality

Independent migrant girls' sexuality was often seen as determined by the need to access certain material things or resources. For instance, independent migrant girls were accused by both aid workers and their peers of having sexual relationships with men in order to get good food and keep abreast with fashion. Generally, there was a tendency to associate independent migrant girls, particularly those who usually wore beautiful and fashionable clothes, with promiscuity. Though a number of girls were doing "piece jobs", the common assumption was that men were sustaining their life styles. To some people, 'piece jobs' became a euphemism for sex work. Generally, any girl who was seen or perceived to often have money, was accused of being involved in sex work. This means that whilst poverty comes with stigma, not being poor is also a source of suspicion. In addition, these findings indicate that views that women and girls cannot support themselves are far from changing.

Discourse at other moments moved from one of poverty, exploitation and survival to one of the immorality of independent children, particularly referring to girls. These are situations when the need for children to uphold high moral values was emphasised, for example, when discussing the socialisation of children and marriage. Aid workers wanted independent migrant children to remain chaste, a state which is consistent with what they regarded as appropriate childhood. At these moments, a number of aid workers and some children associated independent children with unbridled sexuality and a lack of sexual morals. As further evidence of children's uninhibited sexuality and moral decadence, aid workers cited the high number of STI cases, unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortions among independent migrant children. A 16-year-old girl who shared accommodation with six other independent girls from Zimbabwe supported this view. She revealed that her friends, also young Zimbabwean independent adolescent girls, had multiple sexual partners. Their immorality was seen to be due to their nationality, as will be elaborated in later chapters, and their lack of family and proper guidance.

Contrary to the dominant formal representation of children as sexually innocent and naive, aid workers cast these children as knowing a lot about sex: a pathologising description as 'normal' children were not supposed to possess more knowledge on sex than adults. For example, a female aid worker in her late 20s at one time emphasised this point by telling me that "They [independent children] know [referring to sex] much more than me". She used this situation, for example, to justify why she and other aid workers were reluctant to impart some knowledge on sex to these children. In addition, the status of childhood and its associated privileges like protection were often not fully applied on these 'knowing' and deviant children. Girls who were perceived as flaunting their bodies in what was interpreted as sexually suggestive ways, were pathologised. Their movements, the high volume and quality of the goods they purchased for themselves or their families were regarded with suspicion by the aid workers.

The tendency by aid workers to conflate children's sexual activeness with victimhood (for example, effect of poverty) was rejected by some children as well as by some aid workers. For instance, one 15-year-old boy who lived on and off the streets and place of safety, dismissed the representations of children as victims of morally decadent adult women, particularly commercial sex workers. He said:

> To be honest with you I have slept with several partners and at times I have paid the girls and at times it's the women who pay me. The women who pay me are mature women not girls. I have not been consistent in using the condom. What I can say is that I was never forced but I got involved on my own will and I know I have exposed myself to HIV by having multiple sex partners and not using protection at all times.

Though some children represented themselves as active sexual agents, there is a sub-text in the above case, which suggests that independent children were vulnerable. Aid workers felt that these children should be protected from diseases and immoral adults. Characterising this sexual behaviour as 'high risk', aid workers represented sexually active children as victims who had lost their childhood. Nevetheless, this case highlights the contested representation of sexually active independent children.

Some aid workers rebuked 'deviant' children for eroding 'African values' or breaking a cultural taboo by proposing love to adult women. Drawing from the discourses of disappearing and disappeared childhoods, as well as motherhood, these aid workers felt that these children's actions epitomised a serious lack of respect for adults and specifically

women who played a motherly role to them as sexual relations between children and mothers are frowned upon. By labelling what these children were doing as ‘bad’ and ‘not right’, they implicitly claimed moral superiority over children whose behaviour they regarded as morally wrong.

In response to the representation that independent children make sexual transgressions and have no moral compass, independent children, depending on the situation, either affirmed or challenged this sexual discourse which prevailed in Musina. Discourses like the child’s best interests allowed children to challenge dominant perspectives held by aid workers that they were morally weak. Children constructed themselves as victims for various representational reasons.

Aid workers made concerted efforts to suppress children’s sexuality and set rules of behaviour more generally. Again, for example, aid workers constantly used familial discourses like mother, sister, aunt, father, brother and uncle as resources to do so. During their interactions, female aid workers used these familial discourses to avoid the shrinking of social distance between themselves and independent migrant children which would allow boys to make sexual advances on them. They also evoked familiar relations and called them “my brother”, “my child”, “my niece”. Through language like “my brother” they desexualised their relationship (see Mai and King, 2009). This had the effect of limiting children from transgressing appropriate sexual behaviour governing relations between adults and children. They reminded children that theirs could never be a sexual relationship but a familial and hierarchical one. Use of familial labels diffused any sexual connotations or tense sexual situation. For example, when they said “my brother” it not only raised the taboo issue of incest but also invoked the discourse of care and responsibility of adults towards children. In other words, positioning themselves as mothers for these children worked to ward off sexual innuendo, closed down any sexual expectations between aid workers and children, attempts by some children to behave in a sexually inappropriate way in order to challenge the power of aid workers or allow them to set rules of behaviour more generally. The function of these discourses was to assert authority and power. For example, the term ‘mother’ carries with it moral authority but is a complex one. Independent children indicated that they had been socialised to regard any woman or man who is the same age as their biological parents as their parent. Aid workers invoked the discourse of nurturing and protection which is associated with motherhood, to justifying their intervention efforts including disciplinary measures against children who misbehaved by, for example, not sleeping in the shelter.

However, some of these children publicly or subtly turned these discourses back onto aid workers. Firstly, they objected to claims of motherhood by aid workers or any other person who tried to patronise them through reproducing the hierarchical family structure of authority, which disempowers children. Disliking conformity and claiming autonomy from adults, an act which opposes the notion that children are dependents, some of the independent migrant girls candidly told aid workers who tried to control their behaviour, "I did not cross the border with my mother, sister or aunt". In a way, this supports Hashim and Thorsen's point that "For girls… migration is perceived as a means to … resist patriarchal norms (2011: 114). Besides rejecting notions that as girls they needed protection from their 'mother', this statement indicates that these children did not respect non-biological motherhood, a status which is often taken for granted in many African societies that adult women who are the same age as one's mother have that status too. These girls said this situation justified interventions aimed at controlling their sexuality. Independent children's rejection of this age-old custom displayed intransigence, which resulted in them being treated with disdain. Secondly, in a way they reminded aid workers of their practice of drawing from the discourse of minimising responsibility at certain moments – that as non-biological 'mother' their interventions in the lives of these children were limited. This strategy functioned to curb aid workers' interventions in the lives of non-biological children. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, aid workers also applied this understanding of motherhood to justify their intolerance of non-biological children's ill-discipline. So motherhood is a contradictory discourse that is used to do different things at different times. Thirdly, independent children invoked all their expectations of mothers, for example, that mothers provide for their children amongst other things. They did this in order to criticise aid workers for not being competent mothers. This had the effect of eroding the moral authority of aid workers and therefore silencing them from intervening in the lives of independent children.

However, there is a sub-text which suggests that independent children questioned adults' understanding of motherhood and their claims of being on moral high ground. Evoking the discourse of motherhood/parenting, Tariro and Chido, both aged 14, accused aid workers of failing to understand children's behaviour and acting accordingly as parents. They highlighted that aid workers' often swift expulsion of migrant girls from the temporary shelter when they violated the rules amplified their feeling as children that these aid workers did not deserve the "mother" status. This is one example when the children used the discourse of motherhood to challenge the actions of aid workers. According to independent children, a

'real' mother had to have a huge reservoir of tolerance toward her child(ren) and when she meted out punishment, she did not put the lives of her children in danger.

Aid workers countered this argument by saying they tried to be very patient with children who were misbehaving but drew the line between tolerable and intolerable behaviour by saying that they could not look after "those who like men". Aid workers indicated that they feared such children would corrupt the other 'innocent' girls. This shows that sexual immorality was treated as contagious and therefore expulsion of girls they accused of sexual immorality. Connecting this point to my earlier discussion, it shows these children were seen as not deserving the status of a child. Some aid workers felt they could not be a mother to a child who did not behave like a child. So children perceived as sexually active were pathologised because of the stated concern for the innocence of other children. Moral panic is the tool which was used to reinforce the separation of children perceived to be sexual deviants from those seen as innocent.

Reinforcing the idea that prohibits sexualised interactions between adults and children, female aid workers considered being depicted as sexual beings by young boys as degrading their status as women, adults and aid workers. Drawing on this discourse that closes down the possibility of a sexual relationship with a minor, a female worker in her mid-20s who felt that her moral authority was being eroded by independent children said, "I often tell these children to behave normally. I am not the same age as them". This response reveals that at times aid workers did not see these children as inherently innocent but sexually corrupted. Consequently, the female aid workers did not trust these boys. Actually, some of them went to the extent of fearing that they might be raped by the boys. "These boys look like they can rape you", said one of them. One female aid worker revealed that one of the boys aged 15 sexually harassed her he threatened, "If I see you alone I will do something". She said the "something" was having sex with her. Some female aid workers understood boys' behaviour as a way of defining their masculinity. This view that children lack sexual morals was shared by a number of workers. Interpreting these boys' behaviour as dangerous justified aid workers' keeping a social distance between themselves and independent migrant boys at certain moments like night time. Interestingly, even as they kept a 'safe' distance from these children, the idea that children are innocent also prevailed amongst aid workers, particularly during the day. Thus, this dualism in the understandings of children – as innocent and evil – at times allowed these children to retain their childhood innocence. This disputes the point made by Kehily that:

> Once their innocence has gone, so has their childhood, and once that has disappeared they are subject to the same pressures and difficulties as adults, whatever their age and whatever their understanding. They are entitled to no protection, no sympathy and no special pleading. They are no longer children (2004:21).

This indicates that the representations of independent migrant children were not fixed. They were constantly negotiated.

Of note, the status of childhood was not static. Its status depended on the situation and interests of the aid workers at each given time. At other times, informed by conservative and religious (particularly Christian) discourses, aid workers found it convenient to ignore reality – children's sexual activeness – and to insist on childhood sexual innocence. Taking this position made it possible to deny these children certain things like condoms. "We cannot give them condoms as they are minors" was a common statement made by aid workers when I asked them in separate interviews why they were not giving children condoms – referring to those between 12 and 18 years – considering claims that STIs were prevalent amongst these children. Condom use by children was a taboo subject between aid workers and children. It is possible that this position conveniently helped aid workers not to have moral and cultural dilemmas on how they should relate with children on sexual matters. However, I would like to argue that the prevalence of the discourse of childhood sexual innocence served to ideologically "hinder the empowerment of children through awareness and knowledge" (Archard, 1993: 40). Knowledge is 'better' than ignorance.

There were various discursive strategies for reinstating adult - child norms in contexts where they had been breached. Motivated by discourses such as humanitarianism and motherhood that oppose ideas or actions which threaten children's well-being and development, aid workers tended to silence the expression of child sexuality. This point is highlighted by Takudzwa aged 16, who commented:

> They [aid workers] know that children have relationships with the opposite sex but simply think that they are 'children' and nothing serious. They don't know that they are having a 'live' relationship [meaning having sexual intercourse].

Debatably, puritanical discourses were behind the understanding and treatment of this childhood as by and large excluding sexual intercourse. As constructions of sexual innocence in childhood were maintained by aid workers, children themselves as shown by the above

quotation, dismissed these puritanical discourses. They did not disassociate childhood from sexual intercourse.

Although aid workers regarded independent children's sexual activeness as inappropriate and also questioned independent children's moral standing, there were some dissenting voices amongst them. "Although they are having sex they are still children. We continue to assist them", one aid worker argued. These aid workers did not withdraw these independent migrant children's childhood status or innocence. This aid worker was backed by another female aid worker who said:

> These children also like to enjoy themselves. Unfortunately they do not use protection. In any case for many of them, the condoms do not fit their penis. The condoms are too big. We tell them to desist from partaking in adults' business but they don't listen. They think they are adults because they are having sex but they are not.

The victimhood cultivated for independent children who are sexually active by aid workers was meant to mobilise the society to tolerate some bad behaviours by these children and to assist them. Thus, some aid workers were not swayed by the sexual activeness of independent migrant children to re-conceptualise them as adults. In this instance childhood was not connected to their sexuality but remained defined by age (note the point in the quotation above that condoms did not even fit on many boys' penises). Aid workers portrayed sexually active children as stubborn. These positions allowed them to strongly warn children against the dangers of contracting STIs. Having evoked the discourses of children lacking knowledge like use of condoms, childhood fun and gullibility to peer pressure, aid workers through organising some group discussions and talks with children sought to capacitate them on how to deal with or resist peer pressure including engaging in sex.

Informally, there was a tacit acceptance by aid workers that these children are different as they felt that the children lived and experienced childhood differently from other children. This was an acknowledgement of the discourse of multiplicity of childhood (Lancy, 2008). They saw independent children as having assumed adulthood by virtue of their sexual experience. In spite of this, some aid workers instead of being disturbed by children's expression of sexuality, as I expected, casually dismissed children's expression of sexual activeness. They did not take seriously children's sexual advances towards them. Perhaps drawing from the discourse of disappearing childhoods, particularly of sexual innocence, one of them jocularly said, "They are men. They propose to women including me. They like

taking chances". The sexual behaviour of these adolescents was situated in less puritanical discourses that understand this part of childhood as highly sexed and experimental. Nevertheless, the representation of the children usually posed acute dilemmas to aid workers as some of them regarded children as asexual.

Through portraying these children as lacking morals and reproducing the widespread belief of the "'uncontrollability' of male sexual urges" (Lalor, 2004:452) their identity as 'men' was used to 'normalise' their sexual behaviour. Like other men, boys were cast as sexually predatory. Their childhood or asexuality was often doubted as aid workers were of the view that these children did not want to maintain the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. This practice echoed the idea that children are immoral, have no conscience and if uncontrolled by adults, they behave waywardly. The behaviour of children justified attempts by aid workers to maintain the ideal moral order between children and adults.

Independent children's understanding of childhood and child-like sexual behaviour often shifted. At times it was conditional. At times it depended on aid workers' conduct. For example, the discourse of children respecting adults had limits. Some independent migrant boys at the border post tended to reproduce this idea to spare women whom they perceived to be successfully performing motherhood or adulthood roles such as caring for and nurturing children. Independent children and adults' sexual relationship was sometimes based on reciprocity (see chapter five about the case of children who sang sexist and derogatory songs targeting an aid worker they regarded as lacking sexual morals). Moments when children treated adult women as their mothers served to highlight the point that these children negotiated power and knowledge they received from adults. Children were not passive recipients of ideas from aid workers. However, this behaviour resulted in them being constructed as having inappropriate childhoods. Situations like this highlight contradictions and the subjectivity in boys' sexual behaviour. It echoes calls by, for example, Afua Twum-Danso Imoh that there is need to "understand the complexities of children' lives" (2013: 472). Thus, children's qualities should not be dismissed as merely a result of environmental factors. Ideas which governed sexual morality, children and adults' sexual relations, sexual gender relations sometimes remained dominant but at times less prevalent as they opposed certain interests of social actors.

Aid workers at times tolerated some children, particularly those transiting from childhood to adulthood (an ill-defined period anyway), who crossed the sexual boundary (see Valentine, 2003). In this context the construction of childhood was represented as innocent. There was a case of a 17 year old boy who proposed love to a female aid worker aged 28. Basing her

response on the understanding that "childhood is defined primarily as a period of 'becoming'" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011:10; Lowe, 2012) and exploration or learning but within the realm of innocence, the female aid worker did not feel degraded by this child. Without moral objections to the boy's action, she pointed to teenagers' evolving value system. She said that she expected the boy at his age to have or be developing some sexual feelings for the opposite sex. The discourse of childhood innocence seems to have influenced her to take that opportunity to teach this boy not to cross the adult and adulthood sexual boundary. Her reaction can be explained by Schildkrout who says that all experiences in childhood "are regarded as being education" (1981 cited in Hashim and Thorsen, 2011:10). In other words, the aid worker's reaction "is in keeping with developmental psychology perspective that understands children to be working towards becoming adults rather than individuals in their own right" (Lowe, 2010: 277-278). This understanding of children's behaviour set aid workers tolerate some moral failings by independent migrant children.

Despite the tendency in 'official' humanitarian discourse to depict independent children as helpless victims (see Rajaram, 2002), some of these children managed to have some things they were failing to get from aid agencies. For instance they used the following strategies: did some 'piece jobs' and engaged in activities characterised by aid workers as transactional sex. Some independent migrant girls advanced the discourse of poverty to ward off labels of having loose sexual morals. They emphasised that the poor and fixed diet in the shelter was complicit in driving some of them into sexual relationships, including abusive ones, with local adult men in order to have food and varied diet. Anita, aged 16, said,

> Men and boys always want to take advantage of us. Some offer us food and money so that they can have sex with us. Other men will ask you to do a piece job for them and then later on rape you and threaten you not to report or they tell you that they can even kill you if you report.

Despite the desperate poverty and other social pressures, some independent children were portrayed as having control of their sexuality. Actually, some children reinforced the discourse of children's sexual innocence, a contradiction to their common but informal representation as sexually active and irresponsible. "I don't want to involve myself in sex because I might be infected and die. My siblings will have no one to give them what I am giving them now", said a girl aged 18 who lost both parents and was forced to drop out of

school[60]. This argument that some children have control on sexuality was also echoed by aid workers who constructed independent children as asexual and morally upright. Casting these children positively allowed aid workers to successfully lobby for care and support for these children.

At times there are "tensions between the *lived* and represented realities" (Howard, 2012: 1) of independent children. Despite questioning and expressing strong reservations about the sexual innocence of children, some aid workers insisted that they remained children in their eyes. Through reproducing the idea that children are immature, they tended to silence sexuality or desexualise independent children. One aid worker defended independent migrant children's moral integrity by saying, "They are children. They are not having sex". Generally, children's sexuality is not spoken of and people pretend it does not exist. If children enter the sexual world of adults, this is seen as a terrible taboo. This was not very surprising as Kehily and Montgomery (2009: 82) argue that the "privileging of innocence as a central feature of childhood often involves adults in a denial of childhood sexuality". Other aid workers went further and tended to see children's sexual relationships as "not real sexual relationships". This thinking, it is possible to argue, rests on the assumption that childhood is primarily a "period of 'becoming'" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 10) which leads them to understand the relationship they are having with a member of the opposite sex as part of learning to become an adult. Another example of a discursive response to the victim/pathology slippage is that of a 15-year-old girl who had experiences of living in the streets and in the shelter, who said "Some (aid) workers pretended not to see that children are engaging in sex". While supporting the point made by Enguix that sexualities "are situated, flexible and contextual categories that can either be determinant or invisible" (2012: 8), this position allowed aid workers to maintain assumptions about children's innocence and interventions protecting children.

These aid workers were embedded in the discourse of childhood sexual innocence which sees independent children's relationship with members of the opposite sex as 'innocuous'. Arguably, through these acts, they extricated themselves from a moral dilemma of turning children into adults as they officially recognised them as 'minors'. It allowed them to continue to see these children as innocent. What is central in their argument is maintaining the notion of innocence as a crucial marker of childhood. Romantic notions of childhood sexual innocence were used to deny children access to 'sexual citizenship' (see Robinson,

[60] Demonstrating her resiliency this girl had raised money for bus fare to South Africa through working as an illegal gold panner.

2012) and knowledge of sexuality. However, as discussed in this chapter, aid workers' position put independent children in a precarious situation as they needed to access knowledge on safe sex. Robinson writes:

> The discourse of the 'knowing child' is both ironic and highly problematic in that a critical way of increasing children's competency and resilience is to provide them with language and knowledge about sexuality and an understanding of what constitutes ethical and unethical sexual relationships (2012: 265).

Though they did not encourage it, limited childhood sexuality was acceptable, and understood as a necessary stage of childhood/adolescent development, as long as children remained conscious of its boundaries. Representing children as lacking sexual knowledge to go beyond playful, 'innocent' sexual interactions seemed to function to sustain the idea of childhood sexual innocence and justify the aid workers' non-interventions. Claims of ignorance regarding what children were doing sexually possibly served to repel attacks or questions about aid workers' competencies to protect children, an issue that was often raised by other service providers and the general public. Thus, understanding the social context surrounding the sexualisation or de-sexualisation of children is very important.

Some aid workers often played down the sexual experiences of these children, for example, during the moments when they were afraid that any negative report about the sexuality of children might either harm these children or reflect badly on them as care givers. They were aware that donors and many other stakeholders were sensitive to reports of sexually active children. These donors and stakeholders were concerned about the problems of teenage pregnancy, HIV infection and children being forced to drop out of school. Framing children as asexual even when there was evidence that children's sexual practices were inconsistent with their understanding of 'normal' childhood was important to aid workers as it reinforced the discourse that children under the care of adults and parents are protected. Again this emphasises the need to understand the social context in which aid workers framed the sexuality of children.

Aid workers had contradictory explanations for children's sexuality. Aid workers and some children constructed childhood sexuality in ways that victimised and pathologised children they viewed as sexually expressive. An analysis of aid workers' portrayal of childhood sexuality shows how they invoked the corrupting influence of mobility, cultural and sexual deviance discourses in ways that "obscure opportunities to discuss one of the most

pressing social problems" (Worthington, 2010: 609), an increasing number of children being sexually abused and exploited. Such representation worked to promote aid workers' interest in legitimising their interventions in mobile children's lives, presenting themselves as caring and supportive, attracting donor support, and being moral compasses to children not living with their parents and guardians, children under a lot of pressures.

The state of independent children's knowledge on sexuality contributed to the way they were represented. Following the political discourse that links knowledge with power (see Burman, 2008), children who demonstrated having knowledge were perceived as threats to adults' claims of authority over children. Burman argues that the most important thing is to "avoid pathologising children for 'knowing' but probe which "children/cultures/families get stigmatised by exhibiting such 'knowledge'" (2008: 118). Kitzinger (1997 cited in Meyer, 2007: 94) also pointed out that a 'knowing' child is often stigmatised as it is against the idea of childhood innocence (see also Robinson, 2012). This was evident in Musina as independent children who were perceived as having sexual knowledge were problematized. For example, one female humanitarian worker commented, "It is difficult to look after a person who knows men", to justify the expulsion from the shelter, of girls accused of being sexually active. Sustaining the discourse of 'normal' childhood as characterised by immaturity, passiveness and easy to be controlled by adults, she claimed that a sexually experienced young person could not be controlled. Aid workers framed these children as lacking discipline and not receptive to guidance by adults as "they (referring to sexually active children) mistakenly think that *vave kuziva hupenyu* (they now know life)". These children were seen as possessing undesirable knowledge. They included independent migrant girls who normally socialised with boys or adult men. Such children were also thought to be knowledgeable about sex. They were quickly labelled "bad" girls, implying that they were sexually promiscuous. This understanding of these children justified expelling them from places of temporary safety, ostensibly so that they could not sexually corrupt the sexual innocence of others.

Migrant children, particularly girls, were portrayed as lacking morality and being out of control. In fact one female aid worker emphasised that "it is very easy to deal with boys than girls when they are many". This might be one of the reasons why they often chased away girls from the shelters. Aid workers stigmatised girls they suspected of being sexually active. An incident which happened in March 2010 during a measles outbreak at the shelter for girls provides a telling illustration of how and why aid workers stigmatised migrant girls they accused of having pre-marital sex. Following a traditional belief that if a sexually active

person holds a child suffering from measles the child's condition will deteriorate, a female aid worker temporarily barred a 14 year-old-girl from holding or playing with her sister's baby. "She must not hold a baby who is suffering from measles as she is sexually active. She associates with people who are involved in musical bands", said the aid worker. The girl, a talented and aspiring musician, at that time regularly practiced singing with some local DJs (Disc Jockeys) and performed at large gatherings. The music industry is widely associated with sexual immorality. Not dismissing the traditional belief associated with measles and the need to protect the sick baby, the humanitarian worker's action tended to reinforce the notion that sexually active children are not 'pure' or have lost their innocence. In fact, the discourse of children as evil was reproduced to exclude and marginalise the girl from performing her social role and undermine her social standing. Besides 'protecting' the sick baby, this action, which pathologised the girl, served as a form of discipline against her perceived deviant sexual behaviour. Sexual activeness by children resulted in the mobilisation of pathologising and exclusionary discourses against them.

The gendered pathologisation of independent migrant girls saw aid workers being reluctant to report on migrant girls who drank alcohol, bought food from fast food outlets (highly prized), bought large amounts of groceries to remit to Zimbabwe, usually had "a lot of money", dressed "inappropriately", or liked socialising in the streets. These children were regarded or suspected to be sexual delinquents. Conscious of their poor economic background, these migrant girls usually expressed defiance against being labelled as such. However, this only served to reinforce their stigmatisation.

Representations of the Sexuality of Independent Migrant Girls' Sexuality

Generally, there is a gendered tension in adult society between the widespread acceptance of sex for entertainment (at least among men) and the sense that it is immoral, especially for women. Through the media, peers and exposure to high risk sexual behaviour particularly in high HIV transmission areas like Musina (Vearey, Oliveira, Wilhelm-Solomon and Mahati, 2011) children might be aware of the widespread acceptance of sex for entertainment. From the available literature, it is evident that migration has often produced different moral discourses on women's sexual behaviour (see Haram, 2004). While freedom of female adults to migrate, particularly unaccompanied by a man who is their spouse, is debated, migration by an independent migrant girl is invariably understood as immoral. Given the strong questioning of the moral legitimacy of independent migrant girls who are often seen as part

of the marginalised cross border migrants 'other', this section focuses only on the interface between mobility and independent migrant girls' sexual morality. Through showing that the movement of children, particularly girls is conceptualised as a "social rupture" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 11), I further give an insight into how their sexuality is represented.

There was a pervasive feeling amongst aid workers that migration is somehow connected to problematic kinds of sexuality, particularly for children whom they viewed as vulnerable and impressionable. A number of aid workers and migrant boys were convinced that these girls were sexually corrupt and not keeping an appropriate social distance from members of the opposite sex. They responded by often making pathologising remarks like, "Such a young girl, you came all the way from Zimbabwe to look for men". Discourses of gender, age, and shame worked to delegitimise girls' migration and justified interventions to bring them to order, for example, by placing them in places of safety. On several occasions some independent migrant girls expressed their disgust and disappointment about aid workers, men and boys, including those they regarded as friends, who often assumed that since they were living in the streets or were mobile, they were ready to have sex or were having sex for pleasure as they were far from the prying eyes of their guardians. The girls were equally disappointed with the pathologising assumption that they would automatically engage in survival sex since they were struggling to get basics and protection[61]. Due to these assumptions about their sexual behaviour, independent migrant girls often struggled at night to ward off boys and men who wanted to have sex with them. Girls who refused to have sex were often physically and sexually assaulted.

Independent migrant girls who lived in the streets were portrayed as both promiscuous and victims of sexual abuse by aid workers. Living on the street brings with it issues of corruptibility, violence and all sorts of risk. Thus, in viewing girls as such, some men, independent boys and aid workers agreed with the common perception amongst adult migrants that these girls are promiscuous. Aid workers' thinking emanated from observations that independent girls were often offering sex in return for food and security. They accused a number of children of having sex with fellow children and adult men who were living in the streets. In fact, I observed that due to the insecurity of living in the street, many of the girls were forced by circumstances to stay with a boy or man who described them as *mukadzi wangu* (my wife). Actually, one of these independent migrant girls disclosed that these men were "harassing us in many ways", which included sexual abuse. Due to fear, most of these

[61] See also Watson (2011) study about the gendered experiences of homelessness in Australia.

cases were going unreported to the police and aid workers. This form of action which was seen by aid workers as acts of passiveness was actually well thought out as it was informed by lived realities of street life. In addition, they knew that there was a high possibility of aid workers drawing from the discourse that children are immature and weak, used to reprimand them for being away from their parents and therefore responsible for their own suffering.

Actually, aid workers and some children derided girls who lived in the streets and were called "wives" of so and so. They regarded these relationships as casual. This shows the difficulties of these people to understand street children's experiences of sexuality as their culture was foreign to them (see Kehily and Montgomery, 2009). Although in most cases the *Shona* or *Ndebele* traditional processes like *roora* (in *Shona*) and *lobola* (in *Ndebele*) were not followed, by becoming "a wife" a girl's sexual relationship with a man within this setting was normalised. It legitimised the sexualisation of these children, including pre-marital sex and child-bearing, and gave social recognition to their relationship (see Anarfi, 1993). Sex was legitimised as the two were assumed to have an intention to marry.

Of note was the way that abuse slides into culpability for girls. One aid worker said, "Children don't cross the border". To her and other aid workers, migration is a prerogative of adults as children are not ready to participate in the migration process as it "brings forth changes in a person's way of thinking" (Ahmadi, 2003: 318). Emphasising the discourse of children's vulnerability, these changes were seen as harmful and dangerous to children's well-being and development. This is reminiscent of O'Connell Davidson and Farrow's (2007 cited in Heissler, 2010: 209) observation that "child migration is often treated as an aberration" as it potentially leads to the loss of sexual innocence.

This view, which emphasises the vulnerability of children and resulted in attempts to exclude children from migrating without their parents, had a gendered aspect. It moralised girls' migration. Though there was awareness of the 'feminisation of migration' (Castles and Miller, 1998 cited in Sirriyeh, 2010: 213), the discourse of gender was often reproduced to reinforce patriarchal views particularly the notion of considering home as "the most appropriate place for women" (Palmary 2010: 53). "*Good* girls (my emphasis) do not cross the border. There are no girls amongst these people. Girls who are fit for marriage are in Zimbabwe" claimed one independent migrant boy aged 17. What is evident in his statement is that Zimbabwe as home is constructed as a place of morality. This boy echoed the point made by Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White that "children become particularly vulnerable when they move illegally across international frontiers" (2010: 142). But of note is this boy's exclusion of himself and other independent migrant boys from immorality when they cross

international borders. In this quotation, he drew from conservative discourses of 'traditional' femininities to cast aspersions on independent migrant girls and entrench patriarchy through prescribing certain ways of how 'good girls' should behave. This view which was shared by a number of aid workers castigated girls who migrate without their parents and guardians. Aid workers' position gave the impression that these independent migrant children's girlhood was questionable and despicable. They conceptualised movement of girls as "social rupture" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 11) and in the process reproduced existing gender hierarchies characteristic of the field of migration. The act of migration by girls was seen as wrong since it resulted in innocence being lost. It also undermined their prospects of marriage because migration was associated with sexual immorality. Their thinking reflects the resiliency of ideas that say women should express passive femininity in order to be fit for marriage. For many aid workers, female migration was synonymous with immorality and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This thinking which reinforces gender stereotypes was also perpetuated by other women who were still steeped in the view that a normal girl or woman does not migrate or enter the "adult worlds" (Stephens, 1995: 9) without being accompanied by an adult as her childhood can be stolen, lost or corrupted. Thus, what this boy, his peers and aid workers saw as absence of feminine purity led them to explicitly and implicitly disqualify independent migrant girls as suitable candidates for marriage. These findings corroborate those by Boehm (2006: 153) who writes that, "in order to become a complete socially and morally accepted adult being, marriage was, and still is, considered as essential precondition".

A recurrent point is that the border was seen as a symbolic divide: it separated childhood and adulthood; morality and immorality. Crossing the border symbolised entry into adulthood. It also undermined childhood innocence and represented moral degeneration.

As if answering Terrio's (2010: 92) question whether "we assign agency only to those actions we label as morally good or socially normative?" the 17-year-old boy's statement above suggests that he and aid workers did not attribute agency to girls' act of migrating independently and only saw this action in a negative light.. His perception that these girls were not celibate is revealed by the statement, "There are *no girls* (my emphasis) amongst these people" and further indicates that asexuality usually by being a virgin – under the romantic discourse of childhood – remains the defining feature of appropriate girlhood. Actually, the boy, his peers and aid workers at different moments expressed the view that virginity is a marker of being a child. Writing about virginity, Muwati and Mutasa explain:

> Virginity can be said to be the most superior and hence the most defining form of body purity. This is why among the *Shona* people of Zimbabwe a woman who manages to maintain her virginity until marriage is publicly acknowledged with what is known as *mombe yechimanda* 'beast of honour' (2011: 194).

This understanding of children's sexuality, which pathologised girls who 'lost their innocence' and childhood, opposes the universalistic definitions of a child which is age based. It is the definition aid workers often informally used to separate children from adults. Consequently, this position made aid workers use derogatory remarks against children suspected of being sexually active.

Taking children as immature, one of the aid workers' major concerns was of independent migrant girls sharing the same space or accommodation with women who had experienced sexual gender based violence. Treating sexual experience regardless of whether it was abuse or seeing it as contagious, they feared that the women particularly *"vakadzi vakuru"* (the adult women) were going to corrupt the sexual behaviour of girls through influencing or inciting them to engage in sex when they spoke of their sexual experiences. This fear also filtered to or was felt by young girls residing at this shelter. Claiming victimhood and re-asserting their childhood status in what they viewed as adults' corrupt world, one of the girls described the women who were survivors of sexual violence including rape, as people who could potentially corrupt them. She complained that these women often narrated their sexual ordeals in their presence. "We hear things which are beyond our ages", said a 15 year old independent migrant girl. She implicitly portrayed herself and her peers as lacking sexual agency to resist being influenced by these adult women. She and other girls backed the point which was often made by aid workers that girls needed their own shelter, a position which contradicted what aid workers said at other moments; that these children were very knowledgeable and experienced in sex. The aid workers and girls' position is so telling about how victims of of violence become immoral and tainted just because the violence they suffered was sexualised. This suggests that survivors of sexual and gender based violence were seen as victims but in the presence of children, were pathologised and feared. A victim of violence was being blamed. It seems aid workers and these girls were drawing on the discourse which sees active sexuality as "the prerogative of adult males and 'fallen women'" (Marcus, 1966 cited in Clarke, 2004d: 90). It also revealed how children themselves, contrary to the popular thinking amongst aid workers that they were immature and passive, were questioning their sexualised environment and suggesting what needed to be done.

However, some aid workers opposed this discourse of childhood innocence, which was used by some independent children. They contended that these children were simply sexual deviants. In a separate interview with one female senior aid worker, I asked her about her thoughts on whether children were being influenced by the adult women who were staying with them. Her response was unambiguous:

> They are not being influenced by anyone. Some of these children have always been like that. Some will be trying to look for money in order to survive. Then there are those who are generally naughty. I think that place (shelter) is just a stage.

Framing independent migrant children as sexual delinquents, for example, justified the peer education programmes carried out by aid workers, aimed at empowering children on how to resist pressure to engage in sex. However, at the same time, some of the aid workers did not associate the mobility of girls with deviant behaviour, a position which arguably views children as passive actors or victims of environmental factors.

Gaidzanwa (1998) argues that stereotyping of migrant women could be a ploy by men to control the migration space which had for long been dominated by men. In Musina, Gaidzanwa's (1998) point could be applicable. For example, consistent with the notion that the girl child is vulnerable and has to be protected, independent migrant girls were considered more vulnerable to live in violent spaces than independent migrant boys. Concurring with aid workers, independent migrant boys who were based at the border post indicated that the border post was not good for girls to live and eke out a living. So as soon as an independent migrant girl arrived at the border post they encouraged and supported girls to leave as soon as possible. Generally, masculinity bids men to assume the role of protector and boys living at the border post defined their role as consistent with this thinking. Drawing from the discourse of protection, aid workers and independent migrant boys depicted migrant girls as in need of protection and made concerted efforts to quickly help them live in the shelter for girls in Musina. For example, independent migrant boys often alerted aid workers to the presence of a new independent migrant girl at the border post. So constructions of girlhood resulted in some assistance for independent migrant girls, for example, being placed in places of safety but also some pathologising.

Interestingly, independent migrant boys' belief that girls should be protected – what Robnett and Leaper (2013) describe as "benevolent sexism", rooted in patriarchy where tradition and culture expects 'a good' man to protect a woman, was also influenced by ulterior motives of making sure that girls do not share the same space with them. There was a general consensus amongst independent migrant boys that independent migrant girls were divisive characters amongst them. They accused independent migrant girls of distracting them from focusing on making money. Independent migrant boys felt that the presence of girls weakened their group solidarity, for example, when it came to running of food cooperatives and trusting each other as they would be competing for the girls' attention. To buttress the point that migrant girls are divisive elements some independent migrant boys mentioned some moments in the past during which friends had fought over girls and some of their friends who had been in a love relationship neglected contributing to food cooperatives and used the money they had to support their girlfriends. Thus, it can be argued that these boys wanted to exclude independent migrant girls from the migration space as they saw them as not adding value to their social and economic endeavours. Indeed, insofar as this example shades light into notions of autonomous actors/subjects making self-interested, strategic choices (see Long, 1992), I argue that we are right back in the heart of that ideology that sexualises women and excludes them from activities which have economic value.

On a related subject, the 'African tradition' was frequently invoked by aid workers to control girls on the type of clothes they could wear. Migrant girls' challenge to gender-biased practices of dressing was either met with muted or loud denigrations that they were promiscuous. For example, a female worker was unsettled when she saw a 16-year-old girl wearing a mini-skirt and accused the girl of "exposing herself to attract men". She described the girl as troublesome. Besides her statement typifying moral panic about the sexual behaviour of these girls, she was allocating blame for any problem the girl and others like her were experiencing or might experience. Meursing *et al*. (1995 cited in Lalor, 2004: 453) in a study in Zimbabwe, which also gathered views on the rape of teenage girls, noted that men and boys blamed the girls for having sexually provoked men through 'dressing in a seductive manner' to rape them. This situation also reinforces the point made by McFadden (2003: *page unstated*) in her paper on 'Sexual pleasure as feminist choice' that:

> These constructions are aggressively invoked whenever women seek to make independent choices, when they become public and visible as aspiring citizens, when they seek social mobility through their educational skills and material

> resources, and when they transgress cultural and social boundaries defended in the name of 'tradition'.

Aid workers wanted these girls to wear clothes which asexualised them so that they would not be vulnerable to sexual abuse, as well as remain 'innocent'. The suppression of these girls' sexuality through efforts like monitoring their lifestyles (for example, dressing) was maintained by what Patricia McFadden (2003) describes as vigilant surveillance.

Conversely, there was less focus on migrant boys' sexual morality in Musina. This is probably due to the explanation that dominant discourses of sexuality "attribute sexuality as much more 'natural' to boys" (Walkerdine, 1990 cited in Burman, 2008: 107). Independent migrant girls were not seen by aid workers, including the female ones, as moral equals to independent migrant boys as aid workers placed less restrictions on the movements of the latter – for example, every day many boys came back to the shelter late at night and attracted less rebuke from aid workers. In fact, female aid workers sustained the moral double standard that society generally puts on women. This highlights the patriarchal sexual culture in Musina and that its values had also been internalised by some women.

While acknowledging their vulnerability against men who demanded to have sex with them, particularly at night, some of the girls rejected representations of them that emphasized their powerlessness or 'passiveness' to protect themselves. Showing the complexity and contradictory nature of the representations of girls, some independent migrant girls living in the street showed feminine vulnerability and exercised agency in "spaces of vulnerability", for example, in the evening to counter threats of abuse by approaching adult women who were either cross border traders or vendors, and asked to share with them their sleeping places. Adult women embedded in the discourse of protecting children from danger also often took the initiative to invite the independent migrant girls to come and sleep where they slept. These protective measures taken by girls reinforced their vulnerability as girls but it distinctively also shows that they were not hapless victims of migration. In addition, it is clear that they were social actors knowledgeable about their environment and were aware of their limited power to defend themselves if they were to face criminals. This case supports the point made by Laoire, Carpena-Mendez, Tyrrell and White (2010) that there are simplistic views which associate child mobility with deviance and danger. Some independent children contested the idea that migrant children were no longer 'innocent'. This example represents just one of the ingenious ways that girls responded to insecurity on the streets. Ironically, a 15 year old girl who was the only girl under 18 living and working at the border

post told a group of police officers who were accompanied by some aid workers on a mission to stop children from working and to live in places of safety, “I am safe in the streets with migrant boys. I actually fear the police”. This girl felt that aid workers and police officers’ efforts would stifle her plans. However, a few months later the girl agreed with the aid workers’ view that it was risky for girls to live in the streets. She involuntarily left the border post (her home for over two years), her own business of selling boiled eggs and moved back into the shelter complaining: “I am tired of keeping on fighting off men who want to have sex with me”. She had one of the *magumaguma* arrested for harassing, beating, attempting and threatening to rape her. Arguably, her audacious action in light of vicious attacks by the feared *magumaguma* to seek protection challenges the notion that girls and women are hapless victims of violence, migration and patriarchy. However, without nullifying what I said above, this case study, which shows the complexity in understanding children on the move backs Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White’s point that “while children may exercise some agency in deciding to go onto the streets, they can lose control over their lives in conditions of extreme degradations” (2010: 136). While this girl responded by going to live in a place of safety, reinforcing adults’ point that a home is the ideal place for children, some independent children responded by befriending the *magumaguma*, engaged in survival sex with *magumaguma* and other men who offered to protect them. This finding is in agreement with Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White’s (2010) point that when children feel powerless to overcome hardships they engage in crime as a survival strategy and substance abuse. In Musina, a number of independent children including girls were usually “high” or highly intoxicated on recreational drugs or substances like glue, alcohol and cannabis as they wanted amongst other reasons, to “forget the many problems we have to deal with”.

On a different matter, in this context dominated by abuse, poverty and violence, there was little space, particularly amongst adults, for a relationship between an independent child and member of the opposite sex to be constructed as anything other than abusive. The dominant discourse of victimhood closed the possibility for consensual relationships yet many of these children were adolescents who like other adolescents elsewhere could be in a socially sanctioned relationship with the opposite sex. Aid workers’ knowledge of independent migrant children’s romantic relationships seemed limited. Aid workers and independent migrant children hardly discussed the subject of sex especially during formal settings. This can be attributed to what Burman (2008: 120) describes as the feminists’ emphasis on the “position of women as victims” which makes it difficult to imagine them in “relationships outside context of abuse”. The utility of the discourses of sexual abuse and

exploitation resulted in the mobilisation of resources for interventions to 'save' them from having their childhood 'stolen' or 'losing' it (see Poretti, Hanson, Darbellay and Berchtold, 2013).

On another topic, contrary to their construction by aid workers as children who had self-destructive agency (see Gigengack, 2008) – "you are destroying yourselves" as aid workers often said – some independent children behaved otherwise. This can be illustrated by the case of Lulu, a girl aged 17, who left the shelter for girls to live with her boyfriend at the time of fieldwork. She said:

> I am very happy staying with my boyfriend because he provides me with everything that I need. I am not tempted to go out with different men. He bought some hairdressing equipment for me and I am now operating a backyard salon which gives me money to buy whatever I like buying. My boyfriend is 25 years old and is a Zimbabwean from Kadoma. He promised to marry me in May this year (2010).

Though children's practice of living with boyfriends, which was very prevalent in Musina, disturbed aid workers and many other children's moral sensibilities and understandings of childhood, it is worth noting that these children were actually navigating a lot of risks, traditional and cultural issues. Lulu distanced herself from risky sexual behaviour which independent migrant girls particularly those living outside shelters, were commonly associated with. She maintained her moral respectability by having sex with one boyfriend and preparing to be married. Cohabiting (referred to as *kubika mapoto* by the *Shona* people in Zimbabwe) is common but remains something anathema to many adults in both South Africa and Zimbabwe (see for example, Siyachitema, 2011). This frowned-upon behaviour in both the Christian and local tradition is often not acknowledged as a legitimate relationship by many aid workers.

Of note is that though Lulu was away from home, it was clear that gender and patriarchy remained strong structuring forces in her life and other migrant girls' lives. Thus far from being cultural deviants as they were often portrayed by aid workers, Lulu's happiness in having been promised marriage indicated that some of these girls conformed to cultural norms about how men and women should live together. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu's notion of habitus (see Ritzer, 1992).

On a different subject, the common images of independent migrant girls as passive, victims of sexual violence and sexual actors at risk, was challenged by some girls. In the words of Christina, a 16 year old orphan girl who ran away from her sexually abusive uncle in Zimbabwe fearing that she would be infected with HIV:

> Most Zimbabwean girls get abused because they are desperate for accommodation, money, food and therefore they are exposed to abuse and exploitation. I have told myself not to get involved in sex issues because I know how it is to die from HIV. I have seen my parents dying from HIV. I have set some principles for myself. I am going to uphold them because I want to later get married and have healthy children. I should also be in good health so that I can take care of them and see them growing.

Christina's behaviour indicates that notions of migrant girls as hyper-sexualised children who are sexually reckless and have no 'plan' in life should be challenged. Her response was informed by her past and present living reality. HIV and AIDS have wreaked havoc in Zimbabwe leaving millions of children orphaned but aware of its causes and effects on people's lives. Contrary to the dominant discourse of childhood which prevailed during the formal interactions between children and aid workers that children are weak, the traumatising experience of seeing her parents die had an empowering effect on Christina in terms of sexual behaviour. The discourses of poverty and abuse sometimes diminish social actors' capacity to draw lessons from social problems, and become agents in their own lives who implement strategies to improve their social conditions. Some people are empowered through knowledge and experience.

However, actors in a similar situation or same place, such as independent children and aid workers, have diverse life-worlds (see Magadlela, 2000). This situation is illustrated by Anita who chose one sexual partner who would look after her, a practice which was different from that of her friends who had multiple sexual partners:

> Although I am regarded as a minor by the law, at 16 I think I'm old enough to decide what's best for me. That is why I have decided to stay with my boyfriend. I can say it was out of desperation because I was failing to raise money for rent and could not buy myself clothes and food. Now I don't have to worry about any of those things because my boyfriend is responsible for everything. I just sleep with my one and only boyfriend so as to minimise the chances of contracting HIV. We are not using protection because my boyfriend does not like to use the condom. I

> consider myself much better because all my friends whom you saw when you arrived have many sexual partners[62]. One of them is pregnant and she is trying to terminate it using some herbs she got from a certain woman. This girl sniffs glue and drinks a lot of beer … These girls are now involved in prostitution in order to make a living.

Of note is that children's own assessments of the situation and reasons why they were living outside shelters tended to be silenced yet ethnographic research has shown that migrant children tend to be very active in deciding on matters which concern them (see Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010). These children were stigmatised for not living in places of temporary safety. The study also supports Palmary, Burman, Chantler and Kiguwa's (2010) point about how labelling of vulnerable groups can result in a slide between vulnerability and pathology. Consequently, it becomes difficult to address the vulnerability of independent children and their pathologised sexual lives as these issues are often conflated.

With regards to sexual gender based violence, aid workers usually placed the blame on the victims. For example, some of the aid workers said independent migrant girls who ended up being sexually abused by truck drivers "choose not to use public transport which is readily available". Aid workers argued that the behaviour of these children proved that they did not value their lives. They also said the same applied to those who used illegal entry points in the bush guided by strangers and got raped by *magumaguma*.

On a separate matter, girls' interaction with men who claimed to protect them particularly in the streets but were also responsible for their suffering, was very complex. Observations revealed that boys and adult men exercised a lot of power over these girls under the guise of protecting them from other men who might want to sexually exploit them. One of these girls disclosed that these men were "harassing us in many ways", which implicitly included sexual abuse. Due to fear most of these cases were going unreported to the police and aid workers. This form of action which was seen by aid workers as acts of passiveness was actually well thought out as it was informed by lived realities of street life.

However, some independent migrant children were not very keen to maintain the symbolic sexual boundaries between children and adults. The Foucauldian perspective explains this situation by arguing that the presence of boundaries generates conditions for various acts of transgression. For instance, some independent migrant boys flirted with some female aid workers, subjected them to unwanted sexual attention or made inappropriate

[62] I saw four friends of this girl.

sexual comments about their bodies, for example using sexual metaphors and erotic symbols like saying, "*makabatana*" (your body is well structured – meaning she was sexually attractive). In a context of entrenched social distance between children and adults, some young female aid workers described this behaviour as crass, obscene, transgressive and unchild-like. These boys were explicitly and implicitly contesting the dominant ways in which their sexuality was being understood by aid workers and other adults. This behaviour did not ingratiate them with a number of female aid workers who described them as morally corrupt. Aid workers also responded by demeaning independent children's sexual prowess. They wanted to reduce these boys' sense of power over adult women. One of the ways they did so was utilising the discourse of shame: aid workers mocked independent children by saying that their sexual organs were small. This response by aid workers was aimed at reinforcing the childhood – adulthood sexual divide as they reminded children that they were immature and therefore sexually incompetent. Aid workers' infantilisation of independent children's sexuality disqualified them as competent sexual actors.

Female aid workers also employed strategies for closing down sexual innuendo between themselves and independent migrant boys. Take this example: one female aid worker during a light discussion with three boys between 14 and 16 years invited them to come and live with her at her house. One of the boys used thinly veiled figurative language to ask her: "Just to come and eat food only at your place?" She quickly noted that the conversation had taken a sexual turn as the boys' question and its tone implied that besides eating food, they would also want to have sex with her. Contrary to my thinking that this flirting was upsetting the age and gender relations, the female aid worker shocked me by not using the familial discourse such as 'mother', 'sister', 'aunt' which functioned at times to control the behaviour of children or maintain the social distance between children and adults. She like other aid workers also emphasized the non-negotiability of having a sexual relationship through socially constructing familial relationship like 'my brother' and 'my child' which desexualised boys and empowered the aid workers to control the sexual behaviour of these children. She deployed jokes to disempower boys and rebut their efforts to establish a sexual relationship with her. Whilst playing up her sexuality, she infantalised the boy and his friends' sexual prowess by caricaturing their competence and stamina through sexual banters like: "Are you able to satisfy me? If I make love to you I will not feel anything (implying that their penises were too small or they lacked sex skills because they were young)". Jokes including sexist ones, usually expressed during informal situations when normal sense of decency and decorum was low, were also often used by both aid workers and children as 'ice-

breakers' (see Cockburn, 1991) to diffuse tense moments between them as well as keep the sexual boundary between aid workers and children.

Though the rhetoric of childhood as a state of incompetence including sexual performance complicated and caused considerable confusion about boundaries between children and adults, satirical erotic exchanges (like the ones above) also served to emphasise to children not to entertain thoughts of 'taking chances' to have sexual relationships with aid workers. The jokes functioned to casually remind the children that they were minors and their relationship with aid workers was a hierarchical one. In other words, the discourse of childhood innocence with an emphasis on children's immaturity worked to regulate and limit the possibilities of sex between children and adults. So although there appeared to be a breaking down of socially appropriate adult-child relationships, rules and hierarchies that governed appropriate expressions of sexuality remained in place.

Whilst the idea that poverty forced independent migrant children into sex was pervasive, it is very different and even contradictory with the idea that they were as promiscuous. Aid workers pathologised independent children they viewed as promiscuous. During a focus group discussion with girls, one of them recalled an aid worker saying to her and her peers: "You are adults in children's bodies. You are having too much sex. You have already aged because men are using you a lot". Aid workers feared that sexually active children were rushing into adulthood and losing their childhood. Fearing that hyper-sexual activeness negatively affected children's well-being and development, aid workers either tried to make concerted efforts to improve protection systems or ostracised, marginalised, and silenced independent children with sexual behaviour they regarded as not consistent with 'normal' childhood.

Through portraying migrant girls as immoral, reckless and 'unchild-like' in terms of their sexual behaviour, aid workers were in effect shifting blame of the plight of these girls from the structural factors to children themselves. Discourses of blaming victims of sexual abuse worked to expose how the sexual abuse of children in public space was normalised. Aid workers re-victimised or pathologised children they regarded as vulnerable. For example, although aid workers acknowledged that conditions in the shelters at that time were below the government's minimum standards in terms of supporting children with basics like clothing, adequate food, and the required number of care givers, some aid workers were of the view that these girls liked being outdoors looking for men (to form sexual relationships). The conduct of the survivor was blamed for having precipitated the act. "Ironically, those who are survivors of rape are at the forefront of liking men", said a woman aid worker criticising the

sexual behaviour of independent children who were sexually violated. Sexual abuse and consensual sex were conflated. Their action showed that victim-blaming is still alive even amongst aid workers, people who are generally assumed to know better. This position worked to portray women who were victims of sexual abuse as not credible victims.

Generally, during discussions on the difficulties the humanitarian agencies faced in providing support to these children which ranged from inadequate funding to complex funding regulations[63], aid workers tended to be more tolerant of independent children and other young people's sexual conduct. This position served to solidify the humanitarian discourse – that migrant children are vulnerable and therefore more humanitarian aid had to be availed to them. However, at any other time they moralised the sexuality of children and gave little weight to structural issues which influenced children's behaviour. It is possible that the blaming of victims was a tactic by aid workers to absolve themselves of their failure to adequately care for and support these children.

[63] At the time of fieldwork South Africa government's Department of Social Development was refusing to fund the two temporary places of safety for children under study on the grounds that the infrastructure and living conditions which was obtaining in these shelters did not meet their minimum standards (see Department of Social Development, 2010). The management of these shelters and church members did not have the resources to develop them to meet the minimum standards.

CHAPTER 4 AND CHAPTER 5: SOME CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing (chapter four and five), it is clear that independent children were being represented in multiple ways with different meanings. This is not surprising as childhood is lived and experienced contextually (James and Prout, 1997). The representations which are set within social and power structures in aid work manifest differently in different contexts. This dimension is important because it shows the ambiguities and contradictions in the representations of independent children. Here, one is reminded of Ensor's (2010: 16) observation that "Discourses on children and childhood are fluid and evolving". I have shown that representations of independent children change with context and are shaped by various discourses. Thus, I suggest that perceptions of children's mobility, work and sexuality should not be divorced from the social context. In particular, when analysing the representations of independent children, it is important to take into account the choices and actions of social actors in a difficult social milieu before making conclusions.

In concluding this chapter, one thing was obvious: aid workers had contradictory understandings of childhood and relations with independent children. This resulted in no single view of independent children's sexuality, work and mobility amongst aid workers. I showed that competing and contradictory discourses functioned at different times. For instance, there were mixed and conflicting responses by aid workers to the ACRWC (1990) recognition of the responsibility of children to assist their families in case of need (Article 31a). On one hand, the humanitarian workers believed that independent migrant children had to work as part of their socialisation and that they had a responsibility – as spelt out in the African Charter's Article 31[64] - to contribute in building their households' economies through participating in various work activities. On the other hand, the reality dictated otherwise. Aid workers did not want to see minors doing work which they perceived as either dangerous or affected their development. Although they were often against all forms of child work, they sometimes sympathised with and supported working children as they had shifting interests and understandings of childhood. I argued that these representations are situational.

In this chapter, I have described the representations of independent children from Zimbabwe and illustrated their formal and informal representations. I have looked at three areas which feature prominently in discussions on childhood to unpack the way in which they are differently represented and these are mobility, work and sexuality. I presented and

[64] "The Child, subject to his age and ability…shall have the duty to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need"

explained the situations when formal and informal representations tended to dominate or prevail.

I have analysed how independent children are being framed and what discourses informed these understandings. Whilst child migration has different meanings to different social actors, in official situations it is generally constructed as contrary to normal childhood. The dominant anti-child migration discourse sees migration, particularly by independent children as potentially dangerous and engendered. Migrating conferred adult status and autonomy to some independent children. To some independent children, migration marked a turning point from childhood to adulthood, a point which was at times disputed by a number of aid workers keen to maintain social boundaries between adulthood and childhood (Burman, 1995 cited in van der Riet, 2009). I have shown that aid workers at times erased the structural and economic difficulties children faced and so cast their migration as a quest for adventure rather than a necessity. However, aid workers drawing from the discourse of children as competent and responsible community members at some moments, particularly during informal settings, portrayed these children positively.

I discussed the paradoxes in the representations of independent working children as work was central to their lives. My findings show that there were two dominant discourses: anti and the pro-child work. The discourse of anti-child work which tended to dominate during formal situations and portrayed independent children as victims of poverty, forced into work. However, the lived realities of these children sometimes altered the way they were represented. Thus, this study points toward the need for ground analysis in the social context in which independent children made the decision to work or worked as these two competing discourses operated at different times. My results reinforce the point made by Bourdillon that "The lives of the poor are more likely to be improved by access to more and better options, rather than by removing their chosen option for improving their situation" (2006: 1222). This is the position which informed aid workers, particularly during informal situations and made them portray independent migrant working children positively.

I also analysed one of the under-researched and controversial subjects within the field of migration: the contested representation of independent children's sexuality in a humanitarian context. The sexuality of independent children in Musina generated mixed representations, one of which was that they were seen as victims and as lacking socialization as they were accused of running away from their homes. My analysis shows that within the dominant Westernised and local discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability, independent children were de-sexualised. The chapter offered insight into the dangers and dilemmas of

sexualising and de-sexualising children in vulnerable situations. Traditional views that the ideal for children's sexuality is an asexual state persist as they are connected to ideas of childhood innocence and vulnerability.

During formal situations, aid workers' efforts to protect independent migrant children tended to be based on the social categorization, common in Global North's ideologies, of seeing children as innocent victims who are not to blame for their situation (see Burman, 2008), weak and too passive to successfully overcome various constraints. The chapter showed that one can never assume that children who were working, sexually active or mobile without their parents were being cast as 'bad' or irresponsible by virtue of their behaviour that opposed the dominant discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability. Depending on the situation, their involvement in these activities could generate positive representations. Discourses of innocence, vulnerability and children's rights were invoked, often with much contradiction and contest, portraying children as vulnerable and generally strong, as innocent victims and perpetrators of social ills including crime, as responsible social beings and irresponsible beings, as manipulators and manipulated, and as cultured children and uncouth children (see Honwana and Boeck, 2005).

Contrary to my expectations, there was no pervasive climate of intolerance towards child work, mobility and to some extent, sexuality. The line between the anti and pro-work approach as well as the line between anti-child mobility and pro-child mobility was often blurry. The plurality of discourses, often competing, and mediation of contextual socio-economic factors provided a fertile ground for situational and inconsistent representations of independent working children. Consequently, this questions Meyer's point that "this discourse of innocence is extremely resistant to challenges, whether logical, experiential, evidential or otherwise" (2007: 89). Evidence from Musina suggests that the discourse of innocence at times is easily challenged.

Aid workers' constant shifts in representing independent children – between official and unofficial times – buttressed the point made in available literature that "childhood is lived and experienced contextually" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 114). In Musina, for example, this situation resulted in a constant shift of the narrative of victimhood of independent children. The results of this study indicate that "the iconography of victimhood" (Poretti, Hanson, Darbellay and Berchtold, 2013: 2) of independent children was not consistently mobilised and deployed by aid workers. Evidence from Musina shows that the different representations of independent children were based more on actors' different lifeworlds, situational analysis of aid workers' interests and children's lived realities. For instance, I argued that the

dominant anti-child migration discourse anchored on the discourse of child protection resulted in mixed representations of independent children. On one hand, there was an acknowledgement that life in Zimbabwe was unbearable and a thinking that migration can be a viable coping strategy for these children. On the other hand, aid workers feared that migration would introduce to these children all sorts of vices. Such fears legitimised interventions aimed at repatriating children to their homes or re-uniting them with their parents and relatives. This chapter also highlighted the framing of migration as both empowering and disempowering. Some aid workers, particularly during informal moments understand child migration as an empowerment strategy in the context of economic precariousness. Such a view of migration allowed independent migrant children to be cast as responsible household members who supported their families. But drawing from the discourses of schooling and anti-child work, these children were seen as hopeless. For example, aid workers were concerned that migration negatively affected independent children on the educational front. As a result of competing values, norms, different interests and social contexts, the representations of children often changed significantly in Musina. These findings suggest that in general, aid workers should consider the different meanings of childhood, vulnerability and child migration at different times.

As I have shown, representations of independent children tend to be moralised and gendered. I examined the gendering of representations of independent children by, for example, focusing on the ideal of a 'good' girl child. The social actors negotiate the ideal in complex ways, managing the normative expectations of childhood under different circumstances. The pathologisation of independent children reflects the prevailing Westernised and local discourses of childhood which frame 'normal' children as innocent.

Of note is that representations of independent children were a reflection of children "shaping and being shaped by their social world" (Honwana and Boeck, 2005: ix): independent children were like child soldiers who "find themselves in a luminal position which breaks down established dichotomies between...victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protected and protector, maker and breaker" (Honwana, 2005: 32). There is tension between independent children and aid workers' understanding of situations with the latter often, during formal processes, viewing children's actions using the lens of internationally accepted norms of childhood.

CHAPTER 6: Reminders of Childhood and the Economy of Childhood

Introduction

A recurrent theme in this study was aid workers' efforts to remind children of behaviours which constitute 'normal' or appropriate childhood. Through focusing on the everyday interactions between aid workers and independent children, I address, in this chapter, the ways that aid workers reinforced the idea of a good childhood – something I go on to refer to as 'reminders of childhood'. The reminders of the ideal features of childhood and vulnerability, some of which I discuss below, were deployed to set boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and to socially constrain children on what they could do or not do in their lives. Usually, reminders of childhood were evoked when children crossed the boundaries. I discuss how the 'reminders of childhood' functioned and at what moments they were evoked in order to give further insights on the politics of the representation of independent migrant children. In addition, I discuss examples of how aid workers used these reminders to re-instate an appropriate childhood status. In this chapter I consider two kinds of 'reminders of childhood' used by aid workers in representing independent children.

There are kinds of behaviour and activities which are considered child-like or appropriate for children. Generally, children are seen as lacking "the strength and skill of adults and the wisdom of the elderly" (Lancy, 2008: 373). Consequently, aid workers using their parental authority emphasised that they had the right to set appropriate behaviour standards for children through these reminders. Acknowledging that "studying children and childhood in isolation is of limited value" Woodhead (2009: 24), I also briefly focus on understanding what adulthood is. Inversely, this helped me understand how childhood is defined within the migration and humanitarian context.

Though there were reminders of childhood, I observed that there existed the formal and informal economies of childhood which made aid workers' position ambiguous. I discuss the workings of the formal and informal economies of childhood. I show how the concepts of childhood and vulnerability were used as resources by both independent children and aid workers in the process generating various and contradictory representations of these children. But this does not necessarily mean that these economies were clearly separate and fixed.

These economies of childhood and vulnerability often changed as interests of social actors and situations changed.

Reminders of Age and Vulnerability

Ideas that children by virtue of their young ages are incapable of thinking rationally and protecting themselves (see Burman, 2008; Lancy, 2008), particularly those who are not under the care of their parents and guardians, guided many of the practices of aid workers. As already discussed earlier, aid workers often used familial terms which indicated or emphasised that independent children were minors. Such terms included: "child", "my young brother", "my husband's young brother", and "my young sister". These socially constructed familial relations, implicitly emphasised the hierarchal relations between children and adults, and worked to legitimise aid workers' right to take up a position of parental authority with the associated rights to determine appropriate behaviour for independent children. These familial relations which served as reminders of children's young ages, compelled these children to obey aid workers' instructions. For instance, independent children were expected to save their earnings, bath every day, prepare their beds and not have sexual relations among other things. Reminders of age also worked to maintain the social boundary or distance between aid workers as adults and independent children.

Widely perceived by aid workers as incapable of adequately protecting themselves or coping on their own, independent children were subsequently constructed as very vulnerable. Consequently, children were not given the freedom of movement. This was evidenced, for example, by numerous attempts by aid workers to limit the movement of independent children. Reproducing the notion of an ideal home, aid workers did not want children to just come and go from the shelters as they liked. However, this became a source of tension between aid workers and children as independent children often challenged this view which they felt demeaned them. For instance, a number of children, particularly at the boys' shelter, often left the shelter without permission from aid workers. Some of them, particularly boys, returned to the shelters around midnight, a time considered inconsistent with appropriate childhood and dangerous by the aid workers and other independent migrant boys. Children often went in and out of the shelter at will. This behaviour led aid workers to remind them about their state of childhood and vulnerability. They often rebuked children for returning late to the shelter with utterances such as "you are a woman" or "you are *minors*". Telling children that they were minors or that they were "women" was a calculated strategy that

served to disempower these children and emphasised to them that they should not cross boundaries. They also called for those children who were behaving inappropriately to recant their behaviour.

On a separate but related note, aid workers often kept independent children's temporary asylum permits. Aid workers introduced this measure as independent children were leaving the shelter without authorisation, losing their temporary asylum permits or failing to properly take care of them. Without temporary asylum permits, they could not easily leave Musina to Zimbabwe or other places in South Africa, a situation aid workers preferred as they viewed these children as being in need of protection and nurturing (Hendrick, 1990; Ansell, 2005). Aid workers insisted that independent children should seek clearance from them and government social workers when they wanted to move from one place to another. Objecting to aid workers' arguably paternalistic and maternalistic behaviour, a 16-year-old boy complained: "If you want an asylum paper you request it. We are treated as infants". Paradoxically, the impact of aid workers keeping temporary asylum permits was potentially severe as it put these children at risk of being arrested and deported for not having documentation to be in South Africa, undermining their efforts to protect children. This result suggests that far from simply portraying these children as vulnerable and whose movements had to be closely controlled, the aid workers to some extent produced conditions which made children vulnerable (see also Prout and James, 2005).

Though independent children did not have secure storage space to keep their valuables, this situation led to some independent children to tactfully refuse to handover their temporary asylum permits to aid workers for safe keeping. This stance was seen as unacceptable as they were defying aid workers and "behaving like adults yet they are children". Mobilising discourses of adult superiority functioned to silence or remind children to respect the hierarchical order which governed the adult-child relations. Aid workers reinforced children's perceived powerlessness in life. The discourse of children's dependence showed that the idea of children having a say in matters that concern them which was ironically, often promoted by aid workers during formal situations, was limited or at least situational.

Generally, and as mentioned before, aid workers viewed independent children, particularly those outside places of safety, as vulnerable. Informed by ideas of family and home being the ideal place for children to grow up in, aid workers often reminded children not to move without their parents and guardians, and emphasised that they should live either in places of safety or in their parents' homes. Reminding independent children that they were young and vulnerable and could suffer from abuse and exploitation, for example at the hands

of *omalayitsha,* aid workers, working in collaboration with the police, often provided shelter to independent children who were being transported by *omalayitsha* to Johannesburg and other areas in South Africa. Police often took these children away from *omalayitsha* and put them in places of safety. The children's parents and guardians based in South Africa often arranged with *omalayitsha* to take their children to South Africa particularly during school holidays. Though not all *omalayitsha* are violent (see Kropiwnicki, 2010), *omalayitsha* were widely accused of being untrustworthy and violent. They were also accused of sexually abusing some of their clients who included independent migrant children (see for example, Dube, 2015)[65]. *Omalayitsha* often abused the migrants especially if the business transaction turned bad, for example, failure by the clients or the clients' relatives to pay the agreed transport fees.

This intervention of placing independent children in places of safety which cast them as vulnerable and therefore not fit to be on their own, delayed these children's journey. It generated a lot of challenges including logistical ones for a number of people, including aid workers, children and parents. Social workers working together with aid workers often contacted the parents to come and fetch their children from places of safety. The case of 14-year-old Chipo is illustrative in showing how this reminder of children's age and vulnerability functioned. This girl who was doing Form 2 in Zimbabwe (approximately grade 9 in South Africa) on her way to Johannesburg to visit her mother during the April 2010 school holiday[66] in Zimbabwe was separated from the *omalayitsha* who had been paid by her mother to take her. Social workers working with police officers placed her in a place of safety for independent migrant girls. Chipo did not have the required travel documents. The *omalayitsha* proceeded to Johannesburg without having given the girl and aid workers her mother's South African phone number. After the aid workers indicated that they had no money to immediately call this girl's family in Zimbabwe to get her mother's phone number as they had no budget for this service, touched by her plight, I assisted in calling her home in Zimbabwe. After getting her mother's South African phone number, I then contacted her mother. An aid worker under strict instructions from the social workers not to release the child talked to Chipo's mother on the phone. She told the mother to come to Musina and

[65] See for example this report about one *malayitsha* who was accused of raping a 13 year old girl: http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-regional-byo-61888.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Bulawayo24News+%28Bulawayo24+News%29

[66] Thousands of Zimbabwean children visit their parents and relatives in South Africa during the holidays under these conditions.

fetch her child. But the aid worker emphasised to the mother that she would only be allowed to take Chipo if she positively identified herself as Chipo's the mother. Chipo like many other independent children had no passport or birth certificate with her. The following day the mother arrived and was allowed to fetch her daughter. But the other independent children who were being kept under the same poor conditions remained there for days and weeks. One day whilst I was at the girls' shelter I overheard one social worker telling one mother on the phone who wanted her child to continue on her journey with *omalayitsha* as she did not have the money to travel to Musina and was busy at work in Johannesburg, "Do you want me to lose my job? Keep your job and we keep the children". This child ended up spending more than three weeks at the place of safety. Thus, reminders of children's age and vulnerability worked to reinforce the idea that children did not have the autonomy or capacity to freely move without their parents. This shows the continued dominance of the idea of childhood as a special phase justifying protecting these children from potential dangers and hardships.

These reminders of childhood and vulnerability marginalised independent children's perspectives following the assumption that children are immature. At times the *omalayitsha* proceeded to Johannesburg with the children's luggage leaving children with no change of clothes. Aid workers forced a number of children to spend a number of days at the shelter waiting for their parents to fetch them[67]. To further illuminate this point, one girl aged 17 and doing Form 6 in Zimbabwe who was separated from *omalayitsha* and on her way to spend a holiday in Johannesburg dejectedly told me, "Holiday is going to end whilst we are on the road". Some of these children ended up running away from the shelter. This example shows that the discourse of children's vulnerability remains dominant in aid work as it controlled children's movements. However, it was being challenged by the children themselves.

Ironically, the discourse of children's vulnerability was at times undermined by some of the aid workers who allowed children to proceed with their journey without following the official guidelines for ensuring that they would be safe. The following extract from my report during fieldwork exemplifies how aid workers did the opposite of what they were expected to do:

> Whilst I was at the boys' shelter one day in 2010, three *omalayitsha* driving a twin cab vehicle brought in a 17 year old boy who wanted to get R150 from an aid worker. Soon after arriving at the shelter from Zimbabwe, this boy had handed over the money to the aid worker for safe keeping. In fact, this aid worker had

[67] Similarly, "In France separated children are regularly detained in the 'waiting zone' at Charles de Gaulle airport for up to a month or more. In Germany separated children may be detained in the 'airport procedure' and in detention centres" (Halvorsen, 2002:34).

> advised the boy to give her the money for safe keeping. The money was for his bus fare to Johannesburg. The boy had been picked up by police and placed at the shelter. He asked the aid worker to return the money soon after he had been cleared by the government's social workers to proceed with his journey to Johannesburg. Instead of returning the money, the aid worker quickly made arrangements with the *omalayitsha* to take this boy to Johannesburg for R450. She gave the *malayitshas* R150 and told the *omalayitsha* to get the balance (R300) from the boy's aunt in Johannesburg when they arrived. When the boy arrived at the shelter together with *omalayitsha* to take his luggage, a senior aid worker stopped him from going with *malayitshas* as she felt it was not procedural and safe for the boy to do so. Then the *omalayitsha* demanded R50 for the fuel they had used to drive to the shelter from the Musina town centre. The aid worker who had made the transport arrangement refused to pay the *omalayitsha*. Attempts by other aid workers to persuade her to pay the *malayitshas* failed. As they argued *omalayitsha* revealed that they had not received the full R150 from this aid worker, information which shocked the boy and other independent children. "*Vaida kuchekeresa mwana*" (she wanted to sacrifice child), commented one independent migrant boy. *Omalayitsha* are infamous for ruthlessly dealing with migrants after botched deals. The *malayitshas* threatened to beat her up as she was refusing to pay them. The aid worker had calculated that with the boy in Johannesburg, she was going to avoid paying back the R150. As the case had attracted a lot of independent children and created a dangerous situation and the aid workers failed to pacify the *omalayitsha*, I decided to intervene. I negotiated with *omalayitsha* to reduce the amount from R50 to R20 because the distance was less than 10Km. I argued that at most they had used 2 litres (R8.60/litre). They agreed and left but after threatening the aid worker not to try to cheat them in future.

As disturbing as it is, what is important here is that this confrontation between the *omalayitshas* and the aid worker exemplifies not only the unscrupulous nature of some aid workers and the way they abused their positions of power but also the discourse of charity and the vulnerability of independent children. Of note also is that I participated in reproducing the local discourses and representations of migrant children. I influenced the above mentioned interaction between aid workers and independent children. But moments like this when I intervened and shaped events helped me to have a deeper understanding of the politics in the representation of independent children, for example, the different lifeworlds, conflicting interests between some aid workers and independent children.

Reminders of children's young ages and vulnerability were often a response to children's bold claims that, away from their parents and guardians, they were autonomous beings in South Africa (see chapter four and five). Aid workers took exception to these children's claims and insisted that they were passive victims "who are inherently 'vulnerable'" (Clark-Kazak, 2011: 6). Aid workers also openly told these children that they were transgressing by appropriating the status of adulthood. In addition, aid workers also responded by assuming

that these children needed adult protection. Aid workers invoked the term "child" to remind them that they were minors who had to be under the custody of an adult for their own good. "You are children. Our job is to protect you", was a common statement made by aid workers to silence children who claimed autonomy from aid workers and objected to being controlled by aid workers. In response to independent children who claimed autonomy on the grounds that they did not "cross the border" to South Africa with their parents or relatives, aid workers insisted that they were minors by virtue of their young ages. Aid workers rejected the point that childhood status operated in their home country but not foreign lands. This position meant that aid workers could not allow independent children to make independent decisions especially on matters which had implications for their well-being and development.

Besides revealing a lifeworld (Long, 2001) which makes them think they have parental rights and their role as service providers gives them the authority to withdraw independent children's claims of autonomy, aid workers also often emphasised that their seniority in terms of age gave them the authority to know what worked and what did not in the lives of the children. Reminding these children of their childhood status suggested to them that they lacked knowledge and experience. By emphasising that children lacked the wisdom of adults (Lancy, 2008) aid workers often told children that in future they would thank them for raising them well. "If we don't look after these children…limit their freedom they will blame us later on. In Zimbabwe we are tough and act as responsible parents and guardians. We need to do that", explained one senior female aid worker from Zimbabwe. Like other aid workers, she positioned independent children as vulnerable. She constructed home, Zimbabwe, as a site of protection for children and by so doing reminded these children that they were vulnerable away from home. She buttressed the reminders of age and childhood vulnerability by positioning herself and other aid workers as people who had a social responsibility to protect independent children. She also did that by telling the children to mark her words as they would in their adult years realise that they were wrong and aid workers were right to insist that children do certain things, such as attending school. After justifying their intervention, aid workers argued that children had to seek approval from or consult aid workers before they took important decisions like dropping out of school or leaving the boys' shelter to go to other places in South Africa like Makhado about 100 kilometres away to do temporary work. The discourse of parent's rights (see Robinson, 2008) – that it is, parents' right to control their children's movements – served to legitimise aid workers' interventions and remind the children that they could not do whatever they wanted. The power of this discourse was evident when we take note of the fact that a number of independent children did not question

the authority of aid workers to intervene in their personal lives. It reminded independent children that they were young and vulnerable.

Ordinarily, a state of vulnerability or victimhood is seen as something negative but much to my surprise, aid workers sometimes used it as a resource to discipline and further disempower independent migrant children. Though reminding children of their state of vulnerability was officially discouraged by management based on the idea that it could further affect them, it nevertheless served many purposes like limiting independent children's demands or pleas for better services. For example, telling independent migrant children of their poverty stricken past in Zimbabwe before they came into contact with aid workers, and about the improved living conditions they were now having in the shelters served to silence some independent children who were complaining of poor services particularly food and shelter. "You are suffering and we don't have anything better to give you. Better accept what is available" and, "Some people don't appreciate. You should be grateful for the assistance we are giving you", were common statements made by aid workers to independent children who, for example, complained against the rigid and poor diet they were being served in the places of safety. Statements like this show that in these aid workers' worldview, expression of lack of satisfaction over the quality of service by the independent children with a history of experiencing poverty is anathema and should not be accepted. Thus, reminders of their poverty worked to silence independent migrant children's complaints and as a tool to ward off criticisms against the poor quality of service delivery. A reminder of poverty reinforced the idea that poor people have limited choices, a thinking which emanates from the adage, 'beggars cannot be choosers'.

Consistent with aid workers' dominant constructions of children – as people who are still growing up and therefore vulnerable – one of the aid workers' activities or interests was to quickly re-unite independent children with their parent(s) and guardian(s). It was based on the notion that it was in independent migrant children's best interest. The common assumption amongst aid workers was that these children like other children, did not have the competence to look after themselves and again that their parents' home would provide protection. Just to emphasise this point, home was seen as protecting minors from being potentially corrupted by the adult environment. As already discussed above, aid workers sought to achieve this through placing these children in places of safety and sending them back to their parents through the IDTR programme. A dominant view amongst aid workers was that children should live in a home and under the control of their parents. It reminded children about their young ages and vulnerability. To convince independent children who were refusing to live in

shelters, aid workers often openly reminded independent children to behave like "*vana vakakwanwa*" ('normal' children) by either going back to their homes in Zimbabwe or living in the shelter, widely seen as a "home". By framing independent children who lived in places of safety as 'normal', aid workers in a way reminded children on the streets about their vulnerability and informed them on what they should do in order to be seen as having 'normal' childhoods.

Some independent children argued that the IDTR was misplaced and divorced from current realities of the struggling Zimbabwean economy and their needs. "We cannot live in an environment (referring to Zimbabwe) where adults themselves failed to live", said a 15 year old boy challenging adult migrants' spatial hegemony in migration. Independent children felt unjustifiably ostracised and pilloried by people they either expected to know better or be more tolerant towards independent children. Dismissing reminders of their young ages and vulnerability, independent children emphasised that migration for them was not a choice but a necessity, and complained against the tendency by aid workers to marginalise the power of economic hardships as a push factor for child migrants to leave Zimbabwe.

As described above, most of the children were working or looking for work. I have described how, in formal contexts, aid workers resisted this. They reminded the children of their weakness to physically withstand hardships at the workplace and their lack of knowledge and experience to negotiate for fair conditions of work. Undoubtedly, this level of concern by aid workers was appropriate and laudable. However, these reminders of age and vulnerability delegitimised child work and justified efforts to stop child work even through the use of threats of violence. For instance, although aid workers condemned the use of violence by the police they at one moment did not intervene to discourage some police officers who openly threatened to severely beat independent children who would defied their orders that they should stop working at the border post.

On a separate issue, independent migrant children's sexuality, described in previous chapters, was also managed by reminders of age. Aid workers frequently reminded children that they were too young to have sex. A common statement said by aid workers was, "You are still young. First finish school". They reinforced the idea that child sex and schooling were diametrically opposed. These statements functioned to dismiss independent children's expressions of sexuality and regulate childhood. However, according to Tinashe, some boys countered the discourses of childhood sexual innocence by using the discourse of choice to do what they wanted as individuals: "I cannot stop being interested in girls because of what another person thinks". These statements were usually said by children aged between 16 and

18, who were on the contested boundary between childhood and adulthood. Though these children can legally consent to sex, aid workers used the discourses of childhood sexual innocence, schooling, unwanted teenage pregnancies and risk of HIV infection to shape the sexuality of independent children in the form of prohibiting them from having sex. They constructed child sex as an immoral and destructive activity.

Although some children acknowledged being sexually active, some of them saw it prudent to remind aid workers about their childhood status. They did not want to be portrayed as sexual beings and therefore morally corrupt by aid workers whom they respected as mothers, aunts and sisters. Echoing the views of several children whose collective conservative moral conscience was disturbed by the sexual behaviour of some female and male aid workers, Terrence aged 16, said, “We are not interested in girls and women. We are still young”. What is central in this argument was the production of childhood innocence by some children themselves as well as the indication of multiple realities of independent children. They sustained the notion of asexuality as a crucial marker of childhood (Robinson, 2008). Emphasising the prevalence of the discourse of childhood sexual innocence aid workers and independent migrant children justified the need for sex education among children. In various interviews some independent children indicated that they had many questions about sex which needed answers. This indicated that children were active agents who reminded aid workers about their age and vulnerability in order to protect their childhood and health among other things.

Thus, reminders of children’s vulnerability were also made by the children themselves. To further illuminate this point, it is important to highlight a situation when, some adults, including some humanitarian workers, for weeks and even months kept giving excuses for failing to repay money they borrowed from children, as elaborated on in chapter three. This action which divorces working children from the dominant monetised life (that they have urgent need to use money) shocked children. One of them, a boy aged 15, dejectedly used the discourse of childhood innocence which “conflates innocence and vulnerability” (Meyer, 2007: 90) to say, “Humanitarian workers do not quickly return the money they borrowed. They must quickly return the money. They know we are children and do not have many options in life like adults”. Emphasising victimhood and helplessness functioned to remind aid workers about children’s vulnerability and to attract sympathy from them. By not quickly giving children their money, humanitarian workers were seen as blurring the difference between childhood and adulthood. Instead of regarding humanitarian workers as people who were ‘saving’ their lives, children accused these workers of entrenching childhood

vulnerability. So the discourse of childhood innocence – that they are immature and cannot keep their money – was not protecting working children but seen as producing vulnerability.

Despite these challenges, including attempts by aid workers to trivialise children's work, prudent children were learning to put into place tight systems to minimise risks of lending money to bad debtors, for example, assessing the credit worthiness of persons including aid workers. This finding was unexpected and suggests that access to money was making it possible for children to reverse the positions of power between themselves and aid workers. It suggests that at some moments aid workers, as adults, were powerless to successfully remind children that they were vulnerable. In addition, this case of independent children lending money to aid workers supports the point that "young people can exercise their agency to identify and seek solutions to situations of vulnerability" (Orgocka, 2012: 3). Knowing that they lacked physical and authoritative power against humanitarian workers who were failing to honour debts, some children knew that they could strategically exercise power over these bad adult debtors if they took the problem to the public domain and moralised it. This shows that exercising power depends on the social context. Out of respect for adults and aid workers or for fear of being victimised, independent children clandestinely mobilised other children, humanitarian workers and adults including me, to shame bad debtors by exposing them as selfish and cruel. Emphasising their vulnerability as children, they applied social pressure on aid workers who owed them money to pay up. This strategy often worked as they appealed to the conscience of the aid workers to stop ill-treating children who helped them. In acts of collective agency by children, after exhausting all means to get their money, children employed various tactics to get paid: reported to the shelter management, ganged up as children to demand money and at times hired thugs to force these adults to pay up. Thus, depending on the response by aid workers when they asked for their money, independent children either became victims or perpetrators of violence.

Reminding children of their poverty also emphasised to them that they needed aid and should accept it. For instance, that they should accept being placed in places of safety and tolerate the conditions there. This view was disputed by some children who either rejected the aid they were being offered on the grounds that it was of low quality or that they did not want anything to do with aid agencies, and would rather work in South Africa. Independent children who usually snubbed aid were those who were very familiar with life in South Africa, had finished school and those who were on their way to meet relatives in South Africa. Concerned that some of the independent children were losing focus in South Africa when they were poor and had left equally poor and suffering families in Zimbabwe, some aid

workers often reminded the children of their poverty and that of their families. It was a calculated strategy to get them focused on improving their lives. Contrary to the universalised ideals of childhood which "portray childhood as a 'work-free, dependent, vulnerable and care-receiving phase of life'" (Abebe, 2007 cited in Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 21) characterised by play (Boyden, 1997 cited in Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 21; Jenks, 1996) that they often advanced during formal settings, aid workers wanted these children to be financially prudent when spending their money (not being extravagant or waste money on ("useless" goods like sweets) and not to neglect supporting their relatives. To some extent, reminders like this produced the desired results as some independent children changed their behaviour and started, for example, saving and remitting groceries to their families in Zimbabwe much to the pleasure of the aid workers. The children who reformed were portrayed as obedient and often presented as role models for other children.

On a separate but related note, the narrative of vulnerability is largely synonymous with children, particularly those whose parents have passed away. According to humanitarian workers, one of the familiar lies peddled by independent children was that they were orphans. "I really don't know where they get this idea from that if you say I am an orphan you quickly get assistance or a job", said one aid worker. She was responding to my question on whether these children were orphans as I had noticed that a significant number of independent children reported that they were orphans. However, that a number of children appropriated the orphanhood status should come as no surprise as this status did, in my observation, elicit sympathy and speedy flow of help from humanitarian workers. Orphans were considered as very vulnerable by aid workers and therefore in need of assistance. Crivello and Chuta (2012: 537) write that "The attention given to orphans in the international child protection discourse suggests that orphanhood is a major, if not the major factor affecting child vulnerability in sub-Saharan Africa". Consequently, a number of programmes of support are being implemented to assist them. Now and then, some of these children were unmasked as non-orphans, for example, when some of the parents and relatives of these children came from Zimbabwe looking for these children and it turned out that some of these children had not lost any parent or were not poor but had run away from boarding schools, schools generally considered not to be for children from resource poor households. However, by the time this happened these children had already benefited from falsehoods, for instance, enrolled at local schools.

Aid workers also accused these children of overstating their vulnerability as they sought to convince the aid workers that they were legitimate victims and deserved aid (see Clark-Kazak, 2009). Utas describes this act as "victimcy" (2004: 209). Finding it hard to survive in Musina, a number of independent migrant children, both girls and boys, also claimed to be less than 18 years old in order to access services which were strictly for children. They were fully aware that discourses of innocence and vulnerability had a lot of moral power to dissuade aid workers from withdrawing aid.

One of the dominant representations of children is that they are immature and physically weak. Consequently, adults reminded children particularly, girls to be risk averse. Thus, there is a double standard when it comes to risk and gender. Boys are seen as less at risk than girls. Consequently, aid workers often reminded these children about their vulnerability but often highlighting the different risks boys and girls faced. With boys, they tended to emphasise exploitation at workplaces whilst with girls, they emphasised the risk of their bodies being sexually violated. One of the examples of these reminders of childhood is the story of a child called Ben, aged 12, who behaved in a very threatening way, stepping right outside the boundaries of what was considered as acceptable behaviour between a child and an adult. Aid workers responded by challenging Ben in order to re-position him as a child. This boy, a new arrival, vociferously, and to the shock of aid workers, dismissed some aid workers' efforts to advise him to stop looking for a job on the grounds that he was going to be exploited. Ben shocked the aid workers and I when he confidently but cryptically pointed out that he had the "means" to deal with anyone, regardless of their age, nationality and positions in society, who dared to try abuse and exploit him. He emphasised that he originated from Chipinge[68], in Zimbabwe. This area is widely associated by Zimbabweans to have great traditional healers (*n'angas*) who have powers to harm or protect a person. As aid workers laughed and dismissed his claims of being protected from experiencing problems like abuse and exploitation, Ben maintaining his confidence and threateningly said, "If I worked then mine (referring to money) I will get it". His threats to use *muti* against anyone who might want to exploit him echoes what Gelfand once wrote, that "a witch prevents many people from anti-social acts" (1965: 9). Ben implied that he would use *muti* to prevent employers from violating the labour contract. Framing children as people with inferior knowledge and practices, the four aid workers unanimously dismissed the boy's argument not only as naïve

[68] The Chipinge area, in the south eastern part of Zimbabwe, is widely suspected to host people with traditional voodoo power. Many mysterious and witchcraft things are said to originate in the area, including the ability to create lightning to harm people.

but dangerous. They told Ben that *muti* did not work and that he was misled to believe in the power of *muti*. Seeing these children as misinformed and needing to receive Christ or "to be born again" (a Christian 'spiritual re-birth') justified aid workers' efforts to impart these children with the "right mentality" and Christian beliefs. For example, they organised Bible lessons or church activities for children and youths, including baptism lessons. Aid workers reminded Ben of his place as a child by challenging him about his right to use *muti*. They also reminded him that he should go to school, an idea rooted in the notion that formal schooling is the best activity for children to be involved in, instead of using *muti*. After a spirited defence of his ability to punish anyone who might exploit him and noting that the female aid workers – one of whom was a Zimbabwean – had reminded him about child-like behaviour and appeared shaken by his claims that he had the ability not to be exploited, Ben tried to diffuse the tension and assumed the part of a child with appropriate behaviour. He appeared to have clearly read the situation; that power had shifted from aid workers to him and tried to calm the aid workers. He told them, "Mothers don't be afraid of me. I was just joking". But having attended high school close to his home area and interacted with school mates and adults who recounted horror stories of people said to have been bewitched, I understood Ben's argument, his and aid workers' belief in the efficacy of *muti*. I interpreted Ben's action of disassociating himself from the use of *muti* as an effort to avoid being stereotyped by aid workers and other children as a *muroyi* (witch), a label which could potentially lead to stigmatisation and discrimination by both aid workers and fellow children[69]. Since the use of *muti*, including by children, is a widely held belief in this society, Ben's listeners could not accept that he was joking. It is statements like this which also influenced the negative portrayal of these children and convinced aid workers that independent children should be saved from dangerous situations or engaging in deviant practices. This case also shows how difficult it was for aid workers to remind children about their age and vulnerability when they have minds set on crossing the boundaries between adults and children.

Aid workers' efforts to persuade Ben to attend school worked but temporarily as he, like many other children, after two weeks dropped out of school in Musina and left the shelter without telling anyone where he was heading. Aid workers assumed that he had left to look

[69] For example, a few months later, there was a case of a boy aged 16 who was accused by other children of using witchcraft to harm another boy who had stolen his money. The boy who was bewitched became insane and he was taken back by his relatives to Zimbabwe. Other boys accused the boy who had used *muti* after consulting a local *sangoma* of being evil and they threatened to beat him. The boy was forced to temporary leave the shelter.

for work in other areas in South Africa. Ben's departure disappointed aid workers as well as Terrence one of the independent migrant boys who had also tried hard to convince him to abandon ideas and plans of looking for a job. It buttressed their view that a number of these children were immature and had a short term view of life instead of having a long term view. The aid workers' reaction supports Hashim and Thorsen's point: "That children exercise choice – or assert their own agency – appears to be a particularly challenging issue for many adults" (2011: 111). But this young boy's defiance against powerful aid workers who were advising him reminds one of Foucault's observation that "Where there is power, there is resistance" (1978: 95-6). Independent children feeling protected by ancestral spirits and God often resisted aid workers' attempts to shape their behaviour through reminding them about their young ages and assumed state of vulnerability.

On a different matter, there was a tendency by aid workers to characterise independent children as dependents and to remind them about their state of vulnerability. Take the case of a boys' under 17 soccer team which was scheduled on 23 August 2009 to participate in a mini-soccer tournament at a nearby ground in Matswale. The team was forced to pull out after the aid workers failed to raise the mandatory R50 which every team was required to pay. The boys who had many practice sessions preparing for this tournament were very disappointed when an aid worker pulled out the team a few hours before the tournament kicked off. One of the boys aged 16, visibly saddened, told the aid worker: "You should have told us that you don't have money and I would have paid. R50 is little. It's painful [not to participate in the tournament]". The aid worker's response was, "We do not want you to carry that responsibility [of paying]. It's not procedural [for you to pay that money]. This is not a street". While believing that childhood should be a phase characterised by happiness (Jenks, 1996) the aid workers were invoking the discourses of children "in need of care", childhood innocence and vulnerability to regulate and limit the activities children could be involved in. The boys were not convinced. However, realising that in this context they were "powerless actors" (Thornblad and Holton, 2011: 9) and because of the idea that emphasises unquestioning obedience to adult authority, they walked away dejectedly. The discourses of children as dependents and children "in need of care" set limits on independent children's actions. But it generated another discourse and exposed the paradox of the aid work ideology. It opposed the discourse of children's right to participation in matters that affected their lives. The discourses of children as vulnerable, not autonomous beings since they were under the care of responsible adults in places of safety, functioned to curtail the kinds of activities children could participate in. What was evident in the aid worker's argumentation was the

perpetuation of the discourse of children's passivity in aid work – that, for example, stopped children from funding their own activities. This situation entrenched aid workers' role as providers of various things for children they constructed as not in a position to support themselves.

Reminders of Child-like Behaviour

Aid workers were very keen to see to it that independent migrant children displayed age appropriate behaviour. Consequently, they often reminded these children to have 'child-like' behaviour. The notion of child-like behaviour came to the fore regarding talk about children lying. Independent children like other children were sometimes described as incapable of lying. However, one aid worker pointed out that "the organisation's 'policy' is that children do not tell lies and this really is overstated when in actual fact most of whatever they say especially when they are wronged or wrong somebody are lies". Although it was formally not a policy for the organisation he called it policy because it operated this way.

The discourse of the 'evil' child also prevailed but usually during informal interactions between children and aid workers. One senior aid worker said these children had what he called 'tell lies syndrome', a trait he said was inappropriate for children. With regards to why they lied, a number of aid workers in separate interviews contended that these children often falsified their biographical information particularly names, ages and orphanhood status. Aid workers often said the children should not be trusted as they also manufactured falsehoods and half truths about their family and economic background. "They drop or pick up some years and names when they cross the Limpopo River into South Africa," said one female aid worker. One aid worker chided some boys she suspected of being over 18 years. She found some of such "children" queuing for food and told them, "you left some of your years in the river (Limpopo River which divides Zimbabwe and South Africa)". She told them to stop masquerading as 'children'. "This shelter is not for old people" and "the place is not theirs" were common statements made by aid workers to expose or ward off appeals for assistance by people suspected of lying that they were under 18. Aid workers often made statements like these when they were not happy with independent children's conduct. A number of boys who used the state of childhood as a resource claimed to be less than 18 years old in order to be accommodated in the shelter for minors or assisted to enrol in local schools. There is only one shelter for adult men in Musina and it was in a very poor state. The shelter for adult migrant men struggled to get funding. Pathologising statements were discursive strategies

that functioned to silence 'over-aged' boys who did not conform to childhood norms and they were also alienated in the shelters. Children who were under 18 years detested the presence of "over-aged boys" in "our shelter" as they usually said. An analysis of claims of orphanhood and manipulation of age by children worked to expose the shifting practices by aid workers in Musina. Ironically, aid workers connived with "over-aged" children in fabricating their ages when they were recording ages of the children who could have lunch at the shelter. As a monitoring tool, the donors had insisted on having a meal register with names of children who would have been fed.

Some children who ran away from their homes indicated that they often used false ages and names to disguise their identity from parents and guardians looking for them. Lying that they were 18 years and above was also a strategy calculated to deceive local people to employ them. A number of children reported that some local people did not want to break anti-child work laws by employing minors to do strenuous work. Ironically, some of these independent children at other moments either stated their correct ages or inflated their ages to over 17 years in order to access services meant for adult migrants. For example, adult Zimbabweans with asylum papers were allowed to work in South Africa but children with the same papers were not. Independent children were only allowed to study. An asylum seeker permit for adults allowed them to freely go to other areas in South Africa to look for employment. To access these privileges, some children lied that they were over 17 years old.

This contestation over how age is connected to entitlement meant that at times, aid workers typecast independent children as liars, untrustworthy manipulators who did all this in order to access humanitarian aid. I will illustrate this point by discussing the case below, as related to me by one senior aid worker[70].

> An international organisation had a case of a boy aged 13 years who faked his identity. He claimed to have an aunt who lived in Johannesburg. The boy temporarily lived at the shelter but used the name of another boy – based in Zimbabwe - who had an aunt in Johannesburg. Before coming to Musina the boys lived in the same neighbourhood. The boy in Musina successfully got an asylum permit using the fake identity. The boy soon asked for assistance to be re-unified with 'his aunt' in Johannesburg. The organisation, under their reunification programme, assisted the boy and took him there. When they arrived in Johannesburg the aid workers were shocked that the boy and the aunt did not know each other. The boy had the correct phone numbers of that woman (the aunt). The woman openly told the aid workers that the boy was lying that he was related to her. The woman revealed that she had a relative who had that boy's name in Zimbabwe. Upon further probing, the boy told the woman and the aid

[70] 25 August 2009

> workers his real name. The woman knew the boy's family. The aid workers told the boy that they were going to return with him to Musina as they could not reunify him with a stranger. The boy immediately started crying a lot and refused to go back to Musina saying he wanted to be in Johannesburg. The woman felt pity for the boy and pleaded with the aid workers to leave the boy in her custody. She promised to contact the boy's family in Zimbabwe. The aid workers also feeling pity for the boy left him together with that woman, who was not related to him, in Johannesburg, an act which was not in line with how children should be re-united with their families.

On different matter, within the dominant discourse of adult superiority or knowledgeability, independent children were portrayed as incapable of making well thought out decisions or actions. For example, an aid worker who worked as a security guard at the shelter for boys, painted them as follows: "Anything is possible with those boys". This was not a compliment but meant that these children were not principled and accepted anything without thinking. Aid workers associated children with immaturity and ignorance on a number of issues including how aid agencies operated. Independent children were often told or reminded by aid workers that they lacked full adult capacities. Sustaining the idea that children are incompetent worked to silence some children from speaking (for example, on how they wanted to be assisted) or questioning the work of aid workers. Unknown to some aid workers in Musina, a number of independent children had gained knowledge and experience about the work of aid agencies whilst interacting with non-governmental organisations working in Zimbabwe[71] and other parts of South Africa. Often these children had strong views about what they expected from aid agencies. They questioned the competence of aid workers to perform their work. Independent children complained that they deserved to participate in decision making on matters that concerned them. Their thinking which emanated from the discourse of children's right to participation worked to expose the frequent subversion of children's interests in aid work. It is based on the understanding that children are ignorant or that they should accept humanitarian aid unquestioningly since they are desperate.

Aid workers were concerned about independent children being involved in inappropriate child behaviour like criminality. Some of these children socialised with *magumaguma*. As evidenced by, for example, some of them bringing *magumaguma* friends to beat up boys they had conflicts with. This situation prompted one community member to say, "It's (shelter for boys and not) a grooming place for criminals". Due to various factors like difficulties in

[71] For example, Streets Ahead which assist children living and working in the streets of Harare, Zimbabwe.

monitoring children's movements as a result of the shelter not having a secure fence, independent children were usually not asked where they were going and where they spent their day. This situation disturbed aid workers as they felt it compromised children's protection. Consequently, aid workers tried to lock them in. At one time, for instance, aid workers introduced registers to record the time and names of children who were coming into and leaving the shelter for boys. The discourses of criminality and the adult environment having a corrupting influence on minors worked to expose the problem of child protection in resource poor settings.

In their interactions with adults, independent children's physical and social demeanour was expected by aid workers to be child-like. But not all independent children behaved as expected. When I asked one senior aid worker about the conduct of independent children at the border post where violence was prevalent he said, "*Vapfana vacho ivava ... isu tatongojairirarana nawo. But to strangers i*tight*...tinongonzwa*" (These young people misbehave. We are used to them. But to strangers they are difficult. We just hear a lot of stories about them). Some children by their own admission said, "some of us are very mischievous". Appropriate children's behaviour includes being subordinate to adults. However, besides challenging the authority of aid workers at times (for example, refusing to take instructions from aid workers[72]), some of the independent children partook in activities usually associated with adults like having sex, terminating pregnancies, stealing, smoking and consuming alcohol or drugs (for example, the cough syrup called Broncho. Like Hytalex it is mixed with alcohol). Children were also often accused of violating the rules governing decent adult-children interactions, for example, the rule that categorised discussion of sex between minors and adults as taboo. Discourses of childhood innocence and best interest of the child were used to disapprove of unchild-like behaviour through, for example, rebukes and meting out physical punishments. Aid workers often reminded independent children to adopt behaviour which appropriate for children. The type of discipline differed, for example, by gender. Girls who usually socialised with men were labelled as promiscuous and often chased away from the shelter (see chapter seven). Thus, the discourse of child-like behaviour worked to expose the gendered response to the behaviour of children and the drawing from the discourse of parenthood to justify use of power by adults to make children conform to expected behaviour. In situations like this, the discourse of parenting worked to justify disciplinary measures against children who were misbehaving.

[72] For instance, for independent children to agree to participate in programmes organised for them by aid workers, respect the rules and regulations governing the places of safety.

Ironically, some aid workers rationalized unchild-like behaviour, for instance, the practice of looking for temporary jobs, and urged fellow workers to tolerate these children's shenanigans on the understanding that "they are children. Children do that" (meaning that they are immature but 'normal') and "vulnerable" – meaning that the state of childhood was pushing them to do anything to survive. This idea is embedded in the discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability which sees childhood in terms of freedom from responsibility and blame.

On a different matter, multiple realities Magadlela (2000) of independent children were evident, for example, through their reproduction of the popular saying that 'age is nothing but a number'[73] to justify having sex, a contradiction from their assumed position of asexuality. Some children questioned the hierarchical sexual relationship between adults and children. For instance, some independent migrant boys approached female aid workers wanting to have romantic relationships with them. In fact, aid workers and some independent children told me that some independent children acted in ways which disrespected this hierarchical social order, something which infuriated the aid workers. Independent migrant children's actions reinforced ideas that children who were not under the care of their parents were a danger to themselves and effort had to be made to bring them back under adult control. While sexual exchanges were hilarious, to some children and aid workers, they also ignited concern among some aid workers. They were concerned about children's assertion to transgress child-like sexual boundaries. Both aid workers and independent children raised questions on the extent to which aid workers or adults could push boundaries when discussing sexual issues with children so to treat each other respectfully.

One unanticipated finding was that there were reminders from the children about proper adulthood. One way they did this was respecting hierarchical relations between children and adults on condition that aid workers behaved in a manner which was consistent with their understanding of normal adulthood, for example, not discussing sexual matters within earshot of children. Children's conditional respect for adults generated mixed responses from aid workers. Some female aid workers who utilised the discourses of parenthood and adulthood – that children had no moral authority to question the behaviour of their parents – assumed that they wielded power over the boys, clashed with boys in the shelter after the latter sang sexually obscene songs one night. The boys who were in their dormitory had overheard one female aid worker graphically narrating a sexual act to her colleague, about how she had

[73] America R&B recording star Aaliyah Dana Haughton's (16 January 1979 – 25 August 2001) albam titled "*Age Ain't Nothing But A Number"* released in 1994 in USA.

“handled a man”. Aid workers’ bedroom was situated just next to independent migrant boys’ big sleeping room. One of the boys said, “She (the aid worker) said she opened her legs and the man said he wanted to divorce his wife. The man said his wife didn’t open her legs for him. She was talking loudly and we were hearing that. People (children) were laughing”. Laughter also served to embarrass these adults and remind them about appropriate adult behaviour. According to one senior aid worker, some of the words of the derogatory song were "Your (referring to one of the female aid workers) job is always to open your legs for men” and “you sleep with men and do this and that”. The boys could not tolerate such indignity and started singing a song deriding the sexual behaviour of this aid worker. In this society, which constructs female sexuality as passive, the extolling of female sexuality is viewed negatively. However, this behaviour of openly rebuking adults or challenging adults’ authority within adult created contexts landed some boys in trouble with some aid workers as it was deemed by aid workers as out of character of ‘normal’ childhood. It is situations like this when children crossed boundaries that they were reminded to have child-like behaviour.

Mocking promiscuous people through song, a calculated strategy that children used to deride aid workers and humiliate them, once landed some independent children in trouble. Protest songs, which are a resource by people positioned in less powerful positions, are often used to question values and norms or for expressing discontent towards a dominant groups. A few days later after the boys sang the song, one of the senior female aid workers called a meeting to probe what motivated the boys to sing. During the meeting, which I attended but was a passive participant, the aid worker who was usually friendly towards children presented a stern face and demanded to be given names of boys who sang that night. She made it clear that they as aid workers, wanted to discipline these children for using vulgar language and insulting the aid worker in an unchild-like behaviour. During the heated meeting, Tatenda, a vocal boy aged 16, defended his and other boys’ conduct by saying, "We said that because we heard her speak vulgar language". Below is an excerpt from the exchange which shows children ‘speaking truth to power’ or challenging seniority or respect based on age (Mate, 2012):

> **Tatenda:** When people woke up to stop children who were fighting they overheard sister Brenda saying sexually obscene statements. They wondered why sister Brenda and aunt (the lady who was chairing that meeting) discussed their private affairs on top of their voices so that we could hear. They (boys) said lets sing tomorrow to let them know that when they talk tomorrow they should speak in low voices. We sang and

sang. I am one of those people who sang about what we had heard in the next room. We heard what they said. It was a message to sister Brenda that when she is talking to someone who is close to her (referring to physical distance) she must speak in a low voices. When we speak about our private affairs in our room we do not raise our voice. This is the only day you heard people (referring to independent children) saying things like that.

Aid worker (Aunt): It's alright. Another question is, after you heard things like that being said in the next room why did you, particularly you Tatenda, who often reports many things to me, your aunt, did not come and report what you had heard?

Tatenda: Aunt some of the stories are difficult to report on. I 'fainted' (when he heard what was being said) as I know that she stays with you and that she was talking to you. Is it possible for me to come and tell you that what you were discussing is not appropriate?

Aid worker (Aunt): Tatenda, my child, it's like if you see me in town stealing and then you run away you would not have told me that I must not go and steal. But you can tell me not to steal. You know it is possible for you to say that.

Tatenda: You know that if people don't tell you that they (actually) respect you a lot. It's being greatly respected when people don't tell you that the person you are sleeping with (having a sexual relationship with) is a fool. But with Brenda we told her directly to stop her practice of doing such things.

This narrative provides several points for discussion. It refutes or contradicts understandings that these independent children were passive, lacked morality, were powerless and should have accepted humanitarian aid unconditionally. Singing sexually explicit and derogatory songs was not simply about being naughty, but this act also had symbolic meaning. It was a protest message to adult aid workers who had failed to live up to expectations of appropriate adulthood. These boys did not want their childhood to be disrespected. These children's behaviour supports the observation that "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 1978: 95-6). "A Foucauldian perspective indicates that the presence of boundaries also creates the conditions for multiple acts of transgression" (Kehily, 2009: 7). Children's singing which defied all social norms can be seen in this light. Since some aid workers sometimes did not pay attention to this, children appropriated some power to ward off charges of indiscipline. But portraying children as villains became

problematic as children openly challenged adults' moral authority. As evidenced in the above incident, situations like this created contradicting representations of children.

The narrative between Tatenda and the aid worker revealed that aid workers were not respected by independent children if they were viewed as morally compromised. This behaviour led some aid workers to describe these children as "uncultured", "disrespectful" and "acting as if they are adults", meaning that according to them, only adults had the power to define or speak on morality. Consequently, aid workers often tried to change these children's bad behaviour towards adults. In a separate interview with another aid worker about sister Brenda, I heard that "*vanomudheerera zvisingaite*" (children totally disrespect and undermine that aid worker's authority). This case revealed that the discourse of childhood innocence is sometimes not dominant in aid work.

Aid workers tended to only associate power with adulthood and social position. However, in this context, there is a sub-text which suggests that boys had power. It contradicted the assumption of that children are powerless. Demonstrating that discourse is produced and propagated by those who have power (Foucault, 1980) and that children at some moments were not powerless as they are often portrayed by aid workers, independent children refused to be intimidated by aid workers who threatened to discipline them for having disrespected them. Fully conscious that some power had shifted to them as children since these aid workers risked being embarrassed and sanctioned by their management for exposing children to immoral talk and rejecting the notion that children cannot question the conduct of adults, these boys, as evidenced above, in subtle ways described some of the aid workers in unflattering terms. Unnerved, embarrassed, if not humiliated by independent migrant boys' challenging their womanhood, the mores of respectability and positioning themselves on moral high ground but not making an apology for their conduct, the aid worker dropped her investigations as she realised that the boys had convincing evidence against their conduct. Ironically, the investigation ended up empowering the children and disempowering the aid worker who was one of the victims of the insults and the senior aid worker who wanted to punish the children for violating the social distance between children and adults. Tatenda and other boys had without fear tactfully navigated the problematic situation which had the potential of attracting stiff disciplinary measures against them.

On a different matter, some independent children survived through ingratiating themselves to aid workers, for example, by volunteering to help them do chores like cooking meals and washing dishes. This practice which is seen by other independent children as a calculated strategy is embedded in the *Shona* and *Ndebele* traditional practice of minors being

expected to help their elders do some chores or errands. The practice, for example, helped them to become recipients of the largesse of care workers who described such children as very helpful, well-cultured and obedient. Some children who criticised their colleagues for working for aid workers claimed that the children performing chores were given more food during meals whilst those children who did not were considered rude and often punished by being given "*chikepe*" (a small amount of food).

On a different but related matter, though the discourse of independent children as passive dominated, at certain moments they were seen as not passive and powerless. They used various strategies to undermine the authority of aid workers. One of the ways they undermined the power of aid workers was attack their social standing, such as, telling aid workers that "real adults or mothers do not behave like this". Again this behaviour of undermining adult authority resulted in aid workers often reminding these children to have appropriate child behaviour. Though children embarrassed aid workers by positioning themselves on high moral ground, this practice also had the effect of forcing aid workers to reflect on their attitudes towards children and promote the discourse of child protection. This situation buttresses Holloway and Valentine who bring out "the importance of children's agency, even in contexts where they have little formal power" (2000: 773). Though some aid workers acknowledged this expression of children's agency, they remained resolute in reminding children about appropriate children's behaviour as they felt this behaviour was not in line with traditional and cultural practices.

On another matter, aid workers often represented independent children as people who liked money a lot, behaviour considered unchild-like. Rather contradictorily, aid workers also drew from the discourse of poverty to normalise this behaviour. For example, when I asked one humanitarian worker who worked as an informal teacher why children needed money he responded, "These independent children are not victims of war but are economic refugees". He argued that because the children were coming from a collapsed economy with poor social security schemes, they were being forced to fend for themselves, their siblings and family. Aid workers presented children as vulnerable and in need of money. The discourse of poverty usually expressed during moments aid workers were describing the factors which forced children to migrate, functioned to legitimise children's need for or liking of money.

Taking note of the reminders of age and child-like behaviour, some of the children tried by all means to create and maintain a social distance between themselves and aid workers. Although some independent children tried to bridge the social distance between aid workers and themselves in order to access aid, some of them reduced social contact as it served to

minimise conflict with aid workers. They did that by, for example, either being invisible or avoiding talking or socialising with aid workers, eating meals prepared by aid workers in the shelters, being friendly with aid workers but not sharing jokes with them and avoiding being known by aid workers. Independent children sometimes propagated the popular imaginations by adults that children are passive and immature in order to access humanitarian aid without any challenges. Independent children also learnt to remain silent or not to complain against what they described as malpractice by some aid workers, for example, their frequent use of abusive language and corruption. Some independent children claimed to have seen goods donated to them, for example, as Christmas presents, being looted by some aid workers. "They pretended to take the things for safe keeping but we never saw the goodies again. We wonder where they were taken to", said a 15 year old girl who had participated in off-loading and taking goods to the store room when they were donated by a certain donor. One of the boys attributed the culture of not reporting cases of unprofessional conduct by aid workers to management to fear of being accused of "seeing too much". This accusation is embedded in the discourse that expects children not to question things or adults but be passive actors. It was used to silence independent children from levelling complaints against aid workers. Children, to use Lalor's words, under "socialisation pressures to respect parents and elders" (2004: 453), performed the passive role as a survival strategy. Arguing that this type of socialisation of African children increases their vulnerability to abuse, Armstrong (1998: 145 cited in Lalor, 2004: 453) suggests that "we need to find ways to combine the cultural norm of respect with a kind of autonomy that enables children to question their elders and their authority in appropriate circumstances". However, this is a challenge in a humanitarian context as there is power disequilibrium between independent children and aid workers.

Aid workers who wanted to maintain the social hierarchy in humanitarian work represented independent children who had child-like behaviour as clever or respectful towards adults. Some of these aid workers said these children "know their position". Drawing from the discourses of children as immature and that recipients of aid as poor and desperate, aid workers saw independent children as having no moral authority to question the assistance they were being given. Children who tried to challenge the goings on in aid work were often quickly reminded of their immaturity, vulnerability and importance of respecting adult authority.

However, revealing the complexity around the representation of independent children, children who were seen as keeping to their social position were officially portrayed as passive by some aid workers, particularly by those in management who were following the discourse

of children's rights to participation and rights that children should speak out against practices which undermine their well-being and development. In addition, children who kept a distance from aid workers who wanted to socialise or closely interact with them were described as anti-social. This description justified efforts by aid workers to teach these children some social skills as they argued that they were vital in a person life. Thus, reminders of age, vulnerability and child-like behaviour tended to be situational. At certain moments, age, vulnerability and child-like behaviour were not emphasised as other discourses, like children's rights to participate on matters which concern them.

Although the dominant view of aid workers towards independent children was that they were immature, they also at times constructed them as having power over aid workers. For example, I witnessed one of the aid workers, a seasoned male teacher in his 50s, working at the border post, politely asking the boys whether they had discussed and agreed on the date and time for practising soccer. The boys indicated that they had done so. The aid worker asked them to organise themselves and practise soccer. Clearly cognisant that his conduct towards children was not characteristic of how children and adults related, he justified his and some other aid workers' respectful and persuasive approach by saying, "If one tries to act as if you are in a school setting they don't come". He explained that in schools the teacher's word is not challenged. Consequently, he said:

> "*Kutsvetera tsvera....kuita kunge zvisina basa ndokuti vauye*" [We persuade them. We treat these activities (with children) as not very serious so that they can come and participate]. We let them behave freely (laughs)...If you command them they will refuse. We have no control mechanism. If they do not come what do you do? Nothing! We need to create a relationship [with them] and negotiate on what to do".

Evident in the above quotation is the recognition that children are mainly interested in play and that at times they are powerful.

Lack of knowledge of certain traditional practices governing mobility were causing aid workers to often remind independent children about their young age, vulnerability and the need for them to behave like 'normal' children. For example, some *Shona* people believe that it is taboo to bid farewell to people including close relatives before one migrates to 'Joni'. Some migrants believe they should only tell their close family members. Saying farewell to people when going to 'Joni' invites evil spirits (*mamhepo*) into their lives. There is a general tendency to believe that *mamhepo* potentially have power to stop one from realising one's

dreams like finding a well-paying job. I was surprised to see this belief in action, which I have known since my childhood. I heard that independent children often left their homes without telling their parents, siblings and relatives. They did not even leave a written note to say where they were going. I heard a number of children yearned to speak to or notify their parents of their whereabouts but resisted contacting them as they did not want to spoil their chances of succeeding in South Africa. Independent children's conduct was contrary to common assumptions by aid workers that these children did not inform their parents about their plans to migrate because they were afraid of being stopped from migrating and that they did not care about causing alarm and despondency in their homes when they left without telling their guardians where they were going. Revealing the multi-realities (Magadlela, 2000) in Musina, independent children justified their disappearance from their homes as caring acts for themselves and their parents. Showing the existence of differences in lifeworlds amongst the social actors, in this context, reminders of age, vulnerability and child-like behaviour had limited success.

When aid workers were approached by some independent children who behaved in ways they did not like, they often replied: "That's your own matter… solve it on your own". Support for children was conditional: it depended on them conforming to social expectations of having a 'normal' childhood. Thus, in this context, the discourse of vulnerability was dominated by the discourse of appropriate childhoods. As discussed earlier, being a 'good child' had more benefits than being a 'bad' child. Actually, Heissler asserts that "Good behaviour is a source of social power" (2010: 225). Migrant children often used this form of power when negotiating for access to services, including protection. Aid workers allowed children who respected them to easily access services like food as these children conformed to notions of childhood innocence and dependency on adults. Although aid workers often evoked reminders of childhood, they also often contradicted themselves as they sometimes used the notion of childhood as an economic resource. The formal and informal economies of childhood and vulnerability will therefore be the focus of attention in the following section.

The Formal and Informal Economy of Childhood and Vulnerability

Independent children, like many other children, are usually not accorded agency and are portrayed only as perpetual victims (see Kitzinger, 1990). However, I present evidence which shows that aid workers did not only represent independent children as helpless victims and passive actors but active agents who sometimes manipulated their state of childhood and

vulnerability to advance their interests. These contradictory views were reinforced by the behaviour of some children who seemed not constrained, for example, by their young ages and outsider status, who took their vulnerability as an asset and childhood as social capital. In this section, I examine how the economy of childhood and vulnerability functioned. I define the economy of childhood as the activities or rationale for interventions which have economic value to the status of childhood.

Childhood was used both by aid workers and children as a resource or asset to access resources or to elicit humanitarian assistance. Aid workers sometimes admired how independent children courageously and inventively deployed the discourse of childhood innocence to pass through the border's formal entry point with no proper documentation. A number of independent children indicated that the border officials on both sides of the border were corrupt and generally sympathetic towards children, a result of the influence of the discourse of children's innocence and vulnerability. To illustrate this point, one 14-year-old boy living at the South African border remembered that at one time when he was negotiating entry into South Africa, a Zimbabwean soldier told him, "Go and look for money my young brother". A number of key informants claimed that border officials on both sides allowed some children to cross the border masquerading as children of blind people entering South Africa together with their parents to beg. Some independent children revealed that they made these arrangements with blind people who needed guides and masqueraded as children of these beggars. These children and blind people shared the spoils at the end of each day. Children made similar arrangements with the disabled people in wheel chairs. They pushed the wheel chairs as they begged and later shared whatever donations they would have received in cash or in kind. The discourse of childhood innocence and pity worked to allow independent children to enter into South Africa on condition that they would work as porters, collect plastic bottles, buy groceries and return to their homes in Beitbridge at the end of the day. Aid workers were aware of some of these tactics used by independent children and depending on the situation they either labelled them clever or naughty. They often described these children positively during both informal and formal situations to support the view that they were innocent. Such a position justified why they sympathised with and helped these children, for example, with protection and advice. The discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability in this context worked to support Utas's point that young people "express their individual agency by representing themselves as powerless victims" (2004: 209).

Evidence from Musina seems to suggest that both aid workers and independent children at different moments invoked the childhood and adulthood status to serve their different and

often contradictory interests. The inflation of ages by these children at other moments like when they were registering their names at the Department of Home Affairs was part of a strategy to undermine the official 'care and protection' system as it obstructed them from realizing their objectives, like getting money to buy food for themselves and their starving family members in Zimbabwe. However, during official times even children perceived as poor were prevented from working. Following the popular view that children do not manufacture lies, a view rooted in the discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability, aid workers particularly during formal situations did not seriously contest the stated ages of these children. Again this discourse allowed aid workers to continue assisting minors but without clashing with the donors who only wanted aid to assist minors.

The issue of children who were seen as over aged and living in the shelters for children, often generated tension amongst children and also amongst the service providers as it challenged what childhood is. As indicated earlier, children under 17 years insisting that childhood begins at birth and ends at age 18 – the official cut off age for selecting affected children – complained that the resources were limited, "these people [over aged people] bullied and taught some of us bad practices like smoking", said one boy aged 16 drawing from the discourse of the adult world having a bad influence on children. Echoing what other children often called for, he said the over aged boys should be chased away from the shelter. For instance, the UNHCR once informed a meeting attended by non-governmental organisations and international agencies that they had raised the issue of over aged children in shelters with the leadership of the place of safety. The local shelter staff management argued that they started protecting these boys at an early age and could just drop them because they were over 18. Other agencies indicated that they were concerned about the many reports which suggested that the practice of bullying of younger boys by over aged boys was rife in the shelter for boys. The agencies and some of the funders wanted action to be taken before they could financially support the shelter. However, DSD following the country's constitution and the UNCRC (1989), defines a child as anyone below the age of 18. A government official informed the meeting that the centre itself could determine its own constitution and set the age limit, a situation which was not acceptable to some service providers and funding agencies.

There were a number of boys who were above 17 years who lived particularly at the boys' shelter. "When these children who are over 18 years arrive we take them for adults when in fact they will be children", explained one female aid worker. The aid workers were aware that the people affected by interventions were officially "over-aged" and not supposed to

access service at the temporary shelter. In an effort to address one of the concerns raised by a donor about the huge but fluctuating number of children who were being fed at the boys' shelter, the aid workers for some days recorded the names and ages of the boys when they were queuing for food at every meal time. I was shocked to see both the "over aged" boys and the care workers conniving to lower the former's ages as they wanted to meet the donor's conditions that the food must benefit 'minors' only. This demonstrated an economy of childhood and reinforced the idea that it is a socially constructed category. As evidenced by the above situation, sometimes children and adults conspire to re-define childhood as they advance their different objectives or interests. The local humanitarian agency did not have a rigid age limit it had set. It admitted boys aged over 17 years but the international humanitarian agency indicated that they strictly applied the UNCRC's age definition. The latter's workers in a rather derogatory way said they "do not take in '*madhara'* (old men)", referring to those who were aged 17 years and above. Since the two agencies were at that time sharing the boys' shelter, the international agency was very worried about the age mixing which was happening. Their concern was informed by the discourse of protecting children from the dangerous practices in "adult worlds" (Stephens, 1995). This study reiterates the point made by many other researchers like Orgocka that call "to move beyond compartmentalised approaches and oversimplified structural categories such as chronological age to describe (and understand) independent child migration" (2012: 1). The study revealed social actors including children were using these approaches and structural categories in different ways in the formal and informal economy of childhood. In fact, during informal situations the social age – which is basically the socially constructed age (Clark-Kazak, 2009) – rather than chronological age, tended to dominate.

Aid workers and independent children often used the vulnerability of independent children as a strategy to mobilise sympathy and resources from the public and donor community. Due to the widespread reportage of the humanitarian crisis in the mass media, Musina often hosted numerous visiting local and international journalists, researchers, senior government officials from the provincial and national government, NGO representatives, as well as donors. As they formally interacted with these visitors, aid workers depicted these children as destitute and in need of many things. Some independent children attracted the label of being liars as they also cast themselves as poorer than they were in reality in order to get donations like money, food and clothes.

Countering discourses of childhood innocence and powerlessness which were prevalent during official times, aid workers during unofficial situations constructed independent

children as manipulators, devious and sometimes powerful. The power of some of the children over the aid workers partly came from the knowledge of the latter's weaknesses or insecurities. For instance, one male aid worker observed that:

> They [independent migrant boys] play with their [referring to female aid workers] tempers. They say 'let me provoke her and see what she does'. The care giver will shout or report the matter to her supervisor then know that this one is the supervisor and how the system works [how the organisation is structured]. They usually provoke Prisca, an aid worker, because she has a small body. One boy once flashed his private parts to her and she reported [to the management] instead of handling the situation. They manipulate even senior managers. For instance, one boy said he wanted to go to town [Musina's central business area] to see his brother and he was denied permission. He then said he no longer wanted to live at the shelter. Then he said his brother wanted to tell him about his mother who had passed away [in Zimbabwe]. He immediately started crying loudly. Aid workers feeling pity for the boy let him go and only to later realise that he wanted to watch television at Chicken Inn [a fast food restaurant in town]. In another example, 15 boys fought against each other and some were injured. The care giver on duty put them in an organisational bus and took them to the residence of a senior aid worker. Later, the boys revealed that "We just wanted to board the bus and be away from this place as we have lived here a long time". Management had panicked when they heard that 15 boys had fought.

Evidence in the above paragraph shows aid workers constructing themselves as victims of independent children's machinations or expressions of agency. They were of the view that some independent children were using some of the characteristics associated with children and childhood like crying as resources during the power contestation between the two groups. The representation of independent children as villains contradicts the discourse that children are powerless or hapless victims of the adult and aid agencies' hierarchy.

Whilst this was the case, aid workers' reservations about the conduct of independent children, the generally respectful language used by independent children to address aid workers, for example, 'mother', aunt', cannot simply be dismissed as manipulative or obsequious. Besides having been socialised to respect their elders, these were the conventions of the area that had to be observed when they interacted with aid workers. But beyond this, at times there was an element of contempt and even total disrespect in some of the discourse. Some of the deferential statements and actions carried multiple meanings. For instance, some independent children often called aid workers by these familial terms when they were in their

company. During these official settings they embraced the way they were characterised by aid workers as vulnerable children as doing so worked to their advantage, for example, facilitated their access to aid like getting a lot of food instead of a *chikepe*. But they often made disparaging remarks about the same aid workers' behaviour and practices when they were not with them.

Revealing human agency but also its limitation (Long, 1992), independent children sometimes pretended to be well cultured and mannered in order to be in good books with aid workers. "You do what they (aid workers) say, for example, wash the dishes, clothes etc. even if you don't want". One boy who employed this tactic revealed that "You can actually be given money" form it. A number of boys told me that independent migrant boys who assisted aid workers by cooking food and washing dishes in the boys' shelter were usually given more food than the other boys who deployed the discourse of anti-child work not to help the aid workers do these chores. These children insisted that "it is not our responsibility to do this type of work". In general, independent children who did some errands for aid workers or bought some goods like soft drinks for aid workers accumulated social capital. These children were subsequently portrayed as not lacking legitimacy to work. The reason was that these children conformed to social expectation about appropriate childhood; that "good children help their elders". One of the effects of aid workers' negative attitude towards children who did not assist them was that it created tension between some independent children who felt not obliged to assist and aid workers who felt that children should also participate in doing domestic work; some independent children who were assisting aid workers and consequently receiving some favours, and the independent children who were opposed to that. The latter mocked fellow independent children who were working together with aid workers that they were being exploited and accused them of conspiring against their peers.

Contradicting the official view that independent children are legitimate victims of the socio-economic crisis in their households in Zimbabwe, some aid workers, particularly during informal situations, felt that these children were using victimhood, childhood and social capital to advance their interests, for example, to control and access care support. Aid workers accused independent children of fronting or producing the image of victimhood in order to generate sympathies and access humanitarian assistance (see Orgocka, 2012; Clark-Kazak, 2009). One 17 year old orphaned girl explained: "It's very difficult to manage the problems but you will always find a way out of any situation. At times one has to tell lies to the service providers so that you can benefit from their facilities". For example, some girls

told me that some of them had told aid workers that they had been raped in Zimbabwe or by the *magumaguma* whilst crossing the border in order to stay at the shelter for a long time yet they had not. Ironically, independent migrant girls who were desperate but had not manufactured falsehoods that they were sexually molested were often asked to move out quickly. They were often told or reminded, "this shelter is for women and girls who experienced rape and other forms of sexual gender based violence", explained one of the girls who complained heavily against the aid agency. This situation showed that the discourse of childhood innocence did not always prevail in aid work or generated positive outcomes for independent children. Drawing from ideas that construct rape as "cruel, absurd and the worst form of intrusion on a woman's self" (Onyango, 2008: 70) and "one of the most devastating personal traumas" (Robertson, 1998: page number unstated), survivors of rape were prioritised during programming. Commenting on the assessments of vulnerability which were being done, one of the independent migrant girls aged 16 said:

> The service provider's assessment of vulnerability depends on the challenges that you have encountered rather than those that you are encountering at the present moment. Much attention is given to rape issues.

Actually, in this context, vulnerability for independent migrant girls was often conceptually tied to sexual exploitation. But for independent migrant boys vulnerability was "often – but not always – conceptually tied to poverty" (Cheney, 2010: 5). In a separate interview, a 15 year old street child who once lived in the shelter remarked, "I doubt if there is any assistance for those who have been exploited or those who have experienced other types of abuses". Some independent migrant girls who needed assistance but had not experienced sexual abuse accused aid workers of reducing everything to sexual abuse. This situation can be attributed to the high prevalence of sexual abuse cases amongst female migrants in Musina and the great attention this problem received in Musina, and in the South African media. These girls claimed that other types of abuse were being neglected by aid workers. For instance, they pointed out that there was marginalisation and exclusion of survivors of exploitation and non-sexual violence. An independent girl aged 17 narrated her experience of being neglected by aid workers yet she had been victimised by criminals:

> When I arrived with my two friends who had been raped on the way [when they were crossing the border], they were taken to MSF for treatment and counselling. Myself I did not receive any assistance but I was beaten up by *magumaguma*. I don't know what they do with victims of exploitation and violence. I think they should also receive some sort of support since they would have gone through traumatising experiences.

Of note is that certain forms of vulnerability had social capital than others.

In a related but different matter, there were reports of bias in the assessment of children's vulnerability. "I have noted that vulnerability is assessed with bias towards those children who are favourites of aid workers" said Naomi, aged 15. Actually, some children professed ignorance on how vulnerability was assessed, "but it looks like there is some favouritism because you see maybe the same children benefiting in almost everything that comes [given to aid workers so that they distribute to independent children] while others are ignored after making some requests or raising some concerns", said an 18 year old girl.

Contrary to perceptions that the status of childhood disadvantaged children, it had some social capital at some moments as it enabled them to ward off some challenges. To illuminate this point, some independent migrant boys worked in Musina but usually returned in the evening to their parents' or guardians' houses in Beitbridge, the Zimbabwean town across the border. Soon after finishing school in the afternoon, they walked to Musina from Beit Bridge without any documentation to cross the border. Happily emphasizing that "*hatidhizi* (we do not bribe)" like what adult migrants do, children mentioned that they usually negotiated free border movement with agencies manning the border on both sides. Independent children used the poor state of Zimbabwe's economy and the widespread perception that people especially children were suffering to represent themselves as victims in order to negotiate entry into South Africa or assistance from humanitarian agencies. Few children, especially those who were not well-versed with border entry and those who would have been misled by *magumaguma* to use illegal entry points crossed the border through the crocodile and hippopotamus infested Limpopo River. Children who regularly crossed the border usually used the illegal entry points when there was tight monitoring at the legal entry point. Aid workers often expressed positive comments towards border officials on both sides of the border who helped children cross the border without appropriate travelling documents. This case strengthens my argument that the state of childhood has social capital.

Interestingly, the economy of childhood was at times related to space. Paradoxically, during informal encounters between independent migrant children and aid workers, the

former tended to have limited childhood and victimhood social capital outside the shelter. For instance, independent children revealed that a number of aid workers often did not want to be involved in matters which happened to children outside the shelters. These matters included cases of children being beaten up by *magumaguma* and other children. “What happened outside belongs to outside”, was a common response to independent children who wanted aid workers to intervene. The constant shifts in the economy of childhood by space often confused children and led them to question aid workers’ parenthood practices.

On a different matter, some aid workers expressed concern over what they viewed as a disappearance of childhood as a result of children utilising childhood social capital to advance their personal interests, intimidating or instilling fear in aid workers in order for them to get what they wanted from aid workers, a behaviour which earned them labels like *magumaguma*, perceptions that they were disrespectful to adults, uncultured and cruel. By way of illustration, one senior male aid worker recounted to me an incident in which a 16 year old boy used to his advantage the idea of child innocence. This boy accused one aid worker of having shouted obscenities and threatened to chase him away from the shelter. These acts were not acceptable to the aid agency. The boy reported the matter to the aid worker’s superiors. My key informant, an aid worker, said “Fortunately this happened in the presence of a supervisor who later testified as a witness during the hearing. It was discovered that the said caregiver had actually stopped the boy from getting a double share during meals”. Consequently, management dismissed the case against the aid worker and reprimanded the boy. This indicates that these children’s use of childhood status as a manipulative tool can be empowering and even subversive (see Tamale, 2005 making an argument about how women used their sexuality as a manipulative tool).

In fact, the assumption that independent children are powerless when they interface with aid agencies because they are young was challenged by my results on several occasions. Childhood status was sometimes utilised by some independent children to refuse to listen to aid workers or avoid adult control. For instance, some of the independent children particularly those who often had conflicts with aid workers used the discourse of children as weak or too young to work, to sometimes refuse to wash their own dishes including the plates they would have used after meals, insisting or openly reminding aid workers that according to the shelter regulations, they were not supposed to work. Contradicting their portrayal as powerless, independent children used the status of childhood to undermine or challenge aid workers’ power. Aid workers often countered this discourse that children are too young to

work, even to do household chores by deploying the discourses of the "child's best interests" and that children had to be socialised to work, for "their own good".

Ironically, aid workers who often used images of independent children's suffering to draw attention to the problems these children were facing and to successfully mobilise donor funds, tended to accuse some independent children of using the state of childhood as a resource to access aid or have fame. Aid workers labelled independent children as attention seekers, for example when visitors like donors and journalists came and were taking photos. One aid worker explained:

> If you come with a camera you see some children following you to that side [pointing to one side] and if you shoot the other side you will capture them again. They think that if they are known all over the world it will result in them getting more humanitarian aid. They are so happy to hear someone from America calling X [named one boy as an example], their name, amongst a group of children".

However, some children, opposed to the discourse that aid workers advance children's best interests, did not want to be photographed for fear of their images being exploited by aid workers and other organisations to raise donor funds. There was a pervasive feeling amongst independent children that the funds would not be used for their benefit but would benefit aid workers. In addition, independent children did not want to be identified by their relatives and friends in Zimbabwe as failures.

Social capital as a strategy of social control was produced and expended in many ways. Some children who had some social connections with some aid workers such as sharing the same totem or originating from the same area in Zimbabwe often forged and cultivated close relationships with them. Aid workers and independent children who were related referred to each other using familial relations like "brother", "sister, "aunt", "mother", "uncle" and others. Besides generating positive representations of these children, which resulted in them being treated well by aid workers, these social ties gave both children and aid workers some influence or informal power over one another which made it possible for them to advance their different interests. Children who had a socially powerful position over the aid workers, for example, who were regarded as "uncle" status aid worker, at times used their social status to respectfully silence aid workers who wanted to rebuke them or used their position to urge aid workers to do things correctly. This indicates that childhood in Musina was a relational matter. It was not just determined by age as advocated by global policies like the UNCRC (1989).

The familial relations also served as tools in the economy of childhood to govern relationships between independent children and aid workers. For instance, some aid workers often struggled to pay back the money they would have borrowed from children and this situation weakened their power to exert authority over children. Situations like these again give an insight into shifting power relations between children and adults or between recipients of aid and aid workers. Some of the compromised aid workers responded by using the rhetoric of being "mothers" or "aunts" (parenthood) to re-assert their authority over these children. Arguably this action put these children under psychological pressure to behave like "normal children" who obey their mothers and aunts.

A senior male aid worker illustrated the power of the discourse of childhood innocence and its utility to some children like Edwin who was the youngest boy at the shelter. Peter observed that:

> Most researchers want to talk to Edwin because he is the youngest. They really want to understand what his life is like. He himself actively makes it clear that he is young. When a car arrives at the boys' shelter Edwin moves into a position which makes him visible. He is manipulating the system.

Edwin was far from being passive. He was an experienced child in terms of interacting with aid workers, donors, researchers and journalists. He knew how these people would react upon seeing a young boy like him. Says the same aid worker about this boy:

> It is good for researchers and donors [to document and analyse this case]. That makes him a sacred cow at the institution. He is young but he is over protected. He can use that against others. He can say 'I am being beaten up' yet what he would have said when they are playing makes others beat him. Plus he has been exposed to camera. If you ask him to narrate his life he can do so very well.

Instead of agreeing with the discourse of childhood innocence, he constructed the boy as far from being innocent.

However, the economy of childhood at times worked against independent children's interests. Ironically, the protection systems put up by aid agencies and which were appreciated by independent children who wanted to access aid, were sometimes obstacles to these children's efforts to realise their objectives in South Africa. Determined to pursue their dreams, some children below 18 years abandoned or disassociated themselves from the state

of childhood in favour of an "adult" identity . They inflated their ages and claimed to be over 17 years in order to be allowed to access documentation like asylum permits for adults which would make it possible for them to leave the shelter, travel on their own and get work. Thus, children did not have a persistent sense of victimhood. But the shifts in behaviour resulted in aid workers laying charges of dishonesty against independent children. They were labelled liars, manipulative, short sighted and ungrateful.

Commenting on the economy of suffering, Didier Fassin writes that "Presenting children as victims comes at a cost that is … practical" (2012: 168). Aware of these costs, there were moments when aid workers and independent children colluded to misrepresent the latter and their poor living conditions. Both aid workers and independent children were united in not wanting to ruin chances of getting the much needed but elusive support from donors. There were numerous reports by children that they were periodically instructed or coached by aid workers to say positive things about the care and protection services they were receiving from the humanitarian agencies. Independent children claimed that they were often told or reminded that it was in their own best interest to do so as any negative report could adversely affect the organisations' access to donor funds. Tactically conforming to their portrayal as passive actors, a number of children indicated that they had, during formal interactions with donors and journalists, reluctantly under-reported the gravity of the problems they were experiencing, claiming that some aid workers often told them that the shelters might be closed if the government received adverse reports about their operations. This point is evidenced, for example, by one girl aged 17 who saw me talking to another independent migrant girl and suspected that this girl had "[j]ust said positive things only to you". Children living in shelters revealed that the aid workers often made them thoroughly clean their usually dirty dormitory, blankets, and yard when they were expecting some very important visitors, especially donors, in order to hide the realities of poverty in the shelters and create a charade that they were being protected as vulnerable children. Though it appears contradictory, images of children suffering, living in a poor shelter with immense problems were seen as not good for the organisations as they feared it would reflect badly on their competencies to support children. Some independent children claimed that aid workers wanting to impress the visitors who "want to see things moving" (showing progress) at the shelters and areas where the aid agencies were intervening said, "no one will go out [of the shelter] on that particular day until the programme objective have been met".

On a separate but related issue, whilst emphasising the importance of doing research on independent children, aid workers also encouraged independent children to participate in

research as they saw this as an opportunity to publicise their plight and enhance their chances of getting aid. On how independent children viewed their participation in research, one of the aid workers commented: “It’s a decoration in the sense that the caregivers want the researchers if they make donors see the brighter side of the institution. They (children) say we are told that ‘if there is no money we will close’. They see anyone driving into the centre as a saviour so he must be told good things about the centre”. Independent children receiving some support from aid agencies were aware of the informal rules governing their expression on matters which concerned them. This situation shows the complexity of child participation.

Arguably, aid workers had an ulterior motive to perpetuate the discourses of poverty, childhood innocence and vulnerability. Just to extend the discussion, aid workers at times compelled independent children to assume a certain persona to visiting donors: being clean (to send a message that they are being well looked after) but vulnerable in order to generate sympathy from the donors and journalists. Interestingly, the experiences of many children are likely to have been obscured by the experiences of children who were usually and carefully selected to represent or perhaps misrepresent children. Independent children who were usually selected were seen as having “interesting stories”, which usually portrayed the serious problems faced by these children. For example, as discussed earlier, girls who experienced rape were usually selected. In addition, the humanitarian workers calculated that these children would paint an image which advanced their interests given that such children did not criticise aid work and workers. In short, such children did not threaten access to donor funding. Typically, these children were usually eloquent and trusted by aid workers. One consequence of this was that many children’s experiences, particularly the negative ones, were excluded from their narratives. Although they viewed independent children as vulnerable, coaching children what to say to outsiders served to hide the real state of the humanitarian crisis and the quality of care and support which was being provided by aid workers. This shows that even aid workers disregarded children’s opinions and advanced their own interests at times. In the presence of visitors like journalists and donors, aid workers did not want to publicly talk about child deviance as doing so would be tantamount to admitting that they were failing to manage or support children. They did not want to have their parenthood questioned. This finding shows the complexities and contradictions in the representations of independent children. Arguably, the idea and act of discursively constructing independent children as vulnerable can be traced to the dominant ideology in charity work that activating sympathy and understanding for children living under difficult conditions generates funding from potential donors (see Manzo, 2008, discussion on NGO

identity and the iconography of childhood). Manzo (208:632) points out that "images of children are useful for NGOs in reinforcing the legitimacy of their 'emergency' interventions".

At times, some independent children objected to the manufacturing of falsehoods and half truths about their living situation and the services they were receiving (see case study of the standoff between Save the Children and independent children when *Al Jazeera* Television Crew tried to shoot a documentary on the work which Save the Children UK were doing at the Musina border post in chapter three). Discourses of children's active agency and best interests worked to expose the limitations of aid workers' power and the social distance between independent children and workers. This case also shows the ethical dilemmas I experienced during fieldwork. This section has helped to explain why many independent children had a conflicting and, at times, a contradictory experience with aid workers: one of appreciation and then a feeling of being exploited.

Some Conclusions

I have discussed the various ways in which independent children were reminded to conform to "normal" childhood and their state of vulnerability. I have argued that the reminders stem from how aid workers conceptualised childhood and vulnerability. The representations were drawn from different discourses of childhood and vulnerability, which operated at different times. Reminders which were in line with global understandings of childhood were mainly used during formal situations whilst reminders made during informal situations tended to oppose the dominant understandings of childhood and vulnerability. The aims of reminders were mixed: from maintaining and re-asserting boundaries between childhood and adulthood to delegitimising the behaviour and practices of independent children which challenged 'appropriate' childhoods. They also made it possible to justify the rolling out of interventions like limiting movements of independent children and controlling their sexuality. But it also led to silences about the conduct of aid workers. Fassin makes a similar argument about how the discourse of innocence and vulnerability worked to justify introduction of intervention aimed at preventing HIV transmission from mother to child but led "to silence about the treatment of mothers" (2012:168).

The reminders of childhood and vulnerability, some of them gendered, often worked to either limit or close down some interventions. Ironically, some of the reminders of innocence and vulnerability of children worked to reveal some aid workers' problematic and inconsistent understandings of childhood and vulnerability. I will discuss this point in chapter seven. I also paid attention to the formal and informal economies of childhood and vulnerability. But this does not necessarily mean that these economies were clearly separate and fixed. These economies of childhood and vulnerability often changed as interests of social actors and situations changed.

Although aid workers accepted that the Zimbabwean crisis had wreaked havoc in many households, some aid workers reproduced the idea that children are weak and immature to make a contribution. This position functioned to legitimise interventions against child work and mobility. The general competence of children was underestimated. It is illustrated, for example, by a lack of respect for their prioritization of how to spend money. Instead of children's efforts being complemented through, for example, adequately protecting them from abuse and exploitation, some care workers pathologised independent children's efforts.

Although aid workers, utilising the discourse of children's rights 'officially' believed that they were assisting children, the intended beneficiaries often expressed frustration over what they viewed as aid workers' protectionist and paternalistic tendencies. This finding was unexpected and suggests that aid workers' actions at certain moments neither promoted independent children's personhood nor addressed most of the push factors to migrate. Aid agencies' failure to provide independent children with basic things made a mockery of their anti-child work efforts. Instead of depending on adult guidance, nurture and protection, as expected in modern society, this study showed that children in this humanitarian context assumed many responsibilities, including that of protecting themselves against abuse and exploitation.

Having highlighted the reminders of childhood and vulnerability which contributed to how independent children were framed, my attention now turns to discussing the different childhoods for different children.

CHAPTER 7: Different Childhoods for Different Independent Migrant Children

Introduction

The different representations of independent migrant children naturally attract different consequences. In this chapter, I focus on the question: what are the consequences of the complex and contradictory representations of independent children? For example, I ask what happens to the representations of independent children when childhood and adulthood boundaries fade as well as what consequences the reminders of childhood and vulnerability generate. Again, highlighting the different contexts, I uncover the discursive features of various representations of independent children. I reflect on social context, how and why different childhoods emerged for different children during their representations. I draw attention to "the dangers of local and global ideals and stereotypes" – to use Bourdillon's (2011: 98) words – of childhood and children on the move. Different understandings of childhood amongst social actors generated paradoxes in the representations and practices of humanitarian workers towards independent children. Often, each discourse failed to work in other contexts. I look at how these discourses justify certain kinds of interventions or people (children and aid workers) justified certain representations, practices or pathologised them at other moments.

Following Cheney's (2010: 5) call that "it is important to consider the ways that both childhood and the aid industry are depoliticised in popular discourse, despite the fact that both domains are rife with politics", in this chapter I discuss discourses around gender, social class, nationality and space. My aim is to show the many ways in which independent children were represented and how these representations affected these children. The chapter contributes to understandings of discourses which seek to support or pathologise independent children. This study demonstrates that the discourses around child migration, work and sexuality which I used to unpack the representations of childhood produce different childhoods for different children, a contradiction to the universal view of childhood (see Boyden, 2003).

In the next section, I provide an insight into gendered representations of independent children. Generally, there is a lack of gendered accounts of the experiences of children on the move (Sirriyeh, 2010). I argue that Musina society including the aid work fraternity is gendered and draws attention to "childhoods as a gendered experience" (Kehily, 2009: 11) in the context of migration.

Gendered Childhoods

Whilst it is important to pay particular attention to the construction of independent children's sexuality broadly, I was struck by how these constructions are different for girls. It occurred to me that the Musina's migrant community was in the grip of a particular moral panic about the sexuality of independent migrant girls. Aid workers often expressed weariness in continually trying to control migrant girls from "loitering in the streets", experiencing sexual exploitation, engaging in pre-marital sex, contracting STIs and having unplanned pregnancies.

An example of differential expectations for different children which reflect particular gendered understandings of work can be illustrated by the following case. Soon after arriving in Musina in 2008, Thoko aged 16, who had left her family in Zimbabwe to escape poverty and to continue schooling in South Africa, joined other migrants who criss-crossed the suburbs during weekends looking for 'piece jobs'. Though she and her peers were determined to work, to borrow Bourdillon's words, there was a "strong cultural tension around the idea of girls working" (2010: 37) in Musina. Work has long been gendered, and thus politicised, as result of a contestation over the ideal place for women and men (for example, Gaidzanwa, 1998). Independent migrant girls in their daily working lives confronted gender ideologies as migrant work is marked by gendered understandings: boys can work but girls should not.

The idea of discursively constructing working independent migrant girls in negative terms can be traced to the dominant idea of excluding women from public spaces. Both girls and aid workers claimed that some local men took advantage of the desperation of migrant girls who moved from house to house begging for part-time work, piece jobs, by calling them to their houses and asking them to do household chores and from there the men initiated abuse. "We take a chance but many girls are being sexually abused or escape from being abused", revealed one girl. However, "Most of the girls do not report to management or even to us their friends", said Thoko aged 17 years old. Independent migrant girls working especially in risky environments like private homes, the streets and the border were discursively

constructed as irresponsible or reckless for putting themselves at risk of abuse and sexual exploitation. However, this discourse of the girl child being vulnerable functioned to make it difficult for these girls to untangle themselves from financial hardships and support their families. At some moments this discourse worked to close or slow down efforts to support these children, for example, aid workers not helping girls to get 'piece jobs'.

One aid worker complained that "some of them [girls] are naughty. They sleep out and say 'I slept at my relatives' place'. So why did you come and stay here [at the place of safety]?" Comments like this generated moral panic around independent children's sexuality and were used as a "political strategy of social[ly] ordering" (Robinson, 2008: 123) the lives of these children: controlling their movements and whom they socialised with. The dominant idea of childhood as built on notions of innocence and vulnerability resulted in the pathologisation of girls who disregarded aid workers' rules and advice. At times it resulted in the withdrawal of child protection and legitimised the heavy-handed approach or encourage "harsh forms of discipline and control" (Meyer, 2007: 89) against children perceived as transgressing into adult activities.

Officially, drawing from the notion that a girl child is more vulnerable than a boy child, aid workers often placed the vulnerability of girls in the forefront. Girls were seen as particularly at risk of experiencing sexual gender based violence and failing to cope with the adverse pressures of migration. One aid worker explained that "their [referring to boys] physical and biological make up makes them to have more resistance and resilience to circumstances like going for a long period without bathing". In contrast, it is difficult for girls not to bath for a number of days as they often menstruate. Thus, the idea of constructing girls as vulnerable because of biology (see Clark-Kazak, 2011) and in urgent need of assistance can be traced to the prevailing masculinity ideologies in South Africa and many African societies. It is in this context that quickly placing girls in the shelter as soon as they had been identified in the streets of Musina and assisting them was seen as an important humanitarian act. In reality, both independent migrant boys and girls in the streets urgently needed assistance from service providers.

There was a rationalisation of sexual abuse which resulted in gendered childhoods. Aid workers blamed independent migrant girls for putting their lives at risk or having facilitated their sexual abuse. Aid workers usually asked these girls the following accusatory and gendered questions: "*Knowing* that you are a *girl* why did you migrate?" and "What are you looking for there?" Besides constructing girls as not belonging in foreign lands, highlighting the vulnerability of girls made it possible to justify placing girls in places of safety. It also

allowed aid workers to buttress the discourse of home being the best place for children. For example, a 38-year-old female worker felt that "They [independent migrant girls] should have stayed at home and protected themselves instead of putting themselves at risk". As discussed earlier, home is seen as protective space which ensures that their childhood is not 'stolen' or 'lost'. Aid workers were concerned that almost every day a number of girls were being raped along the border but many continued to come to South Africa. This position by aid workers assumes that it was women and girls who were supposed to prevent rape. Consequently, as Gordon (1988: 58) observed, the survivors of sexual abuse are changed from "innocent betrayed to sex delinquent". The fact that sexual offences against women have reached crisis level (see chapter one) was obscured and instead aid workers again questioned why, *munhu wemukadzi* [a woman or girl], dared cross the border. The discourse of victimhood was not mobilised much to assist these girls who were seen as having behaved irresponsibly and recklessly. Some aid workers accused fellow workers who "respond in a negative or insensitive manner" (Robertson, 1998: page unstated) to victims, further causing them to undergo "secondary traumatisation". According to Robertson (1998: page unstated), "Many rape victims perceive this secondary trauma as worse than the rape itself as it leaves them feeling betrayed by those that are designated 'caregivers' in society". Such aid workers in Musina, reinforced the victimhood status of these girls. Consequently, they tried to sensitise other workers to treat victims of sexual assault in a sensitive manner.

Girls' mobility invited clear scorn and boys' mobility generally invited less scorn. Girls found questions and negative attitudes by aid adults contemptuous of their personhood and misplaced as poverty affected everyone in Zimbabwe. This notion of blaming victims or survivors of sexual abuse, usually women and girls, as having invited the despicable act upon themselves remains prevalent, particularly during informal interactions when views that girls had no option but migrate to South Africa to escape from problems were not dominant. It appeared as if independent migrant girls' decision to take the risk and come to South Africa using any means necessary implied consent to sexual abuse. Officially, aid workers utilised the discourse of victimhood to cast independent migrant girls as needing more support than boys, whilst unofficially reinforcing the moral hierarchy that sees girls' sexual morality as corrupt. Through their questioning and moralising statements, aid workers explicitly and implicitly excluded independent migrant girls from the work and migration process. Accusing independent migrant girls of recklessness and not behaving like 'normal' girls who do not travel alone, allowed the aid workers to argue that these girls did not deserve sympathy or support especially if they appeared not to have recanted their behaviour. Though well

meaning, these practices maintained gender inequalities in child work. Similarly, working independent migrant girls were often labelled as morally loose people who were having survival sex or transactional sex (see Watson, 2011 on homeless young women in Australia).

Some independent migrant girls complained against their depiction as having low moral values. This representation made them feel degraded and unwanted by aid workers. It dismissed their innocence. Consequently, at one point some of the girls, including the school going ones who remained in the shelter after the expulsion of their friends for indiscipline, decided to also follow them to a life of great uncertainties in terms of food, access to education and protection. However, this behaviour only served to confirm the idea that they had inappropriate childhoods and further justifying why independent migrant children did not deserve support.

Failure to live up to expectations of childhood by being sexually active generated mixed consequences, including negative ones for the concerned children. For example, despite their fall out with aid workers, girls who had been evicted from the shelter after being accused mostly of sexual 'offences', including engaging in survival sex, together with those who had 'voluntarily' moved away from the shelter due to various reasons like being in solidarity with their friends or sisters who had been expelled, often visited the shelter and talked to aid workers, even in the streets. However, two girls who had been chased away from the shelter lamented that aid workers often ignored children's open statements like, "Life is now difficult for me". Aid workers either did not pick up the hints that expelled girls threw out or implicit appeals for assistance which included frequently visiting the shelter and spending many hours socialising with their friends still living there. The girls expressed remorse but aid workers could not accommodate them citing shortage of accommodation space and maintaining that they were an unrepentant lot, not deserving of their protection. This shows there was not just tension between the idea of girls as victims and girls as immoral but that the impact of aid workers' understandings of independent children's sexuality was enormous. In fact, independent children's survival sex or sexual engagements led to cutting off survival from the shelter, an act which ironically reproduced their vulnerability.

The assumption that girls on the move are vulnerable is not one I oppose. However, this point is often conflated with a thinking that girls are ill-disciplined and naïve (see Palmary, 2010). The situation was complex as in some instances independent migrant girls were treated more harshly than independent migrant boys. Issues of morality and childhood innocence were amplified for girls. Contrary to the rhetoric of childhood innocence, sympathy or pity for 'the girl child' perceived as vulnerable, they were often depicted as

"sexually irresponsible". Aid workers could not fathom the idea of a 'normal' child migrating without a parent or guardian, "yet they are girls and more vulnerable than boys". These girls were criticised for not being risk averse as they were often discouraged by their parents and even by their peers to take risks (see Booth and Nolen, 2010). This statement reflects gendered differential representations in aid work. The label of sexual irresponsibility damaged these girls' social standing. In a bid to control the behaviour of independent migrant children, aid workers had mores and parameters for sanctioning independent children who transgress values governing the shelter and conduct of children. As mentioned earlier, they often chased them away from the shelter so as to "protect other innocent girls" from being corrupted. Aid workers argued that the sexuality of such girls was dangerous and merited exclusion from their shelters. This idea of preventing 'deviant' girls from corrupting innocent girls served to legitimise their denial of services. So, the category of childhood was not preserved but was constantly negotiated.

As a disciplinary measure, the status or some privileges associated with childhood were withdrawn from children who were perceived to be participating in adult activities like having sex. "We don't look after adults", boldly declared one of the aid workers. "A child is someone who has never indulged in sex. Someone who doesn't know a woman or a man", explained another aid worker in a separate interview. Aid workers' statements implied that these children had sexual experience and had therefore experienced a 'lost childhood'. These moments related to discipline when a child did not fit the aid workers' strict definition of strait-jacketed childhood and also serve to emphasise the notion that childhood is a social construction.

One common trajectory for the independent migrant girls who had been excluded from the place of safety over alleged sexual misdemeanours was to fall pregnant a few months later. A senior aid worker expressed regret over expelling girls but nevertheless insisted that the girls were responsible for their own suffering. As a result of this rhetoric of contagion, rarely were girls who had been expelled allowed back into the shelter. The discourses of lost or disappeared childhood and blaming the victims of teenage pregnancy allowed aid workers to withdraw protection and other forms of support from the 'bad' girls. This position also functioned to remove any sense of responsibility for the children's suffering. The discourse of lost childhoods towards these independent migrant girls were usually expressed during informal situations as they opposed agencies' formal position of simply assisting vulnerable children regardless of gender or circumstances. They functioned to set conditions under which children could access assistance.

Of note is that aid workers tended to focus on individual independent children's sexual moral failings rather than child protection systems. For example, as indicated in chapter three the poorly funded places of safety offered inadequate material support for independent children. In addition, the aid workers lacked appropriate training in caring and supporting children in a humanitarian context. The consequence was the pathologisation of individual independent children and a failure to fully engage with the social context within which these children lived.

Aid workers tended to draw from the discourses of lost and disappeared childhoods, and 'adulterised' children they perceived to be sexually experienced. For instance, a female aid worker had this to say about a 13-year-old girl:

> Compared to her you [referring to me, the researcher] might be a minor [as far as sexual experience is concerned]. She knows so *many things* (my emphasis) about sex and the different styles [of having sex]. She might know a lot more than you. That one is an *adult* (my emphasis) and is the one who can tell you about sex.

What can also be deduced from the above pathologising statement, which also disputes "a growing concern in recent decades with the domain of childhood as threatened …"polluted" by adult worlds" (Stephens, 1995: 9), is that children by challenging the male dominance in sexual issues, lose their innocence or status of childhood and therefore the right to certain kinds of protection. Some aid workers' action of upsetting the 'normal' adult-children relations of knowledge and adult governance over childhood was used by some aid workers to justify not giving knowledge on sexuality to children they regarded as having sexual experience. It is likely that aid workers thought being seen as ignorant would most likely erode their power over these children. In addition, it seems the information pointed to the tendency by aid workers to cast children as knowing and therefore sexualize them.

According to Fassin (2012: 179), "compassion has its limits". How to respond to independent migrant girls behaving in ways which were not consistent with appropriate childhood posed moral dilemmas to aid workers. Showing the difficulties of sustaining the idea of children being deviants as far as girls were concerned and putting in place measures in line with that view, one senior worker explained to me why they shifted positions when relating with independent migrant girls:

> Even for girls [who are misbehaving] we are supposed to chase them away. It's only that we end up thinking that 'If I chase her away I will worsen the situation'. You give her many chances. If you think of chasing the girl child...right... then what is she going to do? She will go to a boyfriend. You end up saying 'I should not have chased her away and maybe this child would have had a better future'…Save the Children doesn't want us to chase away children. They [the girls] are supposed to go but you end up feeling pity for them as you are a woman. If I chase her away what will she do? You will be seeing that the person (the girl) is just doing that but has no plan. For example, that Sharon was misbehaving a lot and she ended up leaving the shelter. Later, we saw her roaming in the streets and we said 'shame'. We felt pity for her. We said if she had not done that she would not have forced us to chase her away. She was selling eggs with a child on the [her] back.

In this context, the aid worker positioned herself and her workmates as powerless. She saw herself as having no choice but to enforce expulsion against some children accused of behaving inappropriately. Such a position served to shift blame for these children's suffering from aid workers to children themselves.

In response to my question on what they were going to do to girls like Cathy who often had sleepovers outside the shelter without permission, one aid worker said they did not know what to do. One senior aid worker echoed her earlier sentiments:

> Not really. If we have a matter like this we are just supposed to chase away that child. I talked to Cathy and I asked her 'What do you want us to do with you?' She promised that she was not going to do that again. That was on Friday. I told her that 'If you go out again you will force us to chase you away'. It's only that we at times become lenient after considering that the person is a child. She is 15 or 16 years. She gets out and where does she go? Above all she is a girl child and is more vulnerable than a boy child. If we chase her away and she is a girl child what is she going to think? A boyfriend!

The discourse of the girl children being vulnerable functioned to expose the gendered childhoods and responses in aid work and migration. Situations like this showed the complex challenge of working with and against the representations of independent migrant children: as aid workers, women, and adults. The fact that aid workers sometimes tolerated girls whose behaviour they deemed inappropriate shows the power of the discourse of the girl child needing special protection from potential abuse and exploitation. It positions aid workers as

very compassionate but having little choice at the same time. It also glosses over the additional restrictions placed on the movement of girls in a context where being out in public is key to economic survival.

The discourse of the innocence and vulnerability of the girl child challenged me to explore how the notion of childhood and vulnerability for the independent migrant boys was understood and responded to. The situation was different but complex for independent migrant boys as it appeared that aid workers were more or less tolerant towards independent migrant boys who misbehaved. Inappropriate behaviour by boys was often tolerated on the grounds that "boys misbehave" and therefore their behaviour was normal. However, at other moments aid workers also responded harshly to boys' inappropriate behaviour. For example, some security guards working at the shelter for independent migrant boys sometimes severely assaulted these boys. During the entire fieldwork, I did not receive a report of an independent migrant girl who had been beaten by aid workers. This suggests that violence within aid work was gendered. Aid workers accused boys who misbehaved or were not obeying them of appropriating fatherhood and adulthood. "You now consider yourself as fathers. Go away". Aid workers chased away or excluded some of them from accessing services. Implicitly or explicitly, the discourse of 'normal' childhood as a state of passivity – not questioning adults - functioned to silence these boys. It legitimised exclusionary practices in aid work by aid workers.

Unlike boys, independent migrant girls, having been constructed as vulnerable and hypersexual, were closely monitored and restricted movement. Aid workers' often reproduced idea of confining women to the private sphere of the home worked to suppress independent migrant girls' sexuality and sexual expression. They prohibited all the young girls below 18 years from leaving the place of safety's premises. Rules governing the temporary place of safety included having set times for being inside the shelters and prohibiting children from sleeping out. Both boys and girls found these restrictions infringing on their autonomy and forcing them to have poor and inadequate food because it prevented them from doing "piece jobs". Due to pressure from girls and difficulties in enforcing the rule prohibiting girls from going out of the shelter, the rule only lasted a few days. In addition, portrayal of independent migrant girls as helpless victims served to justify heightened surveillance of independent migrant girls' movements, dressing, sources of material and social support.

Thus, child protection was sometimes gendered and contradictory. In another example, though the dominant view was that the girl child is very vulnerable, one senior aid worker with training in social work tended to oppose the idea of protecting independent migrant girls. In a bid to protect independent children, service providers in Musina agreed that independent children should not sleep at the SMG but in temporary places of safety. This MOU was in line with South Africa's Constitution and the Child Care Act of 1983 that children are not supposed to sleep in a cell/ detention centre especially one which has adults. Service providers identified and facilitated the immediate release and placement of minors into temporary places of safety. Though some aid workers helped both boys and girls to be released from SMG, there was a social worker who at times did not. One day as we were at the SMG at night, this social worker explained to me and another PhD researcher why he was not trying to identify some girls – below 18 years – who were detained there and take them to the shelter for girls. Rejecting the dominant idea that the girl child is vulnerable, he said "They quickly leave the shelter to stay with boyfriends. It's a waste of time to look after girls. They always leave and stay with men". To me and the other researcher's shock, over ten boys were released and placed in a place of safety that night through this senior aid worker's intervention. This case showed the gendered consequences of the pathologisation of independent children by aid workers. It also shows the limits of children's agency – if there were some independent migrant girls that night at SMG they remained there – and some of the dangers of not monitoring work practices of service providers.

One of the consequences of sexualising children was that in the absence of senior management, some young female aid workers were more liberal during their interactions with children. They were involved in subtle sexual power struggles with older boys who seemed to want to blur the thin childhood and adulthood divide. Though these women sometimes shared sexual jokes and welcomed compliments which had sexual connotations from boys, for example about their dressing, particularly when members of the management were not there, they at times wanted to see these children's sexuality regulated and suppressed as it had the possibility of eroding their authority as aid workers. Allowing children to erase the sexual boundary between them and adults had the potential of negatively affecting their source of livelihood which they treasured so much as management did not tolerate sexual relations between children and aid workers.

Classed Childhoods

This section turns to the differential treatment of independent children based on social class. I discuss the question of social class and the understandings of childhood and victimhood. This study revealed that social class shaped how independent children were understood and treated. This led to, to use Goldstein's (1998: 389) words, childhood being "lived and experienced differently" by the different classes of independent children. Acknowledging that independent children have differences, aid workers were supposed to develop and implement a care plan for each child. One aid worker explained to me the necessity of having this plan.

> A care plan is supposed to be there in order to know how to deal with each child. If a child is 17 years you have to see what you can do as he or she is about to turn 18. Then state the assistance you can give the child since after two months the child is supposed to go after a few months. After three months I review the care plan and ask why the child is still there. Then I make a follow up.

In line with the discourse of children's right to participation in matters which concern them, each child is ideally expected to also contribute to making his or her care plan. However, the aid worker explained the challenges of doing so:

> Right from the start each child is supposed to have a care plan but it will be a heavy burden on me because I am the only one. Secondly some only stay here for a very short time. If we were doing things properly and the number is manageable each child would be having an individual file.

Contrary to the official thinking that all independent children in Musina were poor and desperate to receive assistance from intervention agencies, some of these children were seen by both independent children and aid workers as "rich" (coming from privileged backgrounds in Zimbabwe) or having money to support themselves. Marks of being economically well off included: wearing branded clothing with top names like Adidas and Nike, often speaking English with an American or English accent, type of music they listened to (for example, Hip-hop music instead of *Museve* music, the local Zimbabwean music), suburb they used to live in Zimbabwe's urban areas (for example, Waterfalls in Harare; Saucetown in Bulawayo),

and practises of "Western" etiquette (for example, not joining a stampede to get food when meals are being served)[74]. These children were labelled *masala-la* (snobs).

In Musina, the social class of an independent migrant child was a strong determinant of how he or she was constructed and assisted. Social class promoted certain ways of representing and treating independent children. Due to economic hardships, poor independent children usually lived in Musina a longer time than their counterparts who had money or were from households which were better economically. The duration of children's stay in the shelters shaped the relations between independent children and aid workers. To illustrate this point, one aid worker advised some poor children who had lived long in the shelter not to support one boy who was strongly advocating a host of improvements to the conditions of living at the shelter. The aid worker responded by using exclusionary discourse and practices, telling the other boys: "Don't be like him. He will soon leave this place". Evident here is that categorising these children as less vulnerable was led to the alienation of children perceived as economically well-off. Of note also, is that the discourse of the 'other' worked to regulate and limit the possibilities of independent children across social class discussing the quality of services in such a context.

Some aid workers went on to accuse some independent children they perceived to be from economically privileged households of inciting other children to protest against the quality of food and services within the shelter. Informally, aid workers tended to welcome and accept having children from poor backgrounds in their shelters. However, informally as well, they appeared less welcoming to children they perceived to be from economically better groups. For example, some of these children perceived to be from high socio-economic class refused to eat food prepared at the shelters and this worried aid workers. Coming from different social classes also presented challenges in managing the shelters. For example, children with money usually bought quality food. A senior aid worker explained what was happening:

[74] Children from better economic backgrounds made it amply clear that they found it ludicrous to participate in a stampede for food. They described the act of jostling for food disgraceful and demeaning.

> There were the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ among children. Sometimes there is too much of cabbage, soya mince or beans. The children would not enjoy their meals so for those who happen to have pocket money it will be easier because they will be able to augment their diet of relish with food such as polony or corned beef. They also bought take aways [food prepared at fast food outlets].

Aid workers sometimes understood and tolerated the demands for better food made by some “rich” children. They sometimes would go out of their way to try to find good food to feed these children in order to make their stay in Musina comfortable. Feeling pity for some independent children who refused to eat the poor food, some aid workers at times used their own money to buy ‘good’ food for these children. However, this practice of categorising independent children into different social classes and treating them differently was also seen by other children and aid workers as very divisive. They argued that social class undermined the discourse that all children are the same. Children challenged their exclusion from certain services through publicly or silently protesting against what they said was blatant favouritism. The above example, of the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ amongst independent children also exposes the “artificiality” (Clark-Kazak, 2011: 22) of the idea of portraying all independent children as vulnerable and being treated equally in aid work. Aid workers often expressed relief when these “well-off” children left the shelter for other places as it meant reduced burden on them. Thus, social exclusion is a feature of living for some independent children in this humanitarian context. However, some aid workers maintained a social distance in terms of social class between themselves and independent migrant children, and blurred differences in economic status amongst children in order to create harmony and fairness in aid work whilst other aid workers were not sympathetic towards these children and accused them of being spoilt. “They wanted to go away and we were happy to release them”, explained one senior male aid worker. Aid workers often accused “well-off” children of having a bad influence on the “poor” children.

Children perceived to be poor tended to be given the freedom to work. In situations of poverty, the discourses of childhood fun and freedom from economic responsibility were silenced. Actually, some aid workers wanted these children to actively work and use their money ‘wisely’ in order to transform their poor lives. What comes through are images of independent children as actors who have the ability to turn around their socio-economic situation or passive actors who are to blame for their current predicament – a departure from the discourse of childhood innocence.

Understanding the needs of independent adolescent migrants revealed some tensions over social class between aid workers and these children. This can be seen in the following story of one journalist-researcher and two independent migrant boys, which was in response to my question about how aid workers viewed independent children. An aid worker said:

> A journalist-researcher came and asked me what these children want. I told her not to ask me but ask the children themselves as they are there. But what I can tell you from my own perspective is that they are economically driven because they are coming from an economic slump in their country. She said aaah but others are …and I said let's not argue. Towards the end [of the fieldwork] we took Edwin that young boy and Brian for interviews. We interviewed them at the hotel and we ordered food. They ate. We went to Nandos[75] and she bought food for them. They were happy to eat the food and to be taught how to hold a knife. The children were spoilt. Then all of a sudden Brian said he wanted to go to the toilet and Grace [a female humanitarian worker] said there are toilets near Shoprite – a supermarket within the same shopping complex - but one has to pay R2 to use them. Brian was given R2 [by the journalist-researcher] and he put it in his pocket. He went to a nearby bush. When he returned we took the children to the shelter to drop them but when they were getting off Edwin started crying. We asked 'why are you crying'? He said "You gave Brian some money and you did not give me". We said "where did we give Brian money?" We asked Brian who gave him money and he said "he is referring to that money you gave me to pay for the toilet service". *Murungu* (the White person) said 'so you didn't go to the toilet?" He responded 'I went to the bush'. The journalist-researcher was disappointed that she had bought food worth over R200 for these children but he was crying for R2. I told her 'didn't I tell you that its money they [referring to independent children] want. He is thinking about that R2 and the future as you are going back'. She was disappointed that the boy was attaching a lot of value on R2 and I said 'He will do a lot of meaningful things with it. It's not just R2'. She was disappointed.

Clearly, this incident highlights the challenges associated with understanding the lived experience of independent children and the assistance they needed. Implicit in this account is that there were class differences between independent children and aid workers. This result

[75] A restaurant in Musina's central business zone.

suggests that the way some adults perceived independent children resulted in different childhoods for different children. They constructed independent children as different from other people.

Using the discourses of poverty and inferiority, aid workers reminded children of their poor backgrounds and limited options in life as a form of social control. It functioned to, for example, convince them to remain focused on their primary objective of coming to South Africa, accept any food they were being given and avoid clashing with aid workers as "you have no option". Aid workers sometimes accused children who had money or were from households with a better economic position of *kufurira* (misleading) poor children. So advising poor children like that served to alienate "rich children" from the former, which made it easier for the aid workers to manage the shelters and independent children. Social class also served at times to tactfully push children from suspected of coming from privileged economic backgrounds out of the shelters as they were "too demanding". The discourse of social class worked to expose the divide and rule practices in aid work. In addition, it revealed that the discourse of choice is not dominant in a humanitarian context.

There was also division of work based on the perceived social class of independent migrant children. Independent migrant children who had no money or were from poor families tended to do very dirty work or exploitative work. However, children who had money or were from "rich families" often did not work or refused when advised to do so by aid workers who were of the idea that children should intervene and help their families during difficult times. It was easier for the "rich" children to refuse to work as they usually stayed for a few days in Musina. The discourse of social class worked to expose the flaws in the assumption that homogenises the social class of independent children, usually seeing all these children as poor and in need of humanitarian assistance or work.

Although aid workers and even some of the independent children themselves were critical of the behaviour of children they perceived to belong to affluent social classes, they at times perceived them positively. They described these children as well groomed. These children were disassociated from practices which were considered bad like jostling to get food and not bathing every day. Some aid workers did not see the poor shelters as good places for these children. An interesting finding related to this was that some poor independent children testified to the legitimacy of such exclusionary representations. "Some of us are used to suffering. Actually, this life is better [than the life they had in Zimbabwe]. Some of our colleagues are not used to this [miserable] life style", commented one boy aged 16 revealing children's in-depth knowledge of social class and the different ways they interacted with it in

their everyday life. Situating social class within a discourse of pity, some aid workers and independent children reproduced social class differences amongst children to justify or tolerate unequal treatment of children. It also shows how children negotiate exclusionary discourses and practices in aid work.

Access to money influenced the way independent children were represented and treated. Aid workers particularly during informal situations, used flattery and often called working children who usually had money "rich men" or "businessmen" meaning that they were not children but 'men'. Aid workers also used a kind of gendered flattery – referring to these boys as 'real' men, 'father' and rich men. Labelling children as male adults can be traced to the dominating masculinity ideologies in Musina, a practice which further allowed aid workers to normalise borrowing money from these children in order to make ends meet and asking the children to buy soft drinks for them. This means that the relationship between aid workers and independent children should not be characterised as a "power-powerless one" (Thornbald and Holtan, 2011: 2) with the latter always dominated. Relationship power (adult providing support to children and children being recipients of aid) is not unidirectional and static. This again supports Prout's (2002) point that children are not only impacted by their surroundings but also impact it. This idea opposes the notion that children are passive actors. However, aid workers and some independent children tended to moralise economically 'successful' girls. These girls were often suspected of earning their money through engaging in transactional sex. In relation to this, Onyango says about the consequences:

> When men portray women as prostitutes or other things that they cannot say in public, they are simply laying grounds to justify their excesses against them. It is plausible to observe that such negatively skewed ideological images of women constructed by men are the precursors to gendered violence [and pathologising practices] against women [and girls] by men (2008: 64).

In Musina, the consequences were the pathologising and exclusionary practices by aid workers towards independent migrant girls suspected of sexual immorality.

Aid workers often granted victimhood status to independent children after being moved by their emaciated and ill-clad appearance. They did not challenge the dominant conception of vulnerability that usually disassociates vulnerability from high economic status. Consequently, any perceived opulence of independent minors, like buying and wearing expensive clothes, repelled and triggered resentment amongst aid workers. At times these children were seen as not deserving support.

There was a mixture of views on how different social classes of independent children see the interventions by aid workers targeting them. It depended on the circumstances of the child and state of vulnerability. For example, children who came from poor backgrounds tended to value interventions more than those who came from economically secure backgrounds. New children particularly new arrivals in South Africa tended to value the programmes which were being rolled out more than those considered to have overstayed at the shelter. Usually, those who had stayed at the shelters for a long time had means of making money through piece jobs and knew where to go in the event that the shelter closed. Those who were new in the shelters often worried more about where to go in the event that the programme folded than the ones who had lived long in Musina or South Africa. Thus, generally, the new arrivals and poor children were positive and thankful about what was being done for them. Their attitude generated positive treatment for them by aid workers as they were considered 'grateful' and well behaved.

Independent children shared class based social hierarchy and drew from it. Children often talked about the hierarchy of work. They did not want to be looked down upon in terms of the work they did. As such, independent children showed class prejudice as they also drew on class inequalities. The result was that independent children either tactfully or openly rejected attempts by aid workers to mould or re-mould their goals in life arguing that these aid workers had a prejudiced or limited understanding of independent children's childhoods, situation and goals in life.

Within the dominant Westernised discourse of childhood, work is constructed as a danger to independent children. However, within the dominant ideologies in South Africa and Zimbabwe which see children as active actors within their families and society particularly during difficult times, the practice of working generated social capital for independent children who were working. Children who were considered successful at work gained some autonomy and influence over aid workers and other children. For instance, some of the independent children who advanced some money to aid workers in order for the latter to make ends meet were often tolerated by aid workers, when they violated shelter rules like coming back into the shelter very late, going out of Musina without permission and refusing to do household chores, for example. Besides that, working enabled independent children to minimise the way they were controlled by aid workers. It also allowed them to evade doing workloads aid workers demanded they do (see Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010). For instance, some of the working children rendered the sanctions, which aid workers applied to boys who were misbehaving like giving them '*chikepe'* (a very small portion of food)

ineffective, as they had money to buy their own food which was usually better in terms of quality than the one served in the places of safety.

There was a practice of viewing boys who were working and spending their earnings well, in a positive light. It was rooted in the dominant masculinity ideologies in this society. Following the notion that socialising children to work is one of the child rearing practices by local people, aid workers often 'informally' encouraged children to work, particularly those who used their money 'wisely'. For instance, a female care worker who tacitly taught boys to accept and internalise the masculine ideal of supporting family with material things, publicly praised a 14-year-boy who worked hard and periodically remitted groceries to his family. "He is a 'man'. A real 'father'", said the aid worker. Implicitly revealed in this quotation are aid workers' efforts to direct children to adult-like behaviour, action which opposes the dominant discourse of childhood as free from adult responsibilities. In addition, it revealed that children who did not behave like 'a man' and 'real father' were degraded and socially stigmatised in this context. Being "a man", a "real father" and supporting struggling family members was very important in independent children's upward social mobility in Musina and beyond.

The clearly traditionalist position, which reproduces ideas of what it means to be a man in this society, presented this boy not as a passive victim and opposed the conceptualisation of the movement of children as pathological as the boy was supporting his family. The boy was elated to receive social approval from the aid workers and other boys looked on appreciatively because of the compliments he was receiving. Supporting one's family is one of the markers of manhood and it raises one's social status. However, it exposed men or boys who were doing well and those who were struggling to support their family – the latter usually looked down upon. In this context a father is the breadwinner. Thus, for children the act of working is a way of fulfilling their familial obligations, securing their social place and meeting social expectations including from aid workers themselves. However, in terms of function, by not pathologising children who were working hard and supporting their family, aid workers were sending a contradictory message about their position on child work and understanding of childhood.

During informal times, the non-working children were a marginalised underclass by aid workers and fellow migrant children who worked. This situation can be explained using Agbu's (2009: 4) point that "children have always worked in African societies". These children were vulnerable to social exclusion. Departing from their construction of children as immature to work and showing that childhood innocence and vulnerability has its limits (see Fassin 2012 on massacre of the innocents), aid workers described them as irresponsible and

"uncaring" for their suffering siblings and parents in Zimbabwe. Indeed, aid workers wondered aloud why the independent children had come to South Africa. Aid workers expected these children to conform to their society's expectations – that they should financially support their families. In response to being alienated by aid workers and some other children for having inappropriate behaviours, some of these children changed their behaviour and started working and sending money home.

Accordingly, some working children used their financial power to resist in subtle ways some orders given by aid workers they would have lent money. Supporting Magadlela's point that power is "a resource that can easily change hands" (2000: 15), independent children as actors with human agency which made them able to "devise ways of coping with life" (Long 1992: 22) renegotiated their social position within the places of safety. This case of children lending money to people who were supposed to look after them provides a good insight into shifting power relations between working children and aid workers working in a resource poor context. This situation often threatened or disturbed the hierarchical structures within aid work. Some aid workers resorted to using threats (for example, of physical violence, giving them *chikepe*) or "sanctions" as independent migrant boys called these coercive measures, to silence these children from demanding their money or to make them follow their orders like doing household chores.

However, some aid workers mobilised and used the discourse of motherhood or parents' rights to re-assert their authority over these children. Constructing children as people who had an obligation to support their parents, especially when they are old, some aid workers jokingly 'appealed' to independent children to help their parents. For instance, one hot day in Musina, one aid worker said to an independent migrant boy, "It is too hot. Buy a soft drink for your mother". Another point to note is that not confronting children as victims of exploitation and in need of protection or help but acknowledging their industriousness served to legitimise their request for assistance from children. In addition, besides emphasising power hierarchies between children and adults, these acts of casually asking working children to buy something for them put a lie to the notion that aid workers have always opposed child work. This invited accusations by some children that aid workers were not concerned about their welfare and that they favoured working children who gave them something. Children complained that aid workers considered children who gave them something as well behaved. Being considered a good child was rewarding as these children easily accessed aid materials such as food.

The state and application of childhood was conditional. It was at times withdrawn from those children who disrespected adults or failed to have child-like behaviour. Interestingly, for independent children based at the border it was also withdrawn at night. For example, as stated in chapter one, border officials frequently assisted independent children to cross the border without proper documentation. However, at one time Zimbabwean soldiers threatened to severely beat one boy called Dumiso, aged 15, who had violated the soldiers' trust. The soldiers had given him money to buy *pap/ sadza* but he did not return. He ran away. This situation highly incensed the soldiers and forced them to revise the way they viewed independent children in general. Soldiers looked for him and promised to beat him up if they caught up with him. For some time they also hardened their views towards these children. Aid workers who heard this story about the conduct of this boy condemned his behaviour. They expressed the view that children who behaved like him did not deserve support. They demanded that the boy and his friends recant such acts which showed ungratefulness. So certain states of childhood deserved support whilst others did not. Thus, the way aid workers labelled and related to independent children backs Foucault's observation that "…power is exercised from innumerable points…there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (1978: 94-5).

With regards to independent children who were labelled *magumaguma* because they used scary, criminal and dangerous tactics, aid workers' views towards these children were not rigid. On some occasions, for example when they lived in temporary shelters for children, these children were considered as having normal childhoods and easily accessed aid. Yet during visits by journalists and donors the same children were not portrayed as villains but victims of various socio-economic circumstances. In the context of appealing for aid, the rhetoric of sympathy served to convince the donors to support a worthy cause. Their action reflects histories of preoccupation with the politics of aid that frames potential recipients of aid as very desperate for assistance. However, bluntly accusing children of being *magumaguma* or engaging in anti-social activities allowed for actions like illegal deportations of independent children, verbal and physical abuse of these children by some aid workers and police officers. These shifting representations of children support Prout and James' (1990) point that "childhood is a social construction which varies with time and place" (cited in Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 5).

In line with this notion of a socially constructed child (see also James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), there were constant shifts in understanding independent children's claims of childhood and vulnerability. Aid workers, for instance, were often accused by independent children,

especially at the girls' shelter where there was limited space, of forcing them to leave the shelter and live in unsafe places on the grounds that they had overstayed and should leave in order to create space for independent children who were new arrivals in South Africa (see Chapter five for a detailed discussion on this issue). Some aid workers justified their action on the grounds that "this is not a permanent home" and "it's not really your shelter but for women who are survivors of sexual gender based violence". One of the consequences seemed to be that childhood and vulnerability took on new meaning if independent migrant children overstayed and that children who were victims due to other factors which were not sexual in nature were considered less vulnerable. However, some aid workers did not see it like that, particularly if the child remained obedient and was attending school in Musina, acts considered child-like. Such children's childhood and vulnerability status were not withdrawn.

Although the discourse that work is part of "normal childhood" was often emphasised by aid workers, some independent children utilised the discourses of anti-child work and children's rights to refuse to work. This can be illustrated by the case of a 15 year old boy who one day told an aid worker who was ordering him to wash dishes, "I am not the one who was called (recruited) to come and clean the dishes. When you get paid you don't share your salary with me". The behaviour of these children who reproduced the "idea of childhood as a special phase" (Clarke, 2004a: 9) was castigated on the notion that "they (children) want to think they are adults". The consequence was that the disparaging remarks about independent children delegitimised their refusal to work and functioned to justify why these children had to be punished by aid workers. For example, several boys revealed, and I also observed, that the aid workers wielded a lot of power during food distribution. They flaunted this power, sanctioning or punishing the boys they regarded as truant by giving them a *chikepe* (a small quantity of food). Aid workers rewarded boys who behaved appropriately, those who did not challenge their authority (as aid workers and adults) or worldview. Action like this created hierarchy in access to aid, a situation which opposes the notion of humanitarianism. Threat of receiving *chikepe* controlled the behaviour of some boys particularly those who struggled to get money in Musina. However, a few independent children who were working and had "easy access" to getting money through work sometimes avoided threats of *chikepe* by buying their own food. However, these acts generated more tension between independent children and aid workers. Aid workers were against the practice of some children bringing in better food into the shelter than the one they would have prepared as it created a lot of problems including different childhoods in shelters. The discourses of the best interest of children revealed that the discourse of choice is not dominant in aid and child work but is situational.

On a separate issue, working children's priorities were often degraded. This can be attributed to the continued effect of seniority (Elson, 1982) of adults over children. Children, maintaining the childhood and adulthood divide, accused aid workers of 'adulterising' them by wanting them to have adults' spending patterns yet they were still children. However, children's attempts to negotiate the value of their decisions were sometimes dismissed as just stubbornness and disrespect. All this indicates that "the romantic view of childhood as a time for freedom from responsibility" (Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010: 134) was not guaranteed but there were moments when it was withdrawn from these children.

Noting independent children's resilience, evidenced by their continuing to work under difficult conditions, some aid workers particularly during informal times, revised the way they represented children. During these moments aid workers drew from the discourse on childhood resilience to compliment these children for braving the difficult working environment to improve their lives. Informed by the discourse of vulnerability – that children were suffering from poverty – some aid workers often encouraged children to work, gave them work to do and even acted as informal employment agents for these children. However, some aid workers, particularly those who were heavily embedded in the discourses of childhood innocence, children being in school and children's rights, criminalised or pathologised independent children both during formal and informal interactions. Through these discourses, they either withdrew their support for working children or intensified efforts to stop these children from working.

Though some independent children valued their work including the contributions they were making in supporting themselves and their families, aid workers at some moments dismissed the "childish" goods they bought and infantilised their spending patterns. Independent children objected to adults' efforts to blur the childhood and adulthood divide. Although they acknowledged their poor backgrounds, children still wanted to have the freedom to buy goods which other children living with their parents, including aid workers' children, were having. As a result, many of them ignored aid workers' advice as inappropriate, paternalistic and condescending. However, at other moments, some aid workers portrayed these children as socially competent – saying they were proving that they had a moral responsibility to help their struggling family members, and financially competent to use wisely the money they had earned. Besides encouraging these children to work, the pro-work discourse worked to expose the situatedness of the representations of independent children and the different consequences.

Different Spaces and Different Childhoods

Space, for example, their place of abode, where they worked or socialised, also tended to create different childhoods for different independent children. Although they recognised independent migrant children' resilience and ingenuity in developing survival strategies, aid workers embedded in the discourse of the home being the ideal place for children viewed independent children living under the 'home' environment (in shelters) as innocent and child-like. In other words, these children were seen as having appropriate childhoods. Consequently, *vana vekushelter* (children who live in shelters) were not denigrated.

Ironically, at times aid workers appreciated the resilience and ingenuity of children living outside the 'home' environment to craft survival strategies but insisted that their conduct usually verged on the obnoxious. They associated children who were not under their control with all sorts of vices like sex work, substance abuse and crime. Aid workers saw the streets as a site characterised by social order. In *'Children and the Politics of Culture'*, Sharon Stephens observes that

> Notions of street children as non – or antisocial beings, presumably without families or values of their own, have been used to legitimate radical programmes to eliminate the menace of street children in the interests of the general social good (Stephens, 1995:12).

The motivation for rolling out these programmes is that "Children on the streets are 'people out of place'" (Mary Douglas, 1985 cited in Stephens, 1995: 12). Children living in the streets were stigmatised and treated with less respect than their counterparts living in the shelter. The implied social statement was that those on the street had defied social norms and hence were unsuitable children. This suggests that the place where independent migrant children socialised, worked or lived shaped different treatments of independent children and therefore different childhoods.

"Their parents and other humanitarian organizations failed to take them away from the street. They do not appreciate help", said one aid worker. Arguably aid workers categorised children living in the streets as delinquents to absolve themselves from taking any responsibility for problems these children were experiencing. In effect, it displaced any sense of intervening meaningfully in these children's lives. Aid workers often complained that their efforts to assist working children living in the streets, characterised as having a sub-culture, *chiStreet-kids* (street kids), by placing them in places of safety were often a waste of time and

resources. ‘Street children’ is a derogatory label which tended to justify discriminatory practices against these children. For example, although all migrant children were supposed to be fairly assisted, care workers tended to either resign or have a lethargic response towards those who lived and worked on the streets. Aid workers said these children would agree to stay at the shelter for a day or so then go back to live on the streets. These children “viewed the programme (of identifying and placing children in places of safety) as an impediment to their quest for money which they get through begging on the streets” said a non-formal teacher. In addition, although these children viewed the programmes which were implemented by the agencies as helpful and entertaining, for example, soccer tournaments, “they often complained that it wastes their time to look for money” added the non-formal teacher. Although a number of aid workers claimed that they understood children’s objections they still regarded them as misguided with misplaced priorities. “The child on the street has become wild. It is not easy to tame a wild animal”, said a 48 year old female worker labelling children who were working and living in the streets. Whilst it appears contradictory with my earlier claims that aid workers often represented independent children as deviants and treated them negatively, in reality aid workers tended to regard children who lived in temporary shelters as children who can still be ‘saved’. The discourse of children as victims worked to justify interventions targeting these children. In addition, this finding about the othering of children being “(re)produced and articulated through space” Valentine (1996: 82) echoes the point that children living in public spaces are usually pathologised as they are seen as “a threat to the moral order of society” (Valentine, 1996: 581). In addition, the pathologisation of children who lived in certain spaces at the border and in the streets, children seen as having a subculture of delinquency, exposes problems related to othering and unfair practices in humanitarian work. The sub-cultural theory of delinquency developed by Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s is based “on the idea that delinquency arises from a subculture, i.e. a group within society whose values differ from those of the mainstream” (Clarke 2004c: 85). However, this theory is problematic in this context as these children faced the same problems.

Different behaviour of independent children led to the construction of different childhoods and responses to them by aid workers. Utilising the discourses of innocence and framing themselves as victims of aid workers’ interests, a 15 year old street child who once lived in the shelter and who I got to know well in Musina, explained:

> Those guys who are soft, rather obedient and timid are considered to be more vulnerable that those who are outgoing, aggressive and courageous. Those who are soft and obedient are favourites of service providers because it's like they are the ones who comply with the laws and they make the planned programme successful.

Social actors, including those ones living within the same locale often have different lifeworlds and meanings to issues. This was the case amongst independent children as their views were often diametrically opposed. Some independent children vowed to return to Zimbabwe only after having realized their dreams like buying large amounts of groceries, beautiful clothes, and owning an expensive car. For example, Daniel aged 16 said, "I have to present myself as a person who has been working in South Africa." Pressure to succeed amongst children was very high. However, these children were depicted as misinformed and cruel by aid workers. They were seen as cruel on the basis that they were causing their parents and relatives stress as they worried about their whereabouts, fate and protection in South Africa.

National Childhoods

Childhood is a political matter (Stephens, 1995). Consequently, politics shaped and produced different childhoods for different children. One unexpected finding of this study was that independent children were represented as victims and deviants. Their country of origin, Zimbabwe, was portrayed as negligent, an idea rooted in the discourse of child abuse. Aid workers often rhetorically asked, "What type of country are these children coming from?" In fact, this was a common question posed by South African people in general when they saw independent children. These children were seen as coming from a country with an irresponsible political leadership. Consequently, these children were constructed as victims of their government's action but also pathologised based on citizenship, for example, that statement made by one worker who said that children from Zimbabwe liked men a lot (see Chapter five). This is similar to what Neil Howard found in Benin that "the view of rural parenting practices is unambiguously negative" (Howard, 2012: 6). He observed that parents of migrant children were seen as "ignorant and irresponsible" (Howard, 2012: 5). This representation of independent children as victims worked as a tool for mobilising support for them.

One of the issues that emerged from this study was that of aid workers' criticisms of independent children for migrating to South Africa when they are vulnerable to exploitation and unemployable in terms of the law and lacked physical prowess. This criticism was not limited to these children only but extended to their parents, guardians and country. With Zimbabwe's socio-economy in a state of decay and its international image shattered, the standing of its people living within and outside the country was also negatively affected. Independent children and aid workers[76] from Zimbabwe were no exception. Independent children's behaviour was frequently explained by reference to their Zimbabwean nationality. There was a conflation of Zimbabwe's poor state and the lives of independent children. This is contrary to the common notion that children are apolitical and innocent.

The idea of discursively constructing foreign independent children as inferior to local children served to lay grounds for justifying certain negative practices against them. For instance, aid workers emphasised independent children's foreign nationality to silence them from questioning the quality of services they were having (point elaborated below). In addition, some aid workers indicated that parents, relatives of these children and the Zimbabwe Government "must be ashamed" of failing to take care of its children. Consequently, independent children and also aid workers from Zimbabwe often felt they were being unfairly targeted, criticised and pathologised by the local population including some aid workers. The dehumanising discourse worked to create or maintain a social distance between independent children and aid workers.

The majority of independent children were conscious of their nationality. They claimed that a number of South African aid workers had a low opinion of them and held negative stereotypes of them. For example, conceptually tying vulnerability to poverty (Cheney, 2010), some of the aid workers often told these children to accept any food or shelter they were being given in South Africa as they were born and bred in poverty situations, and that they lived in pole and dagga huts, among other things. Although aid workers found it extremely difficult to get a varied good diet for children, independent children felt that aid workers saw them as not really deserving of 'good' food since "they say we were used to poverty", said one 15 year old boy. Many children often complained that they could not stomach eating the food they were being given in the shelters. "I develop skin rash soon after eating the Soya mince", claimed one 15 year old boy. For many months efforts to change the

[76] Sometimes there was tension between South Africa and Zimbabwean aid workers. At one time, a South African aid worker was accused of making derogatory remarks against her fellow workers from Zimbabwe. The Zimbabweans complained and the management intervened and managed to cool off tempers.

diet proved fruitless as this was the food the shelters received from donors. In a bid to silence the children complaining about the quality of the food, some aid workers used the discourse of the other to regulate and limit independent children demands. They reminded the children to stop complaining as this food was better than they had in Zimbabwe, a statement many children found demeaning and others found incorrect as their households did not lack food but other things like love. Aid workers contended that these children's lives in South Africa were actually better. "You walked all the way here", said one senior aid worker as she disempowered children who were negotiating for an improvement in the quality of services. Some independent migrant children argued that they were being attacked because of aid workers' antipathy towards foreigners.

Some independent children responded to inadequate food supply and pathologising practices by aid workers by sourcing their own food among other practices. Thus, there is need to move beyond conflating state of victimhood and inability to make choices. This shows that some vulnerable people can still have the agency to "devise ways of coping with life" (Long, 1992: 22). Emphasising that children walked to South Africa posed a few dilemmas for independent children who complained that some aid workers expressed derogatory statements every time they complained about the quality of services: on whether to accept or refuse aid given after these statements were made. The idea of discursively constructing independent children from Zimbabwe in negative terms can be traced to the idea of looking at people from other countries, particularly poor ones, as inferior. Discourse of nationality worked to expose xenophobic practices in aid work and also implicitly justified poor services for people considered as inferior.

Whilst acknowledging that life in Zimbabwe was terrible and they needed protection from several threats, independent children challenged the discourse of nationality by pointing out that the aid workers' imagination of Zimbabwe and the living situation was sometimes divorced from reality. They felt that some South African aid workers like many other South Africans had scant knowledge of the real situation obtaining in Zimbabwe. "South African aid workers think that Zimbabweans are hungry people who come to look for food. They view the children as hungry and need food only," said a 38 year old Zimbabwean female who worked as aid worker. Consequently, this led a number of children to accuse aid workers of looking down upon them and describing them as coming from resource-poor households, a point which was used to justify why these children should work. Contradicting the official discourse of anti-child work, some aid workers encouraged these Zimbabwean children to

work and often criticised those they perceived as lazy. Thus, the lines between childhood and adulthood were blurred for independent children who were considered poor.

Ironically, independent children used the discourse of nationality to challenge the way they were portrayed by aid workers. “They think our lives have always been characterised by poverty. We used to have a good life... Actually we want to do very well than their imaginations,” said a 16 year old boy. What this boy said is very telling as it reveals that independent children saw themselves as having different childhoods from the ones they were commonly associated with by aid workers; the children saw great prospects and control over their own lives. The point is that the supercilious attitude of aid workers also motivated some independent migrant children to prove their critics like aid workers, wrong.

The discourses of nationality and poverty which shaped some aid workers’ perceptions and practices towards independent children from Zimbabwe negatively affected these children’s self-esteem and national pride. It possibly resulted in aid workers paying little attention to other needs of children like psychosocial support. This could be part of a broad context of anti-Zimbabwean sentiments in South Africa. Zimbabwe, more than any other country, has been problematic for the South African government and population to accept, in part because of the complex economic and political crisis. Current legislation only legitimises politically driven migration. The political reasons are magnified by a history of political connection to Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean leader, accused of dictatorship and human rights violations[77].

There were individual and group rivalries which included frequent fights amongst independent children based on differences like ethnicity, places of abode in Musina, age and length of stay in Musina. Their clashes were sometimes very violent which resulted in these children being seen as dangerous and unpatriotic. Some Zimbabweans who worked as aid workers sometimes made efforts to inculcate nationalistic feelings in independent Zimbabwean children and build a sense of childhood solidarity amongst independent working migrant children through organising group discussions and soccer matches among other activities. Aid workers were concerned that independent children at times lacked solidarity yet they were young, poor and in a foreign country. Aid workers’ primary aim was to make

[77] For example, read this newspaper article: “Zimbabwe's desperate people flee across border to escape Mugabe”
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/zimbabwes-desperate-people-flee-across-border-to-escape-mugabe-457709.html
Wednesday, 18 July 2007

sure that these children remained conscious of their nationality, with Zimbabwean norms and values. At one time, aid workers discussed with independent children their culture and national anthem. One of the aid workers explained why they did that:

> We said even if they are unaccompanied [children] they must know our culture and where they are coming from because they are not going to remain in this situation of being unaccompanied. They are growing up and they will become parents in this country. But they have to identify with a country, with a culture.

I describe this as humanitarian nationalism. I draw on the actor approach to explain "differential responses (by aid workers) to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous" (Long, 1990: 6). Aid workers from Zimbabwe used Zimbabwean nationalism as a powerful instrument to control and shape the behaviour of independent Zimbabwean migrant children. But this nationalism was also at times deployed perilously. Unofficially, the Zimbabwean aid workers were very intolerant towards certain behaviour and practices they described as unchild-like. They scathingly criticised these children for "tarnishing our image as Zimbabweans", a situation which justified stern disciplinary measures against these children like reproaching them when they misbehaved. Of note is that at some moments, for example, when responding to independent children seen as behaving inappropriately, there were differences between aid workers from Zimbabwe and the South African aid workers. Matters, favourable and unfavourable, related to the conduct of children were at times reduced to nationality by aid workers. On one hand, for example, aid workers particularly Zimbabwean nationals often attributed what they proudly regarded as independent children's good traits of working hard, being respectful and love of attending school to their Zimbabwean nationality. These sentiments were usually expressed during both informal and official times. They functioned to justify, rally support for these children as well as salvage Zimbabwe national pride which had been heavily battered in South Africa. On the other hand, some aid workers particularly South African nationals, tended to attribute what they regarded as bad behaviour like "independent migrant girls' promiscuousness", political/ethnic intolerance (for example, evidenced by some rivalry and lack of cooperation between unaccompanied *Shona* and *Ndebele* children)[78] and high mobility, to their Zimbabwean nationality. Besides delegitimising the negative representations of independent children as it also reinforced stereotypes against foreigners, aid workers from Zimbabwe's

[78] See Chapter One for the explaination on the source of this conflict.

statements served as tools for demanding that the independent children change their behaviour so that it could become consistent with "Zimbabweanness". Thus, nationality often structured the representations of independent children and shaped practices towards these children.

Some Conclusions

This chapter revealed both expected and unforeseen consequences of the representations of independent children. These consequences emanated from understandings of childhood and vulnerability which constantly changed as social actors, informed and motivated by multiple ideas and different interests, had shifting understandings of independent children's sexuality, work and migration. This finding backs Norman Long's point that "one should not assume that organisations or collectives (as social actors) … act in unison or with one voice" (2001: 241). Basically, the chapter buttressed James, Jenks and Prout's (1999) point that childhood is situated in time and space and "is changed at different times and contexts" (cited in Thornblad and Holtan, 2011: 3). The chapter has shown that contradictory and politicised discourses around childhood and vulnerability which function at different moments produce varied consequences on understandings of independent children. Independent children experienced many different childhoods as childhood has "multiple and unstable constructions" (Burman, 2008: 116).

Consequences of the moral construction of childhood based on the dominant notions of innocence and vulnerability resulted, particularly during informal situations, in moral panics, pathologisation of independent children, as well as in the legitimisation of the heavy-handed approach or encouraged even "harsh forms of discipline and control' (Meyer, 2007: 89) against children perceived as transgressing into adult activities. However, independent children as social actors responded by challenging, negotiating exclusionary discourse and practices. For example, I have shown that formal schooling occupies a highly contradictory place in this context. Formal schooling was not operating according to hard and fast rules. It created different childhoods for different children.

The study revealed that the gendered representation of independent children led to gendered consequences. Independent children' sexuality, work and mobility were seen as a major social problem. Negative attitudes or stereotypes against children seen as having inappropriate childhoods were not consistent across gender. Independent migrant girls were pathologised more than the independent migrant boys as masculinity and patriarchal ideas

tended to dominate. This affected different children's access to aid. Consistent with previous research on migration and sexuality (see Haram, 2004; Brockerhoff and Biddlecom, 1999), there is tendency by aid workers to conflate mobility and immorality. Since the notion that the right place for women and girls is the home continues to prevail, they reproduced the view that mobility particularly across national borders was not good for their moral well-being. Due to the dominant discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability, the negative representation of independent children's sexuality usually found expression during unofficial interactions. Similarly, aid workers often conflated abuse and sexuality. In fact, abuse easily slipped into immorality. This legitimised withdrawal of assistance from children who were victims or those perceived to have lost their innocence.

Of note, discourses of childhood innocence, vulnerability and children's rights tended to be relegated to informal interactions. The discourse of children's rights, which covers issues like children being allowed to participate in matters which concern them, was seen by a number of aid workers as alien to their local practice. 'Subverting' the discourse of childhood innocence allowed and legitimised the redrawing of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. For example, it also allowed for the withdrawal of services to sexually active girls. However, the tendencies by aid workers to break with sexual norms, particularly during unofficial moments, sent contradictory and confusing messages on how they represented independent children's sexuality. Related to this point is that aid workers were buttressing the point made by Kelly, *et al*. (1997 cited in Lee, 1999: 465) that parents employ two conflicting theories about their children, seeing them both as persons equipped with ability to make own decisions and as vulnerable, needing protection and control.

During 'unofficial' situations, some aid workers saw independent children as sexual beings but it was problematic and complex for these children to exercise their sexuality. Independent children were, to use Mai and King's words, "wanting to express, or denied the means to express, their sexual identities" (2009: 296) by the dominant discourse of childhood innocence. The sexuality of children was being made and broken in a way which confused both aid workers and independent children. Ironically, the need to protect independent children was one of the consequences of the pathologisation of independent children. Aid workers time and again, tried to restrict the movements of independent children particularly girls, in order to protect them from possible abuse and at the same time stop them from immoral behaviour. So aid workers' double role of understanding children as vulnerable/victims and promiscuous/immoral was situational but confusing to both aid workers and children. Inconsistences marked their attitudes and actions towards independent

children. Restricting their movements resulted in the imposition of restrictive measures "in the process reinforcing their already marginal social status" (Wyness, 2000: 56).

Within the humanitarian context of Musina, work, sexuality and mobility remained very much hierarchized by gender, with adults and boys at the top, children particularly independent migrant girls, at the bottom of the hierarchy. The mobilisation of discourses of protection, gender and formal schooling was for the purposes of controlling and protecting children. The boundary between childhood and adulthood in terms of mobility, sexuality and work is not rigidly set but constantly defined (see Valentine, 2003 on transitions from childhood and adulthood). Ambiguous and contradictory interests and understandings of childhood – during official and unofficial times – tended to blur this boundary. Though aid workers usually redrew boundaries, independent children at some moments particularly when aid workers were not on moral high ground, also redefined boundaries. This indicates that power relations between independent migrant children and aid workers were fluid and shifting. But a show of power by children entrenched views that they were deviants and justified interventions to make sure that they behaved as expected.

Discursive strategies were employed to reinstate adult - child norms in situations where they had been violated. Children perceived as deviant in a range of ways, were being pathologised. Consequently, aid workers sometimes excluded children from accessing humanitarian assistance and in the process opposed the principle of advancing children's best interests. This situation contradicts the discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability still dominant particularly in official interactions. Though being steeped in thinking that sex, work and mobility were preserve of adults only, a view being challenged by some children, some aid workers were saying considering the context and challenges the children were facing, they could consider them children anymore. Thus, this study provides further evidence that the age based conception of a child is not helpful (see Kehily and Montgomery, 2009).

This chapter also implicitly examined the tension between global and local understandings of children's work, sexuality and mobility. This made it possible to have an understanding of the everyday social construction of children's work, sexuality and mobility in a humanitarian context and its implications for setting or re-setting limits to childhood. Aid workers' perceptions and responses to children's work, sexuality and mobility were grounded in a complex mixture of local and Western conceptualisations of childhoods as well as the individual aid workers' own thinking. As they interacted with children, the views fragmented or coalesced depending on the situation and other social factors.

Independent children are not a homogeneous group (see Ensor and Gozdziak, 2010: 11) as they are commonly portrayed. The chapter also sheds light on the different treatment of independent children which created different childhoods. The major fault lines in uneven treatment of independent children were gender, social class and nationality. For example, with regards to social class, I have argued that independent children need to be understood in terms of the social class dimensions of childhood (see Goldstein, 1998: 391) and victimhood. I have shown that aid workers' attention to social class of independent children sometimes prejudiced both poor and 'rich' children. Ironically, aid workers' policies and practices might be making the children they claim to represent. I have also shown that childhood is nationalised. The nationality of the child was a strong determinant of what and how a child is assisted. Independent Zimbabwean migrant children were represented as poor and vulnerable. The positive views and stereotypes against these children by and large served to justify supporting them and limiting their demands respectively.

The discourse of childhood innocence which "produces children as structurally vulnerable" (Meyer, 2007: 90) was reinforced through interventions which tightened child protection systems and assisted them to deal with challenges related to abuse and exploitation. Dominant discourses of humanitarianism, childhood innocence and vulnerability worked to legitimise interventions aimed at assisting these children. However, these discourses constrained children from exercising many rights (see Meyer, 2007), like participating in matters which concerned them and in determining their best interests.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

Introduction

In this thesis, I have critically explored the lives and lived experiences of independent children as represented by themselves and humanitarian workers in order to make sense of the social dynamics and discursive practices during the intersection of local and global understandings of childhood and vulnerability in a humanitarian context. In the foregoing chapters, I have suggested that independent children from Zimbabwe, entangled in complex and contradictory relationships with humanitarian workers, were represented in different ways at different moments. I have presented evidence which suggests that this was as a result of different life-worlds and understandings of children and childhood among the eclectic mix of social actors. The findings of my study suggest that humanitarian workers' contradictory and at times binary representations of independent children in everyday life – seeing some as innocent and vulnerable and others as bad or deviants, at times viewing children as "becomings" and at other times "beings" (Thornblad and Holtan, 2011; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Qvortrup, 1994) – represents their conflicted and situational understandings of childhood and vulnerability. These views were drawn from oppositional discourses. This analysis concurs with Meyer's argument that "different social issues tend to be marked by the predominance of different discourses" (2007: 87).

My study focused mainly on these social "arenas" (Long, 2001) of child work, sexuality and mobility as they show the varied understandings of childhood. It provides a useful barometer on how mobile children are being represented in humanitarian work, the nuances and variations in their portrayal. It also offers insights into independent children's lives particularly experiences of their own representation. A central part of the argument in this thesis is that the different understandings of childhood, a result of the different lifeworlds or social worlds of both humanitarian workers and independent children, as well as the different social contexts, generate multiple representations of independent children. I have also argued that the different ways social actors make meaning of local and global ideas on childhood which interface in humanitarian work, generated different childhoods for different children. Although several authors have acknowledged the multiplicity of childhood since contexts differ, the "tendency to treat the category of childhood as a universal one" (James and Prout cited in Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 2) was also evident in Musina particularly during formal

interactions between independent children and humanitarian workers. This homogenising approach functioned to justify certain discursive practices by humanitarian workers towards independent children which maintained the idealised model of childhood, for example, restricting children's mobility. However, "the notion of an innocent, work-free, protected childhood [which is often emphasised by charitable organisations (Ensor, 2010) neglects the interaction of the child with society" (Ekpe-Out, 2009: 32) tended to prevail during informal interactions between independent children and humanitarian workers. Thus, this thesis buttresses the idea that childhood is socially constructed and argues that the analysis of the phenomenon of independent migrant children during their interface with humanitarian workers who are under the influence of both global and local ideas of childhood should consider the social context (see, Ekpe-Out, 2009).

In this concluding chapter, I provide the overall discussion of the major findings and recapitulate my major arguments on how representations of independent children were framed. Through unpacking and discussing the fluid and shifting social context, formal and informal representations of independent children, I showed the situatedness, complexity and contradictions in the way these children were represented and limitations of the discourse of universal childhood in the context of humanitarian work and migration. I pull together research and some theoretical contributions of the study. I then briefly venture into analysing implications of the research findings to practitioners who deal with independent children. I end the thesis by offering suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings, Arguments and Contributions

Representations of Childhood in Context and Paradox

Humanitarian workers, a heterogeneous group, navigated different and ever changing social landscapes. As a result "childhood in Musina was "lived and experienced contextually" (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011: 114). Contrary to the idea of an apolitical child usually promoted by global ideas of childhood, the economic and political instabilities in independent children's home country, Zimbabwe, and the humanitarian crisis in Musina contributed in shaping the way these children were portrayed. Due to the dominance of the anti-child work, mobility and sexuality discourses, humanitarian workers often suspended acknowledging the influence of contextual factors in driving children to behave in certain ways and analysed children's actions without context. Amongst other things, this often led to gendered representations of these children. Thus, in humanitarian work, the representations of

independent children, often paradoxical, are best understood in terms of the social context and outcome of complex processes of negotiation of various discourses.

Affected by migration in a multitude of ways like other migrants and poor people in general, independent children were exercising some agency to survive in a foreign, violent and controlling environment. Thus, this study supports Honwana and De Boeck's (2005) arguments that children in Africa be understood as "makers and breakers" of society. As "makers", independent children contributed to their household economies, improvement in their socio-economic position and thereby the way they were represented. However, as "breakers", these children were seen as disrupting "societal norms, rules and conventions" (Wamucii and Idwasi, 2011: 190). So this study contributes to deconstructing understandings and stereotypes of independent children. Humanitarian workers often overlooked independent migrant children's individual characters and goals, representing them instead in stereotyped roles such as deviants and victims. This position resulted in little attention being paid to these children's resilience and capacity to find ways of dealing with challenges in their lives (see Long, 1992).

The field of migration proved to be one of the useful sites for the production and revision of hegemonic childhood discourses. Migration presented opportunities for humanitarian workers to reproduce the dominant understandings of children – childhood and vulnerability, but it also allowed independent children to exercise agency and be autonomous on matters that concerned them. My research challenged the exclusion, pathologisation and infantilisation of independent children in Musina by presenting and analysing their everyday interactions with humanitarian workers. Though they faced structural opportunities and constraints, these children were not inherently passive and vulnerable as they tried by all means to exercise agency using various strategies and discourses to navigate inclusionary and exclusionary practices characterising humanitarian work and migration.

My thesis is that humanitarian workers as social actors with different lifeworlds (Long, 1992) have complex and contradictory views on childhood and experiences with children. There were shifts in the pathologisation or moralisation of independent children; their exclusion and marginalisation in the migration process as well as the conflation of childhood and adulthood in some instances. There were humanitarian workers that looked at these children and saw innocent, vulnerable, passive, immature and dependent children on the one hand, and those who saw these children as survivors, and competent actors on the other. These humanitarian workers' positions were not fixed. Independent children were not always seen as innocent and in need of protection, nor were they seen as agentive actors during their

interactions with humanitarian workers. Basically, representations of independent children by humanitarian workers were ambiguous, convoluted and interceded by contestations and negotiations. Thus, one of the key findings of this study was the existence of the formal and informal representations of independent children. My conclusion therefore is that representations of independent children in humanitarian work go beyond the discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Kitzinger, 1990) that dominate in literature, formal interactions between independent children and humanitarian workers. The different social contexts result in multiple and contested meanings of childhood.

During official talks and interactions, humanitarian workers, anchored in the discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability which inform and guide humanitarian work, tended to represent these children as innocent, victims and deserving of care and support (Nieuwenhuys, 2001; Green, 1998). “Innocent” connotes the very vulnerability espoused by the donors. Evidence was presented which showed that often, when children seemed to be defying the ‘normal’ or appropriate childhood, humanitarian workers were not open to children’s views. Humanitarian workers tended to negatively portray independent children they considered to have inappropriate childhoods.

My study contributes to our understandings of child migration in southern Africa. Evidence from Musina indicates that migration remains predominantly an activity in which children are marginalised and excluded. The mobility of children without their parents is seen as opposing the dominant discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability. They were labelled victims and deviants. Independent children’s motivations to migrate were often belittled and delegitimised. This is an example of how the structural aspects of child migration are ignored or marginalised.

The sexuality of migrant children has enjoyed little attention in literature. In this study, I explored how the sexuality of independent children was represented by humanitarian workers. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Clarke (2004) and others who assert that children’s sexuality is controversial and problematic to many adults. Consistent with the dominant discourse of childhood sexual innocence, for many humanitarian workers, the state of being a child is closely connected to sexual inactivity, vulnerability, powerlessness, lack of experience and knowledge on sexual matters. Humanitarian workers’ view that migration negatively alters the sexual mores including of independent children supports previous research in this area (see Ahlberg, 1994 cited in Arnfred, 2004). The discourse of sexual innocence worked to negatively portray independent children suspected of engaging in sex of having lost their childhoods. Evidence from Musina

indicates that humanitarian work was dominantly patriarchal and generated gendered representations of independent migrant children's sexuality. Consequently, they produced and reproduced exclusionary practices against independent migrant girls.

Contrary to the discourse of anti-child work which argues that children are too vulnerable to work (Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White, 2010), the results of this study show that independent children were working. They were even doing work which was seen by humanitarian workers as exploitative and dangerous. Drawing from the discourses of innocence, vulnerability, parenting and children's rights, the dominant narrative was that they were being abused and exploited at various workplaces. These discourses functioned to delegitimise independent children's work and justify intervention programmes.

Among fellow humanitarian workers, away from donors and other social actors embedded in the discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability, humanitarian workers tended to be frank about their views on the life circumstances, behaviour of these children, portraying them as innocent and at times, 'abnormal'. Thus, one of the important findings of this research was that Meyer's point (2007: 98) that "childhood has become a moral rhetoric that can legitimise anything without actually having to explain it" was applicable during formal situations but limited during informal situations as the discourse of childhood innocence did not always dominate everyday life in humanitarian work. The informal representations of childhood by humanitarian workers – which dominated the everyday life – were interlaced with love and support, satisfaction and regret, shame and resentment, anger and pity, fatigue and the threat of being disrespected by children. The characters and behaviours of the independent children did lend themselves to frequent descriptors such as "deviants", "immature", "they do not think", and "criminals". A narrative emerged during the fieldwork, suggesting that during informal interactions between humanitarian workers and independent children, rather than the latter being perceived as too weak and immature to migrate and do paid work, independent children who opposed the dominant expected behaviour of children were sometimes viewed as having appropriate childhoods. Drawing from the discourses of survival and ideas that see engaging in work as part of growing up and children as having responsibilities to assist their family and community members in times of need (Bourdillon and Spittler, 2012; Bourdillon, Levison, Myers, and White, 2010), mobile, working children were portrayed positively. They were seen as resilient, pragmatic and responsible family members as they took on the responsibility of supporting their families in times of hardship. Consequently, from the children and service providers, I gathered that at times not all children's movement and way of life in South Africa was perceived as

inappropriate.

This study is a call for more understanding and less moralising of the behaviour of independent children. Moralising mobile children or dealing with them children as miscreants who have no place in cross border movement complicates any strategy that might be aimed at assisting them or addressing the issue. It poses direct or indirect threats to their personhood, well-being and development. Indeed, as the study revealed, in many circumstances some family members depended on independent children's contribution to household income. Host communities, including some of the humanitarian workers themselves, benefited from the work activities of independent children. Acknowledging these realities, humanitarian workers' practices were often not consistent with their official rhetoric on child migration.

While independent migrant boys attracted harsh criticism for having migrated, independent migrant girls were often further summed up through ubiquitous stereotypes that undermined their personhood and agency. So of note is that the representations of mobile children remain gendered with less tolerance for girls partaking in migration due to the dominance of the discourses of the girl child as very vulnerable and patriarchal constructions of the home as her ideal place. Despite the dominant discourse that the girl child is more vulnerable than the boy child and the presence of humanitarian agencies, it remains a challenge for girls to work and live particularly far from home. Though there was an acknowledgement that the Zimbabwean political and economic situation had reached crisis levels, the discourse of patriarchy worked against considering it a commendable feminine characteristic for a girl to migrate alone, especially to unknown places – qualities that are generally positive when embraced by adult men. Humanitarian workers were also the representatives of the global views on childhood that guided and informed most of the interventions. However, humanitarian workers were not just the bearers of the hegemonic Western childhood ideology but were also human vehicles of local views on childhood. These discourses worked to delegitimise the efforts of independent migrant girls who eked out a living to support themselves and their relatives in spite of these stereotypes.

The study revealed that work, at least unofficially, gives independent migrant children a social place and social approval from some social actors, including humanitarian workers. Issues of exploitation and abuse of these children coming from poverty stricken families, were marginalised, not consistently and robustly pursued. This echoes Woodhead's point that "Most types of work do not impact on a lone child but on children as part of a work group, a family group, a peer group etc." (2004: 323). These findings seem to be consistent with other research which found out that expending effort, particularly during official situations, in

outlawing the social practice of child work and discouraging children from working is not effective (Boyden, 2012). The results of this thesis suggest that the onus on humanitarian workers is to negotiate with the local realities so that their interventions are contextually grounded in order to guarantee the interests of independent migrant children (Boyden, 2012).

Contrary to the discourse of anti-child work which dominated during formal situations, humanitarian workers acknowledged that doing paid work could be a positive and empowering choice for independent children who want to escape from problems at home and improve their living situation. This study made a contribution to the call made by Nieuwenhuys nearly two decades ago for anthropological research to understand "the ways children devise to create and negotiate the value of their work and how they invade structures of constraint based on seniority" (1996: 247). Despite facing a number of hardships at the workplace, independent migrant children often managed to craft and implement some survival strategies. In addition, some independent migrant children deployed discourses that delegitimised the dominant anti-child work discourses. I also presented evidence that showed that some independent working migrant children took advantage when the tables were turned against humanitarian workers in terms of power between them by, for example, manipulating the weak financial position of some humanitarian workers to make it difficult for humanitarian workers to restrain them from doing paid work. The humanitarian workers would have borrowed money from working children to make ends meet and this conflicted state muffled their anti-child work voice.

Attempts to stop independent migrant children from working, this study suggests, have produced significant dilemmas for both humanitarian workers and independent children. Traditionally and culturally, contributing to household income confirms children's social place in their households and society at large as it proves that they have cultural competence. As for the humanitarian workers, they are also culturally obliged to socialise or guide children to have cultural competence – contributing to their household income. At the same time, humanitarian workers are under pressure from other service providers to stop children from working. Consequently, a number of humanitarian workers had shifting attitudes towards child work. Framing independent migrant working children within contexts where children's work was seen either as important to ward off poverty or negatively affecting children's well-being and development produced formal and informal representations of working children.

On a separate but related note, during informal interactions, humanitarian workers discursively constructed sexually active independent children in negative terms. This position led them to marginalise and pathologise these children. The tendency by humanitarian workers to relegate discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability, and to privilege the discourse of morality during informal interactions between them and independent children suggests that some of the major problems faced by independent minors remain structural.

Although there has been a slide towards feminisation of migration in sub-Saharan Africa (Adepoju, 2006), overt sexism remains dominant in the representation of migrant girls. There was gendered bias in the representation of children's sexuality. In fact, there was heightened moral panic over adolescent migrant girls' sexuality. Patriarchy which also dominates the humanitarian sector imposed standards of sexual morality. Independent migrant girls were viewed as people of disreputable moral values and independent migrant boys cast in more positive images. In line with this, many humanitarian workers were opposed to girls unaccompanied by their parents or guardians. This situation probably is a result of the views which exclude women and girls from the public spaces that continue to hold sway in this society. There was the conflation of sexuality and morality which resulted in negative views towards children perceived to have crossed children-adult sexual boundaries.

Representation of Childhood: Consequences in Humanitarian Work

Humanitarian workers driven by conflicting interests often perpetuated contradictory representations of independent children in this humanitarian context. Each representation generated both intended and unintended consequences. On one hand, humanitarian workers portrayed independent migrant children as victims, vulnerable and in need of support, and on the other, as deviants, thus drawing from the discourse of blaming the victims as architects of their current problems. Discourses of victimhood and vulnerability of independent children which dominated formal situations were used to mobilise aid for this population and to control these children's behaviour. Independent migrant children as active social actors aware of the politics in humanitarian work, for example the need to present a victimhood status in order to access donor funding, were aware of these shifts in the way they were represented by humanitarian workers. Consequently, independent migrant children often participated in producing and promoting these contradictory representations.

The pathologisation of independent children who expressed unchild-like behaviour characterised everyday encounters between these children and humanitarian workers. The pathologisation was circulated and reproduced to support discourses like anti-child migration, patriarchy and to reinforce the childhood-adulthood social divide, anti-child work and sexual passivity of children. Contrary to the discourse of a universal child (see Boyden, 2003) and the tendency in popular literature to assume that these children are the same and have similar lifeworlds, there were gendered, national and class based understandings and responses to childhood. Independent children were often politicised (see James, Jenks and Prout, 1998 on the social/minority group and social constructionist/tribal child approach).

Looking at representations of working children, the study agrees with James, Jenks and Prout` (1998) who do not see a universal childhood but different childhoods. A key feature of the Musina context was that on one hand, independent children were expected to make economic contributions to their households in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, the dominant anti-work discourse limited children to only play and attending formal schools, both seen as ideal activities for children. The notion that play and work are mutually exclusive in the lives of children is dominant in Western thinking (Woodhead, 1999) whilst the idea that these two are inclusive is often associated with Africans. Arguably, in a humanitarian crisis setting like Musina where there was lack of capacity, limited support or no safety nets for independent children, instead of children's efforts to support themselves and their families through work being viewed negatively, their efforts should be seen as protective mechanisms (see Heissler, 2012).

On a different matter, in the developing world, the girl-child is seen as facing "double disadvantages because of gender discrimination at the household and community level (Hartl, 2006: 2). Humanitarian workers in Musina reinforced this position. Representations of independent children were often characterised by strongly gendered meanings and variations, and were constructed in ways which backed and also questioned dominant Western notions of childhood and vulnerability. Accruing from this view, child work, mobility and sexuality particularly by and of girls, was seen as contradicting appropriate childhoods. Situations like this resulted in different childhoods for different children. Often the mention of independent migrant girls was preceded by reference to the heightened vulnerability that they were facing, especially 'sexual abuse'. Their sexual agency was diminished particularly during formal situations as the dominant view was that they were or should be, sexually innocent. However, during informal situations, the discourse of blaming the victim usually worked to discursively construct mobile children as morally bankrupt. Interestingly, when humanitarian workers

spoke of independent migrant boys they did not start by reference to vulnerability to sexual abuse. Humanitarian workers' generalisations about the sexuality of migrant girls reinforced prejudices against this population and consequently, such prejudices led to the marginalisation and exclusion of girls perceived to have lost their childhood sexual innocence.

This study revealed that the power relationship between independent children and adults, which was usually characterized as adults' dominance and children's submission, was not unidirectional and static. I presented results which, for example, showed that some independent children, commonly seen as lacking moral compasses in the form of their parents and guardians, successfully challenged humanitarian workers who positioned themselves on sexual moral high ground. In addition, I have shown that children, like women, could "negotiate and renegotiate strategies and alternatives within abusive relationships in order to cope within their immediate constraints" (Boonzaier, 2006: 146). Depending on the context, they were either seen by humanitarian workers positively or negatively. Consequences of the discursive construction of independent children in a negative way, for example, were that these children were sometimes excluded from accessing some services and pathologised. An important finding was that due to constant negotiation of understandings of childhood the discursive practices of humanitarian workers towards children were not constant and obvious. In light of this situation, it is important to expose the ideological structures that dominate during the formal and informal situations between humanitarian workers and independent children.

Although children's agency and resistance in abusive relationships or encounters should be acknowledged, humanitarian workers should strive to adequately protect independent migrant children. These children themselves acknowledged that their agency was limited. This was seen for instance, when they interfaced with repressive state apparatus or humanitarian workers who were refusing to return the money they had borrowed from them. To survive, children employed crude tactics like engaging in illegal activities to earn a living. These findings are in agreement with researchers like Graue and Walsh who emphasise that "it is particularly important to study children in context" (1998: 12), in this case, the pressures on these children to work. These social pressures included the need to make a contribution to their households through sending remittances and to appropriate the identity of a working migrant.

This study supports Bourdillon's (2008a) point that child agency appears in unpredictable ways, sometimes forcing adults to re-think the way they view children. Humanitarian workers should understand how independent migrant children exercise their agency regarding work and support their efforts to support themselves in a way which acknowledges their living realities, choices and their lifeworld. Children as actors, depending on the context within which work takes place, were exercising considerable agency not to be constrained by the exploitative employment regime and the dominant gendered and anti-child migration discourses as they eked out a living. However, Nieuwenhuys (1997 cited in Bourdillon, 2008b: 270) warns that an emphasis on the agency and competence of children can be used to justify the withdrawal of institutions from responsibility toward vulnerable children. Thus, humanitarian agencies should consider how interventions should be scaled up but with focus also on supporting children's efforts.

Another theme that I developed across the chapters is the tension between expectations of childhood and children's behaviour. Independent children seen as not having child-like behaviour were often reminded to conform to social expectations. Humanitarian workers maintained social control over independent children through restating the authority of adults over minors such as reminding children to behave appropriately. Discourses of parenting rights, gender and other social relations were being reproduced by humanitarian workers to justify social control over children, including attempts to control their bodies. However, the utility of the discourses of childhood innocence, vulnerability and other discourses which infantalised children was sometimes limited as children questioned or even rejected them at certain moments.

Discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability worked to produce childhood social capital which became important resources for independent children's survival, successful negotiation for services and livelihoods. Though they exercised agency in their lives, for example to work, they were also conscious of the limitations of their abilities as children and foreign migrants. This was evidenced by their expectations or calls for material and immaterial assistance from humanitarian workers. Some children who would have clashed with humanitarian workers often used the discourse of childhood innocence to legitimise their behaviour and ask for forgiveness.

This study has argued that shifts in child care and support should be centred on, firstly, understanding various actors' lifeworlds on how they want independent children to be assisted as well as how these children exercise agency during their interface with humanitarian workers. Secondly, the general tendency of characterising and treating children

as people who are not capable of making rational decisions or choices in life by virtue of their age, social class, nationality, gender and vulnerable situation is not helpful. Living under difficult conditions, these children demonstrated their ability to read their situation in their country of origin, make conscious decisions to leave their families and country and ward off a number of threats in their lives. Contrary to their construction as minors, their thinking and calculated actions were informed by the realities of their everyday battles for survival and past experiences. Thirdly, although they were recipients of aid they did not accept aid as given but depending on their situation, could partially or totally reject aid if it fell short of their expectations or if it ran counter to their interests. As discussed by Turnbull, Hernandez and Reyes (2009) in their paper on street children in Mexico City, I also noted the agentive nature of children. They utilised interventions and services in their own way as they had their own ideas, plans in South Africa and life in general. These findings may provide a perspective for examination of the tension between children and service providers over the understandings of these children. Independent children were not only acted on by humanitarian workers and their hierarchy; they were also changing their conditions of living, social processes and events (see Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007; Long, 1992).

One of the important findings of this study was that humanitarian workers' perceptions of independent children's sexuality had a bearing on their practices as they either promoted or threatened these children's rights, personhood, aspirations, access to humanitarian assistance, and well-being. Humanitarian workers emphasized that their responsibility was to "save children" from the many dangers associated with migration and living in foreign lands without guardians (see Save the Children UK, 2010). Theoretically, this positioned them not to take a high moral ground towards children who were considered as sexual deviants. The study also underlined how discourses surrounding sexuality of children were used by the humanitarian workers to promote conservative sexual behaviour, morality, reduce unwanted teenage pregnancies, STIs, justify social control of children and interventions, as well as to legitimise the withdrawal of aid to these children.

Having laid grounds justifying the negative construction of independent migrant girls, humanitarian workers and even some children themselves, particularly boys, maintained this situation through "vigilant cultural surveillance" (McFadden, 2003). It is this type of characterisation that dissuades some women from improving their lives through migration, particularly girls without their parents and guardians. Migrant girls' challenge to the established moral order legitimised efforts to exclude them from certain services and to control their sexuality. The different childhoods for different children regarding sexuality,

reflected power relations in the patriarchal and humanitarian community in Musina. Interestingly, despite independent children being depicted as morally bankrupt, they demonstrated on several occasions that they had ingrained conservative values that could not be compromised by the act of migration and being away from their parents or guardians (see Bourdieu on the notion of habitus in Ritzer 1992).

Methodological Contributions

This study employed ethnography over a period of ten months. Immersing myself in South Africa's border town of Musina allowed me to have an understanding of the dynamics of child migration, an in-depth understanding of the meanings behind various representations of independent migrant children as well as explore various childhoods. This approach allows me to call for "critical, reflexive representation" (Spyrou, 2011: 151) of children in context of humanitarian work and migration. This study is in agreement with literature which showed that doing research on and with children is complex (for example, Graue and Walsh, 1998; Hill, 2005). Actually, this thesis contributes to the literature on how to research on children on the move, vulnerable populations and reflexive ethnography by calling attention to the position of the researcher, and role of children in research on them. The study has contributed in showing the ethical challenges of conducting fieldwork in a humanitarian context and researching independent children. It suggests how to negotiate ethical challenges in migration and humanitarian contexts.

Taking a reflexive social position (see Alldred and Burman, 2005; Ting, 1998), I showed how location or my position within the study influenced the research process and how it related to different social actors. I used participant observation under conditions of a humanitarian crisis and children being away from their families. I reinforced the point made by Graue and Walsh (1998) that researchers should pay great attention to building relationships with research participants and maintaining a positive attitude towards them in order not to allow attitudinal baggage to disturb the data collection, amongst other factors. Thus, the study contributes to the growing literature on reflexive field methods and data collection amongst mobile children.

This study also contributes to the growing discourse on insider and outsider positions in research (see for example, Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Kusow, 2003). Through active engagement in reflexivity (Berger, 2013), I showed the difficulties of doing research as an insider and outsider, researcher and human being, as well as an adult in a humanitarian crisis.

I have shown how issues of power between the researcher and participants within research, including children, are fluid, complex and can be negotiated. For example, I emphasised the importance of maintaining "respectable" social boundaries with children and interviews-in-situ which minimise power differentials between the researcher and the research participants.

The thesis has shown that discourse analysis (Long, 2001; Alldred and Burman, 2005, Parker, 1999; Lupton, 1992) is important in unpacking the representations of mobile children as it revealed the complexities and contradictions in the understandings of childhood and vulnerability. This aspect is often not paid much attention to in child migration research.

Theoretical Contributions

As already discussed earlier, there is a growing academic interest in theorising about childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) and this study widens academic research on childhood as a contested terrain in migration. I employed eclectic theoretical approach which includes "the New Social Studies of Childhood" (see O'Kane, 2008; Ansell, 2005; Holloway and Valentine, 2000) and actor-oriented approach (Long, 1992) to unpack the multiple and multi-layered representations of independent children. My research in Musina highlights the utility of these analytical tools in unpacking the complexities, contradictions in the representations and discursive responses to autonomous migrant children.

The actor-oriented perspective captured the crucial issues of social interface and lifeworlds that led to shared and different understandings of childhood and vulnerability as well as the lived realities. The actor-oriented approach (Long, 1992) argues that although the situation may appear to be relatively homogenous, there are varied responses to similar structural circumstances. The utility of the actor oriented approach is that it accounts for "contradictions" that characterise the representations of independent children. This is made possible by contextualising the actors' views and actions. Although "heterogeneity is centrally placed", there is also "recognition that practices interlock" (Omosa, 1998: 3). These practices, in this case, are the representations of independent children. There is need to bring out the multiple realities of different social actors. Again, I argue that the representations of independent children are shaped by the situation and dominant discourses at each given time. Social actors respond to these situations. Thus, the study echoes the point made by Lancy that, "nothing much can be done to address the plight of the world's children, if we fail to take into account these radically different ways of viewing and thinking about them" (2008:373). Analysing the results using the actor oriented approach not only shows the

"contradictions between global conceptions and lived experiences of childhood" (Ekpe-Out, 2009: 32) but also shows how the social actors tried to deal with the contradictions in their everyday lives, for example, using various discourses to frame independent migrant children.

The "New Social Studies of Childhood" frame children as competent actors who exercise agency even under difficult work and living conditions. The danger with this approach is that it can exaggerate actors' abilities to deal with adversities which limit their choices. Although at certain moments humanitarian workers took this position, at other moments they acknowledged the enormous challenges children faced, and drawing from the discourse of childhood innocence and vulnerability, humanitarian workers tried to ease children's suffering through rolling out some interventions.

One important lesson I learned from doing this study was that when we push boundaries of conventional knowledge on childhood to explore areas like the phenomenon of independent children, gender, work, sexuality in the context of migration, we gain deeper insights into how the local and global ideas of childhood interface and shape interpretations of childhood as well as the everyday life experiences of children. The study revealed the tension around understandings of childhood and vulnerability in a context where local and global ideas about childhood interact. For example, on one hand, children were seen as dependents and on the other, humanitarian workers were emphasising the competencies of children in various fields such as work. Understanding the local and global ideas about children and childhoods contributes to improvement of service providers' capacity to engage with and intervene in the lives of independent children. So a novel contribution of the study is its exploration of the interface between local and global discourses on childhoods and how different actors negotiated these concepts in the context of migration and humanitarian work. In other words, it is important to explore the fluid links between understandings of childhood at micro and macro levels as this sheds light on the shifts in how children are represented. Thus, the study supports Holloway and Valentine's (2000: 767) argument that the global and local are not separate but are closely intertwined. Holloway and Valentine (2000), in a statement which is central to the exploration of how childhood and vulnerability are represented, further argue that global studies which do not take into cognisance local outcomes and responses to global processes, and local studies of children's worlds of meaning which exclude an analysis of global economic and cultural influences, cannot provide holistic understandings of children's lives. Thus, this study emphasises the need to constantly connect each representation of independent children to both local and larger contexts. This approach has the potential of producing "a narrative that is at once general and

particularistic, broadly focused while thickly descriptive" (Graue and Walsh, 1998: 13). In addition, the study highlights that universal representations of childhood, promoted by various actors including humanitarian workers, do not necessarily match local representations.

James, Jenks and Prout (1999) posited that childhood is situated in time and space and "is changed at different times and contexts" (Thornblad and Holtan, 2011: 3). This study has contributed to understanding the different meanings of independent children's lives and situationality of the representations. The importance of context when trying to understand childhood has also been emphasised by other scholars like Hashim and Thorsen (2011). The multi-layered and mutating representations of independent children as a result of the dynamic humanitarian and fluid social context and ideological shifts in understandings of childhood resulted in different and situational regimes of truth about independent children. The contextualized ethnographic research has contributed to a greater understanding of the complex and contradictory understandings of children on the move in a humanitarian and border land context. The study emphasises the folly of homogenising the representations of independent children. Homogenising children has the potential of obscuring the contradictory and differing discourses on childhood.

In understanding children, "we must view them holistically and in their social context" (Myers and Bourdillon 2012: 614), for their behaviour might be providing protection and making it possible to advance their objectives. Prescribing de-contextualised behaviour to children can harm them (Myers and Bourdillon, 2012or fail to advance their and family interests.

This study provided insight into the contextually negotiated representations of independent children's childhood and vulnerability to many challenges like economic exploitation (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). Humanitarian workers situationally represented independent children. Robinson's assertion that "the notion of childhood innocence has continued unabated to define the child and its place in the world today" (2008: 116) was not always the case in the context of child migration in Musina. The discourse of childhood innocence was prevalent but tended to be situational, expressed usually during formal situations as it conforms to the dominant global understandings of children and childhood in humanitarian work. In addition, this study disputes Robinson's argument that "Any challenge to the sacrosanct concept of childhood innocence generally leads to a heightened level of concern in society" (2008: 116). In Musina the heightened sense of concern was situational, usually apparent during formal situations. Thus, this view

that “Childhoods are variable … and there is no ‘universal’ childhood” (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998: 27) is also applicable within the context of child migration and humanitarian work.

Practical Implications for Practitioners

As stated in chapter one, this study, which has implications for planning interventions for autonomous migrant children, is not a critique of service delivery to independent children by humanitarian workers. At the same time, my mission was not to exalt humanitarian organisations. All things considered, this study revealed and challenged perceptions of independent children in humanitarian work. It emphasizes that there is need to be context sensitive and reflect on the implications of humanitarian workers’ representations of these children, which are often shifting and conflicting. Whilst this is the case, it is important to emphasise that the problems in service delivery which I highlighted, are not by and large an individual failing of humanitarian workers. These humanitarian workers are subject to organisational arrangements, funding regulations and were poorly resourced.

One of the important findings of this study was that the relationship between humanitarian workers and independent children should not be characterised as a “power-powerless one” (Thornbald and Holtan 2011: 2) with the latter always dominated. This supports the point made by Honwana and De Boeck (2005), and Prout (2002) that children are not only impacted by their surroundings but also impact them. This idea opposes the notion that children are passive actors. Consequently, humanitarian workers should consider acknowledging or recognising that children are actors who have the potential to devise ways of dealing with challenges they face in their everyday lives (Long, 1992). “Doing otherwise, we risk maintaining a patronising view of the very people who we seem dedicated to helping”, argues Orgocko (2012: 9). Whilst this is the case, evidence from Musina indicates that some of the independent migrant children were engaged in risky behaviour like survival sex and doing dangerous work. Some were in conflict with the law in order to survive. Service providers should also pay attention to an important point made by Liesbeth de Block that:

> While children might be making complicated and difficult choices, weighing up the possibilities open to them, their options are often narrow and their choices do not have positive outcomes. This is a useful balance against over romanticism of children's agency and participation in difficult life changing circumstances (de Block, 2015: 80-84)

Although some evidence from Musina does not support the point made by Liesbeth de Block that *often* children's choices generate negative consequences, she and the evidence from Musina reinforce the importance of "finding the balance between structure and agency" (Bakewell, 2010: 1690). Adequate understanding of the dynamics in social context, the competing discourses and social actors' lifeworlds will help service providers find that balance.

As they acknowledge children's vulnerability and roll out interventions to mitigate the suffering by independent children, humanitarian workers need to focus also on their resilience and ingenuity in dealing with problematic situations. Effective intervention should build on an appreciation of what actors are trying to do for themselves, and the lessons they are learning through these attempts. However, I am aware that it is problematic to argue that independent migrant children do make choices as that argument might imply an endorsement of the abuse they often experience in their lives. Independent migrant children were often forced to make difficult choices from limited choices available to them. "Societies' constructions of appropriate spaces and activities for childhood" (Levison 2000: 125) and other powerful constraints like age, gender, nationality, social class, patriarchy and poverty constrained their expression of agency.

This study emphasises the "importance of examining issues within their cultural milieu" (Maynard, 2014: e2). Service providers should strive to understand what the local goals are for children's development, ideal adult outcomes, and how school does or does not fit with those goals and outcomes. "There is need to move beyond this black vs white, good vs bad dichotomy and seek to understand the nuances of children's lives" (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013: 474). The study backs calls (for example, by Bourdillon and Spittler, 2012; Liebel, 2012) for practitioners working with children to carefully think through how to support child workers, as children and as workers. Instead of officially condemning working children by criticising their efforts, maintaining and promoting a perception of childhood as a period characterised by incompetence and passivity, humanitarian workers should acknowledge children's own perspectives and competences to learn from the numerous difficulties of

working life. Then, if necessary, capacitate their competences in ways which do not infantilise or pathologise them. However, as the humanitarian workers interface with these children, they should also not inflate or overestimate their competencies, for example, to counter adversities like violence, poverty and xenophobia, as doing so might expose them to suffering.

Humanitarian workers tended to pathologise independent children, particularly girls who were trying to survive using methods considered as repugnant. Humanitarian workers should be aware of environmental factors which shape how children learn to deal with challenges at workplaces. That way they will be in a better position to avoid circulating views which criminalise, demean, or portray mobile children negatively. By so doing, humanitarian workers' every day resilient efforts in children's lives will not be negated (see Sircar and Dutta, 2011) but supported.

An acknowledgement of children's sense of responsibility to support their families particularly during times of hardship, a point captured in the AWCR, might result in service providers developing and implementing interventions, for example educational programmes, which will not be in conflict with children's aspirations. When their efforts to work are restricted, children as actors always seek room for manoeuvre (see Long, 1992; as 'makers' see Honwana and De Boeck, 2005) and this includes consciously undermining interventions which are supposed to care and support them, for example, those against exploitative and dangerous work.

I urge service providers not to pathologise independent children who do not conform to the image of innocent children (see Burman, 2008). Instead, they should understand these children's lived realities and during programming avoid homogenising generalisations as these children have multifaceted experiences and respond to challenges and risks differently. Humanitarian workers often engaged with and made sense of independent children's actions after using tinted lenses which pathologise them. Similarly, the humanitarian workers had scant information about independent migrant children's lived realities. Thus, this study calls for service providers to have a detailed understanding of social actors' multiple realities and childhoods of independent children.

The contention throughout the study is that independent children cannot be fully understood unless the contested representations, which usually emanate from contested understandings of childhood, the 'tensions between the lived and the represented realities' (Howard, 2012: 1) acknowledge that they are 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings' (Steadman, 1997:35; Qvortrup, 1994). Similar to what is happening in other areas where

efforts are being made to involve them in matters which concern them, obtaining migrant children's knowledge and contextualising their experiences may bring to the fore issues like how both boys and girls make sense and interface with the various types of aid or programmes which target them and the discourses of childhood and vulnerability. This will lead to a better understanding of the discourses they mobilise to cope with challenges or exploit opportunities.

Future Research

Finally, this research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. The discourses which are utilised to represent independent children or the aspects of those representations I dealt with are not exhaustive. They exclude a number of discourses or issues critical to the understanding of the migration of children in the global South and in a humanitarian context. Frontiers of knowledge on this phenomenon can be pushed further by asking many questions, such as, for example: How are independent children being represented in the appeals for aid by the State, local and international non-governmental agencies? What are the competing discourses and representations of independent children amongst service providers? How is the State representing independent children in policies, laws and programming? What are the representations of independent children by communities in the host countries? On a separate but related note, what are the impacts of the representations of independent children on their future well-being and development? These questions deserve empirical scrutiny using anthropological methods.

More in-depth, long term multi-disciplinary and cross-national studies focusing on the under-researched independent migrant children will broaden and deepen understandings of children, childhood and their interface with humanitarian work. This also includes the competing and contradictory discourses the actors draw from at various moments when interacting with this population, and the implications to understandings of childhood, programming and policy making.

Child migration is taking place in a – to use Hoffman's words – "complex cultural landscape" (2010: 42). The issue of socio-cultural, religious beliefs, values, class and nationality related to the representation of independent children is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further ethnographic research. Doubtlessly, such studies would provide insights to providing services that are culturally competent or appropriate interventions for independent migrant children (see Higgins, 2000), her discussion on the

influence of Puerto Rican cultural beliefs on feeding practices in Western New York). Basically, culturally competent interventions take into cognisance the importance of culture, interaction of beliefs and behaviour (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo and Ananeh-Firempong, 2003). The implications of socio-cultural values and the above mentioned social factors should be studied as they have influence on the knowledge, behaviour and practices of migrant populations and service providers on issues related to childhood.

As argued by Terrence, one of the independent children participants in this study, their concern as children is not only about getting food but how that food is given. The discourse surrounding independent children must continue to move from the exhausted narrative of focusing on the basic needs they want, "who defines what their needs are" (Burman, 1994: 5) or "participation of those who receive the aid" (Rahnema, 1992 cited in Burman, 1994: 4-5). Humanitarian workers and other service providers need to realise that support to independent children involves much more than giving them food and protection. Researchers should pay attention to unpacking discourses that surround these issues as this has implications for children's well-being (see Myers and Bourdillon, 2012). For instance, there is a dominant thinking that independent children's parents and guardians are anti-child migration but if the debate is to be moved forward, it would be interesting to explore how they are representing independent migrant children and the discourses they are drawing from to represent their children, the times or situations they deploy each discourse and their many different functions.

Another avenue of inquiry that warrants attention pertains to the discourses which other local people like employers of independent children use to represent these children and how these discourses function. Similarly, among the children themselves, the question of what discourses local children draw from when they portray independent migrant children they interact with in spaces like schools and homes remains unanswered. This is an important area for future research as some evidence is beginning to suggest that tension, conflicts and friendships characterise local and foreign children's relationships (see Livesay, 2006 on the extent of xenophobia towards refugee children in Cape Town).

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