

Chapter 9

Migration and the Spatial Mobility of Borders in the Southern African Region



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Introduction

The Southern African region is characterised by a long and complex history of migration in which countries have been both senders and recipients of migrants (Crush, Williams, & Peberdy, 2005; Wentzel, 2003). For example, in the late 1800s, Mozambicans seasonally migrated to work on the farms in the then Cape Province (Crush et al., 2005; Nshimbi & Fioramonti, 2016). In addition, in the nineteenth century, countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia and Zambia also attracted migrant workers from countries in the region, because of lucrative mining activities (Crush et al., 2005; Wentzel & Tlabela, 2006). In the 1860s and 1880s, the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly and gold in the Witwatersrand, respectively, precipitated an exodus of people to these destinations, particularly from countries like Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Crush et al., 2005). For this reason, Crush et al. (2005) correctly observed that it is not surprising that South Africa continues to attract migrants from the Southern African region.

Perhaps one of the countries which has experienced outmigration in the recent past is Zimbabwe. Tevera and Zinyama (2002) observe that two phases of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa can be identified in the period since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. In the early 1980s, a number of white skilled and semi-skilled workers migrated to various countries including South Africa. Recently, the negative economic and political situation has driven many people out of Zimbabwe (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Tevera & Zinyama, 2002). A comment on the recent wave of migration of Zimbabweans to many countries in the Southern African region and

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beyond is needful. As a result of the economic decline in the 1990s, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Economic and Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (Tevera & Zinyama, 2002). The ESAP was characterised by liberalisation of trade, monetary, fiscal and public enterprise reforms, budget deficit reductions and government non-interference in investment, labour and pricing mechanisms (Sachikonye, 1999). But the prescriptions of ESAP failed to resuscitate the Zimbabwean economy, such that there was reduced economic and industrial growth leading to the closure of industries, retrenchments and unemployment (Brett, 2005; Dhemba, 1999; Sachikonye, 1999).

In addition, Raftopoulos (2006) states that the more recent decline in the Zimbabwean economy can be linked to the land reform programme. This is because the land reform led to economic collapse, because agro-industries declined leading to a negative investment climate, unemployment and general economic depression (Fontein, 2009) which led to many people leaving the country to South Africa, among other countries (Crush & Tevera, 2010). Some of these Zimbabwean migrants to countries like South Africa have been undocumented (Araia, 2009; IOM, 2010; Mdlongwa & Moyo, 2014; Ndlovu, 2013), which has forced them to engage in human smuggling so as to cross the border to South Africa (Araia, 2009).

As a result, borders between South Africa and Zimbabwe like that at Beitbridge are characterised by cross-border human smuggling, in which many players and processes feature. These processes include crossing the Limpopo River¹ and scaling the border fence. The players include taxi operators (*omalayitsha*), government officials and other migrants (Araia, 2009). The role played by *omalayitsha* is that they transport individuals from different parts of Zimbabwe to selected points in Beitbridge town.² When migrants who are transported by different taxi operators are a substantial number (30–40 people), they go to specific crossing points from where they are taken across the border by guides (*impisi*)³ who are familiar with the area and are hired by the taxi operators (Interview with a taxi operator/*malayitsha*, Beitbridge, 4 January 2015). After crossing the border, undocumented migrants meet *omalayitsha* at designated points along the freeway from Beitbridge to Musina from where they are collected and transported to many parts in South Africa (Araia, 2009). With this in mind, this chapter explores migration into South Africa from the Southern African region and how the securitised border manifests, mutates and also moves in different scales and locales. The aim in this respect is to demonstrate that a border or borders are not only lines which are fixed at the margins of nation states but

¹The Limpopo River forms a natural boundary between Limpopo Province, in Northern South Africa and Southern Zimbabwe.

²Beitbridge is a town in Zimbabwe, situated at the border with South Africa.

³*Impisi* is a hyena, which is “a carnivorous dog-like species of animal, native to parts of both Africa and Asia. There are four known species of hyena: the spotted hyena, the striped hyena, the brown hyena and the aardwolf. Hyenas are scavenger mammals meaning that the hyena tends to eat another animal’s kill, rather than the hyena actually catching its own food. Retrieved from: <https://a-z-animals.com/animals/hyena/>. Perhaps like and true to the nature of hyenas, the *impisi* are opportunistic criminals who capitalise on defenseless migrants.

can also move and manifest and materialise in socioeconomic and political processes at different levels and places and spaces.

Borders, Securitisation and Mobility

A securitised border is one with features such as stringent immigration requirements and physical barriers like fences and walls (Walker, 2015), whose objective is protecting a nation state against threats, like that of migrants (Mabee, 2007). Perhaps an apt example is that of the US–Mexico border as championed by US President Donald Trump. When he was campaigning for election as the president of the United States of America (USA), in 2016, he declared that he would build a great wall on the Southern border between Mexico and the USA and that he would make Mexico pay for the wall. And at the beginning of 2019, the US government was in partial shutdown over the need to raise money to build the wall (Valverde, 2019). In February 2019, Donald Trump declared a national state of emergency which would allow him to access the money to build the border wall between Mexico and the USA (Baker, 2019). Towards the end of March 2019, Donald Trump further threatened to close a large section of the Southern border between Mexico and the USA, if the former failed to stop illegal migration to the latter. The US president accused Mexico of failing to stop the illegal migration of not only Mexican citizens to the USA but also of other migrants from Central America. However, the Mexican Minister of foreign affairs responded to the US threats by declaring that Mexico did not recognise or operate on the basis of threats (Jacobs, 2019). On 2 April 2018, Donald Trump reiterated the threat to close the US–Mexico border, declaring that the negative economic impacts that this may cause were lesser than the security of the USA, which will be achieved if the border was closed off. Differently stated, Donald Trump suggested that the security of the USA was more important than negative impacts on trade and the economy (Higgins, 2019). With this in mind, the question of how borders are securitised in the Southern African region and in South Africa and its neighbouring countries such as Botswana and Zimbabwe specifically arises and is explored in this chapter in terms of its impacts on migrants.

Beyond securitising the border as demonstrated by the extreme and yet determined resolve by Donald Trump, this chapter also examines the notion of the spatial mobility of borders. The idea of mobility suggests that borders are not marginal lines at the periphery of a nation state but can be “‘displaced’ to the ‘centers’ in different ways” (Cons & Sanyal, 2013: 6). The spatial mobility of borders is demonstrated by the case of the US–Mexico border, in which “‘there has been a marked increase in immigration policing operations away from the borders in the interior’”, to the extent that “‘these new spaces of immigration geopolitics suggest that the border—and border enforcement—is increasingly everywhere’” (Coleman, 2007: 64). As such, the spatial mobility of borders illustrates that “‘borders are everywhere’” (Balibar,

1998, cited in Johnson et al., 2011: 61) and they “never to be found *only*⁴ in border areas but are also located in wider social practice/discourse all around societies” (Johnson et al. 2011: 63). For these reasons, “borders are enacted, materialized and performed in a variety of ways” and that these “performative aspects of borders” can be operationalised by “state and non-state actors” (Johnson et al. 2011: 62). This chapter explores how the spatial mobility of borders materialises in the Southern African region, that is in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe specifically. The chapter is based on a qualitative study of Zimbabwean migrants between December 2014 and March 2015, who were interviewed at the Beitbridge border (South Africa-Zimbabwe), Ramokgwebana border post (Botswana-Zimbabwe), Musina and Johannesburg. The interviewees were purposively sampled such that they provided evidence which demonstrates the focus of this chapter. What is important to emphasise is that respondents provided cases who, on the basis of “orientation towards the in-depth multi-aspect and holistic investigation of one or a small number of instances” (Iosifides, 2011: 202) and “a holistic description through an iterative process” (Easton, 2010: 119), yielded information which achieved the purpose of this chapter.

Regional Integration in the SADC

The SADC is one of the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) which have been identified by the African Union (AU) as the building blocks for the continental community in the form of the African Economic Community (AEC), set for establishment in 2028 (Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, 1991). The other RECs are Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The SADC is made up of 16 member states which are Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The origins of SADC can be traced when the Front Line States (FLS) movement established the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) to be self-reliant and reduce members’ dependence on apartheid South Africa. The FLS were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which joined in 1980. The FLS movement can be traced to the 1970s based on the need to resist apartheid South Africa. For instance, the FLS through the formation of SADCC was able to thwart the efforts by apartheid South Africa to create the Constellation of Southern African States (CONSAS), which was essentially an attempt to increase apartheid influence (Evans, 1984) and

⁴Italics in original.

so the meetings of the FLS in Botswana in May 1979 and Tanzania in July 1979 culminated in the formation of SADCC in 1980 (Southern African Development Community, 2012). The Declaration and Treaty of SADC (1992) transformed SADCC into SADC. The SADC aims to, among others, remove obstacles to the free movement of capital, labour, goods and services (Declaration and Treaty of SADC, 1992). This regional integration is to be achieved through the establishment of formal institutions as postulated by neoclassical economic theory advanced by scholars like Balassa (1961).

In the Balassian logic, the first stage involves the removal of trade restrictions and the establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA). This occurs through the removal of trade restrictions among the integrating countries. However, the integrating countries still maintain trade tariffs with third countries. The second stage is the formation of a Customs Union. This is done on the basis of the adoption of a common external tariff (CET), which is applied against third countries. In the third stage, integrating countries form a Common Market. This is characterised by the removal of all restrictions on the movement of capital, labour, goods and services within the regional economic community. The fourth stage involves the setting up of an Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in which supranational institutions govern policies in the integrated countries, such as the adoption of a common economic policy and a single currency by the integrating countries as well as the setting up of a central bank and unified fiscal system (Balassa, 1961). For this reason, in 2001, the SADC put in place a comprehensive 15-year regional integration roadmap as follows: formation of a Free Trade Area (FTA) by 2008, a Customs Union (CU) by 2010, a Common Market by 2015, an Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in 2016 and an economic union by 2018 (SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), 2003).

The objective in briefly discussing regional integration in the SADC was to demonstrate that the member states are committed to the development of a regional community and citizenry in terms of strengthening and consolidating “the long-standing historical, social and cultural affinities and links among the people of the region” (Declaration and Treaty of SADC, 1992: 5). Hence the commitment by SADC to developing “policies aimed at the progressive elimination of obstacles to the free movement of capital and labour, goods and services, and of the people of the Region generally, among Member States” (Declaration and Treaty of SADC, 1992: 8). Against this background, it is then possible to discuss the issue of securitised borders in terms of how they materialise or dematerialise and the implication of this on the ideal of free human mobility within the logic of regional integration.

On Securitised Borders and Their Spatial Mobility

It was the opinion of the respondents that the securitised border was manifest in that “in some cases it was nearly impossible, to obtain a work permit as a result of stringent requirements” (Interview with Zimbabwean migrant worker, March 2015).

And this resulted in the migrants crossing the border illegally at unofficial crossing points. Such people crossed the border because the 90-day per year visitors' permit applicable to SADC citizens to enter into South Africa was not enough. The Zimbabwean respondent argued that:

the 90-day visitor's visa is not useful at all and this is why many people overstay and rely on using human smugglers to travel to and back from South Africa to Zimbabwe. In addition, some of those who decide to overstay in South Africa, send their passports back to Zimbabwe through bus drivers and omalayitsha for an "exit stamp", when in fact they are in South Africa. Due to their failure to get work permits, they prefer to stay undocumented (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, March 2015).

In addition to stringent immigration regulations was the deployment of the army and police on the border such as that of Beitbridge. The deployment of such a state security apparatus was to monitor and enforce the border. However, the securitised border in all its manifestations at Beitbridge was not enough to stop people from crossing the border. This is precisely because migrants such as those from Zimbabwe had devised dynamic and agentive ways which assisted them to cross the border. These included swimming across the crocodile-infested Limpopo River and scaling the border fence as well as using the services of human smugglers so as to cross into South Africa (Moyo, 2016a, 2016b, 2018).

For such people who illegally crossed the border, it followed them everywhere. A case in point is that such migrants often secured employment on the farms and other businesses in the province of Limpopo and beyond. In such jobs, these migrants faced an intractable dilemma in that the lack of immigration papers made them to be easily exploitable. This is because employers such as farm owners paid workers low salaries and if the migrants showed any unhappiness, such farmers threatened to call the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) officials (Interview with Zimbabwean migrant farmworkers, January 2015). In this, one can see the spatial mobility of the border. Not only were the farmers using the undocumented status of migrants to exploit them, but they were also performing a bordering function in the form of threatening to call the DHA at the border. In this sense, the farmers were also policing the border several kilometres into the interior of the country. And this shows that the Beitbridge border is not fixed and/or marginal but can and does in fact migrate and manifest in the wider social and economic spaces. For instance, paying the undocumented Zimbabwean workers low salaries could be seen as an act of bordering. This is based on the assumption that those who were not undocumented migrants were paid decent salaries, which means that for the undocumented Zimbabwean migrants, not only did the border follow them but it mutated into several other borders such as exploitation, which created inequality and marginality or precarity (Moyo, 2020). The result was that, in the interior of South Africa, on the farms, it was easy to identify (on the basis of socioeconomic and other borders) the migrants and especially those who were undocumented from citizens.

Moyo and Nshimbi (2019) showed other contexts in the spatial mobility of borders in South Africa. One example is that there were several road inspections along the Beitbridge-Musina-Polokwane-Johannesburg freeway. Migrants were subjected to several passport inspection stops, which resulted in some migrants

being detailed pending further verification of the travel documents. Similarly, in Johannesburg, which was over 600 km from the Beitbridge border, there were several and random passport inspection stops in which several migrants were arrested and/or detained (Moyo & Nshimbi, 2017, 2019). Conversations with the respondents also suggested that, in Zimbabwe as well, the borders were also spatially mobile away from the Beitbridge border into the interior. For example, one respondent who lives in Bulawayo, the second largest city in the country, explained that soon after crossing the Beitbridge border, there was another border about two kilometres into Zimbabwe along the Beitbridge-Bulawayo road, in which they were asked for passports by the police and army and not immigration officials. After, this, there were several (about three) similar borders, the last of which was about 40 km from Bulawayo (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, January 2015). Again the people who patrolled these borders were the army and police. Similar borders were also experienced along the Beitbridge Masvingo road in the interior of Zimbabwe (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, January 2015).

Furthermore, on the freeway to Francistown from the border between Botswana and Zimbabwe at Ramokgwebana Border post, the Botswana police randomly stopped people and requested for their passports. Likewise, from the same border post, the Zimbabwean army and police mounted “border” controls on the freeway to Bulawayo (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, December 2014). The insights from these interviews seem to suggest that it may be simplistic to assume that in the Southern African region, it was only in South Africa in which borders were spatially mobile into the interior of the country. The interview material seems to suggest that even in a country like Zimbabwe which experienced significant numbers of people who migrated out of the country in the recent past, actors who were not immigration officials actually performed various aspects of borders and bordering, far away from the borders into the interior of the country.

This is a potential area of research, so as to uncover, for instance, the similarities and differences in the spatio-mobility of borders among the Southern African countries. It is known for example that in South Africa, immigration policing by people who are not immigration officials, such as the army and police, was done so as to flush out undocumented migrants, actual or perceived (Moyo, 2020; Moyo & Nshimbi, 2019). But in a country like Zimbabwe, which experiences more outmigration by its citizens (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Moyo, 2018; Tevera & Zinyama, 2002), it would be interesting to investigate the motivation of the erection of several borders into the interior of the country. Questions relating to whether this was based on immigration anxieties or the so-called security imperatives would need to be answered in such research.

The impacts of securitised and spatially mobile borders on migrants are many. They include the fact that some migrants whether documented or not felt victimised. While it is understood that some of the migrants were undocumented, the question of whether or not they deserved victimisation arises. But the treatment of undocumented migrants in receiving countries is a bone of contention. For example, some argue that because undocumented migrants illegally enter a country, there should be no discussion about their rights or issues of morality but swift arrest and deportation,

but other scholars assert that what may be illegal is not exactly immoral, such that “‘illegal’ does not mean the same thing as ‘immoral’ and so the judgment of illegality, even if indisputable, cannot decisively bring moral deliberation on the matter to a halt” (Taylor, 2008: 31). It is in this context that this argument has been taken further:

If citizenship in rich and safe states ceased to be a privilege, exclusion would be less a prima facie moral wrong. This if has two aspects. The first is temporal: As long as measures to fight poverty are not taken or as long as they are not really effective, ‘we’ (individuals, organizations, states in affluent societies) have no moral right to close borders. The second is gradational: to the degree that affluent states do not live up to their international moral obligations, they have no moral right to close borders. This double if makes all other arguments conditional upon the prior fulfilment of our moral obligations with regard to safety and subsistence (Bader, 2005: 341–342).

Further, Bader (2005) argues that this kind of thinking on and approach to issues of international migration requires a more universalist and less sovereign frame of reference and migration management. And this is where the issue of regional integration in the SADC and the whole of Africa (Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC), 1991) and the ultimate united and prosperous Africa by 2063 (Agenda 2063, 2015) become points of reference. This is precisely because free human mobility is one of the targets and thus discussing such matters directly responds to what the SADC and Africa as a whole hope to achieve. Notwithstanding, the subject around the moral treatment or otherwise of undocumented migrants in the context, like that of the SADC, deserves a chapter of its own and will not be attempted beyond this point. Similarly, the question of whether undocumented migrants, like the case of Zimbabwean farmworkers in South Africa, who were exploited also arises as well and whether or not it was justifiable to exploit them, will not be pursued further than this, given the scope and limits of this contribution. However, there were documented migrants who suffered more or less the same borders as those who were documented. For instance, a documented migrant felt that the several borders on the freeway from Musina to Johannesburg asking for a stamped passport were tantamount to harassment and this made them feel unwanted in South Africa (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, January 2015). Further, even the spatially mobile borders in countries like Botswana and Zimbabwe created anxieties on migrants, because it also amounted to harassment and they made the migrants feel as if they were under surveillance (Interview with Zimbabwean worker, December 2014).

Conclusion

The notion of the spatio-mobility of borders adequately demonstrates that borders are not the simple and marginal lines at the periphery of nation states (Cons & Sanyal, 2013). This has been demonstrated by that in the case of the Southern African region, borders between states like Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe are not fixed at the margins of these states, but such borders “migrate” inland into the

interior of these nation states. For example, the South African border at Beitbridge is not only securitised, in the form of stringent immigration controls as well as the deployment of the army and police so as to monitor the border, but it also followed migrants. This materialised in many ways, such as stops by the police, who demanded to see the passports of migrants who were travelling along the freeway from Beitbridge to Johannesburg. Similar patterns were also revealed by interview data in that along the freeway from the Botswana border with Zimbabwe at Ramokwebana, the Botswana police also stopped migrants and demanded to see their passports. The respondents also stated that this was the same exact practice which obtained along the Zimbabwean freeways from Botswana and South Africa borders. Cases in point relate to the “borders” which were erected and manned by the Zimbabwean army on the freeway from Ramokwebana to Bulawayo as well as from Beitbridge to Bulawayo and from Beitbridge Masvingo.

Furthermore, and in the case of South Africa, the spatially mobile borders were also performed by ordinary people such as employers in Musina and the surrounding farmers in the South African province of Limpopo. In particular, undocumented migrants were exploited and threatened to be reported to the Department of Home Affairs, if they complained against ill treatment (Moyo, 2020). Those migrants who managed to reach Johannesburg also faced similar borders as well as patrols by the police, who demanded to see passports (Moyo, 2020; Moyo & Nshimbi, 2019; Nshimbi & Moyo, 2018). But, in the case of South Africa, the securitised and spatially mobile borders failed to stop the migration of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa, for example. For instance, in order to contest the physical and securitised border at Beitbridge, migrants illegally crossed the border through unofficial points and also engaged human smugglers so as to cross the border to South Africa (Moyo, 2016a; Moyo & Nshimbi, 2019), thus suggesting that migration in the Southern African region has an enduring presence, but at the same time countries erect and attempt to sustain securitised borders, without any success (Moyo, 2016a, 2018).

In the light of this and in a region like the SADC, which is in pursuit of regional integration and indeed the promotion of human mobility, such securitised and spatially mobile borders do not articulate into a borderless Africa as aspired by the African Union and immortalised in the Agenda 2063 project (Agenda 2063, 2015). For this reason, there is a need for reimagining borders (in all their manifestation) in the Southern African region. This could reduce cross-border migration and human smuggling. It is arguable that if the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe was not securitised, people would not have to swim across a crocodile-infested river and that the farmers will have no business threatening such migrants with informing the DHA (Moyo, 2020). The reduction in the impact of securitised borders is being progressively done in other parts of Africa. In East Africa through the East African Community (EAC), Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda accept national identity documents for their citizens, to move across the borders of these countries without passports (Oucho, 2013). This actually achieves free human mobility in such a region. But the relevance of the East African development is that it is a reminder of what SADC targets at, which is implementing “policies aimed at the progressive elimination of

obstacles to the free movement of capital and labour, goods and services, and of the people of the region generally, among Member States” (SADC Declaration of Treaty, 1992: 5). And this is amplified in the SADC Draft Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons which should “progressively eliminate obstacles to human mobility into and within SADC Members” (Draft Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons in SADC, 2005: 3). If SADC countries remain true to this ideal, it means that the development of an effective migration management regime needs to be seriously considered.

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