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The Representations of Unaccompanied Working Migrant Male Children Negotiating for Livelihoods in a South African Border Town

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Introduction

The recent phenomenon of massive numbers of unaccompanied Zimbabwean migrant children¹ who are working in South Africa is provoking consternation among parents, guardians, child-related organizations, and the governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe. People's concerns about these children revolve around their safety, which is threatened by a range of factors from economic exploitation to denial of fundamental human rights. Their fears are based on reports (e.g., Palmary 2009) that these children are doing work that is harmful or interferes with their development (see United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 32).

In response to this situation, agencies working in the border town of Musina were providing a plethora of services to these children. Care workers' efforts to protect children could be based on the categorization, common in Northern ideologies, of children as innocent victims who are not to blame for their situation (see Burman 2008).

Although various parties assume children's work to be wrong (see Burr 2006:4), children themselves sometimes feel they need to work. The way care workers then go about representing working children, which can either help or constrain their negotiations for livelihoods, deserves particular attention. In addition, the representation of these children has to be 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 2008b:270).

Burman explained that problems start when children violate ideals of dependence and innocence, and that children may then incur the penalty of no longer being accorded indulgences or privileges associated with childhood (2008:190). Consequently, children without the attributes of a proper childhood are often considered deviants and this determines how they are treated (Walkerdine 2001).

This chapter stems from broader research, which considers the predominant representations of unaccompanied migrant children that service providers bring to bear on their interactions with these young people in the South African border town of Musina, one of the busiest ports of entry in sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter examines how the representations of service providers are informed by international child declarations.² It specifically focuses on the representations of working boys, when they negotiate for livelihoods. Findings on girls will be presented in another publication.

Migrant working children can experience marginalization and exclusion in the 'new informal economies' (Boeck and Honwana 2005:1) as they are 'not supposed' to work. This view is a consequence of the construction of children as dependants whose main occupations are play and school (Woodhead 2007:23), reinforced by the South African law which forbids inappropriate and hazardous child work as well as any employment below the minimum school-leaving age of 15 (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 75 of 1997). However, a significant population of unaccompanied minors are working as it is one of the major reasons why they migrate to South Africa (e.g., Palmary 2009).

Whilst literature is abundant on why children work, there is less on understanding how these children are represented, the consequences of those representations, and how the children represent themselves. To unpack the representations of childhood, there is need to consider the influence of social factors like age, gender and class. There is also need to question the structural power imbalances which characterize the relationship between adults and children. Kitzinger (1990:162) noted that an analysis of power, which shapes children's position, is often rejected in favour of a paternalistic approach to children.

This chapter is anchored on the understanding that as working migrant children negotiate for livelihoods, they are active social agents who create meanings about themselves and through their relations with adults (Woodhead 2007:34). The construction of children as passive victims 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 prevalence of the view regarding children as passive and immature (Burman 2008). Analysing children's views may bring to the fore issues like how these children make sense of their marginalization and exclusion from the workplace.

Generally, migrants from Zimbabwe have been characterized as “economic migrants, and not refugees” (Roelf 2007 cited in Rutherford 2008:39). However, the issues facing migrant children when they negotiate for livelihoods might not simply be economic.

The study contributes to the concerns which Burman (2008) raises: globalization of the West’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 repudiates the conventional norms. This chapter follows Burman’s (1995) point that the daunting task of supporting children who live in developing countries demands not only a re-conceptualization of how we see those children, but more importantly an assessment of socio-structural factors that determine their positions.

At the centre of the universal child declarations are the principles of the best interests of the child, the right of the child to be heard on decisions that affect him or her, and the importance of soliciting his or her views. The way these principles function and are contested in the context of migrant children in Musina is a further subject of this chapter.

One of the critical areas which are interrogated in this chapter is whether the children see things the same way as the carers; and how they interpret the world may be appropriate to understanding how they interact with interventions. Consequently, Norman Long’s (1992) actor-oriented approach was used as an analytical and methodological approach to unpack the life-worlds³ of both children and care workers. Basically, the actor-oriented approach 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).

Research Methods

This ethnographic study took place between August 2009 and February 2010. It focused on one international agency and one faith-based organization. The research sample of twenty was selected by both snowballing techniques, which depended on children’s social networks, and the purposive selection of the children. The selection of boys for interviews stopped at 20 as it had reached a point of sample redundancy. I did not participate directly in all the money-making activities of children. I did profit by being partially embedded in the work of the selected service providers and this enabled me to get an insight into their experiences.

Data from care workers was collected through situational interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Then the three data collection techniques together with focus group discussions (FGDs) and vignettes were used to collect data from children. These are ‘short stories about hypothetical characters in specified

circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond' (Finch 1987:105 cited in Barter and Renold 1999). Since expressing an opinion on a hypothetical story is less personal and intimidating than talking about direct experience, vignettes can assist in exploring potentially sensitive topics that participants might be uncomfortable to discuss openly (Barter and Renold 1999).

Interviews with children and some care workers were conducted in Shona, and for the purposes of this chapter their responses have been translated by the author.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of informed consent, costs and benefits of participation, anonymity, confidentiality and rights of withdrawal were shared with research participants, including children (see Hopkins 2008; Greene and Hogan 2005).

One of the established practices for a research with children to be ethically compliant is getting consent from parents or those '*in loco parentis*'. However, it is impossible to obtain parental consent on behalf of unaccompanied children (see Hopkins 2008:40). There were few social workers in Musina, so I obtained consent instead from care workers who were looking after children in their shelters (see Hopkins, 2008: 41), who insisted that I do so.

Children who needed assistance or were in perilous situations were referred to service providers, but only after obtaining their consent. Children partaking in illegal activities such as living in South Africa without valid documents were not reported to authorities.

Study Results and Discussion

Children's Work and their Relations with the Social Environment

The unaccompanied migrant children's work and their relations with the social environment shaped the way these children represented themselves and were represented by others. The common factors pushing these Zimbabwean children to migrate to South Africa were poverty, hunger, lack of access to education, abuse at home, and limited employment opportunities (see Palmary 2009; Hillier 2007). Some pursued adventure while others wanted to reunite with family members.

The majority of migrant boys in Musina lived in a shelter or transit centre then co-managed by the two service providers. The second biggest group were living on the streets and at the border post. Very few children were renting places to stay in informal shelters.

The boys in the formal shelters complained of lack of freedom of movement to look for work. They were only allowed to be out between 7.00 and 19:30 hours. Consequently, many children used to sneak back into shelters after hours.

One of the boys, aged 15, argued: 'We didn't come to South Africa to eat and sleep. We crossed the border to work.' Many left the shelter in the early hours in the morning to work. This behaviour led some care workers to describe them as lacking discipline. The majority of children living on the streets did not want to live at the centre. Their major complaints were fear of being physically abused by other children, overcrowding, and theft of their personal possessions like clothes.

Musina town (including the Beit Bridge border post), with an approximate total population of 40,000 people, was characterized by poverty and violent crime. Some children gave care workers and trusted adult women their goods including clothes, groceries for safe keeping.

Although most children were holders of provisional asylums permits, which only allowed them to study in South Africa, they were working. In fact most Zimbabwean applications for asylum were from economic migrants and not refugees as defined by the Refugee Act (1998). Most children were experiencing the same social pressures that adult migrants have of supporting their families in the country of origin (see Kankonde 2010).

The majority of children, including those attending primary and secondary school, were doing menial jobs. Their common working areas were streets, the high density area, and the environs of the border post. They worked as porters, collectors and sellers of shopping receipts with value added tax (VAT, which could be claimed by non-resident travellers when they leave South Africa), human smugglers, vendors (including selling pornographic DVDs), collectors and sellers of firewood, domestic workers, and car and truck washers.

A few boys also worked as informal pimps for truck drivers and sex workers. Some guarded business premises and vendors' stalls at the border post in return for a sleeping place. Children were perceived by care workers as not calculative in taking this dangerous and exploitative work. However, children said this arrangement solved their monetary and homelessness problems.

Working migrant children were exposed to crime and some were being initiated into crime. Pressure to survive forced some of them to engage in criminal activities. For example, some children were moving with razors and using them to forge shopping receipts. This practice was introduced to them by an adult migrant 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 you must resign.'

Generally, a spirit of camaraderie prevailed amongst migrant children. In most cases this was regardless of where they stayed, their ethnicity, ages, etc. The rallying point was the shared vulnerability to hunger, abuse and exploitation. They shared food to save money and to help those who had no money. As a protection strategy they usually moved around in a group.

However, there were also individual and group rivalries around territorial claims. For example, those who lived at the centre said, 'Generally we do not touch a rubbish bin [in the centre of Musina town].' There was an unwritten understanding between them and street children that rubbish bins belonged to the later. Violators of this 'rule' risked being beaten by street children.

Despite efforts by adults to marginalize and exclude unaccompanied minors from South Africa, and through 'regular harassment, fabrications that we committed crimes, beatings, detentions and deportations by the South African police' as Thabani described, all these efforts proved fruitless. Children at a great cost to their physical and emotional well being, weathered the police's heavy-handed blitzes against child work. They mastered the art of evading arrest and deportation. 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.

The adults who harassed children included South Africans and Zimbabweans, criminals and non-criminals.

One of the strategies used by children working at the border to either curry favour with the police or hit back at the *magumaguma*⁴ was supplying the police with intelligence information about their identity and operations. Then some, like those who begged for shopping receipts, periodically thwarted efforts by thieves to steal in return for being 'allowed' by security guards to work at shop entrances. Some of them clandestinely collaborated with children by collecting and giving them receipts to sell in return for a commission.

Partially due to children's contribution to efforts against crime, some law enforcement agents did not arrest or beat them. 'When police are told to arrest all the children from Zimbabwe some of them warn us of the impending raids and on that day they don't find us,' claimed Melusi.

Foreigners, including children, periodically experience xenophobic attacks in South Africa (see Livesay 2006). Soon after arrival in South Africa children make concerted efforts to speak local languages fluently. Many tried to dress like local people. These strategies helped to mask their Zimbabwean identity and reduce hostilities between them and locals. In addition, speaking the local languages helped foreign children to negotiate in business transactions and to ward off accusations of being criminals as they could express themselves clearly. For example, Mandla (aged 16) worked as a vendor and spoke Ndebele, Shona, English, Zulu, Venda and Shangani: he said he sold more cigarettes than his friend who only spoke the first three languages.

The area is a melting pot of many ethnic groups but the dominant one is Venda. Ethnic undercurrents simmer amongst people. Some children from the Shona ethnic group masquerade as Ndebeles in order to get protection from the Ndebele and Zulu transport operators at the border post.⁵

Dominant Thinking of Care Workers Towards Working Migrant Children

Generally, care workers portrayed working migrant children as a vulnerable and exploited group in urgent need of care and protection. They often sensitized children about exploitation and tried to dissuade them from working. Instead they wanted children to attend school in Musina or re-unite with their parents or guardians.

Common perceptions amongst care workers were also that these children were well behaved, trustworthy, intelligent, hard-working and resilient. Care workers regarded the children as coming from resource-poor households. This led many of them to think that these children were prepared to accept any kind of work. However, this was not always the case. Despite shortage of money, some remained selective in the type of work they did. For example, they refused strenuous work associated with poor rural people like fetching firewood for sale, or dangerous work like hunting.

In response to reports of children being exploited, care workers often lobbied the South African Police Services (SAPS) to intervene. SAPS frequently conducted operations to stop child work. However, children complained that SAPS physically and verbally abused them during these operations. Ironically, children also accused care workers of covertly working with SAPS since they had a common agenda of stopping child work. Despite this mistrust, children appreciated care workers' intervention to stop police from beating, detaining and deporting children.

Care workers widely accused children of falsifying their biographical information, particularly names and ages. 'They drop or pick up some years and names when they cross the Limpopo River into South Africa,' said one care worker. Children used fake names to disguise their identity from parents and guardians looking for them. It was also a strategy of hiding their true identity from ordinary people who fabricated stories of theft.

Realizing that most migrants from Zimbabwe were economic migrants instead of political victims; the South African government in 2009 changed its policies of treating irregular migrants from Zimbabwe. Adult Zimbabweans with asylum papers were allowed to work in South Africa. Zimbabwean children with the assistance of care workers and social workers were also getting asylum permits, which only allowed them to study. To overcome the challenge of being barred from working, some children lied that they were over 17 years. At the shelter these boys claimed to be less than 18 years to access services meant for children.

The inflation of ages was part of a strategy of undermining the 'care and protection' system as it obstructed them from realizing their aspirations. Desperation forced them to focus on pressing challenges like getting money to buy food for themselves and their starving families in Zimbabwe. Fear of dying in foreign lands and not being identified remained remote.

Consequently, care workers described these children as money-centred and having a negative attitude towards education. Care workers said whilst the majority of unaccompanied minors wanted to continue with schooling, a significant proportion of them did not. In 2009, a number of those who enrolled in local schools dropped out. However, in 2010 there was an increase in the number studying, including some who had dropped out in 2009 and who expressed interest to go to school. Some children felt under pressure from their benefactors, both care workers and ordinary people (including employers), to attend school. 'Saying you attend school results in less verbal abuse against you by every adult. Every day we are told about the importance of education,' observed a 14-year-old boy.

Some children were also accused of spreading falsehoods that they were victims of political violence.⁶ This claim elicited sympathy from community members who responded by giving them money, shopping receipts, and menial jobs, and led care workers to view the children as manipulative.

According to care workers another familiar lie peddled by migrant 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 care worker. Several children were often unmasked as non-orphans.

Some boys, particularly those living on the streets, were characterized as sexually decadent. Children indulged in high-risk sex with adult women, particularly sex workers on both sides of the border. These boys often had sex with fellow girls who lived with them to have 'fun, just to help each other with sex, for protecting and giving them food', said a boy aged 13. Despite criticising children's behaviour, care workers said these children needed protection from unscrupulous adults including those who employed them to sell illegal pornographic DVDs. In the evening these children found amusement from viewing these DVDs.

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. Despite recognising their resilience and ingenuity in developing survival strategies, care workers described them as uncouth, delinquent liars, naughty, criminals and drug consumers. 'Their parents and other aid organizations failed to take them away from the street. They do not appreciate help,' said one care worker. Street children were viewed as delinquents who were beyond rehabilitation.

Care Workers' Inconsistent and Varied Responses to Working Children

Care workers were inconsistent and had varied responses to working children. They often held out some sympathy for them. They accepted children's argument that they had to work to alleviate poverty in their Zimbabwean households. Some care workers questioned the utility of efforts to stop migrant children from working, since the major push factor was poverty which service providers did not have resources to address.

Care workers tacitly supported children through allowing and encouraging them to work, helping them find work and get paid, and keeping their money and groceries. One care worker remarked, '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.'

However, care workers' attitudes towards working children were often contradictory, depending on their audience. To management, people, or organizations that were opposed to child work, they projected an image of sharing those sentiments. When care workers were with children, they encouraged them, particularly those who used their money 'wisely'. For example, a female care worker publicly praised a 14-year-boy for behaving 'like a father' as he periodically remitted groceries to his family.

In a further endorsement of child work, care workers often accepted goods bought by children like soft drinks. This invited accusations by some children that they favoured working children who gave them something. Children complained that care workers considered these children to be well behaved.

The conflicting attitudes towards child work confused children. Children either ignored or did not take seriously care workers' messages against child work.

Some care 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 care worker.

Some care workers viewed children as immature and incapable of defending themselves against exploitation, and opposed child work. One Zimbabwean care worker who also fled from the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe said, 'Migrant children must go back home [Zimbabwe]. Children rejected this appropriation of migration by adults, arguing that they could not live in an environment where adults failed to live.'

Unaccompanied minors including those with asylum permits faced a great challenge in saving money, since they could not open bank accounts. To overcome

this challenge, some children negotiated with care workers and people they trusted to keep their money. These adults often either abused or used the money they held in trust. Children were often forced to change their plans, for example, postponing going to Zimbabwe with groceries to help their poor siblings and relatives since they failed to collect adequate funds. Children expressed hopelessness, powerlessness, and fear of being victimized if they tried to claim back their money.

Children's Reality and Self-perception

Contrary to their portrayal as people who had 'self-destructive agency' (Gigengack 2008:216), had no capacity to make rational decisions, and succumbed to peer pressure, some children behaved otherwise. For example, 16-year-old Thabani was teased by other children and adults for working as a herd boy. One *magumaguma* mocked Thabani by asking him, 'How can you come to South Africa to herd goats?' He countered his critics by saying, 'Money earned from working as a herd boy or fetching firewood for sale is still money.' He further said the most important thing was earning an honest living, extricating himself and his family from poverty.

A serious argument also brewed between children and care workers on whether children should work or attend school. Many children called for the latter to let them freely make that decision. Children argued that making them go to school was a sheer waste of money and resources as most of them soon dropped out. Moses, aged 15, 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.'

Since agencies did not provide most of the things they needed, children dismissed their efforts to make them focus on education alone. For example, 12-year-old Farai argued, 'Not working is as good as going back home [to Zimbabwe]. Attending school is good, but my family and I cannot live on education alone.'

A number of children had great admiration for migrants, including children, who periodically visited Zimbabwe and sent remittances and groceries to their families. However, others vowed to return only after having realized their dreams like buying large amounts of groceries, nice 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.

A number of children felt that some care workers did not respect their decision to work. John, aged 14, reported that care workers usually described them as 'people who like money too much and hate school, which is not the case'. Children preferred combining work and school, arguing that this would be an effective short- and long-term strategy against poverty.

Despite children's concerted efforts to meet their needs, some care workers at the temporary shelters infantilized their spending ways. They said children tended to buy 'childish stuff like radios, food, and sweet things'. These sentiments were echoed by some children.

However, many children challenged this view that they were immature and wasteful. They argued that buying their own food was imperative as the food which was served in shelters was 'monotonous and distasteful'. As for buying 'sweet things', a 14-year-old said, '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, flour etc for our families.' Another boy argued that since his move to South Africa to work, he was well nourished but not as a result 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.

In addition, several boys periodically bought groceries, clothes and blankets which they gave to friendly adult community women for safe keeping. Generally men were not trusted, nor were those who talked of visiting Zimbabwe in the near future. Children knew that these people were under pressure to buy goods to take to Zimbabwe and often left with people's money or goods.

Children felt disrespected by some care workers who sometimes called them *magumaguma*. This label was usually used when children fought each other. Tindo, aged 15 years feared, 'If people associate us with those beasts, we will end up consciously or unconsciously imitating their behaviour.'

In response to their criminalization, some children felt compelled to engage in crime. For example, Tindo revealed that if he saw an opportunity to steal, he would do so, since it would be pointless to refrain. He and other children would still be accused of stealing that thing and then be beaten thoroughly. 'It's better to be accused and punished for something you have done,' he argued. However, the majority of boys claimed to be law-abiding migrants.

Children viewed themselves as victims of crime. They often experienced violence and robbery. Some children, particularly the older ones and those who had stayed at the border for a long time, warded off the *magumaguma* by threatening to expose their whereabouts to the police. Some boys claimed that the *magumaguma*, to some extent, feared them as they held vital information about their identity, operations, escape routes, and at times their sleeping places. Timothy, aged 14, for example, managed to stop being harassed by one *magumaguma* after he threatened to pour petrol over his body and burn him when he was drunk and asleep at his hideout.

Thus children were not as powerless as often portrayed in literature. They 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, outsiders like care workers condemned these tactics.

Children who worked as human smugglers resisted to be marginalized and excluded by *magumaguma* and other adults from this lucrative but dangerous work. They tried to capitalize on their young ages and assumed innocence to lure illegal migrants from adult smugglers who were widely regarded as the *magumaguma*.

However, children revealed that when smuggling migrants, they sometimes resorted to using tactics used by *magumaguma* 'just to threaten those who would be refusing to pay us', explained a boy aged 13. Children complained of being abused by SAPS soon after a case of an illegal migrant being robbed was reported.

Children portrayed themselves as people who tried to tackle their everyday challenges. A 14-year-boy stressed, 'We are on our own.' Most boys did not have confidence in the commitment of care workers to help them since they were against child work. They observed that most care workers seemed only concerned about reporting for duty in order to earn money. For example, 13-year-old Thabo reported that a few weeks after police launched a heavy clampdown against cross-border people who were engaging children as porters, he together with two other boys appealed to the police to allow children to work. They told the police that they no longer had viable sources of livelihoods. They also stressed that the continuation of this operation would drive children into engaging in crime thus making them vulnerable.

Within a few days of this operation, police relented and turned a blind eye on working children. Although Thabo claimed that the police listened to their calls, Melusi aged 15 attributed the police's waning response to fatigue of dealing with the multitudes of migrant children from Zimbabwe, many of whom had been arrested and deported several times but continued to come back.

Exploitation, Fear of Exploitation, and Children's Responses

Cases of children being grossly underpaid, not paid at all and working under very difficult conditions like long hours without eating were common. Most cases were not reported to the care workers, police or responsible government labour officers. There was consensus amongst children that reporting was useless as they claimed not having anyone who could represent them. Children said a common saying amongst care workers to them was, 'Leave the responsibility of working to adults. What do you want to do when you grow up?'

To minimize chances of being exploited, 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 children. However, desperation for money often undermined their negotiations for a fair deal.

Children who collected shopping receipts complained that buyers used a sharing formula which underpaid them. Despite being aware of this exploitation, children could not do much to correct the situation. 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.

Buyers usually refused to buy shopping receipts with small amounts of VAT saying they were often rejected at the border post. To overcome this problem, children sold a receipt with a big value of VAT together with receipts with small amounts. If buyers refused then they would not have the prized one. Buyers usually agreed. The boys also tried to sell receipts to the highest bidders, but this strategy was not effective as buyers often had a uniform buying rate.

Some children forged shopping receipts by erasing that part which showed that they were copies of the originals. Children sold these receipts to buyers not known to them so that if these receipts were rejected they would not find them.

Then the children who worked as informal pimps called sex workers cheats. Sex workers often reneged on their promise to pay children who referred clients to them claiming that they had been underpaid. To avoid being exploited, the boys demanded advance payment from the sex workers.

Children, particularly those who lived on the street, were seen as vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Boys reported that some adult women, particularly vendors, paid them for sex. 'Unlike adult men, we easily tire when having sex so we do not overwork these women,' explained a 13-year-old boy. Children said most of these local women did not want them to use condoms. Children, fearing being denied sex accepted that condition. Some boys did not care about using protection, exemplified by a 14-year-old who declared, 'Using a condom is outdated.' Consequently, many boys periodically suffered from sexually transmitted infections.

As a strategy of avoiding paying for sex or paying these women and girls whom they accused of being after their money, the boys would take the hard earned money away for safe keeping from the boy who planned to have sex. They were aware of their weakness to part with money after sex.

Some boys were not just victims of sexual exploitation but also perpetrators. They adopted a strategy of getting free sex and having fun through sex. They seduced women, regardless of their age, by stealthily putting aphrodisiac pills into their soft drinks. Musina is an arid area and some women could not resist the offer of a soft drink to quench their thirst, particularly coming from an innocent looking boy. This strategy was introduced to the boys by a local adult man. Then later on women would periodically give the boys some free food and accommodation as they were their secret 'lovers'.

Working Children's Self-image

Respectful, honest, well cultured, vulnerable, but hard-working were some of the attributes that working migrant children claimed to have. These characteristics were used as social capital to get jobs, protection, to be allowed to work, for example, as porters who crossed the border illegally many times a day.

Children also considered themselves clever. For example, those working as human smugglers viewed illegal migrants as fools. They teased illegal migrants who looked down upon them and often 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. Often illegal migrants who ignored children's advice at their own peril were violently robbed, raped, and even killed by *magumaguma*.

However, some children admitted engaging in petty crime as a survival strategy, like stealing shopping receipts from the shopping bags and shop lifting. 'We are not criminals. That is why SAPS usually do not take us to court but just beat and release us,' Thabani insisted.

Children who did not live on the streets shared the sentiments of care workers who criticized the glue-sniffing behaviour of children who lived and worked on the streets. This practice was not condoned at the border post. 'We did not cross the border to sniff glue but improve our lives,' explained one 15-year-old.

Although children accepted that they engaged in illegal activities and had pre-marital sex, they also had some moral standards. For example, Emmanuel said, 'When passing through the bush with illegal migrants... *magumaguma* can rob or rape illegal migrants but not my relatives.' In another example, three boys aborted a plan to have sex for fun with a woman aged approximately 45 who flirted with one of them. They wanted to seduce her by secretly putting an aphrodisiac pill in her soft drink. Although these boys have seduced adult women before, they decided to respect her after considering that she was a mother of three grown up children.

Children had a love and hate relationship with sex workers. 'These women are like our mothers but they are shaming us by having sex with us. They say, my son if you have money to pay for sex you can have it with me,' said Daniel. Most boys claimed sexual innocence and regarded having sex with adult women as against their culture.

The children felt that their portrayal as people who had a negative attitude towards education was unfair, misinformed and an over-generalization. Many of them were attending school in Musina. Poverty, erratic opening of schools in Zimbabwe and abuse at home forced many of them to quit school.

Children also argued that working was a pragmatic move. Timothy (13 years) commented, '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.'

Instead of fully blaming people who exploited and abused them, many children often blamed evil spirits. These forces were blamed for constraining their

opportunities to negotiate successfully for livelihoods. For example, Daniel said, '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 evil spirits to wreak havoc in my life.'

To resist these forces, and instead receive blessings from their parents and ancestors, some boys attended church services and periodically used the little money they had to call their family and to remit groceries. Some care workers even advised those boys who were struggling to earn a living to temporarily visit their homes and appease these spirits. This information buttresses one of Kankonde's (2010) arguments that migrants remit primarily to foster familial belonging.

Conclusion

Care workers' representations of unaccompanied working children were situational and inconsistent. Children were portrayed as vulnerable and generally indomitable, 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. These representations were a reflection of children 'shaping and being shaped by their social world' (Honwana and Boeck 2005: ix): unaccompanied minors were like child soldiers who 'find themselves in a liminal position which breaks down established dichotomies between...victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protected and protector, maker and breaker' (Honwana 2005:32).

These contradictory representations were related to care workers' inconsistent approach towards child work. There were also mixed and conflicting responses by care workers to the ACRWC (1990) recognition of the responsibility of children to assist their families in case of need (Article 31a). Most care workers formally endorsed the UNCRC's position as their careers were anchored on such discourse (see Bourdillon 2003): they did not want to see minors doing work which was either dangerous or affected their development. However, some of them were against all forms of child work, although even these sometimes sympathised with and supported working children.

The ambivalence of care workers towards child work made children hesitant to seek care and support. They did not have confidence in care workers, and were aware of the prevalence of sentiments against child work which fuelled concerted efforts by both the care workers and adult community members to marginalize them and exclude them from working. Consequently, they did not always report cases of abuse and exploitation, and relied instead on a spirit of camaraderie amongst themselves.

Although care workers 'officially' believed that they were saving children's lives, the intended beneficiaries often expressed frustration over their protectionist and paternalistic tendencies. Care workers' actions neither promoted their personhood nor addressed most of the push factors to migrate. Aid agencies' failure to provide children with basic things like clothing, good diet and security made a mockery of their efforts to help them. Instead of depending on adult guidance, nurture and protection, as expected in modern society, this study showed that children assumed many responsibilities, including that of protecting themselves against abuse and exploitation.

Although care workers accepted that the Zimbabwean crisis had wreaked havoc in many households, some regarded children as too weak and immature to make a contribution. The general competence of children was underestimated, illustrated 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 pathologized children's efforts.

The power relationship between unaccompanied minors and adults, which is usually characterized as adults' dominance and children's submission, is not unidirectional and static. Children often used their knowledge of the environment and its rules of engagement to enjoy themselves, make a living, and protect themselves from ordinary people, employers, criminals and law enforcement agencies. Children, like women, could 'negotiate and renegotiate strategies and alternatives within abusive relationships in order to cope within their immediate constraints' (Boonzaier 2006:146). Although children's agency and resistance in abusive relationships or encounters should be acknowledged, this should not excuse adults from adequately protecting children. Children acknowledged that their agency was limited, for example, when they interfaced with repressive state apparatus. In a case of the end justifying the means, children employed crude tactics like working as human smugglers, coercing illegal migrants to honour their agreements to pay them, forging shopping receipts, seducing women to enjoy themselves. What is needed is a safe working environment for children, a reduction in factors which precipitate them to leave their homes, not prioritize education, adopt delinquent and criminal behaviour.

Child agency appears in unpredictable ways, it sometimes forces adults to re-think the way they view children (Bourdillon 2008a:1). Adults should understand how children exercise their agency and support their efforts to control their lives. 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 interventions should be scaled up but with focus also on supporting children's efforts in a way which respects their rights, choices and their life world.

Aid agencies should also understand the pressures on these children that can constrain their negotiations for livelihoods, including pressure from their belief system. These are beliefs and other social pressures like the need to send remittances, shape their meanings and responses to abuse and exploitation.

In addition, an acknowledgement of children's sense of responsibility to support their families might result in agencies developing and implementing educational programmes which will not be in conflict with children's aspirations. Generally, unaccompanied minors appreciated education but the policies against child work, with their focus on school attendance and repatriation, were not appealing to children. When their negotiations for livelihoods are restricted, children as actors always seek room for manoeuvre (see Long 1992:20) and this includes consciously undermining interventions which are supposed to care and support them. For example, through manipulating vulnerability indicators used in aid discourse like being under-age, orphanhood status and political persecution.

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Notes

1. Unaccompanied children (also called minors) are under 18 years. They have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who by law and custom is responsible for doing so (Inter-agency Guiding Principles on unaccompanied and separated children - International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004).
2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the 1990 African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of Children.
3. Magadela defines the concept of life-world 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).
4. An umbrella term for non-state actors responsible for various forms of abuse, exploitation, and extortion along the border (Araia and Monson 2009:68).

5. Shona is the dominant ethnic group in Zimbabwe, followed by Ndebele. Zulu, which is close to Ndebele, is one of the dominant ethnic groups in South Africa.
6. Since 2000 Zimbabwe has experienced political and economic instability.

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