



Cashing-in on Mobility: Economic Actors in the 'Cross-Border Shopping Economy'

Joseph Rudigi Rukema* and Nedson Pophiwa

School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

*Corresponding author: Joseph Rudigi Rukema, School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

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"The town is booming... As far as Musina is concerned, we don't know what recession is. For us, there is no such thing. We just can't keep up." Jason Rana, Musina Chamber of Commerce ¹ [1]

Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to discuss how cross-border shopping impacts on actors whose livelihoods are premised on retailing, mobility and facilitating these activities across the Zimbabwe-South Africa border particularly in Musina. It critically assesses how these actors blur the lines by facilitating all kinds of border crossings including border jumping, excise duty-busting and smuggling. The main argument of this paper is that Musina's transformation into a node which services the needs of Zimbabweans from all parts of that country did not occur by accident. It cannot be explained simply as an outcome of Zimbabweans shopping in the area but also as a result of growing influence of economic players in the town. Walther [2] argues that "the mere presence of a border and a city is not sufficient to create the conditions of a bustling cross-border activity". Rather many border regions experience little cross-border economic activities and as such "many cities turn their back to the border rather than transforming into global bazars." In order to understand actors' influence in Musina's expansion and reconfiguration of retail trading over the last decade the paper adopts Olivier Walther's [2] argument that three factors explain economic development of border markets, namely, the presence of a skilled community of traders that can successfully exploit border differentials; the combination of trading and productive activities that rely on market and transport infrastructure; and the relative porosity of borders, which provides business opportunities.

Reconfiguration of retail space in Musina

The last decade has witnessed the growing presence of a trading community both South African and foreign who have descended upon Musina border town to invest and tap into the

Zimbabwean market. In an interview with a representative from the local business association he mentioned the role of one family in expanding retail activities in the town and the arrival of new players after the years 2000; There was one Indian family called the Rana family who lived on a farm outside of town. They came in the 1980s. If I remember well, they had six children of which two of them stayed in Musina. There was Jason and there was also Bully. These people had an impact on the development of the town. They put up buildings and they rented some of them to other businesspeople to set up shops.

He went further to mention that some of the Rana buildings are leased by traders from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Zimbabwe, you name them. Most of the traders come from other countries as well as a small group of traders from Makhado town nearby who have opened branches here.

Olivier Walther [2] has argued that the presence of a business community is important in giving life to a border market because "it is these entrepreneurs that will, on a daily basis, exploit the various differentials that continue to characterise border regions, and try to make a profit of connecting different nationally-organised markets". Interviews with local residents of the town all concur that the town has changed significantly since Zimbabwe's economy collapsed and local retailers could no longer meet the demands for goods. The town has experienced reconfiguration of its retail landscape as newcomers have entered the space, among them leading South African retail chains and East African/ Asian owned bazaars. Rather than differentiating these retail players in terms of their countries of origin we will analyse whom each category of

¹SAPA-AFP. 2009. Zimbabwe's fall sparks Musina's rise. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/zimbabwe-s-fall-sparks-musina-s-rise-1.432954>

retailers targeted as their primary clientele base are. It is argued that retail firms which are located in a border zone fall into three categories; (i) retailers that strictly cater to consumers from the home country, (ii) retailers that target both consumers from host and their neighbouring countries, and (iii) those whose consumers are exclusively from the neighbouring country [3]. The discussion below will expand on this.

There are a number of shopping zones and hotspots that one can identify in Musina. The N1 highway is a national route linking Zimbabwe and the province of Gauteng and stretching further down to Cape Town. Since this highway was constructed in such a way that it cuts through parts of Musina's central business district the spatial configuration of business activities in the town are broken between what can be termed high-end and low-end consumer retail shops. The significance of this highway can be seen in that the big retailers and a recently built Great North Road Plaza are located closest to it while further into the CBD southwards are new fledging East African and Asian owned bazaars which cater for low-end cross-border shoppers. The township of Nance field which is a big residential settlement for Musina's African population is also located adjacent to the N1. Truck-stops are also common sight as many of the long-haul truck drivers take a rest before or after going through lengthy border clearance processes between the two countries.

Most of the prominent retailers are located immediately adjacent to the N1 highway selling the 'big brands.' One can think of South African retail giants including group chain stores like furniture retailers such as Ellerrines as well as The Bed Shop and supermarket chains like Shoprite, Woolworths and Spar. Whilst the latter supermarkets are likely to service the needs of local Musina residents one can still observe the presence of Zimbabwean bulk buyers who take advantage of a stronger foreign currency exchange rate between Rand/USD. These retail chains retailers target both consumers from host and their neighbouring countries. Interviews with shoppers and shop assistants revealed that during the time of severe shortages Zimbabwean shoppers gained notoriety for emptying the shelves of Musina Spar which was the only one operating at the time in the town.

Along with these shops are automotive service centres such as Supa Quick, HiQ and Musina Toyota to mention a few which services both locals and Zimbabwean cross-border shoppers who bring their cars for service. Cars with registration plates from across the border can be seen being attended in these service centres. Zimbabwean shoppers also buy spare parts for motor vehicle in local branches of Midas and AutoZone There are a number of locally owned shops selling premium electrical goods like Jason Electrical and Lion King which belong to South African citizens of Indian heritage who have lived in Musina for decades.

Initially developed by a company called Solly Noor Properties Group this 13,561 m² plaza was later sold to Investec Property

Fund for R145 million in 2011 (Limpopo Mirror Online, 7 November 2011). This plaza consists of two retail centres on either side of the N1 highway, parking bays for 400 vehicles and a food court. A news report described is as "probably the biggest ever property development project the border town had ever seen." It houses South African retail chain groups such as such as Shoprite, OK Furniture, Clicks and Express Stores. The report indicates Investec's acknowledgement of the importance of cross-border shoppers as the company CEO remarked that "that Musina is a vibrant commercial and trading centre in the far north of Limpopo, servicing both the surrounding agricultural sector as well as cross-border trade from Zimbabwe" (Ibid).

Interviews were conducted with a number of family shoppers in this mall usually in the parking lots where it would be identified Zimbabwean registered cars. Shoppers would often attach quality to purchases they made in this mall especially for items like sneakers and different kinds of clothing as well as electrical appliances.

Located further away from the N1 are shops that sell general merchandise mostly imports from China and other parts of Asia. These shops are more recent having been built in the past few years. Although they can cater for local Musina residents, these retailers' target consumers are exclusively from the neighbouring country. They are mostly owned by East African merchants (Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis) and Asians (Chinese, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, etc.). In the interviews with most of retailers they confirmed that they decided to open shops in Musina so as to tap into the lucrative Zimbabwean cross-border shopping. The majority of shoppers who can be seen in this part of the CBD are bulk buyers who fill up truckloads of groceries, apparels, alcohol, and plastic wares among others which they purchase from these shops.

The China-Musina Mall was also built adjacent to the N1 and houses a number of shops and stalls selling general merchandise including furniture, clothes, blankets, kitchenware etc. At the time of its launch by Limpopo Province Premier Cassel Mathale in 2010 the R600 million-project was expected to provide approximately 400 permanent job opportunities [4]. The Centre has capacity to house 150 shops and covers a total area of approximately 100,000 square meters. The investment was made by Chinese owned Ateic International Property Group. Its Chairman Peter Zhang emphasised the strategic importance of the mall for cross-border trade. In line with the expansion of border trade and the commercial opportunities regarding the development of wholesale malls, this development would allow neighbouring countries to purchase a wide variety of commodities...There are no large trade wholesale malls in any border cities or towns in South Africa. Since border trade is one of the successful factors in China's rapid economic growth, it should be a greater development pattern for South Africa too [4].

Then mayor of Musina Councillor Carol Phiri saw the local economic development value of the Mall, in her words; Besides being

convenient for local residents, it will provide much-needed jobs, particularly for previously unemployed people. We acknowledge that this development is one of our best achievements, reflecting on the history of the economic development of Musina. We are excited to be part of this ground-breaking industrial development which is bringing economic relief to our people [4].

Indeed, the mall is a beehive of shopping for Zimbabweans who purchase items in bulk and in response, a shuttle service was provided freely to them so that they can transport their goods to the border. This shuttle service is in so much demand that the local taxis of Musina have established an informal taxi rank outside the fence of the mall to cash in on ferrying shoppers to the border.

These developments in retail have been noticed and recognised by residents of the town, as a representative of the local business chamber explained; The mid-2000s are the most important period for this town. Traders began to come into Musina, and I must say it exploded almost overnight. The prices of property just shot up as these guys were buying houses and converting them into warehouses or shops. Even big investors like Investec came in and set up a mall near the old mine shaft and another investor set up a mall on Klaff Street. There were confidence and people were putting in money. Another big investment was China Mall. They came in overnight and did their feasibility studies. In a short space of time it was built and open for business. Indeed, the observable proliferation of shopping 'hotspots' in the central business district of Musina can be attributed to the demand for consumer goods from the other side.

Informal cross-border workers

Over the years, jobless Zimbabwean youth have found it rewarding to participate in the informal economy of Musina. In most of the East African and Asian-owned shops the shop assistants were mostly Shona speaking. Studies show that unfamiliarity happens because among other things cross-border shoppers see language as a barrier for them [5]. But in the case of Musina, the shoppers "felt at home" because they negotiated purchases in their mother tongue. Having migrated from Zimbabwe in pursuit of realising their aspirations of a brighter future most of these youths came into the border town when they were still minors. One example was that of Shoti a short young man living in one of the townships in Musina who mentioned that he arrived in the town when he was only 14 years old and now he was 23 and had been able to hustle a living in Musina especially as a courier for cross-border shoppers. He further explained.

I arrived here in August 2007 having dropped out of school in Rutenga. I lived with my mother and all seemed well until she passed away. I had only started my first year in high school and due to my loss, I felt that I just had to move on without anyone else to take care of me. I dropped out of school and followed some friends to the border. Being only 14 years of age came with its own challenges like

very few people refusing to employ us. So, we engaged in all sorts of hand-to-mouth activities just so that we could eat something at the end of the day. We stayed in the local shelters owned by organisations which looked after orphans. Since the conditions were unbearable and were denying us an opportunity to enjoy our lives we left the shelters two years later. I was a bit older and so I began to help shoppers with ferrying their goods to the parking bays where transport headed for Zimbabwe was stationed. That is how we began to sustain our livelihoods without the need for well-wishers. Some days we smile all the way and spend a day drinking and having fun in Musina town or Beitbridge and on others we can barely buy food to eat.

Although Shoti's experience is just like one of a dozen more "children on the move" or unaccompanied minors in Musina the reality is that young people like him motivated by their aspirations of living a better life especially owning their own transport businesses rarely get to see those dreams accomplished.

Their working conditions are nothing far from being precarious. For instance, their salaries average R1200 per month and these would not suffice them considering that they still had to pay rent of about R500 monthly in the shacks in Nance field or nearby areas where they resided. Working hours are lengthy starting work sometimes as early as 6am and knocking off at 10pm. Their work included manning the shops especially serving customers and convincing them to buy as well as offloading new stock from warehouses. Although none of the interviewees admitted they had done it before, they mentioned that they were aware of incidents whereby the shop assistants would steal the new stock and sell it cheaper so as to supplement their meagre earnings. The shop owners trust their female employees a lot and believed they were not capable of stealing from them. One of the interviewees insinuated that trust also developed where the shop owner began a relationship with his shop assistant (Melody, 22, shop assistant, Musina). The female shop assistants would then be given access to keys of the warehouse, sometimes being sent there to collect new stock all by herself-an opportunity which could easily be used to take some of the stock and sell cheaply to a ready buyer. Ironically where trust had been built over time, the assistants took advantage of that and they would steal some of that stock. In cases where some were caught stealing, they would be fired and hardly any incidences of police reports and investigations were reported.

These shop assistants usually youthful men and women in their early twenties are quite shrewd in capturing and convincing customers to buy from their shops. The young men walk up to anyone who would have stopped to ask prices of the goods in their shops and then try to sell a product to that person. Once they agree on a price, they then check with the shop owner if he agrees with the discounted price offered to the customer. In one of the incidents one interviewee who was a shop assistant revealed that one of the

reasons why they did not label prices on the goods in their shops was because they had to know them by heart such that when a customer negotiated a price downwards they already knew how less they could take from their initial asking price. Only on special circumstances did the shop owners have to decide whether to accept the lowest price on offer or not.

Another economic activity that these young immigrants engaged in especially the men was touting for passengers of taxis destined to the border as well as helping owners of trucks load goods from shoppers. Some called them the trolley boys because they carried goods using supermarket trolleys which they took from the big supermarkets. Judging by their physical appearance indeed one would agree that they really looked like boys even if some of them were already in their late 20s. In character most of them were playful as they went around their work. You would see their customers reprimanding them for pushing the trolleys too fast and being reckless with their sometimes-fragile cargo. They would use these trolleys to carry as much goods as they could and load them on to trucks destined for Zimbabwe. Usually they wore yellow reflective vests and would be pushing trolleys, carts or even wheelbarrows and would negotiate a charge according to the customer's gullibility and the weight of the loads. Most of the elderly women shoppers made use of these young men's services and could hire them for the duration of their shopping trip. They would accompany them from shop to shop and even introduce them to shops where they could get lower prices and better quality of goods. Shop owners also found the trolley boys very helpful because they acted as middle men between them and bulk shoppers especially. So, in certain cases they paid them a small gratuity for bringing customers to their shops or they would give them a clothing item as a token of appreciation.

Although for the most part of their work, the trolley 'boys' work in harmony with each other, they sometimes face off against each other especially on days where customers are few. Fights would break out at times in front of customers and the truck drivers would sometimes banish them from the marketplace to cool off. One of them exclaimed that when such a thing happened it would be a big loss for the day and one would have to call it day even if it was so early in the morning (Lucky, 21, Trolley Boy, Musina). The other challenge they faced is that on days when the municipal police conducted raids on hawkers they would also be flushed out of town and could only return when the coast was clear. Much of their earnings were meagre in relative terms and they tended to live each day as it came. Month-end was rather stressful because it was the time, they each had to raise money for rent and electricity. Their landlords would be waiting from them. One trolley 'boy' explained that in the compounds where they lived the property owner would levy each one a fixed amount for electricity and if they failed to raised their share then the landlord would just disconnect their electricity. So, it put immense pressure on each of the residents in

the compound to ensure that they paid their share of electricity. That would motivate them to hustle late into the night.

After a long week of hard work, the shop assistants, hustlers, smugglers, con-men, and trolley boys would descend upon Nance field where they indulged in alcohol and entertainment in the township's taverns. Their counterparts operating from the Beitbridge side also joined them as they danced well into the night. Their lifestyles, however, are far from the aspirations that most of them have. As we spoke to them some mentioned that Musina was a place they landed in by accident as their eyes were set on the brighter lights of Johannesburg. A couple of them had been robbed during their journeys across the Limpopo River by magumaguma and had been stranded in Nance field. They began to rebuild their lives having lost everything they had in the bush by hustling in the town. Some tried but returned because they did not have a starting point upon arrival in the big city or they were greeted by an unfriendly crime incident. Although some of these young men have married and have children, they still wait for that breakthrough which will improve their situation whether in South Africa (especially becoming permanent residents) or returning to a better Zimbabwe. Police raids remind them that they do not belong in South Africa and life in Zimbabwe pushes them away. The events of July 2016 dealt a heavy blow on their informal economic activities as the low traffic of cross-border shoppers threatened their income earning opportunities.

The Transport Sectors

Walther [2] further argues that the levels of porosity of the border itself especially to informal cross-border traders who can import more goods than prescribed by law makes the practice of cross-border shopping flourish. Likewise, the availability of reliable and efficient transport infrastructure is important. In order to facilitate mobility of people and goods across the South Africa- Zimbabwe border the transport sector is one that has proven to be adaptable. There are some structural reasons behind the proliferation of transport companies and networks in Musina. The central business district of Musina is located 12km away from the main border post, therefore goods and people need to be transported. Some transporters can only drop-off passengers at the entrance into the border area and the shoppers have to complete the trip on foot or hire a porter to cross to the Zimbabwean side, and from there use another form of public transport to get to their final destinations.

In one shopping trip, a cross-border shopper can jump from one mode of transport to the other for example they can come on a Beitbridge bound bus and then disembark and board a minibus taxi across into Musina then employ the services of a trolley boy to carry their goods to board an omalayitsha's truck on their return to Zimbabwe. To understand how these dynamics play out, it is important to explain the different categories of transport operators and how they interact with shoppers.

Long-distance buses

On a daily basis Musina receives busloads of shoppers from hinterland areas such as Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Chinhoyi that ferry passengers and goods to Musina for shopping and return with them to their destination. Historically there had always been buses that plied the Harare-Beitbridge, Bulawayo-Bietbridge and Mutare-Beitbridge routes but with a focus on travellers who were moving between those major towns. In the early 2000s as trips to Musina became of significance to cross-border shoppers and migration into South Africa, long-distance bus companies started exploring cross-border routes. Although it is difficult to situate these developments in specific dates, an interview with long-distance buses which were stationed at one of the service stations in Musina revealed that bus companies negotiated for permission to cross into the border town. It was not just by accident. In an interview with a representative of the Coach and Bus Operators' Association (CBOA) which is based in Harare it became clear that this organisation went through negotiations with key stakeholders in the passenger transport businesses. These were on one end the local taxi associations and on the other the local municipality. When Zimbabwean buses belonging to CBOA started crossing into Musina and dropping of cross-border shoppers in a bus terminal right in the centre of the town, local taxi operators began to demand that space and argue that these buses were taking away customers from them.

This argument on the part of taxi operators was premised on the rationale that if these buses did not cross over in to the South African side of the border then the local taxis would have been responsible for shuttling shoppers between the border post and the town and back to the border post. The Nancefield Taxi Association was the most vocal and on a number of occasions they stopped buses en route to the CBD of Musina and demanded that all passengers disembark and use local taxis. It is at that moment around 2010 that the CBOA began exploring options and decided to engage with the Nancefield Taxi Association so that they could offer a shuttle service to the cross-border shoppers.

The issue of parking space for the buses became a major challenge because if they were to stop at the border post on the South African side and handover their passengers to local taxis, they would need a safe place to do so. The nearest option was a Shell Service Station which is less than a kilometre from the border gate. Negotiations with the Musina Local Municipality led to permission being granted for the setting up of a bus terminus at that location. It is also stated that the other main reason why this location was chosen is that unlike the only bus terminus in the town which does not have descent ablution facilities, the Shell Service Station had such facilities and passengers would be more comfortable. Also since this location was outside of the main town centre passengers would avoid risks such as theft and even harassment by touts seeking to make quick money from travellers like they did in the main bus terminus.

Therefore, upon reaching an agreement with the taxi association and the municipality, buses began using this location in May 2011. During the peak seasons, on a good day about 18 to 22 buses would arrive at the new bus terminus and off-peak seasons the number would reduce to as low as 12 buses per day. Peak season comprised mostly the months of June, July and August then October, November and December. Off-peak season would then be the months of January, February and March. Most of these buses had carrying capacity of between 60 and 72 passengers. On a typical morning buses would arrive as from 430am in South Africa and around 5am the local taxi association would begin ferrying the passengers to the CBD where they would conduct their shopping. Depending on the departure times of the return trips to Zimbabwe, the local taxis would agree with shoppers on a time to return them to the service station terminus. Bulawayo bound buses were scheduled on a daily basis to depart from the Shell Service Station as from 12pm with shoppers and their wares. Harare bound buses would begin leaving for the city as from 2pm. On average, it took about two hours just to lead a bus—this made sense considering the volume of goods on each traveller. In terms of costs of travel, the return ticket price for a Harare-Musina bus was US\$45 while for Bulawayo-Musina it was US\$25.

Many of the long-distance cross-border shoppers expressed the convenience of using these buses as opposed to hitchhiking to the border. Bus drivers and their other crew members built good relationships with their customers. They played a number of supportive roles which made their passengers feel comfortable. Bus drivers would help with negotiating duty because of their good rapport with border officials both in customs and immigration. For a fee the bus drivers could also help smuggle goods and avoid paying duty. A common practice was that of asking every passenger to pay a small fee usually R20 per head which would be forwarded to Zimbabwean customs officials so that they turn a blind eye to dutiable goods on the bus. In that way, the shoppers would save time waiting in queues and money that would have been charged on restricted goods usually as high as 40%. In worst of cases when passengers ran out of luck and had to pay hefty duty, the bus drivers would chip in with money which would be refunded by a relative of the passenger when they arrived at their destination. It is hardly surprising therefore that when the Zimbabwean government officials announced the ban on imports through Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 it was later on reported that bus companies crossing from South Africa were threatened with seizure if they were caught transporting passengers in possession of the banned goods (Herald 2016). Indeed buses carry volumes of cargo and so the state could only target them if the regulations were to become active.

“Handei border”: Local transport in Musina

“Handei border” (Let's go to the border) shouts a taxi rank marshal as he scouts for passengers who wish to get to the

Beitbridge border post. Within a few minutes the taxi (cab) is full and off it goes. He opens the doors of another taxi and repeats the same words calling for commuters to get into the car. On a busy day, about fifteen vehicles leave the taxi rank within the space of an hour. This is no surprise because with the boom in retail sales in Musina and increased mobility of Zimbabwean shoppers on daily basis, the local taxi industry moved in to capitalise on these movements. They recognised the lucrative nature of this transport route between the border and the CBD. Most of the minibuses carry between 15 and 35 passengers. The main taxi associations controlling and regulating taxi operators in the town are the Beitbridge Taxi Association and the Nance field Taxi Associations. The latter have a sister association called Musina Metred Taxis Association (MMTA) which operates mid-size family cars that ply the border route every day for a R20 fare.

As mentioned earlier it was through negotiations between the long-distance buses from Zimbabwe and the Nance field Taxi association that led to an amicable agreement in which the local minibuses would shuttle cross-border shoppers into Musina from the border post where their buses would drop them off. These minibus taxis are situated on key points where shopping happens in Musina. Almost at all the major shopping malls in the CBD where shoppers can be found in great numbers, the minibuses can be found parked outside waiting to transport shoppers back to the border once they are done. Their counterparts, the MMTA taxis were initially meant to ferry passengers who wished to travel between places in the town on a fare determined by a metre as in most other parts of the country and the world. However, because the border route is very busy and the distance is shorter, the owners abandoned their metres and agreed to also establish their own loading zone in the CBD to ferry passengers. Although tensions have simmered with the Zimbabwean bus operators the transport business in general experiences fluctuations related to peak and off-peak seasons of travellers. When the Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 was announced the taxi associations were mentioned as having been among organisers of protests calling for the repealing of the regulations because they threatened their viability significantly.

Omalayitsha transport operators

Amongst the hundreds of vehicles that cross the border on a daily basis to transport goods to Zimbabwe is a distinct category of light delivery trucks mostly owned by Beitbridge residents and other nearby rural villages and towns in the southern provinces of Zimbabwe. Most of these vehicles traverse the border daily ferrying goods of up to seven tonnes. The majority of the trucks are 1½ to 3 tonne carrying capacity. They are commonly referred to as omalayitsha. This term is mostly used to refer to transporters of remittances who usually travel from distance towns such as Johannesburg to parts of Zimbabwe. Likewise omalayitsha are very popular in Musina. They carry goods from the town and deliver at the door steps of shoppers in Zimbabwe. Usually on one load of

goods per day the trucks carry enough loads to realise profit. Their fees for transporting goods include customs duty fees and 'bribe' money to offer revenue authorities so that they evade paying any stipulated duties. In most cases the trucks are owned by someone else who then employs a driver to operate the vehicles. For the most part the binding agreement or condition of such employment is that the driver has to meet certain daily targets of income.

Outside one of the busiest wholesale centres in Musina, we met Obey a driver of a Nissan Atlas truck. He approached us to offer their services especially that they could cross with any goods across the border hassle-free. After agreeing to an interview he narrated how he dropped out of high school at the age of fifteen in Bubi when his mother could no longer afford to pay his fees in 2008. He found himself joining his friends in leaving for 'greener' South Africa. Having found no work in Musina three months later, he began touting for customers on behalf of truck drivers who parked outside shopping centres. It was only in 2012 that he met a kind and generous omalayitsha who then employed him to help with loading goods onto his trucks. Because he gained trust of his new employer, obey was taught how to drive the trucks and at one time he drove the truck from Beitbridge to Musina and back without a driver's licence. A year later when he had a licence his employer bought another truck and Obey was the new driver conducting his own trips across the border. Although not many of the Zimbabwean youths who hustle a living in Musina end up experiencing some form of upward social mobility like Obey, his story illustrates that border work has the potential to transform lives.

Omalayitsha cultivate sound business relations with their clients especially in ensuring the safe delivery of their goods. Sometimes they travel together with their clients and wait for them till they are done shopping then return home. In cases like that it means the truckers have a guaranteed income and do not have to queue outside any of the shopping areas of the town to solicit clients.

Because they know how to navigate the border very well, most shoppers prefer to use omalayitsha to ferry their goods and go through the rigorous customs procedures. They also believe that through omalayitsha there are savings to be realised as opposed to encountering revenue officials by themselves. Among some of the goods that they ferry are restricted goods such as alcohol. One shop assistant though made mention of the fact that sometimes clients are just gullible to omalayitsha whom they trust too much. He said because shoppers did not always know what was exempt from duty they would actually pay more money to omalayitsha than required by law. According to the interviews not all truckloads pass through the main crossing point at Beitbridge. Some of the omalayitsha are actively involved in smuggling goods across the Limpopo River. Their vehicles do not cross the river but they handover the goods to other vehicles parked on the other side. In an anecdote from one of the interviews it was mentioned that at one time new border

line soldiers from SANDF stumbled upon omalayitsha who were busy offloading their cargo so that it can be passed down to the Zimbabwean side. The soldiers then stopped that illegal operation and decided to hand over the 'transgressors' to the South African Revenue Services at the main border post. It was said that the South African Revenue Service (SARS) officials found no wrongdoing on the part of the omalayitsha since they were in possession of proof of purchase of the goods they were exporting. Immigration also verified that the driver and his partners in the truck all had valid visas in their passports. Eventually the soldiers had to escort the truck back to the illegal crossing point. The whole idea behind South African authorities' leniency is that all goods leaving the country as long as they are lawfully purchased are a benefit to its economy. Only Zimbabwe would bleed from such leakages because it taxes the passage of goods across its international boundaries.

Chibhasikoro: Bicycle transporters

An observer of traffic that flows through the Beitbridge border will notice men riding bicycles usually carrying boxes of groceries or big bags or suitcases usually heading the northern direction to Zimbabwe. Because they ride mabhasikoro (bicycles) these men are commonly referred to as vemabhasikoro (those who ride bicycles) or vakomana vemabhasikoro (the bicycle boys) while their 'industry' or trade is called chibhasikoro. These men have become a common feature of traffic that traverses the border post on a daily basis. Although one cannot get actual dates as to when chibhasikoro began there is anecdotal evidence pointing to the early 2000s when a certain woman from Dulibadzimu Township in Beitbridge began crossing the border on her bicycle carrying round nuts and fruits to sell on the South African side of the border post. Her daily routine became noticeable to many people in her community. She is said to have opened up a route that had not been traversed by many residents in the town. But it was not until the mid-2000s when bread shortages hit Zimbabwe that men began to ride into Musina to buy bread in bulk for resale in Beitbridge. They would order as many dozens of breads as their bicycles could carry and then ride back to supply tuck shops or sell in their houses. For those who had bicycles but no money to order the bread, they offered a transport service on behalf of bulk buyers from Beitbridge. At the time when the situation deteriorated in Zimbabwe 2007-2008 vemabhasikoro began to increase in number bringing in as much food stuffs as they could into Beitbridge. Other scarce but portable commodities were beginning to be added to the list of items that these men transported. Possibly because most of vemabhasikoro speak both Shona and Venda as they are local residents, the border officials allowed these men to cross with very little control since they were carrying goods that were legal across the border. For most of their part these men enjoyed some form of 'invisibility' especially when other border crossers were expected to have a valid passport and visa to gain entrance into South Africa before 2010 when visa regulations were relaxed for Zimbabweans. Vemabhasikoro were in

a sense exempt from stringent immigration control because they were known to have no intentions of overstaying in Musina. Even if there may have been some who used chibhasikoro as a way of getting a foothold into South Africa, most interviewees could not confirm if such a scenario ever happened. The same was true of the Zimbabwean side where they crossed regularly in a day without restrictions or being subjected to customs duty payments.

As the situation began to improve in Zimbabwe and the demand for bread decreased, most of the cyclists switched to offering services to transport goods on their bicycles from one end of the border to the other. The minimum charge rate for carrying goods across the border was R50 at the time and late in 2015 when the Rand weakened against the US Dollar they upped their minimum charge to R100. If the luggage to be transported is bulkier they negotiate (*kutaurirana*) with their client and agree on a price before engaging the service. As an economic activity chibhasikoro is not organised like taxis which have a taxi association and a board to represent members' interests with the state on discussions around mobility restrictions and impediments. The absence of a representative body makes it difficult also to estimate how many vemabhasikoro there are. Nevertheless as one of the interviewees mentioned, most people were recruited into chibhasikoro either by family members who were trying to economically empower them or even through friends who asked to join them.

Women Head Porters

As travellers disembark public transport at the entrance of the South African side of the border, they are met with women who solicit services for carrying luggage over their heads. "Tokusengerai here (can we carry for you)?" is a common question these women ask to travellers once the taxi door is opened. Unlike their male counterparts who use bicycles to carry and travel across the border post the female porters walk with bags and other containers to the other side.

Border Work as Precarious Work

With ambitions of cashing in on the shoppers are their fellow countrymen who con them out of their hard-earned money. In most cases the conmen prey on shoppers who are willing to pay less for prices of advertised goods. One incident witnessed was that of a certain restaurant where a couple who speak Shona in a Mozambican accent approach passers-by for help with translating documents that are written in English since they can only read Portuguese. In addition to that favour they then ask to see what South African Rands look like and once the unsuspecting victim complies they find a way of taking that money away without the person's knowledge. One of researchers was approached twice by the same people when he went to that restaurant to have lunch. He was in a hurry he brushed them aside and quickly entered the restaurant. The employees of the restaurant know about these

scammers and alerted him but mentioned that they never report because they know the police will do nothing about the matter unless if presented with evidence.

In June 2012 a newspaper reported that a Zimbabwean cross-border shopper had been conned out of R500 by her fellow country man². This is how she fell for the 'trick'; I was doing window shopping when this man approached me. He looked so innocent and asked me if I could assist him in changing his US dollars into rands. He said he did not know the town very well and asked me to accompany him to a place where he could do the currency exchange....He said he wanted to see a sample of the South African money as he was afraid that he might be conned when we did the exchange. I told him that I had R500 in cash and he asked me to give it to him. I gave him the money, because he was so kind, and I did not suspect anything. He opened his bag and took out some newspapers, which he used to wrap around my money. He put the money in his bag and then took it out and gave it to me again. He immediately vanished into the busy shopping centre. When I unwrapped the newspapers, I found that all my money was gone.

When the conned lady recognised the man the next day, she alerted passers-by and they unleashed mob justice on him until he was rescued by the police. After searching him they found that he only had R250 in his pocket. In other cases, cross-border shoppers have been robbed at gun point especially when they arrive in the town during the wee hours of the morning when it is dark.

A number of interviewees mentioned the frightening experiences of being robbed and how this really set them back. Robbers would pounce especially on travellers if they stopped along the highway from the border to Musina central business district. Stories of men pouncing on shoppers and taking away their money and mobile phones are rife. It was reported in one of the newspapers that five Zimbabweans who were travelling in a minibus taxi were robbed R6 000 at gunpoint by three men around 5am as they were waiting for shops to open³ [6]. Garatidye [7] found a number of such accounts in her interviews with informal cross-border traders. In our interviews with shoppers they mentioned that they had experienced very few incidences of robberies because they travelled in groups and using safe transport rather than walking on foot especially at night at the border post. It was interesting though to hear one interviewee backed by his colleagues who were listening in on the interview, dismissing robberies as a serious problem for shoppers but saying that conmen were the worst crooks that preyed on shoppers on a regular basis in Musina. Robberies, he argued had reduced in frequency because of the improvements in transport and mobility across the border especially for those shopping in groups (Silas, 37, bus driver Musina).

Conclusion

The paper has shown that cross-border shopping by Zimbabweans in Musina border town is part of a broader "border-dependent economy" which has led to a boom in retail services and other forms of businesses which facilitate the movement of goods and people. The retail landscape of Musina has altered significantly as newcomers have entered the space. Asian and East African merchants have opened up bazaars where Zimbabweans shop and come in contact with low-end globalisation. Huge investments have been made in erecting shopping complexes such as China Mall where shoppers can buy merchandise mostly from China including apparels, furniture and other household items. South African investors have also descended on Musina to erect shopping malls where leading retailers such as Shoprite, Woolworths, and the like can be found. Automotive chain stores like Midas and Autozone also opened shop in the town in the past years. Also, the levels of porosity of the border itself especially to informal cross-border traders who can import more goods than prescribed by law makes the practice of cross-border shopping flourish. Likewise, the availability of reliable and efficient transport infrastructure is important. Thus, the boom in retail trade in Musina cannot be explained in simple terms as an outcome of Zimbabweans shopping in the area but also growing influence of a business community in the town.

In addition one of the most positive impacts of the cross-border shopping economy that has developed in Musina over the years is not just employment in certain parts of the retail sector but also the inclusion of the local taxis association in the shuttling of shoppers between the border and Musina town. These local stakeholders were able to negotiate for space in the park and ride facility initially through violent ways, but the outcome was a rather amicable and orderly way of improving mobility of shoppers.

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¹Con man falls prey to tough hands of Musina's mob justice 15 June 2012

²Zimbabweans lose R6 000 to Musina gunmen Monday, 15 April 2013 10:32 Editor News http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11443:zimbabweans-lose-r6-000-to-musina-gunman&catid=38:travel-tips&Itemid=18



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