



**‘Bringing time’ into migration and  
critical border studies:  
Theoretical and methodological  
implications for African research**

**Kudakwashe P. Vanyoro**

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Migrating out of Poverty  
Arts B, University of Sussex  
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN, United Kingdom  
Email: [migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk)  
Web: [www.migratingoutofpoverty.org](http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org)  
Twitter: @MigrationRPC  
Facebook: /migratingoutofpoverty  
Blogger: [migratingoutofpoverty.blogspot.com](http://migratingoutofpoverty.blogspot.com)

The author is a Doctoral Researcher at the African Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand.

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## **Abstract**

This paper brings together insights from scholarship on time, migration and critical border studies to propose a research thematic framework for a temporal approach on African migration. Through a case study of Zimbabwe-South Africa migration, it builds on previous studies of time, migration and borders to demonstrate how a temporalised approach to migration and critical border studies can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of migrant subjectivities and their constitution in Africa. The theoretical and literature review adopted in the paper suggests that critical border studies in Africa have not sufficiently temporalised. These studies often focus more on 'spatiality' and migration as a temporal and social process is marginalised in these debates. In this literature, there is a greater focus on 'stasis' and 'borderlanders' that goes together with a widely held belief among postcolonial African scholars that a spatial focus is the most suitable way to politicise and decolonise Africa's colonial borders. This paper demonstrates how a temporalised (space-time) approach to South-South migration and critical border studies in Africa allows us to engage with similar debates by politicising time. It concludes that in an era of 'containment development', a critical understanding of time is a politically enabling exercise.

## Executive summary

In today's world, states are increasingly skeptical of migration thus they show little interest in making their societies more inclusive or opening up their borders. Contrary to the globalisation discourse which was prevalent during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which a new 'borderless world' characterised by reduced barriers and an insignificant impact of borders was anticipated, the world is witnessing a 'mobility paradox' reflected by tensions between two discursive extremes: globalisation and open borders on the one hand, and increasing border securitisation and externalisation on the other (Kleist, 2017). In this context, African migrants like Zimbabweans are excluded from the circuits of legal mobility, producing a precarious class of irregular migrants living in South Africa and other parts of the world.

Border towns such as Musina often serve as refuges for Zimbabwean migrants who experience spatiotemporal disruption; constituting 'floating populations' (Bayart 2007). 'Staggered' forms of migration are on the rise, and so trajectories involving unidirectional and linear mobility and permanent settlement are becoming replaced by pathways that are complex, circular, and varied in terms of stages and duration (Robertson, 2019). However, African migration research and critical border studies are yet to effectively trace the temporal dimensions of contemporary migration processes and the migrant trajectories and lived experiences of migration that they produce. Dominant characterisations of border spaces such as Musina as 'transit zones' or 'stop off points' do not explicitly engage with the notion that migration consists of a multiplicity of potential trajectories, which are often unstable, accompanied by changes in status, thus forming a complex concentration of destinations and positions (Robertson, 2019).

This paper brings together insights from scholarship on time, migration and critical border studies and proposes a research thematic framework for a temporal approach on African migration. Through a case study of Zimbabwe-South Africa migration, it builds on previous studies of time, migration and borders to demonstrate how a temporalised approach on migration and critical border studies can contribute to a better understanding of migrant subjectivities and their constitution in Africa. The theoretical and literature review adopted in the paper suggests that African critical border studies have not sufficiently temporalised because they focus more on spatiality. Migration as a social process is marginalised in these debates and there is a widely held belief that a spatial focus is the most suitable way to 'decolonise' Africa's 'colonial' borders (Ramutsindela, 2010).

This paper demonstrates how a temporalised (space-time) approach to migration and critical border studies allows us to engage with similar debates in two ways. First, it explores the efficacy of bringing time into migration and critical border studies scholarship by adopting temporal methodological approaches to studying contemporary South-South migration in Africa. Second, it explores the use of 'critical border thinking' (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006) as a temporalised theory for studying Africa's national borders.

The paper concludes that bringing time into migration and critical border studies in African research involves incorporating temporal methodologies that engage with agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement in the present that is informed by the past and oriented to the future (Cwener, 2001; Cojocar, 2016). It also entails an analysis of contemporary hostile state responses to migration and dominant categories of migration governance as emanating through a 'migration assemblage' constituted by colonial sedentarism (Bakewell, 2008; Landau, 2019). In other words, it is an exercise concerned with the politicisation of time just as much as extant scholarship on African borders has sought to politicise space in a bid to decolonise colonial borders. Such a theoretical and methodological undertaking is also one that accepts that a critical understanding of time is a politically enabling exercise with emancipatory potential.

## Background

In the past few years the world has witnessed an enormous and widespread intensification in levels of anxiety and uncertainty and a growing sense of precariousness (Pine, 2014). Amidst the threat of global economic collapse, recovery remains embedded in a hope for the future, which is countered by future predictions of impending breakdown and chaos (Pine, 2014). Migration is one of the ways that individuals in the 'modern world' respond to this kind of future uncertainty. Pine (2014: 98) describes migration as one of the most common alternative strategies in the post-socialist world, characterised by the simultaneous acceleration of globalism and fragmented capitalism. Indeed, kinship obligations and household economies mostly revolve around migration as families invest in migration as a project of hope and are geared toward the future.

Scholars like Howarth (2006: 115) have argued that the logic of globalisation has resulted in 'a weakening of the sovereign state' and 'brought about the construction of regional formations such as the European Union'. But in today's world, states that are 'beset with dread' are 'afraid of having been invaded' and 'being on the verge of disappearing' thus they show little interest in 'making the circle more inclusive' (Mbembe, 2019a: 2-3). Rather:

...the idea is to make borders as the primitive form of keeping at bay enemies, intruders, and strangers—all those who are not one of us. In a world characterised more than ever by an unequal redistribution of capacities for mobility, and in which the only chance of survival, for many, is to move and to keep on moving, the brutality of borders is now a fundamental given of our time. Borders are no longer sites to be crossed but lines that separate. Within these more or less miniaturised and militarised spaces, everything is supposed to remain still (Mbembe, 2019a: 3).

As Mbembe (2019a) forcefully suggests, African migration to Europe is indeed characterised by what Kleist and Thorsen (2017) refer to as a 'mobility paradox'. This paradox, they argue, reveals tensions between two discursive extremes: globalisation and open borders on the one hand, and increasing border securitisation and externalisation on the other. The increased reach and accessibility of communication, media and transport technologies globally leads to people in many parts of the world being exposed to 'visions of the good life elsewhere' (Kleist, 2017: 1). By the same token, growing inequality that is accompanied by restrictive mobility regimes means that the vast majority of people in the 'Global South' are being excluded from the circuits of legal mobility (Kleist, 2017).

It is easy to envisage these dynamics as being unique only to North-South migration yet they are not least on the African continent. A similar mobility paradox plays out in South-South migration from other parts of Africa to South Africa – the mobility between Zimbabwe and South Africa being the case in point for this paper. Zimbabweans generally face anxiety, uncertainty and a sense of precariousness owing to a protracted economic crisis in their home country, which forces them to locate their hope in a future in other countries. They have visions of a better life elsewhere, yet they are simultaneously excluded from moving legally to neighbouring South Africa, or maintaining their legal stay, due to several restrictive bureaucratic structures. In a concerted bid to manage migration, South Africa's migration policies are just one example of how African states that can offer better economic opportunities for African migrants have created 'staggered pathways' (Robertson, 2019) that proliferate their limbo.

The 'mobility paradox' reflects how the interplay between visions of good life elsewhere and the exclusion of Zimbabweans from the circuits of legal mobility, produces a precarious class of irregular migrants living in South Africa and other parts of the world. The 'staggered' forms of migration that such migrants experience result in 'contingent, multi-directional and multi-stage mobility pathways – where the boundaries between temporariness and permanence (as both legal status and subjective state) are increasingly blurry and mutable' (Robertson, 2019: 170). These forms of staggered migration are also identifiable in the current South African migration regulatory scenario where Zimbabweans may get an entry visitor's visa ranging anyway from thirty to ninety days, only to become undocumented through the 'overstay' of visa requirements (Zack et al., 2019). Where overstaying is criminalised and consequently not a viable option, as is often the case, staggered migration also takes the form of extra-legal practices such as those we see when Zimbabwean migrants have their passports 'stamped out' of the country by border officials through the use of brokers such as bus drivers and *omalayitsha*<sup>1</sup> (Tshabalala, 2017; Zack et al. 2019).

Robertson (2019) argues that, sociologically, migrants' own experiences of temporality become highly significant within such 'staggered' migration processes. Without the requisite documentation and resources - a predicament which is often

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<sup>1</sup> These are operators of private businesses of a range of scales, from small, often unregistered couriers who use pick-up trucks or mini buses to ferry money and other goods across the border from South Africa, to large consortia and registered transport companies (Nyamunda 2014). Malayitsha is a Ndebele term which means 'the one who carries a heavy load' (Nyamunda 2014: 40).

compounded by the violence these migrants experience from *maguma guma*<sup>2</sup> that rob them of the little money they have during ‘border jumping’ (Sibanda, 2010; Zack et al., 2019) - many of them find themselves in conditions and spaces of great uncertainty and abject negation that alter significantly their aspirations and life trajectories. While their decision to migrate marks in itself a crucial point in their life cycle, often bringing irreversible changes (Cojocar, 2016), spatiotemporal disruption (Auyero, 2011; Ramakrishnan, 2014) results in chronic waiting (see Uehling, 2002; Bayart, 2007; Bissell, 2007; Jeffrey, 2010; Auyero, 2011; Oldfield and Greyling, 2015), which is one of the temporal tropes that often characterise this kind of migration.

In this context, border towns such as Musina often serve as refuges for Zimbabwean migrants who experience spatiotemporal disruption; constituting what Bayart (2007) calls ‘floating populations’. Musina is the northernmost town in South Africa, which lies on the Limpopo River on the border of Zimbabwe (Hugo, 2008). Many Zimbabwean migrants experience unforeseen spatiotemporal disruptions after crossing the border because not everything turns out the way they had originally imagined prior to their crossing. This disruption can often be highly gendered. Because Southern African women are routinely denied the opportunity to acquire the education and resources that would enable them to be viewed as ‘highly skilled’ according to state definitions, immigration eligibility de facto discriminates against them (Dodson 2001). This is a result of the marked male bias in access to income, property, resources, and education in most African countries (Dodson 2001).

Preliminary findings from my ongoing study also suggest that men carry the ‘masculinised’ responsibility of providing for their families. This means that those with little education and often from rural backgrounds are forced to move within the labour migration criteria of ‘low skills’. This kind of mobility tends to be irregular. Therefore, patriarchal norms, beliefs, practices and structures render both men and women susceptible to risky border crossings that are usually accompanied by some kind of disruption. They often experience what Robertson (2019) calls ‘contingent temporality’. Robertson defines contingent temporality as migration trajectories that are contingent in the sense that they involve unanticipated, unpredictable and unforeseen circumstances, but also in the sense that they become dependent on particular unfolding events or conditions. For example, Asian migrants in Australia referred to in Robertson’s (2019: 174) study experienced contingent temporality, ‘as a constant juggling of futures on the biographic timescale – namely life, career and migration goals – across a dynamic institutional timescale in which migration policies

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<sup>2</sup> Shona urban lingua for conmen derived from Shona verb ‘guma’ meaning to ‘dust off’ (Zack et al., 2019). They are ‘unscrupulous gangs’ that rob and assault undocumented border crossers.



and criteria can shift rapidly'. This entailed diverting their plans and aspirations down new and unexpected pathways. Ultimately, contingent temporality appears to translate into 'indentured temporality', which Robertson (2019) defines as specific forms of suspension or delay in migrants' desired or intended trajectories. The term invokes a specific colonial history of mobile labour being placed in indentured servitude (Robertson, 2019).

Temporality is useful as an analytical prism when conducting research in African border spaces, as these are often the spaces in which African migrants feel the liminal effects of the 'mobility paradox', resulting in 'contingent' and 'indentured' forms of temporality. Border towns such as Musina have so far elicited a characterisation, which is attuned to notions of 'transit' and 'stop off', which are consistent with trajectories involving unidirectional and linear mobility and permanent settlement (Robertson, 2019). Moyo provides an example of a young man who took up the services of *omalayitsha* on the understanding that his brother would pay for his border crossing once they had reached Johannesburg (Moyo, 2017). Once in South Africa, *omalayitsha* called the young man's brother to notify him that they had crossed successfully, and when the phone went to voicemail, they abandoned him in Musina. With no networks, friends or family, he found work in construction where he continued to work for an employer who accepted his undocumented status.

These experiences may differ for women particularly those travelling with children. Personal observations from my ongoing research suggest that transport providers such as bus drivers tend to be more sympathetic towards migrant women who are 'stuck' by agreeing to make provisions for a 'pay forward' if the migrant has kin further South in the interior that are willing to assist. At the same time, this may render them vulnerable to untoward approaches from 'unscrupulous' male transport providers. Therefore, some end up bidding their time in local church shelters in Musina. Migrant women also experience sexual and gender-based violence [SGBV] that occurs both during the border crossing and after crossing into South Africa (Elphick and Amit, 2012):

Migrants who cross informally into South Africa have to traverse a poorly monitored 'bush' area between Zimbabwe and South Africa that is more than 20 kilometres wide and stretches along either side of the Limpopo River. Incidents of SGBV are common along this route. Criminal gangs or 'amagumagumas' target migrants traveling both with and without smugglers or guides. They also sometimes pose as guides promising to show the way into South Africa for a fee, and then rob, assault, and sometime rape their clients once inside the bush. The SGBV attacks include threats of sexual violence, gang rape, or compelled rape between companions or even family members. Pregnant

woman are not spared from these sexual attacks. In some cases, children and partners have been forced to watch the rape of a relative or spouse (Elphick and Amit, 2012: 78-79).

Once they reach Musina, migrant women are also vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence including 'violence from persons promising to assist newly arrived migrants, violence by employers, violence experienced during sex work, and violence against street children, either from their companions or from persons promising work' (Elphick and Amit, 2012: 79).

Rutherford observed Zimbabweans in Musina who, while their counterparts were scrapping for work in the farms, chose to bid their time by engaging in highly exploitative work to try to survive until the road blocks and police sweeps decreased so they could continue their voyage further south into South Africa to the larger urban centers (Rutherford, 2008). The time it takes to wait may also have gendered influences as women who travel with children may not have as much time on their hands to work and make enough money to proceed with their journey compared to men who do not have to factor in child care to their daily routine. They may be forced to stay with or be assisted by men who promise to provide food, shelter, or other assistance, which leads the women to remain in abusive relationships because they are dependent on these men for survival (Elphick and Amit, 2012).

Staggered forms of migration are on the rise and trajectories involving unidirectional and linear mobility and permanent settlement are becoming replaced by pathways that are complex, circular, and varied (in terms of stages and durations) (Robertson, 2019). African migration research and critical border studies are yet to effectively trace the temporal dimensions of contemporary migration processes and 'the complex new migrant trajectories and lived experiences of migration that they produce' (Robertson, 2019: 170). Dominant characterisations of border spaces such as Musina as 'transit zones' or 'stop off points' do not explicitly engage with the notion that migration pathways are complex, circular and varied (Robertson, 2019). Indeed, mobility can no longer be understood as a simple journey from A to B. Instead it often consists of a multiplicity of potential trajectories, which are often unstable, accompanied by changes in status, thus forming a complex concentration of destinations and positions (Robertson, 2019).

This paper brings together insights from scholarship on time, migration and critical border studies and proposes a research thematic framework for a temporal approach

on African migration. Through a case study of Zimbabwe-South Africa migration, it builds on previous studies of time, migration and borders to demonstrate how a temporalised approach on migration and critical border studies can contribute to a better understanding of migrant subjectivities and their constitution in Africa. The theoretical and literature review adopted in the paper suggests that African critical border studies have not sufficiently temporalised because they focus more on spatiality. Migration as a social and temporal process is marginalised in these debates and there is a widely held belief that a spatial focus is the most suitable way to decolonise Africa's 'colonial' borders. This paper demonstrates how a temporalised (space-time) approach to migration and critical border studies allows us to engage with similar debates

## **Structure of the paper**

The paper is divided into three sections. It starts by situating the discussion of Africa's borders within spatiality. In this section, the paper highlights that the spatialisation of theories of critical border studies in Africa represents attempts at decolonising Africa's borders by rethinking the organisation of space, territory and citizenship on the continent. In the second section, the paper proceeds to a discussion of 'bringing time' (Cojocaru, 2016) into migration and critical border studies. It first explores the efficacy of bringing time into migration and critical border studies scholarship by adopting temporal methodological approaches to studying contemporary migration in Africa. It then explores the use of 'critical border thinking' (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006) as a temporal and spatial theory (space-time) (Massey, 1994) for studying Africa's borders. Last, the paper offers some concluding remarks.

## **A spatialised reading of Africa's national borders as a decolonisation agenda**

The meaning of the terms 'space'/'spatial' that different authors assume vary greatly (Massey, 1994). Despite the proliferation of the theoretical and empirical discourse of space, the precise meaning of the category of space is ambiguous as there are significant disputes about the different meanings of space and debate about its importance for social and political analysis (see Laclau, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994; Howarth, 2006, Harvey, 2010). For the purposes of this analysis, the category of space refers to:

...any law or order of relations that yields a structural regularity between objects, whether it take the form of succession or co-existence, and the key element in this

conception is the fixation and representation of objects—the rendering visible of objects—whether they are literally or empirically present or absent (Howarth, 2006: 112).

Space and the spatial are in this sense socially constituted (Massey, 1994). Massey (1994) argues that, in geography the realm of the spatial has been until recently depoliticised – deprived of politics and of the possibility of politics. The opposite is true of African critical border studies for it appears that time has been relegated and implicitly portrayed as ‘the sphere for the lack of politics’ (Massey, 1994: 66). Theories of borders have traditionally focused more on spatiality (Little, 2015), thinking of it in ‘a highly active and politically enabling manner’ (Massey, 1994: 66). Empirical studies of African borders have focused primarily on the border in stasis: in terms of its role in the lives of borderlanders (Mechlinski, 2010) or artificially partitioned ethnic groups (Asiwaju, 1993). Lefebvre (1991: 341) argues that space is indeed political – it is not ‘a scientific object removed from ideology or politics’ but one that is always political and strategic. The subject is ‘someone who has been thrown into’ this ‘world of languages and rules already there’, and ‘finds him/herself entrapped in its phenomenological contingency and social structuration’ (Rebughini, 2014: 2).

Recognising that spatial concerns are at the centre of politics, the political, forging of national identities and creating ‘sites of resistance and transformative political practices’ (Howarth, 2006: 107), in this literature, subjectivity is often understood in relation to the potential of spaces like borders to create new forms of exchange, governance, solidarity and social relations. This understanding provides a ‘model of subjectivity’ and politics that is intrinsically tied to space and (de) territorialisation, putting these aspects at the heart of its analyses. Citizenship itself is portrayed in these conceptualisations as static rather than a political function of time. This literature also does little to consider those travelling longer distances, those who do not wish to stay near or repeatedly cross the divide (Mechlinski, 2010).

African critical border studies often oscillate between dichotomous portrayals of Africa’s borders as spaces of resistance on the one hand, and spaces of alterity and marginalisation of borderlanders on the other. In other words, the studies prioritise an analysis of power and agency that are to a large extent informed by analytical frameworks that fall along dualities of resistance and naturalised or internalised domination. The focus by most African critical border studies scholars on these dualities is located within the genealogy of social science knowledge in Africa, which largely draws on the colonial experience and reorganisation of space and begins mostly from there. Indeed, the establishment of political frontiers and the drawing of

boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' 'forge identity through the production of antagonistic relations between differently positioned subjectivities'. This process maintains and reproduces an order that depends 'on the constitution and maintenance of a margin or boundary that separates the system from its other' (Howarth, 2006: 114). "'Sovereignty" is still the name for this spatial and social division' (Howarth, 2006: 114). Therefore, one can appreciate why African scholars and Africanists adopt these dualities: it is specifically because they seek to politicise and decolonise Africa's physical borders (Ramutsindela, 2010).

There is a whole debate on borders composed of two theses that essentially ignore each other (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000). Academic studies of borders fall within one of two traditions: the 'literalists' and 'a-literalists' (Alvarez, 1995). Literalists focus on the actual border as a structure while a-literalists are interested in the border 'as a metaphor for cultural miscegenation' (Mechlinski, 2010: 97). The one prevailing idea in the literalist tradition is that boundaries separating African states were arbitrarily created and drawn by colonialism, separating peoples, linguistic entities and cultural-political communities who were a part of a natural and homogenous whole before the fact against their will (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000). This position expresses the common view that African borders, 'were drawn with rulers and colored pencils on inaccurate maps by diplomats intoxicated by their sense of superiority' (Lefebvre, 2011: 191). Furthermore within this line of thought, colonial boundaries are also said to have, 'opened the way to the Balkanisation of the continent by cutting it up into a maze of microstates that were not economically viable and were linked more to Europe than to their regional environment' (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000: 261). The artificiality of Africa's political boundaries has thus become a commonplace feature of discourse on contemporary Africa (Lefebvre, 2011).

The focus on the coloniality of Africa's borders essentially draws on the prevailing idea that the boundaries separating African states were arbitrarily created and drawn by colonialism, separating peoples, linguistic entities and cultural-political communities who were a part of a natural and homogenous whole before the fact, all against their will (Asiwaju, 1993; Mbembe and Rendall, 2000; Ramutsindela, 2010). African critical border studies debates often take this claim as their point of departure. Scholars like Deng are of the view that politically the starting point in addressing Africa's problems should be the colonial nation state, which 'brought together diverse groups that it paradoxically kept separate and unintegrated' (Deng, 1993: 34). Deng (1993) argues that artificial borders of the new states broke up regional ethnic groups and affiliated them with others, which allowed colonial masters to impose a superstructure of law and order to maintain relative peace and tranquility. Physical borders seems to have become a prism to understand Africa's possible futures as it has been argued by some

that decolonisation is unimaginable without a spatial expression of political, economic and cultural change, which are embodied in radical changes on, borders (Ramutsindela, 2010). The decolonisation movement sees this as important because colonialism used borders not only to delineate the properties of the empire, but to also create bounded spaces for Africans to imagine themselves as nations (Ramutsindela, 2010). It is within this context that border thinking or theorising emerged. It was a response to:

...the violence (frontiers) of imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity (and globalisation) of salvation that continues to be implemented on the assumption of the inferiority or devilish intentions of the Other and, therefore, continues to justify oppression and exploitation as well as eradication of the difference. Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 206).

While Africa's independence movement was a struggle for self-determination, it reinforced the notion of unity within the artificial framework of the newly established nation-state (Deng, 1993). In such instances it became difficult for African leaders who embraced the function of borders in the struggle for control at independence. Deng (1993: 34) perceives internal conflict in countries such as Liberia, Sudan and Somalia as driven by the 'reality' that, 'the ethnic pieces put together by colonial glue and reinforced by the old world order are now pulling apart and reasserting their autonomy'. Deng (1993: 35) goes as far as proposing that, 'Perhaps the time has come for another Berlin Conference, at least a metaphorical one, with a different venue, participants, and guiding principles'.

Starting from the nineteenth century, European powers increasingly deprived lands in Africa of their native social organisation, in pursuance of vital space for the colonial machinery (Zoppi, 2013). Zoppi (2013) argues that the boundary lines created throughout Africa are a genuine product of colonialism and were used to delimit artificial spaces of dominance. Colonialism brought with it new the challenging of values, the commodification of everyday life and the 'decentrement' of the indigenous ordering of social, political and economic space. Colonialism and the subsequent processes of boundary making that accompanied it are a crucial component of understanding the constitution of the migrant subject because it redefined what it meant to belong. In other words, before their encounter with the colonisers, some argue that Africans attached a particular less-labile customary significance to the borders, better known as frontiers (Zoppi, 2013). For African populations it is thus

difficult to take spatial contiguity as an index of common belonging (Pase, 2011:184 as cited in Zoppi, 2013):

...the Western concept of frontier as such makes not so much sense in Africa. A local, regional or national border, as a source for determining who belongs to a community and who does not, is an alien criterion in respect to the African tradition. Therefore, the source that provides the individual with the consciousness of belonging to a community, which is what frontiers had usually entailed in the tradition of their European inventors, in Africa has to be found somewhere else instead. In pre-colonial Africa, political boundaries were not needed, because the sense of belonging seemed to rely more on the mystic locus of the origin and the genealogy, rather than being bounded to local proximity (Zoppi, 2013: 44).

Land, as both a source of economic and spiritual sustenance, carried symbolic meanings. Zoppi (2013) argues that the 'territorial notion' in the customary Africa lay in the mystic meaning of the land, wherein spirituality was more important than geography. Others have argued that the right to self-determination, like other rights claimed by the colonised, derives from particular conceptions of community and politics that are specific to Western culture:

Dating from the tumultuous era spanning the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, the prevailing characteristic of this culture has been an endless quest for material well-being and a reliance on violence to achieve political ends. The political thinking that resulted from this era has been marked by concerns with rights, property, and political representation that derive from a distinction between the political and the juridical spheres that is nonexistent in many other cultures (Grosvogui, 1996: 4).

Africa's borders are thus a physical manifestation of colonial discourse: a body of knowledge propagated through the ideas and theories of specific Western philosophers, statesmen and legal scholars that 'invented' Africa solely as a geographic space to be exploited (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). For example, the Zimbabwe-South Africa border was established as the South Africa-Southern Rhodesia border by the Pretoria convention between the United Kingdom and the Transvaal on the 3rd of August 1881 (Popihwa, 2018). The convention officially declared that the Limpopo River would demarcate the border. The river had until then served as a natural boundary between Transvaal and Matabeleland stretching through to the confluence of the Luvuvhu River (Popihwa, 2018).

In 1884, there was a follow-up convention between the British High Commission in South Africa and the Governor of Good Hope and delegates from the Transvaal that restated the same Limpopo boundary (Popihwa, 2018). Following the defeat of the Ndebele forces in 1894 in Southern Rhodesia, the British government issued what was called the Matabele Order-in-Council, officially recognising the present day boundaries of Zimbabwe (Musoni, 2016; Popihwa, 2018). In 1957 through successive negotiations, the Secretary for External Affairs of the Union of South Africa and the British High Commissioner for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland agreed that their common boundary was the Limpopo (Popihwa, 2018).

This all meant that for the first time ever, activities across the Limpopo River would be subjected to restrictions and controls by the two colonial governments (Musoni, 2012; Popihwa, 2018). This led to the rise of a migrant labor regime that supplied the human resources needs of farmers, mine owners and other employers in both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia accompanied by the falling significance of previous forms of cross-Limpopo activities like hunting or trade exchanges (Musoni, 2012; Popihwa, 2018). However, Transvaal patrollers and Rhodesian counterparts shared responsibilities of controlling movement across the border (Popihwa, 2018).

Prior to then, Popihwa (2018) argues that the state was practically non-existent. Around the 1970s, the apartheid state strongly regulated movement across the border. Popihwa (2018) argues that the apartheid state decided to lure farmers to move to the area around Musina so as to be a part of the local commando to fight the ANC armed wing *Umkhonto we Sizwe*<sup>3</sup>, which was placing landmines on white border farms, labeling them legitimate military targets. The Rhodesia-South Africa border was also militarised and securitised by planting sisal in between the fences and electrifying the fence west of Musina (Popihwa, 2018). The response of bringing white farmers to the area precisely to enhance the state's capacity was to simultaneously culminate into an agricultural area that would gain prominence in the post-apartheid era (Popihwa, 2018).

Hence, in light of this colonial history, others underscore the important role of borderlanders - their agency as a practice of decolonising these colonial borders. These scholars conceive borderlanders' contemporary practices such as forming cross-border networks and informal economies as typifying agency that defies colonial boundaries which were maintained by postcolonial African states. Borders are indeed also spaces of defiance and resistance (Khosravi, 2010). Massey (1992) argues that

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<sup>3</sup> Translated Spear of the Nation.



space 'is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global' (Massey, 1994: 80). The a-literalist thesis similarly posits that in border spaces, a kind of regional integration is already taking place 'from below', 'on the margins of official institutions through sociocultural solidarities and interstate commercial networks' (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000: 262). Such processes originating in borderlands along with the effects that these have within and beyond borderlands are said to redress the imbalance of state-centred societies (Connor, 2003). Through these processes, Connor (2003) argues that borderlanders become citizens of a political state whose authority they are very much aware of, but also 'free agents' who are not irrevocably caught up in political processes over which they have no control. They become residents of a zone that contains diverse opportunities for them to retain control of their lives and make choices that stand apart from those made for them by officials of the state (Connor, 2003: 102).

Some scholars have levelled criticism against the politicisation of borders in African critical border studies, which portrays Africa's borders as colonial constructs and spaces. These scholars take a step back by arguing that the very assumption that Europeans divided the continent and shared it with no regard to Africa and its citizens creating 'Africa's colonial boundaries' is problematic (See Asiwaju, 1993; Ramutsindela, 2010). Ramutsindela (2010) for example argues that the fragmentation of the continent and the emergence of colonial boundaries was not as straightforward as the common narrative and descriptor of African border suggests and would want us to believe. The scholar argues that there were various ways in which Africans responded to the partition of their continent and European penetration, including struggles for land and other natural resources. In this respect, there is an understanding that Africans were not passive victims of the scramble and the whole colonial project. Some scholarship has even suggested that even though Europeans took the final decision regarding partition, Africans were active participants in colonial boundary making through treaties that were signed between African rulers and Europeans during the scramble (Ramutsindela, 2010). And while there is an argument over the amount of say these African rulers had over treaties that were drafted by Europeans or the grasp they had over what these treaties actually meant, Ramutsindela (2010) argues that they nevertheless tried to use them to their own advantage and to play off European powers where this was possible.

Ramutsindela (2010) draws our attention rather to sub-national borders which were constitutive of the colonial state by demarcating units such as districts that were used for the purposes of control and administration. Whereas national borders gave shape to the colonial state, 'sub-national borders not only determined the character of that

state, but also fundamentally configured its power geometry along race, ethnicity and so on' (Ramutsindela, 2010: 21).

Moreover, Ramutsindela (2010: 18) argues that the very idea of the artificiality of borders presupposes that there are natural borders, an idea that the scholar is quick to dismiss as a 'false assumption'. 'All state borders are artificial in the sense that states are not natural creations' (Ramutsindela, 2010: 18). Therefore, while natural features such as mountains and rivers may be used to mark borders ('natural' borders, aligned with the physical features of the landscape) (Newman, 2006) these features as borders play a role that is ascribed to human action and interest so there is nothing special nor exceptional about the artificiality of African borders (Ramutsindela, 2010). Ramutsindela (2010) concludes that the call for border changes on the basis of their artificiality is not a sufficient reason as the new borders are also bound to be artificial. The only difference according to Ramutsindela (2010) would be in the origin of the artificiality, either emanating from imperial Europe (though the degree of this autonomy is already questionable) or postcolonial Africa.

Ramutsindela (2010) argues that the starting point of almost all discussions of African borders is either the process or outcomes of colonialism, which makes the colonial context an important 'template' in any analysis of borders in Africa. These assumptions are based on the dominant consensus in which African borders were considered merely as consequences of domination (Lefebvre, 2011). Over the past 60 years, African borders have been primarily read as, 'wholly imported products imposed without discussion nor common-sense and in total defiance of pre-existing human structures and geography' (Lefebvre, 2011: 191). The narrative of African borders always begins from a common point of view that Europeans divided the continent and shared it with no regard to Africa and its citizens. This theme became the taken-for-granted norm and a standard discursive convention (Lefebvre, 2011). Ramutsindela (2010) argues that the descriptor of 'Africa's colonial boundaries' and its intellectual and political foundations are thus fundamentally problematic.

## **'Bringing time' into migration research and critical border studies in Africa**

Mbembe and Rendall (2000) argue that the two theses (the 'literal' and 'aliteral' tradition of African borders) are based on a simplistic notion of the role of boundaries and a misunderstanding of the role of colonial borders proper. This misunderstanding,

they add, springs from little understanding of the *imaginaires* and autochthonous practices of space and the modalities of territorial power and jurisdiction. Secondly, they argue, African boundaries and their history are often reduced to frontiers that are a device of international law or a specific spatial marker constituted by the boundary of a state. This creates an instrumental connection between state and territory, which only makes sense at a political level and simply probes if restructuring and reordering spaces of exchange contributes or not to the weakening of the state and its sovereignty (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000).

It ignores that, historically, African political entities are not delimited by boundaries but rather 'by an imbrication of multiple spaces constantly joined, disjoined, and recombined through wars, conquests, and the mobility of goods and persons' (Mbembe and Rendall, 2000: 263). As Mbembe and Rendall (2000) opine, various centers of power might have authority over a single place, which might itself fall under the control of another place that is nearby, distant, or even imaginary. Time is therefore a crucial aspect in understanding Africa's borders. This is not to argue for a dualism between space and time, which scholars like Massey have shown to be a fallacy, but to argue that implicitly 'what must be overcome is the very formulation of space/time in terms of this kind of dichotomy' (Massey, 1994: 75).

Massey (1994: 80) argues that, 'Space is not static, nor time spaceless. Of course spatiality and temporality are different from each other, but neither can be conceptualised as the absence of the other'. The critical border studies debates presented above are mostly dominated by stasis mediated through a preoccupation with borderlanders and the physical and social identitive aspects of their relationship with the border and the postcolonial African state. The focus of spatiality leads to a negation of migration processes, migrant relationships to the border and state and critical notions of temporality.

Human migration has itself been largely understood as a phenomenon intimately associated with space, more precisely as a process unfolding in space (Cwerner, 2001). At the time Cwerner (2001) wrote his paper, hints as to the relationship between migration and time could be found scattered across migration and sociology literatures, with some studies of migration providing explicit analyses of some of the temporal dimensions of migration processes. While this state of affairs has shifted, as there is a growing body of work on time and migration studies, the interactions between time conceptions, perspectives, and the temporal habits of migrants and those of the host society have been a secondary focus of sociological research on migration (Cwerner, 2001). However, as (Robertson, 1995: 42) notes, migration is 'a

process as much concerned with time as it is with space' hence, 'a comprehensive analysis of those temporal dimensions is essential for a better understanding of migration processes' (Cwerner, 2001: 7). To bring time into African migration and critical border studies there is need to adopt temporalised methodological approaches and 'critical border thinking' that recombine time and space.

### **Temporal methodological approaches to studying African migration and borders**

A temporal approach to migration processes can enrich existing studies on borders with in-depth insights about migrant subjectivities (Cojocar, 2016) and contribute to the debate around decolonising Africa's borders. At the centre of all individual and collective action is time as it is central to how we organise our lives. The idea that time is a flux 'and not a sum of discrete units' is linked with the theory that 'human consciousness is a stream and not a conglomeration of separate faculties or ideas' (Kern, 1983: 24). Any moment of consciousness is a synthesis of an ever changing past and future (Kern, 1983).

Most ethnographic studies have favoured primarily a spatial approach on migration; time being deemed a far too abstract concept to be looked empirically into (Cojocar, 2016). While others might disagree and argue that ethnographic research interested in time also employs methods such as life histories, which are by definition temporal, these approaches often reflect a view of temporality, as sequential coherence, that has come in for much questioning by scholars like Massey (1994). Traditional ethnographic methods of interviewing and participant observation have great potential to uncover how time functions in migrants' daily lives, but they often occur at fixed sites, at fixed moments and over fixed durations so they often fail to engage with the complex questions emerging around international migration and time (Robertson, 2014). Therefore, Robertson (2014) argues that traditional ethnographic techniques should be reframed in a temporal approach by incorporating self-documentation and virtual or digital methods (for example diaries, social maps, photo voice). A blending of methods may be the best way to capture temporality (Robertson, 2014).

Recently increasing attention has been devoted to the dynamic and heterogeneous temporalities of migration (Cojocar, 2016). In critical border studies, the first step towards a temporal approach to borders is the acceptance of the definition of a border as not merely a line on the ground but a manifestation of social practice and

discourse (Brambilla, 2007). In this way, more than a physical marker or an artificial colonial insignia, the border comes to be understood as, 'part of collective identities and shared memories, constructing a base for social interaction' (Brambilla, 2007).

The move towards a more temporal notion of borders demonstrates that there is still no real consensus on how to theorise the border (Alvarez, 1995). Balibar does great work at temporalising the border. He goes as far as arguing that borders are 'pluriversal'<sup>4</sup>: 'relocated' and 'un-locatable' in that they exist not purely at the territorial transition from one nation-state to the next, but also 'at the locations and non-locations where decisions are made about who can and cannot move from one nation-state to another' (Mechlinski, 2010: 96). Balibar sees borders as negotiation (s) that occur between the person crossing and the institutions on the other side, who is either working to hinder or facilitate the crossing. Balibar terms borders 'colour bars' situated 'everywhere' and 'nowhere' for the inscription of national identity.

The focus on time and temporality in more recent migration studies represents 'a significant even paradigmatic, shift that sees migration and its antonym (non-migration) not as contradistinctive phenomena but umbilically conjoined' (Baas and Yeoh, 2019: 162). Cojocar (2016) argues that migration is customarily viewed as a spatial act of mobility that is a change of residence on a shorter or longer term. What this understanding misses is that migration is more than a shift in geographical location. Rather, migration is a major biographical event that causes 'disorder in one's timeline', which is tantamount to 'an interruption of normality' that needs to be dealt with 'extraordinary resources' (Cojocar, 2016: 7). The waiting that results from spatiotemporal disruption does not affect everybody in the same way nor does everybody experience it in a similar way (Auyero, 2011). This interruption of normality differs according to different time conceptions related to the proliferation of particular visions of time and social maturation. In these conceptions, with modernity, time has been institutionalised and people measure their lives and activities vis-à-vis abstract units of time such as days, weeks, months, years and decades (Jeffrey, 2010). These timelines are themselves gendered particularly in societies where cultural expectations of early marriage and childbearing exert a different kind of pressure on women from men, which has different social and economic consequences. Waiting, in this sense, is also one of the ways of experiencing the gendered effects of power (Auyero, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> This term describes how borders are being diffused throughout society in various ways. Border control is taking place at different points in society not simply at the territorial limits. Rumford (2006: 158) argues that 'the state is increasingly 'privatising' aspects of border security by, for example, requiring airlines, hotelkeepers and owners of Internet cafés to document movements and uncover those whose presence is undesirable'.

According to Cojocar (2016: 7), relocating for various purposes is a movement both in space and time, 'or dramatically termed, both a geographical dislocation and a biographical disruption'. This period is temporally relevant because it is marked with uncertainty when migrants are prompted to continuously re-imagine their future and adjust their trajectory (Cojocar, 2016). In short, migration results in a shift in not only spatial but also temporal objectives, limitations and possibilities. Those who move are compelled to not only look for a comfortable place to stay, but to reimagine their future within these 'new' spatial parameters.

Upon arrival in a new setting, migrants have to institute new routines and 'create order out of the unknown' by adopting what Cojocar (2016: 15) calls 'temporal strategies'. These are the strategies that migrants adopt to mitigate risk, discover new opportunities and make plans in conditions of great uncertainty or little degree of 'time sovereignty' (Elchardus, 1994). Emerging strategies and patterns of spending time (social activities) are intrinsically temporal. A migrant's new aspirations in a new space impact on how they will spend their time since migration projects are essentially informed by migrants' own aspirations and priorities (Cojocar, 2016). These patterns of spending time are also gendered and spatially determined through the regulation of gendered workspaces such as domestic work.

For example, in South Africa, in 2004, domestic work was the second largest employment sector within which black women were employed in the South African labour market (Fish, 2006; Maqubela, 2016; Zack et al., 2019). Although the sector is dominated by locally born black women, the local domestic work force now includes foreign-born women (Zack et al., 2019). Such migrant domestic workers often work under conditions of no schedule or institutional rigour in the private space of the household and may feel that they have to come up with their own strategies to structure time (Cojocar, 2016). Others may encounter strict and constant surveillance from employers that forces them to structure their time along total institution to the domiciliary space while others may juggle several part-time jobs, resulting in a very packed schedule, which requires rigorous time-management (Cojocar, 2016).

If migrants view themselves as strictly temporary, 'they will save money, focus on working time and maintain ties with home. If they deem their exit as permanent and cherish longer plans for settlement, they will naturally show more interest in integration' (Cojocar, 2016: 8). Within this temporality, another form of temporality emerges. Migration trajectories are constantly subject to changes at any given time

and decision-making is ongoing. Therefore, the boundaries between the categories of migrations are many times fuzzy and fluid (Cojocar, 2016). For example, migrants who intended on moving permanently can swiftly decide to return to the origin country while temporary migrants can live in such a protracted or chronic limbo that they become long-term settlers, even against their will (Cojocar, 2016).

Methodologically, conceptualising time and migration can prove to be an intricate mission (Cojocar, 2016). The first temporal framework that this paper uses in its attempt to develop a temporalised notion of African borders is social time (Lauer, 1981). Lauer (1981) developed a conceptual framework of social time. Social time appears best suited to provide a framework that can engage with multiple temporalities and how migrants experience waiting during spatiotemporal disruption (Uehling, 2002; Bayart, 2007; Bissell, 2007; Hage, 2009; Jeffrey, 2010; Auyero, 2011), when the state makes citizens wait for their entitlements such as housing (see Oldfield and Greyling, 2015), and when migrants have to wait for asylum or deportation (Sutton et al., 2011).

A recent study by Zack et al. (2019) found that for many Zimbabwean domestic workers in Johannesburg, securing shelter was tied to their ability to have an income that would allow them to contribute rentals and household costs, so there was more urgency for them to get work. In some cases, the disruptions or interruptions they experienced on the migration journey had the effect of delaying efforts to seeking work that allows them to be self-sufficient. This also meant that even if domestic labour in the residential suburbs of Johannesburg might not have been their target sector, domestic work became one of few options available to them (Zack et al., 2019). Therefore, spatiotemporal disruption along the migration journey can be seen to have had the net effect of resigning these women to getting any kind of work that could allow them to make an income to support themselves and their dependents.

According to Robertson (2014), time is both a slippery and knotty concept, which is by its nature everywhere and everything yet hard to pin down analytically, precisely because of this pervasiveness. Ethnographers can only hope to capture 'snapshots and slices' of complex migration systems but there is always going to be a conflict or a mismatch between the times of the researcher and the time of the researched/migrants (Cojocar, 2016). Operationalising the concept of social time requires an analytical break down of social time in a way that divides it into facets that are amenable to empirical research – otherwise known as chronotypes (Bender and Wellbery, 1991; Lauer, 1981).

Chronotypes are models or patterns through which time assumes practical or conceptual significance (Bender and Wellbery, 1991). Even though time is a non-linear, complex phenomenon, this classification attempts to bring order into a somewhat chaotic situation by identifying the three broad aspects of social time that are necessary for analysis: temporal patterns, temporal orientations and temporal perspectives (Lauer, 1981). These classifications of 'time in general' have a social origin since societies organise their lives in time and establish rhythms that then come to be uniformly imposed as a framework for all temporal activities (Kern, 1983: 19). This classification complements Robertson's conceptual framework of 'time tracks' (a temporal path of social behaviour) and 'time scale' (scales of social, political and temporal ordering), which can be used to capture the multiplicity of both spatial and temporal relationships (Cojocaru, 2016).

### *Temporal patterns*

There is an implicit temporal pattern in every spatial pattern (Lauer, 1981). Temporal patterns refer to the spatial activities that individuals do in social time during the migration process. It is a temporal aspect that reflects one's migration trajectory by inferring the meanings of certain social activities. It consists of periodicity, tempo, and duration (Lauer, 1981). Periodicity refers to various rhythms of social life and it characterises activities related to the needs and activities of people (Lauer, 1981). This may be so broad as to include their socialities, occupations and hobbies. Meanwhile, tempo refers to rate and may be the frequency of activities in some unit of social time or the rate of change of some phenomenon (Lauer, 1981). This notion speaks to how often individuals do certain kinds of activities (periodicity). For instance, tempo could relate to how often per day/week/month individuals go to work or church (i.e. their use of time). Lastly, perceived duration is an aspect of temporal patterns that speaks to the perceived importance of time, anxiety, boredom that individuals associate with their experiences (Lauer, 1981). In other words, this is how individuals experience time during the migration process and the subjective meanings they attach to certain activities.

Migration disrupts existing routines and patterns in what has been termed (migration) 'asynchronies' (Griffiths et al., 2013). Individuals experience 'temporal disjunctures' if they share the same territorial space but lie in different temporalities (Cojocaru, 2016). Individuals marginalised from mainstream societies (including to some extent newcomers) have been found to experience temporal disharmony and disconnection (Cwerner, 2001; Cojocaru, 2016). Migrants in particular experience asynchronies when they are confronted with an unfamiliar temporality in the host country such as new rhythms, patterns of work and leisure (Cojocaru, 2016). They have to adjust to an



alien pace of life. They may experience a disjuncture between their expectations and reality, which also contributes to an altered experience of time in which the future is uncertain and life is unstable (Cojocar, 2016). Hence, understanding temporal patterns is an important way to unpack the various temporal meanings and social constructions migrants associate with their temporal experiences and the mechanisms by which they come to terms with the potential loss or disruption of the idea of a future in 'liminal' spaces such as borders.

### *Temporal orientations*

Temporal orientations refer to the ordering of the past, present and future by individuals (Lauer, 1981). Individuals and groups may be differentiated according to whether their actions during the migration process are primarily related to the past, present or future in some fashion (Lauer, 1981). For example, Lauer (1981) has shown how temporal orientations can be interpreted from an individual's spending or saving behaviour. If someone has a cash savings for example, it can be inferred that their behaviour or migration trajectory is oriented towards the future. Scholars such as Mazrui have even gone as far as proposing a distinction between societies that are primarily nostalgic, presentist, or anticipatory (Mazrui, 1999).

Mazrui (1999) argues that it is possible to examine differences in balance between social perspectives based on the idealised continuities of history (nostalgia), the compelling pressures of the moment (presentism), and the capacity to plan for the future (anticipation). According to Mazrui (1999) cultures differ significantly in terms of whether they are primarily nostalgic, primarily presentist, or primarily anticipatory – what Mazrui calls 'a theory of triple temporality'. Zimbabwean migrants, for example, experience some nostalgia for their rosier past when the country was affectionately termed 'the breadbasket of Africa'. Drawing on the Zimbabwean comic strip Chikwama, which was published in the Zimbabwean privately owned newspaper The Daily News in the early 2000s, Willems (2011) confirms this position. Recurring themes in Chikwama's dialogues with his friends included the eroding value of salaries as a result of the hyperinflation; the rising commodity prices; the shortage of commodities and resultant long queues; the nostalgia and longing for a pre-crisis Zimbabwe; and the diaspora and growing number of emigrants (Willems, 2011).

Mazrui (1999) proposes that 'cultures of nostalgia' develop distinctive features which set them apart from 'cultures of presentism', which in turn, have a different emphasis from 'cultures of anticipation'. In terms of temporal agency, this kind of reading resonates with Griffiths et al.'s (2013) types of ordering time of migration experience:

'futuring' and 'halting'. Halting in time 'designates the incapacity of individuals to take control of their time because they depend on external factors' (Cojocaru, 2016: 15). Migrants may be so highly dependent on the employer and have such a heightened sense of insecurity that can lead to temporal alienation whereby they experience a feeling that they have limited control over time (Cwerner 2001). According to Cojocaru (2016), this 'temporal limbo' reinforces an orientation to the present, in which migrants live with today and are not willing to invest valuable resources such as time, energy, and money for something, which they consider a short-term project. Mazrui (1999) argues that cultures of presentism are driven by values of the here and now, in contrast to cultures of nostalgia. Presentism's subscription to the modern may manifest itself in a nihilist fashion because, in the process of searching for short-term economic gain, it may be characterised by a reckless disregard for long-term environmental conditions and by an embrace of consumerism (Mazrui, 1999).

Hence, following on Mazrui's analysis of Western societies, it is possible that one can read a certain kind of reckless extravagance and superfluity among migrants as Cojocaru's (2016) halting in practice. By the same token, a sheer lack of the pursuit of luxury and minimalism that Mazrui argues was a common characteristic of most pre-colonial African societies (or an 'underdeveloped greed structure') reflects a futurist orientation. Cojocaru (2016: 15) defines 'futuring' as the 'goal orientated' migrant who, 'views migration as a means to achieve a certain goal, a temporal interval from life sacrificed for the sake of reaching that goal: buy a house, have a lavish wedding, pay for children's education, support family'. These kinds of migrants, Cojocaru (2016) argues, tend to credit the future with more value than the actual present time. Some migrants even incur crippling debts in order to migrate, reflecting that they value the future as they are willing to 'mortgage the present' for an anticipated future (Bastia and McGrath, 2011). Futuring believes that, 'Even if times are tough right now, there will come a time when things will be much better' and reflects that some migrants will see migration as a tactic of creating and investing in a better future (Cojocaru, 2016: 15).

Meanwhile, cultures of nostalgia (a past temporal orientation) exhibit great sensitivity to tradition and custom, and their built forms show strong continuities of style or a persistent conservatism (Mazrui, 1999). Nostalgia is indeed a critical aspect of temporality as it is associated with a temporal orientation that is orientated toward the past. Mazrui's analysis of culture centres more on African tradition and practices such as ancestor-reverence and a special interpretation of the meaning of immortality, burying the dead beneath the homes of their living relatives, or in close proximity to them, accommodating not only the living, but also the living dead. Indeed, this built form can be found in Zimbabwe's post-colonial nation-building

exercise that is well documented for its reverence of national heroes who 'spilled their blood' for the liberation of the country. Such nostalgia is memorialised through pinnacles in time and space as seen through physical monuments that occupy physical space such as the National Heroes Acre and commemorations in time that take up the annual calendar like Heroes Day. It can be found in a 'strong elder tradition' that confers respect and authority on the elderly, and presuming that wisdom comes from the accumulation of experience that the old, frail body of Mugabe symbolised as Zimbabwe's then undisputed iron-fist president. This nostalgia plays itself similarly among Zimbabweans as it commemorates the 80s and early 90s as a period when many enjoyed the fruits of Zimbabwe's struggle for liberation and there was hope for a better future. Contemporary forms of Zimbabwean displacement tend to create situations in which time is perceived as discontinuous and disorganised because of temporal disorientation where aspirations of social mobility do not align with prevailing socio-economic conditions (Cwerner, 2001). Also, nostalgia can be expressed through a will or desire to return (Cwerner, 2001) even when the material circumstances back home do not allow.

These 'triple temporalities', as Mazrui (1999) calls them, are by no means mutually exclusive. For example, a culture of nostalgia may inform an individual to live in a presentist framework as a way of preserving him/her for a better future. Collins has observed that migration is an ongoing process within which past, present and future are folded together in the emergence of migrant lives and subjectivities (Collins, 2018). It is never singular in its temporality; hence the criticisms of life course research for its lack of attention to 'multiple, reverse and uncertain transitions' (Shubin, 2015). Timespaces are 'multiple and heterogeneous' and they cannot be internalised in consciousness because they involve 'various (and uneven) networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field' (Shubin, 2015: 250). Hence, also, scholars such as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) have treated agency as a 'temporally embedded process of social engagement' that is informed by the past and oriented to the future. In this sense, human action is 'informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 963). Cojocar (2016: 13) argues that 'we can speak of actions that are more (or less) engaged with the past, more (or less) directed towards the future, and more (or less) directed towards the future, and more (or less) responsive to the present'. These will appear differently in individuals' experience of migration as these actions are all influenced by determinants such as class, age, and sex, concrete social roles and systems (Cojocar, 2016). Therefore, an understanding of how individuals rank multiple temporalities and what temporality their actions are most acquainted

to unpack the objectives of migrants who find themselves in particular liminal or new spaces such as borders.

### *Temporal perspectives*

It must be noted that the terms 'temporal orientations' and 'temporal perspectives' are used interchangeably by different scholars in the literature. Temporal perspectives, as defined by Lauer, refer to the image of the past, present and future that prevails in a society, a social group or for an individual (Lauer, 1981). Temporal perspectives speak to the images that individuals attach to different temporalities of past, present and future. Belief in an individual's control in life can be examined in relation to temporal orientation and how people value different temporalities (Cojocar, 2016). These differences can lead to 'an enforced present perspective, when one is prone to focus on the present and enjoy the moment or a future oriented attitude when one sacrifices the present time for the sake of a better future' (Cojocar, 2016: 14). An understanding of temporal perspectives unpacks migrants' social constructions or what they make of their experiences during the migration process. Cwerner argues that time perspectives and symbols of migrants affect in many ways their predicament in the host society (Cwerner, 2001). The ways in which migrants perceive various temporalities are a useful lens to understand their temporal meanings.

### **Recombining space and time: 'Critical border thinking' as a temporalised theory for studying Africa's colonial borders in an 'era of containment'**

The aforementioned argument against the artificiality and coloniality of Africa's borders (Ramutsindela, 2010) seems to romanticise the extremely violent nature of colonial conquest and in so doing risks erasing the experiences of the 'colonial subject' and his/her constitution across multiple, overlapping timescales. The writing of Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) arguing for the adoption of 'critical border thinking' takes us back to an acknowledgement of the 'coloniality of power' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) inscribed within Africa's borders. From the Renaissance, Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) argue that the rhetoric of modernity could not have been sustained without its darker and constitutive side, that is, the logic of coloniality (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). Coloniality and modernity are in this sense intrinsically linked (Hendricks, 2018).

Coloniality as a concept 'refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and

knowledge production, well beyond the strict limits of the colonial administration' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243). Coloniality, therefore, 'continues long beyond the formal ending of colonial rule and is part of our everyday experiences' (Hendricks, 2018: 19). Therefore, critical border thinking, as Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) use it, is grounded in the experiences of the colonies and subaltern empires, which were experiences of significant proportions of oppression and subjugation. This kind of thinking subscribes to the notion that borders are geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic. Contrary to frontiers, it provides an understanding of borders as implying, 'the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power' (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 208). Hence:

Borders in this precise sense, are not a natural outcome of a natural or divine historical processes in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (i.e. in the imaginary of Western and Atlantic capitalist empires formed in the past five hundred years). If we limit our observations to the geographic, epistemic and subjective types of borders in the modern/colonial world (from the European Renaissance till today), we will see that they all have been created from the perspective of European imperial/colonial expansion: massive appropriation of land accompanied by the constitution of international law that justified the massive appropriation of land (Grosvogui, 1996; Schmitt, 1952); control of knowledge (the epistemology of the zero point as representation of the real) by disqualifying non-European languages and epistemologies and control of subjectivities (by conversation, civilisation, democratisation) or, in today's language – by the globalisation of culture (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 208).

Critical border thinking provides a symbiotic reading of time and space as constituted by coloniality, which continues to operate through rhetorics of modernity, development and globalisation. We cannot think of the globalised subject (read Europe/USA and the rest of the world) without looking to coloniality. In this temporal sense, borders, both physical/geographical and epistemological, are emblematic of both the coloniality of time and the coloniality of space (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). This view differs from the spatialised understandings of borders presented at the beginning of this paper in that it theorises Africa's borders as a physical space that represents a temporal system of coloniality that continues to justify oppression and exploitation of marginalised and racialised black (migrant) bodies. Irregular migration in this sense is a product of the governance of foreigners' movements into a new space and the temporalities associated with the amount of time they are afforded to sojourn into the host country (Cwerner, 2001; Cojocar, 2016; Robertson, 2019).

Time is indeed a central variable and tool used by immigration law, policy and control (Cwerner, 2001). It is implicated in contemporary forms of migration governance in the sense that:

Foreigners are categorised in terms of the length of legal permitted stay, and of whether they are entitled to temporary or permanent residence. Once allowed into the host country, immigrants are often subjected to forms of control that set up temporal conditions for renewing permits and other legal documentation, and for seeking changes in their immigrant status. Very often, 'illegality' stems directly from overstepping those temporal regulations (Cwerner, 2001: 10).

Critical border thinking as an epistemological tool is in its own right a temporal approach to migration and border studies that is able to locate the contemporary constitution of migrant subjectivity within a framework of overlapping, multiple timescales. Critical border thinking can deconstruct the coloniality of African nation-states and their borders as sustained by political discourses and practices concerning international migration, which have the major aim of constructing categories of 'alienship' that are suffused with a temporal language (Cwerner, 2001).

Giddens argues that 'time and space are recombined to form a genuinely world-historical framework of action and experience' (1990: 21). Temporality lies at the heart of bordering issues, as bordering is a process that invokes continuity and discontinuity in historical time. Immigration poses challenges to the time horizons of democratic polities (Baubock, 1998; Cwerner, 2001). Baubock (1998) makes the argument that nation-states or 'democratic polities' are built around shared pasts and futures, stable values and long-term commitments. Essentially therefore – because of their emphasis on past temporality as a ground for commonality – nation-states are perhaps incapable of being inclusive of the experiences of individual immigrants, their families, networks and institutions. Their existence is constructed around exclusive national histories and expectations, which means that particular immigrant memories are systematically excluded (Cwerner, 2001). Hence, the democratic polity and borders that emerged from coloniality are incapable of building on the memories and expectations of present and past immigrant groups.

Realising this, grasping the 'recombination' of time and space to construct a 'world-historical framework of action and experience' requires one to unpack coloniality's extractive and displacing effects. The notion of 'migration assemblage' (Rubinov, 2014; Collins 2018) is instrumental in such an understanding. It helps us to understand how the actions migrants have been constituted by temporalities of past, present and

future. Migration assemblage refers to the social and material interactions that constitute migration as a process and set of practices (Collins, 2018). It involves various actors and objects as well as individuals' personal history and predilections, which interact to generate migration. Migration assemblage articulates desire for movement as a necessary undertaking, one that takes migrants forward in the world (Collins, 2018). The migration assemblage stretches across territories, time-scales and is articulated through regulatory settings and border spaces (Collins, 2018). Obviously, this kind of undertaking requires the use of a historical analysis and empirical work respectively. It requires social science to grasp how processes on post-modernity and globalisation continue to shape (post) colonial subjectivities. These subjectivities constitute and sustain colonial categories of migration governance meant to keep migrants immobile.

Some African migration scholarship has begun engaging with this interface. Landau (2019) for example shows how Europe has invested heavily in 'new sociologies of knowledge' designed to identify 'real and potential defectors' from 'containment development'. In part, Landau (2019) adds, this exercise enables the savage sorting of 'deserving' refugees and the highly skilled from ordinary, superfluous migrants who can then be legitimately detained and excised. If, as Landau suggests, collaboration among political leaders across the Mediterranean has generated a 'chronotope of containment development' intended to alienate Africans from global time (Landau, 2019), then it is also instructive to suggest that Africa's borders are the initial site of this alienation on its 'waiting migrants'. The redefinition of space-time, which Landau (2019: 170) argues, 'stems from an epistemological reorientation coding all Africans as potentially migratory threats to European and African state sovereignty' 'feasts', as it were, on the very logic of coloniality and the continuities of racialised bodies rendered inferior by imperial classification.

Landau's work is focused on Europe's responses to African migration, working together with some North African proxy states like Libya to stop migration to 'fortress Europe'. A close examination will also illustrate a similar European-style modeling of migration management being adopted by the South African state. Some of the resemblances are striking. By subscribing to globalised norms, ethos and practices of migration governance, which are consistent with Europe's approaches and narratives, it is indeed conceivable that South Africa's 'conceptual realignment' is de facto 'spawning a defensive assemblage of coercive controls, sociologies of knowledge, and education initiatives designed to normalise sedentarism by geographically localising Africans' desires and imaginations' (Landau, 2019: 170).

There are temporal implications to South Africa's migration governance such as duration of visas or (dis) allowed number of working hours and other state-designed policies meant to maintain temporariness of certain categories of migrants. A European-style attempt to contain migrants in Africa's borders through the externalisation of borders is also being imitated by the South African state. For example, the country's Border Management Authority Bill (2016) seeks to externalise borders and set up a Border Management Agency to manage asylum seekers at the country's borders. One of the structures proposed in the Border Management Authority Bill are processing centres, which activists have argued resemble detention centres (Vanyoro, 2019). Consistent with the country's history of political isolation, political discourses in South Africa demonstrate that the country imagines itself somewhat as existing in a different time when compared to other African countries. This imagination is based upon South Africa's advances in 'modernisation' and 'development' represented by its sprawling urban infrastructure, and the affectionate framing of metropolitan spaces like Johannesburg as a 'World-Class African City'. City officials like outgoing Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba constantly pathologise African migrants residing in previously 'white spaces' of Hillbrow and the inner city by suggesting that they are being 'run down' by migrants. Remarks by elected state officials like former President Jacob Zuma to the effect that: 'we can't think like Africans in Africa generally. [Laughter] We are in Johannesburg. This is Johannesburg. It is not some national road in Malawi. [Laughter] No' (Africa Check, 23 October 2013) also attest to this assemblage. These discourses suggest that there is first 'the world', to which South Africa belongs, and the 'rest of the world', which 'Africa' as a temporal construction that represents everything 'backward', 'primitive' and 'underdeveloped' is a part of.

The logic of coloniality that builds on 'colonial sedentarism' (Bakewell, 2008) still operates through migration governance in South Africa, operating through containment development (Landau, 2019). Its borders are increasingly becoming key sites for keeping migrants immobile. Landau (2019) argues that such sedentarisation strategies are not novel, but the containment imperative has now become a dominant trope around which continental relations are being redefined. Through this reconfiguration of coloniality in space-time, the ultimate goal is to turn 'Africa' (as both a geographic and temporal space) into 'a huge Bantustan' (Mbembe, 2019b).

Displaced Zimbabwean migrants who cannot regularise their stay in South Africa experience the 'mighty hand' of the Department of Home Affairs in a fashion that is similar to how they experienced Rhodesia's Native Affairs Department. The department was charged with reconciling Africans to their status as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' in the colonial order (Owen, 2002). Also, by reproducing the 'two-gate' aspirations of the apartheid-colonial era Aliens Controls Act, South Africa's



immigration policies relegate 'low-skilled' migrants to the 'back-gate'. Drawing on Paret's (2014) work, de Gruchy (2015) argues that this response by the state replicates the on-going reality in the United States where immigration regulations, regardless of the form or ideological stance they take, are implemented in an effort to retain an exploitable working class. Migration, as Collins (2018: 967) argues, is clearly coded in these 'norms of contemporary capitalism and the valorisation of economic, social and cultural powers that emanate through this assemblage'.

## **Concluding remarks**

Bringing time into migration and critical border studies in African research involves incorporating temporal methodologies that engage with migrant agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement in the present that is informed by the past and oriented to the future. It also entails an analysis of contemporary hostile state responses to migration and dominant categories of migration governance as emanating through the 'migration assemblage' constituted by colonial sedentarism. In other words, it is an exercise concerned with the politicisation of time just as much as extant scholarship on African borders has sought to politicise space in a bid to decolonise colonial borders. 'Bringing time' is also to accept that a critical understanding of time is a politically enabling exercise. This is not to argue for a dualism between space and time but that the very formulation of space/time in terms of this kind of dichotomy in critical border studies must be overcome.

Going forward, this paper suggests that an analysis of time entails locating migrant subjectivity within space-time. Temporalising the constitution of migrant subjectivity in a context where this has been done mostly by paying attention to spatial dynamics should begin from adopting 'chronotypes' of social time (such as temporal orientations, temporal perspectives, temporal patterns) as units of analysis in order to understand how different temporalities regulate and control the actions of migrants experiencing the violence of temporal spaces such as borders that prompt them to 'wait'. Only when these actions are understood can African scholarship on migration and border begin to effectively trace the relationship between subjectivity and broader spatiotemporal configurations such as policies of containment that are designed to keep migrants 'outside', whether in the physical sense (outside the borders of the state) or symbolically (through language, times allocated to visas and at different points in society not simply at the territorial limits).

This kind of work is already beginning to be conducted by scholars interested in how the European Union's responses to migration normalise sedentarism by

geographically localising Africans' desires and imaginations to great effect. In addition to this important work, a more localised interpretation of this 'chronotope of containment development' that adopts 'critical border thinking' in relation to South-South mobility can provide a nuanced space-time model of subjectivity in Africa's physical, symbolic and temporal borders.

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Migrating out of Poverty  
University of Sussex, Arts B  
Brighton BN1 9QN, United Kingdom  
Email: [migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk)  
Web: [www.migratingoutofpoverty.org](http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org)  
Twitter: [@MigrationRPC](https://twitter.com/MigrationRPC)  
Facebook: [/migratingoutofpoverty](https://www.facebook.com/migratingoutofpoverty)  
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