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ABSTRACT
Located at the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe, the Beitbridge border post aptly demonstrates border citizenship from below. Established as a result of the London Convention of 1884, the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe finds expression at the Beitbridge border post. However, Venda-speaking people on both sides of the border post who were “separated” when the border was drawn have always engaged in dynamic and agentive ways that defy the existence of the border. This interaction pre-dated and survived the colonial and apartheid years in the then Southern Rhodesia and South African Republic, respectively. After both countries attained independence, they have remained blind to the reality of border citizens. Consequently, the fact that Venda-speaking people have—against strict and successive regulatory regimes from colonial to postcolonial times—“defied” the border and continue to do so, establishes a case of their being de facto border citizens. This not only challenges the inflexible territoriality of citizenship at both the South African and Zimbabwean borders, but also presents a compelling case for the recognition of border citizens and the granting of easy and controlled movement based on best practices in other parts of the world.

Introduction

Neither the South African nor the Zimbabwean governments recognize the existence of border citizens at Beitbridge. The border was established by the Pretoria Convention of 1881 and later replaced by the London Convention of 1884, which drew and set the boundaries of the South African Republic—the Transvaal Republic (Olson and Shadle 1991, 367). The South African Republic became part of the Union of South Africa in 1910, while Beitbridge was part of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe, after independence in 1980). The Beitbridge border post is situated where the South African N1 highway and the Zimbabwean A6 highway are joined by the Alfred Beit Road Bridge, which was constructed in 1929.1 It has theoretically served the purpose of defining where the territorial extents of the two countries start and end and where citizens of both countries belong. This paper argues that this concept of citizenship ignores the true dynamics; namely, the interactions across the border points to the existence of de facto border citizens who consider themselves to be both South African and Zimbabwean.
Such border citizens argue that their existence, as dynamic and agentive as it is, has been necessitated by the fact that both the South African and Zimbabwean governments have been blind to the fact that before the colonization process, people across the Limpopo River lived as one community separated by a simple river and bound by the same Venda language and culture. Today, the town of Mussina (Messina) and the Vhembe district of South Africa and the rural areas and town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe are largely populated by the same cultural and linguistic populations. Since both South Africa and Zimbabwe have adopted a strict adherence to a post-colonial border, the Venda-speaking people of the town of Messina and the Vhembe district in South Africa and also the town and rural areas of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe have challenged this bordering and separation by adopting double identities—they refuse to recognize what they consider an imposed border, as their lives straddle the border in a way that no law or security forces can stop or contain.

After this introduction is a discussion of the theoretical framework and a description of data collection and analysis procedures. The term “border citizen” is then defined. This is followed by a discussion of strategies by the Venda-speaking people which qualify them—or may be considered as qualifying them—for border citizenship. On the basis of such findings, recommendations and the conclusion are made.

**Context: Borders, Migration and Immigration Debates**

This study is informed by the literature on borderlands or border studies. Newman (2006) conceive that borderlands are made up of social processes rather than places which divide countries. Novack (2011, 742) posits that borders are ambiguous in terms of “being both static markers of sovereign jurisdictions and socially produced and reproduced institutions.” For some authors, borderlands demonstrate the extent of sovereignty (Berg and Van Houtum 2003; Johnson et al. 2011) and for some, borders “remain spaces of securitization” (Cons and Sanyal 2013, 9) or those “spaces that are in constant historical flux” (O’Dowd 2010, cited in Cons and Sanyal 2013, 9). This paper is located at the center of the study of borders and borderlands in terms of unraveling the unique social, economic and even political processes which take place at the South African–Zimbabwean border at Beitbridge, by focusing specifically and mainly at the migration of Venda-speaking people from Beitbridge (Zimbabwe) into Messina (South Africa). This zone demonstrates a population which was split during the colonization process, but since independence, the respective countries have been oblivious to the fact that the colonial and post-colonial border divided people who for centuries were only separated by a river.

The geographical feature that forms the border of about 200 km between South Africa and Zimbabwe is the Limpopo River and;

on the Zimbabwean side, the principal deterrent against human movement is the river’s edge. In contrast, on the South African side, security is tight. Approximately one kilometre from the river, there is a three-line barbed-wire fence with the potential to be charged with electric power. The border line is patrolled by South African authorities including the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), and at least one private security agency. There are two official border posts along the frontier with Zimbabwe, but the Beitbridge post, located on the N1 highway, is currently the only operational facility. (Araia 2009, 9)
The Limpopo River also forms a border between South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique. In an attempt to enforce the border and further break up and separate the Venda people, the apartheid government opened up farmland near the South African border. Although movement of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa was restricted during the apartheid years, it did take place clandestinely as people from north of Limpopo River and other parts of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe in 1980) looked for employment on the farms near the Limpopo river and mines further into South Africa (Jevees 1985). This restrictionist approach continued after 1994 when South Africa became a democracy. There was the adoption of “Fortress South Africa,” which entailed the symbolic tightening of borders against foreigners, especially those from African countries (Mamdani 1996; Peberdy 1998; Peberdy and Crush 1998; Sinclair 1998, 1999; Peberdy and Majodina 2000; Adepoju 2003).

Several scholars (Neocosmos 2006, 2008; Nyamnjoh 2006, 2007, 2010; Campell 2010; Crush and Frayne 2010; Geschiere 2010; Kriger 2010; Landau 2010; McGregor 2010; Muzondidya 2010) have commented on how post-apartheid South Africa has mostly targeted African immigrants. As African immigrants are the archetypical illegal aliens, this has led to them being referred to as “makwerekwere” (Laher 2010); this term “depicts the phonetic sound of foreign African languages and is used in an attempt to ridicule” (Laher 2010, 15). It also implies primitive people who are:

- attempting to graduate from naked savagery into the realm of citizenship, are usually believed to be the darkest of the dark-skinned and to be less enlightened … are also thought to come from distant locations in the remotest corners of the “Heart of Darkness” north of Limpopo (Nyamnjoh 2006, 39).

Thus, makwerekwere is also “a derogatory term African foreigners are referred by” Neo-cosmos (2006, 113) or is used to refer to African immigrants “who do not speak the language of the people” (Mawadza and Crush 2010, 366).

In this vein, many South Africans believe that African immigrants “take away jobs from South Africans” (Laher 2010, 7). African immigrants are:

- uneducated and desperate people who are fleeing poverty and chaos in their home country to find work, peace and shelter in the “land of milk and honey” by crawling under the fences or paying off corrupt border officials and are entering by the millions. (McDonald 2000, 2)

They are “hostile, unwelcome, a threat to the culture, way of life and economic life of the citizen” (Mawadza and Crush 2010, 366).

This perception of African immigrants results in them being called the black tide from the north (McDonald, Mashike, and Golden 1999), “barbarians at the gate” (McDonald 2000, 2) and “parasites … stealing jobs of South Africans” (Maharaj 2010, 367). This brief problematization of African immigration and attempts to keep them out of South Africa is intended to illustrate the context of bordering; namely, keeping African immigrants out of South Africa. This has involved excluding from South Africa people who have always had inseparable ties with the country along the South African–Zimbabwe border at Beitbridge, as demonstrated by the town of Beitbridge and surrounding rural areas on the Zimbabwean side and the town of Messina and Vhembe district in South Africa.

The testimonies of the South African and Zimbabwean Venda-speaking people who were interviewed at Beitbridge illustrate that, in many ways, the Beitbridge border has
strengthened what happened during the colonial and apartheid years—separating people who since time immemorial have been one community defined by a similar language and culture, a practice which is still evident today. Although the frequent and major flow of movement is from Zimbabwe to South Africa—due to the economic crisis that has affected the former recently and because the latter has been more concerned about flushing out a tide of illegal immigrants—there have been South Africa citizens traveling to the Zimbabwean side of the border for community and family reasons.

Therefore, in a clear demonstration of the existence of border citizens at the Beitbridge border, the Venda speaking people involved have, in agentive and dynamic ways, adopted double citizenships and identities in order to beat the territoriality of sovereignty which specifies that South Africans belong south of the border and Zimbabweans north of the border. There is a lack of attention to the reality that there may be overlaps in terms of where citizens of both countries belong. In the case of Beitbridge, the failure to recognize border citizens—and defining sovereignty in a mechanical top-down approach—results in the people in this zone defining their citizenship in ways which, although illegal, accommodate their unique cultural, linguistic and historical circumstances. By doing this, these unrecognized border citizens are claiming their border citizenship by fragmenting “the apparatus of power from below” (Cons and Sanyal 2013, 8).

This paper’s central contribution to the study of borders and borderlands is therefore in its analysis of the nature and extent of the interaction between the people on the borderland and the border. Although in some parts of Africa, colonial and post-colonial borders have caused conflict and secessionist movements (Bach 1997), the case of Beitbridge seems to suggest a people who have realized that even though they cannot change or redraw the post-colonial border, they have learnt to disregard it, demonstrating that “boundary lines never proved much of a physical obstacle” (Bach 1997, 103). Their frequent interaction across the border seems to suggest that they do not “cross” the border, but that the border has “crossed” them (Lamb 2014, 3). Hence, the numerous interactions with Venda people on either side of the border could be perceived as unmaking, unmarking and remaking and remarking the border to a status of pre-colonial times.

**The In-depth Interviews**

This paper is based on interviews with Venda-speaking people who crossed the Beitbridge border between January and November 2013. I interviewed people, young and old, female and male. The main focus of the conversations was how the Venda-speaking people on both the South African and Zimbabwean sides of the border conceived the border and what their frequent interactions across the border meant to them. I focused on issues and questions of citizenship and belonging within the fixed border of Beitbridge. In particular, the focus was on how the respondents have reacted to the border with regard to colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid years. I especially deployed interviews because I wanted to establish the consciousness of the Venda-speaking people with regard to the Beitbridge border and thus enable them to grasp the experiential reality (Titchen and Hobson 2005; Entrekin and Tepple 2006) of the border interactions from the perspectives of those involved. This was considered important because:
meaning is not something to be found in objects, but instead must be understood in relation to subjects. Thus, place, region and landscape are not simply spatial categories for organizing objects and events in the world, but are rather processes in the on-going dynamic of humans making the earth their home and creating worlds out of nature. (Tuan 1991, cited in Entrekin and Tepple 2006, 31)

It is for this reason that meaning, imagination, and human agency are so closely associated with humanistic geography. (Entrekin and Tepple 2006, 31)

In this case, the subjective experiences and perceptions of the Venda-speaking people shed light on how they dealt with what they considered an imposed limitation on their existential circumstances. The deployment of interviews is relevant because knowledge is socially constructed (Stake 2000, 442) and from these interviews, this paper will be able to establish a case for border citizens. As Smith (1994, 292) observes, “facts” should speak for themselves; this suggests that the interviews must be able to tell a story because “naturalistic, ethnographic case materials to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental process of awareness and understanding” (Stake 1994, 240).

**Regarding Border Citizenship from Below**

As a prelude to a discussion about the practices of border citizenship at Beitbridge, it is germane to this paper to proffer a definition of border citizens—what Lamb (2014) regards as border residents—and how this is conceptualized in this analysis. By reference to the border population of south central Arizona—especially the Yaquis, Tohono O’odham, and ethnic Mexicans—Meeks (2007) conceives border citizens as people on the borderlands who have, among others, suffered stringent immigration controls, limiting their claims to citizenship. This has placed such people on the peripheries of the US nation state. The way in which they have challenged their limits on citizenship makes them: border citizens, both because of restrictions imposed on them and because they were redefining what it meant to belong to the U.S. nation-state from its borderlands. In the process, they helped to redefine what it meant to be Mexican, Indian, and Anglo. (Meeks 2007, 11–12)

The interactions between these groups of people have influenced the way that they have come to identify themselves as border citizens. For instance:

Yaquis came to inhabit a liminal cultural and political space between two nations and between their status as Mexican and Indian. They lived and worked alongside ethnic Mexicans, shared their precarious legal status, and often spoke Spanish, while they shared close cultural and economic connections to indigenous groups in the region and were viewed as American Indians by Anglo-Americans. Over decades these circumstances spawned tensions among the Yaquis themselves, especially between those who hoped to gain official legal status as American Indians and those who felt such a status would mean a loss of cultural independence and self-determination. Many of the latter built upon their interethnic ties and transnational culture to challenge existing ethnic boundaries and the cultural definitions of U.S. citizenship. (Meeks 2007, 11–12)

The defining feature of border citizenship is that it is a status which is relational and is a product of the interaction between the people and the state(s) concerned, hence:

border citizen is therefore a category co-produced between states and citizens, where people, who are often perceived as marginal, enact alternative forms of citizenship, using its
mechanisms to make strategic claims on both of the states whose overlapping sovereignty constitutes the non-post-colonial third space … . (Shneiderman 2013, 34–35)

Arising from this conceptualization of border citizens, I also wish to advance the argument that the Venda-speaking people on the South African–Zimbabwean border at Beitbridge constitute border citizens, based on their legal or illegal interactions with the institutional regulatory regimes of these two states which exist at the Beitbridge border post. What makes them border citizens is that they refuse to be citizens at the margins of two states and resist being a colonial creation—two separate and unrelated communities belonging to two different nation states. The existence of a border which separates a community which regards itself as one lays a claim for their being border citizens. They silently but effectively contest this colonial and post-colonial landscape at the border in question. This is why questions about how they define their existence and daily interactions in relationship to the border and its controls are apposite to this discussion and are considered next. The interviews yielded rich insights which seem to suggest the existence of border citizens at the Beitbridge border. A 65-year-old man from the Zimbabwean side of Beitbridge declared that:

… the story I am telling you now is traced from my grandfathers; that when white people came, they separated people who have always lived as one community separated by a simple river across which we did not need a bridge. When white people arrived and took over our land, all of a sudden they declared that those north of the Limpopo river belonged to another country, just like those south of the same river. All of a sudden we needed permission to visit our friends and family across the river and during the colonial and apartheid years it became a criminal offence, to cross to the South African side, we were now illegal immigrants who were not wanted. That did not stop us from crossing the river to the South African side through what was now illegal means. The so called illegal was a construction of the white people who constructed the border, because we had always crossed the river without needing any permission. I have family, community and friends on the other side of the border and nothing can ever erase that. After majority rule in 1994, there was no difference, the controls at the border were even more tightened and yet again, just like the colonial and apartheid years, the idea that people who have always been family and community were turned strangers, belonging to different countries was vigorously highlighted. At the Beitbridge border, it was now black people and not white people who were harassing and telling us that we were Zimbabwean and needed a visa to travel to Messina and the surrounding rural areas, where we have friends and family, a community. The truth is that I am neither a South African nor Zimbabwean; I am both, a human being on this part of the earth.4

This account demonstrates the crisis of citizenship and belonging, which although not highlighted in popular press and political discourse, exists at the South African–Zimbabwean border at Beitbridge. Colonial rule, apartheid and, most recently, the democratic government in South Africa—just like their Zimbabwean counterparts—have been blind to the existence of border citizens at the Beitbridge border. These are people who have been a community and have shared familial and community ties since time immemorial. These ties were not broken due to colonial rule, apartheid and subsequent postcolonial bordering. The sentiments from this man suggest that the Beitbridge border is both a present and absent reality. It exists in the form of the Limpopo River and the fences that accompany and emphasize its material existence—its presence. That it was imposed and
the people have always disregarded it suggests that in the minds of these people the border does not exist—it is absent. The internal conflict suggested by this respondent communicates the idea that modern borders give birth to border citizens who, in the words of Shneiderman (2013, 27), articulate “an alternative mode of belonging.” This respondent has chosen to relate to and interact with the Beitbridge border in a “defiant” way in the sense that if the border broke away communities, they would not allow it to limit any continued interactions with these communities. This relational reproduction of practices as suggested by this respondent reflects border citizenship. The respondent will not abandon his roots in either Beitbridge in Zimbabwe or South Africa. He will continue to travel to the South African side of the border and back to Zimbabwe, legally or illegally, as was done in pre-colonial times. Based on the perspectives of this respondent, the Beitbridge border cannot be dismissed as non-existent; at the same time, its existence is perceived as something which will not be allowed to place limitations on age-old family and community interactions.

In addition, the insight from this respondent shows that members of the community do not consider themselves to be illegal immigrants when they go to South Africa—with or without documents. They believe that the illegality was constructed by the imposition of the border. Even if the immigration regime was tightened both before and after 1994, this tightening was of “no consequence,” because as far as these people are concerned, it does not erase the bond between the Venda people on both sides of the border. They are border citizens who were “crossed” by the border (Lamb 2014) and hence by challenging its existence, they are directly or indirectly asserting their belonging on the border.

To demonstrate the existence of these ties, one respondent testified that:

Chief Makhados community was torn apart by the imposition of the Limpopo River as a border. Hence, the name Makhado is used on both sides of the border. On the South African side of the border, there is a town named Makhado, just as there is a community on the Zimbabwean side by the same name. In addition, many Venda-speaking people on the Zimbabwean side of the border still pay homage to the traditional Venda king Mphephu, who is on the South African side of the border. The Venda-speaking people on both sides of the border also believe in the Ngoma Lungundu legend and Nzhelele as their cultural shrine. The Ngoma Lungundu was a giant Venda magical drum which needed many people to carry and beat. It was used for among other things war and it is believed that it gave the Venda-speaking people some magical powers to defeat their enemies. This illustrates the similar cultural and linguistic and other ties.

In the eyes of both the South African and Zimbabwean governments, border citizens do not exist. There are either Zimbabwean citizens to the north of the border or South African citizens to the south. The Venda speaking people do not agree. Therefore, in the words of Middleton (2013, 16), borders and states can be theorized “as markers and makers of difference.” Sometimes, they mark and make these differences incorrectly by marking and making differences where there should be none. The practices by the Venda on both the South African and Zimbabwean sides of the Beitbridge border illustrate the marking and making of borders where historically people who have always been a community are separated by a fence or a wall which makes them different, while they are not and never have been different.
On the State, Nation, Sovereignty and the Border: The Beitbridge Interface

When South Africa attained majority rule in 1994, the Venda-speaking people on the Zimbabwean side of the Beitbridge border thought that there would be a relaxation of the stringent controls at the border. As this was not the case and since these Venda-speaking people also had South African roots, they managed to legally apply for and obtain South African identity cards and passports. Consequently, whenever they want to travel to South Africa, they simply produce South African identity particulars and when they cross the border to the South African side, they regard themselves as authentic South African citizens. When they cross the border and travel back to Zimbabwe, they again become complete and authentic Zimbabwean citizens. This seems to illustrate a strategic claim to dual citizenship by the Venda-speaking people on both the South African and the Zimbabwean sides of the border. By having both South African and Zimbabwean documents, these people are making a statement that they are both Zimbabwean and South African citizens who reside on the border. The fact that they possess documentation for both countries demonstrates that these people are contesting the border from below. They are defining themselves in relation to their Venda-speaking communities on both the South African and Zimbabwean sides and in relation to the apparatus of state control which is manifest at immigration controls and regulations of both countries.

During the interviews, I established that such people had houses in Beitbridge town and rural homes as far as 70–80 kilometers or more into Zimbabwe along the 335-kilometre Beitbridge–Bulawayo highway. In South Africa, they have families and relatives in the border town of Messina and also in the rural areas of the Vhembe district in South Africa. A 40-year-old man on the Zimbabwean side of Beitbridge declared that:

I have a homestead here in Zimbabwe and I also have the Zimbabwean particulars, just as I have a South African identity document which I rightfully obtained because my parents have always had ties and family on the South African side of the Beitbridge border. So I use these two sets of documents according to the demands of the circumstances.

This included securing employment, housing and all civil and other benefits. For example, while in South Africa, he sought employment just like any ordinary South African citizen would do and, while in South Africa, also demanded all the rights to which any South African citizen was entitled, such as health care and child and social grants. In addition, when he crossed the border into Zimbabwe, he regarded himself a Zimbabwean citizen and expected to be treated like any other Zimbabwean. This seems to illustrate the idea of border citizenship; people who occur at the border and because they are not recognized by both states, they claim the citizenship of both.

When the economic situation in Zimbabwe reached an all-time low in 2007–2008, the South African–Zimbabweans moved across the border to Messina and worked there just like any South African citizen would do. They frequently traveled back to Zimbabwe and also remitted goods and money back to their homes in Beitbridge. After the economic problems began to subside in about 2009, they moved back to Beitbridge and today continue to travel intermittently to visit family. The Venda-speaking people on the South African side of the border also added useful insights as captured in this conversation:

the Immigration Officials always accused me of being a fake South African because I always have to stamp my passport to visit family in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean authorities do not stress about how many times I stamp my passport. This shows that the South
African government is concerned more about illegal immigrants than catering for the needs of people at a place like Beitbridge. I have had to walk across the border without stamping my passport so that I avoid being questioned by South African Immigration officials whether I am a true or fake South African. Due to the need to visit my family on the Zimbabwean side of the border, with whom I have age-old ties, I have had to defy the border control. I do not have Zimbabwean documents and will not attempt to get some, but will always travel to Zimbabwe as many times as I want. In a way, I have a split citizenship between South Africa and Zimbabwe, because I will never give up family and community in Zimbabwe, I belong to them and they belong to me; this border means nothing if it fails to consider our historical circumstances. If they question me at the border about my South Africaness, I just stop presenting and stamping my passport. The fact is that the border cannot stop family and other relations that are centuries old. Although I understand that there are illegal immigrants and criminals that need to be screened before they enter into a country, there needs to be special recognition of people at a border like this who have always had relations, way before borders were ever there. Whether or not the Immigration officials allow me, I will always travel as I always do to Zimbabwean side of the border.10

On the basis of these conversations, it appears that both South Africans and Zimbabweans frequently cross the border. Due to the strict immigration controls on the South African border, the interviewees in this study have to devise agentive and innovative ways to beat the border and continue their familial, community, and even economic and work-related movements. In this context, “agentive” involves practices which enable the Venda speaking people to continue to exercise their interactions across the border. For example, some of these people cross the border without presenting their passports, because they do not want to be questioned by Immigration Officials as to why they cross the border several times in a year. Others have two sets of documents.11 For instance, Venda-speaking persons from South Africa will use South African documents to cross to Zimbabwe and once they have crossed the South African and Zimbabwean border controls, they produce Zimbabwean documents. When they cross the border, they suddenly “become” Zimbabwean with full sets of identification documents.12

Some Venda-speaking people cross the border in the morning to buy commodities in Messina and travel back to the Zimbabwean side of the border in the evening. Some have become used to the Immigration officials and do not have to present their travel documents. They have to buy the Immigration officials a “drink.”14 For such people traveling to Messina and back to Beitbridge on the Zimbabwean side, this amounts to a shopping trip in the “same community.” Furthermore, some of these Venda-speaking people from the Zimbabwean side of the border have crossed without presenting their documents. They claimed that they had struck a “good working relationship” with Immigration officials, some of whom spoke mostly Venda. Over and above those who bought “drinks,” these Venda-speaking people stated that this allowed them to cross to the South African side of the border. This group included those who sold consumable goods and vegetables at a taxi rank next to the South African side of the border a few meters from the last immigration check point.

These people usually stayed on the South African side of the border for a few days or even months before traveling back to Zimbabwe without any documents.15 The case study of the Venda-speaking people on the Beitbridge border between South Africa and Zimbabwe aptly demonstrates the articulation and material existence of border citizenship from below. The South African government has refused to recognize that the border
could have split families and communities along the river by adopting a “Fortress South Africa” approach and maintaining that those who are north of the Limpopo River are not South African—this has forced people to foster double identities. By carrying South African identity documents and passports, these border citizens are refusing to be South African citizens only, but are making a statement that they exist on the border; this makes them neither strictly South African or Zimbabwean, but border citizens.

Furthermore, even if the Zimbabwean government does not allow dual citizenship (Citizenship of Zimbabwe Act No. 23 of 1984 as amended by Act No. 7 of 1990), the reality is that the people at the border have deliberately chosen to be both South African and Zimbabwean citizens. While Zimbabwean law expressly illegalizes this, the border citizens believe that by virtue of their geographical, cultural, linguistic, and historical peculiarities, the law should not be blind to this reality. If the law and the states are insensitive to this fact, the people involved would use any means at their disposal—even if illegal—to define citizenship which would accommodate their unique existential circumstances; this constitutes fragmenting “the apparatus of power from below” (Cons and Sanyal 2013, 8).

However, it is important to understand that among these Venda-speaking people there may be people who adopt double identities as an economic insurance that, should the political and economic situation fail in Zimbabwe, they would go to South Africa. This may well be a survival circular migration strategy, but what is certain is that there are Venda people where this movement is part of their lives, as there are both family and community ties across the river. This interaction has survived colonial, apartheid and post-colonial years. They exist as border citizens and if the changing fortunes of the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe should force them to move to Messina and the Vhembe district in South Africa, this should be seen as occurrences and exigencies which are superimposed on a long-existing pattern of interaction. After all, in the 1980s, when the Zimbabwean economy was sound and healthy and South Africa was under the firm grip of the apartheid government, the movement and interaction did not stop. As clandestine and “illegal” as it was, it still occurred, just as it did during the pre-colonial and colonial years. Therefore, what is certain is that this interaction is not a recent phenomenon being carried out by pragmatic circular immigrants, but while such immigrants exist in this pattern, there are still long-standing, unrecognized border citizens at Beitbridge.

In addition, while there may be some Zimbabwean and/or South African citizens who are not Venda but possess double identities, they cannot be recognized as border citizens. These are people who have two sets of documents as a result of ties that have nothing to do with being Venda or having ties with the Venda people at the Beitbridge border. Some may be ordinary Zimbabweans who have learnt to speak Venda and have no idea of historical, linguistic, and other ties between Venda-speaking people on either side of the border. In addition, others may be desperate Zimbabweans seeking a better livelihood in South Africa by illegally crossing the border without documents and fraudulently obtaining South African documents. This scenario complicates the status of border citizenship at the Beitbridge border and may make any efforts at recognizing border citizens a daunting task. However, the interviews do suggest that there are authentic Venda-speaking people on either side of the border. This lack of recognition of who is or who is not a border citizen in this area could provide an opportunity for any other person to claim border citizenship. This should not be allowed to obscure and or undermine the claim by people who are genuinely Venda and suffer crisis of citizenship as a result of the border’s existence.
Conclusion

When the South African government strengthens its borders—as illustrated by the Beitbridge border post case study—they are shutting out border citizens who, in response, engage in agentive ways to make borders flexible and accommodative to the disruptions and splits occasioned by colonial, apartheid and post-colonial bordering. By adopting double identities, the Venda-speaking people of Beitbridge are de facto border citizens. Even if the Zimbabwean government refuses to recognize border citizens, the reality is that they exist. Clearly, therefore, citizenship and sovereignty as defined by the states has limits if it does not recognize social processes which unfold at border zones. If states shut their eyes and remain fixed on enforcing and strengthening post-colonial borders, they prove that the territoriality and fixity of sovereignty only exists in a fictional status.

Border citizens who are denied rightful recognition will engage in dynamic and agentive ways to defy the imposed limits of citizenship and sovereignty. Such border citizens define citizenship and sovereignty in their own terms, which cater for and fulfill their unique, cultural, linguistic, and historical circumstances. This case study shows that nothing, not even immigration laws, can change this. Thus, border citizens, such as those in Beitbridge, place a responsibility on African countries to take them seriously. If this does not succeed, it will mean that citizenship and sovereignty which fails to take care of all citizens—including border citizens—is a negative endeavor, because it cannot accommodate the peculiarities of peoples who make states and nations.

In fact, the case study of Beitbridge suggests that where border citizens are not properly recognized, there is room for illegal practices such as double identities by people who may not be border citizens—or even Venda for that matter. The South African and Zimbabwean governments may learn from progressive examples in Asia, where border citizens are recognized; for example the Nepal–Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of China where, since 2002, border citizens have been provided with border cards that permit them to cross the Nepal–TAR areas for up to 30 kilometres without passports (Shneiderman 2013, 25). This is relevant, because as this paper illustrates, there are limits to the conception and definition of the interiority and exteriority of the South African and Zimbabwean citizenship and sovereignty at the Beitbridge border.

Notes

3. Interview Number 20, in Messina, South Africa, October 2013.
5. Interviewee Number 22, Messina, South Africa, October 2013.
6. Interviewee Number 2, at the Beitbridge border, April 2013.
8. Interviewee Number 3, at the Beitbridge border, Zimbabwe, April 2013.
9. Interviewee Number 6, at the Beitbridge border, Zimbabwe, April 2013.
10. Interviewee Number 10, at Messina, South Africa, July 2013.
11. Interviewee Number 4, Beitbridge town, Zimbabwe, September 2013.
12. Interviewee Number 8, Beitbridge town, Zimbabwe, September 2013.
15. Interviewee Number 21, at the South African side of the Beitbridge border post, October 2013.

References

Citizenship of Zimbabwe Act (Act No. 23 of 1984 as amended by Act No. 7 of 1990) (Chap. 4:01).


