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Zimbabwean migrants considering return

This paper investigates how Zimbabwean migrants in the UK consider return to Zimbabwe.

Elin Berstad Mortensen



Zimbabwean migrants considering return

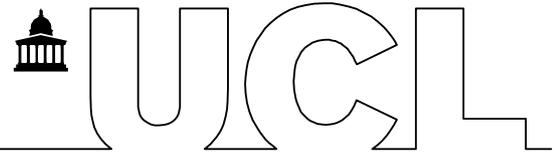
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Supervised by: JoAnn McGregor

UCL DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY



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M.Sc. in Global Migration

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how Zimbabwean migrants in the UK consider return to Zimbabwe. It is based on interviews with 18 Zimbabwean migrants chosen to illustrate the diversity of the Zimbabwean diaspora. When the respondents consider return, the uncertainty of return emerges as the main consideration. Uncertainty is explored and revealed to be uncertainty in Zimbabwe's political and economic situation, uncertainty that migrants experience in the UK such as deskilling and lack of legal status and the uncertainty of not knowing what return will be like. In addition, migrants' considerations are affected by collective influences. There are diasporic discourses and expectations from Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe about whether and how to return. Return considerations are both personal and follow communal stances. The Zimbabwean migrants relate to the return question in different ways, but there is a general trend of ambivalence in their considerations. Especially, ambivalence can emerge from a conflicting dilemma between an intention to return and lack of ability to return. Exploring the ability to return reveals a legal status divide in return considerations.

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¹ Tariro

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Caught between leaving and staying, the pathos of [my respondents’] situation is a sobering reminder that, despite the celebratory tones attached to the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller 1993), migration is after all, a human flow, filled with all the complexities of choice and decision-making, sacrifice and commitment, thoughts and emotions.”(Teo 2011: 813)

This paper engages with Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, particularly their considerations of return. The Zimbabwean community outside the borders of Zimbabwe constitutes one of the new African diasporas (Koser 2003). A diaspora is a group of people residing in a foreign place, being scattered but holding a communal identity in sharing a persisting memory of and attachment to the country of origin, often called their homeland (Safran 1991). A few scholars have explored the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK in depth before me (McGregor and Primorac 2010, Pasura 2008). It is described as a fractured and politicised diaspora. As the quote from Teo above suggests, return is a complex and emotional topic. Considering return is filled with uncertainties in itself and it may further be complicated by the nature of the diaspora that I have engaged with. It is a difficult terrain I approach in this paper, but the more interesting and in need of exploration.

When approaching return, I adopt a wide definition in terms of time, space and legality (Oxfeld and Long 2004). Considering time, traditionally return is understood as a permanent move back to the country of origin (King 2000). However, one has come to understand that return movements are often not as clear-cut as one permanent movement. A visit can lead to more permanent return and return intended to be permanent can lead to re-emigration. The return definition in this paper therefore incorporates movements on the scale from visits to permanent return, and more circular movements (Conway *et al.* 1990, Sinatti 2011). Covering this spectrum with a wide definition is also truer to the qualitative method used in my research, where it has been the intention to understand how Zimbabwean migrants themselves define the concept. A wide understanding is also given to the aspect of space; return can be to the actual place of origin, to another place in the country of origin or it can be to a third country. In the case of Zimbabwe, return could for example be to another country in the Southern African region. Keeping a wide definition in terms of legality is important as well; on the scale from voluntary to forced migration there are many nuances. Return is often a semi-voluntary movement in the sense that external powers and expectations influence the migrant to return. These kind of collective influences impacting on return are very relevant in the Zimbabwean diaspora.

This paper is led by three research questions. First, how is return considered by Zimbabwean migrants in the UK? Second, which collective discourses and expectations circulate about return in the Zimbabwean community and how are they shaped? And finally, how do individuals take these collective influences into their own return considerations and does return become morally constructed? Because I focus on considerations, it is important to say that imagining return, although it could take place without actual return movement, is important in itself. It is an important part of the migration experience, a very meaningful and emotional process framing relationships to the country of origin, country of settlement and migrant identity (Boccagni 2011, Oxfeld and Long 2004). It can even be said to shape a diaspora's identity (Safran 1991).

The paper is structured in the following way. First, I review topics in the literatures about return and about the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK. The intention is both to provide background information for this paper and to place its debate in the wider field of literature. In the paper's next section, the methodology on which it is based is presented. After this follow the three empirical chapters focusing on how return is considered by Zimbabwean migrants. The first empirical chapter, chapter four, examines the main consideration of Zimbabwean migrants, namely the uncertainty of return. Uncertainty means economic and political uncertainty in Zimbabwe, uncertainty in the UK and uncertainty of what an actual return movement will be like for the individuals themselves. This chapter reveals debates about the degree of change in Zimbabwe's economic and political situation and also how there is a legal status divide in the diaspora that impacts upon return considerations. In chapter five, collective influences on return considerations are put forward. These are discourses that circulate in the diaspora and expectations coming from people in Zimbabwe. They are influences about whether and how to return. In the third empirical chapter, chapter six, I look at how the issues raised in chapter four and five affect the individual migrants. The research participants' return considerations are full of ambivalence that is explored in this chapter. I follow return and ambivalence, intentions to return and ability to return and investigate how participants relate differently to the question of return. I conclude with having offered an insight into the complexities of considering return for Zimbabwean migrants in the UK.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Return migration became rigorously analysed, categorised and theorised from the 1970s, and some key writings on return have been made since then (Cassarino 2004, Cerase 1974, Gaillard 1994, Gmelch 1980, King 2000). Recently, there has been a new wave of writings about return (Long and Oxfeld 2004, Miller 2008, Stefansson and Markowitz 2004, Tsuda 2009). According to King and Christou (2011), this wave stems from a reconceptualisation of the study of migration more than from any significant increase in return movements. The wave is also promoted by a prominence of return on the policy agenda. Repatriation has become a political issue (Koser and Black 1999) and there is a growing interest in the relationship between return and development (Ammassari and Black 2001).

The following literature review has two sections, one discussing the topic of return and another looking at the case of Zimbabwe. I start by reviewing three issues within the return literature. First, which factors lead to return migration and the process of imagined return. Second, how return is both different and similar for refugees and asylum seekers than for other migrants. Third, links between return and identity are explored in the idea of a myth of return and its critiques. In the second section, the case of Zimbabwe is introduced; its history and immigration to the UK, the current diaspora and what has been written about the diaspora and return.

Return

Actual and imagined return

Most review articles on the topic of return deal with which factors lead to actual return migration. Classically, return migration is thought of as the last stage of a successful or failed emigration project, where emigration is understood as a means to increase economic capital (Cerase 1974). The migrant can return when he has met with expectations and acquired capital to make a good life in the country of origin, a *return of success*. Alternatively, he returns to the country of origin as a disappointment after realising that hardship in the country of settlement was unbearable, a *return of failure*. However, most scholars today underline that non-economic factors are more important than economic ones in promoting return (Gaillard 1994, Gmelch 1980, King 2000). Examples of non-economic factors include family ties, obligations to care for elderly parents or a child who remained behind upon emigration, feelings of loyalty to the country of origin, social and cultural advantages of return and things that are missed, like climate or community (Boccagni 2011, Gmelch 1980). Also push factors

like prejudice in the country of settlement matter. Although it may be more likely that a migrant returns at the initial stages of migration (Alberts and Hazen 2005, Boccagni 2011), both retirement return and repatriation of bodies are significant phenomena (Becker 2002, Cerase 1974, Mbiba 2010).

When exploring return, one should not forget that many more migrants than those who actually return consider returning (Cohen 2008). Some scholars have thereby adopted the broader label of return over return migration to include *imagined return* in addition to actual return moves (Oxfeld and Long 2004). Research on the factors leading to actual return migration is informed by already made choices summarised in migrants' accounts (Gmelch 1980). The process of imagining return is in contrast continuous (Oxfeld and Long 2004). Imagined return is not only about considering returning or staying, but also about picturing in what way one will return. While Cerase (1974) describes how migrants return because of their own failure or success, when imagining return, migrants consider their own relative success and ability to meet with expectations. At this stage, individuals can picture returning as successes. In considerations of return, obstacles to return are also important; for example the practicalities of having children in school and earning for a pension in the country of settlement, own skills and possibilities, age, change of values and the reception that awaits in the country of origin. Obstacles to return can be real or perceived, and visits can help clarify return considerations, imagination becoming reality (Muggeridge and Doná 2006).

Refugees and asylum seekers

In the literature, returnees are often divided into groups according to legal and socio-economic status, and return of professionals, refugees and migrants without legal documents are treated as three separate issues. In this paragraph, I will describe the main topics in the writings about refugees and asylum seekers. Deportation is the main focus in the literature on returned asylum seekers and irregular migrants, either treating repatriation from a policy and human rights point of view (de Genova 2010, Noll 1999) or from the migrants' point of view (Brotherton and Barrios 2009, Miller 2008, Peutz 2010). Being a deportee is described as a life of stigma and struggle to reintegrate. A lot of this literature is highly critical of the so-called securitisation of migration and its effects. In the literature describing refugees returning to post-conflict territory, the interest is in how refugees reintegrate and whether return can become a sustainable solution (Black and Gent 2006, Stefansson 2006). There is also focus on the degree of coercion in return (Israel 2000, Oxfeld and Long 2004, Webber 2011). A few

volumes cover return to countries in conflict or post-conflict as a whole, seeking to include several of the topics mentioned above (Black and Koser 1999, de Genova and Peutz 2010).

The process of considering return to countries in conflict or post-conflict is both different from and similar to considerations of return to peaceful places. Specific factors that refugees consider are end of conflict in the country of origin and having secured immigration status in the country of settlement (Muggeridge and Doná 2006). Furthermore, feelings of loyalty and betrayal can be stronger for refugees and asylum seekers than for other migrants, and can become both a reason for and an obstacle to return. The duty to return is a feeling of loyalty to the country of origin and of betrayal by emigration or non-return (Gaillard 1994, Steyn and Grant 2007). A need for assurance of security upon return is also stronger with refugees and asylum seekers than for other migrants. Moreover, asylum seekers can be repatriated forcefully and there may therefore be greater fear and insecurity tied to return for this group (Cunningham and Cunningham 2007, Talavera *et al.* 2010).

Return and identity

The concept of a *myth of return* has been used when raising questions around integration. In this view, immigrants do not only have a different culture, but carry myths about their homeland – and about eventual return there – that make this distant place more of a home than the host country (Anwar 1979). The past is idealised and linked to a mythical future *at home* in the country of origin (Zetter 1999). This myth of return has been held to hinder integration, and it fosters the belief that an immigrant can spend a life-time in the country of settlement without growing roots. He goes into typical patterns of saving, remitting, overworking and being reluctant to learning the language, at least initially (Boccagni 2011). Also experiences in the country of settlement impact on the myth of return; discrimination can lead to increased detachment from host society even for second-generation immigrants (Bolognani 2007).

It is common to use a definition of diaspora that is intrinsically linked to the myth of return (Safran 1991). Especially for so-called victim or refugee diasporas, the myth of return is said to be necessary for their identity as strugglers or exiles (Cohen 2008, Schulz 2003). Thinking about diaspora more as a stance that migrants take than as a group of people, captures how loyalty to the country of origin is voiced by some migrants to make a specific claim (Brubaker 2005). A stance can become a group identity that has a powerful influence on its members' personal decisions. Israel (2000) has suggested naming group identities around political commitment to return *ideologies of return*. As such a stance or ideology can inspire actual return, it could also provoke debates and divides between migrants who support this

stance and those who do not. Empirical studies show that there are differences within diasporas when it comes to thoughts about return (Bolognani 2007, Pasura 2010a). And some scholars believe that these differences may cause divides (Graham and Khosravi 1997). Migrants of conflict diasporas might see themselves divided amongst or somewhere between the categories of political exiles and integrated citizens. When one integrated citizen returns, this may provoke anger from the political exiles.

The idea of a myth of return can be critiqued for holding a simplistic view of migrants' notions of home, identity and return. Memories of the country of origin can become more distant or closer over time and in particular moments (King and Christou 2011), and return can become less important over time as migrants live in the here and now (Brubaker 2005). Moreover, the way the word home is associated with safety and dwelling can be misleading (Markowitz 2004). Some migrants have experienced hardship in the country of origin, and do not wish to recall those memories, but may still call it home (Graham and Khosravi 1997). For other migrants, return does not mean going home (Hammond 1999). Migrants can in fact feel disconnected both from the country of settlement and of origin (Leavey *et al.* 2004). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the possible existence of dual or multiple identities (Miller 2008, Teo 2011). Some migrants have hybridised forms of cultural identification, belonging to both here and there. In fact, the meaning of home often contains a tension between belonging here and there (Stock 2010). Kivisto and La Vecchia (forthcoming) examine how ambivalence is a central feature of the migration experience. They find that migrants experience dual ambivalence; ambivalence to both the country of origin and the country of settlement. In migrants' narratives, both places are idealised and resented, both at the same time. The ambivalence comes from living both here and there and being in a situation of conflicting choices. The authors show how migrants "feel the need to respond to ambivalence" by adopting one of three strategies, *exit*, *loyalty* or *voice* (Kivisto and La Vecchia forthcoming: 6). This means that the migrant expresses either stronger alienation from (exit) or loyalty to (loyalty) the country of origin or opts for a dual identity (voice). By expressing alienation towards the home country, the migrant redefines personal identity and chooses a home in the country of settlement. By expressing loyalty to the country of origin, he maintains that place as home and can therefore not free himself from thinking about it. If he chooses the strategy of voice, he remains in-between, holding a transnational identity.

The Zimbabwean diaspora

Zimbabwe is a former British colony that after years of oppressive white minority rule embarked on a liberation war leading to Robert Mugabe's election in 1980. The rule of liberation war hero Mugabe and his political party the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was widely celebrated. Unfortunately it did not take long before their nationalist rhetoric showed its horror (McGregor 2009a). In 1982, state violence in Matabeleland was performed to wipe out the opposition party ZAPU. Thousands of members of the Ndebele ethnic group were killed (Pasura 2011). A new opposition movement, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was formed in late 1999. When ZANU-PF subsequently lost the referendum for a new constitution in 2000, it launched another period of war-time rhetoric, the "Third Chimurenga" [liberation struggle] (McGregor 2009a). The targets were MDC activists, white farmers and their workers, unionists, journalists, teachers and public servants. State power has been centralised and militarised and the violent oppression has seen peaks around elections. In addition to its unstable political situation, Zimbabwe was steered into an overwhelming economic recession. In 2008, hyperinflation was measured in millions. Some change has taken place since then, however. The MDC won the 2008 election and the Government of National Unity between the two MDC factions and ZANU-PF was formed in February 2009 (McGregor and Pasura 2010). Since then, the economy has experienced growth and hyperinflation has ended (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). At the same time as there is a sense of change in Zimbabwe, there is uncertainty as to how stable the situation is. The years since 2008/09 have been relatively quiet, but ZANU-PF continues to hold more power than the MDC and human rights violations still happen (Human Rights Watch 2011).

There is a long history of migration between Zimbabwe and the UK (Bloch 2010). Recent migration has followed push-factor events; the civil war for independence leading up to 1980, white settlers fleeing before and after the independence, flights from Matabeleland in the 1980s and professionals leaving because of the 1990s' structural adjustment programs (McGregor 2010, Pasura 2011). Still, the period following the establishment of the opposition party MDC created displacement within and beyond Zimbabwe's borders on a larger scale than ever before (McGregor 2010). The UK imposed visa restrictions on immigration from Zimbabwe in 2002 and has therefore diminished their share of migrants. Around 200 000 Zimbabweans reside in the UK today (Pasura 2006), out of a total of three million international Zimbabwean migrants and many more displaced (McGregor 2009a). Although

large parts of the diaspora is clearly conflict-generated, and those who left Zimbabwe after 2000 felt forced to leave (Bloch 2010), it is important to highlight that not all migrants have come through the asylum system. Other routes include using British citizenship (for those eligible), family reunification, false passports or temporary work or student visas that can be overstayed (Bloch 2010, Pasura 2011).

Most of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain consists of middle class skilled migrants who had the financial means, support and connections to embark on long distance travel (Pasura 2011). However, many have experienced deskilling in the UK. Finding work that corresponds with skills is difficult because the migrants lack legal status, because of a harsh labour market, because of discrimination or because migrants prefer doing different work to what they did in Zimbabwe – for example teaching (McGregor 2007). Many end up finding work in the care sector and find this to be both hard and dirty work.

The Zimbabwean diaspora can be called *fractured*. This label describes the diaspora's diversity (Pasura 2011). It is not one community, but many. It also says something about different divides within the diaspora where there are conflicts and suspicion among migrants (McGregor 2009a). Legal status operates as an important divide, as do class, political affiliation and degrees of political participation. Divisions sometimes lead to debates about what *being Zimbabwean* in Britain means, and who is a good representative of the diaspora (Mano and Willems 2008, 2010). It seems paradoxical that despite divisions and the existence of several *diasporas* there are attempts at finding one diaspora identity. Zimbabweans even started calling themselves a diaspora around the year 1999 (McGregor 2010). This paradox follows the idea of a diaspora as a stance rather than as a group with members (Brubaker 2005). What stance the Zimbabwean diaspora takes will be explored in this paper's empirical chapters.

There is uncertainty about numbers, but a trickle of Zimbabwean migrants are returning to Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean state is sending out mixed messages about return. While President Mugabe distrusts the Zimbabwean diaspora, Prime Minister Tsvangirai has tried to convince its members to return (McGregor and Pasura 2010). Two studies are written on the current Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK and return. As part of a survey about skills and deskilling amongst asylum seekers in the UK, some questions about the wish to return were asked (Doyle 2009). The question was conditional; whether asylum seekers would like to return if it was safe to do so. The study found that the majority responded yes to this question, but that respondents felt that one would face significant economic difficulties upon return, partly because of deskilling. In the second study, Pasura (2010a) looks at the

significance of the of concept of diaspora through Zimbabwean migrants' own narratives. He finds at least four different meanings: Diaspora means to have a right to reverse colonisation in Britain, to be a diaspora of labour migrants with a myth of return, to find a legal home in the UK while maintaining a social and cultural home in Zimbabwe and to be a diaspora of exiles akin to Babylon. In all four meanings, the importance of belonging to Zimbabwe emerges as important. The study also finds that attitudes towards return and settlement are constantly shifting and are easily influenced.

These studies reveal that there is a strong sense of belonging to Zimbabwe and a wish to return in the diaspora, but whether there are divides in the diaspora that follow from the question of return is not investigated. For example, there may be contrasting opinions between protestors who demonstrate against human rights violations in Zimbabwe and groups who explore initiatives for development and the return of skills (McGregor 2009a, McGregor and Pasura 2010). This paper seeks to examine what happens in the relations between the collective and the personal in considerations of return.

3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods are useful for exploring “the feelings, understandings and knowledges of others” (Dwyer and Limb 2001: 1). They are a way of investigating complexity not only in individual experiences, but in wider social structures and processes (Winchester 2000). Interviews are particularly suited to reveal the relationships between interviewee and the complex layering of society (Dwyer and Limb 2001). Furthermore, they invite the research participants directly into the research process (Dunn 2000). Interviewees provide information about a variety of topics, reflect, elaborate and clarify as well as get into themes unanticipated by the researcher (Valentine 2001).

Return considerations are revealed through the literature review as a complex matter. They are about imagining return, they are emotional and a continuous process. In this research, I set out to explore whether they are also morally constructed through collective influences. The qualitative method of the interview was a natural choice. I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that are ordered but flexible and allow for comparison between individual interviews (Dunn 2000, Esterberg 2002). I followed an interview guide around the topics 1) personal history, 2) transnational ties, 3) involvement in the diaspora, 4) own thoughts on return and 5) others’ perception of return (see annex).

Data

The data for this paper consists mainly of 18 semi-structured interviews gathered from late May to early July 2012. Research participants were recruited through three entry point organisations, through personal contacts and some were contacted directly at different gatherings where many Zimbabweans were present. In addition, I used snowballing where initial contacts were asked to provide me with one further contact. The three entry point organisations were the Zimbabwe Association (ZA), a membership organisation that provides practical and emotional support for Zimbabwean asylum seekers and refugees, the Zimbabwe Vigil, a weekly demonstration outside the Zimbabwean Embassy on the Strand that gathers mainly migrants without legal status, refugees, MDC activists and white Zimbabweans and the Zimbabwe Diaspora Focus Group (ZDFG), an umbrella organisation gathering a wide variety of Zimbabwean organisations under 11 portfolios. All interviews were conducted in the Greater London area, either in people’s homes, offices or at a café in an area chosen by the participant. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and two and a half hours with an average of one and a half hours. All interviews were conducted in English.

In addition to conducting interviews, I had more informal chats specifically about return with two institutional representatives – one community leader and one representative of the Zimbabwean Embassy – and I attended one meeting specifically on return – the initiative Skills for Zimbabwe that emerges from Zim Unite!, a Zimbabwean community group affiliated to Citizens UK. I also spent time at several places where Zimbabweans assemble; at ZA meetings, Zimbabwe Vigil demonstrations and action forums, public meetings on Zimbabwean issues, at a Zimbabwean barbeque and the Zimbabwean Embassy’s Friday night drinks. This kind of engagement was used as a way to get to know the Zimbabwean diaspora in addition to being a means of recruiting research participants.

I was looking for diversity in the sample of interviewees along the lines of gender, ethnicity, age, time spent in the UK, legal status, family situation, engagement in diaspora organisations and politics as well as in return experiences and attitudes. Table 1 below lists interviewees by name and date of interview, table 2 lists other informants and table 3 illustrates the diversity amongst the interviewees. In order to guarantee anonymity, all names are pseudonyms.

#	Name	Interview date	#	Name	Interview date
1	Bambanani	21.06.12	10	Mary	05.06.12
2	Christopher	22.05.12	11	Nancy	08.06.12
3	Esther	07.06.12	12	Peter	14.06.12
4	George	26.06.12	13	Simbai	12.06.12
5	Gift	20.06.12	14	Stanford	15.06.12
6	Gloria	01.06.12	15	Tariro	02.06.12
7	Grace	02.07.12	16	Victoria	16.05.12
8	Jim	15.06.12	17	Yolanda	13.06.12
9	Joe	06.06.12	18	Zibusiso	23.06.12

Table 1: List of interviewees by name and date of interview

Informant	Date
Community leader	20.06.2012
Embassy official	21.06.2012
Skills for Zimbabwe meeting	06.06.2012

Table 2: List of additional informants

Gender	9 female, 9 male
Ethnicity	4 Ndebele, 10 Shona, 3 white, 1 half Ndebele/Shona
Age	Aged 29-70
Arrival in the UK	1 1975, 2 1989-1995, 10 1999-2003, 2 2005-2008, 3 2008-2012
Legal status	6 professionals, 3 students, 5 asylum seekers, 1 temporary leave to remain, 3 refugees
Family situation*	5 no children, 7 single, 5 partner and child(ren) in the UK, 3 British partner, 3 child(ren) and partner (if applicable) in Zimbabwe, 4 transnational family
Engagement in the diaspora**	7 Zim Vigil and/or ZA, 4 church representatives, 4 development oriented, 1 Mthwakazi, 5 MDC-T, 1 MDC-M, 4 not much engaged, 2 unengaged
Return visits	9 no visits, 4 few visits, 5 frequent visits
Return attitudes	A diverse range***

Table 3: List of interviewees by diversity

* Overlaps in this category (for example someone can be single and have a child in Zimbabwe).

** Overlaps in this category.

*** Category included in table to show that this diversity was of interest. However, the result is both too diverse to be listed neatly in the table, and will be the main topic of the empirical chapters that follow.

One type of diversity that I was looking for, was for people to be engaged in a variety of diasporic organisations and to represent different groups in terms of type and level of activity, more accurately classified by Pasura (2010b). Among the 18 interviewees, seven participants are actively engaged at the Zimbabwe Vigil or ZA or both, four people hold positions in church communities and five people are engaged in a development oriented organisation. One person is engaged in the project of a Mthwakazi Republic, a separatist movement for the re-establishment of a pre-colonial nation for the Ndebele ethnic group (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008). Seeking diversity also from Zimbabwean political parties, five people are engaged in the MDC-T and one person engages with the smaller MDC fraction. Representation of ZANU-PF was provided through a chat with an official at the Zimbabwean Embassy. This person was not engaged in a full interview, however, and is therefore not included in table 3. In addition to these actively involved individuals, four people in the sample are currently fairly unengaged and two people are completely unengaged.

I looked for diversity in the sample of people firstly, to get a sample that would illustrate how return considerations are differently shaped for different people, and, secondly, in order to represent different voices in the diaspora itself. The narratives gathered are of a subjective nature and not taken to be representative of all Zimbabwean migrants' experiences; the sample is taken to be illustrative (Valentine 2001). It is the nature of the interview that it

does not gather representative data, but that the experiences and interpretations of individuals are at the centre (Valentine 2005).

Positionality

A researcher must consider the unequal power relations between oneself and the research participant as well as how own identity and conduct influences this relationship (Mohammad 2001, Valentine 2005). It is particularly important to consider positionality in cross-cultural research (Skelton 2001). My position as female, Norwegian, white, young and of high education influences my relation with research participants. Throughout the research period, I have considered how I present myself in order to build the trust needed to conduct good interviews (Valentine 2005). I have focused on establishing positive relationships with research participants, taking time before the interview starts to explain my intentions well (Esterberg 2002). I have presented myself as a student hoping to learn from the participants' experiences. As more than half of my research participants hold higher education, they were familiar with what being a student implies and it proved a good role. Many interviewees took the role as teachers, something which was both empowering to them and useful to me. They explained Zimbabwean community and history to me, and some tried to classify the diaspora. Sometimes, another of my identities than that of the student was prominent. I found that some men were uncomfortable with debating certain topics with me as a young woman, especially communication with their spouses. Positionality changes from meeting to meeting and can be hard to predict, and thereby worthwhile considering continuously. To my surprise I was treated by some participants as an insider in the sense that I am a foreigner, someone not British (Mohammad 2001, Skelton 2001). When participants related to me as a foreigner, they compared their situation in the UK to mine. As Tariro said:

“Here, I mean, it's just different, it's a stressful life! I'm sure, you come from Norway, I'm sure you know the difference. At home you are a bit more relaxed. In fact, right now, you probably are relaxed, because you know when you are finished here, you are going home. You know. So that's the way most Zimbabweans feel.”

This quote highlights how I was at once an insider and an outsider in relation to Tariro. As an asylum seeker, she cannot easily go home at any one point and is therefore not relaxed about being in a foreign place such as I am in her eyes. In fact, the divide insider/outsider is somewhat artificial; positionalities are dynamic (Mullings 1999). I have chosen to highlight different sides of my identity at different times. When encountering asylum seekers, I have

openly told them that I have understanding for their difficult situation as I have engaged voluntarily with asylum seekers for several years. Moreover, conducting interviews with a diverse sample of Zimbabweans has made me negotiate my positionality from meeting to meeting, acting differently towards a business man that I met in his office than towards an asylum seeker that I met in her temporary home.

I have had to think ethically through meeting with individuals with conflicting standpoints. I have for example been both inside the Zimbabwean Embassy for drinks and outside it demonstrating. I chose to be open to participants about speaking to a diversity of people holding conflicting views, but at the same time not to reveal exactly which groups I engage with at all times. I would argue that only this way could I engage fully with the people I met at any one point.

As I hold a specific position in relation to others, the participants also hold roles in relation to me. Research participants also have interests and agendas (Mohammad 2001, Skelton 2001). Some individuals wished to steer my research in a particular direction by asking me to speak to certain people over others, for example. Discourses about return became visible in which reflexions they encouraged me to make. Sometimes I also had to be careful about not making emotional judgements during interviews as participants talked about difficult things and started crying (Valentine 2005). In personal meetings, I have been open about my project and clear about what I can and cannot offer.

Coding and analysis

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis. Coding is a crucial part of the analysis and determining how to code and what to code are important choices (Saldaña 2009). Coding is both data summation and complication as it leads not only to an overview of, but also to more questions about the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Coding and analysis is about being open-minded and at the same time understanding that what questions were asked in the interviews and what codes are applied is about making decisions to explore specific themes (Saldaña 2009). In this research, I let the coding process be guided by the research questions. Due to time constraints, this was important as choices about what to code had to be made. I chose to partially code only the part of the vast material that was about return considerations. NVivo 9 software was used, making it easier to identify and pull out main themes in the material (Crang 2005). I looked for differences and similarities and began to make sense of the material. Analysing has been about studying meaning not only in terms of

words, but also unspoken meanings. I have paid attention to conversation in terms of emotions, silences, understatement and in terms of what is said about the self in relation to what is said about others. This follows an understanding of emotions as significant expressions of meaning; where injustice is expressed in anger, opposition in aversion and fear in reluctance (Ho 2009, Taylor 2007). It is beneficial to pair the analysis of words and emotional expressions.

4. UNCERTAINTY

As in the literature about return reviewed, interviews with 18 Zimbabweans from diverse backgrounds show that a variety of issues are taken into considerations about return. One common theme runs throughout the participants' narratives, however; uncertainty. The narratives reveal that the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe is considered uncertain. Most respondents name the uncertain situation in Zimbabwe as a reason either for initially leaving Zimbabwe or for non-return and they discuss how significant current changes in Zimbabwe have been. There is uncertainty in not knowing what return to Zimbabwe will be like. Return is *imagined* as the respondents consider uncertainty (Muggeridge and Doná 2006, Oxfeld and Long 2004).

Uncertain Zimbabwe

Uncertainty about economy and welfare in Zimbabwe is a main worry when the interviewees consider return. Zimbabwe's unemployment rate was, as late as 2009, measured to 95 % (Central Intelligence Agency 2012), and is a major concern. Many respondents picture having to take up informal employment or going into business as self-employed upon return. Zibusiso, for example, says that if she returns to Zimbabwe, it will be with the knowledge that she will not obtain a job there. The options she has of getting an income is through letting out her house in the UK combined with a pension, or by becoming a self-employed business woman in Zimbabwe. In addition to unemployment, the level of salaries in Zimbabwe is a worry for the participants; even if obtaining a job, it would mean a 90 per cent pay cut, some say. Furthermore, some of the business people amongst the respondents mention the inability of Zimbabwe's authorities to protect investments as a negative. Stanford worries that the Zimbabwean government might claim half of any earnings that he would make and this becomes a reason for not returning. In fact, at one point he was offered a job in a Zimbabwean company but turned it down because of the degree of state interference in that company's business.

Another main uncertainty is Zimbabwe's health service. The interviewees explain that there are no drugs and equipment to treat simple diseases and minor injuries in Zimbabwe's public hospitals and private alternatives are expensive. Zibusiso narrates the shock she experienced when visiting a hospital in Bulawayo and finding patients waiting for treatment and medication that was not available. Now she says that when she travels to Zimbabwe, she frequently takes "tablets, medication, simple things like, you know, wrapping solution, 'cause

you can come across someone, you think, well, here is a tablet, because they have got to pay, you've got to pay for your medication, everything!" There is still the sense that health services and treatment is secured only for those who can pay for it. The same applies to education and utilities.

The Zimbabwean political environment is another major uncertainty to consider. The political climate has proved throughout the last decade and beyond to be highly unstable, with violence increasing significantly around elections (McGregor 2009a). Many respondents speak of the impossibility of inserting oneself into the political vein again if returning. Moreover, some of the interviewees with refugee status say they are uncertain about whether they would be safe upon return. Gift has not visited Zimbabwe since emigration in 2002 and only considers it if Zimbabwe's political situation "improves dramatically." However, it is especially by asylum seekers that the political uncertainty is mentioned as the primary reason for not returning. Gloria, an asylum seeker, says that there has in fact not been any change in Zimbabwe and refers to political refugees when saying that "everybody has no choice" but to remain in the UK because they cannot risk returning.

Change

On the degree of political change, there is disagreement in the diaspora. Most of the refugees interviewed consider it safe to return based on news about others' successful visits and admit that the fear is probably exaggerated. The majority of political refugees keep their heads low in Zimbabwe in order to visit, but even those who return openly, stay safe:

"Elliot Pfebve who was a candidate for the MDC in Bindura and a very well-known activist, who's brother was killed by ZANU-PF, he went back over Christmas, very openly, and didn't have any problems at all. So if people like that can return openly, then I shouldn't imagine there's too much of a problem for other people." (Jim)

These visits give those who tell me about it a sense of real change. In contrast, the asylum seekers consider it unsafe in Zimbabwe still. At the Vigil, some asylum seekers I met had actually fled Zimbabwe within the last year, after the establishment of the Government of National Unity. The majority of the respondents will agree that there are still political changes needed in Zimbabwe. Jim was quoted above saying that it should be safe to return to Zimbabwe in terms of political violence. However, he also acknowledges that:

“Although things have been relatively peaceful for the last three years, no, four years now, nearly five, the apparatus for state violence is very much intact. [It] just hasn’t been used, but, at the drop of a hat, things could go back to the darkest days of 2008.”

In stark contrast to opinions of no change or small changes, however, Bambanani, who wanders in circles of professional Zimbabweans, is of the opinion that Zimbabweans do not even discuss politics as a consideration for going back or not. However, this is not the general opinion of professionals, as for example Peter tells me that there is “a genuine fear” in the diaspora that is nourished by ZANU-PF’s rhetoric of violence.

When it comes to Zimbabwe’s economy, there is a clearer agreement in the diaspora about the amount of change, especially because many compare today’s Zimbabwe to the year 2008/09 when Zimbabwe experienced hyperinflation, a violent political transition phase and a cholera outbreak, all at once (Cable News Network 2008). Despite the challenges that remain there is optimism. The main worry is whether it will be possible to maintain a certain lifestyle upon return. One has to be fairly wealthy in Zimbabwe in order to provide for private solutions in health, education and supply of utilities, and the fact is that the British pound does not hold as great a value in Zimbabwe as before dollarization (Kufakurinani 2012).

Where to start from?

One of the main challenges to return is how return is perceived by the research participants as starting from scratch. Many interviewees use the expression ‘where to start from?’ or something similar. For example, Grace says “It’s not about just upping and going, it’s about what you’re going back to.”

The question of how to return successfully to Zimbabwe is complicated by the fact that many Zimbabweans have experienced deskilling in the UK (Doyle 2009, McGregor 2007, Pasura 2011). A few interviewees portray leaving regular mansions in Zimbabwe and how, upon arrival in the UK, they are suddenly faced with living at other people’s expense. The respondents talk of people who were lawyers or doctors in Zimbabwe who have become redundant or forced into irregular employment. Others have not experienced deskilling to this degree, but have perhaps changed skills entirely. Peter says that it will be difficult for him and his wife to return. He has a specific career linked to London’s global economy and while his wife was a banker in Zimbabwe, she ended up as a nurse in the UK. Nursing is a difficult career to rely on in Zimbabwe, especially as a 60 year old. Upon return, one needs the ability to adapt to a new and hard work climate as returning means starting from fresh.

Asking oneself where to start from is also about considering the opportunity of maintaining a certain lifestyle upon return, not going back to poverty, but to a relaxing life where one can afford private services like sending children to a good school. Provided one has the economic means, opportunities for that good lifestyle are considered great in Zimbabwe and people have started searching for realistic paths to return. At the Skills for Zimbabwe meeting, I met people who were excited about a more stable environment – economically and also politically – who were proposing training as an incentive for people to return to Zimbabwe with skills. Also other such initiatives were mentioned to me during the research period. Furthermore, there is a trend among young Zimbabweans to embark on degrees in Development studies in the UK (Doyle 2009). Getting involved in reconstruction, politics or development work in Zimbabwe was considered by a few interviewees individually. Yolanda is very much geared towards finding employment in Zimbabwe or on the Southern African continent:

“I mean, I can kind of see the positives of being here. But I think because, like I said, I’d like to do development work. You can’t really do it in a developed country. And Zimbabwe is perfect for that if you want to do that kind of work.”

In this statement there is a certain sense of some opportunities being greater in Zimbabwe than in the UK. The community leader I talked to explains that in Sub-Saharan Africa “in terms of entrepreneurship, economic opportunities ... I think people get a sense that there’s a kind of closing here [in Europe] [...], whereas in Africa there’s an opening of space.” This sense of an opening of space in Zimbabwe is reflected in stories about successful returnees who work in the IT sector, in mining, farming and technology such as solar panels. These people are described as the first wave of entrepreneurs or ‘risk takers’ who are benefiting from return.

Legal status

Life without legal status in the UK is described by the interviewees as a life turned upside down, a life that is a static limbo. Especially having no work, just being redundant, is hard to handle. Not only is income reduced, but also one’s self-esteem. Moreover, living conditions for asylum seekers are often precarious (Cunningham and Cunningham 2007, Doyle 2009, Sales 2002). The interviewees without legal status do not have a space of their own. They live in shared accommodation with family or in more temporary arrangements. Some participants even live with people that they do not know well. Mary lived in an acquaintance’s living room

for a while and recounts that while the children in the house wanted to watch TV there, she wanted to sleep all day. It was at a time where she was very depressed about her situation, and living conditions made things worse. Furthermore, feeling like a prisoner and fearing detention are common statements amongst the asylum seekers I interviewed. This is found also in other studies (McGregor 2009b). Gloria says: “I don’t have any freedom. You know, the day when you go and sign [to report with the UKBA], you know ... I think that’s why I’m always hurting, my blood pressure is always high. Because, you know, you don’t have freedom. You’re not a free person at all.” Several of the asylum seekers mention their own or others’ deteriorating health in relation to the uncertain situation in the UK.

Distrust amongst asylum seekers stands in a reciprocal relationship with uncertainty. The research participants mentioned fear of their community being infiltrated by people with dishonest intentions; people such as Central Intelligence Organisation officers, Home Office representatives and ZANU-PF supporters. It is widely held that there are such infiltrators present at political gatherings like MDC meetings and at the Zimbabwe Vigil (McGregor 2009a). One interviewee pronounces this suspicion in the following way:

“I’m very wary of a lot of Zimbabwean people here, until I know what your motives are, what your politics was, not now, because as I said, you can’t get asylum here unless you’re an MDC member here, so, you’ve got people from dyed-in-the-wool MDC activists to people who are dyed-in-the-wool ZANU-PF activists who all have MDC membership cards here.” (Jim)

This suspicion leads to a broken community, and asylum seekers especially suffer. While people holding legal status can get work permits, apply for family reunification and start a stable life, asylum seekers stand very much alone. They are often separated from their close family as well as afraid to trust the community around them. Although the Zimbabwe Vigil and local MDC branches are well organised and meet frequently, the interviewees who go there explain that they only talk about politics and rarely about more personal matters. They greet each other, sing, dance, pray, discuss politics and are friendly, but they do not get personal. As Nancy says “they know me [enacts] ‘how are you?’ ‘how are you?’, that’s it. [...] [But] they don’t know what I do, how I do it, how I live, and that’s [pause]. So, that’s how my life is.”

For the interviewees who do not hold legal status it can also be difficult to keep in touch with family members in Zimbabwe when there is little money for telephoning and no possibility of visiting. If a family member in Zimbabwe dies, undocumented migrants cannot go to the funeral. Gloria missed the funeral of her father and feels sad, angry and guilty about it. Several other respondents fear this impossible situation. There is also fear among the

asylum seekers that they themselves may fall ill while in the UK. Many Zimbabweans wish to be buried in Zimbabwe, something which is costly and requires arrangement (Mbiba 2010). Simbai says that it is important to stay in contact with other Zimbabweans in the UK for this reason; then someone will know what to do in case you die in a strange country. But this is not easy considering the lack of trust in the community.

5. COLLECTIVE INFLUENCES

After reviewing the uncertainties that the respondents face, I now turn to another side of the considerations of return. There are some collective influences that impact on the migrants' considerations; both in the form of discourses emerging from the politicised climate of the Zimbabwean diaspora as well as expectations from Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe.

Diasporic discourses

Common belonging

Through the research participants' narratives, I find discourses about how Zimbabweans should belong to Zimbabwe, about how Zimbabweans wish to return and also discourses about making the return move a reality. The myth of return is described by some scholars as necessary to certain diasporas' identity, for example as strugglers or exiles (Cohen 2008, Schulz 2003). The Zimbabweans in the UK began to see themselves as and organise as a diaspora around the year 1999 (McGregor 2010). Pasura (2010a) finds that belonging to Zimbabwe is important to the diasporic identity of Zimbabweans. The emic 'home' is used about Zimbabwe by all but six of my interviewees, three of these six using 'back home' in a kind of past sense and three simply 'Zimbabwe'. Some of the participants talk about a strong belonging or emotional attachment to Zimbabwe, something Tariro says "is hard to put in words." Furthermore, half of the interviewees stated that the majority of Zimbabweans in the UK *wish* to return to Zimbabwe. When I asked Mary about people's wishes she said that of course people would like to go back, "home is best no matter what." And Bambanani said that although some people do not have the possibility of returning, when they die in the UK and their bodies are repatriated, that shows how they hold "the ultimate wish to return", something that is the *right* Zimbabwean identity in his opinion. In contrast, the wrong identity is when Zimbabweans find belonging in the UK. Several of the participants mention that some Zimbabweans hold the UK in too high esteem. Zimbabweans should make sure they do not become British. In addition to these discourses about belonging and a diasporic wish to return, there are discourses stating that people should return. George says that "we have it in us that we have to go back and, you know, reconstruct our country." He and others place a kind of moral obligation on Zimbabweans to make the return move.

Being stuck

One of the ways that the discourse of common belonging translates into other discourses is when the participants explain that there are people who are just *stuck* in the UK. Their narratives divide these people into two groups. The first group is those without legal status. Among asylum seekers, there is a sense that the Zimbabwe situation is keeping them away from Zimbabwe, and that, in addition, their situation in the UK is static as well. They cannot return to Zimbabwe even for funerals. The general reply to considerations of return is that there is ‘no choice’. They have to remain in the UK waiting. The second group that is considered to be stuck are Zimbabweans enjoying legal status in the UK, but who cannot return or claim that they cannot return for other reasons. The interviewees give two explanations for this. Firstly, there are those Zimbabweans who have nothing in Zimbabwe to return to. Bambanani mentions how he and friends talk about these people:

“Recently we were talking about another lawyer friend who was saying ‘oh, I don’t know whether, you know, to teach my children any African language because I don’t know whether I’ll be going back and’, so people were laughing and saying ‘listen this man was saying this’, you know, they were surprised! But I said ‘no, don’t be surprised. Have you ever asked him where he comes from? Maybe he comes from a grass thatched house next to nothing! And I can understand [laughs] here he’s a lawyer, he’s got a three bedroom house and whatever, so ... don’t.”

It seems a common belief among the respondents that those who come from poverty in Zimbabwe or who have lost too much there during the period of emigration cannot return. As Jim says:

“[I]f you grew up dirt poor in Zim, you might miss it because it’s home and because that’s where your family are, but you’ve come here and your quality of life has risen. High. The thought of going back is daunting for a lot of those people. Whereas if your memories of Zimbabwe are swimming pools and barbeques and beers with friends around your swimming pool, and it’s good memories, you’re more likely to go back.”

The second explanation for why Zimbabweans holding legal status can get stuck in the UK is that there are those who get caught in what Joe calls “the fear factor”; letting themselves be ruled over by the uncertainty in Zimbabwe or, discursively pronounced; their own insecurities and fears, and therefore becoming stuck in the UK. This explanation can become quite moralistic as for some Zimbabweans being paralysed by fear is not a valid excuse for not returning. Joe says “Yes, things were bad, but things are improving! So ... it’s a matter of whether we want to hold on to these bad stories and shy away from going home, [...] we are stuck here, just mourning.” When asked what he means by mourning, he says that there is too much complaining in the diaspora, too much talk about violence and that people can decide

whether to keep on pretending “that things are not ok, things are not ok”, or that they can start returning. Joe insists that it is time for Zimbabweans to overcome their fear and return. He thinks that although he is a refugee, it is probably safe for him to return after all these years; the chance of somebody remembering him and persecuting him is very slim. Still, he says that he himself could fall prey to “the fear factor”, something which is reflected in his own account – his return plans remain undecided. Yolanda is another respondent who complains about Zimbabweans talking and talking without returning. There are so many diasporic meetings on development and return, she says, but little action from most people.

The noisy asylum seeker

There is distrust in the diaspora and part of it is about who is a so-called genuine refugee. As mentioned above, there is a belief that some people are claiming to have been MDC activists in Zimbabwe while actually belonging to the ZANU-PF side. Furthermore, there is a discourse claiming that few of the current asylum seekers are genuine refugees, they are economic migrants. George, for example, was keen to point out to me that “[y]ou may not have met a refugee from Zimbabwe before me. Probably this is the first time. The bulk of what we have here are economic refugees.” Pasura (2010a) also found that Zimbabweans are convinced that a vast majority of fellow Zimbabweans come to the UK for economic reasons.

Sometimes distrust between asylum seekers and other Zimbabweans can provoke conflicts. The community leader told me about a virtual meeting between voluntary assisted returnees and asylum seekers arranged by the IOM. The asylum seekers had become very angry at the returnees:

“Because these guys [the returnees] [...] some of them were finding it tough, but there was a number who were doing ok [says] ‘things are not that bad. In Zim we stay out of politics and no one has given us a hard time’. But the guys from here [the asylum seekers] were, ‘it’s really bad for us’ and so on and so forth. In a sense what they are saying is ‘you guys are ruining our cover story’.”

It seems that the asylum seekers in this story feel that voluntary repatriated returnees endanger their credibility. What is more, we learn that they have; the community leader himself calls the stories they provide the Home Office with ‘cover stories’. Simultaneously, there are Zimbabweans who hold legal status in the UK who accuse asylum seekers of stealing the debate about return. Had it not been for asylum seekers, return to Zimbabwe could have been discussed more freely in public. Stanford says that while there are many Zimbabweans who wish to return to Zimbabwe and would have wanted to discuss possibilities for return

publicly, the asylum seekers' "argument seems to drown out anyone else's argument. So it's always the failed asylum seekers sort of saying that they're afraid to go back because they might be killed and so on." As the asylum seekers are very well-organised, continues Stanford, they turn up at public meetings in greater numbers than other diasporic groups and "outnumber" other voices. Jim says that even Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe are sceptical towards some fractions of the diaspora getting more attention than others. As he says:

"The Zimbabweans in the UK have quite a strong voice in the media that is concerned with Zimbabwe. And therefore, a lot of the views of people here, or that are expressed by the Zimbabwean groups here, are well-known by the Zimbabweans who are still in Zimbabwe. [...] And, I think the problem is not that they are making noise, it's that the people in Zimbabwe think that they are making noise about the wrong things. So ... the people in Zimbabwe would rather, that the Zimbabweans here highlighted the problems in Zimbabwe. Whereas a lot of the campaigns or the organisations that are held here, are ... more geared towards people here. So ... ehm. Better treatment for refugees, access to asylum. Those kind of things. Which for people in Zimbabwe is very disconnected. "

Expectations

Another strong influence revealed by the narratives of return, is expectations emerging from Zimbabweans who are in Zimbabwe. That such expectations influence migrants is a common topic in the return literature (Carling 2002, Kufakurinani 2012). Stanford says that expectations are linked to Zimbabwean history in the Shona proverb *chitsvia chiri mutsoka* [something new is in the feet]:

"So, there's even a proverb in Zimbabwe that sort of says like, 'if you want something new, you'll find it in your feet', that's sort of a literal translation which really means like, if you go on a journey, then you get something new. So, since they discovered gold in South Africa, a lot of Zimbabweans migrated, [...] made a lot of money there and they came back with wealth. So that pattern has repeated over the years. Anybody who leaves Zimbabwe normally returns bearing gifts, bearing huge sums of wealth."

Traditionally, Zimbabwean migrants have returned in wealth and now it seems a common understanding that the only way to return is to return wealthy. *Return of failure* is not an option to migrants (Cerese 1974). Not all expectations have their root solely in Zimbabweans' imaginations of the migration experience, however. Jim explains how people's behaviour when abroad impacts on expectations:

"I've met a lot of people in Zimbabwe [...] who feel quite abandoned by their family who are here. And in some cases it might well be true, but in others, I think it's a problem of perception. [...] And facebook is a *major* contributing factor to that. [...] You have to be quite wealthy in Zimbabwe, in terms, to spend your weekend barbecuing and sitting around your car listening to music and drinking beers with lots of pretty girls around you. Whereas here it's pretty easy, you don't need to be that wealthy to do that, and people post all these pictures on facebook, and then the family at home [smiles] who people have just

said ‘I don’t have money for’ ... whatever, and they see on facebook someone who is living what they think is a dream life, you know, it may not be.”

Migrants use social media and contact with family to display only the part of their life that they are proud of. They give an impression of being wealthy. The community leader I met explains that when people get influenced by expectations this is linked to Zimbabwean pride. It relates to what he calls a “psychology of status” where having a menial job is not acceptable in the African man’s psyche. Return to Zimbabwe is postponed as long as people do not hold jobs that they are proud of or can display wealth and status upon return.

The reality is that many Zimbabwean migrants struggle in the UK, they have become deskilled and relatively poor compared to how they left and especially to what they feel is expected of them. Peter is one of the respondents who feels that the expectations emerging from Zimbabwe influence him:

“There is an expectation from Zimbabweans back home, that when you’ve been in the diaspora, you’re better off. And therefore, when you come back home, we expect you to show that you are better off, financially, economically. We don’t expect you to go back to the old job, we expect you to have a better job, we expect you to have a better house, [...] we expect you to be driving a Mercedes Benz or, those are the expectations back home. And they have an effect on me, because those are the expectations of my people at home. And I know I cannot meet those expectations, because I have a small car here, I don’t have enough money, I don’t have savings here. Ehm. So, eh, it’s a bit difficult.”

The repetition of the word “we” and Peter’s explanation that these communal statements come from “my people at home”, underlines the strength of the influence of expectations. Sometimes one can feel forced to stay in the UK because of expectations and against one’s own wish and better knowledge. As Simbai explains: “I think that [...] fear of people expecting too much from you, that has made people even worse off than, because they would say ‘ah, you cannot go there because I’ to impress someone, you know. But maybe it would be good for you to go back there, than to stay here.” Ushehwedu Kufakurinani (2012) focuses on the families left behind in Zimbabwe when describing how migration has produced what he calls a *crisis of expectation*. Both family members and migrants themselves expected that migration would improve the households’ living conditions by producing income through remittances. Instead it often leads to family feuds and breakups as migrants struggle to meet with expectations and the family members in Zimbabwe are disappointed about lack of communication, remittances and visits. This crisis of expectation stems not only from the expectations that family members express, but also the expectations that the migrant continues to have to the migration experience. When these expectations lead to migrants who would

benefit from returning not doing so, that could be added to the list of negatives in the crisis of expectations.

6. RETURNING TO ZIMBABWE?

At the end of every interview, I asked the research participant to fill in an attributes form that would provide me with some background information as well as work as a clarification of our discussion (see annex). I asked directly and quantifiably about return intentions; whether the participant plans to return, has a return wish, a wish to remain in the UK, a wish to move to another country or is undecided about return. Instead of working as a clarification, however, I often felt more confused than enlightened by the responses. There are internal conflicts or ambivalences in the respondents' return considerations that I will explore below.

Ambivalence

The cautious plan

First, it is important to mention those participants who are very clear about their return intentions; three respondents hold a plan to return and a further two respondents have a clear plan *not* to return to Zimbabwe. Among the interviewees, the three people who are forging plans to return to Zimbabwe are Jim, Yolanda and Zibusiso. Although some interviewees describe returnees as 'risk takers', they themselves are cautious and prefer carefully planning return. The plan should even incorporate an escape route. Jim, who was a political activist in Zimbabwe, wishes to return in order to get involved in MDC politics again. But before he leaves he says he wishes to own a house in the UK. This house is his escape route should he need to flee from Zimbabwe because of politics. In addition, Jim wants to secure an income in Zimbabwe. He considers Zimbabwe to be uncertain economically as well as politically. Yolanda also plans to return and has already visited Zimbabwe and gone for job interviews in the development sector. She says that she is ready to return anytime, but repeatedly states "I know that I could always come back to England." Zibusiso has the clearest plan of the three; she is taking a six months sabbatical from her work next year and returns to *try*. Her plan is cautious, she says; "but then again, as I said, I have not lived in Zimbabwe for a long time so that's why we – I don't want to give my job up – I want to go home and try." If she makes a permanent move, she will retire from work life in the UK and enjoy a relaxing life style and volunteer work in Zimbabwe. Holding legal status in the UK or British citizenship allows these three people to lay return plans of a careful nature. The carefulness also shows that even migrants with a plan to return negotiate with uncertainty.

Two people amongst the interviewees plan not to return to Zimbabwe to reside. Christopher and Victoria both feel that they have left Zimbabwe behind for good, just keeping

the country in their hearts as happy childhood memories. Christopher says that when he left Zimbabwe in 1999 he closed the door to it, and this closure has been confirmed by two visits that he made soon after emigration. Visits can indeed work to positively confirm return choices (Muggeridge and Doná 2006). Christopher feels that Zimbabwe has deteriorated, that people are negative and he felt evicted when he left it, claiming British citizenship by ancestry. Although he plans a third visit in the future, he now considers himself a tourist in Zimbabwe.

Unclear intentions

The remaining 13 interviewees are, following the results from the attributes form, divided in their return intentions amongst holding a wish to return, wishing to remain in the UK or being undecided. However, when I tried to divide the participants into these different categories, I found this was not as easy a task as it seemed. In their responses, there is ambivalence about return. For example, Tariro, an asylum seeker, refers to Zimbabwe when saying:

“I love my country. I don’t like what’s going on there. I hate the politics for one [...] I hate that, but I love my country, and ... I would love to be at home. If things were normal, [...] I’d like to be at home with my [family]! [Emotionally] I really would like to be with [them]!”

It seems clear that she wishes to return to Zimbabwe and the family members that she left behind. However, further into the interview, when thinking about why she initially decided to stay in the UK, she says; “when I came here, I discovered that I had the opportunity, like, to do more.” She has studied and worked in the UK and says that she has been continuously reassessing her situation. The economic and political situation in Zimbabwe has been a big part of that reassessment. Tariro, as other Zimbabweans, has applied for asylum after passing several years in the UK on other visa conditions. She is now trying to look positively upon her future and the possibility of legalisation. When I ask whether the UK could do anything to make her stay, she says: “[The] UK could allow me to work and settle down properly so that I can explore my full potential and contribute meaningfully to the country.” It seems that she is keeping the possibility of staying in the UK open, something which is reflected in her wish to continue her education if she obtains legal status. When I ask her to fill out the attributes form, however, she ticks off for holding a plan to return. I am left quite confused about her intentions.

This lack of clear return intentions is visible in many of the respondents’ narratives. It bears witness of an ambivalence that is an integral part of the migration experience and how

considering return is a continuous and emotional process (Kivisto and La Vecchia forthcoming, Oxfeld and Long 2004, Teo 2011). Furthermore, it says something about considering return to Zimbabwe in particular as Zimbabwe is in an uncertain situation. It also describes the uncertain situation of many Zimbabweans in the UK where they experience deskilling and lack of legal status.

Intending to return

An interesting trend in my material is that there are participants who are not ambiguous in their return *intentions* as such but who still express internal conflict in relation to return. These are four respondents who hold legal status in the UK and who say clearly that they will return to Zimbabwe, but who do not hold a return plan. One example is Joe. He is a refugee who wishes to return to engage in development. He considers it safe to return. When I ask him about his future plans, he says confidently “[w]ell, to go back to Zimbabwe.” He continues; “I ... think I’m giving myself at most four years. Just to finish off my studies and eh ... jump start one or two projects back home and ... I’ll be gone.” In the next four years he says he will “spend a lot of time in Zimbabwe, [pause] really preparing for my eventual return.” When I probe into his return plans, this dialogue plays out:

“Elin: Have you ever visited up until now?”

Joe: No.

Elin: No?

Joe: I’ve never been to Zimbabwe since 2000, no. No.

Elin: Do you have any visits planned?

Joe: [Looks at his phone] Sorry?

Elin: Do you have specific plans for a visit?

Joe: [pause]

Elin: ... ‘cause you said that during the next four years you want to spend ...

Joe: [Impatiently] Yeah, yeah, yeah, I, I, I need to-to-to, to really. I am very serious about [this plan]. So ... it will take a bit of time to [set up] ... [...] And after that, we go to Zimbabwe. Mm.

Elin: When do you think you will make your first visit?

Joe: [Matter of factly] Well, if this works out, possibly we will be looking at August-September. Yeah.”

There are internal conflicts in the time frame of Joe’s response. When my question challenges him to specify how he will visit Zimbabwe a lot during the next four years, he seems to brush me off and answers unclearly.

Another respondent in this group is clearly provoked by my questions. Bambanani is a professional who has stayed in the UK for nearly 40 years, but keeps underlining his strong intention to return to Zimbabwe. He explicitly clarifies that he means *permanent* return. He says it as strongly as this:

“Nothing can happen in Zimbabwe ... that will make me *not* return there. Even if they dropped a nuclear bomb there ... I’ll return there. That’s all. In as far as I’m concerned, I’ll return to Zimbabwe. It doesn’t matter if, if we had a dictator who was eating babies for breakfast I’d still return there.”

When asked why he has not returned in the last decades, he says “[w]hy I didn’t do it last week is because maybe I was doing something else” and “[w]ell, I consider it every day, I mean the thing is ... but every day brings its own, eh, problems.” He does not explain what is keeping him from returning other than mentioning that he is earning for a pension in the UK. Towards the end of the interview, he gets quite upset when I ask directly whether he knows when he will return:

Bambanani: I mean ... why did you ask that question? [laughs] Because ... eh ...

Elin: I’m curious [laughs]

Bambanani: No. Because ... your idea of returning is that somebody gives up their ... for instance ... I have a bank account here. I’ll have all sorts of things. [...] Do you mean that ... when I say I return to Zimbabwe, I give up all those?!

Elin: I guess that’s what I’m asking, that’s what I’m trying to ... dig a bit into, to find out ... how ...

Bambanani: [Cuts me off] Would it be reasonable to do that? [pause] Would it be reasonable, I mean, for anybody, to do that? [...] No! Because ... eh ... the way you progress, those are the advantages that have accrued to you, you don’t give them up. [...] I mean ... in my case I spent more time with foreigners than I did with my family. And I mean that ... that is not natural. Yeah. So ... there must be something that I gained out of that.”

Furthermore, he says:

“The thing is. I feel ... that I have a right to go to *any* country in the world who’s citizens come to my country. And they have a right to come to my country. Yeah? [...] So. I don’t think I have to prove my attachment to Zimbabwe by being in Zimbabwe. If at any time ... I need to be somewhere else – for whatever reason ... I will go there. But it is a sacrifice in terms of I would like to be home. I don’t want to be home if to prove that I’m a, I’m a dedicated Zimbabwean.”

Bambanani turns the question of return around asking whether he has not got the right to be in Britain. This is a way of avoiding the question that provokes him.

Before offering an explanation for the emotions and avoidance that Joe and Bambanani express when asked about their intention to return, I will first turn to another group of respondents. I will look at the other side of the legal status divide.

Ability

Asylum seekers' protection

Respondents without legal status give a clearer answer to the question of return itself.

Looking at Tariro's response above, she is ambivalent as to what she intends to do in the future, but not to what she is *able to do* at the present time. The participants lacking legal status in the UK (five asylum seekers and one participant with leave to remain), most firmly claim that they are not able to return at the moment. They say that it is unsafe for them; only Zimbabweans who are not politically involved can return. When I asked asylum seekers about their return considerations, it became a thought experiment. Similar to how Doyle's (2009: 39) study asked "if it were safe to do so, would you like to return to Zimbabwe?", I found myself having to ask in conditional ways in order to get more elaborations, other than 'I have no choice' or 'I can't'.

Considering return is for the asylum seekers not only tied to political safety in Zimbabwe, for some it is tied to not having anything to return to, and furthermore it is tied to the lack of legal status in itself. They are in limbo and forced to wait in the UK although life is difficult, they say. The alternative is to return to Zimbabwe without the possibility of ever re-emigrating, and that is not really an option. Esther, who has got temporary leave to remain, says that although her husband, her dependent in their asylum case, could return safely to Zimbabwe today "but because he's got the same status with me, if he goes ... he have ruined his [legal] status, he won't be able to come back."

Lack of legal status is also a *valid* reason for not returning, something widely accepted in the diaspora. In the circle of asylum seekers, for example at the Vigil, it is accepted to say that there is no possibility to return for them (The Zimbabwe Vigil 2011). There is a diasporic discourse or stance around lack of ability to return (Brubaker 2005). Interestingly, also Zimbabweans outside the group of the asylum seekers accept that return will jeopardise legal status and that therefore asylum seekers cannot return. Lack of legal status is a valid argument for not returning across groups in the diaspora. Similar things are found in other studies (Carling 2002, Muggeridge and Doná 2006). The community leader that I spoke to said to me that without papers, asylum seekers cannot go home, but when realising what he had said, corrected this to: "Ehm ... or, actually, that's not quite true. Eh ... they can go *home*, because the British government gladly gives them their papers to go [...] but then you can't ... come back." Other respondents make it even clearer that they appreciate the impossible situation that the asylum seekers are in. Yolanda puts herself in their place and says:

“It would be completely different if I [...] had come from a not so good upbringing [...] and [if I had] not had a passport at the moment or I’d claimed asylum. [...] Then I’d think ‘shit, shit!’ That’s what I’d think, that I can’t go back there because I don’t have the skills. If I try to get a job, I wouldn’t have the skills. If I tried to go back [to the UK], I couldn’t leave.”

Yolanda holds that asylum seekers have difficulty returning both because they risk losing the possibility to re-emigrate and because they have little to return to. Although there is a lot of suspicion towards the asylum seekers in a discourse about them being ‘bogus refugees’, this does not challenge the asylum seekers’ stance of exile in relation to return. None of the interviewees mention that they wish deportation for asylum seekers. Rather, they explain that after a long period of being trapped in the asylum system, asylum seekers will have too little to return to. Return is impossible for them if they are not given the opportunity to work in the UK, get skilled and prepare for return. Because it is widely held in the diaspora that asylum seekers are not able to return to Zimbabwe, it becomes a stance that protects them from the question of return. Then answer to the question becomes a simple ‘I can’t’.

Unable to follow intentions

“[E]ven if someone wants to go home, there’s a difference between wanting to go home and being able to go home. And I think that being able is a much clearer way of assessing it than those who want to go home.” (Jim)

Respondents discuss other’s *lack of ability* to return. They refer to Zimbabweans who lack legal status, but also to those who face severe economic restrictions or fear persecution upon return. I argue that being able to return is more complex than simply that asylum seekers cannot return, while Zimbabweans holding legal status can. Furthermore, I will show that accepting a wider definition of ability gives an insight into ambivalence around return and a dilemma that some respondents are in.

In chapters four and five it was demonstrated that return is a difficult question to answer as there are no simple pros and cons, but many uncertainties and collective influences that an individual needs to consider. Zimbabwean migrants in the UK have to consider uncertainty in Zimbabwe’s political and economic situation, the uncertainty of deskilling and lack of legal status, own and other’s expectations, discourses about how one should return and the uncertainty of not knowing what return will be like. There are fears about return as well as pride about returning in the right way. This can be daunting for many migrants, and for some it can amount to a lack of ability to return. I wish to define ability this widely, accepting that lacking ability to return is layered and complex.

However, for some migrants it is challenging to acknowledge their own lack of ability to return. I am referring to a group of migrants viewed above; those migrants who hold legal status in the UK and intend to return to Zimbabwe, but who lack a plan and avoid the question of return. There is wide belief amongst these migrants that Zimbabwe has experienced economic and political change. They focus on new opportunities in Zimbabwe and are geared towards returning to develop and reconstruct. What is more, this group follows a diasporic stance about return as in an *ideology of return* (Brubaker 2005, Israel 2000). They are communally committed to returning. They are at the front of voicing the discourses about a common belonging and how migrants must not get stuck in the UK. However, the lack of ability does affect them as they have not forged a plan to return. To continue with the two participants viewed above, Bambanani talks about earning for a pension before returning, he says that there are “problems” that hinder his return. I think his lack of ability to return lies in lack of wealth. He says that in the UK, “I’ve become more educated ... and more impoverished.” Similarly, Joe mentions “the fear factor” to me; that people fear the uncertainty of return. He says that this is the greatest challenge to return for the Zimbabwean diaspora and that it affects also him. I believe that when migrants who are loyal to the communal stance about returning face such challenges to return – what I call lack of ability – they face not abiding by *their own* loyalty to return. Their identity is linked to the stance or ideology to return and they are caught in a dilemma that becomes visible in their tactics to avoid questions about return. The interview setting becomes part of the discourse as my questions pry into their unfaithfulness to the stance they take. In contrast, the asylum seekers are protected by their stance of being exiles and the diasporic discourse holding that lack of legal status equals lack of ability. There is a legal status divide when it comes to diasporic stances about return and ability.

Identity

An interesting detail is that many of the undocumented migrants are finding belonging in the UK while in exile. Half of these respondents admit that they would like to stay given the chance. Gloria says “if they can give us a chance, especially me, I want a chance to stay here.” Nancy says that after spending a large part of her adult life in the UK and because she has her children around her, the UK feels like her home. In addition, she has nothing in Zimbabwe to go back to; no family, no house, no work. She has tried taking the British citizenship test online and it has gone very well, she talks of “winning it.”

There is only one person amongst 18 interviewees who does not have any doubts about his attachment to Britain, however. Christopher not only plans not to return to Zimbabwe, but he is determined to stay in Britain. It has become his home. For the other respondents, it is not without ambivalence that belonging is found. For the asylum seekers who have found belonging in the UK, there is ambivalence tied to lacking recognition in the UK because of lack of legal status and a material home in their new *home*. They are in limbo. Nancy's celebratory tones evaporate when she talks about her illegality and living conditions. Also for most respondents holding legal status, there is difficulty in acknowledging Britain as home. Britain is Zimbabwe's former colonial power and it is widely believed that Zimbabweans are not treated too well in the UK. Stanford says that he wishes to stay in the UK. Referring to how this decision is a matter he has to discuss with his partner, he says: "If it were up to me, I'd just stay here. I mean, I like the UK [laughs]." However, he says that there is a discriminatory climate in the UK and that he has resented British citizenship:

"[W]hen you look at the idea of British citizenship, [...] I feel like you lose part of your Zimbabweanness, and then you have to swear allegiance to the Queen and her offspring and all this. I ... I quite frankly find that somewhat insulting, ehm, for a proud people like ourselves where we have actually won our independence and have our own identity and our own country. [...] You see, a lot of people do it for convenience. Whereas I don't think, eh ... my humiliation through that process, would, eh ... be a convenient thing for me. [...] I think British citizenship is for British people. A Zimbabwean like me ought to remain Zimbabwean."

Even though Stanford likes the UK, he is ambivalent towards becoming British. Only Christopher amongst the interviewees is fully able to settle down in the UK. This supports the idea of a strong communal stance about belonging to Zimbabwe and how migrant identity is linked to Zimbabwe as home. The migrant is standing in between here and there and becomes ambivalent about returning and staying.

7. CONCLUSION

The main finding of this paper is that in Zimbabwean migrants' return considerations there is ambivalence. This is not a surprising finding in itself; ambivalence is both an integral part of the migration experience and there are enough uncertainties and collective influences around return to Zimbabwe to make migrants ambivalent about it (Kivisto and La Vecchia forthcoming). However, when the ambivalence that different research participants experience is explored, some interesting aspects emerge.

The asylum seekers I interviewed say that they are not able to return. They are afraid of being persecuted in Zimbabwe and they lack legal status. Lacking legal status is widely accepted in the Zimbabwean diaspora as lacking ability to return. For those migrants who hold legal status, however, there are reasons not to return, but few that are communally accepted as a lack of ability to return. There is a legal status divide in how the return question can be answered. If the migrants holding legal status stated that they were unable to return, other Zimbabweans would perhaps say that they had become 'stuck' in the UK or that they no longer were Zimbabwean in their identity and belonging. These are collective discourses. There are also identity issues within the migrant himself. This is especially visible in the case of migrants who hold a strong intention to return. When they do not return, they struggle to find reasons for it that are valid not only in the eyes of the wider community, but to themselves and their identity. Instead of providing reasons that explain postponed return, they provide unclear answers and tactics that avoid the question of when they will return or why they have not returned yet. Kivisto and La Vecchia (forthcoming) describe *loyalty* and *exit* as tactics responding to ambivalence, but I find that these tactics can in fact lead to further ambivalence. The authors explore the ambivalence of being a migrant but do not look at the question of return as such. Return is for the Zimbabwean respondents not only a question of imagining return, but also of whether imagination will become reality. To the respondents who intend to return to Zimbabwe, who use the tactic of *loyalty*, return signifies a real and permanent move that should take place as soon as it becomes possible. Pressure to actually return increases with opportunities and change in Zimbabwe. However, as the respondent is unable to make the move for different reasons, he is also unable to expose his inability. This is his dilemma and it increases ambivalence.

One group of respondents plan to return to Zimbabwe. They have the possibility to choose a plan where they could re-emigrate. The plan is not presented as a diasporic stance (Brubaker 2005), but as an individual decision. The different discourses and communal

stances about return in the diaspora and how some feel pressured by them, others feel protected by them and some do not relate to them as such, say something about how the Zimbabwean diaspora is at once a divided community and an influence of importance to individuals. Many of my interviewees mention not having enough or the right kind of contact with other Zimbabweans in the UK. However, this is stated with a certain sadness. Having a community is important in the Zimbabwean culture. At the same time, some Zimbabweans choose not to be engaged in diasporic groups. They wilfully avoid the community and its discourses, choosing the individuality that being a migrant in Britain offers. This could make their ambivalence less complex and easier to bear.

Asking how Zimbabweans consider return is a question that reveals many layers of ambivalence connected to uncertainties and influences, as explored in this paper, but also to identity, home, moral obligations and freedom. This paper is not an exhaustive exploration of return considerations; it demonstrates how extensive and complex the question of return is and reveals matters that must be explored further in the future.

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9. ANNEX

Initial proposal

Dissertation proposal, 27.02.2012

Student: Elin Berstad Mortensen

Course: MSc Global Migration

Proposed title

Returning to Zimbabwe?

– individual considerations and diasporic discourses about return migration

Introduction and relevance

Many migrants in the diaspora consider returning to the homeland (Cohen 1997). This especially applies to forced migrants and those who engage actively in homeland politics. However, thoughts about return are always complex, and one must expect to find a variety of intentions and discourses within one diaspora (Graham and Khosravi 1997). I want to explore what the thoughts about return are for migrants who left Zimbabwe during the last wave of immigration to the UK, during the economically critical and violent period after the referendum of the year 2000. Many of these people engage in Zimbabwe from the UK, some also in homeland politics, but the diaspora is heterogeneous and represents many different attitudes towards the homeland (Pasura 2010b). Discussions about return have become part of a new development rhetoric sparked by hopes for a regime change after the 2008 election that brought the opposition party MDC into a coalition government with Mugabe's ZANU-PF (McGregor and Pasura 2010). I am especially interested in how thoughts about return migration are shaped by the context of forced migration, and the different discourses about return that are present in the politicized Zimbabwean diaspora.

Aims and objectives

- To gain an insight into how Zimbabwean migrants reflect on the possibilities and realities of return migration to Zimbabwe, acknowledging the particularity of forced and asylum migration and of the Zimbabwean case.
- To explore how these reflections are interlinked with wider discourses about return migration in the UK, in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora.
- To investigate whether there is a politicization of return migration discussions.
- To map out the Zimbabwean diaspora(s) in regards to different views on return migration.

Research questions

- RQ1 In what ways do Zimbabwean migrants in the UK consider the possibilities and realities of return migration?
- RQ2 What different discussions and discourses about return migration exist in the Zimbabwean diaspora(s)?
- RQ3 How is return migration to Zimbabwe politicized in different ways?

Methods and analysis

I plan to conduct interviews that are transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. My sample will be approximately 20 Zimbabwean migrants who live in the Greater London area and who came to the UK in the period 2000-2010. I want a diverse sample representing

different parts of the diaspora, and I want to seek heterogeneity also in terms of when the migrants came to the UK, age, gender, social class, and representations of different diasporic and political organizations. I will use personal contacts, contacts in the Zimbabwe Association (ZA) and other diasporic gatherings as entry points to carefully pick my illustrative sample. In addition to these interviews, I will collect material from news, web and public meetings that will give an insight into the wider discourses about return identified through my interviews.

Existing literature

By return migration I mean ‘the movement of emigrants back to their homeland [...]’, but I will not as George Gmelch (1980, 136) did in his seminal review article add ‘to resettle’ as I believe that the analytical problems inherent to distinguishing between settlement, visits, extended visits and circular migration are too great. This difference is often not known by migrants themselves. I will primarily focus on voluntary return migration in my dissertation. It is important to consider the variety of reflexions about return in one and the same diaspora. Thoughts about return will often change over time as return is no simple “end of the refugee cycle” (Cassarino 2004, Graham and Khosravi 1997). The transnational approach to migration allows for a more nuanced view, and will in addition to social networks theory be one of my main frameworks of analysis (see below).

Following three waves of immigration since the 1980s, there are 200 000-500 000 Zimbabweans in the UK today (IOM 2006). Some are white Zimbabweans who claimed British citizenship, others came through labour migrant channels, others through the asylum system and some have come irregularly. These numbers, the long time frame and the different ways of entry gives a picture of the heterogeneous Zimbabwean diaspora. Dominic Pasura (2010b, 106-107) identifies four types of members of the Zimbabwean diaspora; visible, epistemic, dormant and silent members, describing the ‘intensively active in political and diasporic life, [...] cyberspace activists, [...] members [that] are inactive [and] people who are not involved in diaspora politics because of their desire to disown and distance themselves from the Zimbabwean background’. The diaspora is organised in different ways, through political organisations, interest organisations, churches, sports groups and some members remain unorganised. Diaspora meetings have shown strongly opposing views on return, the divide might follow residence status (McGregor and Pasura 2010). When Morgan Tsvangirai promoted return to the diaspora on 20 June 2009, he was booed of stage. The Zimbabweans, as other migrants of conflict diasporas, might see themselves divided amongst or somewhere between the categories of political exiles and integrated citizens (Graham and Khosravi 1997). Experiences with discrimination are not uncommon and many Zimbabweans feel opposition towards the UK (Pasura 2010a). Feelings of guilt and debt towards the homeland are common in conflict diasporas and will be another aspect to investigate in this case. There are also those who fear return as it recalls hard times and violence or because of their uncertain legal status (Graham and Khosravi 1997, McGregor and Pasura 2010).

Theoretical framework

1) Literature on return migration

- Defining return
- Looking at key issues in the return literature:
- Reasons for returning/staying
- Return and transnationalism
- Return as duty
- Returning as a failure/success

2) Postcolonial theory

- Opposition, discrimination and racism
- Multiculturalism

3) Literature on the diaspora and conflict diasporas in particular

- Social networks theory and political organisation
- Transnationalism
- Forced migration as a particular situation

Outcomes and value of research

The first proper review article on return migration dates 1980 and asked for more comparisons and model building in the return migration literature (Gmelch 1980). Much has been written on the topic of return since then, the fourth issue in 2011 of the journal *Mobilities* is in fact a special issue on return migration, illustrating the growing interest in return migration as a particular field within migration research (King and Christou 2011). Another example is an on-going large scale project from the Peace Research Institute of Oslo and the University of Sussex, *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration* (PREMIG), that makes comparisons between five immigrant populations in Norway, the UK and in the home countries (PRIO 2012). My dissertation will benefit from the insights in the literature. My project's particular contributions will be that I look at the particular case of Zimbabwe at what is a particularly interesting time. The conflict diaspora is standing at the edge of a period of change that now impacts on the diaspora's discourses and their individual member's considerations of return. I hope to contribute both to research on return migration and on Zimbabwe.

Timetable

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
Make contacts									
Lit. review									
Data collection									
Transcription									
Analysis									
Writing									

Specific deadlines:

27th of Feb	Dissertation proposal due
9th of March	Allocation of supervisor
2 nd of May	Oral presentation of dissertation proposal
9th of May	List of interviewees in place (personal deadline)
10th of Sep	Submission of dissertation

Preferred supervisor

JoAnn McGregor

Proposal bibliography

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Auto-critique

During the first stage of this research, when I made contacts in the Zimbabwean diaspora, engaged with Zimbabwean migrants and reviewed literature, the idea for this paper developed and took a more mature form. The two greatest changes from my initial proposal are that I decided to include a wider diversity of Zimbabwean migrants in my research and not to focus on ‘forced migration’.

As I discovered the diversity in the Zimbabwean diaspora through making my own experiences with it, I understood that to investigate return, including that diversity is important. There have been many different routes into Britain over time and the Zimbabwean diaspora is particular because of its fractured nature. Furthermore, although there are divides between groups, there is also communication between them; both friendly interaction and gossip. A great debate like that of return to Zimbabwe involves all these different communities. Zimbabwean migrants create both new inclusive forums as well as private clubs that debate development and return. Including diversity means including a fuller range of return considerations.

Distinguishing a ‘forced migrant’ from other migrants is as difficult a task as categorising return movements as either forced, semi-voluntary or voluntary. Instead of focusing strictly on people who immigrated during the decade 2000-2010 and narrowly on those who took the asylum route, I decided to include a wider range of individuals and also institutional representatives that know the Zimbabwean communities and issues intimately.

When creating the interview guide, I decided to take an open attitude to what I might find, exploring return considerations broadly albeit through topics guided by my research questions. This open approach was important as my research is the very first to focus strictly on the question of return for Zimbabwean migrants in Britain today. Throughout the analysis, uncertainty emerged as the greatest return consideration and intimately linked to normative, collective influences. One of the greatest challenges at the stage of analysis was to make sense of how individual migrants had different return intentions and took different stances to return. It was apparent that some migrants belonged to different groups – the groups of those migrants with a return plan and the group of asylum seekers being clear from the beginning – but making sense of the ambivalence that most respondents express was difficult. Approaching ambivalence through ability became the solution. It illustrates how ambivalence can become a bigger dilemma to migrants than what other scholars have found because they are not investigating return specifically.

A useful second stage of this project would have been to arrange for either a focus group or an internet forum in order for Zimbabwean migrants to comment on and debate my findings. This would allow for another round of engagement by research participants and it would be a way of digging deeper into the complexity of Zimbabwean migrants' return considerations. As this paper explores and clarifies return considerations, it also exposes a complexity that I would have liked to investigate further.

Interview guide

1. Personal history

- 1.1 Can you tell me about the main moves you have made in your life – both before you left Zimbabwe and after? (Reasons, with or without others, etc.)
- 1.2 Can you tell me about your life in the UK when it comes to family, friends, education opportunities, work and other issues that are important to you? (positive and negative aspects of life in the UK)
- 1.3 Have any big changes taken place in your life since leaving Zimbabwe? (Family, work, education, home etc.)
- 1.4 Can you tell me about your future plans? (Family, work, education, home, etc.)

2. Transnational ties

- 2.1 Can you tell me about your ties to Zimbabwe and how you keep in contact with Zimbabwe? (People, news, investments etc., through any org?)
- 2.2 Have you ever visited Zimbabwe since you came here? (If yes: tell me about these visits. If no: why not, would you like to, what do you do instead of visiting?)
- 2.3 In what ways have your ties to Zimbabwe changed over time?

3. Involvement in the diaspora

- 3.1 How do people from Zimbabwe keep in touch with each other in the UK?
- 3.2 When do you meet other Zimbabweans in the UK? Can you tell me about these meetings?
- 3.3 Are any meetings organised, are you a member of any organisation? (Church, NGO, political party, etc.) (If not: why? Have you ever considered this?)
- 3.4 In what ways are these meetings with other Zimbabweans important to you? (If yes to 3.2 and/or 3.3)
- 3.5 Have you been to any meeting in the diaspora where return was discussed? Or have you followed any news/other media discussions where return was a theme? Can you tell me a bit about this discussion?

4. Thoughts on return

- 4.1 Where would you say that “home” is?
- 4.2 Do you ever consider returning to Zimbabwe or going elsewhere? (If yes: What makes you think about this, what are the main reasons for staying/going, has this changed over time? If no: If you were to reflect on this, what would be the main reasons for staying/going, have your reflections changed over time?)
- 4.3 Have you ever considered British citizenship?
- 4.4 When discussing staying/going, do you involve anyone else? What are the issues that come up in these discussions?
- 4.5 What would be the advantages/disadvantages for you (and your family) in returning?
- 4.6 What does your family feel about your thoughts on moving?
- 4.7 If you have visited, how did this make you think in regards to return? Did it have an impact in any way? Did it affect your view on the UK and Zimbabwe?

5. Others' perception of return

- 5.1 What do you think other Zimbabweans in the diaspora think about return migration?
- 5.2 Do you have any thoughts on what the Zimbabwean government and the UK government think about return of Zimbabweans?

- 5.3 Do you know anyone who has returned? Or have you heard any general stories about returnees? How have these stories affected you?
- 5.4 What do Zimbabweans who are still in Zimbabwe think about returnees?
- 5.5 What do Zimbabweans who are still in Zimbabwe think about migrants in the diaspora in regards to return?

6. Wrap-up

- 6.1 What would the UK have to do to keep you here? What could Zimbabwe do to get you to return?
- 6.2 (Go through the attributes form and ask about anything that has not yet been covered.)
- 6.3 Is there anything else you would like to add?
- 6.4 (Do you know anyone else that I should talk to here in the UK?)

Attributes form

Informant ID:	
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Interview:

Date:	
Location:	
Duration:	
Reporting format:	

Informant background:

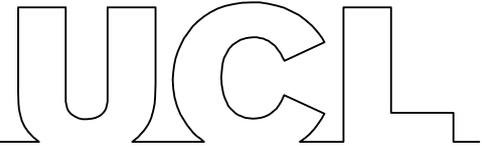
Year of birth:		
Gender:		
Place of birth:		
Place of current residence:		
Year of (first) emigration from Zimbabwe:		
Year of (first) immigration to the UK:		
Has visited Zimbabwe since immigration:		
Return intentions: RP : Return planned, RW : Return wish, UK : Wish to remain in the UK, T : Wish to move to a third country, U : Undecided.		
Citizenship(s):		
Ethnicity:		
Languages spoken:		

Comments:

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Information sheet for interviewees

UCL DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY



INFORMATION ABOUT THE MASTER'S DISSERTATION PROJECT *RETURNING TO ZIMBABWE?*

I want to learn from you! This sheet provides information about the project *Returning to Zimbabwe?* and is an invitation for you to take part in it by giving an interview. *Returning to Zimbabwe?* is a master's dissertation project that focusses on discovering how Zimbabweans in the UK consider (or not) returning to Zimbabwe. I am interested in Zimbabweans thoughts about returning and know that some want to do this, others have decided to stay in the UK, and others have not made up their mind. Some Zimbabweans also fear being returned against their will. I am interested in all these perspectives.

Who conducts this research? My name is Elin Berstad Mortensen and I am a master's student at the University College London, studying for an MSc in Global Migration. My dissertation is supervised by Dr. JoAnn McGregor.

What does it mean to participate? I welcome you to talk with me in an individual interview. Your thoughts and experiences will be very valuable to me. Approximately 20 people are invited to take part in this research. I am keen to involve research participants who together represent diversity in the Zimbabwean diaspora. The research will involve interviews about how you consider return migration – today and over time – and no specialist knowledge is required. Interviews will take 1-2 hours and can take place somewhere that suits you. Interviews are conducted in the period Mid May to End June 2012.

My promise to research participants:

- Consent will be obtained from all participants before any interview is conducted.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- All transcripts will be made anonymous, by removing names and identifying characteristics, unless otherwise agreed.
- Permission will be requested from you to record interviews using a digital voice recorder.
- The completed master's dissertation will be made available to you upon request
- All data will be collected and stored securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be deleted after ten years.

You are welcome to raise any other issues or concerns with me.

How can I be contacted? Feel free to contact me about my project by e-mail: e.mortensen.11@ucl.ac.uk or phone: 075 680 77741. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or would like to participate in the project.

Thank you for considering taking part in my study!

Excerpt from transcript

Interview 12 June, North East London. With Simbai.

[...]

Elin: Can you tell me more about ... like how you keep in contact with Zimbabwe? Like, both the people who are back there, and ...

Simbai: It's, well I ... my, my wife phones me usually, because I, even I don't have money, to, to phone, to call her, so she is the one who sometimes phones me here. Yeah. Maybe twice or trice per week. Then I speak with her. But most people ... it's hard for them to ... to ... to phone here. When I have the chance sometimes I phone, but not, every day, and, eh ... And some of them, we communicate over, the what do you call, the facebook. You know, yeah. E-mail, yeah. Some of my colleagues. Yeah.

E: Do you keep very up to date with news and things like that in Zimbabwe?

S: I do, I do read a lot when I go to the library. Yeah. I spend most of my time reading. So, when I, whenever I go on the internet. I check newspapers from home, then sometimes I ... when I communicate with those people, I sometimes ask them, verifying some of the things that I read on the newspapers, asking them is it what is really happening here. Uh, if that's some stories on the news, yeah. So. So I, I'm, I'm at least up to date. Especially when I'm, when it comes to broad news, I mean, to news that is, you know, yeah. Because I always read some ... newspapers from Zimbabwe, yeah. Most, not only from the internet, I mean, those are, that are published there in Zimbabwe, you know, that, that local dailies there, or weeklies, and other news are, other news agents from, from, from wherever you know, but they talk of Zimbabwe. Yeah. Then ... I, like when my wife phones me, I, I sometimes ask her, or even my friends, like, one or two phones me, I, sometimes ask them, what the situation is like. Yeah.

E: Mhm. Ehm. I ask people whether, whether they have visited Zimbabwe since coming to the UK, but

S: No I haven't.

E: No.

S: No. I, I, I, I, I'm, I'm an asylum seeker so

E: So you can't

S: No I cannot. Yeah.

E: Yeah, it's different with different people that I, I ask. Would you like to visit?

S: To visit Zimbabwe? I am not allowed to go there? I'm not allowed to go to Zimbabwe, anyhow. Because you will, that's the problem, that's the reason why I am looking for asylum. That I can't go. As it is now, I can't be in Zimbabwe. Yeah. [pause] But if things change, obviously, yeah, I would rather go, yeah.

E: Do you feel like, for the year that you have been here, have your ties to Zimbabwe and the way you keep in contact, has it changed over that time, you think?

S: Yeah, somehow. You, you stay, you, you keep going, drifting further, further, further, especially with the. Yes. Except maybe with my family. Yeah. But. With friends, you know, you ... communicating with them, after some period, you know, it's different from, like, face to face interaction, yeah. It's different. Here it's now, here you keep on, it's like drifting further, further, further, further, further, further away. The way, you, you always try to go to, to be in touch, but it's ... I mean, it's getting weaker and weaker and weaker and weaker, I don't know ... maybe it's time. Yeah, yeah.

E: Do you know how, how other Zimbabweans in the UK, how they keep in contact with Zim? With people, with ... property, with news, with different things ...

S: Ah, it's, it's, it's, I don't know, maybe that's the reason why I sometimes, I say I want to go back home. Because you know, most Z-Zimbabweans that, I mean, I only meet them like at you know ... some events like, you don't normally ... I don't, I don't meet them like going

to their houses, or, you only meet them like, like Zim Vigil. Yeah. There's, there's no room for, I mean, it's ... just a, just a short period of time. You can't ... you don't usually discuss a lot of things with people. And some of them we meet at, ah ... where, where we do our political meetings, in [place], but most of them, unfortunately they are asylum seekers. And ...

E: MDC meetings, or?

S: Yeah. So, so, they don't usually ... most of them are asylum seekers, they are not ... they are in the mess, in the same situation as me. We are in the same situation. So for them to say they go to Zimbabwe, it, it's rare you find someone who is ... who say I go, it's only maybe one person that I know, who ... went to Zimbabwe last year. Where I volunteer, there's a lady there from Zimbabwe, yeah, she's the only one who I know who said she had been to Zimbabwe, last year. For the holiday, yeah. But, but most, most of the other people, no.

E: They are in the same kind of situation.

S: Yeah, yeah. Even though they have been here maybe for years. Yeah. But they haven't been to Zimbabwe. Yeah. [pause]

E: Do they also stay, like, up to date, like you do, with like following news and ... what is happening amongst friends at home and family?

S: ... I don't ... that's what I'm saying, we don't usually ... discuss or, I mean, things like ... yeah, we talk of, you know ... major things like political, you know, not really about family matters, like our family, what family is doing there, and. We just discuss on issues like, eh, ... what about the elections, what people are dying, you know, such broader subjects. And intimate things like family, how are they doing, we don't use, it's very rare to discuss things like that. Even if you are ... even if you have people from the same ... eh ... the same political party. And most of them, most of them, we don't even ... we only meet, we don't even. You don't even know where they, they live, you know. It's one of those things, we might be from the same country, but, eh ... there's this privacy. You know, people they don't like to ... unless you are really close, they don't, they don't usually, I don't know the suspicion, I don't know the suspicion, people, I don't know why they do that, that they do,

you can't even, don't know even, where a person stays, who she stays with or who he stays with. Yeah, what kind of, life he leads. You don't know, we only meet, you know, like, those gatherings. Rallies, eh, demonstrations, and it ends there. Yeah. [pause]

E: So that will be very different than what, then what you have back in Zimbabwe as well? With the way you kind of, kind of meet people and ...?

S: In Zimbabwe?

E: Yeah, cause in Zimbabwe, I guess you would go to people's houses ...

S: Ah, no, you, you, you would go for funerals. [laughs]

E: No! [laughs]

S: There is nowhere you can say, you know, you know, there is nowhere you can say, even if there's a political meeting, you are not related, you are just here maybe for an idea that you are, you know, we [laughs], but we, we are, we are united. When it comes to, like to, funerals. We make sure that we attend that person's funeral! [passion in voice] Whether he, he's a next of kin who died or, we go there, if it's a party we go there. We are just close, but, you know, close people. You know, even if, eh, even if it means somebody lives, like, like, you know like another suburb, maybe are living in Bethnal Green and somebody lives in Brixton, but you belong to the same party. We know each other, we go there! We say, ok, let's go, let's send our representatives there.

[...]