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Diasporic reorientations: Emotional geographies of the Zimbabwean diaspora in a post Mugabe era

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Abstract

In recognition of multi-sited and dynamic diaspora formation, this article explores the relationship between significant (yet limited and differentially experienced) political change and emotional geographies for those outside of their country of birth. We do this with reference to the removal of President Robert Mugabe from power, as experienced by first-generation Zimbabwean migrants, asking if and how "change" has been experienced and felt, but also what such responses do through what we call *diasporic reorientations*. This helps us to think through emotional alignments with/to Zimbabwe, as part of practical trajectories already under formation, but reinforced, exacerbated and in some cases reconfigured. We discuss how participants understood and navigated contested notions of "change" with attention to the ambiguous co-existence of celebration, uncertainty, scepticism and tentative hopefulness. We then highlight the significance, complexity and unevenness of diasporic reorientations, through intentions, desires and experiences of return. In so doing we contribute to debates around the significance of emotional spatialities and temporalities in the re-construction of diasporic subjectivities, through and despite of such "change".

Keywords

Diaspora, Zimbabwe, ~~Mugabe,~~ Emotions, Affect, Orientation

~~**Word Count (excluding abstract, keywords and acknowledgements)**~~

~~9083~~

Introduction

On November 14th 2017 'Operation Restore Legacy' saw tanks take to the streets of Harare, Zimbabwe, after army chief Chiwenga publicly denounced President Mugabe's sacking of Vice President Mnangagwa. Later that week, in another unprecedented development, citizens from across social divides flooded the capital's streets demanding Mugabe's resignation. The following day, in a rambling televised address, Mugabe defied expectations that he would resign. However, by November 21st Mnangagwa had called for Mugabe to stand down and later that day the President tendered his resignation, ending 37 years of rule (Mudau and Mangani, 2018).

The "change"[1] many Zimbabweans had been hoping for had arrived, and the public emotional outpouring was striking in a nation where dissent has often been suppressed (Kasambala, 2006) and where there was no 'coup precedent' (Tendi, 2019: 40). The week witnessed frustration and anger, before celebration, joy and relief erupted. Affective reverberations, via news channels, papers and social media (Washington Post, 2017), were felt far beyond Zimbabwe as the millions-strong diaspora gathered online, in public spaces and homes in anticipation (Simpson, 2017) and celebration. Yet, only 9 months later, following the first 'post-Mugabe' elections, familiar events unfolded, questioning the extent of change. Amid vote-rigging claims and dashed hopes of the "new dispensation" (Mnangagwa, 2017), violence flared up, leaving three dead as ZANU-PF[2] retained power.

[1] This idea of change is treated with caution as recognition of the contested nature of this notion amongst our research participants.
[2] ZANU PF stands for Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front.

In recognition of multi-sited and dynamic diaspora formation (Taylor, 2018), this article explores the relationship between significant (yet limited and differentially experienced) change and geographies of belonging for those outside their country of birth (Christou and Mavroudi, 2016). We do this with reference to Mugabe's removal, as experienced by first-generation Zimbabwean migrants, asking if and how "change" has been experienced and felt, but also what such responses do through what we call *diasporic reorientations*. This helps us to think through the temporality of emotional alignments with/to Zimbabwe, as part of practical trajectories already under formation, but reinforced, exacerbated and in some cases reconfigured. Despite recognition that events would not lead to "real change", degrees of tentative hopefulness surfaced amidst uncertainty, enabling differentiated reorientations that were routed through complex space-times. We thus contribute to debates around the significance of emotional geographies in the re-construction of diasporic subjectivities (Conradson and McKay, 2007), through *and despite of* such events.

After outlining the position of the Zimbabwean diaspora in relation to Mugabe, the paper sets out our understanding of 'diasporic reorientations' that emphasises the productive, situated and relational character of diasporic belonging. Our methodology outlines fieldwork with Zimbabweans living in multiple national/local contexts. We go on to discuss how participants variously understood and navigated these events with attention to the ambiguous co-existence of celebration, uncertainty, scepticism and tentative hopefulness. We lastly highlight the significance, complexity, and unevenness of diasporic reorientations through intentions, desires and experiences of return.

Mugabe's Zimbabwe and the diaspora

"It was Mugabe who was in power and all this suffering I attributed to him." (Female, 35-44, resident in UK for 11-15 years)

November 2017 was significant because of the longevity of Mugabe's rule, but also because of the association between the leader, party and nation. Although ZANU-PF[3] had been subject to splits, and Mugabe was Prime Minister under ZANU before becoming President under ZANU-PF in 1987, *together* they were an enduring and powerful force. While ZANU-PF has been portrayed as monolithic, it was until this moment, "a loose and fragmented coalition party, held together by the persona of Mugabe" (Nkiwane, 1998:110).

Mugabe's ability to maintain his position was primarily based on his liberation credentials in wrestling control from the white Rhodesian government (1965-1979) during long and bloody military campaigns (Nkiwane, 1998). In addition, he sought tight control of his inner circle, exacerbated established ethnic and racial divisions (Mutanda, 2013) and repressed opposition voices. Although the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) emerged from 1999 as a credible force, and at one point formed a Government of National Unity with ZANU-PF (2009-2013), ZANU-PF's *and* Mugabe's monopoly on power continued. Tendi (2010: 1-3) suggest this was achieved through a "patriotic history" (Ranger, 2004) which "distorted legitimate concerns and grievances", creating a citizenry of *either* "patriots" loyal to party *and* country or "sell-outs" to neo-colonial forces.

Amidst the hyper-inflation, extreme unemployment and political intimidation of the early 2000s, pressures on the regime emerged from within the continent (McGreal, 2008). Ultimately though, Mugabe's resignation came about through the culmination of a feud within ZANU PF, which saw Mugabe's ability to command loyalty from key liberation struggle figures wane Tendi (2019).

Whether through political persecution, economic necessity or a combination of forces that meant a better life could be lived elsewhere, Zimbabwean emigration has been bound to

[3] Originally formed as the Zimbabwe African National Union in 1963.

Mugabe. Indeed, Mugabe was known for his demonization of emigrants as “inauthentic citizens” (Mano and Willems, 2010). His departure therefore represented a significant moment in the life of the diaspora, that maintains vital political (Mbiba, 2012), economic (UNDP, 2010) and social (Bloch, 2010) connections. McGregor (2009) notes that (in the UK) Zimbabweans retain an explicitly “long distance nationalism”. However, the Zimbabwean diaspora is neither fixed nor homogenous (Pasura, 2011). As post-colonial scholars argue, to be diasporic is an emergent, contextual and multi-sited process of belonging (Hall, 1996) that does not necessarily entail a desire for some authentic and lost homeland (Brah, 1996). Rather than relying on fixed co-ordinates, it is a ‘heuristic device to think about questions of home, belonging and community in the context of dispersal and transnational networks of connection’ (Fortier, 2001:406).

The history of outward migration points to this evolution and diversity. The UNDP (2010) identify five distinct phases since 1960. During the last phase from 1999, 3–4 million individuals relocated mainly to South Africa, UK, Botswana, Australia, USA, Canada and New Zealand. This built on historical regional mobility, but also involved those seeking asylum, (Bloch, 2010) applying for work visas and enrolling as students in the Global North (Crush and Tevera, 2010; McGregor, 2010). This included the movement of highly educated and professional black Zimbabweans into “abject spaces” of irregular immigration status and poorly paid, insecure and undesirable work (McGregor, 2008). Within these flows, “increasingly restrictive regimes of mobility” (Kleist, 2016:1) exacerbated complex social cleavages. In the UK context, Pasura (2014) defines the Zimbabwean diaspora as “diverse” and “fractured” in relation to mobility, settlement, relationships with “host” and “homeland”, gender and ethnicity. In the context of the events that contextualise our research, the surfacing of emotions was central to both shared and diverse experiences.

Emotional geographies and diasporic reorientations

Whilst neglected in more "rational" accounts, emotions are constitutive of transnational experiences (Svašek, 2010; Christou, 2011; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015). This can be seen through traumatic migration control (Canning, 2019), political activism (Milan, 2018), long distance intimacy such as care chains (McKay, 2007) as well as love and sexuality (Mai and King, 2009). One central feature of this literature is emotional ambiguity, such as the simultaneity of uncertainty and hope. As Kleist (2016: 4) explains, uncertainty emerges from unpredictable futures, contextualised by precarious livelihoods and an absence of assurance regarding mobility. However, this "lack of closure" also opens "space for hope" (Kleist, 2016: 4). Whilst the focus for Kleist (2016) and others including Carling and Collins (2018) is on the "drivers of migration", other research has emphasized hopeful yet fragile emotions in the negotiation of belonging between, for example, racialized migrants and more settled residents (Askins, 2016). Thinking through a diasporic lens, we emphasise the *on-going* negotiation of uncertainty and hope (amidst other affective states) that incorporate multiple times and places (Brah, 1996; Conradson and McKay, 2007; Taylor, 2018).

We draw attention to the relational geographies and nonlinear temporalities that inform migrant experiences (Clayton and Vickers, 2019a) and more specifically, diasporic belonging. Attention to emotions is not then just reserved for era-defining moments of 'hot nationalism' (Paasi, 2016), yet such a focus lays bare affective relations that are reinforced, exacerbated, but also reconfigured, as shown through other political ruptures, such as the Arab Spring (Gabiam and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2017). For those living outside their country of birth, responses to developments elsewhere may be momentous, yet also relationally situated, contested and part of enduring (dis)connections.

Andits (2010) explores these (dis)connections through the Australian-Hungarian experience in the aftermath of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. Through shifting discourses of identity, belonging and contribution, directed towards, and emanating from the diaspora, she

points to the "double voiced" discourses of hope and disappointment. Desires to contribute to Hungary's future, were met with dismissive formal responses renewing alienation, distrust and a comfort in being distant. In this sense "…exilic narratives often compete with diasporic dreams of connectedness" (Andits, 2010:1003), mediated by longer standing attachments and key moments that animate/disrupt established dispositions.

The circulation of affect and expression of emotions that connects "distant" places, illustrates the sociality, materiality and spatiality of the emotional as a "relational being-in-the-world" (Svašek, 2010). That is, emotions are both performed through specific positionalities, but also form the basis of actions that have practical and material qualities. As Anderson and Wylie (2009:332) argue: "corporeal sensibilities, senses of self and world, are precipitated, activated, through intertwinings of matter and sense." At the same time, there is no smooth relationship between emotion and action, as Mavroudi (2018) explores in her work on the limits of diasporic mobilisation in crises for Palestinians and Greeks. The way in which emotions *matter* is differentially enacted.

We suggest that Ahmed's notion of *orientation* is pertinent here. Ahmed suggests that orientation is "a question not only about how we 'find our way", but how we come to "feel at home." (Ahmed, 2006: 7), emphasising emotional alignments and practical trajectories that emerge across space and time. Ahmed (2006) draws attention to the way emotions are always oriented towards something, and that through this they shape bodies "as forms of action" and their orientation towards 'others'. In *Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) she outlines how orientation requires attention to alignments with objects *and* an intensity of feelings that may both be produced by, and is productive of, bodily arrangements in space. This productivity allows us to think of orientation not as individualised one-off achievements, but as relational and unfolding positionings across relational space and time that are subject to renewal and change. Ahmed conceptualises this in terms of active "*re*orientation" through ongoing

encounters with “emotive objects”. In our own study such encounters are revealed as situated, embodied and immediate, yet also mediated and connected, forging “emergent configurations” (Hawkins, 2018:75) of diasporic identity.

> “Emotions are impressions made on us by certain objects that trigger ‘affective forms of reorientation’ towards the object of encounter and encounter itself, it is through the encounter with emotive objects and the intensity of feelings that such encounter produces that social spaces are reshaped and bodies re-arranged” (Ahmed 2004: 54).

For Ahmed (2004), orientation is illuminated through attention to *dis-orientation*; an absence of familiarity, of not feeling at home. Through concepts such as ‘homing desires’ (Brah, 1996), scholars have argued that diasporic visions of home may “…not so much be about the connection with a country as it is about the creation of a sense of place, which is often uttered in terms of ‘home’”(Fortier, 2000: 163). This implies a consideration of not just how one moves towards (or away from) some idea, object, body or place, or how ones feels about/towards those entities, but how such (dis)positions “emerge *within* the very spaces of inhabitance” (Fortier, 2001:420). For example, in Raffaetà’s (2015) study of Ecuadorians in Italy, she argues that ‘hope as affect’ is materially emplaced with(in) objects and spaces of everyday life in new places of settlement, that “help[s] people orient themselves in relation to the world” (p. 119). Yet Ahmed suggests that “migrant orientation” might be a process of *both* dis-orientation *and* re-orientation; “…of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home.” (Ahmed, 2004:10).

In this paper we emphasise how ‘becoming oriented’ does not occur *just* through the search for and establishment of homes in new (and sometimes hostile) places, but *also* through transnational connections that are never entirely lost and for many first generation

Zimbabweans live on. We focus on those orientations that are renewed, that shift, and are affected through enduring and evolving relations between places, suffusing both cumulative experience with moments of "hot nationalism" (Paasi, 2016).

Methodology: diasporic experiences of "change"

Whilst recognising the elusivity of "inexpressible affects" (Pile, 2010), we acknowledge here the deep entanglements of affect and emotions (Miller, 2015). In this spirit, an attempt was made to understand how November 2017 and its aftermath were experienced and expressed by first-generation Zimbabweans living outside Zimbabwe[4].. We employed methods that allowed for both access and rich qualitative reflections, with a commitment to provide a space for the expression of feelings and experiences (Clayton and Vickers, 2019b).Allied with an appreciation of the contexts through which articulations are produced and inevitably translated, we engaged with participants to consider 'how conscious thoughts mutually co-construct emotional responses and behaviours' (Askins, 2016: 518). Fieldwork was conducted from December 2017 – December 2018, comprising two stages. Initially an online questionnaire focussing on immediate reactions to of Mugabe's resignation was conducted amongst established educational, religious and civil society networks of first-generation adult Zimbabweans living outside Zimbabwe from December 2017 until February 2018 (n=128). Participants were then largely those educated to degree level and had in many cases either been in full time education or professional occupations in Zimbabwe. Whilst these limitations are acknowledged, as Mbiba (2011) shows, many Zimbabweans, particularly in the Global North, fit this profile.

Given the dispersed character of the Zimbabwean diaspora, the questionnaire allowed us to access participants globally. There was a bias towards the UK (42 per cent). However, we also

[4] Glimpses of the experiences of our participants' children would suggest a very different relationship with Zimbabwe and their diasporic identity.

gathered responses from those residing within: South Africa (20 per cent), USA (9 per cent) as well as Namibia, Botswana, Australia, Canada, Mozambique, South Sudan, Ireland, China, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Ecuador, Swaziland and Eritrea. The sample was split fairly evenly by gender (58% female, 42% male). Overwhelmingly participants identified as of African (94%) (rather than European) heritage. The majority (78%) had lived outside Zimbabwe for between 6-20 years. Participants were from diverse regions, but particularly Matabeleland North (25%), Harare (18%) and Bulawayo (13%). Primary languages were Shona (33%), Ndebele (24%), Tonga, (14%) and English (18%) and 40% were aged 35-44. Questions focussed on how events were followed, memories of and reactions to events, impact of recent political events and plans, hopes and fears for the future. Whilst one of the purposes of the questionnaire was to offer opportunities for further discussion, many provided rich open responses. This was then used as the basis for the development of questions in the second stage.

The second stage involved interviews with a smaller sample of self-selected participants from the survey (n=18). These were conducted in person where possible and via Skype or through e-mail where internet connectivity was an issue. These were mostly one to one, but on two occasions involved more than one participant. Questions covered life in Zimbabwe, migration histories, memories of November 2017, responses to political developments, positions in the diaspora and future plans. Most were one-off interviews, although in several cases second interviews were conducted and e-mail contact maintained. In addition, two lengthy and detailed regional (North East England) focus group discussions were organised (n=10). 4 participants also participated in the follow up interviews. In total 23 participants were involved in this stage. 10 were female and 13 female. 15 were living in the UK, 2 in Namibia, 2 in Canada, and 1 in

Swaziland, South Africa and South Sudan. One participant identified as 'White African' and one as 'Mixed race', while all others identified as 'Black African'.[5]

This data was also supplemented by a visit to Harare, Bulawayo and Binga in Zimbabwe in October 2018. This included spending time with three participants from the UK, two of whom were visiting and one who had recently returned with intentions to stay more permanently, thus providing access to intimate experiences of diasporic mobilities. The themes explored here were arrived at through inductive thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Celebrating a moment of reorientation?

Despite historic decisions to migrate and the complexities of Zimbabwean diasporic identity (Pasura, 2011), November 2017 clearly mattered; demonstrating enduring emotional investments across space (Burman, 2002) as well as a shared "bond of suffering" (Ndlovu, 2010). Events were followed closely, via WhatsApp groups and other social media platforms as well as "reliable" news channels. Indeed, one UK based participant commented on how, given relative internet connectivity, they became distanciated conduits of news for those in Zimbabwe – productive of what Karekwaivanane (2019) conceptualises as the 'unruly publics' of Zimbabwean digital politics.

Most survey respondents identified these events as either "important" or "very important", although this varied for Zimbabwe as a nation (87%), for the diaspora (74%) and for their families (66%). Whilst we are cautious of binary categorisation, immediate reactions were overwhelmingly positive (90%). This was expressed through happiness, euphoria, jubilation, joy, elation, ecstasy, relief and hope. Participants understood that these events *could* be a watershed, variously expressed as: "the end of a very cruel period", "a fresh start", "a new trajectory", while others spoke in spiritual terms: "beginning a new life, like I was born again".

[5] Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of participants.

Alongside these sentiments was the re-emphasis of (trans)national pride and for some an intensification of identification: “I felt my family become *more* [our emphasis] Zimbabwean”.

Celebration was apparent in terms of how people felt, but also what people *did*. These were emplaced affective practices that were symbolic of past connections, but also enduring orientations towards Zimbabwe infused with national pride. Examples included: contacting friends and family both locally and globally to share in the moment; sharing updates via social media; crying; screaming; praying; dancing; wrapping themselves in the Zimbabwean flag; playing Zimbabwean music; cooking sadza; drinking champagne and organising local community events. Regardless of what followed this altered (trans)national mood was something to savour and share.

> “I posted happy videos on Twitter and the Zimbabweans at my school went out for dinner to celebrate that *at least* [our emphasis] this one change had happened, even if we did not know what the future holds.” (Survey participant: female, 18-24, resident in United States for 2-5 years).

Responses comprised yet exceeded the emotional in ways that recognised the scale of this development. This was particularly evident for those who visited Zimbabwe in the immediate aftermath, as well desires expressed amongst 59% of survey respondents to *be there* and bear direct witness to events.

Scepticism amidst enduring orientations

> “If you talk to me, I have given up.” (Themba, male, resident in UK for 21-25 years).

However, responses were not uniform, and a scepticism seeped into the more detailed accounts of those who became fatigued by dashed promises of tangible progress. This was differentially expressed in relation to intimate knowledge of the Zimbabwean political system; awareness of

worsening adverse material conditions for those in Zimbabwe; and scars of persecution and exile.

For some, Mugabe's departure, whilst welcomed, was not viewed through a celebratory people's uprising narrative. Rather, it was recognised as a carefully executed plan organised by elements within the ruling party to ensure a power transition that would see off rival factions whilst not threatening ZANU-PF hegemony (Tendi, 2019). According to such accounts, the production of emotions as governance (Jupp et al., 2016) was achieved through the impression that people power had driven Mugabe out, bringing Zimbabweans hungry for change, onside. Themba, who actively wrote on Zimbabwe politics and had privileged knowledge, explained the detailed logistics of the coup as a negotiation between ZANU-PF factions and the army. In the same discussion, Thandeka, who had worked for a government ministry, made it clear that people were only allowed onto the streets with the support of a partisan army, *allowing* Zimbabweans to demand a resignation and celebrate.

> "They lied as well to get the support of the people…They knew the language to get people attracted, to get them in and once they got people's attention, they carried out their agenda." (Thandeka, male, resident in the UK)

Many were keen to avoid stark distinctions between pre and post November 2017, both with reference to the narrative above, but also in recognition that any meaningful change would take time. Knowledge of limited adjustments were highlighted (and observed on our own visits), such as the visibility of anti-corruption campaigns, easing of police roadblocks, a de-escalation of intimidation by army veterans and an improved, if not comprehensive, political permissiveness in the run up to the July 2018 elections. This was illustrated in a greater confidence to be critical of the government via social media (Karekwaivanane. 2019).

However, these “changes” were also often seen as temporary and for external audiences[6]. As Themba articulated when asked whether the coup had brought lasting difference, he suggested that any “change” was ephemeral.

> “I don’t think so. Just for a day, only when, that’s when the media was there. So, after that it died like mist.”

All participants recognised the continuing challenges in the day to day lives of friends and relatives in Zimbabwe including living standards, access to work, basic goods and resources, currency value/availability and the ability to speak out. Rufaro (female, aged 35-44. resident in Canada, and living outside Zimbabwe for 16-20 years), was cautious with reference to her awareness of such circumstances. Unlike Themba and Thandeka above, she didn’t engage with detailed state manoeuvrings. Rather her response was articulated in relation to ongoing professional work involving regular contact with marginalised Zimbabwean communities.

> “…for [others in the diaspora] that change is *significant enough* [our emphasis], but I’ve been like looking into some many like other things behind that that… looking at people’s economic opportunities and looking at like the state of poverty and you know how people are affected.”

Her narrative reveals diasporic tensions at work. She appreciates the scale of problems faced and is not considering returning to Zimbabwe permanently. She sees no opportunities in her career path (describing herself as an ‘economic refugee’) and her family, particularly her children, have established new lives elsewhere. Yet this doesn’t mean she has severed ties (despite a transnational family and professional life) to “the place where I’m from”. It is

[6] I (Author A), for example, as a white British visitor, was treated very differently to Zimbabwean citizens at road blocks.

because of entwined emotional and practical orientations towards Zimbabwe, which *precede* these events, that she adopts this perspective.

For others there is even more scepticism about both the country's future and their identification with it. Ngoni (male, aged 35-44, resident in UK for 11-15 years), has oriented himself away from aspects of his Zimbabwean-ness. In his own words: "To hell with that country!" Mugabe's removal is seen to make little difference: "Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss". As Brown (2011) discusses in relation to the Polish diaspora in the UK, distinct experiences within communities reveal "alternative emotional relationships with their homeland" (2011:229). In Ngoni's case, this relates less to the generational differences Brown (2011) identifies, but rather his ethnic, religious, political and professional identity. He is a member of both minoritised ethnic and religious groups, has worked in media and sought asylum in the UK in the early 2000s. He has been historically discriminated against by both colonial and post-colonial powers and due to his profession saw it as "only a matter of time before I got in real trouble". His politics, informed by such experiences, play a role in these orientations. However, his account does not convey absolute dis-identification. Ngoni retains "translocal" (Conradson and McKay, 2007) interest in and connections to individuals and initiatives in a specific region, including sponsoring a child, supporting cultural festivals and engaging in political debates. As he puts it: "these might actually offer avenues for maintaining connections." Even for those who described themselves as cynical, continued orientation towards Zimbabwe through emotional practices of identification and obligation is apparent (McGregor, 2010), revealing the ambiguous character of orientations, both prior to *and* in response to November 2017.

Dis-orientation and tentative hopefulness

Many participants refused simplistic distinctions between optimism and pessimism. As one female aged 35-44 participant living in South Africa and identifying as Tonga stated: "It was

like I was dreaming; I didn't know whether or not to celebrate." In finding herself in new affective territory, the sense conveyed here is *dis-orientation* rather than confusion. While Ahmed (2004) refers to dis-orientation as characteristic of the migrant experience more generally, responses to these events offer a contextual and transnational dimension. These events were, in the immediate aftermath *at least*, an "unsettling force" (Gorman-Murray, 2011). As such, they contributed to a sense of uncertainty: 'the feeling of having multiple possibilities while simultaneously being unable to attach to and name coherent possibilities' (Anderson et al., 2019:3). For some this uncertainty about how to feel and what to do, was related to Mugabe as a contested figure. While the governments' failings were recognised, there was amongst some, a respect for an ageing Mugabe in relation to the place Zimbabwe *had been* for them. The participant above spoke of nostalgia, sadness and sympathy. This is perhaps surprising, given the marginalised position the Tonga have occupied (Manyena, 2013): "I became emotional, seeing a 93-year-old being made a joke. I remembered some of the good he had done to his people."

Temporality, and more specifically memory, is crucial to any sense of orientation (Kuah-Pearce and Davidson, 2008). To know where one is (going) is to appreciate where one has been. Some, such as Zibusiso (female, aged 25-34, resident in UK for 6-10 years), who moved to the UK to study and then work in the early 2000s, but moved back to Zimbabwe during our fieldwork period, were young when Mugabe came to power. She recalls this with clarity and excitement:

> "I remember, in the 90s, running to the shops to buy chewing gum and hearing that Mugabe was coming. We would chase his car man! We would wave at the man! He was a hero! Do you know like when you see somebody you like and you're just running barefoot, waving your T-shirt?"

These associations with youth, freedom and empowerment are tempered by Zibusiso by failed promises and an entrenched regime resisting challenges to its authority. Yet still, he was for Zibusiso, *the* President. She wanted Mugabe to go, but not because he represented an inherently evil figure (Tendi, 2014). This period was experienced as an emotional rollercoaster, both in relation to the unpredictability of the coup, but also because experiences were mediated by memories of better times and desires for better futures. As a disorienting force, these uncertain times were characterised by some as something to fear:

> "And then just felt some sense of panic because there wasn't a clear direction, we seemed to be going in. I felt like: 'So he resigned, now what?' Which sometimes is scarier because you don't know what the future holds." (Survey participant: female, aged 18-24, resident in US for 2-5 years as a student)

For others, despite acknowledgement 'real change' had not arrived, uncertainty was viewed as a *potential* path towards a different future, both for individuals and the nation. Chiming with Anderson et al's (2019: 6) notion of 'hope of an end', there is a hopeful *prospect* the future could be different from the failures of the present; uncertainty as a pre-condition for hope (Kleist and Jansen, 2016). The fact many participants expressed disbelief illustrates there existed less room to consider alternative futures in the "horrible certainty" Munatsi refers to here:

> "It will sound quirky if I say when you have had a horrible certainty you almost celebrate uncertainty when it comes because you think whatever comes, it will be different from that certainty." (Male, aged 45-54, resident in UK for 16-20 years)

For some, specific and long-desired outcomes such as improved health systems and infrastructure and resolutions to economic challenges were hoped for. But others expressed less targeted hopes, speaking to intangible shifts that resonate with "affective atmospheres"

(Anderson, 2016); collective moods that make certain actions and dispositions possible, whilst closing off other potentialities. Even where initial hopes of more fundamental change were not fulfilled, windows have (for some) partially opened *re-animating* or *accelerating* established commitments. Indeed, for some, such as Chamarai (male, 25-34, who has lived in the UK for over 6 years) the very fact the brakes have been applied on those initial hopes, produces its own 'fire'.

> "…where all that hope is being crushed which also gives people sort of, that fire to say, maybe we need to do more to change what's happening in the country because we now know that it is possible."

Whilst exacerbated by these events, hopefulness did not come just as a response to the Mugabe's departure – but was seen as an "underlying predisposition" (Pile,2010: 10)deployed in an increasingly desperate situation: "you've got to have hope at some point, especially when you've hit rock bottom – the only way you can go is up" (Male focus group participant). Yet socio-spatial context is crucial. In particular, religious faith played an important role in the development of hopefulness. As Chitando and Manyonganise (2011) write, the centrality of messages of hope and patience through Zimbabwe's faith communities, help to explain relatively peaceful resilience in ongoing crises (Manyena, 2014). However, better outcomes for the future are not seen as freely given, but something to be worked at. This was expressed clearly by Mbuso (male, aged 35-44, resident in UK for 16-20 years):

> "[God] doesn't give you everything on a silver plate. So God said OK I've heard your cries and I've taken you out of this problem [removal of Mugabe], then it was a problem for us to sort out that issue." (Mbuso)

This is not a naive hope, particularly for those whose position in their country of residence was precarious in some way. For Faith, living in South Africa, managing to earn just enough

to support her family in an administrative role, future oriented decisions are not made rashly amidst co-existing and multiple forms of uncertainty.

> "We are careful and treading with care, you don't want to be too hopeful and then be disappointed, but you just want to take it one step at a time." (Female,, 25-34, living in South Africa, temporary resident visa)

Whilst responses were varied, shifted and were often ambiguous; a tentative hopefulness amidst a dis-orienting uncertainty can be identified that speaks to ongoing re-evaluations of position, alignment and direction. Memory, desire and faith may drive such hope, yet it is realised through practices, and relations including faith-based networks and institutions, economic opportunities, political networks, charitable work, moral and familial obligations. As Ahmed states: "Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates a struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through." (Ahmed, 2017: 2). While, for some these events brought cautious reflection and relative *inaction* (Anderson et al., 2019) illustrated through the expression of 'treading with care' above, in our last section we consider how other reorientations are characterised by the expression and practice of return.

Practical reorientations: questions of return

> "As much as we may experience things differently…everyone wants the country to return to normalcy you know, people want to wake up one day, they are at home." (Ayanda, female, aged 25-34, resident in UK for under 1 year)

As Brah (1996) emphasises, "homing desires" do not equate to a desire for a return to some fixed origin. Yet, Ayanda above suggests the longing to both *feel* and *be* at home with specific reference to Zimbabwe is powerful. For our participants, home was multi-sited and for some, the desire to find or reinforce that sense of home through the actuality of 'return' has been

influenced by recent events. *Despite* recognition little had changed, cautious reassessment as well as practical steps were being taken in relation to investments that had a longer history. Yet, "return" was also differentially expressed and experienced (Binaisa, 2011) and for some did not entail immediate re-location.

Thandaka viewed the situation in early 2018 as a window of both obligation and opportunity (McGregor, 2010); a chance to better fulfil already existing responsibilities and possibilities. He speaks to actual and metaphorical farming practices; planting seeds in the 'soft' or 'shaking' ground. The instability and uncertainty generated by the Mugabe's departure created a moment to seize, whereby hope became not just an emotional reorientation to possible futures, but a practical reorientation in the present.

> "But opportunities, I feel are there. And *especially right now*, I've got a social responsibility back home and it's hard to do them, to execute them from here. But there's a lot of hope, there's big hope…whenever the ground is shaking, the ground is soft enough for you to be able to plant"

Thandaka continues to recognise many challenges. It is then hopefulness that does not align with the hope professed by the ruling party through a 'new dispensation' discourse (Mnangagwa, 2017). Thandaka's tentative hopefulness is found here in the more modest sites in which he is already invested – the family farm. Whilst he acknowledges the period's unique atmosphere, he is not looking to physically return for now, but looks to take up these 'opportunities' from a distance through established connections still on the ground.

Reorientations do not represent a mechanistic reaction. Rather unevenly experienced opportunities must be seen in light of established transnational relations, alongside the challenges, successes and routines of lives lived in other places. Munatsi's decisions to re-invest in Zimbabwe, were based upon a shifting yet uncertain transnational context, pre-existing

attachments, responsibilities, economic self-interest and practical familial negotiations in the UK that corresponds with the combined effects of "sentimentality" and "speculative opportunities" McGregor (2014) discusses. Munatsi (who has lived in the UK for approximately 20 years, with time in the US and a brief stay in Zimbabwe), grew up in rural Zimbabwe (contrasted with his wife's urban upbringing). He emphasises the moral obligation and gendered role he needed to fulfil as a "custodian of culture and tradition" of his people. At a distance, these responsibilities have involved chairing several development projects.

> "You almost grow into an older statesman, an age-old community leader, whether you like it or not, and if you have made some successes in your life, then those responsibilities almost come straight over onto your shoulders".

Because of these ties, but also due to his difficulties in forming friendships in a rural English town, he still considers himself a "visitor" to the UK. He identifies moving back to Zimbabwe to establish a business in the aftermath of Mugabe's departure, using skills honed in his successful UK based professional career. On the other hand, while his children have shown an interest, his wife is more hesitant, suggesting a significant impact of developments was that it: "left my wife with less excuses [laughs]!"

Desires to return were also driven by ongoing evaluations of home (Blunt, 2005). For example, Jendayi (female, aged 25-34, resident in the UK for 16-20 years, including time spent in Zimbabwe) discussed her disorientation of a "lost home" and "a place that was not yet home" (Ahmed, 2004:10). Whilst born in Zimbabwe she spent the latter part of her youth in a relatively 'white' northern England town where she felt a futile requirement to adapt in order to be accepted. This had considerable consequences for her well-being and identity when contrasted with memories growing up in a comfortable middle-class household in Zimbabwe. Regular

trips back and longer extended periods of residence meant that despite spending more time in the UK, she was "identifying with Zimbabwe much more than I identify with being here."

Yet the struggle to find a home as Mortensen (2014) shows in relation to broader moral obligations and identities, is not straightforward. Jendayi also recognised on trips to Zimbabwe during the "dire" mid-2000s she was also made to not feel entirely welcome as identifiably diasporic (dress, speech and social attitudes) and had to develop 'survival skills' to cope. Despite these challenges, and the knowledge she may initially have to leave her children in the UK, she was inspired to make the return. A latent desire to make such moves was expressed by participants either now or in the future to; live out lives [at some future point]; help solve challenges; offer expertise; re-unite with family; appreciate life lived to a different rhythm with different priorities. For Jendayi recent changes have resulted in a renewed discussion of more permanent moves amongst her social circles.

> "I found myself imagining going home now, in the *real sense of going home*. It feels like this is the time…Now, it's real. I actually have a timeline. I have a plan right down to saying: 'This is what I need to do'. I'm finding out about how to do it."

The ability to take such actions are neither open nor desired by all. As Munatsi made clear, the possibility and wish to 'return' is contingent: "I think the more professional types feel a bit more comfortable that they can go back and make it work". For Zibusiso (female, aged 25-34, resident in the UK for 6-10 years), a government job and ease of transnational mobility (her husband has British citizenship) meant the option of return was not as fraught as for others. Whilst it wasn't an easy decision, it was one made quickly that spoke to her commitment to the country's future, her passions and expertise that wouldn't excessively penalise her, as well as her recent and familiar experiences living and working in Zimbabwe:

> "I'm catching a plane going back to Zimbabwe to join [a government department] full time…I don't want to be part of the mass that's going to continue blaming and pointing fingers at how Zimbabwe's not doing OK without me being on the ground and doing something about it."

Zibusiso continued to work in Zimbabwe under the new government. However, practical reorientations are not set in stone. Towards the end of our fieldwork, whilst expressing a clear desire to remain, she also recognised the opportunity to work elsewhere was increasingly attractive given the volatile Zimbabwean economy in late 2018 and the fact her education, experience and ability to move meant alternative opportunities were available. Uncertainty about the future continues for Zibusiso, alongside a "general feeling of being unsafe".

> "While this characterises emotions surrounding working in fragile or rather volatile economies, the feeling is heightened when one imagines a better life elsewhere - as in my case." (E-mail correspondence with Zibusiso)

The main distinction we found between those who articulated tangible plans to make such a move and those that either didn't want to or couldn't – was the absence of opportunity and resources to make such a move realistic, feasible and in some way beneficial.

As Ayanda who is coming off a student visa and may well find herself in a precarious status without stable work and a right to remain in the UK, made clear, the lack of opportunities for younger, well qualified graduates in Zimbabwe means she has little option but to remain outside the country. This is *despite* a passion and love for her country:

> "It's not that I don't love my country, I do love my country and if I had all the resources I would prefer to go back to my beautiful country."

For Ayanda, who came from a poor rural background in Mashonaland East, she does not want to return to poverty. Moving to the UK to get post graduate study at Masters Level (something

only achieved through a benefactor) was seen as a route to escape those economic challenges. An important distinction should be made here between escaping poverty and escaping the country. Like many others she wants to contribute, but she can't see herself going back, even after only one year away.

As Binaisa, (2011) suggests 'return' has spatially contingent meanings, basis and outcomes. For those who have migrated away to other parts of Southern Africa, the events of 2017 have sparked an interest in return, on the basis life *might* be better and more bearable for those who are struggling with status insecurity, poverty and xenophobia (Steenkamp, 2009). Faith (Female, aged 25-34, resident in South Africa for 11-15 years, temporary resident visa) was managing to eke out a living, supporting her family and therefore didn't see the need to return. But for others she knew, caught between intolerance, economic precarity and status insecurity, these changes were enough of a shift to greater stability (Makina, 2012) to take the risk. She was unsure what had happened to them.

> "Some had been struggling to find work here, some were staying in a shack, they don't have employment, they're just like beggars surviving. So, those people I know …have decided to go back soon after the November happened…because they were *hoping* it's better that side, they thought with the changes in Zim, *maybe* life would be better."

Attachments endure, because "objects of desire" represent a "cluster of promises" (Berlant, 2011:24) worth holding onto and worth acting on in different ways. Return, in various forms, is seen as a form of (re)orientation that brings about a proximity of those affective promises. This is contingent on the ability *to imagine and to live* a certain life on returning in relation to the life being lived, which might in some contexts mean a greater willingness to take risks.

This is subject to negotiation in relation to other multi-sited and changing demands, commitments and relationships.

Conclusions

The paper contributes to an understanding of the multiple space-times of diaspora, through reactions and responses to the removal from power of Robert Mugabe amongst first-generation Zimbabweans living outside Zimbabwe. Regardless of the extent of material "change" and the questioning of these events as a geopolitical watershed, the affective force of this event amongst our participants cannot be dismissed. Neither though, can these shockwaves be divorced from 'everyday emotional topographies' (Pain, 2009:466) navigated in relation to past lives, intimate familial negotiations, positions and status within countries of residence, and practical commitments to home in more than one place (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008).

Drawing on ideas set out by Ahmed (2004) these experiences are conceptualised as *diasporic reorientations*, emphasizing how participants' became aligned with/against and moved towards/away from emotionally charged obligations, plans, people and places in a context of contested "change". Responses opened new, yet fragile, affective diaspora spaces through which established orientations were reinforced, reanimated, and in some cases reconfigured. Reactions and responses are not seen here a mechanistic chain-reaction but involve transtemporal and multi-sited constellations of experience. The grand moment then should not be fetishized (particularly when its impact is so disputed and changeable) and not viewed in some generalised and static fashion (Anderson et al., 2019) By using this as a jumping off point, we draw attention to the force of evolving transnational connection and uneven significance of these moments...

Mugabe's departure was experienced as significant, but simultaneously spoke to false dawns, limited change and continuity. Recognising the uneven nature of diasporic mobilisation

(Mavroudi, 2018), for some these events have reinforced distrust of an embedded Zimbabwean political culture. Yet mediated and physical transnational engagement was demonstrated over the course of this tumultuous year, articulated through uncertainty, ambiguity and tentative hopefulness. This incorporated both disorientation, but also reorientations not synonymous with optimism (Bruininks and Malle, 2005), but rather an affective resource in the face of enduring adversity, ambiguous ties and emerging opportunities.

For those with investments, interests and obligations, as well as the requisite experience, capitals, ease of mobility and willingness to take risks, this tentative hopefulness has been practically harnessed. “Desire is expressed in the actions people take” (Carling and Collins, 2018: 918) and these reorientations allow us an insight into how emotional relations are lived as part of ongoing re-evaluations of attachment, position and direction, but also differentially distributed opportunities in a diverse and fractured diaspora (Pasura, 2014). We have specifically explored this with reference to those who were considering or had ‘returned’ to Zimbabwe. Participants re-assessed their own position within the diaspora, reflecting on continuing challenges and in some cases new possibilities that either renewed the idea of return or resulted in mobility. The narratives explored highlight both a pre-existing or latent energy amongst participants for a ‘genuine’ new era, but also the socio-spatial contexts produced by, and which shape, the capacity to feel and to act.

This paper opens up pathways for future research including an enhanced understanding of non-linear temporal fluctuation of diasporic reorientation and further work on diverse experiences of displacement/emplacement and orientation (including greater attention to legal status and generational differences) that would necessitate finer grained multi–sited ethnographic research in the context of an evolving Zimbabwean and diasporic context.

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