

Finding Home in Uncertainty: Returnees, Reintegration, and Reconciliation

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
Harare, Zimbabwe

Natasha Venables

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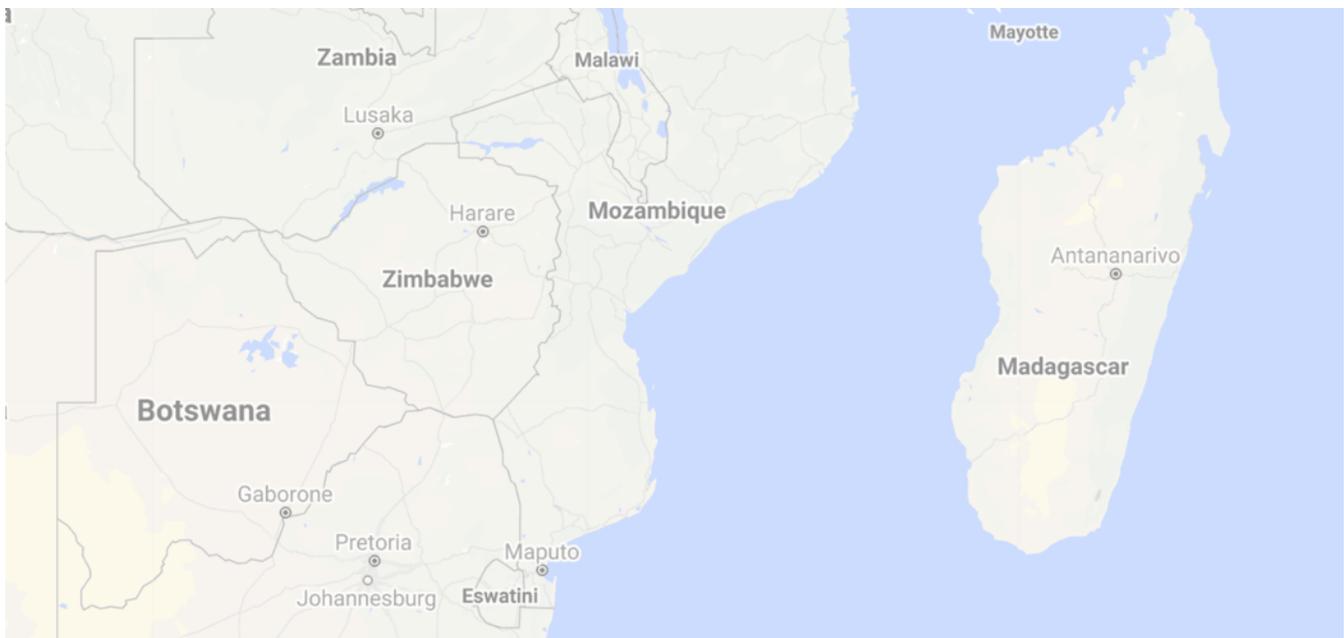
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Cover Photo – The iconic Moffat Street in Harare with Jacaranda trees in full bloom. All report photos by author.

Location



With a population of over 1 million, and a large 370 square mile (960 km) urban footprint, Harare is the most populous city in Zimbabwe, and the country's economic and administrative center.



Experiencing severe economic problems and insecurity since the 1980s, Zimbabwe has recently become home to a network of tentative refugee returnees. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

For more background on refugees in Harare and Zimbabwe, continue to the appendices.

Introduction

Since its independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has had two waves of out-migration. The first occurred immediately after independence when many left to avoid the new government. A mass exodus began in 2000 as a result of the increasingly punitive actions of the liberator-turned-dictator, President Robert Mugabe. In the past 19 years, over three million Zimbabweans have fled, as a result of the persecution of some ethnic groups and individuals and the economic and political decline of the country.¹ Some were victims of *Murambatsvina*;² others, both black and white farm workers and owners, fled because of the farm invasions. In addition, there was the hatred caused by *Gukurahundi*,³ a massacre that was the Mugabe “regime’s first, and still unpunished genocide.”⁴

This history cries out for reintegration and reconciliation in the country if the return of the diaspora is to be successful. The Zimbabwean diaspora spans some 122 countries, with the most significant departure destinations being South Africa and the UK.⁵

My interest in return migration to my homeland, Zimbabwe, stems from my desire to return home, knowledge of other people trickling back, and research that shows that most migrants have a desire to return home.⁶ The yearning for return increased after the “peaceful coup” in November 2017 when Robert Mugabe, president since independence in 1980, was ousted, and Zimbabweans thought the ongoing violence and economic chaos would abate and conditions would improve. Many believed Zimbabweans would now come home, especially after an encouraging message from the new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, inviting people to return home. He promised the diaspora options for 99-year leases to farm again or to set up businesses and gave the impression that all Zimbabweans, regardless of ethnicity, race, or political persuasion, were welcome to come and help rebuild their country. Sadly, the violence that followed the August 2018 elections and further economic downturn destroyed the hopes for a mass return. Many Zimbabweans refer to the situation as “riding on the same bus, only the driver has changed.” The new leader has maintained the politics of fear and polarization, forcing people to seek safety and economic opportunities outside Zimbabwe. Yet significant numbers of people are still returning home.

¹ Much of this migration is forced, but it must be acknowledged that some emigration has been for personal ambition, education, and adventure (Ndlovu, 2010).

² Operation *Murambatsvina* (Shona word for “Move the Rubbish”), also officially known as Operation Restore Order, was a 2005 large-scale government campaign to forcibly clean up a huge slum that posed a public health risk due to lack of sanitation and services (IDMC, 2008). It has been accused of being an attempt to create fear in an opposition stronghold area and resulted in the brutal destruction of people’s houses and livelihoods. *Murambatsvina* affected at least 700,000 people directly and 2.4 million people indirectly and led to out-migration, internal displacement, and homelessness (IDMC, 2008).

³ *Gukurahundi* (a Shona word for “the rain that clears the chaff from the wheat”) began in January 1983 and was framed by the government as the subduing of an insurgency in Matabeleland to maintain law and order. It was ethnic cleansing by another name and was responsible for an estimated 20,000 deaths. Prior to 2015, only non-governmental organization (NGO) or church reports existed about *Gukurahundi*, despite a truth commission in 1985 (which led to a report that was never released) (CCJP, 1997). In 2015, historian Stuart Doran published a book of findings that created pressure to acknowledge the atrocity, but there has to date been no formal recognition or reparations for the people affected (Doran, 2015). As a result of *Gukurahundi*, some groups migrated out of the country.

⁴ Shemurenga, 2013, 21.

⁵ Chikanda and Crush, 2018.

⁶ Azose and Rafferty, 2019.

In this report, I explore voluntary return to Zimbabwe and the reasons people go beyond their desire for economic security in search of belonging, identity, and home.⁷ I explore returnees' impact on the city of Harare, and their experiences of reintegration through rediscovering their culture, recreating social ties, accessing jobs and citizenship, and developing a sense of belonging again. I explore how the home population interacts with returnees and how returnees learn to navigate life in Harare, which used to be familiar, but through time and distance has become foreign. The report concludes by overviewing the support needed to enable reintegration and reconciliation, which could increase the possibility of return that is sustainable over the long term.

A Note on Terminology

This report describes those who left Zimbabwe as “forced migrants.” McGregor and Primorac⁸ point out that “Since 2000 there is a sense in which everyone [Zimbabweans in the diaspora and internally] experienced their moves as forced.” As one female in her 40s stated, “We were all devastated. Zimbabwe was our home. None of us truly wanted to leave but didn't see we had a choice.”

I define returnees as people who move back to their place of origin, voluntarily or because they are compelled to do so, and settle down there. I wish to emphasize the vulnerability of all returnees, both economically and psychosocially. They all need support to reintegrate and resettle in a place that used to be their home.

Reintegration is sometimes defined as the “process of integrating back into society...after staying outside of your home country for some time; It is a process of learning to participate again in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the state of origin.”⁹ However, this definition assumes that people integrated before they left, which was not “true” in Zimbabwe because of its long history of segregation, polarization, racism, colonialism, sexism, and nepotism. Zimbabwe has arguably never been a nation where all people feel they belonged.¹⁰ I, therefore, use the International Organization for Migration's (IOM)¹¹ definition, in which a person is “re-included or re-incorporated” in a way that enables them to “re-establish economic and psychosocial ties for sustainable return.” In Zimbabwe, reintegration needs to be an active process where inclusion and incorporation create the sense of belonging for all Zimbabweans, a sense of belonging that goes beyond racial and ethnic groups, and geographical location (e.g., from the city or the farming community) or political affiliations.

⁷ A returnee is defined as a person who returns to his/her country of origin “usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or may not be voluntary” (IOM, 2018a). See “A Note on Terminology,” below for discussion.

⁸ McGregor and Primorac, 2010, 10.

⁹ Cassarino, 2004, 134.

¹⁰ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009.

¹¹ IOM, 2017.

The Author's Position in Harare and Experiences Researching this Case

I was born in Harare as a fourth-generation white Zimbabwean. I grew up on a farm; my mum volunteered as a community health nurse, and my father was a commercial farmer. Only when our family left the country did I realize how little I knew of its recent history and the effects of colonialism. I was not fully aware of the many divides in our country. I had lived on top of two layers of privilege: the opportunities I was given due to my family's socioeconomic status and the preferential treatment I received due to my skin color. In the late 1990s, I began questioning my identity. The Zimbabwe government had begun linking white Zimbabweans to British settlers and describing us as sellouts. But I considered myself a Zimbabwean. I knew little of the trauma of the war of independence that ended in 1980—it had been hidden from our generation—and I had no connections to any country other than Zimbabwe. My parents were both born in Zimbabwe, and our family's roots there were on the farm and in the surrounding community, which we considered our home.

In 2003 at the height of the land invasions, my family moved to Australia. Our home had been attacked several times, through intimidation and lawlessness, and we had been forced to flee our home for a few weeks until things settled down. When these invasions happened at our schools and my mum was violently robbed, we no longer felt safe in the country of our birth.

I returned to Zimbabwe three years later, in 2006 at the age of 21 in search of Winnie, my *Gogo* (nanny¹²) who had worked for my family since 1983 and played a massive role in my upbringing (see photo, left, and painting by my brother, below). We had had minimal communication since our teary farewell on January 5, 2003, which plagued my memory. I naively thought everything would go back to normal soon, and we could return home. However, the situation in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate, but since that first visit in 2006, I managed to return every two years to visit Winnie and friends. These visits were always tricky. I felt guilty for leaving, especially given the reality of the many Zimbabweans who were out



¹² *Gogo* is a Shona word that means grandmother but is also an affectionate and more accurate term for the relationship we have than the term nanny is.

of work while I was able to get on a plane with my new Australian passport. These visits were like dipping my toe in the water in the hope to find the courage to one day dive back in and move home.

One of my best memories of visits home during those years was attending Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA), one of the few places where different groups of Zimbabweans interacted. The Festival gave me hope that the people of our diverse nation could live together in peace. During these visits home, I became more aware of the urban-rural and socioeconomic divides, as well as ongoing racial and ethnic divides. These return trips made me question where I fit in, made me aware of my own biases, and forced me to think about how these biases affected whether I could rebuild social connections in Zimbabwe. I was aware of the prejudices some had against me as an ex-farmer's daughter and the heightened need to be sensitive to all points of view on the issue of land reform.¹³ These visits prepared me for my permanent return home in July 2018, when I began researching this report and navigating these social systems again.



My return in 2018 to conduct my research highlighted the challenge that many returnees face: coming back to their home country but unable to return to their physical house. It was a real challenge to me that I could not go back to live in the house I grew up in. I also felt displaced because the community and social connections I once took for granted had weakened or disappeared over time. For me, Harare was unrecognizable. But sitting with Winnie in her house on the farm (my home for 17 years) in August 2018, one month into my return, I felt more at home than ever. Despite the fact the farm was no longer our “home” and the house I grew up in no longer existed, it was clear to me that the concept of home is tied up with more than the building or the people and includes the familiar smells, sights, sounds, and memories that contribute to a sense of belonging again.

¹³ The Land Reform and Resettlement Program is formally known as the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) because of the speed and unplanned nature with which it took place (Kinsey, 2004). This period is referred to as Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution as it resulted in massive agricultural restructuring, reallocating 4,500 farms to over 170,000 new farmers starting in 2000. The process was legitimized based on the historical injustices and ongoing inequality of land ownership that many scholars agree needed to be corrected. However, how it was carried out, with violence and evictions, has made its success highly disputed and politicized (Moyo, 2004 and Scoones et al., 2012).

Due to the high value Zimbabweans place on education, research is something people are familiar with and are willing to help conduct. In preparation for my return home, I talked to a non-governmental organization (NGO) and research organization (Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT)) in Zimbabwe about my work. To my surprise, they offered me office space in Harare upon my arrival in July 2018. The ability to share and work alongside fellow researchers gave me a sense of security and connection as I set about re-establishing myself in what would otherwise have been a lonely new beginning.

For more on the methods used for this case report, continue to [Appendix A](#).

Finding a New Home: To Return or Not to Return

Reasons for Returning Home

The hope for change inspired by the 2017 coup led to the hope that Zimbabweans would begin to return *en masse*. Sadly, this hope is a deferred one, as Zimbabwe continues to be in a protracted crisis. Some are indeed voluntarily returning, although in small numbers. This section focuses on the experiences of the majority of interviewees who returned willingly. This section explores some of the key reasons why people are voluntarily returning despite the ongoing uncertainty in Zimbabwe.

Identity and Belonging

A big reason for those returning was to regain a sense of “Zimbabwean-ness,” a feeling of belonging, and the need to reclaim their identities. One woman in her 30s explained that she lost the “core” part of her identity in the UK and so “decided to go back to Zim,¹⁴ to figure me out. I had got to that point where I had lost myself.” Upon arrival in host countries, many returnees were not able to express themselves because of lack of safety due to stigmas about their culture or lack of freedom of movement. As a result, they either had to change and adapt to survive or live in ethnic enclaves. Creating a sense of identity and belonging is more complicated for returnees with children who were not born in Zimbabwe. One couple in their 30s commented: “It is tough when your home is somewhere that is different from your kids’ home. We wanted them to ‘belong,’ so we came home.”

Social Ties

An unsurprising reason for return was strong social ties and support systems within Zimbabwe, including extended family, friends, work colleagues, previous work colleagues, church community, and social organizations such as sports clubs, Rotary Clubs, and mothers’ groups.¹⁵ All returnees I spoke with commented that social ties were integral to their return home and fundamental to their quality of life

¹⁴ Abbreviation Zimbabweans use to refer to Zimbabwe.

¹⁵ A group of people, usually mothers, who meet regularly after having a newborn to encourage and support each other in learning the ropes of child rearing together.

and happiness. Many returnees said it was important to know they had family or friends to fall back on if they got sick, whereas in the host country they felt alone.

Entrepreneurial Ambition

Although non-economic factors were the primary reasons for return, ambition to build businesses and contribute to society was also crucial in returnees' decisions. For example, one male in his 30s who now runs his own business in Harare employing over 30 people said: "Ambition brought me home; I didn't fit into British society. I was supposed to be a business owner and wanted to play a much bigger role in building and creating." He explained that a fundamental part of his upbringing was in a post-colonial developing country context, and thus there was a culture of building that is now innate in his generation, those born in the 1980s. Seeing the opportunities, one man in his 40s explained, "In structured societies, you operate in a bandwidth of just below average and just above average. Here we have very high highs and deep lows, but we have more opportunity to be creative." He acknowledged that social ties were crucial to providing access to these opportunities, resources, and information. These social ties were vital in opening up access to entrepreneurial opportunities that returnees could not access abroad due to a lack of established connections. The sentiment expressed by returnees was, "Why would I continue to struggle outside when...I can be where I belong?"

Safety and Stability

An unexpected reason for return was the need for safety. Many returnees experienced insecurity from feeling like an outsider while living abroad. Interviewees noted sticking out at work or in social situations. Some reported being targeted by the police for standing out and not being allowed specific jobs or rights.

NoViolet Bulawayo captures the fear that Zimbabweans living in the U.S. have in her novel, *We Need New Names*:

When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken borders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We bit our tongues till we tasted blood, sat tensely on one butt cheek, afraid to sit on both because how can you sit properly when you don't know about your tomorrow? (Bulawayo, 2013, back cover)

Reasons for Not Returning Home

Despite the "peaceful coup" and leadership change in November 2017, uncertainty continues. The way the new regime responded to the 2018 post-election protest, with even more force than under Mugabe's reign by using live ammunition and tear gas, has only validated for the diaspora respondents their concerns about the future. In this section, I discuss reasons the diaspora gives for not returning.

Continued Uncertainty

It was no surprise that the main reason members of the diaspora gave for not returning to Zimbabwe was the insecurity of the political and economic situation, along with the trauma remaining from the past

that has made many feel that Zimbabwe is no longer their home.¹⁶ One man in his 40s reflected the feelings of many from the diaspora when he said, “I have no regrets about leaving, my home was taken away from me, I am very aware that I don’t miss Zimbabwe.” Similarly, a 60-year-old woman highlighted the lack of security for some, saying that “the massacre in Matabeleland showed us the police could not protect us.”

Expectations for Remittances and the Diaspora Trap

A second primary reason keeping the diaspora from returning is the expectation by family in Zimbabwe that emigrants will send money back to them in the form of remittances. One man in his 50s explained that having “one family member abroad sending back money is a survival strategy of nearly every family in Zimbabwe.” The need for remittances also led to what a few Zimbabwean emigrants described as being stuck in the diaspora because they had lost all their money and now could not afford to go back. This “diaspora trap”¹⁷ happens to many Zimbabwean migrants who feel that they cannot return home because they are unable to fulfil the expectation that they would return economically successful and have to keep up their obligations to send remittances home.

Home Population Encourages Family to Remain in the Diaspora

Another reason people do not return is that their family members within Zimbabwe do not let them. These family members do not want their relatives abroad to have to deal with the daily challenges of life in Zimbabwe, or they want their children who have only been exposed to life in Zimbabwe to attend university abroad, thinking this experience will teach them valuable life skills. A man in his 60s said: “It’s tough out there, and they [referring to his sons in the diaspora now] need to learn that the grass isn’t greener everywhere.” Many of the overseas university-educated generation remain abroad where their roots are beginning to form and only return to Zimbabwe for holidays to visit family.

Experiences with Return

Generally, all interviewed returnees exhibited a strong desire to reintegrate within society. Having experienced the outside, they returned with a greater appreciation for home, with all its challenges and opportunities. Their experiences with reintegration have centered around education, access to citizenship, access to cash, safety, and stability, and rebuilding social connections. In learning to re-navigate these services, returnees have expressed that their general knowledge about society was lacking, especially for younger returnees. One woman in her 30s commented, “Having been away for so many years and left just after school, I did not get to participate or experience a lot of other parts of Zim, so in some ways, it is like coming back to experience a whole new place.”

¹⁶ Over 300,000 people in the Mugabe era were made stateless through revocation of their citizenship. Many more had to accept “alien” status in their own country overnight (IDMC, 2008).

¹⁷ The term “diaspora trap” was coined by Nzima and Moyo (2017). They argue that individuals can get stuck involuntarily in the diaspora, trapped there for social, economic, or political reasons. There is a social expectation that migration leads to success, and therefore one will return with many assets. Some migrants are financially unable to return due to complete failure in the host country.

Returnee Identity

Many returnees I spoke with commented that the seemingly innocent question, “Where are you really from?” is a loaded one, premised on the idea that if you don’t speak a specific language in a particular accent or have a particular skin color, then you cannot be from Zimbabwe. A Shona doctor I interviewed who returned to Harare five years ago has found it increasingly difficult to be accepted, due in part to his American accent, limited Shona skills, and the cultural mannerisms he picked up while living abroad. Many Indian or white Zimbabweans experienced the same thing after returning home, despite being third or fourth generation Zimbabweans. Returnees shared that this question cut to their core and made them feel that their identity was being questioned. Zimbabwean author and scholar Ndlovu-Gatsheni aptly asked the question in his book entitled “Do Zimbabweans Exist?” where he highlights the problem of defining Zimbabwean identity.¹⁸ To explore this issue of identity, I asked all my interviewees the question, “What makes someone Zimbabwean?” Three categories emerged in the answers: one can be Zimbabwean (1) by birth; (2) by culture; and (3) by association, a *Zim-betweenener*:

1. For the first category, the answer was clear-cut: being Zimbabwean is based on where you were born, grew up, and have a family. This group fully claimed their Zimbabwean-ness and believed in a Zimbabwean identity, with comments such as “I’m still Zimbabwean, a passport does not change that in my eyes,” as was said by male returnee in his 50s.
2. For the second category, being Zimbabwean was more abstract. It entailed knowing about the culture and feeling a sense of belonging. Many felt they had lost their Zimbabwean identity. “I don’t feel like I am from the UK as I don’t know the culture, but also a whole bunch of Zimbabwean culture I don’t know now. So, coming back here, I don’t feel like a Zimbabwean, to be honest with you,” said a male returnee in his 20s, exemplifying this group.
3. The third group included those who were in between, a *Zim-betweenener*, aware of the new identity and culture they had adopted in the host country as well as the influence their Zimbabwean upbringing had on them. One male in his 30s said, “I identify as both Zimbabwean and British.” A woman in her 30s said, “I don’t know. I introduce myself as Zimbabwean, but when I go back, I feel out of place, but there is something there.”

These differing senses of belonging appeared to be based on age and length of time spent inside or outside Zimbabwe. Older returnees seemed to be more confident of their “Zimbabwean-ness,” having spent more of their adult life there and not questioning it, whereas those in their 30s appeared more confused in their sense of belonging, felt lost outside of the country, and felt a need to return home to find themselves again. The younger generations who have lived outside for most of their adult life felt connected to more than one home.

Daily Obstacles

For returnees, daily life has changed since they left, so “relearning” how to overcome everyday challenges has been difficult. As one man in his 30s said, “People took advantage of me all the time as I didn’t know what the currency was worth. They would tell me a Coke was \$5 when it was just \$1.”

¹⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009.

Social media helps with this obstacle. One respondent commented on how much it helped when they posted on Facebook about their imminent return and asked for suggestions and help with finding accommodation and work. Returnees also used Facebook and WhatsApp groups to help navigate daily life within Zimbabwe, including such groups as Fuel Watch (which tells people where to find fuel when there are shortages) and Zimvine (which connects people to events for social and business networking, as well as being a platform to buy and sell goods).

Safety and Stability

Most returnees I spoke with stated that their sense of safety and stability had increased upon coming home. A man in his 30s summed up a common theme: “I was afraid a lot of the time and restricted.” This concern for physical safety was especially real for people returning from South Africa, as merely going for a walk there after 6 pm was considered dangerous. Mozambique and Botswana had an element of insecurity too. Interviewees commented that the police there tend to harass and sometimes deport Zimbabweans regardless of whether they have a correct visa.

However, the sense of safety and stability went further than just physical safety, as those returning from relatively “safe” countries like Australia or the UK found their sense of feeling safe was also emotional or existential, based on being back in their community. As one man in his 30s explained, “Driving around Hong Kong, you are just another number. Here you get the whiplash of straining to see if you know that person as you drive past.” A woman in her 50s said your sense of self becomes lost in a new country: “Friends went to Australia and they were traumatized, nobody told them how difficult it would be. I don’t think the age when you leave does make a difference as no matter what your memories become divided.”

Employment and Entrepreneurship

In Zimbabwe, there are less than three people employed in the private sector for every two civil servants, creating heavy demands to squeeze more tax revenue out of fewer people and leading to continued harassment from the tax department of the formal economic sector. Thus, the government has introduced new laws and strategies for building up tax revenue, such as the tax of 2% levied on all bank transactions, including those in the informal sector. Currently, most trade occurs in the black market, where sales are conducted as “cash exchanges” and are primarily untaxed, leaving the city with few operating funds. Due to the lack of availability of actual cash in the country, these transactions are done through Ecocash,¹⁹ a money transfer system that sends money directly from one bank account to another. However, the new tax rule means formal businesses are now subject to

The Grey Economy



This produce stand is just one of many informal businesses set up along the side of roads.

¹⁹ The phone company Econet has developed a way of connecting your bank account to your phone number, enabling people to transfer money through a mobile money transfer platform called Ecocash.

double taxes, paying tax on Ecocash transactions for salary payments and invoices and also paying income tax.

Navigating these kinds of exchanges is described by most returnees as being one of the toughest things to figure out upon return. Returnees commented that it feels like they need to earn an economics degree in their first few months home, with the local community as professors and WhatsApp groups as their classrooms. Returnees first have to learn about the dual currency system of bond notes and the US dollar. They also have to learn what to do with the foreign currency they bring into the country. If a returnee does not know how to trade these currencies on the black market, foreign currency will effectively lose its value by a factor of four.²⁰ Those returning home thus must engage with a system that is a moral grey area but is also a matter of financial survival within the country.

With over 90%²¹ official unemployment in Zimbabwe, many in the home population stated that they think people are “mad” for returning. Most returnees were not being economically rational in their decision to return home. They were very aware of the lack of formal employment, high financial risk, and economic instability in the country but were willing to move back anyway.

Access to Rights and Citizenship

Mugabe’s rule disrupted citizenship pathways, and formal practices on acquiring citizenship through birth, naturalization, or descent were changed. These changes were presumed to be a ploy to prevent those most likely to support the opposition party from voting.²² Consequently, people with dual nationality or those born overseas were forced to choose one citizenship or were denied citizenship altogether, which led many Zimbabweans to become categorized as “aliens” or “stateless” on their identity documents. They were then unable to access certain rights. The lack of access to citizenship was described as one of the most significant barriers to return and reintegration. A woman in her 30s commented, “These structural systems stripped us of our national identity, which put a lot of shame and guilt on you as an individual, maybe made many question their sense of belonging here in Zimbabwe.”

The rhetoric of President Mnangagwa in 2018, encouraging Zimbabweans to return home, led to a surge of people taking the risk of return. There has been a change in the attitude of the staff in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, who appear to be genuinely more helpful now. This change in attitude is presumed to be a directive from their superiors, who want to facilitate business and exports for local companies. Permitting dual citizenship has allowed people to re-access their citizenship and rights, such as the right to vote. Several returnees spoke about how this change in the citizenship act was making people want to come home, since they are not required to give up the safety net of having another passport should they need to re-migrate. One woman in her 50s said when she got her National ID in 2018, “It may have seemed like such a small thing, but it’s so nice not to be an alien anymore, to have Zimbabwean citizen on my ID makes me so happy.”

²⁰ The current black-market rate is 1:4, US dollars to local bond note.

²¹ The figure is disputed but recognized as true by Zimbabweans on the ground. For an in-depth explanation, [see BBC’s reporting here](#).

²² Dube, 2012.

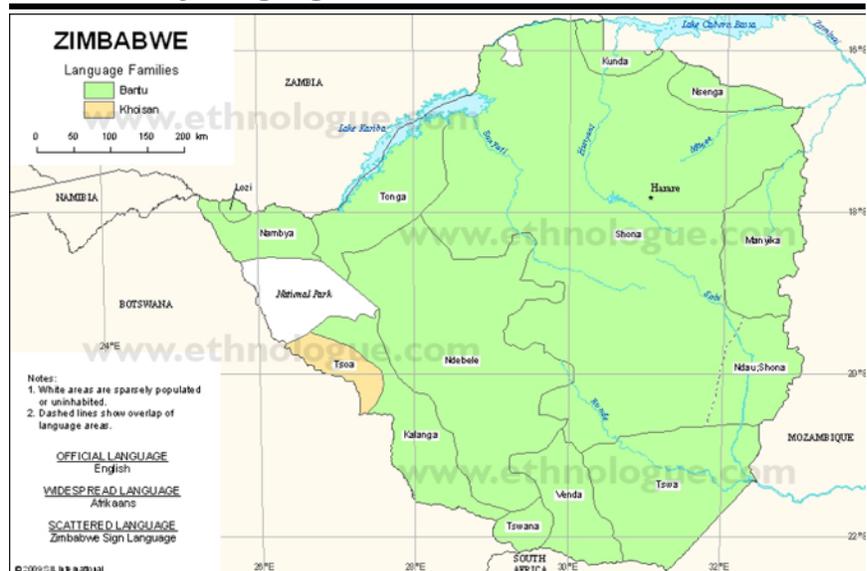
However, other returnees mentioned that the change in rhetoric does not seem to have trickled down to the immigration department. In practice, the process of getting a passport and reclaiming citizenship is a costly, confusing, and time-consuming one, making it inaccessible to many who continue to live on a visa or invisibly.²³ This invisibility is especially true of women who have the additional cultural barrier of their gender in accessing these services in a patriarchal society.²⁴

These barriers act as a deterrent to permanent resettlement and lead to re-emigration (especially irregularly) as an easier option. Not trusting the legal system to protect returnees due to the level of corruption or lack of respect for property rights experienced in land reform was also a big obstacle to return and reintegration. Many in the diaspora expressed concern about the legal system. One male in his 50s described being afraid that “we would lose everything in 20–30 years” again. Another male in his 60s said that “the continued disregard for law and order on the part of a lawless government gives me no reason to consider return.”

Language, Culture, and Identity

Almost all Zimbabweans can speak a native Bantu language. Shona²⁵ is the most widely spoken language in Harare. English is the primary language in business, government, and schools. However, many returnees commented on the importance of learning or maintaining the native languages of those around you, a realization that came with their experiences outside the country. One returnee from Mozambique said, “Looking back, I didn’t ask for help from anyone as I didn’t trust Mozambican guys, so I never asked. I was full of fear there, as they didn’t speak my language.” In Harare, returnees, especially white Zimbabweans, commented that they regretted not learning Shona properly before and expressed their desire to do so now to aid their reintegration. Learning Shona was also a reason why many wanted to get their kids into the Zimbabwean school system. One male returnee in his 60s commented on how important speaking Shona was for our future as Zimbabweans, proudly saying that his sons are both “fluent in Shona.”

Zimbabwe by Languages



This map highlights the many different language groups across Zimbabwe, most of which are from the Bantu language family. The Bantu language family belongs to a group of some 500 languages that span across Africa. Zimbabwe has 16 different dialects, many of which cross the border to the neighboring countries. Although English is the official language, not everyone can speak it. Source: Lewis, 2009.

²³ Living invisibly refers to those who have no identity documents, such as birth certificate, passport, or ID (Dube, 2012).

²⁴ Dube, 2012.

²⁵ Spoken by about 70% of the population.

Attitudes of the Home Population towards Returnees

Responses from the home population vary radically. On one end of the spectrum are attitudes that are entirely embracing to returnees. “Zimbabweans must come home, we will share what little we have,” said a woman in her 50s. Most returnees stated that their overall experience was positive and that they encountered openhearted attitudes from the home population. One male in his 40s said: “It was like ‘Welcome back to the team and let’s try to fix this place.’”

Others in the home population expressed their concern about how those returnees who were still bitter could impact the culture those who have remained were working hard to change. Some suggested ideas such as having an entrance exam for people who want to come back. One 60-year-old male said that an entrance exam would help prevent people coming back “with their old prejudices.” He went on to say, “If you are going to come back and embrace the new Zimbabwe, then very welcome.”

On the other end of the spectrum are members of the home population with an exclusionary approach who let fear of change or competition drive their responses. Returnees experience this exclusion in the language used by some of the home population, such as “*chichoni*” in Shona, which refers to a person who is gone and does not come back. Another example is a term used in rural Zimbabwe, “*mujubheki*,” meaning you have gone to stay in Johannesburg for good. In Matabeleland, the terms “*injiva*” and “*wadliwa yi goli*” are commonly used, meaning you have been eaten up by Johannesburg, especially if you have cut ties back home.²⁶ A typical label in the urban areas and the white farming community is “deserters,” those who some see as having “just upped and left.”

The negative experience of returnees was captured by a man in his 30s who shared that “socially it [reintegrating with the home population] was hard work, as the people who had not left resented the people who had come back, feeling they had not gone through the tough times, so returnees had to work hard at getting into a friendship clique.” One male member of the diaspora in his 30s aptly pointed out, “How can meaningful reintegration occur when those who fled the persecution and political violence in 2008 reconcile and reintegrate into a society which still has the same people who chased them away?” Yet in the interviews, the overall sentiment that came through was that there had been a shift in attitude by returnees and the home population. One man in his 50s, when relating about the farm invasions and trying to define who is Zimbabwean, said, “It is not like what happened in the past when Mugabe took the farms, that is not good ‘cause we are all Zimbabweans, no matter you’re white or black. Look where we are now; we are all suffering. Because of that, [we are] thinking that...because [someone is] white, [then they are] not Zimbabwean. Now we are calling back all those people [who] realized they were also true Zimbabweans.” For me, this culture of “*kubatana*,”²⁷ or “togetherness,” that many interviewees expressed as something they were proud of, was evident. People want to help each other out, despite the levels of polarization within the community over the last 15 years, which is what makes it in many ways so attractive to come home.

Overall in the interviews, most people alluded to their awareness that we are not only defined by language, religion, geography, and race, recognizing that these were used to turn people against each

²⁶ Ndlovu, 2010.

²⁷ *Kubatana* is a Shona word for togetherness, unity, collectiveness. It represents the social capital that exists within Zimbabwe between people.

other, pre- and post-independence. Instead, many home population members spoke about how the hardships people had faced brought people together: “We are now united in our hardships, people who are still here or coming back it is because they want to be here, and that makes them Zimbabwean,” said one male in his 60s.

Returnees’ Impact on Harare

Overall, returnees are not a large enough group (yet) to have had a noticeable impact on the city of Harare. However, urbanization is creating pressure on the city that will only get worse if more people decide to return home. Lack of preparedness for returnees and urbanization are concerns for the city’s housing, transportation, water infrastructure, and healthcare services.

Remittances from the diaspora have affected three key areas of the city: housing, transport in the “purchase of cars,” and education (keeping the diaspora’s children at school in Zimbabwe). Returnees do have an impact on the local economy that in the short term appears to be harmful, as they are no longer sending remittances from abroad. But research and observation show positive impacts beginning to emerge in the longer term.²⁸ Returnees have impacted the culture of the city intangibly, bringing new political opinions, aspirations for the future, and participation in cultural activities like sports. Below we focus on housing, transportation, water and public health, the local economy, and the education system.

Housing

Harare already has pressure on housing availability due to urbanization.²⁹ As more Zimbabweans begin to return home, one real estate agent I spoke with predicted that there would be severe housing shortages, similar to what was experienced in the 1980s with the mass movement back to Zimbabwe after independence. Buying a house is already extremely difficult due to the inability to access loans, which means home ownership requires hard cash. Many from the diaspora are building homes in preparation for their return to avoid this obstacle even if they are not physically returning yet. There is extensive building going on throughout Harare. However, with the loss of value in currency exchange, a noticeable number of these houses are only half-finished as people run out of money before their project is complete.

Buying and Building Houses



A half-built house in Harare.

²⁸ Hausmann and Nedelkoska, 2017.

²⁹ Potts, 2010.

Transportation

Getting to and from work is a massive struggle for the average Zimbabwean. Many returnees see a car as a necessity to facilitate the return home and the ability to reintegrate. Car ownership is now being affected by the rise in fuel prices and availability of fuel. Most of the population relies on commuter omnibuses³⁰ that charge higher rates for peak hour travel, which is increasingly becoming unaffordable. Hitchhiking, although more common on the outskirts of the city going to the rural areas, is seen as an informal taxi service, as drivers often ask for a small fee towards petrol. While bicycles and walking are heavily relied on, they are quite dangerous due to the lack of pedestrian walkways, the speed at which people drive, and lack of adherence to rules of the road. The public bus system within Harare is the cheapest but most unreliable way to travel and has recently reopened, with a timetable meant to compete with the commuter omnibuses and ease the financial stress on citizens. However, seeing a “ZUPCO”³¹ bus has become uncommon because over the past two decades transportation infrastructure has deteriorated. There has been severe mismanagement and a lack of finances for maintenance and repair of buses.³²

In recent years, the number of cars on the roads has increased,³³ due to the growth of the middle class in Zimbabwe, remittances, and the availability of inexpensive Japanese imported cars. Although there are some attempts to limit traffic congestion, such as a government policy that allows returnees to bring in only one car duty free per family, the pressure on Harare’s roadways will continue to increase as more returnees come back with capital to buy cars, and public transport continues to be unreliable and expensive.

³⁰ Individually owned informal transport.

³¹ Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) is a state-owned parastatal that administers government's public transport buses and commuters.

³² Dube, 2004.

³³ After the coup in November 2017, police harassment on the roads stopped, which has led to an increase in people being willing to drive again.

Zupco Buses



A not uncommon site of a Zupco bus broken down or in an accident.

Zimbabwe’s Roadways



A common sight along Zimbabwe’s roadways are overloaded Zupco buses, like this one.

Water and Public Health

Currently, over four million people within Harare require help accessing safe water, and over half of the city's water boreholes are not operational,³⁴ in part due to the exodus of skilled professionals and the subsequent drastic reduction in formal taxes that resulted in a deficit of resources for public spending. The neglected infrastructure is caused more by financial hardships and mismanagement of public funds than the pressure of population growth.³⁵

The neglect of the water infrastructure has led to two severe cholera outbreaks in the last ten years. The neglect of public health systems has resulted in a lack of food, drugs, and equipment in hospitals. Harare Central Hospital has had to close for periods, while other facilities struggle to continue to treat patients with the resources they have.³⁶ Many ask patients to bring their own blankets and food.³⁷ The exodus of experienced medical professionals³⁸ has also destabilized the system. This trend has been slowed by the return of a few medical professionals in the last few years,³⁹ who are required by the government to work in a public hospital for a period before they can practice privately. IOM has been working on a program of skills exchange with medical professionals in the diaspora whereby they return temporarily to assist with training and support in the public health system.⁴⁰

However, the latest challenge in 2019 has been the lack of foreign currency to bring in the supplies needed for medical services. One female returnee in her 30s explained that her son had a health condition, and the public health system was unable to deal with it, "so we had to raise private funding to get him sorted out. Thank goodness it was not life-threatening as we would have had to move back [to the host country]." In Zimbabwe, access to healthcare is severely limited, reflected in the growth of private health services that are unaffordable for much of the population. Returnees expressed an awareness that when moving back, it is essential to have private health insurance or emergency savings for trips to South Africa for medical needs. There is a need for both patients and medical professionals to return to enable the system to function. One returnee said he left a successful practice in the U.S.; when he feels like he made a mistake, he reminds himself, "Here I have been involved in the training of future doctors, I hope that one day when I am 80 years old, I see a doctor who says, 'I remember you when you came back and trained us.' You see, it is all about the next generation."

³⁴ WHO, 2018.

³⁵ Spicer, 2017.

³⁶ Truscott, 2009.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The National Critical Skills Audit (2018) reported a 95% shortage of skills in the health and medical sector and an 80% shortage in specialist medical fields (IOM, 2018b).

³⁹ I interviewed three who returned in the last five years who spoke of others doing the same.

⁴⁰ IOM, 2018b.

The Local Economy

The brain drain caused by outward migration has been a considerable concern for many African leaders, yet there is evidence now of highly skilled workers beginning to return home to Africa, Zimbabwe included.⁴¹ Previous studies⁴² suggest that returnees are one of the most likely groups to become entrepreneurs and thus create employment in their homeland. Most of the returnees I spoke with said they came home to start businesses or take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities and gaps in the market.⁴³

Returnees starting businesses in Harare were very aware that they are taking a significant risk but also saw the potential to benefit from the lack of any real private sector competition. Given Zimbabwe's trade deficit and the scarcity of foreign currency and consumer goods, more businesses have been closing than opening, and most consumables are now purchased on street corners and in informal markets, leaving considerable gaps in the market for those with the capital to start a business.

Thus, returnees are setting up businesses in the agricultural sector, import/export services, the aid sector, and the medical field. However, the economic impact of returnees is hard to measure precisely as most businesses are discouraged from operating formally. Meanwhile, other skilled returnees are managing to get work in areas such as telecommunications, teaching, accounting, development, and sales, based on their work experience in other countries. Some members of the home population did feel that the economic impact from returnees to Harare is beginning to have a small net positive effect on business creation due to the employment they are creating and their contributions to taxes.

Business Startups



Refugee returnees have started businesses across Harare to fill gaps in the market.

⁴¹ Atnafu and Adamek, 2015; Okome, 2014; Ndlovu, 2010; Nzima and Moyo, 2017; and Setrana, 2017.

⁴² Dustmann and Kirchkamp, 2002; IOM, 2017; and Sinatti, 2018.

⁴³ For example, due to the lack of commodities in the country, many returnees are setting up businesses as “runners” or “agents” for cross-border trade using the contacts they made in South Africa to bring basic supplies into Zimbabwe.

Education System

Many returnees cite Zimbabwe's education system as a reason for their return, wanting their children to get "as good an education" as they did. For a period, schools ran with untrained teachers. However, the teaching skill set has been built back up through experience and mentoring of initially inexperienced teachers. Interviewees cite the balanced curriculum that goes beyond academics to include sports and culture. One couple in their 30s were happy to have their children back in the Zimbabwean school system, noting that "schools here build a sense of working together and community."

Education options differ depending on income levels. Those with higher income have a choice of public or private schools. A few school principals commented that they have waiting lists of Zimbabweans living in the diaspora, who will move back when their children get a slot. Those who are unemployed choose to migrate and leave their children with relatives, funding their education in Zimbabwe from abroad. A private school in Harare has set up a boarding facility to facilitate the diaspora sending their children to school in Zimbabwe. The principal commented that assistance is being given to those who are in the process of return so that they are able to enroll their children at the beginning of the school year. As a means of reintegration, school events are an excellent opportunity to assist returnees in getting to know the community again.

The pride in the Zimbabwean education system no longer extends to the universities, as these institutions were severely affected by brain-drain emigration in the 2000s. Many universities became places of protest, where students and staff would express their grievances about human rights abuses and injustice, leading them to be regularly shut down and severely impacting students' studies. One middle-aged female commented that she did not see the central university as an option as it was closed more often than open. A 40-year-old male who attended university in Zimbabwe remarked that he had to complete an extra year to graduate due to the closures, while some of his peers had to drop out because they were unable to keep paying and waiting to graduate. In Zimbabwe, the idea that your education is not complete until after university is pervasive. Thus, many Zimbabweans grow up with a strong desire to attend university. Before the 2000s, Zimbabweans would have been proud to attend a local university but now most aspire to go abroad. They rely on scholarships, obtaining citizenship in another country, or help from relatives in the diaspora to make this a possibility.

Zimstock



ZimStock, an annual festival fundraiser at a private primary school in Harare. Fundraisers create spaces for interaction to occur across social groups. Parents and children all dance and sing together to songs from the Rusike Brothers, a popular group in Zimbabwe from the 1980s.

Three language teachers in Harare shared their concern about the levels of indigenous languages in their classes, often finding returnee children had a better command of Shona or Ndebele because their parents had made them speak it at home in their host countries, whereas in Harare parents were making their children speak English.⁴⁴ They commented that the current curriculum for language learning (all the indigenous languages) does not get students to a conversational level, meaning they are unable to practice and use it outside of school, therefore making it very unlikely that they will become fluent. In response to this weakness, one returnee schoolteacher has partnered with a Ndebele teacher and is working on a program of improving the language curriculum. Their program also focuses on how important language is for cultural understanding and a sense of belonging.

Places for Reintegration

The lack of integration is where the need for reconciliation becomes most apparent.⁴⁵ In Zimbabwe, reconciliation must go beyond conflict resolution to include restoring relationships and helping people think about the emotional barriers from past hurts, to bring understanding and forgiveness in our society. Bar-Tal⁴⁶ said reconciliation begins when psychosocial changes start to take place: changes of beliefs, attitudes, goals, motivations, and emotions about conflict, each other, and future relations. Many of my interviewees described some of these changes taking place, through changes in attitudes and feelings towards the past, and the perspective people gained from going abroad.

Successful reintegration depends on having places where people can rebuild social ties,⁴⁷ the layout of cities can present obstacles to reintegration. There are apparent circles of interaction within Harare that stem from Rhodesian times, where areas separated by race are now separated by class (see map in Appendix B).⁴⁸ These dividers are detrimental to reintegration but possibly could be prevented with proactive town planning. There are zones that people avoid in Harare, restricting reintegration and thus preventing reconciliation from occurring. For example, certain groups (women alone or “well-off” white people) view the city center or Central Business District (CBD) as unsafe. The city center is a hub of activity that most people using public transport pass through daily and think nothing of doing so. It is also a place of informal trade, where the unemployed and refugees from neighboring African countries make a living, making it a culturally diverse place.

On the other hand, those welcomed in the CBD feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in the suburbs. There are a few locations in the city where people can meet and mix, mainly churches, schools, and

⁴⁴ If Shona is not spoken at home and they are attending a public school, returnee children who were born outside Zimbabwe may struggle to cope. In Harare, Shona and English are often mixed together in conversation.

⁴⁵ The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) was set up in 2016 and on January 5, 2018 was finally enacted through the Reconciliation Bill by the new president. It has a large mandate and is currently creating a strategic plan that is attempting to decide on the period of history it will deal with.

⁴⁶ Bar-Tal, 2007.

⁴⁷ IOM, 2017.

⁴⁸ Auret, 1995.

workplaces. Supermarkets have also become places where people try to branch out, often approaching others to ask for jobs. For reintegration to occur in Zimbabwe, these social connections need to reach beyond those with a shared identity to people of different backgrounds. There is evidence of people wanting this to happen, but there is a need to create spaces and opportunities within the city for it to occur naturally.

Conclusion

Return movement to Zimbabwe remains small. Many people are still being forced out of the country for economic reasons, while others are coming home in search of the sense of belonging that was missing in foreign countries. People are returning to Harare due to both the push factors of hardships abroad, such as xenophobic treatment, and pull factors, the strongest being social connections and a desire to rediscover home. To date, Harare has not been heavily impacted by mass returns. However, the home population is developing a sense of optimism for the future about how a return movement might change Harare for the better.

My experience in Zimbabwe and the responses from those I interviewed show the challenges of reintegration. Being able to remain in Zimbabwe after returning is not easy, and many have not been able to reintegrate economically. After researching and reading about the state of the country, the violence and injustices, it was surprising for me to return to a population of people who shared their craving to reintegrate, belong, and rebuild, and were no longer fixated on a history of violence and hate. Hearing these opinions left me with the impression that should there be any promising signs of economic or political stability, Zimbabweans will begin returning en masse. The last person I spoke with during my stay in Harare, who has been back and forth to many countries trying to survive, said in closing: "Since the coup, the hearts of people are united. We realized we have to do it together." Men and women, returnees and home population, shared their awareness of the need to be proactive about dealing with the past through some reconciliation process; the question is how, when, and where. He concluded by saying: "We also require the same investment in reintegration and reconciliation from our leadership. We need our government to care about their people."

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Appendix A: Methods

I began this study with a broad review of reports, news articles, municipal data, and academic literature on migration into and out of Zimbabwe, with a focus on Harare.⁴⁹

Due to the lack of official data on people's movements, my data collection began with an online questionnaire posed to the diaspora exploring their intentions to return and reasons for and against it. The responses came from over ten different countries but was a small sample size of 73. The sample was not representative in terms of numbers, partly due to some people responding that they did not believe they were Zimbabwean and others that it was too painful to go down that road with the questions asked. The sample covered a range of ages, ethnicities, and genders. The questionnaire found that 51% of respondents, when specifically asked, were planning to return. One-quarter of the rest were unsure of return and were in "wait and see mode," while the other quarter had "naturalized" in their new countries and had no plans to return.

The second stage of data collection focused on interviews with returnees in Zimbabwe and the home population, and my experience as a Zimbabwean returnee. In August 2019, I returned for the first time for longer than a two-week holiday and conducted my research for four months. I relied on my social ties to collect information. I was able to talk to people of different races, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, with varying employment status. I interviewed 32 people in total, including those who had returned voluntarily, those deported from the host country, and those who had illegally crossed the border into and out of Zimbabwe.

Limitations

I worried about getting candid information from interviewees, given my identity as a young, white, female researcher. I thought male interviewees might be uncomfortable or unwilling to "open up" to a female. I was aware of my whiteness, and my cultural roots in the *Ubuntu*⁵⁰ philosophy, and respecting elders made me concerned about asking such personal questions to older interviewees. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that my fears were unfounded and further still that the culture of silence⁵¹ in Zimbabwe has eased, with people feeling they can express themselves more openly. My interviews turned into two- to three-hour conversations. Interviewees attributed this openness to the 2017 coup creating a feeling of "people power" that has meant more candidness about layers of trauma, while highlighting the dire need for change, regardless of the consequences.

⁴⁹ Most notably, Chigwedere, 2017; Jacobs, 2016; McGregor and Pasura, 2010; McGregor and Primorac, 2010; Crush and Tevera, 2010; Nzima and Moyo, 2017.

⁵⁰ *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy based on the idea that "my existence relies on your existence," so we must rely on and look after each other to survive together. Often defined as "I am because you are."

⁵¹ This culture of silence has been built up over years by the leading political party. There is a lack of freedom of speech because of fear of violence or disappearance. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009.

Appendix B: Refugees in Zimbabwe

Historically, southern Africa was a region of cross-border movement depending on where work was available and changing insecurity from the policies of oppressive governments. For Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), the migration of the 1950s and 1960s was predominantly labor immigration from Malawi, Zambia, and even Asia and Europe to support agriculture. However, after independence in 1980, the tables turned, and emigration increased.

At independence, the idea of nation building became prominent with Prime Minister (1980–87), then President (1987–November 2017) Robert Mugabe declaring that the Zimbabwean people shall forgive and forget the 10-year Bush War (also called the Liberation War) and the effects of colonization. Since 1980, Zimbabwe has had three attempts at reconciliation. These attempts forced the population to move on without healing⁵² and allowed the elite to get away with violent crimes against humanity.⁵³

Ultimately, return migration has a lot to do with reconciliation or lack thereof. The first attempt at reconciliation in the 1980s was called the “Let bygones be bygones reconciliation project” by University of Pretoria researcher Ruth Murambadoro.⁵⁴ In this attempt at reconciliation, Mugabe led the nation with rhetoric saying, “Let us move together as Zimbabweans to trample upon racism, tribalism and regionalism and work hard to reconstruct and rehabilitate our society.”⁵⁵ Peace lasted only two years before conflict broke out between the two nationalist parties who had fought for independence. The second reconciliation attempt was in 1987 and took place alongside the Unity Accord that gave amnesty for all crimes committed between 1980 and 1987.⁵⁶

This attempt, “Forcing the population to move on,” had no formal reconciliation process to deal with war victims, massacre victims, or any of the psychosocial support needs of the communities that had been subjected to violence.⁵⁷ Again in 2000, there was an outbreak of outward state-based violence that perpetuated the colonial narratives, causing people with certain political persuasions, ethnic identities, and, to a certain extent, educational and socioeconomic statuses to lose their security. This violence led to the need for a third attempt at reconciliation in 2008 as part of the Global Political Unity (GPU) Government after the divisive June election. The GPU led to the creation of the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) in 2009, with a mandate until 2013, in which time little has been achieved due to the many conflicts of interest that existed during its set-up.

The violence began after Zimbabwe gained independence, with the massacre of over 20,000 people in the 1980s in Matabeleland and Midlands. This violence was legitimized by labelling the people there as “dissidents,” when in reality a large number of the people killed were women and children.⁵⁸ The massacre caused a great number of people from that region to spill across the border into South Africa and Botswana because the people could not survive (economically and emotionally) in Zimbabwe after

⁵² Murambadoro, 2014.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch, 2008; IDMC, 2008; and Pigou, 2019.

⁵⁴ Murambadoro, 2014.

⁵⁵ Mlambo, 2013, 50.

⁵⁶ Murambadoro, 2014.

⁵⁷ Murambadoro, 2014.

⁵⁸ Mlambo, 2013.

losing key members of their families and communities. Since the massacre and up to the present day, Zimbabweans do not have freedom from violence. The violence has lasted for over three decades, resulting in authors referring to Zimbabwe as being in protracted crisis.⁵⁹ One female in her 20s referred to the situation as “living in a silent war.” One of the many survival strategies is what is known as “survival migration.”⁶⁰

Currently, the state is failing to provide basic services for citizens. This failure is said to have originated from the effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) imposed on many African nations by the World Bank in the 1990s. This policy was then perpetuated by the policies of the ruling party led by the liberator-turned-dictator President Mugabe. Corruption has directly contributed to the rapid deterioration in the quality of life of everyday citizens since 2000. The policies included the costly involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s regional war⁶¹ and awarding of gratuities to war veterans. The result is that Zimbabweans do not have freedom from want or freedom from fear, with mass unemployment, food shortages, and a continued politics of fear.⁶² These politics of fear⁶³ resulted in three to four million people fleeing the country between 2000 and 2010. Eighty-three percent of them settled in other African countries.⁶⁴ The prevailing assumption that people in the diaspora and their families have achieved socioeconomic success has motivated millions more to escape the social, political, and economic hardship of Zimbabwe.⁶⁵

The population of Zimbabwe is said to be 17,174,775.⁶⁶ However, this number is inaccurate due to the continuous irregular movement of people in and out of the country.⁶⁷ Despite outward migration remaining high, there is a small return movement that has been observed and written about.⁶⁸ However, this return movement is often overshadowed by that fact that in 2016 Zimbabweans were still the largest population submitting asylum claims in South Africa, at 8,000. However, 2016 saw a significant drop from the 17,800 Zimbabwean applicants in 2015.⁶⁹

Due to these continuous movements of undocumented migrants, estimating the number of Zimbabweans outside the country, and therefore the potential number of returnees, is challenging and may be impossible. IOM’s recent migration profile for Zimbabwe highlighted that “administrative data on regular, voluntary return migration from the Department of Immigration Control was not accessible during the preparation of this Migration Profile.”⁷⁰ IOM’s report ended by stating the need to improve data collection to support the needs of the community adequately.

⁵⁹ McGregor and Primorac, 2010.

⁶⁰ Crush and Tevera, 2010.

⁶¹ “Involvement in the war triggered a precipitous decline in Zimbabwe’s economic performance and the value of the Zimbabwean dollar. In addition, it caused severe shortages of hard currency.” *Zimbabwean*, 2008.

⁶² Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009.

⁶³ A concept popularized as a culture of fear by sociologist Barry Glassner in 1999, which encompasses how politicians use emotional manipulation to incite fear as a method to achieve political goals.

⁶⁴ McGregor and Primorac, 2010; and UNDP, 2010.

⁶⁵ Nzima and Moyo, 2017.

⁶⁶ World Population Review, 2018.

⁶⁷ IOM, 2018a.

⁶⁸ Dziva and Kusena, 2013; IOM, 2018a; and Ndlovu, 2010.

⁶⁹ This was possibly because Zimbabweans began choosing to illegally cross the border or were able to access the temporary work permit that the South African government introduced (UNHCR, 2018).

⁷⁰ IOM, 2018a.

Appendix C: Refugees in Harare

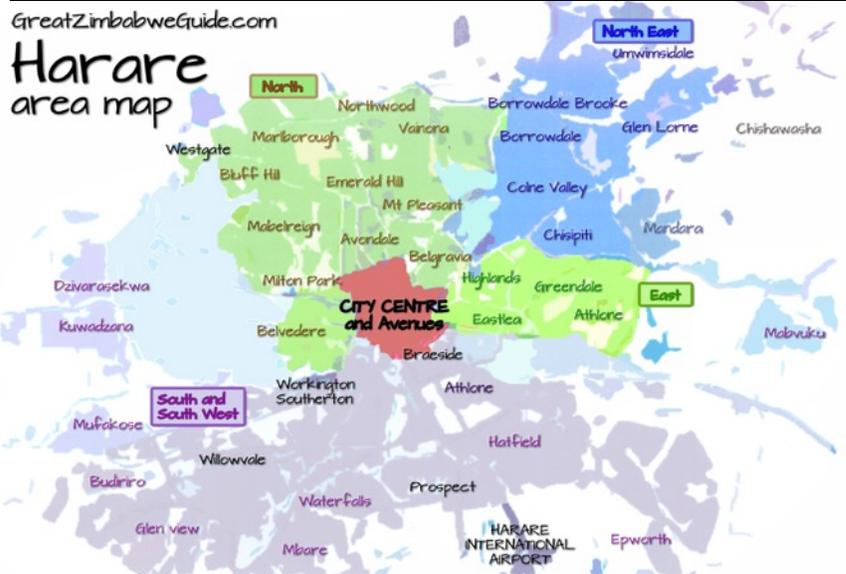
Harare is nicknamed “the Sunshine City” but is now characterized as green but gritty by travel blogs; it has many trees and greenery but has become increasingly run down over the years due to lack of maintenance and economic decline. The roads leading out of the capital are now in better condition due to privatization and the introduction of toll gates that see to their maintenance. However, the CBD has wide streets littered with potholes. In the CBD streets, vendors sell everything from cell phone airtime, shoes, and clothes to fruits and vegetables. The existing layout is

a remnant of many other postcolonial cities, in which the lower socioeconomic groups get pushed to the periphery into high-density suburbs and then need to travel the longest distances to get into work, and the low-density suburbs surround the city center.

Rural-to-urban migration to Harare increased in the 1980s due to opportunities for better income and access to services in the city such as schools that were preparing people for office jobs and healthcare positions. Many rural inhabitants were experiencing a shortage of land in the communal areas.⁷¹ In the 1990s, insecurity in urban areas led people to lose confidence in urban lifestyles, and there was a movement back to the rural areas. Urban jobs did not grow fast enough to supply jobs for many of the newly arrived city dwellers, so the informal economy grew, with government sanction.⁷² The informal economy would be a key to economic survival for many Zimbabweans in the years to come as well as the reason for the devastating Operation *Murambatsvina* (Move the Rubbish) in 2005, in which the government attempted to force urban-to-rural migration to occur.⁷³

The 2012 census showed that 67% of the population was rural, with urban areas hosting only 33% of the population. However, these percentages changed again as the country continued to struggle. The

A Map of Harare’s suburbs



Map of Harare’s suburbs and peri-urban sprawl, used with permission from GreatZimbabweguide.com

⁷¹ Zimbabwe’s communal areas are where communal farmers reside and practice agriculture for subsistence purposes. Potts, 2010.

⁷² Potts, 2010.

⁷³ Operation *Murambatsvina* (Shona word for “Move the Rubbish”), also officially known as Operation Restore Order, was a 2005 large-scale government campaign to forcibly clean up a huge slum that posed a public health risk due to lack of sanitation and services (IDMC, 2008). It has been accused of being an attempt to create fear in an opposition stronghold area and resulted in the brutal destruction of people’s houses and livelihoods. *Murambatsvina* affected at least 700,000 people directly and 2.4 million people indirectly and led to out-migration, internal displacement, and homelessness (IDMC, 2008).

lack of land ownership or title deeds prevented access to finance or bank loans to begin farming and pushed people who had been given land back into the cities in search of an income.⁷⁴ Harare is now following the African trend of its cities experiencing the world's fastest urbanization rate at 3.5% annually, despite the various attempts by the Zimbabwean government to force urban-to-rural migration. The migration has only exacerbated the housing shortages; Harare was built for a population of less than a million but now has 1.5 million people living there.⁷⁵ Government neglect of essential services such as roads, schools, health clinics, and drinking water leaves Harare ill equipped to cater to the number of people trying to make a living there, and puts the city at risk for further health outbreaks.⁷⁶

Returnees are adding to the existing pressure, as most who come back are likely to settle in the economic hub, Harare.⁷⁷ My research showed returnees, who were originally from other parts of the country, confirming that they had returned to Harare as the best place to get work or start a business. This phenomenon needs to be planned for and considered. If it is managed well, the return migration has huge potential to bring skills and capital to help support the development needed to cope with the existing population. But if managed poorly, the increase in population will likely continue to lead to the failure of an already struggling infrastructure and to the further outbreak of health epidemics.

⁷⁴ Scoones et al., 2012.

⁷⁵ World Population Review, 2018.

⁷⁶ Rotberg, 2018.

⁷⁷ Setrana, 2017.

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

About the Author

Natasha Venables Natasha holds an M.A. in Peace Studies from the International Christian University in Tokyo through a Rotary Peace Fellowship. Previously, she worked with the Australian Red Cross for six years on disaster management, food security, health awareness and livelihoods, school community gardens, and migration social education. She also supported the response and recovery of Vanuatu during Tropical Cyclone Pam with CARE International. Her interests in peace studies and the plight of displaced people began when her own family had to leave their home during farm invasions in Zimbabwe, leading her to question the role of nationhood, race, and food security in maintaining peace. She received her two B.A.s, one in Sustainable Development and one in Commerce, from Murdoch University in Perth. Currently she lives in Zimbabwe and is the editor of *The Zimbabwean Gardener Magazine*.

Email: tash.oceans@gmail.com

Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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