

# **Migrants and Voluntary Return to Political and Economic Uncertainty in Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses a non-normative case of return migration to economic and political uncertainty. Although return migration is often associated with improvement in home country factors that led to emigration, unanticipated factors in the host country such as lack of the expected economic opportunities and dim prospects for upward social mobility also inform the decision to return. Socio-cultural factors and their psychological effects on migrants also have a countervailing impact on availability of economic opportunities in the host country and contribute to the decision to return. While the untenable economic situation in Zimbabwe influenced the decision to emigrate, the decision to return is not necessarily informed by positive economic change in Zimbabwe but by lack of means to achieve economic goals in the host country and a sense of socio-cultural and psychological displacement. The latter can lead to return in spite of better economic prospects in the host country. The paper attributes migrants' return to political and economic uncertainty to failure to rationalize migration out of poverty into poverty or reach a trade-off between economic gain in the host country and socio-cultural and psychological well-being in Zimbabwe. The paper also discusses migrants' post-return experiences and circumstances and how these lead to conflicted views on return and plans to re-emigrate or, conversely, satisfaction with the decision to return. The paper highlights the role of social relationships in how migrants rationalize their return to what they fled from in the first place and their views on future migration.

## **Introduction**

Normative voluntary return takes place when the circumstances that led to migration have either ceased to exist or abated. Return migration to Zimbabwe provides a deviant case which defies this norm. This paper addresses Zimbabwean migrants' return to the country when the economic difficulties that prompted their emigration remain unsolved. It seeks to explain return migration at a time when many Zimbabweans in the country are desperately looking for ways to emigrate due to persistent economic and political uncertainty. Indeed, many Zimbabweans who have lived through the country's socio-economic and political difficulties with no hope for change in sight see migration as the most viable option. Yet, some of the Zimbabweans who managed to leave the country have returned to the essentially unaltered situation thus raising

questions on home country factors that influence the decision to return. This paper argues that return is not necessarily influenced by improvement in home country factors that led to migration as return can also occur even when this improvement has not taken place. Whereas Makina (2012) argues that Zimbabwean migrants' reasons for migration do not significantly predict return, this paper conversely argues that the role of reasons for migration in predicting return is observable when these reasons are located in host countries' failure to meet expectations in relation to these reasons. At the same time, return is not confined to reasons for migration as it is also influenced by multiple reasons (Wang and Fan, 2006) in both the home and host countries. The paper accordingly discusses the interplay between lack of better economic prospects in host countries and the concomitant socio-cultural and psychological factors that diminish appeal of the host country. The paper addresses how migrants rationalize their return and how they adapt to the uncertainty in Zimbabwe. It also addresses reintegration into Zimbabwe which occurs without state assistance or other forms of institutional support leading to anxiety in some cases and desire to migrate once again. In the process, the paper highlights the role of family in how migrants view their return and future migration based on their experiences in the host country and their post-return experiences in Zimbabwe. The paper is based on ongoing research on return migrants. The data used were obtained through semi-structured and narrative interviews.

### **Zimbabwean Context and Return**

Returning to Zimbabwe appears to be an economically risky undertaking akin to migrating back into poverty in view of the high rate of unemployment in a shrinking economy with dwindling cash reserves that led to introduction of a surrogate currency in November 2016 which has revived fears of re-introduction of the local currency which was phased out in 2009 due to hyperinflation. The economic respite and hope for better prospects from 2009-2013 when the Government of National Unity (GNU) subsisted was followed by regression which saw more people losing their jobs as companies closed at the same time that the country's indigenization policy repelled Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the economy failed to grow and create more jobs. The formal labour market is characterized by massive retrenchments, difficulties in paying workers' salaries and stiff competition for the few available jobs. The majority of urban dwellers eke out a living as street vendors. The economy continues to shrink as more companies fold up and the government struggles to replenish its reserves and pay its workers among other obligations. Zimbabwe's welfare system is currently unable to assist even the poorest of the poor, a role that has been assumed by NGOs. The country has been on a steady decline on the

Human Development Indicator (HDI) and Human Poverty Index (HPI). Zimbabwe's HDI for 2015 placed it at 155 out of 188 countries and territories.<sup>1</sup>

Migrants' return to this context means that they have to create their own livelihoods and safety nets to fall back on. With Zimbabwe ranked among the worst countries on various poverty indices, return migration to the country appears to be a case of returning to poverty as the prevailing economic situation in Zimbabwe contradicts preconditions that need to exist for migrants to return to the home country. Barrett and Goggin (2010) identify three factors that influence the decision to return. First, return occurs when individuals place a higher value on consumption in the home country vis-à-vis the host country. Second, it takes place when host country currency has a higher purchasing power in the home country thus maximizing consumption in the latter. Lastly, migrants return when human capital acquired in the host country is better rewarded in the home country. In relation to these factors, Zimbabwe provides an intriguing case which turns these factors on their head. Life is expensive in Zimbabwe and both the South African rand and Botswana pula, currencies of the most common destinations among the migrants, have a lower purchasing power in Zimbabwe which is currently using United States dollars than in South Africa and Botswana respectively. At the same time, salaries are generally lower in Zimbabwe than they are in these two countries and beyond such that migrants who return with higher skills do not necessarily earn more than those who stayed in the country. Zimbabwe's economic situation dissuades rather than encourage return which points to non-economic factors in the country and economic and non-economic factors in host countries as compelling Zimbabweans to return.

### **Rationalizing Return**

In the literature, migrants' return is attributed to a variety of reasons. In Cerase's (1974) typology for reasons for return, return migrants are categorized in terms of 'return of failure' which takes place when migrants fail to integrate into the host country in terms of finding jobs, saving money and sending remittances to the home country, 'return of conservatism' in which migrants remain in the host country until there is an improvement in the home country, 'return of innovation' which captures migrants who tend to be detached from the host country and return with new values and ideas and, lastly, 'return of retirement' which occurs when migrants decide to end their careers and return to rest in their home countries. The return migrants

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP Human Development Report 2015, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/ZWE.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/ZWE.pdf) (accessed on 28.02.17).

discussed in this paper fall under 'return of failure' and 'return of innovation'. 'Return of failure' migrants returned to Zimbabwe due to uncertainty in the host country or 'a worse-than-expected outcome in the host country' (Saarela and Rooth, 2012: 1893). However, these typologies can be extended to non-economic motivations for return that I categorize under 'return of alienation' which involves failure to integrate in socio-cultural terms leading to a sense of insecurity and estrangement from the host country. While Zimbabwe does not offer economic inducements for return, it offers socio-cultural and psychological well-being which return migrants failed to find in their host countries. On their part, host countries also contributed to the decision to return through failure to provide anticipated economic prospects in some cases and socio-cultural and psychological integration. As such, the decision to return is informed by an overlap of non-economic factors in Zimbabwe and a combination of economic and non-economic factors in the host countries.

### ***Lack of Legal Documents and Economic Implications***

One of the factors that led to return was lack of work permits. The dire economic situation in Zimbabwe at its peak around 2007/8 led to significant numbers of people leaving the country as undocumented migrants while some of those who had passports failed to secure work permits. Lack of work permits exposes mostly lowly skilled and unskilled migrants to abuse and exploitation particularly in the informal employment sector where employers play on migrants without work permits' fear of being deported which dissuades them from reporting employers who do not pay for services rendered. One woman, Yvonne, explained her experiences when she worked in Botswana without a work permit,

It was tough because you would have thought that because of the economic difficulties that were experienced in this country [Zimbabwe], if we go and braid hair things will get better and maybe working piece jobs, but then it's tough if you don't have a work permit. The Tswana have this cruelty that they have such that if you work for them and they see that they don't want to pay you, they can just report you to the police saying that she does not have a permit. That becomes the end and you won't get your money. We would braid hair here and there but you can see that it's really tough because you don't have a permit.

### ***Family Obligations***

Some female migrants employed in the informal sector or those who were self-employed had to leave their children in Zimbabwe. Yvonne, who left her husband and children in Zimbabwe when she went to Botswana, also decided to return because of the need to keep her family together. In her case, the legal challenge of not possessing a work permit combined with socio-cultural considerations as a wife and mother. She explained that it was difficult for marriage to survive international distance and that working away from her family meant that her meagre income had to be split between two households namely herself in Botswana and her husband and children back in Zimbabwe. Sheila, another hairdresser, narrated that she had to leave her son with her mother in Zimbabwe when she left her job in a hair salon to ply her trade and join her husband in South Africa. She returned to Zimbabwe after her mother who had been taking care of her son died. She took her son to South Africa with her but returned to Zimbabwe so that her son could attend school because she thought that South African schools gave children too much freedom which she saw as detrimental to her son's upbringing. Timothy, who spent one year in Ivory Coast, explained that being away from his family was one of the challenges that he had to cope with although he would come back for visits and once invited his family to join him when he could not travel back to Zimbabwe due to work commitments. Migrants with families have to do a delicate balancing act between economic and socio-cultural obligations. Family commitments at different stages of the individual's life cycle determine choices when the individual migrant is faced with economic global options (Bielsa, Casellas and Verger, 2014). Both migrant women and men's initiative in terms of quest for opportunities outside Zimbabwe to fulfil their economic obligations to their families is checked by socio-cultural obligations that pull them back to Zimbabwe. The family is thus an individualizing centrifugal force that draws migrants back to the country against economic prospects outside the country that act as a centripetal force. It provides an arena in which tensions between outbound mobility and dispersal on the one hand and return and local attachment on the other hand play out.

### ***Aspirations, Multiple Fronts of Exclusion and Alienation***

Some of the migrants did not have plans to return to Zimbabwe when they left the country. This position was dominant among migrants who did not leave behind spouses and children. They only made the decision to return due to a discrepancy between aspirations and reality in the host country. One female migrant, Rachel, explained her situation thus,

I didn't want to come back home. I think, you know, what happens in South Africa... I don't know if it's the same with, ah, migrants all over. Coming back... going back to

your country is seen as a sign of failure. When a person leaves Zimbabwe their aim is never ever to set foot in Zim except maybe for a funeral. It's tantamount to real failure and people will avoid it by all means...all means. If it means lying to immigration, if it means dodging immigration, you will do anything and I mean a-ny-thi-ng even getting married to... you know, marriage of conveniences (sic) — anything. So when I was there I also joined that mode of thinking that for me going back to Zimbabwe is out of the question; I am not going back.

Rachel described South Africa as having 'very lovely attributes' in terms of affordable food and clothes and explained that these attributes, in contrast to the situation in Zimbabwe, feed into dreams of possibilities and how one could buy a house in an affluent neighbourhood in Cape Town if they managed to get a job. She started chasing what she termed 'the South African dream' but realized that 'that dream is not easy. That's the truth.' Rachel who abandoned her civil service job to enroll for a master's degree at the University of Cape Town decided that a postgraduate qualification at a South African university would make her job search in South Africa easier. Anthony, a male migrant who also left Zimbabwe to study in South Africa, similarly hoped to use a postgraduate qualification attained at a South African university to gain access to the South African job market. However, Rachel and Anthony cited exclusion and racism in the universities as the main obstacles to living the South African dream. Rachel described her experiences at the university as disappointing and narrated in detail how her expectations before she left Zimbabwe were crashed by the reality that she experienced in South Africa. She left without enough money and when she arrived in South Africa, her aunt was unwilling to host her and she ended up living with her brother in a crowded apartment until they both left when the flat mates complained about her unannounced arrival to be the eighteenth occupant in the already overcrowded flat. Her money ran out but she was able to secure a scholarship with the help of her university supervisor. However, this scholarship ended before she could complete her master's degree but she could not find odd jobs to pay tuition fees so she decided to apply for a scholarship for a student exchange programme in Jamaica. Her supervisor refused her permission to go and she told her,

'[L]ook, I am a black student; I am not a white student and when opportunities like this come, we grab them with both hands because there is money involved. It's ah, it's my..., it's survival for me; it's not just gallivanting in a foreign country.' And if you have noticed, a lot of exchange students are blacks because they are looking for money. And she didn't... I told her the truth, and I was like I come... I don't come from privilege. I

can't just say look here I am going to UCT and I am going to concentrate on my studies. It's difficult to concentrate on your studies when you are staring poverty in the face and there is so much uncertainty and I really need to go because only then can I come back and pay my fees and then she is like hee 'if you go I am not going to supervise you' and I was like 'to hell with that.' I have told her my situation as a black student she doesn't want to understand so I am just going to go. So I left; I went to Jamaica. I had a very fabulous time there.

Anthony attributed his return to frustration upon realising that he could not secure a permanent post at the university. He attributed this to racism thus,

I saw that there were white postgraduate students who had it easy who would teach or who would just get some scholarship or some information and so forth. I thought they had it easy and I didn't. So, so there were experiences of some disparities based on colour and background which, I think, when I started in 2008, were very apparent, you know, very apparent. [...] But there were so many, so many issues there. [...] [T]he whole picture, in one way, the whole set-up would affect me not directly perhaps but I couldn't navigate through the system and establish myself as an academic in South Africa and I guess there are so many like me. Ah, by establishment what I really wanted was that I would go back to my passions and aspirations because, really, a permanent job which can allow me to get credit for a house, you know, so that I don't... I stop renting.

Racism was not confined to the universities as it was also experienced in everyday interaction outside them. Anthony stated that he experienced racism at a shopping mall when two black shop attendants provided service to a middle aged white woman before him when he was first in the queue. He recalled, 'I complained and he [shop attendant] didn't stop serving her. This white lady [...] she didn't contest my claim; she simply continued getting her service. The guys [black male and female shop attendants] never listened to me and I was helpless. I had all the frustration.' An interesting point on racial exclusion in South Africa is that it dominated narratives of migrants with university education but was absent from narratives of migrants with primary and secondary school education. This is attributable to the fact that migrants without university education working in the cities mainly worked or were self-employed in the informal sector where they did not work directly with non-blacks. However, this is not to suggest that migrants without tertiary education do not encounter racism as there are

possibilities of some of them working as domestic workers in non-black households. Zimbabwean migrants across level of education had in common experience of exclusion on the basis of nationality which exposed them to negative stereotypes and downright hostility epitomized by xenophobic attacks by black South Africans targeting mostly immigrants from African countries. Rachel described black South Africans as both indifferent and hostile to African immigrants. She also observed that biracial Zimbabweans commonly referred to as 'coloureds' were also excluded by biracial South Africans because the former spoke with a Zimbabwean accent which betrayed their outsider status in South Africa.

There was also exclusion among Zimbabweans themselves based on level of education and class. Excluded by South Africans and having excluded themselves from the other foreign nationals in ways that reflect South Africans' negative stereotypes, Zimbabweans who are equally vilified by South Africans have to rely on networks among themselves but these are also tenuous. According to Rachel, Zimbabweans with work permits and white collar jobs did not want to associate with their blue collar compatriots some of whom did not have work permits. Although she could freely move between these groups as a university student, she explained that this level of 'classism' bothered her. Rachel attributed weak ties among Zimbabweans to class differences and what she perceived as Zimbabweans' competitive nature. The latter was also noted by Sheila who stated that Zimbabweans in the informal sector hide information from each other on where to get clients in order to avoid competition. Rachel explained that when she was in South Africa and heard people speaking in Shona, Zimbabwe's main local language, her brother would tell her not to speak to these people and pretend she was not one of them. She wondered about this attitude which also occurred when she went to a restaurant in Cape Town where they were served by Zimbabwean waiters but her friends told her not to speak Shona in their presence. She remarked, 'but they [Zimbabweans who shun fellow Zimbabweans in blue collar jobs] do not realise that the waiters also have degrees.' Sheila attributed Zimbabweans in South Africa's failure to help each other to lack of love and empathy and contrasted them to Nigerians whom she described as capable of establishing close-knit familial relationships in which they treat each other as 'my sister from another mother'. Rachel, who suffers from an 'anxiety disorder', explained that if she had stayed on in South Africa, she probably would have ended up in a psychiatric unit. Jamaican hospitality

[...] magnified the problem in South Africa for me. [...] the whole hostility of South Africans: their arrogance, their... you know, everything about the country started hitting

me when I was in Jamaica. [...] So it was at that point in time that I decided I didn't want to be in South Africa anymore and by the time the four months [in Jamaica] had ended, I had also ended my love affair with South Africa. I just said this is not the country for me. I don't care how well up they are; all their stuff, all their resources, all their everything; I just didn't want to be in SA anymore. So when I came back [to South Africa from Jamaica], [...] I didn't even bother to look for another supervisor. [...] Aah, I didn't fight. I just decided I am packing my bags and going back home. I am just going back home. Yeah. This, this... if it means leaving poverty to live like a slave in a country in which, I don't know — we are all black people... you are seen like a lesser black. Because you are from across the Limpopo, you are an inferior black person.

Migrants who returned because of exclusionary experiences that stood as obstacles in their paths towards professional and economic goals reflect the neo-classical perspective that attributes return to failure to economically and socially integrate into the host country. This motivation for return captured by Cerase's (1974) 'return of failure' also fits into what Coniglio and Brzozowski (2016) describe as 'bitter return' characterized by return without savings thus raising the probability of economic hardships upon return. Migrants with university education who returned contradict the view by Nyi, Chamratrithirong and Guest (2012) that better educated migrants are likely to stay on in the destination country because they have better prospects for employment and better wages. Nor do they conform to Barrett and Goggin's (2010) observation that links return migrants to higher wages relative to those who stayed and higher premium to those with postgraduate qualifications relative to those with primary and secondary education. This outlier character of return migration to Zimbabwe is due to the fact that the migrants did not return because of improvement in the Zimbabwean economy but because they did not see better employment prospects in their destination countries. Whereas De Haas, Fokkema and Fihri (2014) note that migrants may postpone the decision to return when they fail to achieve the goals of migrating, return migrants studied for this paper saw continued stay in the host country as synonymous with chasing elusive dreams and wasting the most productive years of their lives. All the return migrants interviewed were in their thirties and middle ages in contrast to Efstratios, Anastasios and Anastasios' (2012) observation of a low likelihood of return for migrants in the productive years of their lives. Rachel was of the view that migrants who are not highly educated stay on because their expectations of the host country are limited to the very basic of needs such as being able to eat three meals a day which they could not do in Zimbabwe. In contrast, highly educated migrants focus on whether the host

country can provide opportunities to earn enough incomes to buy decent houses and expensive cars, go on holiday and enjoy other middle class trappings that come with upward social mobility. Return involves rational choice or a cost benefit analysis (Efstratios, Anastasios and Anastasios, 2012) in which migrants weigh hope for opportunities in future against the current reality of joblessness and the likelihood of continuing in this state.

### **Security Concerns**

The negative headlines that Zimbabwe has grabbed due to its political and economic situation have created the impression that the country is insecure. In contrast to this impression, Zimbabwe presents a contradictory situation in which its high level of political and economic disaffection has not degenerated into widespread violence and a high crime rate. It is thus not uncommon that most of the migrants discussed the security situation in their respective host countries and its influence on their decision to return. Tawanda, who worked on a one year contract in Ivory Coast, stated that he felt secure even though he could not understand French. His employer provided a car and an Ivorian driver and told him and his colleagues not to venture beyond the city of Abidjan and its environs for security reasons. He was secure because he heeded the physical boundary beyond which he could have experienced insecurity. In contrast, migrants who had lived in South Africa emphasized the issue of crime and insecurity among their reasons for return. Rachel described the crime as targeted because,

South Africans can actually tell that this person is foreign. We...our complexion is different and our features are different so when a person is walking they can actually tell, ha this is not one of us; this person is from across the border and they sort of look down upon us. We dress differently. We might be wearing clothes from the same shops... but they just have their own fashions, their own little way of doing things so most of them [Zimbabwean migrants in a slum called Khaelitsha] were just targeted by criminals; nasty South Africans.

She also related how a thief approached her during the day and ordered her to surrender her handbag to him and that people in South Africa do not intervene for fear of getting killed by the criminal. She further elaborated on the insecurity that she felt living in South Africa thus,

[...] [Y]ou have to be very careful with them [South Africans] because some of them can be quite violent and you can actually get hurt. It doesn't matter if they are women. And those were the stories that we used to hear every single day...someone has been

stabbed, someone has gotten shot, money has been stolen— a lot of stories. It does start affecting you to some extent. You don't feel safe. Half the time you are afraid even when you are walking on the streets. I was being taught, you know, one of my first weeks in South Africa my brother was telling me that, you know, when you are walking in South Africa you don't walk like in Zim. You don't just walk looking at stuff and you are just walking without even looking, like you are not alert. When you are walking in South Africa you need to check out the pedestrians coming your way and try to assess whether the person is a criminal or not. Ahm, and if it's a man walking alone, you should cross the road to the other side and let them pass and then when they have passed then you can cross back to the side of the road because you can get stabbed or you can get shot or they can just grab your handbag. And then when you walk, for every few steps, you should turn to see whether someone is following you from behind. And when you get to the house, the first thing you do is to lock the door. So it's those little things that start getting to you slowly, slowly, slowly and then, so... and then the pressure; because the pressure also mounts. You want to be also successful in a country that is hostile.

Sheila related her fear of crime in South Africa as follows,

Of course you eat what you want and you get what you want but there is no true freedom. I used to wonder that South Africans say they got freedom; they got freedom when you can't even walk in the middle of the night? You can't walk around 7pm, 8pm or even during the day. You get scared, your phone... you always have to hide your phone whereas here in Zimbabwe you can walk. When I got to South Africa the first time, I thought they didn't have churches because with all the crimes that we heard about, I thought they didn't even know about God. So I was surprised, like, 'Oh, there are churches with all the things that these people do!'

She contrasted this to Zimbabwe where she said she can work on a client's hair until 10pm and go home late at night without worrying about getting attacked by criminals. She also explained that when xenophobic attacks occurred in South Africa in 2008, her mother urged her to return to Zimbabwe insisting that it was better for her to come back and suffer together with her family than risk getting killed. This was a case of poverty in the security of home being considered more tolerable than poverty in the insecurity of a foreign country. Rachel corroborated this view by stating that in Zimbabwe she felt safe walking in the city and meeting familiar faces and walking around in her neighbourhood where she knew the people and they exchanged greetings

on the streets. In contrast, she struggled with anonymity in South Africa and worried that if anything happened to her, no one would know who she was. Sheila also experienced a similar sense of insecurity due to profiling on the basis of nationality. She explained that South Africans use corporeal markers to separate foreigners from locals and would say, 'Let's see your immunization marks' and 'Any person who walks this way is Zimbabwean.' Anthony also referred to high levels of crime which forced him to live in expensive multi-racial neighbourhoods around Sandton. John, who worked on a farm in South Africa, explained that apart from fear of getting attacked and robbed because he kept his money on his person, he also returned to Zimbabwe because he could not cope with seeing Zimbabwean women who roamed around looking for employment being lured to stay for the night by South African men who promised them jobs the following morning but instead raped and threw them out. Belonging or not belonging to South Africa has corporeal manifestations inscribed on migrants' bodies through immunization injection scars and manner of walking accentuated by style of dressing. These real or perceived differences are then invested with the power to harm manifest in negative stereotyping by South Africans on the basis of nationality in which Congolese and Nigerians are associated with crime. In a petition in February 2017 by South African residents of Pretoria, Zimbabweans were blamed for filth in open spaces where Christian sects among them worshipped while Nigerians were singled out for crime which included drug trafficking and prostitution of South African 'children' as well as being arrogant and rude. Zimbabwean migrants' self-exclusion from other foreign nationals reflective of South Africans' stereotypes reduces the size of their social field thus restricting the space in which to acquire and invest social capital and accrue benefits. Migrants with limited social capital have a higher likelihood of returning as opposed to those with higher social capital (Efstratios, Anastasios and Anastasios, 2012).

Against this background, Zimbabwe offers security couched in a sense of belonging and familiarity that return migrants experience as citizens in the country. It provides 'a sense of intimacy and security' (Ralph, 2009: 191) which anchors migrants who floated and felt excluded and detached in host countries. Return migrants generally referred to the adage 'home is best' or 'there is no place like home' and homesickness is experienced by migrants around the world (see White, 2014 on Polish migrants). Zimbabwe as home acts as 'a grounding force facilitated by a sense of belonging and continuity with culture' (Ralph, 2009: 190). Yet, return does not necessarily mean a smooth process of re-integration. Having lived outside Zimbabwe and seen how economically and politically stable countries function, return migrants express

disappointment with the country. Awareness of pervasive incompetence, inefficiency, lack of professionalism and corruption and how these co-exist with the comforts of home leads to the wish to simultaneously leave and stay which reflects what Bielsa, Casellas and Verger (2014: 68) refer to as ‘the ambiguities of involvement and detachment’. In as much as home offers security and a sense of belonging, Rachel noted, ‘I know the good life that I am missing’ (by returning to the frustrating *modus operandi* in Zimbabwe). The security that Zimbabwe offers and its failure to meet return migrants’ aspirations and possibilities tasted in host countries portray home as familiar and strangely foreign (Bielsa, Casellas and Verger, 2014). Zimbabwe as home has contradictory characteristics that leave migrants sandwiched between attachment and alienation. The meaning of home shifts in antagonistic directions as return migrants seek to strike a balance between socio-cultural acceptance and economic rejection in Zimbabwe. Return to the familiarity of home and the sense of belonging that it offers is not free of hurdles. It entails significant readjustment challenges (Barrett and Mosca, 2013) emanating from the contrast between home and host countries. Absence from home creates a positive image of Zimbabwe in which migrants focus on what they lack in the host country but these positive attributes are eclipsed by the everyday economic challenges of living in an economically and politically uncertain environment upon return to the country. As the contrast between nostalgia during the period of migration and post-return realities dawn on migrants, consciousness of and yearning for possibilities awakened by experiences in the host country take root in migrants in the ‘return of failure’ category leading to restlessness about living in Zimbabwe which feeds into aspiration to re-emigrate.

### **Circumstances after Return and Attitudes towards Future Migration**

There are differential economic circumstances among return migrants that are also connected to motivations for return. These circumstances and motivations for return determine attitudes towards return. Tawanda expressed satisfaction with his decision to return. During his stay in Ivory Coast, he engaged in temporary return visits that facilitate transfer of significant resources, savings, contacts and knowledge that are crucial for pursuit of new economic activities or investment (Sinatti, 2015). In relation to temporary visits and investment, Tawanda bought land for agricultural purposes on the outskirts of Harare when he returned to Zimbabwe at the end of his contract. He decided that he would use this land as his fall back plan should he lose his job or his employer fail to pay his salary. His situation fits into ‘return of innovation’

as he came back with new ideas that enabled him to diversify his sources of income and cushion himself and his family from the vagaries of the Zimbabwean economy. It is not surprising that Tawanda stated that he would only consider re-emigrating if the current situation deteriorated further otherwise he had no intention to re-emigrate. John said that he would not re-emigrate especially to South Africa where he felt very insecure working on farms and worried about getting stabbed and robbed. For Yvonne and Sheila who worked as hairdressers, Yvonne who returned from Botswana categorically stated that she would not emigrate again while Sheila who worked in South Africa explained that she intended to re-emigrate because she was experiencing difficulties paying rent and school fees for her two sons after her husband died. Rachel and Anthony expressed the desire to migrate again but not back to South Africa but to other destinations outside Africa. In their case, return to Zimbabwe provided the space, time and break to re-strategize and move to another country after their career prospects in South Africa hit a brick wall. Attitudes towards future emigration are based on economic circumstances and how these influence levels of satisfaction with life in Zimbabwe. Rachel attributed her intention to re-emigrate to the fact that she has not been able to find a permanent job since her return to Zimbabwe in 2011. She works on contracts for a total of four months per year and is unable to cope with the economic and socio-cultural effects of not having stable employment.

On his part, Anthony who teaches at one of the universities in Zimbabwe attributed his plan to re-emigrate to low salary, dissatisfaction and frustration because of unprofessional conduct at his workplace which was magnified by the fact that he constantly juxtaposed the situation with his experiences of professionalism at South African universities. Migrants who return with human capital find themselves in a quandary in that they want to use their additional skills and experience acquired outside the country to improve local institutions where they work but face resistance and have to avoid clashes with colleagues without the migration experience. A similar observation has been made by Gaillard and Gaillard (2015) on returned highly skilled Moroccan scientists and engineers. In this case, future migration is premised on the sense of being a stranger at home emanating from home's failure to provide opportunities and possibilities in contrast to the host country. This frustration is captured by Bielsa, Casellas and Verger (2014) who note the difficulties and sense of displacement arising from 'adapting to an unchanged place as changed agents' which makes return migrants acutely aware of what they lose and miss by returning. Instead of 'return of innovation' or migrants returning as agents of transformation and renewal (Bielsa, Casellas and Verger, 2014), return migrants who find stable

jobs find the work environment stifling because of resistance to change leading to disaffection and alienation. Return migration has contradictory impacts. On the one hand, it provides socio-cultural well-being through familiarity with life and people in Zimbabwe which engenders a sense of belonging. On the other hand, it creates economic insecurity where migrants fail to find economic prospects and successfully re-integrate into the home country (Coniglio and Brzozowski, 2016).

An important factor in migrants' attitude towards return is the attitude of their families to the same. Sheila returned when her mother urged her to do so because of xenophobic attacks. Tawanda had the support of his immediate family whereas Anthony had the support of his parents and father-in-law although his mother-in-law was against his return with his wife and two children. However, this does not necessarily mean that migrants only return when they have support from their families. Rachel returned against her mother's wish. She highlighted the paradox in her situation by explaining that her mother had returned from the United Kingdom after working there for six years citing the same exclusion that Rachel cited to explain her return from South Africa. Since she continued living with her mother when she returned, her mother insisted that she had made a mistake returning to Zimbabwe and she yielded to the pressure and migrated once again to South Africa. Still, her prospects for employment remained gloomy and she returned to Zimbabwe for the second time to her mother's further disappointment. Her difficulties with integrating into South Africa have been replaced by challenges with re-integration into Zimbabwe without a job and both experiences have exacerbated her anxiety thus showing how return migration premised on an unsuccessful migration experience and failure to re-integrate into the home country can have detrimental effects (Coniglio and Brzozowski, 2016). Failure to re-integrate can lead to re-emigration where return migrants are concerned about their careers and economic circumstances (Gaillard and Gaillard, 2015). Re-emigration can result in the decision to settle outside the home country and sever ties or networks with it (White, 2014). This potentially leads to changed perspectives on the host country intended to help migrants adapt to the idea of it becoming home. Rachel stated that if she re-emigrates, she will not pay attention to her future host country's socio-economic and political problems such as the gap between the rich and the poor in South Africa which she found upsetting and cited among the reasons for her failure to integrate into the country.

Return migrants find themselves in a dilemma in which their strong attachment to Zimbabwe co-exists with the country's inability to meet their economic needs. Sheila stated that if she could find someone to care for her children, she would migrate again. She explained,

The reason why we come back is that we love our country and want to live in our country where we are free, not living where we are abused. Here, you don't hear '*celi pasipoti*' ('Can I see your passport') [...]. Right now you can see Congolese are many here [in Zimbabwe]. They just come, look for money and stay. There is nothing like these or those people have been raided.

Because of the security that she felt in Zimbabwe, Sheila explained that even if she re-emigrated in future, this would be to meet specific objectives after which she would return to Zimbabwe. This view, in the context of migrants' return to Zimbabwe after a few years outside the country points to Labrianidis and Kazazi's (2006) observation that emigration is not a long term life choice but solution to an immediate problem which can be reversed once the problem has been solved or for other reasons that may arise in its course. Richter et al (1997) also note that people migrate because they need to earn adequate incomes and that if they could earn decent incomes in their home countries migration would not be the preferred strategy. Plans to emigrate in future also depict return as an interval (Labrianidis and Kazazi, 2006) in which migrants return to familiarity of the home country to come up with new strategies on other prospective destinations that promise better prospects than previous destinations. Return does not mean an end to the migration cycle as migrants can re-emigrate or engage in transnational mobility as a solution to 'return of failure' (Sinatti, 2015). As Saarela and Rooth (2012: 1897) note, 'many migrants seem to return migrate to correct for (sic) mistakes in the initial migration decision, which occur because of imperfect information or bad luck.'

## **Conclusion**

Return to Zimbabwe is not informed by normative or orthodox reasons located in improvement in the circumstances that led to migration. Zimbabwe remains in a state of economic and political uncertainty which does not provide incentives for return. In most cases, return to the country is an outcome of host country factors such as lack of economic opportunities and socio-cultural integration manifest in violent hostility and discrimination and the psychological impact on migrants. This forces migrants to do a cost-benefit analysis in which they weigh the gains and losses of staying on in the host country against those of returning to Zimbabwe.

Return migration occurs when the gains of returning outweigh those of staying on in the host country. These gains are not considered strictly in economic terms as migrants also consider socio-cultural factors such as social commitments to family, sense of belonging, security, attachment to the country and psychological well-being. Notwithstanding the political problems in Zimbabwe, return migrants find freedom and security in the country and highlight the irony of not finding the same in countries such as South Africa and Botswana that are touted as democracies in Southern Africa. However, socio-cultural gains are diminished by negative economic circumstances post-return. Migrants who have not been able to find opportunities to earn decent incomes in Zimbabwe express the intention to re-emigrate to new destinations altogether when opportunities arise. Even migrants who cited family responsibilities as the reason for return were quick to point out that if they could not discharge their economic duties to their families, it would also be difficult to fulfil their socio-cultural obligations as spouses and parents. In contrast, migrants who are satisfied with their post-return economic circumstances took the position that they did not intend to re-emigrate in future but qualified this decision by premising it on the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe not drastically changing for the worst.

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