

Introduction

Frameworks for Analyzing Conflict Diasporas and the Case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article examines debates over conflict diasporas' relationships to the African crises that initially produced them. It investigates the difference that crisis makes to frameworks for thinking about diasporic entanglements with political, economic and cultural change in sending countries. We argue that the existing literature and dominant approaches are partial, ahistorical, and constrained in other ways. The special issue contributes to new strands of scholarship that aim to rectify these inadequacies, seeking historical depth, spatial complexity and attention to moral- alongside political-economies. To achieve these aims, the special issue focuses on one country – Zimbabwe. This introductory article provides an overview of the themes and arguments of the special issue, revealing the multitude of ways in which diasporic communities are imbricated with political-economic, developmental, familial, and religious change in the homeland.

Keywords

crisis – conflict diasporas – migration and development – homeland impacts – political and moral economies

Résumé

Cet article examine les débats entourant les relations conflictuelles que les diasporas entretiennent avec les crises qui traversent le continent africain dont elles sont originaires. Il interroge l'impact de ces crises sur les systèmes d'analyse des liens politiques, économiques et culturels de la diaspora avec les pays d'origine. Nous défendons l'idée que les littératures existantes et les approches les plus courantes sont à la fois partiales, anhistoriques et limitées sur d'autres plans. Ce numéro spécial entend apporter sa contribution à ces nouvelles approches scientifiques dont le but est de corriger ces failles, en donnant leur juste place à l'histoire, à la complexité spatiale et en accordant de l'importance aux économies morales et politiques. Pour y parvenir, ce numéro spécial se concentre sur un pays, le Zimbabwe. L'article en introduction offre une vue générale des thèmes et des argumentations développés dans ce numéro, révélant les manières multiples par lesquelles les communautés diasporiques s'impliquent dans les changements politico-économiques, familiaux et religieux ainsi qu'en matière de développement dans le pays d'origine.

Mots-clés

crise – diasporas de conflit – immigration et développement – impacts dans le pays d'origine – économies politiques et morales

Introduction

This special issue focuses on a particular aspect of debate about African diasporas – their engagements with and effects on process of politico-economic and cultural change in African homelands during episodes of crisis and subsequent instability. It takes the case of Zimbabwe, a country which now has a diverse transnational diaspora of professionals, labour migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and others following an exodus from the late 1990s that involved as much as three million people, or a quarter of the population (McGregor and Primorac 2010; Crush and Tevera 2010; Pasura 2012b). Although crisis and emigration peaked in 2008, most Zimbabweans abroad have deferred return, because of ongoing political and economic uncertainties. The case is a specific one, but the articles collected here speak to key theoretical and policy questions over transnationalism, diasporic engagements and impacts at home.

By way of introduction we review debates over conflict diasporas' relationships to the African crises that initially produced them, and reflect on the dif-

ference that crisis makes to frameworks for thinking about diasporic influences on political, economic, cultural and religious change in sending countries. Our argument is that the existing literature and dominant approaches have often been partial, ahistorical, and constrained in other ways we spell out below. The collection contributes to new strands of scholarship that aim to rectify these inadequacies, seeking historical depth, spatial complexity and attention to moral- alongside political-economies.

The shortcomings that characterize some of the existing literature on diasporic dimensions to African crises can be explained in various ways. First, although diasporic communities are commonly understood as dynamic and fluid, produced through interactions with both hosting and sending contexts (Sheffer 1986; Shuval 2001), some strands of theoretical and empirical research downplay the importance of diasporic material and other engagements with homelands, privileging relations to hostlands (Clifford 1994; Anthias 1998). Clifford for example, insists on the importance of shared histories, memories and ongoing realities of displacement, suffering, adaptation, and resistance within hostlands (Clifford 1994). The quest to move beyond 'methodological nationalism' (Glick Schiller 2010) and emphasis on hybridity in the analysis of transnational spaces has produced a rich body of new theoretical and empirical research documenting transmigrants' dense material connections and intense emotional ties to the homeland. Yet, the corpus of research in countries of settlement is larger than in countries of origin, and studies rarely combine 'receiving' and 'sending' contexts (notable exceptions include Mercer et al. 2008; Maz-zucato 2008; Mohan 2008).

Second, the 'applied' policy literature that has helped rejuvenate debates over transnational connections with and impacts at home can be divided into two distinct fields – one focused on diasporic politics, the other on diaspora and development. The former has predominated in relation to 'crisis' contexts, and as Brinkerhoff notes, the impact of diasporic engagements through remittances and other interventions during crises is still poorly understood (2008, 2011). She elaborates: 'While diasporas have been a factor in stake-holder and conflict analyses for some time, they have not been a major focus of analyses for rebuilding and development, excepting the repatriation of refugees and political and government leadership' (2011: 138). This unhelpful bifurcation in the literature can also reify the distinction between crisis and non-crisis contexts, emergency vs. developmental interventions, the economic and political, and has seen too little mutual exchange (Lubkemann 2008; Brinkerhoff 2008A and B; Lindley 2009). These binaries can lead to a neglect of other dynamics too – such as those of transit and in-between destinations (Collyer 2007), or onward migration (Lindley and Van Hear 2007). Moreover, they can overlook

the multilateral nature of diasporic ties and overlapping networks. As Lubkemann explains, the:

two lines of inquiry remain somewhat “balkanized”, in that studies of “political” and “economic” diaspora influence upon and involvement in, homelands have demonstrated a tendency to run parallel to, rather than engaging substantively with one another. Thus relatively few of the growing number of studies that explore the roles of diasporas in homeland economic development – through remittances or otherwise – have also explored the political implications and effects of diaspora economic participation. At the same time, those studies that have focused on the role of diasporas in conflict-ridden homelands tend to focus almost exclusively on political dynamics while paying very little attention to other forms of involvement, economic and philanthropic, that have garnered the lion’s share of analytical attention in the burgeoning “diasporas and development” literature.

LUBKEMANN 2008: 45

Third, the predominance of global security concerns in framing debates over ‘conflict diasporas’ in African contexts has produced further distortions, as the complexity of war in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, and more recently in Mali and other parts of the Sahel continues to be downplayed as important local, regional or national agendas are unhelpfully subsumed into debates over state failure or forced into the prism of the global war on terror, in which Islam, as ‘other’ of the West figures prominently. As Dowd and Raleigh argue in relation to accounts of conflict in Mali and the Sahel, policy makers ‘continue to fall back on simplistic narratives in their attempts to explain the intensification of violent Islamist activity in the region. Without a finely tuned understanding of diverse groups – their structures, objectives and modalities of violence – analysts risk recycling dangerously misleading narratives about Islamist violence in Africa’ (Dowd and Raleigh 2013: 498). The negative view of diasporic engagement promoted through these debates over security contrasts with the positive, often celebratory tone of much writing about diaspora and development, or debates over transnational communities.

Fourth, although a recent strand of development thinking has come to see diasporic engagement in African conflicts as potentially more positive and has moved away from stereotypes of security framings or older assumptions of the pernicious irresponsibility of the ‘long distance nationalist’ (Anderson 1994), this also brings with it the risk of replacing one over-simplified framing with another. As Van Hear notes, development agencies have begun to

think of diaspora formation as a 'manifestation of the "creative destruction" of conflict' and as an opportunity to rebuild, or construct something new in the wake of war (Van Hear 2011). This is to be welcomed insofar as it focuses on potentially positive roles, and allows for a mutual dialogue with debates over diaspora remittances, and non-policy oriented debates over transnationalism. Yet, it is important that this view of diasporas as potential 'peacemakers' and not only 'peacebreakers' recognizes diasporic heterogeneity, plural interests, spatial variation and (often very rapid) change over time (Smith and Stares 2007). The essays in this collection demonstrate that transnational connections and engagements, even if philanthropic or developmental in intent, are much more multi-faceted, fraught and conflictual than development literature conveys. There may also be impacts that are geographically dispersed beyond simply home/host. As Osella and Varghese argue in relation to the realities of transnational marriages and property, there is 'an underbelly of tensions, contradictions and contestations' (Osella and Varghese 2011). McGregor's research on the 'sentimentality' and 'speculative' interests that characterize transnational property investments during Zimbabwe's crisis argues that investigation of 'social entrepreneurship' needs to be matched by parallel attention to 'predatory' economic practices (McGregor forthcoming, cf Lubkemann 2008). The 'post-nation' transnationalism literature shares with some of the 'diaspora and development' literature a celebratory tone, that both downplays the role of government actors and state regimes of citizenship, and portrays migrants and the transnational fields they sustain in a solely positive light (Osella and Varghese 2011). The 'ambivalence' that Osella and Varghese see as characterizing the tensions of transnational social fields in general may be exacerbated in crisis contexts given the uncomfortable 'pairing of dispossession and wealth creation' during conflict, which frequently has important transnational dimensions (Guyer 2002; Roitman 2005).

The body of scholarship on diaspora engagements with Somaliland's reconstruction has, exceptionally perhaps, begun to discuss an unusually broad range of political-economic engagements, extending beyond initial debates over remittances and peace-making, to include diasporic involvement in state-building over a protracted period, including the reconstruction of services from hospitals to universities and electricity supply, and producing a vibrant transnational private sector (Bradbury 2008; Hoehne 2010; Kleist 2008; Farah et al. 2007). These studies have not ignored the politicization and tensions surrounding diasporic engagements. Lubkemann's (2008) work on Liberia also emphasizes the potentially contradictory nature of diasporas' economic role in post-conflict transitions. He argues that on the one hand, diasporic social networks and cultural capital can provide the necessary and highly localized

insight that allows risky contexts to be navigated productively, yet at the same time diasporas may undermine their own peace-making and philanthropy by 'predatory economic activity' and 'accentuating social differentiation' (Lubkemann 2008). Transnational diasporic economic activity in unstable contexts, he concludes 'will have many different – and sometimes contradictory – effects on post-conflict development' (Lubkemann 2008: 64).

This emphasis on diasporic heterogeneity, politicization and spatial complexity is important, and is furthered in this collection. We understand conflict diasporas as plural, shifting communities of interest entangled in a multitude of ways with the genesis, character, and development of crises and their aftermath, as well as longer-term processes of socio-economic and cultural change in countries of origin (Smith and Stares 2007; Lubkemann 2008; Brinkerhoff 2008). Studies in this volume combine an exploration of the political-economy of material engagements and practices with attention to moral and religious discourse that emphasizes the role of emotion in shaping transnational affective fields. The focus on one country – Zimbabwe – allows us to consider a broad range of political-economic and moral questions surrounding the role and implications of diaspora formation during the violent decade of chaotic economic implosion from 1997 to 2008. Zimbabwe differs from the stereotypically 'weak' state of the African conflict literature, because of its historically strong, well-developed state institutions and middle income status.¹ The crisis was a time of persistent state repression but rarely all-out war, with episodes of political violence often peaking around elections and militarized state 'Operations'. What had been a middle-income country de-industrialized rapidly and slid down the human development index to a position close to the bottom (Chimhowu 2010). Economic dimensions to the crisis in the form of soaring inflation, dual currency markets, unemployment and informalization had some similarities to crises elsewhere provoked by devaluation and neo-liberal deregulation (on Nigeria see Guyer et al. 2002). Zimbabwean diaspora communities had to navigate transformations that were rapid, chaotic and unpredictable, and hyperinflation that was extraordinary (Hammar et al. 2010, McGregor and Primorac 2010). Our central concern here is with change in Zimbabwe itself and the effects of the significant communities of Zimbabweans abroad, revealing the imbrication of diasporic engagements with emerging processes of political and social change in the homeland.

1 For a discussion of the profound changes to the Zimbabwean state, see Alexander and McGregor (2013).

The diaspora produced in the context of politicized economic explosion was itself highly politicized, and the most visible diasporic groups were opposed to Mugabe's ZANU(PF) government, and aligned with the MDC opposition or civic groups which lobbied vocally in international fora exposing human rights abuses (McGregor 2010; Pasura 2010). Yet, Mugabe's skilful domestic, regional and international political strategies proved significant obstacles to political change, and South Africa's leadership consistently supported the regime and proclaimed that there was 'no war in Zimbabwe', undermining the impact of domestic political opposition as well as the potential political impact of the diaspora (McGregor 2010; Pasura 2010). In this context, it was the economic weight of the diaspora rather than its political influence at home that was so striking as the crisis deepened. As irregular transnational circuits of money became centrally important foci of both accumulation and survival, those linked into ruling party patronage networks were in a particular position to benefit, but so too were the displaced middle classes beyond national borders, as small amounts of hard currency earned in low-paid work translated into considerable fortunes back home. The important economic dimensions of the exodus and the ramification of business and social support networks across regional and more distant borders were both politicized and intensely emotional. Meanings were shaped in reference to prior histories of cross-border migration and previous episodes of conflict and violence.

The articles in this collection show how transnational exchanges between diaspora and home during the Zimbabwean crisis have been implicated in everything from keeping the hyperinflationary economy afloat and propping up urban commuter transport systems to a reworking of theology and religious practice within expanding transnational churches and reshaping moral-economic debates over marriage, gender, care, and obligation within the family. Diasporic investments were also implicated in an urban residential construction boom and urban land grab (McGregor forthcoming). The recent exodus and resultant transnational embeddedness has stimulated a reworking of historical memories of prior episodes of conflict. Perhaps unusually, diasporic economic impacts were felt most strongly during the crisis itself, as the advantage of foreign exchange in the contexts of dual currency markets and spiralling hyperinflation came abruptly to a halt with the suspension of the Zimbabwe dollar in early 2009 by the Inclusive Government. The liberalization of currency controls encouraged individuals and businesses to move assets out of the country, given the ongoing uncertainty (McGregor forthcoming), at the same time as wealth from newly discovered diamond fields and other minerals became all important to the irregular financing of Zimbabwe's security sector and ZanuPF linked business.

Thinking through the difference that crisis makes to diasporic engagements with home in a manner that is sensitive to politics and history, geography and moral-economy opens up a new set of questions. Among the issues we explore in this volume are the following. How do protracted crises and unsteady transition affect diasporic discourses, moral framings, and actualities of return? (Mortensen, this volume) What is the role of diasporic finance and cross-border business in the remaking of livelihoods, transport systems, and city spaces in the homeland? (Mazarire and Swart) How do transnational financial flows intersect with changing city governance? How do transnational practices relate to regional and ethnic grievances, and prior episodes of conflict and emigration? (Nyamunda, this volume) How have crisis conditions reshaped family relationships and moral debate over youth, gender, marriage, care-giving and obligation to kin? (Kufakurinani et al.; Manamere, this volume) How have emigration and investment at home been moralized within, and shaped the theology and practice of transnational religious movements? (Biri, this volume)

The context in which the research for these articles was conducted was one of ongoing state repression notwithstanding the reduction in levels of violence produced by the Inclusive Government between ZANU(PF) and the opposition MDC parties formed in 2009. Political transition was anticipated but failed to materialize, as ZANU(PF) used the Inclusive Government to rebuild its power (Alexander and McGregor 2013). The protracted instability produced a situation familiar from other African contexts where there is neither war nor peace (Richards 2005). Economic conditions stabilized and improved considerably under the Inclusive Government, but there were continuities in ZANU(PF)'s control of the security arms of the state and much uncertainty about the future. The effects of this instability on diasporic dilemmas over return are explored in detail in Mortensen's (this volume) article. She highlights a profound ambivalence. Mortensen unpicks the role of collective moral pressures within the diaspora and the ways in which broader communally defined obligations – to national development in Zimbabwe or to demonstrate success on return – for example, impinge on individual decisions. For asylum seekers and other irregular migrants, 'return is impossible', she argues, while the identity of 'exile' is emotionally charged and can be difficult to lose. The history of acute crisis and protracted uncertainty matter in these deliberations, as they underpin the quest for security and the need for a 'fallback' outside Zimbabwe, deferring large-scale return.

Our primary focus is on changes within Zimbabwe produced by the existence of and exchanges with transnational diasporic communities. Contributions discuss the ways diasporic engagements have influenced the dynamics of the crisis itself, as well as the transitional period that has followed. Two arti-

cles focus on the economic impact of the diaspora, its association with wealth, and on the meaning and effects of cross-border remittances and investment in the context of informalization and Zimbabwe's developing hyperinflationary economy. Nyamunda (this volume) focuses on cross-border transport and courier businesses over the Zimbabwe/South Africa border known as *omalayitsha*, which bourgeoned as the crisis deepened. The article has a novel focus on the perspective of the couriers themselves, and on the way these businesses are embedded in specific regional histories of conflict and violence, being widely upheld as a symptom of Matabeleland's marginalization and displacement in the aftermath of the 1980s state violence. Indeed, the figure of the *malayitsha* cross-border transport operator is an icon of regional identity and a symbol of neglect. Narratives of the growth of *omalayitsha* businesses are linked to broader regional grievances that disrupt timelines of the country's national crisis beginning in the late 1990s.

Indeed, transport became so important during the crisis that it was a major focus for diasporic investment. Aside from the new upmarket 'diaspora suburbs' in Zimbabwe's capital Harare (McGregor forthcoming), the other iconic material manifestation of emigré wealth during the crisis in Zimbabwe took the form of imported buses and trucks – the 'diaspora fleet' that emerged to fill the many gaps in the country's commuter and broader transport systems. This 'diaspora fleet' and its role in Harare's urban commuting business is the subject of the article by Mazarire and Swart (this volume). They chart the virtual collapse of urban commuting and the processes of its deregulation, which created the 'gap' that much denigrated diasporic imports briefly filled. However, the new imported vehicles proved badly suited to Zimbabwean realities as they were difficult to service, problematic to run from a distance, and too large to compete successfully with smaller kombis and new irregular cut-throat modes of operation that came to predominate in Harare commuter transport for reasons the authors chart. By the time of 'dollarization' and the signing of the power-sharing agreement, the diaspora fleet was redundant, though the landscape of Harare still bears witness to the many dumped, non-functioning diaspora imports of the crisis years (see also Pasura 2014: 93–95).

The issue explores political and moral economies not only through the theme of diaspora investment, but also through a focus on transnational family relations. A growing body of literature on transnational families underscores how migrant parents, notably mothers, participate in and sustain intimate relations across national borders. With few exceptions, this literature has neglected how extended kin and others in the homeland manage care for left-behind children. Addressing this gap in the literature, Kufakurinani's (this volume) article examines the contradictions and tensions of transnational family

practices and, in particular, the emergence of 'diaspora orphans' over the crisis period. These children are widely cast as profligate, degenerate, snobbish, and precocious – spoilt by material goods and suffering from neglect. The debates over this phenomenon reflect a range of real emotional and practical problems encountered by children and youth with parents abroad. But they also highlight the ambiguity of moral judgments of emigration and émigrés, and what Kufakurinani et al. refer to as the 'crisis of expectation' that assumptions of diaspora wealth fostered within families and among those remaining behind. The essay adds a new dimension to debates over African youth by focusing not on the problems created through entrapment by poverty, but on the emotional consequences of parents' spatial mobility in families where material resources may be ample.

Derogatory discourses about the effects of emigration on family relationships are also a feature of rural communities close to the South African border where the majority of young men have left as labour migrants (known as *Majoni-joni*). Manemere (this volume) explores how debates over *majonijoni* are reworking ideas of masculinity and marriage in rural sending communities. She examines performances of masculinity on the part of returning male labour migrants themselves, the evaluations of young women who enter into relationships with them, and the derogatory views of rural elders underpinned by romanticized versions of their own respectable labour migration in the past. Polarized stereotypes of *majoni-joni* as either wayward criminals or a good catch matter, as the former underpin efforts to control the young while the latter reveal young people's own desire for mobility. But the article also reveals more complex realities shaped by class, types of work, and levels of education, providing a nuanced picture of the moral economies of migrancy, marriage and sexuality as these are debated and enacted in rural sending communities.

Finally, Biri's (this volume) article explores the way in which Zimbabwean Pentecostal spirituality has moralized emigration, investigating the role of diasporic transnational connections on the theology and practice of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), one of the largest and oldest Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. Although the church has created and sustained transnational religious identities that transcend familial, ethnic, and national boundaries, it remains underpinned by essentialized notions of national cultural difference. Biri explores how ZAOGA's teaching encouraged emigration over the period of the Zimbabwe crisis, but combined this with an emphasis on temporary sojourn, stressed the morality and importance of investing in the homeland, and promoted a theology of Zimbabwe as morally superior to the foreign countries where diasporic communities have grown up. Within congregations in Zimbabwe, a sense of transnational Pentecostal religious com-

munity has thus developed alongside the circulation of essentialized notions of national cultural difference hinging on derogatory stereotypes of foreigners while elevating the moral supremacy of Zimbabwean nationhood.

By exploring the role of diaspora communities in shaping this range of political-economic, developmental, familial and religious issues over the course of Zimbabwe's crisis, we hope to show the potential for more complex, historicized approaches to 'conflict diasporas' that do not reduce them to a range of contemporary security concerns over terrorist threats, and also ask a range of political-economic and moral questions commonly overlooked in debates over 'diaspora and development'. Crisis clearly matters in a multitude of ways and domains. But we do not want to imply that there are strict categorical differences between crisis and non-crisis contexts, but rather a continuum. Policy makers engaged with non-crisis contexts can learn from the kinds of questions that politicized situations of conflict pose, which necessitate attention to history and potentially conflicting interests. The impact of Zimbabwe's new diaspora during its crisis decade is unusual in comparison to other African 'conflict diasporas' that are more familiar in the literature (Somalia, Liberia) because its economic influence was at its most pronounced at the peak of the crisis itself. The instability of the transitional government, new local sources of local mineral wealth and the impact of global recession have all undermined the possibilities of large-scale diasporic involvement in Zimbabwe's reconstruction. Yet we hope to have shown here that the scale of communities of Zimbabweans still living abroad and the persistence of a multitude of transnational connections mean that the diaspora continues to be entangled in ongoing transformations of socio-economic and cultural life at home.

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