

Jenny Kuhlmann (2013), *Transnational Diaspora Politics: Cross-Border Political Activities of Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, ISBN 9783865837417, 412 pp.

Depending on what sources you consult, it is estimated that the number of Zimbabweans in the diaspora is anywhere between two to four million people. Whatever the actual figure, the growing importance and impact of the diaspora has become increasingly apparent. A recent Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe report stated that approximately USD 1.2 billion was injected into the economy from the diaspora, amounting to nearly 40 per cent of the country's budget. This figure is almost on par with the mining sector's contribution, which, at USD 1.9 billion in 2014, represents the largest share of the national GDP. Additionally, in an attempt to cash in further on the high number of professionals and university graduates still leaving the country, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, and Technology announced in June 2015 that to partly address the lack of employment opportunities for university graduates it had signed agreements with several African countries on the export of graduate labour.

These developments point to both the growing economic significance of the Zimbabwean diaspora and the Zimbabwean state's desperate need to cash in on the future movement of Zimbabweans to other countries, at a time when it faces severe budgetary constraints and new political challenges from its own support base. Yet, Robert Mugabe's regime remains extremely ambivalent about the role of the Zimbabwean diaspora, particularly in terms of its political entitlement and its participation in national politics.

Jenny Kuhlmann's book provides a very detailed account of the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK and the issues this diaspora raises around the politics of both the homeland and the host country. The book adds to a rich and growing literature on the displacement of Zimbabweans and on their activities in the diaspora, and it contributes to an understanding of the transnational politics of this group by clearly setting out the different contexts that shape the agency of the diaspora and its members' capacity for political participation and mobilisation.

As many scholars have argued, circular migration has long been a part of the history of Zimbabwe and other parts of Southern Africa, from the colonial period onward. During the first half of the twentieth century, labour from settler-colonial Rhodesia migrated largely to the mines of South Africa, even as migrants from other parts of Southern Africa entered the mines, farms, and industries of colonial Rhodesia.

Additionally, the high rate of white emigration throughout the settler-colonial era resulted in a fragile construction of white Rhodesian identity.

In the postcolonial period, there were three waves of increased movement into the diaspora. From 1982 to 1987, many people from the Matabeleland region left the country, mostly for South Africa, in the wake of the Gukuruhundi massacres carried out in that region and in the Midlands under the Mugabe regime. This was followed by the growing emigration of professionals during the economic squeeze of the structural adjustment programme in the 1990s. However, it was during the Zimbabwe crisis, which took place over most of the decade from 2000 to 2010, that the largest movement of people out of the country took place. As Kuhlmann observes, the Zimbabwean diaspora is now “huge and growing” and has become a “global nation.”

In the UK, where the number of Zimbabweans is estimated at between 200,000 and 400,000, the diaspora is a heterogeneous group composed of labour migrants, students, asylum seekers and refugees, undocumented migrants, and naturalised citizens. Moreover, as Kuhlmann explains, this group is also fractured in terms of geographical and social origin; political orientation; and racial, ethnic, class, and gender cleavages. Driven by both the politico-economic crisis and the human rights crisis, many of these Zimbabweans have been drawn into different forms of political intervention in their native country, including supporting political parties – particularly, though not solely, the opposition; campaigning against human rights abuses through demonstrations, vigils, and other forms of advocacy; and using the diaspora media to provide information and opinions on developments in the home country. In addition, the various groupings that have emerged have protested the continually contested status of Zimbabweans in the UK.

However, in attempting to make their voices heard regarding the abuses of the Zimbabwean state, these groups have also faced many challenges. There appears to be no end in sight to the crisis in Zimbabwe, and many in the diaspora have become disillusioned at the prospect that there will be no dramatic changes in the country’s fortunes in the near future. This despondency has also been fed by the divisions within, and persistent unravelling of, the opposition parties, which has been made evident by the lack of accountability, the self-interest, and the tribal factionalism of those leading the Zimbabwean opposition within the UK. The Mugabe regime’s continued unwillingness to engage seriously with the diaspora, coupled with the double standards of successive British governments – which, while condemning Mugabe and his government, have also made life very difficult for asylum seekers – has led many Zimba-

bweans to withdraw into a sense of private resignation. For those Zimbabweans residing abroad without official status, this has also meant living with the constant fear of exposure and deportation to a country with little capacity to absorb the large number of its citizens living abroad. Many Zimbabweans inside the country have a growing feeling that they would prefer to quietly contribute to the livelihoods of their families at home rather than become more openly involved in campaigns for national political change.

One of the major conclusions of Kuhlmann's study is that even while most in the diaspora still view themselves as Zimbabweans, with Mugabe's nationalism sometimes resonating with their experiences of racism in the UK, there is no overall sense that they will rush back to their home country any time soon. Given the length of time many have now spent in the UK and the continued political and economic challenges facing their homeland, many foresee a transnational life between "here" and "there." Perhaps the growing politics of "fortress Europe" and the electoral ascendancy of anti-immigration policies in the EU will shift this sentiment amongst some of them. However, it is more likely that as long as prospects in Zimbabwe appear bleak, its citizens in the diaspora will do what they must to stay outside of the country. Gone is the sentiment of those Zimbabweans who returned to Zimbabwe in the 1980s with an overwhelming feeling of hope and possibility after a long period of exile in the 1960s and 1970s. Kuhlmann's book is a very good contribution to this ongoing discussion, even if the reader is sometimes worn down by the density of the detail.

■ Brian Raftopoulos