Introduction

The future of Zimbabwe does not come through Harare, it comes through me.

– Daniel Molokele, Chair, Global Zimbabwe Forum[1]

Rwandans – often Tutsi – consider themselves as … I wouldn't say 'the African Jews', but they believe that their suffering is equal to that of Jews – that's why Rwandans will tell you about 'the Rwandan diaspora'. Others say 'Me? I'm not part of the diaspora'. This is what they'll tell you: 'We are Rwandan refugees'.

– Faustin Twagiramungu, Prime Minister of Rwanda 1994 to 1995[2]

Background

The majority of the world's population lives in authoritarian regimes. From North Korea to Syria, autocratic governments suppress political engagement. Deprived of fundamental rights and the ability to engage meaningfully in political life, many flee across international borders. Yet far from the common portrayal of refugees as passive, apolitical victims, exiled populations sometimes mobilise transnationally to contest the politics of the homeland state.

Authoritarianism leads to a geographical relocation of political life. Effective autocracy rarely extinguishes political life. But it generally means that the only viable space for opposition politics may be outside the territory and jurisdiction of that state. When political opponents, dissidents, and activists are unable to operate within the country of origin, the most significant politics for a state is likely to take place transnationally, across states and among dispersed

[1] Speech at workshop 'Zimbabwe's Diaspora: Where Next?', Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa, 12 January 2015.
[2] Interview via Skype, Stockholm, 8 November 2013.

national communities. Examples of contemporary diasporic mobilisation to contest authoritarian or competitive authoritarian regimes include Kurds, Tamils, Burmese, Tibetans, Iranians, and Russians.

And it is not just opposition groups that engage in transnational political mobilisation – incumbent regimes also frequently mobilise extra-territorially to strengthen their hold on power or to weaken opposition. Sometimes concerned that the only viable source of threat to the regime comes from abroad, authoritarian regimes may engage in counter-mobilisation seeking to garner loyalty and dismantle transnational opposition.

To take an example, in May 2011, the British police issued warnings to two Rwandan nationals living in London that they faced an 'imminent threat' of assassination at the hands of the Rwandan government. One of these individuals, Jonathan Musonera, is a founding member of a new political party of exiles, largely former military officers, called the Rwanda National Congress. Directed at challenging the current Rwandan political leadership on a number of issues, it was founded in Bethesda, Maryland, and now has a presence in London, Montréal, Paris, and several other major sites of Rwandans abroad. The other, Rene Mugenzi, stood as a Liberal Democrat candidate for Greenwich Borough Council and runs a social enterprise, the London Centre for Social Impact, which runs, amongst other things, activities and seminars 'aimed at members of African Diasporas and African Diaspora Organisations who are determined to improve the quality of lives of people in their countries and transform their area into a better place to live in through various social innovation actions'.[3]

At the same time, the Rwandan government is reaching out to its diaspora through a new set of institutions (the Rwandan Diaspora General Directorate [RDGD]), events (such as the Diaspora Youth Conference held in London two months after the alleged assassination attempts), and policies (the RDGD aims to 'tap' the diaspora in four areas: investment, advocacy, 'mobilisation', and skills transfer). This is not an isolated case: it is becoming increasingly obvious from work on a range of diasporic populations, from Armenians to Zimbabweans, that the diasporas have a politics of their own which extends beyond

[3] Retrieved from the LCSI website, 'About Us' section, www.centre4socialimpact.org/training/seminar-london-african-diaspora-development-africa-0.

the particular place in which these populations live, and which is taken extremely seriously, not least by the governments of the homeland.

The purpose of this book is to understand that politics and in particular the process of transnational political mobilisation. How and why do exiles mobilise politically? What organisational forms does transnational mobilisation take and how do the resulting networks evolve over time? What do such transnational networks do once they come into being? Under what conditions do they develop formal organisational structures or remain informal networks? When and why do such networks self-identify as 'diasporas' as opposed to alternative forms of self-representation such as 'exiles' or 'refugees', and with what consequences? How do their agendas form and their strategies and tactics emerge? What impact do they have back home?

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing recognition of the role of transnationalism. Authors such as Stephen Vertovec and Thomas Faist have been pioneers in recognising that multiple ties and interactions link people and institutions across the borders of nation-states.[4] One sub-set of that work has been the emergence of work on diasporas, looking broadly at the emergence, behaviour, and culture of transnational communities.

A vast literature already exists on diasporas – often defined as communities that are transnationally dispersed, resist assimilation, and have an ongoing homeland orientation. For us, one of the defining features of diasporas, as distinct from other groups of migrants, is that it is an inherently political stance; it is to have political business with the homeland. Much of the existing work has traditionally been sociological and anthropological in orientation, examining the cultural practices and social interactions of particular diasporas. An increasing body, though, engages with the role of diasporas in world politics, drawing upon the tools and concepts of political science and international relations.[5] We build on that literature to explore the particular question of how refugee diasporas mobilise to contest authoritarian states. We argue that diasporas are created and sustained by elites whom we call 'animators'.

[4] Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*; Vertovec, *Transnationalism*.
[5] Adamson, 'Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence'; Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics*; Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*.

Puzzle

The starting point for our analysis is a simple observation. We began our research by looking at the Zimbabwean diaspora. In the context of authoritarian ZANU-PF rule under Robert Mugabe, hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans left the country around the turn of the millennium. They fled to South Africa, the United Kingdom, and other countries. In exile, political mobilisation took place, including through the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). A literature emerged proclaiming Zimbabweans to be an archetype of the 'New Diaspora', and it was heralded as one of Africa's most significant and politically engaged diasporas.

The recent political history of the Zimbabwean diaspora highlights an interesting pattern. The diaspora emerged and become extremely politically active between 2003 and 2008. This was partly correlated with the support of diasporic activity by a range of outsiders, including donor states and predominantly white human rights activists external to the diaspora. Yet, from around 2008, with the negotiation of the Global Power-Sharing Agreement and the subsequent Government of National Unity within Zimbabwe, the levels and intensity of Zimbabwean diasporic activity began to dissipate, as international support for the diaspora waned.

Rather than being permanent, the Zimbabwean diaspora – or at least its substantive political activity – exhibited a life cycle. It was born, it lived, and then it began to die. Furthermore, it even exhibited what might be thought of as an afterlife – with residual political activity remaining long after substantive organisational structures had been dismantled or returned to Zimbabwe. This observation posed a paradox for us. It showed that one of Africa's putatively most significant diasporas was in fact historically and politically contingent. It emerged at a particular moment and then largely disappeared at a subsequent point in time.

It also appeared that a significant part of its mobilisation was contingent on the role of external actors – interested governments and activists – deploying resources to bring it to life. Yet once the external resources being put into the diaspora from outside waned, so diasporic activity began to disappear, and the diasporic life cycle came to an end. In other words, the Zimbabwean diaspora's life cycle was driven by a political economy that was able and willing to sustain it.

Standing back from the Zimbabwean case, many of these features resonated more broadly. Looking across the universe of cases of diasporic engagement, relatively few are permanent and enduring. The Jewish diaspora, on which a significant amount of the early diaspora literature is based, is a rare example of an enduring and quasi-permanent diaspora. Others, such as the Armenian diaspora, have undergone periods of activity and periods of latency. Meanwhile, many diasporas have mobilised at particular moments and for particular purposes. For example, the Eritrean diaspora emerged largely in Cairo in the 1960s in opposition to unification with Ethiopia. Faced with Ethiopian intransigence it radicalised and mobilised to conduct an extremely impressive liberation struggle despite deeply inauspicious circumstances, culminating in victory in 1991.

Along the same lines, not all groups of exiles or migrants that leave a country adopt a diasporic stance as a mode of political representation. For example, Uganda, Sudan, and China have significant numbers of extra-territorial citizens but little politicised diaspora. While some groups of extra-territorial citizens adopt a diasporic stance, others may not, instead adopting other forms of representation and self-representation, including as 'exiles', 'refugees', or 'migrants', for example.

The recognition that significant variation exists in terms of the degree and durability of diasporic mobilisation leads us to our main research question: how do diasporas mobilise to contest authoritarianism? We thereby focus on the process by which diasporic mobilisation takes place. How does diasporic consciousness take hold? How are particular activities and organisational types adopted? And, crucially, what factors determine the conditions under which they endure and have impact?

This represents a puzzle for the existing literature on the politics of diaspora because it lacks a compelling theory of diaspora formation. There has been scholarship that has highlighted the impact of diasporas on domestic politics[6] as well as on the very ways in which we think about international relations.[7] Within this literature, pioneering work has shown the ways in which diasporas can be instrumentalised for

[6] Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics;* Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics;* Lyons and Mandaville, *Politics from Afar*.

[7] Adamson and Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of "State" and "National Identity"'; Ragazzi, 'Governing Diasporas'.

political purposes, including by rebel groups[8] or 'emigration states'.[9] Meanwhile, some scholars have drawn upon the social movements literature to interrogate the process of diaspora formation.[10] However, what has been missing is a theory that can explain the variables that lead to differing types and degrees of diaspora formation.

Research Questions

We aim to systematically explore these basic observations by examining three core research questions, relating to the emergence, change, and impact of transnational political mobilisation. Each of these main questions in turn breaks down into a number of sub-elements, which follow logically from one another.

1) How Does Transnational Political Mobilisation Take Place?

Under what conditions is transnational political mobilisation carried out *qua* diaspora, as opposed to through other modes of political representation? Where does the impetus come from? Who provides the material, ideational, or sociological resources that lead to mobilisation? Do those resources come from within or outside the 'community'? What organisational forms does transnational mobilisation take? Under what conditions do they develop formal organisational structures or remain informal networks?

2) How Do Transnational Networks Change over Time?

How do the agendas, strategies, tactics, composition, and internal distribution of power of the networks adapt over time? What explains these changes? Is it primarily influenced by changes in material resources or ideas? To what extent is change driven by actors internal or external to the networks? Can this form of adaptation be mapped on to a life cycle? How are transnational networks born, and how do they die?

[8] Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders*.
[9] Délano, *Mexico and Its Diaspora in the United States*; Gamlen, 'The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination'.
[10] Adamson, 'Constructing the Diaspora'; Sökefeld, 'Mobilizing in Transnational Space'; Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*.

3) What Impact Does Transnational Political Mobilisation Have?

Are there any impacts from mobilisation? If so, what consequences do they have for the regime back home? Do these impacts match the stated aims of the networks? Do they meet the aims of some actors in the network more than others? Were there unintended consequences? Under what conditions do these intended or unintended outcomes happen?

These three broad research questions in some ways map on to the core research interests of some of the pioneering scholars within Diaspora Studies. Vertovec focuses broadly on how diasporas form, why they persist over time, and what members of the diasporic community do (*viz.*, the behaviour, actions, and discourses of those taken to be diasporic).[11] Sökefeld[12] has also proposed a research agenda for Diaspora Studies that would look at the triggers for the diasporic imagination of a community; who produces and disseminates that discourse of transnational community; and what events, strategies, and practices are instrumental for this mobilisation. Yet, although others have recognised that our questions of emergence, change, and impact are *the* relevant questions, they have so far mainly been approached from a sociological rather than a political perspective. Our aim is therefore to make a constructive contribution to that wider literature by taking these questions in a political direction. In particular, we develop a theory to explain variation in the degree and type of diaspora mobilisation across different cases and over time.

Theory

Our premise is that diaspora mobilisation is an inherently political process – it has an underlying political economy. Diaspora mobilisation is not a given but is based upon an underlying set of interests and power relations. The nature of those underlying interests and power relations determines the character and viability of the resulting diaspora. The diasporic stance, the agendas, and the organisational forms

[11] Vertovec, 'Three Meanings of "Diaspora"'.
[12] Sökefeld, 'Mobilizing in Transnational Space'.

assumed by the diaspora are the subject of a political process which needs to be understood through in-depth and granular analysis.

Embarking on an overtly political analysis of the process of diaspora mobilisation enables us to move beyond romanticising the diaspora. It also mitigates the risk of assuming diasporas to be static, uniform, or even internally coherent entities. Indeed, this is a risk that has been widely acknowledged by authors such as Rogers Brubaker who has admonished many for 'reification' – taking the diaspora as though it were fixed and immutable and prior to analysis.[13] Just as studies of ethnicity and nationalism have progressed beyond reification,[14] we embrace a similar move in relation to diasporas. We regard 'diaspora' as a potential source of political mobilisation that is constructed and is brought into existence for political purposes.

Reflecting this view of diaspora, we seek to explain the 'life cycle' of the diaspora; in other words, the birth, life, death, and afterlife of a diaspora. We use the metaphor of the life cycle to reflect the process of dynamic change that we observe in many diasporas. Indeed, while some diasporas such as the Jewish and Armenian diasporas may endure over time, we argue that this is the exception rather than the rule. And while those life cycles may not necessarily be linear in the same way as a human life is, they may ebb and flow in the way that a riverbed may be described as having a 'life cycle'.

We suggest that underlying this life cycle is a process that we call 'animation'. Animation is our key concept and refers to the way in which identity categories are politically constructed and mobilised. It might apply to other identity categories such as ethnicity, but in this case we are interested in the way in which diasporas are brought into existence. Central to animation is the role of animators – actors who strategically allocate resources. These animators are generally elites who, through deploying money, networks, or ideas to bring diasporas into existence, thereby serve particular interests.

In some cases, diasporas may be primarily internally animated from within the community, in ways that create longevity and sustainability. This is the case with the Jewish archetype, on which much of Diaspora Studies is arguably based. However, this underlying view of internally

[13] Brubaker, 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora'
[14] Mamdani, 'Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities'; Sen, *Identity and Violence*.

animated and enduring diasporas does not travel easily to the African context. Far from being internally animated, we argue that many African diasporas are significantly externally animated, by elites who are not part of the exiled population. These elites may be governments, private foundations, or activists with political agendas. This role played by external animators is one that is frequently neglected within the existing literature. Yet animation has been an enduring part of international history. During the Cold War, for example, diasporas were often strategically animated by the US government to support contestation within communist states. In these cases, resources (money, expertise, and connections) and ideas have often been put in by third parties to animate the diaspora at key historical junctures. This is the case, for instance, in the contexts examined within this book.

Often, though, the externally-driven political economy that sustains diasporic activity will endure only for a short period and will target only particular organisations. If the currents which brought such activity into being dissipate, diasporic political mobilisation will cease to have content, but organisations may nevertheless continue to stagger on, displaying much of the infrastructure of diasporic self-representation but without substantive political content or activity. Whilst it may remain in everyone's interests to pretend the diaspora still exists, the emperor may have no – or very few – clothes.

Case Selection

We look in detail at two of the most widely recognised contemporary African diasporas, both of which have mobilised to contest authority within authoritarian regimes: the Zimbabwean diaspora (since 2002) and the Rwandan diaspora (since 1994). We explore the life cycles of these diasporas, and we show that, in both cases, their emergence – as organised entities – was politically contingent and dependent upon sources of animation external to the diaspora.

In the cases of Zimbabwe and Rwanda, the diasporas that emerge in the early twenty-first century are highly politically contingent. They do not fit the ideal type generated inductively from the classic Jewish archetype. Rather than being internally generated, they were largely dependent upon external sources of animation, whether by international elites or states. In other words, they were brought to life because they served a political purpose. Rather than being enduring

or quasi-permanent, they were born, lived briefly, and died, with only a fragmentary afterlife now remaining.

We do not select the cases from the African context to suggest that there are generalisable features of specifically 'African diaspora' mobilisation. However, we have an additional reason to focus on the African context: that it can serve as a valuable corrective to existing literature on transnational political mobilisation in Africa. Indeed, a significant proportion of the literature that does exist on African transnational mobilisation has, put crudely, been between rebels and remittances. The former literature has seen extra-territorial nationals purely negatively, as a source of violent challenges to order and the state,[15] the latter has seen them in almost entirely positive terms.[16] In other words, the literature is polarised – either the violent or the developmental. Both of these extremes occlude what we study in this book: non-rebel political, extraterritorial mobilisation, without categorical normative praise or condemnation.

Within the Africa context, our case selection is based on three things that these cases have in common. First, both states have *competitive-authoritarian regimes*.[17] They thereby represent closed social orders, within which political competition is unfair but not entirely closed off. Second, they both have *purportedly significant diasporas*. Both states have historically been arenas of high mobility, even by African standards, and are both governed by returned exiles. This has unsurprisingly led a number of authors to recognise the diasporas of the two states as among the most active African diasporas.[18] Third, both are also countries with key *strategic alliances with liberal democratic states*. In the case of Zimbabwe, this has been with South Africa; in the case of

[15] Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Cramer, *Civil War Is Not a Stupid Thing*; Collier and Hoeffler, 'On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa'; Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders*; Fearon and Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War'.

[16] Adams and Page, *International Migration, Remittances, and Poverty in Developing Countries*; Azam and Gubert, 'Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa'; Crush et al. *Migration, Remittances and Development in Southern Africa*.

[17] Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 'Elections under Authoritarianism'; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

[18] Turner, 'Staging the Rwandan Diaspora'; Rafti, 'The Dismantling of the Rwandan Political Opposition in Exile'; Marijnen, 'Exister C'est Rèsister – Resist to Exist'; McGregor and Primorac, *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora*; Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe's Exodus*.