



## *Mobilising the Diaspora*

Over half the world lives under authoritarian regimes. For these people the opportunity to engage in politics moves outside the state's territory. Mobilising across borders, diasporas emerge to challenge such governments. This book offers an in-depth examination of the internal politics of transnational mobilisation. Studying Rwandan and Zimbabwean exiles, it exposes the power, interests, and unexpected agendas behind mobilisation, revealing the surprising and ambivalent role played by outsiders. Far from being passive victims waiting for humanitarian assistance, refugees engage actively in political struggle. From Rwandans resisting their repatriation, to Zimbabweans preventing arms shipments, political exiles have diverse aims and tactics. Conversely, the governments they face also deploy a range of transnational strategies, and those that purport to help them often do so with hidden agendas. This shifting political landscape reveals the centrality of transnationalism within global politics, the historical and political contingency of diasporas, and the precarious agency of refugees.

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# Mobilising the Diaspora

How Refugees Challenge Authoritarianism

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*For Leo Betts and Sophie Jones*

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## *Acknowledgements*

Like many books, this began with an argument in a pub. Having known one another for more than a decade, the two authors sat down in the Royal Oak in Oxford and began thinking about the historical and contemporary role played by exiles in opposing regimes from abroad. When an authoritarian government leaves little or no space to challenge it from inside its borders, how does the politics of that state relocate abroad and with what consequences? Is this ‘transnational’ political space one which can help promote democracy and, if so, how?

Both of us also shared a deep frustration with the characterisation of refugees as passive, apolitical victims. In contrast, we frequently observed refugees to be important political actors in their own right, not least in contesting authoritarian regimes from abroad. The majority of the literature on refugee politics was more about how states and international organisations respond to refugees than about when and how refugees themselves engage in political activity. Our goal was not to romanticise that politics but to examine how power works within transnational mobilisation.

Alex’s background in international relations and Will’s in comparative politics offered a basis for creative tension in theorising transnational politics. Geographically, our mutual focus was on Africa. Alex had done recent research on Zimbabwean refugees, and Will’s prior work mainly focused on Rwanda. This provided an immediate starting point for thinking comparatively about two countries whose recent political pasts are characterised by authoritarianism, exile, and transnational contestation.

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