

## Locating exile: decolonization, anti-imperial spaces and Zimbabwean students in Britain, 1965-1980

JoAnn McGregor

### Publication date

01-07-2017

### Licence

This work is made available under the [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#) licence and should only be used in accordance with that licence. For more information on the specific terms, consult the repository record for this item.

### Document Version

Accepted version

### Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

McGregor, J. (2017). *Locating exile: decolonization, anti-imperial spaces and Zimbabwean students in Britain, 1965-1980* (Version 1). University of Sussex. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23446115.v1>

### Published in

Journal of Historical Geography

### Link to external publisher version

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2017.06.003>

### Copyright and reuse:

This work was downloaded from Sussex Research Open (SRO). This document is made available in line with publisher policy and may differ from the published version. Please cite the published version where possible. Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. For more information on this work, SRO or to report an issue, you can contact the repository administrators at [sro@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:sro@sussex.ac.uk). Discover more of the University's research at <https://sussex.figshare.com/>

## Locating exile: decolonization, anti-imperial spaces and Zimbabwean students in Britain, 1965-1980

### Abstract

Exile is usually cast as a time of hardship, narrated through tropes of nostalgia and loss. Yet it is not always experienced and remembered in this way. This article provides a counterpoint to the familiar nostalgic lament by exploring the narratives of Zimbabwean students 'in exile' in Britain during the country's liberation war of 1965–1980, who looked back on their stay in the imperial heartland as a time of opportunity and excitement. They recalled their own youthful militancy, the optimism of liberation movements before independence and invoked the conviviality of joint political campaigns with British-based allies. The article explains their up-beat recollections by locating exile in transnational socio-political spaces created by Rhodesia's contested sovereignty, focusing on exiles' relations with mainstream liberal-left solidarity organizations, with Caribbean/black British groups and the liberation movements' own transnational networks. By locating exile in this way, the article extends two hitherto disconnected bodies of scholarship – on southern African nationalisms in the making and British decolonization and postcolonial cultural politics. It highlights how students helped foster liberation movements' international standing and their influence on post-independence ideas of status. The article also offers a new vantage point on Britain's re-racialised cultural politics, as performed in middle class spaces on student campuses and internationalist campaigns. Zimbabwean students' accounts of exile in Britain can thus do more than reveal the inadequacies of generalisations about a singular exile condition. Their narratives of the opportunities and sociability of exile in Britain reveal the occlusions of narrow military versions of southern African liberation history, while adding new, transnational dimensions to historical geographies of decolonization, urban cosmopolitanism and the African presence in 1960s and 1970s Britain.

Keywords: postcolonialism, solidarity, cosmopolitanism, race, class, southern Africa

The notion that exile can be an opportunity or even a privilege jars with much writing on the topic, which is stereotypically nostalgic and forefronts hardship and loss. Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* begins by asserting 'Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted'. Said continues, 'Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider'.<sup>1</sup> While he, and others, acknowledge the potential for diverse experiences and for displacement to be creative in cultural and political terms, the emphasis on loss still predominates. These themes are repeated in other accounts of exile that align it 'to experiences of loneliness, foreign-ness, homesickness and an enduring longing to re-migrate to the place of origin', while a broader literature on refugees reinforces the association between displacement, vulnerability and victimhood.<sup>2</sup> 'Exile' as invoked in Caribbean writing on experiences in postwar Britain can hinge centrally on racism and racialized exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> E.W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, London 2001, 137 and 141; E. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, London, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> M. Baumann, Exile, in: K. Knott and S. McLoughlin (Eds), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, London, 2010, 19; H. Bernstein, *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans*, London, 1994; P. Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency*, London, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, London, 2006 (first published 1960); E.R. Braithwaite, *Reluctant Neighbours*, London, 1972; M. Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return*, London, 1997.

This article explores the life histories of a group of politicized Zimbabwean exiles whose narratives provide a stark contrast with these tropes. It uses the notion of 'exile' as a means of connecting the historiographical literature on southern African liberation movements with that on British decolonization and postcoloniality. Doing so responds to Ruth Craggs' call for historical geographers to pay greater attention to mid twentieth-century 'imaginings' and 'performances' of 'becoming postcolonial'.<sup>4</sup> The focus here is on Zimbabwean students who spent time in Britain during the country's independence war between 1965 and 1980. Many Zimbabweans looked back on their stay in the imperial heartland as a time of excitement and opportunity. There was, of course, no nostalgia for Rhodesia – quite the opposite, as they were looking forward to an independent Zimbabwe, anticipating revolutionary transformation. They recalled their own youthful militancy, remembered their anger at the British government, the optimism of African liberation movements prior to independence and the support of liberal-left solidarity organizations and black British groups. Accounts did not dwell on personal suffering in Britain, indeed most emphasised the greater sacrifice of compatriots languishing in Rhodesia's jails or suffering the hardships of refugee and guerrilla camps. In relation to contemporary British racialized exclusion too, their circumstances afforded relative privileges as educational scholarships promised a route into professional roles and anticipated elite status on return.

In seeking explanations for the up-beat tone of Zimbabwean accounts of exile, the article makes the following broader arguments. First, it challenges the idea of a singular 'exile condition' that can be generalized across time and space, arguing instead for a critical geographical approach that treats exile as performative and locates experiences historically within transnational networks and life trajectories. The article explores three sets of defining relationships for politicized Zimbabwean students in Britain: with left-liberal internationalist solidarity groups, with black British communities and with liberation movements' own transnational networks. These relationships fostered forms of politics in metropolitan spaces that were characteristically both convivial and contentious. Partly the sociability reflected the 'diplomatic labour' invested to 'construct atmospheres' that furthered joint political action while masking divergence between sometimes contradictory agendas of anti-imperialism, anti-racism, black internationalism, humanitarianism and socialism, as well as hiding contention within and between liberation movements themselves.<sup>5</sup> But these were more than just diplomatic efforts and can also reveal the 'emotional and libidinal economies of identification and desire' that produced intimate relationships across racial (and other) boundaries in student, and radical, political circles, which Mica Nava argues are 'deeply embedded in political resistance and transformation' in this period.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the article develops two hitherto disconnected bodies of scholarship, on the making of southern African nationalisms and on decolonization, postcoloniality and urban cosmopolitanism in Britain. Students' political and social lives at the heart of empire are part of the neglected transnational and non-military dimension of Zimbabwe's liberation movement history, which I argue shaped Zimbabwe's post-independence elite and professional classes, influencing ideas about status and the value of educational distinction. These exiles' histories and geographies should also be part of the story of postcolonial Britain, of histories of urban cosmopolitanism and of the African presence. The sociability exiles and solidarity activists recalled can, I argue, be seen as a neglected episode in the development of youthful 'convivial metropolitan cultures' grounded in 'cosmopolitan

---

<sup>4</sup> R. Craggs, Postcolonial geographies, decolonization, and the performance of geopolitics at Commonwealth conferences, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35 (2014) 43.

<sup>5</sup> R. Craggs, Hospitality in geopolitics and the making of Commonwealth international relations, *Geoforum* 52 (2014) 90. On internationalist anti-imperialism at this time, see C. Lee, *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, Ohio, 2010, 20. On the Anti-Apartheid Movements, see footnote 28.

<sup>6</sup> M. Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*, Oxford, 2007.

solidarity and moral agency' that Paul Gilroy and others see as emerging in British cities at this time.<sup>7</sup> Marc Matera has explored a longer history of cosmopolitan spaces of sociability and anti-imperial internationalist politics – in the clubs, pubs, bohemian salons and student venues of Soho and Bloomsbury up to the 1950s.<sup>8</sup> But the transnational spaces I explore here were shaped by the specific global political currents of the 1960s and 1970s, the shift to military struggle on the part of southern African liberation movements and the cultural politics of the new left, student and radical black mobilisations in Britain. They appear much less 'fugitive' than the 'sanctuaries from white hostility' that Matera identifies for black internationalists in 1950s London.<sup>9</sup> While Tariq Modood has cast the 're-racialised' politics of the 1970s and anti-racist political performances as 'foundational elements of urban cosmopolitanism' in Britain', the emphasis here is on sojourn and circulation rather than settlement and 'integration'.<sup>10</sup> I situate the anti-imperial political campaigns and related conviviality in relation to influences on postcolonial cultural spheres in both Zimbabwe and in Britain.

This article draws on more than thirty life histories from a diverse group of Zimbabwean men and women who lived and studied in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as interviews with solidarity activists.<sup>11</sup> The interviewees mostly came to Britain after 1965, following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on the part of the white supremacist Rhodesian Front, at a time when southern African nationalist movements shifted to armed struggle, looked to the Eastern bloc for military support and gained recognition from the Organisation of African Unity and United Nations as genuine liberation movements. Although the interviewees arrived at different times and spent variable periods in Britain – as little as three years or up to fifteen years – all were relatively young adults. Their legal status in the UK varied according to race. White dissenters expelled from Rhodesia could mostly enter Britain as citizens or 'patrials', while non-whites occupied the 'grey' zones of imperial subjecthood, as Rhodesian passports were not recognized after UDI and British subjects' passports did not confer rights of entry to Britain. Most of the black Zimbabwean interviewees had student status in Britain. They took up scholarships specifically targeting 'Rhodesian Africans', which expanded dramatically after UDI through a large Commonwealth intergovernmental programme initiated in 1966 – open to any 'Rhodesian African outside Rhodesia with 'O' level qualifications or above' – and a host of other international and charitable sponsors who had interests in training and shaping a Zimbabwean postcolonial elite.<sup>12</sup> Only two interviewees had refugee status, as scholarships were used deliberately to keep non-white Rhodesians out of the asylum system.

Everyone was involved in politics at some level. Interviewees included representatives and activists of the two main liberation movements – Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwean African People's Union [ZAPU] and Ndabaningi Sithole's/Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwean African National Union [ZANU] – as

---

<sup>7</sup> P. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Columbia, 2005, xv, 118. Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism* also explores this trajectory, emphasising the decade of the 1970s, stressing the cultural politics of activism rather than dance.

<sup>8</sup> Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Berkeley, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 10, 322.

<sup>10</sup> T. Modood, A defence of multiculturalism, *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 29 (2005) 69.

<sup>11</sup> The interviews were conducted in the UK and in Zimbabwe, as part of a project on two episodes of transnational politics (the 1960s-1970s and post 2000). Some interviews were conducted jointly with colleagues from the University of Zimbabwe, Gerald Mazarire and Munyaradzi Nyakudya. A small minority of interviewees wished to remain anonymous, which I have respected here. In addition, I draw on two oral histories held in the National Archives of Zimbabwe [NAZ].

<sup>12</sup> Including the World University Service, the International University Education Fund, Africa Education Trust and the Ariel Foundation. Many universities waived fees.

well as people with committee roles in the linked Zimbabwe Student Union (ZSU) structures.<sup>13</sup> Some interviewees were prominent activists released from Rhodesian detention, or student activists expelled after protests at University College Rhodesia (UCR) in 1966 and 1973. Some had been trained as guerrillas and had combat experience. Even those without formal roles, or who cast themselves as 'apolitical' spoke of following politics closely and everyone had attended solidarity events, helped raise funds and been on demonstrations. Some went back to fight after graduating and all the interviewees returned to Zimbabwe after independence, becoming leading figures in Zimbabwean public life as lawyers, academics, civil servants, politicians, business people and journalists. White interviewees were politically active in the solidarity committees, which were animated by deportees from Rhodesia who took up positions in the Rhodesia Working Group of the Anti-Apartheid Movement [AAM] (set up in 1965), the Justice for Rhodesia Campaigns (JRC) in the 1970s and human rights groups including Amnesty International and the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF). The oral histories showed the influence of Zimbabwean nationalist ideology past and present, as they were often narrated as 'contributions to the struggle', implying that episodes that did not fit nationalist teleology were not worth telling. But they also show the impact of the passage of time and disillusion with liberation movements in power, which has created new, critical perspectives on liberation history.

What follows first explores how narratives of exile can develop understandings of southern African nationalisms and postcolonial Britain. It then turns to the oral histories themselves, elaborating an approach to exile narratives as performative, and locating the convivial politics they describe in relation to the increasing militancy of southern African liberation movements over the 1960s, convergences with sections of the radical left, student and black mobilizations in Britain as well as in relation to liberation movements' own transnational networks.

### Exile as prism

The advantages of using 'exile' as a vantage point for exploring broader socio-political processes – particularly nationalisms in the making and hospitality (or otherwise) from British-based anti-imperial groups – are most readily apparent through contrast to the linked idea of the 'refugee'. 'Exile' is not bureaucratically determined, is intrinsically political and is a condition subjects often chose to identify with, individually or collectively. Said notes that despite its sadness, exile brings 'a touch of solitude and spirituality'.<sup>14</sup> Exile's aestheticize-able qualities create 'a certain power and agency', indeed the alienation of the exile is often equated metaphorically with that of the modernist writer and intellectual.<sup>15</sup> For example, the term was embraced in Caribbean writing on racism and misrecognition in 1950s Britain, most notably in George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*. Researching exile thus has the benefit of beginning from subjectivities. It provides a focus on individuals who have access to and influence in the public sphere. The term thus avoids the imputed victimhood, passivity, feminization and depoliticization ascribed to 'refugees' as object of humanitarian intervention.<sup>16</sup> Rather, the idea of 'exile' can work to create moral community and motivate political action. Said argues that exile and nationalism cannot 'be discussed neutrally, without reference to one another'.<sup>17</sup> For South Africans in Britain, being an exile provided 'a sense

---

<sup>13</sup> Zimbabwean nationalists established a house in Golders Green in London in the late 1950s, under the National Democratic Party (NDP), then after the NDP was banned, as ZAPU. When ZANU split from ZAPU in 1963, the house became a bone of contention, and both parties moved into central London, maintaining separate premises. The ZSU was an umbrella organization, but in practice was cast as ZANU dominated.

<sup>14</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> L. Malkki, Refugees and exile: from 'refugee studies' to the national order of things, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1994) 501.

<sup>16</sup> Malkki, Refugees and exile; Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees*.

<sup>17</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 140.

of dignity', upheld a 'defensive patriotism' and entailed political and moral obligations.<sup>18</sup> Geographical writing on 'exile' is more limited than that on 'refugees', but shows clearly how the term invites historical and geographical placing and leads to questions that intersect closely with debates over transnational diasporic identities and practices reflecting multiple orientations – towards homeland, hosts and others.<sup>19</sup>

This multi-directional orientation and close connection to political subjectivities is precisely why exile can provide an interesting vantage point from which to add to literatures on southern African liberation movements and British postcolonial urban cosmopolitanism. The article develops recent work on the former that seeks to capture the 'sprawling transnational character' of liberation movements and the 'peripatetic lives' of nationalist and solidarity activists.<sup>20</sup> Focussing on sojourns in Britain draws attention to neglected non-military dimensions of Zimbabwean liberation movement history, which have been occluded in post-independence state celebration of war heroes and 'patriotic history'.<sup>21</sup> It highlights student activists' roles and, more broadly, profiles the 'international nationalism' supporting the war effort.<sup>22</sup> As Munochiveyi notes, 'war vet nationalism' promoted in Zimbabwe in recent years elevates the fighter while affording political detainees a 'curiously marginal position'.<sup>23</sup> Although 'exiles' – especially those studying in Britain – do not feature in this Zimbabwean moral hierarchy of who fought, suffered or sacrificed most, their political lives shed light on neglected episodes and influences on the contested trajectory of Zimbabwe's independence.<sup>24</sup>

Exile narratives can also rectify some of the omissions of existing historical work on decolonization and postcoloniality in the British context. As Howe notes, historians of decolonization have often focussed narrowly on British diplomacy and constitutional handovers, while postcolonial theorists' 'teleological' assumptions of continuity have neglected 'the visions of alternative futures debated or fought over at the time'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the perspectives of nationalist representatives based in the metropole have been largely ignored.<sup>26</sup> Although there is a significant body of work on the Anti-Apartheid movement in Britain, from its emergence out of the late 1950s boycott movement of the Committee of African Organizations, the Rhodesia campaigns have been overlooked,

---

<sup>18</sup> M. Israel, *South African Political Exile in the United Kingdom*, Oxford, 1999, 145.

<sup>19</sup> U. Kothari, Contesting colonial rule: politics of exile in the Indian Ocean, *Geoforum* 43 (2012) 697-706; F. McConnell, Governments-in-exile: statehood, statelessness and the reconfiguration of territory and sovereignty, *Geography Compass* 3 (2009) 1902–1919; J. Murphy, From place to exile, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011) 473–478.

<sup>20</sup> H. Sapire, Liberation movements, exile and international solidarity: an introduction, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35 (2009) 273.

<sup>21</sup> T. Ranger, Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 (2004) 215-234.

<sup>22</sup> D. Moore, ZANU-PF and the ghosts of foreign funding, *Review of African Political Economy* 103 (2004) 135-204; J. Day, *International Nationalism: The Extra-Territorial Relations of Southern Rhodesian Nationalists*, New York, 1967.

<sup>23</sup> M. Munochiveyi, 'War vet nation'?: beyond 'guerrilla nationalism' and the search for other nationalisms in Zimbabwe, in: S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and J. Muzondidya (Eds), *Redemptive or Grotesque Nationalism: Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe*, Oxford, 2011, 108.

<sup>24</sup> L. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization*, Chicago, 2015; F. Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*, New Jersey, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> S. Howe, Crosswinds and countercurrents: Macmillan's Africa in the 'long view' of decolonization, in: S. Stockwell and L.J. Butler (Eds), *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonization*, Oxford, 2013, 256.

<sup>26</sup> N. Owen, Four straws in the wind: metropolitan anti-imperialism, January-February 1960, in: Stockwell and Butler (Eds), *The Wind of Change*, 116-139.

notwithstanding their centrality to AAM activity over the 'difficult decade' of the 1970s.<sup>27</sup> Instead, scholars have followed the AAM's own 'reluctance to dilute its anti-apartheid message'.<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall recalls how an 'inexplicable distance' emerged between it and the anti-racist movement in Britain, such that the literature on the AAM is largely disconnected from histories of urban cosmopolitanism and the African presence in Britain.<sup>29</sup> The latter, for its part, has been concerned primarily with Caribbean migration and domestic anti-racist struggles, often narrated as black British or black internationalist history.<sup>30</sup> Yet my interviewees were emphatically Zimbabwean (not British), while the relationships between nationalism and ideologies of multi-racialism, black consciousness and socialism were contested rather than settled at the time. By locating Zimbabwean exiles' metropolitan experiences and political practices in relation to southern African liberation movement networks and mainstream solidarity groups, as well as exploring links with black British communities, this article can respond to David Olusoga's challenge to re-cast 'black British history as a global history and ... as a history of more than just the black experience itself'.<sup>31</sup>

Having established the advantages of 'exile' as vantage point, the article now elaborates the performativity of exile in relation to the increasingly militant discourses of southern African liberation movements and convergences with strands of British-based internationalism.

### **Performing militant nationalism in exile**

The article follows Said and others in treating narratives of exile as performative, to capture their creative (rather than simply descriptive) capacity in relation to politics and subjectivities. This means situating accounts of Zimbabwean exile in relation to liberation movements' elevation of the superior morality of fighting as well as solidarity organizations' moral and political agendas, sections of which also celebrated militant credentials, reflecting broader global internationalist political currents in the late 1960s and 1970s. Below, I argue that Zimbabwean students' strong sense of national identity and their public performances of militant nationalist commitment reveals their very different positionality from prior generations of African students who were 'aspirational imperial citizens'.<sup>32</sup> Zimbabweans' sense of betrayal and outrage at the British government was different from the 'disappointments' of postwar students.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, they had a political prominence in Britain because Rhodesia's contested sovereignty was very much in the public eye. The Wilson and later Conservative governments' approaches to the rebellious white settler regime – appeasing it as 'kith and kin', while purporting to be supporting a trajectory towards black majority rule, satisfied no-one, such that the presence in Britain of Zimbabwean students was a political opportunity not

---

<sup>27</sup> C. Gurney, The 1970s: the Anti-Apartheid Movement's difficult decade, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35 (2009) 471-488. See also R. Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A History of the Movement in Britain. A Study in Pressure Group Politics*, London, 2005; H. Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, Oxford, 2006; H. Sapire and C. Saunders (Eds), *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives*, Cape Town, 2013; C. Gurney, 'A great cause': the origins of the anti-apartheid movement, June 1959-March 1960, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26 (2000) 123-144.

<sup>28</sup> S. Hall, The AAM and the race-ing of Britain, in: AAM Archives Committee, *The Anti-Apartheid Movement: A Forty Year Perspective* – South Africa House, London, 25-26 June 1999. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/aam-and-race-ing-britain>, accessed 15 January 2016.

<sup>29</sup> S. Hall, The AAM. Though see E. Williams, Black British solidarity with the Anti-Apartheid struggle: the West Indian Standing Conference and Black Action for the Liberation of Southern Africa, in: Sapire and Saunders (Eds), *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, 251-273.

<sup>30</sup> P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London, 1984; Matera, *Black London*; D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, London, 2016. For a West African and Pan-Africanist focus, see H. Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Communism*, London, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Olusoga, *Black and British*, xi.

<sup>32</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> A. Stockwell, Leaders, dissidents and the disappointed: colonial students in Britain as empire ended, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008) 487-507.

only for the anti-imperial campaigns but also for their rivals, the 'new right', pro-Empire, anti-immigration lobbies.<sup>34</sup>

The performativity of southern African exile narratives has been discussed most clearly in relation to South Africa.<sup>35</sup> Mark Israel situates the defensive emergence of 'exile' in the 1960s, at a time of intense criticism of South Africans who left.<sup>36</sup> Exiles narratives, which were often recounted publically, signalled the tellers' patriotism, telling of heroic 'great escapes' and 'clandestine, hurried departure in conditions of real danger'. They can be seen as an uplifting 'morality play' that denigrated the regime and 'established the moral and physical courage of the hero. These stories had great 'symbolic value' as signifiers of resistance and expressions of 'long term commitment to the homeland, as well as marking a personal rite of passage'. For British audiences these stories had the effect of 'personalizing distant oppression ... particularly if the escape was being retold by the escapee ...'. Many of the audiences 'did not want to know how exiles really left' – they wanted 'symbols of fierce determination to resist – skill, courage, wit'.<sup>37</sup>

Approaching exile narratives as performative in this way also demands attention to what they suppress or hide, particularly the contention of exile politics, which is infamously fractious. Indeed, Said speaks of the 'narcissistic masochism' that makes a 'fetish of exile'.<sup>38</sup> A few critical South African voices in the UK, such as Breten Breytenbach, 'abhorred' the concept 'exile' for its 'dog eat dog politics' and pieties that go 'clothed in a mantle of romantic lamentation'.<sup>39</sup> This article thus treats claims to 'unity' between exiles and solidarity activists as part of contemporary political discourse, and tries to avoid simply repeating uncritically the view that they constituted a united 'family' with 'umbilical connection', while also acknowledging the mutual support and political work such claims could bring about.<sup>40</sup>

In the Zimbabwean case, heroic tales of resistance and escape were also performed publically to demonstrate nationalist commitment, but without making a fetish of 'exile' itself. This is because the Zimbabwean struggle and nationalist discourse was much more strongly militarized than its South African counterpart. Indeed, who was fighting most was an important marker of status among southern African exiles. Zimbabweans recall how this gave grounds for a pronounced superiority over South African colleagues. The emphasis on heroic resistance converged with the ideal of the freedom fighter circulating in British radical leftist and student circles, which valued militancy and celebrated revolutionary credentials. Activists recalled Zimbabwean guerrillas as 'romantic' figures, remembering the passionate crushes and affairs that were part of the solidarity scene.<sup>41</sup> It was not

---

<sup>34</sup> B. Schwarz, *The White Man's World: Memories of Empire*, Volume 1, Oxford, 2011. On Rhodesian politics in Britain, see J. Brownell, 'A sordid tussle on the Strand': Rhodesia House during the UDI rebellion (1965–80), *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38 (2010) 471–499; J. Brownell, *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race*, London, 2011; P. Murphy, 'An intricate and distasteful subject': British policy for the use of force against the settlers of Central Africa, 1958–1965, *English Historical Review* 621 (2006) 745–777; C. Watts, *Rhodesia's UDI: An International History*, Oxford, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Israel, *South African Political Exile*, 140, 146; K. Parker, Home is where the heart ... lies, *Transition* 59 (1993) 65–77. It was elaborated through literary figures such as Lewis Nkosi and Denis Brutus.

<sup>36</sup> Israel, *South African Political Exile*, 47; H. Adams, Exile and resistance: the ANC, the SACP and the PAC, in: P. Berger and B. Godswell (Eds), *A Future South Africa: Visions, Strategies and Realities*, London, 1988, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Israel, *South African Political Exile*, 55–59, 84.

<sup>38</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 140.

<sup>39</sup> B. Breytenbach, *End Papers: Essays, Letters, Articles of Faith, Workbook Notes*, New York, 1986, cited in Israel, *South African Political Exile*, 152.

<sup>40</sup> These claims are repeated in academic accounts. Berstein, *The Rift*, xvi, argues that 'The loneliness of exile ... reinforced the unity' of the ANC abroad, such that exiles found in it 'a new family'; the relationship between ANC and AAM is described as 'umbilical' in Colin Bundy, National liberation and international solidarity: anatomy of a special relationship, in: Sapire and Saunders (Eds), *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, 212–228

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Ling, interview, London, 29 July 2010.

just guerrilla fighters themselves who had such appeal, however. New arrivals from Southern Africa, who could speak with personal experience of repression and war, were deployed to maximum effect by nationalist and solidarity committees. Students or nationalist activists arriving or returning from visits to the frontline were celebrated to the point that some of my interviewees remembered their surprise at their own (or others') 'instant heroism'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, for solidarity work, non-military figures could be particularly useful, as their lives fore-fronted only the violence of the Rhodesian Front regime, avoiding the complexities of armed struggle and the messy internecine violence of the liberation armies.<sup>43</sup>

Exile was embraced by the interviewees as a condition they had experienced, but they were ambivalent about claiming it as an identity, because of its dubious status in militaristic Zimbabwean nationalist discourse. Those who had undergone military training, or went on to have military careers after graduating, often identified primarily as 'soldiers' and were also keen to distance themselves from 'students', who they implied were self-interested or lacked the commitment, courage and manliness to fight.<sup>44</sup> Many with direct personal experience of the war cast exile in the UK rather as 'ordinary life' and unremarkable, in contrast to the life or death situations closer to the fighting.<sup>45</sup> Those who wished to signal their nationalist commitment mostly did so not by claiming the status of exile but by emphasising party loyalty and militancy – they described themselves as 'party cadres first' or 'party operatives', or as 'militants rather than mere students'. 'You could define us as nationalist party revolutionaries', several explained.<sup>46</sup> Only one interviewee upheld exile and 'running away' as an indication of political commitment, using it as a way of distancing himself from those in the UK who were 'only there to study'.<sup>47</sup> Some recalled how 'we were in exile yes, but you didn't feel it. We were just the same as the next student – living on the same grant, living the same life'.<sup>48</sup> Many equated exile with reluctance to return, one activist recalling: 'I didn't consider myself an exile, I was sure I wanted to go back. I resisted the temptation of not going back and looking for a job'.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, not being closer to the fighting had to be justified – generally through obedience to party orders, or family obligations to young children.

Party cadres' accounts of their part in nationalist resistance are notable for their narrative form. It was typically that of a heroic adventure story rather than a nostalgic lament, and with the emphasis on previous action and departure rather than arrival.<sup>50</sup> They echo contemporary public performances designed to demonstrate nationalist commitment and rally support, acknowledging the help of a cast of helpers (fellow nationalists as well as white activists, particularly former lecturers expelled from University College Rhodesia), who took on quasi familial roles, as 'mentors', 'paternal' or 'maternal' figures. One such 'party cadre' who arrived in Britain in the mid-1960s via ZAPU networks provided a typical story of hair-raising escape and transit through the 'pipeline' that ferried young activists to Zambia from Botswana, assisted by party and solidarity figures who 'forced' the hand of the British government to allow young militants to enter:

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibbo Mandaza, joint interview with G. Mazarire, Harare, 13 December 2010; Owen Tshabangu, interview, Harare, 23 August 2011; Solomon Wekwete, interview, Manchester, 7 January 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Southern African political prisoners' causes were immensely successful, G. Klein, The British AAM and political prisoner campaigns 1973-80, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35 (2009) 455-470.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Wekwete, interview; Sam Geza, joint interview with G. Mazarire and M. Nyakudya, Harare, 8 August 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Including some who led a mutiny in Zambia against the ZAPU leadership, for example Tshabangu, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Cyril Ndebele, interview, Bulawayo 21 August, 2010; Chen Chimutengwende, joint interview with M. Nyakudya, Harare, 16 December 2011; TC, interview, Harare, 11 April 2011; Geza, joint interview.

<sup>47</sup> Japhet Ndabeni Ncube, interview, Bulawayo, 6 September 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Tshabangu, interview; Fred Zindi, interview, Harare, 12 August 2010; Wekwete, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Geza, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Influences on guerrillas' war stories are discussed in J. Alexander and J. McGregor, War stories: guerrilla narratives of Zimbabwe's liberation war, *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004) 79-100.

Three of us disguised ourselves, Ishmael Mlambo, Dr Makanza and myself. A brother of mine drove us to Plumtree [on the Botswana border], it was hectic! There was a roadblock ... how we escaped I don't know .... Others [ZAPU agents] were waiting for us – Dr Nondo, who took us to the Botswana border. He dropped us and we walked .... I had ordinary town shoes, by the time we got help my shoes were worn out and my feet blistered. We got on a donkey cart to Francistown and there we were declared refugees, went to the camp, were registered as refugees. A very helpful UN guy, Professor Rogers was involved – he'd left the University after UDI. So I went on to Zambia, we were flown, we were refugee students ... guests at University of Zambia for about six months. Cyril Rogers by then at the University of Zambia was the one who arranged, made things easy for us ....

We were very attached to the party in Lusaka .... At first there was resistance from the party – they said, 'No fight there, why are you coming out [of Rhodesia]? You've run away, you should fight at home!' ... [But then] in our case, we were told 'We need you to further your education'. And so we had the blessing of the party for the arrangements of our placements in universities. The British government was forced to be sympathetic to us.<sup>51</sup>

Another member of the same group of student activists recounted the 'bit of good luck' through which he was 'shunted to Oxford' by ZANU after completing his MSc in Zambia, despite wanting to 'sacrifice myself' and take up arms, which he did after graduating.<sup>52</sup> Trades union activist Isaiah Chigwendere described his gratitude to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) for funding the legal appeals that secured his release from Rhodesian jail and his route into Ruskin College, Oxford despite 'being 'far from thinking I would have wanted to be a student'.<sup>53</sup> Chemutengwende, who had been trained as a guerrilla in Ghana by the Chinese, thanked the British Council for Refugees under Martin Ennals and Mrs Colin Legum who 'got me into Britain as a refugee' and who he stayed with initially, as well as Labour MP Joan Lestor who defended him when Conservatives in the House of Lords used his case to accuse the government of admitting 'terrorists'.<sup>54</sup>

The ambiguous rendering of arrival in the capital in these accounts reflected the ambivalent morality of exile in nationalist discourse, particularly exile in Britain. Although the ZAPU and ZANU leaderships themselves sent their educated members to study in the UK (among other locations), they came to be deeply suspicious of the intellectuals based there, particularly after UDI, when interlinked Rhodesian, South African and British intelligence agencies scaled up surveillance and infiltration of exiles.<sup>55</sup> The British Foreign Office tried to use negotiations over the release of detained nationalist leaders into scholarships quite deliberately to undermine the liberation movements, and scholarships were part of the soft diplomacy of both sides of the Cold War.<sup>56</sup> Suspicion of intellectuals more broadly on the part of military leaders deepened as the war progressed, not only because they articulated criticisms, but also because of their involvement in mutinies and attempted takeovers. Indeed, interviewees recalled how readily 'you could be labelled British spies or CIAs'.<sup>57</sup> When a large group of more than forty ZAPU mutineers were given scholarships to Britain, for

---

<sup>51</sup> Ndebele, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Geza, interview.

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah Chigwendere, NAZ ORAL 228.

<sup>54</sup> Chen Chemutengwende, interview, Harare, 16 December 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Rhodesian intelligence boasted complete infiltration of the UK-based committees. K. Flower, *Serving Secretly. An Intelligence Chief on Record: Rhodesia into Zimbabwe, 1964 to 1981*, London, 1987; H. Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War: Counter-Insurgency and Guerrilla War in Rhodesia 1962-1980*, Gweru, 1989.

<sup>56</sup> See correspondence over the potential for 'discrediting' ZANU by 'skillful leaking' of applications for release from detention to study abroad for key detainees, including Sithole and Zvobgo. The National Archives, Kew, London FCO 36/1319 Enquiries on visits of citizens of Rhodesia to UK on non-compassionate grounds.

<sup>57</sup> On accusations, interview, Elphas Mukonoweshuro, interview, Harare, 23 August 2010.

example, it simply reinforced the ZAPU leaders' view that the upheaval had been a British plot.<sup>58</sup> Thus, 'party cadres' embraced the opportunities of study in Britain, while also narrating reluctance, emphasising it was 'the last place in the world I wanted to be', that they went only through loyalty to party orders.<sup>59</sup>

While narratives of submission to party will and 'study by force' echoed the moralism of contemporary nationalist discourse, there were also some interviewees who were straightforward in narrating the desire to study rather than fight, and who were also critical of the nationalist movements in various ways. Agrippa Madlela had taken part in ZAPU's early military incursions in 1967, and described his relief at being 'saved' from the hardships of war by a scholarship organized by his former UCR tutor Richard Brown.<sup>60</sup> A former clerk in the ZANU office in Tanzania recounted feeling that scholarships were going to one ethnic group over another, and told of unofficially adding his own name to the ZANU list (and having a tense reception by the party representative in Britain on arrival as a result).<sup>61</sup> Those who arrived later on through ZSU campaigns to reach out to African Rhodesian school leavers put a great deal of emphasis on their own right to education.

Exile did not have to be justified just once, but repeatedly. Liberation movement propaganda called on students not to abandon the struggle, and to return to the frontline after completing their studies. The ZSU magazine, for example, ran an article in 1972 on 'return' as the superior moral stance, reminding students that ZANU exhorted them not to remain among the 'confusionists' expounding 'theories in pubs six thousand miles away'.<sup>62</sup> On occasion, leaders called on 'exiles' to return directly. Robert Mugabe famously passed through Britain in 1976, announced he had taken over the ZANU leadership and later called on exiles to join him in Mozambique. For both parties, the Geneva talks of 1976 – in which the liberation movements were directly involved – marked a turning point. Intellectuals who had been kept at a distance by party leaders found themselves called upon to deploy their skills. There were roles for them in educational, diplomatic and legal capacities in Lusaka and Mozambique, as well as in London. Many who had completed courses circulated back closer to the military action in the frontline states, creating a moral and political 'sacrifice' against which decisions to stay had to be justified..<sup>63</sup>

This discussion of the powerful ways Zimbabwe's militant nationalism shaped narratives of exile has already begun to shed some light on the convergent interests of solidarity groups. But understanding the accounts of support and friendly welcome in Britain by some sections of society requires further examination of the activities of diverse anti-imperial organizations. Particularly, it demands attention to the cultivation of hospitality and convivial sociability as an intrinsic part of internationalist solidarity politics.

#### Relations with solidarity organizations

We were in the imperialist den ... but we found there were some friendly lions inside.  
Ngwabe Bhebhe, Harare, 11 April 2010.

Relations with solidarity groups in Britain, particularly the AAM, labour and student movements, were central to Zimbabwean nationalist parties' positive political visibility. Here I discuss the strong emphasis on cosmopolitan conviviality in exiles' narratives of politics and social life in Britain, arguing that this reflected both the cultivation of mutually beneficial strategic relations, but often

---

<sup>58</sup> D. Dabengwa, Daring to storm the heavens: the military strategy of ZAPU 1976-1979, in: N. Bhebhe and T. Ranger (Eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, Oxford, 1995, 24-35.

<sup>59</sup> Mandaza, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Agrippa Madlela, interview, Bulawayo, 8 September 2009.

<sup>61</sup> TC, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Tonderai Makoni, Return, *Pfumo* (January 1972), Antony McAdam Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies Archive, London

<sup>63</sup> Responsibilities for young children were sometimes invoked to justify staying in Britain, as by Simba Makoni, interview, Harare, 31 August 2011.

also impinged on personal, affective domains of life, as captured in Nava's notion of 'visceral cosmopolitanism'.<sup>64</sup>

Solidarity organizations supported party representatives by meeting the costs of offices and other expenses, as well as providing openings for public appearances. Political activism followed events in Rhodesia closely, with notable joint campaigns in response to UDI, over sanctions, the succession of constitutional talks, political trials and extrajudicial hangings, forced conscription, the aerial bombardment of guerrilla camps by Rhodesian forces and the Lancaster House talks in 1979 (Fig. 1).<sup>65</sup> The basic tenet of both African nationalist and solidarity campaigning in Britain post-UDI was encapsulated by the slogan 'NIBMAR': No Independence Before Majority Rule.

Interviewees who were ZAPU or ZANU spokespeople narrated an exhausting whirl of public speaking, political meetings and demonstrations. Many spoke of close relationships with individual Labour Party MPs and AAM activists, notwithstanding an enduring narrative of 'betrayal' by the Labour government. Lawrence Vambe recounted working 'relentlessly' with ZAPU representative Nicholas Samkange lobbying the Commonwealth Relations Office and engaging in 'public speaking, journalism, denouncing pro-Smith elements in Britain as fascist and racist, radio, TV etc'.<sup>66</sup> Ignatius Chigwendere (a ZSU representative studying at Ruskin) recalled grassroots efforts 'address[ing] cops, people in the Labour Party at constituency level, school kids ...'.<sup>67</sup> Where emotions are mentioned, the most common were perhaps 'anger' and 'frustration'. Vambe recounted his 'very vivid memory' of the 'bitterness fostered in us by the pro-Rhodesia crusades ... by the Anglo-Rhodesia Society, the League of Empire Loyalists and the National Front'.<sup>68</sup>

The most famous public face of Rhodesian exile in Britain was Judith Todd, daughter of Rhodesia's last liberal prime minister Garfield Todd. She was a glamorous figure based in Britain as a journalist from 1965, who was closely involved with ZAPU (Fig. 2). Her prominence in the British public eye seems a reflection of contemporary racism and sexism, and the press followed her personal life as well as her politics with prurient interest. The diversity of her speaking engagements, reflected in her papers, are evocative of the range of political platforms she and other prominent Zimbabwean activists used to promote their cause, from teach-ins on radical university campuses, Communist Party women's groups, miners' association and trade union meetings, church groups, political party conferences across the political spectrum and Oxford Union debates. She remembered gaining the nick name 'Miss Nibmar', and described her time in London as 'an inexhaustible adventure in itself', recalling how much she 'loved' the city. Her home was a regular gathering place for Zimbabweans, and, as a former UCR student herself, she described feeling 'maternal' towards the succession of arriving students who were her juniors.<sup>69</sup> She cast her motivation for an unrelenting schedule as being 'the detainees – [ZAPU leader Joshua] Nkomo and my father'.<sup>70</sup>

Student politics was a particularly important domain of activity and friendships. Japhet Ncube was among a group of students who abandoned studies in Czechoslovakia, resenting the segregation of foreign students and racism. He contrasted it with the UK, where he narrated how 'we had a very good time - we hit it off with the Labour Party students .... The spirit was there to help, but it wasn't so much the money ... they'd invite us back, make us feel at home...'.<sup>71</sup> Tendayi Bari was in London from the mid-1960s, training as a nurse then studying at the Polytechnic of Central London and

---

<sup>64</sup> Craggs, Hospitality in geopolitics; Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*.

<sup>65</sup> See Fieldhouse, *Anti Apartheid*, for a chronology of AAM Rhodesia activities.

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence Vambe, NAZ ORAL 233.

<sup>67</sup> Chigwendere, NAZ ORAL 228.

<sup>68</sup> Vambe, NAZ ORAL 223.

<sup>69</sup> Judith Todd, Letters 1966-67. Personal archive, Bulawayo.

<sup>70</sup> Judith Todd, interview, Bulawayo, 16 September 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Japhet Ncube, interview, Bulawayo, 6 September 2009.

helped found the ZANU Women's League. She also highlighted the support from fellow students and the excitement, optimism and cosmopolitan sociability:

There was a very active student union and also an Afro-Asian group that mobilised support and solidarity ... and we met top Labour Party figures. We supported any issues that were anti-capitalism! The ... ideology of egalitarianism was powerful and exciting – the workers would be in charge working with peasants and intellectuals! Women would be free! Heated debates! It was exciting – things were going to change. Now we're back to capitalism ...<sup>72</sup>

Others emphasised how much they enjoyed student life in the UK, underlining the contrast not only to a prior cohort of African students in Britain, but also with the post-2000 cohort of Zimbabwean emigres.<sup>73</sup> As the musician Fred Zindi (Figs 3 and 4) recalled:

I wasn't an activist ... except through my music. My first recorded album was called Okoyo, Zimbabwe on Fire, the band was called Stars of Liberty – all had political connotations .... [T]he drummer was from Jamaica and the saxophone player was from Antigua and the backing vocalist Joy Welsh went on to be famous with Boney M .... I know all the universities in England as a result of the band!... We also played at demos .... Come Saturday, we used to say, 'Who's having a party?' We were looking for parties not work. It was a fun time.<sup>74</sup>

Central London – particularly Bloomsbury and Kings Cross – was a hive of southern African anti-colonial nationalist, and broader revolutionary leftist, activity that facilitated joint action not only with British student sympathizers, but also friendly diplomatic relations among fellow liberation movements and supporting embassies. ZAPU was closest to other 'authentic' (Soviet-backed) southern African liberation movements, and particularly close to the South African National Congress (ANC) and the AAM. Its office in King's Cross led to joint meetings with, among others, Sinn Fein (who had a neighbouring office).<sup>75</sup> ZANU was closer to the South African Pan African Congress (PAC) and other Chinese-backed liberation movements, and for a time, its London office was shared with the PAC and Angola's UNITA as well as the southern Sudanese Anyanya and Malaysian nationalists.<sup>76</sup> Palestinian and Vietnamese groups also feature in accounts of joint revolutionary nationalist politics in London. Embassies of sympathetic governments were part of this anti-imperial conviviality. ZAPU activists remembered parties at the Zambian embassy, ZANU activists remembered 'dinners, not parties, with the Chinese'.<sup>77</sup> Central London meeting places included Africa House (funded by Kwame Nkrumah) and the Africa Centre in Covent Garden (funded through the Catholic Church and opened by Kenneth Kaunda in 1964), and the Marlborough Arms in Gower Street, which gained a reputation as 'the Zimbabwean pub'.

Chemutengwende was a stalwart of the Marlborough Arms, which was close to his office at the Student Christian Movement, and recalled 'a lot of our Ministers used to drink there – ZANU, ZAPU, PAC, the Angolans, Mozambicans – it became a centre for political activists from different African countries, particularly those on the radical side of things rather than straight forward nationalists'.<sup>78</sup> As a ZSU committee member, he represented the liberation movement on the BBC and other public platforms, despite being 'on the fringe of ZANU', as 'a very strong Marxist'. He remembered 'going all over Europe, everywhere, addressing meetings, conferences on imperialism and racism and

---

<sup>72</sup> Tendayi Bari, interview, Harare, 24 March 2011.

<sup>73</sup> On the latter, see J. McGregor and R. Primorac (Eds), *Zimbabwe's New 'Diaspora': Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, Oxford 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Zindi, interview

<sup>75</sup> Don Naik, interview, London, 10 August 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Chemutengwende, interview.

<sup>77</sup> Dr and Mrs Kalayi Nijini, interview, Bulawayo, 9 September 2009; Chemutengwende, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Chemutengwende, interview.

capitalism', and he went to China as part of the British Distinguished Persons Delegation in 1974. His journalism, for the BBC Africa Service, for *Liberation Struggle*, the Trotskyist journal *Black Dwarf*, *Race Today*, for the Kwame Nkrumah Institute of Writers and the Afro-Caribbean Black Studies Group, brought him into close contact with a broad cross-section of prominent British-based left-internationalist intellectuals. He recalled meeting his first wife (editor at *Race Today* and Irish), after submitting an article that was so poorly written that he was 'called to explain what I wanted to say exactly'.<sup>79</sup>

Zimbabwean student networks stretched across western Europe to Scandinavia and into eastern Europe, as did the two rival international youth networks sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States. A former ZAPU representative and his wife recalled 'interacting with the Cubans, Russians, Vietnamese. When I look back, I think wow! We used to have joint meetings, us and the ANC, we'd socialize with students, also Arafat's people and the East Germans. In 1973/4 we all went with ZAPU for the Youth Festival in the GDR...'.<sup>80</sup> Dan Ndlela remembered attending the same Youth Congress from Stockholm and meeting the 'six guys and two ladies' sent by ZAPU-London: 'it's where I met my wife – there were Cubans, North Koreans, Vietnamese, Latin American socialist movements, the socialist working parties of Egypt and Tanzania'.<sup>81</sup> Judith Todd recalled attending the rival (US-aligned) youth congress in Japan and becoming aware belatedly of its Cold War political role, although she recounted taking this as an opportunity to increase understanding of Rhodesia's plight and meet key southern African nationalist leaders.<sup>82</sup>

Most interviewees did not dwell on the emotional difficulties of exile. One mentioned in passing that it was 'harrowing' to leave family behind and be constantly on the move.<sup>83</sup> Judith Todd's letters home to her parents have a cheery tone, and were written to lift their spirits as well as with an eye to the Rhodesian censors. But they occasionally reveal a broader array of feelings – including sadness, homesickness and limbo – that are likely to have been more widespread and have, perhaps, got lost in the up-beat tenor of retrospective accounts of youthful militancy and adventure. There were moments when she wrote of acute 'despondency' at 'the latest action of the Brits', on one occasion describing how 'It's terrible to be so far away from the country one loves, and terrible to watch the South Africans and Zimbabweans trying to accommodate themselves in a city they never really wanted to do more with than visit. We all get a little sad at times...'.<sup>84</sup> During a visit from Vaskar Bashee (one of the expelled 1966 student activists, later a ZAPU representative in the Netherlands), she wrote, 'I said the weekend was emotionally exhausting. The trouble is that as soon as you get a group of Zimbabweans together one starts looking back, or far forward, and remembering the friends and relatives at home. Then you have to joke furiously or dance furiously or listen to sparkling music ... and that only helps for a while because sooner or later you find yourselves sitting and talking about "when we go home" ...'.<sup>85</sup>

This discussion of interviewees' strong emphasis on cosmopolitan sociability as an intrinsic part of political work with diverse solidarity organizations also emphasised how relationships were often more than simply strategic, but impinged on personal lives. Yet so far it has largely echoed public performances of seamless relationships between predominantly black exiles and diverse solidarity groups, including the mostly white student and mainstream left-liberal groups in Britain. To explain why some interviewees felt friendships with whites were shallow, and that their closest personal relationships were with fellow Zimbabweans, Africans and black British communities, it is necessary

---

<sup>79</sup> Chemutengwende, interview.

<sup>80</sup> Nijini, interview. Dr Nijini held a range of ZAPU positions in the UK, and was secretary in the late 1960s.

<sup>81</sup> Dan Ndlela, interview, Harare, 23 March 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Todd, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Kotscho Dube, interview, Bulawayo, 28 August 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Judith Todd, Letter home, 9 April 1967.

<sup>85</sup> Judith Todd, Letter home, 17 April 1967.

to look more closely at the racialized hierarchies and cleavages in contemporary British society, including in the largely middle-class university spaces and internationalist political circles exiles inhabited most fully.

### Relations with Black British groups and experiences of racism

Zimbabwean exiles' sojourns in Britain need to be situated at their specific historic juncture in terms of the politics of race in Britain. This had its own trajectory towards militancy, shaped by a new generation born in Britain who faced exclusion and racism, and the notorious intensified policing that targeted and criminalised young black men.<sup>86</sup> Disillusioned with the assimilationist ideals of their parents, this younger generation developed a more confrontational political style. They were suspicious of both the apparatus of race relations and the anti-racist politics of the left. Prime influences on mobilizations around blackness in the late 1960s were from the USA and Black Power. There was also a new interest in Africa on the part of black British youth, and in the idea of 'return'. It is an oversimplification to read British left politics in this period as entirely dichotomized along racial lines, but as Alleyne points out, joint campaigns over a shared commitment to anti-racism built on alliances that 'were never without tension'.<sup>87</sup>

This highly charged politics of race was an important part of the UK context that youthful militant Zimbabwean party cadres and students entered into. There were multiple socio-political connections between Zimbabweans and black British communities, and many marriages between exiles and Caribbean or black British women. Despite the many boundary-crossing political campaigns and friendships among students and solidarity activists, the closest personal relationships were often with fellow Zimbabwean, African and Afro-Caribbean communities. But there were also differences. Zimbabweans arriving in Britain after 1965 had a positionality that was distinctive not only from the post-war African/Caribbean students, but also from the younger militant, British-born generation. They were not making a 'journey to an expectation' comparable to the earlier students, nor did they bring 'a comprehensive experience of the black Atlantic'.<sup>88</sup> Unlike the angry black British youth, Zimbabweans had no desire to be British. Zimbabwean liberation movements had radicalised from the late 1950s, incorporating symbols of Black Power, but most of my interviewees were not fully embedded in these influences before arriving in Britain. Their prior political experiences were shaped by Rhodesian racial segregation, 'multi-racialism' at UCR, and were mediated primarily by the political practice and teaching of ZAPU and ZANU, either underground or in exile in Zambia and Tanzania. Those coming direct from Rhodesia often narrated London as their first encounter with a wide definition of 'black'.<sup>89</sup>

When asked directly about racism in Britain, interviewees often spoke first about experiences beyond university and campaigning spaces, narrating encountering racism in the street, from the police, in pubs or from landlords. Many recalled National Front demonstrations. University spaces were of course also marked by racialized hierarchies, but were rarely invoked specifically in discussions of racism or as sites for moments of misrecognition. Experiences of accommodation and study were very variable. Zimbabweans were scattered in different parts of the country on more or less politicized campuses. Some were in urban locations where there were significant communities of Zimbabweans as well as significant Caribbean and black British communities, others were more isolated in smaller, less diverse towns. Some were hosted by or had landlords who were fellow

---

<sup>86</sup> Fry, *Staying Power*; P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Chicago, 1991; S. Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, Basingstoke, 1978; B. Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics*, Oxford, 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race*, 31 and 29.

<sup>88</sup> B. Schwarz, Introduction: We have met before: *The Pleasures of Exile A view from England*, in: Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, xvii and xxii.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Dzinotyiweyi, interview, Harare, 14 August 2010.

Zimbabweans, others were in international students' accommodation. Discrimination in seeking accommodation, poor standard rooms or patronising experiences in international hostels that feature prominently in the 'disappointments' and 'dissent' of an earlier generation of African students did not dominate this set of interviews, perhaps because, coming from Rhodesia, racism was expected.

Although most looked back on student sociability as cosmopolitan and some explicitly mentioned white friends, several also emphasised a sense of distance from white students. One female student in Birmingham said 'I didn't really have white friends, but students union parties, we'd join in and we'd go together sometimes to pubs. On Africa day we'd celebrate as African students ... the Jamaican students also joined in .... We cooked African dishes and booked one of the rooms in the students union and keep going all night'.<sup>90</sup> Others reflected explicitly on the contemporary consciousness of, and debates over, race and racism. Zindi recounted 'We accepted that racism is inherent in society and I personally accepted it .... I stood for social secretary for the student union [in North London], which was 90% white – I think they voted me in because I was black .... We also had white friends in my network, one is still my friend, he's in Canada now, a professor, we're still in touch. I used to tell him the racism I experienced ...'.<sup>91</sup>

Trajectories over time were also varied, but most of my interviewees managed to secure a succession of different scholarships extending from diplomas to BAs, Masters and PhDs. Some then went on to professional work in the UK (in law, academia or the civil service). Ignatius Chigwendere assumed an executive position in the Commission for Racial Equality, which he used to raise the funds and expertise for legal aid for ZANU detainees in Zambia.<sup>92</sup> Others circulated out of Britain into work placements with the civil service or academia in African and Commonwealth countries. These opportunities and professional status in Britain were described as diminishing the personal impact of racism. As the lawyer Cyril Ndebele remembered: 'I experienced racism, but no different than how Shonas treat Ndebele, nothing that really affected me. In my legal profession, even whites looked up to me, so I never felt that'.<sup>93</sup> Angeline Kamba spent nearly fifteen years in the UK with her husband Walter, who rose to dean of the law faculty at Dundee University. She narrated belonging where she was known, but still being seen as an anonymous black elsewhere: 'We ... bought a house, settled down, were well known in the neighbourhood, were natives! ... When we left, somebody had an article in the Dundee courier ... 'Scotland has done it again – sending one of its sons to a developing country' .... That's how much we were accepted, though elsewhere you could be just another foreigner'.<sup>94</sup>

There was, however, an important strand in the interviews that revolved around strong 'distrust of white liberals', which may have emerged even more potently with a different interviewer.<sup>95</sup> Some interviewees narrated how this mattered beyond politics to shape personal relations. ZANU as a party upheld an explicit racial exclusivism that contrasted to ZAPU's official stance of multiracial inclusiveness, which made the former politically closer to pan-Africanist, black consciousness and Black Panther groups in the UK. The interviewees who spoke strongly of their distrust of white liberals were all ZANU. One woman, who was on the ZANU committee in London in the late 1970s, remembered:

---

<sup>90</sup> Connie Ncube, interview, Bulawayo, 17 August 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Zindi, interview.

<sup>92</sup> See G. Mazarire, ZANU's external networks; a reappraisal, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43 (2017) 83-108.

<sup>93</sup> Ndebele, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Angeline Kamba, interview, Harare, 7 April 2010.

<sup>95</sup> TC, interview.

Social life was mixed with politics, we'd go to the Africa Centre, we focussed on all things African .... We didn't mix so much with the British students except at a technical level – our social life was Zimbabweans, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, because at the time British people were not welcoming .... We didn't go to church, we associated that with colonialism .... We had trouble looking for a Catholic priest for our marriage, but eventually found one who was Irish .... We were involved in the Justice for Rhodesia campaigns; people got assistance via those campaigns. We met white people like that, but we didn't really socialise. There was always an evaluation: OK or not OK? We knew about liberals. We felt you couldn't afford to be liberal, you needed to make a stand, which side to support.<sup>96</sup>

As another ZANU activist who studied in both the UK and USA remembered, 'My position in terms of ideology was that the nationalistic part of it had to be first and foremost. If those goals happened to coincide with what the socialist ideals said, that was fine .... We were very suspicious of white liberals ... in both the UK and USA, we couldn't trust them. The Afro-American groups we considered to be more genuine...'.<sup>97</sup>

Solidarity from black British organizations was a consistent feature of Zimbabwean exiles' accounts, with many recounting that 'they did more for us than we did for them', 'whenever there was a demo, they were the majority – they were many and we were few, and they supported us'.<sup>98</sup> The contemporary black British interest in Africa lent itself to openness. Doreen Sibanda, then a young black British activist in the Midlands, recalled her generation's disaffection, and how she met her Zimbabwean husband through an initiative linking racism in Britain and southern Africa:

At that time, the Caribbeans, the blacks were very keen to know more about Africa .... [There was] a real realisation, reconnection, recognition – these people don't want us, this is actually where we belong .... Through that you began to meet real African people, as opposed to the fantasy of it, and realise you've got the same sort of struggles, something in common.<sup>99</sup>

Many Zimbabwean men married middle-class Afro-Caribbean women. The Mangwendes married in the Martin Luther King Centre in Birmingham; the Sibandas had a white wedding at church followed by a reception at Carib International in Derby, with 'lots of reggae music and Caribbean food'.<sup>100</sup>

Yet there were also differences. Some interviewees contrasted their own striving for education with what they saw as a disregard for education among Caribbean and black British communities, though this could also be articulated as a class issue that included the white working class. Some recounted feeling a sense of difference 'whenever the conversation turned to Britishness'. Owen Tshabangu recalled of his time in Birmingham, 'I remember going to dances. Not so much to the Caribbean clubs – they weren't so easy to get on with. We used to attend black parties, but we didn't like the ganja. I was more in with the left – with Militant and the Communist Party of Great Britain'.<sup>101</sup> A quest for respectability could contribute to this sense of distance. One woman narrated how, despite not being 'churchy' in Britain, her missionary schooling shaped her perspective, recounting: 'Some of the [Zimbabwean] kids – if they looked to Jamaicans for company, they'd go Rasta, smoking

---

<sup>96</sup> MM, interview, Harare, 24 August 2010.

<sup>97</sup> TC, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Chimutengwende, interview; Zindi, interview.

<sup>99</sup> Doreen Sibanda, interview, Harare, 23 March 2011.

<sup>100</sup> Sibanda, interview.

<sup>101</sup> Tshabangu, interview.

mbanje .... We look[ed] down on that sort of behaviour. We were brought up through the mission churches'.<sup>102</sup>

Support from black British groups for liberation and decolonization in Africa, as in other sections of the solidarity movement, was also characterised by a lack of understanding or interest in the contentious internal politics of the liberation movements themselves. Venetta Neros, a Black Panther activist whose family was from Antigua, married ZAPU activist Cyril Ndebele when she was a PhD student at King's College London and remembered 'We were a bit impatient with all the splits, didn't really understand it all, we identified with liberation, didn't really understand the issues that divided people'.<sup>103</sup>

For all the interviewees, their engagement with Zimbabwean nationalism and their sense of themselves as Zimbabwean was primary. This, combined with class identities, shaped reactions to British racism and definitions of blackness that were debated and mobilized at the time in black internationalist and domestic British anti-racist politics. It could produce both a sense of unity with and difference from Caribbean and black British communities. Yet Zimbabwean nationalism also had its own powerful internal dynamics which were important in shaping both exile politics in the UK and return to Zimbabwe.

#### Relations among Zimbabweans and with liberation movement headquarters

The transnational lens adopted here means it is important to analyse exiles' strong nationalism and its performativity not only among Zimbabweans living in Britain, but also through relationships with liberation movement leaderships based in southern Africa. These relations mattered, not only shaping departure narratives and political practice in Britain, but also the process of return home. While relations among Zimbabweans or loyalties to nationalist parties could be narrated and performed publically as taking on the status of metaphorical 'families', it is important to scrutinize what this means, and to look beyond the public accounts of unity to discuss not only positive support roles but also dysfunctional propensities and episodes.

Many of my interviewees commented on a 'live and let live' attitude among Zimbabweans in the UK, speaking of political, as well as community and family, events that crossed party lines, from weddings to baby-sitting.<sup>104</sup> Some stressed the shared outrage at British government action, which fostered joint action.<sup>105</sup> Common intellectual interests in revolutionary theory could also bring people together. Ndebele remembered how 'the more educated in ZAPU were flirting with ZANU intellectually' due to the appeal of Maoist revolutionary philosophies.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, student politics could crosscut party loyalties. The first UCR students to arrive from those expelled in 1966 and 1973 recounted lobbying for those left behind regardless of party affiliation. Later, in 1975 and 1976, many recalled the ZSU coordination of a cross party campaign to write letters to 'O' Level school-leavers in Rhodesia, promising scholarships and encouraging individuals to 'just come', leading to an escalation of new arrivals then a Home Office clampdown.

Yet the frictions of exile politics are a major feature of many accounts, to the point, for some, of complete disillusion with liberation movements. ZAPU representative Kotscho Dube recalled

---

<sup>102</sup> FU, interview, 8 August 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Cyril and Venetta Ndebele, interview.

<sup>104</sup> Mrs Nijini, interview. Connie Ncube had come to Britain through ZAPU but remembered how 'When Nyashanu got married, all the [ZAPU and ZANU] students went to Birmingham', interview, 17 August 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Vambe NAZ ORAL 223 stressed joint gatherings post UDI; see also Chigore on 'cordial' joint fundraising at Sussex, interview, Harare, 12 August 2010; Makoni, interview.

<sup>106</sup> Ndebele, interview.

clearing two new ZANU arrivals at Heathrow, only to find himself being denounced by them in a public meeting a week later.<sup>107</sup> Vambe recollected the divisive effects of infiltration:

The Smith regime got information which it used to intensify the hostility not only between ZANU and ZAPU but also within each .... At one ZAPU meeting, confined, we thought, only to the executive of the London branch ... before we had communicated our views to Lusaka, in a matter of days, a publication, supposedly published in East Germany, reached our desk in London. In it was an article recording some of the views expressed at this particular meeting warning Joshua Nkomo that the Mashonas, otherwise Maholes, were plotting to take over ZAPU to the detriment of Lobengula's descendents .... Subsequently, we established that Rhodesian intelligence were responsible.<sup>108</sup>

The suspicion of infiltration contributed to relations with party headquarters that are more accurately described as 'suspicious' and 'distanced' than 'umbilical', and appear as such repeatedly in the oral histories. Indeed, the continuity of ZAPU and ZANU activity in Britain over the fifteen-year period belies a turbulent politics, as the echoes of broader conflicts between and within the liberation movements ramified in the metropole. There were times when committees fell apart due to attempted takeovers by particular factions and occasions when headquarters intervened heavily handedly.

Relations between ZAPU London and Lusaka frayed severely in the early 1970s when the movement was paralysed by internal dispute, ethnic polarization and a formal split (that gave birth to the short-lived Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe, FROLIIZI). This period of 'crisis' for ZAPU ramified in London, as ZAPU Lusaka (through George Nyandoro) took legal action to oust the London ZAPU representative (Nicholas Chitsiga). The incoming representative, Kotscho Dube, remembered it as a 'demoralizing' period when external support dried up, including funds for his own rent and subsistence. He recalled how difficult it was to retain cordial relations with the 'hard boiled' military leadership in Lusaka, and for a time concentrated on his studies.<sup>109</sup>

But the London-based students' sense of their own importance as an intellectual and ideological vanguard undoubtedly also contributed to strained relations with party headquarters, as Cyril Ndebele explained:

We didn't entirely take everything that the leadership in Lusaka told us, we weren't very popular with the executive in Lusaka, we were the revolutionary arm, the intellectuals, thinking ahead, thinking that we could give the party direction. We organised an international ZAPU students' conference in London, where all the students from Europe, USSR, USA, Sweden came over to attend .... We informed Lusaka ... but it was a closed conference for students only, no member from the executive in Lusaka was going to be allowed to come. They [Lusaka HQ] tried to disallow that, they sent Edward Ndlovu, and we kept him out! I went to explain to him in a pub in Hampstead Heath that we are very loyal ... but he couldn't accept, as ZAPU leader, that he was excluded from a ZAPU meeting! But we excluded him and talked freely. We produced a masterpiece document. Edward said, 'We're going to use that document as toilet paper!' I know that the document as it was became the manifesto of ZAPU, the ideological position. That was the document almost in full, it never ended up in the toilet – I don't know who rescued it.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Dube, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Vambe, NAZ ORAL 223.

<sup>109</sup> Dube, interview.

<sup>110</sup> Ndebele, interview.

In the mid 1970s, when initiative at the warfront shifted to ZANU, it too experienced multiple crises that left their mark in the UK party structures, and the demoralised drifted away to swell the ranks of Muzorewa's United African National Council (UANC). Indeed, according to some, ZANU 'nearly died' in the UK.<sup>111</sup> Interviewees recalled the internecine strife, accusations and attempts at control by party HQ in southern Africa. Mandaza recounted that 'There was ... intense suspicion of students, of intellectuals, of people in London .... Mugabe had his agents, there would be war in the meetings. Exile politics - it was awful!'<sup>112</sup> Others remembered debate being shut down by party slogans and raised fists.<sup>113</sup>

By 1976, control by ZANU over exile party committees was enhanced as the representatives became a formal diplomatic corps, accountable to ZANU's Department of External Relations. Simba Makoni, who had arrived as a student activist in 1973, helped set up and formalize a hierarchy of expanding committees, taking on the role of ZANU representative for western Europe from his student flat in Leicester. His account of his own contribution to ZANU's activity in the UK, which he combined with doctoral research, remained shaped by a careful diplomacy, giving no hint of the conflicts that others conveyed.<sup>114</sup>

In reality, however, the scaled up military effort and enhanced control had contradictory effects on British-based activism for both parties. On the one hand guerrilla armies' expansion gave a huge boost to morale. Visits to the vastly expanded refugee and guerrilla camps were narrated as powerfully affecting. Ndlela remembered his return to Lusaka from London: 'It was a pilgrimage! We were welcomed at the airport by comrades. In between teaching, you'd visit the [ZAPU] camps. That was both personally and politically meaningful to me. I'd see my young sisters, two younger brothers, one of whom later died crossing the Zambezi .... The camps were inspiring and gave determination'.<sup>115</sup> Ndebele remembered the experience of visiting the camps as 'electric – it made your hair stand on end – the depth of the commitment was deeply moving...'.<sup>116</sup>

Others, in contrast, narrated first-hand encounters with militarism and internal power struggles that could be disillusioning, or even 'a shock'. Mandaza, for example, left university in the UK for Mozambique and recounted how frightening it was to arrive in the ZANU house in Maputo in the tense aftermath of an internal upheaval: 'It was a very depressing place to be, and frightening! I remember that first night I heard someone being tortured and beaten up ...'.<sup>117</sup> But party control over public versions of the struggle and performances of nationalism in exile worked to silence articulation of criticism. Mandaza continued to explain how he could not speak of what he had experienced. Going back to the exile communities in Britain meant being expected to perform as a liberation hero, which was 'the most difficult, because ... you couldn't tell them – if you came to London you were a hero now! Coming from the struggle...'. In Mandaza's account, ZANU's transformation of exile committees into diplomatic units was about control not only of the image of the war, but also funds, following misappropriations by ZANU's London committee.<sup>118</sup>

Some recalled becoming aware of such tensions only much later, stressing rather their own youthful idealism and the optimism of solidarity campaigns. Zindi recalled:

---

<sup>111</sup> TC, interview; Mukonoweshuro, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Mandaza, interview.

<sup>113</sup> Personal communication from Brian Raftopoulos.

<sup>114</sup> Makoni, interview.

<sup>115</sup> Ndlela, interview.

<sup>116</sup> Ndebele, interview.

<sup>117</sup> Mandaza, interview.

<sup>118</sup> Mandaza, interview.

In 1979 [during the Lancaster House talks] we played at a gig in Camden Hall and raised £16,000 .... It was full capacity, packed ..., organized by Peter Tatchell, by then a communist. We gave that money to the ZANU committee – Rex Chirwara, Kempton Makamure and Frederick Shava .... We understand not all the money reached Mozambique. They insisted we take some money, but we were young and very revolutionary and we insisted they keep all the money. We played for nothing and they benefited from our sweat. I don't know really what got there, but what we know is that they bought flats in London!<sup>119</sup>

This strong forward-looking nationalist sentiment obviously also influenced these interviewees' decision to go home after ZANU(PF) won Zimbabwe's 1980 independence elections. Some recounted a very personal process of 'being called' back into top jobs by ZANU(PF) leaders including Prime Minister Mugabe himself. Although supporters of the losing ZAPU remembered not just disappointment, but 'devastation', there were opportunities back home for them too.<sup>120</sup> The Zimbabwean Public Service Commission toured Britain recruiting exiles and the Africanisation of state bureaucracies meant opportunities were plentiful for those with degrees, including for critics and some ZAPU cadres (though the latter were often relegated to junior positions).<sup>121</sup> The backbone of the new Africanized civil service, ministerial posts, academia, the legal and medical professions were highly educated returning exiles who had studied in a wide diversity of locations.

## Conclusion

The fact that exile ended for these interviewees, most of whom went home and managed to build successful careers undoubtedly contributed to the upbeat tenor of accounts of their sojourns in the UK. However, I have argued that the militarism of Zimbabwean liberation movements meant that even at the time, 'exile' was not fetishized among political activists and the oral histories conveyed few echoes of the usual tropes of hardship and separation, loneliness and loss. These exiles' specific positionality – on scholarships, anticipating return as professional and political elites – afforded relative privileges in relation to compatriots enduring the hardships of war, as well as in relation to black British communities contesting contemporary racialized exclusions.

My main arguments here, however, are broader. The first is against a tendency to universalise a singular 'exile condition' and in favour of an approach that locates exile, historically and discursively, in transnational spaces as well as in terms of individual life trajectories. Treating narratives of exile as performative and transnational means asking what work they did in relation to contemporary political discourses.<sup>122</sup> Here this involves situating them in relation to the moral and political rallying messages of military struggle that sought to recruit fighters, raise funds and maintain legitimacy, as well as with regard to the ideals of diverse solidarity activists, who were necessarily ignorant of internal liberation movement politics and sought wide support for their own varied projects of social and political transformation. The performances of joint solidarity and related convivial sociability promoted optimistic, utopian views of the struggle and Zimbabwean futures. In these stagings the voices and embodied presence of Zimbabwean students were important. They could represent the heroism and idealism of the struggle in person and speak with authority of first hand encounters with repression or the frontline of war from their own pasts or personal networks. Just like the more formal diplomatic hospitality discussed by Craggs, solidarity work produced atmospheres that were 'intangible' but 'crucial to the production of shared affinities' even if they were 'temporary and masked rather than altered relations of power'.<sup>123</sup> Although joint public performances worked to

---

<sup>119</sup> Zindi, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Isaiah Magagula, interview, Bulawayo, 3 September 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Highly qualified ZAPU cadres' entry into government was often delayed, with many getting top jobs only after the Unity Agreement of 1987.

<sup>122</sup> Israel, *South African Political Exile*.

<sup>123</sup> Craggs, *Hospitality in geopolitics*, 90.

downplay and occlude conflict, rivalries and boundary-policing within and between liberation movements themselves, they were not totally obscured. The oral histories of politicized Zimbabwean exiles convey echoes of both convivial diplomatic performances and the tensions that were not fully hidden, or can only be discussed now.

Second, the article offers new dimensions to existing scholarship on Zimbabwean nationalisms in the making. The accounts of sojourns and activism in Britain can help reveal what is missing in versions of the independence struggle that revolve exclusively around the heroism and sacrifice of the guerrilla fighter.<sup>124</sup> Exiles' accounts of their activism and study abroad are irrelevant to bitter post-independence controversies over who should be awarded the status of national 'hero' or who suffered most. But they matter in other ways. 'Contributions' in the form of educational, legal and diplomatic roles were personally significant and structured many life narratives. Moreover, civilian party cadres' activism and broader lives can help recover initiatives and networks that mattered to liberation movements' international standing and legitimacy, as well as demonstrating the enduring emotional power of militant nationalism and the liberation war. Scholarships funded as soft diplomacy by Cold War rivals and others created opportunities for a significant cohort of black Zimbabweans to achieve educational distinction and prestige. The public profile of highly educated returning exiles after independence, and the valuation of postgraduate and professional qualifications in recruitment to public office undoubtedly helped reproduce Zimbabwe's substantially consolidated state bureaucratic institutions (at least initially), as well as reinforcing the importance of educational distinction in postcolonial ideas about status.

Third, Zimbabwean narratives of exile in Britain provide a new vantage point from which to revisit debates over postcoloniality, urban cosmopolitanism and the African presence in Britain. As nationalists and temporary sojourners circulating through the country at a particular moment in time, their positionality was specific and transnational. The welcome from solidarity activists and the spaces created for joint public performances of Zimbabwean nationalist commitment created a different set of experiences from those of a 1950s generation of African and Caribbean students and intellectuals who travelled to Britain on a 'journey to an expectation' premised on a shared Britishness, but instead experienced racialized exclusion and misrecognition. Cultural politics in Britain in the late 1960s were different. The cosmopolitan affective spaces in middle-class networks on university campuses and in political campaigns seem much less confined than the 'fugitive landscapes' of 1950s Soho dance clubs and black internationalist London.<sup>125</sup> Exiles' strong identification as Zimbabwean and their preoccupation with return allowed for both political convergences and differences with a militant generation of young black British activists. While a section of the interviewees (particularly in ZANU networks) emphasised a lack of welcome in Britain, the shallowness of political friendships with whites, and primary social networks among fellow Zimbabweans, Africans, Afro-Caribbean and black British communities, in most narratives the boundary-crossing, cosmopolitan sociability of student and solidarity circles comes across strongly notwithstanding the confrontational 're-racialized' politics of this period.

The joint performances of anti-imperialism in campaigns for black majority rule in Rhodesia did not mean that racism and other intersectional boundaries and cleavages were absent. I have tried to shed light on the tensions and divisions that marked exile and solidarity. These were masked by the mobilizing metaphors of 'unity', 'family' and 'umbilical connection', and they included not only racialized divides, class or gender hierarchies, but also liberation movements' own internal politics and leaders' attempts at long distance control. Recovering these frictions, debates and forms of sociability shows that middle-class spaces on university campuses and internationalist southern African campaigning in Britain in this period deserve more space than they have hitherto received in

---

<sup>124</sup> Critiques include Moore, ZANU-PF and the ghosts of foreign funding, Munochiveyi, 'War-vet nation?' and Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya (Eds), *Grotesque or Redemptive*.

<sup>125</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 322.

reflections over the processes through which convivial urban cosmopolitan spaces have developed over time in the UK. Exile, I have shown, need not be remembered in terms of Said's 'essential sadness'.<sup>126</sup> This matters beyond theoretical debates over displacement. Locating African students' narratives and performances of nationalist activism during the protracted and uncertain process of Rhodesia's decolonization and Zimbabwe's independence points not only to the opportunities this conjuncture created for some. It can also provide new insight into middle-class spaces and transnational networks that helped shape both African postcolonial elites and the politics of race, class and the African presence in Britain.

---

<sup>126</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 137