

“Self-Serving Or Self-Effacing?” An Analysis Of The Zimbabwe-United Kingdom Diaspora`s Role In Human Rights Advocacy

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***Abstract**— This paper conceptualizes the significance of human rights activism by the Zimbabwean diaspora in the United Kingdom by analyzing how the diaspora advocates for the promotion of the rights of the people in Zimbabwe. It critiques the strategic essentialism theory that is used by the government of Zimbabwe as a basis to discredit the work of transnational advocacy groups. The research advances this position by articulating that the diaspora does not falsify nor simplify themselves to garner external support on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. It establishes and shows the significance of transnational advocacy by articulating how the Zimbabwean diaspora addresses and brings to the attention of the international community human rights violations in Zimbabwe that would otherwise not have seen the light of day due to the absence of a conducive environment in that country that stifles the organization of protests under repressive laws such as the public order and security act¹ of 2009. **Keywords**— strategic essentialism, transnational advocacy, public order and security act, Zimbabwe diaspora.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora engagements have been instrumental in shaping policies at home and abroad. Gamlen (2006) postulates that states hope that diaspora engagement policies will help them to manage the scale of their political and economic manoeuvres both by leveraging powerful expatriates to upscale their concerns into global-scale arenas and by exerting control on urban-scale transnational dynamics through closer engagement with migrant civil society. This shows that the scale and influence of the diaspora cannot be underestimated. The diaspora has the power and potential to influence the nature of home politics and contribute to social change.

Many scholars have conceptualised the diaspora and the early discussions on the diaspora were firmly rooted in a conceptual ‘homeland.’ They were concerned with a paradigmatic case or a small number of core cases. The paradigmatic case was the Jewish diaspora, some dictionary definitions of diaspora, until recently, did not simply illustrate but defined the word with reference to that case (Sheffer, 2003; 9). Cohen (1997) defines the features of diasporas as groupings that have dispersed from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions. Cohen further sub categories the diasporas as either, labour

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¹ <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/zimbabwe-POSA.pdf> accessed 29/08/15

diaspora such as the indentured Indians, Imperial diaspora such as the British, trade diaspora such as the Lebanese and or Chinese and also the deterritorialised diaspora such as the Caribbean peoples, Sindhis and Parsis. This shows that diasporas are not a monolithic entity and are heterogeneous in nature thus any attempt to study diaspora should account for these varied distinctions.

Zimbabwe is a country that has been plagued by human rights violations and has been at the scrutiny of the international community for a long time. A significant number of its citizens have sought refuge in many countries and a significantly large proportion is domiciled in the United Kingdom. Zimbabwe has been in the United Kingdom (UK)'s top ten asylum receiving nations since 2000 (UNHCR, 2009). This is attributed to the unprecedented economic decline and political instability that has prevailed in Zimbabwe. Not only does the UK receive most of its asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, the UK is also the top destination for Zimbabweans after South Africa. Having fled the socio-economic, political and human rights challenges many are now involved in human rights advocacy with various local, regional and international lobby groups.

The Zimbabwean diaspora can thus be defined as a victim diaspora given their circumstances of having fled economic and political persecution in the 1990s to seek refuge in the United Kingdom. A victim diaspora is classified as a class of people who have been banished from their place of origin and sent to another land. Usually as a result of a traumatic event, like conquest, persecution, enslavement, genocide or exile (Cohen, 1997). Zimbabweans in the UK have migrated for economic and political reasons as well as to study and to join family members. Moreover, because migration from Zimbabwe to the UK is characterised by different and mixed motives for migration and includes people across the spectrum of immigration statuses, including asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants, both of whom are excluded from the regular labour market, the impact of these factors on both transnational activities and capabilities should be examined (Bloch, 2008).

It is imperative to note that the diaspora is very significant because of its immunity to repressive laws that make it impossible for Zimbabweans to demonstrate or express any dissenting views to those of the current ruling government under the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). As part of its clampdown on dissenting voices, the government introduced and selectively applied repressive legislation such as the *Broadcasting Services Act* (BSA) of 2001², with provisions of the Act as contained in Section 9(2) and (3) which restricts signal carriers. It stipulates that, “only one signal carrier license shall be issued to a person other than a public broadcaster” and “with the exception of a public broadcaster, a broadcasting license and a carrier license shall not be issued to the same applicant.” Once again this is designed to centralise transmitting signal which undoubtedly is intended to be used as a means of control. This is how the incumbent maintains its political hegemony by controlling the media. The provision is unconstitutional as it infringes on people's rights to freely express themselves through broadcasting without hindrance. Other repressive laws include the *Public Order and Security Act* (POSA), the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (AIPPA) and the *Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act* which are aimed at restricting the rights of the majority of Zimbabweans to freely associate, assemble and express themselves. Specific provisions of these laws have been used by the government to narrow the space for open public debate, silence those perceived to be critical of its policies, and shield itself from domestic and international scrutiny. For instance Section 33 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act Chapter 9:23 stipulates that it is a Criminal offence to insult or mock the President³. Thus whereas Zimbabweans in that country cannot be actively involved in human rights advocacy without reproach from the government the diaspora can and is an important player in

²<http://www.davidcoltart.com/2001/10/a-critique-of-the-zimbabwean-broadcasting-services-and-political-parties-finances-acts/#sthash.ZhVmTgUz.dpuf> (accessed 23/08/15)

³<http://www.crisiszimbabwe.org/component/content/article/41-news/591-when-will-the-government-recognise-that-persecution-of-gays-and-lesbians-is-wrong-1154.html> (accessed 18/08/15)

this regard. Kuhlmann (2010) notes that Zimbabweans abroad have therefore searched for other ways of participation in the political life of their home country. Using the alternative democratic space in some of their receiving countries, such as the United Kingdom, politically active Zimbabweans in the diaspora still try to influence domestic political processes in their country of origin through other, non-electoral means.

The government of Zimbabwe is critical of the diaspora and blames it for example, in his speech at Independence Day in April 2006, the President, Mugabe blamed Zimbabweans for joining the diaspora in the United Kingdom:

You might go to England, but you will be discriminated against there. You will be given menial jobs like looking after old people in their homes. If you flee then who will make the country better? Is it Mugabe alone? Did I fight for the country alone? The answer is no. It was a collective exercise [...]. We should remain united, love each other and help each other and know that we are all Zimbabweans especially in the face of the current challenges. Zimbabwe is one country and is the only country we have. If it's the only country we have, let's make it great because people fought for it [...]. You might flee and go to South Africa or the UK, but we will meet; nyaya haiperi [the crimes will not be forgiven].⁴

The issue at hand therefore relates to the different interpretations of diaspora activism, with the Zimbabwean government being critical of it whilst on the other hand the diaspora remains resolute and has been at the forefront of campaigning against the regime. This love-hate relationship has necessitated the need to seek answers to and demystify accusations of the Zimbabwean diaspora essentialising itself to gain sympathy from the international community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been vast amount of literature on diaspora engagement but the literature on the Zimbabwean diaspora has tended to focus on the economic realm especially in lieu of remittances that the diaspora sends back home. There is limited research on the supposed influence of the Zimbabwe-UK diaspora in humanitarian initiatives. There has been an emphasis on the economic realm as exemplified by (McGregor,2010) who documents the economic sphere in the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, mostly involved in the care work sector. This review analyses the general broader text in diaspora studies then dwells on the Zimbabwean case.

Diaspora organizations are often involved in activities to increase public awareness about the homeland conflict, and play an important role in framing conflict issues. Furthermore, they develop social networks to accommodate newcomers and find housing, jobs and asylum. They often form religious groups, set up language courses, and are engaged in all sorts of social events to celebrate national holidays, rituals and ceremonies. Demmers (2007) further avers that as it has become increasingly hard to settle and assimilate in the hostland diasporas are more likely to continue to form in their erstwhile homeland. Today what we have at hand is many different diaspora groups in many different host countries that are trying to influence policy in both home and host countries.

The Zimbabwe government has been critical of the diaspora and any opposing force critical of its rule, it does so by what (Kriger,2003:72-76) terms the creation of a "party-nation" and a "party-state" as well as the maintenance of a hegemonic and

⁴ Come Home, Let's Rebuild Zimbabwe', Association for Zimbabwe Journalists website, 20 April 2006. (Accessed 20/18/2015)

monologic narrative of the nation that casts ZANU-PF as the divinely ordained heir to the nationalist revolutionary spirit running from the primary resistance of the 1890s to the mass nationalism of the 1960s and armed liberation struggle of the 1970s. The messianic role has received a boost from the notion of a vanguard political party that led the masses and knew what the people wanted (Chitando 2005:223-25). Any dissenting voices such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) oppositional political party and the diaspora are viewed with skepticism and the government engages in strategically essentialising its opposers such as the MDC being labelled as not being

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(Mbimba 2009)

an authentic Zimbabwean political party but rather a creation of the UK and the United States of America (USA) as part of their neoimperialist agenda of regime change. The diaspora receives its fair share of criticism by being essentialised as involved in transnational or diasporic politics which is characterized as the practice of supporting or opposing homeland political regimes (Mavroudi, 2008: 59) largely because the Diaspora are not able to directly participate in the home politics. Mbimba (2009) notes that On Saturday 20 June 2009, Morgan Tsvangirai, long-standing leader of the former opposition political party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe was heckled and booed off the pulpit of Southwark Cathedral, London. This followed his emphatic message and call to the crowd of up to 1000 Zimbabweans that there was now peace and stability in the country

and that ‘... Zimbabweans must come home ...’ the diversity of the Diaspora is revealed more in the cyberspace submissions made in the aftermath of this event. In these submissions, the diaspora in Britain or London was described as an ‘ignorant bunch of persons’; ‘uninformed, fake asylum seekers’ and not real victims of violence in Zimbabwe. This depicts the extent to which the diaspora faces backlashes from not just the government of Zimbabwe but within members of the diaspora itself. These statements also epitomize the extent to which the diaspora is essentialised by its critiques.

Smith (2007) has brought together various articles on diaspora groups and their role in international conflict. As a result of comparing various cases, he has arrived at the conclusion that “diaspora groups are internally heterogeneous and different parts of the same diaspora can and do have different interests, defined among other things by class, gender, generation, occupation and religion” (Smith, 2007:5). Therefore it is very important to avoid generalizations when we talk about a diaspora community in general. This is a position supported by (Pasura, 2010) arguing against viewing diaspora as a monolithic entity such as Palestine identity or Irish identity, favoring a more nuanced approach to diaspora groupings as exemplified in the ethnographic study of Zimbabweans within the UK at various settings such as a pub, a barbeque/gochi-gochi, the Vigil, and in Wigan. As (Bloch, 2005: 15) explains, “in the UK the asylum system also results in deskilling among professionals who are unable to work legally while waiting for their case to be determined, and are often unable to practice their chosen profession as qualifications obtained overseas are often not recognized at the equivalent level. Is this what motivates the Zimbabwean people to be involved in advocacy since they are not legally allowed to be working? (Pasura, 2010) avers that although the Zimbabwe Vigil is open to all Zimbabweans, it draws its participants primarily from asylum seekers, refugees, MDC members, and white Zimbabweans. While some authors perceive diasporas as members of an ethnic community who live outside the homeland; others argue that diaspora is more than an essentialist form of ethnic group members. It is an elite mobilized political project, and the diaspora is constructed, rather than a natural result of mass migration. The research will explore whether there have been any changes in the demographics of those attending the vigil considering the fact that a number of political events have occurred in Zimbabwe including the disintegration of the opposition, the unity government and subsequently a 2013 electoral victory for Mugabe, notwithstanding the fact that it was marred by controversy of electoral fraud . The research will explore whether these shifts have affected the attendance of protestors

and the demography and interests of protestors.

Clifford (1994) avers that cross-cutting debates around the hybrid or essentialised notion of diaspora have been discussed about the relationship between diaspora and nationalism in line with accounts of diaspora entailing multiple attachments. Diaspora consciousness has been framed as in tension with and even incommensurate with nationalism. The research is a departure from the work on the geographies of diasporic politics (Carter, 2005, 2007; Dickinson and Bailey, 2007; Yeh 2007; Mavroudi, 2008, 2010) which outlines that diasporas are not necessarily transgressive, and are involved in boundary maintenance activities which may be extreme, and narrowly constructed. Whilst acknowledging attempts to create diasporic political change can be fraught with tension as voices and opinions struggle to be heard and also how diasporas are not neatly organized political units, united under a single cause but are replete with contradictory positionalities as individuals and groups articulate different ways of being, feeling and acting diasporic. It will show that the Zimbabwean diaspora is not strategically essentialised because it depicts a true version of human rights accounts in the country as shown by this study. The government on the other hand is the one that engages in essentialising and depicting the diaspora as a falsified entity and puppet of the west. McGregor and Primorac (2010) make the point that while President Mugabe mocked the diaspora for being 'unpatriotic', the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), Gideon Gono urged Zimbabweans to work abroad and to remit foreign currency back to Zimbabwe. This shows the fact that the diaspora has been at the mercy of politics and economic concern from the country though the government prefers engaging with it economically rather than in political and human rights issues

Schiller (2004: 570) avers that diaspora communities tend to create a softer version of the conflict dynamics back home in the host land and produce their own way of "struggle" such as protests, public demonstrations, theatre plays, and lobby activities. This is often treated with suspicion in the host countries as postulated by (Vertovec, 2006) who noted that some people resented migrants because of the "village mentality" which is the tendency to be concerned with what is happening back in their village of origin and with their own continuing social status there than trying to be successful within their immediate locality in the UK. Thus the research will seek to establish whether Zimbabwean human rights activists and their attachment with politics back home is as a result of failure and unwillingness to integrate into the British society. It will be interesting to note whether those who have integrated into the system and are holders of the much fancied British passport, asylum papers and or citizenship are involved in human rights advocacy or is it intricately a contested arena for those aspiring to gain this social status? What are the motivations then for those who integrated into the British system and holders of citizenship to continue the fight for a democratic Zimbabwe? These are some of the contentious issues the research seeks to unravel and conceptualize.

Lobbying for rights in the UK has become an important aspect of Zimbabwean diaspora politics. There is a significant overlap between Zimbabwean activism on the issue of asylum and the extension of Zimbabwean opposition politics in Britain—a conflation of host and homeland politics that is characteristic of diaspora political engagement (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). This research concurs with this assertion and will unravel how the changes in the home politics in Zimbabwe have contributed to shifting patterns in diaspora activism considering the main oppositional party the Movement for democratic change is now fragmented and has split into MDC-Tsvangirai and MDC (Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, 2014). The research will seek to articulate how these changes have impacted on diaspora engagement. There has also been a significant drop in the number of asylum claims by Zimbabweans over the years, it will be vital to articulate what effect this has had on diaspora activism since most activists were drawn from the people caught up in the asylum process. The research will rope in (Pasura, 2010) ethnographic studies of the Zim vigil. Pasura noted that for many vigil participants, the assumption seemed to be that freedom comes through and with the MDC. Given the fact

that MDC has split how has this affected the rhythm of the vigil, what are the new issues that the vigil is engaged with. Considering the different timescale between Pasura`s research and new issues in 2015 it will be essential to highlight whether the vigil is still drawn along party lines.

Having analyzed different scholarship on the diaspora engagement efforts from different contexts whether in conflict or non-conflict situations it can be noted that there is a dearth of information pertaining to current and ongoing human rights advocacy initiatives by the Zimbabwe diaspora community mainly as a result of a myriad of factors relating but not limited to a weakened oppositional party, the movement for democratic change and donor fatigue in light of the fact that there have not been any notable changes to the Zimbabwe situation despite years of pumping aid and supporting non-governmental organizations involved in advocacy work. There have been documentations about the economic activity as well as the political ramifications but there is a gap in knowledge in the social activism with regards to the actors and their differing interests. Considering this is a current and ongoing engagement it is significant to document these initiatives as they have a direct bearing on foreign policy of the respective countries and can provide important recommendations on future diaspora engagement efforts.

III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper will critique the Strategic essentialism theory. This is a theory that refers to a strategy that nationalities, ethnic groups or minority groups can use to present themselves. While strong differences may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves they engage in continuous debates, it is sometimes advantageous for them to temporarily "essentialize" themselves and to bring forward their group identity in a simplified way to achieve certain goals, or to oppose the levelling impact of global culture (Ritzer, 2007) This contemporary theory will inform the research and aid in appreciating the dichotomy around transnational advocacy.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The project thus uses primary and secondary data in a quest to comprehend the diaspora activism by Zimbabweans in the UK. There is the use of web analysis where various websites of organizations involved in advocacy work related to the Zimbabwean diaspora is concerned are meticulously analyzed. Primary research in the form of participatory observation is also carried out and the reason and significance of this type of data collection is that it enabled the researcher to comprehend how issues are organized and prioritized by the main advocacy group, the Zimbabwe Vigil. Participatory observation was employed in order to gauge the nature of the activism that is carried out by the main advocacy group representing the interests of Zimbabweans in the UK. This occurred outside the Zimbabwe embassy in London every Saturday between June-August 2015. Participatory observation allows a deeper insight into a problem by observing and understanding the behavior and feelings of a community. The researcher inevitably took part in the activities done by the Zimbabwe Vigil in order not to draw attention or make them act in a way that is different since they knew they were being observed.

The study also undertook secondary research by analyzing the web contents of various organizations involved in transnational human rights activism concerning Zimbabwe here in the UK. Such organizations include but are not limited to the Zimbabwe Association, Zimbabwe human rights NGO forum, Nehanda radio, Zim Vigil, the Zimbabwe embassy in the UK. An analysis of the evolving themes during the period under study was done and this was instrumental in noting the different levels of interest and focus of different groups.

V. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS; AN ANALYSIS OF THE ZIMBABWE-UK DIASPORA HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM INITIATIVES

An analysis of the web content of the different organizations involved in activism around Zimbabwe and human rights such as the Zimbabwe Association, Nehanda Radio, Zimbabwe Human rights NGO forum, Zim Vigil and The Restoration of Human Rights Zimbabwe shows a general overlap in the issues the diaspora is advancing during the period under study from June-August 2015. All the diaspora organizations have shown keen interest in the most pivotal human rights issues emanating from Zimbabwe. The most reported issues by all organizations during the period under study include but are not limited to the disappearance of Itai Dzamara a journalist and open critic of the incumbent government in Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe who he was staging an occupy Union Square protest after petitioning the President to step down and pave way for fresh elections. There was much coverage on this issue by human rights organizations in the United Kingdom showing solidarity with the Dzamara family and the people of Zimbabwe. Ephraim Tapa, President of Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) told a fired-up gathering at the Zimbabwe vigil in London after the abduction of the still missing open critic of Mugabe that many people had disappeared after being abducted and tortured or from so-called accidents.

'Enough is enough' he said. *'We must move the struggle to another level. The Zanu PF regime must be dismantled. People must demonstrate outside Zimbabwe's embassies abroad and use social media to encourage people at home to join the protest.'* Considering that Itai Dzamara was not an activist based in the UK but the diaspora was involved and demanded justice on this issue shows how much the diaspora is connected to the issues prevailing in the country and they are up to date with events occurring in the country and demand justice not just on issues with a direct foreseeable benefit to them but to every Zimbabwean. This case in point shows that there is no falsification nor simplification of human rights violations by the diaspora but simply a critical openness about issues the Zimbabwean public cannot highlight. This is attestable by the fact that there have been more protests in London over the disappearance of Dzamara than in Zimbabwe.

An analysis of the Zimbabwean embassy in London website tells a different tale. It makes no mention of any of the critical issues bedeviling the country. It is that of a country at peace and with no issues to report or justify. This epitomizes that the government through the embassy by choosing not to address or mention even any details about the protest groups that hold a vigil on their *The Zim Eye an online publication reported on 28 March that Ready to shoot British Terror Police Squad ended up warning the under siege Zimbabwe Embassy not to ever again waste their weaponry, fuel and time in another false alarm, after Zimbabwean citizens besieged the embassy demanding the release of democracy activist Itai Dzamara.* doors every Saturday are the ones who essentialize themselves and portray a simplified account that downplays the nature of the human rights issues in Zimbabwe and how they have a bearing on Zimbabweans in the diaspora. The embassy serves the interests of Zimbabweans in the UK but clearly they are odds with each other as epitomized by the events that occurred when the embassy officials called the Anti-terror riot police on protestors who had stormed the embassy offices.

The literature reviewed in Chapter two showed the need to gauge the extent to which those Zimbabweans caught up or went through the asylum process are involved in human rights advocacy. An analysis of the asylum statistics show a significant drop in the numbers of Zimbabweans who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom over the recent periods especially in the years from 2010 to the current period 2015 . This is as a result of the general prevalence of calm and tranquility that was brought about by the unity government and the dollarization of the economy signaling a return to economic prosperity and thus reducing the number of people fleeing economic stagnation. On the other hand the number of activists has not fallen showing that there is no direct link between asylum seekers and activists. Activism figures have been on the rise as shown by the number of participants at the major advocacy gathering the Zim Vigil with hundreds

of members. The research has established that there is no direct correlation between those seeking asylum and their involvement in human rights activism. This has been justified by the drop in number of Zimbabwean asylum seekers and a general increase in activists advocating for human rights. The reason why it was important to look at the nexus between asylum seekers and human rights advocacy stems from (Pasura, 2010) analysis that although the main vibrant advocacy group propagating the rights of Zimbabweans in the UK the, Zimbabwe Vigil is open to all Zimbabweans, it draws its participants primarily from asylum seekers, refugees, MDC members, and white Zimbabweans. This position warrants the case for the question on whether or not these activists are simply after validating their claims to highlight that they fled and fear persecution in Zimbabwe and thus are seeking justice and a redress in the human rights situation. It is worth noting that less and less Zimbabwean have sought asylum in the UK in the last few years due to the strengthening of the visa regime and improvement in the economic situation back home. On the other hand the numbers of people engaged in human rights activism for Zimbabwe have soared as shown in the numbers of people signing the attendance register with the Zimbabwe Vigil at the main protests in London every Saturday at Zimbabwe house. Statistics obtained from the Zimbabwe vigil show soaring figures of people participating in the vigil with average numbers of hundreds of people participating in the weekly demonstrations. Accounted for numbers of those signing the register are within the range of 35 to 50 varying on different days.

The literature analyzed for the purposes of this research averred that the capacity of some diasporas to secure tangible and intangible resources in support of armed conflicts, the often opaque institutional and network structures that can allow for transnational transfers of arms and money to state and non-state actors, including terrorist groups, as well as to more deserving causes (for instance as humanitarian assistance) along with rapid transnational communication, mean that, in the era of globalization, diasporas have been reconstructed as new and potentially powerful actors in international politics (Smith, 2007). This has been shown to be true by an analysis of the impact of the Zimbabwe-UK diaspora's way of keeping international pressure on Zimbabwe to ensure that there is the respect of the rule of law for fear of international condemnation by the government. For instance during the period under study Nehanda Radio, an independent news website based in London but representing the voices of the Zimbabweans in the diaspora was instrumental in highlighting the issues of vendors being kicked off the streets. This type of activism can be typically classified as digital democracy. The research has analyzed and noted that there is no oversimplification or distortion of facts by the diaspora during this period. Therefore the argument that the diaspora essentialised itself has no credible basis as shown by the analysis of the web content of the diaspora advocacy groups.

Observations of the Zimbabwe Vigil engaged in activism reveals that there is a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism that seeks to advocate for a better Zimbabwe. This is commensurate with (Anderson, 1983)'s assertion that diaspora communities tend to create a softer version of the conflict dynamics back home in the hostland and produce their own way of "struggle" such as protests, public demonstrations, theatre plays, lobby activities. The Zimbabwe diaspora is very much organized and up to date with the prevailing social, political and economic issues bedeviling the country. They mimicked the Grace Mugabe, first lady during the event of her 50th birthday by remonstrating the fact that there was a lavish party for her amidst the bleeding economy. It is also significant to highlight the fact that such depictions of displaying a mock statue of the president would be deemed illegal in Zimbabwe and liable to prosecution under Section 33 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. The police are empowered to arrest civilians for insulting Mugabe and undermining the office of the president. The diaspora activists are able thus to exercise the rights such as freedom of expression and this a major right that is stifled under present repressive laws in Zimbabwe. It is important to highlight at this stage the fact that the diaspora is showcasing real life issues and not falsified depictions of the dire human rights situation on the ground. The fact that during the period under study there were massive

violations of human rights such as the disappearance of human rights activist Itai Dzamara, the demolition of houses , the Violent Crackdown on Street Vendors and the job losses, and yet the top officials had time to “party,” show that if anything it is the government of Zimbabwe that gives an essentialised perspective of the human rights situation in the country by choosing to be engaged in less significant issues at the expense of bread and butter issues. The diaspora thus gives important coverage to human rights issues that the people of Zimbabwe cannot confront head on.

Taking a swipe at the first lady`s extravagance they reported that:

The Vigil apologized to Dr Grace for our failure to match the lavish hospitality of the Borrowdale Brook shindig where guests stumped up \$2,000 each to enjoy unlimited food and drink on the house ‘including expensive whiskeys and wines’. Dr Amai Grace Mugabe PhD graciously accepted our apologies, saying she understood the straitened circumstances of the exploited Zimbabwean bottom wipers in the UK. And with a typically generous gift of a 100 trillion Zimbabwean dollars, she ascended majestically into the sky to be teleported by Air Zimbabwe back to the more comfortable environment of Borrowdale Brook .

VI. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ACTIVISM AND NEUTRALITY

During the period under study the research found out that out of the twelve weekends when the vigil met outside the Zimbabwe House in London to protests against human rights abuses all twelve times it addressed issues that have no direct bearing to the diaspora itself per se. The cases at the attention of the diaspora included but were not limited protest over the missing journalist and political activist, Itai Dzamara, the issue of job losses in Zimbabwe, Grace Mugabe, the first lady to the president`s lavish birthday celebrations in a country where there is an economic meltdown. The nature and scope of the issues addressed show that none concerns the diaspora directly, they are not advocating for or showing a biased exaggeration of homeland human rights violations by the government of Zimbabwe but are concerned about pivotal real life substantial cases the people of Zimbabwe cannot demonstrate on. What is significant is the fact also that there have been more protests and vigils held in the United Kingdom to protest against these injustices than in Zimbabwe itself. This epitomizes the significance of the diaspora as an extension of the nation-state with the ability to influence political processes in Zimbabwe. If the people of Zimbabwe cannot stand up for fear of intimidation at least the diaspora ensures these cases are highlighted and it is much better than having no coverage at all on these issues.

However the activities of the vigil should also be viewed with a cautionary approach as epitomized by the involvement of members of the oppositional party, the MDC-T during a recent trip to London. An observational analysis of the main advocacy group in the UK the Zimbabwe Vigil makes an interesting contribution. Questions of its neutrality and impartiality have been raised before and (Pasura, 2011) highlighted whether the vigil was an extension of homeland politics, this issue came to the fore on the weekend of the 10th of August 2015 when, The Vigil welcomed unexpected visitors from Zimbabwe: Douglas Mwonozora, Secretary-General of MDC-T, and Theresa Makone, the party`s Treasurer. They were accompanied by officers of the MDC`s UK province. Mwonozora addressed the Vigil and spoke of reforms wanted by MDC-T, including the diaspora vote. This drew cheers from Vigil supporters. The MDC being a significant oppositional party in Zimbabwe and its involvement in the vigil begs questions on the neutrality and impartiality of the advocacy groups in the UK. It makes for the case that there is internal dispersion within the main advocacy group that has members with varying interests such as political stakeholders, religious members, human rights activists and also neutrals who do not derive direct benefits from the operations of the group. Unless the involvement of one political party and not others is for solidarity it affects the neutrality of the human rights group. The argument for the involvement of the MDC-T could be that they are fighting a common enemy, the present government which is under the rule of ZANU-PF, so it only makes sense

for the oppositional party and human rights advocacy groups to work hand in glove. There is nothing wrong with political parties taking an active role in human rights advocacy. Cheap politicking and propaganda from ZANU-PF makes it appear as though it is wrong for the diaspora to have links with the opposition parties in Zimbabwe, but it can be argued that members of the diaspora are free to support and associate with whoever they want without fear of backlash and lamentation from the government.

During the period under study the Zimbabwe Association, an organization which supports Zimbabwean asylum seekers and refugees in the UK launched the Zimbabwean asylum seekers exhibition. As part of its policies it works to ensure that Zimbabweans in the UK have access to fair legal representation & accurate information throughout the asylum process. In June it launched the asylum seekers exhibition, a project that sought to highlight the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrants when they moved to the UK. The significance of this project is that it details a part of the country's history that will not be recorded nor accounted for where it not for the Zimbabwe Association because this is a part of history the ruling government is not proud of, and will not want to be associated with. The government cannot celebrate figures showing the number of people who fled the country. It would rather downplay the figures and be seen in a positive light, shifting the blame on sanctions and accusing the West rather than take the blame for this dark historical account of how people fled the country. The project epitomizes the significance of diaspora non-state actors in ensuring this history is captured and maintained. The project according to the Zimbabwe Association will end up at the Black archives Museum in London. What is important to note also is the fact that organizations in Zimbabwe cannot be engaged in this type of activism since there is a crackdown on civil society organizations that seek to highlight issues that are at odds with the principles of the government. (Nehanda News of 20 March 2015) reports that a series of meetings have been taking place and it has been agreed that the civil society organizations in the country are becoming a security threat hence the need to crack them down," the source said.

“A number of organizations have been put on serious surveillance, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition leading the list,” said the source.

Plans to crackdown on the civil society organizations come at a time when local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media groups have said they are unruffled by revelations that the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), together with the South African intelligence, are spying on their activities.”

The above shows that civil society in the country is effectively gaged and has to toe the line set by the ruling party. The task remains therefore for the diaspora groups to effect change and critique the government and highlight issues of concern that the Zimbabwe organizations cannot advocate for, such as the asylum seeker project. This an example that the diaspora does not essentialize itself but brings to light factual accounts which are significant in championing the cause for the promotion of human rights.

VII. CONCLUSION

The basis of the research was to comprehend current and ongoing efforts by transnational Non-governmental organisations to redress socio-economic, political and human rights challenges in Zimbabwe and it can be noted that the diaspora has an important role to play because of its strategic position within the global system. It in turn brings to the attention of the international community issues that would otherwise not have been exposed. Human rights ensure communities are protected from the state and this is the

reason that they were established henceforth the Zimbabwe human rights advocacy groups particularly those in the UK due to its position within the global system are pivotal players in ensuring the government of Zimbabwe adheres to the basic human rights principles. The process of deterritorialization does not create an exaggerated sense of criticism to homeland human rights violations but rather amplifies their voices since they cannot be gagged by repressive laws or the incumbent`s authoritarianism. The diaspora in today`s global and highly digitalised world can no longer be viewed in isolation but should be seen as an extension of the nation state with a role to contribute to political processes and ultimately challenge and change unjust policies in host and homelands.

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