Diaspora Ethnicity and Politics in the Electronic Media:

Case studies of United Kingdom-based Zimbabwean internet websites and their associations

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OCMS. Ph.D

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ABSTRACT

The project explores how the internet gives groups of Zimbabwean exiles in Britain a medium to express their own identity and consciousness. It describes the manifestations of different Zimbabwean identities in the British diaspora, showcasing similar and contrasting histories, memories of home, concepts of citizenship, and negotiation with homeland and hostland agencies on behalf of marginalized interest groups in both contexts. Four case studies of interest groups that illustrate the plurality of these discourses help to re-focus scholarship on Zimbabwean migrants in Britain from a purely political or economic contestation with the Zimbabwe government, to a multi-sited engagement of diverse diaspora communities not only with the government, but also with their base constituencies in the homeland. The research uncovers in these cases reproductions of different Zimbabwean identities which, while unusable in the British context, are important in sustaining connectivity with homeland spaces. The conceptual grounds for case selection are diverse constituencies on the margins of the Zimbabwean public sphere, whose presence in Britain and access to the internet allows them to reproduce their identities outside of the homeland’s legal and social constraints. Through use of surveys and interviews, the research probes group traits and the role of the internet in facilitating their transition from online narratives into tangible initiatives in public life.

The conversations and actions analysed in the online and face-to-face interactions are important insofar as they germinate outside the strictures of the African nationalist ‘unity’ narratives that are dominant inside Zimbabwe. Their facilitation via the internet, and in the diaspora, locates the research in the two fields of communication and diaspora scholarship, with the social history of the groups providing a crucial undergirding to the narratives and social action ensuing. The thesis conceptualizes internet use and associated activism by Zimbabweans in Britain as twin agencies in a transnational public sphere that allows Zimbabweans abroad to continue to engage with Zimbabwe, while maintaining networks that generate discourses about group identities in Zimbabwe and abroad. These discourses, forming an alternative to the majoritarian discourses of the Zimbabwean state and the ‘abstract wholism’ of global understandings of diasporas, provide space for minorities and non-state players to interact with each other, the homeland, and with their host country as part of an extension of the Zimbabwean public sphere.

Out of the analysis emerges an ethnically diverse and politically polarised account of Zimbabwean histories, personal voices, and interest group discourses, an account that is revealingly honest about the fissures in Zimbabwean society and, by extension, its diaspora, extending postcolonial scholarship to previously ignored groups on the margins of former colonies. With its empirical description of each website and activity, the thesis has engaged with multiple authenticities in a way that undermines hegemonic perspectives of Zimbabwean nationality.
‘Diaspora Ethnicity and Politics in the Electronic Media: Case studies of United Kingdom-based Zimbabwean internet websites and their associations’

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M.A. (Wales)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Wales

May 2009

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies
DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (Candidate)  
Date 12 May, 2009

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Date 12 May 2009

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For my Princess…

Still ‘the Best in the World’
I have a lot to be thankful for. The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies faithfully funded and facilitated this work, which is not obviously theocentric. I trust that I have justified their faith in me and that they will see in the final product (the researcher as well as the text!) a valuable investment. My supervision team of Prof. Juan Rogers, Prof. Terence Ranger and Dr Ben Knighton was the best that could possibly have been assembled. They were, collectively, a tremendously rich resource which made sense out of my interests and saw viability when the project seemed to be floating in no-man’s-land. Dave Adams was an ever-dependable friend and mentor; without his advocacy, my stay in Oxford would have been insufferable. Andrew Steele proof-read the thesis while Ranka Primorac, Jo-Ann McGregor, Andy Hartropp and Brian Woolnough gave useful comments. I remain indebted to them. The movers and shakers in the different website communities with which I engaged were unfailingly polite and supportive: I hope you realize the importance of this work, and your contribution to it. My mum, my dad (R.I.P.), my brothers and sisters and their spouses, know the value of encouragement: they gave it liberally. My wife Rosie – this work is in her honour – and my son, Jordan Joshua, gave me strength when I had none left. As always, the sum contribution of all these would have come to naught was it not for the Life-giver and Font of Wisdom. I call Him Yahweh Sabaoth, and I do so in awe and with gratitude.
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<td>AIPPA</td>
<td>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Council (Zimbabwe)</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>AZJUK</td>
<td>Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>BCC</td>
<td>Bulawayo City Council</td>
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<td>BG</td>
<td>Barham Green suburb, Bulawayo</td>
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<td>Byo</td>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
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<td>BZS</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistical Office, Harare</td>
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<td>f2f</td>
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<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>COU</td>
<td>Count on Us</td>
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<td>CZI</td>
<td>Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries</td>
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<td>EJN</td>
<td>Exiled Journalists Network</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>ICAO</td>
<td>International Civil Aviation Organization</td>
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<td>GALZ</td>
<td>Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>Mark Chavunduka Award</td>
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<td>Movement for Democratic Change - Mutambara</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change - Tsvangirai</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<td>MR Zims.Net</td>
<td>Mixed Race Zimbabweans Network</td>
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<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of mixed-race Coloured People</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NUJ</td>
<td>British National Union of Journalists</td>
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<td>OCMS</td>
<td>Oxford Centre for Mission Studies</td>
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<td>PF-ZAPU</td>
<td>Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People’s Union, also known as ZAPU</td>
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<td>RAM</td>
<td>Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Media Project</td>
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<td>RBZ</td>
<td>Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>SAPPHPH</td>
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<td>Short Wave Radio Africa</td>
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<td>TBH</td>
<td>The Bottom Half website</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>Voice of America</td>
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<td>VOP</td>
<td>Voice of the People</td>
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<td>VOZ</td>
<td>Voice of Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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<td>ZANU (PF)</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe African People’s Union</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>ZCTU</td>
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<td>ZUJ</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Union of Journalists</td>
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<td>ZUPCO</td>
<td>Zimbabwe United Passenger Company</td>
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Part One - A ‘CUMULATIVE FRAMEWORK’

CHAPTER ONE: Diaspora, Websites and Homeland

1.1 Researching Migrant Experiences

Research into Zimbabweans living in Britain has tended to contextualise their relocation in the immediate economic and political challenges of their homeland. These factors precipitated high levels of migration and are significant to any research on Zimbabwean diasporas (see e.g. Ranger 2003; Chetsanga 2004; McGregor 2008; McGregor and Primorac, forthcoming). But as these and other scholars also appreciate, the range of influences is wider than the fall-out from post-2000 socio-political and economic developments. The need to articulate broader influences and time scales challenges assessments of the Zimbabwean crises and their transnationalisation through large-scale migration. Without historical and wider sociological theories to provide a background to a focus on population movements between these two countries, the phenomenon is perceived somewhat restrictedly in economic, demographic, and political terms. Historians would assert that ‘lack of realistic historical contexts’ makes analyses meaningful but rootless (Pooley and Whyte 1991:13). The underlying convictions that shape immigrant Zimbabweans’ actions and their circumstances lie deeper than what McGregor (2008:470) calls a ‘single British frame of reference’ that increasingly and indiscriminately views immigrants as a monolithic ‘other’. They focus on a narrative of ‘postcolonial relationships and responsibilities’ (McGregor 2008:473ff) which highlight legacies of
British influence in Zimbabwe, but which are being challenged by preoccupations with the European Union over ties with former British colonies.

Yet the historical connection, for better or worse, is integral to the narratives of Zimbabwean migrant spaces in Britain, and will inform this analysis in an interdisciplinary framework. This diaspora study engages colonial era identities and their relevance today, even as the identities manifest in new media discourses. The internet is discussed as presenting a complementary agency of presence, dualising Zimbabwean manifestations as web-based and face-to-face, and necessitating a methodological appraisal of lived and communicated experiences among the country’s dispersed groups resident in Britain.

1.2 Thesis Statement and Scope

The research explores British-based expatriate Zimbabwean websites and their connections with multi-layered identities. Undertaken during the years 2003-2008, the research examines the role of websites in diaspora identity formations that target ethnic, racial and non-state constituencies from a premise that these subsets of the Zimbabwean presence in Britain identify and collaborate through the internet-based networks they use. The intuition is that, by tracking the websites and real time activities associated with each, a phenomenon of internet group interaction completing itself in f2f will emerge that will add to knowledge about Zimbabwean immigrant communities and the uses they make of the internet. Specifically, an understanding is sought of how the cultural and social reproduction of transnational Zimbabweans in Britain is put to effect as they interrogate their own identities, their citizenship and sense of belonging, their politics, homeland and host country situations, and their transnational aspirations.
Bourdieu (cited in Harker 1990:13) defines three types of ‘capital’ or resources that can be produced from the material and symbolic interactions in a social formation: economic (cash, assets), social (based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support) and cultural (forms of knowledge and attitude transferred from one generation to the next). The reproduction of these assets in the microcosmic formations of Zimbabweans in Britain is described in this thesis as having a social, political, and economic resonance with a homeland that is facing serial challenges in the lifetime of this research. It is the latest phase in a history of Zimbabwean dispersion that has been regional, in the form of 19th to mid-20th century labour migration to South Africa (Muzondidya 2006:3; Mbiba 2005:31-32), and overseas, mostly to Britain where the nationalist exiles of the 1960s and 1970s found opportunities for further education, networking, and solidarity structures (Sithole 2002a&b; Ranger, 2003).

The introductory chapter will set out the epistemology of web interaction as a function of the social, political and economic practices of Zimbabweans living in Britain. It will explain the topic, relevant theoretical propositions, and a little of the researcher’s intuition as well as the contexts from which the research subjects have emerged. Included in the chapter is a review of background and source material which, like the thesis itself, reflects a combination of disciplines and topics. This is a design decision which allows the literature survey to set the context of the thesis while the second and third chapters are devoted to discussions around data gathering methods and primary resource protocol.

1 References to ‘Zimbabwean’ in this thesis do not accord with the strict definition of a Zimbabwean citizen under Zimbabwean law. Most contemporary scholarly works use the designation to include anyone of Zimbabwean origin. Recent surveys by Chetsanga (2004), Bloch (2005), McGregor (2005), and Mbiba (2005), for example, have not referred to a ‘citizenship test’. Indeed, Sithole’s groundbreaking research (2002a) expressly incorporates into the research frame long-term exiles from the pre-independence period who he described as ‘old and wealthy’ and who may have taken up citizenship in their host countries.
The second and third chapters adduce quantitative evidence of the profiles of online and offline interactions while the succeeding six chapters switch to a description of online materials and their corresponding spheres of activism, using a multiple case study approach to highlight marginalized Zimbabwean constituencies. In this multi-method description of groups, their internet practice, website content and activism, the use of surveys and interviews and their results in chapters two and three inform perceptions of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain. But the thesis as a whole is not confined to questionnaire feedback, nor is its format constrained by the thesis statement. The importance is recognized of the opening arguments as a body of theory on which the description of the case studies is embarked and against which they are critiqued. But as the conversations of web users carries the discussion forward, the discourse will accommodate those themes of interest that emerge from the websites themselves, rather than any styles or protocols of thesis writing that may miss the liveliness of the exchanges for their rigidity.

1.3 Background to the Research

Since the mid-1990s, Zimbabwean diaspora groupings in Britain have flourished on the worldwide web, taking advantage of increased access to the internet technology. In their foreword to a volume of essays on Zimbabwean transnationalism, McGregor and Primorac (forthcoming) describe the expatriates as civic actors in both Zimbabwe and Britain, and therefore an extension of both homeland and hostland discourses:

Diasporic claims-making has not only aimed to transform the situation at home, but also to extend the civic sphere within countries of settlement, challenging exclusionary state policies both within the southern African region and in the West, particularly with regard to asylum.

They go on to make the point that ‘the term “diaspora” has been invoked in this extension of the Zimbabwean social and political field beyond national borders simply to mean Zimbabweans outside the country’s borders’. This research seeks to describe that added dimension of internet-based activism in which Zimbabweans who produce and participate
in these online fora join a global interactive phenomenon that challenges previous communication practices and cultural conventions. The thesis aims to correlate diasporic identity formation and the internet through the experiences of transnational Zimbabweans in Britain, whose interaction through new technologies is attracting a growing body of research. It is hoped the thesis will take forward the discussions by Pasura (2006a) and Mano and Willems (2008), who have highlighted the significance of Zimbabwean diaspora websites in previous work but excluded the sites and collectivities outside the widely known news sites. Consequently, their research is open to criticism for being exclusionary, conveying as it does a possibly unintended implication of the Zimbabwean diaspora internet websites as homogenous.

By contrast, this thesis includes as its case studies websites with openly ethnic and racial content and constituencies. They are www.inkundla.net and www.goffal.com\(^2\) for Zimbabwean Ndebele and mixed-race overseas communities (inkundla is the siNdebele word for a pre-colonial consensus-seeking court where community elders discussed important matters; goffal is a Zimbabwean slang word for a mixed-race person); www.thebottomhalf.com with a bias in membership and content to Zimbabwe’s dispersed white community, and an online group of dispersed journalists. The choice of the latter constituency for this study follows a trend in recent research into Zimbabwean expatriate communities in Britain of emphasizing the challenges facing trained and skilled Zimbabweans, especially in finding employment in their fields (see e.g. Bloch 2005; McGregor 2008:466-482; Mbiba 2005:26-39). Despite being affected by what Mbiba (2005:31) describes as ‘exclusionary forces that operate in the job market’, the

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\(^2\) In November 2008 the webmaster of Goffal.com decided to change its name to Mr Zims.net – an acronym of sorts for ‘Mixed-race Zimbabweans Network’. The website can be accessed using the www.mrzims.net url. As the name change came at the end of my research, and certainly long after the extraction of data from its message boards, the thesis will continue referring to ‘goffal.com’ for the sake of clarity and continuity. The change was accompanied by a dumping of archives by the webmaster, which renders obsolete all the referenced web links related to this website.
journalists’ online forum will demonstrate a collective ‘diaspora remittance’ (Mbiba 2005:36) of resources from a British-based association of Zimbabweans to their fellow-professionals in the homeland, as will be seen in Chapter Seven.

Mbiba has not made specific professional constituencies the subjects of his interest, but has underlined ‘the importance and contribution’ of diaspora groups to business, real estate, health, education, democracy and culture in Zimbabwe (2005:38). These websites have operated in a crucial period of Zimbabwean diaspora formation and their objectives were shaped by time-bound historical and political developments. Other variations of online networking – ‘Facebook’, ‘hi5’ and ‘WAYN’ (Where Are You Now), for example – represent a later model of internet networking that this research has not attended to.

In 2004, Zimbabwe’s central bank sought to quantify the country’s out-migrants as a planning figure for the purpose of remittance calculations. It anticipated a variation between its findings and those of other agencies. Whereas the government’s Central Statistics Office accepts a low figure of 350 000 emigrants between 2002-2009, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe has been using the figure of three million.³ In a survey commissioned by the central bank’s Governor, Gideon Gono, and moderated and compiled into a report by local economist Eric Bloch, human resources executive David Harrison, and banking executive Weston Makwara, it emerged that official statistics understated the size of the Zimbabwean presence abroad because of narrow focuses on formalized migration from the country of origin, whereas the evidence showed that increasing numbers where leaving under other guises (Bloch, Makwara and Harrison 2004). Using emigration and travel data from the national immigration department, and various skills loss analyses compiled by the national employers’ confederation, EMCOZ, and the

industry and commerce federations, CZI and ZNCC, since the late 1980s, the RBZ report
said it had established that there were approximately 3.4 million Zimbabweans in the
diaspora. Of these, ‘1.1 million are in the United Kingdom, 1.2 million in South Africa, 450 000 in southern African countries, 200 000 in the United States and Canada, 300 000 in mainland Europe and 150 000 in Australia and New Zealand’, the report said.

Other estimates have, like Bloch, Makwara and Harrison, put the number of Zimbabweans in Britain in the region of one million, making Britain the highest overseas destination for emigrating Zimbabweans. British journalists frequently quote this figure, believing it closer to the truth than official Home Office statistics, which do not include undocumented migrants. The Times of London most recently referred to the ‘estimated one million Zimbabweans who live in Britain, many of them with refugee status’ (Evans, News Media, 2009). How they came to be in the country is not a simple linear process of reverse colonialism, of black African immigrants looking for opportunities in the colonizer in the same way that adventuring Europeans headed for Africa in previous centuries. Diaspora studies today focus on the social complexity of multi-faceted communities that were fashioned or influenced by colonialism, at once proudly defining their disparate heritage while also linking, forward and backward, to the cosmopolis on the one hand and the homeland on the other.

The fact is that postcolonial transnationalism has evolved into something different from the polarity between Caucasian white and dark-skinned South. The postcolonial societies that threw up the communities now described as ‘the diaspora’ are a diverse mix that contrasts the racial dualism that informed colonial politics. Immigration from Zimbabwe and other sub-Saharan parts is not exclusively of desperate blacks fleeing the messy politics and shattered economies their countries have become: there are large numbers of white Africans too, and others besides – Asians of all shades and origins, Arabs, hybrid peoples.
So a plurality, rather than a dichotomy of black versus white, is the key to understanding the cultures and identities of peoples who come to Britain from abroad to extend their engagement with the former colonial power, while clinging to aspects of their Africanness.

This research suggests UK-based Zimbabwean websites as a sphere for such a varied interface, a starting point for understanding the coexistence of different Zimbabwean constituencies. Each website reviewed serves as both venue and tool for hosting and creating different discourses about identity. Stubbs (1996:158) defines discourse as ‘recurrent phrases and conventional ways of talking which circulate in the social world, and which form a constellation of repeated meanings’. Involved in the circulation of ‘recurrent phrases and conventional ways of talking’ are not only people-at-large in the social world, but also researchers, and the ‘constellations’ which include classification of people into various social categories. This thesis is concerned with the ways in which exemplars of such categories use discursive resources to represent themselves. The websites, their users, their content, real-life associations cultivated by the websites, and the professional, ethnic and political expressions that contrast internal discourses marshalled by the Zimbabwean state, provide minorities and other non-state actors with spaces in which to interact, critique Zimbabwean state policies and formulate alternatives. At the same time, they provide opportunities for reproducing and reinforcing sub-national identities that had been marginalized in the Zimbabwean context.

Located in Britain, the country with the second largest concentration of Zimbabweans outside Zimbabwe, this study describes Zimbabweans on the margins of the public space.

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4 South Africa, Zimbabwe’s southern neighbour, easily has the biggest Zimbabwean expatriate community, according to studies by Bloch, et al (2004), Bloch (2005) and others. South Africa’s wealth, the possibilities of work and study, related histories (including common ethnic identities and languages between the two countries – Venda in the border areas, or Sotho, Shangaan or Ndebele elsewhere) have been cited as reasons for its popularity as a destination for emigrating Zimbabweans.
and the websites generated by their transnational constituencies. The research illustrates these websites, their events, associations and social actions as alternative discourses engaging with social actors in Zimbabwe and Britain using the capital and agency of transnational Zimbabweans. By using Zimbabwean websites in Britain and their associations as units of analysis for the case based approach, the research interrogates the segmented identity politics that are part of the articulation and representation of Zimbabwean communities at home and abroad.

The word ‘diaspora’ requires some justification for its use here, for ‘dispersion does not automatically create a diaspora’ (Zeleza 2005:11). Friedman (1997:71) writes that Diaspora Studies emerged in the twentieth century with a broader agenda than its classical use, to provide academic understanding of dispersed populations in the context of their political, social and economic mobilization in their hostlands. He suggests the usage of the term diaspora, taken from its original reference to Jews displaced from their homeland who aspired to return, carries the connotation of forced or imperative relocation due to expulsion, economic hardship, or conflict. Implicit in this understanding from the classical Jewish sense is the desire of those displaced to return to their homeland once conditions allow, and therefore a continuation of connectivities through social, economic and political influences ordinarily characterises diaspora formations described in the strictest sense. In contrast to the narrower idea of exile, however, ‘the term diaspora implies a degree of embeddedness in the country of residence (even if clearly also estrangement)’, say McGregor and Primorac (forthcoming). They suggest that while the notion of ‘exile’ is individualistic and brings to the fore the act of banishment, ‘the notion of diaspora is collective and can invoke a degree of choice…such that diasporic demands for recognition and rights are typically made on a dual front, in relation to the host society as well as the homeland’.
But nationals can also constitute a diasporic community in their own country. Fonchingong and Nkene (2007) have looked at communities of Nigerian ancestry born and living in Cameroon who experience this exclusion among ‘indigenous’ Cameroonian communities. Yet the authors go even further in deconstructing western notions of ‘nationality’ when they identify the plight of what they call ‘trans-local migrants from the North-west to the South-west Province’ of Cameroon who also experience victimization, despite their Cameroonian nationality. As such, Fonchingong and Nkene suggest that ‘so long as they possess an identity that links them to a homeland, which could be a region of the country’ in which they live, groups of people may have historical, social and political motives for constituting a diaspora which is not country-specific. Kinni (2004) has similarly discussed ethno-national tensions in southern Cameroon. The ethno-nationalist dilemma as it manifests in constituencies of the Zimbabwean diaspora and their sense of nationality and belonging has made the social histories of those constituencies an important contribution to the conduct of this research. There are examples of similar alienation in the works of Guazzini (2004) on ethno-tensions in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Reno’s (2004) broader survey of ‘within borders’ alienation that affects populations in sub-Saharan Africa, central, south and south-eastern Asia, and in certain eastern European states. These are issues relevant to Zimbabweans’ own struggles, as will be manifest in this work.

In Zimbabwe, the plurality of identities has exercised politicians more than it has academics. One of the country’s foremost nationalists, Joshua Nkomo, has been praised and criticised for his emphasis on national unity. Most criticism came from his own siNdebele-speaking minority who constitute less than 20 per cent of Zimbabwe’s population and who continue to harbour resentment at their treatment by central
government, as can be seen in the fifth chapter. Perhaps Nkomo was not entirely understood, or perhaps his perspective changed as the nationalist war was waged and he became its iconic figure. Some of those on whom he made an impression at some point would say he valued national unity not through the forced absorption or assimilation of minorities, as has been the Mugabe government’s practice, but through acceptance of ‘a hierarchy of identities, each deep and valid and each enriching the other. Nkomo was a great synthesizer’ (Ranger 1999:211). The experience of Zimbabweans in nearly three decades of Robert Mugabe’s rule has not been so positive.

Insensitivity to ethnic plurality in African post-colonial contexts has clouded comprehension of the multi-ethnic dimension of different Zimbabwean diaspora formations in Britain. Both the coercive national unity project of the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe and the ‘Western monologue on Africa and the non-Western world’ (Irele 2001:72-73) that misinterprets each national diaspora as an ‘abstract wholism’ (Axel 2001:24) have eclipsed the diversity variable, which this thesis regards as important to Zimbabwean diaspora studies. Academic research into diaspora Zimbabweans has therefore tended to be occupation and skills focused (e.g. Bloch 2005; McGregor 2008:466-482; Mbiba 2005:26-39) and not exercised by ‘the details of local difference’ and ‘the minutiae of locality’ (Axel 2001:24-25). This research will address that oversight as it scrutinizes diaspora websites which dismantle the ‘abstract wholism’, introducing a detailed discussion of disparate diaspora groups subsisting within a single national construct, developing knowledge of the social, cultural, economic and political dynamics of these largely unresearched constituencies, particularly the efforts of each to address self-identified concerns. Plural transnational imaginings of community, belonging and citizenship less familiar to western interests than multi-partyism, if verified, would access an alternative range of questions for post-colonial scholars. While this research
does not discard multi-partyism as an important variable, it has received far more focus than ethnicity – and yet by design, both have influenced the quality of life and human rights of Zimbabweans in the current as well as the colonial dispensations. The research question frames plurality in broader dimensions than politics, though the Mugabe government’s catalytic influence on the emergence and activism of diaspora formations cannot be ignored.

1.4 Research Themes

The research describes subsets of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain using these conceptual arguments:

a) How the diaspora websites and their offline associations have developed as a transnational public sphere that allows Zimbabweans abroad to continue to participate and engage in the debates ongoing in Zimbabwe, as well as develop a sense of community where they can create new discourses about identity, belonging and citizenship. This interrogates how marginalized constituencies are reproduced in the online and offline contexts;

b) The Zimbabwean diaspora experience is fragmented and diverse, particularly how its diversity challenges assumptions of a national wholism in the diaspora itself, and in Zimbabwe’s postcolonial context;

c) The Zimbabwean diaspora websites evidence a phenomenon of website interaction completing itself in f2f; that is, a metamorphosis of online forms of interaction into offline social movements;

d) The paradox of Zimbabweans in the diaspora as ‘beings for whom being is a question’ (Heidegger 1962:1). Removed from their homeland but firmly clinging to Zimbabwe-produced identity labels (Ndebele, goffal, white) when, as residents of Britain, they need not do so, are these groups articulating a ‘forehaving’ that ‘is proximally ready-to-hand as
equipment’ (1962:200) and yet conforming to Heidegger's (1962:102-3) description of the equipment as ‘unusable’? Do those in the diaspora paradoxically articulate these identities in an alien national-social context because their ‘unusability’ in Britain creates Angst about customs known and valued, but not utilised?

In the ensuing fieldwork, the problematics will be explored through locating each group’s web presence and real-life association, distributing online and face-to-face questionnaires, and by semi-participant observations, online and at venues where members of the groups congregate. The researcher registered as a member of the fora to access password-protected sites, posting news and views occasionally to establish a degree of familiarity with other users and to interact with issues which might bring clarity to the research. The postings, always under the researcher’s name, in domains dominated by pseudonyms, helped achieve name recognition, which was particularly helpful when mounting questionnaires on websites and when engaging with subjects face-to-face. To gain an understanding of the websites and communities, websites were scanned for new content on a twice-weekly basis from 2003-2006, during which the bulk of the online material used for analysis was recorded. After 2007 the tracking was less structured as attention turned to the narrative. In order to gain a deeper understanding of diaspora activities it was necessary to attend events associated with each constituency.

1.5 A New ‘Agora’? Theorizing migrant networks, spaces, and marketplaces
Conceiving the diaspora and its internet websites as a public sphere or, as is proposed, an extension of the homeland’s public sphere, draws on Habermas’ notions of public discourse. In the initial years of research, theoretical engagement with Burnett and Marshall’s ‘Cultural Production Thesis’ (2003) to explain the interface between people’s movements, online discourses and the homeland was a comprehensible but incomplete option because the authors’ emphases were on personal consumption rather than social
function. Yet the authors described the web as ‘a refraction of people’s networks’ (Burnett and Marshall 2003:70) and acknowledged it as ‘a new public sphere, it must be emphasized that…resembles the agora or market place as the free exchange of ideas and development of free speech are embedded into this…’ (2003:106). At this point, Burnett and Marshall, whose work I engaged for ideas in theorizing the social uses of internet networks, pushed me in the direction of something profoundly Habermasian. If the web is, as Burnett and Marshall (2003:34) also say, ‘a postmodern public sphere’ that ‘allows for the building of identities through a diverse range of investments and forms of interpersonal communication’, then this research wanted to build on that intuition by demonstrating possibilities in internet communication for an investment in people’s lives. Its use could not just be a mechanized gaze at visual material. Might social interaction through internet media exhibit the properties Taylor (1995:3) associated with a public sphere, of ‘a common space in which members of the society are deemed to meet…to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these…’?

Cyber and transnational networks have already been described in Habermasian terms. Moyo (2007:81-105) and Pasura (2008:149, 193, 205 and 219) reinvented Habermas’ notion of ‘public sphere’ to describe internet media practices of Zimbabwean publics relocated outside the country, with Pasura’s thesis reviewing the sociology of those interactions while Moyo’s journal article pinpointed the unfettering of Zimbabwean media - conventional and informal - and ensuing interventions through those alternative media based abroad. These scholars have identified a diaspora ‘public sphere’ linked with the homeland not just by memory, but a contemporary engagement with the realities there. Other scholars point to this transnational public sphere’s ‘agora’ properties: Mbiba (2005: 33-34), for instance, locating Zimbabwean marketplaces in London where sociality as well
as commerce were traded. The markets included ‘Zimnat’,\(^5\) in Plumstead, South-East London, where Mbiba described business as brisk from mid-day to midnight; ‘Mau Mau’\(^6\) at Southend, East London; and Zambezi\(^7\) Foods in Luton. Within this vibrancy, there may be a hint of more besides. The trajectories of Zimbabweans abroad, it seemed, could offer more knowledge of migrant spaces, certainly more about their functions than so far availed. If diasporas are a ‘public sphere’ (Appadurai 1996; Moyo 2007; Werbner, P 1997; Wise 2006) and websites ‘a postmodern public sphere where there is a greater search for identity from information sources …’ (Burnett and Marshall 2003:33), how do Zimbabweans in Britain fit this paradigm? The answer may be found in socio-historical articulations and manifestations that interest Zimbabweans in Britain and shape the public realm that these websites and their associations provide.

Detailing the Zimbabwean diaspora’s multiple identities will be central to the account of how this public sphere might function. Pasura describes Zimbabwe’s British diaspora as ‘fragmented’ (2006a), ‘multi-sited’ (2008:70), ‘hugely diverse’ (2008:74) and having ‘multiple divisions’ (2008:127). Debates over ethnicized and racialized understandings of identity in the diaspora are pursued by and embedded in three of the constituencies discussed in this thesis, highlighting the capacity for diasporic expressions of attachment to the nation to foster both convergent and divergent definitions of the nation with their dominant expression at home. This is a worthy topic in itself, but at least one other related project has suggested that websites, users and their communities can metamorphose online interactions into offline social action – an interesting dynamic, if proven among the subsets

\(^5\) Zimnat was the name of a major insurance firm in Zimbabwe
\(^6\) Named after a Harare mogul, boxing promoter and politician who is known by his liberation war nom de guerre, Stalin Mau Mau.
\(^7\) The Zambezi, Africa’s fourth longest river, part of which forms the boundary between Zimbabwe and Zambia and on which Zimbabwe’s Victoria Falls are located
of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain. As previously observed by scholars of Mexican transnational communities in the US which interacted through the internet, but also became f2f participants in local government and community initiatives in their places of origin in Mexico (Navarrete and Huerta 2006:136, 139), internet website interactivity can extend to substantial involvement in the homeland in a variety of ways. We will be looking for evidence of this involvement in contemporary social relations as the thesis seeks to describe how the diaspora and their websites might be an extension of the public realm.

Finally, groups of Zimbabweans deploy the familiar tools of their past in an unfamiliar present to deal with their longing for home. Alienated from their homeland, they grapple with Du Bois’ (1961:3) ‘double consciousness’ phenomenon - a black identity in a white culture and where race does not apply (as with white Zimbabweans), an African sub-culture estranged from its Caucasian roots that now encounters the unfamiliar in an ancestral homeland. With discussions around cultural differences, immigration law and prejudice, Zimbabwe diaspora scholars like Mbiba (2005:31ff), McGregor (2008:466-482), Pasura (2008) and McGregor and Primorac (forthcoming) contrast the alienation and integration dynamics – the push and pull factors – that account for what McGregor calls ‘abject spaces’ and ‘ethnic cleavages’ into which Zimbabweans in Britain are pushed. The authors point to ‘syndicates’ (Mbiba 2005:34-35), the politics, protests and campaigns of ‘diaspora associational life’ (McGregor 2008:476-477), and a ‘social construction … built on multiple points of identification’ (Pasura 2008:157) as places of retreat for Zimbabweans negotiating alienation and difference in Britain. In this setting, it will be argued that a perception conforming to Heidegger’s Angst for a being that is present but not fully deployed, exacerbates the pull of familiarity offered by the websites and associations of fellow Zimbabweans.
1.6 Why the Study is Located in Britain

There are significant historical links between Zimbabwe and Britain that underwrite this research. Zimbabweans’ colonial ties to Britain and the Commonwealth and the relatively recent experience of colonial and white settler rule has left a British legacy in the Zimbabwean experience that includes the retention of English as the country’s official language. As such, Pasura (2008:166) describes most Zimbabweans in Britain as possessing the ‘language capital’ of the hostland. However this has not given them a distinct advantage over other immigrants in the job market (Pasura 2008:176-177, Bloch 2005:53, McGregor 2008:466-482), hence the ‘deskilling’ and ‘occupational downgrading’ that has reduced even those who were professionals or entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe to doing menial jobs in Britain.

The Zimbabwean immigrant population consists of political and economic refugees, health professionals whose services have been in demand (Mhiba 2005:32; Gaidzanwa, 1999), and current and former students, including those whose immigration status has become irregular but who ‘feel they cannot return home’ (McGregor 2008:471). Also in the diaspora are artistes seeking lucrative markets, farmers of all races who may have experienced violence and who witnessed the disintegration of Zimbabwe’s agricultural sector, teachers, clerics, university lecturers – in short, the wealth of Zimbabwe’s productive citizens who chose ‘the potent attraction of economic power’ (Young 1995:2) and the sanguine politics of Britain over their volatile homeland. With immigration, legal and otherwise, a political powder keg in Britain and the rest of Europe, the influx of Zimbabweans is particularly thorny because of the protracted meltdown in the former British colony, as well as the fact that many of the immigrants have British ancestry. The intuition of this research is that lack of social justice and economic stability precipitated
the flight of Zimbabweans from their homeland and the arrival of many of them in Britain, conforming to global migration patterns that are influenced by social pressures in the country of origin (Hoffman 2004:11).

Britain does not have the biggest Zimbabwean population outside Zimbabwe: that distinction belongs to South Africa, whose proximity makes it an easier and cheaper refuge for Zimbabweans (Palayiwa 2003). And yet the web-based activism has taken off in a bigger way in Britain than in South Africa. There are a number of possible explanations for this.

• South Africa’s proximity to, and economic, political and social relations with Zimbabwe allow its broadcasting and newspaper media easy access to Zimbabwean destinations, with the result that South African newspapers, radio and television channels offer extensive first-hand coverage of events that interest the large Zimbabwean population in their country. This would render Zimbabwean website media less imperative than in the case of farther-flung countries like Britain.

• For the same reason of proximity, as well as political support from the South African government for the Mugabe regime, SA-based activists are likely to be more reticent about any web or public presence for fear of being discovered and kidnapped by Zimbabwean state agents. Shumba (2003), a human rights lawyer in exile in South Africa, reported that such kidnappings had occurred.

• There is a realization among Zimbabwean activists (e.g. Shumba) that social activism in general, including web-based activity, is more likely to elicit favourable responses in Britain and other western countries than in South Africa or any other African country. Because African leaders were largely supportive of Mugabe, the logic would be that no amount of lobbying, protesting, and web campaigns would sway them, whereas for political leaders in Britain and the rest of the developed world,
Zimbabwe remains a topic very much on the table, and politicians, academics and other centres of influence remain easily engaged.

It is not within this research’s objectives to develop those comparisons, beyond noting that Zimbabwean web-based activism has been phenomenally more intense in Britain than in other countries with significant Zimbabwean populations. But the research is alive to the convergence of Britain and Zimbabwe’s histories and the attractiveness of Britain as a destination, correlations which are developed in the ensuing discussions of how history has influenced the Zimbabwean diaspora and how the literature has recognized this.

1.7 Surveying the Literature

1.7.1 Diaspora Studies and Social History: The Present as a Product of the Past

The research is related to diaspora studies, drawing on Zimbabwean social history and updating it. Diaspora studies is a defined study area. The history of the homeland context has contributed to the diaspora’s formation and the identities and ideologies that constitute the dispersed groups. But the historical narrative introducing the identities at the core of the case studies is mostly derived from secondary sources. Thus the thesis reviews the social history of different groups of Zimbabweans, but would not define itself as a social historian’s study even though it provides material for social history. Diaspora studies could be pigeon-holed in social history through showing a process of change within the diaspora in Britain, but this would be difficult to achieve in a snapshot of five years in which the primary research for this project was undertaken. The focus has therefore centred on the maintenance of diaspora networks in Britain through websites. This extends existing research of Zimbabwean diasporas to spheres of web-driven activism, informed by historical discussions of the diaspora’s composition and dispersion.
Previous research attests to migration from Zimbabwe to Britain as initially racially and ethnically inflected. Sithole’s (2002a&b) description of the trajectories of Zimbabwean migration to Britain begins with the flight of African nationalists in the 1960s and 1970s. He also discusses more recent trajectories of white and Ndebele emigration produced, in the first case, by white reaction to black majority rule, and then by what McGregor (2008:469) called ‘ethnic tensions between Shona and Ndebele exacerbated through state massacres in the 1980s’. The ethnically-laced tensions that prompted these migrations are revisited when this research interacts with Ndebele (Chapter Five) and white (Chapter Six) groups. As McGregor (2008:469) notes, however, over the course of the 1990s, migration from Zimbabwe became less ethnically focused and ‘more all-encompassing, with women prominent in the outflow thanks to the feminisation of opportunities in care and nursing’.

The significance of social history for this research is reflected in the fact that three of the cases in the thesis (chapters 4, 5 and 6) are introduced by social history. With accelerated migration flows since the deepening of the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis in the year 2000 there is a broader field of research options into the Zimbabwean presence in Britain: who they are, what they are doing and how the added numbers have enriched or otherwise affected interactivity in the various Zimbabwean constituencies. The histories of people groups caught up in these flows is reproduced in the sometimes nostalgic online discourses of those with access to media technologies, contributing new evidence of social uses of the internet. Experiences of Zimbabwean diaspora communities overlap with issues of identity and belonging that polarize many African countries and challenge the bounded citizenship of the nation state. Race, ethnicity, gender, class and geography have tested the cohesiveness of African postcolonial societies, creating inequalities in notions of citizenship and in some cases stoking secessionist claims to pre-colonial formations of nationhood.
The remnants of these pre-colonial formations are part of the current context’s power struggles, with the political and ethnic dimensions reverberating as far as the diaspora communities. This interface of history, diaspora and identity makes the research heritage-laden, an intersection of legacies and traits with current internet uses and activism in the diaspora. Such interface ‘clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes’ (Otnes and Maclaran 2007:52), assisting diaspora researchers to connect group traits which will become evident in this work with Zimbabweans’ individual and cultural pasts. McGregor and Primorac, in their foreword to the most recent volume of research in this area (forthcoming), affirm a historical undergirding of the Zimbabwean diaspora experience:

The exceptional place Zimbabwe occupies in the British public sphere has been produced through the legacies of Rhodesian settler colonialism and the struggle for national liberation, and this “presence of the past” is reflected in today’s diasporic claims and transnational engagements.

With the Zimbabwean country context being one of extreme hardship, the diaspora experience of collaborative activity, engagement with its homeland communities and a desire to see change in the home country brings into sharp relief the type of claims that can be made about internet-based efforts and representations about identity. Its research will throw light on a more intense example of displacement and expatriate activism than the studies of diaspora from other country contexts that are cited in this research.

**1.7.2 Online Communication and its ‘Characteristics of Physical Communities’**

Previous research has discussed how the internet is utilized ‘to maintain social connections with the community of origin’ (Navarrete and Huerta 2006:138). The literature has asserted that communication occurs ‘within a given social context in which senders and receivers of messages enter into transactions of some sort’ (Sy 2004:64) and has created an impression that information and communication technologies reproduce community insofar as they ‘refer mainly to people and the way they relate to each other …rather than to technology’.
Another application of ‘sense of community’ to virtual groups is Navarrete and Huerta’s (2006:141) recognition of ‘traditional characteristics of physical communities’ in the Chilean and Mexican diaspora websites they investigated, though the authors note that ‘[j]ust as in the physical world not all settlements develop a sense of community, not all virtual settlements develop a sense of virtual community’. Their view is that such online formations with their transmission and reception processes require ‘identity and identification’ and a common interest in ‘membership, influence, integration and fulfillment, and shared emotional connection’ to constitute a properly identified social unit.

It has been argued that these processes facilitate even more effective group action when they translate into real time group action, or what Navarrete and Huerta (2006:139) call ‘grounded relationships’ where they found people ‘would be able to bond better and share values more effectively than communities that rely upon only one or the other mode of communication’. So past research of how computer-based technologies provide the setting for the traditional characteristics of physical communities to emerge online has made these claims, which we share. However, the literature also makes clear that online interaction has reproduced identities on the internet that have articulated group interests in interesting ways (Burnett and Marshall 2003; Wong 2003; Rodriguez 2004; Sy 2004).

Studies of internet communication practices of Indian (e.g. Rao 1998; Mitra 2000), Haitian (Adams-Parham 2004), Somali (Issa-Salwe 2003), Chinese (Wong 2003) and Chilean, and Mexican diasporas (Navarrete and Huerta 2006) are relevant antecedents in the dual fields of communication and diaspora studies pursued here. Each has contributed to the interface of these two fields through an appreciation of how diaspora communities appropriate new media technologies for their own information sharing and consumption patterns, cultural tastes and social interests; to keep in touch with each other and to relate to their home contexts. Rao’s case study about ‘India Network’, an online community created in Ohio, USA, described a communication phenomenon developed out of a student’s mailing list,
into ‘a mini India where people from around the world meet to share information about life abroad and different regions in India’ (1998:1527). In the same country context Mitra’s content analysis of messages posted by Indians in the United States, Europe and India offered critical discourses about religion, culture, national identity, and politics, analysing factors which the researcher perceived to have produced a sense of community or, as she put it, a ‘sense of commonality’. Adams-Parham (2004) found evidence to support his claim that American-based Haitians not only reproduce the dynamics of a community in their online interactions, but actually are made more sustainable by the offline relationships of the web users.

The Somali diaspora, refugees from a country which disintegrated into protracted violence in 1991, used the agency of the web ‘to communicate, regroup, share views, help their groups at home, and organize activities (e.g., development projects)’. The trauma that drove them to other destinations, including in significant numbers to Europe and North America, was to yield website activity that re-shaped a Somali public realm in which identity became a crucial factor. It was a sphere of public interaction that ‘broke the bond of geography’ by creating ‘communities not of common location, but of common interest’ (Issa-Salwe 2003). Given the freedom to articulate identities, it was always going to be a fragmented online presence, the splintering reflecting not just the break-up of Somalia into three governments – Somaliland, Puntland, and in the capital city Mogadishu – but also the political and social divisions among Somali clans. Consequently, Issa-Salwe said, the Somali diaspora websites captured ‘the turbulence of a contradictory time of collective identity and fragmentation’, and foreshadowed more website manifestations that would express a country’s multiple community identities.
Wong’s (2003) dissertation on ‘Belonging and Diaspora: The Chinese and the Internet’ points out the reaction by diaspora websites to the apparatus of the state which has been deployed to unify by coercion the various social constituencies of China. Critics often equate the discovery or rediscovery of ‘ethnic’ identities as a response to feelings of national attachment. But as Wong points out, identities may also fulfil people’s emotional desires for deeper belonging than what state-crafted nationalism can inspire, by emphasizing less of the nation-state’s ‘territorial framework’ or ‘single privileged political institution’ and more of the ‘cultural determinants and relational interdependencies’ that influence people’s values. For Wong, it is the people’s identification of how they constitute a state and not the way the state labels them that enables ‘a pervasive system of social classification…an interpretative grid for public discussion, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities’, and ‘a ready-made template for claims to sovereignty’. Arguments like Wong’s do not constitute wholesale repudiation of nation-states, though they do challenge the absolutist tendencies in which these are administered, certainly in China and Zimbabwe. To argue for multiple expressions and identities in shared geo-political spheres raises complex, but not impossible alternatives.

Navarrete and Huerta, in a journal article with a title ‘Building Virtual Bridges To Home: The Use of the Internet by Transnational Communities’, identify websites as the latest in a line of communication tools used by immigrants to maintain ties with their countries of origin. The more contemporary linkages, Navarrete and Huerta argue, create a ‘sense of virtual community’ through which the internet provides an ‘infrastructure for community interaction’ capable of ‘recreating and maintaining a sense of community across borders’ (2006:134). The diaspora condition as defined in this chapter requires some active linkages with the homeland to distinguish it from less engaged immigrant groups, and the websites can be said to provide these linkages. Specifically, they develop the argument that the
internet technologies ‘provide the setting for the traditional characteristics of physical communities to emerge online’ – a claim by Navarrete and Huerta of the social properties of the internet that other authors cited in this section do not readily make. Navarrete and Huerta discuss instances of web activism becoming features of real-life – what they call ‘hybrid virtual communities’ because they retain both online and offline properties (2006:134). These claims are of interest for a thesis such as this that seeks to show the translation of virtual forms of activism into tangible benefits.

Navarrete and Huerta’s references to ‘ethnic enclaves’ among the dispersed communities of Mexican and Haitian immigrants in the US, and Chilean immigrants in Australia (2006:143) help to foreground the emotional and socio-historical bonds that create a sense of belonging among ethnically fragmented diaspora groups from the same national context. It is a useful parallel to the more in-depth study of the fragmentation in coming chapters. The ‘integration and fulfilment’ dimension that draws together people from similar social backgrounds is highlighted by Navarrete and Huerta (2006:145), as it will be with the groups that are the subject of this thesis. Likewise the shared history that identifies the common ground for like individuals in a virtual as well as a f2f community is the intuition that connects the social history of the constituencies with the objectives of this research. It is an intuition tested in the website case studies that make up later chapters.

Navarrete and Huerta’s research stretched the knowledge barrier beyond a preoccupation with the technological innovation by investigating technology’s facilitation of human interaction. The discourses were rich and varied, and they were locked into the conditions of their users. This makes it instructive that a successive project be interested in the content and the social condition of the users of the internet, especially those whose networking reproduces a nearly-lost cohesiveness of compatriots about to be absorbed.
into the host culture in Britain, in which they have settled. The constituencies of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain that are researched here fit this description.

1.7.3 The Diasporic Condition: Echoes of Heidegger?
Combining a social, political and cognitive assessment, the research interrogates a complex sociology of Zimbabweans’ mediated and f2f experiences, linking website use and cultural phenomena to transnational preoccupations with identity. Among theoretical tools deployed to this discussion is Heidegger’s system of thought and experience that locates ‘being’ as phenomenally present and Angst as a detrimentality which alienates that presence. ‘Being’ in the diaspora consists of assertions to rights and principles of living in the hostland. The environment to which the immigrant has relocated conditions the conduct of exercising these rights, and so the knowledge capital an immigrant possesses, unless relevant, has to undergo processes of negotiation with the new culture to determine applicability. A function of this transition may be to declare redundant some or most of a migrant’s practices – a juxtaposition of things accepted as true with things that are appropriate for public use. This transition Heidegger (1962:200) describes in terms of movement from what is ‘ready to hand’ to what is necessarily ‘present at hand’. Heidegger likened this transition to a ‘circumspective interpretation’. The need to conform is not always categorical, but there are things that the migrant possesses which might be considered out-of-place. In other words, to adjust normative behaviour so as to breach the gap between immigrant and host culture, the Zimbabwean does not summarily discard previous norms, but adapts in a gradual shift of expectations and courtesies intended to ‘fit in’ with the new environment.

Often, the old values stick, and the home, family and larger social networks in the hostland provide the venues for their continued articulation. But it is characteristic of Zimbabweans in Britain, as with other diaspora formations, that they have to deal with a
conviviality lost, both in friendships and in practices. This is what draws them to seek out other Zimbabweans in common spaces that manifest in the form of public events and in the phenomena of special interest websites. On these sites, they can inter-relate using ‘ready-to-hand’ codes like languages, gestures, diet, the arts, forms of worship, or politics – anything which constitutes a latent nativism which is ready to hand but inapplicable in normal British life. When they step back from these sites, virtual and real, and go about their everyday business in their British neighbourhoods or workplaces, the ready to hand Zimbabweanness is ‘veiled’ (Heidegger, 1962:200) and a ‘presence-at-hand’ is restored to fulfil the practicalities of life in a British environment.

In his work, Heidegger wrote not of Zimbabweans or the diaspora, but of different notions of the constitution of being. But his concepts of useful versus useless modes of being can be deployed to describe a nativism which might exist in every other diaspora, but which is perhaps not always retrieved and deployed to collectively assuage yearnings of sub-national groups looking for spaces and voices of their own. It is a claim of this research that the Zimbabwean examples it describes are able to do this.

Elsewhere, Heidegger (1962:102-3; 282) describes a ‘conspicuousness’ created not by a property’s ‘presence-at-hand’, but by its ‘unusability’ in the ‘everydayness of Being’. Equipment’s usefulness is, he suggested, contemplated most when redundant:

This presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand in this way is still not just a Thing which occurs somewhere... The more urgently we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered... all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become (1962:103).

In the scope of this research, we can explore the continuation of the non-British past in the British lives of transnationals and how that ‘past’ remains alive even when unused, especially for adults, for whom there cannot be a complete renunciation of the ‘before’
and a full embracing of the present. This proposition may be evidenced in some responses from transnational groups in subsequent stages of the inquiry.

1.7.4 People, Attitudes and Content

Debates over ethnicized and racialized understandings of identity in the diaspora are pursued by and embedded in three of the constituencies discussed, highlighting the capacity for diasporic expressions of attachment to the nation to foster both convergent and divergent definitions of the nation with the dominant discourses at home. Indeed, racialism and racialized discourses are a component of Zimbabwe’s social history. As a result, the topology of the field interacted with in this thesis is loaded with ethnic sentiment. If not racist, some of the expressions display defensiveness towards such prejudice. The research does not see its role as mediating between the different constituencies of Zimbabweans. As such, it does not address at length the commonalities-within-difference that very likely exist. That noble objective can be pursued elsewhere; preoccupation with it in this instance would risk clouding the issues affecting numerically inferior groups which the research identifies as important to raise. The research will only look for commonalities that underline its themes in what is a riven field with several fault lines. Nevertheless, the manifest plurality emerges from a common project: a multi-cultural nationality occupying and being studied in the same epistemic space and on the same spatio-temporal scale.

1.7.5 The Relevance of Habermas

Zimbabweans in the diaspora have had to deal with existential questions located in their uprootedness from their homeland, distance from their loved ones and things familiar, the necessity of adjustments to a new host environment, and dealing with the politics of home and host country. In this, there has been recourse to the ‘collective identities’ and ‘public discourses’ which defied the typical ‘national frameworks’, creating counter-discourses to
the mainstream Zimbabwean social and political agenda and adding to the existing scholarship the possibilities for shaping the public realm that Zimbabwean diaspora groups have explored and exploited online and in real time associations. Moyo (2007:84, 85) alludes to these websites’ ‘set objectives of providing alternative public spheres for voiceless Zimbabweans both in the diaspora and at home’ as he contrasts the freedom in which they operate abroad to the ‘repressive conditions’ in Zimbabwe. It is worth reflecting at this point that while the imperfections of Zimbabwe’s internal discourse transgress all notions of free speech, it is possible for marginalization because of identity to occur in countries with plausible reputations. As Hoffman’s (2004:35-36) ‘tyranny thesis’ explains, democracy can generate ‘statism in an absolutist and totalitarian form’ that represses minorities and political opponents ‘so that the problem is not really with majority rule: it is with the state’. There is a sense therefore that the alternative Zimbabwean media is as much an alternative in Britain as it is in Zimbabwe, even through repression of Zimbabwean expression is negligible, if at all, at the time of this research.

In ‘Remarks on Discourse Ethics, Justification and Application’ (1993:93) Habermas described the democratic public space as ‘a public body of citizens … characterized by a plurality of belief systems and interest structures and the coexistence and confrontation of life forms and individual life projects…’. In other texts, Habermas (1989:29; 1990:4) expanded on the definition of what constituted the public sphere – qualities like rationality, quality of discourse, quantity of participants, universal access, morality and a relationship between the public and their government – and described it in terms of a contested space to be preserved from over-domineering state control. Habermas may not have comprehensively theorized the nature and roles of new media, but neither did he completely ignore them. His focus on networks and their importance for democratic space has been criticized for its ambivalence towards the internet’s social properties (Rutherford 2000:18), in that he has argued that the newer media formations are a ‘degeneration’ of
print-based media. But Habermas himself understands the public sphere to be a virtual or imaginary community, not necessarily existing in any identifiable space (Habermas 1989:176). His more recent reflections do contain arguments for ‘mediated political communication’ – into which description the transnational websites fall – being able to facilitate ‘deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies’ (2006:411ff) under the following conditions:

- A ‘self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments’;
- There is, among ‘anonymous audiences’, a ‘feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society’.
- There are especially adverse circumstances, in the form of a totalitarian government and state censorship, that make the use of websites essential in getting around the legal and physical barriers that may be put in the way of free public sharing of information (2006:423)

Furthermore, Habermas has commented favourably on the internet’s facilitating a ‘public of writers and readers’ (2006:423). But this sphere of engagement can only be phenomenally successful in his eyes if serving interest groups that are trying to express themselves in a realm governed by a dictatorial political regime. Thus the extraordinary circumstances presented by dictatorships give websites a more gainful use than those in politically and culturally ‘open’ societies. The circumstances of this research and Zimbabwe’s country profile fit Habermas’ reading of what sort of internet usage is socially and politically significant.

1.7.6 Further Reviews of Diaspora Literature

Various communication theory, practice and social history sources have already been cited and so, in a sense, the review of the literature relevant to this research is well underway. But the focus on issues germane to this research began with the sharp escalation of
Zimbabwean immigration into Britain after 2000 and the world’s focus on events inside Zimbabwe. Two research conferences in the new millennium broke ground in directing the focus of scholarship to activities and interactivities of Zimbabwean groups in Britain. These conferences, intentionally or not, threw the spotlight on under-represented groups that Nyamfukudza (2005:18) and Nyamnjoh (2006:94) call ‘undigested’ and Muzondidya (2005) and Thondhlana (2001) have referred to as Zimbabwe’s ‘invisible subject minorities’, some of which have become particularly expressive in the diaspora. Papers by Masiane (2003), Peel (2003a, 2006) and Pasura (2006b) profiled the website media outlets to these diverse expressions of ‘Zimbabweanness’ and noted particularities of cultural identities among the Zimbabwean diaspora. The papers, and the conferences, covered new territory as far as Zimbabwean studies were concerned, and even as this work was being completed, the dearth of research of a comprehensive nature that explored diversity within this displaced country group was surprising, particularly in view of ethnicity’s role in the country’s history.

The Britain Zimbabwe Society’s 2003 research day in Oxford adopted ‘Zimbabwe Diasporas’ as its theme, conscious of their historically significant roles in the anti-colonial struggles that brought the Mugabe government to power. It seemed, now as in the pre-independence war of the 1960s and 70s, that the struggle for the homeland’s prosperity could not be de-linked from the efforts and aspirations of those who had fled it because of instability and became in themselves externalizations of the social and political processes at play in the homeland’s internal sphere. Three years later, the BZS revisited the theme, specifically focusing on displacement, citizenship, identity and survival (Primorac 2006). Both the 2003 and 2006 conferences engaged with the preliminary findings of this research, agreeing with its relevance in reviewing internet media as used by Zimbabweans in Britain, but asking pointed questions about qualifying output, representativeness and accessibility. Might these websites not be seen as ‘offering democracy to a minority’, in
the words of one of the conference reports (Ranger, 2003b)? This thesis addresses those questions at various junctures, including the caveat that the cases of this study are not samples of the whole demographic of British-based Zimbabweans, but do point to existent constituencies. These constituencies are noted for each having parallel online and offline formations, a phenomenon for which there is research interest (Navarrete and Huerta 2006; Dahan and Sheffer 2001; Massey 1987; Smith 1998).

Studies by Pasura (2006a) and Mano and Willems (2008) exploded the myth that Zimbabwean diaspora websites and their message boards were not academically interesting. But Pasura’s early work was limited to 93 respondents, perhaps due to the fact that his was a ‘mapping exercise’ undertaken over three months (2006a:2,3). By his admission, his work ‘does not purport to be exhaustive’ (2006a:1), its objective only to inform the International Organization for Migration (IOM) how best to reach British-based Zimbabweans. But it acknowledged the fragmentation of Zimbabweans and their websites (2006a:4, 9, 11, 16) and identified three of the four cases which this thesis analyses in greater detail. It was not an in-depth study and included no reference to user behaviour. A more focused inquiry such as this thesis will nevertheless appreciate Pasura’s identification of websites among principal media channels used by British-based Zimbabweans in the diaspora (2006a:7, 9-12).

Pasura’s more substantial 2008 thesis was a sociology of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain that acknowledged a ‘hugely diverse’ (Pasura 2008:127) and ‘multi-sited’ (2008:70) presence, seeking as its ‘overarching aim’ to ‘draw out people from different categories, probing differences within the diaspora in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status…and political belonging’ (2008:74). But while acknowledging the ‘multiple divisions’ (2008:127), Pasura fell into his own categorizations of ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ which seemed to limit the coverage of his research (2008:128). He went on to
exclude, without explanation, the details of ethnic minorities whose activism he had acknowledged in his 2006 publication, like the amaNdebele of southern Zimbabwe and the mixed-race ‘Coloureds’ or goffals so that his thesis was largely abstract in its failure to illuminate the ‘multi-sitedness’ it so often alluded to.

Whereas in 2006, Pasura was exercised by the ‘cultural capital’ of their online networks, prompting his suggestion that the IOM ‘should advertise in some of these websites paying attention to the way the ethnicity, race and class organise the online papers’ (2006:9), this enthusiasm was not reflected in the 2008 thesis even though the networks remained active. In terms of the ethnicity of his respondents, Pasura did include white, Shona and Ndebele informants (e.g. 2008:73; 187-88) but the peculiarities of their networks hardly surfaced in the rich and meaningful analyses he proffered in other areas of the diaspora experience. He made only one reference to goffals, not as a category, but in describing one of his respondents as 'mixed-race' (2008:278). In fact, it is the respondent who draws attention to her identity in explaining her flight from Zimbabwe, otherwise goffals can be said to be marginalized in his research.

He also makes brief, almost dismissive references to websites either as expressions of illusory attachment to 'Rhodesia', or as being the intellectual spaces of what he calls the 'epistemic members of the Zimbabwean diaspora' who are 'desktop activists' (2008:130-1). The sum of this research will not be a rebuttal of Pasura’s thesis, but there are comparisons to be made and this work will extend the boundaries of Zimbabwean diaspora research to include those social constituencies which he and others before him have left out.

Mano and Willems (2008:101), using www.newzimbabwe.com and its treatment of Channel Four reality show star, Makosi Musambasi (the first Zimbabwean in a UK ‘Big
Brother House’\(^8\) as a case study, explored this website’s pre-occupation with her fame, character, and her provocative on-screen antics. Tracking the conflicting views expressed on her ‘success’ as a reflection of Zimbabweans’ struggles with their conservative backgrounds and the more liberal, media-influenced environment they have found in Britain, the case study intended to show that not only was it possible, but desirable, for scholars to understand the Zimbabwean diaspora and these tensions through online discourses.

Other studies by McGregor (2005), Bloch (2005), Mbiba (2005), Chetsanga (2004), Ranger (2003b) and Gaidzanwa (1999) have contributed to a growing body of research into the experiences of Zimbabweans in Britain. However, these researchers have ignored, or peripherally engaged, the intricacies of ethnicity in the political discourses and communication practice, focusing instead on the skills resource, largely untapped - except for sections of the health sector - that the Zimbabwean presence in Britain offers. Yet ethnicity is a factor, and not just in Zimbabwean communities. Wise’s 2006 book on the East Timorese diaspora in Australia and an illuminating essay by Navarrete and Huerta (2006) touching on diversity in Chilean transnational communities in Australia and Mexican communities in the US, are scholarly works demonstrating the competence with which ethnic as opposed to national identities in diaspora formations can be described. In contexts where, like Zimbabwe, the differences originate in the homeland’s social stratifications, a strong ethnic group consciousness in the migrant spaces is seen to ‘symbolically and affectively bind the pain of the individual victim to the fate of the ethnic collectivity. Violence against one is violence against all’ (Wise 2006:15).

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\(^8\) Big Brother series 6 housemate, Makosi Musambasi, was born on 23 September 1980 in Zimbabwe and was a cardiac nurse when she entered the ‘Big Brother House’ on 27 May 2005. She did well to finish third out of 13 original participants, but was arrested soon after and almost deported for visa irregularities related to her ‘Big Brother’ involvement. An immigration tribunal accepted her plea that it would be dangerous to return to Zimbabwe after her international media exposure – which included televised sexual encounters with a male and female housemate – and allowed her to remain in Britain.
Bloch (2005:18), whose work on behalf of the IOM is among the more authoritative, notes four main areas of diaspora activity: economic, political, social and cultural, which she divides into home country focus and host country focus. Economic home country focus includes remittances, investments, charitable donations, taxes and buying entry into government programmes, while the host country focus includes charitable donations and donations to community organizations. She describes political home country focus as including membership of political parties, while the host country focus includes participation in political demonstrations and mobilization of political contacts. All these are avenues of engagement for UK-based Zimbabweans (Bloch 2005:63ff), and we will see evidence of their use in this thesis’ own case studies.

1.7.7 The Websites as ‘Citizens’ Media’

The websites, demonstrating expanding possibilities for ‘lay’ speakers – the ‘public’ – to actively create and engage with media content by immediate dialogue and debate, illustrate the transition from media-as-tool to media-as-sphere. Particularly resonant for this thesis are arguments promoting websites as a social sphere in which ‘transformative processes’ impact participants and their communities, energising what Rodriguez (2004) calls ‘social movements’. It is arguable that the diaspora websites discussed in the ensuing pages are part of what Rodriguez described as ‘citizens’ media’, ‘participatory media’, ‘alternative media’ or even ‘radical media’. Underscoring a ‘social presence’ and ‘social influences’ of like-minded and antagonistic constituents online (Fogg 2003), this researcher betrays an inclination towards such anthropomorphosis, although the research explores the websites as both containing, and spawning, associations of different Zimbabwean constituencies (i.e. the media generating the spheres of interaction as well as being the spheres of interaction). How does one address the problem theoretically? Will online interactivity, however ‘intimate’ its language or instantaneous its response, become universally accepted
as a legitimate group activity beyond the level and function of signification? The quest for answers is ongoing, but previous research has shown that websites offer more than enabling people to read and chat. Rheingold (2000) proffers, even-handedly, a non-dogmatic assessment that gives currency to the anthropomorphic view, but also challenges its uncertainties.

When we say ‘society’, we usually mean citizens of cities in entities known as nations. We take those categories for granted. But the mass-psychological transition that people made to thinking of ourselves as part of modern society and nation-states is historically recent. Could people make the transition from the close collective social groups, the villages and small towns of pre-modern and pre-capitalist Europe, to a new form of social solidarity known as society that transcended and encompassed all previous kinds of human association? Nations must exist in the minds of its citizens in order to exist at all. Virtual communities require an act of imagination to use, and what must be imagined is the idea of the community itself. (Rheingold 2000:53-54)

In other words, inasmuch as ‘nations’ require an imaginary concept of often diverse peoples constituted as one national whole, the mutual affinities that draw like qualities to particular websites, including shared history, lead members to conceptualize themselves as a social unit, for ‘in the mind of each (member) lies the image of their communion’ (Wise 2006:63).

1.8 The Websites as ‘Home’

As appreciation of the properties of the internet expand, the work by Burnett and Marshall (2003:67-68) aligns itself with arguments supporting the pull (aggregation) factor of the technology to engage the user with others, and the result is the socialization of individual and group behaviour that manifests in the online communities. ‘People are increasingly using the web to create virtual homes and online communities,’ the authors say.

What are lacking are studies of actual social internet use as it occurs in the context of daily activity. We need to know more about how the internet is used across the full range of social interactions, how it fits in and compares to these interactions and ultimately what meanings and significances are generated by these new configurations.
The research examines aspects of this aggregation, though not ‘the full range’. The website and its capacities are central to this pull factor, to the extent that they fulfill needs and spawn intimacies fed by ‘histories of relationships, interconnectedness, networks and conviviality’ (Nyamnjoh 2006:75). Not only do the diaspora websites demonstrate connectedness to the country of origin; they also express a connectedness of like ethnic, political, and professional persuasions so that Zimbabweans who share in any of those distinctives are drawn to the website where they feel most comfortable. The fact that they revisit the same website comparably more than they do the others (Chapter 2) represents a ‘homing’ that occurs when one becomes a long-term member of a website ‘community’.

In the cases to be examined, the draw factors are peculiar to ethnic, political and professional sentiments underlying the condition of some Zimbabwean expatriate groups and their sense of alienation in Zimbabwe. The argument is not that these distinctives alone define the entire Zimbabwean diaspora condition, but rather that these exemplify the peculiar experiences of segments of the Zimbabwean expatriate population in Britain whose alienation from Zimbabwe is brought on by an inherent marginalization beyond the distance from, or the different life outside, the homeland.

Yet how real is this website ‘home’? Is it ‘real virtuality and not virtual reality’ (Castells 1997:10-11)? Is it a communication tool located in the ether that just happens to be able to produce tangible products, or is it a location in a profound sense, a venue for the types of conviviality and interaction that resemble a domain close to home, if not home itself? Is it so comprehensively engaging, this website communication, that, like Castells, we might argue that ‘the virtuality of this text is in fact our reality, the symbols from which we live and communicate’? What leads to some Zimbabwean expatriates relating to these ‘migrant spaces’ (Nyamnjoh 2006:77) in such intimate ways?
The evidence addressing these questions about the utility of the websites will emerge from this inquiry. By embracing transnational, local, public and government discourses, the websites will reiterate the expatriate’s concepts of ‘home’ in a relational way to norms and conduct that are familiar and remote. In these websites, belonging does not simply come by self-defining, but by relating to the others with whom we choose to share a virtual home. This means identification through others, principally as they subsist or subsisted in Zimbabwe, so that, as Hoffman (2004:9) argues, ‘we only identify ourselves through others, and when these others are deprived of their freedom, we have no freedom either’. And, underlining Heideggerian theory, the awareness of not being in Zimbabwe and of having, but not using, the familiar aspects of ‘Zimbabweanness’ subsists as a draw to the communal refuges of web communities. Not everybody uses the websites and/or engages with their associational activities with the same intensity. Kozinets’ typology of membership (Otnes and Maclaran 2007:56) illustrates different levels of intensity of ‘social’ and ‘consumption’ habits in these collectivities. The ‘insider’ has strong ties to both the collectivity and social activities emanating from it, the ‘devotee’ a stronger interest in active use over social activities; the ‘mingler’ or ‘lurker’ will not post on the website, even under a pseudonym, but is present as a reader; and the ‘tourist’, who has a ‘weak interest’ in all aspects of the collectivity. The research does not explore these variations in any great length, but it bears noting that the membership of websites and their associations extend beyond the identities that post online and the activists detectable at events.

Unease at the racialized thrust of the inquiry manifests itself in parts of the fieldwork. But the conviction remains that this is a necessary reflection of and by the Zimbabwean presence in Britain of mistakes made, prejudices harboured, and possibilities beckoning, in a difficult time for Zimbabweans. As a field of research, anthropology has developed a global discourse of racialized understandings of human diversity and while the language
has shifted towards cultural relativism rather than racial difference (Pierre, 2006:41, 46), the fascination of researchers with local loyalties is still very much a part of academic life. The indifference in the academic community thus far to multiple identities in Zimbabwe’s British diaspora and their creation of alternative discourses - an indifference discussed in the preceding sections - makes exploration of these identity formations instructive.

1.9 Diversity, Websites and Cultural Alignment: Chapter Conclusion

Zimbabwean website-based networks in Britain are important communication tools that respond to the politics of exile, identity, and the history of both in contriving democratic space for Zimbabweans. This chapter recognized the interest in new media technologies appropriated by immigrant communities for maintaining linkages with the homeland and enjoying their heritage in foreign contexts. Focusing on heritage and identity in the social spaces of dispersed communities enables the study to examine important questions on how people conceptualize their pasts, and how they incorporate these pasts into their present lives. The sociology of Zimbabwean internet interaction contains their social and political struggle because of the influence of the homeland’s politics on emigration and dispersion and the particularly sensitive bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and Britain. A domestication of cyber spaces by a multi-faceted Zimbabwean presence in Britain seeking to reflect what Giddens (1998:69) called a ‘cosmopolitan nation’ that extends national identity to a multiple identification incorporating minorities is the bane of the Zimbabwean government, but provides scope for illuminating research. Social History, Communication and African Diaspora Studies will find in this sphere some profoundly different positions not commonly recognized by an academy steeped in hegemonic assumptions of post-colonial societies.

This chapter foregrounds a plurality of ethnic, political and professional continuities to introduce a study that addresses the democratic deficit and counter-authoritarian discourses
that co-exist in an extended public sphere which this thesis seeks to describe. It has introduced plurality as a key element in website production and usage and the real-life associations that are formed based on shared affinities to the respective websites. It provoked discussions that nested the research in a body of knowledge outside the research’s data set (Miles and Huberman 1994:87) to connect the study’s framework and findings with broader academic discourses around the internet and media societies and their opening of new frontiers in the field of Diaspora Studies. Particularly significant was the concept of transnational websites and their communities in Britain as an extension of the Zimbabwean social and political space, with the perspectives they offer on the Zimbabwean situation which are not readily available in other media of added interest. With multiple case studies at the centre of its approach, it will benefit the thesis to have explored these propositions.

And yet, much of the connectivity is rooted in a shared past that is intelligible in the articulations of the different Zimbabwean communities and, at the same time, is disembodied; gone, but not dead. Where the tangibility emerges, in events, associations and social action linked to the online fora – which links will be interrogated – it is as an intermediary between presence and absence, created through life-sized experiences that are vivid and emotionally intense. If the academy has ignored these phenomena and their properties, it would have missed opportunities for an inclusive engagement with the sociology of Zimbabwe and of Zimbabweans in Britain. The tension between the phenomenology of British-based Zimbabweans integrating themselves into the host society and the spaces they maintain in which they insist on expressing their non-British identities makes the research one of identity-based choices. Hence, the use of Heidegger’s (1962) projection of being to describe a two-way negotiation of homeland capital in an alien British context, where the properties of the identity of origin become worthless tools of priceless consequence. Worthless, because Zimbabwean values are often out of place
in the hostland (languages, male-only bastions like the inkundla/padare fora in Chapter 5, or the Zimbabwean flag in Chapter 7, for instance). Priceless, because these tools have a higher value for their ‘unusability’ in Britain.

The premium value placed on the instruments of a people’s origin when forced to adapt to a transnational experience fit Heidegger’s sense of the uncanny, a sense that we are not quite at home in a world where we are influenced by our past while projecting ourselves into the future. Whatever their social category, Zimbabweans memorialize their past in co-existence with their present British setting to which they must also adapt.

Although the chapter has theorized extensively, the point in the end is not to have theory for theory’s sake, but to set it in a dialogue with the research material and thereby record the experiences of the research subjects. An exploration of the social, cultural and subjective processes at work will ensure that transnationals, not transnationalism, are the centre of focus. The tendency towards what Wise (2006:12) called ‘voiceless macro-analyses of mass movements’ risks rendering transnationals as ‘speechless emissaries’ – a condition which would void a principal motive behind this research. Instead, said Wise, ‘work in this area must insist on acknowledging the human suffering, narrative authority, historical agency, and political memory of the subjects’. The research, then, will emphasize the centrality of people’s views in a ‘transnational public sphere’ (Burnett and Marshall 2003:33) described by themes related to the Zimbabwean experience.
CHAPTER TWO: Researching the Extended Public Sphere

2.1 Introduction: An interdisciplinary, multi-method inquiry

The transnational processes that have occasioned this research are of interdisciplinary interest, requiring a multi-method inquiry of quantities and contexts, while also conduct-focused and concept-driven. This chapter unveils the strategy for that inquiry, listing sites on the margins of the mainstream, justifying their interest to this research, and exploring linkages between their online and offline manifestations and the connections of both to social histories of broader constituencies. The chapter assembles a toolkit for the specific data collection and analysis techniques that apply to those phenomena and their investigation. These are implemented in two phases. First, the chapter lists 10 websites operating out of Britain which are profiled as reproducing marginalized ethnic, political or professional identities. Then it selects four websites on the basis of their f2f properties to test the hypothesis that web discourses can materialize as social action. Could these manifestations constitute the ‘alternative public sphere’ which Moyo (2007:84) described as emerging in Zimbabwean expatriate communities, in response to the exclusivity of state-crafted discourses inside the homeland?

2.2 The Researcher’s Location in the field and its implications

My location in the research field merits a little articulation and self-reflection, given that I share a background with the social phenomena. I am a Zimbabwean. I belong to that group of Zimbabweans (mixed-race ‘Coloureds’ or goffals) that is among those described in this research as marginalized, and reproduced in one of the website case studies (www.goffal.com). I come from the Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe, where ethnically-laced grievances against Robert Mugabe are strong and for which another of the research sites, www.inkundla.net, is an overseas outlet. I worked as a journalist in Zimbabwe for 12 years, and joined the journalists’ network analyzed in
this thesis for research purposes, but also with an entitlement to membership and a stake in the
issues. Lastly, I am one of the diaspora, not immune from the insecurities that befall it, sharing the
Angst of subjects with no long-term rights of abode in Britain. This will not amount to a navel-
gazing form of scholarship: vocal respondents will challenge my perceptions and interpretations,
most explicitly in the inkundla.net constituency (Chapter 3) where revision of the questionnaire is
prompted. This is occasioned by ‘the dialectical nature of knowledge creation’ (De Neve &
Unnithan-Kumar 2006:12) in which negotiation by and with informants conditions the research to
address the subject matter through ‘native’ lenses (Bodenhorn 2006:21). Researchers are learners,
even in social spaces with which they are familiar (De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar 2006:6). My
‘taken for granted authority’ (2006:3) as a researcher in this case does come with a personal interest
that enhances knowledge of the subjects and subliminal influences (DeWalt & DeWalt 2002:8) and
creates easy access to sites and key informants. But there is also a vulnerability in such familiarity
which can lead to a researcher being insensitive or unsighted, as with the sub-identities which
required the revision of the inkundla.net questionnaire.

But what of the field? What is it, and my relation to it? Coleman argues the field is both a place ‘out
there’ and an intellectual context that shapes the research and its boundaries. It is reflective of the
researcher’s ‘biography’ insofar as ‘ethnographers both create and are created by field sites. Such
sites are material but also intellectual spaces that define the limits and contexts of authorized
interpretation’ (Coleman, 2006:34). What this means is that my past and who I am is a part of this
research, discreet though I want it to be. I did not travel to Zimbabwe, or introduce myself to
Zimbabwean diaspora communities, as an outsider, even where, as with the white and amaNdebele
communities, I negotiated a role as a familiar ‘outsider’, one who had lived among them, spoke
their languages and recognized their traits, and could be relied upon in this alien environment. I
brought baggage into the fieldwork: my being a goffal, a journalist, my familiarity with
amaNdebele grievances, my education in a predominantly white Zimbabwean school. There were
surely concepts that pre-existed this research that shaped the ‘intellectual spaces’ into which the
categories discussed here so neatly fit. But the evidence has to justify the spaces and categories, and the narrative must lead from concepts to places ‘out there’, where these Zimbabwean identities manifest and can be found by a different researcher, concomitantly or as a follow-up to my research. These two fields – the conceptual and the embodied – describe ‘the limits of one’s contact with informants’ within the narrative which, when compiled, will be an ‘intellectual biography’ of learning about the very people and cultures among which I was nurtured (Coleman 2006:34-35). It is nevertheless a virtue to aspire to some distance between my own dispositions and the inquiry and narrativization of the project.

2.3 Defining ‘Marginal’ Constituencies as Research Subjects

Data extraction begins with ten websites mounted and subscribed to by Zimbabweans in the British Diaspora (Table 2.1). The websites that fit the research agenda (i) promote a marginalized political view; (ii) promote a marginalized ethnic or racial identity; (iii) promote a marginalized professional interest. They include some websites that have f2f associations. Their orientation would be distinct from state and state-sanctioned discourses in Zimbabwe which are pro-Mugabe, anti-western governments, hostile to political and civic groups critical of Mugabe, and unfriendly to ethnic minorities. Marginalization is discussed for the most part of this thesis as the state of being on the periphery of political, economic and socio-cultural interactivities within Zimbabwe and attracting open hostility or a latent unacceptance in the state-restricted public domain. The marginalization might be legislated and explicit, as in the hostile media laws that have led to the flight of journalists abroad, some of whom are part of the Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK, or it might be implicit in the exclusion minority groups feel from public discourse. The ten websites in Table 2.1 were selected for their linkages to one or more of those marginalized groups.

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1 Zimbabwe’s restrictive media laws, chiefly the Broadcasting Act of 2000, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2001 and the Public Order and Security Act of 2002, have led to the closure of six media outlets and the arrests of scores of local and foreign journalists to date. See e.g. Nhuka, (2006)
2 See e.g. NAAC (National Association for the Advancement of Mixed-Race Coloureds, 2003) Baseline Study on the Situation of Coloured People in Zimbabwe, Harare: NAAC/CIDA.
Table 2.1: Functionality of the 10 selected Zimbabwean Diaspora Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk</a></td>
<td>A meeting space for Zimbabwean journalists in Britain, started in October 2004. Categorised as a newsgroup.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.inkundla.net">www.inkundla.net</a></td>
<td>Online lobby in favour of Ndebele minority rights and/or political autonomy. News feed, Discussion fora, chatrooms.</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.mannfriday.com">www.mannfriday.com</a></td>
<td>White rock band’s website, publicizes and reviews performances, albums and media appearances. Bulletin board</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.newzimbabwe.co.m">www.newzimbabwe.co.m</a></td>
<td>Introduced in June 2003 by an exiled journalist, it offers news updates, debates and online shopping and money transfer facilities. It tends to be dominated by diaspora-based perspectives at variance with the Mugabe government and mainstream Zimbabwean media. News (own and agencies), discussion fora, chatrooms</td>
<td>Homogeneous-s</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.swradioafrica.co.uk">www.swradioafrica.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Nominally trans-ethnic. Visitors to the website can listen to either live broadcasts at the specified times, or past programmes any time. News (own and agencies), bulletin boards, discussion fora, chatrooms</td>
<td>Homogeneous-s</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.thebottomhalf.co.m">www.thebottomhalf.co.m</a></td>
<td>Overwhelmingly white subscription, mostly Zimbabweans in Britain. Discussion fora</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.wezimbabwe.org">www.wezimbabwe.org</a></td>
<td>Philanthropic objectives. Events and membership identical to the bottomhalf. Bulletin boards, discussion fora</td>
<td>Homogeneous-s</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.zimbabwewe">www.zimbabwewe</a> hope.co.uk</td>
<td>Static, one-dimensional (sender-to-receiver) detailing hardships suffered by white Zimbabwean farmers.</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.zimvigil.co.uk">www.zimvigil.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Anti-government website sustaining weekly protests outside the Zimbabwean Embassy in The Strand in London. Linked to Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change. Discussion fora</td>
<td>Homogeneous-s</td>
<td>Password</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 Data Collection and a ‘foot in the door’

In a dual research frame where assessment and measurement is online and in-person, mixed modes of research and a triangulation of methods within those modes help to access the research subjects. In assessing website activity, it sufficed to insert online questionnaires on each website to

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1 ‘Newsgroups’ are conversational, one-to-many fora that usually offer a narrow subject focus, defined by an area of interest, such as graphics, cultural groups, or, as in this case, journalism.
2 ‘Live ‘news feed’ to websites can be arranged through subscriptions to syndicates.
3 ‘Bulletin boards’ or ‘message boards’ are intended for leaving messages for one or a group of fellow-readers of the website which the sender does not mind being in the public domain. However, on goffal.com, the message board was the most active location of discussion threads on the website – even more interactive and contentious than the discussion fora.
4 Discussion fora are custom-made for many-to-many users’ engagement and are popular with website users.
5 A ‘chatroom’ is that part of a website which allows members online at any given time to exchange live, I2I messages which are accessible to all community users logged in to the site.
obtain co-operation from the subjects. Where real-life analysis was required, opportunities for face-to-face interviews or the handing out of immediate-return questionnaires (Dillman 2000:246) came at the events generated by those websites. When people who are eligible for the surveys appear at the area of interest, it is possible to sample them and ask that they answer some survey questions before leaving. The latter option, where the researcher asks questions while having respondents fill out the questionnaire, to be collected at the end of the conversation, is what was used in most cases at events in this study and is what Dillman calls a ‘foot in the door’ approach. A test of these procedures in the US showed that the ‘foot in the door’ approach recorded response rates of 75 per cent, compared with 38 per cent for the ‘mailback option’ where respondents were handed a questionnaire and asked to post it to an address (Dillman 2000:246). Dillman argued that the presence of the researcher or interviewer and the insistence on immediate return was a catalyst in ensuring that those who committed to the process actually completed and submitted the questionnaire. When Mbiba (2005:28) tried the mailback option in his research of British-based Zimbabweans, he fared badly: ‘only 20 percent of the questionnaires left for self completion or posted for completion were returned or completed’, he wrote. Mbiba found the approach ‘inappropriate’ and lacking a necessary ‘degree of familiarity between researcher and potential respondent’ given what he called the ‘sensitive’ nature of immigration as a topic among many Zimbabweans in Britain. It was clear direct exchanges with respondents was necessary, rather than placing the onus on the respondent to ‘mail back’.

The nature of the research also required online questionnaires. Gauging the research population’s characteristics and internet use required offline and online surveys that quantified both strands of the research field. Since the study describes online phenomena and their ‘teleological structure’ (Habermas 1997:101) – website discourses materializing as social events - each case study includes a pairing of a website and a corresponding public association to show that there are lived experiences emanating from the online discourses. The research intuition is to recognise the website
as a ‘case’ and the association as part of the case’s social and physical setting (Miles and Huberman 1994:27).

Among other questions, the surveys required a specificity of ethnic self-identification which some website managers were uncomfortable with. For instance, one website with an estimated 89 per cent dominance by whites declared itself ‘a non-racial forum for all races’. Other websites were less reticent in advertising their objectives as centred around the identity of their dominant group: websites like www.inkundla.net and www.goffal.com were – in terms of content - overtly serving the amaNdebele and mixed-race Zimbabwean communities respectively. Still others, like www.zimvigil.co.uk and www.swradioafrica.com professed to be above political affiliation – yet their content lurched towards sympathy for Zimbabwe’s Movement for Democratic Change.9

After securing data from online surveys, an inquiry into real life associations linked with four websites selected for in-depth reviews follows. Both phases of the research are crucial in examining links between websites and the associational spaces they produce. The researcher began data collection using a structured questionnaire distributed at public events generated by the online discourses, and the same format of questions posted on four websites.

8 A survey to ascertain the ethnic composition of www.thebottomhalf.com membership recorded an 88.9% response from persons identifying themselves as ‘white Zimbabweans’ – and there may have been more whites among the 2.3 per cent respondents in the ‘other’ category. See survey results and chart, ‘Case 2’ of chapter three.

9 Formerly the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won a parliamentary majority in March 2008 and subsequently formed an inclusive government with Robert Mugabe’s ZANU (PF), which was inaugurated on 13 February 2009
2.5 The In-Depth Analyses of Four websites

2.5.1 Case Study Rationale

The use of descriptive case studies to validate plurality in diaspora discourses in contrast to, but also in dialogue with, the repressed environment in Zimbabwe is at the heart of the second phase of this study. Through a selection of cases that illustrate the plurality and free speech variables, this chapter begins the process of tracking relevant discourses in the transnational environment. The approach is descriptive as opposed to Yin’s (2003:6) other categories of ‘explanatory’ and ‘exploratory’ case studies. Yin’s (2003:4) ‘classic example of a descriptive case study’ had a three-fold effectiveness:

- tracing ‘the sequence of interpersonal events over time’;
- describing ‘a sub-culture that had rarely been the topic of previous study, and (discovering) key phenomena’;
- dealing with ‘issues of individual performance, group structure, and the social structure’.

Case studies are also used ‘when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context’ (Yin 2003:1).

Each of those qualities are pertinent to this research, which will use multiple case studies of communication phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin 2003:13). The websites’ intentionality in reproducing explicit political, ethnic or professional interests removes this research from an exploration of possibilities to a description of the preponderances and their importance to Zimbabweans in their distinct and heterogeneous settings. Those preponderances are dictated by self-selecting ethnic and professional entities that have defined themselves as constituencies within

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10 This includes some quantitative surveys and content analysis, although the research question really deals with what Yin (2003:6) calls ‘operational links’ than with ‘frequencies or incidence’
the Zimbabwean diaspora, but with identities of their own. As subjects of this study, they allow microscopic analysis of representative components of ‘Zimbabweanness’ that have distinctive sub-cultures which they purvey through their websites. That said, the observables described needed verification ‘beyond sheer association’ (Miles and Huberman 1994:170) and so this study incorporates conceptual, historical and contemporary quantitative evidence to expand knowledge about each constituency.

The four cases, like the 10 formations from which they were extracted (Table 2.1), reproduce the sentiments of constituencies marginalized from the mainstream homeland discourse. These counter-majoritarian formations evidence white, Ndebele and mixed-race communities as well as a group of journalists, each group relating to their ethnic or racial origins, professional interest or political persuasion. To grasp the text and action dimensions of these cases, a thematic framework is adopted in later chapters for extracting and discussing their characteristics (chapters 4-7), with the proviso that the themes ‘should be maintained in the original forms throughout the study’ (Miles and Huberman 1994:6,7; 73). Selected from topics which occur with ‘some regularity’ in Zimbabwean discourses (Miles and Huberman 1994:57), the themes are ethnicity, interaction with the Zimbabwean political discourse, gender, the impact of HIV-AIDS, and interlocution with the British culture and establishment. Racially-charged politics in the homeland, a high rate of HIV-AIDS infection, gender relations complicated by a country context that is mostly culturally conservative, and sensitivities provoked by the migration of Zimbabweans to Britain, attest to the relevance of those themes, as the research will also illustrate.

The research assumes the content of each case will justify the choice of each theme, rendering protracted explanation of the selection of themes unnecessary. The intended outcome is compelling research whose cases are typical, and whose findings inform other studies, and equip policymakers and other agencies as they relate to expatriate Zimbabweans as a component of immigrant communities negotiating their homeland legacies and their British domicile. The research findings
will be expected to have identified and defined the social system that operates in each of the in-depth case analyses, and tested the extent to which these have impacted Zimbabweans and their diverse discourses.

2.5.2 The Quantitative Surveys as Data Providers
This research draws on analyses of websites and website-generated activities conducted during the years 2003-2008. It surveyed up to 1,372 online respondents per website as well as clusters of face-to-face interviewees ranging from 45 to 410 respondents, each cluster tracked to public events held in and around London (but attended by constituents living in different parts of Britain). The research carried out direct and semi-participant observation on internet bulletin boards and fora and at Zimbabwean festivals – called gigs - and focused on the political, ethnic, gender, professional and other identity dimensions of the diverse Zimbabwean presence in Britain. The questionnaire format at the end of this chapter was used alongside unstructured interviews. It was handed out to face-to-face respondents at various events, and posted on goffal.com and thebottomhalf.com. The inkundla website and the newsgroup for journalists had their own facilities for crafting an online survey and this was used to similar effect. The researcher hoped to document the mobilization of Zimbabweans in Britain along political, race, gender and language distinctives, and to examine the extent to which these manifestations might challenge state-directed discourses from the homeland. Direct observation in the public events was facilitated by attendance, with interviews, person-to-person distribution of questionnaires, note-taking and conversations with Zimbabweans used as recording methods.

2.5.3 Issues of Legitimacy and Method Constraints
In his book on mail and internet surveys, Dillman offers insight into the uncertainties that attend internet-based research methods – from modest response rates caused by technical and social

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11 I addressed the nature of my ‘semi-participant observation’ in Section 2.2.
inhibitions facing respondents (2000:356-365), to margin-of-error volatility caused by respondents who may complete the questionnaire more than once, complete it despite being outside the field that was targeted for the research (e.g. in this research, US-based Zimbabweans or people of other nationalities attempting the survey), or who may misunderstand one or more questions and in the end, answer incorrectly, or else not at all. Dillman (2000:378) suggests having respondents use a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to limit access to Zimbabweans in Britain. This would require that such a PIN be mailed to accessed Zimbabweans. Still, there is the problem identifying respondents who qualify: with the exceptions of www.inkundla.net and www.thebottomhalf.com, mailing lists of most of the websites being reviewed do not indicate the geographical location of the user, making it difficult to discern who to communicate the PIN number to. Also, in many of the web communities, some subscriber profiles give fictional locations, like ‘the Republic of Mthwakazi’ (a non-existent homeland for siNdebele-speaking Zimbabweans); or they give their Zimbabwean village of origin in order to convey an indigenous identity when, in fact, the web users are in London.

Evidence of these difficulties can be found in the larger number of users who clicked on website links to the questionnaire (the ‘hits’), but did not complete it. (This meant low response rates of those who completed the survey when measured as percentages of the total number of visitors, or ‘hits’ – see Table 3.2 in the next chapter). The technical problems of online quantitative methods are acknowledged as such. But the study’s use of the complementary offline data gathering techniques to get the thicker picture of each constituency represented by each website case means that statistics of online usage affected by these quirks of method feed into a larger and composite data set. And as the research as a whole follows a mixed method approach, acknowledged idiosyncracies in the online component of the research should neither inhibit the project nor compromise its outcomes, for web users and their associations constitute the composite cyber-social fields being problematized. The duality of online and real-life associations is appraised descriptively using surveys and case studies to deal with each and all of the components of online
and real-life cases. While the questionnaire in Table 2.3 below was the preferred instrument for testing membership in the online and real-life network contexts, the researcher elected to go beyond forced choice questions by developing the description of the constituencies as case studies. The researcher has thus used a mixed-method approach, utilizing the case study approach at the heart of the narrative and supplementing it with the quantitative data adduced in Chapter Three to strengthen and inform the conclusions.

2.5.4 Issues of Representativeness and Choice of Cases

An Oxford panel of researchers involving this writer, Dr Winston Mano from the University of Westminster, and the School of Oriental and African Studies doctoral student Wendy Willems, addressed whether the Zimbabwean diaspora websites could be described as representative of the whole Zimbabwean presence in Britain, and if so, how this could be validated. The lively exchanges included an oft-stated scepticism that internet websites can be accepted as representative, quantitatively or otherwise, of the entities they purportedly represent. This was an important consideration in the discussion, which included contributions from the floor, and the overriding impression was that quantifying such ‘representativeness’ would be difficult. The panellists nevertheless agreed that this should not be a reason for aborting a study of the websites and their associations. As Mano proffered, ‘these websites are…a very, very important location for the emergence of a type of community. All these are online communities, difficult to study we agree – it’s a methodological problem – but to dismiss them as an area of study on that account is to throw out the baby with the bathwater.’

An operative basis for this research, therefore, is that each case study does not represent a sample. Case studies, says Yin (2003:10), are ‘generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to

12The exchanges were during the third session of the Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Day, St Antony’s College Oxford, 17 June 2006. The session was devoted to the Internet and the Diaspora, and this researcher was addressing the topic, ‘Exile, Identity and the Internet’
populations or universes’, a point underscored by Miles and Huberman (1994:29) in whose view ‘the choice of cases usually is made on conceptual grounds, not on representative grounds’. The ‘conceptual grounds’ for case selection in this research have been defined as diverse constituencies on the margins of the Zimbabwean public sphere, whose presence in Britain and access to the internet allows them to reproduce their identities outside of the homeland’s constraints. The use of surveys and interviews underscores group traits relevant to each case study. The research is sensitive to response rates: it shares a practical difficulty with state and international migration agencies in quantifying the Zimbabwean presence in Britain, both for its size and geographical spread (Bloch 2005:10; Chetsanga 2004:19-20). It focuses greater emphasis on a description of the plurality claimed by the research topic.

2.6 Questionnaire Design for Online and Offline Surveys

2.6.1 Hyperlinked Access

The questionnaire, a sample of which is provided at the end of this chapter, was designed using the format prescribed on the www.formsite.com website. Questionnaires were posted on thebottomhalf.com and goffal.com through a banner on each web portal that was hyper-linked to www.formsite.com, the quantitative survey-formulating website. For the other two sites, use was made of inkundla.net’s built-in multi-question polls and survey software (using an identical set of questions), while a similar type of questionnaire was inserted on the Yahoo newsgroup for journalists, using the Yahoo polling facility. It was thought better to engage both the journalists and the inkundla constituency using the polling facilities in their discussion fora, which allowed the researcher to motivate the questions and the rationale of the broader project on a more personal level while receiving feedback in the same section of the website. Embedded questionnaires would have

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13 Chetsanga, for instance, noted that most countries, including Britain, did not keep consolidated databases of immigrant numbers and instead relied on (often outdated) census statistics from the previous exercise. In the UK this is compounded by the fact that census databases are maintained separately for England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland
been preferred for all the websites had they possessed polling software capable of generating sufficient detail in their bulletin boards.

The online questionnaires were accessible for a period of two months. On each website, the location of the questionnaire was password-protected to ensure that the field attracted was of the subscribed membership. The process of downloading results from the formsite.com questionnaire and adding to these statistics from face-to-face data gathering opportunities at Zimbabwean events produced a ‘cumulative framework’ for analyzing and interpreting the results, on which the next chapter will dwell at length.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of survey</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 2.2 Duration of online surveys

2.6.2 Asking and Answering Questions

Field research is partly ‘a matter of going where the action is and simply watching and listening’ (Babbie 1983:252-3). However, it can involve more active inquiry like survey questionnaires, which are always structured and can be either self-completed or filled in by the interviewer while engaging respondents, and unstructured interviews in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions. An unstructured interview, Babbie says, is ‘a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics. Ideally, the respondent does most of the talking…’. Interview topics differed slightly from the structured questionnaire used in this project (Table 2.3) in that they were prone to influence by whatever conversation the interviewer and respondents engaged in, during or
after the filling of the questionnaire. Some topics raised outside of the questionnaire included details of occupation, nationality, marital status, usage of UK-Zimbabwean websites as opposed to Zimbabwean and British media, comments on Zimbabwean events, ethnic-based segmentation among Zimbabweans, and a spectrum of political views. Responses from the unstructured interviews were useful in filling in the gaps in information gleaned from the formal research processes. They confirmed that:

(i) The events where the interviews were held were conceived for, and dominated by, people of Zimbabwean origin;

(ii) Most people interviewed used the internet, kept in touch with the particular website linked to the event at which they were interviewed, and learnt about that particular event at which they were interviewed through the ‘parent’ website;

(iii) Most people were anti-Mugabe and blamed him for Zimbabwe’s woes;

(iv) Most people wanted to return to Zimbabwe to settle once a new government was in place;

(v) Two respondents said they ‘hated the word diaspora because it has been used by the Zimbabwe Government to generalise those of its subjects abroad as unpatriotic, subversive, as doing menial jobs in the UK far below their qualifications and skills’. Another respondent said the diaspora was being abused as a rich source of foreign currency inflows. She said the government was exploiting its emigrant population with a mixture of charm and indirect but far-reaching forms of taxation such as exhorbitant rates in foreign currency for renewal of passports and other Zimbabwean documents, as well as taxes on all remittances to Zimbabwe.

14 Interviews at ZimFest 2004, Raynes Park
Unlike the unstructured interviews, the formal questionnaire was designed to produce statistically verifiable results and addressed, specifically, issues of website usage and their correlation to ethnic stratifications. Considerations that influenced the design of the formal questionnaire were similar to those posed by the ethnographer Hine (2000:8) in her investigation of correlations between online phenomena and real-life relationships. Her ‘virtual ethnography’, as she described her research, posed the following questions:

- How do the users of the internet understand its capacities? What significance does its use have for them? How do they understand its capabilities as a medium of communication, and whom do they perceive their audience to be?
- How does the internet affect the organization of social relationships in time and space? Is this different to the ways in which ‘real life’ is organized, and if so, how do users reconcile the two?
- What are the implications of the internet for authenticity and authority? How are identities performed and experienced, and how is authenticity judged?
- Is ‘the virtual’ experienced as radically different from and separate from ‘the real’? Is there a boundary between online and offline? (Hine 2000:8).

The questionnaire needed to simplify this intellectual plan of inquiry into a set of easy-to-answer questions that would not tax respondents or serve as a disincentive to completing the questionnaire. The line of multi-choice questioning devised was uncomplicated, and the format designed to induce one or a series of simple push-button (online) and tick-box (paper) replies. It can be noted that statistics which would have allowed a discussion of the respondents’ occupations, ages, gender and immigration status were not asked for at this stage. The purpose of the questionnaire in Table 2.3 below was to ‘open a relationship’ with the subjects in line with Nichols (1991:16) and, as suggested above, to encourage them to take part in the research. With hindsight, it was a mistake not to find out some basic and important information about the respondents.

In addition, the questionnaire drew the following adverse reactions:

(i) A small minority of respondents challenged the omission of the British Broadcasting Corporation and its website from the list of options in Question 1. Indeed the BBC has a long relationship with pre- and post-independent Zimbabwean audiences.
(having offended the Ian Smith-led white government as much as it did the Mugabe regime). Its omission was an oversight: living in the UK but with a tradition of reading newspapers inherited from Zimbabwe, the researcher underestimated the reliance of people on the BBC and related broadcast media. There are also other sources of Zimbabwean news such as AllAfrica.com, news24.com and the Mail&Guaridan online service. Including an option for all sources of any Zimbabwean news would have provided data which showed how important actual Zimbabwean websites were by comparison. This comparison would have added another dimension to our knowledge of Zimbabwean media consumption habits in the British diaspora. However, the primary focus of Question 1 was to find out what Zimbabwean sources were available to the subjects and to evaluate their importance.

(ii) For the simplicity of data collection, I sought to avoid complex and multi-choice questions, insisting on only one answer in Question 2. The respondents indicated their preferences in the surveys and they are as reflected in the tables in Chapter 3. However, the respondents may have regarded as equally or nearly as important one or more of the other options listed. Many gave ‘information about Zimbabwean events’ as their prime motive for using the websites, but might also have regarded the importance of ethnicity, immigration matters, communicating with others, or addressing social problems in Zimbabwean communities. Insisting on only one response for Question 2 may have constricted the responses and weakened the analysis, as a result of which some conclusions from the answers are subject to some qualification and/or caution.

(iii) ‘News’ is missing as an option of why respondents might consider Zimbabwean websites useful. The omission results from an oversight that deprives the research of a useful data set from which the plausibility of these websites as a news source could be assessed. Many of the websites use RSS, sometimes known as Really Simple
Syndication, for sharing news content, and they are likely to be used to a large degree by visitors updating themselves on Zimbabwe and its current affairs.

(iv) It also needs to be acknowledged that since many respondents were accessed via the internet, we cannot be certain where they were physically situated – though we are able to establish that the websites through which they were engaged were managed in Britain, by UK-based Zimbabweans, primarily for a British-based Zimbabwean audience.

To reiterate a central weakness in the questionnaire design, the insistence on only one answer has led to some conclusions being drawn from Question 2 that are either inadequate or questionable. Consider the question of ethnicity. With only one possible answer, just 6.6 percent gave this as most important. Yet ethnic reasons may be very strong in people’s minds but not on the surface and not often articulated and often not admitted to. The survey does not, in retrospect, show what respondents thought ‘the primary objective of any website’ is. It shows simply that 6.6 percent of respondents gave ethnicity as being their single most important reason for them to access Zimbabwean websites. Maybe the remaining 94 percent also put a high priority on using Zimbabwean websites for this purpose. We shall never know and it is a weakness of the whole project that needs to be acknowledged.

2.7 Conclusion to Chapter

Two convergent dynamics affecting networked communities in the twenty first century are the ever-increasing multicultural composition of organizational life and its online representation as constituency-based websites. In this chapter the researcher has highlighted how he proposes to examine both of these, looking for a complementarity of online and offline interaction projected
in the selected constituencies of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain. Globalization and its effects, both positive and negative, mean that a communication-based research such as this must take cognisance of the electronic media and how it is used in order to maximize the benefits of multicultural diversity, and to enable the participation of the marginalised within the Zimbabwean context. This requires a methodology that interrogates online formations and the quantifiable, observable and communicable products that these internet networks generate in real-life.

Thus a dual examination of online and off-line manifestations of composite constituencies will take the research forward. The complementarity of both fields makes composite analyses of each case of online/real-life manifestations feasible, as shown in the data presentations and overview in the next chapter. Having outlined the research design to achieve these objectives, and having also established the significance of this specific course of inquiry and situated it within the larger environment of Zimbabwean social history and diaspora studies, the researcher will now turn to a case-by-case data analysis on the basis of the questionnaire in Table 2.3. Discussion of the broader profiles and histories of the constituencies will follow in Chapters Four to Seven.

The thesis does not discuss how internet use fits into the daily practices and routines of informants. Scholars like Savolainen (2008:203) have discussed the effect internet use has on the routines and habits of disseminating and receiving agents. However, the focus of this thesis is on group networks and their interactivities rather than individuals’ consumption within their home or work contexts. Admittedly, contextualization of internet consumption is of interest, particularly as scholars discuss the implications of the ‘multiple positioning and various opportunities’ (McGregor 2008:467) in which Zimbabweans in Britain engage.
Table 2.3 Sample Questionnaire

1. I update myself on events back home and among Zimbabweans in Britain, MOSTLY:

Through British newspapers. # %
Through Zimbabwean websites based in Zimbabwe.
Through Zimbabwean websites in Britain.
Through text messaging.
By word of mouth.

2. I consider the Zimbabwean websites that I visit to be most useful for: [CHOOSE ONE OPTION]

Communicating with other Zimbabweans
Advice on UK immigration/work and residence permit
Advice on Zimbabwean consular matters (passport renewals, etc.)
Addressing social problems in Zimbabwean communities
Information on forthcoming and past Zimbabwean events
Promoting the interests of my ethnic group
Re-affirming my Zimbabwean identity
Nothing. It's just a pastime!
Other (please specify)
3. I log on to my favourite Zimbabwe Diaspora website:

- At least once a day
- 2-6 times a week
- Between once a week and once every three weeks
- Once every two months or less
- Once a month

4. I am:

Black (state language group)
White
Mixed-race/Coloured
Other (state)

Thank you for taking the time to give us your opinion. Click the browser back button twice to return to the page you were previously on.
3.1 Introduction: Quantitative Surveillance as a tool for definition

This chapter introduces a quantitative dimension to the four diaspora formations under focus. It locates and interacts with the websites and their offline associations, illustrating their connections through surveillance of both sites and attempting to explore them as fields which permeate each other. The surveys and interviews in this chapter produce preliminary profiles that do not conclude the thesis argument, but connect the networks with categories of membership that define the nature of association that the thesis seeks to describe. Defining the online and face-to-face interactions as twin contexts in a constituency, the chapter looks for empirical evidence of diaspora Zimbabwean engagement in British-based associational spaces that reflect Zimbabwean interests.

3.2 The Cumulative Framework and Representativeness

Cumulative research of online and face-to-face Zimbabwean interaction constitutes the ‘methodological space’ for interrogating these phenomena. This space is ‘multi-sited’ not ‘ring fenced’ (Coleman 2006:32), and in a field of study straddling two countries, necessitates ‘translocal approaches’ that ‘enlarge the concept of the “field”’ (De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar 2006:5). Like Coleman’s multi-sited ethnography, the fieldwork of this study is not confined to a geographical site, but is driven ‘between locations, ideas and relationships’ by ‘mutual engagement between people, locations and representations’ (De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar 2006:1). The locations are internet-based and f2f, as well as transnational and multi-territorial. That the primary research moves between virtual and real spaces reflects scholarship that is open to the view that
contemporary social relations develop in real life and on the internet. As the research methods understand locality as being both in and outside the ‘ontological moorings’ of traditional research (Appadurai 1995:4), the fieldwork is a mix of paper questionnaires, informal interviews, online surveys, and, in later chapters, case study narratives, all of which draw on offline and online contexts. In its multi-sitedness the fieldwork ‘reinforces the field’s (multi-) disciplinary identity’ (Coleman 2006:31), embracing ‘heterogenous sets of practices’ (ibid:32).

The constituencies of four networks were accessed at four public events, each advertised on parallel websites in advance. Exclusive use of a particular website to publicize a particular event linked that website and event, although ‘word of mouth’ was an inevitable channel of information that would have challenged the exclusive publicity on any given website. An anti-Mugabe demonstration in central London on 25 October 2003 allowed the researcher access to both principals and rank-and-file members of the inkundla network, the event having been promoted on www.inkundla.net. Sixty paper questionnaires were distributed to SiNdebele-speakers at the event for immediate completion, of which 53 were returned answered. A fund-raiser at Footsie Sports Club in Lower Sydenham on 10 July 2004 gave access to the www.goffal.com constituency, at which 163 out of 165 distributed questionnaires were answered. The Zimbabwe Festival or ‘ZimFest’, flagship of the constituency associated with www.thebottomhalf.com, was the occasion on which that network was engaged personally, yielding 410 responses out of 500 distributed questionnaires on 11 September 2004. The researcher also attended an Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK meeting on 22 August 2004 in central London to access subjects.

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1 As will become evident in the case studies, most ‘advertising’ for these events emerged through discussion threads, often snowballing from a suggestion to announcement, and then into debates about pre-event organization, choice of venue, distribution of proceeds, celebrity attendances, etc. The more protracted the discussion in advance of an event, the more publicity it received.
On that occasion, all 45 attendees at the meeting answered and returned the questionnaire.

The journalists were asked to ignore Question Four, regarding ethnicity, because it was directed at the other cases, whose profiles align with Zimbabwe’s ethnic divisions. This is not to suggest that the question of ethnicity is irrelevant to journalists: as Chapter Seven will show, they are not immune from influences drawn out of Zimbabwe’s ethnically divided past. However, as a research question, it seemed not entirely appropriate in this case, given that the journalists were included to illustrate a different area of marginalisation.²

The cumulative framework does not seek representative samples, nor is it a method to conduct a census of the identified collectivities as they subsist in the Zimbabwean diaspora. As a framework, it seeks to integrate responses from online associations and their face-to-face outgrowths so as to produce a composite field of research subjects.

### 3.3 Response rates

In all, 2726 respondents took part in the survey (Table 3.3). The observation of websites and website-generated activities was conducted during the years 2003-2008. The journalists and the mainly white Zimbabweans surveyed at ZimFest at Raynes Park yielded bigger face-to-face responses than on the internet, with the trend reversed for the mixed-race goffal constituency at Lower Sydenham and the siNdeblele-speaking inkundla members.

² Note: The choice of the overseas journalists’ fraternity as a subject for this research was justified in chapter one, in the section giving the ‘background to the research’.
When assessed by percentages of those who accessed the questionnaire in each group, three of the communities recorded better response rates to paper questionnaires distributed in personal interaction than those accessed online. They were goffal.com, thebottomhalf.com, and inkundla.net (see tables below). The fourth, the journalists’ newsgroup, provided a 100 per cent response rate for both surveys, helped by the small-sized samples, the researcher’s status as a practised Zimbabwean journalist and the name recognition and relationships he enjoys in those circles.

Table 3.1 considers online interaction with the questionnaire across the four websites chosen for its distribution. The response rate is a measurement of the numbers that attempted the questionnaire as a percentage of the total number of ‘hits’ from each website. ‘Hits’ refer to those who accessed the questionnaire on each website and are seen as having considered taking the online survey, by virtue of having clicked on the hyperlinks to the questionnaire. The hits are important because if one simply put the questionnaire online and did not know the number of hits, made available by the formsite.com software in respect of goffal.com and thebottomhalf.com and by the bulletin boards of inkundla.net and the journalists’ newsgroup, then a response rate could not be calculated. The ‘hits’, then, are taken as being comparable to accepting the hand-out of a paper questionnaire at face-to-face encounters with the research team.
The venues listed in Table 3.2 are in the order of the websites listed in Table 3.1. Thus the event generated on goffal.com was held in Lower Sydenham, the event from thebottomhalf.com at Raynes Park, inkundla.net in The Strand, central London, and the journalists’ meeting at Friends House, London. Accepting a questionnaire handed out by the researcher or his assistants was interpreted as considering taking the survey – much like online users clicking into the survey – and so, as in Table 3.1, the basic necessities of a f2f ‘hit’ are there in Table 3.2 to enable the calculation of a response rate.
Table 3.3 Summary Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Response Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>2055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combined total of responses which adds the internet survey results to those of the paper questionnaires is very much closer to the online totals compared to the person to person answers. Many more respondents answered online than by hand, giving a weighted average of users whose number will be closer to the online than offline user totals. That would suggest that the online survey was more productive to the research. When cumulatively reviewing responses to each of the questions in Section 3.6, the trends that are set will have been much more influenced by online respondents than those who used paper questionnaires at face-to-face encounters. Looking at totals in the table above gives an overall summary of the effect of the online respondents on conclusions, acknowledging therefore the importance of internet surveys to the research. It is as much a comparison of successes between online and hand questionnaires as it is an attempt to straddle the field of research subjects across virtual and real life spaces of engagement.

3.4 Online Response Rates

Variations between the response rates of websites and events reflects differences in sample sizes, nature of event, and website user-strength. The link to the questionnaire on the goffal.com website recorded the highest number of ‘hits’. It also recoded the highest number of completions online – 1372. Expressed as a percentage of the total number of
‘hits’, this translates to a response rate of 61 per cent (Table 3.1). Name recognition, personal relationships, and a public and highly contentious discussion thread that developed around the race categories question in the survey (Q4) increased the survey’s exposure. But while these factors may have drawn the high number of ‘hits’ to the thread and the hyperlinked questionnaire that were recorded by the website counter (2243), at 61 per cent the goffal.com survey had the second lowest response rate online of the four cases.

The questionnaire hyperlinked from thebottomhalf.com’s portal yielded a completion rate of just over half of those who clicked on the link (52.4 per cent or 262 questionnaires completed online from 500 recorded ‘hits’). Unlike the brouhaha over ethnicity and race questions which the survey precipitated on goffal.com and inkundla.net, not a single comment, let alone a thread appeared in relation to the survey on thebottomhalf.com. The reasons for this are not clear, but it may be that sensitivities were not provoked by the ethnicity question as they were on goffal.com, or on inkundla.net.³ In the latter case, where online response rates averaged 75.6 per cent, the question on ethnic demographics had to be re-worded after feedback from respondents insisting that sub-categories of Ndebele identity be used.⁴ Having two versions of the question meant two sets of statistics with a cumulative figure also given. The researcher considered that to discard either of the surveys or to start afresh would not be a good option, since the first survey derived from the historical development of a greater Ndebele identity, whereas the second survey took into account language groups which subsist within that identity.⁵ The researcher expressly asked users not to take the second survey if they had already participated in the first, to avoid distortion.

³ For a thread containing exchanges between the researcher and users on goffal.com, see page 78. For a thread on inkundla.net on the ethnic variable of the questionnaire, see page 83.
⁴ See pages 83–84.
⁵ A broader discussion on this distinction in Ndebele identity is found in Chapter 5.
3.5 Response rates at face-to-face events

Smaller numbers took the survey at two of the four events than were recorded in their corresponding websites. The journalists’ forum, in its infancy when the fieldwork was undertaken, had more respondents available at the real-life event than were members online (although the meeting specifically encouraged and followed-up those journalists present who had not yet subscribed online). In the overall fieldwork, the numbers of those who undertook the survey was mainly determined by the size of the event: the journalists did not half-fill the hall in which they met whereas the expanse of fields that is Raynes Park bustled with hundreds of ZimFest goers. A comparison could also be drawn between the protest march generated on inkundla.net and its fluid numbers and locations (from the Houses of Parliament to The Strand in central London), and the more static and enclosed outdoor venue of the Footsie Sports Club in Lower Sydenham where a better-attended goffal event was staged. The disparity in numbers is neither insignificant nor fatal. The researcher might have employed more than the two research assistants to help him get an even better spread at the bigger events, but the nature of the events themselves and the volume of attendance at each was beyond his determination.

3.6 Results from Questionnaire

3.6.1 Block Charts: Indexed or in-text?

Block charts and tables are used to illustrate internet use, user demographics and other prevalences. They are part of the narrative that responds to the questionnaire and I prefer them to be incorporated in that narrative, rather than appended to it. This choice of presentation embeds the graphics in the social action being described – what Miles and Huberman (1994:4) call ‘the concrete, particular doings of people’ – instead of separating them as appendices.

6 Minutes of the AZJUK steering committee meeting, 5/3/2005, emailed to membership on 9/3/2005
3.6.2 Question 1: Utility of the Websites

‘How do you mostly update yourself on events back home and among Zimbabweans in Britain?’

When asked how they updated themselves on events in Zimbabwe and among Zimbabweans in Britain, respondents were offered the five possibilities listed in the table below. It was found that 76 per cent used the websites for updating themselves: 29 per cent said they used homeland websites, 47 per cent used websites based in Britain. Other sources were less influential, with 12.5 per cent relying on word of mouth, 8.5 per cent reading British newspapers, and 2.8 per cent saying they mostly used text messaging to keep informed.

![Figure 3.1: Block Chart showing how Zimbabweans in Britain ‘mostly update’ themselves](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Usage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Through British newspapers</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Through Zimbabwean websites based in Zimbabwe</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Through Zimbabwean websites in UK</td>
<td>1282</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Through text messaging</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Through word of mouth</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2726</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Ways that Zimbabweans update themselves
Discussion

Internet websites run from Britain by Zimbabweans based there are the dominant interactive medium for the research population, according to answers to Q1. The rate of subscription to British-based sites (47 per cent) suggests that the British-based sites are more synchronized with the communication, information and societal needs of Zimbabweans in Britain than would be the websites operating from Zimbabwe, for example. The figures also suggest that while use of text messages, reading British newspapers, and relying on word of mouth is part of the communication practice of Zimbabweans in Britain, none of these three modes of contact is as significantly preferred by the research population as are the internet sites.

The figure of 8.5 per cent for users that claim British newspapers as their primary source of information strengthens the view that a Zimbabwean’s perspective is more weighty than foreign media coverage of events inside Zimbabwe. The 2.8 per cent statistic for those who chiefly use text messaging does not make this mode of communication unimportant. But it does mean that the mobile phone texts are not the main source of information.

3.6.3 Question 2: What’s most useful about the website?

‘I consider the Zimbabwean website that I visit to be useful for…’

Respondents were asked to state what they found most useful about their favourite website, choosing from nine listed possibilities. They were restricted to one answer so as to extract the most beneficial aspect of the site that they used most. The biggest number of the respondents were most interested in information on forthcoming and past Zimbabwean events. The second biggest motivation was ‘Communicating with other Zimbabweans’ (nearly 19 per cent), while reaffirmation of a national identity was seen as the most important property of these websites by the third largest group. Addressing social problems
in Zimbabwean communities at home and abroad (374 respondents, or 13.7 per cent) was the fourth most popular impression of the websites, while 309 respondents (11.3 per cent) indicated that they found nothing significantly useful and although they visited the websites regularly, it was mainly for leisure or to pass the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Respondents identifying these benefits</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Information on forthcoming and past Zimbabwean events</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Communicating with other Zimbabweans</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Re-affirming Zimbabwean (national) identity</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social problems in diaspora and homeland</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nothing. It’s just a pastime!</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Promoting ethnic group</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. UK immigration/work and residence permits</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Zimbabwean consular matters (passports, etc.)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other (specify):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Easing ‘homesickness’ and ‘loneliness’</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. News (current affairs) from Zimbabwe</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Locating friends and relatives</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Employment opportunities</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Looking for ‘love’, specifically a Zimbabwean partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. Associating with people of like interests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii. Online purchase of Zimbabwean/South African products</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2 726</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 The Most Useful Purposes of a ‘favourite’ website
Figure 3.2: Block chart of ‘most useful’ purposes

Discussion

People participate in website communities for a number of reasons. The graphical representation epitomizes many different ‘favourite’ uses of the websites. Information exchange was, unsurprisingly, a chief function for most respondents. Specific information on Zimbabwean events like shows, meetings, sports festivals or protests was the most preferred option among respondents. The second most significant group of users were those who prioritised ‘communicating with other Zimbabweans’ as the biggest benefit of using their favourite website, while other categories of users prioritised advice on immigration matters and Zimbabwean consular matters. Other uses included addressing social problems, at home and in the diaspora; and promoting ethnic interests.
That a small proportion of the respondents thought ethnicity was the most important interest in their frequenting of Zimbabwean diaspora websites undermines the research intuition that race and ethnicity are foremost attractions. But being foremostly attractive and being important generally are different categories when the question narrows the options to just one choice, making it unsafe to imply that ethnicity or race is unimportant because respondents thought of it as not ‘most important’. The ‘most useful’ purposes which the respondents indicated, variables of a certain ambiguity in the question (but nevertheless revealing an affinity to the community-building properties of the use of the technology), summarize the pull factor of the Zimbabwean websites by subjects who are in the main removed from their homeland. What they are able to recreate online and face-to-face is the community enhancing, culturally affirming communication ‘with other Zimbabweans’ (Q1) which evidently, from the responses to this question, has the capacity to generate the greatest interest in the events, past and present, that bring online users together in real-life events.

3.6.4 Question 3: How often you access your Diaspora website?

When asked how often they visited their favourite Zimbabwean website, 45.8 per cent of respondents (or 1 249 answers) said that at the very least, they made once-daily visits. Between two and six times a week, 511 users (or 18.7 per cent) make visits to their favourite website. The number dips to 364 for those who only visit their site between once a month and once every three months. There were 257 respondents who said they made it to their favourite website once a month, while 345 subjects (or 12.5 per cent) are less regular, visiting once every two months or less regularly.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. At least once a day</td>
<td>1249</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2-6 times a week</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Between once a week and once every three weeks</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Once every two months or less</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Once a month</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2726</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 Frequency of access to favourite website

Figure 3.3: Block chart showing frequency of access to favourite website

Discussion

By significant margins, most of the respondents are daily website visitors. This is a significantly high number of regulars, which demonstrates the high level of commitment to the sites by those who use them on a daily basis. That there are regular ‘devotees’ or ‘insiders’ of a forum (Ottes and Maclaran 2007:56) can be attested to by the familiarity of usernames that are seen posting to the forum regularly – indeed, on a daily basis. Their participation in their favourite web forum can also be tracked by the regular and repeated
appearance of the name (or, very often pseudonym). They are likely to be the ‘insiders’ of
the web community.

3.6.5 Question 4: The ethnic mix of users of different websites

Introduction

This section will analyze the ethnic interests of three of the websites. Although the question
was also posed outside the websites, to respondents at face-to-face events, observation
clearly showed the attendances at three of these events to be ethnically or racially linked.
At the goffal.com event in Lower Sydenham, overwhelmingly attended by mixed-race
‘Coloured’ Zimbabweans, the only variants were three blacks and seven whites counted in
the whole venue where there were 300 people who entered and paid the five pound
admission fee. At ZimFest, whites were a clear majority, but there was a small minority
of blacks, Coloureds and Asians. Likewise the anti-Mugabe demonstration in The Strand,
specifically called by the siNdebele-speaking inkundla network to draw attention to the
government’s massacres of civilians in the Ndebele-populated areas of southern Zimbabwe
from 1982-87, comprised almost exclusively of Ndebele, the exceptions being a mixed race
couple and a white who all said they came from Matabeleland, southern Zimbabwe. Since
the ethnic profile of attendances at events seemed self-evident, this section confines its
statistical analysis to ethnic clusterings on the goffal.com, inkundla.net and
thebottomhalf.com websites. The graphs and tables that follow illustrate the dominance of
ethnic interests on the three websites.

Although a decision was made not to quantify journalists by ethnicity, the topic slipped into
their forum in a manner unrelated to the research questions (Chapter Seven). This reiterates

7 Interview with Marion Strachan, Secretary of the Count on Us Charity, who co-organised the event, Lower

8 The research did not statistically quantify attendance at all these events by race, although it was observable
that their attendances were ethnically linked and corresponded with the dominant ethnic paradigms of the
three websites from which they were generated.
the levels of ethnic consciousness in post-colonial Zimbabwe and the futility of ignoring its social impact.

**Case 1 Users of goffal.com website**

Over a century after the colonizers arrived in modern-day Zimbabwe, a by-product of their invasions fights for public space by demonstrating its use of an electronic forum to serve important self-realisation needs. In the online exchanges and by its graphically larger share of the user market (Table 3.7), mixed-race goffals claimed membership and editorial prerogatives to belong, and to articulate issues of relevance. A sample of self-selecting respondents was clearly dominated by this group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People group</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Coloureds (mixed-race)</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Blacks</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Asians</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Whites</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other (Specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodesian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodesian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1372</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 ‘Our website, our home’: goffal.com respondents by ethnicity

Figure 3.4: Block chart showing ethnic clustering on goffal.com
Discussion

‘If you have populations that need certain remedies, what do you do to ‘identify’ them?’ asked William A. Darity (2001), Director of the Institute of African American Research at the University of North Carolina, US. He concluded that self-identification was the only way, the people concerned recognizing that ‘how they are seen by others can be quite different from the way they label themselves – and that may be more important in the kind of social treatment they face’. In this survey, the presumption that goffal.com reinforces the mixed-race ‘Coloured’ identity is supported by the dominance of participants surveyed who identified themselves as such. (The questionnaire used this standard nomenclature, but could equally have used the word goffal as these are common synonyms). The response was as emphatic as could be expected from an online community with a self-proclaimed emphasis on issues as they affect Zimbabwe’s minority mixed-race population. It was reinforced by the message board dialogue which the survey provoked, beginning with a strident attack on the research.

Clayton
I saw your survey. What the fuck man! Who cares whether your readers are Coloured or black or Chinese or white? Why is it so important, in this day and age? I have a problem with such websites monopolizing on race issues and claiming themselves to be better than others when out here in the west we’re all just niggers – no such thing as ‘Coloured’, ‘black’, etc. Grow up Clayton I thought you were more sensible than that.9

To whom I replied:

Thank you for taking an interest in my survey. It is clear that you have missed the import of the whole exercise. As I explained in my message of 28 August, the day the webmaster uploaded my questionnaire, the survey is part of a broader research project into Zimbabwean websites and how they serve a diversity of interest groups. I explained that similar surveys would be mounted on other websites to determine a dominant racial group membership and I am negotiating with the managers of those websites. Clearly, you did not read my earlier message. My interest is purely academic.10

There was more to come.

Clayton I just had a look at your poll Zimbabwean coloured/Zim black other Shona/Ndebele etc?????? What are u trying to achieve? You are just as bad as these British and the rest – You incite this segregation on yourself and the people you are crying out to hit home with….So Clayton you the brains behind this vehicle for colour definitions. I beg you to justify the meaning of your poll. Just remember and always

---

10 Clayton Peel, Note Nr 4473, www.goffal.com. 21-09-2004
remember with this kind of machination and racial definition there will be no unity amongst the people of Zimbabwe and you will always see the ‘coloureds’ as you politely and dignifyingly define them counted as second – RECOGNISE! IT BEGINS WITH HARMONY! I CHALLENGE YOU CLAYTON TO DEFINE THIS WHOLE SAGA!!!

But other respondents, like ‘Spider’s Pad’, saw an opportunity to define not just the survey’s objectives, but the entire stratification of ‘Coloureds’ and their legacy as expressed on this website. He said:

Clayton’s survey asks an important question. Who are we as Coloured people? Whether we are in Zimbabwe or abroad, we still need to ask these questions. People who will not allow Coloureds to define themselves are those who have historically been hostile to Coloured people. They are quite happy to have other Zimbabweans categorized as Ndebele, or Shona, or white etc., but when it comes to Coloureds, we should just sit tight and not be bold to articulate who we are and what we want to be. Nonsense! I think Clayton’s survey should go even further. Why not do a survey on the Coloured people abroad, their resources, their needs, etc., and then link it with the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in Harare, who produced their baseline study a few years ago but seem to have gone quiet and done nothing to follow it up.

Clearly, the survey provoked mixed feelings on this website. As the thread which developed from the messages above showed, the issue is as sensitive to mixed-race ‘Coloureds’ themselves as it is to critics of what Mandaza (1997) calls ‘the Coloured ideology’. Mandaza himself is a critic. Of mixed ancestry, he has used his published doctoral thesis to disown an ‘entire process of social or racial engineering…designed to give form and content to the idea of Coloured community’ (Preface). A journalist, publisher, political scientist and self-proclaimed nationalist, Mandaza has been pilloried on www.goffal.com as a traitor to his mixed heritage, an opportunist supporter of Zimbabwe’s land reform programme and a beneficiary of the Mugabe government’s patronage.

11 ‘Zizi’, Note Nr. 6943, 31-10-2004
12 Note No 4678 on 12-10-2004. The baseline study referred to by ‘Spider’s Pad’, sponsored by a Canadian aid agency, was conducted in 2003 and was quoted in footnote 2 of Section 2.3, in the previous chapter.
13 Mandaza claimed, in a meeting attended by this researcher, that he used his Southern Africa Press and Publishing House (SAPPHO) titles to defend what he called ‘nationalism and the national interest’ against foreign-backed business and political alliances he believed were out to subvert Zimbabwe’s independence (SAPPHO House, Harare, 4 October 2001).
Yet, notwithstanding Mandaza’s and other objections to the southern African ‘Coloured ideology’, what is self-apparent is that the www.goffal.com website is, like www.inkundla.net below, definitively targeting, and being subscribed to by, a particular ethnic or racial group, in this case mixed-race group of Zimbabweans. That the dialogue contains much of the colloquial slang commonly used among mixed-race Zimbabweans also shows that the site is unequivocal about its own niche. The website itself contains a goffal slang dictionary.\(^{14}\) It is only in cyberspace that literature is available in this medium. Cyberspace – in particular goffal.com - has created space for less recognisable groups of Zimbabweans like the mixed-race ‘Coloureds’, whose language and sub-culture are not officially recognised and whose existence as a non-black, non-white, non-Asiatic entity is considered ambiguous by some Zimbabwean and international academics. The researcher did not sample racial or ethnic categories at the goffal event in Lower Sydenham because the attendance was self-evident. As a measure, respondents in all of the 163 questionnaires returned described themselves as ‘mixed-race/Coloured’.

**Case 2 Users of thebottomhalf.com website**

At the core of why a quantitative study should explore the racial composition of website users and link that with the ethno-related character of each website’s content is the fact that non-subversive sentiments and aesthetic forms of expression by ethnic minorities were routinely suppressed in Zimbabwe at the outset of Robert Mugabe’s regime (Zaffiro 2002:103). Therefore websites in the diaspora provide open fora for genuine expression of ethnic sentiment. Not that all the Zimbabwean websites are consciously ethnic-based. Where the biases are less explicit, websites’ content by language and subject interest, and the results of ethnographic readership surveys conducted with their co-operation, point in the direction of which ethnic group enjoys the greatest service. Thebottomhalf.com falls

into the latter category, as the ethnic clustering of its users indicated in Table 3.8 and Figure 3.5 shows.

Table 3.8 Racial composition of respondents on thebottomhalf.com

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People group</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Whites</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Blacks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coloureds (mixed-race)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Asians</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other (Specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>262</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.5: Block chart showing ethnic clustering on thebottomhalf.com

Discussion

This website’s owners stressed it was not for a particular ethnic group (Sharp email 2003), but it seemed important to get a sense of the membership’s profile, especially as the overwhelming number of images uploaded were of white people. The content also belied empathy for, if not representation of, white Zimbabwean interests, as the discourses in Chapter 6 will show. Before then, it is clear from the response to the above survey that this
website, whatever else its properties and objectives, draws largely the white Zimbabwean element of the diaspora. Although some of the entries are from people who have become naturalized British citizens, a number are still Zimbabwean passport holders, and their online postings reveal fears as white Zimbabweans which are synonymous with those of other Zimbabweans with tenuous rights to stay on in Britain.

**Case 3 Users of inkundla.net: Components of Ndebele identity**

On 20/9/2003, using the available polling facility on this website, I mounted the first of two online quantitative surveys. By 25/11/2003, 208 responses were registered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People group</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. isiNdebele</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English (Coloured)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English (White)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. isiShona</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>208</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.9 Ethnic clustering on inkundla.net (Survey A)*

![Figure 3.6: Ethnic clustering on inkundla.net (Survey A)](image)

Important lessons were learnt about this constituency and people group. Dialogue with a respondent, ‘Toots’, was particularly instructive, challenging the content of the questionnaire and its assumptions about Ndebele identity. ‘Toots’ helped clarify a socio-
historical detail that is explored further in Chapter Five: that communities where siNdebele is spoken include significant other dialects or sub-groups who speak both siNdebele and their mother tongues of Kalanga, Venda, Sotho, Tonga, Nambya, Xhosa, and so on. The dialogue with ‘Toots’ challenged assumptions of Ndebele homogeneity which had influenced the design of the above questionnaire:

Toots:
Why does your survey make no provision for other ethnic groups within the Ndebele nation? Start this thing afresh and rectify the omission before we start to accuse you of things.

cpeelzw
Toots, your complaint is understood…this survey will show the broad national profile of this website’s readership, before we do another one which will focus exclusively on the home front

Toots:
It seems you have not understood my point. The poll speaks of “mother tongue”, and me as a Venda, where should I vote? it surprises me that you rush to recognize Shonas over other people of our region in your poll

With the benefit of the dialogue with ‘Toots’, the researcher accepted that the frame of inquiry, and therefore the results reflected in Table 3.9 and Figure 3.6, were incomplete. There is a shared identity among most siNdebele-speakers, but, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five, the amaNdebele as presently configured are descended from segmented groups that were amalgamated under the nineteenth century kingdom of Mzilikazi Kumalo and his successor, Lobengula. ‘Toots’ intervention was therefore historically and practically valid. Alerted to his objections, it seemed reasonable to continue this poll for the value of responses already recorded, but start a fresh survey in another section of the website with slightly different categories to include sub-groups omitted in the original survey. In this second poll from 23/10/2003 to 25/11/2003, which I called ‘Survey B’, 178 votes were registered. The distribution of respondents was as follows:

15 Exchange over three days between the researcher and the respondent ‘Toots’. www.inkundla.net, 23-26 September 2003, translated from siNdebele
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People group</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isiNdebele</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiTonga</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiKalanga</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiShona</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiSotho</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiXhosa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isiVenda</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (White)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (Coloured)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>178</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10 Ethnic clustering by language and people group on inkundla.net (Survey B)

The susceptibility of the researcher to interventions from the field is interesting for its demonstration of power relations in which the researched subject challenges, indeed re-shapes, the presumptions and structure of inquiry. This dynamic of the subject coming alongside in the research process should strengthen the quest for accuracy if the researcher remains focused on the objectives. The experience of ethnographers like De Neve and Unnithan-Kumar (2006:5) that fieldwork ‘has never been completely determined by the researcher’ but required ‘shifts to take into account [informers’ and subjects’] concerns and conceptions of what we are doing or should be doing’, suggests that substantial learning can take place through ‘the co-operation and resistance of informants’. This awareness
seems particularly useful in cross-cultural research and, as Mytton (1999:78) points out, in media research among ethnic minorities.

3.7 Overall Impressions from the Questionnaire Data

The methodology has pulled together two sets of samples: one, of those who worked with the survey online, and the other grouping those who attended events and who were engaged face-to-face. These two fields of respondents have been put together as subjects of common constituencies, based on the premise of causation between online activism and real-life interventions. Information and social issues are the foremost interest of respondents (Question Two), influencing their use of the websites as knowledge sources as well as venues for social and knowledge exchange. The responses to Question Two furthermore demonstrate that the Zimbabwean diaspora websites are more relied on than the conventional British media and websites from within Zimbabwe as sources of knowledge. With the British media saturated with reports on Zimbabwe, the extent to which a majority of British-based Zimbabweans appear to prefer their own websites to ‘the news’ suggests issues of credibility, balance, cultural perspective and inside knowledge give the diaspora websites the edge over established newspapers in the estimation of the UK-based Zimbabwean reading public.

Responses to Question Three (how often respondents use favourite websites) suggest a considerably high daily patronage of the websites. This could indicate a high degree of loyalty by users, likely to be enhanced by the ethno-linguistic and ideological considerations of some of the websites. With such high daily patronage levels, the importance of regular contact is underlined. It may also have been influenced by the intensity of Zimbabwean politics and rates of migration to Britain during the research period (2003-2008), with diaspora communities anxious to keep track of developments at
home and to keep contact with fellow-Zimbabweans in Britain on matters of mutual interest.

3.8 Surveying the goffals in their public association

On Saturday 10 July 2004 the research focus shifted to a fund-raising ‘fun day’ at Footsie Sports Club, Lower Sydenham, targeting Zimbabweans of mixed-race origin, or goffals, to test a perceived and intended link between those who attended the event and the goffal.com website which advertised it. The ‘fun day’ had been promoted through goffal.com for a month preceding the event. The inquiry into its being and genesis was to illustrate whether, and if so, how websites and web communities influence or correspond to social events and causes in the Zimbabwean British diaspora and beyond. At Footsie Sports Club, where there were 300 people who entered and paid the five-pound admission fee, 165 questionnaires were distributed. Proof of Zimbabwean identity beyond self-identification and accent was not required. It was necessary to explain to would-be interviewees at length the purpose of the study, its academic status, and to assure that the anonymity of the respondents would be respected. In any case, they would not need to identify themselves on the answer sheet. Suspicion of researchers among Zimbabwean communities in Britain is high. For instance, an International Organisation for Migration study of Zimbabweans in the UK and South Africa faced such a high degree of scepticism, that the organizers felt called upon to enlist no fewer than 13 organizations with links to Zimbabweans as interlocutors for the IOM office in London. 17

Back at Footsie Sports Club, a respondent, suspicious of this project, declined to be ‘interviewed by the Home Office’, the British Government department responsible for

16 Interview with Marion Strachan, secretary of the Count on Us Charity, who co-organised the event, Lower Sydenham 10/7/2004.
17 Report to the Britain Zimbabwe Society of the IOM consultation meeting, Clayton Peel, 21 May 2004
immigration which has been responsible for the identification and expulsion of thousands of Zimbabweans. He eventually co-operated after the intervention of an interlocutor who vouched for this researcher’s sincerity. All 165 questionnaires distributed were returned, two of them unanswered – hence the 98 per cent response rate reported earlier. As the researcher distributed the questionnaires to arriving patrons in the car park, respondents were asked to ensure that only one person per couple (though not per household) filled the questionnaire: the reasoning was that couples may share attitudes to a point where, collectively, the responses of married or co-habiting couples risked distorting the overall response of the research frame. The decision of which partner in the relationship should answer was left to the couples themselves. Cultural deference to the male as family spokesman was rarely observed, which helped protect the gender balance of the research sample.

3.9 Face-to-Face with the inkundla lobby

To encounter the constituency that subscribes to inkundla.net, the researcher chose a demonstration through Westminster by Zimbabweans seeking to commemorate the slayings of tens of thousands of isiNdebele-speaking Zimbabweans by the Fifth Brigade, a North Korean-trained unit under Mugabe’s command from 1983-1987. The event was held on 25 October 2003, and took participants on a march from the houses of parliament in Westminster, to the Zimbabwean Embassy in the Strand, Central London. A selection of 53 isiNdebele speakers was recruited to answer the questionnaire during this event.

In the first chapter, we alluded to inkundla.net as a pioneer network among Zimbabwean constituencies to go online with their activism. In that introduction, and in the case study on inkundla.net to follow in Chapter 5, Masiane (2003) reflected the view among co-founders

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18 Other Zimbabwean researchers like Pasura (2008:157) report similar encounters in their fieldwork with a fear among Zimbabweans in Britain of under-cover immigration officers or, more likely, paid Zimbabwean informers.
of the network of the galvanizing effect memories of the Fifth Brigade campaign had on siNdebele speakers rediscovering themselves and the spaces in which they could communicate after relocation to Britain. In this gathering in central London, culminating in a protest outside the Zimbabwean embassy, the network wanted to foreground those memories in the more contemporary media spotlight on Mugabe’s persecution of whites and the political opposition now led by people of Mugabe’s own Shona ethnic group. One of the participants, an asylum seeker who gave his name as ‘Mntongelakudla’,19 said the focus on Zimbabwe after 2000 gave the impression that Mugabe had only recently changed his ways when he began seizing white-owned farms and businesses and brutalising opposition supporters. The irony that people who once supported Mugabe solidly even as he waged his bloody campaign in Matabeleland were now the ones fleeing his excesses was a bitter one for ‘Mntongelakudla’ and some in the inkundla network.

Today, they are the champions of freedom and human rights. In the 1980s, when our homes were being burnt, our women raped, our children imprisoned and tortured, and tens and thousands of us killed, we Ndebele found very little sympathy among the rest of the country. To them, we were ‘dissidents’ who had to be eliminated. These people hung onto Mugabe’s every word, indeed some of them took part in the ransacking of houses and eviction of Ndebele from Harare, Gweru and other urban centres. It is amazing to see these same people today claiming asylum and appearing on BBC 20 as the champions of human rights in Zimbabwe.

The demonstration itself had an interesting mix of objectives: to call for Mugabe’s ouster as president of Zimbabwe and his replacement through transparent elections, concomitant with calls for self-rule in siNdebele-speaking parts of the country. This mixture of national objectives with regional secessionist campaigns is a feature of the inkundla website discourses, of which more will be discussed in Chapter 5.

19 ‘Mntongelakudla’ may be translated as a person with no food, or a starving man.
20 BBC – the British Broadcasting Corporation
3.10 Surveying the ‘white’ component: thebottomhalf.com and ‘ZimFest’

The issues of ethnicity, identity, belonging, citizenship, and of relating to Zimbabwe as ‘home’, are perhaps accentuated in relation to white Zimbabweans, who are generalized by the Mugabe government as ‘British’ even though a study by Eaton (1996:2) found that just 38 per cent of those surveyed were actually born in Britain. More would have had British ancestry with various degrees of entitlement to British residency and/or nationality, but as shall be discussed in Chapter 6, and also pointed out by Pasura (2008:186ff), whites born or raised in Zimbabwe tended to acquire a distinct sub-culture from what may be considered a quintessential ‘Britishness’. This was due in part to African influence, the intermingling and intermarriage with other whites of diverse ancestry\(^{21}\), and a conceptual as well as constitutional rift which accompanied white Rhodesians’ 1965 rebellion against British colonial rule (Lowry 1997:280-1).\(^{22}\) Furthermore, the online discourses of what might be considered this group’s flagship UK-based website reveals a significant antipathy towards British life and culture even where many of those contributing have been rescued from the uncertainties of Zimbabwe and have been resident long enough to acquire British citizenship. Nonetheless, the condition of Zimbabwean whites remains a source of fascination for many, often to the exclusion of other minorities that also suffer from the stifling of difference in the country’s public spaces.

To visit thebottomhalf.com and to attend ZimFest is to come face-to-face with extra-territorial and supra-statutory notions of Zimbabweanness: icons of the Zimbabwean flag adorn the website, both as part of the banner of the home page, and alongside identities of

\(^{21}\) Afrikaners from South Africa, for example, as well as Italian and Portuguese communities which settled in Zimbabwe after the Second World War.

\(^{22}\) Ian Douglas Smith’s ‘Unilateral Declaration of Independence’ from the crown on 11 November 1965, which was to last 14 years until Margaret Thatcher installed the late Lord Soames as Governor for the seven-month period leading up to independence and black majority rule in April 1980.
those who identify themselves as ‘Zimbabwean’. Among these would almost certainly be people who had acquired, or were in the process of acquiring, non-Zimbabwean nationality.

3.11 Journalists in Exile

To the first three groups, the research has added the internet discussion group set up by British-based Zimbabwean journalists who called themselves, and their Yahoo! Newsgroups web page, the ‘Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK’ (AZJUK). This campaign was started through a mass mailing of invitations to the inaugural meeting on Saturday January 29 2005. The researcher attended the meeting. Membership was formalized and an information network subsequently established through a new Yahoo! newsgroup. This news group is the focus of the fourth case. The responses mirrored expectations which were outlined in the communiqué drafted by those present, which were:

- to create a database of Zimbabwean journalists living in Britain;
- to conduct research and facilitate dialogue on issues affecting Zimbabwe and its media industry;
- to provide a platform for the journalists to meet, discuss ideas of how they can develop themselves professionally in Britain, and related issues;
- to work with British universities, colleges and the media in the UK to secure educational opportunities for its members, dedicate some of its work to the defence of journalists in Zimbabwe and the promotion of media freedoms;

23 http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/messages - but on 4 December 2008, the moderators closed the site and the network migrated to google (Dzikiti email, 2008)
• to help struggling colleagues in Zimbabwe whose newspapers were closed down by the government;
• to launch an annual award to be given to a Zimbabwean journalist in memory of the late Standard editor, Mark Chavunduka, who had been arrested and tortured.24

An interim committee comprising Forward Maisokwadzo (formerly of the Zimbabwe Independent), Simbarashe Chabarika (formerly of the Herald), Blessing Ruzengwe (formerly of the Chronicle) and Sandra Nyaira (formerly of the Daily News) was mandated to run the association prior to the election of a permanent executive. The addition of this category to the research is significant for two main reasons: it includes a discourse of marginalized professionals who communicate at a level governed by their peers’ discerning, non-sectarian and only mildly rhetorical conversation. It also locks into the reflections of practitioners in the core sphere of communication practice, whose careers have taken a direct hit along with the broader profession in the restrictive environment within Zimbabwe.

3.12 From quantitative correlation to causation

The aim of this chapter was to present for inquiry two parallel strands of interactivities in which four pairings of online and offline collaboration illustrate their connectivity and confirm a phenomenon of online interaction generating f2f manifestations. Due to the two modes of distributing the questionnaire, we had two sources of data: online and face-to-face surveys. That created two locations in the research of one field. I used both locations to describe single constituencies. It seemed sensible, then, to engage in a cumulative

24 The communiqué was posted by the association’s secretary, Sandra Nyaira. Online, available at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/messages/1?fl=1
framework of fieldwork that aggregated the data from the twin locations. Presenting just
the parallel strands for analysis, or comparing them without appreciating them as
catchments of single constituencies, would be giving half the story. The hypothesis that
online groups and the offline associations they generate form a composite diaspora
constituency that is engaged in effective social action is the other half of this research, and
it motivates further investigation of the online and f2f engagements, cumulatively
appraised.

This chapter has begun an examination of motives, institutions and processes involved in
the online and real life spheres of the Zimbabwean diaspora. With statistical feedback from
questionnaires, it achieved aggregated data of the four constituencies, leading to an
interrogation of the genesis of events and the correlation and causation factors in each
constituency. These will be further explored in narrative form from the case studies, where
interventions on a broader social scale attest to the productivity of web discourses and
interactions.

That the largest number of the respondents visited their favourite website once a day
amplified the commitment to the websites as a meeting point. Quantifying this level of
commitment in this chapter has helped move the inquiry from intuitive to quantitative
knowledge of the intensity of engagements. In this regard, quantitative methods buttress the
assessment of observables and their patterns. From these observables and patterns, further
investigation of the formations, using direct quotations from the selected fora instead of
mathematical coding, will characterize the next chapters. Responses to the surveys and
interviews in this chapter suggested that most respondents agreed on the importance of the
internet for diaspora-based information and interaction. However, to adopt an overview of
social actions generated by the internet-mediated channels exploited by the Zimbabwean
diaspora, the research now needs to move into a narrative and less index-focused appraisal
to find the core of the associations and see how each operates in its own terms. Connecting the quantitative data of this chapter with the ensuing cases is therefore less a priority than developing the themes that emerge from the narratives of each website, which will substantiate the plural ideologies of Zimbabwean communities.

As far as establishing the connections between discourses and events, it is true that a correlation between website and event does not necessarily demonstrate causation. But in these cases, where motivation of campaigns and events are peculiar to certain websites, the electronic discourses, the events and the participants are shown as linked to the constituency of the website on which they were organised. Statistics alone will not reveal the identity of the people behind the phenomena. Rather, active engagement with Zimbabweans at Zimbabwean sites in and around London as well as online generates more data in the ensuing case study chapters, making them an in-depth description of that engagement.
CHAPTER FOUR: *Hybridity and the Goffal Discourse*

4.1 The Goffal Phenomenon and its spaces

This is the first of four chapters devoted to the website cases and their in-depth analysis. The justification for the selection of the four cases from the ten websites initially profiled is given in Chapter 2. This chapter examines www.goffal.com narratives and what they say about and to the website’s constituency. The relevance of these narratives to the broader Zimbabwean discourse is also of interest, hence the choice to locate this, and the subsequent discussions of case studies, within themes that overlap with other Zimbabwean communities and have been raised in recent studies of Zimbabweans in Britain. The four cases, like the 10 formations from which they were extracted (Table 2.1), reproduce the sentiments of constituencies marginalized from the mainstream homeland discourse. The thematic framework for discussing selected topics which occur with ‘some regularity’ (Miles and Huberman 1994:57) includes reflections on ethnicity, Zimbabwean politics, gender, HIV-AIDS, and interlocution with the British culture and establishment. Racially charged politics in the homeland, a high rate of HIV-AIDS infection, gender relations complicated by a country context that is mostly culturally conservative, and sensitivities provoked by the migration of Zimbabweans to Britain, attest to the relevance of those themes.

To examine some of the material generated online in the period of research through these various themes is to broaden the analysis, albeit within the context of identity negotiation
and cultural affirmation which Carey (1989:34-35), Burnett and Marshall (2003) and others have highlighted. As a case study, this website’s material is descriptive of the processes and emotions involved in those interactivities, fulfilling an anthropocentric as well as communication agenda of website ‘prosumers’ as they self-identify and communicate through the technology.

From a historical point of view, it is also interesting to draw parallels between this community coalescing around the goffal website, mostly in Britain, and the social phenomena of the last century which forged a certain goffal identity from amid the conflict between African nationalist and militant white settler aspirations in Zimbabwe. Even if an aside from the core focus of this thesis, the history of ‘Coloured’ social movements in Zimbabwe from as far back as mid-1920s is relevant in foreshadowing communicative behaviour as explored and encountered in the functions of www.goffal.com today. The goffal website is a cultural product, as are its real life offshoots and as were those associations of the colonial and post-colonial period. From those strategies of self-identification, in the context of ‘Coloured’ negotiations with the colonial state and with other races, we may understand the incongruity of lumping the products of bi-racial unions with one or another of the dominant groups.

Reading Mandaza’s 1997 critique of the emergence of ‘Coloured’ Consciousness in southern Africa (principally in the colonial territories of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland – now independent republics of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, respectively), one is struck by how much the ‘Coloureds’ themselves were involved in

25 Alvin Toffler coined the term ‘prosumer’ when he predicted in his 1980 book, ‘The Third Wave’, that the role of producers and consumers would begin to blur and merge in a post industrial era
shaping their identity. Mandaza is scornful of how they negotiated an acceptance of their distinctiveness and how they manoeuvred from the patronage of white colonial rule to a far-sighted anticipation of the advent of black majority government, always seeking to protect their own way of life. Mandaza’s thesis, replete with his own biases against ‘Coloured’ self-identification and cultural generation, reveals nonetheless that however misguided one might consider it to have been, it was a shrewd strategy to have social movements for the collaborative self-identification of mixed-race Zimbabweans (and Zambians and Malawians) that pre-empted and prompted the colonial administrations of these territories into recognising their distinctiveness.

Groups like the Anglo-African Association, the Euro-African Association, the Euro-African Patriotic Association, the National Association of Coloured People, the Coloured Community Services League and the Coloured Community Development Fund lobbied colonial administrations, and later the African nationalist movements and the governments they formed, to keep ‘Coloureds’ from being marginalized. These associations Mandaza derides as convenient for the colonial rulers and the select ‘Coloured’ leadership ‘in pursuit of their petit bourgeois class interests’ (1997:xxxv), produced spheres of communicative action that advanced the causes of mixed-race people in the colonial and its successor white settler administrations as well as in the interactivity with the ascendant black African nationalist movements. It cannot be discounted, as Mandaza himself acknowledges, that while engaging the colonial and white settler governments (see e.g. 1997:338ff; 390; 465; 488-493; 500; 683), the luminaries of those associations were also the gateway to the mixed-race constituency for the African National Council of Bishop Muzorewa (1997: 746-755); Joshua Nkomo’s Zimbabwe African People’s Union (1997:736-738), and Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF (1997:564).
We see therefore that associations and movements drawing the mixed-race community into communicative action on a national scale did not start with www.goffal.com, but with www.goffal.com they entered a new phase with new battles, and using new technologies, in a different context that locates this research a generation apart from Mandaza’s. Nonetheless, Mandaza’s is acknowledged as a seminal work in understanding the history and social context in which ‘Coloureds’ have developed an identity and culture in Zimbabwe. It is a rich resource in understanding the history and ideology of mixed-race people in Zimbabwe.

James Muzondidya’s more recent work (2001) charts the production of a ‘Coloured’ culture in Zimbabwe. He acknowledges an historical dialectic that was abetted by colonialism: its segregationist policies that kept blacks, whites, ‘Asiatics’ and those of mixed-race in separate residential areas and schools, made it easier for ‘Coloureds’ to define themselves not just by their colour, but also by locality and what was offered them by way of residential and education facilities.  

At independence, the ‘Coloured’ identity did not immediately become an aberration to be discarded with other by-products of colonial and settler white rule (such as Silaphalapha, an unofficial mishmash of English, Afrikaans and indigenous Zimbabwean languages which became highly unfashionable once independence came to Zimbabwe in 1980). Unlike Silaphalapha and its use mostly by whites and immigrant black labourers as an improvised medium forged to bridge a language barrier in the workplace, the goffal culture and language was born not of convenience, but a battle by one group for survival amidst ambiguity, the ‘Coloureds’ torn between the ruling white class and a dispossessed black population. As Muzondidya observed, the construction of a ‘Coloured’ culture was a long, contested process which

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26 Muzondidya’s second and third chapters are devoted to chronicling the development of ‘Coloured’ amenities, the agitation from the communities concerned for their improvement, and debates over who qualified to be classified as a ‘Coloured’.  

27 Note: sometimes the prefix ‘chi’ is used instead of ‘si’. Hence, ‘Chilapalapa’
featured intra-Coloured factionalism on the basis of those who were the products of miscegenation being looked down upon by immigrants of Afrikaner-Malay descent (so-called ‘Cape Coloureds’) whose black African ancestry may have been more distant (Muzondidya 2001:174).

This was all part of a negotiation of ‘Coloured’ identity in which finally, after nearly three decades of ill-feeling, so-called mixed-race ‘Eurafrican’ products of miscegenation were accommodated in newly-built urban suburbs and were accepted by their so-called ‘Cape Coloured’ neighbours as part of ‘the Coloured community’. They were joined by Goanese immigrants from neighbouring Portuguese colonies who were ‘excluded from the mainstream Rhodesian Indian community by caste’ and ‘found themselves defined as Portuguese mulattoes or Coloureds upon entry into Rhodesia’ (Muzondidya 2001:23). Asians, both Chinese and south-east Asian, who ‘crossed the colour line’ by marrying or co-habiting with black or goffal partners risked losing access to residential spaces and facilities reserved for ‘Asians’, and very often came to be classified as goffal families.28

Mandaza and Muzondidya localize the debate on bi-racial groups by underscoring identity and ideology over ‘hybridity’ as central to the construction of the ‘Coloured’ culture in Zimbabwe. Not the raceless product of miscegenation in other contexts – between Vietnamese civilians and American servicemen, for instance – nor the terminable mulatto phenomenon in isolation whose descendants ‘die out’ (Young 1995:80), Zimbabwe’s goffals, as evidenced in both Mandaza and Muzondidya’s theses, epitomize, firstly, a collective founded upon, but not confined to miscegenation. Secondly, an ethnic social space negotiated with colonial authorities and maintained after independence; and thirdly,

28 Some prominent Zimbabweans descended from such families include the former vice-captain of the Zimbabwe Test cricket team, Dion Ebrahim; the former chairman of the Zimbabwe Football Association, Rafiq Khan, and a former Miss Zimbabwe, Una Patel.
residential spaces\textsuperscript{29} which have marked goffals across Zimbabwe as a historically constructed demographic (Muzondidya 2001:41-42), asserting what Muzondidya (2001:24) described as ‘a distinct Coloured identity… distinctions based on colour, language and geographic origins’ that ‘became focal points in the whole process of Coloured identity construction’.

This marks a shift from the genetic account of ‘Coloured’ identity to a cultural and racial identity by which goffals came to embrace a ‘distinct Coloured consciousness’ that provided ‘a way of dealing with the colonial order and creating social space for oneself in an environment where one’s race determined access to civic rights and economic resources’. The residential spaces were ‘the old and less desirable parts’ of Zimbabwe’s cities, where ‘closer identification occurred among the residents, promoted through marriages, sexual relationships …and social and sporting activities, such as evening dances and football matches’. New communities, with a distinctive set of values and cultural ethos began to emerge (Muzondidya 2001:40). A nationwide ‘Coloured community’ thus came into being as a civic force.

Unlike Muzondidya, Mandaza (1997:18-38) dismissed ‘Coloured consciousness’ as a colonial contraption, though he admitted the role played by institutions that were set up for ‘Coloureds’ in shaping that identity. He therefore denied the existence of a goffal culture. Yet, simply because a social form was in some way an invention of the colonial period does not prevent it from taking on a life of its own. Nearly all Zimbabwean state institutions have colonial origins. Furthermore, convictions detached from how these people view themselves will not unlock group dynamics that could contribute more to postcolonial

\textsuperscript{29} Frequently referred to in www.goffal.com narratives are Arcadia, Ardbennie, Sunningdale, St Martin’s (in Harare); Barham Green, Rangemore, Thorngrove, Trenance (in Bulawayo); Florida (in Mutare); and Nashville (in Gweru). Some critics lament the ‘urbanisation’ of Coloured identity as having the effect of denying the rural ancestry of a significant number (see NAAC, 2003:29)
studies than the European-native binaries that have dominated the field. Thus, the attention to goffal.com is not with the ‘Western monologue on Africa’ (Irele 2001:72-73) that operates along rigid African-European binaries and also misinterprets each national diaspora as an ‘abstract wholism’ (Axel 2001:24), but with ‘the details of local difference’ (Axel 2001:24-25) that give rise to the goffal construct in Zimbabwe and its dispersions. To access these details, the scholar is to be persuaded to ‘build up a conceptual vocabulary from within the local system as opposed to imposing one’s own logic upon it’ (Bodenhorn 2006:22).

4.2 Goffal.com and its Philanthropy

One of only two out of the ten websites analysed that are explicit in identifying themselves as an index of an ethnic group, the www.goffal.com website grew out of Zimbabwean exile Andrew Longworth’s online guest book, hosted on a Bravenet server, which he first designed in 1999. It was at first a ‘forum for visitors, mostly friends but also other Zimbabweans, to leave their comments, ideas, or just praise of some of the issues I was raising for discussion’, Longworth (2003) said. Born in Arcadia, Harare, of mixed black and white parentage, he described himself as an ‘average IT enthusiast’ who was looking to the guest book to keep himself in contact with family and friends. Longworth’s page was soon inundated with messages, mostly from ‘lost friends’ and Zimbabweans seeking to make contact with others and using the page to ask if any reader knew where a particular person was, and if so, could they contact the writer.

It [the website] became a means of communication, a venue for discussions, and a source of information at the same time. I used to get messages asking for news from home, like I was a news agency with a staffer in Harare. Eventually I had to arrange for updated news feeds to my home page to satisfy the demand for news. This stimulated more interest and even more discussion, and the number of visitors to the guestbook grew. (Longworth, personal interview 2003)

As the trickle of messages increased and became more varied, Longworth detected that ‘Coloureds’ were discovering the internet as a resource – either to stave off homesickness, or to win solidarity and advice from others on issues like immigration, job-hunting, social
concerns among the Zimbabwean diaspora, and anguish at the slide of the political and socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe. As he noted how intense some of the messages were, he became increasingly aware of the greater potential his small media project had. He described, for instance, participating in the protracted online discussions that gave birth to the website’s ‘Count on Us’ project, a UK-registered charity seeking to raise resources in Britain to support areas of need in ‘Coloured’ communities in Zimbabwe.

‘Count on Us’ was born on goffal.com. A few of us mooted the idea of organising ourselves to support causes at home, if not from our own pockets, then through fundraising and specific public events that would attract website users to a day of live entertainment, sport, the opportunity to meet with other ‘Coloureds’ in the UK and re-establish that kindred spirit, and the chance to socialise as individuals who may or may not be familiar with each other, but certainly share a common use of the www.goffal.com website. All the proceeds from these ‘fun days’ would go towards identified projects in Zimbabwe. The first such event – in Lower Sydenham in 2002 – was such a huge success, both in terms of the proceeds and the ability to bring Zimbabwean ‘Coloured’ people together in the UK, that it rapidly became a twice-yearly event. (Longworth 2003)

‘Count on Us’ was registered as a charity in June 2003 and now has a website of its own, with a link to www.goffal.com. Longworth, among the originators of this movement, is not among the trustees and has taken a back seat.

I was happy that it started, because at last the ‘Coloured’ people were doing something constructive. For years, the website’s message boards were inundated with requests for help, expressions of dismay and a lot of wringing of hands. There were plenty of ideas, but no concrete action. The birth of ‘Count on Us’ in 2002 was a milestone in our history as a people, and I am proud of goffal.com’s role in it. But now that there is a committee and a board of trustees running it, I am able to devote my limited time to other aspects of running the website. Remember, I didn’t start ‘Count on Us’: ideas were rolling about on the message boards and eventually a group of people met face to face and started to plan. I was one of those people and if time allowed, I may still have been one of those actively involved. But running www.goffal.com is not a full-time activity: I have a job and I have a family, and occasionally I get involved in other aspects of Zimbabwean life, like support for Zimbabwean detainees, asylum seekers, and human rights pressure groups. I am quite happy with the way that ‘Count on Us’ has matured, with other members of the goffal community taking the lead. (Longworth 2003)

But Longworth and his co-founders of this movement faced scepticism in setting up what was to be the first relief agency started by Zimbabweans of mixed-race in Britain. The intention was always to benefit Zimbabwean ‘Coloureds’. But as the contributions to the website discussion on this initiative show, not everyone was convinced that this was a genuine cause.
The online discourse that follows (reproduced verbatim) exposes the contradicting expectations of members of this online community. Nevertheless, members of www.goffal.com who felt strongly about having a movement with charitable objectives pressed ahead with the formation of a charity. It started with a message on the bulletin board from ‘Another Goffal’ challenging his peers against selfishness in the diaspora which he contrasts with apparent solidarity shown by other Zimbabwean communities. Why, he asks, do other racial and ethnic groups provide their members a supportive network ‘and yet ours so small, lives divided by hate and gossip’? Setting the scene for much deeper introspection, he notes how:

Other people are organising themselves, arranging support structures for people arriving in UK. The blacks take care of the blacks, the whites take care of the whites. But goffals pretend they don’t know you, even if they see you sleeping on the street. Right now black Zimbabweans are sending money back home to support their relatives and their schools. How many of us are doing something for our communities back home? All we can do is come on this website and talk kak about each other.

The provocative call to solidarity is not just philanthropic, though it leads to social action in that direction. ‘Another Goffal’ hints at a need for cohesiveness, which he has seen among other Zimbabwean race groups, but not in this community. It is not for lack of causes, for within a week, an appeal from Harare seeks support from the diaspora for residential areas populated by mixed-race persons in Zimbabwe.

Note Nr.: 3061 from 2002-07-30 06:43:49
by BERTRAMTABBETT
Hello peeps all over the world. Still waiting for ur replys for direct assistance to our organisations Ambassadors for Life, Youth HIV & AIDS group based in Ward 2 of Harare, which covers Arcadia, Braeside, Cranborne, St Martins, Hillside, Wilmington Park. 1 pound a month from all u all is all we asking 4. Bertram

30 Note Nr.: 3032 from 23 July, 2002
31 ‘Talk kak’ could be equated with ‘talk nonsense’. In a more literal slang translation, its synonym would be to ‘talk crap’.
32 Short for ‘people’
I am glad to see that people are discussing something more constructive. The trading of insults that had become routine on this message board was an embarrassment. This is what we should be talking about: Helping ourselves, and helping others. A number of us have been talking about setting up a charity to help both the people at home, and those who live here in the UK but who may not have status or who may be in distress. We can raise funds as goffals. Look how many successful fun days we’ve had? If we can run those every so often for deserving causes – take away a few pounds for administration and rentals – we could make a good start. We would be supporting our own, instead of the local pub. I say, let’s think about this. Let’s make it a goffal initiative, not one in which a few do all the work. We can all be involved. I look forward to more constructive comments.

Bloody good suggestions, and I wish you all good luck in your efforts. Now I will tell you why I am not going to join in your fund-raising. I am not going to give a cent because I already send money to my family at home. My family has needs, parents, grandparents, young children in school, older children in college. All of them need help. So I have enough on my plate as it is. I don’t mean to sound harsh, but those are the facts. In fact, how many of you are helping your own families at home, before you go helping the whole world? If you guys want to save the world, so be it. My take on this is that there is not enough in our small coffers to go around. So who gets help, and who gets left out? Bertram is talking about helping people in Arcadia and its environs. What about people out of Harare? Its not only Harare goffals who read this website. Suppose I was from BG or Trenance in Bulawayo, or a goffal from Kwekwe. Why would I support if fund-raising is only focused on Arcadia?

Well said, msg 3067. I say each to his own. A lot of these fundraisers are to fill someone’s pockets anyway. How many times have we seen gigs advertised on this website, saying ‘proceeds to charity’ or ‘part proceeds to charity’? Have you ever seen a report on this or any other website on how much money was raised and how it was used? Maybe I missed it, but I’ve never known it to happen – not on goffal.com, not on any other website. The people who run these gigs do them for themselves. Let’s not become part of another scam.

Alright, I am prepared to donate £5 a month to a cause that benefits our Coloured people. I haven’t got time to be the administrator, someone needs to volunteer to set up the bank account and we need to nominate three signatories to it. Now Andrew, as the administrator of this website, I would nominate you to be one of the signatories, since you are contactable and, I think, trustworthy. Eldridge Culverwell could be another signatory since he is well known and is involved in a lot of Zim-related causes. What do others say?

33 Gigs - ‘goffal slang’ for a cultural gathering where live or recorded music features as part of the entertainment. A synonym for other ‘goffal slang’ words like ‘jam’, ‘session’ and ‘scene’.
I agree with Zulu. I think Justice James Devittie should also be among the trustees. He was much respected as a judge before Mugabe’s thugs hounded him out. I believe he is in the UK?

The discussion has moved from what could be done, to who should drive it, drawing on suggestions of respected mixed-race Zimbabweans known to be in Britain. Status and past positions in Zimbabwe influences perceptions of suitability for trusteeship of the fledgling movement, but will the good intentions of some be construed in the same way?

I am a bit concerned at the racist nature of this website. First you have all the hate messages against blacks on the messageboard. Now there’s talk of setting up a charity to help Coloured people. So, if I may ask, what will you do if approached by a poor widow whose children need school fees, and who happen to be black? Or a white family in desperate circumstances, like been thrown out on the street for debts, etc. How will your charity respond to that?

I wish to agree with Fire lion this website is very biased as calling it “goffal.com” is not very nice we live in an age of equal rights so please consider those who’s feelings are being hurt

Fire Lion and Low Down, you need to Lay Low. How can you say goffal.com is racist? Could you please give clear, precise and detailed evidence as to why you think it is racist. In the UK, they have B.E.N television (black entertainment network,) B.E.T (black entertainment television), the Voice and New Nation papers who both use the headline “Britain’s best black newspaper”. In America, you have Jet magazine, Mahogany and Ebony magazines, all black only magazines. We have goffal.com where we can come and chill out with goffals from our communities. If you do not like what you see here, Chirundu.com and bottomhalf.com await you. Bear in mind that both sites are for white Zimbabweans. If you still feel lost there, you can go to zvakapressa.com or inkundla.net where they cater for black Zimbabweans. Don’t come here and try to stir up shit.

The sensitivities which have been provoked in the thread go to the heart of debates around ethnicized websites and their initiatives. While there are other websites dominated by
particular racial or ethnic groups, many avoid making explicit claims of exclusivity. This website, and indeed this initiative, is explicitly for mixed-race Zimbabweans, a thrust that we have seen passionately justified. To some, the ethnic debate is inevitable, but it must not obstruct progress to setting up concrete and workable forms of action, for which some are growing impatient.

Note Nr.: 3118 from 2002-08-04 20:18:27
by Zulu
Again, we go way, w-a-y off topic. Can’t we stay focused on the positive? I was suggesting we set up a bank account to which we can contribute as we wish, but no-one seems interested in taking this up further. So then we will forget about it til someone comes up a month or two later and starts a new thread of how we must do something to help people at home. Then we go round in circles, month in month out, and nothing gets done. Oh, well…

Note Nr.: 3119 from 2002-08-04 20:18:27
by Fire Lion
To G-Dep (msg 3105). Why should I go to Chirundu.com, or thebottomhalf.com, or inkundla.net? For your information I am a goffal, with a black father and my mother is mixed-race. I love goffal.com; I just think it should be protected from the people you call “haters”. You accuse me of being one, yet all I said was there should not be racist hate messages, and your charity – if you succeed in forming one – should not discriminate. Why don’t you answer my questions: are you going to tell whites who come to your charity to go to chirundu or thebottomhalf.com or are you going to direct Ndebeles to inkundla.net and Shonas to zvakapressa.com? If that is the case, what ‘charity’ are you showing, and what ‘charity’ are you trying to set up?

Note Nr.: 3125 from 2002-08-04 22:09:24
by tatenda
i really like this website! it is off tha chain son! keep it g-h-e-t-t-o! im blak tho, but i support u goffal ppl! do yo thing son!
l8a bellz

Note Nr.: 3129 from 2002-08-04 22:56:28
by Pam
Andrew (Mr Goffal.com), Eldridge and others – where are you? If I remember correctly Andrew and Eldridge were nominated to set up the trust fund. Are these gentlemen still with us, or are they pissed off with the nonsense that’s been written on this site? Please gentlemen, you have been nominated. Stand up and be counted. Like Zulu, I’m also willing to put my few pennies towards helping our own people. Hope this gets a response from the gentlemen concerned.

Note Nr.: 3135 from 2002-08-05 08:06:09
by Admin
Email: admin@goffal.com
url: www.goffal.com
A number of people have contacted me about the discussion about setting up a fund for Zimbabweans back home. Others feel the fund should also be available to struggling members of our community here in the UK. I am happy to correspond privately with those interested since some will not be happy to have their real names revealed on the message

35 ‘l8a bellz’ – later bells, meaning ‘See you later’.
36 ‘pissed off’ – to be angry
board, and we need to know at some point who exactly we are dealing with. So to those interested, contact me and we can arrange a face-to-face meeting with others who have also expressed interest. Let’s get this thing off the ground while there’s still momentum.

Note Nr.: 3153 from 2002-08-09 17:09:46
by Admin
Email: admin@goffal.com
url: www.goffal.com
Further to my email last week, a committee of volunteers has been set up to launch the fund, open a bank account and co-ordinate fundraising activities. We appointed a co-ordinator to look into the logistics and report to the community, through this website, since this is where the idea was conceived. Watch this space for more details.

Four months later, more progress was reported. The committee had established itself, adopted a charter, and resolved to obtain charitable status in Britain. This was announced in a message from ‘Viper’ on December 2, 2002:

Note Nr.: 3405 from 2002-12-03 16:56:45
By Viper
Goffals,
We have made progress. An initiative to support our communities at home has been several months in the works and now we have applied to the England and Wales Charities Commission for registration. The Bank Account details will be posted as soon as we get charitable status. We will be lobbying various organisations here in the UK for financial support, but in the true spirit of gaining ownership of the project, as a community who initiated the idea we should all prepare to contribute generously. The plan is to hold fundraising fun days, sports tournaments, and other cultural events that bring our people together for a worthy cause. Andrew has kindly agreed to offer free advertising space on goffal.com. Please support our events, as they are for the benefit of our struggling brothers and sisters at home.

Although simplistic in process, the extracted online conversations track the emergence of an agency to be set up in the name of the goffal community. The agency’s evolution from an idea to conflicting assertions and expectations; a critical mass of proponents; and finally, with the website manager’s intervention, to a crystallization of the concept into a registered, physically existent charity with aims and objectives, illustrates the power of the discourses in conceiving a real-life agency with an agenda of the marginalized. Evident in the protracted discourse is the partisanship, even in discussing the direction of the relief

37 Note: the message board of www.goffal.com works differently from the forums of most websites, in the sense that it is not divided into different threads of topics. Hence all types of entries appear sequentially on the message board, which accounts for the fact that the entry numbers in the extracts above are not in sequence.
work, towards the mixed-race ethnic group. With its rudimentary structure of trustees and volunteers all nominated from the goffal.com online community, it is hardly surprising that all were Zimbabweans of mixed-race. But besides this important process of a relief agency emerging from online discourses, the exchanges extracted from the message board show a continuing dialectic between self-identification as mixed-race ‘Coloureds’ or goffals, and a sense by some in the community that the emphases on exclusivity is at worst racist, at best unhelpful. Furthermore, there is evidence that issues around the identity and culture of goffals remain contested territory, even, it would seem, among the goffals themselves. A broader discussion on goffal.com and ethnicity beckons in the next section, Section 3.3.

Before that, the story of the creation of the ‘Count on Us’ charity from online discussions on goffal.com must be concluded. To do this, we must leap forward two years from our last recorded posting – from ‘Viper’ on December 2, 2002 – to more heady days in February 2004, by which time ‘Count on Us’ is a registered charity, and income has been generated from both donations and live cultural events in the UK.

Dear Friends
We are a newly formed UK-Registered Charity (Registered Charity 1098220), whose main objective is to invest in our communities’ future, by taking a stand against the realities, consequences and effects of poverty, that are affecting the youth and the elderly in our communities in Zimbabwe today. We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ‘Count on Us’. You’ve heard about it, you’ve spoken about it, you’ve debated about it. NOW find out about it. YOUR VOICE MATTERS! Please visit our website www.cou.org.uk to see how you can make a difference.38

Our targets include relief of poverty by the procurement of basic commodities to hand to the needy, supply of basic clothing collected in the UK and sent back to Zimbabwe to be given to those in need, advancement of education. By application Count on Us will pay fees directly to schools. By application Count on Us will pay for school uniforms directly.39

By the end of 2004, ‘Count on Us’ was operating almost independently of goffal.com, with its day-to-day running in the hands of volunteers who were accountable to the trustees. Financial reports were being submitted annually to the Charity Commission for England

38 Message by ‘COU’, Note Nr. 6225, www.goffal.com, 18-02-2004
39 Message by ‘COU’, Note Nr.: 6230 www.goffal.com, 19-02-2004
and Wales. Nevertheless its symbiotic relationship with www.goffal.com continued. Notwithstanding its own website, it continued to advertise events and report on its achievements to the broader constituency through goffal.com, as in this entry by ‘Audrey’:

Count on Us would like to say a thank you to the just under 700 people who supported our Summer Funday, on 10 June 2006, and helped make it such a successful day! We hope that you all had a great time. See you all again on 26 August, at the same place…

The joint initiative with Shumba Warriors Football Club, which on the day fielded a team in which all but one of the players were goffals – the black Zimbabwean who was the exception conversed effortlessly in goffal slang – reaffirmed the charity’s linkages with and rootedness in the social world created by Zimbabwe’s mixed-race. As recently as 2007, Count on Us was still being called to account on goffal.com. A consciousness remained among members of their obligations towards the less fortunate. Explicitly and implicitly, this desire to help others was based on race, just as the website that conceived it was ethnocentric. But while ‘Count on Us’ has helped mixed-race communities inside Zimbabwe, it has not carried through the other objective that started the conversations which led to its generation: helping mixed-race Zimbabweans in Britain. Thus, when on February 19, 2007, ‘bertt’ posted his views on how those in the diaspora could and should support needy cases back in Zimbabwe, but also had to address their own pressing needs as immigrants in Britain, the only agency sprung into the conversation that developed was ‘Count on Us’. With its high profile on goffal.com and its public endeavours well supported by Zimbabweans of mixed-race – as reported by ‘Audrey’ above, for example – that recourse was inevitable.

Wrote Daran Turner:

40 See the Count on Us website, http://www.cou.org.uk/index.htm
41 Note: the www.goffal.com website was revamped in January 2005, and its message boards redesigned
Count On Us regularly feature/ carry appeals for folks back home in dire straits and in need of some medical care or the like. A few who have found it possible have set up standing orders into CoU and that is to be commended. 42

The researcher was able to interact with the coordinators of ‘Count on Us’, was invited to their meetings, and was even nominated as a volunteer – a nomination tactfully declined. Marion Strachan, the chief organiser and her brother, Bruce, both from Bulawayo and progeny of a former Deputy General Manager of the National Railways of Zimbabwe, said they were fuelled by a compulsion to help their own. ‘We cannot sit here in the relative comforts of the UK, doing nothing, while our people go without bare essentials like food, medicine and education. We were fortunate enough…others did not get that opportunity’, said Bruce. 43

When asked if the proceeds from their fundraising served a specific ethnic group, the coordinators were careful to state that they were bound by their conditions of registration not to discriminate. Thus on their website, the stated objective is ‘to provide help and assistance wherever it is needed within and beyond our communities in Zimbabwe’. 44 In reality, Marion and Bruce say the expectation of many of those who support the initiative is that it would benefit the communities in which they grew up, that is, areas across Zimbabwe that were historically reserved for mixed-race goffal residents. Marion and Bruce, who are part of a committee of five volunteers, backed by occasional help from other mixed-race Zimbabweans, say the task is thankless, not least because of the scrutiny they received, sometimes abrasive, on goffal.com. Said Bruce:

43 Interview with Marion and Bruce Strachan, Count on Us Fun Day, Lower Sydenham, 10 July 2004
You get people who are appreciative, and then you get people who are rabble-rousers. They won’t get off their backsides to do anything productive, but have a lot to say to those of us who will. These are people you learn to ignore.

Has the Count on Us initiative reached a stage where it can afford to ignore comments on goffal.com?

Of course we log onto goffal.com – it’s the website which most of our people identify with. We read what the people say. We take on board what’s constructive, contact those who want to play an active part, and leave those who have nothing positive to say to their own devices.

Marion added: ‘Count on Us got a lot of momentum from goffal.com and we continue to get generous publicity for our events. We count on them in a big way’.

Five years on, the agency created by goffal.com retained a strong link to its online origins. It did not register its ethnocentric credentials with the Charities Commission, but there is no mistaking its pulse or its loyalties. On its Acknowledgements (or ‘Thank You’) page, the Count on Us website lists among its benefactors, in the category of contributions between £50-£100, one Andrew Longworth. And at the bottom of the page, recognised for its ‘time, resources, invaluable help and support’, is www.goffal.com.

4.3 Wanting to Be Heard: Towards An Ethnic Representativeness

The research has distinguished between websites that explicitly project themselves as an agency for a particular ethnic group, and others which, for undefined reasons, ascribe to themselves a homogenous identity even where, as our surveys and subsequent case reviews

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45 Copies of the registration documents were shown to the researcher during the interview on 10/07/2004. The purpose of the charity is stated as the ‘relief of poverty, sickness, distress and the advancement of education in Zimbabwe’, while the stated beneficiaries of the charity are ‘communities in Zimbabwe’. For updated reports to the England and Wales Charities Commission, see the Count on Us details online, available at http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/ShowCharity/RegisterOfCharities/CharityWithoutPartB.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber =1098220&SubsidiaryNumber=0

show, there is demonstrable partiality to one group’s ethnic interests. There are no such pretences on goffal.com. The website itself declares it is ‘a platform where the Zimbabwean mixed-race “Coloured” community’s aspirations and concerns can be expressed’ and where ‘open democratic debate on issues common to and arising from the “Coloured” community’ can be discussed. In addition, the website manager (Longworth, 2003) described the purposes of goffal.com as seeking to:

- Provide a resource for Zimbabwean ‘Coloureds’ abroad to network with each other, and especially to bring those in the UK into more regular interaction, both online and in social events;
- Work with groups and other organisations from the community within and outside Zimbabwe, for the common purposes of furthering the aspirations of Zimbabwean ‘Coloureds’ and providing some relief to those in distress;
- Provide various levels of support to projects arising from the community; this support can take many forms depending on the circumstances and the resources available;
- Promote support network and linkage building for community organisations in and out of Zimbabwe;
- Assist in sustaining communication between members of the community who are living in the diaspora in different countries of the world – ‘most often not by choice but through the compelling circumstances in Zimbabwe’.

Longworth is, unsurprisingly, a proponent of this robust ethnocentrism. He started the website along those lines, and couched it in activist rhetoric that demanded that Zimbabweans of mixed-race be ‘heard’. ‘We demand that our rights as citizens of Zimbabwe be respected, that we are accepted as Zimbabweans and that we have equal

access to land, employment and business opportunities which the Government has denied us through its argument that we are not indigenous', the home page once screamed in bright red-coloured font. (The banner proclamation was removed during one of several facelifts since given to the website).

Longworth deplored racist comments directed at black Zimbabweans but refused to delete them. A foot soldier in the UK structures of the Movement for Democratic Change, he says he had bitter exchanges with senior colleagues in the movement who demanded that he remove the invectives from public view. Said Longworth:

I say to them, ‘Look, it’s free speech.’ I may not like the racist comments that surface sometimes, and in fact I do intervene by responding to them critically where they are extreme. But who’s to say that I should remove what I don’t agree with? After all, other Zimbabwean websites have forums where racial and tribal abuse are the order of the day. Who asks them to remove their messages? I’ve had furious disagreements with my black friends on this. In the end most of them see my point of view. You can’t hide the rotten eggs and pretend they don’t exist. (Longworth Interview 2003)

The clash of cultures and perspectives historically has left ‘Coloureds’ and blacks in an ambiguous relationship, fraught with superiority and inferiority complexes, mutual resentment, and a desire to generalize and exaggerate perceived negative traits in each other. These complexes, undesirable as they are, surface in conventional as well as internet media. A former popular Saturday columnist in the Chronicle newspaper in Zimbabwe once controversially described mixed-race Zimbabweans as ‘hordes’ whose behaviour disrupted the tranquillity of suburban beer-gardens and who were historically ‘more racist than whites’. Similar generalizations, unpalatable as they do seem, show up on goffal.com attacking Zimbabwe’s majority black establishment. Evidence is seldom found to substantiate these claims, but they gain currency from any media exposure and have the effect of testing already tenuous race relations in Zimbabwean societies. Can websites

provide a solution for these sentiments other than suppress or give them space? The research does not answer that question, in fact avoids it. Longworth says the gatekeeping prerogatives of the website’s management should be exercised with restraint in order to give the community of users more freedom.

The best thing to have come out of www.goffal.com is its availability as a home for ‘Coloureds’. It is not just an arbitrary website: it is our space as a people. It says what we are, and how we think. It is where we can interact as a people, agreeing and disagreeing within our own venue where we know we can be comfortable expressing a view without the prejudices of others who believe that we should not have a view, or that if we have, it should not be publicly expressed. I’m not saying that everything that appears on www.goffal.com is agreeable. But I defend the right of ‘Coloureds’ to debate issues and to differ among themselves without the constraints that exist offline. (Longworth Interview 2003)

He is quick to point out the positives that have emerged from the website: the generation of a relief agency; political mobilisation (although, as we shall see in the next section, the interest was minimal); support on immigration and related issues; news from Zimbabwe; and, not least of all, a meeting place for ‘Coloureds’ abroad. His objectives are not short of support on www.goffal.com, and the likes of ‘The Bomber’ demonstrate this:

Goffal.com is our voice, the voice of the Coloured people of Zimbabwe. It is a sign that our people have come of age, that we will refuse to be dissolved by the majority, and that we will leave our mark, not just in cyberspace, but on the minds of coming generations who will read goffal.com and know that, despite the dispersion of many Coloureds of Zimbabwean origin, we once had a peculiar way of life, and that peculiar way of life was not European, nor was it Black African. It was the way we talked and lived as Coloured people in our own areas, in our own schools, and with our own sets of ideas.

Evidently, ‘The Bomber’ wrote from an optimistic view of the permanence of goffal.com and its content. The website went on to change its name to ‘Mixed Race Zimbabweans Network (Mr Zims.net) in 2008. Although it kept its race-based ideology, it dumped all previous content into the ether, retaining nothing from the manifold discussions which ‘The Bomber’ hoped would leave its mark ‘on the minds of coming generations who will read goffal.com’ (Longworth 2008). ‘Count on Us’ remained durable; by late 2008 it was still

drawing hundreds to its gigs and was actively fund-raising for school fees, pensioners, health care and related needs in the historically ‘Coloured’ residential areas of Zimbabwe. Yet unanimity on the objectives of the website and associated networks was elusive. Wrote ‘Piper’:

Reading some of the postings on this site makes me realise exactly why your white and black compatriots treat you all with contempt and disdain. I would not be proud to be associated (sic) or called ‘Coloured’ if the content of the postings represented colouredness and thankfully they are not representative of the whole group but then again it’s not surprising to read racist postings on a site which is solely based on one mixed and clearly a mixed-up racial group.51

‘Piper’ may be from outside the goffal community, or is perhaps a mixed-race Zimbabwean critical of the dominant discourse on the website. It is true, as ‘Piper’ points out, that not all mixed-race Zimbabweans share Longworth and others’ partisan objectives (see e.g. Mandaza 1997). Nevertheless, the credibility of the goffal construct is predicated on a set of shared values endorsed by the belief among many that they have a culture, a language of their own, residential spaces and a set of interests that distinguishes them as a unit within the politico-geographical boundaries of the nation-state in which they subsist. Legally and historically, they have both claimed, and been assigned a distinct identity by colonial and post-colonial administrations: from the 1930s, associations of so-called ‘half-castes’ in Zimbabwe ‘became the basis for whipping up sympathy for what was increasingly, particularly from the late ‘30s onwards, regarded as a new “race”’(Mandaza 1997:393).

Notions of ethnic group identity among people who came to see themselves and were seen by others as ‘Coloured’ were however not simply invented or imposed from above. As Muzondidya (2001:30) has argued, the goffal construct emerged as a ‘result of a dialectical relationship between racialization by whites and self definition’. It was, he said, ‘a result of customary segregation in residential areas that closer identification occurred among the

51 ‘Piper’, Note Nr. 4403, 21 June 2004
residents’, promoted ‘through marriages, sexual relationships … and social and sporting activities, such as evening dances and football matches’. The result was that ‘new communities, with a distinctive set of values and cultural ethos, began to emerge’ that ‘provided an important breeding ground for communal ideologies’ (Muzondidya 2001:40).

Such communal ideologies ‘were built from cultural input’, Muzondidya tells us, adding that:

Where there was a strong correlation between colour, language, culture and historical origins, on the one hand, and the living space, on the other hand, as in Bulawayo and Salisbury, the communal ideologies that developed and bonds of commonality forged by the residents tended to take on an ethnic dimension. In this case, the communities that emerged predominantly comprised persons of mixed-race…

In Zimbabwe today, the national census figures still differentiate between the black majority, Whites, Asians and ‘Coloureds’, meaning that ‘Coloureds’ are still designated as a separate ethnic group.

An identity does not pre-suppose a culture underlying it. But as studies by Muzondidya and Mandaza have shown, common interests draw people into communities with more or less of a shared ethos - in the way www.goffal.com does, or the associations within Zimbabwe agitating for ‘Coloured’ distinctiveness do. They yield more than just the labelling, as this chapter and its case study show. They become fertile ground for cultural production and are themselves cultural products in the sense described by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:21), who saw culture as ‘the shared repertoire of practices, symbols and meanings…the space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others – and, hence, society and history’.

For goffals, these interactive practices define their embodiment and frame their interaction with other entities. The prosumers of goffal.com are engaged in ‘a social form of human achievement’ (Gorringe 2004:13) where the initial contacts are via a web forum posting and the ensuing interactivity creates a cultural product. All these are ‘signs’ whipped together
into an identity. Saussure (Fiske 1990:52) says that these signs are organised into codes that
in turn facilitate the communicative action of the different communities.

The signs used in this communication, who uses them and how they are used, are matters
for the speakers of the language to decide. They do this through a process Fiske (1990:53)
calls ‘convention’. It is ‘the social dimension of signs’ (Fiske 1990:56). This convention
centres on validity claims by a particular language or ethnic group about their freedom to
express, and to be understood, in a use of language with which they are accustomed. Goffal
slang, as the derivation from Afrikaans and English used by mixed-race Zimbabweans is
sometimes called, is an element of the culture which goffals have generated in their
territorial communities which, for the first time, has achieved literary use online through
www.goffal.com

4.3.1 Goffalism: Expressed as a Language, or suppressed by Diasporism?

Issues of language, identity and the citizenship of mixed-race Zimbabweans are spiritedly
discussed when they arise on goffal.com – which tends to be often. As newer, presumably
younger, members join the online community, without recourse to the earlier postings from
previous years which are archived or trashed, they wrestle with much the same issues as
those confronted by the earlier generations of goffal forum users. These debates frequently
end unresolved; however, a dominant view clearly emerges by which the online community
is defined. In the language debate, there is a clear partiality to goffal slang, despite its being
attacked by some mixed-race Zimbabweans in the diaspora, and even though there is
progressively less and less of it used as most members of the online community spend more
time in Britain. The debates that follow, taken from exchanges on the message board in
September 2004, illustrate the sensitivities of a number of mixed-race Zimbabweans to this subject.

Note Nr.: 7658 from 2004-09-01 11:07:52
by BG rules

Okay so I sound like a boring old guy, but i remember back when we all still lived in Zim. Saturday night scene at the BG Hall and people came from miles to join in. In those days there was one thing that set goffles apart from everyone else. We were cool and black and white all tried to copy our slang, it was goffle slang and no one else did it like us. But what happened? If you look on this website you find a lot of goffles trying to be Americans and using American slang. I even heard of one ou 52 who claims to have gone to ‘elementary school’ in Zimbabwe. I don’t remember any elementary schools in BG, Trenance, Rangemore, Arcadia or Nashville. Does this mean goffles aren’t cool anymore because now we are copying Americans?

Note Nr.: 7706 from 2004-09-01
by KING OF THE HILL

The goffal mensa (BG RULES) that mentioned American slang is being used nowadays is quite right. It does seem strange to see “American slang” on a “goffal” website. I’m in the US, and use “their” lingo (not the accent though!) for day to day communication, but when I’m on goffal.com I feel free to rap the way I would at home, because I know “we speak the same language”.

Note Nr.: 7707 from 2004-09-02
By 4eva lives

I really agree with KING OF THE HILL the goffal lingo has really…pooof gone. I think we need to USE it…honestly. I have been in England for sumtime and I have already 4gotten my home language. I miss it man…if I say to my gurls jorl. They be like uhhhh…(confused face) wats that…they already think I’m a bit coo coo…but hey! Soooo let our goffal slang live on baby!

But there are other forces in the goffal community less appreciative of its slang and the sentimental attachment of many to it. ‘Den’ starts the trading of contrasting views with an appeal to fellow goffals in Britain to embrace the host culture.

I am now living in a different culture and spend most of my living life with the people from the country I am living in so it is only obvious that I will pick up bits and pieces from them, yes I am and will always be Zimbabwean and am proud to be Zimbabwean but people can’t expect me to switch on and off, when at work try and fit it and then when with Zimbabweans switch off and forget what my new experiences. I am myself, I still have a zimbabwean accent with a few english phrases and slang, hell yeh I don’t even live in the States but I also speak bits of american slang too. That is the problem with some of us we are either too scared, or too stupid to move on and experience things. 53

52 ‘Ou’, slang for ‘chap’
53 Note Nr.: 7714, www.goffal.com, 2 September 2004
The spark of ‘Den’s’ message was soon a flame that raged on the message board for weeks. Anger was expressed both ways: some supported ‘Den’, most stridently opposed her. Yet the debates were rarely conducted with much more than a smattering of slang words. It seemed the language was dying even as its custodians haggled over it on the message board. The passion in the debate was palpable, though:

Note Nr.: 7716 from 2004-09-02 11:55:08
By Just me
I am a coloured person too but you know what the way you “goffals” go on about speaking a different language it is so hilarious. Slang IS NOT a language, then you wonder why ya all end up failing or failed ya ‘O’ level english. All because of using slang more than normal english words. The slang words we use as zimbabwean coloureds are not even in the dictionary where as there are a few American ones in the dictionary and in brackets defined as slang. Anyway I was just popping my nose in for a while. Den below speaks since54 move on and learn new things, i am not saying forget where you are coming from though.

Note Nr.: 7718 from 2004-09-02 12:22:21
By Coloured chick55
To Just me.
Firstly I would like to correct you that the slang we speak as goffals is in the dictionary, whose fault is it that you probley used to speak slang without knowing where it came from. For your information its in the Afrikaans dictionary, our slang is Afrikaans you twit!!!!!!! Gosh!!!!!!!!!

Note Nr.: 7719 from 2004-09-02 12:33:56
By Human Being
Ok coloured chick no need to be calling Just me a twit. Not everyone knows everything!

Note Nr.: 7720 from 2004-09-02 12:38:28
By Just me
To Coloured Chick,
There is no need to be like that yeh, no name calling and the like. There you go, the slang may be in the Afrikaans dictionary but is that what we are? I think not. If you are so proud to be Zimbabwean then why are you using Afrikaans for ‘zimbabwean slang’, come on be intelligent. Who is the imbecile now!!!!!!!

Note Nr.: 7724 from 2004-09-02
By Coloured Chick
To Just me
Gosh!!!! No need to get upset because you don’t appreciate the slang word, hold your temper down. By the way, be proud of the slang language like we all are. I mean its our only means of communication when you really think of it. The blacks have shona, ndebele etc., whites have English, French, dutch, etc. we only have slang, which if you should know comes from Cape Town, CAPE COLOURED, it was not something that was thought up like yesterday, its been around for years. Afrikaans is a Coloured language, not white. When different types of whites came to Cape Town, they spoke French, Dutch, English etc. so the Cape Coloureds invented Afrikaans to communicate with all the whites, so slang is a mixture of French, Dutch, English, etc.

Are you cool now?

54 ‘Sense’, presumably
55 A ‘chick’ is one of several terms used in goffal slang to refer to a young woman.
for all those goffals abroad that are becoming honkiefied\textsuperscript{56} or Ja-faiians (fake Jamaicans), heres what makes us goffals proud to be goffals: our language. Check out the dictionary section on this website. Be free of your stupidity.

To Just me
I sense you want to be white, no problem with that as we come from both white and black. Its sad that you don’t really appreciate slang that much because you now overseas, most in Zim speak slang a lot. I can tell you been away from home for a long time coz if you knew the situation at home you would appreciate the slang. Anyways, its your call to be who you want to be, but I am proud to be coloured and slang speaking, I wish I could speak always, but you know the job situation is strictly English.

Hey I’ll let you all know, that I really and truly hate slang, I was born in Zimbabwe but never ever spoke this language because I thought it was disgusting, I don’t know how you all can go on about such a lot of tripe like this. You know if you take more interest in the world around you, people suffering, children dying, right now in Russia, children are being held hostage, people have died and all you think about is this absolutely dreadful language, ‘slang’, come on, get a life, move on. You’all need change, you are now living abroad become someone special. Not just a Zimbabwean Coloured, which by the way is not that important, it does not matter what you call yourself, coloured, black, white or mixed-race, as long as there is blood running thru your veins, you are alive and a member of the human race. Now snap out of it, you hear…and go get yourselves a life….

The intervention by ‘What ever’ invites comment. The writer is averse to goffal slang, and wants goffals to ‘snap out’ of the view that they are a distinct identity with peculiar memories of home and homeland spaces. Being abroad can facilitate such denial, especially when identities from home do not fit the racial categories of the hostland – and goffals from Zimbabwe find this a vexatious misfit, particularly when asked, as they often are, why they ‘don’t look like other Zimbabweans’. But although some with the mindset of ‘What ever’ deal with the problem by adopting the British dichotomy of ‘whites’ and ‘minorities’, with goffals blending in conveniently with the sizeable and heterogenous British non-white population, absence from a geo-physical and ideological past is not

\textsuperscript{56}‘Honkie’- Goffal slang for a Caucasian, hence ‘becoming honkiefied’ would be to speak and behave like a white person.
without yearnings for the ‘web of relationships’ into which one was born (Arendt 1978:55-57). This ‘death of being’, as Heidegger (1962:102-3) would describe it, brought about by pressures from an alien environment, should strengthen the transnational’s sense of origin. As a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, Arendt recalls feeling ‘stateless’ and ‘rightless’, exacerbated by fellow-Jews she saw as expunging their identity in response to Nazism and the social order of the hostlands to which they fled. Being denied a political space had led some of them to a mental form of suicide where, she said, ‘whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews’ (1978:63). This seemed not to have been the dominant discourse on goffal.com, where pride in the ideologies of the past proved rampant.

By most accounts, goffals in Zimbabwe were victims and dispensers of prejudice, but never suffered on the scale that Jews did under Nazism. Yet the negation Arendt lamented seemed explicit in postings like that of ‘Whatever’, and rejoinders like the one by ‘Loving life’ below were expected.

Note Nr.: 7791 from 2004-09-04 04:44:18

By loving life

dear whatever…firstly…this is a goffal website and we are truly a long way from home…sooo its not a crime to remember good times using slang…a lot of goffals used it. I never really did that much but there are still a few words that I do use now and then…im glad that you have a different opinion, you think its not a very nice language – but that’s a language we could all understand. We were on the same page. …another thing is no-one said there are not more important things going on.i agree but yet I disagree with the fact that you come on here and try and bust everyone’s happy bubble about the good old zim slang times. Im sorry, if you want to begin a post on the things going on in the world then do so and people will respond to it, you can all talk about what is going on in the world….so hope to see your post! Live life and take care of everyone around you! Peace!

The ‘slang’ debate raged back and forth, for a longer period that the researcher could usefully track. In one sense, mixed-race Zimbabweans use English as their native tongue, with goffal slang a secondary form of communication used for socializing, and almost never used when addressing older generations as this is considered disrespectful. On the
other hand, the day-to-day engagement in Zimbabwe’s mixed-race communities is rarely without the unconventional: from the standard greeting, Howzit ekse, to more serious transactions like scoring a cabin, which means to buy a house, or flogging a gee, which is to sell a car. What is interesting in the above discourse is evidence that as people abroad adapt to their new lifestyles, there are discernible differences that emerge between Zimbabwean ‘Coloureds’, both at home and those abroad. But those differences are opportunities to negotiate identities and are not inimical to the historical particularities that have shaped a definitive goffal presence in the demographics of Zimbabwe and in its diaspora.

4.3.2 Goffal Representation in the Politics of the Homeland

The political activism of the founder of the website is not secret. Longworth had a passionate desire to mobilize ‘Coloureds’ to become politically active in Britain, with a view to staking their claim to a future in a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. Particularly in the years 2002-2003 when, after the strong showing by the MDC in Zimbabwe’s Parliamentary and Presidential elections, it appeared possible that they would unseat the Mugabe government in Harare, Longworth made it his mission to lure goffals into the vibrant anti-government campaigns in exile, and so convince other Zimbabweans of the sincerity of their compatriots of mixed-race.

‘During the liberation war, Coloureds sat on the fence and were conscripted to serve in Ian Smith’s army,’ wrote Longworth in November 2002 as he exhorted his fellow-‘Coloureds’ to support anti-Mugabe demonstrations in London. ‘Very few of us openly stood on the side of the blacks. We were not visible in the campaigns against Smith’s rule, either in the country or in exile. For that, we have been marginalized after independence.

57 Note Nr 414 from 2002-11-01 10:09:08
Now we have a chance to make ourselves a part of the change, so that when the new MDC government comes to power we will be recognised as colleagues and given our due as Zimbabweans.’

Longworth’s activism was targeting the broader apathy among Zimbabwean ‘Coloureds’, especially those in Britain whom he accused of ‘a gigs culture – where’s the next gig is more important than what we can do to save our country’. But he was also galvanizing goffal support for the next major anti-Mugabe protest in London, as the rest of his entry illustrated.

For a long time I have noticed that our community isn’t serious about getting involved in events to support change in our country. Unlike other races who’ve come to the UK and made a stand, our community shows no interest in national affairs. I ask myself: what is it with Coloureds? Why do we act as though nothing else matters, as though we do not belong, as though we have no place, the stateless people content to go about their own business just to make a living and nothing else? Why are we so conspicuous by our absence? Organise a fun day and we are there in droves. But when the rest of Zimbabweans come together for a public demonstration of what they believe in, where are the Coloureds? Only two or three turn up. You can count them with the fingers on one hand. Even white Zimbabweans show more interest than us in the affairs of our country. NOW we have a chance to show that we, the ‘Coloured’ people of Zimbabwe, will not sit back in negotiating our country’s future. Zimbabwe is on the brink. All hands are needed on deck. A demonstration outside the Zimbabwean Embassy is being arranged for Saturday 21 December, starting at 11am. Please Coloureds, let’s get involved. I’d like to see a massive turnout by Coloureds, so we can show the other races that we care and that when it counts, we are more than ready to be in the trenches and making a stand against tyranny and corrupt rule.

This particular demonstration was also promoted on other websites, including two of the other case studies, www.thebottomhalf.com (targeting white exiles) and www.inkundla.net. Over the coming weeks Longworth, who was patently part of the organization of the forthcoming protest, issued several lengthy appeals through goffal.com to his constituency to turn up, including one with a street map of the location and details of train and bus
routes. He broadcast his home and telephone numbers for anyone needing more details, and gave assurances that the demonstration had been cleared by the police and that there would be adequate security to deter ‘troublemakers’. He wrote, on the eve of the event, 60:

Some of you have contacted me about fears for your security if you take part in the demonstration. We have been assured of adequate protection by the London Met Police and there is no question of anyone of us being attacked. This is a free country, and the right to peaceful protest is respected. Nobody can deny us that right.

It appeared the Zimbabwean goffals were not ready to accept those guarantees: very few turned up on the day, and Longworth was ready to throw the towel in and close down www.goffal.com:

Note Nr.: 607 from 2002-12-23  1:55:08  
By admin

The Stop the Violence Campaign demonstration was held last Saturday and I would like to thank those Coloureds who made the effort to attend. Apart from myself, I counted four Coloureds present and although it was not the turnout we were hoping for, I would like to thank those Coloureds for making a stand. Your commitment is much appreciated.

I have been trying to get us involved as Coloureds in the UK, to show that we can make a difference and that we are part of the struggle for freedom in our country. I realise now that I have failed and that Coloureds are not interested in anything that does not include beer, music, and maybe a bit of soccer. I have been barking up the wrong tree. Everytime I told my black friends that if we were just given a chance, Coloureds would prove everyone wrong and make a massive presence. Now I realise that they were right: Coloureds are good at partying. Nothing else really matters. Unless this attitude changes, Coloureds will have no future in Zimbabwe, or in Africa for that matter. We will always be the ruled, the marginalised and, eventually, the forgotten. We act like we have nothing to give to Africa, therefore Africa will reject us.

I have decided to close goffal.com. I think it has outlived its purpose. There are more important things happening in our country and I want to be a part of the efforts to bring about change. If the rest of the Coloureds are not interested, so be it. It was nice being in touch with you, but I think I have done my bit and its time for me to move on.

Longworth’s reaction to the embarrassment he had been caused by the no-show had repercussions within and outside the goffal community. Black critics of his website, including those within the MDC, begged him not to shut it down (Longworth 2003). There was some sympathy for his sense of betrayal by his own after the canvassing to generate a bigger goffal turnout. But there was also anger within the goffal community at his
perception that the mobilising power of goffal.com which drew hundreds to the goffal fun
days and even generated ‘Count on Us’ to help the needy, could now be used to conscript
people of mixed-race into political activism. The website had been given its last rites by its
‘owner’. But the prosumers who had become attached to it in the two years of its existence,
and now claimed it as theirs, were also to make their presence felt. What followed was
somewhere in between a ‘people power’ revolution in the goffal community, and
intervention by black colleagues who assured Longworth that they appreciated his efforts
and that they did not want to see goffal.com close. The interventions by other goffals on the
message board were mostly cheeky: Longworth was told that he ‘should not expect
everyone to be a politician’ 61 and that not every goffal saw the website as a recruitment
vehicle for the opposition MDC. 62

Note Nr.: 623 from 2002-12-21
by Binga

Andrew
I read your note mate. So you want to pack up and close goffal.com all because a few dozen
people shouted outside the Zimbabwean Embassy, and there were too few goffals who
bothered to get involved. Has it occurred to you that the one reason why we don’t want to
get involved is because we are concerned for family back home? Let’s face it Andrew, can
you ever go back home, now that you have made yourself a hero by getting involved in all
the politics? What will it change? What will it bring for you? I’m sorry to sound so selfish,
but me, I’m in for anything that helps me and my family. I come onto this website because I
want to be connected with the goffal community, not to be recruited for some other people’s
functions. And because you, Andrew, are a member of the MDC, you should not expect
everyone to be a politician. Some of us are and some of us aren’t, then there are those of us
who know even more than you about politics but choose not to get involved. It’s called
choice Andrew and its allowed. Like somebody said, England is a free country, you get
involved if you want, or you stay out. I’ve done my bit for the country, now I’m
concentrating on my family and our lives here. If you want to be a hero, that’s your
problem. Don’t make it everybody else’s.

Note Nr.: 624 from 2002-12-21 15:53:46
by The Pied Piper

Andrew
Don’t worry mate. The world won’t end because goffals didn’t turn up at your demo. There
have been demos before, and this surely was not the last. So keep up the good work. We
support you.

61 Note Nr 607 from 2002-12-22

62 Note Nr 612 from 2002-12-24
So is this an MDC website or what? Why don’t you take your issues to the MDC website? Anyway what’s the fuss not all of us support the MDC anyway we don’t come on to this site to talk politics but to link up wit da hommies so leave the site as it is, its lekker. CU Later

mugabe should not be insulted, he is an elected leader and his done well, yes the nation is in a state now but if it was not for him, rhodees would still be running that lovely nation

Close the website? Good grief! Haven’t you got any other toys to throw out of the cot? Think again, Mr Webmaster. I’m sure you were upset and wrote what you did in anger. But step back and think about it a little. Can we afford to lose goffal.com? What would we do without it? Where would we go? Its unfair to punish us because we did not go to your demo. So you went and shouted and beat drums. What have you achieved? Zilch. What will you achieve by closing goffal.com? Zilch. I think you know that you are being petulant. Think again.

Pharoah
Agreed, if nothing else let’s take a step back from the edge, as it benefit no-one to close our website.

Why do you Coloureds give Andrew such a hard time? The man works long hours to keep this website going and give you a sense of community but all he gets is abuse in return. No thanks, no support, nothing. Do you people know how much work he puts into goffal.com, for no reward. How many of you would do that? You people are so thick-headed you don’t see a gift when it bites you. Ungrateful souls

Sasha who do you think you are coming here and playing mother Hubbard If Andrew closes the website, so be it, its his prerogative. All along we thought this was a website for the community, now we told it’s been closed because we never went to the webmaster’s demo. So if this is a website for demos and the like why weren’t we told in the beginning and why was it called goffal.com? Is every goffal an MDC supporter or should every goffal support

63 To ‘link up wit da hommies’ is to meet with people from home
64 ‘Lekker’ – from the Afrikaans word for ‘nice’
65 ‘Rhodees’ – short for ‘Rhodians’, as people from the former British colony were called before independence in 1980. Now used specifically to refer to all whites from Zimbabwe
66 Zilch – absolutely nothing
Morgan Tsvangirai because he is Andrew’s friend? If you want to sulk, go for it but don’t come on here and rev us up for zilch. It’s just not on.

Note Nr.: 640 from 2002-12-21
by Alan Webb
Andrew, Let’s just adjourn sine die on this one, I can see this will lead us to Armageddon.

Note Nr.: 643 from 2002-12-22 09:56:49
by senna
we need a goffal president who dops a span that will sort it all out

Note Nr.: 645 from 2002-12-23 11:16:23
by SPIDER’S PAD II
e-mail: abbewa@hotmail.com

Andrew you lose the plot a little when you make a sweeping statement about goffals in Africa. Speak only of Zimbabwe as the experience is different in other parts of Africa. Former president Jerry Rawlings of Ghana is mixed, he had a Scottish father and an indigenous African mother. I was told by a middle-aged Ghanaian gentleman that Rawlings once visited Scotland to try and trace his father and was given the snub. Moving to our neighbours in Botswana, Ian Khama, son of the late president and royal clan chief and a British woman is an army general and also the Vice President of Botswana. These two individuals are some of the mixed-race persons on the continent who have been acknowledged by their black peers. Let some mixed-race person of say British ancestry try to make it into the House of Lords. In Angola there is a lot of mixed persons too, I wonder what their experience is.

It took a while for Longworth to respond to the flurry of messages that inundated the forum after his announcement. Some three weeks later, into a new year and with his temper cooled - after others expended considerable energy in the debate - he announced that he was not going to close the website after all. He admitted that he had over-reacted, but said it was an accumulation of a long period of frustration at the failure of goffals to make their mark on the political scene. He was gratified by the messages of encouragement, particularly by black Zimbabweans in general, and those in the leadership of the exiled political structures in particular.

67 Morgan Tsvangirai, founder president of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)
68 ‘Rev us up for zilch’ – to accuse us without cause
69 ‘Dops a span…’ to drink a lot (usually of alcohol)
70 Note Nr. 660 from 2003-01-12 14:30:53
‘The ouens\textsuperscript{71} understood,’ Longworth, referring to his MDC colleagues, told me later. ‘We had a good laugh about it and they told me not to fret about it too much. They said they understood my frustration and appreciated my efforts. But they didn’t think stopping goffal.com or my work with the community was the answer. In fact, some of them who previously had criticised goffal.com as racist repeatedly urged me not to shut it down.’ (Longworth 2003)

Back in the goffal community, Andrew Longworth’s about-turn was greeted with relief. He had made his point, but had also been challenged by his peers. A new power relationship between the webmaster and the community seemed to have taken effect, in which the man who conceived the project could no longer define its members’ political activism. This was a demonstration in itself, one that supported Burnett and Marshall’s reasoning that a negotiated ‘social construction of reality’ takes place on the internet (2003:61ff). The freedom to communicate, and to share intense human emotions like anger, sympathy, support and disappointment through an online message board had the effect of moderating the moderator; of turning the goffal.com hierarchy on its head and dictating to the founder-administrator the very principles he himself would have espoused when conceiving the website and the social movements it spawned. Power was not in the hands of a gatekeeper, but a community of regulators in which the webmaster was a significant part.

Chastened, Longworth became less vigorous in his MDC advocacy through the website. The prominent MDC banner and link which had pride of place on the home page was quietly relegated to the ‘links’ page. When a year later, another demonstration was planned, Longworth took a back seat, at least on goffal.com. He allowed the event to be publicised, but by Eldridge Culverwell, then the MDC’s UK District spokesman (also of mixed-race)

\textsuperscript{71} ‘Ouens’, Afrikaans/slang word for ‘chaps’
who was drawn into fresh debates with the **goffal** constituency about the merits of the protest movement. Not a word was recorded from Longworth.

The researcher attended the latter demonstration in Parliament Square on October 26, 2003, and counted five persons of mixed-race among the 80 or so protestors. One of the mixed-race persons was a Nigerian, an academic with an activist’s interest in the affairs of Zimbabwe, but hardly a member of the **goffal** community. He professed ignorance of the website. The other two were organisers – Longworth and Culverwell; the fourth person of mixed-race was the researcher, and the fifth may have been the only one to respond to Culverwell’s rallying call through goffal.com on this occasion. Of this, we cannot be sure.  

Longworth and Culverwell might have considered the possibility of Zimbabwean demography influencing the numbers of **goffals** in political activity. If **goffals** constituted less than one percent of the homeland population, or 50 000, in 2002 (Central Statistical Office 2004), then the attendance by four or five of them in a multi-racial assembly of between 80 and 200 Zimbabweans in London would be about what one would expect if their involvement in such activity were proportional. However, while there are no official statistics quantifying the Zimbabwean **goffal** population in Britain, research by the Harare-based National Association for the Advancement of mixed-race Coloureds suggests that whereas nationally, Zimbabweans emigrated to South Africa in the largest numbers (Bloch, Makwara and Harrison 2004), the NAAC (2003:53) sample of 1775 **goffal** emigrants suggested Britain was by far the most common destination for Coloureds (763 or 43 per cent of those sampled, against 135, or 7.6 per cent headed for South Africa, for example).

72 Unfortunately, the researcher lost track of this fifth person during the demonstration and could not interview him to ascertain, among other things, whether his presence was influenced by www.goffal.com
With the goffal sample reflecting such a departure from the national trend of destinations for migrant Zimbabweans, it may be deduced that Zimbabwean mixed-race Coloureds constitute a more substantial proportion of Zimbabweans in Britain than their percentage of Zimbabwe’s population might suggest.

If we accept estimates by Bloch, Makwara and Harrison that there are around one million Zimbabweans in Britain, and if we take the goffals to constitute one percent of that total – slightly higher than the fraction recorded in the homeland census of 2002 – we are left with a figure of 10 000 goffals. If, given their apparent heavier migration flows to Britain, we weight the proportion of UK-based goffals two times higher and operate on the assumption that two percent of the one million Zimbabweans in Britain are goffal, we obtain a figure of 20 000. None of these estimates fully qualifies expectations of the visibility or otherwise of mixed race persons in the politics of the diaspora. The figures give an approximation of the number of goffals in Britain, and may be used either as an explanation of why these people are not visible at large gatherings (after all, they make up only two per cent at most of the Zimbabwean diaspora), or, conversely, as a justification of expectations that they should at least be more visible at the political events for which Longworth attempted to galvanise their participation (there could be as many as 20 000 of them!).

4.4 Care, Companionship and Commiserations in the Shadow of HIV-AIDS

A virtual community coping with the revelation that one of them is dying of HIV-AIDS, the outreach to such a one by website members drawn by his honesty, the blossoming of a relationship between the ‘dying man’ (as he called himself) and a stranger he met on goffal.com, and members’ reflections after his death frames the analysis of this encounter.
The ‘Coloureds’ on goffal.com show an awareness which suggests that many of them had been affected through the loss of a family member or friend, or had at least more than superficial knowledge of the condition and its effects on those infected and their families.

The conversation begins with a conversation on the toll that HIV-AIDS is taking in Zimbabwe. A contributor using the name ‘Kamuzu Banda’ (after the founder-president of Malawi) opines that the sharp increase in HIV-AIDS deaths is the fault of Robert Mugabe’s government, alleging that it has presided over the decline of the country’s health sector, and is unable to subsidize the price of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs so they can be more affordable to Zimbabweans. ‘Spider’s Pad II’ springs to the government’s defence, blaming unnamed ‘American corporations’ for allegedly profiteering from the disease. The exchanges between Banda and Spider’s Pad II continue for nearly two weeks before two successive interventions suddenly shift the tone from political, to personal experience. In the first contribution, a Zimbabwean returning to Britain laments that ‘our coloured people back home…are dropping (dead)’ from the disease.

Note Nr.: 7019 from 2004-06-14
by Zimbo

OUR PEOPLE ARE IN TROUBLE!!!! Just returned from a 3 month visit Home and I can tell you I’ve seen and heard enough to make me realise our coloured people back home... sad...sad but they are dropping. Aids is now in charge and as long as our people do not realise and learn to act more responsible we will be wiped out eventually. The sleeping around circle is so large it is frightening...Even the prayers don’t help anymore. Satin is winning!!!!!!!

About a week after ‘Zimbo’s’ entry, a man claiming to be at the point of death posted his first of several entries. His emotive writing and use of capital letters was to be a trademark of his contributions in the weeks to come.

>Note Nr. 6896 from 2004-06-02 18:03:09
HI PEOPLE, I DON'T GET MUCH TIME ON THE COMPUTER AS I USE TO DUE TO MY ILLNESS, BUT ON READING YOUR STORIES, REGARDING HIV ECT, PLEASE I TAKE THIS MOMENT IN LIFE OR MAYBE THIS WILL BE THE LAST TIME I GET THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE. I AM HIV POSITIVE (FULL BLOWN) AND AM NOW ON THE LAST STAGE, DEATH IS KNOCKING ON MY DOOR. PLEASE I AM BUT A SMALL DROP IN THE SEA, PLEASE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THIS MESSAGE I GIVE TO YOU, LIFE IS VERY SHORT WE SPEND OUR TIME HERE DITCHING ON EACH OTHER ON THIS SITE, FOR WE DONT KNOW WHEN DEATH COMES TO OUR DOOR, TRY TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE, AND HOW THEY FEEL WE ALL HAVE FEELINGS, SO MY POINT IS LET'S NOT HURT OUR OWN (GOFFAL'S) BY OUR WORD'S AND ACTIONS, SEE THE GOOD IN PEOPLE IN WHAT THEY DO, AT THE END OF THE DAY WE ARE ALL BUT ONE, CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH, AS TOMORROW IS PROMISED TO KNOW ONE, LET'S MAKE EVERYDAY AS IF IT'S OUR LAST. FOR ME THIS IS MY LAST MESSAGE TO YOU, LET'S THANK GOD FOR WHAT WE HAVE, AND WHAT WE CAN GIVE, GOFFAL BROTHERS/SISTERS THANK U FOR EVERYTHING I MUST GO NOW MY TIME IS OVER. I NOW FACE THE SUN AND THANK GOD FOR MY LIFE. "A DYING MAN"

The two messages had a sobering effect on a usually rash message board. Spider's Pad II and Kamuzu Banda instantly halted their encyclopaedic exchanges and, interestingly, a string of contributions from regular female contributors began to flow in, seeking to relate with the ‘dying man’ and his condition. First to respond was Pam, who saluted the man’s courage, thanked him for his positive contribution to the message board and ‘the community’, and offered to pray for God’s comfort. It was clear that a pastoral influence, notably from women, had taken over the thread. A ritual of commiserations, prayers, Biblical injunctions and words of counsel continued to pour in after Pam’s contribution, with no further mention of ARVs or other medicinal relief that this man may well have needed. God’s healing hand, or His compassion, was thought to be needed more than medical relief. The man’s location and physical needs were never mentioned in the three weeks of discourse, the focus being always on the value of life, the need for ‘Coloureds’ to love each other, and the spiritual direction which some of the womenfolk continued to give this man. This included, on cue, bouts of soul-searching coupled with what may be regarded as an Evangelical Christian’s equivalent of ‘the last rites’ which would normally
be performed by an ordained minister in the more traditional churches, but which was ably taken up by one ‘Natalia’ on goffal.com:

A DYING MAN
Note Nr.: 7063 from 2004-06-23
by Natalia

To "a dying man"… I just want you to know that you touched my heart so much, you brought tears to my eyes on a beautiful day. I am so sorry that you have to be in the situation you are in right now... I respect you, because you are a strong person to accept it and make the most of what you have... Something you said in the lines of "life is too short and you never get a chance to say you are sorry until it is too late", you got me thinking... I have been let down by the people i loved the most, and because of that a couple of months ago i became the worst person ever, self-centred, selfish, horrible with a terrible temper, i fought with friends, and even family who are halfway across the globe... My granny passed away a couple of months ago, and i hated myself for not going home for xmas last year, because i was the only one who never got a chance to see her again... I love her so much and i wish i had the chance to tell her to her face, but its too late now... I have since changed my attitude towards life and people in general, i know that there are alot of people out there, who probably still hate me because of the way i treated them and the things i said to them, i wish they could know how sorry i am, and that i never meant to hurt them the way i did... i disappointed and hurt everyone close to me that loved me and that i loved, and treated them in ways i should never have... Anyways, a dying man… Its people like you that keep me grounded and remind me not ever to change into what i was when i first came to the UK. Thank you... And to my friends and family, and people that hate me now, some of you i have already apologised, and to others that wont even speak to me (they know themselves), i am so very sorry - i never meant what i did and said A dying man, thank you for your advice, if it means anything to you - i said a little prayer for you after reading your messages... God Bless you always... and eternity in Heaven..

It was an interesting parallel to the deference Zimbabweans (and Africans in general) traditionally show towards death that the two men who had dominated the HIV debate for almost a fortnight, made no contribution at all in the wake of ‘the Dying Man’s’ contribution. It was also noteworthy how the women were the first to respond and took up the counselling function – again, roles synonymous with aspects of most Zimbabwean cultures. But, this being a public message board, there was no stopping the doubters. ‘Excuse me for asking’, asked ‘Zulu Dawn’, ‘but is A Dying Man really a dying person’? That question was never directly answered. But on 12 July 2004, a message from someone identifying themselves as ‘Friend of a Dying Man’ announced that

My friend died last week. So I take this time to tell you about his last day. Time of death was about 05.30. I had been sitting all night in his room, so at about 05.05, he asked me to push his bed facing the window, seems he wanted the sun to face him. As I sat next to him he took my hand. By then a few tears ran down my face. In a soft tone he said, ‘I have to go now my time here is over, please let me help you to say goodbye’. I could not contain
my tears, now pouring down my face. His last words were, ‘Don’t cry!’ Then he closed his eyes and...  

The identities of the ‘Dying Man’ and his friend were partly revealed two weeks later when a woman broke her silence to relate how she had met the ‘Dying Man’ on www.goffal.com, and later met him in person. She also claimed to know his friend. This was how she related their relationship and its transition from virtual contact to a real-life association:

Note Nr.: 7412 from 2004-07-29 13:40:23
by Sugar

MY SAD STORY

We meet on Goffal.com Message Board in the beginning of this year, we used to talk alot on the message board about everything, he made me believe in men again and that there were good people in this world, we became great friends and started e-mailing each other, after a while Yuri and i started talking about the future and how we wanted to meet.

Yuri made me feel special, its like he reached into my heart and made my heart start beating again, a place that i had forgotten ever existed, a place i closed off to everyone. Yuri used to call me alot and we would talk for a long time like we knew each other for years and yet it was just months, he used always say that life was just to short to waste and that we should make the most of every day. Then one day the calls and e-mails stopped, the last e-mail i got from him was just saying that he was sorry that he hadn't called but he had the flew, i thought nothing of it and waited for his next call........ There was never going to be another call and never will be because my friend Yuri has passed away...!

To Goffal.com. Thank you for giving me Yuri, for the little time we had to share, thank you for giving me my friend, i am glad i got to know an angel...

Miss you Yuri..... Sugar.....

Although ‘Sugar’ gives no indication of an actual meeting taking place, it seems one did take place – if a response from ‘Yuri’s’ friend is credible.

Note Nr.: 7418 from 2004-07-29
By Bunny
Sugar

Hi, its Yuri’s friend. You guys met at my office, remember? I just wanted to thank you for your love and friendship during Yuri’s final months. I know it meant the world to him. I was with him when he died; it was largely peaceful. Yuri is resting now and is safe in God’s house. Most of us have lost loved ones, but the goodness about it is that we are going to meet them all one day again. I understand how you feel, that just when you’ve found the one person who understands you more than anyone, that makes you complete, that gives...
you a shoulder to cry on, that even though they are not there, you can sit on the phone with them, not say a word to each other and think wow! What a great conversation we had today. Just the presence of the person matters.

But now that Yuri is gone Sugar, you have to let it go but be thankful to God that he brought Yuri into your life for a good reason, even if you don’t know why, just thank God and he will reveal it to you one day.

Yuri is safe in God’s safe and loving arms.
Bunny

4.5 Goffal.com and Gender

4.5.1 The ‘Pastor’ and ‘Counsellor’ Roles

In the previous section we saw a pastoral as well as counselling role that was taken up by female members of the online community in dealing with a person dying from HIV-AIDS, who continued to find succour in the goffal.com community. It was significant that women took up those roles; the maternal instinct, perhaps, but exercised almost as a matter of course, whereas in most real-life Zimbabwean situations the pastoral and counselling roles would be undertaken by a male elder. Nevertheless in urban centres, and in particular among Zimbabweans of mixed-race, the offering of pastoral care to the sick by female members of the congregation is not unheard of, especially in the absence on site of a male ‘pastor’ figure. What was interesting with the ‘Dying man’ experience on goffal.com is that there were males prominently present in the discourses preceding the ‘Dying Man’, but these stepped back and allowed the women to lead in the compassion and counselling ministry.

4.5.2 The Women’s Activist Roles

In the experience of this research, the women of goffal.com are seldom excited to levels of gender activism. With its free-flowing discourses and traditional bastions of male chauvinism – existent also on goffal.com – internet websites can throw up embarrassing subjects for women, ranging from the uncomfortable to the downright provocative. Thornton (2002) discusses evidence of the ‘unequal’ participation between men and women
online when she refers to men’s ‘dominating presence on the internet’ (p18). Quoting Spender (1995) extensively, Thornton points to the ‘adversarial’ conversation of most online forums as distinctly masculine: ‘Make no mistake about it, the internet is male territory. Considering its roots are sunk deep in academia and the military industrial complex, that is hardly surprising’ (Spender 1995:166; Thornton, ibid.). Yet notwithstanding the aggression, Thornton acknowledges a growing assertiveness by women in developed countries like the US, where domestic use of the internet has accelerated and women at different levels of society consider online business and leisure engagements as part of their lifestyle. A test of this assertiveness, in somewhat different situations from the pastoral and counselling roles discussed earlier, occurred on goffal.com when a contributor intemperately referred to women of mixed-race as ‘ZUPCO buses’.76

The context of the discussion was inter-racial dating or, as the topic was framed, ‘Dating outside one’s own culture’. The texture of the discussion was therefore both gender and ethnicity-based, showing an affinity among contributors for the goffal identity while reflecting the struggles of men and women as they relate to each other’s roles in real life. ‘Sniper’ was the protagonist who provoked the ire of the goffal women when he, in support of inter-racial dating, promoted the view that women of other races often showed higher ambition and a level of sophistication than those of mixed-race who, he suggested, were limited in those respects. Apart from his failure to substantiate this claim, ‘Sniper’, a regular contributor who self-identified as a goffal - hence his reference to ‘our goffal babes’ – departed from the dominant paradigm on the website which affirmed goffal identity

76 Note Nr.: 7361 from 2004-07-27 14:53:08. ‘ZUPCO’ – the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company – used to be the main mode of public transport in urban centres. The likening of the goffal babes – women of mixed-race – to ZUPCO’s inelegant heavy duty buses with their dusty exterior and belching exhaust pipes would have been considered a most unkind remark.
against perceived prejudices against it and its people. For this, he was predictably lambasted.

Note Nr.: 7362 from 2004-07-29 13:40:23
by Tregena

Hey you Sniper – or should I say ‘Viper’ – where do you get off describing us as ‘ZUPCO buses’; what kind of a person are you? Uncivilised, I presume. Your mother or your aunts or your sisters are goffal – are you proud to describe them as ‘ZUPCO buses’? This is why men are losing respect, they have no problem rattling off their dirty mouths maybe because they hiding behind a pseudo-name. If this website required people to use their real names would you make that remark against your own mothers and sisters? No wonder people are losing respect. There is just no appreciation of decency anymore when people can come on a public website and slander women and think lightly of it. If you think your entry was funny, well IT WASN’T. I challenge you to put your name to your views so that we know who you are. People like you are users and women are better off without you. Loser!

Not a word followed from ‘Sniper’. He could have gone off this website and found another one to suit his interests. Or he could have lurked on goffal.com, enjoying the controversy he created without being in the limelight. At the time of his posting and the conversation that followed, goffal.com’s design did not allow participants a view of which fellow-users were online in a given space of time (it now has this facility). Without further contribution from ‘Sniper’ on this subject, his motivation, development of rationale and general outlook towards women’s issues remained shrouded. All that was evident was that he had stoked anger in the ranks of the female subscribers.

Note Nr.: 7370 from 2004-07-28 05:06:14
by What the...

To Sniper.

What kinda person are you to be proud of opening your big mouth and insulting women like that? do you not have any conscience or feelings.. whatever you say always realise that. Women are mothers. That’s our role. We bear you, we nurse you, we feed you, we see to it that you grow and have most of your needs. And when you’re big enough to do things on your own we’re still there. That is someone’s child. Would you be proud/ happy if someone said your mother was like a ZUPCO bus! lets be fair, at the end of the day we all human beings.. no-one’s special or higher than anyone else.

Like a gathering storm, the message board took on a warring tone. ‘Sniper’ had violated the affirmation tenor by belittling his own and, worse, by comparing them unfavourably to women of other races. It was as if ‘your husband came home with another woman and told you to your face that she was better than you and that you were a ZUPCO bus’, one
contributor said. Clearly, in many of the members’ minds, ‘Sniper’ had overstepped the mark, and a fellow-male member thought he should apologize. ‘Sniper’ never did, but a conciliatory tone from other male members seemed to pacify the womenfolk, whose interventions on this subject propelled the debate’s intensity – 23 postings were recorded in the first 24 hours.

Note Nr.: 7389 from 2004-07-28 19:09:24
by ex-UK Guy

Well I think goffal babes are the sweetest, most charming, most faithful, adorable honies in the world. I’ve travelled some, been in different places, met different people, and I can tell you from experience that no other honies beat the sweet caramel chocolate goffal honies. We love ya.

If it was a message designed to appease, it succeeded. The clamour died down, the rancour subsided and a warmth seemed to return to the message board. The women had made their point. Not known for their activism, the goffal babes were roused to a display of indignation by ‘Sniper’s’ insult. Once their protests were acknowledged and they felt that their dignity was restored, the protests rapidly subsided.

Note Nr.: 7390 from 2004-07-28 19:51:00
by Den

Why thank you, ex-UK Guy! It’s nice to know we’re appreciated. That’s all a goffal woman wants: to be loved and appreciated. Do that, and you’ve got her for life. You know something? I’ve seen even here in the UK, tho life is hectic and time is scarce, most goffal chicks I know still cook for their dudes, do their laundry, prepare them a packed lunch for work, etc. We don’t use the changed lifestyle to put our men behind the sink. All we ask for is some help and a bit of respect.

Note Nr.: 7391 from 2004-07-28 20:05:33
by NOBODY

Hi goffal ladies, just want to say hold your heads up high girls, for I will never look at another. To all the other shades of ladies out there U are all mighty fine, but you will never be as fine as our goffal ladies (please, no offence). Stand by my word. NB: For the record, single guy.

77 Note Nr.: 7381 from 2004-07-28 13:24:23, by ‘Pat’
78 Note Nr.: 7384 from 2004-07-28 14:59:41 by ‘Spider’s Pad II’
80 ‘Chicks’ – Goofal slang for girls, usually young women (also ‘babes’ or ‘honies’)
The debate should have ended on that healthy note – and to all intents and purposes, it did, but for a sobering Biblical perspective on the ‘ideal woman’ proffered by one ‘Robert’, who appeared to appreciate the need for decorum in the wake of recent outbursts, but still felt free to press a contrary view.

To say all Goffal Chicks are “fine” would be like telling yourself that the colour green is pink. The only woman who I can honestly pick out of a crowd of women of different races would be a woman as described in the bible Proverbs 31 vs 10-31. Only then will I call any chick “fine” be it Goffal, black, white, asian etc and not just at face value because looks don’t mean nothing if any woman does not have the following attributes:

I. SHE IS TRUSTWORTHY Vs. 10-12
1. Her husband can trust her to be his helpmate Gen. 2:18 I Cor. 7:10
2. He can trust her to the keeper of his house Titus 2:4-5
3. He can trust her to be faithful to their marriage vows Eph. 5:22-24
4. He can trust her to always do him good & not harm Vs. 12

II. SHE IS HARDWORKING Vs. 13-14
1. She works willingly with her hands
2. She works in the home Vs. 15 & 27 I Tim. 5:14
3. She works outside the home Vs.16, 24, 18-19
4. She has compassion for the needy Vs. 20 Dorcas- Acts 9:36-39

III. SHE IS RESPECTFUL Vs. 17, 22
1. She respects her own health
2. She is respectful of her appearance Prov. 11:22 I Tim. 2:9-10
3. She shows respect by her quiet spirit I Pet. 3:1-4
4. She is respectful in her service to God Example: Mary-Lk. 1:28, 30, 42, 46

IV. SHE IS KIND Vs. 26
1. Her mouth speaks with wisdom Titus 2:8 Titus 2:3
2. She speaks no malicious gossip Col. 4:6 I Tim. 5:13
3. She is not contentious Prov. 25:24 Prov. 21:19
4. She controls her tongue Jas. 3:5-6

V. SHE IS VALUABLE Vs. 31:10, 28-31
1. Her worth is far above rubies
2. Her children arise & call her blessed
3. Her husband praises her
4. Many have done well but she exceeds

The tone of ‘Robert’s’ contribution ensured there were no flare-ups in response: a few temperate replies showed that his contribution was considered respectable. Nevertheless, a rubicon had been crossed: lewd remarks that provoked gender sensitivities might resurface at one time or another, but they would not go unanswered. As they did in the experience
with ‘A Dying Man’, the goffal babes had emerged from the shadows of the forum to redefine roles and defend their self-esteem. It seemed possible that such resilience could help surmount whatever impediments women faced in other virtual communities, identified in Thornton’s (2002) thesis. But cultural norms are perhaps more rigid in other societies. Could black Ndebele women assert themselves on www.inkundla.net in the same way, for instance? Would they be accommodated and responded to in as even-handed a manner? The next chapter’s case study will help interrogate a more traditional African virtual community and its re-affirmation of a patriarchal society.

4.6 Goffal.com as an Interlocutor with the host culture

Although immigration and asylum issues are of concern to all Zimbabwean communities in Britain (Mbiba 2005:17), there is reticence in some quarters to openly discussing what has profound legal, social and political implications for Zimbabweans themselves. There is also a perception that ‘spies’ of the British immigration authorities lurk in online and f2f migrant spaces, which might explain why responses to the online and f2f survey employed by the researcher (Chapter 3) suggested a minority interest among Zimbabweans in using the internet website communities to interrogate immigration and asylum-seeking policies of the host government.

And yet immigration is an issue of concern. On goffal.com are occasionally to be found questions concerning qualifying periods for the acquisition of indefinite leave to remain in Britain, visa and passport extensions, work permits, and even the intensity or otherwise of the Home Office’s raids on ‘illegals’ on any given month. For instance, Note Number 7227, purportedly written by an insider at the Home Office, warns that enforcement and

removal teams ‘are in the Coventry area this week and are looking for Zimbabweans working illegally’. The authenticity of that warning and its source cannot be verified, but it plays on a very real concern in the goffal community, even if website advocacy is not a means to its resolution.

The researcher and one-time consultant with the British government’s Africa Commission, Beacon Mbiba, describes the engagement by Zimbabweans with the British authorities as fraught with the difficulties experienced by migrant communities in other parts of Europe.

He says that in the context of the prevailing neo-liberalism, economic considerations underpin most of the key policy decisions made by European governments regarding treatment of migrants. Although ‘security’ dimensions are now used as reasons to ‘control’ migration into these countries, the treatment of migrants as rational economic actors remains paramount. This supposes that migrants take rational economic actions based on access to information. Yet, as noted by Castles (2000:20) the reality is that migrants have limited and often conflicting information about their new environment and options open to them. Hence as shown by primary information, social capital, historical and family considerations play a major role in how decisions are arrived at. For migrants, history is very important yet is ignored in the way policies are developed both for them and those minorities that have settled in European environments. (Mbiba 2005:17)

The interlocution on behalf of goffals, evident on their website, is premised on three observations:

(i) that the British culture is alien and there is need for considerable adjustment by goffals, particularly where issues of family upbringing, intimate relationships, and the claim of a stake in ‘Britishness’ by goffals is concerned;
(ii) as an interlocutor with the UK authorities viz. immigration, asylum, job opportunities, and general welfare issues as they affect ‘Coloured’ Zimbabweans, the website gives advice on a range of related issues, and the webmaster in particular has spoken of his own efforts to support and secure the release of detained Zimbabwean nationals facing deportation (Longworth 2003).

(iii) The website can be seen as signposting to the host authorities and host culture the goffal identity and culture, currently a barely acknowledged distinctive within the generalized Zimbabwean presence in Britain. The ensuing paragraphs explain these functions further.

In the first instance, conformity by goffals to British mannerisms is not a seamless process. Despite a considerable British influence in their own history, mixed-race Zimbabweans have evolved into their own. We saw this evolution of a culture at various stages of this chapter, including the contestations among goffals over the use of their goffal slang medium, which some thought should be replaced by an assimilation into British culture (section 4.3.1). Secondly, Coloureds are an ‘invisible minority’ in Zimbabwe (Muzondidya 2004) and so the peculiarities of their existence and the spaces they occupy in Zimbabwe and in the Zimbabwean presence in Britain are not commonly acknowledged in official British circles. Their plight in and amidst the social upheaval in Zimbabwe appears not to have preoccupied the British immigration authorities until an appeal against the rejection of applications for permanent residence by two Coloured families in 2006 (Secretary of State versus Hamilton and Secretary of State versus Cameron). In an expert witness’ disposition to the adjudicator upon appeal, it was argued that there was ‘no precedent upon which a
claim for asylum on the grounds of proven hostility towards the mixed-race group in Zimbabwe might have been entertained.82

Secondly, contributors to the goffal website complained on several occasions that the representations at the highest levels of the British political establishment appeared to exclude the mixed-race minority. As ‘Muntu’ complained,

Who represents us as Coloureds in the UK? Who can we turn to? The whites have their contacts in the House of Lords…Nearly every other week there is a motion prompted by white interests. Look at the outcry over the land acquisitions (from whites). The blacks also have their political connections, such that you hear of demonstrations by well-connected British at Heathrow and Gatwick airports when black Zimbabweans are deported. But who is there to fight our corner, who understands that if you lump us in the queue with everyone else as ‘Zimbabweans’ we will be at the end of that queue, because we are not seen as black or white?’

The message goes on to exhort the webmaster to ‘represent us in this cause’ because ‘a lot of us don’t know our rights in this country, and are too scared to ask’.83 Longworth replies ‘Muntu’ by stating that he is ‘always happy to do his best for the goffal community and has tried to give advice and seek it on behalf of others in the past’. But, in returning to the theme of his painful row with his goffal constituency back in 2003 (see earlier in this chapter), he blames goffals for ‘sitting around, waiting for someone else to do things for them’ instead of ‘going out and establishing a visible presence. Take the issue of demonstrations in London…’.84

One could say, wearily, that Longworth had long made his point. But perhaps it is an important point. If this segment of Zimbabwean society wants to be taken as a constituency, then its qualities and properties must be tangible and be verifiable by the establishment. An invisible minority remains invisible, even to a culturally sensitive British establishment, if

82 ‘Instructions to Expert’, 9th page, 3rd para. 21 August, 2006
that minority does not manifest in the formal engagements that other Zimbabwean groups have with agencies like the Foreign Office, Home Office, the UK media, legislators, peers, focus groups and various multi-lateral agencies that are based in London and regularly focus on the concerns of Zimbabweans. To say that these agencies should pay heed to a mixed-race minority that scarcely manifests itself outside leisurely fora is to invite scrutiny of the significance of this group, thereby reigniting debates on the history of race relations that touch raw nerves across different sections of Zimbabwean society.

Thus, despite its explicit intentions, the engagement of goffal.com and its constituency with official and semi-official bodies has been limited, certainly compared with the siNdebele speaking constituency which has maintained regular contact with the Foreign Office. Nevertheless there have been gains. Longworth’s lobby on behalf of detained asylum seekers did give a goffal presence, even if in tandem with other asylum seekers’ welfare groups. As he confided in a 2003 interview, ‘there are goffals locked up by the immigration authorities and I do my best to see them. Where we can “hook them up”, with legal aid, we do so. We also bring them food and, if possible, make contact with their families’ (Longworth interview 2003). It’s a long way from having the ear of an earl or baroness, and it appears to be a somewhat isolated and ad hoc operation in comparison to the broader-based ‘Stop the Removals’ campaigns promoted on other websites. But it is a start.

4.7 Conclusion: Power or Apathy in the Goffal network?

The website and f2f interactivities of goffal.com evince a critical contestation of goffals’ subsistence - supposed by the hybridity theorists - in the dominant black and non-black cultures from which they emerge. This research has argued the integrity of the goffal

85 ‘Hook them up’ – goffal slang for ‘connect’ or ‘point them in the direction of…’
agency, having traced the genesis of the community through the colonial strategy of divide and rule; institutionalisation of differences with their forbearers; the goffals’ acceptance of this difference for political and economic advantage; and the de facto resultant distinct community arising from these measures. In a chapter devoted to different facets of the goffal experience, its use of the online facility offered by goffal.com offers potentially mixed signals. While the emergence of ‘Count on Us’ from largely online discourses says a lot for the capacity of websites to generate real-life movements, are there implications for the same argued effectiveness when two sustained campaigns on this website fail to yield more than a dismal attendance at protest rallies in London (Section 4.3.2)? A definitive answer to this should wait for the end of the thesis, but it is instructive that respondents to the webmaster’s despondency pointedly stated that as a community and race, goffals would not be pressed into the website management’s pet interests. This is an interesting exhibition of how power is managed in such networks. Web managers exercise ownership over the product and claim rights to monitor, change or close the fora down, as with Longworth’s decision to close goffal.com because of lack of support for a protest.

But the change in the power relationship between the creator of the website and other users as a result of this incident was significant. The community rejected hierarchies and insisted that projects embraced under the banner of the website should reflect the outcome of a more communally reasoned approach. This would suggest why Count on Us, which took off and has sustained itself beyond any political demonstration for which the webmaster agitated, emanated from the suggestions of the community of users, and was then taken up by the webmaster and others. Even more significantly, the webmaster was not the lead player in the charity’s formation and registration and is not, at the time of writing, listed among its trustees. Yet as has been shown, the initiative was clearly an outcome of the goffal.com website. It would seem, then, that the galvanizing effect of websites must be generated by the groundswell of opinion that supports ideas raised in the online forum.
5.1 Introduction and Background

This website fits Habermas’ model of the public sphere and that most established of Zimbabwean public discourses, the inkundla. It represents, in name, content and symbolism, an established mediation and deliberation process involving an authority and public in a traditional Zimbabwean setting. The inkundla (padare in Shona) where the community elders assemble under the aegis of a chief or his area representative is a consensus-making concept with pre-colonial origins (Mano 2004:16). Citing the Shona dictionary, Mano describes it as:

- ‘A place in which men sit alone during leisure time to eat (sadza) and talk around a fire’;
- ‘A (legal) court presided over by a king or a judge’;
- ‘Citizens presiding over a case under the guidance or leadership of a king or a chief’.

The concept of inkundla.net as an assembly of male elders, presided over by a chief (Sibalukhulu or ‘governor’, as the website manager is known) and convened to ventilate matters confronting the diaspora community and their place of origin, generates in its various fora a patriarchal gravitas consistent with traditional Zimbabwean values. But tensions stoked by gender sensitivities in the western context are inevitable, given that the more liberal attitudes towards gender roles make it difficult to sustain an exclusively male domain. At least one example in this chapter of persistent, if tactful encroachment by a female member exemplifies this. More importantly, the inkundla concept is similar to

86 Sadza – Zimbabweans’ staple diet, a thick porridge cooked from maize-meal. Also called isitshwala in siNdebele and pap in Afrikaans
Habermas’ public sphere because its triangulation of governor, medium and governed has powerful motives to generate as well as to resolve; to articulate and to enact; to promote and to preserve; and to address not just the immediate geographical location (as the traditional inkundla might), but the whole ‘Ndebele’ nation. Its focus is on conceptualising responses to perceived problems in Matabeleland and in the Ndebele diaspora, and to resourcing those. In so doing, inkundla.net captures ‘particular moments and cultural formations…of dialectical reconstruction not theoretical speculation’ (George 2003:71).

This is also a case where the transnational web community deconstructs ‘Zimbabweanness’: an example of how the diaspora websites are challenging authoritarian nationalism and its assumptions of homogeneity. Moreover, it is significant to note that most discourses on this website are focused on imaginings of nationhood in Matabeleland, a province of Zimbabwe. The chapter focuses on the amaNdebele of Zimbabwe, their presence in the British diaspora, their politics in both domestic and diaspora settings, and how these have been affected by ethnic variables. The role played by inkundla.net in generating flows from the transnational to local spaces provides an agency for re-examining Ndebele claims to statehood and challenges the Zimbabwean state’s rigid control of the socio-political, economic and cultural spaces in Matabeleland. A significant secessionist strand in the discourses draws on the history of the region, especially the recollections of a powerful Ndebele state whose demise came through the entrenchment, by deception and then by force, of European settler rule in what is now Zimbabwe (Ranger 1967:41; 1999:100ff).
5.2 Virtual and Imaginative Recreations of Ndebele Statehood

Imagined spaces of self-government which have a historical basis but are not corporeal in the current national context characterise this case study. The concept is strong among the transnational component of disaffected groups who feel entitled to their own distinct polity and ‘territorial designation’ (Axel 2001:5). The need for a fixed territorial locality - land, its ownership and its governance –energises diaspora-based peoples of ‘repressed’ nations, no matter how remotely the prospects for realisation of that self-governance might seem. This website has at its core a claim to such nationhood. It debates measures towards fulfilling that territorial agency, and although the odd appeal to force of arms has come to nought, significant discourses around consolidation of land ownership in Matabeleland have led to practical measures by those in the diaspora, working with agencies inside Matabeleland, to influence settlement patterns that have threatened to tilt the demographic balance against the amaNdebele.

Axel’s work on the Sikh campaign for a territorial homeland provides parallels to some of the aspirations on inkundla.net. The representation of a wounded nation in both discourses reviews what has been embedded in the individual, collective and institutional memory of the affected, and fuels the quest for self-determination on inkundla.net as much as it does for Sikhism as a subject of Axel’s study. Sikh campaigns for independence from, or autonomy in, the union of India; the ‘Baster Coloureds’ movement for autonomy and repossession of ancestral lands in Rehoboth, Namibia, and the exiled Tibetan government and population’s campaign against the Chinese government’s annexation of

the territory in 1949 (Dunham, 2005), are examples of repressed nationhood through their forced incorporation in greater, heterogeneous nation-states. The experiences these oppressed nations felt at being stripped of their autonomy, often accompanied by force, was not the only wound inflicted on their psyche and their corporate and individual identities. There followed varying degrees of conflict that, in the case of the amaNdebele in Zimbabwe and the Sikhs in India, came at a cost of tens of thousands of lives (Werbner 1991, Alexander, McGregor and Ranger 2000 and Chan 2002; also Axel 2001:136-39; 22).

There is therefore a disjuncture between adherence to a Zimbabwean identity, and the inclination by prominent voices in the amaNdebele diaspora, dominant on this website, towards a nationality that is Ndebele-specific. For these Ndebele voices, the deployment of ‘place of origin’ as a category to ‘describe, explain and distinguish the identity of a particular diaspora in relation to other diasporas’ (Axel 2001:8) provokes reflections of history, what is, and what might have been, according to the dominant perspective of the group. The Angst which lack of an autonomous homeland causes, leads to contra-Zimbabwean nationalism discourses that dwell on perceived strengths in the imaginings of a resurrected Ndebele ‘nationhood’. Such imaginings are typical of the ‘diasporic public sphere’ (Wise 2006:82; Werbner, P 1998:11). Werbner describes this sphere as ‘a space in which different transnational imaginaries are interpreted and argued over, where aesthetic and moral fables are formulated, and political mobilisation generated’. Discourse around such ‘imaginaries’, fed by authentic histories and ‘fables’, is the staple of our four cases. But the amaNdebele diaspora’s imaginings are peculiar for their transcendence, at least in the secessionist strand, from Zimbabwean nationality. In the

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words of Enoch Powell, it may even be said of the secessionists that ‘the life of nations no less than that of men is lived largely in the imagination’ (cited in Lowry 1997:280) in the sense that Ndebele ‘nationhood’ is a concept that, although passionately held, is without political autonomy or statutory effect. Yet there is a historical undergirding of the concept of Ndebele nationhood.

The connections between these imaginings and the historical record are authenticated by references to nineteenth century monarchies which shaped the formative experiences of Ndebele (and, by comparison, Sikh) nationhood: Mzilikazi Khumalo (reigned 1820-1868) and his successor, Lobengula (reigned 1868-1894) of the amaNdebele, and Maharajah Ranjit Singh (reigned 1799-1839) and Maharajah Duleep Singh (1843). The elder Singh’s establishment of the Khalsa Raj, a great Sikh state ‘for the only time in Sikh history’ (Axel, 2001:39) can be compared with Mzilikazi’s conception of the Ndebele nation in the same century. Both polities no longer exist as nation-states, for the era of British colonial conquest was to prove the downfall of successors to both thrones: Duleep Singh in Khalsa, and Lobengula in Matabeleland. Khalsa became part of British India, while Matabeleland was incorporated into the territory administered by the British South Africa Company that would become the colony of Southern Rhodesia. Southern Rhodesia was re-named ‘Zimbabwe’ with the advent of a black majority government in 1980.

Informed by both histories, a reading of the inkundla discourses detects a sustained, though not altogether unanimous imagining of an Ndebele homeland where the group can claim permanency as a people with a land and a destiny. In assessing the impact of these aspirations on social action, the analysis of discussion threads on inkundla.net produced

evidence of the imaginings of Matabeleland as the site of a past and future Ndebele state that inspires capital flows from communities abroad to Matabeleland and its institutions, rather than to ‘Zimbabwe’ as a state or commercial macro-entity. This is borne out by discussion threads in which the criteria for such repatriation of resources is the degree to which amaNdebele will benefit from such flows.

Reviewing these discourses shows evidence of cultural and capital accumulation and their transfer to abet the territorial agency of Matabeleland. This territorial agency, in reality, is under the administration of elected structures in local government as they exist at the time of this research, limited though these are in comparison with the scope of autonomy envisaged by the dominant inkundla discourses. There are mixed views on how to regard the elected and appointed agencies in Matabeleland and how to relate to them in an agenda to revitalise the Ndebele homeland and its culture. As will be seen from some of the discussion threads, some believe that there is no valid representation of the Ndebele nation in any of these structures. The elected councils of the city of Bulawayo and other Matabeleland localities are, some feel, captives of Zimbabwe’s central government, while the governorships and provincial administrative structures are by presidential appointment, as are traditional chiefs. The ethnicity of the office holders, a majority of whom are Ndebele, is less an issue than the perception of them as instruments of the Shona-dominated Mugabe government. Nothing in the various discussion threads proves the hunch that diaspora-based amaNdebele are more critical of these structures than the local population who have no choice but to use them. Despite the criticism that these structures receive, there nevertheless is an appreciation at a particular point of the role that the locally based Ndebele leadership play in realising ambitions drawn from the emotional intensity of debates on the preservation of rural and urban strongholds in the Ndebele heartland.
5.3 Inkundla, Ethnicity and Exile

Political and ethnic agitation led to an exodus of thousands of siNdebele-speakers from southern and western Zimbabwe, primarily to Britain, Botswana and South Africa, in the early years after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980. That this is still part and parcel of the inkundla discourse shows how a community shaped by its past, fed by its present and aspiring for its future is using the internet as a galvanizing tool, and the website, more specifically, to generate and sustain an Ndebele identity. It makes this website an intriguing agency of counter-Zimbabwean nationalist historiography and national definition.

Yet even before the amaNdebele exodus, of which Masiane spoke vividly at the 2003 Zimbabwe Research Day, Sithole (2002a) suggested a substantial number of siNdebele-speaking Zimbabweans were already in Britain, having refused to return home at independence because they feared the worst for siNdebele-speaking communities in Zimbabwe after Mugabe was swept to power in the 1980 elections. Sithole, explaining this reticence and mistrust, wrote:

Many left, particularly from Matabeleland during the Gukurahundi\textsuperscript{91} period of the 1980s. This confirmed the worst fears of those who were more cautious during the independence rush of the ‘exiles’ and remained put until the 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU PF and PF ZAPU. Still many stayed put in the diaspora after this unity, suspecting their leaders to have either sold out or have been coerced into it.

The siNdebele-speaking Zimbabwean nationalist, Joshua Nkomo, was himself forced into post-independence exile in London until the start of negotiations with Mugabe that led to

\textsuperscript{90} ‘Media and the Diaspora’, 3\textsuperscript{rd} session of the 2003 Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Day, St Antony’s College, Oxford, 14 June

\textsuperscript{91} The Shona name given by Mugabe to the Five Brigade, an army unit blamed for the most human rights abuses during the Matabeleland crackdown
the Unity Accord (Nkomo 2004:236ff; see also Chan 2002:32). Yet Nkomo continued to articulate a composite Zimbabwean nationalist perspective: he refused to see himself as a leader of Matabeleland alone (Nkomo 2004:248). This view, and the National Unity Project he co-signed with Mugabe, put Nkomo at odds with many of the exiles of Ndebele origin who, as Sithole wrote, suspected him of giving in to coercion, or of ‘selling out’. From this perspective, the emancipation and security of the siNdebele-speaking peoples could only be secured through self-government, either by secession, or through a federal state with constitutional guarantees for the right to self-determination of the people of Matabeleland, or ‘Mthwakazi’ as the region is referred to in inkundla discourses. Many of the discourses on the inkundla.net website occupy this trend of thought.

Wrote Mbodlomani:

The Unity Accord has not worked for us, the amaNdebele, because the difference made since siNdebele-speaking people joined ZANU-PF is not apparent. It has long since been said that these amaNdebele in ZANU-PF are just like those people they work with.

There are contributors to the website who do not agree with this view, but like Nkomo, they find their Zimbabwe nationalist perspective vigorously examined by the secessionist and federalist elements. Evidently, the philosophy of the website’s management, and that of a significant portion of the contributors, is weighted towards secession or, at least, constitutionally guaranteed self-rule for the ‘Republic of Mthwakazi’. The home page, prior to its re-design in September 2005, identified an interest in ‘the Ndebele nation’ when it stated, in siNdebele, the website’s objective: ‘For the nation of Mthwakazi to prosper, we need to commit to work with the people of Mthwakazi to prosper those of our

92 A BBC report (13 March 1983) on Nkomo’s flight can be found at http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/13/newsid_2543000/2543101.stm
93 Mbodlomani (2003) ‘On introspection and self-reflection’, Message No 4560, Umbangazwe (Politics), www.inkundla.net, 28 April. Accessed 2/03/2005. This message, like most on this website, was contributed in siNdebele. For purposes of length, it has been decided to use only the English translations of the exchanges in citations from the website.
own’. This philosophy was further evidenced by a predominance of issues close to Ndebele society and the locality of Zimbabwe’s three Matabeleland provinces. Indeed, the home page of this site has included four symbols of Ndebele pride: the Bulawayo City Hall, the logo and updated results of Premier Soccer League club Highlanders (whose popularity in the region is unparalleled), the link to the website’s internet radio station, Radio Tshay’Inkundla and an image of popular Ndebele musician and poet, Albert Nyathi.

Unlike many other websites (including www.goffal.com and www.thebottomhalf.com) whose portals displayed the Zimbabwe national flag, there was no signifier of a Zimbabwean national identity anywhere on this website. Often ‘Zimbabwe’ was referred to as a territory alienated from ‘Mthwakazi’, a homeland for Shona-speakers peripheral to amaNdebele. Thus, ‘Zwangendaba’ could claim, in a tone not out of place on the website, that ‘there should not be a mention of “Zimbabwe” except as reference to it existing as our neighbour. We do not have a choice on that. Neighbours we shall be for a long time…”.

The website eschews links to major Zimbabwean inland and external news websites, save for its own Radio Tshay’Inkundla station (re-named Shaya FM), its own Indonsakusa (‘Morning Star’) online journal, and its own ‘The Mthwakazian’ newsletter – all framed in the secessionist and neo-secessionist philosophy that dominates the website. This suggests the website’s management does not consider other media in and outside Zimbabwe to be capable of representing Ndebele aspirations, nor worthy of a link on the www.inkundla.net

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95 Translated into English, the radio station’s name means ‘Join the Forum!’ as it includes not just siNdebele and Zulu music, but also interviews and panel discussions on matters affecting the amaNdebele at home and in the Diaspora. After the re-design of the website in 2005, the name of the radio station was abbreviated to ‘Tshaya FM’.
home page. It also reinforces what Masiane (2003) outlined as the founding imperatives of a website community that was produced by elements of a brutalised and dislodged ethnic minority which had no media outlet anywhere in the world through which to process the traumatic events which befell them in Zimbabwe in the 1980s.

The traditional public sphere has been shown to play a critical role in post-war ‘social healing’. Schmidt (1997:305ff) describes how in traumatised Zimbabwean communities, a ‘chief mediated discourse’ drawing on ‘social circles’ expunges guilt, vengeance and mistrust through the inkundla mechanism. In this process,

- Shared experiences which had been ‘forgotten’ surface and are thus turned into communal memory. Once this is achieved, the case is settled. But if social healing concerns entire communities and mediators, the question arises of who is being healed? The intricate linkages between identifying a patient and local power relations become apparent in the way alternative healing practices are negotiated (1997:307).

The traumatic events of the 1980s in Matabeleland were not followed by mediation between the state and the people of Matabeleland at community level, nor was there opportunity for rapprochement with the Ndebele diaspora. The soldiers who perpetrated the abuses were mostly from outside Matabeleland, and may have had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to engage in such ‘social healing’. Hieke Schmidt’s (ibid.) observations above were of a rural community in Mutasa district of eastern Zimbabwe coming to terms with the aftermath of the 1970s liberation war. She did not use the terms inkundla or padare, but the discursive and religious communal actions informants described to her as being used to effect social healing fitted the definitions of these public spaces proffered by Mano (2004:16) and discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Likewise, the inkundla online network, arising from the displacement and flight of Ndebele victims of the Mugabe government’s onslaught, was concerned at its inception in 1999 to, among other objectives, be a medium of self-realization and healing (Masiane, 2003).
In the period of this research, the reach of www.inkundla.net has been asserted in other areas. Rather than brood over their scars, the *inkundla* community in Britain set out an agenda, like the dispersed Jews before them, to work for a homeland to which dispersed amaNdebele could return, a home based not on the testaments of millennia long past, but on the recent history of nation-building by King Mzilikazi and his armies in the mid-nineteenth century. Scattered across the UK, they ‘took hold of the new technology and made it work for them, and were the first website set up by exiles from Zimbabwe, and the first to have an online radio station...all serving the Ndebele people’ (Masiane 2003). The harsh realities of oppression, exile, and then being rendered voiceless in an unfamiliar Britain had driven home a key objective: whatever medium the new technologies afforded, they had to be put at the disposal of the downtrodden amaNdebele.

### 5.4 *ubuNdebele*: Historical Definitions of Ndebele Identity

The *inkundla.net* website’s identification with a broader Ndebele identity than what historians view as a polyglot of people and language groups whom the colonial state, missionaries, African nationalists, and the Ndebele chieftainships incorporated into ‘invented’ or ‘imagined’ senses of belonging, has not expunged from memory or use the languages and customs of assimilated groups. Historians like Ranger (1993) and Alexander and MacGregor (1997) are careful to highlight the componential rather than corporate expressions of Ndebele identity, using terms like ‘invention of tradition’ (Ranger 1993:62-111) to describe the role of colonial-era authorities in grouping and naming native groups as compound ‘Ndebele’ or ‘Shona’ entities. Yet it is a fact that not only www.inkundla.net, the nationalists or the surviving aristocracy, but the nineteenth century monarchy itself, contemplated a single siNdebele-speaking polity. Zimbabwean nationalism, meant to achieve national unity, had its advances qualified by splits along ethnic lines which Ranger in his scholarly works has sought to downplay or contest (see
The most serious of these rifts was between the Patriotic Front partners, the Mugabe-led ZANU (PF), which was dominated by the Shona-speaking majority, and PF-ZAPU, led by Nkomo and with its support base among the siNdebele-speaking people of Matabeleland. While Ranger is reticent about this significant ethno-linguistic dualism in Zimbabwean politics, Msindo (2004: iv) has addressed the issue thus:

> The central concern here is to show that the split led to the growth of subnationalism, a regional Matabeleland identity in which Ndebele and Kalanga became closer than before. The relations between ZANU and ZAPU did not improve with the attainment of independence. The gross sadism of the government on Matabeleland people, which is the subject of my last chapter, increasingly cemented a regional Ndebele identity.

History informs a distinction between the corporate and component Ndebele identities and so this discussion cannot avoid it. But as Msindo pointed out, and even Alexander and McGregor (1997:188) concede, the history of Matabeleland and its identities have consolidated around ‘national level oppositions’ between what Richard Werbner calls ‘the polarization of two quasi-nations or super tribes, the “Shona” against the “Ndebele”’ (1996b:197). The components of Ndebele identity do not define the discourses of inkundla.net: a composite ‘nationhood’ does. The secession-related discourses are not about dissecting Matabeleland into its constituent parts, but uplifting the language and customs which the majority of the people in the region have in common and furthering those objectives which assist them collectively as ‘a nation’.

Addressing Ranger’s suggestion that the ethno-linguistic categories are a colonial invention, Richard Werbner (1997:312) contests that preoccupation with colonialism as the sole determining factor, insisting that ‘tradition is imagined and re-imagined by its bearers, rather than being imposed, under conditions of cultural hegemony, as in the invention of tradition’. We cannot discount the observations of Ranger, and Alexander and McGregor, that historically the communities of Matabeleland were disparate. As Chapter 3 showed, discussion of ethnicity and language in Matabeleland needs to be
sensitive to the histories and sub-cultural affinities, even as www.inkundla.net emphasises the uniting of those groups in an Ndebele ‘national’ construct called ‘Mthwakazi’. But the over-riding aspirations of Matabeleland politics, shaped by what Alexander and McGregor (1997:188) call ‘national level oppositions’ to Shona hegemony, have meant that the segmented past counts for less than the current understandings of belonging in negotiating power relations with the Shona-led central government.

Two 2004 doctoral theses illuminate issues about ethnicity in Matabeleland. One is Msindo’s Cambridge thesis, already cited; the other is Ndlovu’s doctorate on ideological hegemony in the Ndebele state. In Ndlovu’s account, which draws on both oral tradition and published sources, he notes that the Ndebele state was propped up by heterogeneous groups even as it took shape with its nineteenth century northward advance.

…as Mzilikazi and his people were migrating away from the Zulu and entering Transvaal, they adopted the policies of raiding, conquest, incorporation … [They] started with the composition of the Ndebele nation by conquest and assimilation as far back as the split with and flight from Tshaka’s kingdom …in 1820 leading to assimilation of weaker groups they met on their way to the north. The basic ambiguity and contradiction is revealed in the fact that while Mzilikazi and his followers cherished their rights and autonomy they went about attacking, raiding, incorporating, and assimilating the Pedi, Tswana and Sotho, violating their autonomy and depriving them of their cherished rights as they were incorporated into the lower echelons of the Khumalo groups and other Zansi people. It was through these processes that Mzilikazi was able to build the Ndebele state south of the Limpopo River and to establish Khumalo hegemony. (Ndlovu 2004:61)

Thus the nation-building of the amaNdebele in this manner was in progress long before Mzilikazi led them across the Limpopo River into what is today Zimbabwe. The assimilated peoples’ submission to the over-arching ‘Ndebele’ identity was a foregone conclusion once Mzilikazi’s regiments entered an area and won the allegiance of local communities, such that by 1825, ‘a composite Ndebele state’ had come into existence in western Transvaal (Ndlovu 2004:64). Once he and his regiments crossed the Limpopo River in 1832, Mzilikazi ‘continued the process of state formation and to spread the rule
of the Khumalo over more people of different ethnic and religious origins’ among the inhabitants of present-day Zimbabwe (2004:68). The assimilated people came to be derogatorily distinguished from the Zansi people of South African origin through being referred to as the enhla (people of the north), amahole (slaves) or abetshabi, names which interestingly still find their way into the inkundla.net discourses, although now chiefly referring to Shona-speaking Zimbabweans rather than other Matabeleland people groups. Ndlovu (2004:70ff) recounts how the Ndebele used a combination of peaceful and violent overtures to subdue those they found:

Those who happened to be at the centre of where the Ndebele state was established were attacked, conquered and incorporated into the ranks of the Ndebele state as the Hole group. Those like Rozani of the Gwelo area who submitted without offering resistance were accepted as a tributary group and their positions as chiefs were confirmed and respected. They were given the responsibility to look after Ndebele cattle. The Nyubi of Matopos fell under direct rule of the Ndebele and some of their chiefs were reduced to the status of abalisa (headmen) subordinate to Ndebele izinduna (chiefs). The Kalanga of the Nata-Plumtree area were organized into a defensive perimeter of the Ndebele state and placed under the supervision of Ndebele chiefs though their original leaders were not deposed.

Although notions of difference within siNdebele-speaking communities are seldom raised in the inkundla.net discourses (my own questionnaire provoked a rare thread on the different languages, as discussed in Case 3 of Chapter Three), articulations of difference in ‘national level oppositions’ to the Shona-speaking majority has considerable prominence, defining an agenda to preserve political, cultural and physical space for the Ndebele. With the focus away from its internal inconsistencies, it might be argued that one of the functions of inkundla.net is ironing out historical complexities and a simplification of identities. But in order to argue that one has to be aware of the historical complexities, hence my reference to Ndlovu, Msindo, Ranger and Alexander and McGregor’s treatments on this subject.
There are similar questions about language, and again, my intervention in Chapter 3 and the responses of inkundla.net forum members is demonstrative of the inherent complexities. These are not incompatible, however, having co-existed within first the Ndebele state and thereafter the colonial and post-colonial conventions of ethnicity for more than a century in total.

The definition of the amaNdebele beyond narrow concepts of Zansi origins as the authenticating factor has become important for Ndebele unity in Matabeleland, particularly given that even within Mzilikazi’s lifetime, the Enhla and the Hole people assimilated during his conquests grew to outnumber the Zansi (Ndlovu 2004:81; 97) and the class and ethnic discrimination would have been unsustainable for the kingdom. It is probably with this in mind that the fora on inkundla.net prioritise broader Ndebele unity and the use of siNdebele to forge political and social cohesiveness against the Shona-speaking ‘national opposition’. ‘Dokotela’ makes this point to fellow contributor ‘Ndwandwe’ in the entry below:

I will disagree with you, we are not South Africans. Mthwakazi is a multicultural society which is not only made up of the Khumalo. The moment we begin to view Mthwakazi as South African, then we are segregating our own selves and we will never be able to unite. If we are South Africans why don’t we just go to South Africa? I think calling ourselves South Africans is capitulation to the pressure and shame within us of what has become of our land. So we yank ourselves off it and I really think that it’s not noble.

As if to re-emphasise ‘Dokotela’s’ point, ‘Mbulawa’ immediately follows with a contribution to the same thread that re-asserts the amaNdebele ‘national level oppositions’ (Alexander and McGregor 1997:188) with Shona-speakers. ‘Mbulawa’, also


disagreeing with ‘Ndwandwe’s’ view of Nguni/South African exclusivity in the notion of Ndebele identity, argues that ‘ubuNdebele’ has come to embrace minorities in Matabeleland, but not the dominant Shona, who have numerical ascendancy in other parts of Zimbabwe. These discussions of the componential identities are important nowadays only insofar as they are dwelt on by some academics. Force of demographics, along with a conscious effort to promote coalesced super-ethnic identities (as was the case with ‘Cape Coloureds’ and ‘Euro-Africans’ in the shaping of the goffal community, described in Chapter Four), has rendered the old distinctions almost redundant. As Ndlovu observed,

The refugees and captives of earlier decades and those who were acquired in the southwest now coalesced into a nation, broadening the heterogeneity of the Ndebele state. Some of them …assumed powerful positions as chiefs and commanded a lot of respect from the kingship. As such they deserved to be treated in a more humane manner for them to be fully incorporated into the ranks of the Ndebele. The Enhla and the Hole now dominated the Zansi, in terms of numbers.

So it was that ‘Mthwakazi’ became a more egalitarian construct of an Ndebele nation, as in the same vein the www.inkundla.net discourses are able to represent ‘the heterogeneity of the Ndebele state’ (Ndlovu 2004:80-81).

5.5 Inkundla.net and Politics: The Case for ‘Mthwakazi Nationalism’

This section examines closely the ethno-nationalist perspective seeking to resurrect the Ndebele state, destroyed when its last monarch, Lobengula Kumalo and his royal regiment fled before an advancing column of white colonialist forces – known as the

99 ‘Nguni’ refers to the related tribes originating from present-day South Africa, the most prominent of them being the Zulu nation. Various offshoots of the Zulu broke away and migrated north, conquering territories in modern Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and beyond and re-establishing themselves as self-governing entities. The amaNdebele under Mzilikazi Kumalo were one such offshoot, but their policy of subduing and assimilating the peoples they encountered in the new territories meant that what emerged in the post-monarchy period was a fusion of cultures that grew apart from the original Nguni in South Africa.
‘Shangani Patrol’ – sent to capture the king and extend white rule to Matabeleland$^{100}$. Lobengula eluded his would-be captors, and historians are divided over how soon after, or where he met his death. Some accounts suggest that he crossed the northern Zambezi River frontier into what is now Zambia, where he settled and was secretly sheltered by the local communities. Others suggest he died from fever in the forests of Matabeleland and was buried at a location kept secret by his closest advisers. In common Ndebele folklore, it is simply accepted that ‘the King disappeared’, hence the use of the phrase, ‘since inkosi yanyamalala’.

Mthwakazi nationalism is an example of what Mbembe (2000:38) called the ‘re-enchantment of tradition’, an imagery of self-representation that seeks to recapture the past through the processes of cultural recollection, regeneration and reaffirmation. Driven by communitarian movements that define citizenship on the basis of common genealogy, a cultural matrix which anchors the civic space, and a territorial ‘home’, this ethnocentric nationalism seeks to free its people from the post-colonial nation state, re-focusing its ‘nationhood’ along its own ethnic lines and the territoriability it claims for areas historically settled by its own people. This concept of ‘citizenship’ subsisting within the boundaries of a modern state, often in spite of the existing political reality, raises for claimants possibilities of what Mbembe (2000:38) describes as chez soi (or ‘home’); the ‘possibility of excluding strangers from it; the right to protection of and access to a range of collective goods and resources in the designated space’. In this ‘re-enchantment’, Mbembe sees fertile ground for ‘the expression of grievances and complaints, the claiming of rights and the legitimation of struggles over resources…made through the idiom of filiation,

genealogy or heritage, in terms of which victims are identified according to a logic of wounded identity’ (Mbembe 2000:38).

Inkundla.net seeks the establishment of those ideals in a corporeal ‘Republic of Mthwakazi’, whose constitution-making process is one of the objectives of the website, as its home page implies: ‘Our main focus is getting Mthwakazians to participate in the projects that benefit all Mthwakazians and Mthwakazi as a nation’. On another page, the website’s management proclaim that inkundla.net is a vehicle for the amaNdebele – the ‘Mthwakazians’ or ‘citizens of Mthwakazi’ – to ‘claim their humanity’.

For UK Government agencies such as the Home Office and the Foreign Office, it seems ideal to package these issues as part of the ‘Zimbabwe problem’. Masiane (Interview, 2005) revealed how in discussions with the authorities, exiled Zimbabweans of Ndebele origin presented themselves as a constituency within the Zimbabwean construct rather than a secessionist movement.

It would complicate the issue, my friend. The British are the ones who facilitated the Lancaster House settlement in 1980 on the basis of a unitary state. We brief them on the concerns of people in and from the siNdebele-speaking regions of Matabeleland and they are receptive. The British government is well aware of the marginalisation of Ndebeles by Mugabe’s government and the vulnerability of siNdebele-speaking people even in the UK, where they have been excluded from structures in the opposition movement. But we have to be careful when we talk secession: the British have not yet bought into that even if they understand the challenges we are facing. They want to deal with heterogenous political groups like the MDC, not movements that seek a breakaway republic. So when we engage the British government, we do so as one of the Zimbabwean organisations. And we do have the ear of the British government.

The dilemma is real, in the sense that many people on the inkundla website and the movements it has spawned do not see a future for siNdebele-speaking people in Zimbabwe – not just Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, but even under subsequent regimes.

Furthermore, to the extent that the Matabeleland question is both historical and current, and, having already been the cause of unrest and considerable loss of life under Mugabe, the conflict could erupt yet again under successor regimes, to more misery for this people group, and instability for Zimbabwe as a whole.

With the suppression of free thought that obtains in Zimbabwe under Mugabe, the problem of securing the political, social and cultural space of the amaNdebele in Zimbabwe and reconciling it with their social history and now dispersed communities is a dilemma not adequately addressed by the major political parties. Only in the diaspora, and specifically on www.inkundla.net, is the condition of the people group and its future assiduously debated – and then, with conflicting views and issues related to their status in their host countries compounding their strategies. With a growing alienation from their home context, the amaNdebele in Britain are grappling with more than the ‘double consciousness’ described by Du Bois (1961:3) as afflicting African Americans: a black identity in a white culture. In this case, it is a treble consciousness of the British-based diaspora: their Zimbabwean connections, their ethnicity and loyalty to the concept of an Ndebele nation (‘Mthwakazi’), and their practical adjustments to a British culture which they must accept if they are to succeed in that (British) context. This ‘triadic relationship’ (Harris, 1996:7) is an interesting case of self-definition that defies the constitutional realities of Zimbabwe. In a sense, the ‘triadic relationship’ of the amaNdebele diaspora resembles the goffal culture and its struggle for recognition of its distinctive in both domestic and transnational conditions. Goffals, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are also caught in between concepts of ‘Zimbabweanness’ and their own historical development as an ethnic group – except that, unlike the amaNdebele, goffal discourses do not aspire to ‘nationhood’, nor indeed to any form of self-rule. In this pursuit, the amaNdebele, and their vehicle, inkundla.net, are a unique set of counter-authoritarian nationalism among the exiled groups.
5.6 ‘Insiders’ and ‘Outsiders’: The Politics of Exclusion?

Even in a national unity construct, it is possible, say scholars, for the politics of belonging (or exclusion) to result in de facto diasporic communities existing within countries of which people in those communities would ordinarily be regarded as citizens. The issue of identity politics is heightened in a context where the mobility of Africans means that some ethnic groups have a longer association with the territories where they live than others. The amaNdebele fit the description of more recent arrivals, and while the government now tends to be more careful with its rhetoric in relation to this group than was the case in the 1980s, websites dominated by the ethnic majority Shona-speaking Zimbabweans are far less subtle.

It was in the aftermath of the Mugabe government’s campaigns against ‘dissidents’ in Matabeleland that Richard Werbner (1996a:13) offered this grave assessment of the Ndebele condition in Zimbabwe:

> I found that the catastrophe in postcolonial Zimbabwe left many survivors alienated from their nation-state, some deeply convinced it proved that the war for Zimbabwe had failed to make it one nation. As I was told by a member of the family I knew best in western Zimbabwe: ‘Mugabe says he fought and won the country. But has he got a country? No, he has no country’.

Werbner went on to challenge postcolonial scholars to interrogate and articulate the coercive and exclusionary forces at play in the new independent states with as much rigour as rightly applied to interrogation of the failures of colonialism.

Silence is complicity, mainstream postcolonial studies often remind us in rightly speaking out against the living force of our heritage of colonial racism. But what about the impact of and responsibility for state violence against internal ‘enemies’, genocide and quasi-nationalism? Who, among the diasporic spokespersons for postcolonial studies, puts that on the critical agenda? Like the colonial legacy of which it is a reinscription, the quasi-national legacy lives as an unfinished moral narrative, and it motivates survivors to call again and again for political debts to be met and moral violations to be put right, especially by the state and its agents.
Those complexities noted, the question for the inkundla members in the current environment has remained how the amaNdebele, who sit uncomfortably in the minority in the broader Zimbabwean state, can realistically articulate their own wishes for self-determination in those provinces where they now constitute an ethnic majority. Or, while such a settlement proves elusive, how those in the diaspora can assist Matabeleland agencies with existing inland structures to achieve specific aims.

5.7 Identity Crisis: Mthwakazian, Zimbabwean or British?

The Ndebele identity crisis appears more complex than the African-American scenario, moreso for those who have taken British residency or citizenship. Even in a family of Mthwakazi activists, day-to-day social, business and school lives in Britain dictate the use of English most. An inkundla regular, ‘Zwangendaba’, acknowledged this in a thread on language and culture.

Folks, one thing we should know is that we live among others. I know this in my own industry. All aviation communication is conducted in English, this is established practice, agreed by the ICAO. Whether you are Chinese, Indian, Russian or African, when you ask for traffic clearance, you only use English. Let us emphasize our language and our culture in our homes and in our country. Look at the Chinese, how they write and publish in their own language. We should also do the same. But when we are abroad, let us be international; let us not be left behind. Let English and siNdebele go parallel.

Li Zwangendaba.102

The demands on a siNdebele-speaker in Britain, as with other nationalities, increase the pressure to not only speak in English, but ‘perfect’ their pronunciation to suit the dialect of whichever part of Britain they live. In the workplace, in schools, in social

102http://www.inkundla.net/ubbthreads7/ubbthreads.php/ubb/showflat/Number/32622/page/1#Post32622
Accessed 22/05/2005
life... wherever the siNdebele-speaker interacts with the host culture, English dominates. Those instances of interaction add up to a larger chunk of the immigrant’s life than the time spent at home, or in recreation with only other siNdebele speakers. To that extent, English – and English mannerisms – become the dominant medium of interaction even in the home of one as conscious of his origins as is ‘Zwangendaba’. Thus the next contributor, ‘Mahlabayithwale’, points out that if the operative medium in the society is English, then in the home, too, both parents and their offspring become less inclined to converse in siNdebele.

But they are not parallel, sir. Go into the homes of many amaNdebele here in the diaspora, you will find people talking in English, it’s called being civilised. You hear the children addressing their father and mother as ‘guys’, children watching shameful films together with their parents, it’s called being civilised. All this is created by the fact that we as people have long convinced ourselves that the English language and lifestyle is good, and even better than our own.103

Like the previous contributor, Bhiyuti’s entry focused the blame on parents.

I do follow you points cousins, and I agree with you that our language is important. Yes, we can insist, and encourage each other that we speak our language, but the fact remains that we are abroad: at work, English; in the schools, English; so when is siNdebele spoken? Am not saying we do not and should not speak it but we should consider the circumstances. Back home, yes, I will speak siNdebele, hey! I will speak it in any office despite being under Shona domination. However, because I am in England, where I work, I have to speak English. That is why especially our children end up being more conditioned to English, because they spend the whole day with these people; that doesn’t mean they can forget siNdbele. We should speak siNdebele at home…but it’s our responsibility to let our children learn other languages so as not to be disadvantaged.104

‘Bhiyuthi’ shares the sense of alienation from the language and culture as families adjust to using English as a dominant medium, and life in general. But she tactfully presents (as must a woman in this patriarchal domain) the practical importance of not only speaking English in Britain, but learning to speak and use it well. Children would not succeed unless  

they mastered the language and the culture, but it is at home that the fires of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be stoked. She has tactfully agreed with ‘Zwangendaba’, and differed with ‘Mahlabayithwale’, without raising emotions.

This concern with preserving the siNdebele language and promoting its use was among the central motivating factors for the founding of the inkundla website. Alienation from an environment where siNdebele was commonly spoken was a major challenge especially for the earlier arrivals in Britain, and the website was a welcome forum for interaction in the native language. But in the long run it became more than just a venue of cultural and linguistic affirmation. Above and beyond being zealous for the language was a need to take concrete steps, in concert with amaNdebele at home and abroad, to breathe life into dormant causes and to renew institutions which were floundering. As Masiane (2003) said,

We desperately needed to speak in the oral tradition of the elders; to proclaim our humanity. So the rise of the internet and of email came as a wonderful opportunity for us. At first, perhaps, the inkundla site was useful mainly for letting off steam and expressing anger in deep siNdebele. But now we know we must get beyond letting off steam to generate ideas, and to translate these ideas into action. We have set about encouraging people in the diaspora to support schools and hospitals in Matabeleland. And they need to use not only siNdebele but to sustain all the languages of Matabeleland - of the people who preceded Mzilikazi. We are twenty-first century people but there is no need to eradicate our footsteps. There had been many changing ‘isms’ in Zimbabwe since 1980 but our people will remain - a quilt made up of every culture.

Habermas (1997:355) also identified the malleability of people’s cultural consciousness when faced with changing environments. He conceived society’s development as ‘the history of the continuous transformation of the forms of objectivity that shape the existence of human beings’, and said that Western capitalist societies in particular were ‘determined by a specific form that establishes the way in which its members categorically interpret objective nature, interpersonal relations, and their own subjective natures’. Into the British version of western society has come ubuNdebele and its baggage, including its interesting yet also vexatious contestations with broader
Zimbabwean identities. Negotiating this treble consciousness is a trademark of discourses on inkundla.net.

In the next section, an examination of the practical flows of capital from the diaspora to Matabeleland actualises the involvement of those abroad in sustaining institutional and cultural vitality among the amaNdebele in Britain and at home.

5.8 Transforming Ideas into Reality: Internet Activism made real

5.8.1 Regaining Lost Ground: Property investments in ‘Mthwakazi’

The inkundla.net founder-member who addressed the Britain Zimbabwe Society in 2003, Rolli Masiane, made it clear that the while the immediate motivation for the website was community support and cultural solidarity, it was also now intended as a vehicle for longer-term objectives to take shape. It was, he said, that time when ‘ideas flow into reality; when we see happen what all along we thought was possible’. The period from 2005 witnessed the most comprehensive and most substantial steps taken on the fora to prepare to contribute to ‘Mthwakazi’ business, political and social life by investing in the territory rather than merely decrying its present state of misgovernance. Bloch (2005:18, 19) recounts five different types of transnational networks or a broader range of financial exchanges that might have a greater impact on development in the ‘home’ territory: foreign direct investment by emigrants in their home countries, tourist visits by members of the diaspora to their country of origin, philanthropic donations by individual migrants or diaspora communities providing resources for development, fundraising targeting political candidates or causes in diaspora communities, and nostalgia for foods and produce from the country of origin that leads to local production, new markets and trade.

A group of participants began to discuss seriously how the Matabeleland region could be saved from two identified ills: the ‘invasion’ by Shona-speaking households who were now populating not just Bulawayo, but even the rural heartland of Matabeleland, where
the only Shona was hitherto spoken by soldiers and civil servants; and secondly, the death of economic and cultural vibrancy in Matabeleland as a result of years of neglect by central government. The land redistribution programme, led by the Mugabe government, had come to Matabeleland, but not entirely in the way envisaged. Instead of local traditional leaders being given the agency for allocation of land so that deserving locals get a fair share, it was lamented on inkundla.net, citing news reports from other media, that, in fact, Shona speaking businessmen and farmers from outside Matabeleland were being given vast tracts of land in a bid to transform the Ndebele base of rural Matabeleland and dilute, once and for all, the ethno-political territorial space of the amaNdebele, particularly their ethno-nationalism, independent identity and their tendency to vote as a bloc, which was a constant irritation to the Mugabe government. This revelation via live interviews with angry local villagers protesting the ‘invasion’ of the Shona-speakers on the Zimbabwe diaspora online radio station, www.swradioafrica.com, sparked emotional exchanges on inkundla.net that were to lead to some of the most concrete forms of action seen on this website in the period of research. This was the extract from the story that ‘Potshoza’ used to break the news to his fellow-debaters:

Let us not be complacent lest we allow the enemy to catch us off guard. We should be continually VIGILANT and WARY of Zanu (PF).

quote:
"Villagers in Matabeleland are up in arms over what they call government's tribal policies in the allocation of Land. Our Bulawayo Correspondent, Themba Nkosi reports that members of the government land task force, most of who are from outside Matabeleland are taking land from villagers in Shangani, Filabusi and Nyamandlovu and giving it to the shona."

Originally from SWRadio

‘Potshoza’ broke the news in the middle of a long-winded discussion on whether the envisaged Ndebele autonomy would be achieved through secession, or a negotiated federation. ‘Potshoza’ was trying to demonstrate what he saw as the futility of negotiating with Mugabe’s government, given its alleged ‘bad faith’ in staffing nearly all government posts in the Matabeleland region with Shona-speaking people from other regions, and more recently, as revealed in the report ‘Potshoza’ was citing, by government’s attempt to ‘encroach’ on Ndebele territory by resettling people from other provinces.

As other contributors to the thread, like ‘Noligwa’, reasoned:

We need to learn to be united as a people and be a force to be reckoned with. We can have our own state within Zimbabwe and drive these people out of our territory. The sad thing we have allowed them to build homesteads in our rural areas and they are buying properties in our towns. We don’t need to go eZansi [to South Africa], Zansi can take us with our territory and leave these people with their piece of land.107

Interestingly, it is a contributor taking the full name of King Mzilikazi who first responds to ‘Potshoza’s ‘revelation, by challenging amaNdebele abroad to invest their capital in Matabeleland, buying properties in urban and rural centres, investing in businesses, and giving support to the elected institutions such as the Bulawayo City Council, which were being made to operate under difficult conditions because they were controlled by the opposition party.

Mthwakazi. Matabeleland North province, Matabeleland South province and the Midlands is our land, our heritage which we were left by our forefathers. Bulawayo is the nerve centre of what defines uMthwakazi in general. It is the cultural spirit of those who have gone before us.

We therefore have a responsibility to ensure it remains so. We have seen the efforts of the enemy to change our region, our city from what our forefathers wanted it to be. Yes circumstances beyond our control have led us to abandon our lands, our towns and cities in a bid to survive. Now that we are abroad, it is important for us to remember home. As we all leave in search of greener pastures, we must remember that we have left behind even fewer people to make up the Mthwakazi population. In the process we open up space for more Shona invasion and if this is not reversed our talk of Mthwakazi will remain an academic exercise. Every Mthwakazian has to see to it that he prepares to return home, once the political situation has changed.

Accessed same day.

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We know that where we are now is a temporary sojourn. I know that there are Shonas who, even when they have the citizenship of other countries, do not neglect their homeland. Yes, they are many, and indeed they have developed the knowledge economy to maximise their foreign earnings and invest in Zimbabwe. But we, whatever it takes, have to go back to preserve what our forefathers left behind.

We must make sure that with the foreign currency we are generating we buy houses in Bulawayo, Gwanda, Vic falls etc. We start izibini [businesses].

We seek out and exploit every opportunity that arises in our region - dont worry about Harare etc. The whole idea is to shut out the marauding and invading Shona tribesmen from our region.

I am impressed with the way some of our guys in Mzansi [South Africa] have changed the face of iKhezi and its surrounding areas. Unfortunately iBulawayo has already has been taken over by Shonas. We need to regain lost ground. You see, when people vote in local govt elections, they must own property in that local area. Now if iBulawayo ends up dominated by Shona-speaking people, I foresee a situation where the future Council, councillors and Mayors will all be Shona. Remember your home!108

‘Inkosi uMzilikazi’ ends his monograph with his own testimony of having bought property in an upmarket Bulawayo estate formerly owned by the late Joshua Nkomo.

Most of the plots in Burnside left behind by ubabu Joshua Nkomo, now under uThandiwe109 were bought by amaShona mostly from Harare. I know this for a fact because I bought one, but all my neighbours are Shona. Where are we, people of Mthwakazi? This is our city and we should not be allowing this. Nowadays houses new and old are bought in foreign currency – we are many ‘Mthwakazians’ in the diaspora. Buy these properties and let’s not allow outsiders to do as they wish. It’s up to us to resolve this!

It is clear that the changing demographics, mostly of Bulawayo but also increasingly of rural Matabeleland – as a result of emigration of amaNdebele mainly to South Africa, Botswana and Britain, allied with the resettlement of people from Shona-speaking provinces – presents a challenge for the ‘Mthwakazi’ project. This is not just sabre rattling by a tribalist fringe: in 2005, a report from the Central Statistical Office in Harare projected a decrease in Matabeleland’s population as a result, in part, of high emigration levels to South Africa, chiefly from the Matabeleland provinces. Partly as a reflection of


109 Ubaba (literally meaning ‘father’) is a respectful way of referring to an older man. Hence, ubabu Joshua Nkomo’, who invested heavily in property throughout Matabeleland, but whose hieress, Thandiwe, was disposing of much of his investments.
this, it can be noted that while the CSO’s 2002 census report put the population of siNdebele-speakers at between 14 and 16 per cent of the Zimbabwean population, high levels of emigration to South Africa, particularly from rural Matabeleland, invited projections that this could fall to between 8 and 10 per cent of the total population by the next national census.

As Pathisa Nyathi of the Bulawayo City Council (2007) warned, the permutations of these ‘numbers’ could be politically significant. A reduced population density would mean a reduction of the share of seats in the national legislature for Matabeleland, as well as the apportioning of even less resources to the region as a result of its declining population. This has the potential of further fuelling the perception that Matabeleland and its people are being marginalized.

Furthermore, the fear often expressed – and implicit in Nyathi’s (2007) remarks – is that central government could use such statistics to support the relocation to Matabeleland of substantial numbers of households from the ‘overpopulated’ parts of Shona-speaking provinces. The more Shona-speaking Zimbabweans settle in the southern provinces, the more complex agitations for an Ndebele homeland become. This is clearly an emotive topic that the participants feel requires action by the Ndebele diaspora, who are financially able to invest in land, property and business and to support the democratically-elected local government structures against the government appointees – even though, on other threads, even the elected leadership in Matabeleland is berated for not being outspoken on issues of autonomy.

110 Projections in a 2005 bulletin suggested that, based on abnormally high migration levels from especially rural Matabeleland to South Africa, the Ndebele population resident in Zimbabwe could fall to between 8-10 %, from about 14-16 per cent of the population recorded during the previous national census in 2002. Source: Central Statistics Office, Harare. 2 June 2005
The Ndebele diaspora in neighbouring South Africa, where the biggest Zimbabwean transnational community is (Bloch, 2005; Chetsanga, 2004; Bloch, Makwara et al. 2004), has taken a lead in the reclaiming and development of Matabeleland, ‘Inkosi uMzilikazi’ tells us. They have invested in rural Kezi and its surrounding areas by setting up businesses and building impressive family homes, all of which have greatly transformed the landscape of some rural outposts. Mahamba (2008:1), quoting an Empandeni resident, attests to this contribution by the Ndebele diaspora in South Africa to development in another part of rural Matabeleland. The thrust of the thread’s discussion was that it remained for other ‘Mthwakazians’ based elsewhere, including in Britain, to complement these efforts by also re-establishing a home base and developing properties, businesses and institutions such as hospitals and schools in Matabeleland. This was seen as a means of reclaiming the homeland, of establishing both a family base and an Ndebele presence, of filling spaces vacated by mass emigration and a rising mortality rate – hence, the title of the thread, ‘Regaining Lost Ground’.

The result of ‘Potshoza’s’ posting was a critical re-examination of how the polity of Bulawayo, capital of the Matabeleland region and therefore of ‘Mthwakazi’ could be kept well within the Ndebele sphere of influence, and how other rural and urban centres could be ‘reclaimed’ from the steady settlement of ‘outsiders’. It was noted that politically, the Matabeleland region’s elected structures – urban and rural – were controlled by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. However, the Mugabe government had diluted the power of elected officers such as city mayors, rural council chairpersons and urban and rural councillors, by vesting greater authority in the unelected offices of Governor (of Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South), as well as traditional leaders and civil servants, all on central government’s pay roll and, for the most part, appointed by the President.
The currency with which these issues are debated in the diaspora was borne out by a direct appeal from the elected Mayor of Bulawayo to the diaspora to help the city out of its cash crisis. The Mayor’s appeal was conveyed in a report published by the inkundla.net newsletter, The Mthwakazian, quoting extracts from his 2006 annual report as covered by the Daily Mirror newspaper in Zimbabwe. The resulting thread betrayed tensions between the ‘Mthwakazi nation’ concept and existing elected structures in Bulawayo.

‘Ndukuyezizwe’:
Zimbabweans in Diaspora urged to supply council with equipment
THE Bulawayo City Council has appealed to Zimbabweans in the diaspora to source and supply equipment and spares to the municipality to improve its operations. In his annual report released this week, city mayor Japhet Ndabeni Neube said: “Zimbabweans in the diaspora are requested to consider venturing into the supply of critical spares and materials for council’s operations. This is against the current volatile economic situation worsened by the current shortages of foreign currency and critical inputs. However, the effective and efficient service delivery has been greatly affected due to these factors.”

Well, here’s a task for us, gentlemen. Does anyone have Mr Ndabeni’s contact details?

‘Ingqwele’:
City council landline; ++263-9-75011 and ask for his office.

‘Sibambimidele’:
Lobengula, you guys are the economists Sir, can you advise us what opportunities there might be in the Mayor’s appeal? Is it wise for us to take over the city council through outsourcing?

‘Moyo’
Before releasing any monies is it possible to get the population breakdown of the people living in Bulawayo, i.e. how many people from Mashonaland and how many from Matabeleland?

‘Ndukuyezizwe’:
I wanted to collect all this information from the Mayor’s Office but the person whom I spoke to in his office and I ‘are not speaking the same language’112 I want to find out what type of help the Mayor wants, and what will he do to overcome i red tape_ekhona113 in case we need to do something for the city in the new year.


112 The translation from ‘asizwani elimini’ could be either a literal speaking of different languages, or it could mean ‘Ndukuyesizwe’ and the Mayor’s receptionist had a misunderstanding, or, as the English phrase goes, were ‘not on the same page’. ‘Mabila’ invites ‘Ndukuyezizwe’ to clarify this in the subsequent posting, but ‘Ndukuyesizwe’ never does.

113 Meaning ‘bureaucratic obstacles’
A disjuncture is betrayed between some concepts in the diaspora and the realities on the ground. Moyo’s request for ‘the population breakdown’ assumes that the demographics of Bulawayo might have changed so radically as to have altered the siNdebele-speaking majority in the city. While we have discussed government projections of a decline in the Ndebele population and Phathisa Nyathi’s related comments, those knowledgeable about the elected structures in Bulawayo at the time of the thread (2005) would have known they were overwhelmingly Ndebele, as they would remain after the 2008 elections. Thus concerns over urban and rural resettlement by non-Ndebele ‘outsiders’, however valid, had not been reflected in voting patterns, which are usually along ethnic lines at regional level, nor in the region’s power structures. But this has not stopped a certain hostility to the Mayor of Bulawayo’s appeal, including a further misconception by ‘Zwangendaba’ that the mayor belongs to Mugabe’s party.

‘Zwangendaba’
Folks, I believe Mr Ncube’s appeal is MISPLACED. He is looking for Zimbabweans in the diaspora. ZIMBABWEANS. For too long we as Mthwakazi have benefited the People of Zimbabwe. Is it not true that the Zimbabwe Government takes resources and equipment from BULAWAYO to beef up the ailing equipment in SALISBURY?? Is this not true??? Mr Ncube should stop messing with the people. Let him quit ZANU (PF) and join forces with us in establishing Mthwakazi… without looking GOOD by asking for the impossible. Does he honestly think that I can contribute my effort to feed ZANU? Forget it.
Let’s establish the nation of Mthwakazi, no matter how difficult the task. Let’s not speak of Zimbabwe anymore.

‘Golide8’
Go to hell! This Ncube is taking chances with us. He is like the Governor of the Reserve Bank Gono, when he took office, he ran around saying, ‘Diaspora, diaspora!’ They think that people who work as carers can carry the country. All along they have helped themselves, eating the people’s money from the beginning. Why can’t they contribute themselves, since they earn so much money? If he really wants to make a plan, ‘scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’ as the saying goes. Let him sell us council houses for £2000 or council stands at cheap rates. We only help Highlanders Football Club.

114 ‘Salisbury’ was the colonial name for ‘Harare’, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The use of the colonial name could be intended to show disdain for the current administration.
‘Mahlab’ayithwale’:
You couldn’t have said it better, sir. It does not work that way, the frickin govmnt has to take responsibility not the diaspora. We don’t have voting rights anyway!

The last contributor reinforces a false perception of the Bulawayo municipal government as a political agency of Mugabe’s government. In fact, Ndabeni-Ncube, a mayor who belonged to the opposition MDC, led a council in which all but four of the 42 elected members belonged to the opposition. He faced challenges to his authority by government-appointed mandarins who encroached on council responsibilities. He faced government-induced financial pressures that vetoed municipal budgets (Rukuni 2005) and withheld millions of dollars in tax rebates and long-overdue compensation for central government’s takeover of electricity supply functions and installations in the mid-1980s. Yet, when the council failed to deliver basic services because of an inadequate budget, central government blamed it for incompetence. The result was a cash-strapped city, with Ndabeni-Ncube and his council carrying the can.

There is awareness by some of these mitigatory factors. Mbolomani equates the Bulawayo municipality with Highlanders Football Club as a symbol of ‘Mthwakazi’ success that can be the beginnings of localised aspirations for an Ndebele government:

Within the imposed unitary state of Zimbabwe today, there is a flicker of optimism because institutions that are mainly owned or administered by Ndebele people continue to be free of the corruption and rot experienced elsewhere. Good examples are the Bulawayo Municipality, which despite tough economic conditions, continues to strive and is a major success compared to other local government councils. On the sporting scene, Highlanders Football Club’s on-field exploits and administrative excellence are the envy of other teams in the country.

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115 See e.g. ‘ZINWA to take over Bulawayo water supply’ (2007), The Financial Gazette. Harare, 18/01/2007, p1

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It turns out that there was some enthusiasm for Ndabeni-Ncube’s project in the diaspora. Contributions were made, both in cash and kind. But they were not yet substantial enough to lift the city out of its woes (Nyathi interview 2007)\textsuperscript{117}. Still, a number of the inkundla forumites are in favour of development oriented interventions that assist Bulawayo and institutions in ‘Mthwakazi’ more broadly. Acquisition of properties, urban and rural, by amaNdebele continues to feature in the threads that address this. And ‘Lobengula’s’ contribution below shows the city council to be more oriented to the inkundla agenda than members of the forum have given them credit.

Folks, I recently (after Xmas) went to the Bulawayo City Council housing department (where I also met one of the leading members of our forum Hlathi), and specifically asked them about their experiences of the Homelink Scheme and how our people can utilise it. The grim answer I got was that currently there are 1 Acre x 1 Acre stands available in Khumalo / Parklands areas. Similar stands exist in Mahatshula / Selborne Park areas. Stands are also available in Mganwini and Pumula South near the Mbonqane area. The council housing staff expressed discomfort with the fact that the only people who keep enquiring about stands or property were people from the East (Mashonaland) who are based in foreign countries. The question they asked me was where are our own people, the Khumalos, the Ndlovus, the Ncubes, Nkulas, Moyos (not Jones), the Mlotshwas etc etc???????. It would seem that the Tshabi\textsuperscript{118} bloc is trying to use the Homelink scheme to monopolise Bulawayo!!!. But as a patriotic organisation\textsuperscript{119}, the BCC has tactfully delayed the use of the Home Link scheme thereby deliberately giving us the time to make a decision whether or not we want to acquire property using this scheme. The fact of the matter is that whilst we are still undecided and dilly-dallying, the Tshabis are waiting on the fence to sneak in should we delay even further. The next thing we will be kicking ourselves in the back crying foul when all our suburbs have been colonised by these people with the consequent [sic] that our sisters will unwittingly fall victim to the economic power of these monsters.

So the question is what should our policy be regarding these Homelink schemes? Some might want to know how the whole Homelink scheme functions? we can address this if needs be. Will the acquisition of a property by any Mthwakazian in Bulawayo be equated to being a turncoat? I think we need to pronounce on this issue so that we approach it from a concerted and collective viewpoint. If we pronounce on whether or not Mthwakazians can buy property using such schemes, it will open new opportunities whereby we keep updating each other on new opportunities without fear of being labelled or branded with predictable ugly

So members of this forum must express their onions on this issue because further delay will only disadvantage us as a people. It is useless for ‘Lobengula’ or ‘Gazlam’ to acquire a stand or house in Khumalo or Parklands when the whole area is swamped by the Tshabis, but it is good if we can acquire these stands and properties en masses [sic] as Mthwakazians.

\textsuperscript{117} Interview with Phathisa Nyathi, Public Relations Manager, Bulawayo City Council, 26/06/2007.
\textsuperscript{118} Derog. For ‘Shona’
\textsuperscript{119} Bulawayo City Council is referred to as patriotic to the ‘Mthwakazi’ cause for apparently delaying the acquisition of properties by Shona-speaking transnationals
Concomitant with this activism that engages officials within urban Bulawayo’s Housing Department is a significant development in rural Matabeleland that the inkundla community has become aware of and exploited, for the purposes of monitoring land redistribution patterns and lobbying the responsible agency at provincial-regional level. ‘Lobengula’ asks amaNdebele in the diaspora to take advantage of a recent appointment of an Ndebele to the position of regional government resettlement officer in Matabeleland, an appointment ‘Lobengula’ insists has helped ‘keep these Shona vultures out of our provinces’. Other contributors to the forum are sceptical that uDube’s appointment will have much effect, but ‘Lobengula’ is adamant that already, the appointment has resulted in locals being given priority for land as the new officer ‘wants amajaha eSindebeleni [siNdebele-speaking young men] to come in their thousands to get their potions (sic) of the land in their respective provinces’. The challenge, ‘Lobengula’ says, is for amaNdebele in the diaspora to stop philosophizing about an immediate political solution, and to move by stealth towards empowering and working with agencies ‘on the ground’ that share, and are part of, the ‘Mthwakazi’ agenda. The discussion is on the verge of contriving investment and settlement strategies that counter-colonise rural and urban spaces in Matabeleland to keep in check demographic shifts and alleged government designs from diluting the Ndebele majority. A year after ‘Lobengula’ began his thread, ‘Majahawodwa’ – whose pseudonym has interesting implications of gender exclusiveness – reports progress:

Those interested in one-acre stands, brothers you can phone the housing department in Bulawayo on this number: 00-263-9-75011 ext 2019. They say that there are stands going in Parklands right now. If you are in the diaspora, you give your relatives power of attorney so that they get you a registration form. Prices are between 57-97 million Zimbabwe dollars. You pay half deposit. Thats a good deal. They say they have not yet considered the Homelink scheme. You can get more information from their offices if you phone them, people of Mthwakazi!

The cry on www.inkundla.net, with the blessing of at least some city hall officials and the rural resettlement agency, is that amaNdebele who have means – this would refer chiefly to those based abroad – should snap up the available stands and housing units to prevent them being taken by the Shona. Not surprising, therefore, that more than one discussion thread on this website has revisited the polemics of the demographic shift and what might be done to address it in the short and long term. It is not an edifying discourse for Zimbabwean nationalists, nor would it sit well with more liberal, globalised norms of residence and belonging that are developing in the West. But it is a parochialism that has been noted in comparable studies, including Navarrete and Huerta’s (2006:137) reference to Mexican immigrants in Brooklyn, New York who interact with local government officials on development projects in their home town. In any case transnationals, as already noted, do tend to develop a heightened zealousness for the concept of ‘home’, even if relying on very imagined spaces like ‘Mthwakazi’.

It is difficult to get information from the city council on the Ndebele diaspora’s success in turning around the apparent rush by Shona-speaking transnationals to acquire housing stands and units in Bulawayo. An official in the Housing Department told this researcher that all interested buyers were required to register with the department; that this required filling out a form, proof of funds, and the down-payment of a deposit. Payment of the deposit secured the prospective buyer a place on the waiting lists for either housing units or undeveloped stands, and there were separate lists for stands and houses in the low and high density suburbs. There was no provision in this process for discrimination on ethnic
Similarly the identified government resettlement officer referred the researcher to official government policy regarding the Model A resettlement schemes (sub-division and resettlement of formerly white-owned large scale commercial farms), which was where much of the focus of the current redistribution lay. The criteria targeted ‘indigenous persons (in Zimbabwean official circles, this means black Zimbabweans) with agricultural production potential’ and did not discriminate among black Zimbabweans on tribal grounds, he said. Only beneficiaries resident in Zimbabwe could benefit from the scheme and so there could be no ‘collusion’ with externally-based agencies, including Zimbabweans in the diaspora, to influence land redistribution trends.

The resettlement officer admitted that some resettled farmers had had to be removed but said this was because of inefficient utilisation of the land rather than on ethnic grounds. The recovery of land from beneficiaries who did not engage in productive farming was in line with government policy, he said. The researcher conducted the interviews with both officials knowing the difficulties that an official or agency would have in confirming whether their operations favoured one ethnic group over another. Especially in the sensitive issues surrounding land resettlement and property acquisition in Matabeleland, the researcher did not expect anyone in a government or municipal agency to confirm their support for, or adherence of, an inkundla agenda, as it would have legal and political pitfalls. And so, especially for Bulawayo, a local authority already under siege, it was difficult for this research to verify by personal contact whether and how the collusion with diaspora groups is taking place, and to quantify the effect it has had on amaNdebele access to housing and any effect it might have on the supposed ‘colonization’ of Matabeleland by Shona-speakers.

122 Telephone interview, 22/09/2007, name withheld
123 Telephone interview, 22/09/2007
But the revelation by ‘Lobengula’ in message 11699 of direct contact between www.inkundla.net members and the Bulawayo Housing Department, and the apparent empathy in those quarters, it is not difficult to see how this collusion would take place. Nor would Lobengula’s other entry (message 7591) announcing, by name, the land officer’s appointment in Matabeleland as an opportunity for amaNdebele abroad. Perhaps, this was the concretization of a social movement to re-establish parity in housing and settlement patterns in Matabeleland. As one of the threads suggested, an element of collusion between council personnel and the Ndebele diaspora to ensure more and more housing is accessed by siNdebele-speakers had, in fact, been sparked by the sentiments on www.inkundla.net, marking collaboration between www.inkundla.net and the authorities in Bulawayo to ensure amaNdebele could ‘gain lost ground’\textsuperscript{124}.

Certainly in the rural areas, where Ndebele traditional leaders can still allocate land in areas under their jurisdiction, there would be a lot less sensitivity if tracts were taken up by people whose roots were in those areas – provided their family members actually occupied the land and lived in the homestead. For the Mugabe government has gone on record several times, insisting that it did not acquire land from whites only to hand it to ‘absentee’ black tenants.\textsuperscript{125} Whatever the case, all parties would have to tread carefully. Mugabe’s government would certainly not allow the city council to overtly reserve housing stands and units for siNdebele speakers: it would go against global trends of cosmopolitan cities; it would also set a precedent which other urban centres may feel tempted to consider, turning the tables on the amaNdebele minority in some cases. However in the rural areas, and especially rural Matabeleland, it was much easier to

\textsuperscript{124} http://www.inkundla.net/ubbthreads7olde/ubbthreads.php/ubb/showflat/Number/34019#Post34019
\textsuperscript{125} See e.g. ‘State to ensure women get equal opportunities: President’, article in the Herald, 4/9/2004, p1
prioritise the ‘resettlement of locals’ in preference to ‘outsiders’ because of the active agencies of local chiefs and liberation war veterans with whom the central government is more circumspect.

The www.inkundla.net website’s management would not discuss specific schemes with the researcher, saying only that they encouraged any initiative that redressed disparities in access for siNdebele-speaking ‘Mthwakazians’ (Masiane 2005). But the website does celebrate investments in Matabeleland schools, after reports of pitiful exam performances at most schools in the region provoked an outcry on www.inkundla.net. Some day soon, perhaps, Bulawayo will be able to discreetly celebrate an upsurge in housing developments and acquisitions by amaNdebele, and there may be further positive reports on the development of rural areas, not just by South African-based Zimbabweans, but an influx of capital from Britain and further afield. To many, this would represent the beginnings of practical steps to reclaim ‘Mthwakazi’ as an Ndebele heartland, if not ‘homeland’.

5.8.2 ‘Saving our Schools’: Investing in ‘Mthwakazi’ Education

The Ndebele diaspora’s practical engagement with Matabeleland is often prompted by news reports, picked up by one of the members and reproduced on fora to provoke discussion and possible intervention. This is how ‘Gaselomhle’126 highlighted the plight of Matabeleland’s schools. The thread, quoting a news report on the provincial governor’s speech, began as an expression of disgust at the large number of schools registering a zero per cent pass rate, gaining momentum as a discussion of whether or not, and how, to

fund the schools, and ending with a corporate attempt by www.inkundla.net to invest in infrastructure at various schools. It provides examples of needs assessment and the obstacles to be overcome before the intended help benefits those targeted.

‘Gaselomhle’:

This is heartbreaking, it's not only killing the present generation but it's TOTAL TRAGEDY to those to come. It’s a pity because the Governor acknowledges that it is because our schools do not have adequate furniture, books, infrastructure and staff… but when it comes to stating the solution she chickens out from the direct truth which is marginalisation of those communities. Instead of hammering on the persons and systems responsible for lack of adequate resources, she says people in those communities should chip in. Mthwakazi let’s pull together and help. Our children are in peril and no one will help them except you and me.

‘Madlenya’:

It is indeed heart-wrenching, I am torn apart, my heart is bleeding for our children. But luckily we could put a stop on that predicament, we could built libraries and resource them, school or community libraries or combined. Some of us in the diaspora have access to many different books and with people with massive resources which could be channelled to our children in remote areas. This can be done and should be done.

‘iBoyz yezkweyeni’:

‘Kill them before they grow....’ is the Mugabe strategy. You and I in the diaspora are busy chasing wealth, only to give it to our oppressors every month.127 Wake up, Mthwakazi, the nation is dying and me and you are contributing to this.

The state of schools elicits predictable anger consistent with the sense that Matabeleland is deliberately marginalized. But in a sign of the development-oriented thinking which has begun to channel the anger and trauma of Ndebele exiles, ‘Madlenya’ switches the discourse towards practical solutions.

‘Madlenya’:

How would it be if inkundla organises a fundraising event in London, we raise money and buy for the children attending schools in Matabeleland North the various necessities that schools require. I myself, whatever it takes, will be present at such a gathering, and if not, I will ask the webmaster to make it possible for me to donate towards the cause. Let’s try, Mthwakazi!

‘Mbuzimbili’:

Let’s help. I am also ready to throw in the little I have for the benefit of our children. it is the same story eMatebeleland South or should i say in all mthwakazi areas. But from

127 This presumably refers to remittances from the diaspora which kept the economy, and the government, afloat. Many Zimbabweans send foreign currency to desperate family members on a monthly basis.
experience, we might be told that our contribution is not necessary or they tell us to hand
the money to ZANU-PF so that it distributes the money]. As said above, this is a calculated
move by the government to kill off uMthwakazi. LET’S DO SOMETHING!

‘Gaselomhle’:

There are many ways to tackling this predicament. What matters most is our willingness
and determination and the thermometer to this is how much we are prepared to part with
for the cause (in cash or kind). One practical way of doing is this: Formation of associations of former students to the schools we attended or communities
we belong to. These associations will then set developmental targets focussing on their
schools. Ideas and resources will be harnessed from those persons and any other well-
wishers.

To enable participation of those abroad cybernetics can be used. Bank accounts can be opened in the names of these associations thru which funds can be
channelled. The associations can be subject to audit to ensure bona fide & best practice in
the management of the resources. However this idea requires someone to stand up, go to
the respective school, market the idea and convince the school leadership. There after with
the blessing of the school leadership try to identify and group those former students. This
may require massive advertising, which is not only confined to Zim. If in this inkundla we've been able to identify ex-schoolmates, and we giggled & had fun on
the discovery, I'm sure we can as well discover each other and work for our communities.
I know there are many more ideas which are even more brilliant that are being considered
by the brethren on this forum. All that is deficient is action. Let’s get on with it, elders!
This is not impossible.

But there are practical difficulties. How do UK-based amaNdebele support government
institutions like schools without being deemed to prop up the foreign currency-starved
Mugabe regime? ‘Gaselomhle’ again:

It's true, that is one possibility that money raised abroad and handed over as a donation to a
school, it is quite easy for these to be labelled as funds from bleya [Tony Blair] to finance
emudisi [the opposition MDC]. Or if we say the funds should be distributed to the
schools... they can easily take them over and distribute but not in the spirit of the donor.
But if there is a school development association of former students some of whom actually
reside in the respective community (and any other who might be willing to participate)
who are channelling funds thru a known bank account which is in the name of the school
association, chances become slim for these to be labelled as such. However this should be known that whatever endeavours we may make we will meet with
resistance, but that should not work to discourage us.

At this juncture, concrete measures are suggested. And in the next message from
‘Vunguza’,128 we learn that measures are afoot among the UK diaspora. The interest,
from the perspective of our study, is what will become of these measures, and whether we
can keep track of evidence of verifiable outcomes. Evidence would again emerge from the

Online, available at
http://www.inkundla.net/ubbthreads7olde/ubbthreads.php/ubb/showflat/Number/34241#Post34241

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momentum generated on inkundla.net and the claim therein of using an agency in situ (i.e. the ex-students, and school development associations, rather than state-employed head teachers and staff). A meeting was convened to act on the web discussions. The meeting, held at Stratford Library in London on 3 February 2007, and attended by about 40 people, resolved to raise a fund in Britain that would ‘partake in development of infrastructures (sic) such as schools, businesses and hospitals in Matabeleland’. The resolution was broader than the schools’ crisis which prompted the meeting. To track all developments that might have ensued proved beyond the time and resources of the research. But the schools’ initiative remained prominent, with the website devoting a section to the needs and contact persons in Britain for named schools. Each school had a profile, which was updated as and when resources from the diaspora funded a project.

By no means exhaustive, the lists of schools and their profiles provided a window to some of the struggles that underlie student performances, and successes the diaspora had achieved. There was the science laboratory at Nhlambabaloyi School in Ntabazinduna which still needed to be painted, but thankfully had, with input from the diaspora, raised $34000 for ‘eight student benches, 46 stools, a demonstration table, chalk boards and notice pin boards’ to be fitted. The school still had plans to develop ‘a full science laboratory block up to the required standard and which is fully furnished and equipped’, in order to be able to offer Integrated Science up to Advanced Level. Sojini Secondary in Mguza had just completed ‘one wing of the science block’ through resources raised

129 ‘Save our Schools’: Report back on the meeting held on 3 February 2007 http://www.inkundla.net/ubbthreads7olde/ubbthreads.php accessed 05/10/2007
130 For reports on the schools’ project, see http://www.inkundla.net/schools/IZIKOLO.HTM . Accessed 5/10/2007
locally and needed help to equip it.\textsuperscript{132} Nechilibi School in Hwange had no laboratory at all and students were ‘studying science in an ordinary classroom’.\textsuperscript{133} Then there was the interesting Jutshume Primary School, right on the Botswana border – peripheral to the extent that it is accessed through a Botswana dialling code.\textsuperscript{134} We are told by Difference Dube, who compiled the profile for this school and who according to the web page is contactable on a UK telephone number, that the school is located on a former San (nomadic ‘Bushmen’) hunting ground, and that the school had been sustained by funds from Zimbabweans in the diaspora from its inception in 1980.

When the school was built it only survived [on] people working in South Africa: Those were the sponsors of the structure to be built and the students, who did the most work. As it is now, the school has insufficient funds to maintain the infrastructure. \textit{(ibid.)}

In all, there were 27 schools profiled, some of which the \textit{inkundla} community had helped collaboratively and others which were being offered publicity through the website at the time of this research. As the report from the meeting in Stratford suggested, there would be an ongoing focus on schools, among other initiatives which the \textit{inkundla} community abroad had initiated and wanted to see succeed. What has been interesting is the emotional attachment that contributors to the website have displayed in bringing issues such as education to the fore, and the way in which members, and ultimately the website’s management, have organized to bring at least some of the relief efforts to reality.

\section*{5.9 Inkundla.net and Gender}

In the last chapter, I anticipated that gender issues, in particular the role of women, would define contrasts between how women are portrayed in the different websites. On

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Sojini School, Mguza – Mat. North’ see \url{http://www.inkundla.net/schools/Sojini.htm} Accessed 5/10/2007
\textsuperscript{133} ‘Nechilibi School, Hwange – Mat North’ see \url{http://www.inkundla.net/schools/Nechilibi.htm} Accessed 5/10/2007
\textsuperscript{134} ‘Jutshume Primary School – Mat South’ see \url{http://www.inkundla.net/schools/Jutshume.htm} Accessed 5/10/2007
goffal.com, partly derived from the mixed heritage of, and western influences on goffals. women easily step into pastoral, counselling and advocacy roles and are not constrained by cultural norms from a confrontational discourse with male subscribers. We now need to examine whether this treatment of women and women’s issues on www.inkundla.net fits a different set of gender relations and whether the women themselves feel liberated by the technology, an implicit proposition (in relation to the marginalized sectors) in this thesis. It seems useful to explore this in active discourses where the sensitive issue of ‘Mthwakazi nationalism’ is live, where the focus is intense, and where one of the regular women members attempts to engage with the male members as an equal participant.

A reading of ‘live’ texts from other threads in this chapter will have oriented the reader to a thoroughly masculine bias in the communication practices on inkundla.net. Modes of address are almost invariably masculine, even where a female is present, and the expectation is that the woman member should be sensitive to her role as a junior partner in the discussion, irrespective of what academic or experiential credentials she may bring to the subject. I have purposefully chosen the critical subject of ‘Mthwakazi nationalism’ or, more specifically, the ‘secession debate’, to allow the sensitive and intense engagements to demonstrate the practical and attitudinal hurdles a woman must overcome on the inkundla forum, and why this would not entertain the sort of boldness exhibited by the women on www.goffal.com in the last chapter.

In his contribution to the topic, ‘Federation vs Secession’, Lobengula¹³⁵ writes:

Having spent bagfuls of hot air debating and arguing about these two realms, I think wisdom and logic at our disposal now dictates that we need to draw an inference from the various viewpoints expressed and reach a conclusion. The proverbial million US$ question is: What exactly does Mthwakazians want? Which of these two policies do we think will take us forward? To try and zero in on this crucial issue, let us be democratic and state unequivocally what each one of us as members of the forum want or prefer. I therefore start the ball rolling by stating that I prefer FEDERATION for Mthwakazi at this point in time. Our express opinions as reflected in our vote here will be crucial in narrowing the debate and will equally demonstrate clearly exactly what the people (Mthwakazians) want. It could happen that while we are spending endless hours debating this issue maybe only one person favours secession while the majority favours federation or vice-versa. So let us not allow only one or two persons to hold our future to ransom by defying the will of the majority. As such let us not mortgage our future by succumbing to some dictatorial will of one or two fellows in the name of secession or federation. Let the people speak!!

In interesting and protracted exchanges, no doubt not the first encounters with this topic on this website, as ‘Lobengula’ and ‘Skuveth’ wearily point out, the importance of the topic is manifest and the desire by most to come to an agreement as to what aim and which strategy to adopt, is palpable. ‘Ndebele phaq’ responds to Lobengula’s reconvening of the debate by alluding to the need for concrete action to follow on from this thread. He implores ‘our leaders on this forum’ to set up a vote line ‘so that we arrive at a conclusion without delay and proceed to put it into action’. The exchanges between pro-secessionists on the one hand, and others who feel the interests of the amaNdebele can be fought for within a federation and a preserved unified Zimbabwean construct, are revealing for the insights they provide into the sentiments around this topic, which is frequently rejoined by the members of this website, thus underlining its significance to this constituency. But the exchanges also show other flows of social and cultural engagement that typify Ndebele distinctives of language, conversation, hierarchy, patriarchy, identity, politics, and gender sensitivities. It is a useful conversation from which to begin interrogation of the themes that attend the research framework.


‘Mabila’:

Lobengula! May I be included in this discussion, even though I’m not a ‘chap’? It’s not my fault that I was created a woman! For progress, I am in agreement with Ndebele phaqa. I would suggest to you Lobengula and Baba Skuvethe that each person takes some space to argue their case, showing us advantages of either secession or federalism. Skuvethe can argue his case for secession; you sir can take up the cause of federalism. Speak simply for all of us to understand. Even if in the end we do nothing about it, we will have learnt a lot. May I therefore suggest some guidelines for your discussions? (i) Definition of terms; (ii) Why secede or federate; (iii) How Mthwakazi should secede or federate, and its qualifications for citizenship; (iv) Time frame for achievement; (v) Advantages and disadvantages; (vi) Success stories or failure of either. Masiyeni Phambili (Let’s move forward!) 138

‘Lobengula’:

Mabila,

I will try to be very very very simple and basic in answering your questions. I will try to answer them such that the lay man in the street (Lobengula Street)139 understands what the hell this devil called federation is about.

Federation:

A union of states such that each keeps its own territorial government, independence and autonomy while at the same time a federal government is in place to prevail on matters that affect both states.

Why federate?

Mthwakazi will be in charge of her own affairs: self-governance, culture, education, jobs, economic development, language development, tourism, industries, police, basically we will be running our own affairs. You will never have a situation where a foreigner from Zimbabwe will come and occupy any meaningful post in our region (as is the case now, where police officers in Lupane140 only speak Shona). We might even have our own national sports teams just like Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for example; and our own official language, just like Quebec in Canada uses French. Brothers, it’s us who will be running business here.

How to federate?

Mthwakazi has to lobby at all levels of business, politics, at village level, in cyberspace, at Buckingham Palace, at 10 Downing Street, at Union Buildings (Pretoria). In Tsholotsho, lobby specialists, the churches, Ndebele legal experts (Judge Ben Hlatshwayo), lobby in shebeens,141 basically lobby at ALL levels. Citizenship? We contact all key Ndebele leaders, religious, political, business or intellectuals in a very responsible way and impress upon them what we think is good for us.

Time frame for achievement:

This has to coincide with the departure of Mugabe, whether ZANU-PF remains in power or not.

138 It is interesting that ‘Mabila’ (message 7486) ends with the City of Bulawayo’s official motto
139 ‘Lobengula Street’ in Bulawayo is the western boundary of the central business district. Before independence, it separated the city and its affluent suburbs from the working class areas reserved for blacks under the laws of racial segregation.
140 Lupane, capital of Matabeleland North province, is in the siNdebele-speaking heartland, yet according to ‘Lobengula’ is served by police officers ‘from Zimbabwe’ who cannot speak the local language. This is a long-held criticism in other parts of Matabeleland and extends to other civil service departments.
141 ‘Shebeens’ are unregistered (unlawful in Zimbabwe) taverns operating from private homes and serving alcohol. They are popular for offering retail prices, much lower than established pubs and restaurants, and also for their homely atmosphere.
Mabila continues to press for recognition of the female presence on the forum – her own, and possibly others – while making her arguments heard. She even takes the unusual step, in traditional Ndebele settings, of determining the agenda and assigning roles to her male counterparts. Although it is clear that she in not being ignored as ‘Lobengula’ and others are engaging with her arguments, the apparent insistence on addressing her and the forum at large through masculine discourses is deliberately meant to represent a barrier to female participation in a decision-making forum on equal terms, as ‘Thandindaba’ goes on to explain in the next post. ‘Thandindaba’ parodies the gender-lingual debate by correcting a common form of expression by which Ndebele men address each other (madoda) to add labodade (and sisters) to include women participants. Mabila fuses the qualities of respect due to the man and love reserved for a woman – suggested by ‘Thandindaba’ – to argue that one cannot go without the other, and that by extension of the same argument, both men and women are worthy of both love and respect. Succinctly, she presses the point beyond ‘Thandindaba’s’ nebulous response to her question by suggesting that love and respect towards a man or a woman are not mutually exclusive.

The cultural difficulties of accepting a women’s involvement in public discourses is underscored by descriptions in Ndlovu’s thesis (2004:105-7) of the strong traditional patriarchy in Ndebele society. According to Ndlovu, the woman’s stock was reduced by the fact that she did not go to war, did not participate in raids, and therefore could not be valued as the menfolk whose exploits yielded loot, captives and territory for the Ndebele nation. In this regard, Ndlovu quotes King Mzilikazi’s interjection when listening to missionaries preach about honouring one’s father and mother: ‘It is false. What honour can be due to a woman who did not go to war?’ (Ndlovu 2004:106).
Nevertheless, the internet allows the likes of Mabila to penetrate the meeting spaces once reserved for men and to engage meaningfully with the topics and other participants. The nature of the internet and of membership of web communities is that, even where strong cultural disinclination exists, the inevitable existence of less conservative types as well as a natural inquisitiveness to engage with whatever points the woman might raise mean that, with perseverance, the woman participant need not be frozen out of the discussions for too long.

5.10 Inkundla.net and HIV-AIDS

The discourse in relation to the HIV-AIDS condition in the previous case study, www.goffal.com, covered the pastoral and counselling roles of women; the exhorting testimony of the person living with HIV-AIDS; the ability to find and generate affection through the online community; and the practical help that may be available through interacting on the website. If we thought we would see less female articulation of the issues surrounding this disease on inkundla.net, on account of the website community and Ndebele culture’s traditional patriarchy, we would have been slightly surprised to see that, although conservative and male-dominated in almost every other section or thread, the inkundla discussions around HIV-AIDS drew out a visible female component. The women took a view which suggested that people with HIV-AIDS had what Giddens (2001:160) called ‘the illegitimate sick role’. As opposed to the ‘sick role’ (Giddens 2001:159) where the afflicted person was viewed as ‘not personally responsible for being sick’, the ‘illegitimate sick role’ evoked the belief that the victim somehow had something to do with the cause, either by omission in not practicing safe sex, or by commission in being promiscuous.

Notwithstanding the conservativism associated with this forum, sexuality and its related
illnesses is not a taboo subject, particularly in relation to its impact in the diaspora. The thread on ‘HIV-AIDS and Race’ is preoccupied with the threat of infection and causes linked to the irresponsible behaviour of some Zimbabweans abroad. Attempts are made, not to stigmatize the infected, but to forewarn the uninfected into behaving responsibly. The positive development of a discourse on moral standards from what started out as a regurgitation of conspiracy theories vis-à-vis the origins of the virus and its racial deployment is again a useful barometer of web discourses and their emotional currents. ‘Mabila’ began the thread with a lengthy lamentation of the disease’s association with black people globally, stating that ‘it does not matter whether you are a black living in America, Africa or Europe…the biggest impact of AIDS has been on those communities’.142 But the analysis turned to risky behaviour in the diaspora, which led to introspection that veered from the race-inflected discussions.

The appeals to Zimbabweans abroad to spare themselves the anguish of a slow death in a foreign land was intended to arrest misbehaviour which the debaters presented as rife among UK-based Zimbabweans. It reversed the trend we identified as an over-arching property of online conversations generating action – in the sense that, in this particular instance, behaviour in public has provoked online discussions on inkundla.net that will hopefully go on to condition that behaviour. Thus, because of the dominant tendency in the thread to connect HIV-AIDS with promiscuity, what could be described as a ‘conditioning base’ in the level of discourse is orientated by preoccupation with intercourse – ukusiya

ecansini (literally, ‘to lie on the mat’) – as the greatest threat.

Says ‘Pamela’:\(^{143}\)

I tell you, it is better to protect yourself these days, because people are falling sick here in the diaspora. What is happening here overseas is that people don’t respect themselves, especially people from home. They behave like animals. They have no shame, I tell you. You would think sex is the fashion nowadays. In the past, anyone in a sexual relationship would be discreet about it. Now it’s like, ‘I’ve been there, go and taste for yourself!’ It’s disgusting, people don’t look after themselves. The condom is there guys, play safe. You don’t know where the person you’re sleeping with has come from. It’s frightening!

‘Pamela’ addresses her words of caution to men. The presumption is that women are the virus carriers, perhaps derived from the likelihood that most of the conversations whose explicitness so repelled her would have been with women. It could also be indicative of the large female component of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain on which previous studies (e.g. McGregor 2008:469; Mbiba 2005:32) have commented, many leaving husbands and families in Zimbabwe.

5.11 Conclusion

The historical institution of an inkundla/padare public discourse on which this website was modelled – both the institution and website are hierarchical, patriarchal and conservative – was a legislat ing and social agency which, while not egalitarian by Western standards, ventilated public issues in a way in which both the authority (the chief) and the commoner were mutually accessible. The inkundla website reproduced this model by serious debates, regular feedback from the moderators (the reports on the Matabeleland schools project, for example, and the contacts made with Bulawayo City Council and state agriculture authorities about settlement in urban and rural Matabeleland) and sustained attention to a heritage and homeland that must be protected and passed on to future

\(^{143}\) Contribution to thread started by ‘Mabila’, ibid.
generations. The website did not legislate, but the imaginings of nationhood it produced were of a polity that fixed Ndebele identity in a self-governing structure based on ethnicity, land ownership, and autonomy from the government in Harare. This is in contrast to the goffal website, for instance, where cohesion and solidarity are important but the feasibility of sustaining a heritage is disputed by some transnationals. Informed by Habermasian concepts of public discourse, this chapter represented a negotiation of identity that very much contends with government policy in Zimbabwe and its concentration of power at the centre, constraining regional autonomy and the rights of national minorities to influence the spheres where they are numerically ascendant. As such, the website is a model of uncensored public speech, demonstrating its potential to become one facet of a pluralised media which can help democratise the Zimbabwean public sphere. This chapter has shown how the ‘public’ can actively create and engage with media content, generating material transactions and social formations that influence developments at home. The social interventions resulting from online communication may be seen as part of a re-enfranchisement of the website’s constituencies inside and outside Zimbabwe.

At a more ideological level, there are important factors to be acknowledged in this case study whose neglect has robbed Zimbabwean social history of a variable richness, especially a closer view of identities in conflict with the macro-political and cultural environment. In this chapter, we have learned of the ‘national’ developing distinctiveness from other dominant flows within a nation state. These identities are resilient: they have to be, for they are engaged in a struggle with dominant discourses that have global recognition, whereas their campaigns may not. Unlike the Rehoboth Basters in Namibia, ‘Mthwakazi’ has not yet applied for membership of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation. Even if the campaign has merit, it must contend with a tendency
among academics and politicians alike to play down sub-nationalist aspirations - such as this - as ‘tribalist’, narrow-minded and unfortunate. The world is prepared, it seems, to collectively forget that it was the colonialists, with their alien designs of nationality and statehood as opposed to peoplehood, who drew the boundaries of governance in which many unrepresented nations are now trapped. Yet the feeling of belonging, of patriotism, of identity, cannot be guaranteed by mere allegiance to one flag, one passport. One must balance inclusivity with respect for a minority’s right to engage, or disengage, as they see fit.

The use of website forums and message boards to articulate these perspectives is not an exercise in voyeurism, but a realization of the power to act on group identity issues through the website. Forum interactivity has as its objective knowledge sharing that is productive in diverse ways. We have seen culture conceptualized, whether in the attitudes of male forum members to women or in their re-emphasis of difference from the culture in which they are living. There have been discussions on HIV-AIDS in the community. Further research might explore the extent to which the diaspora has influenced homeland developments, particularly of property acquisitions in urban and rural Matabeleland. No doubt, Zimbabwe government agencies will, for good or not, show interest in such a research.

But while Zimbabwe’s government continues to display hostility towards any and all discussions around Matabeleland autonomy, central governments elsewhere have embraced devolution. South Africa has a decentralized model, although control of nine out of the ten provincial governments by the ruling African National Congress invariably means that the central government prevails in every facet of administration in those nine provinces. As contributors to inkundla.net frequently point out, Britain has recognized the
‘nationhoods’ of its four constituent parts – Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England – and a workable solution does seem to have taken hold, albeit not without tensions (Giddens 2001:443-4). Of course, the ‘Mthwakazi project’ need not lead up to the ‘Balkanization of Zimbabwe’. We have seen enough evidence on the forum of disagreement over absolute secession, and there are concerns among ‘Mthwakazians’ that care be taken not to marginalize those who constitute minorities in ‘Mthwakazi’. The ethnocentricity of Zimbabwean discourses from which the amaNdebele and their institutions feel excluded, instructs many of the principals in the Mthwakazi movement to avoid the same pitfalls. It may be worth closing this chapter with the question not vividly addressed in the inkundla.net discourses: how would minorities inside ‘Mthwakazi’, particularly the Shona-speakers, have their rights protected in a ‘Mthwakazi Republic’?
6.1 White Zimbabweans in Perspective: An Introduction

Among the profiles of web-related associations Chapter 2 introduced was the Zimbabwe Festival (or ZimFest), an annual meeting of mostly white Zimbabweans from across Britain to express their common origin, nostalgia, and support for Zimbabwe-related causes. This chapter will locate ZimFest in the binary contexts of (i) mobilization online and in the networks associated with this community in the British diaspora; and (ii) dilemmas of white Zimbabwean consciousness as it relates to homeland and host country contexts. It will show how and where white Zimbabweans create spheres of interaction in Britain through a particular website and its output to reproduce their past and maintain linkages to Zimbabwe; the varying ways in which they negotiate race and the paradoxes of their condition as white Africans; the Angst they share for a lost homeland and quality of life; and the usability of their values in Britain, from which many of their ancestors came, but which to a large extent they consider alien. Pasura (2008:187) has referred to white Zimbabwean alienation from the British context as ‘this kind of otherness’ that is ‘distinct from British identity’, evidence of which is palpable in the www.thebottomhalf.com discourses and the Zimbabwe flag-bearing whites who are encountered in this chapter.

6.2 Genesis of www.thebottomhalf.com and ZimFest

The website was started in 2000 when a farmer from Beatrice near Harare, recently resettled in Britain, was motivated along the same lines as the founder of goffal.com (Chapter 3) to network with friends and family left behind in Zimbabwe. Originally called
thezimbo.co.uk,\textsuperscript{144} it was, said webmaster Tommy Sharp, intended ‘just as a personal website for me to keep in touch’ and to ‘let them know what I was up to’.\textsuperscript{145} Like Andrew Longworth’s goffal.com, Sharp’s network grew exponentially so that by 2002 it was abuzz with substantially more content than the life and times of Tommy Sharp. Zimbabweans, and especially Zimbabwean whites who dominated the network, had a lot to say: the intervening years were, after all, the height of white evictions in Zimbabwe. Anguished decisions, relayed on the website, to leave Zimbabwe for anywhere safer – Australia, Britain, Botswana, South Africa, the US, even previously unstable neighbouring countries like Mozambique and Zambia – made the discourse a rich record of the people on the ground’s experiences, and the Angst shared by whites already in the diaspora, not just in Britain, but in other countries across the globe with sizeable concentrations of Zimbabwean whites. Clearly, the website that initially focused on ‘the Zimbo’, Tommy Sharp, was serving a broader purpose and a much bigger constituency than just Sharp or his associates, or even fellow Zimbabweans in Britain. So Sharp took the decision to rename his website ‘the bottom half’, taking into account significant numbers of South Africans, Australians and New Zealanders with connections to either pre- or post-independence Zimbabwe who were using the website.

But as Sharp told this researcher in 2006, the discussion threads have never since ventured too far, too long, from Zimbabwe-related issues.

People of Zimbabwean origin continue to dominate the membership. Extending membership to other people of the southern hemisphere, who in many cases would have lived in Zimbabwe or at some time known friends and family who lived there, was not a disadvantage.\textsuperscript{146}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{144} ‘Zimbo’ is an abbreviation mainly used by white Zimbabweans in Britain to refer to all compatriots.
\textsuperscript{145} Sharp was interviewed in person at the 2002 ZimFest at Barnes Elms Sports Club, London, 30 August. He provided useful information in subsequent email exchanges.
\textsuperscript{146} Sharp, e-mail, 20/02/2006
\end{flushleft}
The annual ZimFest, held usually around the British summer Bank Holiday weekend, epitomizes the co-operation and rallying of mass support among Zimbabweans, mostly of European extraction, through web-based mobilization and advertising. In the course of the fieldwork for this research, two websites - www.thebottomhalf.com and www.wezimbabwe.org – conveyed the conception, planning and interest in ZimFest on the largest scale. While both the original and redesigned wezimbabwe website showed a preoccupation with ZimFest as an event, the more diverse interests of www.thebottomhalf.com contained a broader interactivity among the discussion threads that tracked the actual organization of ZimFest each year. An examination of the content of both websites found that not only did www.thebottomhalf.com boast greater evidence of people participation in the preparations, it also provided reviews and pictures of each year’s event, allowing critical feedback in volumes unmatched by www.wezimbabwe.org.

An example of the ancillary role www.wezimbabwe.org played to www.thebottomhalf.com in the generation of ZimFest each year is this revealing post on the former, where a contributor is actually informing wezimbabwe.org of the anticipation and build-up to the event on the other website.

ACarr: 147

Quite a few people on TBH 148 have been asking what you get for your £16. Is it just the entrance fee and nothing else or is there a freebie that goes with the fee? I will pass on your answer to TBH.

TKO:

The ticket gets you access to the event and a complimentary commemorative t-shirt.

ACarr:

Cool, Thanks. I will let everyone know.

148 TBH – Acronym for ‘the bottom half’. i.e. www.thebottomhalf.com
Whereas the wezimbabwe website, intended as a promotional tool of ZimFest (Mendelsohn, Personal Interview 2003), was relying on ACarr as a ‘go-between’ with what clearly was a larger ZimFest constituency on www.thebottomhalf.com, the latter website was in a more vibrant mode, harnessing numbers for support work and keeping track of negotiations for a venue for the 2004 ZimFest, as well as a suitable date. The date eventually chosen – 11 September 2004 – had its own significance and complexities, as the thread below will show. It is a thread that illustrates the ‘triadic relationship’ (Harris, 1996:7) between the transnational, their homeland and their international context:149

North vs South:
More importantly is…getting ZimFest going this year. There are a few hardy souls who have put together ZimFest from day one. This has involved an inordinate amount of work with those involved: Paying up front in many cases for hire of things and only being reimbursed later out of profits.

Iyndsay79:
I heard quite a disturbing story over the weekend. The ZimFest may not be on this year? Does anyone know anything about this? Is it true? Cause it would be tragic if it isn’t on!!

Luigi:
I think Zimbru helps organise it and stuff…zimbru you know nething?

Zimbru:
Am 99% sure it will be on. We have all been spending many an evening trawling around venues negotiating with them (it’s not as easy as it sounds to get a venue in London) but hold tight and will know very soon. Provisional date is Saturday 4 September. No more rumours that it is off please. Wait for an official announcement that will come shortly and then please get off your a**ses and buy tickets EARLY.

Whisper:
4th of September? I’m gonna miss it. But then again I’ll be in Zim...

Nyala:
Oooo exciting! That would be a great date pleaseeeee as I will have a hockey tournament the weekend before and in Spain the weekend before that and REALLY would be chuffed if I can still come, loved it last year…so this is a tiny little request for that weekend.

Zimbru:
As my thread says, that is the date provisionally. We are still negotiating with venues. Hold tight and in a week or so we will be sending out OFFICIAL notification.

Nemo:
Have u thought about some wet t-shirt competitions and, erm, mud/jelly wrestling? I am always suggesting this but no-one listens. Oooh I got an idea, what about having a Zim singles desk at ZimFest coz I know many Zimbos who say they only wanna date other Zimbos...

ZimFest is extraordinarily significant to the white Zimbabwean diaspora. The subject of many more website threads each year, it provides a continuity that builds up intense anticipation leading to the event, and is the subject of many photo reviews and forum discussions afterwards. Embedded in www.thebottomhalf.com narratives, it may be described as compensating for the absence of home, in Papadopoulos’ (2002:16) words, ‘to re-create the protective and containing membrane of home’ so that each year, the event brings people together as a high point in the otherwise cyber-based interactions. The enwrapment in the Zimbabweanness of the event is illustrated by the debate over the holding of the 2004 edition on 11 September.

**Zimbru:**
Date: September 11 CONFIRMED
Venue: Raynes Park, London. CONFIRMED.
Now hang on a little longer and we will chat with our kind friends Tommy and Sophie\(^{150}\) and get a proper email flyer up here with all applicable details, but at least you have the date now, so get it into your diaries and put some money aside now to buy your, and all your mates, tickets early!

**171:**
With all due respect…I can’t believe its being held on 9/11.

**Zimbo Ouen:**
Why? Ok something bad happened but the longer we leave it something else bad could happen and then we can never have it…Sorry but its sad that it happened on that date and maybe we can have a minutes silent but this is life people…September the 11th is good to me…if anything we can show the terrs\(^{151}\) that nothing can keep man down…and we have a good time all the time…

**Chaela:**
Agreed with ZO…If we had to always be worried about days where there has been national/world disasters, there’d be plenty of days when we couldn’t do anything.

**171:**
Fair enuff, but I bet you wouldn’t be saying that if a member of your family died in the attack? I just asked why it was happening on that day and wondered if someone couldn’t have chosen another day.

**Chaela:**
Agreed Blondie… but at the end of the day it was something that had nothing to do with us as a nation, and I bet that they (America/Britain/Iraq etc) wouldn’t give much of a damn if something bad happened in Zim. (which they clearly don’t). And whilst yes, it is a bad day in history - there are plenty of bad days - what about Gooks and Spooks that we party on? What about during WW1 and WW2? The Gulf War? The Vietnam War? The Cold War?

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\(^{150}\) Tommy and Sophie Sharp, the husband and wife team that run thebottomhalf.com

\(^{151}\) The ‘terrs’ – an abbreviation for ‘terrorists’, it was commonly used during white rule to refer to insurgents of the liberation movements in Zimbabwe
The earthquakes in America, volcanoes in Hawaii, monsoons in India, tidal waves in Japan - Hiroshima, Pearl Harbour, mass murders in American schools...etc... it's just endless... so whilst I understand that maybe it's a bit insensitive to have a party on the 11th September, we have to move on with our lives...

**Green:**
I think a big celebration on a world day of mourning is a bit off. Yes, bad things happened all the time, but 9/11 was the start of what has happened and is what to come. Millions more will die of it. I respect the date and always will. My heart goes out to those people.

**jester7:**
Terribly sorry to throw my incredibly insensitive oar in here - but 9/11 as a perpetual day of mourning for all eternity - come on we all need to get over it. It shouldn't have even been brought up in a forum that is aiming at reuniting a people who for the most part have had to leave their own country because of the strife in it. We don't feel sorry for ourselves why the hell should we feel sorry for a nation who keep sticking their paws into world situations with the pretence of doing them a favour when the truth is it is to line their own pockets. Casualties in war are a terrible thing - I'm sure a lot of us had family members who lost their lives in our own struggles. We grieve and we move on - that is the Zimbabwean way. We are survivors. For the most part, we have put aside grievances and continue to live our lives. There is no way I am going to spend the rest of my life bowing my head on the 11th of September because a group of militants took an extreme action against two pillars to greed power and control of the rest of the planet. The only thing that concerns me about September the 11th is that I hope its sunny.

**Zimbru:**
I am not going to get into some long discussion on anything but fyi152:
It is extremely difficult finding venues that fit the following:
The necessary security requirements for an event of this size (i.e. only one main entrance to stop gatecrashers etc); a venue that will allow for the variety of activities - open fire for braais153, plus sport, plus noise, plus alcohol licence. Add to this the end of the cricket season and the beginning of the rugby season and the grounds' own requirements for matches. Plus other strict council requirements, then at the end of the day you do not actually have very much choice on the date.

**Zimbo Ouen:**
Good call there too Zimbru...Sorry peeps but life is life and we need to get on with it...A mins silence maybe wouldn't go astray out of respect tho.

**Whisper:**
oh blah give it a rest who bloody cares about the 'date'.

The comments that the date is an irrelevant distraction for Zimbabweans has incensed ‘171’. She contrasts the insensitivity of her fellow users with their own recurrent tales and commiserations on the website about their harassment and flight from Zimbabwe. Clearly offended, she brands them collectively with a derogatory reference formerly reserved for those whites who left Zimbabwe at independence because they could not face a future under black rule.

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152 fyi – For your information
153 ‘braai’, derived from the Afrikaans term widely used in Zimbabwe for ‘barbecue’
171:
You know what you lot... with the whole outlook of some on here with ‘lets just get on with life’ attitude, you lot sure like to sit about and lick your wounds on the whole issue of being kicked out your country etc., and how hard done by some of you are and how life is full of injustices etc. If that’s how you feel stop feeling so sorry for yourselves you bunch of ‘when wes’154 and get on with your own lives. Bet you wouldn't have the same attitude if someone in your family or a loved one was in the twin towers and died.

Zimbo Ouen:
Jay155 you are probably right... if we were affected directly by the events of 9/11 when it happened (like losing loved ones or were there) we'd prob be saying a whole different story. But we weren't and that's why it doesn't hit us that hard. It's with everyone in the world... it happens all the time. People don't really give a damn unless they have been affected or are involved. Now the issues about leaving Zimbabwe and some of us getting whiny and upset about that? Well that's because we ARE/HAVE BEEN affected... hence we have more of a right to be sad and depressed about zim than 9/11... both in my eyes are terrible things...but the latter issue is affecting most if not all of us.

You are right overall about getting over it and moving on. I am much better now than I was last year – I am moving on and accepting life as it comes now. I am trying... I am still a ‘when we’ sometimes...why? Because I am too proud of where I came from I think and what I had. My life in Zimbabwe back in the days to me... is what the twin towers were and meant to the Americans.

171:
Back in the days? Mate it happened three years ago.

Zimbo Ouen:
Ya I left Zimbabwe 3 years ago. What I'm trying to say (harsh tho it may sound) is that 9/11 was a shocking and sad event... but I'm over it now... it doesn't really mean anything to me anymore. How can one expect to hold misery and upset from the past for every bad thing that happens including things that you haven't been affected by or involved with yourself? In fact if they gave a minutes silence for 9/11 but not for Zimbabwe and it's current state then I would be disappointed especially as it is a Zimbabwean event...

The interest, in reproducing the above thread extensively, is in illustrating priorities for white Zimbabweans: their annual festival in London means more than deferring to the Twin Towers outrage which, for most of the contributors, was an American tragedy. As Zimbo Ouen opined in the thread above, Zimbabweans had their own losses to mourn. And if ZimFest represented the unyielding Zimbabwean spirit despite those losses, why should its scheduling defer to an American tragedy? The significance here is identification in this

154 ‘when wes’ – A term used after independence mostly by white Zimbabweans to describe those whites who left the country at independence and who considered every facet of life in the pre-independence period to have been superior to life abroad or under a black government. Such people’s conversations were said to almost invariably include the phrase, ‘when we were in Rhodesia…’, hence the designation.
155 ‘Zimbo Ouen’ appears to know the real identity of ‘171’
website of ZimFest’s cultural importance, and of affinities and losses that dominate the white Zimbabwean psyche over and above global trajectories.

Acknowledging the important role that www.thebottomhalf.com played in generating mass participation at ZimFest, the festival’s co-ordinator, Hilton Mendelsohn, said the website represented a core constituency and was not a competitor to ZimFest’s own website, www.wezimbabwe.org. As regards the racial composition of attendance through the years, Mendelsohn said no person was turned away on grounds of race.

But if white people are the ones who are prepared to work to make the venture succeed and are prepared to attend in large numbers, then there is only so much we can do. We put on a number of shows by black artistes and involve Zimbabwean dee-jays of all races. Nobody can claim to be wilfully excluded. We have blacks who are active members of the organizing committee and, of course, blacks and other races attend ZimFest each year in increasing numbers. But if the whites are seen to be the most enthusiastic, we go along with that enthusiasm. (Personal Interview, 2003)

To a very large extent, therefore, the annual ZimFest has been engineered on www.thebottomhalf.com in the year under review (2004) as in preceding and succeeding years. Its website manager was a member of the organising committee before his family relocated to New Zealand, and both pre-publicity and after-event reviews have yielded densely-contributed threads from ZimFest-goers.

But ZimFest also saw the personification of many online identities. Having developed an intimacy defined by cyber-identities or, where virtual conversations have continued off the message board (by direct email contact, for instance), ZimFest has provided the once-a-year opportunity for the manifestation of person-to-person contacts nurtured on www.thebottomhalf.com and the strengthening of those ties in succeeding events. Common Zimbabwean origins have energised these relationships, but the leg work of getting to know each other was often advanced in the near anonymity of the website fora.

156 Personal Communication, Tommy Sharp, 14/05/2005
Actualised relationships could vary in their intensity and effect: from Chaela’s introduction to a job opportunity and her subsequent employment\footnote{Chaela, 03/05/2005 10:24 Re: Who’d you meet thru this forum? Online, available at: http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?pID=110061&iCat=350&iChannel=9&nChannel=Topics Accessed: 12/09/2006} to Green’s liaison and subsequent marriage\footnote{Green, 06/05/2005 08:14 Re: Who’d you meet thru this forum? Online, available at: http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?pID=110061&iCat=350&iChannel=9&nChannel=Topics Accessed: 12/09/2006} and flutterby179’s unelaborated ‘HUGE mistake’\footnote{Flutterby179 03/05/2005 20:47 Re: Who’d you meet thru this forum? Online, available at: http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?pID=110061&iCat=350&iChannel=9&nChannel=Topics Accessed: 12/09/2006} of a courtship (‘Some people really aren’t what they seem to be’, (s)he warns in a hindsight contribution to the forum). Flutterby179’s disappointment appears to be in the person courted or by whom (s)he was courted, rather than in the medium of thebottomhalf.com by which (s)he came to know the other person. Igundwane also strikes a discordant noted: ‘Don’t meet people off here, hate to give the Local Gossips more work than they usually have’\footnote{Igundwane, 04/05/2005 13:45 Re: Who’d you meet thru this forum? Online, available at: http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?pID=110061&iCat=350&iChannel=9&nChannel=Topics Accessed: 12/09/2006}. But a positive account from Julie, describing her ‘meet-ups’ with other correspondents at ZimFest, says:

> It was great to put faces to ‘words’, Chaela, Suzie (a.k.a. ‘Di’) and her family and loads more. As I keep saying (drone, drone) this site is a wonderful extended family. Would love to meet all on here – maybe at next year’s ZimFest we should extend the www.thebottomhalf.com stall by having a marquee for those interested in a ‘getting-to-meet-you’\footnote{04/05/2005 13:57 Re: Who’d you meet thru this forum? Online, available at: http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?pID=110061&iCat=350&iChannel=9&nChannel=Topics Accessed: 12/09/2006}.

The extent to which one allows the reminisces of their Zimbabwean past to become part of their lived present in Britain influences the ambiguity surrounding their sense of belonging in the host country. And yet the perspective is fashioned by choice: the minority of respondents interviewed at ZimFest (Chapter Two) who viewed ZimFest as no more than a beer fest and said they had ‘moved on’ with their lives in Britain, and others of the same constituency who responded passionately to questions about Zimbabwe as a present-day
reality to which they still belonged. As one contributor to thebottomhalf.com using the name ‘ZimFest’ observed, ‘Where we are is just geography. Who we are is life’.162

6.3 www.thebottomhalf.com and Ethnicity

White Zimbabwean attitudes, their legacy and how they are perceived is an anthropological interest behind the scrutiny of this website. The website’s principals use every opportunity to portray themselves as not racially exclusive – unlike, for instance, www.goffal.com and www.inkundla.net – but the discourse as a whole betrays an aggrieved white Zimbabwean perspective. The purposefulness of the white Zimbabwean sentiment is not at issue, but the attempts to disguise the medium as one identified with by all races is, on the whole, unsuccessful. A bias towards ‘white thinking’ obtains in most of the threads, illustrated by the extracts reviewed in this chapter. Where non-whites involve themselves in the discourse – for the website’s management has not sought to deny registration on the basis of ethnicity – the esprit de corps becomes differentiated between what Martin (2001:48ff) categorized as ‘communal’ and ‘associative’ forms of social relationship. In the former, said Martin, you have ‘subjective states of emotion and highly personalized relations’ whereby the ‘cohesiveness’ between the communicants is ‘organic’. The manner in which the white Zimbabweans interact within the fora of this website assumes a common, though not unanimous, antipathy towards black Zimbabweans. Where there is a divergence from this view, the body politic of thebottomhalf.com expresses what Weber, quoted by Martin (2001:49) calls a ‘rationally motivated adjustment of interest’ that draws a line between the dominant as opposed to the extraordinary or deviant perspectives. Perspectives that are from without the dominant white articulation of Zimbabwe’s affairs draw a hostile reaction on thebottomhalf.com.

The following exchange between white Zimbabweans extracted from a thread entitled ‘Why did you leave Zimbabwe?’ is an example comparing the organic unity of the dominant white view, versus the extraordinary view of one (white) contributor calling for a historical assessment of the factors that may have contributed to the anti-white sentiment in Zimbabwe

Truebluezimbo

I do not imagine for one minute that anyone on this site will read this objectively but it needs to be said for once (oh, and by the way - I am white). Why did I leave Zim? Well simple really. I followed the same brainwashed route as everyone else...
I forgot that we whites are not superior...that we invaded the country in the first place and just took over ( the Rudd Concession after all, did not say the BSA Company\textsuperscript{164} could HAVE the country - merely that it could have the mineral and hunting rights). I forgot that the native people did not ask for us to come and "develop" the country. They were quite happy as they were. I forgot – whilst being fiercely proud of being ‘Rhodesian’ – that being a black person in those days was akin to being stateless, that the big strong Rhodesian army killed a fair share of civilians in ‘crossfire’, defending a nation that should not have been anyway.... I forgot the time that the all powerful and FAIR (mind you) BSAP\textsuperscript{165} pushed our 70 year old gardener up against the wall with FN rifles shouting at and berating him for ‘terrorist” activities and then taking him away for three days. When they returned him, he cried uncontrollably for three days whilst he recovered from welts and wounds. After that he just lost interest in life and died three months later (the police meanwhile...admitted that they had ‘the wrong one’ - not even a man???). I forgot that whilst we are very quick to jump up and down about ‘injustices’, we very casually overlook those perpetrated by the ‘brave, wonderful, all righteous Rhodesians’. I forgot that whilst it was Mugabe's winning hand, the land invasions weren't difficult to set up.... by people eternally deprived of fairness and opportunity watching the white farmer bwanas riding past in their mercs...with their other five cars parked at home, their overseas holidays and children getting the most advantageous education available... and wondering exactly how this benefitted them.
I forgot that the whites who stayed on in Zim after independence only wanted to contribute to national good if it directly benefited their own bank balances... and provided they didn't have to get involved with the blacks. I forgot that this was a mess that started a long time ago and was mainly the result of yet another colonial blunder by the great British Empire (which is, thankfully, no longer around).
I forgot the ability of white Zimbabweans to tell stories, rumour monger and over react. (I wonder where young girls got handguns from, why she would have needed all that

\textsuperscript{163} Exchanges on white attitudes to leaving and returning to Zimbabwe, thread started by ‘Nyala’, 10/02/2006. Online, available at http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?nChannel=Topics&iData=146788&iCat=385&iChannel=9&offset=30
\textsuperscript{164} British South Africa Company, the commercial enterprise led by Cecil John Rhodes, which was granted a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria to administer Zimbabwe from 1890 to 1923.
\textsuperscript{165} British South Africa Police, the police force of the BSAC which became the national police force of Southern Rhodesia and its successor, Rhodesia, up until the country became Zimbabwe in 1980.
Anyway — perhaps it was all the ‘rapes’ that happened... which actually didn't happen but resulted in a group of white vigilantes beating up two black doctors walking to work at Pari. I never actually met one of the so called rape victims - but met hundreds of people who knew of someone who knew someone...etc etc etc bullshit).

Most of all I forgot that howsoever my forebears came to live in Zimbabwe, I am now a Zimbabwean - and I will not solve my country's problems by running away and whinging and telling stories and lies overseas, but that I will help by staying there and getting involved, whilst understanding the background of the various players and trying to get more people to stop being so self righteous, self indignant and talking rubbish.

And so I am going HOME... to my country to meet whatever challenges and risks arise, to where I do not have read in the news every day about suicide bombers, about paedophiles queuing up to download offensive rubbish off the internet, about rises in council tax, about another young person murdered, or robbed, or raped, about eleven year olds smoking cocaine, about gangs of youths terrorising neighbourhoods and beating pensioners for a few pounds....

I am going HOME to the SUNSHINE and I will make friends with my enemies, and work with them to stop the rot. There is still a chance MY country will not turn out like this wonderful first world country (with prisoners being released early to avoid overcrowding and patients not waiting five or more hours in the ER at hospitals), but only if I get involved and make my own positive contribution.

So the reason I left Zim....simple I was being a lemming!

taurus66
Well my best wishes on your ever so speedy return to the ruins. So just because the rest of us left Zimbabwe we are now lemmings. You obviously cannot survive in a real economy nor can you contend with living out in the real world. Most Zimbabweans that have moved out for one reason and another did so they could have a future not only for themselves but for their children. And another thing whilst you are going on about how 'I forgot' this that and the other, you also forgot that maybe one’s grandparents made a move to help colonise Africa and help in one way or another to bring the ‘dark’ continent into the new age. This my friend is history, one cannot escape history, not me and certainly not you, so don't go calling us lemmings when at one stage you to did the same.....The pot calling the kettle black and all that.

MSTYLES
I don't think we should be blamed for what our ancestors did, its nothing to do with us and its time to get that chip off your shoulder.

Taylor
Ok so bye. Go back to where there is no news to make you bleak simply because there IS no news, it all has to be passed before it can be broadcast! And while we are forgetting stuff...

We also are so keen to forget the fact that our ancestors I am sure did not go to Africa for anything other than being in search of a new life. Something I think we all who have moved away can relate to. They were not stupid, thick or horrible people. They were just like you and me. There is always two sides to every story. Why did the story turn into one of racialism etc. I don't believe for one minute that people are wrong to cry foul play over the way Zim has turned it's back on it's white population as they are the people who preached solidarity etc. If you don't practice what you preach you will be criticized! At least the White Govts in Africa have shown that as a race we are capable of change and are willing to try to live in harmony.

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166 ‘Truebluezimbo’ is referring to an earlier contribution in the same thread in which a young lady claimed to have left Zimbabwe because of the crime rate, having had to travel around Harare armed with a shotgun for her safety.
167 ‘Pari’, an abbreviation of Parirenyatwa Hospital, the biggest government referral hospital in Harare.
As in other chapters, the need for the analysis to extrapolate from the raw data necessitates an expansive reproduction of extracts from the discourse. This represents textual and contextual aspects of the contributions in order to resonate with the analysis and allow any reading a sense of the emotions at play. It also better exposes the mindset of white Zimbabweans as a constituency, the contradictions within – illustrated by the contribution of ‘truebluezimbo’ and the responses it received – and their negotiation with their new environment in Britain which, as will be shown in this chapter, is not a seamless exercise.

That there is a history behind the antipathy is clear, but ‘Truebluezimbo’ spells out only half of it. The other half, more recent but to which respondents in the extract do scant justice, is that contemporary Zimbabwe represents the very worst of bigotry, mirroring the excesses of the white colonialists – for which there can be no excuse of trying to ‘help’ Africa, as ‘taurus66’ claimed – and betraying the constitutional order that protects not just whites, but all citizens. Nevertheless the mindset of whites in the extract cited above displays a misplaced sense of entitlement: that they were entitled to settle in Zimbabwe, overthrow the nineteenth century political order there and seize the local people’s prized assets – land, cattle, self-determination and, most of all, dignity. When a twenty-first century black government makes historically and morally sound arguments for redress – notwithstanding the historical and moral hash it makes of the process – white Zimbabweans shrug their shoulders and say, ‘Don’t blame us, blame our ancestors’ or worse still, ‘We may have robbed you of your possessions but we brought progress’.

Wrong (2005), researching Eritrea and the adverse effects of the western allies and their periods of responsibility over this east African nation, describes in the Foreword to her book the same unwillingness or inability to comprehend the resentment towards colonialists and their descendants.
Any regular Western visitor to the developing world will be familiar with that awkward moment when a local resident raises, with a passion and level of forensic detail that reveals this is still an open wound, some injustice perpetrated long ago by the colonial master. Baffled, the traveller registers that the forgotten massacre or broken treaty, which he has only just discovered, is the keystone on which an entire community’s identity has been built. ‘Gosh, why are they still harping on about that?’ he thinks. ‘Why can’t they just move on? We have.’ It is a version of the ‘Why do they hate us so much?’ question a shocked America asked in the wake of September 11….It is very easy to be generous with your forgiving and forgetting, when you are the one in need of forgiveness. A sense of wounded righteousness keeps the memory sharp. Societies that know they have suffered a great wrong have a disconcerting habit of nursing their grievances, keeping them keen through the decades. (Wrong 2005:xii)

The suggestion is not that whites in Zimbabwe received their just desserts: the Mugabe government has hardly shown itself an arbiter of justice, with its expulsions of perceived black opponents through ‘slum clearances’ exposing political motives behind much of the policymaking, land redistribution included. What is instructive from a research point of view is the shallow perception of and response to the historical realities that Mugabe seized upon, by many white Zimbabweans who genuinely believe only full restoration of their disproportionate ownership of Zimbabwe’s resources would rescue the ailing economy. This has implications for the role thebottomhalf.com plays as an outlet for a section of the diaspora community. A far-reaching effect of the postings on this website is when others see it as representing white Zimbabwean sentiment, in its most unyielding form, and is brought into even sharper focus on the rare occasion when non-white Zimbabweans venture onto the fora – as in the thread started by ‘josephm’ when he requested the webmaster to introduce a forum exclusively in the Shona language. Two aspects to analyse in this thread: an objection by a white member - though countered by the accommodation by other white members – who stated inaccurately that ‘everyone from Zim speaks English anyway’168; and when ‘Leomud 69’ attempted to correct what he considered a vulgar mistranslation into Shona by one of the white members. Again, reproducing a substantial

part of the thread seems appropriate to convey all aspects of the discourse, both for its
candour and for the uncomfortable inter-racial dynamics that become evident:

\[169\]

**josephm:**
To the boss of the bottom half, I was wondering, maybe if you wanted to, if we could
please have a Shona part in the forums where we can talk our own language. I know more
are white here but i know lots of my black friends who sometimes come here but feel
scarred to write something in shona. If you put a part somewhere where we can we would
like it very much. thank you.

**igundwane:**
Jo old boy, I wouldn't worry about it, go for it if you want. Post away in Shona and I am
sure those that speak / understand it will be happy to join in. It would certainly be a 1st!!

**nemo:**
hi there I mean this in the nicest possible way but I think its a bit unfair because most of us
wouldn’t understand and also everyone from zim speaks english anyway, I know you want
to speak your language but I think it would exclude alot of others. I for one don’t speak or
understand shona

**Luigi:**
nemo thats true - but english might not be his first language. I say if you wanna speak
shona - go for it! i for one wont understand a word you are saying but neway!

**crunchie:**
Does anyone know how to say grasshopper in shona?

**greenleader:**
It's on the tip of my tongue, have a bundu book or search the web for a shona dictionary or
something. i know there are a couple of sites that have like shona/english translations... or
ask someone like peasy who is in zim to ask a local...

**peasy:**
Grasshopper - Svetamadziwa

**greenleader:**
Well done pease!! Always rely on a zimbo

**crunchie:**
Cheers Pease you are a star!!!!!!!

**peasy:**
Anytime guys! (altho i had to act like a grasshoppa coz my maid is kinda duh\[170\]) (gave up
and asked the security guard)

**Maddie:**
\[Imto@Peasy acting like a grasshopper - what a thought teeheehee

**LEOMUD69:**
Grasshopper is not a svetamadziwa! but a "HWIZA". Svetamadziwa
means to suck mucus from the nose or the mucus membranes in the nostrils. That’s so disgusting guys to lie like

http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?nChannel=Topics&iData=146788&iCat=385&iChannel=9
&offset=30
Accessed 3/08/2005

\[170\] A typically condescending madam-servant relationship familiar to white Zimbabweans: the black maid
is ‘duh’ (dull) because she struggles to understand her employer, who likely was communicating in English,
whereas the measure is not applied to the employer, who confesses to speaking little or no Shona (see later
entry by Peasy, same thread).
this. It’s nasty!!! HWIZA is the shona name for grasshopper. I can be your shona DICTIONARY!
Hope i helped someone.

peasy:
Ag for fuk sakes… I am not a shona. I do not have a shona dictionary - why the hell would
i want one.. gross... I asked my maid. and that’s what she told me.. so if you want come and
say that to her f**king war vet face OK! 171

whisper:
calm down dear he was only helping

LEOMUD69:
PEASY THE QUESTION WAS AND I QUOTE " Does anyone know how to say
grasshopper in shona >>I would appreciate it if someone could tell me." YOUR ANSWER
AND I QUOTE ”Grassopper - Svetamadiziwa”. MY REPLY TO YOUR LIES WAS AND
I QUOTE ” Grassopper is not a svetamadiziwa! but a ”HWIZA”. Svetamadiziwa means to
suck mucus from the nose or the mucus membranes in the nostrils. That’s so disgusting
guys to lie like this. Its nasty!!! HWIZA is the shona name for grasshopper. I can be your
shona DIC-tionary! Hope i helped out someone’. YOUR DIGUSTED REPLY AND ONCE
MORE I QUOTE ”Ag for fuk sakes.. I am not a shona.. I do not have a shona dictionary -
why the hell would i want one.. gross... I asked my maid. and thats what she told me.. so if
you want come and say that to her f**king war vet face OK!’

YOU GUYS DO THE MATH. YOU SHOULD HAVE SAID YOU MADE REFERENCE
TO YOUR MAID COZ THE QUESTION WAS SPECIFIC, NOT ANYONE’S MAID!!!
IT WAS NOT DIRECTED TO VASHONA BUT ANYONE WHO KNEW!!! AND FOR
SURE YOU DIDN'T KNOW AND GAVE THE WRONG ANSWER!!! HOPE U HAVE A
PEASY DAY SIR AND WE LOVE YOU TOO!!!!

tontohome:
Thank you leomud69 for your commentary on how the conversation went. I think you will
find that the forum actually records what is said and we don't need anyone telling us again,
twat. Peasy was just helping also, she was asked to try and find out and she did. Someone
gave her the incorrect answer. She need not apologise to you...maybe her maid but
certainly not you.

ZeroK66:
@leomud69 - Indeed running commentary was not needed, chill out! Peasy was giving a
hand.

Although this website’s principals refused to be associated with a specific racial identity,
the allegiances of its membership were clear: the perspectives, beliefs and attitudes
articulated in the exchanges above, but also more broadly throughout the website, allowed
the assumption that whites were the bedrock of the constituency. The visit to the flagship
ZimFest event confirmed this. Pasura problematizes white Zimbabwean activism as visible
(2008:101) but selfishly driven (2008:139) – an assessment which, while not baseless, does
not present the whole picture. While acknowledging racist traits on thebottomhalf.com,

171 A slight variation to peasy’s account: two messages earlier (admittedly a couple of days before, from the
recorded dates of posting ) peasy said the maid could not give an answer and that she’d had to ask the
security guard.

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white Zimbabwean consciousness should be analysed through broader interactivities than this trenchant exchange which, while characteristic of exchanges across the colour line – on this website and others – obscures a reading of the contradictions of entrenched difference yet emotional connection to the homeland. Section 6.5 below draws on philanthropic activities of this constituency to highlight some positive aspects of the connectivity between white Zimbabweans and their homeland. Before that, though, interrogation of white attitudes in the diaspora must continue in order that the contradictions in that constituency are understood.

It is true that white Zimbabwean reactions are often conditioned by a historical colonial mentality that creates imagined spheres of influence in which other races are tolerated only by force of circumstances, with minimal direct engagement. The encroachment of non-whites onto a forum where white attitudes reign provokes uncivil rejoinders where the topic would otherwise have lent itself to an easy-going discourse. It is right, in one sense, that a sphere of interaction is protected and respected. But using difference to demean others is untoward in cyber spheres, as in most public spaces, certainly in Britain where most of the contributors to this forum reside. Yet this is a Zimbabwean website. Semiotically, its symbolism embraces the Mugabe-era national colours; it keeps track of white Zimbabwean sportspersons like Olympic gold medallist Kirsty Coventry and teams which still have a white interest, like the national cricket and rugby teams. Furthermore, subscribers to this website identify themselves as Zimbabweans, whereas on other websites, whites still choose to identify themselves as ‘Rhodesian’ and trade briskly in Rhodesian memorabilia (Eaton, 1996).

Ethnicity then is the inescapable defining factor in thebottomhalf.com’s discourse. But it influences an assertively Zimbabwean protest movement against the Mugabe government, against black nationalism, at times against blacks in general, without repudiating
Zimbabwe as a social reality or affirming Rhodesian nationalism as an alternative way of white linkages to their homeland. For a clear picture of white Zimbabweans’ current, as opposed to historical links to the homeland, the philanthropic pursuits of this constituency, which culminate in a partnership with Mugabe’s health department, discussed later in this chapter, support the important identity distinction of white Zimbabweans from Rhodesians.

**6.4 Anger, Rubber Balls and a Portrait of Mugabe**

One of the most popular stalls when doing fieldwork at the ZimFest 2004 held at Raynes Park was that of the Movement for Democratic Change, the party in parliamentary opposition to Mugabe’s government since 2001. Manned by white Zimbabweans, it sold literature, recorded speeches, and various other paraphernalia bearing the party’s colours or image of the party president, Morgan Tsvangirai. The paraphernalia had some draw, but, monitoring the level of interest from the neighbouring stall of the Britain Zimbabwe Society, the researcher could easily see where the bigger focus lay: a long queue of mostly white males were waiting their turn to pay £5 to throw four rubber balls in anger at a mounted portrait of President Mugabe. The popularity of this stall, which would have been illegal in Zimbabwe, revealed the extent of political allegiance among many of the attendees.

But beyond missile-throwing at Mugabe’s portrait, what could the ‘white diaspora’ do to have a bearing on the political discourse of a country to which many of them clearly wished to belong? Looking around the marquee which housed the MDC stall, the sight of hundreds of whites, if not waving life-sized Zimbabwe flags then bedecked in them or else in the colourful strip of the Zimbabwe cricket team, two British nationals manning the BZS stall said it was not just the identification by white Zimbabweans with the flag that was interesting, but the culture of using it to make ZimFest a patriotic event despite the fact that many of the whites fled racial and political oppression at home. One of the women said she
commonly associated the vaunting of the Union Jack with far-right movements like the anti-immigrant British National Party and was amazed to see the enthusiasm of young white Zimbabweans displaying the national colours not just at the venue, but on the streets outside and in the public transport to and from the event. Was it apolitical sentimentality that drove these expressions, or was there evidence of a purposeful patriotic movement which could engage whites proactively and reactively with the realities in Zimbabwe?

The 2004 thread, ‘I hurt inside’, debated the setting up of a movement without political party ties that would lobby for international intervention to end Mugabe’s rule and restore stability to Zimbabwe’s economy. The divide between apathy and enthusiasm towards the project was evident, as was a mindset extraneous to the dilemmas of the majority black population. Despite living in the country for many years, the thread showed that many white Zimbabweans, while deeply attached to Zimbabwe and the lifestyles it once offered them, wrestled with an understanding of the inequities and the need for their redress which drove the black electorate.

tricky:
We already have countless organisations, so-called non political and non Governmental. Mugabe and his cohorts don't give a monkey's for them or for the UN, UK, USA et al. He will hang on to power for as long as the povo IN ZIMBABWE allow him to. Plain and simple!

Angela:
Ok Tricky - the povo as you so call them .. how would you change things there - if you could ... what do you suggest we do? If we do anything?

---

174 ‘Povo’, from the Portuguese word for ‘the masses’, was imported from Mozambique by Mugabe’s liberation movement, who used the former Portuguese colony as their external headquarters and base during the independence war. It is now as commonly used in Zimbabwe as its opposite, ‘Chef’, which is the equivalent of ‘boss’ in Portuguese and came to be used in Zimbabwe, as in Mozambique, to refer to high-ranking ruling party and government officials.
tricky:
Angela, things will change if and when the people (the *povo*) have genuinely had enough. The fact is that at the moment, despite all the complaining, not enough of them are pissed off enough to actually do something about it collectively. Tsvangirai and the MDC are the only way out of the mess at the moment, but they need a massive show of support from the people. Whites have stuck their heads out, and have paid a heavy price. It’s time the majority were prepared to do the same to get this country back on the road to recovery.

The rigging of the elections would have been a failure if so many people had not voted for Zanu PF. The mass stayaways and big push would have prompted Mugabe's exit if enough people had supported them. It is all very well saying that there is too much repression and intimidation but look at other countries whose populations have refused to take anymore and forced oppressive regimes out of office. The police and army would not be able to fire on protesters if they protested *en masse*. But let's face it not enough of them want to protest.

sideshowbob:
You have a very naive and casual way of looking at the situation in zim tricky. You can't measure the climate in zim in terms of the *povo* being ‘pissed off’ or ‘not pissed off enough’. Assuming you're in europe like i am, i bet you don't quite understand the fear that mugabe has driven into people thru the CIO, military, etc. and can anyone think of an example of an oppressive regime forced out by the people (i.e. a revolution)? This does not happen very often: the most famous one being the french rev. Has it ever happened in Africa?

tricky:
Romania and Georgia are recent examples in Europe, Philippines in Asia. I know about the fear Mugabe and his Government can instil, I've had first hand experience! Anyway, fear and intimidation will go on for as long as the people tolerate it.

171:
I agree with tricky. the people in Zimbabwe are suffering because they are allowing Mugabe to impose the suffering on them. They've had the chance, several times, to get rid of him but they fluffed it. Too many of them voted for Zanu PF in the elections, too many of them stayed at home when they could have taken to the streets. If their suffering was unbearable they'd do something about it.

sideshowbob:
i suppose the european people have the advantage of looking back thru their long recorded history where revolutions and upheavals are common. They can seek courage in this. mugabe is a liberator as well as an oppressor. new territory for zimbabweans.

Angela:
You're right tricky - thousands do turn out to cheer him on - but again - they're on his payroll - not educated enough to know better - or just plain nasty.... When I see those thousands,- I want to be sick, but then I remind myself ... you watch the reports - he can’t fill Rufaro stadium 175 anymore ... I remind myself of when I was in the line waiting to vote - I remember all the people in their MDC shirts ... I remember the truck load of army going past the polling station and people ducking inside ... but then again,. it’s only thousands out of how many millions that are there now, who do the *ululating*?

I'm now tired of hoping for it to 'come right' and I'm sick and tired of crying when I think about all the innocents and everything that has been lost. I'm beginning to wish that I never been born there, never lived there - because then I'd not feel that way I do now. How easy it seems for those of his supporters to turn on us ... Yes we are the minority - but you cannot

---

175 Rufaro Stadium in Harare is one of the main political and sports venues in the country. It was where Prince Charles, representing the Queen, formally inducted Mugabe as the first Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980.
paint all with the same brush ... you cannot kill and maim and hound us from our VERY OWN property (bought fair and square AFTER liberation and refusal from the Govt176).

How much it hurts to know that our ancestors did do wrong. But does the punishment have to be meted out on us - on our generation? This punishment is not only for us - but it's being carried to the MAJORITY too. Why? Because we whites had the stupid idea of educating them about what a dictatorship is, we tried to show what a democracy should be - then the referendum ... and then the full force of his selfish ugliness reared it's head properly.

I wish I could turn off the taps and just stop all this horrible feeling... I hate it that ONE man could've done this to me, my family, my home. As time goes tho' - like it's been said - it becomes more a friend than a love ... the sooner the better ...

tricky:
It’s called democracy, mate.

sideshowbob:
you may know what democracy is, smartA**e, but its clear the zimbabweans do not!
and in my opinion - give them another 50 years before they do.

For the white contributors to this thread, the objective of removing Mugabe was uppermost, to be followed in short order by a market economy that generated wealth for those with capital. Hence, for example, Tricky is underscoring the need for ‘pissed off’ blacks to ‘do something collectively’ about removing Mugabe, in order to ‘get this country back on the road to recovery’. Black economic advancement and measures to protect the emerging class of black farmers and entrepreneurs, many of whom benefited from positive discrimination under Mugabe, do not feature in the discourse. There is only interest in what the blacks can do to vote Mugabe out – and they are berated for failing to do so. All of which suggests a different set of priorities for whites and blacks, and begs the question whether vested interests more than social and economic uplift of the broader Zimbabwean population is the vision behind the political interventions and human rights initiatives by the white diaspora.

Raftopolous (2005) discusses a ‘neo-liberal orthodoxy’ that drives much of the white, anti-government activism in Zimbabwe, in which the rule of law and property rights are

176 Many dispossessed white farmers claim to have bought their land after independence, and to have been issued with notices of refusal in line with a requirement in the 1980s that they could only purchase land which was first offered to, and refused, by the government.
invoked in favour of white capital, yet the historical framework which shaped white influence and affluence in Zimbabwe was of questionable legality. In discussing the legal assuredness with which whites protest their dispossession of assets in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, academics like Raftopolous and Shire (2003) acknowledge the inequalities that the black majority have had to endure and the ‘historical redress’ which Mugabe’s nationalism is said to undertake. For whites, the need of such redress is not their concern. As MSTYLES wrote in the thread, ‘Why did you leave Zimbabwe’, contemporaries should not be punished for the sins of their forbears, notwithstanding that the very privileged economic position now enjoyed might be directly related to historical injustices. Thus, the question might be as Pasura (2008:139) posed it: whether white activism uses the mass discontent with Mugabe’s government as a vehicle towards reclaiming their losses, or genuinely aligns with the deprivation of Zimbabweans under Mugabe and longs for relief for the poorest as much as for the recovery of confiscated white-owned assets?

This approach to the Zimbabwean political discourse, with its extraneous, prescriptive disposition, is what, I would suggest, locates some white transnationals outside of what Wise (2003:154) describes as the ‘sympathetic community of struggle’ or ‘community of suffering’ abroad. It threatens to transform some diaspora communities from being participants and sympathetic listeners into armchair critics or press box commentators of the struggle. It also objectifies and homogenises the reality and experience of oppression and trauma as requiring a mad rush through the streets of Zimbabwe by baying crowds, the assumption being that black Zimbabweans have absolutely nothing to lose from

177 The white colonialists’ overthrow of the Ndebele monarchy and seizure of the population’s assets by deceit and force of arms, to which a passing reference was made in introducing Chapter Five, is one illustration of the disregard accompanying the establishment of white political and economic power in Zimbabwe from the end of the nineteenth century.

178 Exchanges on white attitudes to leaving and returning to Zimbabwe can be found at http://www.thebottomhalf.com/topics/detail.asp?nChannel=Topics&iData=146788&iCat=385&iChannel=9&offset=30

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confronting the ranks of armed police and soldiers with their bare hands. In the words of Wise (2003:159), such logic is premised on ‘the iconographic victim’ who ‘often becomes a politicized, commodified category’, making great media imagery but not necessarily effective as a political strategy.

That there are whites actively engaged in the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe is not disputed. But in the bearing of innermost thoughts in cyberspace, the separation between elements of the white diaspora and ‘the povo’ is coloured by condescension and selfish interest.

6.5 From London with Love: The Shared Health Empowerment

This section addresses the more positive aspects of white Zimbabwean engagement with their homeland from advantaged positions in the British-based diaspora. There is a health care initiative that draws on this constituency to harness transnational support for the provision of professional health care in Zimbabwe. It includes the provision of resources to support health workers dealing with an increasing number of people with HIV-AIDS, and emphasizes their training and equipping to consolidate an under-resourced national health care system. A beneficiary of some of the proceeds from ZimFest, the programme galvanizes Zimbabweans, especially those working in the health sector abroad, to contribute their skills and/or resources towards excellence in their homeland’s health care system (Ray 2005). Zimbabwean medical consultants, general practitioners, nurses and support workers are recruited from the diaspora for voluntary short-term stints in hospitals or for seminars that update locally-based professionals on developments in the global medical world. Non-Zimbabwean volunteer clinicians are also welcome to give of their time and expertise, and the initiative – called ‘Shared Health Empowerment Zimbabwe’ - liaises with other overseas agencies like the Zimbabwe Health Training Support (UK) and
the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta, US, which are enthusiastic about non-partisan efforts to boost health delivery in what is clearly a difficult environment. This ties in with emerging thinking within the public health world about ‘decent care’ (de Gruchy 2007:2), and has drawn solidarity from health workers in Britain and other western countries with significant Zimbabwean populations (Ray 2005). Contributions to fund air travel are sourced from ZimFest and other fund-raising in Britain.

As a variable of diaspora interest in health care and HIV-AIDS on the web discourses, it seemed appropriate to focus on this project, a charitable offshoot of ZimFest and therefore within the ambit of the bottomhalf.com constituency. In a web link from thebottomhalf.com, the ‘Sharing Health Empowerment’ website179 explained the initiative’s objectives:

Our current focus is not on equipment or drugs but on health care personnel. We are aiming to look after, support, build up, encourage and spur on to excellence any and all people involved in the provision and maintenance of health in Zimbabwe. That means not just doctors and nurses although they have been our primary focus up to now. We are also working with pharmacists, physiotherapists, psychologists, dentists and a range of complementary and community health workers.

A thread appeared on www.thebottomhalf.com in February 2006 to promote the cause and its most recent fundraising venture, ‘Teach a Mann (sic) to Fish’. The inspiration for the name of the venture, which featured a London-based Zimbabwean rock group, Mann Friday, was the idiom, ‘Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime’. The emphasis on was on training and resourcing health care professionals on the ground in Zimbabwe to overcome scarcities and be able to offer palliative and holistic care of a quality comparable to world standards, especially to HIV-AIDS-related cases. The feeling was if health workers were helped to deliver quality health

179 The ‘Sharing Health Empowerment’ web page can be accessed directly at http://www.sharinghealth.org.uk/#2 Accessed 10/04/2008. Bold typeface is the website’s emphasis.
care through ongoing training, the service would be consistent despite the constraints. Of course, not everyone who has left Zimbabwe feels the need to support a health sector whose precariousness is largely blamed on misplaced government spending priorities.

casey:180
Inviting you to the "TEACH A MANN TO FISH " benefit gig in aid of SHARING HEALTH EMPOWERMENT's work in Zimbabwe
Mann Friday with supporting act Rockafella
Zulus Bar, Fulham
Friday, 31st March
8pm onwards
Tickets £10 available only in advance online from www.africacircle.com
or in person from Zulus Fulham; Zulus Leytonstone; Southern Sun, 27c Commercial Road, Aldgate - 0207 377 8955; Hunters Deli, 690b High Road, Leytonstone - 0208 988 0530; The Kalahari, 286 High Road, Leyton - 0208 558 6371

All proceeds to SHARING HEALTH EMPOWERMENT, who sponsor volunteer doctors and health specialists to visit Zimbabwe and share their skills with the local healthcare community, with particular emphasis on HIV management and the welfare of AIDS orphans.
www.sharinghealth.org.uk
Please support the TEACH A MANN TO FISH benefit gig and help us to make a difference in Zimbabwe. Enquiries: Starr 07961420840; Hanley 07909918799

Igundwane:
Hell the SPCA only want a £1.00 a month, so does the dog shelter, the donkey shelter, Oxfam, Christian aid, Mencap, RSPCC, The cats protection legume, Noraid, MSF, Scope, Guide Dogs association, local animal shelter, homeless society and @ least another 20 if I flicked through the TV channels .......... Oh bollocks to it, I may as well give away my entire salary !!! Whats the point in feeding my own family, and paying my own rent and looking after my own animals ?? Better I let them starve in favour of all others......................... God is going to reward me bounteously with a place @ his side when I finally stagger through the pearly gates.... but not without giving a £1.00 to the Wingless Angel Society, The Harp Preservation Club, The Pearly Gate Restoration Fund.......... and Jesus’s Annual Booze Cruise across the sea of Galilee.

casey

Maybe I should have explained that this is not just charity, it’s investing in Zimbabwe’s health care sector. We realise that, like many aspects of society in Zimbabwe, health care has been under enormous pressure due to a number of factors. A key problem has been the temporary or permanent emigration of health professionals to other countries, leaving fewer and fewer health care workers to look after an increasing number of sick people. Other significant causes have been the collapse of the economy and general instability in the country. The increasing cost of health care worldwide, shortages of drugs and lack of access to many of the rapid advances in medicine have also contributed to our health care problems. All of these factors have come at a bad time for our country for they have coincided with the worst health problem ever to face us, in the form of the AIDS epidemic. About 1 in every 3 Zimbabweans walk around and try to conduct their daily lives whilst infected with HIV, and many of these people feel unwell and are getting progressively sicker.

HIV-AIDS training has been our main focus up to now. We are working in partnership with the Centre for Disease Control, Atlanta (CDC) that has an office in Harare. Our aim is to have offered this training course to every doctor in Zimbabwe. While the course covers the broad aspects of HIV, its main focus is on using Anti-Retrovirals (ARVs) for the management of HIV disease. ARVs are not yet widely available in Zimbabwe but they are coming in slowly, and since the advent of generics they are becoming more affordable. ARVs make a dramatic difference to the lives of HIV positive people and can prolong and significantly improve their quality of life.

This is our new project and the one with which we hope to work with specialists in London. Many Zimbabwean specialists have left and we are starting to see gaps in some areas e.g. cardiology, endocrinology, respiratory medicine & paediatric psychology to name a few. We want to pre-empt a dearth of knowledge in the country by working with specialists in the UK and South Africa to help maintain standards and upgrade our knowledge.

This project will ensure that standards of medicine in specialist areas are kept up and that it will be a place where health care workers of any description would be comfortable and happy to come back to anytime.

We would greatly value your support!

As the researcher learnt when attending a 2008 meeting of this initiative, even people outside the health profession are involved, among them Starr Benyon, a ZimFest co-ordinator. The following chart reviews some of the short-term gains of this initiative.

Table 6.1 Shared Health Empowerment Objectives, 2007-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZimFest</th>
<th>BMA(^{182})</th>
<th>Kings Link</th>
<th>Obstetric Care</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£900 from ZimFest funded a tutor to lecture and serve as an external examiner at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), November 2007</td>
<td>Funded a medical student and a qualified doctor to visit NUST(^{183}) School of Medicine, Bulawayo in August 2008</td>
<td>Facilitated a link between Kings College Hospital (London) and (a) the UZ College of Health Sciences; (b) the NUST School of Medicine. Hosted UZ, Dean of Health Sciences at Kings for tutorials, meetings and to interact with diaspora and develop areas of co-operation.</td>
<td>£20 000 sourced for: (i) Train the trainers course for UZ Faculty in Kadoma, Zimbabwe, February 2008 - nine faculty members were trained; (ii) Simultaneous workshop in Kadoma attended by 39 midwives, 13 doctors and seven obstetricians (all local)</td>
<td>Project initiated by Kirsten Scott, white Zimbabwean medical student at Kings: a) Kings and NUST students correspond regularly for collaborative learning and peer review; b) 500 medical textbooks dispatched to NUST c) Five Kings students – including Scott – conduct seminars on reproductive health alongside their NUST colleagues for secondary school students across Bulawayo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{181}\) Meeting at BMA House, headquarters of the British Medical Association, Tavistock Square, London, 26 April 2008

\(^{182}\) BMA – British Medical Association

\(^{183}\) NUST – National University of Science and Technology, a state university in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
It is important to clarify the situation of the Shared Health Empowerment initiative within a discussion of Zimbabwe’s white diaspora. As a variable, it is less visible in the online discourses of this constituency than it is in the organisational offshoots of the constituency’s flagship event, ZimFest. It ought to be remembered that neither ZimFest, nor its associated websites – thebottomhalf.com or wezimbabwe.org – claim an ethnic exclusivity: the dimension is introduced by this researcher on account of the overwhelming majority of online subscribers and real time supporters who are from the white Zimbabwean diaspora. If thebottomhalf.com and wezimbabwe.org wished to press the point that they harbour no such designs for exclusivity, the active benefiting of their efforts by institutions and professionals in a Zimbabwean health care sector that is resoundingly non-white would support their claim. For it is true that the ethnicity variable which impacts so many other interactions on this forum is far less in evidence in the interactions that resource health care from this constituency. Nevertheless, the association with ZimFest is a connection to a broader constituency that aggregates a white-led activism in the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain which, for better and worse, is a component of externally-based discourses seeking that connectivity with various phases of the Zimbabwean situation in the homeland.

6.6 thebottomhalf.com and Gender

The conduct of female online users has revealed possibilities for gender roles that defy stereotypes in the African context – whether through pastoral counselling on goffal.com, or asserting the modern woman’s public persona on both goffal.com and inkundla.net. But there may yet be another area where Zimbabwean women are pushing the boundaries, and that is the sexual assertiveness manifesting itself on thebottomhalf.com. Particularly in the inter-gender discourses, women on this website have shown a propensity to ‘perform gender differently’ (Threadgold 1997:1) in such a way as to redefine their social world, culture, and subjective views of relationship. Taking advantage of the anonymity online
and the liberal tendencies which arguably come easier to those moving in white Zimbabwean circles, this ‘semiotic of habit change’ and women’s representation (Threadgold 1997:5) frees the female user actively to make, interpret and re-order narratives at her leisure. The result is more vibrant but irreverent gender contact, symptomatic of a new environment in which media and media associations have empowered women’s behaviour.

A 2005 study by the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in the US found a growing acceptability by men of assertive female behaviour, particularly in relationships (Russell, 2005). The random survey of 200 men found that 26 preferred conservative women, 46 said aggressive and conservative, and 138 said they like aggressive women. The survey suggested that ‘the influx of confident women in the media has had a significant impact on the trend toward more aggressive women. The media shows women being assertive and free with their sexuality’. Women in the western context had ‘rewritten patriarchal knowledges’ (Threadgold 1997:36) and their online conduct reflected their growing confidence. Deborah Fallows, Senior Research Fellow at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, observed in her foreword to the 2005 study, ‘How Women and Men use the Internet’ that ‘women are catching up to men in most measures of online life. Men like the internet for the experiences it offers, while women like it for the human connections it promotes’.

The palpable interest in a male newcomer who starts the thread below by declaring his interest in finding a Zimbabwean partner demonstrates both the assertive and ‘human
connection’ characteristics of the www.thebottomhalf.com female web user. Their responses are almost instant and barely restrained.\textsuperscript{184}

ZeroK66:

Hello all,

Well, 2 years ago I landed in this country. Took me ages to get a job and all that. 2 years down the road I find myself surrounded by pommee\textsuperscript{185} mates, fantastic job, doing far better for myself than I ever expected. I have been sooo lucky it is not funny. So whats the problem? I still find myself lacking in a social life I am comfy with. Pommee women as fantastic as they look - are dogs. The guys are generally pricks. There is that lack of clicking with a crowd of people.

I got an e-mail today from Bottom half saying my profile had not been updated in 2 years... so I popped in and thought maybe this is what I am lacking... interaction with people that came from the same background, a similar lifestyle... those who understand without needing explanation. Okay, so all of that is very boring, what I am trying to say is I need to get back in the loop with you lot... here I am, hello and when is the next Zimbo event?

Cheers,
Leon
PS: Here is a silly pic a me incase someone here knows me from home
http://www.faceparty.co.uk/public/486/images/zerok66_2761099.jpg
Exeter/Devon
Harare/Zim - Left June ’02

ZeroK66 :

Right, so the photo is a flop... never mind. I’m in NE London by the way... down the road from Leytonstone.

Chaela:

Oooh Leytonstone you say? Well I suggest that you get your butt to Zulus\textsuperscript{186}, and when you do so, you tell me and I will meet you there for a drink. There is no excuse. And another thing! When are we doing this?
PS great pic . And you're right this is what you've been missing!

ZeroK66:

When you want to go. You local I take it? I need to meet a load a Zimboz... hope you know a few. I live in Southwoodford which is a 5 min drive from Zulus... I just never go - such a tit. PS: Thanks for the comment on the pic... *blush*

Chaela:

I know one or two....(or more perhaps) And yes, you are a tit if you're not going to Zulus and it's just down the road from you! Will give you the grand tour... soon... very soon.....

peasy:


\textsuperscript{184} ‘It has been a while – Going back to my roots’, Thread started by ZeroK66, 04/04/2004 Online, available at:
\textsuperscript{185} ‘Pommee’, the name that was given to British expatriates in white Zimbabwean circles
\textsuperscript{186} South African-owned pub and restaurant, also popular with white Zimbabweans
Igundwane:  
Little C is always up for a Drink ...... And Fresh Nyama187 !! Great pic. The boy is cute!

ZeroK66:  
Oh dear.... what have I got myself in for???

Chaela:  
B*****ds.... I haven't nicked anything... and anyway Peasy, not only are you in Zim, but you are spoken for  
*smirks @ peasy*

ZeroK66:  
*shocked*  
Ahhh guys... I am reading this!!

Chaela:  
Did we say that out loud?

peasy:  
Wipe that smirk off ur face chicken! I may be in zim, but anything is possible with a web cam!!!!!!!

Chaela:  
well....... Leon....  
At least you can't complain about the friendliness around these parts!!  
Peasy, webcam shwebcam!!

peasy:  
parts What parts, where parts, why parts, my parts

ZeroK66:  
There is deffo no lack of friendliness or humour. Webcam??? - Did I mention I have one too...

zimbo girl:  
easy girls, he's only new! don't worry sweetie, these girls won't bite unless you want em too! lol

peasy:  
Can i bite?

Chaela:  
hey, I'm not easy!! And anyway...... bugger off ZG! He's already being sliced too thin to accommodate all of us

The women’s assertiveness in the thread above comes from the bold end of a western liberal perspective of gender relations in which public expressions of attraction towards another person would not be entirely untoward, even where the object of affection is a relative stranger. Whether banter or angled towards a relationship, it fits with the access websites give for producing and receiving ‘greater portions of our personal and professional selves […] placed online for exchange and interchange’ (Burnett and Marshall

187 ‘Nyama’, vernacular for ‘meat’ or ‘flesh’.
and marks a seamless transition from the Westernized upbringing of whites in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe into the liberated woman’s role in many western websites. By contrast, the exchanges across gender on inkundla.net deferred to customary men-in-council and women-on-the-periphery binaries, an embedded understanding of role and place that would not have countenanced the displays of attraction in the thread above. For the dominant user types on thebottomhalf.com’s Zimbabwean fora – white Zimbabweans188 - there would be no such opprobrium. They would share the Zimbabwean academic Gaidzanwa’s (1985:13) reading of this assertiveness as ‘the kinds of calculations and choices a woman creates’, which are her ‘mark of liberation and freedom’.

### 6.7 Thebottomhalf.com as interlocutor with the host culture

In mid-2004, the Immigration and Naturalisation Department in London suspended the issuing of Commonwealth ‘ancestry visas’ to progeny of expatriate British citizens because it said this route of immigration was being abused (Payne 2005). The fears of the British government were not unfounded. The researcher spoke to two reliable sources in Harare who explained how, for a tidy sum, employees in the Registrar-General’s Office in Zimbabwe could be persuaded to ‘doctor’ birth certificates of Zimbabweans with English surnames whose links with their British forebears exceeded the two generations margin in which a descendant could claim rights to settlement in Britain. The effect of the ‘doctoring’ would be to make the Zimbabwean applicant’s relationship with a known ancestor less remote; so for instance, a great grandfather from Britain becomes one’s grandfather through the alteration on a certified extract of the father’s document from the Births Register in Harare. It was difficult to ascertain the extent to which this abuse occurred, but that it did occur is more than likely.

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188 See Case 2 of Section 3.4 of Chapter Three
The decision by the British government to suspend the process left many white Zimbabweans in Britain trapped between the post-arrival four-year visa, and qualification for permanent residency, which is followed by naturalisation. A campaign on behalf of such cases reached the House of Commons, where legislators said the plight of white Zimbabweans in Britain was disgraceful (Payne 2005). Predictably, the campaign generated heat on thebottomhalf.com, the discussion reflecting the exasperation of white Zimbabweans who in their persecution at home were derisively referred to as Britain’s children, but who now found themselves anonymities in the queue of migrants from all parts of the world struggling to settle in Britain. 189

Essie:
I am trying to find out as much information as possible on the next steps after the 4 years is up. My visa is up at the end of this year and I want to make sure that I do everything right and am well prepared with all the information that is required! I would appreciate any information that anyone can give. My understanding of the whole thing was that you have to get nationalised and then another year and you get a brit passport but I was just reading on the Home Office website and just to be nationalised you have to be here for 5 years so now am VERY confused!!!!!!!!

chabwino:
Well, the Home Office has held our documents for nearly a year now. Apparently they’ve suspended applications under the ancestry route. My wife couldn’t attend her uncle’s funeral in February coz to retrieve her passport from Home Office would be a hassle and besides, the visa had run out. So we’re stuck here. That in itself is not so bad; it’s the anxiety of not knowing what’s going to happen when that kills us. I’ve taken it up with our MP coz this is getting ridiculous

sebear:
It is ridiculous! We haven’t cheated the system… we are not bogus. We have traceable ancestry. So if some people have abused the system that’s the Home Office problem, why make it ours? I get sick of a country which welcomes people from all four corners of the earth who can’t speak a word of English but gives us, their kith and kin, 190 so much crap. No wonder the system is abused.


190 There is an important historical resonance in the language and argument used by ‘Sebear’. The then British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, once infamously ruled out military action against white Rhodesian rebels led by Ian Smith who had declared the country independent of the crown in 1965, saying the British public would not support a war against their ‘kith and kin’ (see Chung, 2006:138). Zimbabwean nationalists, including Mugabe, who had urged military intervention, to this day refer bitterly to Wilson’s statement when justifying the expulsions of white Zimbabwean landowners and arguing for the culpability of the British government in Zimbabwe’s history. It is interesting that ‘Sebear’, who is quite likely a white Zimbabwean refugee, makes the kinship argument to justify preferential treatment for Zimbabwean whites seeking settlement in Britain.
chabwino:
OK, my MP’s taken it up with the Home Office Minister. And we’re getting some press publicity hopefully in the coming week. Watch this space.

The interlocution of the white Zimbabwean constituency with the British government can be seen as a parallel of other Zimbabwean constituencies’ advocacy of Westminster: the Ndebele community’s briefings on the political situation from their perspective (www.inkundla.net, Chapter 5); goffal.com’s monitoring of immigration detention centres and support for Zimbabwean detainees (Chapter 4); and AZJUK members’ interaction with the same detention centres (Chapter 7). All constituencies galvanised social capital from their own online networks, and political capital from their advocacy in the host country, to raise important matters that affected their constituencies. But it is an important discovery for many that white Zimbabweans face the same obstacles, bureaucratic and others, as other communities when negotiating their immigration status and other factors related to their integration into British society.

6.8 Conclusion

Despite the existence of other ‘white’ websites which still identify with pre-independence Rhodesia – as Zimbabwe was known – there is decisiveness on the part of this website’s management and membership in opting for a Zimbabwean identity. Nowhere on this website do the old symbols of Rhodesia that adorn websites like ‘Rhodeians Worldwide’ and ‘Rhodesia was Super’ appear: the flag, the coat of arms, even the rendition of the old ‘Rise, O Voices of Rhodesia’ national anthem. Rather, thebottomhalf.com identifies with Zimbabwean flag on its web portal, and users appear proud to associate with it on their user profiles. The ZimFest emblem also embraces post-independence Zimbabwean symbolism, and the event itself, as pointed out, is thronged by whites dressed in Zimbabwe national colours, if not the Zimbabwe flag itself.
The ability of white Zimbabweans through the medium of thebottomhalf.com to subsist in a Zimbabwean identity as well as their British environs is part of what is described in diaspora studies as a ‘triadic relationship’ (Harris, in Jalloh and Maizlish 1996:7) connecting them with both Zimbabwe and their host/adopted countries. In the differentiation of communities of Zimbabwean origin and their cultural expressions, the case of white Zimbabweans understandably exhibits the greatest connectivity to the British context. Many are, after all, of British descent (Eaton 1996). But there is also an empathy and familiarity with the situation in Zimbabwe, and nostalgia for the lifestyle left behind is frequently drawn upon in keeping the homeland on the agenda of the web fora. Even if at times for selfish rather than philanthropic motives, the white diaspora remains affected by the turmoil there and evidence of hope in the online threads that their relocation to Britain might be temporary, if the political and economic situation at home resolved itself, suggests that the embedding of the white constituency within the Zimbabwe situation is not about to dissipate.

To the extent that their connectivity has allowed them a strident critique of the black nationalism that expelled them from their homes and factories in Zimbabwe, the white diaspora can be said to have strengthened the British mainstream political discourse that is anti-Mugabe and regards the anti-white campaigns as central to the destruction of the economy. Nevertheless, even the most strident white critics of Mugabe’s nationalism who may have grown used to the idea of settlement in Britain have been drawn to a geographic-specific website that voluntarily associates them with Zimbabwe’s present-day realities. In this sense, and despite imperfect motives on the part of some, the bottomhalf.com might claim some credit as ‘not a shelter or a structure built to protect its members from global society’ but a place where ‘members are able to integrate themselves in both communal and associative systems of solidarity’ (Martin 2001:67).
CHAPTER SEVEN: Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK

7.1 Introduction to Chapter

Earlier chapters alluded to imaginings of space, community, nations and histories, each fulfilling desires by transnational constituencies to be relevant to some aspect of Zimbabwe’s affairs. Specifically, the thesis conceptualises how the public sphere and its extension utilises the wilful flow of capital, all the energy and emotion invested, plus the advantageous situation – in financial and other terms – of those in the diaspora to link them with the homeland and the professional and social contexts there. The emergence of a network of Zimbabwean journalists who have relocated to Britain was fuelled by their desire for a social presence, online and offline, to sustain morale and share opportunities for study and employment as they became known. In its geographical dislocation from Zimbabwe, the Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK is another by-product of imagination: a central feature for its own purposes (as a forum for Zimbabwean journalists in Britain), but a contraption external to the realities in Zimbabwe. It is almost as if the transnational journalists will themselves back into Zimbabwean spaces without the dangers that face their colleagues on the ground. It is, as Taylor (1995:3) would suggest, ‘going through the motions’.

Yet the usefulness of the forum and association to its members sustains it. Including a network of journalists abroad in this research unlocks the thicker question of whether Zimbabweans with competitive skills and qualifications are being absorbed into the British job market and if not, what the reasons for this are, and how, if at all, this can be addressed. Studies have shown that while Zimbabweans arriving in Britain offer a skills and language
set that justifies the attention of the medical, media, legal and education professions, among other skills (Bloch 2005:35-38), there is concern over ‘unused skill areas’ (p58-59) or ‘de-skilling’ (p16) as a result of Zimbabweans desperate for work doing ‘menial jobs’ far below the value of their qualifications (Chetsanga 2003:2-7). Pasura (2008:179) described it as ‘a U-shaped occupational mobility’. In these uncertainties and restricted opportunities, Zimbabwean journalists have banded together, both those still practising their profession, and a considerable number of others who were forced into other forms of employment.

The pull factor in many of these overseas movements is ‘common ground’, ‘common interest’ or ‘common origins’, whether as a location or a demographic value. I have added to the social formations under review a more orthodox frame of participation via ‘professional practice’, a recognized conviviality kept together by skill and a sense of responsibility to a constituency, with a code that governs its conduct. This conviviality with a set purpose determines the interactivities of a society of professionals, organised around an agenda and a code of practice, and motivated by altruism, accountability, excellence, duty, honour and integrity (Jonsen 2002). It is recognized that unlike the other three case studies, which are ethnically based, this network has benefited from prior ‘traditions of collegiality and occupational community’ (Tunstall 2001:4). Evidence of occupational influence – use of source references and personal identification in postings to the forum – attests to a difference which a professional code and training brings to this website. And yet, heated disagreements do arise, proving that a profession-based constituency is not insulated from social relations, but is ‘conditioned by the political discourses of the public sphere’, particularly ‘where questions such as indigenous rights and rules governing the access to natural resources are put on the agenda’ (Aarsaether and Baerenholdt 2001:39).
The quoted authors are discussing interactivity across networks not necessarily professional. But any network engaging in reflexivity will not fail to be affected by issues of politics and indigenous rights if they have emerged from a history that is fraught with ethnic conquest and civil unrest. For the journalists, notwithstanding their elevation of professional and economic over political pursuits, are by their constitution as Zimbabweans abroad political citizens and cultural subjects, affected by the politics at home and aware that there are socio-historical rifts, however much elites might seek to suppress them.

7.2 AZJUK: Emerging out of the Rubble

The Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK was founded on the liberal tradition of respect for private citizens’ rights to be informed and to express a view, as against ‘republican and deliberative traditions’ (Habermas 2006:412) which promoted a ‘patriotic’ discourse that stymied the freedom of expression in general, and the private media in Zimbabwe in particular (Ranger 2005:7ff). The motivation for the government’s assault on a free press was Mugabe’s perception of a calculated encroachment by western governments and their ideals into the Zimbabwean public space, particularly through Zimbabwean citizens abroad (Mugabe 2003; Meredith 2002:154; Jeater 2007). The self-regulation model of media advanced by new technologies which gave capacity to all comers to articulate their views, was seen by Mugabe as an opportunity for external forces to foist their political and cultural choices on Zimbabweans not for the benefit of the majority poor, who are largely without access to media technologies, but to brainwash elites who preferred western-mediated discourses to those more closely embedded in Zimbabwean culture. These elites were attacked by Mugabe as un-Zimbabwean, un-African – in his own words, ‘people without totems’ (Ranger 2003b). This assumption of
passive reception of information by a highly literate population is contestable. But it suited
the Leninist-oriented philosophies of the Mugabe government to view everything outside
their chosen perspective as an intrusion by western capital.

To counteract the perceived moral and political intrusions, the Mugabe government
resorted to a lockdown of what unrestrained media there remained, with legislated and
extra-legal pressures being brought to bear on journalists and media organizations
considered to be out of step with the establishment. Privately-owned newspapers, radio
stations and the semi-independent Joy TV channel were closed down, and other media like
the Financial Gazette and the Daily Mirror and Mirror on Sunday were the subject of
hostile take-overs said to have been sponsored by the government’s intelligence operatives.
The developments sent scores of journalists abroad: some, the victims of violence or
threats; others having lost their employment with no prospects of being employed
elsewhere. The Daily News, flagship of the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe
company owned by cellular network mogul, Strive Masiyiwa, was bombed and forcibly
closed (Meredith 2002:203-4). So too was Brian Kagoro’s Voice of the People radio
station (Zimbabwe Media Dossier 2003). Kagoro abandoned his project and, after serving
for a couple of years as Chair of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, he left Zimbabwe to
join a Nairobi-based human rights network. Masiyiwa and his editors fled to South Africa
where, for a time, they continued an online edition while mounting a succession of
challenges at various levels of the Zimbabwean legal system. Mostly, they were successful,
but police ignored court orders, seized the newspaper’s equipment, and surrounded its
Harare and Bulawayo offices, making it impossible for the Daily News to be printed.
Eventually, a reconstituted Supreme Court overturned the lower courts’ rulings and said
the Daily News had failed to comply with new registration laws (Chidyausiku, CJ et al.,
2003).
Masiyiwa continued paying his staff for months after the closure, but it became clear with the Supreme Court ruling that the loss of revenue and limited circulation online would make the resistance unsustainable. Unable to join the flight to South Africa en masse, the beleaguered Daily News journalists, together with others from independent weekly papers still operating who had been hauled before the courts on new media law violations, began the trickle to Britain, whose asylum policy in the early 2000s was a lot more sympathetic than that of South Africa. So began the build-up of the presence of media professionals – but it was a couple more years before 2005, when the first real steps were taken towards formal networking.

7.3 Generation of a Movement

The objectives of the association were introduced in Chapter 2. Cognizant of growing numbers of Zimbabwean journalists who were forced by economic and political circumstances to relocate to Britain, a movement was formalized for solidarity and to exchange information about career and educational opportunities, given the indefinite nature of their need to remain in Britain. The thread below charts not so much the movement’s generation as it does its naming (or re-naming), after controversy arose over the name ‘Exiled Journalists’ in the original title, the ‘Exiled Zimbabwe Journalists Association’. The thread does not make explicit why the journalists resented being classified as ‘exiled’, but it may have something to do with the distinction Wise (2006:4) makes between ‘exiles’ and ‘diasporas’: ‘The first is an identity forced upon a group, the second has an element, I argue, of voluntariness’. Not all the journalists, it seemed, wanted a political victim’s angle to their transnational condition. So, within the space of an hour’s online collaboration, the new website was re-christened, a process in which the forum was all of subject, venue of and vehicle towards that re-christening.
elton: colleagues, it has come to my attention that some members have expressed misgivings over the email/web address’ name of the group. for the record, the moderator was advised by the steering committee to set up the email group under that name and did not take a unilateral decision in so doing. Could disgruntled members kindly put their concerns forward via the group for open discussion?

sandra: i have also received complaints. but if i remember the yahoo groups address is not the name we will call ourselves so i do not think it matters since this is for internal comms only. i understand some journos are not in exile but others are. i suggest we leave the yahoo groups ad as it is but our other comms will be without the exiled. i’m surprised people are not writing at all - where are u people?

elton: sandra, forward and blessing now have access/privileges necessary to make any and all changes to the group email settings, including name change, invitation/ban of members etc. any queries can be raised directly with them. hope this helps.

sandra: i guess we can just remove the exiled part of it if people are not comfortable. as long as we fight to achieve our goals.

forwardm17: Can we use Association of Zimbabwe Journalists UK instead and move on if that’s okay with others. Like what Elton echoed can we use this egroup for comments, suggestions, notices, ideas and anything that one thinks might be of interest to members of the association.

February 2, 2005: 9.58pm
Hello,
The moderator of the exiledzimbabwejournalistsassociation group has changed the group's name. This means that both the group's email address and the group home page location have changed. The group email address: associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk@yahoogroups.com
The group home page location: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk
Regards,
Yahoo! Groups Customer Care

It is interesting how this group quickly established standards for its online membership, drawing from a shared professional background and a desire to achieve more focused objectives through the forum and in public association. The use of personal identities was insisted upon, as was the insistence that quotes taken from books or articles elsewhere

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be correctly attributed194. A UK-based member and another journalist in Zimbabwe who used the forum to promote opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai’s statements and to advertise his party’s events both felt it necessary to withdraw from the forum after a divided membership could not agree on whether their material was of genuine public interest, or free and excessive advertising which presented the forum as an unbalanced medium supporting one side of the political spectrum.195 It says much for the strength of the forum that firstly, political activists within the group could not monopolize the site for their ends without objection, and secondly, that the response was divided not by political affiliation, but by different interpretations of newsworthiness and the sometimes fine line between information and advertisement that preoccupies many a conventional newsroom.

Eight months down the line, the network began to register an offline presence and, through some of its members, to establish useful contacts for interlocution with local and foreign journalists and with British authorities on matters of refugee status, access to resources, and press freedom.

Bristol launch for UK Exiled Journalists' Network Message #509 Tue Oct 11, 2005 10:50 pm196
forwardm17
Hi All,

Many of you probably you know I work for a media ethics charity based in Bristol, MediaWise Trust which runs the Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Media Project as their Communications Officer. The project's thrust is to fight for fair and accurate representation of refugee issues in the mass media. One of the project's aim was to identify exiled journos in the UK and have for past year I have asked Zim journos to join this network too which includes all journos world over. NUJ197 and the organisation I'm working for launched this to ‘Crimtata’, whose true identity is difficult to establish. Crimtata was forced to re-register using his surname.

194 Thread started by forwardm17, (06/02/2005) entitled ‘Zimjournos story’, http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/40 Feb 6. The contributor was correcting a colleague who reproduced an article on Zimbabwean journalists published by the Exiled Journalists Network, without crediting the source.
197 NUJ, Britain’s National Union of Journalists
network which is now registered as a company limited by guarantee and we're in the process of registering with the Charity Commission.

I have included a press release we send out last Friday. For the record Zim journos who attended were myself, Sandra Nyaira, Simba Chabarika, Phil Gurupira, Henry Makiwa and Matthew Takaona.

It was open to all those who're ejn198 members among them Blessing, the ladies in the USA who receive information etc

**Bristol launch for UK Exiled Journalists Network**

More than 35 journalists from 20 countries will gather in Bristol over the weekend 7-9 October to launch the Exiled Journalists Network (EJN) - a self-help group devoted to press freedom and assisting journalists who flee to the UK to escape persecution - in the presence of Ms Bemma Donkoh, UK representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Backed by National Union of Journalists' President Tim Lezard and General Secretary Jeremy Dear, Independent columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, and Channel 4's international editor Lindsey Hilsum, the EJN has been set up with the help of the Bristol-based MediaWise RAM Project which aims to improve media coverage of refugee and asylum issues. The EJN plans to register as an independent charity.

The launch conference, funded by the Open Society Foundation, takes place at Bristol University's Burwall's Centre for Continuing Education beside the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

It opens on the Friday evening with a debate before an invited audience about how the UK media reports the rest of the world. Speakers include journalists Richard Dowden (Director, Royal African Society) and Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (Editor, ExpoTimes, Sierra Leone), and the Community Development Officer of Bristol Muslim Cultural Society Farooq Siddique.

"We have contact with over 150 exiled media workers in the UK (from around the world). Too many people who have risked their lives to tell the public the truth have still not been granted refugee status," says RAM Project Co-ordinator Forward Maisokwadzo, himself an exiled journalist from Zimbabwe. "We hope the creation of the EJN will be another milestone in the long process of defending press freedom. The EJN will be looking for moral and financial support from fellow journalists and media organisations," he said.

Saturday sessions include workshops on career development, online journalism, media law and ethics, and training of trainers run by NUJ members and MediaWise staff. Tim Finch (Communications Manager, Refugee Council), Phil Gibbons (Project Manager of Bristol's Radio 19), Kayse Cabdillaahi Maxed (Editor, Somali Voice), and Terry Williams (RAM Project media networks' co-ordinator) will also outline ways in which exiled journalists can assist refugee community groups and their supporters.

The evening will see the launch of a MediaWise report on Exiled Journalists in Europe with contributions from Rich Cookson (MediaWise), Giovanni Massaro (Mira Media, Holland), Balint Molnar (Media Diversity Institute, UK) and exiled journalists from Denmark, France, Germany and Spain. It will be followed by a social event with musicians led by Alphonse Touna (Cameroon) and Fidelis Mherembi (Zimbabwe).

Sunday morning will be devoted to the election of a Management Committee, unveiling of the EJN website, and discussion of the next steps for the Network.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, AND TO BOOK INTERVIEWS, PLEASE CONTACT:** (details)
The importance of this initiative, in addition to putting AZJUK on the radar of British and international media and refugee organizations, is that it now located the Zimbabwean journalists alongside those from other countries who were also working outside their contexts and who were in a partnership with British and other western media organizations to create an awareness of foreign journalists in Britain who were forced from their countries. The reluctance of some AZJUK members to being identified as ‘exiles’ appeared not to have dissuaded the steering committee from aligning with the exiled groups: perhaps, on this occasion, linkage was institutional and individual journalists could exclude themselves if they felt uncomfortable with the arrangement. None of the threads would suggest that there was such unease.

7.4 AZJUK: Making Capital, and Making its Presence Felt

We have so far discussed how, as an emerging constituency of professionals needing to salvage their craft and articulate their identities and media traditions, AZJUK has manifested itself as an organization, as a web presence, and as a partner with other British-based groups pursuing similar objectives. In this section, the discussion moves to what the association itself can contribute to its profession. The thread discussed below relates to how an award aimed at encouraging journalistic standards within Zimbabwe by rewarding courageous reporting with a cash prize (£500) can be managed, and named in honour of the late Zimbabwean journalist, Mark Chavunduka. The idea was that the network of British-based journalists should not just look after themselves, but use their advantageous position in the diaspora to also be supportive of colleagues left behind in Zimbabwe.

199 Chavunduka, the first Editor of The Standard, an independent Sunday paper, was taken into military custody after his newspaper published a story about arrests in the armed forces over an alleged foiled coup attempt. Chavunduka and the author of the story, Ray Choto, were held without access to lawyers or their families for over a week, in defiance of court orders that they be produced in open court and charged or released. In the end they were released without charge, badly bruised and traumatized, and immediately left Zimbabwe for treatment in the West (see Meredith, 2002:149-153)
bleruzengwe:
I am sure we all remember that a donation of £500 was made at the launch towards a Mark Chavunduka award. The award still has no proper name to it and I suggest we call it something like: ‘the mark chavunduka courage in journalism award’ or maybe the ‘Mark Chavunduka award for excellence in journalism or services to journalism’. However the decision has to be made by all of us. Secondly I also think that the award should be given to a journalist working in Zimbabwe who excels and/or show courage on duty. I also think that the selection of the winner should be done by a panel of journalists with members both in Zimbabwe and representatives from our association. I think the award should be given to the winner on the day of the world press freedom day. We could make a vote on the name of the award using the facility on the website but members should suggest other names. Meanwhile i would like to suggest that we get in touch with our colleagues at the ZUJ to normalise relations with them so that we can work together on so many of our projects. please suggest names for the award and then we will have a vote before meeting next Friday.

sandra:
Hi guys - sorry I have been so quiet since Friday because I'm in Scotland for a women's conference but do agree with Ble that we need to make some decisions before Friday so that when we meet we won't be bogged down by things we could have started talking about before the meeting. So let's see what people think about the award - i would rather it is called the MC courage in journalism award rather than excellence. Don’t know what others think. As for ZUJ, I have made contact and they were going into their own meeting to discuss our proposal to work with them and Foster is set to get back to me anytime soon.

ashley:
this award about chavunduka needs to be high on the agenda - but ladies and gentlemen i would also want to point out that we should remember to reward journalists on the basis of genuine courage and not cooking up stories only to get into trouble and then we say this bloke has been a hero having gone through some ruthless treatment at the hands of rogue elements of the intelligence or the police. i want to believe there are many journalists doing wonderful work to help develop the country and they will need to be rewarded and not just look at those who have been arrested only. additionally we need to broaden the scope to cover all aspects of journalism i.e. corruption for example is not only in government - it is also there in the private sector and there are journalists working very hard to expose that and therefore they also need to be remembered for such wonderful work.
That’s my humble contribution

bleruzengwe
Charles that is a well worth contribution but could you also suggest a name which encompasses all those areas which you are talking about. Let’s have the names guys so that we can move. Charles what’s up for Easter?

Makusha
I beg to differ with Charles and propose that the award be called the Mark Chavhunduka Award for Bravery in Reporting on Repression, and that it concentrates merely on that. Others who want to sponsor awards for speech reporting or capturing conferences can also do so. These sponsors want to sponsor an award for bravery, to encourage journalists to remain brave in the face of repressive governments, of which we have and will continue to have in Africa. As for events leading to Chavhunduka’s death I would never be caught dead blaming rogue elements in the state security and intelligence. Torture of journalists who

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200 ZUJ – the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists
201 Foster Dongozi, the secretary-general of ZUJ, who is based in Harare
are seen to be against the regime has been a hallmark of the Zanu (PF) government and
Mark suffered the brunt of it. It was state terrorism, sanctioned by the highest offices in the
land, because the disappearance of Mark and Ray was well reported and if anyone in
Government did not want Mark to be tortured they would have stopped it. The fact that he
refused to reveal his sources despite the torture is what brings the bravery element and the
fact that even after having gotten a chance to get away from the regime he chose to come
back to finish his work, speaks mountains. I propose as above and call for a vote if there
are any alternative proposals.

ashley:
The good thing about living where we are today is that we must be learning how
democracy works sometimes and it is against this background that i also go on to be
askance to Makusha’s response to my earlier point that we champion the cause of
journalists at large in Zimbabwe not just those in the privately owned media. I agree with
what you are saying but i must hasten to point out that i did not seek to endorse the torture
of journalists at all in Zimbabwe at the hands of a repressive regime - but for all intents and
purposes i remain a journalist and not a political activist. The difference is found in the way
you operate. We should seek to ‘liberate’ our country on the basis of reporting factually in
any – story we pen
and in the case of Zimbabwe it is the case that we need to fight for the removal of all the
obstacles to make it easier for every citizen to live freely and peacefully. And i was only
suggesting a more holistic approach in looking at the award as history has taught us that
challenges met by journalists in the state-run media organisations tend to be ignored with
dire consequences. It is against this background that i can highlight the fact that Matthew
Takaona lost his job at Zimpapers after standing up to address the plight of journalists at
the daily news but that point is never highlighted because he was not arrested and sadly, in
your considered opinion he is a conference journalist. I am sure you have not even
considered the fact that he lost his job on the basis of trying to help colleagues against their
problems with the government and employers.

mishkazim:
Hi people. thought I should contribute my two cents worth to the debate on a name for the
MC award. I disagree with Makusha about calling it Mark Chavunduka Award for
Bravery in Reporting on Repression. Thing is, i think as Zimbabweans we are a bit
negative about our own country. I would like to think that our country is going through a
transition and I am positive that there will be change. I suggest we call it something slightly
more inspiring. Perhaps the mark chavunduka award for investigative journalism is more
progressive and inclusive i believe. Mark did encourage investigative reporting at all the
news organisations he worked at, parade, fingaz, standard etc, so i think this name will be a
fitting one. Once you start talking about repression you court controversy and you are
excluding our colleagues in the state media some of who do a grand job and may not want
to be associated with this kind of award. Will there always be repression in Zimbabwe. My
answer to that will be no. I think this award should encourage investigative reporting not
only on government issues, but on the private sector and on other social issues. My feeling
is that the name makusha is suggesting is based on Zimbabwe’s current politics alone.

bleruzengwe:
Can i take it that so far we have three suggestions:

1. MC award for courage in journalism
2. MC award for investigative reporting and,
3. MC award for bravery in reporting on repression

Zimpapers (Zimbabwe Newspapers) is the state-controlled newspaper, printing and publishing group. Takaona, an employee, was also president of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists. His advocacy on behalf of journalists at the banned Daily News was said to have cost him his job.
The vote on naming the award was conducted from 23 February to 5 March 2005, when the results were reviewed and formally adopted at a meeting of the association’s four-member steering committee. Polling was carried out using the Yahoo! Groups facility, as follows:

New poll for associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk Message #166 Wed Feb 23, 2005 1:33 pm

Question

What name should be given to the Mark Chavunduka award

<table>
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<th>Responses</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>40 replies</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MC Award for excellence in Journalism</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC Award for investigative journalism</td>
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<td>25.0</td>
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<td>MC Award</td>
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Table 7.1 Votes to decide the name of the Mark Chavunduka Award

There are two aspects to review here. First, the investment by diaspora-based journalists of what is a considerable sum as an annual form of encouragement to their colleagues in Zimbabwe is an example of how transnational communities can give back to the spheres from whence they have emerged. The Mark Chavunduka Award for Courage in Journalism, as it came to be called, was a bridge between the UK-based journalists and their colleagues at home and demonstrated that the network intended to be of more tangible

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203 Extracted from minutes of the AZJUK steering committee meeting, 5/3/2005, emailed to membership on 9/3/2005

204 Poll at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/166
benefit than mere rhetoric. The second aspect is the continuity in the UK-based network of
tensions between ‘state’ and ‘privately owned’ media which polarized the profession at
home and now reared itself in the debate over the criteria for the Chavunduka award. As
contributors to the thread pointed out, concepts of ‘bravery’ and ‘repression’ can be
relative. For those in the public media who have very little scope for exposing government
flaws, bravery can consist of uncovering irregularities in non-governmental spheres like
businesses, churches or relief agencies. On the other hand, the privately owned media can
interrogate the conduct of state agencies in a variety of ways, albeit at greater risk to life
and limb. The disjunction in this discussion arises from the warning not to reward the
reporting of ‘falsehoods’ which resulted in arrests of some independent newspaper
journalists. Though this warning appeared to be well-intended, it was not well taken by
some former independent journalists who, in turn, acidly remarked that the award should
not go to ‘conference and speech journalists’ – a reference to the fact that state media most
often produced stories on the bases of government press releases, speeches, and workshop
and conference resolutions.

In the end, it was left to the panel of judges each year to select from the nominees
submitted by members, guided by a definition of ‘courage in journalism’ that embraced all
angles of the debate recorded above. The AZJUK steering committee, in its meeting on
March 5, 2005, decided that the panel should select:

…the nominee whose portfolio of published articles are well-researched and demonstrate
evidence of investigative reporting and risk taking within accepted ethical standards. The
nomination should be supported by a comprehensive statement by one or more member of
the association explaining how the specific articles reflect the nominee’s courage in
journalism.205

205 Extracted from minutes of the AZJUK steering committee meeting, 5/3/2005, emailed to membership on
9/3/2005
7.5 AZJUK and Ethnicity

7.5.1 The Ndebele versus Shona Divide

For all Robert Mugabe’s energies towards enforcing national unity, ethnocentricism pervades Zimbabwean communities, at home and abroad, in the twilight of his presidency. This website of professional journalists has not escaped the ramifications of Zimbabwe’s ethnic fissures. Debate on Ndebele autonomy, forcefully argued on inkundla.net, re-emerges in this network. It starts with the reproduction of a Zimbabwean newspaper report on opposition leader Gibson Sibanda’s call for Ndebele autonomy.206

ruserep:

The Daily Mirror Reporter

THE Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) deputy president, Gibson Sibanda is advocating the establishment of an independent state for the Ndebele-speaking people. Speaking last week at a campaign rally to drum-up support for the MDC faction that has decided to participate in the senatorial elections slated for November 26, Sibanda said the establishment of the state would be the only way that could guarantee the Ndebele-speaking people total sovereignty.

‘Ndebeles can only exercise sovereignty through creating their state like Lesotho, which is an independent state in South Africa and it is not politically wrong to have the State of Matabeleland inside Zimbabwe,” said Sibanda.

Some observers project that the tribal sentiments expressed by Sibanda could worsen the split in the MDC, saying there is a possibility of further cracks along ethnic lines.

They say the Karanga, Zezuru and Manyika-speaking sub-ethnic groups might feel threatened by the call for the formation of a Ndebele state and could organise themselves into a grouping opposed to the one that Sibanda leads.

cnyamutata:

The grim prospects - separatist guerrillas, visa to Bulawayo, ambassadors in Harare and Bulawayo. Silly, silly politics.

qmayisa:

Sad prospects indeed ...for some that is. I am observing with interest the very different ideas we all have about a new Zimbabwe. It appears that contrary to my naive beliefs, there is not a common vision of a new Zimbabwe. Perhaps when Mugabe and company are through with our country, it will never be what we anticipated it will be, at least not what it was when we last saw it. I would like to investigate the extent to which regional autonomy is a common aspiration among grassroots peoples of Matabeleland and Midlands. Lest I be caught off guard when I require

clearance from separatist guerillas, visas and good contacts at the Harare and Bulawayo embassy to visit my relatives across the country.

The context in which Gibson Sibanda made the reported remarks was itself one of regional and ethnic overtones. The opposition MDC, up to this point a solid presence in the legislature, was on the verge of a split owing to a decision by Sibanda and others to contest elections for the re-introduced Senate, a second chamber of the legislature which Mugabe abolished in 1987 but which he was re-introducing eight years later for reasons many people struggled to justify, especially as the economy could hardly afford it. The MDC president, Morgan Tsvangirai and his supporters resolved not to participate on the grounds that it was a waste of resources. It happened that Sibanda and Tsvangirai, former comrades in the labour movement, were Ndebele and Shona respectively, and hence their factions came to be labelled in some quarters as the ‘Ndebele-led’ or ‘Shona-led’ formation, which was not entirely accurate. What did seem to be the case on the AZJUK forum was that siNdebele speaking journalists like Mayisa were not totally averse to discussions about Ndebele autonomy, whereas the Shona-speaking community appeared outraged. There was more prickliness in another topic introduced by an article from www.newzimbabwe.com, reproduced on the forum, which focused on ‘Ndebeles and the Zimbabwean national leadership’ (Mkwananzi 2005). Mkwananzi was responding to comments by Prof Welshman Ncube of the MDC that an Ndebele could not become President of Zimbabwe because of the country’s demographics. Both Mkwananzi and Ncube are Ndebele, and the criticism appeared to be targeting the presumption that the presidency of Zimbabwe was the preserve of the Shona majority. In practice, this was a probable presumption – but not even Mugabe at his most rhetorical would venture such a categorical statement, and Mkwananzi’s article, pointing out the injury to all amaNdebele of Ncube’s self-deprecatory statement, was mildly provocative.
But Shona-speaking journalists protested Mkwananzi’s views and the judgement of www.newzimbabwe.com editor Mduduzi Mathuthu in publishing them. One accused Mathuthu, an AZJUK colleague, of fomenting tribalism like Rwandan radio stations stirred up Hutu sensitivities before the genocide in that country. Mathuthu took exception.  

mmathuthu:
Someone has helpfully told me that a writer on your network has passed comment, drawing parallels between New Zimbabwe.com and some Rwandese Radio Station during the genocide. You will no doubt accept that this is strong comment. I therefore ask to join your network, and I would be eternally grateful if you sent through some of the contributions so that I can at least present the other side.  

Makusha:
I was one of several commentators on Mdu’s article. My comment, which is still my feeling, was that I was surprised he published that piece of trash, or the rantings of a rabid tribalist. I think it goes against all ethics to publish one-sided opinionated articles purporting to contain facts that malign individuals and organizations. As the person was making such strong allegations, and Mduduzi was obviously not oblivious to the implications, we can only assume that these were his scrawlings and that he has an axe to grind with Tsvangirai. But as we know him not to be having any personal reason, we can only assume that he was or is fighting a tribal war. I would want him to join our forum for some education, although I am not sure we can contain the poison that he might bring. What a pity indeed. We have never had to deal with this as membership is open to any Zimbabwean journalist. We can say members have to abide by an ethical code which is implied in our being journalists, but which we have not articulated yet, then invite Mr Mduduzi to join as long as he abides by it, or bar him if he does not. His reason for wanting to join as stated in his e-mail is certainly not noble.  

mmathuthu:
Makusha, yours is an open and shut case! You come here pretending to be some reasonable journalist, and want to market yourself as a custodian of integrity, ethics and fair practice. Only charlatans will be fooled by your false jacket of impartiality because you are writing from a position of involvency and advocacy. Do you remember the statement you trotted out two weeks ago in support of your president Morgan Tsvangirai in your capacity as an MDC foot soldier in Birmingham? I am not surprised by your views because you are an MDC secretary for publicity for your district; you are embedded with that party. You have gone head and toe into the bootlicking and fear of authority that has pulverised your movement. Thankfully, there are journalists who retain their independence and who are answerable only to their readers and not politicians. It is useful that before you engage in such debates, you declare your political association.  

You claim that I wrote the opinion piece on our front page today. For someone who pretends to seek only the truth, I think you have a cavalier attitude to facts. When I do have an opinion about your party, I will write it Mr Mugabe and never in my life have I hidden behind a pseudonym, unlike some cheese-eating-surrender-monkeys running riot around here claiming to be media heroes and proponents of good governance.

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208 Mathuthu apparently was already a member, but had not yet activated his online subscription. See message No. 594 of the same thread, online at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/594.
I think your accusation of tribal bias exposes your own fears, whatever they may be. There is no scientific measurement of tribalism, and may I take this opportunity to accuse you of the same? What makes you think you have a monopoly of labelling others? It is clear to me that your criteria of a tribalist is someone who is Ndebele, who has an opinion about anything, and whom you wish to silence so that only your voice, and that of your political demi-Gods can be heard. Why should every Ndebele be labelled a tribalist Mr Mugabe?

Your suggestion that I should be castrated on what I say and what I don't say confirms the above. You only want to hear and dance to your voice. Good luck mate, and your Rwanda project!

sandra:
You guys now see how serious such stories can be. I have seen people like William Bango have since been copied our discussions. Mduduzi on the other hand has also heard through third parties (I did not know he was not part of this forum) - of course we are journalists and that is what we do best. I just wanted to underline what i said and probably before anyone else says anything, retract the Rwanda reference i put in my earlier remarks - they were not made in the context of newzimbabwe.com but the article in question for i feel it is very tribal. i sincerely hope you guys did not take it to mean i was likening newzimbabwe to the Rwanda radio station. I’m sorry if i offended anyone and if u thot that was what i meant. Let us all work for a united Zimbabwe, it’s not going to be easy but i feel we as journalists can make a big difference.

makusha :
All patriots should be wary of fanning tribalism under the guise of trying to fight it, or by discussing it without the sensitivity that is necessary. Tribalism only serves those who fear our united strength!

The emotion generated by this thread confirmed that ethnic difference influenced all four case studies, albeit to varying degrees. Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, described by Nyamfukudza (2005:21, 23) as a ‘dull intellectual ghetto’, may have seemed languid at the surface, but the agitation bubbling below suggested a lot of unfinished business. Sandra’s suggestion that journalists have a role in achieving national unity is well-intentioned, but neglects mention of the disenfranchisement of the southern regions as a result of the centricism of Mugabe’s rule, especially the lack of meaningful devolution of authority to civic and traditional leaders, elected and hereditary, in Mzilikazi and Lobengula’s former kingdom. The constraints on Bulawayo City Council in this regard were mentioned in Chapter 5. The Zimbabwean polity resembles the pre-colonial Rozvi or Munhumutapa Shona empires with token Ndebele representation at vice-president, ministerial and appointed governorships level, but with the siNdebele-speaking regions alienated from significant decision-making.

209 Bango at the time was Morgan Tsvangirai’s personal assistant
A recognition by both major ethnic constituencies – Ndebele and Shona - of the legitimacy of each as domains in the unitary state would have to be a starting point in the post-Mugabe constitutional review and journalists, clearly, would have to reconcile their own views and be receptive to alternatives if they are to be part of such reconciliation and reform.

What was productive in the above exchanges was the conciliation that ensued over the most incendiary of implications – the suggested parallels between Rwandan media discourses that precipitated the genocide, and the tensions in the online diaspora media, specifically in one publication whose editor was a member of this network. The manner in which the issue was clarified, albeit amid other recriminations that remained unsolved, reaffirmed my assessment of this network having benefited from the professional collegiality of its membership.

7.6 AZJUK and the Zimbabwe Political Discourse

Section 7.3 made mention of the withdrawal from the group, amid lively debate, of two MDC spokesmen – one, the personal assistant to Morgan Tsvangirai in Harare – who several colleagues felt were ‘abusing’ the forum by flooding it with free publicity. The antagonism, as contributions below suggest, was not towards the party or its leader, but the practice where a journalists’ forum is blanketed by columns of editorial and graphics promoting one formation and almost no contribution from others. Some, in view of the newsgroup being a medium of professional journalists, considered the imbalance in coverage unbecoming.

ashley:
Makusha in addition to the press statements I think there is need for an extra bit about the shortened version of the release for the purposes of discussion. For example how do

you reconcile the suggestions in the Third Way\textsuperscript{211} vis-à-vis what the MDC is doing on the ground? What strategies do you reckon the MDC can implement to woo the voters because in some way people in my view seem to be shying away from politics. And of course HIV/AIDS has played a part in helping alienate voters from mainstream politics in the sense that with an average of 7,000 dying weekly surely there is more bereavement time rather than caring about MDC or ZANU PF. I think the MDC could do a research to see how the AIDS pandemic has affected people's attitude towards politics.

\textbf{bleruzengwe:}
I accept posting of information but not propaganda. Makusha would do better if he picks a topical issue and posts it on the forum for discussion with members. It's all fine to say we have different political persuasions so let’s have the postings but it does not generate debate rather it discourages members from debating issues and will certainly kill the forum. We have been receiving loads of press statements over the months but I have not seen one e-mail responding to it and this is a sign that members would rather be discussing issues than putting their political persuasion under the spotlight when responding to party propaganda. I feel the forum should be about issues and the campaign journalists working for various political parties should bring hot topics for discussion as opposed to loads of propaganda statements. I would be interested in discussing the serious reports carried in the British media alleging Tsvangirai’s fixation with fighting people within his party than the governing party. I am interested in discussing issues of women quotas in the MDC cabinet than the loads of statements which I have been receiving. I want to know more about the logic of your shadow minister of industry - that guy who represents Mpopoma constituency who used to be a representative of the clothing and textile industry union in the zctu\textsuperscript{212}. It is the leadership of such people i want to talk about and not loads of those statements. I want to talk about the reported looming defections in zanu pf and the impact it may have on Zimbabwe. As journos this forum should be about discussing all the rumours circulating in harare and the experiences of our sources of what is happening in harare, bulawayo, chitungwiza, mutare and even london. I am not a very politically correct person and do not believe in political correctness but if this forum is to become lively lets talk issues and not political labels, that will certainly kill the forum - i have not doubt about that.

In response, the forum moderator took a more nuanced view\textsuperscript{213}. In his opinion, all perspectives were welcome, even if the volume overwhelmed most of us. The forum could do with not just the MDC statements, but also bits from ZANU (PF) and the other political persuasions. However, there appeared to be no-one willing to advance the cause of Mugabe’s party in this forum – although, as we shall see, divergences emerged sharply once the MDC itself was split and the perspectives of both sides clashed on this forum.

\textsuperscript{211} ‘The Third Way’ was a movement started by Mugabe’s estranged former information minister, Prof Jonathan Moyo, who was opposed to both the MDC and his former party ZANU-PF, and argued for an approach which he claimed differed from both parties.

\textsuperscript{212} ZCTU – The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, the labour movement considered the backbone of the MDC

That did make more balanced reading. But it became heated, to a point where suggestions of sexism almost joined tribalism in undergirding the debate.  

sandra:

Philip, I write this response to your comment with a heavy heart. I know we as journalists have taken sides with either Tsvangirai, Mutambara or Zanu PF but I do not believe that this statement was fair really. Instead of attacking and labelling each other, why don't we argue about facts, help Violet see the light if you have seen it by giving her facts or points as to why you think Mutambara is a waste of time. Persuade her through proper conversation that your way of doing things or the way you see things is the right way. I think it is a fact that there are two MDC groups today and that one lost heavily in Saturday's by-election and the other bigger one triumphed but that does not mean that journalists should not interview the losers. I know people are being emotional about this whole Mutambara/Tsvangirai issue but I also feel our role as journalists is to write about what happens on the ground, whether it is to the advantage of the ones we align ourselves with or not. Most importantly my heavy heart comes from where you say Violet must cover HIV/AIDS issues etc etc - I took it to mean because she is a woman then she is not strong or seasoned enough to write about politics - i could be wrong but that's how i saw it.

Anyway, goodnight people.

What had Philip said? He had challenged SW Radio Africa presenter Violet Gonda, a member of this forum, for referring to Tsvangirai as a leader of one of the factions fighting for control of the MDC.  

pasirayip:

Violet are you sure that Tsvangirai is a leader of a faction? Let us be wary of falling into some CIO trap here. Why don't you concentrate your efforts on other issues rather than propping up Mutambara and ignoring critical issues. Report about the number of people dying of AIDS, food shortages and Zanu PF corruption. Nyaya ya Mutambara yawasimbiriria iyi yanyanya (Mutambara’s agenda which you seem to be promoting is a waste of time). Unless you have some interests at a personal level with that faction, like some colleague at New Zimbabwe.Com. Very soon we will call you ‘Editor-Mutambara Desk’.

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216 Central Intelligence Organisation, Zimbabwe’s secret police

217 Prof. Arthur Mutambara became the president of what was regarded as the ‘Ndebele-led’ faction – although Mutambara himself is not an Ndebele

218 There were insinuations of an affair with a senior member of the Mutambara faction in another contribution which was deleted from the forum.
The suggestion that Violet was out of her depth in political reporting and should stick to social issues like HIV-AIDS would not have gone down well with the female membership; it attracted scorn even from male colleagues.219

makusha:
While I would agree that we cannot put Mutambara and Tsvangirai on the same level, I think Philip's comments were unfair. The interview was a two parter; I would not call that wasting time.

ruhanya:
Respecting people means telling the truth Mr Pasirayi. If you Mr Pasirayi start to be dubious and cocky I for one will not respect you and I will attack you and expose your double face.

The tension between dispassionate professionalism and affection by the protracted unease that has gripped Zimbabwe is easy to understand – from both points of view. On the one hand, any supposition that journalists in the diaspora should be commandeered en masse into supporting the presidential ambitions of Tsvangirai attacks the essence of both professionalism and journalism. On the other hand, illegal, violent machinations for which the Mugabe regime has globally been condemned could result in journalists being accused of aloofness devoid of social responsibility. Off the forum, I engaged two AZJUK members who offered opposing views on this matter. One said journalists should never sign up for a political organization, let alone serve as office-bearers (three AZJUK members held positions in the MDC). He said: ‘In my book, all a journalist should do is report factually what is happening, exposing the flaws and assessing the strengths. Even in a war situation, it is not ethical to take sides. There are innocents on all sides’.220 But the other source, an MDC post holder, said circumstances justify a journalist’s active campaign against violence, corruption, disregard of the law and human rights in Zimbabwe. ‘A decent human being will not see the images we are seeing, the reports, the threats from Mugabe himself, and then go on to write from the umpire’s chair while those

219 ‘Makusha’ (message 1616), 23 May; and ruhanya (message 1621), 24 May were among male journalists who challenged pasirayip. Available at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/1616
220 Name withheld, email correspondence, May 24 2006
with power brutalize those who do not. I think when you belong to a party you are more effective.’\textsuperscript{221}

The difficulty is, once embedded in an organization, where do your professional loyalties lie? There is a precedent for such a dilemma. At independence, ZANU (PF)’s external broadcasting service, the Voice of Zimbabwe, was transferred \textit{en masse} from exile in Maputo, Mozambique to take up the leadership and direction of the new Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Zaffiro 2002:81ff). The new Director-General was the party’s former chief representative in New York, Tirivai Kangai, while Charles Ndhlovu, who headed the VOZ in Maputo, was named Director of News. Kangai explained that ‘comrades were attached to the ZBC….After independence, they became regular employees. With this physical penetration also occurred the political and ideological penetration’ (Zaffiro 2002:81-82).

Just as ZANU(PF) harnessed journalists’ skills in the war years, it was unwilling, as a conventional government, to release its cadres to a professionalism that would ensure the new national broadcaster was less partisan than the Maputo-based VOZ. The result was seamless translocation of VOZ journalists from party functionaries in exile to party functionaries in the national broadcaster – an inconsistency, considering the ZBC is publicly funded and not party-owned. This precedent concerns critics of a residual anti-Mugabe phenomenon in the diaspora media, and particularly within AZJUK, who fear that journalists in exile who, for noble reasons, join the MDC, may struggle to make the transition once back in a media-working environment in Zimbabwe - indeed, may not be allowed to make that transition if under an MDC government. This is partly speculative, but as Zaffiro graphically recorded, the ‘patterns of regime influence’ (2002:103) in the

\textsuperscript{221} Mugabe, Makusha (2008) email correspondence, 30 April

252
post-independence period were abetted by a ready pool of party cadres who happened to be trained journalists, such that they could be deployed in a way that allowed the media to distort the record of the liberation struggle to imply that Mugabe’s party alone prosecuted and won the war against white rule. Tsvangirai and the MDC may soon have the opportunity to falsify such fears, but have the journalists within his party’s ranks already compromised themselves?

7.7 AZJUK, Health and HIV-AIDS

7.7.1 Perspectives on the Forum

There is no co-ordinated scheme or individual initiative emanating from this community that contributes directly to health matters, in particular the relief of people with HIV-AIDS. In the other cases we found some evidence of engagement, albeit at varying levels of intensity, some more focused on counselling and others, notably the Shared Health Empowerment programme from the ZimFest and thebottomhalf.com constituency, more practically involved to the extent of supplying personnel from the diaspora to work alongside Zimbabwe-based health professionals (Chapter 6). Nothing on this scale exists on the journalists’ forum or association. To analyze the issue of HIV-AIDS and its coverage on the journalists’ forum, this section provides a synthesis of relevant comments prompted by four questions from Miles and Huberman’s (1994:178-9) ‘Case-Level Display for Partially Ordered Meta-Matrix’: (a) ‘How did it look like to the user?’ (b) ‘What was the user doing?’ (c) ‘What feelings and concerns were paramount?’ (d) ‘Which problems were looming large?’

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222 In fact, Mugabe’s party and Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU fought an inconclusive war against the white government that was brought to an end by the Lancaster House ceasefire agreement in London in 1979.
Table 7.2: Case-Level Display of HIV-AIDS related Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Feelings/Concerns</th>
<th>How It Looked</th>
<th>What was user doing most?</th>
<th>Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BANKS, David banksd@...</td>
<td>Britain’s reaction</td>
<td>Fed up to 3 million people and provided treatment for more than 30 000 HIV/AIDS patients.</td>
<td>Quoting British Foreign Secretary David Miliband 223</td>
<td>The 2008 post-election crisis in Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 22, 2008 Message #3076</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Coltart Mar 27, 2008</td>
<td>Zimbabwe’s life expectancy is among the lowest in the world</td>
<td>‘Some 3 500 Zimbabweans die every week…’</td>
<td>User is an opposition legislator.</td>
<td>The 2008 post-election crisis in Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #2927</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forwardm17@... Jun 14, 2007</td>
<td>Panel discussion on developments in Zimbabwe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising the Bristol Zimbabwe Day</td>
<td>‘Serious’ issues to be discussed included HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #2320</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #2315</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imadawo@... Jul 28, 2006</td>
<td>AIDS orphans could be given a chance to interact internationally</td>
<td>An appeal, which the user himself received through another network</td>
<td>Forwarding an appeal for sponsorship of two Zimbabwe-based AIDS orphans to attend a conference in Toronto, Canada</td>
<td>The organization that would like to send them to the conference cannot meet airfares, food, accommodation and local travel allowances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #1749</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T W Bango Mar 18, 2006</td>
<td>Bleak outlook of the overall state of Zimbabwe</td>
<td>The high death toll from HIV-AIDS was seen as a symptom of misgovernment</td>
<td>User was disseminating a party policy document and is the personal assistant to MDC president Tsvangirai</td>
<td>A collapsing economy and health care service, allegedly a result of misgovernment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #2320</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mishkazim July 3, 2005</td>
<td>Disclosing a job opportunity for colleagues who may wish to return home</td>
<td>Advertisement by a Catholic organization ‘working to strengthen community responses to HIV-AIDS’.</td>
<td>Pointing out what appeared to be a useful job opportunity for graduates and others considering their options</td>
<td>The work would be among economically disadvantaged groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message #312</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.7.2 Summary Analysis of Display

The case level display above is a simple matrix sorting case-level data by different levels of gravity for each concern – in this case, all HIV-AIDS related. The procedure was straightforward: I used the search engine within the AZJUK Yahoo! Newsgroup to call up eight postings over a period of nearly three years (3/7/2005-22/04/2008) related to HIV-

223 Ministerial Statement to the House of Commons, Westminster, 21/04/2008
AIDS. From the available content, the evidence was that the network was not organically involved in HIV-AIDS related advocacy. But some stakeholders who are, and who came to be registered members of AZJUK, provided the agenda that there is. David Coltart, MDC Member of Parliament for Bulawayo South (2001-2008) and lately senator for Khumalo, and MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai’s personal assistant, T Bango, framed their contributions in party-line criticisms of the Mugabe government that were, in fact, official communiqués to their constituents: Coltart to voters in Bulawayo South, and Bango the formal national report submitted to his party’s congress. Keith Goddard, director of the Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe in Harare, is also at liberty to contribute to the forum. While Bango is a journalist, Coltart and Goddard are not. At any rate, the access given to all three to membership of the forum was vigorously examined, and left the membership divided.224

Despite the absence of a coherent strategy on the forum for HIV-AIDS, a summary of the matrix would show it to be of great concern to Zimbabweans; linked to misgovernance; and attracting international support (thereby providing employment for postgraduates, including possibilities for forum members considering a return home). Eight postings is a narrow base from which to produce summary material, but the HIV-AIDS variable, existent on all four websites scrutinized, will still retain its significance as a challenge confronting Zimbabweans, whether or not the transnational journalists are engrossed in its impact or contribute towards the relief of its victims.

224 See e.g. messages on GALZ, 2247 to 2250, via http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/2250; on Coltart, 1620 and 1621 via http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/1621; and on Bango, messages 1234 to 1247, via http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/1234
7.8 AZJUK and Gender

Women on this forum been articulate, helped by a collegiality in the profession of which they have long been part. However, they have not been particularly activist-oriented about gender issues. The forum itself is not culturally conservative, but neither has the female membership advocated any agenda that might offend cultural sensitivities. Discussions on intimate matters are extremely rare on the forum, as the previous section’s analysis on HIV-AIDS postings will have shown. In any case, the steady rate of contributions from female forum members was rarely gender-based, the preference being for conversations that kept the membership engaged with topics of broad interest. There was the odd exception to this equanimity, like the case referred to in Section 7.6 above where Sandra, a member of the committee, intervened on behalf of another female member who she felt was vilified in sexist terms.225 There was also a case where a husband intervened – the couple both journalists and members – to demand and cause the expulsion of a male member who, in responding to a posting by the complainant’s wife, alluded to the ‘bottom power’ of female journalists in Bulawayo, where the wife had been employed.226 But these offences proved extremely rare, and were scorned by the membership through decisive actions of its committee and remonstrations on the forum.

The greater contribution to content on gender issues on this forum appeared in the form of, or related to, speeches and statements of public bodies and figures. Six out of the eight postings registered in a search for gender-related issues were posted within the chaotic pre- and post- election period of February-April 2008 (Table 7.3), reflecting the pitch of


politicians and lobby groups for the sizeable female component of the Zimbabwean electorate. Although diaspora-based Zimbabweans are not legally entitled to vote, the forum received lobbying material from political and quasi-political sources, indicating a level of recognition by homeland agencies of AZJUK’s capacity as an extended public sphere to give their views the currency and publicity they require. As the summary analysis beneath the table notes, this collection of postings is less about the forum’s engagement with gender issues than it is about women and their struggles, their opportunities, or lack thereof.

Table 7.3: Case-Level Display of Gender-related Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Feelings/Concerns</th>
<th>How It Looked</th>
<th>What was user doing most?</th>
<th>Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>povhomuzimbabweryaramba</td>
<td>Removing Mugabe</td>
<td>Women being marginalized in the MDC?</td>
<td>Agitating for unity between factions</td>
<td>Mugabe won’t concede defeat, retains power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 5, 2008 Message #2981</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>mmathuthu</td>
<td>Grief and shock</td>
<td>Death of female colleague</td>
<td>Notifying AZJUK membership</td>
<td>Loss of a friend, loss to the profession, loss to the cause for advancement of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 20, 2008 Message #2894</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>makiwa.</td>
<td>Grant for female 'academic refugees'</td>
<td>Opportunities being passed to the rest of the network</td>
<td>Alerting colleagues of the possibility of assistance</td>
<td>De-skilling through limited opportunities to work or study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 18, 2008 Message #2882</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>youthforumzim.</td>
<td>Marginalization of women</td>
<td>Women in Zimbabwe a bear the brunt of the social, political and economic ills</td>
<td>Calling for increased female participation in civic, political, economic and social life</td>
<td>The 2008 elections, economic collapse and political instability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 11, 2008 Message #2870</td>
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<tr>
<td>zinasu</td>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>Women bear the brunt of social, political and economic ills, including state brutality</td>
<td>Statement by the National Students Union in solidarity with Zimbabwe’s women</td>
<td>The 2008 elections, economic collapse and political instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 8, 2008 Message #2862</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>shungu_chinga</td>
<td>Promoting Simba Makoni</td>
<td>Makoni, from Mugabe’s inner circle, rebelled and ran as an independent</td>
<td>Arguing that Makoni would be the most woman-friendly candidate</td>
<td>The 2008 elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 29, 2008 Message #2826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snjobo</td>
<td>Positive review of a forum colleague’s MA dissertation</td>
<td>Gender affects reporting perspective</td>
<td>Defining ‘objectivity’.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 20, 2006 Message #1491</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruserep</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mutambara’s commitment to gender issues</td>
<td>Quoting Mutambara</td>
<td>Gender based inequalities and violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 27, 2006 Message #1251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The selection of gender postings is not noticeable for its reflection of the day-to-day impact of those living in the diaspora. It is largely a collection of postings on the miserable state of women in Zimbabwe. A consensus that women are at the bottom of the social ladder and are most acutely experiencing the stresses of Zimbabwean life in the form of deprivation, responsibility for children (theirs and the orphans of their relatives), state violence and manipulation, domestic violence, and non-political criminal activity in which they are viewed as soft targets, shows up prominently. There is some disappointment that the MDC is showing evidence of gender insensitivity, suggesting perhaps that the post-Mugabe era, when it arrived, would not necessarily remove all gender-inflected obstacles. That the constraints facing women in the homeland has preoccupied a diaspora internet forum is perhaps further confirmation that geographical location is less of a factor for transnational activism than are the issues to be addressed. The discourse treats problems in Zimbabwe as though affecting the daily activities of those on the forum, who for the most part are in Britain. This equates with Wise’s (2003:152) identification of ‘collective trauma’ and ‘very specific collective identity’ which created in diaspora communities ‘a powerful affective moral pull toward the homeland’. Wise sees such behaviour as ‘a deliberate strategy on the part of the readers to implicate themselves in the homeland, in part, as a means of ameliorating … migration guilt induced by leaving’. The journalists’ forum thus takes up a broader role as ventilator of gender concerns at home, and does so with a level of consciousness uncommon outside of feminist groups. The postings also reflect an implicit commitment by two senior politicians, Makoni and Mutambara, to reverse the mistreatment of women, giving the promise of significant social change.
7.9 Interlocution with British Culture

7.9.1 Immigration and Asylum

As with all three other case studies, immigration issues are not far from the surface of this forum. An intensive outreach to Zimbabwean detainees scattered across the immigration detention centres of Britain was undertaken by forum member Ezra Tshisa Sibanda, a former ZBC presenter and soccer commentator who was not, however, acting on behalf of this forum. But what he did, moving from centre to centre and documenting cases of Zimbabwean inmates before presenting them to lawyers for appeal to the British authorities, was in tandem with the association’s own efforts, through the Exiled Journalists Network, to sensitize the British government to the anxieties of Zimbabwean journalists whose residential status in Britain was temporary or questionable. 227

Sibanda’s (2005) article on www.newzimbabwe.com raises the plight of Zimbabweans whose British residence had not been formalized. Many of them, he claimed, were fulfilling the conditions of monthly reporting to a police station when they were seized. Sibanda alleges ill-treatment in the detention centres.

After touring some of the detention centres across the UK I discovered the so-called failed asylum seekers are in great distress having been assaulted, harassed, threatened and abused by the security officers manning the centres. Having run away from the evil regime of Robert Mugabe, Zimbabweans who came here to seek shelter and protection find themselves enduring more human rights violations. (Sibanda 2005)

He raises a serious allegation, often repeated in Zimbabwean circles, that the vetting access is so flawed, some of Mugabe’s state agents have successfully claimed asylum, while deserving cases were rejected. And he says he has taken his campaign to the House of Commons.

I fail to understand why every Zimbabwean coming to the UK fleeing persecution should only be an MDC member and should know all of the party’s leadership to be granted refugee status. After studying and checking most of the refusal letters of the so-called failed asylum seekers it’s all to do with failing to name MDC officials, not the problems each individual experienced before fleeing the country. I could not believe when I saw in one of the refusal letters of the detained people that she failed to name the MDC MP for Mutare Central or how many votes he got and which candidate he beat. This poor girl comes from Silobela in Midlands, surely these are stupid questions. Because she didn’t know, she had to guess wrongly and was denied status despite answering correctly almost 90 percent of the questions she was asked about the MDC not Zimbabwe. It’s like asking a 22-year-old Liberal Democrats voter from Newcastle who the MP for Swansea in South Wales is! It’s an unfair question…

…I did ask some of the House of Commons MPs (and one would expect they should know) some simple questions about daily politics in this country and almost all of them didn’t know. Some could not name the candidates they beat in the last general election and by what margins, surely you expect poor Zimbabweans who are not even high profile people in politics to know everything about one opposition political party in Zimbabwe? Do they really expect a villager in Murambinda to memorise the name of the MDC MPs from Gwanda to Makonde?

Sibanda says he has helped to get some of the cases reviewed, though he could not say if any of the appeals had been successful. He repeats the argument by some politicians and activists that a formalization of status for immigrants already in the country would make economic sense.

The UK could save millions of pounds in the taxpayer's money if they allowed Zimbabweans to work and fend for themselves. Estimates say the cost of keeping one person per day in detention, is close to a thousand pounds per day. This is ridiculous! Zimbabweans in the UK will not ask for a penny from the British government, what they need is to work, pay tax to British government and help their suffering poor families in Zimbabwe!

Colleagues on the forum can easily relate to Sibanda’s views. His article was the subject of discussion by the journalists, who acknowledged that some among them were also struggling to regularize their status in Britain. Among the contributors were the two below, urging concerted lobbying of the British establishment for a more lenient visa regularization scheme for Zimbabweans.228

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228 Entries by ‘bleruzengwe’ and ‘qmayisa’, messages 345 and 348, posted 28 July 2005. Available at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/345 and
bleruzengwe:

I am also very worried about the treatment of our colleagues in detention centres. Ezra has written about what many of us have known. I think you might find it a cause for concern. Despite our seeming desperation, I believe as Zimbabweans we should not allow ourselves to be abused by anyone for whatever reason. I also think the British government should be lobbied by ourselves as journalists, as we have credibility and can attest to the dangers which these people face if forcibly removed and sent back.

qmayisa:

I am also very concerned. Mr Blair has said no-one in any danger, or with legitimate fears of persecution, will be returned to Zimbabwe. But on whose assessment is the outcome decided? On the judgement of a tribunal in Croydon? There may be little we as a group can do, but at an individual level Ezra has shown that we can translate our concerns into action. Solidarity with those of our compatriots languishing in these detention centres by visits which inform us of their conditions, so that we can lobby on their behalf, is what we should be doing.

Recourse to MPs and the Home Office by Zimbabwean networks have had varying degrees of success. But day-to-day support and dissemination of information have also been evident on the websites and, as we have seen in previous cases, have been necessary across the spectrum. Even white Zimbabweans and their anxieties were plain to see (Chapter 6) as they used channels of communication with the British establishment to regularize their residence.

7.9.2 Job Searches and Opportunities

It is the case with this constituency, as with many Zimbabwean professionals with transferable skills, that they suffer a loss of status in a British job market that undervalues overseas experience. Such a disconnect with the immigrant worker’s qualifications and experience are compounded by other forms of prejudice: McGregor (2008:478) writes how some professionals ‘may share experiences such as racism, reactions to gender or parenting norms in Britain. The polarisation of opportunity clearly has the potential to foster differences … has already done so in some contexts, and feeds into decisions about future mobility as well as into the discourses and dynamics of status back home’. The adjustment
of Zimbabwean professionals to this environment is linked with opportunities for remuneration and/or studentships to make the Zimbabweans’ qualifications more competitive. For the members of this forum, these are not a given provision. Access to sources of livelihood or scholarships in Britain are dependant on immigration status – a sensitive subject for Zimbabweans, and no less on this forum. Gleaned from the contributions, there exist three categories of Zimbabwean journalist: (i) those who have indefinite leave to remain; (ii) those who are on student visas; and (iii) those whose asylum claims are in the determination or appeals process. A fourth category which may, or may not exist is of those with no legal right at all to be in Britain. Because of the sensitivity of the subject I have not broached it in my interviews or interaction on the forum. But there is reason to believe a number of journalists are in that predicament, and cannot even respond to the frequent postings of job opportunities.

7.9.3 Rejection of the Union Jack

Controversy surrounded the design of the new association’s logo. After a draft design was unveiled on the web page – crossed pen and sword against a backdrop of the British flag – a majority of members who expressed their opinion were against such a graphic identification with the host country – although not averse to keeping ‘in the UK’ in their official title. Decision-making in this regard, which resulted in the Union Jack being replaced by the Zimbabwe flag, was swift, within one day (see thread below), again attesting to the closer networking occasioned by a common professional identity to go with nationality. The strong objections to the inclusion of the Union Jack in the logo of what is essentially a British-based association of Zimbabwean journalists reinforce an earlier

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application of Heideggerian theory to the usability of unusable Zimbabwean national symbols and the exaggerated importance attached to them in the diaspora. Even professional journalists who fled the oppressive Zimbabwe government refuse to see the country’s flag contested as an essential symbol representing their own interests.

Table 7.4 Summary of Views on the New AZJUK Logo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic and Entry</th>
<th>Contributor</th>
<th>Date, Time and No. of Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about the logo can we have something relevant to Zimbabwe and our colours, or a flying bird inside a circle. can you put something like that together so we can steam roll debate.</td>
<td>forwardm17</td>
<td>Message #22 Fri Feb 4, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the logo i suggest a pen scribbling on a note pad with the zim flag superimposed.</td>
<td>ashleymtetwa</td>
<td>Message #23 Fri Feb 4, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well done. Looks good. Please don't crowd it anymore, a logo can never be representative of everything. I have my reservations about the Union Jack though...</td>
<td>nyamutata</td>
<td>Message #113 Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guys the union jack. the union jack. please please please. union jack can something be done. i don't think we need that.</td>
<td>blruzengwe</td>
<td>Message #114 Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i take it that the logo needs minor alterations i.e., removing the union flag bit. however i also take it that u should not forget that some of our colleagues are now exiled after claiming asylum here while others are illegal and others are students - you have a variety so the author had argued that since some are now British permanent residents they would now literally subscribe to the union jack.</td>
<td>ashleymtetwa</td>
<td>Message #115 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i would be happy to keep the union flag only if it is joined together with a similar size Zimbabwe flag - u know side by side or we remove it completely. anyway, if people do not want it there i will go with the majority because we are zimbabweans and always will be regardless of status. in any case we are not in partnership with any british organisation so maybe let us remove the flag.</td>
<td>sandra nyaira</td>
<td>Message #116 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks Sandra. I think the Union jack has no place is our identity as an association or as individuals, irrespective of our immigration status (illegals will be deported to ZIMBABWE, by the way!), unless of course there are, among us, people of dual citizenship or who have officially renounced the Zimbabwean one.</td>
<td>nyamutata</td>
<td>Message #117 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainly the union flag has to be removed anyway for it has no relevance to the objects of the Association. But what members ought to remember and applaud is that Charles came out with something so that people can make meaningful suggestions and move forward. We can now perfect this. Guys I hate to say this but I think for the betterment of the Association especially at this earliest stage, can we try to avoid BUT unless where extremely necessary to try to make reference to issues like immigration status of people here. We're all Zim journos residing in UK hoping to establish an association representing this constituency must be the basis of our thinking when making contributions despite the variety of other reasons.</td>
<td>forwardm17</td>
<td>Message #118 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well put, Forward. Let it be the last time the issue of status is referred to; in fact it is quite sensitive. Is there a way of determining the majority view, say in terms of numbers, with regards to the flag?</td>
<td>nyamutata</td>
<td>Message #119 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeah the logo looks though the union jack have to go...thanks guys for creating it</td>
<td>rhodamash</td>
<td>Message #122 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think with all the people who have so far contributed, it seems as if the union jack is not wanted so maybe Charles and Clemence can move on and complete the job. well done guys.</td>
<td>sandra_nyaira</td>
<td>Message #124 Thu Feb 17, 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Figure 7.1 shows below, the intention in the original design was not to diminish Zimbabwean identity, but to reflect its existence in a British context by incorporating both national flags in the association’s logo. This went too far for the journalists, who rather than maintain a bi-focal representation of ties to the country of origin and the country of destination, objected to the Union Jack’s presence. It was as though the inclusion of the Union Jack impinged on the ‘Zimbabweanness’ of the association and its members. This presents some challenges to assimilation and incorporation theories of diaspora studies and is especially noteworthy in a constituency such as journalists, among whom a significant number were forced from Zimbabwe into exile.

Unlike the three preceding case studies which provided opportunities for reproducing and reinforcing sub-national identities that had been marginalized in the Zimbabwean context, the fourth case – of exiled journalists – has demonstrated an assertion of Zimbabwean identity and a resistance to the adoption of British national symbolism. This takes place even as the association attaches itself to British institutions like the National Union of Journalists and individual journalists covet placements with British media institutions.

While there is, here again as in the other cases, a ‘double consciousness’ (Du Bois 1961:3) about the debate and the grappling with contending loyalties, there might also be in this debate another dimension to Mbiba’s (2005:31) argument of the ‘exclusions’ and ‘exclusionary forces’ said to be alienating Zimbabweans in Britain. Do Zimbabweans who show an aversion to British identities and symbols, as in the journalists’ example above, contribute to the sense of alienation that Mbiba and other scholars have discussed?
7.10 Conclusion.

In creating and accessing the communal space of a shared professional background, the Zimbabwean journalists broaden their ‘coping strategies’ (Aarsaether and Baerenholdt 2001:39) as foreigners, beyond ethnic networks or membership of a more general Zimbabwean interest. As professionals, they use both association and reciprocity as ‘crucial forms of socio-economic relations, especially when combined’ (ibid.) in that, amid the political and social dialogue their forum
facilitates, there is interest in sharing professional advancement opportunities in a situation where most members are not practising their profession.

There is an organic solidarity in this forum that creates a social sphere defined by qualifications and past practice. Its online and public profile as an extension of the Zimbabwean journalists’ fraternity is acknowledged by British and UK-based media organizations, and it comes replete with the rifts between public and privately-owned media and their practitioners, rival ethnicities, and political affiliations characteristic of the public sphere in Zimbabwe. As such, it is a diaspora space attuned to the fissures and pressures of media in the homeland, in many ways a reproduction of that context.

Much of the forum’s membership is not currently engaged in journalism, but each member retains their identity as a Zimbabwean journalist through recognition by their peers. Name recognition, if not previous acquaintance or work relationships in the homeland, are the initial criteria for admission to the fraternity. In the words of Maffesoli (2007:30), ‘we only exist because the other, which is the social sphere, gives me my existence. I am what I am because the other recognizes me as such’. The relocated journalists have retrieved their professional identity by mutual though qualified admission. Members of the forum are sensitive to unqualified or inappropriate contributors. As this chapter illustrated, users subject both colleagues’ and non-journalists’ forum entries to rigorous examination. This maintains a framework of standards and conformity and returns the journalists to a fraternal code they may have lost when dispersed from Zimbabwe. But conformity to standards is not uniformity of views. The divergences on this forum have played into the ethnic and political pluralities seen in the other cases, albeit with restrained rhetoric. The Ndebele-Shona divide was not bridged, but the crass exchanges commonplace in other
sites was hardly seen on this forum. Nevertheless the intuition of how interwoven ethnicity is to Zimbabwean discourses was again supported in this chapter.

In terms of concretization of initiatives, the forum and its association showed evidence of having reached out to its base constituency in Zimbabwe with remittances, although the linkages are hardly as developed as the school refurbishments and land claims of inkundla.net or the investment in Zimbabwe’s health sector by constituents of thebottomhalf.com. There appear to be stronger backward linkages than contemporary continuities between this fraternity and the homeland media, in the sense that the only tangible intervention in the homeland is one that is memory-driven. The desire to honour a dead journalist by elevating his undoubted resilience in 1999 over the heroism of individuals among the current crop of Zimbabwe-based journalists, perhaps indicates a certain distance between those who last lived and worked in Zimbabwe as contemporaries of Chavunduka, and those who battle in the profession in arguably more testing circumstances in Zimbabwe today.

Meanwhile, the diaspora journalists’ discourses hinge on an often tenuous state of translocation to a new environment in a new country, many of them working in a new field for lack of media-related opportunities. In this uncertainty, the past profession remains a personal and public marker even for those journalists resident but not currently practicing in Britain. As such, the identity can be seen as the unused tool deployed to give the Zimbabwean journalist fulfillment in a context that has not found use for their competence. The greater achievement of AZJUK, as a public body and as a newsgroup, has been the coming together of those who arrived in Britain at different times and headed for different occupations in different corners of Britain. Some registered as students in institutions as far flung as Cardiff and Edinburgh, others were absorbed by the exiled SW Radio Africa in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire; a few fortunate enough found employment on the BBC
Africa Service or in the publicity departments of organizations. But a significant number were forced to find employment outside the profession: some as carers and housekeepers, others as security officers, at least one is known to have retrained as an accountant. To find each other again through the AZJUK medium and initiatives it undertakes has helped rekindle a ‘community of memory’ (Rheingold 2000:29) that is identified by its past but attempts to find relevance with the present, especially in the diaspora setting, and imagines a future where it may be possible to return to practice journalism in Zimbabwe.

The tension within this movement is whether to identify with the political struggle against the Zimbabwean establishment and if so, to what extent journalists should embed themselves in the ranks of the opposition’s structures in Britain. Comparisons could be made, and perhaps lessons drawn, from ZANU (PF)’s own exile experience, how it incorporated exiled journalists into its fold during the liberation war, and how these journalists were to be used to complete the transition from an authoritarian white government’s control of the media, to an equally authoritarian nationalist government’s stranglehold after independence in 1980. In view of the tension pre-occupying the AZJUK discourses on embeddedness in the MDC, the fears of members who are against such an incorporation might be encapsulated in this question: Will a post-Mugabe dispensation be any different?
8.1 Making Comparisons

This chapter intends to make a comparative analysis of the cases in order to summarize outcomes and convey a synthesis of messages, their divergences, and how they contribute to the same diaspora space. The comparisons do not intend to champion one communicator or website over another, but to summarize aspects of the activism of each constituency. Each website bore the hallmarks of personal quests, yet they were at the same time collective or associative quests. The emotional attachment to the contexts and activities associated with ‘Zimbabweanness’ was also many-sided. In particular, the case studies accentuated the tragic aspect of Zimbabwe’s past and present while yielding demands for social action through agencies like ZimFest, the Shared Health Initiative, Count on Us, and even the tribally-laced resettlement initiatives generated on inkundla.net. Positive outcomes emerged from the anguished circumstances. In the cross-case analysis (Table 8.1), the aim is to summarize these outcomes and their differences, so that especially the comparisons define what’s good about the public sphere, namely its heterogeneity and the benefits that evolve from plural representations to communities on the margins.
8.2 Why Do Cross-Case Analysis?

Miles and Huberman (1994) provide guidelines for summary analysis across cases. The purposes of this chapter are derived from them,

- to examine relationships between the data sets (p178);
- ‘to enhance generalizability’… do the findings make sense beyond each particular case? (p173);
- ‘to deepen understanding’… to reconcile ‘an individual case’s uniqueness with the need for more general understanding of generic processes that occur across cases’ (p173).

The Variables versus Case Analysis (Table 8.2 below) adapts from Miles and Huberman (1994:175ff) a synthesizing of different contributions from members of the online fora. The contributions to the discussion threads are categorised using the thematic framework introduced in Chapter Two, attempting to ‘draw meaningful cross-case conclusions’ that give a composite picture of how the four cases contrast or overlap within the thematic framework. In synthesizing the contributions, the need for coherence of arguments within the thematic framework has helped fashion a criteria for selecting material for cross-case analysis. Questions about the perspectives of individual users and how they blend with the philosophies of the websites and web communities help analyse within-case and cross-case data. Miles and Huberman (1994:178) suggested this line of questioning:

- How did it look to the user?
- What was the user doing?
- Which feelings and concerns were paramount?
- Which problems were looming large?
‘Condensation’ of data for a manageable cross-case analysis makes brevity of the cell entries a prime objective in the matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1994:179) but the ‘analytic text clarifying and deepening’ the entries follows in Section 8.4.

8.3 Illustrative Entries for Cross-Case Analysis

The following tables and categories illustrate the comparisons between the four case study websites and their treatment of the five variables that have guided the analyses of the cases throughout this thesis. The tables’ content is illuminated by the contextualisation of the entries in the discussion above. The clustering of the information contained in Table 8.1, in a more explanatory frame in the table below it (Table 8.2) helps summarize and conclude assessment of the four cases, their messages, and what they mean for the study of the diversity of the diasporic public sphere. The chart suggested by the qualitative researchers, Miles and Huberman, to achieve this clustering is called a meta-matrix. Meta-matrices are master charts assembling descriptive data from each of several cases in a standard format. The juxtaposition of the single case displays is focused on the inclusion of condensed, relevant data, clustered so that the variables of interest become clearer. The intention is that the information generated in the case studies is summarized and compared so it can be ‘ordered conceptually’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:178).
### Table 8.1 User feelings/concerns and other variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites/Users</th>
<th>Feelings/Concerns</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>goffal.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Another Goffal</td>
<td>Other ethnic groups provide supportive networks for their own kind. Why should anyone object to mixed-race Zimbabweans doing likewise?</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. G-Dep</td>
<td>In western countries, ethnic-specific media is commonplace, and is even big business. What is wrong with goffal.com providing a medium to its own racial constituency?</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fire Lion</td>
<td>Says, 'I am a goffal', but objects to a racial exclusiveness of the website and its philanthropic outreach.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Low Down</td>
<td>Creating a website called goffal.com and promoting its identity is hurtful to other races.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inkundla.net</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ndwandwe</td>
<td>‘inkundla’ and ‘Mthwakazi’ membership defined by Nguni ancestry</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dokotela</td>
<td>inkundla.net should embrace all peoples of Matabeleland. The Ndebele kingdom was not homogeneously Nguni, but assimilated non-Nguni inhabitants of conquered territories.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>thebottomhalf.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Nemo</td>
<td>Objects to use of Shona on the website, claiming ‘most of us wouldn’t understand’ and ‘everyone from Zim speaks English anyway’.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Josephm</td>
<td>Wants contributions in Shona to enable blacks to use the website</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Luigi</td>
<td>Non-English speakers should be free to post in Shona</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Peasy</td>
<td>‘I am not a Shona. I do not have a Shona dictionary. Why the hell would I want one….gross!’</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AZJUK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cnyamutata</td>
<td>Ndebele autonomy in southern Zimbabwe a ‘silly’ prospect.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Qmayisa</td>
<td>Wants respect for the ‘common aspirations’ of people of Matabeleland.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mkwananzi</td>
<td>Can an Ndebele become President of Zimbabwe?</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mmwananzh</td>
<td>Protests parallels drawn between his own website and the Rwandan media whose tribalist invectives sparked the 1994 Rwandan genocide.</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>goffal.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Zimbo</td>
<td>Casual sex has led to ‘our people…dying like flies’.</td>
<td>Health and HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kamuzu Banda</td>
<td>Mugabe government to blame for the high fatality rate at home, and among those arriving in the diaspora, due to collapse of the Zimbabwean health sector and economy.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spider’s Pad II</td>
<td>The spread of HIV-AIDS is the work of ‘American corporations’ profiteering from the disease.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inkundla.net</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Pamela</td>
<td>Blames casual sex among Zimbabweans in the UK diaspora, where she says people ‘behave like animals’, ‘have no shame’, and where ‘you would think sex is the fashion nowadays’.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mabila</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS could be the result of a racist project hatched in the West to reduce the populations of ethnic minorities.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>thebottomhalf.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Casey</td>
<td>Fund-raising to support the health sector in Zimbabwe, sponsoring volunteers to visit Zimbabwe and share skills on HIV management and the welfare of AIDS orphans.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AZJUK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Senator D. Coltart</td>
<td>Government to blame for poverty and abuse of the most vulnerable, and for the absence of adequate health care.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Keith Goddard</td>
<td>Gays And Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe celebrate government endorsement of their AIDS awareness manual.</td>
<td>HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>goffal.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Webmaster</td>
<td>Wants the website to galvanize political activism among goffals in the UK diaspora by encouraging involvement in MDC activities.</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Binga</td>
<td>‘You should not expect everyone to be a politician’.</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Muntu</td>
<td>goffal.com is not an MDC website.</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inkundla.net</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Zwangendaba</td>
<td>Hostility to local government structures in Matabeleland, even where they comprise siNdebele-speaking officials.</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mbolomani</td>
<td>Unity between Mugabe and Nkomo did not meet the aspirations of the amaNdebele</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>thebottomhalf.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tricky</td>
<td>Rather than international pressure, the push for Mugabe’s exit should come from the Zimbabwean masses, who have been cowed into</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. sideshowbob  
Zimbabweans do not have a legacy of democratic change to inspire them to ‘people power’ revolts against the state. Mugabe is their liberator as well as oppressor.  

**AZJUK**  
1. makusha  
Objectors to publishing MDC publicity material on the website are necessarily pro-Mugabe.  

2. bleruzengwe  
Journalists should not be spoon-fed copious and uncritical party propaganda, moreso by fellow journalists using their access to the forum to advance the political groups they serve.  

**goffal.com**  
1. Sniper  
Comparing goffal women unfavourably with those of other races, ‘Sniper’ likens them to dusty omnibuses.  

2. Tregena  
Leads feminine rage at the insult, which she describes as symptomatic of a growing disrespect of women by men in the goffal constituency.  

3. Robert  
The ideal woman is not defined by race, but by whether she possesses the values espoused in the Book of Proverbs, 31:10-31  

**thebottomhalf.com**  
1. Chaela  
Fairly blunt inter-gender online discourse that reflects assertive female personalities and a more liberal accommodation of women than is the case in the other online fora.  

2. Peasy  

**inkundla.net**  
1. Mabila  
Intrudes on male-dominated discourses, making use of the internet to breach cultural expectations of male exclusivity, especially when discussing critical issues.  

2. Thandindaba  
The woman is to be loved and kept, but the man’s decision-making responsibilities underline public and family power relations which must be respected in accordance with Ndebele custom.  

**AZJUK**  
1. Senator Coltart  
Blames Mugabe government for ‘politically motivated sex crimes’.  

2. shungu-chinga  
Claims Simba Makoni to be the most ‘women-friendly’ of the 2008 presidential election candidates  

**goffal.com**  
1. Muntu  
Laments that Coloureds ‘have no representation in the UK’  

2. Longworth  
Support for immigration detainees  

**inkundla.net**  
1. Masiane  
Channels of communication maintained with the Foreign Office  

2. Masaine  

**thebottomhalf.com**  
1. chabwino  
Lobby Westminster and Whitehall over ancestry visas and settlement/naturalisation issues  

**AZJUK**  
1. Ezra Sibanda  
Support for immigration detainees and lobbying of MPs for their welfare  

2. qmayisa  
Concern over who in the British establishment determines the veracity of an asylum claim, and the bases for a refusal of asylum  

Having stripped down the meta-matrix in Table 8.1, the next step is to create a display format for cross-case comparisons in each of the thematic categories. This is achieved in Table 8.2, where case-level entries are ‘distilled…down to fewer, case-specifying words’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:178), creating comparable displays on one meta-matrix and bringing into sharper focus the parallels and contrasts of the four different groups on which this research has dwelt. The case level display in Table 8.2 moves beyond a descriptive analysis to offer more explanatory ones, including the highlighting of ‘different levels of gravity for each concern’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:180). In this analysis, specific
contributors and contributions illuminate the research themes and how the four different sites are oriented, albeit with the dominant perspectives challenged by discordant views on each forum. The points of focus confirm the earlier analyses of each case and its discussion threads, providing a summary analysis from case-specific incidents that fit the research themes. It is an illustration of the broader, multi-sited democratic space which accommodates Zimbabwean plurality in the diaspora.

8.4 Implications of the Case Comparisons

The contributions summarized in the table above articulated perceptions by some quarters in each constituency. But they were not global and uncontested: at each point, contending views were aired and the conversations that ensued did much to justify the hypothesis of the website fora serving as public, democratic spaces. The vertical axis of the analysis table points to similarities and differences in the perspectives of the case study variables. The ‘ethnicity’ variable exposes a tension in some of the cases between acute racial awareness and accommodation of difference, particularly when implementing social action. The first two cases share similar viewpoints among their contributors in the ‘Ethnicity’ and ‘Health and HIV-AIDS’ variables. Both organize and implement their social initiatives around ethnic affinities with self-serving projects in the goffal community and inkundla network respectively. The webmasters and contributors on goffal.com and inkundla.net see the inward-looking focus as imperative, especially as both the goffal and inkundla constituencies consider themselves marginalized in Zimbabwe. However, there are objections to having such a narrow focus in both cases. For the goffal.com user, the downside articulated by a couple of dissenters, among them FL, is in the racial exclusivity of the discourse. When racial identity is stringently applied to select beneficiaries in Zimbabwean neighbourhoods, it is, FL warns, a discriminatory approach to social action which is likely to discredit any good intentions.
Table 8.2 The Cross-Case Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES/THEMES</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Health and HIV-AIDS</th>
<th>Political Discourse</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interlocution with host culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| goffal.com       | AG and G-Dep want a race-conscious, pro-goffal social action focus, but FL and LD warn against such discriminatory giving.  
231 ‘Another Goffal’, Note Nr.: 3032 from 2002-07-23 12:56:00, quoted in Chapter 4, Section 4.2   
232 ‘Fire Lion’, Note Nr.: 3076 from 2002-07-31 08:05:56, quoted in Chapter 4, Section 4.2   
233 ‘Zimbo’, Note Nr.: 7019 from 2004-06-14 16:36:50, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.4   
234 ‘Kamuzu Banda’, Note Nr.: 6812 from 2004-06-02 08:56:59   
235 ‘Spider’s Pad II’, Note Nr.: 6896 from 2004-06-02 20:09:46   
236 ‘Admin.’, Note Nr.: 607 from 2002-04-19 16:36:50, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3   
237 ‘Sniper’, Note Nr.: 7361 from 2004-07-27 14:53:08, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
238 ‘Tregena’, Note Nr.: 7362 from 2004-07-29 13:40:23, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
239 ‘What the…’, Note Nr.: 7370 from 2004-07-28 05:06:14, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
Accessed same day   
|                   | Z 235 blames casual sex, KB 236 blames the Mugabe government, SP 237 blames America   
247 ‘N’239 recognises traceable Nguni ancestry as an indicator of Ndebele identity, but D is against excluding ‘minorities’ living in Matabeleland. 241   
248 Website claims it is for all comers, but membership profiles suggest whites dominate the numbers.   
249 Politics, journalism viewed through the prism of the Ndebele/Shona divide   
250 Failure of health services blamed for high HIV-AIDS fatality rate. Gay lobbyists 247 use the forum for their initiatives.   
251 Opposition politics dominate, but resistance to use of the forum to post MDC publicity material, particularly by forum members who are officers of the MDC.   
252 Pledges by politicians to improve the lot of women after Mugabe is removed   
253 E visits immigration detention centres, protests the British government’s methods of assessing asylum claims 246 |
|                   | Webmaster cannot infuse his own brand of activism, web users are their own agents 236   
254 More liberal towards women, explicit cross-gender discourse. |

231 ‘Another Goffal’, Note Nr.: 3032 from 2002-07-23 12:56:00, quoted in Chapter 4, Section 4.2   
232 ‘Fire Lion’, Note Nr.: 3076 from 2002-07-31 08:05:56, quoted in Chapter 4, Section 4.2   
233 ‘Zimbo’, Note Nr.: 7019 from 2004-06-14 16:36:50, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.4   
234 ‘Kamuzu Banda’, Note Nr.: 6812 from 2004-06-02 08:56:59   
235 ‘Spider’s Pad II’, Note Nr.: 6896 from 2004-06-02 20:09:46   
236 ‘Admin.’, Note Nr.: 607 from 2002-12-20 11:55:08, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.3   
237 ‘Sniper’, Note Nr.: 7361 from 2004-07-27 14:53:08, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
238 ‘Tregena’, Note Nr.: 7362 from 2004-07-29 13:40:23, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
239 ‘What the…’, Note Nr.: 7370 from 2004-07-28 05:06:14, quoted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2   
Accessed same day   
Similar objections are found on inkundla.net. For D on inkundla.net, the exclusivity concentrated on elevating an Ndebele identity of Nguni descent, which is evident in much of the website’s rhetoric, will create other forms of marginalization for minorities in the siNdebele-speaking heartland, replicating the ills suffered by the amaNdebele themselves in contemporary Zimbabwe. Given that goffal.com and inkundla.net were the only two of the cases to explicitly state their ethnic bias, the similarity in dynamics of interaction between a dominant ethnocentric orientation and a minority of dissenters on each website who found the dominant paradigms implausible was an interesting parallel. It showed that, however predominant the paradigms of ethnic exclusivity, they were not uncontested, and indeed could not be, in a democratic sphere where the proponents of exclusivity were themselves challenging other ideologies and hegemonies.

Concerns with the spread of HIV-AIDS in Zimbabwean communities at home and in Britain are contextualised in the alleged promiscuity among Zimbabweans, according to goffal.com and inkundla.net contributors. Contributors to inkundla.net (P and S) are especially critical of UK-based Zimbabweans who they accuse of taking advantage of their dislocation from family networks to engage in outrageous behaviour. It is this sort of recklessness that the contributors in the two case studies blame for the high number of fatalities that they say are HIV-related. On the AZJUK forum, a correlation is made between poverty socio-political collapse in Zimbabwe on the one hand, and rising HIV-AIDS infection and fatality rates on the other. Prostitution and rape is said to be common, in an environment where increasing numbers of households have single parents, or consist solely of what are called ‘AIDS orphans’ – the surviving children of couples who have died of AIDS. The girl child, often desperate not just for her own sustenance, but that of siblings without a breadwinner, is vulnerable to exploitation and infection in this environment, one
of the hazards confronting women and girls in the collapsed state of affairs within Zimbabwe, and which exercises activists who use the AZJUK forum.

The bottomhalf.com throws up some striking differences with other websites in the ‘gender’ and ‘health and HIV-AIDS’ variables. Chapter 6 discussed the westernised outlook of white Zimbabweans which made attitudes to gender a lot less patriarchal, and more tolerant of women’s expressiveness, than the dominant culture in Zimbabwe would usually allow. The narrative that was the focus of the case study locates that expressiveness in an open display of sexual attraction by not just one, but several women on the message-board towards a newcomer male who was looking for friendship. Even in an online forum, the women’s jousting, interpreted as flirting, would be resisted on inkundla.net, where women struggle to be heard at all. We assume that the Anglo-influence in Zimbabwe’s white community has contributed to the easy acceptance, even by male members of the community, of the openness. Atkinson and Errington (1990:35) explain the divergent cultural approaches through views on biological difference, extended to other aspects of power and difference such as roles in a society. The authors argue, for instance, that

Some cultures insist that men and women are profoundly different sorts of beings …constituted in very different ways anatomically and psychologically. These cultures may think of the distinction between men and women as the most profound and significant difference that human life offers up, worthy of elaboration and contemplation in every sphere of activity and thought, from strict divisions of labour, to separate men’s and women’s religious cults, curing rites and birth ceremonies, to separate language styles or highly gender-inflected languages.

So the human form of embodiment, which determines gender, would in many cultures be the life-long determinant of fixed roles, entitlements, power dynamics in work, home and social relationships, and wealth. This had been an almost universal disposition in the past, but the shift in socio-political perspectives modernity and post-modernity have brought to western contexts has made such stringent allocation of roles difficult to sustain. The internet makes it even more difficult to prescribe these differences, even on a website as conservative as inkundla.net, the case where the cultural construct of meeting of the village
elders was transferred to cyberspace and attempts made to preserve the exclusiveness of the male enclave – attempts which were breached by the western-based and educated female elite like ‘Mabila’. Likewise goffal women could also rise above the strictures of pastoral roles in a Zimbabwean setting to offer prayer and counselling in a time of sickness and bereavement – even where the condition is as sensitive as HIV-AIDS. The least inhibitions were on thebottomhalf.com, where a stronger female presence subscribed to a female assertiveness birthed from an Anglo-influenced elaboration of gender and power relations.

As regards the empowerment of the health sector by diaspora-based professionals and funders, ZimFest substantially contributes to this, the most visible and proactive engagement especially in the fight against HIV-AIDS and for universal best practice. Some publicity is generated on thebottomhalf.com. That this apparently mainly white constituency yields from its ranks a network of professionals dedicated to supporting the Zimbabwean health system demonstrates ‘a concern for health, understood comprehensively’ and not as a sectoral issue (Cochrane 2007:8). This is one example where the segmented presence of Zimbabweans rises above difference to face a challenge confronting all Zimbabweans in the homeland, and does so, not under the banner of an ethnic constituency, but out of professional and philanthropic convictions, which use the social networks of thebottomhalf.com and ZimFest to galvanise support for the cause.

The AZJK forum is dominated by politics, most of it directed against the Mugabe government. Intrusion by campaigners and politicians given access to the forum annoys members who insist the forum should be for journalists only. The journalists are still valued as disseminators even though many are not linked to a news organization. Hence, alongside the chatter, the forum carries hard news: opposition leaders’ perspectives dutifully posted by aides who are members of the forum. This direct access by politicians and political aides (usually activist journalists) to an online diaspora community is uncommon in other
websites, but operatives for Morgan Tsvangirai, Arthur Mutambara and Simba Makoni make sure the AZJUK forum carries briefs from their quarter. Readers are told Makoni is a respecter of women and will restore to them the dignity they are alleged to have lost under Mugabe’s rule.247 Mugabe’s government is accused of culpability in the escalation of HIV-AIDS fatalities, with Senator Coltart citing a collapsed economy, poverty alleviation schemes and health care, and politically motivated sex crimes.248 The politicians never in the experiences of this research concretize plans to address these ills, unlike for instance the Shared Health Empowerment scheme which has tangible results from engaging the health crisis in Zimbabwe.

In all four cases, politics is engaged dialectically by rival perceptions, and not just between pro- and anti-government factions. A mindfulness of choice and of the freedom to diverge from the views of the majority ensures robust challenges to the dominant discourses of the cases, strengthening the credentials of the diaspora websites and associations as a democratic space. Although goffal.com’s content is largely anti-government, we saw formidable opposition to the webmaster’s attempts to channel the energies and sentiment of the website towards a concerted activism under the banner of the MDC. This parallels in some ways the resistance by journalists to the activism of political and other interest groups seeking publicity through the AZJUK medium. Secession and its rhetoric dominates inkundla.net discourses, but not without probing questions as to the viability of the project, and outright dissent.

247 shungu_chinga, 29/02/2008, number 2682 via http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/2682 ; Accessed 29.2.08

248 Coltart, D messages 1234 to 1247, via http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/associationofzimbabwejournalists-uk/message/1234
As regards the fourth variable – engagement with the British establishment and culture – success tends to be uneven when assessed from the perspective of group progress. For while evidence was found of government-level lobbying in the inkundla and bottomhalf constituencies, among the journalists and goffals this appeared to be less so, apart from individuals reporting to the group their own experiences in interacting with the asylum system and the Zimbabweans it detained. The view that goffals feel as ‘unrepresented’ in Britain as the do in Zimbabwe was also expressed.

8.5 Conclusion to the Chapter

The evidence appears to show that there is intent and action in most variables of activism in the different cases, but that there is a tension between different orientations, political and ethnic, in each of the four web case studies. The ‘Count on Us’ charity continues to exist, eclipsing its sixth year at the end of this research. It still supports only goffal beneficiaries. Investments in Mthwakazi autonomy that generated much heat on inkundla.net are reflected in schools’ rehabilitation with support from diaspora resources and the linkages of diaspora capital with the relevant homeland agencies to facilitate domestic housing in urban and rural areas (Chapter 5). These interventions are ethnically defined. To the extent that the schools and housing developments might be measurable, their scale has not translated into permutations of an Ndebele state at hand.

Tangible investments in the health sector by way of skills and equipment is a uniquely non-sectarian initiative that gets funding from ZimFest and publicity on thebottomhalf.com. In time, as it collaborates with other transnational health initiatives, it will likely lose the association with the white diaspora, not least because increasing numbers of black Zimbabweans around the world are showing interest in supporting their country’s health sector. However, it will always be significant that the particular initiative that this research
reviewed – the Shared Health Empowerment – was the brainchild of white medical practitioners, students and non-medical professionals in London who exhibited a philanthropic vocation that necessarily addressed a corporate rather than sectional Zimbabwean concern.
9.1 A Public Sphere of Special Interests

There is a public sphere of the Zimbabwean diaspora, on and emerging from special interest websites in Britain. It is a significant media and associational space addressing a breadth of needs and diverse agenda of the British Zimbabwean presence. The experience of Zimbabweans, their sustaining of networks through the internet, and how this has precipitated social action, sheds light on the connectedness of expatriate communities within themselves and with their homeland, especially where the dynamics of the homeland constrain public discourse and render the discordant voices of nationals abroad unwelcome. Researching the Zimbabwean experience in Britain to this extent has revealed something in the nature of diaspora experience that has not been available in previous studies: the desire and need of change in the homeland and the efforts of those in the diaspora to provide some relief for an imperilled situation. The internet websites established by UK-based Zimbabweans also provide a venue for analysis of the multi-faceted terrain presented by Zimbabwean groups. They give access to useful and useless expressions of these groups as they contend with and contrast official discourses. Scholars can use these websites for a closer look at Zimbabweans and their lived experiences, especially abroad but also as they relate with conditions and communities at home.

The part played by these websites as artefacts of identity, working within the webs of social relations, show how patterns of association can be reproduced online. With its empirical description of each website and activity, the thesis has engaged with multiple authenticities in a way that undermines hegemonic perspectives of Zimbabwean nationality. Each case examined was a corporeal component of the diaspora public space, with just one idealizing discourse about the ‘nation’ of Mthwakazi which no longer is, but
which has a historical basis and is a motivating factor for mobilising siNdebele speakers in the British diaspora. The websites offer symbolic resources generated and mobilized for action and for stating and re-stating identity. The examples this thesis explored will go a long way towards breaking the homogenizing discourse by which diasporas generally, and the Zimbabwean diaspora in particular, have been understood.

The website and associational spaces have been shown as sites where collective understandings and group allegiances are sustained. They have extended homeland discourses and liberated them. Each website was shown to comport with Giddens’ idea of ‘social movements’ that attempt collectively to ‘further a common interest or secure a common goal through action outside the sphere of established institutions’ (2001:439). They instituted, in the electronic and transnational domains, consultative processes that have been likened to the inkundla/padare or Zimbabwean traditional public sphere, albeit with the patriarchy challenged in all cases, even discarded in some. By whatever name it is called, in whichever language, the public discourse as extended to the diaspora in this thesis is representative of a plurality of identities. The discourse, as was shown, gives rise to social action: a charity for goffals, land claims in Matabeleland for the amaNdebele, support for the health sector (Chapter 6), a cash reward for Zimbabwe-based reporters (Chapter 7) – all objectives negotiated and presented on the fora for action. These examples have translocated the inkundla/padare concept from a deliberative forum of village elders to a meta-narrative experience that gives possibilities for media representation to all constituencies of Zimbabwe, even if the possibilities are not always exploited, thus conforming with Habermas’ (1989:446) expectations:

A legitimate decision does not represent the will of all, but is one that results from the deliberation of all. It is the process by which everyone’s will is formed that confers it legitimacy on the outcome, rather than the sum of already formed wills.
The evidence confirms the fragmented nature of the Zimbabwean diasporic public sphere in Britain. But fragmentation is to be expected where the home context is dominated by an ethnocentric political elite to the marginalization of others. We have tracked the emergence of some of that fragmentation in Zimbabwe’s colonial history, its modification by the nationalists to suit their majoritarian agenda after independence, and the fertile ground that created for discontent. We have seen that fragmentation grow to the extent that some no longer identify with their political community (secessionists on inkundla.net talking up their own ‘statehood’ and referring to Zimbabwe as a ‘neighbouring’ country, for instance), or with shared social concerns (the goffals and ‘Count on Us’ who can really only be ‘counted on’ by the needy in mixed-race communities). In the absence of a functioning democracy at home with fundamental freedoms of expression and information, this thesis evidences the usefulness of such fragmentation in serving ‘deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies’ (Habermas, 2006:411ff). The ‘double space’ occupied by the diaspora as components of multi-cultural British society on the one hand and proponents of a ‘rabid racial absolutism’ on the other, might seem incongruent to critics like Mishra (2006:449), who was researching a volatile and segmented Indian context whose homeland divisions, Mishra felt, are stoked by people living in more tolerant western societies.

Mishra’s Indian context may, or may not be as stifling as Zimbabwe’s. What we have shown this segmentation in the Zimbabwean diaspora to be, is both a reaction to homeland politics, and an illustration of the Du Boisian ‘double consciousness’ discussed in the first, fifth and seventh chapters, bringing with it a tension between the ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan narratives with which diaspora scholars should remain engaged.
The spheres we have explored offer space even for those who frequent but do not join discussion threads. On the internet as in broader consumption theories, the user experience is not simply a binary one between those who articulate and those who lurk as silent readers. As with the village forum, all are invited to proffer a view, but are not coerced. The futility of coercion must have dawned on Longworth, the goffal webmaster in Chapter Four: users, even in a community of strong connectedness, are of the ‘neo-consumer model’ which ‘does not involve an individual who has been manipulated and hypnotized but one who is mobile’ (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007:8). The process is of users operating or lurking ‘within the confines of a situation that no one truly controls’, where users ‘are not manipulated but engage in tacit compromises’.

Even a silent reader can avoid manipulation, and is to be respected for their choice to withhold their opinions despite their membership and entitlement to use the online discussion facilities. It is reasonable to expect that the lurkers are living off the website community after all, keeping abreast of information, and attending the goffal, inkundla, ZimFest, AZJUK and related functions, perhaps even contributing financially or materially to the causes that spring from these initiatives. To see these websites and their constituencies solely in terms of the vocal components is to restrict engagement to that which can be phenomenologically abstracted. Yet the public sphere is a marketplace of people, vocal and otherwise. The listeners may not always be noticed, but they do add volume to the faculties of reception.

Thus the public sphere, conceived by Habermas as a power relationship within one jurisdiction, contrived as an electronic sphere by internet scholars like Burnett and Marshall, and incorporated into diaspora experiences (Appadurai 1996; Werbner 1997; Wise 2006; Moyo 2007), has been combined by this research into a contra-authoritarian narrative of all three spaces – internal, diaspora and internet. It is depicted here as a
model of Zimbabwean heterogeneity that speaks from and for constituencies. Meaning is negotiated, values reinforced and challenged, and objectives set and achieved. Habermas may not have conceived of such an extension to his sphere of interactions of citizens within a jurisdiction. But he critically engaged with wider implications of his theories in his most recent publications and, as this thesis showed, has inspired internet and diaspora scholars seeking various ways of conceptualizing mediated and other public forms of engagement. From the perspective of this research, the participatory nature of diaspora websites and their associations provides a new dimension to these forms of engagement.

The engagement of the diaspora with the Zimbabwean homeland establishment and social contexts could be appraised by a wider range of theories than are deployed here. Habermas theorized on the distinction and interaction between a ‘debating public’ and authority, but others question how inclusive his concept of ‘public’ was. In his works, Michael Warner both challenged and developed the Habermasian concept of discourse by introducing notions of publics ‘defined by their tension with a larger public’ that ‘contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large’ and include ‘the sexual cultures of gay men and of lesbians(...camp discourse or the media of women’s culture’ (Warner 2005:56). Such publics were ‘the stronger modification of Habermas’ analysis – one in which he has shown little interest’. Warner argued that the bourgeois public sphere defined by Habermas focused on resistance to authority in broader communal terms, missing the resonance of ‘transformative’ and ‘creative’ discourses that had become marginalized within that resistance. But in those broader terms of engagement, did the inter-subjectivity of actors marginalise their individuality? Did conformity arising out of a need for acceptance apply more influence than other factors? Could other actors with entitlements to belong, feel excluded from the subjective
identifications by which a ‘public sphere’, even an ‘extended public sphere’ like Zimbabweans in the diaspora, might be defined? Was Warner’s (2002:243) criticism of the ‘abstract’ nature of the Habermasian public space underlining a subversion, rather than enablement of democratic discourse? And might there be more resonance with individuals’ everyday lives in Warner’s (2002:260) argument for ‘counter publics’ which reflect a social world of conflicting opinions and contradictory interests ‘that cuts against the bourgeois public sphere’?

There are aspects of Warner’s argumentation which could elucidate some of the properties of the diaspora networks engaged in this study – migration support, drawing on legal channels but refracted through ethnic and nationalist permutations, for example; or the Mthwakazi secessionists contradicting their homeland’s legal status as part of Zimbabwe. But Warner’s departures put him at odds with Habermas on several fronts, beyond the ‘stronger modification’ discussed previously. Warner argued that unlike the ‘utopian’ nature of the public sphere which he claimed ‘has rarely, if ever, approximated reality because the abstract and disinterested public it imagines nowhere exists’ (2002:243), his notion of counter publics bears ‘personal signatures’ and ‘trademarks’ (p260) that arise from a sub-culture and its attempts to create, not a general public, but a ‘public of individuals’ seeking to find ‘the utopian promise of consumer publicity’.

Other than alternative sexual orientations, he gives an example of the mainly black urban male’s graffiti writing culture, which he says has become both a medium and a counter public: ‘the major cities each devote millions of dollars per year to obliterate it, and to criminalise it as a medium, while the art world moves to canonize it out of its counter public setting’ (2002:260). This is advanced as an example of how the counter public creates agency for those on the margins, defies institutional structures and strictures of civil society, and reflects a quest in academic discourse for a theory ‘more
sensitive to various forms of communication and to multiple publics and sites of reception’ (Sassi, 2001:93).

Yet Habermas (1990:4; 1989:29) considered his public sphere to be one of interaction, not abstraction: an interactivity of substance between the public and authority, a collective engagement of individuals, and therefore not prone to abstraction or uniformity. Its multifarious nature accommodates the diverse, contra-authoritarian narratives which this work has discussed. Spheres of counter-establishment and transnational engagement, examined as an extension of Zimbabwe’s homeland discourses, fit the Habermasian frame and have been researched here in a symmetrical, but not uniform national context, so that the resistance of one or more components does not dichotomise the discourse into ‘publics’ and ‘counter publics’. The Mugabe government embraces such a dichotomy because it has sought to discredit diaspora-based Zimbabweans as operatives of foreign powers (Mugabe 2003; Meredith 2002:154; Jeater 2007). But we have shown in this research that the linkages between Zimbabweans in British and homeland spaces are wider and deeper than politics, and that the physical dislocation exacerbates the sense of belonging to the one geo-political sphere, rather than alienating those abroad as some form of ‘counter public’.

It is an appreciation of the Habermasian accommodation of engagement and resistance under a totalitarian government– and his reference to a ‘cooperative search of deliberating citizens for solutions to political problems’ (Habermas 2006:414) – that sustains the boundaries of transnational activism as an extension of the Zimbabwean discourse within the interpretative framework of this thesis.
9.2 Diverse Identities

This study was located at the confluence of culture and historicity: a point where Zimbabwe’s expatriates, provoked by their diaspora condition, reflected on their pasts and futures in times of heightened anxiety. Tracking online discourses and the events and campaigns they created, the research abstracted identities ignored by other scholars which transcended geographical boundaries, but remained embedded in Zimbabwean historical and social contexts. The anxieties palpable in each of the four website cases studied mirrored the degeneration in Zimbabwe, particularly the plight of constituencies within that situation. This research has shown that through an appreciation of Zimbabwean diasporas and the country’s social and political history scholars can delve in even greater depth into reproductions of Zimbabwean identity that some may have thought never existed. Viewed through previously unresearched websites that galvanized diverse identity formations and their cultural, political and economic investments, the Zimbabwean diaspora’s diversity has been placed on the academic and social agenda and can no longer be ignored. Scholars have previously studied Zimbabweans, their politics, and their increased visibility in Britain, but the diaspora websites this research has highlighted have provided new and diverse vantage points on those realities. As a scholarly contribution, the thesis has generated insights into the differences affecting diaspora identities, how history has shaped those differences, and how use of the websites allows all these to be arbitrated beyond a viewpoint that is hegemonic, narrow and exclusive.

Through an analysis of how a range of variables (ethnicity, gender, health/HIV-AIDS, politics, and interlocution with the British establishment) map onto the f2f activities and online interactivities that the subjects engage in, the study has sought to confront an under-acknowledgement of the plurality of ‘Zimbabweanness’, especially as it is reflected within the British diaspora. British government and non-governmental
discourses have not recognized the cultural autonomy of goffals and the amaNdebele despite campaigns by these groups in Britain, nor was British asylum policy alert to the hazards these particular groups faced inside Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean journalists, the other constituency reviewed, were likewise peripheral to asylum narratives that presupposed that only political activists could be in harm’s way in Zimbabwe. Those who have understood the Mugabe regime’s indiscriminate violence have a broader knowledge of the permutations of non-political ‘difference’.

The plural expressions of identities that have a Zimbabwean socio-geographical relevance also found realization in the manifestations of those websites’ cultural and political affinities as visible, diverse expressions of activism. Indeed the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative character of social communication in dispersed Zimbabwean communities has reflected a re-enfranchisement of diaspora groups of ethnic minorities and professionals who are connected through electronic media discourses. Seeking information and companionship (Chapter 3), Zimbabweans of varied descriptions have used the space for plural expression in Britain’s liberal democracy to articulate more than the political polarizations of their troubled homeland. It was clear online interaction had not masked ethnic diversity. Interactivity with ethnic biases proved Burkhalter’s (1998:72) findings that ‘[f]ar from eliminating race as a salient characteristic, online interactants employ the limited resources available in a textual medium to establish a racial world online that resembles the offline world’. This resemblance is factual in terms of Zimbabwe’s history, politics and demographics, no matter how downplayed or ignored ethnic minorities and their public spaces might be.

What’s to be made of these phenomena? We have seen evidence of a reflexivity by Zimbabweans of nationality, distinct categories thereof it is true, but in each case an intense investment in claims of ownership and belonging. We have seen evidenced a
finger-on-the-pulse connection with lives and livelihoods in homeland neighbourhoods of the same identities as those that dominate the diaspora websites. There appeared to be genuinely philanthropic motives in each case, but it is also true that expatriate communities have come to be associated with opposition to Mugabe, and especially with articulation of minority narratives of exclusiveness. These properties of diversity, objectionable to some, are an inevitable response to the manner in which Mugabe’s nearly three decades in power have constrained a public sphere of diversity.

9.3 The Metamorphosis of Online into Offline Interaction

This study underlined important life-sized interventions that emerged from online networks. Although some studies of diaspora use of websites preceded this research, the literature does not abound with examples in that direction. It is therefore significant how this research illustrates the fruition of some aspects of the online discourses it examined. Evidence produced from each of the four case studies (chapters 4 -7) showed the evolution from message transmission to online interaction and then concrete interaction. The chapters evaluated the importance of outcomes to an extent, dwelling more on the significance of initiatives towards those outcomes, and drawing important indicators of the priorities and self-definition of each constituency. The evidence showed support for Zimbabwe’s health sector, education, poverty alleviation and land procurement initiatives from one or more of the websites and their offline associations, illustrating a progression from an idea by users online, to a momentum that impacted the corridors of health institutions, the Bulawayo City Council, government land allocation agencies, and hardship relief schemes. School refurbishments (Chapter 5), health support initiatives and the massive demonstrations of affinity by white exiles in London (Chapter 6), cash awards in Sterling for homeland-based journalists arranged by their UK-based colleagues (Chapter 7) were outcomes which could be evaluated within the research. But the research could not always quantify outcomes to precision – for example, the extent to which siNdebele-
speakers regained control of the resettlement and purchase of residential stands in Bulawayo and Matabeleland (Chapter 5). Still, these chapters chronicled a progression beyond willingness, to a political and social action that transcended the virtual domain of discourses on the four websites. This demonstrated how use of the internet is able to effect material transactions and social formations emanating from cyber-discourse.

To the extent that marginalized groups made use of the internet for their Zimbabwean constituencies, their social interventions resulting from communication on the websites was part of a re-enfranchisement of the websites’ constituencies inside and outside Zimbabwe. With the Zimbabwean country context being one of extreme hardship, the diaspora’s experience of collaborative activity, engagement with homeland communities and a desire to see change in the home country accentuates the claims that can be made about its internet-based efforts and reproductions of identity. As such, based on peculiar histories, this research has thrown light on a more intense example of displacement and expatriate activism than the studies of diaspora from other country contexts referred to throughout the thesis. For a country and continent that relies on foreign aid, these contributions from the diaspora are critically important. The scale of provision as a direct result of the internet interaction in the case studies this thesis has reviewed arouses natural interest, but this thesis has not proffered itself as a yardstick for any such measurement. Rather it attaches importance to the processes of interactivity, identity-claiming and reproduction, the contrasts between the different groups of actors, and their relevance to Zimbabwe.

It may be appropriate to ask what would or would not have happened without the technology, and particularly the websites researched. The question is a little speculative, but has been answered by some of our key informants. Goffal.com was the first recorded medium of any form – inside or outside Zimbabwe – offering a mixed-race Zimbabwean
perspective primarily targeting its own constituency without the caveats dictated by African nationalism in Zimbabwe and broader indifference to hybridity in academic and political perceptions of post-colonial societies. An independent medium of aggregation and information dissemination of this nature would have been hard to conceive, and indeed was not conceived, before the internet. Likewise the founder-member of the oldest surviving Zimbabwean network (inkundla.net), Roli Masiane, recounted the angst of newly-arrived siNdebele speakers in Britain in the 1980s with access only to Zimbabwean government newspapers - which arrived in London a day late – and British newspapers which at the time failed to appreciate the extent of the repression in Zimbabwe. Other groups, Zimbabwean whites and journalists among them, have similarly interacted from the furthest parts of Britain. The technology was shown in this thesis to have given the platform to marginalised groups which are situated in the diaspora to articulate their past and their present and to construct a vision for their future. Without it, the projects and achievements, however modest, would likely not have been conceived. As it happens, the properties of the internet continue to expand today and to make these objectives more and more feasible. Outside the scope of this research, more recent use of internet websites has alerted a global audience to the horrors inflicted by the Mugabe regime on villagers in the most remote locations of Zimbabwe. That dimension might provide an option for further research.

9.4 Making the ‘Unusable’ Usable: Deploying Identity Properties in Migrant Spaces

The currency of the website cases and their communities was their ‘unBritishness’. Characteristics which were decidedly out of tune with the host culture but which the diasporans used as linkages to their past threw up virtual and corporeal enclaves of identity narratives of Zimbabwean origin. In all four case studies, the user-constituents exported categories produced or reinforced in Zimbabwe that were not squarable with
British categories, even though they could modify them radically, since they were confronted with a different set of stratifications in the diaspora. A journalists fraternity in which less than six actually worked for Zimbabwean media demonstrated the contradictions of this double-sitedness: rejecting the Union Jack in its logo, yet suffixing ‘UK’ to its name, having a membership of British residents, teaming up with the (British) National Union of Journalists, exploiting employment opportunities in British institutions, even campaigning for asylum-seekers in Britain. The strong views elevating Zimbabwean symbols over those of the hostland evince near hostility to the hostland’s national flag. Again the flag issue surfaced when white Zimbabweans attending Zimfest packed trains and buses headed in the direction of Raynes Park, London, bedraped in the colours of the Zimbabwe flag, if not the flag itself. This demonstration of Zimbabwean symbolism in suburban London by white Zimbabweans parallels the journalists’ animation over national symbolism as an illustration of how diasporas look to their past for signifiers, even as they attune to British residential and perhaps citizenship status.

The inclination towards conspicuousness by these diasporic formations and their interactions should be read against the hegemonic posturing of the homeland government and the alien environment of the hostland. They do not regard themselves as representing something new. Rather, they are characterized by a degree of conservatism and a willingness to uphold what they perceive as their values. They are standing up for their right to conspicuously flaunt their stuff. This deployment of conspicuousness illustrated, and is the result of, Heideggerian Angst over usability of identities and their properties from the past, unlocked by the ‘otherness’ of the diaspora groups and their needs in an alien context. Even as their identities are determined by

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segmented histories reflected in struggles with the host country context, whose fault lines do not match the permutations of Ndebele, goffal, white, or for that matter, Shona identities, the thesis shows how these identities are fundamental to the Zimbabweans themselves and, for the most part, the philanthropic initiatives that ensue from each constituency. Arguments about the utility of goffal slang in Chapter Four (4.3.1) and the three-way ‘identity crisis’ discussed by UK-based amaNdebele in Chapter Five, Section 5.7, typify the struggle of Zimbabweans in Britain with their redundant mannerisms.

Yet this nostalgia does not place the Zimbabweans in an all-encompassing alienation from the British present. However keenly they feel the allure of their Zimbabwean pasts, the constituencies reviewed are also moving on with their lives in the host country, enjoying privileges of permanent residence or citizenship and becoming more attuned to the social environment. This does not erase the emotional attachment to Zimbabwe, hence the ongoing recourse to Zimbabwean identities and, therefore, the continued usefulness of these websites in reproducing the ‘unusable’. The Heideggerian influence on notions of ‘Being’ discussed in earlier chapters also help explain an accentuated ethnic partisanship among those abroad than there may be at home – but this has been energetically channelled towards provision for the base communities in Zimbabwe. How the different forms of encounter organized themselves in response to particular relational spaces determined by inner-group pressures and the dynamics of the greater Zimbabwean discourses reflect aspirations for an identity more localized than national citizenship. An example of this is how siNdebele speakers elevated inkundla.net to a rubric for an ‘Mthwakazi’ nation still to be formally established within Zimbabwe, and how Zimbabweans of mixed ancestry reflected on their marginalization by being pro-active in transnational philanthropy in aid of the residential spaces within Zimbabwe historically dominated by persons of mixed-race (goffals).
9.5 Race in the discourse

This has been a thesis as much about multiple identities and their textual reproduction as it has about the multiple definitions of belonging. The racialized identities in particular spoke to new understandings of nationality and its articulation on the margins, the internet providing space for colonial era categories to be reproduced as authentic definitions in the diaspora as they are in the post-colonial homeland. These definitions do not fit British categories of difference and are contested in Zimbabwe itself. The identities preceded the diasporic condition of the racialized communities, justifying historical analysis of the homeland context. This is why the argument has been made that the websites themselves, though established in Britain, are clearly extensions of homeland spaces, and likewise events generated through each website which remit capital to causes in the homeland. The strength of the homeward linkages has dominated the racial element to the extent that it has constrained the thesis from exploring identity politics within the diaspora more broadly.

For example, there were interesting cues in the discourses on www.thebottomhalf.com that pointed to the struggles of white Zimbabweans abroad, trapped between a European heritage and an ‘Africanness’. The result was a white Zimbabwean nationalism that both marginalized itself in Britain, and was alienated from Zimbabwe’s majority blacks. The frustrations detected in their discourse was instructive for diaspora studies and will continue to interest post-colonial scholars eager to look beyond colonial-era antagonisms.

The bottomhalf.com is clearly dominated by the younger generation, which helps to explain its sexual frankness, promotion of links with tertiary institutions inside Zimbabwe, and the energy with which it annually sustains a formidable Zimbabwe Festival. Its attitude towards history is that the events and consequences of the past belong there: today’s generation of Zimbabwean whites cannot be blamed for what their forbearers did. The Ndebele website, www.inkundla.net, by contrast, enthusiastically embraces its historicity. It incorporates the values of seniority, with its participants assuming web names like
Mzilikazi, Lobengula, Zwangendaba and other Ndebele historical icons to stake a claim to the Ndebele legacy as transmitted and preserved by a lineage of elders. The inkundla.net forum is an electronic version of that forum of elders, defending the Ndebele legacy against encroachment by a Shona-dominated central government in Zimbabwe. The mixed-race goffal.com forum also derives its ideology from socio-historical events. It takes for granted an understanding of its existence as a fact of Zimbabwe’s demographics, even if some scholars view the goffals as a hybrid people with without any distinct identity to the extent that their make-up is influenced from both their black and white forebears. Academic arguments on either side of the description of goffals have been few and far-between, but an in-depth look at goffal.com affords an inside perspective of how these people are perceived and how they view themselves in polarized notions of Zimbabwean nationality.

As illuminating as this study was into Zimbabwe’s diverse social history, a secondary agenda of how minority rights are defined in post-colonial states influenced the discussion. As was evidenced, there are a multiplicity of localized sentiments expressed by Zimbabwean communities that appeal to deeper emotional and cultural needs than do the centralized, state-crafted paradigms of enforced nationalism. This research has highlighted the micro-components over the national because there are fundamental claims for recognition of the integrity of component minority identities swallowed up by the wave of majoritarian nationalism which has engulfed Africa in the last half-century. The thesis’ contention is with nationalism – the state-enforced coercion and constraint in which specific political and cultural symbols are deployed as the only legitimate forms of national expression – rather than nationality which as a concept ‘respects and learns from others who are different, both those in their midst and those who live in other countries’ (Hoffman, 2004:7).
9.6 Hopes for a ‘cosmopolitan citizenship’

In many ways, the thesis offers a critique of Zimbabwe that undermines the hegemonic perspective. Along with the evident philanthropy, it is an ongoing engagement with Zimbabwe by its expatriates. The expatriates’ interventions in defiance of hostile Zimbabwe government attentions are compelled by their connectivity to the Zimbabwean situation and the suffering of their base communities. It is a relational identification with the homeland’s suffering which, as Hoffman (2004:9) explains, ‘underpins the case for a citizenship that excludes no-one’, including those in the diaspora. The critique from the diaspora both in solidarity and as a form of authentication bolsters under-siege compatriots at home, ensuring that the ‘critique from within’ Hoffman alluded to receives currency from abroad.

Ndebele and goffal communities at home may not be in raucous confrontation with the systems and discourses accused of sidelining them, but neither are they evidently pleased with their lot. In Matabeleland, the Ndebele electorate has almost shut out Mugabe’s party from local government structures, and while there are no patterns of voting to describe the disposition of the tiny goffal presence, their exclusively urban habitats have also voted decisively for Mugabe’s opposition. Diaspora communities and their media thus have become components of their base communities’ struggles to free Zimbabwe from Mugabe’s nationalism. They are, in concept and in practice, an extension of this struggle, and therefore an extension of the Zimbabwean sphere. The extension of that public space despite Mugabeism will likely thrive through the difficult years, and possibly after Mugabe’s exit.

While these aspirations for ‘cosmopolitanism’ are positive, it does not follow they will always yield positive results. The tensions which Mugabe claimed to be addressing, albeit
with a heavy-handed and ultimately destructive government (Chapter 6), look set to re-emerge if new freedoms benefit only the elites. Murphy (2005:62) has warned that

…with this high cosmopolitanism, some of the inherent conflicts re-emerge: conflicts with labour, conflicts with those on the periphery of the privileged capitalist core, conflicts between different industrial centres of the core, especially conflicts with other social models governing parts of the world economy.

Thus, the ambitions of the diaspora discourses for a post-Mugabe era must not lose sight of the imbalances that existed before, which gave Mugabe an agenda in the first place. The degree of Mugabe’s coercion and exclusion in the pursuit of this agenda runs contrary to what the diaspora groups have achieved, and continue to practice. Yet the contrasts, stark as they are, do not require a disembowelling of the reasonable exercise of prerogatives by an elected and accountable government that might follow Mugabe’s era. The formula for a secure future for all Zimbabweans lies in the incorporation of minorities without stifling difference, not simply de-regulation for its own sake. The ideal, to quote Nyamnjoh, is a ‘cosmopolitan citizenship of diversity and inclusion, where difference is practically liberated from the tokenism of the coercive illusion embodied in the pursuit of the nation state’ (2006:111; 207).

It could be argued that all societies require some ‘coercive illusion’ to function satisfactorily. Coercion implicit in a constitutional order – to which the state party also must be accountable – would likely qualify as a ‘reasonable exercise of prerogatives’ by a government. But where state power is used against communities on the margins, often discriminately, the inclusiveness of the society is compromised by the state actor which ordinarily should guarantee it. In response, the networked social spaces the likes of which we have examined have emerged as ‘cathartic antidotes to the alienated subjectivities created by these environments’ (Maffesoli 2007:36) in empowering some of the stifled
identities inside Zimbabwe. The dialectics observed in the online discussion groups and their associations, pitting state interests against a plurality of ethnic minority and alternative political formations, clearly externalise the debates which are not possible in the homeland.

There is also evidence of the British-based websites and their associations acting as interlocutors for Zimbabweans in their engagements with British authorities, particularly in asylum and naturalisation narratives in each of the four cases. The websites offer practical help and empathy, and even official representations to parliamentarians, as seen in some of the cases. This has verified theories of the internet which anthropomorphise online interaction by emphasising the pull of its shared processes of constructing meaning, and the active and interactive participation it facilitates between the establishment and those who are marginalized.

9.7 Developments emerging at the end of the research

The social history of constituencies occupying diaspora spaces exceeds the colonial and post-colonial parameters of Zimbabwean identities. Diaspora studies looks at history in terms of memories and memorialisation, yet the contexts continue to mutate post-fieldwork. Any trends that develop in the immediate future of these constituencies may be linked to emerging possibilities in the homeland, where a new form of government has incorporated the political opposition, and the economy has deteriorated beyond the malaise which influenced migration to Britain in the last decade. The implications of this decline compromise incentives for return. To assess whether the winds really have changed in Zimbabwe, and what the response of its expatriate communities to the new government might be, will require a bit more time. Meanwhile, white Zimbabweans continue to interact with colleagues in the collapsed health sector back home. The Shared
Health Empowerment Initiative held its annual meeting in London in April 2009 to assess the effects of the new government’s stabilisation measures on their continued resourcing of Zimbabwean hospitals and university medical schools. The white website, thebottomhalf.com, closed in November 2008, but initiatives such as the health support and the annual ZimFest were continuing regardless. Perhaps they, like goffal.com’s ‘Count on Us’, had assumed lives of their own.

Goffal.com’s name change coincided with sharply reduced information flows. Barring advertisements of the still popular gigs, the re-named Mr Zims.net message board looked inactive in comparison to the daily flood of postings that fuelled goffal.com. Perhaps the new format was off-putting: there were complaints to the webmaster of access and posting difficulties. Perhaps goffal users were offended at the name change, effected without consultation, which replaced the common nomenclature with the universally understood, but not well-loved ‘mixed-race’. More significantly, perhaps the newer forms of online networking – Facebook in particular, with its several goffal sites – had bled the new-look website of its subscription base. That investigation into social networking through the mutating cyber formations will be another project. We can begin to pose the questions for it, though. Will Zimbabwean diaspora communities sustain their activism? How will it be affected by recent political changes? Will people become less activist, and more sanguine, about the human rights and economic failures? Will the ‘new’ government inclusive of Mugabe and his military power base encourage their return to Zimbabwe?

The issue of return has not preoccupied the research. In the despairing situations of the research period, and even in light of recent promising developments, one cannot offer an informed opinion. There are contrasting levels of repatriation to countries emerging from insecure pasts. With the notable exceptions of the immediate post-colonial Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa, African countries struggling to rehabilitate themselves after
disastrous regimes have not been overwhelmed by returning nationals who fled the
deterioration. Even in countries like Uganda, which show some positive signs of recovery,
the caution of overseas-based nationals has prevented their return and restricted their
investments. Kampala, Uganda’s capital, may have become a thriving economic hub
again, but that has been largely stimulated by international aid and not because of
returning Ugandans. The main impact of the Ugandan diaspora continues to be in
remittances from abroad, where they remain largely ensconced, rather than in political or
transformational involvement. On the other hand, countries like China and India have
found their huge diaspora not only a source of overseas investment, but also hands-on
expertise, with homeland and foreign-born Chinese and Indian expatriates returning to
capitalise on strong economic prospects in Beijing and Bangalore. It remains to be seen
whether the first or second scenario applies in Zimbabwe’s case.

9.8 Conclusion

This has been a study about multiple identities in a singularly constituted national
construct. But it is also about researching diasporas, and Africans, from outside
hegemonic wholisms. In a democratic public space meaning is negotiated by all
participants and participating cultures, but in the past, continuities of Zimbabweans in
Britain has been viewed in a way that was narrow and exclusive. This thesis provides a
nuanced view of the Zimbabwean diaspora, its emergence from extremely difficult
conditions in Zimbabwe, and its struggles to fully integrate with Britain’s social and
professional circles. Zimbabwean internet websites have provided a window on those
struggles.

The thesis has significantly informed existing knowledge of how new media reproduces
communal identities and plays a role in contemporary social relations. The research
examined whether, as an extended Zimbabwean public space, the internet’s transnational
websites and their associations provide venues for accumulation and bases for intervention in broader spheres. The research has sought to develop insights into the nature and content of the website discourses and the capacity of their networks as a ‘cooperative search of deliberating citizens for solutions to political problems’ (Habermas 2006:414). The research found evidence of strong but segmented identities, some based on language use as part of dilemmas vis-à-vis changing transnational circumstances and the need to use both British and Zimbabwean codes for functional and nostalgic deployment. Some choose a dualistic ‘double consciousness’ (DuBois, 1961:3) to negotiate the double act of being a British resident, with the pressures to conform that come with it, and a native Zimbabwean keen to retain aspects of their upbringing. British values of heterogeneity may encourage integration but even for longer-term British residents, deviance remains etched in their narratives, hence the appeal of the sites monitored.

The distinctiveness of the Zimbabwean groups and what they do, to say little (as we have) of what they are capable of doing but have not, is what makes the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain interesting. What happens in the diaspora, among the groupings, is not ignored in Zimbabwe. Mugabe’s appointment of Senator Guy Georgias, a goffal, to first the Zimbabwean senate, then to a deputy ministerial post even as many political veterans were dropped to accommodate the opposition in the inclusive government, may not be put down to goffal.com. But it certainly showed an awareness at State House that representativeness was still on the agenda. The emergence of a transnational struggle for an autonomous entity called ‘Mthwakazi’ recreating the Ndebele kingdom was not achieved within the lifetime of this research, but was certainly adopted with growing vigour and boldness by political movements within Zimbabwe. In two electoral campaigns – 2002 and 2005 – the Matabeleland-based Zimbabwe Africa Peoples Union failed to win first the presidency, and later a single parliamentary seat. The confusion of a
party seeking autonomy for Matabeleland actually contesting a Zimbabwean Presidential Election would not alone have sunk a political party’s fortunes, but it did not help sell ZAPU’s platform. Which was it that they wanted, people asked, autonomy in Matabeleland, or the whole cake? Still, the fact that a serious campaign at a national level by a party which advocates significant devolution of power – more than Mugabe was prepared to even discuss – shows that what gained currency abroad through the lively www.inkundla.net debates, could find its way into a national electoral contest.

Some would say the task of fostering national cohesion, especially envisioning a more prosperous future, requires the antithesis of the diversity-plurality argument. Mugabe’s national unity philosophy was laced with similarly well-intentioned one party, one people, one nation objectives, the outcomes of which were painfully apparent: the ethnic majority thrived, the others were sidelined. Pseudo-composite nationalism, enforced in three barbaric phases of anti-Ndebele, anti-white, and anti-MDC campaigns, dealt a blow to aspirations for an all-inclusive Zimbabwe. In this light, the thesis has argued the fundamental right to an inclusive citizenship that empowers minorities and other marginalized voices while isolating those who are staunchly opposed to extending the rights of citizenship on misogynist, racist or nationalist grounds or because they are so privileged that they cannot identify with others. The plural representations of groups in the public sphere is subjectively constructed, but publicly manifested. The innermost convictions of individuals and their inter-subjective consensus with like individuals who share the same ethnicity, culture or profession means that there are innate processes that human beings draw on to define themselves and express who they are as individuals, as families, as ethnic collectivities or as nationalities. What happens when these groups or individuals exercise their freedom of expression is provocative, but not a universal abrogation of national citizenship. Instead, the case studies have shown how intentionally
different labours together create something larger than the groups: a multi-cultural Zimbabwe.

In the end, the research showed that the web-based constituencies offered constituents tangible benefits. These included providing a social sphere of organic solidarity, generosity, mutual support and goodwill, as well as different humanitarian actions which even in the aftermath of the research have the capacity to proliferate. The websites and communities also offered participants respected and shared symbols of nationalism, even if expressed segmentally, helping users engage and fostering identity reproductions based on shared history, culture and traditions. The research underlined the capacity of citizens in the public sphere. It re-affirmed the Habermasian notion that the public sphere, even when internet-based, allows people to engage with each other and make claims on an equal footing. This could potentially redirect the national agenda from the nationalist monopoly that has destroyed Zimbabwe.
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