

# In Pursuit of Being and Belonging: Migrant Associations and the Integration of Nigerian Migrant Entrepreneurs in Harare

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The main thrust of this article is to analyze how a migrant association, particularly the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ), facilitates being, belonging and integration of migrants in the host society. Grounded on ethnography as a method of inquiry and transactional theory as an analytical framework, the article attempts to answer two questions: i) how does the association help to bond and enrich the lives of migrants; and ii) how does the association facilitate the bridging of social connections with the 'other' with the ultimate goal of burying differences, which in essence helps them to continue staying and accumulating in the diaspora. The article illustrates how the association facilitates newcomers' integration, through a range of activities, purportedly, to enrich the lives of migrants in 'strange' downtown environs. As increased contact with the indigenes ensues, the article also shows that the association shifts focus and starts to lessen the social differences between 'us' and 'them' through various activities. The article concludes that migrant associations act as a buffer for migrants as well as a bridging mediator vis-à-vis the host society. With these observations, the article recommends that there is a need for nation-states to leverage on migrant associations for effective migration management as their roles need to be incorporated into migration policies. Additionally, establishing a line of communication with migrant associations is vital. Migrant associations and the nation-state need to find more spaces of communication and interaction to bridge the divide that separates 'us' and 'them'.

Keywords: Ethnography, identity, integration, migrants, migration, transactionalism

## INTRODUCTION

Migrations, with all incidental collision, conflicts and fusions of peoples and culture which they occasion, have been documented among the decisive forces in human history (Park 1928). In recent years, one consequence of increased mobility which is evidential in mobility discourse is migrants' disposition to form migrant associations in host nations. However, despite the overwhelming evidence on intra-African mobility, research has mainly focused on the Global North (Layton-Henry 1990; Putnam 1993; Owusu 2000; Moya 2005; Sardinha 2009). African migrants in other African countries have rarely been the subject of serious study, and hence very little is known about migrant associations in African settings.

The overbearing angle of this article is to look closely at the roles attributed to migrant associations when it comes to migrants' being, belonging, and integration in host societies amidst ethno-cultural and social differences. In practice, Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs have organized themselves internally often belonging to an association – the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ). The article also shows that beyond the entrepreneurship, the association also helps them to forge relationships with the 'other', namely the local community to which they are strangers and must fit in. In addition, the article shows how they use this association to win favours among the authorities and the local people who constitute their neighbours. Accompanying ethnographically-based observations, this article sets itself within the theoretical outlook that being, belonging and integration are not only socially constructed but mutually constructed by migrants and the host society they are settling in. Within this context, the article supports the assertion that being, belonging and integration are migrants' objectives to be achieved within multicultural/intercultural environs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW – CONTEXTUALIZATION

The current era is one in which varied forms of human mobility, across cities, nations and geopolitical frontiers are redefining the meaning of 'home', 'community' and 'belonging' (Landau and Bakewell 2018). Migration is not a new phenomenon in the history of Africa. According to migration scholars, migration had its own functions for different groups and societies, which included the pursuit of sheer survival, search for better opportunities and improved conditions, and of course, the consolidation of advantages and benefits (Adepoju 1995; Baker and Aina 1995).

Some observers have amply described Africa as a 'continent perpetually on the move' (Flahaux and De Haas 2016). In Africa, the dominant theme has been movement to the Global North (Adepoju 2005; Obi 2010). However, there is evidence which points to internal mobility within the continent even if this is intended to prepare for final migration to the Global North (Whitehouse 2012; Antwi-Bosiakoh 2009).

Despite the apparently distinct phases of African history (the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras), migration assumes a considerable measure of both

diversity and continuity in its causes, magnitude and effects on African cities and economies (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004). As the African City increasingly becomes metropolitan (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008; Simone 2001), new scents are smelt, new tastes savoured, new sounds heard and above all, new faces seen (Simone 2004). The city is reproducing the uneasy convergence of seemingly different needs and practices among migrants as new arrivals are moving in, seeking profit, passage and protection (Landau and Bakewell 2018). Through migrants' mobility into, within and out of cities, urban spaces which had tenuous connections between subjects for many years, have now become nodes in diasporic networks of social and economic exchange (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004; Landau 2014).

Migrants not only leave their homelands and find ways into new spaces, rather they reshape themselves along with relations, values and institutions in the host country (Landau and Freemantle 2016). They create and recreate relations with their compatriots who moved with them or before (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005). In the host country they are subject to different laws and regulations; they take on new customs; they have different neighbours and they learn new skills and reshape their own history (Owusu 2000; Whitehouse 2012). These novel and peculiar laws and regulations, as alluded by Landau and Bakewell (2018), create possibilities of migrants organizing themselves and creating symbiotically organized associations in order to navigate the strangeness and quandaries that characterize the new urban milieu (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). These associations are formed to create solidarities in the host countries to protect mutual interests and mobilize support on issues of concern (Layton-Henry 1990).

Casual observers and scholars alike have called attention to migrants' disposition to form associations or communities abroad (Moya 2005; Vertovec 2004). De Haas (2006) defines a migrant association as a voluntary grouping of migrants based on reciprocity, solidarity and collectivism, which wields resources and power to forge collective benefits. Bell (1975) defines a migrant association as an effective tie with a common interest formed to preserve the identity and culture of migrants as well as playing a role in the settlement processes through to pathways of integration. These associations provide migrants with social capital, either bonding or bridging (Putnam 2000). Bonding capital connects migrants internally to sustain in-group reciprocity. Thus, integration is maintained through interdependence, exchange and reciprocity (Sardinha 2009). On the other hand, bridging capital connects migrants and the hosts and helps to bring consensus between 'us' and 'them' (Putnam 1993) and integration is achieved through forging of relationships with the hosts, which can lead to cooperation, transactions, and exchange of resources (Cheater 1989).

The review above is suggestive that migrants often develop social and close relations with each other. This might involve subjugating themselves to a membership or voluntary association. Whatever the case, migrants are able to adapt to the new environment using these institutions. But there is another set of literature which suggests that migrants also forge relationships with outsiders using these associa-

tions (Sardinha 2009; Cheater 1989). They may provide gifts, information or provide social responsibility. The range of what they do is unlimited. These sets of relationships, it would appear, are capable of making the new migrants better understand, and more importantly exploit the resources at destination.

This article deals with this matter, using the case of Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs who have migrated to Harare since the 1990s. Mangezvo (2018) observed that Nigerian migrants represent the largest proportion of foreign entrepreneurs operating informal businesses in Harare. Data provided by the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ) shows that there are between 1500–2000 Nigerian entrepreneurs, broken down to fluid ethnic groups which include Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Hausa and Ogoni. These ethnic identities are de-emphasized, and the common identity as ‘Nigerian’ is the one that is preferred. These migrants chiefly come for business opportunities which they say are endless in Zimbabwe. Even those who view Zimbabwe as a transit point to other destinations end up attracted by these opportunities. In Harare, Nigerians have taken over the downtown area, putting up shops retailing goods and services ranging from motor spares, electricals, cell phones, clothing, cosmetics and internet cafes. However, in this same locale, migrants are often regarded as ‘aliens and unwanted intruders’ who have come to grab opportunities from the autochthons, and this further compounds their precarity. Thus, to navigate this seemingly chaotic and rough terrain imbued in their everyday struggles over ‘politics of space’ (Certoma et al.2002), they enact being and belonging through forming associations.

This article employs a transactional lens to show how migrant associations facilitate migrants’ integration into the host society. Barth (1963, 1966, and 1969) and Bailey (1970) propose the importance of association in enhancing group solidarity. Additionally, these scholars also observe that reciprocity and exchange between diverse actors is the basis for bridging social relations. In recent years, a new concept of conviviality has emerged (Nyamnjoh 2017; Overing and Passes 2000; Gilroy 2004), emphasizing how migrants create associations to enrich themselves or to use these associations to create convivial relations with the ‘other’ thereby forging belonging in particular contested spaces. This article argues that this is still the essence of transactionalism, which both Frederick Bailey and Fredrik Barth – two leading transactionalists – saw as being at the centre of all societies, including urban cities.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for this article was generated from ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Harare’s popular downtown boulevards, located in the fringes of the city centre. This is a locale where migrants, Nigerians included, have arrived in various migratory rhythms seeking opportunities in the thriving informal sector. In line with Ferguson’s assertion that, “ethnography is like fishing; all you need is a net to swing; and you will be sure of catching something” (1999:17), ethnography allowed for the acute exploration of the associational lives and experiences of participants.

Since there was no existing sampling frame and participants exemplified a

hard-to-reach population (Atkinson and Flint 2001), snowball sampling was the main vehicle through which participants were selected. As suggested by Akanle (2013), this method consists of identifying and contacting participants recommended by others. For example, the researcher identified the association's president and one local entrepreneur operating in downtown Harare, who then referred the researcher to other participants. This technique was useful because many potential participants were sceptical of the researcher's intentions. Thus, initial participants and contacts were relied upon to recommend other participants.

In keeping with Denscombe (2010), the aim of this study was to emphasize the depth and detail of everyday associational lives and experiences rather than the breadth of associational lives and experiences of migrants. The number of participants was thus limited to 45. By its nature, ethnography may not yield depth if not narrowed to a few cases. Geertz rightly points out that "small facts speak to large issues" (1973:23). Participant observations and in-depth interviews were the primary avenues of approach to gather the required data from a broad swathe of participants, who included: 20 Nigerian entrepreneurs, 8 association leaders, 3 commuters, 10 local traders, 2 immigration officials and 2 Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) officials. In other instances, the researcher made use of informal discussions, some spontaneous and some orchestrated to capture the lived realities of Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs. Secondary sources, particularly the local newspapers and the associations' Facebook pages were also used to triangulate data obtained from in-depth interviews and participant observations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Motives for Formation of the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ)*

According to its president, Mr Obodo, the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ) was formed in 1994 to cater for the welfare of Nigerians in the country. The association has a clear organizational structure which consists of the president, vice-president, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer, welfare officer, assistant welfare officer, spokesperson and the provost/coordinator. These leaders 'give face' to the association and work as active members, defining rules and modes of action, emitting their opinions and exercising their influence on the association's members. This resonates well with the observations of Cheater (1989) and Albuquerque et al. (2000) that social relations and agreed rules govern migrant associations.

Additionally, the NCZ leaders have been in Zimbabwe for a period of 15–20 years, and have extensive knowledge about the host country. This coincides with the popular belief that migrant associations are governed 'from above' by migrants who have been in the host country for considerable periods of time (Antwi-Bosiakoh 2010; Obeng 2010). NCZ leaders are chosen on a rotational basis, after every two years. Mr Osuofa, vice-president of the NCZ and household electricals shop owner, succinctly captured the various prerequisites for eligibility to serve on the leadership

structure:

NCZ is the powerhouse welfare organization of Nigerians in the country and leaders are chosen on a rotational basis. Each of the leaders has his or her own roles and responsibilities. We vote for each leader based on merit. We check whether the individual is brave enough and with 'big heart' because no one is paid and it is time consuming. We try to involve every tribe in these leadership positions based on ethnicity, although in Zimbabwe there are more Igbos than any other tribe (18 December 2018, Harare Street).

Thus, based on the above narrative, being a leader of the association is contingent upon the personal qualities and abilities required to qualify for various leadership positions. These can be academic qualifications, knowledge of the host country, and credibility they may possess in the eyes of Nigerian migrants. As argued by Labelle et al. (1994), as association leaders, these individuals are vital in carrying out the responsibilities of group representation, partly because of their positioning and visibility as intermediaries.

The association's members meet once every two months to discuss planned activities. At these meetings new migrants are introduced to the association and members also vote for their respective leaders. Non-members may also attend the meetings but they do not have the right to vote. Moreover, all association members are obliged to pay a monthly subscription fee of \$5 (USD) and those who default are relieved of their privileges as active members of the association.

#### *Adaptive and Integrative Functions of the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ)*

One thing that is clear about migrants is that they find their initial phases of settling bewildering because they lack the requisite information about the host nation. The NCZ plays a pivotal role in providing information about the host nation to migrants. It functions as an intermediary in offering first-hand experience of the host country to the prospective migrants. This came out clearly from the association's spokesperson, who runs a business specializing in motor spares. He said:

You can't migrate without prior information of where you are going. You have to join the association together with people you know and as Nigerians, we help each other with information about the host nation, we are brothers and we love each other (23 December 2018, Kaguvi Street).

Similarly, the NCZ Coordinator claimed:

We inform Nigerians who would want to migrate what is required in Zimbabwe before they come here. This involves information about visas, permits, either spousal permit or investors' permit. We also tell those who want to travel that if they are not married, they should marry here in the country and get a spousal permit (5 January 2019, Bank Street).

Additionally, the association informs members about investment opportunities in the country as some migrants end up running illicit businesses that tarnish the image of all Nigerians in the country. This was expressed clearly by the welfare officer

of the association who poignantly expressed the following:

I came here in 2005 and I found out that there was NCZ in the country. NCZ was formed to bring all Nigerians in Zimbabwe together. In NCZ we ask a lot of questions: what are your reasons for coming here? What are you doing? Some of our fellow brothers bring a bad name which the host country doesn't like. If you want to specialize in minerals, we warn members to never go near the mineral sector as it is highly political (8 January 2019, Kaguvi Street).

Likewise, Obi, a 40-year-old from Enugu State is exemplary to the sentiments made by the NCZ welfare officer. Obi came to Zimbabwe in 2006, a period when diamonds were discovered in the eastern parts of the country. Obi had a goal to 'flourish in exile' as he wanted to trade in these precious gems. That was possible for him because the diamond fields were characterized by impunity and lawlessness, an indication of the desperation and chaos that pervaded the country at that time (Katsaura 2010). Upon arrival in the country, he registered with the association and was warned not to do that business as it was going to tarnish the image of Nigerians in the country. To avoid swimming in troubled waters, Obi then invested in the motor spares business and today he is a proud owner of two motor spares businesses, one in Harare and another one in Lagos. The laconic narratives above clearly show the importance of the NCZ in conveying pertinent information to migrants. These results concur with scholars. For instance, Crisp (2000) states that migrant associations provide invaluable information to prospective and new migrants. According to Caglar (2006), migrants are often secluded in host communities and migrant associations help migrants by providing critical information for their survival in host communities.

### *Advocacy Roles*

Generally, when migrants move to new territories they are regarded as aliens; and they become scapegoats when nation-states confront economic, political and social problems. They become targets of hostility from the autochthons and blamed for all the social, economic and political problems in the host nation. Zimbabwean bureaucrats suspect migrants of being drug dealers, thieves, fraudsters, and con artists (Mangezvo 2018). This means that Nigerian migrants have to devise new strategies of surviving such a toxic environment. Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs have learnt that the only resolution to disputes with their hosts is through forming an association, which plays a critical judicial function in advocating for their rights. Despite the documents they have to legitimize their stay, they remain subject to multiple forms of exactions from various rent-seeking individuals, maltreatment and unlawful arrests. Rather than exercising the 'politics of invisibility', which characterizes most migrants in a foreign land (Whitehouse 2012), they have opted for the 'politics of recognition' (Taylor 1994; Englund and Nyamnjoh 2004) through the association, to defend their interests en masse – by collectively refusing to put up with abuse, being cheated and paying bribes.

To illustrate its advocacy roles, the association's president reiterated that there

was a time when Nigerian entrepreneurs were continually maltreated by the Zimbabwean authorities. They were unlawfully arrested and detained and pressured to pay huge sums for legal representation or bribes. However, the association helped by representing them in the courts of justice. Ozeze, a 33-year-old specializing in cosmetics was once arrested. He expressed the following:

I was once arrested and unlawfully detained by the Immigration, Compliance Department. Our NCZ lawyers represented me in the courts and I was later released (15 January 2019, Gulf Complex).

However, taking such a grand stand of 'politics of recognition' does not go down well with some Zimbabweans, who think that this is a breach of their tacit agreement not to 'rock the boat' in the host country. This was evident from Kenny, the compliance officer at the Immigration Department who was reported by the NCZ to the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) for soliciting bribes from some Nigerian traders. He frantically noted:

It's a very difficult position for foreigners to advocate for their rights in this country. They should not do what they want and they should know they have limits. Last time I was called by the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) to respond to allegations of soliciting bribes from foreigners including Nigerians. This led to my immediate suspension but I was later reassigned. It didn't go well with me and my superiors (5 January 2019, Department of Immigration).

This narrative concurs with Whitehouse's (2012) observations that strangers in a foreign land should have a stranger's code that obliges them to desist from any activity that might disturb the tenuous relationships between them and the hosts. This includes desisting from drawing unwanted scrutiny to the locals in exchange for permission for 'belonging' in the host country. By this, Whitehouse (2012) argues that strangers should remain quiet and keep their heads down, as exile knows no dignity. Moreover, at an individual level, the association has also performed the judicial function of solving disputes among Nigerians, that would otherwise end up as police or court cases. Such disputes are normally arbitrated by the leaders of the association who use appropriate Nigerian social practices as the basis for settling the disputes.

### *Death and Bereavement*

Generally, people of African descent desire to be buried in their native lands. The NCZ also ensures that its members are buried in their native land. In the event of the death of a member, their kin or relatives in the host country, the association offers a monetary contribution to the grieving family and assists in repatriating the body back home. This was stated clearly by both the association's treasurer and the spokesperson, respectively:

NCZ helps members during good times and bad moments. For example, if death befalls our members, we contribute towards repatriation and burial (3 March 2019, Harare Street).

Sometimes the NCZ helps in times of need. For example, when my wife died, the association took over the whole repatriation process to Imo state for her burial (3 March 2019, Kaguvi Street).

However, it appears that those Nigerians who are not part of the association do not get any help from the association when misfortune befalls them. This was expressed by the association's spokesperson:

We love each other as Nigerians, but there are those who go astray and NCZ punishes them. NCZ helps to repatriate the dead back to Nigeria unless you don't associate with us. Someone died 2 years ago who wasn't registered with us and he was buried here (7 May 2019, Robert Mugabe Street).

These narratives reflect that in the event of the death of a member, the association helps financially to repatriate the body back home. Moreover, in the case of migrants whose family members in Nigeria pass away, the association also contributes financially to assist them. These contributions attest not only to the social and economic importance of migrant associations, but also to the cultural importance attached to death in their homeland (Owusu 2000). According to Nwala (1985), the Nigerian customary belief in an eternal existence in the assumed next life, often leads to burial rites that embrace a variety of functions and rituals, mediated by kinsmen, sons and secret societies, to mention but a few. Where burials are well-planned, they comprise of many rituals, separating the dead from the living, as well as re-arranging spiritual communion and relationships with the ancestors (Nwala 1985). From this discussion of the roles of the association, it is clear that these activities help to bond, enrich and facilitate the adaptation of Nigerian migrants in the host nation.

The next section discusses how Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs, through the NCZ, mount activities and forge relations with the locals, thus facilitating their continued living and accumulation in the host community.

### *Recognition of Incompleteness leads to Conviviality with the 'Other'*

When a migrant community encounters adaptation and integration challenges, the activities of a migrant association take a new direction. This section discusses the efforts of the migrant community at cementing relationships between 'us' and 'them' with the ultimate goal of bridging social connections and burying differences (Albuquerque et al. 2000). This bridging of social connections, where Nigerian traders come closer to the indigenes in various contact zones, allows for the forging of conviviality, where differences between outsiders and insiders recede and become somewhat inconspicuous (Overing and Passes 2000).

Nyamnjoh (2017) asserts that conviviality is the recognition of being incomplete, as humans, on the part of both migrants and indigenes. It is this incompleteness that allows migrants to be open minded in their claims and articulations of identities, belonging and being. "Conviviality encourages (both 'insiders' and 'outsiders') to reach out, encounter and explore ways of enhancing or complementing themselves with the added possibilities of potency brought their way by the incompleteness of

others, never as a ploy to becoming complete, but to make them more efficacious in their relationships and sociality” (Nyamnjoh 2017: 1).

One of the activities where this much-needed conviviality is experienced in abundance, is end-of-year parties, where all Nigerians gather to celebrate their achievements of the year. Two of the participants expressed the following:

This is the time that we gather as NCZ and our families. We invite Zimbabweans happening to be our in-laws as well as other well-wishers to celebrate ourselves after a hectic year. This is just a way of cementing our relations (3 January 2019, Kaguvi Street).

Every year we hold end-of-year parties for our families, where we also involve locals. Sometimes we even invite the local ministers. We are all Africans and it’s a moment for togetherness with Zimbabweans as one people. In Africa there are no borders, like in Europe (8 January 2019, Copa Cabana).

It is also at these end-of-year parties that relations with the officialdom are also consolidated, as a few officials, especially from the Department of Immigration, the City Council and Zimbabwe Republic Police are tactically invited. By forming alliances with these high-ranking officials, they are fashioning a new form of ‘tactical cosmopolitanism’ (Landau and Freemantle 2010) to navigate real or imaginary intricacies characterizing the host community. One might say that they are playing by the rules, which although largely unspoken and unwritten, are known by the actors. This concurs with Milandou (1997) who argues that laws and regulations are only for the anonymous; everything is a matter of relationships. Thus, conviviality can be explored as a process of interaction embedded in social practice, sometimes free from tensions and racism (Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2014; Gilroy 2004). As Putnam (2000) argues, networks forged in these contact zones, like the end-of-year parties, facilitate the integration of newcomers into the host nation, and they also potentially open up more social and economic opportunities.

For locals, this is also an opportunity to know and integrate with the ‘aliens’ better and also to pursue their own interests. This was expressed by a Zimbabwean entrepreneur who operates a clothing shop in downtown Harare:

Nigerians have their own association here in Zimbabwe called NCZ. This association serves a lot of purposes for them. Every year they hold end-of-year parties where we are also invited. I have been invited to their parties several times where we celebrated together and I befriended most Nigerians who later helped me (27 March 2019, Gulf Complex).

However, it is not only migrants who invite the locals to their celebrations. Locals also extend the ‘olive branch’ and invite migrants as a symbol of oneness. This was well captured by Kedha, a local entrepreneur who shares a cosmetic shop with Ozeze, a Nigerian entrepreneur:

I have managed to invite a couple of NCZ members to our celebrations like weddings, parties and other cultural ceremonies and rites in my rural area. This is just to show that we are one and to cement our relations even more (16

January 2019, Gulf Complex).

Moreover, besides the ordinary Zimbabweans inviting Nigerian migrants to their celebrations, the officialdom is not left out. This was expressed by a senior Immigration Officer who articulated the following:

Every year we send formal invitations to all foreigners in the country, including the Nigerians to attend our Independence celebrations, Heroes Day Celebrations as well as the Annual Harare Carnival, to come and showcase their cultural talents. This is a gesture to show our cordial relations with Nigeria from time immemorial (3 July 2019, Department of Immigration).

From the narrative above, it is clear that the NCZ is fashioning new forms of belonging where convivial relations are continually created and recreated. It is at these parties, celebrations and gatherings where accommodation of differences between 'them' and 'us' and where reciprocity and exchange have become the norm (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006).

The demonstration of conviviality above bears testimony to the ways in which migrants employ celebrations and rituals to win the support of a potentially hostile community, narrowing the gap between 'us' and 'them'.

### *Financial Assistance*

Sometimes migrants get start-up capital to start their businesses from the association because they do not have, as a result of their unresolved citizenship status, the requisite documentation to access funding from formal institutions like banks and credit institutions. The association offers direct financial assistance to its members in the form of soft loans, with low interest rates and flexible repayment terms. One of the respondents, Ngozie, who owns two cosmetic shops at the popular Gulf Complex, delightedly expressed the following:

When I came to Zimbabwe, I didn't have enough capital. NCZ helped me with start-up capital amounting to \$3000 USD which I repaid after a year (3 June 2019, Kaguvi Street).

Besides financial assistance, the association also assists newcomers to stock their new businesses, if they do not have enough. This was the case of Victor, who was given motor spares to stock his shop and he said:

At first when I came here it wasn't easy because I didn't have enough capital for a business. One of my brothers, who is also one of the members of the association, advised me to join the association which then helped me with the motor spares stock (26 June 2019, Harare Street).

These results confirm Putnam's (2000) observations that migrant associations foster social ties, which facilitate entrepreneurship among migrants. Norris (1975) also pointed out that migrant associations provide newcomers with a basis of familiar and viable interactions and relationships on which they start to build their new lives 'elsewhere'. However, besides borrowing from the association, some have also borrowed from their Zimbabwean counterparts. For instance, Stany borrowed about US\$ 5000

from his Zimbabwean business partner to expand his business. At the same time, one Zimbabwean automotive entrepreneur based in Norton, about 40km North West of Harare who has close ties with the association members noted that, in order for him to start his motor spares business, he borrowed from association members. This two-way reciprocity qualifies migrant associations as 'communities of itinerancy' in which debts, gifts and finances are exchanged whilst fostering a sense of collective consciousness among migrants and indigenes who did not know each other previously (Alioua 2011).

### *Social Responsibility*

The Nigerian community in Zimbabwe seldom limits its integrative activities to one specific activity. Rather, it has a range of activities to facilitate integration of Nigerian entrepreneurs into the socio-economic environs of the host country, as the scope of its activities involve, most often, forging relationships with the indigenes. Of late, the association has donated to the less privileged, the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the Harare City Council and the victims of Cyclone Idai that ravaged parts of Eastern Zimbabwe. The following narratives by Nigerians support this assertion:

We have donated towards Cyclone Idai victims. We do it with our hearts. Sometime in 2015, we bought bicycles for the Zimbabwe Republic Police and sometime, we bought refuse bins for the Harare City Council. This country is also our country, so we need the Zimbabweans to welcome us as fellow Africans (30 April 2019, Bank Street).

Typically, Nigerians are the most travelled people in Africa, but when we travel, we take with us beliefs that, whatever place we live in is our second home and problems faced in that country we also regard them as our problems. We are committed to serving this country with all our hearts (8 May 2019, Robert Mugabe Street).

The expression, 'this country is also our country, so we need Zimbabweans to welcome us as fellow Africans' can be conceived as a narrative to claim space and belonging, where new-comers try to portray an image that there is no difference between 'us' and 'them' (Landau and Freemantle 2010). Moreover, the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Mr Onyeama, was invited by the association to Zimbabwe in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai in 2018. He was accompanied by the NCZ president to the State House to meet the Zimbabwean President. As cited by the local newspaper, the Herald, the Foreign Minister candidly expressed the following in light of the special visit:

It is a manifestation of the fraternity and solidarity between our people and our two countries (Interview with Foreign Minister Onyeama at State House). More so, the Zimbabwean President was overwhelmed by Nigeria's gesture, reiterating that it was demonstrative of the cordial relations between the two countries which date back to the liberation struggle (Munyoro 2019). The President expressed the following:

The people of Nigeria and its leadership have realized that our brothers and sisters here were visited by Cyclone Idai and in their compassion have sent us a

plane-load of aid to give to people in that area, who have suffered a devastating event (Interview with Zimbabwe's President at State House).

By virtue of these activities and initiatives, the association can be conceived as allowing newcomers to be 'at home away from home'. The association contributes to 'home-making abroad' (Antwi-Bosiakoh 2009), as it is strategically encouraging its members to be responsible citizens at points of destination. Members are encouraged to exhibit a high level of civic spirit to facilitate cohesion and integration. As suggested By Landau and Duponchel (2011), this could offer newcomers protection from exploitation, as these activities and initiatives seem to grease the corridors of bureaucracy. As one Nigerian internet café owner clarified:

At first, the police and the immigration officials were so suspicious about us, so they couldn't take our matters seriously, but now when we can't solve our matters on our own, we now engage the police and immigration officials as we now have a cordial relationship, particularly because of what they have seen us doing in the country.

### *Enhancing Networks through Cultural Exchanges*

In reaction to the swelling 'politics of non-belonging' on the continent, African scholars have stood up to challenge the rhetoric of nativism and autochthony (Whitehouse 2012). Achille Mbembe has been at the forefront of this crusade, as well as Ghanaian Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. Appiah (2006) argues that cultural purity is an oxymoron. Endeavours to fix human identity in space and place, he argues, rests on a fundamental error: cultural hybridization and migration are not exceptions but are indeed its very essence. It is possible, thus, to imagine a future in which openness to outside influence is celebrated as a virtue. Appiah (1997) argues that the cultural differences that we bring to the table, make it rewarding to interact after all.

Owusu (2000) argues that one element that defines the identity of migrants is the ability to exercise their sense of belonging through symbolic and material practices. As argued by Giberovitch (1994), migrant associations help to fulfil the cultural needs of their members for the perpetuation of their particular language, tradition or culture. This is done through cultural expression, preservation, exchange and promotion. Chineze and Ajoki expressed the following, respectively:

As an association we also observe our cultural holidays, for example the New Yam Festival, which is for Igbos. We invite even our Zimbabwean friends to celebrate our culture together. This is just to facilitate oneness, just like Shonas and Ndebeles here in Zimbabwe (3 August 2019, Chinhoyi Street).

Every year we celebrate New Yam Festival and it's a time for all Igbos in the host country to come together wearing our attire to thank the gods for the harvest and protection (3 August 2019, Cameroon Street).

The New Yam Festival also offers an opportunity for cultural mixing between the Igbos and other Nigerian tribes. As noted by the association's president, who is himself an Igbo, the New Yam Festival is the most glamorous and most important festival of

the Igboland in the Southeast of Nigeria. It is celebrated between August and October each year to thank the gods for a bumper harvest. It also heralds the time of harvest as well as providing an opportunity for social integration of the various tribes in Nigeria or in the diaspora. The festival creates a sense of oneness and solidarity between migrants and helps to forge belonging in host communities. It is also at these festivals where Nigerians invite the local people for cultural exchanges. This was expressed by Mama Amaka, a local woman married to a Nigerian Igbo King:

We celebrate New Yam Festival each year where we also invite Zimbabweans for cultural exchange. Zimbabwean music is played and we dance to it and Nigerian music is played and the local people also dance to it. Different Nigerian and local cuisine is also served at the festival (8 September 2019, Mbuya Nehanda Street).

A local Zimbabwean friend of a Nigerian who was invited for the 2018 New Yam Festival expressed the following:

I used to think that Nigerian food is unpalatable. However, thanks to my friend who invited me to their festival, I really enjoyed their food as they do too, our own food here. We look forward for more of these festivals as they help us to meet and exchange our cultures with our Nigerian brothers. I have also invited a couple of Nigerians to our rural home for various celebrations and they really enjoyed it. They now feel home away from home with the reception we give them here in Zimbabwe (8 September 2019, Kaguvi Street).

Although a cultural exchange denotes bridging of social capital, it is not integration itself (Landau and Duponchel 2011). What emerges from these cultural exchange arenas is what Bhabha (1994) refers to as a 'third space' of belonging, a space that fuses multiple identities and practices. This is where resources, rights and belongings are constantly negotiated, with the result that migrant associations become multi-ethnic and multinational (Sardinha 2009; Marquez 2001).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main thrust of this article was to analyze how a migrant association, particularly the Nigerian Community in Zimbabwe (NCZ), facilitates being, belonging and integration of migrants in the host society. The article attempted to answer two questions: i) how does the association help to bond and enrich the lives of migrants; and ii) how does the association facilitate the bridging of social connections with the 'other' with the ultimate goal of burying differences, which in essence helps them to continue staying and accumulating in the diaspora? As revealed in this study, migrant associations function to minimize the challenges of initial settlement caused by mobility, becoming spaces of solidarity and reciprocity (Putnam 1993; Alioua 2011). At the initial stage of migration, the association facilitates the adaptation among migrants. Additionally, the association functions to preserve the migrant community's values and heritage. It is these shared values and heritage, together with the cultural identity shared by migrants, which become fundamental for a positive association

(Nwala 1985; Owusu 2000). However, migrants' associative actions are reliant upon the host society's attitudes towards the migrant community, and this is vital for their integration. As increased contact with the indigenes ensues, the association shifts attention and starts to mount activities to bridge social relations, thereby lessening the social differences between 'us' and 'them' (Nyamnjoh 2017; Overing and Passes 2000; Gilroy 2004).

What conclusions can be drawn from this case study? Contrary to the prevailing idea that African mobility and cities are characterized as chaotic and competitive, it turns out that these places are centres of conviviality and encounters between migrants and hosts. Diverse cities are thus transformed into places and spaces of interrelationships, interconnections, collaboration, interdependence, compassion and coproduction where migrants and hosts are converging and producing new forms of values, practices and beliefs in potentially hostile and toxic environments. This seems to be a more useful way of theorizing about urban cities, than the dominant perspective which describes them as chaotic and doomed. The authors perceive being, belonging and integration as mutable processes, ever-changing in space and time. These processes are not conclusive, but rather it is the making of headway and progression towards achieving the acceptance of difference within diverse spaces that makes migrant associations momentous. Migrant associations advocate the right to negotiate difference and identity, in turn allowing migrants to actively belong and participate under the flagship of plurality.

Within this context, the authors recommend that in calling for attention to place migrant associations in migration policy-making discourse, there remains an urgent need for nation-states to leverage on migrant associations for effective migration management in Zimbabwe and beyond. The roles that migrant associations play should be incorporated into migration policies such that migration associations should be viewed positively, and if possible encouraged by nation-states. Finally, establishing a line of communication with migrant associations is critically important. Migrant associations and the nation-state need to find more spaces of communication and interaction to bridge the divide that separates 'us' and 'them'.

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