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# **Negotiating Employability: Migrant capitals and networking strategies for Zimbabwean highly skilled migrants in the UK**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper we focus on highly skilled migration from Zimbabwe to the UK, exploring these migrants' social capital sources/structures and content. In doing so we pay attention to routes of migration and how they shape migrants' networking capabilities and patterns. We further take a Bourdieusian perspective and explore the intersection between social capital and cultural capital in the process of migrants' negotiation of employment opportunities, giving closer attention to how the distinctive habitus associated with being highly skilled migrants from Zimbabwe shape migrants' attitudes towards work. By exploring the interplay between external processes and internalised structures, we bring to the fore the multiple positioning of our participants, who we see not as simply depending on social networks, but as complex actors whose negotiation of employability in the UK is shaped by various factors including intersecting aspects of differentiation.

**Keywords: Cultural Capital, Habitus, Highly Skilled Migrants, Social Capital, Social Networks**

## **Introduction**

The notion of social capital has widely been employed in the migration literature to explain the role that migrant networks play in facilitating migration movements, employment and even political participation and integration in countries of immigration. However despite the widespread use to which the concept has been put, social capital as a conceptual framework remains highly contested, with controversies stemming from the ambiguity in its application (Portes 2000), the scarcity of research evidence on the practical processes of migrant networking (Ryan and Mulholland 2014) and even the relative lack of research evidence of how social capital fuses with other forms of capital in the process of migrants' negotiation of different social ties and employment opportunities in different settings (Ryan 2011).

We aim to address this gap by focusing on highly skilled migration from Zimbabwe to the UK and explore this group of migrants' network structures, content, the types of resources they generate and their relative usefulness in as far as they facilitate the highly skilled migrants' labour market insertion within their specific areas of specialisation. In so doing we also pay closer attention to

migrants' routes of migration and how these shape migrants' networking capabilities and patterns. We further adopt a Bourdieusian perspective in order to understand the interaction between social capital and cultural capital in the process of migrants' complex negotiations of work through engagement with both social networks and the UK employers. In doing so, we do not simply regard our participants as individuals who are looking for a 'skill fit' but as competent actors who are capable of creating new forms of cultural capital in their endeavour to regain their professional status in the UK. In this exploration we give closer attention to how the distinctive *habitus* associated with being highly skilled migrants from Zimbabwe shape migrants' attitudes towards work. As argued by Friedmann (2002:302), habitus is place-contingent, and as such the occupational habitus of migrants' place of origin often create tension when exercised in a different socio-economic context. Thus by exploring the interplay between external processes and internalized structures, we seek to show the multiple positioning of our participants, seeing them not as simply depending on social networks, but as complex actors whose negotiation of employability in the UK is shaped by various factors including intersecting aspects of differentiation.

We start with a discussion of the theoretical resources applied in this study, bringing the case of the Zimbabwean highly skilled migrants into context. The following section provides the scope and methods employed with the subsequent two sections exploring first, migrants' professional networks and then, non-professional networks and the complex negotiations involved in migrants' search for job opportunities, before we turn to our conclusions.

### **Theoretical resources**

In this paper we mobilise two broad sets of theoretical resources. We start by drawing upon the concepts of social capital and networking. We then turn to Bourdieu's notion of forms of capital, exploring the relationship between social capital and cultural capital.

### ***Social capital and networking***

The concept of social capital, mainly associated with the works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam is argued to be 'one of the most successful "exports" from sociology to other social sciences and public discourse' (Portes 2000:1). In Bourdieu's pioneering work, social capital is defined as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition'(Bourdieu 1986:248). Bourdieu's definition highlights the importance of group membership showing that the volume of the resources accessible to an individual depends on the size and quality of associations that the

individual can effectively mobilize (1986:249). For Coleman 1988:S98) social capital ‘consists of some aspect of social structure, and facilitates certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure’. Like Bourdieu, Coleman sees social capital as a resource that is embedded in social structure. However his work has been criticized for opening up the concept to being used as a ‘panacea for the ills of the modern society’ (Anthias 2007:791; Portes 2000). While the contours of this debate need not be examined here, the relevant point is that the value of Coleman’s work can be seen in its being foundational to Putman’s work which, although it has received similar criticisms in some places, it has nonetheless been found insightful especially in the migration literature in differentiating between bonding and bridging social capital as will be discussed later on in this article. While not applicable to the present study, we acknowledge the fact that Putman’s work has gained significant currency in political science, particularly the study of political participation where there is a growing body of research which explores the political participation and integration of immigrants in receiving societies (e.g. Jacobs & Tillie 2004; Morales and Giugni [eds] 2011). More broadly, these studies have shown that the more immigrants are involved in voluntary associations, the higher their levels of political participation.

A particularly relevant body of literature for our present purpose is the one looking at the role of social capital in migration and settlement. Within migration studies, the notion of social capital has been widely deployed to explain the critical role that kinship and friendship networks play in facilitating migratory processes as new migrants often move to destinations where there is an already existing concentration of compatriots and/or established ethnic communities (e.g. Reynolds 2010; Harvey 2012, 2008; Haug 2008; Boyd, 1989). Migrant social networks contribute to the decision to migrate by providing information about job opportunities, and support the mobility process through providing resources and facilitating new migrants’ integration into the destination society (Portes 1998; Eve 2010).

However, in recent years, the use of the concept has increasingly been called into question (e.g. Ryan 2011:710; Anthias 2007). Ryan (2011:710-11) has noted a tendency in the migration scholarship not only to use the concept in very loose terms but also to ‘confuse the sources of social capital – in particular access to networks – with the resources thus derived for example, socio-economic benefits’. She argues that this ambiguity can be overcome by focusing ‘on the specific relationships’ and ‘the different resources available within networks and their relative usefulness and accessibility’ (Ryan 2011:708). In line with this view, the first aim of our paper is to explore the Zimbabwean highly skilled migrants’ social capital sources/structures, analysing not only the types of resources

available within these particular networks but also their relative usefulness in facilitating the highly skilled migrants' labour market insertion within specific employment contexts.

Migration scholars have also been criticized for giving inadequate attention to the actual process of network formation as evidenced by the scarcity of research evidence on the practical processes of networking (Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Wierzbicki 2004). Here we note that the works of Granovetter (1983) and Putman (2000, 2007) have been drawn upon to make an important distinction between types of social network in terms of strong and weak ties (Harvey 2008) or bonding and bridging networks (Nannestad et al 2008; Kelly and Lusia 2006). In the popular migration literature, the notion of strong/bonding networks has often been associated with ethnic-specific bonding connections, with weak/bridging ties denoting acquaintances or people who are not very close to an individual. More generally ethnic bonded networks have been argued not to be necessarily profitable as they often lead to ethnic enclaves and ghettoisation (Ryan and Mulholland 2014), while bridging ties, because they 'provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle' (Granovetter 1983:208), tend to be viewed as promoting social mobility and integration (Poros 2001).

Nonetheless, questions have been raised about how network structures are defined, with some scholars (e.g. Oliver and O'Reilly 2010; Ryan and Mullholland 2014) critiquing the over simplistic assumption that 'all members of the ethnic community are equally committed to that culture or to specific notions of ethnic authenticity' (Shah 2007:20-30). They argue that such an understanding undermines the role of other factors such as class that have the potential to create complex hierarchies of distinction. While it is possible that highly skilled migrants may privilege professional connections over ethnic ones in cases where the former offer resources that promote positive labour market outcomes, more often, Harvey (2008) argues, people draw on both types of social networks to access the labour market.

Using Uzzi's (1999) concept of 'network complementarity', Ryan and Mullholland (2014:163) have argued for the urgent need to go beyond the bonding and bridging dichotomy and look at the key aspect of network content further arguing that an understanding of the content of social ties is crucial to illuminating 'how and why migrants form networks with particular characteristics'. This argument suffices Bourdieu's (1986:52) conceptualization of the complexities of networking in which he argues that besides being 'a product of endless effort', networking is also invariably shaped by other

factors including social class such that some networks may operate to limit access to resources and valuable information (Ryan 2011).

A further aim of this paper is to expand on this body of work by paying closer attention to participants' network content. In seeking to understand how and why participants formed networks with particular characteristics we go beyond these authors to give greater attention to migrants' mode/routes of migration. As argued by Liversage (2009:205), 'mode of entry plays a central role in shaping both immigrant's labour market incorporation and networking capabilities and patterns'. In so doing we not only seek to 'highlight the opportunities and obstacles which shape access to different kinds of networks'(Ryan 2011:711) but also to offer new insights into the different mentalities that are associated with particular networks and their power to facilitate or complicate the highly skilled's labour market outcomes.

### ***Social capital and cultural capital***

Migration literature has further been criticised for paying insufficient attention to how social capital fuses with other forms of capital in the process of migrants' negotiation of different social ties and resource types in different settings (Ryan 2011). We contribute to this debate by drawing insights from Bourdieu's (1986) classic thesis of the forms of capital: cultural, economic and social. Whilst we cannot do all three full-justice in this paper, Bourdieu argues against a narrow focus on human capital alone. Authors from the migration field have also critiqued the human capital orthodoxy for its weak and linear account of migrants' deployment of cultural capital (Erel 2010; Kelly and Lusia 2006). For example, Erel (2010:649) critiques the human capital's 'rucksack approach' over the Bourdieusian 'treasure chest' view:

Human capital theorists conceptualize cultural capital as a key that a migrant put in *his/her* rucksack and once in the country of immigration unpacks to see if it fits the 'keyhole' of the culture system of the country of immigration. *In contrast*, Bourdieusian scholars view migrants' cultural capital as a 'treasure chest' consisting of language skills, knowledge about customs and lifestyles, professional qualifications etc. Again these are put in the rucksack, but when unpacked in the country of immigration, rather than looking for a 'fit'...the migrant engages in bargaining activities with institutions (such as professional bodies and universities)... they do not only rely on the dominant institutions... but also engage with migrant networks...

We therefore foresee the Bourdieusian perspective as providing some important analytical avenues for bringing together migrants' lived experiences with the structural and social constraints that go beyond their control.

Also, famously Bourdieu (1986) notes that cultural capital can exist in three broader forms of; *embodied* (habitus); *institutionalized* (including education and professional qualifications) and *symbolic* (including cultural goods and objects). While Bourdieu has been criticized for overlooking issues of gender, Erel (2010:650) argues that 'within a migration group cultural capital is differentiated' according to key factors of social class, gender, ethnic background and education and professional status; these are vital to understanding 'how social and cultural capital are mobilized'. Following Bourdieu, the third aim of this paper is to engage with participants' complex negotiations of work through engagement with both social networks and the UK employers and expand the debate by considering how the distinctive *habitus* associated with being highly skilled migrants from Zimbabwe shapes their attitudes towards work. The Bourdieusian notion of habitus encompasses 'those internalised structures, dispositions... or habits that are both individualistic and yet typical of one's social groups...and historical position' (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010:14).

In the context of our study, the profile of a Zimbabwean highly skilled migrant can only be best understood when analysed within the context of the country's post-colonial state. A former British colony, Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980 which subsequently facilitated upward mobility among black Zimbabweans. A new successful middle-class emerged that adopted much of the lifestyle of the colonial elite and who viewed it as largely the way of life that was appropriate for members of the professional class. Also, until recently, the Zimbabwean education reflected a British-styled education as evidenced by an examination model heavily dependent on English-based examination boards both for schools and university. Thus, education, already well-valued and a major source of unrest under white settler rule, was accorded great value both as a process of cultural capital investment and as key to entry into an elite lifestyle (McGregor 2008). In a Bourdieusian perspective, lifestyle and class formation is not just a neutral process but also produces particular *habitus* that give a group some form of distinctiveness. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, and for a long time, possessing a degree virtually guaranteed a salary that was unimaginable to rural Zimbabweans but also an accompanying package that might comprise for example a company car; payment of fees for elite private schools and; a subsidised mortgage.

However, with the economic downturn of the mid-1990s, the interaction of political and economic factors led many Zimbabweans to migrate. For some professional elite there seemed to be the opportunity of sustaining their acquired status and lifestyle through schemes such as the UK Highly Skilled Migrant Programme. Generally, coming with a British-styled education and many years of appropriate work experience provided confidence that they could transfer their cultural capital to the UK context. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, aspects of historical occupational status and *habitus* are intertwined meaning that, 'in regard to attitudes towards work, *habitus* valorises certain labour market activities and specifies which types of jobs are considered prestigious or stigmatised' (Bauder 2006:711).

However, Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* has been criticized as an inherently ambiguous, overloaded and deterministic concept which leaves no room for individual agency ((Nash 1990:446). While in this paper *habitus* helps us to extricate participants' occupational expectations and perceptions about the jobs they considered appropriate and desirable, we do not regard participants' received socialization as the end of the story. Thus in presenting empirical data, it is important to avoid two traps: first, to see *habitus* as something that is static and, second, to objectify our research participants as passive recipients of the UK's social and employment structures. It has been argued that migration itself is not just an act of physical border crossing but also a process that challenges the self as migrants have to also deal with other imposed boundaries such as migration policies, the structure of the labour market and even the social system of their new environment (Liversage 2009).

In the sections that follow, we engage with some of these issues, showing why some of our participants managed to make a successful transition to life and work in the UK and why others have found the transition quite challenging. In so doing, we consider the multiple positioning of our participants, who we see as not simply depending on social networks, but as complex actors whose negotiation of employability in the UK depends on various mediating factors.

### **The study**

This article is based on in-depth interviews (averaging one hour) we conducted with 20 Zimbabwean graduates residing in the UK. The sample consisted of 7 women and 13 men, from a wide variety of academic and professional backgrounds, who migrated between 2000 and 2005. The interviews were selected by snowballing, drawing on the networks of two of the researchers, who are themselves Zimbabwean graduate migrants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to thematic analysis by the three team members, the third having been a highly skilled migrant to Zimbabwe.



Each read the transcripts both with an autobiographical eye and through their own predominant disciplinary lenses – from sociolinguistics, the political economy of skills, and migration and diasporic studies. Individual interpretations of the data were discussed in team meetings and the paper then drafted and redrafted with different researchers taking the lead at different points in the iterative process. This approach was a step towards a more interdisciplinary model of migration research, as advocated by Castles (2010). All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

### **Professional networks and the resources inherent in them**

The Zimbabwean highly skilled migrants' migration trajectories reveal that their network structures can be collapsed into two categories of professional and non-professional ties. Professional networks were defined by membership of professional bodies such as UK Institute for Engineers and the UK Health Professions Council as well as networks of professional colleagues. In the context of this specific group of migrants, it should however be noted that in-group networking is typical of the Zimbabwean collectivist culture whereby members largely rely on social ties to attain career mobility between organisations. In our data one engineer, Tongai related how while in Zimbabwe he depended on (professional) social networking to move from one job to another without requiring an interview, in ways that demonstrate the interaction between social networks and cultural capital:

... this French company came into the country. This friend of mine who had been one of my trainee engineers referred me to them. So when I went to that company there was no interview, it was a question of... 'We hear you're very good. When can you start?'

It is important to point out that of the 20 participants interviewed, eight came from what Liversage (2009) calls 'hard professions': Engineering, Medical Sciences and IT. These mentioned their participation in transnational networking, facilitated by their sought after professional skills. It followed that the 'contacts one had with global professional social ties, the better one's access to valuable information' (Ryan and Mulholland 2014:163). For example, Jabulani's geographical mobility was enabled by a transnational network built around a shared professional identity:

a friend of mine (an Engineer) who was already working abroad said, 'you can get information about engineering jobs online...' I went on the computer and just googled and boom, it came out and it says: 'you can apply to this highly skilled, migrant programme'. I applied, without even going through a lot of detail, lo and behold a letter came saying: 'yes, come'

As Bourdieu (1986) has shown, social networks are more useful when they provide access to those who have resources or knowledge. The usefulness of the resources provided by professional contacts is further made explicit in Tongai's experience when he arrived in the UK. On arrival, he was initially hosted by a relative, who was also a minister of religion, whose social network, as Tongai recalls 'was made up of Zimbabweans of all sorts most of whom were working in semi-skilled and non-skilled jobs'. This particular network, as Tongai explains, exhibited what he termed a 'warehouse mentality' meaning the belief that employment in the UK entails taking any job available, regardless of one's educational and professional qualifications. Tongai found this at odds with his professional socialization and career aspirations, and hence had to seek for and rely on the advice of his professional network:

...most of people who visited the pastor were working in the warehouse ...they wanted to know if I had already found a job. Some offered to get me a job at their workplace. I was waiting to attend an interview for an engineering job in few weeks. I found myself under a lot of pressure to get any job. So I had to call my engineer friend... He told me to ignore this mentality and concentrate on what I had come here for. This calmed me down until the time of interview. I got the job and moved on with life.

We will pick up on the theme of the 'warehouse mentality' in the next section.

Still in the context of professional networks, some participants reported membership of professional bodies within their field through which they were able to easily buy into the UK labour market within their areas of specialisation. One participant, Chamunorwa noted that following his BSc in Electric Engineering at the University of Zimbabwe in 2000, he enrolled for 'a two-year graduate training programme, which was run in conjunction with the UK Institute of Engineers'. On completion, Chamunorwa automatically became a member of the UK Institute of Engineers. He then secured employment with the railways of Zimbabwe. With the deterioration in the country's economy, Chamunorwa witnessed his engineering job degenerating to a more supervisory position: 'job satisfaction was not there anymore', he told us. With ten years of experience in the field and membership with the UK Institute of Engineers Chamunorwa felt well-positioned to apply for an international job. In her study of Turkish and Kurdish skilled migrants in Britain and Germany, Erel (2010:648) has shown how 'migrants whose institutional cultural capital is transnationally validated

can use it for professional and geographical mobility'. Indeed, for Chamunorwa, both his work permit and relocation were facilitated by the UK engineering company that was hiring him:

There was such a high demand at that time in the rail industry for that specific engineering skill. As a member of the UK Institute of Engineers I could easily get a job. I actually came sponsored by the company. They process your work permit and pay for all your relocation.

While relocation involved geographic mobility, Chamunorwa noted that the work culture felt almost the same.

It just felt like a continuation, because... all the training and everything we did in Zimbabwe and the systems we used were all British... So it was almost like waking up, the next day you are at work here in the UK.

It is clear that professional networks are crucial to providing useful information and support both before and after migration. We have also seen that, through their ability to award internationally-accredited professional qualifications, professional bodies implicitly shaped some of the graduates' geographical mobility. Concurrently they enabled them to convert their third world degrees and professional qualifications into portable and universally recognised institutional cultural capital. In some ways, these graduates were already part of a global professional community which ensured transferability of their professional skills before even coming to the UK. For this group, migration to the UK could be seen as part of career progression and the resources inherent in their professional networks together with their highly portable institutionalized cultural capital facilitated direct labour market insertion.

### **Non-professional networks, resources and the complex strategies of negotiation**

Our second group of participants were part of a diverse and complex non-professional network which includes mostly family, relatives, friends, church community, asylum community and other undefined ethnic compatriots typically referred to as 'they'. It is clear that these networks were significantly shaped by a strong sense of immersion in the ethnic community (Kelly and Lusia 2006) and yet heterogeneous in terms of differentiation in goals and aspirations. This resonates well with what is called "clustering" (Raguram et al 2009) which has the effect of channelling migrants into specific labour market spaces.

Also, within this group, participants reported using diverse migration pathways, including student visas, family reunion and the asylum routes. On arrival they predominantly depended on exclusively Zimbabwean pre-existing networks. Much of the attention given to Zimbabweans in England has focused on the large numbers who have found employment in the care home sector: as ‘British Bottom Cleaners’ (BBC), according to the popular rhetoric of those at home (see McGregor 2007). As our data suggests, the population of those who migrated earlier and subsequently became the receiving community for a greater percentage of highly skilled migrants, was made up of mainly non-degreed teachers and nurses and other diverse groups of non-professionals. This category of migrants’ work culture has been noted to involve engaging in multiple jobs mainly in non-skilled and semi-skilled occupations; the mentality behind being that of making money as opposed to attaining any career mobility or maintaining professional identities. A recurring theme of the interviews was the immobilizing aspect of this community as it seemed not to offer resources that promote immediate entry into professional jobs. Our group of highly skilled migrants, as mentioned earlier, largely referred to this mentality and practice as “the warehouse mentality”.

### **Highly skilled migrants and the warehouse mentality**

Our first case is that of Tashinga who moved to the UK in 2002 motivated both by ambition and uncertainties about his own future in a failing country. Tashinga notes how his career progression, while in Zimbabwe, was hugely impacted by his professional network including a friend ‘who was a mature student and had the experience of life’. On completing his first degree, Tashinga claims that this friend not only inspired him to study for an MSc in Sociology but also encouraged him to take part-time jobs as a researcher during the course of his studies. This experience as Tashinga recalls significantly motivated him to consider a profession in academia in order to join the class of elites:

Through working on different projects ... I could see the kind of monies academics were getting and for me that became sort of like a dream...because I discovered the kind of lifestyle that the academics lived...

On completing his MSc course, Tashinga was offered a place to study for a PhD at the University of Zimbabwe. However, the country’s economic and political decline brought tension between his desire to develop an academic career in Zimbabwe and the sense that there were more professional

education opportunities 'out there'. In this case, his present research job provided a way out given the unfeasibility of self-funding a PhD in the economic context of Zimbabwe:

I wanted to do a PhD but there were no funded PhDs. So I thought it's rather I go to the UK because back then there were many opportunities out here, you know. Working as a research officer, ...I saw it as an opportunity to buy the ticket then

Arriving on a student visa without any form of sponsorship, Tashinga quickly realized that he needed to get paid employment. However, because of the nature of his visa which allowed him to only work for 20 hours per week, he soon discovered that his only employment prospect was in a warehouse. He subsequently found himself among many other migrants from Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa, most of whom were 'undocumented' both in terms of academic and immigration status. Having found himself among people who were not 'like him' Tashinga describes the effects of the 'warehouse mentality', particularly how it played a major role in undermining his occupational aspirations:

The kind of social circles that I got entangled in here in the UK were the wrong ones. ...They were always telling me, 'so and so has got a degree, but they are working in the warehouse'. ...so it really sort of discouraged me in a big way ...my focus changed from an academic focus, to looking for money ...

Repeatedly, we listened to participants as above echoing the discomfiting gospel of their new community especially the notions that in England, 'social status was no longer expected to be read through occupation' (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010:10):

In our study, dynamics of networking and employment negotiation strategies are significantly gendered. While this is a huge topic which we cannot fully engage with in a paper of this nature, we acknowledge that gender and gendered relations have much to do with conditioning who is a lead migrant between husband and wife and their positioning within the social and employment settings of the new society. Our most striking interview was with a former adviser to a very senior politician, Mugove, who while in Zimbabwe had managed to penetrate corridors of political power traditionally confined to men. Mugove migrated in 2005 to join her husband who had been awarded a refugee status in the UK. During our interview discussion it was paradoxical to learn how she easily succumbed to the warehouse mentality of her new community, echoing that if her husband who possessed a Master's degree could not find a professional job, who was she to think she would get it.

I'd heard from friends and relatives ...that it may be a nightmare to get your real job. ...my husband had a Masters as well, but he couldn't get any relevant job. He was just doing things in order to survive. So when I came I was also prepared just to do things in order to survive. So, I just joined him...

By this we do not seek to perceive women through the stereotypical lens of 'masculine domination and feminine submission' (Silva 2005) often associated with the African gender tradition. We acknowledge the fact that there are other women, who like Mugove, used the family reunification route, and yet they expressed their agency in seeking professional work, rather than simply being repositories of the warehouse mentality associated with their new conditions.

One such woman is Pafunge who qualified as a forestry officer in Zimbabwe and moved on to study for a BSc in Geography and Environmental Studies on part-time basis. She came to England to follow her husband, only arriving three years after him in 2005 due to visa complications. Yet she saw this delay as giving her the opportunity to complete her BSc degree in preparation for a professional job in the UK.

It was good that I did not follow immediately... even my father was happy that I was coming here after my graduation...

However on arrival, Pafunge struggled to find employment in her area of specialization. Liversage's (2009:220) work is insightful in showing how migrants with soft/less-portable qualifications often encounter employment challenges. In Pafunge's case, neither her qualifications nor her experience appeared to have value to English employers:

I realized that people who have got qualifications from here stand a better chance... also because I didn't have any experience of working within the UK setting, I didn't really stand a better chance

While we will return to the issue of none recognition of skills below, what we seek to show through this example is that having been directly confronted with the discriminatory aspect of the UK employment system, Pafunge's network encouraged her to take any job available. She firstly tried care work, which she quickly moved away from for reasons of status:

People were saying get care or support work if you want to make a living here. I worked there (care home) for one month, the nature of the job made me feel this is not for me...

With the help of her husband, she then drifted into the call centre industry, and although her husband tried to make her believe that her position was far much better off than that of most Zimbabweans, this did not satisfy Pafunge's sense of who she was:

I remember my husband saying, "oh people from Zimbabwe here think that you're working in a call centre, oh you've got a good job". Here I am thinking it's not a very good job. What skill am I getting by just talking to someone over the phone ? ... if I'm to go back to Zimbabwe today can I just go and blab and say, "oh I worked in a call centre"? They'll look at you and think, 'okay, so what?'

Pafunge's imagination of going back to Zimbabwe and blab about her work in the call centre industry profoundly reveals Friedmann's (2005:311) argument that habitus can inflict a feeling of one living 'simultaneously in two countries'. Consequently, individuals may 'continue to judge their circumstances according to the 'rules' of their place of origin (Kelly and Lusi 2010:837). In this sense, habitus remains a discomfoting spectre when people find themselves confined in an environment where former achievements and resources are rendered irrelevant (Oliver and O'Reilly (2010:14). We will pick up on Pafunge's case in the section that follows.

In the remainder of this paper we engage with the issue of non-recognition of professional qualifications.

### **Non-recognition of skills: bargaining processes with educational and employment institutions**

As we have already shown through our first theme, several participants in our larger sample, particularly health workers and engineers, found it easy to get initial employment in their own professional areas due to easy transferability of their institutionalized cultural capital. However, in the less regulated sectors, a significant number of migrants found their professional qualifications devalued and denigrated. Indeed, professional institutions are increasingly associated with the tendency to exercise what Erel (2010) calls 'nationally-based protectionism' through non-recognition of institutionalized capital which has been acquired abroad.

One of our participants, Munetsi, who was a prominent lawyer in a Zimbabwean context, had to flee to South Africa in 2002 as his work was getting too political. He then moved to the UK in 2005, inspired by his friends who were already working in the law field. On arrival he was successful in quickly switching from a visitor's visa to a refugee status given his convincing and proven record of practicing in the potentially controversial political atmosphere of Zimbabwe. However, despite the fact that few of his friends were already working in the law field, Munetsi found it almost impossible to penetrate the law industry as his institutionalized capital was not easily transferable.

I had three interviews and that's when the challenges started. Because in Zimbabwe our system is based on Roman-Dutch Law, all prospective employers said, '...in as much as I appreciate your experience but in terms of the qualifications that you have they are not relevant in this country'.

Munetsi's experience was also echoed by several other migrants including Nhamo, a teacher with a Zimbabwean Bachelor's degree:

Zimbabwe is a former British colony, so I sent my certificate to be compared ...they said I've got to ...learn the education policy as it relates here... Then you ask yourself why... (Nhamo)

As argued by Erel (2010), when migrants fail to find a 'skill fit', they do not always pack back their institutionalized cultural capital into their rucksacks. Rather, they exercise their agency mostly by using other strategies such as retraining in order to improve their chances of being professionally employed. In our study, perceptions about further studying as a route to 'personal and professional lift' (McGregor 2008) formed a recurring theme. For example, after failing to penetrate the law sector, Munetsi, with the advice of his lawyer friends, moved on to do a degree in Business Management and Law. However, he was further disappointed to learn that even after three years of investment in studying British law, he still could not get a job. Here he cites how he felt discriminated upon in his previous job when a law position was given to a junior candidate:

...an opportunity came up and I was on the short list but they gave the job to a law graduate from a local university. ...she had never done any proxy law work whatsoever ...but she got the job. ...so it's not wrong asking yourself 'what sort of criteria is used to offer people opportunities...?'



Research has shown how employers often evoke complex criteria to ‘turn apparently neutral job specifications into ‘national capital’ and enables privileged access to skilled jobs for those considered properly part of the nation - that is, not migrants’ (Erel’s 2010:648). Having failed to get a professional position, Munetsi also subsequently lost his call centre job through redundancy. Faced with the need to support his young family, he had to climb down further by taking a job in the care industry, supporting people with mental health illness while at the same time recalculating which direction to take in order to further enhance his chances of securing a professional career. Scholars such as Bauder (2006:712) have argued that habitual attitudes towards work can be adjusted and such an ‘adjustment process is not a natural process of adaptation from one fixed culture to another’ but is rather ‘often strategic, responding to the context of particular social and economic interests of the individual, a social group, the state and a range of labour market actors’.

In our data, participants’ recalculations reflected a particular pattern. So for example, by the time of interview Munetsi shared his plans to do a Master’s degree in social work, a decision which seemed to have been heavily influenced by his wife who was a newly qualified social worker. This career direction also mirrors what emerges like the Zimbabwean diaspora pattern of studying nursing and social work; professions that are considered to offer the best return on investment, particular because of the availability of government funding and employment prospects. As Munetsi notes:

I have to look at, which area is currently employing, job prospects-wise. So I heard social work. I think if I choose this line there will be a lot of career opportunities in the mental health area as a social worker (Munetsi).

Also, Pafunge, the environmentalist, started to look for master’s courses that could help her get out of the call centre into professional employment. Like in Munetsi’s case, ethnic networks directed her to do social work:

People I have been in touch with or talk to, they’ve either done nursing or they’ve gone into social work. ... you don’t self-fund. So initially I thought okay ... just to get out of this call centre thing, I will follow suit

However, initially Pafunge failed to secure a place to do social work and after some recalculations, she decided to stay within her existing profession but at the same time incorporating some public health training.

As I was looking... the description of the degree: 'environmental health' was something interesting'... I thought I would be better suited to get a job here. Also things are getting tough within the UK... if we decide okay we're going back to Zimbabwe, I need to go back with education that is higher than what I had and also hoping people recognise the international degrees

It is arguable that such calculations position Pafunge as a complex actor trying to, on one hand, prepare for UK employment by satisfying the expectations of the local employers in line with the ethnic network's tradition while on the other, adding British acquired institutionalized capital to her 'treasure chest' with the hope of political change in Zimbabwe, and returning to enjoy a more prestigious status.

Overall, what we are trying to show in the above examples is the extent to which participants can be seen as complex actors involved in complex negotiations, involving, education institutions, employers and social networks in the face of many challenges and obstacles.

In our sample, some eventually managed to breakthrough what seemed like complex barriers. So for instance, Tashinga whom we mentioned earlier that he came to the UK as a student, later on switched to the asylum category and eventually managed to acquire a stable immigration status (in the form of indefinite leave to remain as a refugee) which enabled him to reclaim his professional identity. He notes:

When the visa issue was resolved...as I was still working in the warehouse ...I began to tell myself that I can do something better. I applied for a professional job and I got it. ...this brought me back to life.

The change of occupational status also enabled him to reclaim his identity within the professional social circles. Tashinga started to mix with 'people like him' which eventually saw him moving on to pursue PhD studies:

My social circles also changed ... I got in touch with many of my professional friends, including my Zimbabwean friend, who was now in South Africa... he was now a post-

doctorate and encouraged me to do a PhD... This changed my focus to my original plans to do the things I've always desired to do...

Throughout our interactions with Tashinga, we got the sense of a complex actor whose employability journey had been shaped by various factors.

## **Conclusion**

The starting point for this article was to explore the Zimbabwean highly skilled migrants' social capital sources/structures and their relative usefulness in as far as they facilitated the graduates' labour market insertion in their areas of specialisation. To this end, we have identified two types of networks: professional and non-professional. Through our first theme, we have demonstrated that professional networks such as those generated by membership of professional bodies and social ties were found extremely useful in providing information about jobs before migration as well as making it possible for individuals to achieve successful labour market insertion following migration. Through our second theme, we have revealed the complexities of the experiences of those using non-professional networks. Overall, we have shown that non-professional networks were shaped by what participants referred to as 'the warehouse mentality', to describe a particular culture within the networks, renowned for downplaying the highly skilled's career expectations and aspirations, mostly by channelling individuals into non-skilled and semi-skilled jobs, privileging economic capital over occupational status. This leads to the question of why and how participants formed networks with particular characteristics, which is the second aim of our article.

To address the above question, we have drawn attention to the issue of migrants' mode/routes of migration, showing, for example, how those with insecure immigration status (e.g. student visa) found themselves limited in their navigation of the UK labour market, ending up in the warehouse with people who were not like them, which saw their education and career aspirations being under constant attack. At the same time, we have provided a glimpse of gender issues at play, especially in cases where lead migrants, mostly men, had found themselves confined in minority ethnic enclave economy, which to some extent, became the standard for their wives to follow when they joined them later on in the context of family reunification.

Far from claiming that our participants were repositories of the warehouse mentality associated with their new environment, we have made it explicit that our participants' primary aim was that of

regaining the privileged occupational status they had enjoyed in Zimbabwe as opposed to taking any job available in the UK. Thus, in our analysis, we have gone beyond the traditional notions of ethnically bonded relationships to consider how the intersecting axes of differentiation including occupational status and the related historical habitus formed a strong 'basis of distinction' though in a new socio-economic environment where occupational position seemed to lack its 'discriminatory powers' (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010:24). We see this as an important contribution in the context of a subsequent literature on the role of social networks in migration that tends to celebrate social capital for enabling migrants to achieve successful labour market insertion but often treating migrants as a homogenous group, and overlooking their historical labour market contexts, migration goals, the content and dynamics of networks and how these are negotiated within specific contexts.

To achieve the article's third aim, which was to explore the interaction between social capital and cultural capital, we have shown that, migrants' failure to find a 'skill fit', did not necessarily result in them packing back their institutionalized cultural capital into their rucksacks, as assumed by the human capital perspective. We have demonstrated how our participants engaged in acts of 'reinvention' (Bauder 2006) in an effort to make their dreams come true as opposed to doing what everyone else was doing. Adopting a Bourdieusian perspective has helped to reveal how habitus 'moulds what is considered achievable and worth aspiring to' (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010:5) as demonstrated through migrants' agency in creating new forms of 'migrant specific capital' (Erel 2010) through engagement with both social networks and education institutions. In this way, we have noted a particular pattern of adjustment, involving careful calculations and diversion into professions that were considered to offer employment prospects, suggesting the emergence of a new habitus associated with the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK.

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