MIGRANT MOBILIZATION:

HOMELAND ADVOCACY OR MIGRANT RIGHTS?

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ABSTRACT

There is now a significant body of literature on migrant political participation associated with three intellectual research agendas on diasporas, transnationalism, and migrant rights. Because migrant political participation can take on many forms and is affected by structural factors in the country of residence and in the country of origin, it is difficult to pin down a generic picture of migrant political participation. In this article, we add to and also clarify the theoretical forest. Our primary focus is on migrants' motivation to mobilize and the comparative advantage in their available resources to predict the level of migrant political association as well as the target of mobilization. These activities are moderated by the density and accessibility of the host country's civil society. Thus, we adopt a political opportunity structure framework to model *migrant associational mobilization* and focus on three specific components: precarity as a primary determinant of the *motivation* to mobilize; relative precarity and the comparative advantage of migrant resources that determine the primary *target* of mobilization; and the permeability of civil society organizations in the host country to understand the *level* of mobilization. This article brings together three distinct but complementary literatures by incorporating both homeland and host country mobilization in a single framework. We employ two case studies as a plausibility probe to illuminate the relationships between precarity, migrants' comparative advantage in political resources and host country organizational structures, and home and host country activism.

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INTRODUCTION

There is now a significant body of literature on migrant political participation associated with three intellectual research agendas on diasporas, transnationalism, and migrant rights.[1] Because migrant political participation can take on many forms and is affected by structural factors in the country of residence and in the country of origin, it is difficult to pin down a generic picture of migrant political participation. In this article, we add to and also clarify the theoretical forest. Our primary focus is on migrants' motivation to mobilize and the comparative advantage in their available resources to predict the level of migrant political association as well as the target of mobilization. These activities are moderated by the density and accessibility of the host country's civil society. Thus, we adopt a political opportunity structure framework to model migrant mobilization and focus on three specific components: precarity as a primary determinant of the *motivation* to mobilize; relative precarity and the comparative advantage of migrant resources that predict the *target* of mobilization; and the permeability of civil society organizations in the host country to understand the *level* of mobilization.

Migrants, as defined by the United Nations, are individuals living in a country other than their country of origin for more than one year. The term incorporates both refugees, as defined by the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951/1967), as well as "voluntary" or "economic" migrants. Thus, our project incorporates both individuals fleeing individual persecution and migrants moving for any and all other reasons. The literature on migration processes is rich and suggests that migrants move for multiple and complex reasons (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Massey et al. 1993). However, one central reason for moving is to reduce their vulnerability (UNHDR 2009; Piper et al. 2017). Thus, the vast majority of migrants move to countries that are wealthier and more stable than their country of origin. However, this movement does not mean that migrants have mitigated their precarity entirely.

We are interested specifically in *migrant political associations* that are organized by nationality. This is only one dimension of migrant mobilization – we know that migrants may participate in political processes through many channels: voting, demonstrations, hunger strikes, etc. (see, for example, Miller 1981; Ireland 1994; Koopmanns 2004). Moreover, migrants create many nationality-based associations, with a primary emphasis on maintaining ties with members of their national community and celebrating their culture or in hometown associations to promote economic development in their home communities (Moya 2005; Portes et al. 2007; Faist 2008). Yet migrant political associations represent one important method of political participation as they provide an arena in which migrants can discuss political issues and generate resources to intervene in political processes in both countries of residence and countries of origin (Portes et al. 1999 and 2017; Zarpour 2013). Thus, they are of central importance in migrant political

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[1] For a seminal article in each research tradition, see Shain and Barth (2003) for diasporas; Portes et al. (1999 and 2017) for transnationalism; and Piper (2015) and Grugel and Piper (2011) for migrant rights.

mobilization. Migrant political associations may have multiple goals but they usually focus primarily on a specific target, either the home country – homeland activism – or the country of residence – migrant rights.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section presents our theoretical propositions. We introduce the concept of precarity and construct the link to migrants' motivation to mobilize. We point out the relative levels of precarity as well as the variation in migrants' access to resources and how those resources may be more effective in the home country arena or the host country political system. Finally, we develop our ideas on the host society's civil society and how they may mitigate migrants' needs to mobilize as a nationality group. We then turn to two specific contexts, Zimbabweans in South Africa and Burmese in Thailand to illustrate the promise of our theoretical conjectures.

MIGRANT COLLECTIVE ACTION

Individuals experience different levels of precarity and migrants often leave their home countries because their lives are precarious there (Sassen 2014). However, upon arrival, migrants may well find themselves in situations that are more precarious than than the host country's population. It is not surprising, then, that migrants seek to reduce their level of precarity either through individual or collective action.[2]

Migrant Precarity. We begin by defining precarity, as it is central to our understanding of migrant mobilization. Migrant precarity is both multidimensional and additive (Waite 2009; Standing 2011; Lewis et al. 2015; Paret and Gleeson 2016; Piper et al. 2017; Papadoupolos et al. 2018). Whether their migration is forced or voluntary, migrants may confront *legal precarity* – the absence of a guarantee to remain in the host country.[3] They may also confront *economic precarity* – low and/or uncertain income and the absence of access to state services. In addition, migrants may confront *physical precarity* – violence that threatens their physical security. These dimensions of precarity are additive in the sense that an individual who confronts both economic and legal precarity is more precarious than if she confronts only one type of precarity. We also argue that the dimensions of precarity are correlated, albeit imperfectly. An individual who confronts legal precarity is more likely to experience economic precarity and physical precarity (Piper et al. 2017).[4] However, migrants, even from the same country, are not homogeneous. Therefore, migrants with the same nationality may confront different levels of precarity in their country of residence. For example, highly educated migrants usually confront lower levels of precarity than migrants with little education. Convention refugees often have better guarantees of residence rights than economic migrants.

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[2] Although the initial conditions of precarity are exogenously determined, subsequent levels of precarity reflect the activities of the migrants as well as other exogenous factors. We describe below these feedback loops from migrant mobilization.

[3] Banki (2003) vividly labels this "precarity of place."

[4] Lewis et al. (2014, 3) describe migrants as "hyper-precarious" because of the "ongoing interplay of neoliberal labour markets and highly restrictive immigration regimes." This term captures two of the dimensions we describe: economic precarity and legal precarity.

Migrant motivation to mobilize. We argue that migrant precarity is a central component of migrants' *motivation* to mobilize politically (Waite 2009).[5] Migrants seek to reduce their precarity through individual action and through collective action. Mobilization for collective action however, tends to be the exception rather than the rule. Most human activity is individually and family-oriented, associated with garnering the necessities and pleasures of life. Mobilization for collective change requires additional individual effort to collaborate with other individuals to achieve a change to the structural status quo. When individual action is insufficient to reduce precarity, migrants have the option of mobilizing collective action to effectuate change. We hypothesize that the highest levels of precarity generate the highest *motivation* to mobilize (Banki 2013a). Even though precarity may reduce the resources available for mobilization, individuals with the highest level of precarity have the most to gain from mobilization.

However, precarity in the host country is only part of the calculus of mobilization. Migrants sit at the *intersection of precarity in the country of residence and the country of origin.* Migrant motivation to mobilize is a function of the precarity in both home and host societies. Piper et al. (2017) observe that migrants often leave their country of origin in an effort to reduce the precarious conditions they face in their home country. Thus, the level of precarity in the home society informs the motivation to migrate. The decision to stay in the country of residence is taken, in part, on the conditions that the migrant confronts should she decide to return. When precarity is lower in the country of residence than in the home country, we expect that migrants are more likely to remain in the host country; conversely, if precarity is higher in the host country than in the home country, migrants are more likely to return home. Of course, return involves costs as well – the real costs of travel and relocation as well as the emotional costs associated with the change of place. So, migrants may not return even when conditions improve in the home country. When migrants decide to remain in the host country, we argue that higher levels of precarity produce higher motivation to mobilize. The most precarious migrants have the most to gain by a reduction in precarity (Banki 2013a).

Resources and the target of mobilization. The motivation to mobilize does not, in itself, determine either the target of mobilization or the level of mobilization. Rather, the resources available to the migrant as well as the political opportunity structure in the host country are intervening variables of critical significance. We recognize a "danger zone," where migrants confront very high levels of precarity in both home and host societies. In this space, migrants are unlikely to mobilize as mobilization presents a danger to their very existence. Where bullets are flying, lifting one's head represents a significant probability of death. Under these circumstances, keeping one's head low is the most likely action.

Yet migrants do mobilize even in highly precarious situations. Even though highly precarious migrants are often viewed as those with the absence of resources, individuals are rarely totally devoid of resources. We argue that the comparative advantage of migrants' resources, interacting with the relative level of precarity, is a determinant of the primary target of mobilization. Holding the level of home country precarity constant and high, we argue that

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[5] In fact, Waite (2009, 26) suggests a dual meaning of precarity: "The term is further seen to be double-edged as it implies both a variously defined condition as above, and also a possible point of mobilisation amongst those experiencing precarity."

when migrant precarity in the host country is either high or low, migrant mobilization is more likely to target the home country – homeland activism. In contrast, when migrant precarity in the host country is in the intermediate range, migrants are more likely to target the host country – to enhance migrant rights.

We assume that the migrant always begins with a *comparative advantage* in resources for mobilizing to target her home country (Banki 2013a). There are several reasons supporting this assumption. First, the migrant is a citizen of the home country and has a legitimate claim to participate in the politics of the country as opposed to political participation in the host country. Second, the migrant has knowledge of the political system of the home country and is therefore better prepared to know the avenues of participation. Third, even if the migrant has meager resources, those resources are more valuable in the country of origin, resources such as information and connections. Migrants are able to maintain contact with the conditions in their home country – they may encounter newly arrived migrants or they may themselves move back and forth across the border and maintain awareness of home country conditions through firsthand experience. The resources that they have access to enable them to communicate to other international actors the need for an international response. Therefore, even though the most precarious individuals have the fewest resources, their comparative advantage in resources privileges home country activism (Banki 2013a). Therefore, we hypothesize that the migrant, when confronting high levels of precarity in both the home and host countries, will target the home country. Mobilizing for change in the home country represents a path out of precarity through return.

However, the target is likely to shift as the resources of the migrant grows. Despite the comparative advantage in resources for mobilizing to target her home country, the migrant begins to build resources in the host country that can be deployed effectively there. Resources include assets that are useful in a political setting, such as money, knowledge, networks, and information. Therefore, as the level of resources available in the host country increases, the comparative advantage of targeting the home country decreases. Consequently, the possibility of reducing precarity in the host country becomes a plausible strategy for achieving a less precarious existence. Mobilizing for change in the host country represents a path out of precarity through staying.

Finally, at some point, the returns to collective action targeting the host country diminish as the migrant's precarity in the host country moves toward zero. There is little reason to mobilize to target political change in the host country as the migrant is thoroughly integrated and does not experience precarity. However, the migrant does have many resources and, if precarity in the home country remains high, collective action is likely to target the home country again. Many migrants retain connections to their country of origin and may still have family and friends; these connections may motivate migrants to target the conditions in the host country for improvement. This point is differentiated from the point where precarity in both home and host countries is low and there is little need to organize collectively to press for political change.

The political opportunity structure and mobilization. The third element of the puzzle is the civil society resources in the host country. Collective action is expensive. It takes time and energy and resources – which is one of the reasons that it is not more ubiquitous. Therefore, the

motivation to mobilize interacts with the host country's civil society. Each host country has a civil society that is more or less well developed and that is more or less open to the foreign population. It is important to recognize that civil society organizations in the host country may include domestic as well as international organizations. Both may offer resources to the migrants that are useful for achieving the goals of precarity reduction in either the home or host country.

In countries where the civil society is flourishing and migrants are welcome, there is less need to mobilize as a national migrant group to change host or home country policies. Existing organizational structures can respond to the migrants' individual needs by providing private goods that reduce precarity – such as housing, food, employment, education, etc. Or existing organizational structures can adopt the migrants' demands as a component part of their own demands to the government and other components of the society. Churches are one example of the former civil society organizations; unions are one example of the latter civil society organizations. Even the host country government may be sympathetic to the preferences of the foreign population – recognizing the need for change in the home country government. Note, though, that these civil society organizations must be able to identify with the demands of the newcomers and have the ability to communicate effectively with them, in order to incorporate them. Thus, we hypothesize that the level of mobilization is a function of the existing host country organizational structure. A dense and welcoming host country organizational structure defuses the need to mobilize as a national group – as a diaspora. Where resources are scarce, a generic host country organization may well serve the needs of the migrant community.

Migrant precarity, the comparative advantage of the migrant's resources and the density and accessibility of the host country civil society are the three central components of our theoretical frame. However, additional factors may well come into play. We describe three components here: feedback loops, the sunk costs of collective action and the type of host country organization.

Feedback Loops. When migrants seek to reduce the precarity they face in either their host country or their home country through collective action, their mobilization may result in two different types of responses. First of all, the results of their mobilization may be positive in the sense that the government adopts new policies that help to reduce the migrant's precarity. In this case, the level of precarity is endogenously determined and the reduction in precarity reduces the likelihood of future mobilization. Alternatively, migrant mobilization may elicit a backlash, a negative response that leads the government to adopt repressive measures. In this case, migrants may move into the "danger zone" and reduce mobilization. Thus, although the initial level of precarity is exogenous to migrant mobilization, feedback loops have an effect on the motivation to mobilize.

Sunk Costs. However, migrants also may take advantage of the "sunk costs" of collective action. Setting up an organization requires effort and resources. Once the organization is established, though, it may reduce the costs of continuing collective action, thus augmenting the resources available to migrants. These sunk costs may have either or both of two effects. First, even though the motivation to mobilize is reduced based on a reduction of precarity, migrants may continue to mobilize because the costs of mobilization are reduced. Second, migrants may

adopt new goals, given the lower cost of mobilization. For example, over time, organizations focused on homeland activism often adopt strategies to reduce the precarity of the migrants in the host country as well. In general, organizations tend to focus on either homeland or host country, but this focus may not be exclusive, particularly when the costs of mobilization have already been paid.

The type of host country organization. Finally, we recognize variation in host country civil society organizations. Host country organizations are most frequently those that cater to the needs of the host population. Political parties, interest groups, philanthropic organizations, unions, churches – these are established to respond to the needs of the domestic population. If migrants have common interests with these organizations, then this reduces to need to organize associationally as a nationality group. However, in light of the sheer numbers of migrants in particular societies, migrant specific organizations have begun to emerge. These organizations may facilitate collective action around specific nationality groups or around migrant specific interests. The types of civil society organizations – generic or migrant oriented – may affect the mobilization agenda of the migrants.

Research design and empirical evidence. In this article, we draw on two case studies that represent both within case and between case variation. In examining the activism of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, we explore the variation in three waves of migration. The first wave of migration between 1990 and 1999 was generated by economic crisis in Zimbabwe and drove short term, circular migration into South Africa. The second wave between 2000 and 2007 brought members of the Zimbabwean political opposition facing persecution to South Africa, along with their families. The third wave from 2008 to present represents a reversion to economic migration but at higher levels of precarity at home relative to South Africa.

For the Burmese migrants in Thailand, we focus on the variation between different migrant groups. The first group includes the ethnic Karen, Mon and Karenni minorities who faced persecution from the Burmese military regime and, as a result, usually received a protected status in Thailand. We then examine the ethnic Shan migrants; the Shan were not recognized by the Thai government as a refugee population because of that group's association with the global drug trade centered in the "Golden Triangle." Finally, we examine Burmese economic migrants. In each instance, we examine the level of precarity of the migrants vis-à-vis their home and host countries, the types of resources available, and the density and accessibility of the host country civil society and link these factors to the level and direction of migrant political association. Overall, the evidence traces the underlying causal mechanisms of migrant mobilization across a significant number of empirical observations.

Our catalogue of migrant political associations in South Africa and Thailand, respectively, is available in the online appendix. The document includes a detailed description of the procedures we employed to generate the list. We summarize the Zimbabwean political organizations in South Africa and the Burmese political organizations in Thailand in Table 1, by level of precarity.

Table 1: Migrant mobilization

Country of Origin	Period/Group	Relative level of precarity (origin/host)	Civil society organizations	Migrant mobilization
Zimbabwe	1990-2000	Low/low	NGOs dense and open	
Zimbabwe	2000-2008	Medium/medium	NGOs dense and open	
Zimbabwe	2008+	Low/low	NGOs dense and open	
Myanmar	Karen, Karenni, Mon	High/low	IOs dense and open	
Myanmar	Shan	High/medium	Closed?	
Myanmar	Economic migrants	High/medium	Closed	

CASE 1: ZIMBABWEANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In our first case study we analyze three waves of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa. In each of the waves, Zimbabweans face varying levels of precarity in both their home country of Zimbabwe and their host country of South Africa. As their levels of precarity change over time, we see the levels of migrant mobilization also change in response. During the first wave of migration (from 1990 to 2000), Zimbabweans confronted low levels of precarity both at home and abroad in South Africa. As a result, Zimbabwean migrants during the first wave have very little motivation to mobilize. However, this quickly changes between 2000 and 2007 during the second wave of migration. In response to growing levels of precarity both in their home and host countries, Zimbabwean migrants begin to mobilize to advocate for change. Although we see an increase in mobilization during this second wave, the existing civil society network structure already in place in South Africa serves as a useful springboard for Zimbabwean migrant organizations. As a result, Zimbabwean migrant mobilization is present but nested within the South African civil society network, as Zimbabweans do not need to duplicate already existing efforts. During the third wave of migration (from 2008 to present), Zimbabwean migrant precarity begins to diminish both at home and in South Africa. Consequently, the mobilization efforts witnessed in the second wave of migration begin to wane and Zimbabwean migrants once again rely on local networks to meet their needs. The Zimbabwean case clearly demonstrates that changes in precarity alter incentive structures for mobilization; furthermore, this case is particularly illustrative of how the existing civil society structure already in place in a host country can be an important determinant of the level of migrant mobilization.

The first wave, 1990 – 1999. After achieving independence from the United Kingdom in 1980, Zimbabwe was considered a role model for African independence for almost a decade. It was one of the most prosperous southern African countries with rich agricultural and tourism potential, a relatively modern infrastructure, and a highly respected education system (Power

2003). However, beginning in the 1990s, Zimbabwe began to experience economic decline. First of all, in an effort to reallocate land from the white minority to the black majority, President Robert Mugabe engaged in a number of hasty land reform measures that resulted in a food crisis as well as hyperinflation, crashing the Zimbabwean currency ("Zimbabwe" 2019). In addition, during the 1990s Mugabe decided to intervene in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's civil war, costing Zimbabwe hundreds of millions of dollars in war costs, and prompting international donors to suspend all economic aid and loans to Zimbabwe ("Zimbabwe" 2019). Thus, in a matter of a decade, Zimbabwe went from being a thriving African economy to a state of economic crisis and chaos.

As a result, rampant unemployment caused many Zimbabweans to look for jobs elsewhere, particularly in South Africa. Previous immigration to South Africa was virtually non-existent but it now rapidly expanded. Migration in the first wave was primarily dominated by economic concerns as Zimbabweans did not yet face a significant threat of political oppression and violence. It remained relatively safe for Zimbabwean migrants to return home if needed or when desired, leading to relatively high levels of freedom and security among Zimbabwean migrants. Furthermore, most Zimbabwean migrants were men of working age were often heads of households who had wives and children back home to support (Crush et. al 2012). Therefore, even though they were now spending much of their time in South Africa, Crush et al. (2012) estimate that 91% of these migrants stayed in South Africa for less than a year at a time. Migration to South Africa in the first wave was simply a short-term solution to a short-term problem.

This pattern of circular migration was largely consistent with the legal options available to Zimbabweans in South Africa at the time. South Africa's 1991 Aliens Control Act (ACA) essentially established a "two-gate" system for migrants to South Africa (Segatti 2011). The "front gate" permitted immigration by individuals who were able to "assimilate" with the European population (Segatti 2011). These individuals were usually highly educated, white Zimbabweans who faced little difficulty in migrating to South Africa. The "back gate" was the system of temporary labor for the mining industry and commercial agriculture governed by bilateral agreements between the South African government and neighboring states (Segatti 2011). Although workers were tightly controlled through temporary work permits and were required to return home at the end of their contracts, this provided a formal legal option for Zimbabwean employment in South Africa and contracts were issued on a renewable basis. This meant that Zimbabweans could cross the border into South Africa to find jobs, return home if needed or desired, with the option to renew their contracts.

Consequently, during the first wave of migration, there was little need for Zimbabweans to organize in South Africa. Although many Zimbabweans were dependent upon their ability to migrate to and work in South Africa for their livelihoods, most Zimbabwean migrants were only in South Africa on a temporary basis and had no intention of staying in South Africa long-term. The short-term nature of their residence in South Africa made it difficult to develop the institutions and structures necessary to make meaningful changes for Zimbabwean migrants. Secondly, even in the face of less than ideal circumstances within South Africa, for many

Zimbabwean migrants these grievances were short-lived and could be easily tolerated because most Zimbabweans did not have a long-term investment in their situation in South Africa.

Additionally, the relatively low levels of precarity faced by Zimbabweans within Zimbabwe did not necessitate Zimbabwean migrants to organize in South Africa on behalf of their Zimbabwean brethren at home. Zimbabweans were perfectly capable of organizing at home to advocate on behalf of their own grievances during this first wave. Relatively speaking, they did not face high levels of persecution at home in Zimbabwe for their advocacy efforts and thus could engage in activist activities closer to home where they not only had greater access to the Zimbabwean government, but also could engage with Zimbabwean citizens more directly. The first wave of migration was thus characterized by circular migration with relatively low levels of precarity, resulting in virtually no migrant mobilization.

The second wave, 2000 – 2008. By the early 2000s a new wave of migration began as Zimbabwe was not only afflicted with economic turmoil, but also began to suffer from political oppression and violence. Unsettled by clear signs of opposition to his rule, President Mugabe embarked upon many paths of brutal repression. Mugabe restricted media freedom, aggressively confiscated farms from white owners, harassed members of the opposition and, in 2005, launched what was known as "Operation Murambatsvina," a cleanup campaign largely targeted at supporters of the opposition who lived in shantytowns outside of Harare that resulted in the displacement of over a half a million people (Crush et. al 2012). Furthermore, in the early 2000s, political violence in Zimbabwe spiraled out of control resulting in over 300,000 victims of human rights violations (Crush et al. 2012). As a result, between the years of 2002 and 2005, up to 56% of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa claimed political reasons as the primary reason for migrating (Crush et al. 2012).

Thus, the second wave of migration began to take on a very different character. Economic motivations were no longer the primary motivation for migration and many migrants now had legitimate claims to asylum in South Africa. Unfortunately, however, South Africa was ill-prepared to manage this high volume of asylum claims and a massive backlog of asylum cases began to develop. South Africa had just become party to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951/67 and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) refugee convention, meaning the ability of the South African government to process refugee claims was highly underdeveloped.

Furthermore, both the government of South Africa and the UNHCR consistently maintained that since most Zimbabweans were not fleeing individualized persecution, they did not qualify for refugee status (Betts 2013). Therefore, during the second wave, Zimbabweans could indeed apply for asylum, but their chances of obtaining 1951 Convention Status were incredibly slim. For example, in 2004, which witnessed the largest increase in the percentage of applicants from Zimbabwe, only 3.8% of new applicants were granted 1951 Convention status (UNHCR 2004).

During the second wave of migration, South Africa also adopted the 2002 Immigration Act. This Act required employers to prioritize employment of South African nationals; migrant

work permits were subjected to local recruitment and were granted only if the employer could demonstrate that no South African residents were qualified to fill the position (Goitom 2013). The 2002 law also criminalized employment of undocumented migrants and required employers, businesses and individuals to report undocumented aliens in most circumstances. This Act also criminalized aid to undocumented residents by citizens, except for the case of humanitarian assistance, and required the deportation of all undocumented aliens (Goitom 2013). Therefore, the 2002 Immigration Act further limited the legal options available to Zimbabwean migrants, increasing their level of precarity.

Precarity increased in both home and host countries during this second period. Zimbabwean activists faced a much higher cost of organizing and advocating for their fellow Zimbabweans within Zimbabwe. Outspoken individuals became political targets, and thus political activists kept a much lower profile. Zimbabweans were now forced to leave the country and found themselves residing within South Africa for longer periods of time. But the newly arrived political exiles had few appropriate resources for petitioning the South African government. Rather, their comparative advantage in political resources privileged their home country. Unable to safely protest in Zimbabwe for reform, they organized to petition for reform from the safety of South Africa. This represented a better and more efficient investment of their meager resources than participation in the South African political system. Ultimately, a small number of civil society organizations (CSOs) focused on reform in the home country began to emerge. For example, the Zimbabwean Exiles Forum (ZEF) was established in 2003 by a group of displaced lawyers from Zimbabwe with the goals of advocating for political change in their homeland, documenting human rights abuses, and empowering and educating Zimbabweans in exile ("Zimbabwe Exiles Forum" 2019). Members of the ZEF were largely individuals who were forced to leave their homes in Zimbabwe and would face potentially dire consequences if they returned; therefore, their organization outside of Zimbabwe was a necessity.

It is important to note that although there were a number of civil society organizations developed by Zimbabweans in South Africa in the early 2000's (citation), South Africa was already home to a number of South African, regional and international organizations. After the collapse of apartheid, South Africa developed an extensive network of humanitarian organizations focused on human rights. South Africa was a prime location for regional organizations to set up their offices due to South Africa's central location and high levels of development and infrastructure. Consequently, South Africa had become a regional hub for humanitarian work that not only focused on the situation in South Africa, but also the political and economic crises in neighboring countries as well. Therefore, when the situation in Zimbabwe escalated, many of these South African and regional organizations also took an active role in advocating for change in Zimbabwe and assisting Zimbabweans who had fled their homes (Betts 2016).

To coordinate the efforts of all of these CSOs, the Zimbabwean Solidarity Forum (ZSF) was formed. This forum is a clear example of the collaboration that has occurred among civil society organizations associated with Zimbabwe. Established in the late 1990s and consolidated in the early 2000s, the ZSF is made up of numerous organizations "that include youth, women,

labour, faith-based, human rights and student formations in South Africa and across the region" (Action Support Center 2019). The forum is hosted by the Action Support Center (ASC) at their regional office in Johannesburg, South Africa and is designed to reduce duplication of efforts, facilitate dialogue, coordinate strategies, and share information among civil society organizations and is "recognised as a central coordinating hub of South African civil society activities on Zimbabwe" (Action Support Center 2019).

Therefore, the CSO structure that was already in place in South Africa served as a useful platform from which Zimbabweans as well as South Africans could coordinate efforts to manage the Zimbabwean migrant crisis and press for reform at home so that return would become possible. Consequently, Zimbabweans migrants, although facing high levels of precarity both back home and in their host country of South Africa, did not experience high levels of urgency to create new organizations, because they had access to the extensive CSO structure already in place in South Africa.

Third wave, 2008 – present.

By 2008, the third wave of migration began. Demographically, the profile of Zimbabwean migrants in the third wave remained similar to that of the second wave; however, the major change that marked the shift between the second and third wave of migration was that economic push factors again became the primary motivator for migration. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in the first half of 2008 and, despite concerns about electoral fraud, ultimately resulted in a unity government where both major political parties were represented. Even though political repression and violence had not disappeared in Zimbabwe, survey data showed that less than 20% of Zimbabwean migrants cited political factors as the primary motivation for migration (Crush et al. 2012).

However, these statistics are complicated by the fact that the abysmal levels of hyperinflation and unemployment were a result of discriminatory political policies and corruption. Therefore, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between economic and political migrants. Furthermore, the volume of Zimbabwean migrants continued to increase rapidly, making it very difficult to keep track of and process migrant flows from Zimbabwe to South Africa. From 2005 to 2010, the number of Zimbabwean migrants more than doubled, from 220,867 to 470,423 migrants and increased again from 2010 to 2015, to 604,480 (UN Population Division 2017).[6] At the same time, the number of migrants who applied for asylum also surged. In the second wave of migration, asylum claims climbed from 0 to 50,000; in the third wave, the number jumped tenfold to almost 500,000, with a success rate of less than 1% (Crush et al. 2012).

This abysmally low success rate reflects, for one, the inability of the South African government to process asylum claims fast enough. The low success rate also reflects the growing belief among South Africans that "economic" migrants from Zimbabwe were trying to abuse the asylum system to keep themselves from being deported – a view substantiated by survey data. In a 2012 survey, Crush, Chikanda, and Tawodzera (2012) found than among

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[6] Note on UN statistics versus other statistics that suggest a much higher level of Zimbabwean migration?

Zimbabwean migrants who migrated to South Africa after the year 2005, only 4% stated that they sought political asylum in South Africa and only 3.4% cited safety concerns as a motivating factor for migration. In contrast, 44% stated that their primary motivation for migrating to South Africa was for work and 18% because of living conditions in Zimbabwe (Crush et al. 2012).

Ultimately the government recognized this ploy and partially resolved it through the recognition of the special circumstances of Zimbabweans during the third wave. In 2009, the government approved a "Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project" (DZP) that allowed undocumented Zimbabweans to register for a temporary residence permit with a validity of 4 years (van den Heever 2017). 242,731 Zimbabweans took advantage of this legal opportunity and were granted a permit in 2010. The program was twice renewed under the auspices of the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit, providing protection through 2021 to approximately a quarter million additional Zimbabweans (van den Heever 2017).

Overall, the precarity faced by Zimbabwean migrants during the third wave began to diminish over time. Not only did it become safer for Zimbabwean migrants to return home, but the presence of Zimbabwean migrants became more tolerated, or at least ignored, in South Africa. Zimbabweans also began to access more legal options within South Africa that further reduced their precarity within their host country. This reduction in precarity meant that much of the CSO activities focused on Zimbabweans within South Africa began to dissipate, becoming less centralized and more under-resourced (Betts 2016). Additionally, Zimbabwean civil society organizations could now take on a more active role within Zimbabwe to advocate for change; therefore, CSOs based outside of Zimbabwe became less critical for Zimbabwean advocacy efforts.

Despite the extensive civil society network already in place in South Africa, during the third wave of migration, this network became less active when it came to Zimbabwean migrants. The remaining CSOs were largely unorganized and under-resourced (Polzer 2008). Although they did provide many relief services to Zimbabweans in South Africa, their efforts were often on a small scale and were often based on informal social networks. Many CSOs did not have large funding bases and mostly operated off of small donations of food and clothing from members of the community (Polzer 2010). Furthermore, many of these CSOs did not have formal office spaces and were run on a purely volunteer basis, which made it difficult to develop the institutions and structures necessary to implement a long-term strategy in regards to Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa (Polzer 2010).

Because CSOs in South Africa currently lack stable sources of funding and resources, many Zimbabwe migrants instead rely on other Zimbabwean migrants who are already settled in South Africa (Polzer 2008). Moreover, Zimbabweans in South Africa who have been able to integrate into South African society because of their linguistic and cultural similarities and social networks, fear "outing" themselves as foreigners and are reluctant to utilize support from CSOs and NGOs in the area (Polzer 2010). As a result, Zimbabwean civil society organization during the third wave of migration was largely concentrated within Zimbabwe. CSOs in Zimbabwe had greater access and insight into the current situation in Zimbabwe and thus were better positioned to advocate for change. For the Zimbabwean migrant residing in South Africa, there were many

incentives to keep a low profile and integrate into society as best as possible without being noticed. Therefore, relatively little organization has taken place and Zimbabwean migrants have mostly relied on small-scale social networks to meet their individual needs.

CASE 2: BURMESE[7] IN THAILAND

In comparison to the case of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, there are several crucial differences in the precarity faced by Burmese migrants that overall leads to higher levels of mobilization among Burmese migrants. First, Burmese migration has occurred in the context of a brutal civil war at home. Therefore, the overall levels of precarity faced by the Burmese in their home country are substantially higher than that of Zimbabwean migrants who indeed faced political oppression, but were not forcibly removed from their homes as a result of coordinated armed attacks against them by armed forces. Second, as a result, the international community and, importantly, the UNHCR, have played a more active role in coordinating the protection of Burmese refugees within Thailand. Third, unlike South Africa, Thailand did not have an extensive civil society structure in place, meaning that Burmese migrants could not easily rely on local civil society organizations upon arrival. They either needed to leverage the resources of international organizations, or to mobilize their own organizations. Finally, most Burmese migrants are linguistically, ethnically, and culturally dissimilar than the local Thai populations, meaning that they could not as easily assimilate into Thai society without being noticed. This has called more physical attention to Burmese migrants as they can often be visually identified as migrants, thus increasing their risk for deportation, exploitation, or xenophobic violence.

Furthermore, another important distinction between the two cases that shapes how we proceed with this second case is the fact that although Burmese migration to Thailand has indeed occurred in waves, variation in precarity is more aptly demonstrated through distinguishing among the different types of groups who migrated to Thailand from Myanmar. Given the more nuanced complexity of the Burmese migrant profile, it is more difficult to analyze precarity through the lens of historical time frames, as we did with the Zimbabwean case. Therefore, in the following case, we examine variation in precarity across three different Burmese migrant profiles: (1) Burmese refugees (including the Karen, Karenni, and Mon) who mostly live within one of the nine refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border, (2) the Shan ethnic community which was not recognized as a refugee group, and (3) migrant workers. As will be demonstrated below, the three migrant groups all experience higher levels of home and host country precarity than Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa. However, across these different migrant profiles, there is still variation in the levels of precarity that results in different types of mobilization.

Burmese Migrant Precarity. The conditions in Myanmar that generated the first outflows of refugees and migrants to Thailand were a result of the increased militarization by the state against ethnic minorities seeking self-determination. By the 1980s, the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese

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[7] In 1989, the ruling military junta changed the name of Burma (Union of Burma) to Myanmar (Union of Myanmar, later Republic of the Union of Myanmar). However, when referring to the citizens of Myanmar, the common usage is the term Burmese. There are many ethnic groups within Myanmar; the term Berman is used to distinguish the majority ethnic group in Myanmar from the other ethnic groups such as the Karen, the Karenni, the Mon, etc. We follow this common usage; prior to 1989, we retain the name Burma; subsequently, we refer to Myanmar. It is also common usage to refer to the Thai/Burma border rather than the Thai/Myanmar border.

military forces) had gained increasing control against the armed insurgent groups, resulting in the displacement of civilians who were forced to flee across the border to Thailand in the thousands. In addition to the destructive campaigns of the *Tatmadaw*, the repressive policies of the Burmese government created a context of economic devastation and insecurity within its borders (Human Rights Watch 2005), forcing many Burmese to migrate from Myanmar to Thailand for both political and economic reasons. Consequently, according to the UN, there are at least 1.7 million Burmese in Thailand as of 2015, which comprises more than half of all migrants in Thailand.

Although many of these Burmese migrants have often fled severe human rights abuses in their home country of Myanmar, they still face high levels of precarity in their new host country, Thailand. Thailand has yet to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol and has very little infrastructure in place to manage the mass inflow of refugees into their country (Human Rights Watch 2017). The Thai government does not have a legal framework from which to assess asylum claims and has delegated responsibility for adjudicating asylum claims to the UNHCR (Human Rights Watch 2017). Many Burmese refugees decide not to venture outside of the designated refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border, which receive high levels of support from the UNHCR and NGOs such as the Border Consortium and the Red Cross (Burma Link 2015). Refugees within these camps are essentially completely dependent upon outside aid and are unable to safely venture outside of the camps for food, resources, or employment due to restrictions by the Thai authorities (Burma Link 2015). Many refugees have in turn spent their entire lives in these refugee camps and many do not know any other life outside of these camps (Burma Link 2015). Even though the Burmese in the camps are legally secure in their status of Convention refugee, life in the camps remains precarious. Nonetheless, the mobilization efforts of the Burmese, including refugee women's groups, is nested within the dense structure of international organizations.

Outside the camps, Burmese refugees within Thailand lack legal status and thus are considered to be illegally residing in Thailand by the Thai authorities and run the risk of deportation or detention in immigration detention centers (IDCs) or government run-shelters, which suffer from overcrowding and inadequate living conditions (Human Rights Watch 2017). In addition to not having legal status within Thailand, many? Burmese migrants do not have the legal right to work in Thailand (Human Rights Watch 2017). Therefore, many Burmese migrants are solicited to work in jobs that are dangerous and degrading and since Thailand's labor laws do not apply to refugees, they are subsequently often exploited and abused by their employers (Human Rights Watch 2017).

For the Burmese activist however, there is a significant trade-off between the protections provided by the refugee camps, and having more of a voice and access to an international audience by living in Thai cities, such as Mae Sot, which has become an unofficial hub for Burmese activists, IGOs and NGOs. Within these Thai cities, Burmese activists face higher risks of arrest and deportation, making their decision to live outside the refugee camps a risky one (Brees 2010). However, for many, the decision to stay within the confines of a refugee camp can severely limit their level of agency. Therefore, given the level of precarity *all* Burmese migrants face at home in Myanmar and within Thailand, the question then becomes: how do we explain the variation in mobilization among various migrant groups within Thailand?

Profile 1: Burmese Refugees (Karen, Mon, and Karenni ethnic groups). In our first migrant profile we examine Burmese refugees who have experienced high levels of precarity in

their home country, giving many of them no option but to flee without hope of returning in the near future. These migrants thus face high levels of precarity in their home country, and indeed experience precarity in their host country of Thailand, but their access to refugee status mitigates their host country precarity by providing them with legal protection along with humanitarian assistance provided by the auspices of the refugee camps.

However, as mentioned above, migrants residing within the confines of the refugee camps have very little agency. Leaving the camps could result in deportation by the local Thai authorities; therefore, Burmese refugees within the camps have little incentive to venture outside of the camps even to look for work. Within the camps however, most humanitarian and advocacy work is led by the UNHCR and IGOs. Although migrant mobilization within the camps does exist, it is usually minimal and is often facilitated by these IGOs. Furthermore, most advocacy work is focused on calling attention to the situation in Myanmar, rather than the situation in Thailand. Refugee camps are designed to be temporary solutions until conditions in the home country can be improved enough so that refugees can return home. As a result, for Burmese migrants within the refugee camps, the reduced precarity minimizes migrant mobilization toward the host country and filters migrant mobilization on behalf of the home country through institutionalized channels like the UNHCR and international organizations. What about relative precarity and comparative advantage of resources?

Some Burmese refugees have chosen to live outside of the confines of the designated refugee camps. Although living outside the camps introduces higher levels of precarity, Burmese refugees are able to exercise more agency than they would under the confines of a refugee camp. In Thailand, the town of Mae Sot has become the unofficial hub of Burmese human rights activists, IGOs and NGOs, thus fostering an extensive network of individuals and groups fighting for the protection of Burmese. This network has served as a platform from which the international community can be informed about the current situation in Myanmar. For example, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) is a non-profit organization founded by former Burmese political prisoners living in exile in Mae Sot (AAPP nd). Its main objective is to call attention to the plight of political prisoners still residing in Myanmar (AAPP nd). By writing monthly and annual reports, maintaining a list of former and current political prisoners and those awaiting trial, and producing advocacy and lobbying materials, the AAPP seeks to put pressure on the Burmese government for the immediate release of these political prisoners (AAPP nd). Although AAPP leaders are UN recognized refugees, since the foundation of AAPP in 2000, the leaders and members of AAPP have not enjoyed legal status outside of the refugee camps in Thailand?. Headquartered in Mae Sot, Thailand, AAPP leaders are often detained by Thai authorities and have to pay bribes or elicit the sympathies of the Thai authorities to ensure their release ("Burmese exiles" 2010). It is as if their presence in Thailand is merely tolerated, but at a price. Therefore, the legal precarity faced by these migrant activists makes it difficult to mobilize efforts targeted at their host country, and instead has incentivized them to focus on their comparative advantage in homeland activism. Interestingly, this case thus illustrates that migrant mobilization can indirectly decrease one's level of precarity over time, particularly when the mobilization efforts are focused on home country advocacy and are highly regarded by the international community.

Profile 2: Ethnic Shan

The ethnic Shan within Thailand face different challenges than other Burmese ethnic groups who are also residing in Thailand. For starters, the Shan are the most ethnically and linguistically similar to the local Thai, thus making it far easier for the Shan to seamlessly integrate into society and find temporary forms of employment (Human Rights Watch 2012). This in many ways reduces the level of precarity the Shan face within Thailand, as they are less likely to stand out in Thai society therefore reducing the need to mobilize on behalf of their status within Thailand.

On the other hand, the other crucial difference between the ethnic Shan and other Burmese migrant groups within Thailand is the fact that the ethnic Shan are precluded from obtaining refugee status within Thailand, even though they face similar levels of precarity back home in Myanmar. The reasoning behind their exclusion is twofold: First of all, because of their ethnic and linguistic similarity to the Thai people, the Shan are more often viewed as economic migrants who have historically crossed over the Thai/Burma border frequently for work (Human Rights Watch 1998). Second, the Shan State is widely known for its involvement in the drug trade (the Shan state falls within the Golden Triangle known for its production of opium). Subsequently, the reputation of the Shan people has been tainted by the Shan state's involvement with the drug trade; therefore, all Shan are viewed skeptically by the Thai authorities out of fear that the Shan are using the guise of refugee to propagate their drug trade (Human Rights Watch 1998).

As a result, many Shan refugees who have genuinely fled violence in their home state have been left without a safe refuge within Thailand due to their inability to register as a refugee (SHRF nd.). This means that the Shan have not been able to access the designated refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border as well as the international civil society organizations based out of these camps (Burma Link 2015). Consequently, the ethnic Shan within Thailand face high levels of precarity back in their home country as well as in their host country.

In the face of this dual precarity however, we do see mobilization, albeit less than the mobilization seen by the ethnic Karen, Mon and Karenni. For example, the ethnic Shan have mobilized to form the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF), a non-governmental organization based out of Chiang Mai, Thailand. SHRF's main function is to document human rights abuses in the remote conflict areas of the Shan State in Burma for the purpose of informing the international community of these violations to keep perpetrators accountable (SHRF nd.). SHRF's access and insight into these remote areas in the Shan state provide the international community with unique information about the perpetrators, victims, and locations of human rights violations which can greatly inform the international community of how to exert political pressure and provide relief.

As a result, most of the SHRF's efforts have been focused on advocacy targeted at the home country, given the comparative advantage they face in regards to homeland activism. Given the Shan's limited access to resources within Thailand, the Shan have instead focused their efforts towards their home country to create a path out of precarity through return.

Profile 3: Migrant Workers. Finally, in our third migrant profile, we examine the Burmese migrant workers. Although it has always been difficult to distinguish between the economic and political reasons prompting Burmese migration to Thailand, since the early 1990s,

the Thai government has established a migrant worker management system, which provides another legal option for Burmese migrants as an alternative to obtaining refugee status. In 2001, approximately 560,000 migrant workers were registered in Thailand (Amnesty International 2005), and as of May of 2018, there were approximately 3.2 million documented migrant workers in Thailand (ILO 2018). Although not all of these documented migrant workers are from Myanmar, the ability of Burmese migrants to obtain legal status as a migrant worker in Thailand has diminished some of the legal precarity faced by Burmese migrants, thus increasing the amount of resources available to them in their host country

However, their legal status as a migrant worker has not guaranteed them equal or fair treatment and, as a result, many Burmese migrant workers have incentive to mobilize to improve their working conditions within Thailand. Yet, Burmese migrant workers face an uphill battle when it comes to standing up for their rights in the workplace. For starters, in Article 87 of Thailand's 1975 Labour Relations Act (LRA), labor unions can only be formed by Thai nationals and in Article 100 of the LRA, union committee member positions must also be filled by Thai nationals (Arnold 2005). Therefore, even though Burmese migrants can technically join Thai unions, it is unlikely that their specific interests as migrant workers would be represented. Furthermore, language and cultural barriers also serve as a major obstacle in Burmese migrants learning about, and participating in Thai unions. As a result, Burmese migrant workers have developed their own migrant organizations focused on improving their living and working conditions within their host country.

For example, the Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA) was founded in 1999 by Burmese student activists and migrant workers and is currently located in Mae Sot, Thailand (YCOWA nd). The goal of YCOWA has been to improve the working and living conditions of Burmese migrant workers by educating workers of their rights, helping to facilitate collective action among migrant workers, and providing legal advice to victims of human rights abuses in the workplace (YCOWA nd). In 2003, the YCOWA accomplished their first major achievement, by helping 43 workers win a legal battle against their employer for paying less than minimum wage (YCOWA nd). This was the first time that a case had been successfully brought and tried against a Thai employer, siding in favor of the Burmese migrant workers (YCOWA nd). This was a landmark case because it not only brought attention to the plight of Burmese migrant workers, but also demonstrated that with proper legal guidance, Burmese migrant workers could successfully bring cases against their employers to the Thai courts and have a chance at winning.

These successes, however, have not been without their difficulties. For example, after YCOWA's major success in 2003, the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) asked the provincial governor to issue an investigation of the NGOs in the area (Arnold 2005). The FTI was complaining that the activities of these NGOs were stirring up their workers, causing them to strike, wreak havoc in the city, and engage in insubordination (Arnold 2005). As a result, many of the YCOWA staffers went into hiding after local thugs came around Mae Sot with pictures of the YCOWA staffers' faces, hoping to find and interrogate them (Arnold 2005). Despite persecution and intimidation however, the YCOWA has not allowed its precarious position to hold itself back from its advocacy efforts. Given the long-term view YCOWA has regarding its tenure in Thailand, its efforts are crucial to improving the living and working conditions of migrant workers within Thailand. As a result, this has prompted migrant mobilization targeted towards the host country as a means of reducing their overall precarity through staying.

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