

ABSTRACT

The nature of being an emigrant has changed. With mobile phones, laptops, Wi-Fi, and numerous apps, no emigrant is ever far from home. Nowadays, migrants can have long daily conversations at home and even watch films or eat together with their family on laptops or phones, regardless of the thousands of miles between them. However, this change has not been sufficiently researched or written about. Therefore, this project explores the on-the-ground effects of WhatsApp and Facebook on migration. The key question is how cheap technological communications are creating a world where 'leaving is not really leaving'. In addition, this project's practice involves a film that responds to the changing nature of migration. Mainly set in Luton where there is a large longstanding Zimbabwean migrant community, my practice, like the writing, informs one another to examine the use and impact of WhatsApp and Facebook in maintaining relationships with their homeland. By integrating insights from regions like Zimbabwe, the research captures the diverse experiences and nuances within the broader discourse on migration and communication. Zimbabwe, with its unique socio-political context and history of emigration, offers valuable perspectives that deepen our understanding of how technological advancements shape migrants' connections to their homeland. The research argues that migrants in the big cities of the West operate in a state of double consciousness. They are both far away and home at the same time. Furthermore, interconnected through the project's film practice, this project highlights how emigrants are taking advantage of this new world of unlimited free communications as well as the paradox of unlimited connectivity among migrants. Both the film and the written thesis discuss, in their own ways, the significance of the emerging new culture of communication that makes migrants still feel connected to their homelands.



**Reimagining Migration: Investigating the Impact of Mobile Phones on
Contemporary Zimbabwean Migration to the UK**

by
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Introduction

Before reading this thesis, kindly consider watching the accompanying film, *Leaving but not leaving* (2024). The film is an integral component of my research, providing visual context to the arguments and analyses presented in the written text. By watching the film beforehand, you will gain a deeper understanding of the concepts explored in this thesis. It serves not only as an illustrative or data collection tool but also as a narrative counterpart to the written analysis. The interplay between visual, audio, and textual elements, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of the methods researchers employ to study contemporary migration, enabling the viewer-reader to engage with the research findings on multiple levels. This realism in film and media can truthfully portray the lived experiences of migrants, capturing the nuances of their daily lives, struggles, and triumphs. By focusing on real stories and avoiding exaggerated or sensationalized narratives, realistic portrayals help to humanize migrants and present their realities in a relatable and truthful manner. The term "realistic" closely relates to the documentary's method of depicting migrant lives. My film creates a sense of realism through candid portrayals of daily routines, intimate interviews, and reenactments of significant moments. By avoiding sensationalism, it seeks to humanize migrants and provide viewers with a relatable and authentic understanding of their struggles and triumphs. For instance, the visual aesthetics of Luton's streets, combined with elements of Zimbabwean culture, evoke a feeling of both belonging and dislocation.

Throughout the thesis, explicit connections are drawn between the content of the film and the discussions within each chapter. Each element of the film is carefully crafted to resonate with the themes and discussions outlined in the chapters. Whether examining theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, or critical analyses, the film grounds the research in real-world contexts and human experiences.

As people around the globe become increasingly interconnected, the traditional figure of the uprooted migrant is giving way to another figure (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2018: 12), one that is yet to be fully defined. This figure corresponds to that of a migrant on the move, who relies on alliances outside their own group without cutting ties with the social network at home. In her article *The Connected Migrant: an epistemological manifesto*, Dana Diminescu contends that the emergence of this new figure requires us to rethink how we conceptualize

migration and the ways that people living away from home interact and form networks across multiple communities simultaneously (Diminescu, 2008: 565-579).

Before the arrival of today's ubiquitous smartphone technology, migrants relied on traditional research methods such as writing letters, sending photographs, and using audiocassettes to stay connected with their families. While these methods served their purpose, they lacked the immediacy and pervasiveness of modern communication technologies. One participant in this study, a Zimbabwean woman who has resided in Luton, UK for three decades, reflected on the challenges of staying connected in the past (see appendix 1).

I remember sending letters, using that - the letter, stickers saying "by air", if you don't see it, it goes by sea. So, it'll take longer to get there. Yeah. Zimbabwe. But if you said "Fly", it's gonna fly. Yeah. It'll take like seven days or 14 days. Right. So now, your question about how long it takes you, it would take you that much - a week plus (03.24).

This interview underscores how smartphone technology, including video calling, text and picture messaging, and social media platforms like Facebook, has revolutionized the migrant experience and the process of migration. In some cases, people who have never met become like family through social media interactions. For instance, in August 2023, I witnessed an incredible example of this. A video of a Zimbabwean migrant woman was shared on Facebook by a South African philanthropist, touching the hearts of thousands of Zimbabweans worldwide. I shared it on my Facebook page as well, and it was reposted 206 times with 1,100 sympathetic comments. Inspired by this, I created a crowdfunding campaign on the same Facebook platform, raising 7,000 pounds for the woman (see link <https://go-fund.me/ee13928e>). With this fund, she was able to fulfil her dream of opening a thriving retail and baking business. Though we have never met in person, she considers me her brother, and we regularly communicate via WhatsApp. She even gives me virtual tours of her shop through WhatsApp videos, making me feel as if I have been there.

Moore (2005) cited in (Ferris Dobles, 2022: 53) explains that communication technologies become embedded in our 'every day' habits through constant use. In other words, technologies become ubiquitous devices in our lives when we dedicate and organize our time around them. Communication in this research, is examined through the lens of transnational connectivity. Technologies like WhatsApp serve as lifelines for migrants, enabling them to 'leave but not leave' their homeland. In this context communication is not merely about information exchange but also about emotional sustenance, cultural continuity, and the negotiation of identity.

The thesis explores how digital platforms mediate these interactions, shaping the migrant experience in profound ways. In this research the lens serves both as a metaphor for perspective and as a literal tool in filmmaking. Through the camera lens, the film captures the complexities of migration, providing viewers with an insider's perspective. Metaphorically, "the lens" represents the researcher's interpretive framework, shaped by personal migration experiences and reflexivity. This dual function highlights the interplay between observation and participation in both the film and the written research

As the example above illustrates, these technologies enable rapid and instantaneous communication across time, space, and borders, transforming the way migrants stay connected with their families and communities around the globe. Mobile phones are characterized by their accessibility, immediacy, interactivity, portability, and mobility, allowing migrants to remain in constant communication with their kin 24/7 throughout the year. The use of digital technologies is indicative of the "portability of the networks of belonging" (Diminescu, 2008: 573).

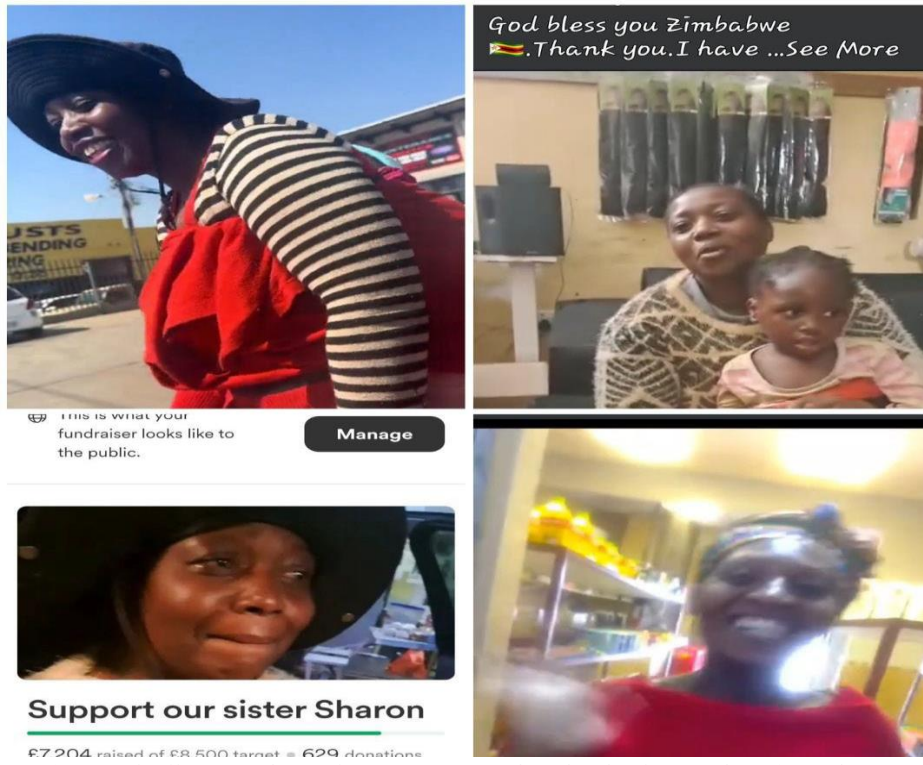


Figure 1: Screenshots from my Facebook platform showing the crowdfunding campaign and the subsequent shop opening. Facebook: (2023).



Figure 2: Figure 2: A screenshot from *Leaving but Not Leaving*. Source: Kaseke, R. (2024).

Through real-time video calls, migrants can participate in significant life moments and maintain a sense of presence despite geographical distance. This demonstrates the transformative impact of technology on migration experiences.

The screenshot above captures a moment where a Zimbabwean migrant engages in a WhatsApp video call with her youngest son on his fourth birthday, despite being separated from him. Her mother stands in the background, silently witnessing the emotional exchange. This illustration exemplifies the themes examined in Chapter Three, focusing on how technology bridges physical separation and emotional connection. These themes are explored in my thesis and documentary project.

My thinking aligns with Diminescu and Loveluck's (2014, 1) claim that the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies impacts all aspects of a migrant's experience, from before entering a new country to after arrival. Prior to entering a new country, the migration journey often begins by gathering information online, crossing an informational frontier comprised of databases and identification systems like the Schengen Information System (SIS). Upon arrival, migrants face the immediate need to obtain a SIM card or mobile phone and gain access to a computer in order to seek employment and stay connected with family and friends.

Migrants are often regarded as early adopters and users of technology, as they have progressed alongside advancements in communication (Madianou, 2014, 667). Starting with letters, telegraphs, telephones, and fax machines, they have now embraced instant communication through smartphones with internet connectivity. Due to my dual role as an emigrant, filmmaker, and social activist with a significant online following, I was deeply immersed in the experiences explored in this project. As both a researcher and participant, the project drew upon my personal reflections on connecting with people back home, my involvement in politics through social media, and my expertise in storytelling through film.

In interviews conducted for this study, Zimbabwean migrants underscored their heavy reliance on self-publishing and social media platforms as their primary means of connection. The widespread use of these platforms in Zimbabwe has effectively bridged the geographical gap between those living abroad and their families, providing a virtual window into their homes

and communities. As mentioned earlier, this intersection of personal experience and academic inquiry informs the thematic exploration of migration and technology in both my thesis and documentary film.

The excerpt below serves as an example of one such interview *see* Interview 2, in appendix 1.

So, if you are not connected to the internet in Zimbabwe, you miss out. Luckily, I had access, so I managed to come across my job. Due to that, I could keep in touch and bridge the gap through getting a job interview (5.40).

Contemporary migration goes beyond physical relocation, incorporating technology-mediated experiences that blur the line between digital and physical realms. This project aims to explore and understand this complex phenomenon, where migrants navigate between their home countries and adopted homes using digital tools. This interaction takes place within constantly evolving technological environments that shape the migrant experience. Referring to the research project Migration, ICTs, and the transformation of Transnational Family Life (University of Cambridge, 2011), Mirca Madianou reports that many migrant workers are in touch with their left-behind families on a daily basis. This means that communication via new media is not only an integral part of their lives, but it also changes the experience of migration and transnational family life.

According to Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999, 219), transnationalism refers to a series of activities that involve regular and sustained social interactions across national borders. In other words, for an activity to be considered transnational, it must involve a significant level of exchange, constant transactions, and multiple activities across different countries. Based on this definition, this study argues that the use of mobile phones by migrants and their relatives facilitates transnational practices in terms of experiences and communication. The transnational culture of bonds, previously a latent feature but typical of all groups on the move, became more visible and highly dynamic once migrants began to use modern information and communication technologies (ICT) on a massive scale.

Previous scholars have argued that migrants are often early adopters and users of technology, evolving alongside advancements in communication. They argue that today's migrants are pioneers of a culture of bonds that they have forged and sustained even as they traverse geographical boundaries. However, these utilitarian perspectives fail to acknowledge that migrants may not always have the freedom to choose constant connectivity (Leurs, 2019). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this utilitarian narrative and how it overlooks the paradoxes of the "compulsion of connectivity" experienced by migrants. According to Leurs (2019, 646), the focus on the positive dynamics of smartphone technology intersecting with migration perpetuates an "idealized vision of the individual/connected citizen and of equally idealized digital connectivity," which, in everyday reality, remains riddled with complexities and nuances. Therefore, this research argues that the emphasis on unlimited and free mobile connectivity should be met with equal attention to the negative aspects of constant connectivity, which in my view remain largely underexplored and understudied.

For example, one negative aspect is emotional strain. The pressure to constantly stay connected with family and friends back home can have a negative impact on migrants' emotional well-being. They may feel obligated to respond immediately to messages and calls, even at the expense of their own mental health and personal time. Another negative aspect is social isolation. Migrants, especially those far from their home countries and communities, heavily rely on mobile devices to stay in touch with loved ones. However, this constant virtual connection can hinder their integration into new communities, leading to social isolation and a sense of disconnection from their immediate surroundings.

As this study will reveal, while this technology serves as a lifeline for migrants, unlimited connectivity also presents unique challenges. For instance, one participant, a man in his late thirties residing in St. Helena, Jersey for four years, shared his experience,

Sometimes I regret posting a WhatsApp status because as soon as I do, people I'm not even close to or haven't spoken to in years suddenly pop up and start asking me for favors... One guy even messaged me asking for my old iPhone after I posted about my new one, and yet I'm not even close to this person.

This highlights how unlimited connectivity can lead to unwanted intrusions and boundary invasions. While digital connectivity may have positive impact migration, it also

introduces challenges and disparities in various aspects of society, including social relationships, spatial dynamics, and occupational opportunities. This juxtaposition highlights the complexity of the effects of digital connectivity, where both positive and negative aspects need to be considered in understanding its overall impact (Lynn et al., 2022: 125).

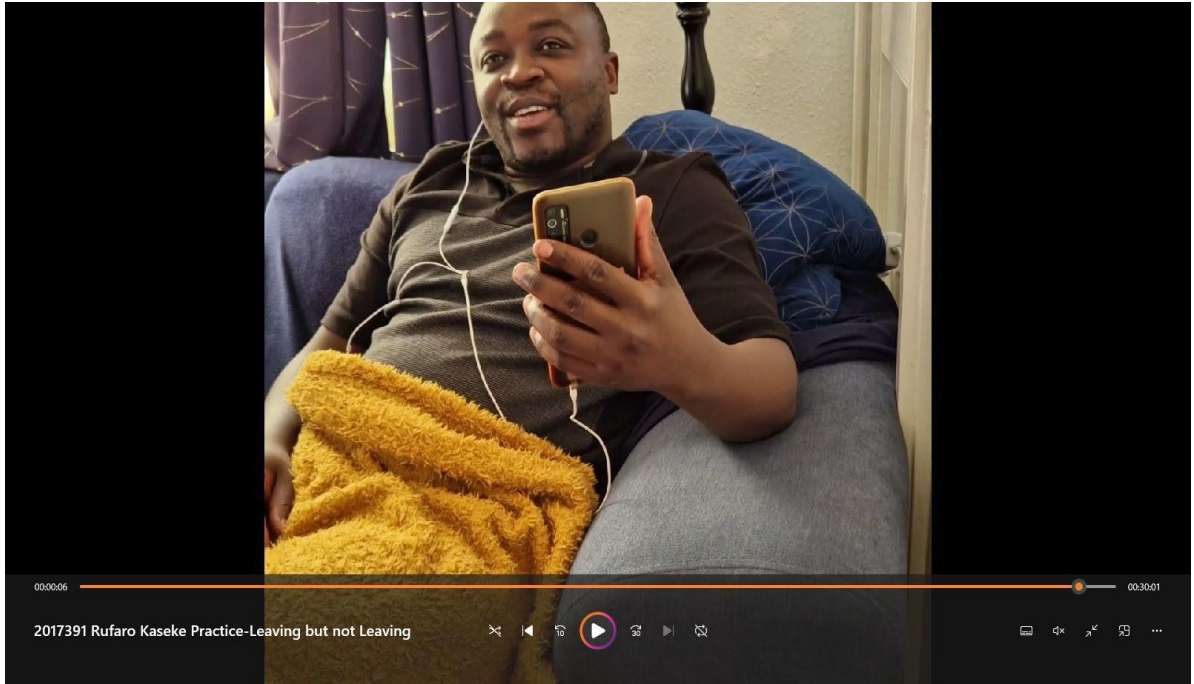


Figure 3: Still picture of Luton captured from Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Research Questions

Central to this exploration is the examination of smartphone technology and its impact within the context of today's diasporic lived experiences. By addressing specific research questions, my aim is to illuminate the ways in which migrants navigate their lives through mobile phone technology and shed light on the complexities of contemporary migration experiences.

1. How do migrants perceive the significance of maintaining homeland relationships through platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and mobile phones as emigrants?

2. What are the dynamics of bonds formed and sustained through mobile phone apps among migrants, and how do they articulate these connections?

3. In what ways can film effectively depict the dual aspects of the contemporary migrant experience?

4. How can an emigrant filmmaker explore, interpret, and communicate the emotional attachment migrants have towards mobile technology and the constant connectivity it offers?

The first two questions align with previous studies by Leurs and Prabhakar (2018), Castells (2007, Bernal 2020), and Dekker and Engbersen (2013). These studies have examined social interactions facilitated by mobile phone apps among migrant communities and provided insights into the nature of these relationships and the ways migrants express their connections in digital spaces. Chapter 1 and 3 of this research project respond to these research questions and build upon the groundwork laid by previous studies. Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive understanding of migrant social interactions in the digital realm, setting the stage for further responses to the research questions in subsequent chapters.

The third and fourth question, addressed in chapter 2 and 4, align with scholars such as Ferris Dobles (2022) and Borish et al. (2021), who have demonstrated various cinematic techniques for capturing the multifaceted nature of the migrant experience. These techniques include the use of personal narratives, visual imagery, thematic exploration, and innovative storytelling methods. By answering these questions, my thesis and accompanying film, *Leaving but not Leaving*, aim to shed light on the overlooked ways in which migrants adapt and interact with smartphone technology in their daily lives, exploring how it shapes their experiences.

Setting the Research Questions

The formulation of the research questions was a critical step in ensuring the study addressed key gaps in literature and built on established theoretical frameworks. Diminescu's (2008) work provided a foundational lens for exploring how digital tools facilitate transnational connections. This concept helped frame questions about how Zimbabwean migrants navigate dual identities and maintain ties across borders. Additionally, the theory of polymedia, as discussed by Madianou and Miller (2012), informed the focus on the emotional and social

dimensions of digital communication. This perspective was instrumental in shaping questions about how migrants choose specific platforms to meet their relational and emotional needs.

Furthermore, the research questions were designed to address underexplored areas in the field, such as the ethical implications of constant connectivity and its impact on migrants' mental health. For instance, one question examined how the compulsion to remain digitally connected affects emotional well-being.

Research Aims and Objectives

Aims

This study aims to examine the impact of mobile phone technology on the experiences of migrants, particularly those maintaining family connections across long distances. By utilizing documentary film as a method of exploration, both in written and visual formats, the focus is on the role of communication platforms in reducing isolation and uncertainty. Additionally, through the use of film as a means of investigation and research reporting, this study aims to expand the scope of traditional research methods, contribute to discussions on employing creative arts-based approaches in migration research and public discourse, and encourage interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the migrant experience (Morris and Paris, 2021, 14).

Objectives

According to Zhong, Huang, and Guo (2022), with the increasing pervasiveness of the mobile phone in people's everyday lives, its impact on psychological well-being has received much attention in recent years (3). The migration experiences and everyday encounters of Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, alongside their utilization of smartphone-mediated communication, offer an intriguing avenue for comprehending the contemporary dynamics of how migration experiences and technology intersect and reciprocally shape one another. The main objectives of my project include:

1. To analyse the usage patterns of mobile phone apps among Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, the study examined the motivations behind their constant connectivity and the emotional significance attached to this usage. This involved conducting interviews or surveys to collect data on app usage habits, exploring the reasons for frequent use, and investigating the emotional connections migrants have with their mobile phone usage.

2. To assess the effects of international mobile phone calls on interpersonal dynamics and transnational family relationships among migrants in the UK. The goal was to understand how these interactions influence feelings of strain or relief within migrant communities. This involved analysing the frequency, nature, and outcomes of international calls, as well as exploring the factors shaping migrants' perceptions and experiences of communication practices.

3. To explore the effectiveness of documentary filmmaking in capturing and sharing narratives and cultural heritage among Zimbabwean migrants in the UK diaspora community. This involved examining the role of digital spaces in identity formation and cultural resilience among migrants. The goal was to highlight the potential of documentary filmmaking in amplifying and preserving migrant voices and experiences.

Research Relevance

The relevance of this research lies in addressing a significant lack of understanding regarding the intersection between migration and communication technologies, particularly focusing on the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the UK. While migration is a global issue, little research has been done on the challenges and opportunities faced by Zimbabwean migrants in adopting smartphone technology in the diaspora context. Zimbabwean migrants face a distinct set of socio-political and economic challenges that differentiate their experiences from other migrant groups. These challenges are deeply rooted in Zimbabwe's complex historical, political, and economic landscape, which has shaped migration patterns and influenced the lived realities of its diaspora. I will discuss more of these in chapter 3.

Ferris Dobles (2022: 323) highlights the transformative role of smartphones for migrants, going beyond mere communication tools to becoming essential transnational care instruments almost becoming an extension of their physical being. She suggests that research and scholarship on the interconnections between human migration and communication technologies should move beyond a simplistic “celebratory” or “utilitarian” approach, which frames technology as a resource that is either good or bad for the migrant. However, there is a significant research gap in investigating the relationship between migration and communication technologies, especially among Zimbabwean migrants in the UK. Closing this gap is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of how migrants navigate daily life and maintain transnational connections through smartphone usage.

Furthermore, although the intersection of technology and migration has gained attention globally, existing perspectives often overlook the complexities of mobile device usage within migrant communities. This oversight is particularly evident among new African migrants, including healthcare workers relocating to the UK under the Certificate of Sponsorship scheme. The recent introduction of the Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) scheme has led to an increase in Zimbabwean healthcare workers seeking opportunities in the UK. However, changes in visa regulations have significant implications for these migrants, highlighting the need for research to explore their experiences and the role of smartphone technology in sustaining familial and social connections across borders.

Research Motivation

As an emigrant, filmmaker, and social activist with a significant online following, I was highly engaged with the experiences explored in this project. This study draws from my personal reflections on connectivity with people at home, my involvement in politics through social media, and my expertise in storytelling through film. In interviews conducted for this study, Zimbabwean migrants highlighted their heavy reliance on self-publishing and social media sites to maintain ties and contacts within geographically dispersed networks of family and friends (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013, 407). The widespread use of these platforms in Zimbabwe has effectively bridged the geographical gap between those living abroad and their families, providing a virtual window into their homes and communities. The combination of

personal experience and academic inquiry informs both my thesis and documentary, evident in the hybrid nature of my film. This hybrid approach, incorporating interviews, observational footage, archival material, fiction, and nonfiction elements, allows for an effective portrayal of the multifaceted nature of migration and the impact of smartphone technologies on diasporic communities.

The hybrid methods used in *Leaving but Not Leaving* align with Nichols' performative and expository documentary modes. However, this blurring of styles raises important questions about how truth is constructed in documentary filmmaking. Based on Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, the re-enacted scenes in the film could risk creating a simulated version of migrant realities. While these scenes may be emotionally impactful, they require a transparent approach to maintain authenticity and trust.

Notable filmmakers like Trinh T. Minh-ha have successfully blurred the lines between fact and fiction, inspiring my own artistic vision. Minh-ha's integration of academic theory and visual experimentation provides guidance for my exploration. By drawing from works such as Minh-ha's, I aim to create a compelling narrative that captures the nuanced experiences of diasporic communities in the digital age while engaging with academic discourse through visuals.

This study takes inspiration from the research of scholars and filmmakers like Michelle Ferris Dobles. Dobles' thesis, "Hybrid Migration: An Analysis of the Interconnections Between Migration and Media" (2022), serves as a significant reference for this study. Her acclaimed films, including "Casa en Tierra Ajena" (Home in a Foreign Land) (2016) and "Marea Alta" (High Tide) (2020), have not only received recognition at esteemed festivals but have also resonated deeply with audiences, winning the Jury Prize at the Los Angeles Film Festival in 2022. Dobles' work, along with my own filmmaking experiences, intersects with the research topic in multiple significant ways. Her groundbreaking research on hybrid migration and acclaimed films provide valuable insights into the complex interconnections between migration and media, specifically exploring how migrants use media technologies to navigate transnational identities and maintain connections with their homeland. In this context, the homeland represents not just a geographical location but also a reservoir of memories, values, and identities. This thesis explores how migrants navigate their relationship with their

homeland through digital media, balancing nostalgia with the realities of life in their host

countries. The film illustrates this tension by contrasting scenes of everyday life in Luton with digital interactions that keep the homeland vibrant in the migrants' consciousness.

Moreover, my experience as an emigrant and my exploration of migration in my films *Lobola* (2010) and *The Gentleman* (2012) fueled my fascination with transnational narratives, particularly those originating from Luton, where I resettled in 2015. Building upon previous research projects, I embarked on this creative practice research project, believing that my background in filmmaking and personal emigration experience could significantly contribute to the discourse surrounding migration and media. Añuli Agina, Knorpp, and Mano (2017) stated in their book *African Film Cultures: Contexts of Creation and Circulation* that the creation of the film *Lobola* reads like a movie itself,

The film's creation itself reads like a movie: two young men from the less than-salubrious suburb of Harare dream of becoming filmmakers. There are no obvious ways of making a film in Zimbabwe – no subsidies, no business funding culture, no foreign investment apart from the donors who want issue-led films – and even that funding is extremely sparse right now in Zimbabwe. The two young men, Joe Njagu and Rufaro Kaseke have no money whatsoever, no resources, they come from underprivileged backgrounds in the same area in which *Lobola* takes place, namely Chitungwiza, but somehow, despite the impossible odds, they make the first commercially viable independent film Zimbabwe has ever seen (152)

When I came to Luton, England, I had numerous interactions with migrants, further intensifying my curiosity in exploring transnational narratives. Filmmaking allowed me to highlight nuanced aspects of migrants' behaviors, emotions, and everyday human traits that are difficult to inquire and analyse through written research approaches alone (Daniels, 2019, 97-110). In this project, I used the camera to identify and frame the human actors and elements that influence the events and experiences that I write about. As an emigrant engaged in communication and information flows with the homeland, my relationship to the object of study – modern digital communication technology – is of central concern in my practice and is in accord with Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity. Reflexivity guides every stage of the process, from conceptualization to analysis. As an emigrant, filmmaker, and social activist embedded in the subject matter, I constantly reflected on my own positionality and how it may influence the research outcomes. For instance, in my involvement in the fundraising for the Zimbabwean

woman in South Africa mentioned earlier, this self-awareness helped me acknowledge any potential biases or preconceptions that could shape my interpretation of the data. Moreover, reflexivity informed my filmmaking approach with participants and interpreting their narratives. By recognizing the power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship, I created an open and inclusive space where participants felt empowered to share their stories authentically, ensuring their experiences are accurately represented and contextualized within broader social structures.

Critique of Reflexivity in Bourdieu's Framework

Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity emphasizes the sociologist's ability to reflect on their positionality within the structures they analyze. However, it is often criticized for being overly structural and for neglecting the personal, emotional, and affective dimensions of reflexivity. This limitation affects its applicability in contexts like migration, where subjective experiences and emotions are crucial. In contrast, feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway advocate for situated reflexivity, which stress that reflexivity is not abstract or detached; rather, it is deeply embedded in and shaped by the context in which individuals or groups operate. This perspective acknowledges that our interpretations and decisions are influenced by the specificities of time, place, power relations, and social structures. This lens is particularly vital in documentary filmmaking, as the filmmaker occupies roles as both observer and participant, necessitating a nuanced understanding of their own biases and influences on the narrative.

The integration of digital tools in migration and filmmaking calls for an acknowledgment of technological reflexivity. This involves critically examining how the use of technology (e.g., mobile phones, social media, and digital editing tools) mediates the filmmaker's relationship with the subjects and influences the narrative. According to Paulus and Jessica Nina Lester 2023 this framework articulates the importance of considering the consequences of technology as a critical component of methodological reflexivity. Unlike traditional reflexivity, this framework addresses the implications of digital mediation, including the ethics of representation and the power dynamics inherent in digital storytelling.

Drawing from embodiment theory, reflexivity can also be understood as a physical and sensory engagement with the subject matter (Sandeep Kaur Glover, 2023). For example, filming migrants' everyday lives requires not only intellectual reflection but also bodily

immersion in their environments. This embodied reflexivity provides insights into the sensory and emotional dimensions of migration that traditional written research methods often overlook, making it a critical tool for visual anthropology and documentary filmmaking. Sandeep Kaur Glover argues that this sensorial inquiry resides in the in-between spaces of breath and bone, ambiguity, and paradox, revealing how embodied, arts-integrated inquiries offer transformative possibilities for (re)humanization, healing, and social justice in arts-based and qualitative research and educational practices.

Malterud (2001) characterizes reflexivity as the influence of a researcher's background and position on their choice of investigation, the approach taken, the research methods used, the preferred findings, and the framing and communication of conclusions (483-484). Markham (2017) acknowledges that ethnographic research is conducted from a specific standpoint that shapes cultural knowledge in distinct ways (4).

Context and Research Environment: Luton as a Case Study Significance of Luton

The choice of Luton as the research context was intentional and significant. Luton's diverse community provided a rich backdrop for exploring themes related to migration, identity, and digital technology. The town's unique socio-cultural dynamics offered valuable insights into the experiences of individuals navigating life in a new country while maintaining connections to their homeland.

Conducting research in Luton also facilitated easier access to participants for follow-up interviews and observational recordings. Being based in a single location reduced logistical complexities and allowed for a more focused and immersive research process. This proximity enabled me to build stronger relationships with the participants, further enhancing the quality and authenticity of the documentary.

Research Context

The stories, the art and the academic theories all promote a growth of understanding our culture. They promote dialogue. They help people to cope and to deal with the leaving far away from the homeland. Barrett and Bolt, (2007, 4) argue that, since the creative arts research such as textiles arts, performance arts and for this project visual arts, is often motivated by emotional,

personal, and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. To put this concept, into perspective I consider an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible tip above the surface of the water and a larger, unseen part under water, creative arts research involves both explicit, visible knowledge and tacit, hidden knowledge. The explicit knowledge represents the tangible elements of artistic expression, the film, techniques I used, and messages the film conveys. On the other hand, the tacit knowledge is the deeper, less tangible, or noticeable aspects such as the emotions, memories, and cultural nuances embedded within the artwork.

The changes brought about by smart phone technology may not be easily accessible or expressible through traditional academic research. Using filmmaking as a research tool provides the opportunity to explore, document, and reflect on the emerging and often indescribable aspects of transformed lives by incorporating emotional, physical, and interactive experiences. Accordingly, this approach enables meaning-making that allows for reflexivity, inter-personal connections, and dialogue. I explore how migrants create and negotiate meanings in their transnational lives, particularly through digital interactions and storytelling. In this context, meaning is intertwined with both personal and collective experiences, influenced by technology and cultural memory. Utilizing theories such as Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity, we see that meaning is not fixed; it evolves as individuals engage with their social, cultural, and technological surroundings. This is particularly evident in how migrants reinterpret familial and cultural connections through digital platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook.

For example, as Demi expresses her support for her nephew who lost his mother during the in 2021, my film captures some intimate moments of connection, longing, that go beyond words. In this scene Demi who was folding her clothes in her living room pauses, lowers her voice, and speaks looking at me directly. In the interview excerpt below she articulates this connection (see Interview 3, in appendix: 166).



***Figure 4: Demi captured in a screenshot from Leaving but Not Leaving
(Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).***

His Mom, During Covid. Just, when Covid was about to start, I mean, yeah, just around Covid time. But she didn't die because of Covid. Just she had cancer. Right. Because she was ill so nobody could go and see him. So imagine he went through this grieving by himself but the fact is that we could actually talk to him on a video contact, you know, and, you know, spend hours with him talking and talking about his mom with him. He felt like we are sitting together in the lounge talking about it, rather than him being by himself (12.19).

This further elaborates my argument that disciplines like filmmaking contribute to understanding migration experiences through their ability to convey emotions and cultural nuances that may be difficult to articulate through traditional academic research methods.

Finally, in coming up with the research context, I considered several relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts from migration studies and visual anthropology. These theoretical perspectives offered valuable insights into the complex interplay between migration experiences and visual storytelling. For instance, in the context of migration, embodiment

theory highlighted how migrants' physical experiences and emotions influence their sense of self, belonging, and identity. Through visual storytelling, it provided a framework to capture embodied experiences such as gestures, facial expressions, and bodily movements that convey migrants' lived realities in a visceral and emotive manner.

To emphasize this point, Marks draws upon the philosophical mentorship of Deleuze, particularly referencing Henri Bergson and his theory that perception and memory are multisensory (Totaro and Marks, 2001, 5). Deleuze was heavily influenced by Bergson's philosophy and developed his own concepts based on Bergson's ideas. Bergson's perspective also underscores that perception is not solely an attribute of individual consciousness but is intertwined with external reality a blend of what exists externally and internally within individuals. Marks extends Bergson's insights to politicize perception, contending that cultural needs shape both perception and memory.

Marks argues that perception and memory, while often considered personal and individual, are profoundly influenced by cultural contexts. Therefore, even in intercultural cinema, where experimental forms and deeply personal subject matter are prevalent, these elements serve the broader collective memory rather than merely individual recollection. This perspective reframes the role of cinema, suggesting that it serves as a conduit for the collective memory of cultures, societies, and communities, contributing to a broader understanding of shared experiences and histories. In alignment with this thinking, my film project provides nuanced insights into how migration shapes participants' embodied identities and experiences.

Drawing on the affect theory I examined the ways in which emotions and affects shape human experiences and interactions. Affect highlights the pre-conscious emotional states triggered by technology. It encompasses the joy, nostalgia, and longing that migrants feel when using digital tools. Drawing from Papacharissi's theories, affect goes beyond verbal communication, serving as a crucial lens for understanding and visualizing the emotional landscapes of migration in your film.

In the context of migration, affect theory emphasizes the role of emotions in mediating migrants' relationships with their surroundings, communities, and cultural identities. For instance, empathy emerges as a prominent emotion throughout the film. To effectively convey

this emotion, I employ various cinematic techniques. One approach involves utilizing interviews to provide insights into the characters' inner thoughts and feelings, allowing viewers to empathize with their experiences. Additionally, I incorporate poignant moments of silence, capturing characters in contemplative sitting positions as they stare either at their phones or directly at the camera. These silent moments serve to emphasize the emotional depth of the scenes, inviting viewers to connect empathetically with the characters' internal struggles and reflections. Furthermore, strategic use of sound effects is employed to punctuate these moments, enhancing the overall cinematic experience, and intensifying the emotional impact on the audience (Jiang, 2023, 8).

As I will discuss further in the first chapter and in subsequent chapters, with this approach I aimed to make a film which evokes and conveys a wide range of affective experiences such as longing, nostalgia, joy, and grief that resonate with viewers. In alignment with transnational family dynamics theory, I explore how migration reshapes family structures, relationships, and practices across national borders. In this context, transnational families of maintain connections and support networks through various forms of communication and interaction. My film illuminates the complexities, depicting the ways in which migrants' relationships with their families evolve and adapt in response to technology. By capturing intimate moments of communication, virtual reunions, and separation, it offers insights into the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of transnational family life.

As put forward by Zhong, Huang, and Guo, social support encompasses resources within a person's network that foster feelings of care, love, esteem, and belonging, as well as a sense of mutual obligation (453). The social convoy model suggests that these resources, including family and friends, play a vital role in individuals' psychological well-being. Convoys serve as a protective base, enhance the quality of social relationships, and contribute positively to mental health.

I discuss these concepts in more detail in the first chapter. However, as a parting shot on the research context, I integrate these theoretical concepts into the research approach, providing a nuanced and theoretically informed analysis of migration experiences through filmmaking. As emphasized throughout this thesis, this interdisciplinary approach enriches our

understanding of migration dynamics, offering insights into the complex interplay between migration, media technology, and lived experiences.

Research problem: Exploring the Intersection of Migration and Communication Technologies Among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in the UK

Sub-Saharan African migrants represent a substantial and growing demographic within Western societies, yet their experiences remain underrepresented and understudied in academic research. By neglecting the unique challenges and dynamics faced by Sub-Saharan African migrants, existing studies risk providing an incomplete picture of migration processes and outcomes. This omission not only undermines the diversity of migrant experiences but also perpetuates biases and stereotypes about migrant communities.

Additionally, the experiences of Sub-Saharan African migrants may differ in important ways from those of migrants from other regions. Factors such as historical colonial legacies, post-colonial relations, economic disparities, and cultural differences shape the migration experiences of individuals and communities from Sub-Saharan Africa (Lemlem Fitwi Weldemariam et al., 2023, 8). Therefore, failing to account for these specific contexts and dynamics may lead to a distorted understanding of migration phenomena and hinder the development of effective policies and interventions to support migrant populations.

Traditional approaches to studying media and migration often overlook the complex narratives of migration, focusing on utilitarian aspects and neglecting challenges like separation and displacement. Ponzanesi and Leurs emphasize the importance of recognizing the intricate narratives surrounding migration, which often involve stories of separation, displacement, and violence (25). They caution against perceiving digital connectedness as a panacea for these challenges. Oetzel, Pant, and Rao (2016, 16) argue that our cultural frameworks greatly influence what we study and how we study phenomena, as our worldview shapes our reality. In conclusion, the insufficient representation of Sub-Saharan African migrant experiences in academic research, coupled with the limitations of traditional approaches to studying media and migration, underscores the need for innovative methodologies. By incorporating documentary filmmaking into research practices, this study

aims to bridge the gap in the literature, offering a more nuanced understanding of migration narratives and the impact of communication technologies.

This introduction has outlined the key research aims, questions, and central argument. It emphasized the transformative impact of smartphone technology on individuals' lives, particularly in the context of migration. Building upon this, the following conceptual review chapter will present the key theoretical concepts and their implications on how smartphone technology and migration experiences are examined.

Chapter 1:
Transnational Connectedness. A Conceptual
Review

This chapter presents the key theoretical concepts informing this study drawing on prior research contributions on the theme of digital migrations. It offers a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these concepts in relation to the research problem and demonstrates how this research project aligns with existing relevant scholarship about migration and modern communication technology.

To conduct this review, I undertook a comprehensive literature search, from various databases such as the Journal of Asian and African Studies (2020) and the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (vol 48: 2020). I utilized specific keywords and concepts including Transnational Co-presence, Mediation, and the Connected Migrant, Affect - bringing emotion more explicitly to the forefront of theorizations, the Paradox of mobile connectivity, Affordances, and Documentary Filmmaking as a Research Method.

Several studies have investigated these concepts, providing valuable insights into the complex intersections of migration and digital technology. Among the works reviewed are those of Ferris Dobles (2022), Borish et al. (2021), Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2020), Cabalquinto (2019), Kufakurinani, Pasura, and McGregor (2014), Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman (2012), and Diminescu (2008). These studies offer diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks, contributing to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of digital migrations and their implications for individuals and communities.

For example, Ferris Dobles' work emphasizes the evolving role of smartphones as transnational care instruments, highlighting their significance beyond communication tools for migrants. This perspective aligns with my research focus on understanding how migrants utilize digital technologies, such as smartphones, to maintain connections with their homeland and navigate transnational identities.

Similarly, studies by Borish et al., Alinejad and Ponzanesi, and Cabalquinto offer insights into the complex dynamics of digital migrations, exploring themes such as identity formation, cultural resilience, and the negotiation of belonging in digital spaces. These themes

resonate with my research objectives of examining how digital technologies shape migrants' experiences of identity, belonging, and cultural integration.

Additionally, the works of Kufakurinani et al., Karatzogianni and Kuntsman, and Diminescu explore the social and political dimensions of digital migrations, highlighting issues such as power dynamics, surveillance, and activism in online spaces. These critical perspectives inform my research by prompting considerations of the broader socio-political implications of digital technologies for migrant communities and advocating for more inclusive and equitable digital environments.

Overall, the diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks presented in these studies enrich my understanding of the multifaceted nature of digital migrations and inspire me to explore the complexities of this intersection in my own research. By building upon and engaging with this existing scholarship, I aim to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the implications of digital technologies for migrants and the societies they inhabit.

This chapter will critically engage with these works, discussing key themes, gaps, and areas of consensus and contention. Through this review, I aim to explain the theoretical and empirical landscape surrounding digital migrations and informing this project.

Navigating Transnational Relationships

By examining the interconnectedness facilitated by transnationalism and the impact of remittances on migrant communities, my project sheds light on the complexities of expressing care within transnational families. Transnational co-presence, a concept central to migrant-focused literature, reflects the interconnectedness facilitated by globalization and technology, allowing individuals to maintain interactive presence across borders. Cabalquinto (2019, 54-57) argues that ICT become an integral part of the migrants' emotional experience as daily mediated communication result in powerful emotional outcome for both parties. Cabalquinto used 'mediated co-presence' to refer to Filipino migrants in Melbourne's performance of family activities through Skype. Cabalquinto observed that many Filipino migrants set up a 'digital hub' corner in their homes dedicated to their mediated co-presence activities.

Kilkey and Merla (2013:14) explore the role of institutional contexts in shaping care-giving arrangements within transnational families. In their study, they conduct a comparative analysis of two migrant groups: Salvadorans in Belgium and Poles in the UK. The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate a framework for understanding the complexities of care provision across borders. By examining transnational families within specific institutional contexts, the research sheds light on how policies, regulations, and social structures influence the dynamics of care within migrant communities.

By bringing together the literatures on the digitised home environment with that on transnational communication, Cabalquinto's study of the digital practices of Filipino workers in Melbourne showed how the concept and space of 'home' were negotiated in and by these activities. He identifies the sociospatial and temporal dimensions of these practices of home, positioning the home as a dynamic assemblage of habituated practices conducted largely with and through the messaging and video conferencing apps used on the devices.

In the Zimbabwean context, studies show that while migrant children may benefit economically and socially from their parents' overseas work, they also face emotional challenges from separation. Not directly mentioning transnational approaches in her study McGregor (2007: 3) notably contributes to the literature on 'global care chains' by examining the narratives of Zimbabwean women and men working as carers in the UK. She investigates why social care has become an important focus of employment for Zimbabweans and explores the means by which migrants of different legal status have negotiated work in a diverse sector. Her article provocatively titled "Joining the BBC (British Bottom Cleaners)': Zimbabwean Migrants and the UK Care Industry" explores the experiences of a highly educated, middle-class migrant group, who left their country in the context of deepening economic and political crisis. She uncovers that Zimbabweans have been able to use transnational mobility and care work as a means of coping, finding opportunities to meet family obligations and personal ambitions, while entrepreneurs have found openings to set up in business as care agencies, providing work for their compatriots and others.

Transnational co-presence can be likened to a vast network of interconnected highways stretching across continents. Just as these highways allow for seamless travel and

communication between distant destinations, transnational families utilize virtual digital highways to maintain interactive presence across borders. However, navigating these digital highways presents its own set of challenges, particularly when it comes to expressing care and maintaining familial bonds across vast distances. Through the lens of my film, we witness the emotional impact of physical separation on familial relationships, as characters like Tino and Edwin grapple with the challenges of long-distance parenting. However, despite the hurdles, diaspora parents are adapting to this new reality, embracing virtual parenting as a means of bridging the gap between continents and nurturing familial bonds across the digital divide.

According to Cabalquinto, in recent times, high levels of human migration alongside the rapid development of digital communication technologies are reconfiguring family traditions. Cabalquinto (3) investigates the ways in which 21 overseas Filipino workers in Melbourne, Australia, and their left-behind family members in the Philippines use mobile devices and communications platforms to restage festive family rituals. Cabalquinto emphasises that organizing, performing, and experiencing festive family rituals sustain relationships among family members. For example, in alignment with my own findings, he states that an overseas family member can send money to send their child to school as well as finance the construction of a house or a small business. Such practices show how migration operates as a collective family strategy towards survival (3).

By rethinking the mediation of transnational affective economies via digital connectivity, Cabalquinto offers an analysis of how connectivity services, such as money transfer (Western Union), parcel manipulate the affective needs of migrants. Employing a visual method and drawing on in-depth interviews, the empirical study uncovers the personalized and heterogeneous practices of the transnational Filipino family in performing intimacy at a distance, paving the way for constructing co-presence during festivities. His study mirrors my project in significant ways, including the sample size and the emphasis on leaving but still attached to the homeland through parental obligations. The study illustrates what the title of my film, leaving but not leaving portrays in that it draws on in-depth interviews and employs visual methods to illustrate the findings.

Cabalquinto's findings align with my own research, which also explores migration as a collective family strategy for survival. Both studies highlight how migrants navigate their

obligations to their homeland while residing abroad, including sending money for education or financing housing and small businesses. These practices demonstrate the multifaceted nature of migration within the context of family relationships and economic support systems.

Cabalquinto's analysis also investigates the impact of digital connectivity on transnational affective economies, particularly through services like money transfer and parcel delivery. This sheds light on how migrants maintain emotional and financial connections with their families across borders.

Importantly, both Cabalquinto's study and my own project utilize visual methods and in-depth interviews to capture the diverse practices of transnational families. Through visual storytelling, we aim to illustrate the complexities of migration experiences and how families negotiate distance and closeness during festive occasions. Cabalquinto's research serves as a valuable reference for enhancing my own investigation into migration, digital connectivity, and familial relationships.

However, transnational co-presence and expressing care as in Zimbabwean families and friendship groups present both opportunities and challenges shaped by various concepts including technological mediation, impact on relationships, emotional toll, cultural differences, and power dynamics. In the next sections I will discuss the multifaceted nature of these dynamics and offer a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play within transnational families and friendship groups.



Figure 5: Still shot from Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024)

The Poly Media Concept & Technological Mediation

According to Madianou and Miller (2012: 170), the concept of "polymedia" refers to the convergence of different media into one integrated structure of capabilities that users utilize to manage their emotions and social relationships. The term "polymedia" suggests that emotions play a significant role in determining which medium users choose. It is not only the technological capabilities of the mediums that influence preferences, but also the emotional and moral motivations behind the decision-making process. Drawing from the theory of polymedia, my project goes beyond just looking at the functions and capabilities of technological devices. Instead, I explore the social and emotional issues that drive people to use smartphones based on their corresponding needs.

According to Madianou and Miller, polymedia focuses on how users exploit the differences between various media to meet their relationship and emotional needs, rather than focusing solely on the capabilities of each medium (128). In other words, media go beyond simply transmitting content – they become the means by which people express themselves (Madianou & Miller: 126). The choice of one medium over another within the polymedia integrated environment becomes a significant part of its relational meaning (Madianou & Miller: 139). Ultimately, when it comes to maintaining, nurturing, and enhancing relationships, people select the specific mediums from the polymedia environment that best address their current emotional needs. As stated in the previous section, technology plays a central role in mediating transnational co-presence and expressions of care. Platforms such as video calls, messaging apps, and social media enable real-time communication and virtual interactions across borders.

Mediation refers to the act of transmitting something through a medium. According to Ferris Dobles, mediation can be seen as the overall effect of media institutions in contemporary societies, emphasizing the impact they have by being present in our social world (27).

Anecdotes, like the one from the participants in an interview (20.15), highlight how technology is bridging the emotional gaps and stark differences in experiences before the ubiquity of mobile phones. In the interview, Tino intimated, "So today it's my son's birthday, our second son, it's his fourth birthday, and the first with us not being with him. But I think it's

compensated because we have managed to have a video chat. It was fun." In Demi's monologue, she states how calling her mother gives her the energy to get up and do what she is supposed to do. These examples illustrate how technology serves as a bridge for transnational families, enabling emotional connections and bridging the gap created by physical distance.

Tino's experience of celebrating her son's birthday through a video chat highlights how mobile devices compensate for the absence during special family events, allowing migrants to participate in meaningful ways despite being physically apart. Similarly, Demi's reflection on her phone calls with her mother demonstrates how these interactions provide her with the emotional support and energy needed to navigate daily challenges. Through these examples, it becomes evident that mobile communication not only facilitates practical communication but also fosters emotional bonds and a sense of co-presence among transnational families.

According to Alinejad and Ponzanesi, (18) the mediation of emotion, affect, and feeling through digital media has been studied in various contexts. This includes sentiment analysis of platform data, which reveals positive or negative emotional contagion, as well as interpretive analysis of how audiences are affected (or unaffected) by text and images portraying distant violence and war. Additionally, there have been discussions about people's emotional motives for watching cat videos online. These researchers propose integrating emotions into the understanding of digital mediations in migrant realities (11).

Transnational Digital Mediation of Emotions

In this section, I will discuss the concepts of affect and digital intimacy as they pertain to emotion. Imagine a world in which we could not understand when a friend felt sad or a partner was angry. Affect, in this context, is similar to emotional intelligence in personal relationships. Just as emotional intelligence involves recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions in oneself and others to navigate social interactions effectively, affect emphasizes the importance of emotions in understanding the dynamics between digital media and migration.

Affect enhances our understanding of migration by examining the emotional aspects of digitally mediated social interactions. It broadens our perspective beyond verbal

communication to include non-verbal cues and underlying emotions, expanding the scope of migration research to include the nuanced emotional experiences facilitated by digital media, moving beyond traditional diasporic texts and interpersonal communication. WhatsApp has emerged as a vital tool for mediating intimacy among transnational families. Its features, such as real-time messaging, voice notes, and video calls, allow migrants to participate in daily family rituals, bridging geographical distances. Scholars like Cabalquinto (2019) describe this phenomenon as "mediated co-presence," where digital interactions replicate the emotional closeness of physical proximity.

For Zimbabwean migrants, WhatsApp facilitates not only communication but also emotional support and financial transactions. For instance, migrants often use the platform to coordinate remittances, share updates, and celebrate milestones (Mbiba, 2012; Mbiba & Mupfumira, 2022). However, this digital intimacy is not without challenges. The expectation to remain constantly connected can create emotional fatigue, while the visibility of online activities can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts within families (Machaka, 2023).

Emotions greatly influence the way humans interact with technology. Our perceptions and expectations of technology are shaped by the emotional experiences we have with them (Ferris Dobles, 47). Affect explains the emotional intensity we feel in our bodies when we encounter technology. It is described as the capacity to be influenced and moved by other entities, whether human or nonhuman. Additionally, affect can be seen as a state of pre-emotion, triggering emotions without being fully conscious or subconscious (Papacharissi, 2015, 307-324).

In line with Alinejad and Ponzanesi's (2020: 1,) argument, my research emphasizes the crucial role of emotions in understanding the dynamics between digital media and migration. I agree with their suggestion that there are various conceptual and methodological approaches for researching the relationship between media technologies and their socially embedded usage in order to analyse affect and emotion in transnational contexts of digitally mediated sociality. They aptly point out that the entry of digital media into discussions of migration has expanded the scope of investigation, necessitating a deeper exploration of emotions beyond traditional diasporic media texts (13).

They argue that the entry of digital media into discussions of emotion and migration has opened up a much broader and more complex field of investigation that cannot be addressed through diasporic media texts and transnational interpersonal communication alone. My project builds on the themes explored in Jane Vincent's research on emotional attachment to mobile phones. While Vincent focused on traditional mobile phone usage from 2004-2006, my project investigates how smartphone applications have transformed communication practices since then, specifically among Zimbabwean migrants. Vincent's studies revealed the emotional significance individuals attribute to their mobile phones, highlighting the interconnection of feelings of dependency, connection, and even anxiety. By examining people's relationships with their mobile phones in the UK and Germany, Vincent's research provided valuable insights into the various emotions and concerns associated with mobile phone usage.

She discovered that many individuals developed emotional attachments to the information contained on and delivered through their mobile phones, becoming overly dependent on the device. Some respondents discussed how they used their mobile phones to keep in touch with spouses and friends throughout the day.

Her findings demonstrate the role that mobile phones play in people's everyday lives and, in particular, their effect on relationships with loved ones. Moreover, it aligns with Waruwu's (2022) statement that storytelling enables migrant mothers to tap into the contextualizing power of narrative (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2015) to contest prevailing family discourses by introducing a new mothering logic and enabling them to defend it (16).

By showcasing emotions visually, such as through re-enactments and interviews, my study adds depth and value to our understanding of how migrants navigate the digital landscape. For instance, from Tino's narration, we see the smartphone becoming what Amanda Alencar et al. (2018, 12) describe as a lifeline, as stated, that is used not only to seek information and maintain networks but also to experience and express emotions. My use of documentary filmmaking to capture migrants' emotions adds a visual dimension to my study, allowing for a more immersive exploration of affective experiences. By showcasing emotions through visual re-enactments and interviews, my research goes beyond traditional textual analysis, providing a richer understanding of migrants' experiences with digital media.

When users engage with communication technologies, they are affected by them, which allows them to experience emotions. These emotions can be rational or irrational, conscious, or unconscious, and both subjective and socially constructed. Therefore, the affordances of technology are not only shaped by material factors but are also influenced by individual and collective user experiences. Affordance relates to the functional and perceived possibilities provided by mobile technologies, such as smartphones, which serve as tools for maintaining transnational relationships. It explores how migrants leverage features like video calls to simulate physical presence, thereby transforming their social interactions and redefining spaces such as 'home.' In other words, people have the power to shape the uses, functions, and meanings of technology. However in this context the dual nature of affordance is also apparent; while it facilitates connection, it also places an emotional burden on migrants..

My study demonstrates that mobile phones are not limited to fixed functions but instead offer a wide range of socially shaped uses that adapt to different contexts. The film showcases how this technology, initially designed for voice communication, now allows migrants to share special life moments together in real-time, creating a greater sense of community. People's choices regarding their phones are influenced not only by the technological possibilities they offer but also by their personal values, beliefs, and ideals (Ferris Dobles, 35).

In conclusion, the exploration of transnational digital mediation of emotions sheds light on the intricate interplay between technology, migration, and affective experiences. Similar to how emotional intelligence enhances interpersonal relationships, Affect Theory enriches our understanding of migration by delving into the emotional dimensions of digitally mediated social interactions. The advent of digital media in discussions of migration has broadened the scope of investigation, necessitating a deeper exploration of emotions beyond traditional diasporic media texts and interpersonal communication alone. This discussion lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration of the practical implications, particularly focusing on the affordances of digital media and how mobile phones reshape our perceptions of time and space while reconfiguring our social interactions. The next section will look into the materiality and functionality of mobile phones in relation to migrants' perceptions and expectations, offering insights into how these affordances influence transnational care and social interactions across borders.

Affordance and Connectivity

Affordances, a concept introduced by psychologist James J. Gibson in the late 1970s, refers to the perceived and actual properties of an object that determine how it can be used. In essence, affordances are the possibilities for action that an object or environment offers to an individual. These possibilities are based on the individual's perception of the object's properties and their own capabilities. With the proliferation of social media technology and especially the ubiquity of social network sites, the use of the theory of affordances in social media research has increased, with more scholars employing the concept of affordances as a useful theoretical lens for the study of the effects of the new media on society. As this project will highlight, the use of mobile apps affects individuals differently. Both the film and the thesis reveal that mobile phones play a crucial role in reshaping the characters' perception and interaction with space. One notable aspect is the utilization of GPS and location-based services for navigation and exploration (Ferris Dobles: 12)

For instance, in an interview segment, Tino and Edwin recount their experience of using mobile technology to familiarize themselves with the streets of Kent before their migration to the UK. They describe how they extensively researched and virtually explored the areas they would soon inhabit, making Bromley feel strangely familiar upon their arrival. Furthermore, even after settling in the UK, Tino's sister back in Zimbabwe expresses curiosity about Bromley's streets, prompting Tino to provide live virtual tours using her phone.

Actually, we went on like Google Map, where you can actually see the buildings in the streets. Yeah. We wanted to know where we are going. So yeah, that's possible. You can actually see a street (06.38).

Tino's testimony encapsulates the spatial affordances enabled by mobile technology, allowing individuals to virtually explore and navigate unfamiliar territories before physically experiencing them. This integration of spatial affordances not only facilitates smoother transitions into new environments but also fosters a sense of interconnectedness between distant individuals.

By incorporating these narratives into the film's storyline and thesis discussion, the transformative impact of mobile technology on spatial perceptions and interpersonal connections is vividly depicted, highlighting the profound role of digital tools in shaping contemporary experiences of space and connectivity. This theory recognizes that affordances aren't solely determined by the physical properties and designs of technology. Rather, they are also influenced by users' expectations and agency, created by their imagined affordances. In other words, the meanings and potential uses of technology are shaped by users' imagination, perceptions, experiences, expectations, and beliefs, all of which have physiological and physical effects. Therefore, affordances aren't only related to the physical features of devices but also to the psychological and social characteristics of human-technology interaction.

This theory combines the materiality of technology, the role of affect and imagination, and the processes of mediation to provide a deeper understanding of what influences our decisions, interpretations, and usage of communication technologies. These three key concepts - mediation, materiality, and affect - are crucial to analysing the role of mobile phones in mediated social interactions that occur across time and space.

In my thesis, I apply this theoretical framework by examining how mediation, materiality, and affect intersect to shape individuals' interactions with mobile phones in transnational contexts. Firstly, I analyse the mediation process, which involves understanding how communication technologies mediate social interactions and influence users' perceptions and behaviours. By investigating how mobile phones mediate communication between migrants and their families across time and space, I explore the role of technology in facilitating and shaping these interactions.

Secondly, I examine the materiality of technology, considering the physical characteristics and functionalities of mobile phones. This includes examining the affordances of mobile devices and how they enable or constrain certain forms of communication and interaction. By studying how migrants utilize specific features of their mobile phones, such as GPS and location-based services, I uncover the ways in which material aspects of technology influence their experiences.

Lastly, I investigate the role of affect, acknowledging the emotional dimensions of migrants' interactions with mobile phones. By exploring how individuals perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to digital communication, I uncover the affective implications of mobile phone usage in transnational relationships. This includes examining how mobile phones serve as sources of comfort, connection, or distress for migrants separated from their families. By integrating these three key concepts - mediation, materiality, and affect - into my analysis, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of mobile phones in mediated social interactions across time and space. This approach allows me to uncover the complex interplay between technology, migration, and emotional experiences, shedding light on the ways in which mobile phones shape contemporary communication practices in transnational contexts.

The Intersection of Migration, Digital Technology, and Visual Arts-Based Research

While Diminescu's framework provides a foundational understanding of migration within the context of mobile technologies, the integration of documentary filmmaking as a methodological paradigm highlights the active dimension of the connected migrant.

My project aligns with the perspectives presented by Borish et al. (2021) regarding the use of audio-visual media and visual arts-based research in scholarly endeavours. Borish et al. argue that digital technology has opened up numerous possibilities for documenting, creating, preserving, and sharing digital content. They emphasize the potential of visual arts-based research as a departure from traditional research paradigms that primarily rely on text-based methods.

Traditional research often prioritizes written documentation and analysis, which may overlook or underrepresent participants' subjective experiences and interpretations. By contrast, visual arts-based research emphasizes the use of audio-visual media and visual arts as tools for documentation, creation, preservation, and sharing of research content. This shift in method and focus allows researchers to capture the richness and complexity of lived experiences in ways that traditional methods may not fully capture.

For example, while traditional research may rely on written interviews or surveys to gather data, visual arts-based research might incorporate methods such as photography, film,

or participatory arts activities to engage participants and elicit their perspectives more holistically. This approach prioritizes participants' interpretations and allows for a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. Additionally, visual arts-based research encourages researchers to critically examine power dynamics, representation, and ethical considerations inherent in the production and dissemination of visual content. By actively involving participants in the creation and interpretation of visual materials, researchers can foster collaborative relationships and empower participants to shape the research process.

In documenting the experiences of migrants through the creative research practice lens, I had to consider both the theoretical and creative complexities of capturing and portraying transnational experiences in this context. Theoretically, contextualizing my film's position within the broader framework of migration studies involved understanding how mobile technologies mediate migrants' experiences of displacement, belonging, and transnational connections. It also requires engaging with other films on digital migration, which explore how mobile technologies reshape.

These will be discussed in detail in chapter 5, but at this point, it's worth mentioning that locating my creative film practice within the digital migration research domain involved grappling with the methodological decisions of capturing subjective experiences through film. This includes considerations such as ethical concerns, reflexivity, and the representational dynamics inherent in documentary filmmaking.

By focusing on individuals' perspectives and using documentary filmmaking techniques, my project aims to tell a story that captures the meaning of being a migrant in a technology-mediated world. My observation regarding the significance of seemingly small decisions, such as the location and framing of shots, aligns with Borish et al.'s findings that these decisions have significant implications for data collection and subsequent analysis.

In a scene from *Leaving but not Leaving*, I capture Tino in a serene outdoor setting, enjoying a moment with her two young children and siblings over a video call. The tranquil atmosphere suggests a seemingly relaxed and peaceful day, but Tino's reflections afterwards during an interview reveal the complexities of transnational motherly care, mediation, and connectivity. But well, sometimes I actually dread talking to them.

Right.... Because then after talking to them via the video call, oh no, I think I need to hold. Okay, I've talked to them, but I wish I could hold them. I wish I could talk to them face to face. So you think now, okay, I'm getting emotional. You get emotional after that. You want to now hold them. (22.43)

Tino's words highlight the bittersweet nature of digital communication for migrants, as it provides a means of maintaining relationships across borders but also underscores the physical distance and separation that they experience.

Through Tino's poignant reflections, this scene underscores the key theoretical elements of my project, such as the paradox of connectivity. It illuminates the complexities of transnational relationships, where technology serves as both a bridge and a reminder of the physical distance between migrants and their families.

The scene suggests a moment captured in time, where the simplicity of sitting on a swing in the outdoors is elevated into something more significant, reflective of Tino's emotional state as she longs to hold her children. It contrasts the seemingly relaxed serene setting with her heavy emotional state, holding her kids in her arms, and dreams of a better life in Europe.

Tino's emotional journey encapsulates the longing, joy, and sorrow inherent in navigating migration in a technology-mediated world, offering viewers a profound insight into the human experience of longing for closeness and connection across borders.



*Figure 6: Screenshot of Tino from Leaving but Not Leaving.
(Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).*

Through this review and the film, the objective is to explore the concepts that underpin the impact of mobile phone applications on migrants' experiences, with a specific focus on how communication platforms mitigate feelings of isolation and uncertainty. In this section, I reveal that by utilizing film as an investigative tool, we can expand traditional research methods, contributing to discussions on employing creative arts-based methodologies in migration research and public discourse, and advocate for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the mediation of transnational relationships.

Moreover, this project's alignment with Borish et al.'s perspectives contributes to the ongoing conversation on the use of visual arts-based research by highlighting the powerful advantages and practical opportunities offered by integrating documentary film into the research process. By emphasizing the importance of participants' interpretations and the impact of visual elements on data collection and analysis, this project adds depth and richness to the understanding of migration experiences in a technology-mediated world.

Digital Migration: A Case for Sub Saharan Africa.

In the context of globalization, the overlooked focus on migrant communities from Sub-Saharan Africa in research on communication practices involving mobile phones highlights broader disparities in understanding the effects of technological advancements and their everyday impact on these populations. This oversight perpetuates a limited understanding of the ways in which mobile technology shapes the lives, interactions, and migration experiences of individuals from this region. While existing research on media and migration has made valuable contributions to understanding the role of communication technologies in migrants' lives, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the experiences of migrant communities from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Zimbabweans resettling in Western countries. This gap is significant for several reasons.

Sub-Saharan African migrants constitute a significant and growing demographic in Western societies, yet their experiences are often overlooked and under-researched in academic studies. By ignoring the unique challenges and dynamics that these migrants face, existing research risks presenting an incomplete picture of migration processes and outcomes. This oversight not only diminishes the diversity of migrant experiences but also reinforces biases and stereotypes about migrant communities.

Moreover, the experiences of Sub-Saharan African migrants may differ in crucial ways from those of migrants from other regions. Historical colonial legacies, post-colonial relations, economic disparities, and cultural differences all influence the migration experiences of individuals and communities from Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, neglecting these specific contexts and dynamics can lead to a skewed understanding of migration phenomena, ultimately hindering the development of effective policies and interventions to support migrant populations.

For example, in their notable work, Leurs and Smets (2018) omit Sub-Saharan migrants when they offer a comprehensive examination of the impact of digital technologies on forced migration in Europe in their Special Collection called 'Forced migration and digital connectivity in(to) Europe.' Through this collection, they look deeper into the concept of digital migration as an evolving area of study, historicizing, contextualizing, and empirically

grounding it. Starting with the heightened focus on digital mediation during the 'European refugee crisis,' they reflect on the conceptual, methodological, and ethical challenges faced in this emerging discipline. They also explore how digital migration is shaped through interdisciplinary dialogues and its interaction with policy and public debate. They argue that digital migration in the European 'refugee crisis' has brought about various ways of imagining different worlds. Their research highlights the transformative power of digital connectivity in shaping the narratives and realities of forced migrants in Europe. Furthermore, they call for more in-depth and comparative research that underscores the importance of understanding the complexities of digital migration in order to effectively address the challenges and opportunities it presents within the context of the 'refugee crisis.'

Despite Alencar's (2020, 1) assertion that research on communication practices involving mobile phones tends to prioritize other migrant groups over refugees, I argue that the current focus of such research predominantly revolves around larger, more traditional migrant communities, neglecting migrants originating from Sub-Saharan Africa. This lack of attention to the communication practices of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa perpetuates inequalities in research and limits our understanding of their experiences within the globalized world.

The desire to migrate from Sub-Saharan Africa to more economically developed regions is evidently growing, as highlighted by the CoS scheme mentioned earlier and by research from the Pew Research Center (2018). This desire to relocate for work opportunities underscores the complex interplay between globalization, economic disparities, technology, and the aspirations of individuals seeking to improve their circumstances through migration. Yet, without adequate research and understanding of how mobile technology influences the migration experiences of individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa, policymakers, academics, and practitioners may overlook crucial factors shaping migration dynamics in the contemporary global landscape.

Addressing the gap in research on communication practices involving mobile phones among migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa is essential for achieving a more comprehensive understanding of globalization's impact on migration patterns, social interactions, and technological integration across diverse communities. It is imperative to recognize and study the experiences of all migrant populations to develop inclusive policies and interventions that

address the needs and challenges faced by individuals navigating the complexities of contemporary migration within a globalized world.

Communication Technologies and Globalisation.

Communication technologies, specifically the internet, have completely transformed connectivity, making it easy for individuals to connect with each other despite long distances. These technological advancements have had a profound impact on globalization. According to Ferris Dobles, globalization is a process shaped by both economic and political transactions, as well as by the exchange and integration of social and cultural expressions. That is to say, it encompasses more than the interchange of tangible goods and products but is also comprised of the exchange of culture, languages, values, and ideas (43).

Her research focuses on how the internet and communication technologies have influenced human migration in the context of globalization. She highlights the significance of acknowledging that the internet is not only a byproduct of globalization but also a driving force behind it. Originally developed as a tool for worldwide social integration and progress, the internet has the ability to connect people on a global scale, as emphasized by Castells (2002). While the internet is not the sole catalyst for globalization, it has undeniably accelerated the process by facilitating fast and efficient connections between individuals and places worldwide.

In addition to the internet, other communication technologies have also played a crucial role in enabling and amplifying globalization. According to Tomlinson (1999), as cited by Ferris Dobles (44), transportation and communication are key modalities through which technology facilitates globalization. Transportation encompasses various modes such as air travel, shipping, roads, and railroads, enabling the movement of people and goods across the globe. Technology's role in the expansion of globalization, both economically and culturally, cannot be overstated.

The concept of globalization resonates with my research, particularly regarding the transnational mediation afforded by communication technologies on migrant experiences. I explore how digital platforms and social media networks reshape social interactions, cultural

exchanges, and identity formation among migrant communities to contribute to the understanding of the specific mechanisms through which communication technologies facilitate globalization in broader contexts.

By adopting film methodologies and expanding upon existing text-based scholarship, this project could highlight how disparities in technological infrastructure and connectivity contribute to uneven patterns of globalization and exacerbate existing utilitarian perspectives. While my project presents insights into the role of communication technologies in shaping globalization, it only scratches the surface of a much broader theoretical and empirical area of research.

The Paradox of Mobile Connectivity

According to Zhong, Huang, and Guo (2022), substantial research suggests that mobile phone use has paradoxical effects on loneliness. This mobile phone paradox is consistent with arguments about the internet paradox, suggesting that although the internet promotes communication, it brings a decline in social involvement and increases in people's loneliness and depression (4). Leurs (2019) conducted a study with young refugees residing in the Netherlands from 2016 to 2019, in which he observed that the effects and emotions of transnational co-presence are manifold and often paradoxical. Scholars such as Madianou and Miller (2012) highlight the paradox of digital intimacy, where constant connectivity can lead to emotional strain and surveillance-like dynamics within transnational families. For instance, Zimbabwean migrants may experience pressure to remain perpetually available to their families back home, creating a double burden of emotional labor (Mutambasere, 2022). Furthermore, Alabi (2024) discusses how expectation-reality discrepancies in migration exacerbate these tensions, as migrants often face the dual challenges of supporting families while navigating their own struggles in host countries.

According to Faber et al. (2022. 39), a paradox can be thought of as a "simultaneous binary," where "a situation, act, or behaviour that seems to have contradictory or inconsistent qualities." Leurs (2019) adds, citing (Mick and Fournier, 1998: Arnold, 2003), in the case of smartphones, for example, they can be engaging and disengaging. Paradoxes arise when these two realities are experienced together: person A finds her phone simultaneously engaging and

disengaging: in other words, the two experiences are pitted against each other. It's important to recognize and address the paradoxes of the 'compulsion of connectivity' among migrants.

A study by Faber et al. (2022) presents five paradoxes associated with the use of mobile devices, each highlighting contrasting effects that technology has on individuals and society:

Freedom/Enslavement: Mobile devices offer users unprecedented freedom by enabling them to connect and carry out tasks regardless of time or location. However, this constant connectivity can also lead to a sense of enslavement, where individuals feel tethered to their devices, unable to disconnect or find respite from work or social obligations. While technology initially promises liberation, it paradoxically binds individuals to a perpetual state of connectivity and anticipation.

Efficiency/Inefficiency: Smartphones are lauded for their efficiency in facilitating real-time coordination, information access, and organization. Yet, the same tools can also lead to inefficiencies as individuals become overwhelmed by the volume of information and updates, relying on improvisation rather than planned actions. Thus, while technology aims to streamline tasks, it can paradoxically result in wasted time and cognitive overload.

Competence/Incompetence: Technology enhances individuals' competence by providing them with resources and tools to perform tasks effectively. However, it can also induce feelings of incompetence as individuals navigate the vast array of available options and features. Moreover, reliance on certain technological skills may inadvertently undermine proficiency in other areas, leading to a sense of ineffectiveness or frustration.

Assimilation/Isolation: Mobile devices facilitate assimilation by allowing people to remain connected despite physical distance, thereby strengthening relationships. However, they can also foster isolation as individuals prioritize virtual interactions over face-to-face communication, sometimes ignoring those physically present. Consequently, while technology fosters connection, it can also contribute to feelings of social disconnection and alienation from immediate surroundings.

Engaging/Disengaging: Mobile technology provides engaging experiences that captivate users and induce a state of flow. However, prolonged engagement with technology

may lead to disengagement from in-person interactions and traditional activities. This shift in attention and behaviour can alter social dynamics and detract from the quality of face-to-face communication, ultimately reshaping human interaction patterns.

Faber et al.'s (2022) exploration of these paradoxes highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of technology's impact on individuals and society. By acknowledging these paradoxical effects, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced dynamics between technology use and human behaviour, informing the development of strategies to harness the benefits of technology while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

Witteborn (2019) suggests that we should be aware of the different implications that connectivity has in the lives of displaced and vulnerable people, as "gifting a mobile device and data enhances the aspirational mobility of forced migrants" (1). She points out that connectivity influences not only people's physical mobility but also their "aspirational mobility," their desires and hopes of "making it" (Chamberlain, 2001: 8), their desire to make their lives better (Witteborn, 2019: 2). Thus, providing connectivity to migrants has implications that go beyond the materiality and the uses of the mobile phone: it affects people's lives in symbolic and affective ways (Ferris Dobles, 2022). Navigating the paradox of mobile connectivity for migrants is akin to walking a tightrope, where each step forward towards enhanced communication brings both benefits and risks. Just as the tightrope walker must maintain balance amidst uncertainty, migrants must navigate the complexities of digital connectivity, balancing the potential for transnational connections with the reality of exclusion and disparities. Like the delicate equilibrium of the tightrope walker, understanding and addressing the paradoxes of mobile connectivity requires careful attention to both the positive and negative implications, ensuring a more stable and inclusive path forward for all migrants.

The film *Leaving but not Leaving* combines visual storytelling with realism to explore the complexities of digital connectivity for migrants. Through the experiences of Tino, viewers witness the paradoxical nature of technology-mediated relationships. The scene depicting Tino engaging in video calls with her family, alongside her emotional reflections, visually represents the impact of digital communication on migrants. This realistic portrayal sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of transnational relationships and highlights the positive and negative aspects of staying connected through mobile apps and social media.

The paradox of mobile connectivity underscores the intricate relationship between technology and migration experiences, a central theme in my thesis. As migrants increasingly utilize smartphones and social media for communication, they navigate a complex landscape marked by both connectivity and exclusion. While digital connections foster a sense of transnational synchronicity and geographical proximity, they also reveal uneven experiences and living conditions across borders. This emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing the compulsion of connectivity among migrants, as focusing solely on its positive aspects may create an unrealistic view of individual and digital connectivity. By understanding the symbolic and affective dimensions of connectivity, my research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of technology on migrants' lives.

Combining established theoretical frameworks and the narratives depicted in the film, this project provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between mobile connectivity and migration experiences. The utilization of theoretical concepts such as digital migration, mediation, the paradox of connectivity, and polymedia enriched the analysis by offering a robust theoretical foundation upon which I could interpret the findings. As Madianou (2014) notes, theories such as polymedia are part of a recent theoretical trend that seeks to understand media as environments. Polymedia can be seen as part of wider theoretical frameworks such as mediation and mediatization, which are interested in identifying the cumulative effects of media and the mutual shaping of the social and the mediated (671). The inclusion of creative practice, the role played by smartphones in shaping transnational family dynamics, all characterized by the term "leaving but not leaving," adds another dimension to the research methodology. The film serves as a medium for conveying the lived experiences of migrants, capturing their emotions, struggles, and triumphs. This not only amplified the voices of migrants but also enhanced the rigor.

In conclusion, this conceptual review chapter has provided the theoretical concepts I employed to investigate the lived realities of migrant families, with a particular focus on how my film intersects with the concepts in exploring digital migration experiences. By examining the intersection of technology and migration, this chapter explores how digital platforms mediate social interactions, emotional connections, and support networks among Zimbabwean migrant families.

The forthcoming methodology chapter will outline the research design, methods, and procedures I employed to explore the lived realities of Zimbabwean migrant families in the United Kingdom. Grounded by the interpretivist approach adopted to capture the subjective knowledge, meanings, and experiences of participants within their own environments, it draws on insights from migration studies, discussed in this chapter, to provide my methods of conducting the exploration of contemporary migration.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Philosophy: Interpretivism

Building upon the conceptual foundations established in the preceding chapter, this methodology chapter outlines the research philosophy, design, methods, and procedures I employed in investigating the lived realities of Zimbabwean migrant families in the United Kingdom. For instance, when discussing qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, I showcase how these research methods were implemented and reflected in the documentary. By featuring migrants' voices and real-life scenarios of Zimbabwean migrant families, the film brings to life the research process, allowing viewers to witness firsthand the lived experiences of the participants. Drawing from available literature and insights from my background, guided by an interpretivist paradigm, this study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at capturing the subjective knowledge, meanings, and experiences of participants within their socio-cultural contexts.

Interpretivism adopts a philosophical perspective that acknowledges individuals create their own subjective knowledge and meanings of their social realities through interactions with others, objects, documents, language, and shared practices (Alborough and Hansen, 2022, 3). This philosophy recognizes researchers' immersion in a web of social meaning and a collectively held fabric of social relations, known as ideology (Harrington and Yngveson, 1990, 136). Unlike the positivist paradigm prevalent in hard science studies, interpretivism acknowledges that reality is socially constructed not only by the observer but also through shared experiences and interactions with participants. Consistency is represented in positivist approaches by reliability, and in an interpretivist approach by dependability. Neutrality, conceptualized within positivist traditions as objectivity, is addressed within interpretivism as confirmability .

As it has been highlighted in the film and in the previous conceptual review chapter, my film serves as a central component of my research methodology within digital migration studies. This chapter focuses on how this applies particularly within the framework of grounded theory and interpretivism.

Interpretivism and Film-Based Research

My choice of interpretivism as a research philosophy emphasizes the subjective knowledge and meanings individuals create within their social realities. My film reflects the interpretivist research philosophy by highlighting the subjective knowledge and meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. In interpretivism, reality is seen as socially constructed and subjective, emphasizing the importance of understanding the perspectives and interpretations of individuals. While interpretivism offers valuable insights into the subjective nature of human experiences and the importance of understanding individuals' perspectives, it also has limitations that researchers should consider.

One limitation is the potential for bias or distortion in participants' interpretations. Because interpretivism focuses on individuals' subjective meanings, there is a risk that participants may provide biased or unreliable accounts of their experiences. Additionally, interpretivist research may lack generalizability, as it emphasizes the uniqueness of individual experiences rather than seeking to identify universal patterns or principles. Finally, interpretivism may face challenges in terms of replicability and rigor, as subjective interpretations can be difficult to verify or validate through empirical research methods. Despite these limitations, interpretivism remains a valuable approach for exploring the complex and multifaceted nature of human experiences.

For instance, the participants account of communicating with home through letters emphasizes their subjective experience of distance and time. They describe the process of sending letters with specific instructions, indicating a personal understanding of how communication works between countries. Their account reflects their subjective interpretation of the time it takes for information to travel and the significance of staying connected with their homeland. Tino's account of the internet's role during herself and her husband's migration journey for instance, demonstrates the subjective significance they attribute to connectivity. They express how being connected to the internet was essential for accessing opportunities and maintaining communication with their family. This reflects their personal interpretation of the importance of technology in navigating the migration process and bridging the gap between

their old and new lives. experience with mobile technology, particularly WhatsApp, showcases the subjective emotional impact of digital communication. Demi describes using video calls to support her nephew who was grieving the loss of his mother during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her account illustrates how technology facilitated emotional connection and support, emphasizing the subjective meaning of virtual presence in comforting her nephew.

Adopting this approach shaped my understanding of what constitutes meaningful data and helped me to align my creative practice with cultural values and modes of communication and knowledge-sharing among Zimbabwean migrant families. As a migrant filmmaker, I recognized that leaving home involved more than just starting a new life abroad: it was also about improving the lives of those left behind. This understanding played a crucial role in determining my methodological approach. In the next section I will briefly outline why and how documentary filmmaking was a suitable research approach.

Informed by grounded theory (GT) I investigate both individual and collective actions, as well as social and social-psychological processes. This includes examining various aspects such as everyday life within specific family and social settings, relationship changes, establishment and maintenance of relationships, identity transformations, problem-solving processes within family groups, and responses to and coping with the pervasive nature of mobile communication technology. Through a GT approach, my focus is to understand not only what people do, but also the meanings they attribute to their actions, and the contexts in which these actions take place. In contrast to researchers from other traditions who typically collect all data before analysing them, grounded theorists gather data and conduct analysis simultaneously throughout the entire project.

Grounded Theory (GT) is not restricted to any specific method for gathering data but instead utilizes data collection methods that are best suited to the research problem and ongoing data analysis. Therefore, GT remains open to a variety of data collection approaches, including field observations, informal conversations, qualitative interviews, focus groups, documents, questionnaires, and diaries. Additionally, Glaser (1992: 1998: 2008) suggests that even quantitative data can be incorporated into GT. While methods are merely tools, the choice of methods carries implications: "How you collect data affects which phenomena you will see,

how, where, and when you will view them, and what sense you will make of them" (Charmaz, 2006: 15).

In this section, I will explain why I chose hybrid documentary as the appropriate research methodology drawing on the work of previous scholars. The film-based research methodology has allowed me to offer novel insights into how these migrant families experience not only displacement but also belonging. By this, I do not necessarily imply that the insights were physically present but could not be seen. Rather, I contend that these perspectives have not been previously explored or brought to light in existing fully through filmmaking, emphasizing the novelty and originality of the insights uncovered through my film practice research methods. These findings present an opportunity to understand how communication technology fosters connections between distant families isolated from one another.

In a case study of her documentary film practice, Daniels suggests that while films communicate in a sensory mode that may challenge written theorization or interpretation, they can still contribute to knowledge through their originality, rigor, and relevance to the broader social world (98).

Friend and Caruthers (2016) note that documentary films produced through research incorporate the same steps as traditional qualitative methods, including site selection, participant selection, informed consent, inquiry, meaning making, and sharing results (38).

For Trevor Hearing, the documentary narrative can be presented for educational purposes and promoted to a wider audience (Hearing, 2015: 69).

Some critics view the documentary approach as highly subjective because the filmmaker directs the entire process, including subject selection, research, data collection, and creative approaches (Iwasaki 2021: 3). However, proponents of the approach, such as Borish et al, argue that when combined with participatory action research, community-based and community-led research, and other frameworks, it aims to meaningfully engage participants in an equitable research process. They argue that documentaries have the ability to create 'aesthetics of knowledge,' which involves reinterpreting and reshaping our shared experiences to give knowledge and facts their true meaning. Through techniques like using silent speech, incorporating montage with sound, text, and image manipulation, documentaries can help us understand how our sensory experiences are contingent and dependent on various factors (9).

In my documentary film *Leaving but not Leaving*, I showcase the lived experiences of migrants through sensory storytelling, challenging conventional written theorization. One scene illustrates this as a character frantically searches for his mobile phone, only to realize he is not interested in talking to people (see minutes 37.43). This scene reflects how films incorporate body language, environment, and emotions in every frame, emphasizing communication on multiple levels (Daniels, 2018: 98).

Following Friend and Caruthers' framework for documentary research, *Leaving but not Leaving* underwent meticulous steps akin to traditional qualitative methods. For example, in selecting sites, although the sample was restricted, I ensured representation with diverse migration experiences from individuals who arrived before the spread of mobile phones to individuals who planned their whole journey using mobile technology. This enabled me to capture a comprehensive range of experiences. Additionally, obtaining informed consent from participants involved transparent communication about the film's objectives and their rights throughout the process. As Daniels herself emphasizes, every aspect of my filmmaking process was guided by ethical considerations and a commitment to truthful representation. Furthermore, Hearing's perspective on documentary narratives as awareness and educational tools is evident in my plans to distribute "*Leaving but not Leaving*" in public institutions and community screenings, such as ZIMFEST, an annual arts and music festival held in the UK. By leveraging these platforms, the film serves as a catalyst for raising awareness and fostering dialogue on migration issues, aligning with Hearing's vision.

These insights solidified the idea of incorporating filmmaking to understand the context and subjective experiences of migrants and interpret their meaning. It was useful for exploring the complex social phenomena that arise from the interaction between migrants and their families through technology. This involved capturing moments and asking relevant research questions, even if the participants themselves did not consider them important or interesting.

Grounded Theory and Film Based Research.

Grounded theory, with its focus on understanding both individual and collective actions, social processes, and the meanings attributed to these actions, aligns well with the goals of the

film-based research approach, particularly in response to the third research question (see Introduction: 16). Grounded theory emphasizes the simultaneous collection and analysis of data throughout the research process. This aligns with the iterative nature of my filmmaking, where data collection and analysis occurred concurrently as I captured and interpreted the lived experiences of participants (Nikielska-Sekula and Desille, 2021:109).

For example, as I captured footage of participants engaging in WhatsApp video calls with their families and friends back in Zimbabwe, I was able to analyse the nuances of their conversations, including body language, nonverbal expressions, and emotions in real-time (24.05). This allowed me to gain a better understanding of the social processes and meanings attributed to these interactions. By integrating and engaging with participants in their various settings, the approach allowed me to gather critical nuanced, contextual data that informed the evolving narrative of the film. Furthermore, grounded theory allows for flexibility in data collection and encourages the researcher to remain open to emergent themes and ideas that arise from the data. As the filming progressed, emergent themes and narratives also emerged, shaping the evolving narrative of my film. For instance, the unexpected moments of emotional reflection when Tino suddenly realized the distance between her and her sons after chatting via video call highlighted broader themes of longing which I had not anticipated in the beginning.

By incorporating these emergent themes into the narrative, I was able to capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the participants' transnational experiences truthfully. This openness to exploration and discovery aligns with my filmmaking process, where unexpected moments and narratives were arising during filming. By remaining attuned to these emergent themes and incorporating them into the evolving narrative of the film, the approach allowed me to capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the participants' transnational experiences.

Finally, in alignment with the third research question also outlined in the introduction, grounded theory acknowledges the role of the researcher in shaping the research process and interpretation of data. Similarly, in my approach as a filmmaker, it allowed me to exercise agency in selecting subjects, framing narratives, and editing footage to construct a coherent and meaningful portrayal of migrant experiences. While this subjectivity may raise questions

about objectivity, I argue that this approach allowed for a more nuanced and empathetic exploration of a complex and often sensitive subject.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity played a pivotal role in shaping various aspects of my research project on the interconnections between communication technologies and human migration. My personal experiences as a migrant living in the UK also informed my interest in studying this topic, offering valuable insights into the everyday realities faced by migrant communities. However, I recognized that my role carried inherent privileges and power, given my background as a filmmaker and academic, and I approached the research with a strong moral stance. I remained mindful of the multiple layers of potential interpretations and the implications of my personal position within the research process. Malterud (2001) aptly describes reflexivity as the acknowledgment of how the researcher's background and position influence various aspects of the research, from the choice of investigation angle to the framing and communication of conclusions (483-484). Markham further emphasizes that embracing reflexivity can enhance the overall robustness of the research approach (Markham, 2017).

The interplay between objectivity and subjectivity was fundamental to the methodological approach of this study. As researcher with personal connections to the Zimbabwean migrant community, reflexivity was an essential part of my approach to participant selection. I recognized that my dual role as an insider and academic could introduce potential biases, so I took deliberate steps to maintain critical distance while ensuring the study remained inclusive and representative. I was particularly mindful of the risk of overrepresentation of individuals from my immediate social network.

To address this, I actively sought participants outside my immediate community organizations. For example, I invited participants whom I had never met before, to take part, and I also approached individuals still in Zimbabwe who were preparing for their migration journey. This approach ensured that I connected with individuals whose experiences extended beyond those already familiar to me. Additionally, collaborating with trusted intermediaries within the Zimbabwean community allowed me to identify and include participants outside my direct network. This collaboration was critical in achieving a broader and more balanced

representation of voices. For Zimbabwean migrants, subjectivity is evident in their emotional ties to both their homeland and their host country. These tensions resonate with Du Bois's idea of double consciousness, which I reinterpret through the lens of digital technology. Zimbabwean migrants navigate dual realities: one characterized by a virtual presence with family in Zimbabwe and the other by their physical integration into British society. By explicitly addressing my own dual consciousness, this research underscores how subjectivity enhances rather than detracts from academic inquiry.

Navigating the balance between empathy and objectivity was another critical aspect of reflexivity in this study. While building rapport was necessary to elicit genuine narratives, I worked to maintain professional boundaries. I achieved this by keeping reflexive notes, where I documented my interactions, thoughts, and decisions. This practice enabled me to critically assess how my positionality shaped the research and to remain transparent about my influence on the process. Moreover, I openly shared my dual role with participants, ensuring they were aware of my position as both a researcher and a member of the Zimbabwean diaspora. This openness fostered trust while maintaining the integrity of the research.

By integrating these strategies, I was able to minimize potential biases and ensure the study captured a diverse range of experiences. Reflexivity was not only a methodological safeguard but also a means of enriching the research by critically engaging with my positionality at every stage.

By acknowledging my position and experiences, I aimed to ensure transparency and integrity in communicating the findings. In engaging with participants, reflexivity guided me in recognizing the shared experiences and commonalities that facilitated ethical and assertive research practices. As a native Shona speaker with cultural familiarity, I was able to communicate effectively with participants and build trust, allowing for meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Additionally, my previous experiences in filmmaking projects centred around migration further enriched my understanding and shaped the direction of the study. By embracing reflexivity, I aimed to conduct the research ethically.

The ethical challenges of studying African diasporic digital users are multifaceted, encompassing issues of representation, consent, and data privacy. Scholars such as Alencar et al. (2018) emphasize the need for culturally sensitive approaches that respect the agency and

dignity of participants. For example, when documenting the lives of Zimbabwean migrants, it is essential to navigate the fine line between portraying their struggles and avoiding exploitative or sensationalized narratives (Mbiba & Mupfumi, 2024).

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Additionally, the use of digital tools in research and filmmaking raises concerns about data ownership and privacy. African diasporic users often share information on platforms like WhatsApp, making it imperative for researchers to adopt ethical practices that safeguard this data. This includes obtaining informed consent, anonymizing identities, and ensuring that participants retain control over how their stories are shared (Tawodzera, 2024).

Documenting the lives of migrants involves navigating complex ethical terrain. Authentic portrayal requires a commitment to representing participants' realities without imposing external narratives or biases. For African diasporic communities, this is particularly critical given the historical misrepresentation and stereotyping in media.

Ethical challenges include ensuring that participants have agency over their stories and addressing the power dynamics inherent in the filmmaker-subject relationship. Additionally, the use of digital tools in filmmaking raises concerns about privacy and consent. For example, capturing intimate moments on WhatsApp or social media requires explicit permission from participants and careful consideration of how such content is contextualized in the documentary (Mano & Willems, 2008).

In addressing these challenges, this research adopts a reflexive approach, continuously evaluating the impact of storytelling choices on participants and audiences. By prioritizing transparency, consent, and collaboration, the project aims to create a documentary that respects the dignity and agency of Zimbabwean migrants while contributing to broader discourses on migration and digital media.

Research Methods

I commenced initial fieldwork in March 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown restrictions posed a challenge to my research design, impacting the size of the sample

I could access. This situation was not unique to me as I later found out that many researchers in my field encountered similar challenges during that period.

As Ferris Dobles (2022) aptly expressed, "Honestly, this scenario was already terrifying to experience day-to-day, and beginning dissertation research under these conditions was intimidating, to say the least." (72).

Despite the difficulties in scheduling appointments, the lockdown provided an opportunity to spend extended periods with particular families, during which I would undergo testing for COVID-19. At times, I stayed with a family for up to a week due to travel restrictions. Reflecting on this period, I realized that while it was challenging for everyone, these restrictions enabled deeper engagement with participants, who were also communicating with loved ones experiencing lockdowns worldwide. For instance, in September 2020, when restrictions eased temporarily, I arranged a visit with a participant, only to find myself staying an additional 8 days due to a resurgence in cases and the introduction of new regulations.

Amidst the challenges, the pandemic presented a distinct opportunity to explore the use of communication technologies for transnational mediated communication, a topic that became increasingly relevant (Ferris Dobles: 115, 116). Remarkably, this newfound reality closely aligned with the focus of my research on the transnational communication and care practices of migrant communities. This shift in context provided a fresh perspective on the significance of my research and underscored the importance of its findings.

Sample

Using a qualitative sampling method, 35 individuals were initially chosen. From this pool, five individuals were selected as the main characters for the film based on their availability, knowledge of the subject matter, and suitability (Vasileiou et al., 2018: 15).

Participant Selection and Biographies

The participant selection process was guided by the study's objectives and methodological considerations, including the integrity of documentary film production. From an initial pool of 30 potential participants, five individuals were selected based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance to Research Questions:** Participants were chosen for their active engagement with digital tools such as WhatsApp and Facebook, which they use to maintain transnational connections with their communities in Zimbabwe.

2. **Diversity of Experiences:** I aimed to include individuals representing various age groups, genders, and durations of migration to capture a wide range of perspectives.

3. **Accessibility and Willingness:** Participants needed to demonstrate a willingness to engage deeply with the research process, which included participating in interviews and allowing their narratives to be featured in the film.

As a documentary filmmaker, I needed to spend extended periods recording participants' daily activities and conducting semi-structured interviews. Unlike online interviews, face-to-face recordings allowed me to observe and capture non-verbal cues while interviewing participants in locations and at times of their choosing. This approach required selecting individuals who were geographically accessible to minimize logistical challenges and financial costs. Given my limited resources in terms of time and finances, I focused on participants I could engage with cost-effectively. This practical strategy enabled me to dedicate sufficient time and attention to each participant without overextending my resources.

The decision to narrow the participant pool from 30 to 5 was made to ensure that each story received the necessary depth and attention. A larger sample size would have diluted the focus and made it challenging to explore each narrative comprehensively within the research timeframe. By concentrating on a smaller group, I was able to delve deeper into participants' experiences, providing a richer and more meaningful exploration of the study's themes.

Working with 30 participants would have required significantly more time and resources, both of which were limited. Managing, filming, and analyzing data from such a large

group would have been overwhelming and could have compromised the quality of the final output. Narrowing the sample size allowed me to uphold high standards throughout the research process.

The five participants were selected based on the strength of their stories and their alignment with the research objectives. Each individual provided compelling narratives that reflected the project's goals. Their willingness to share their personal stories authentically was a key factor in their selection. While some participants were open to discussing their experiences, they were not comfortable with having their lives documented on film. This underscored the importance of choosing participants who were willing to engage with the process, as the film's integrity relied on their ability to candidly share their experiences.

Although the small sample size facilitated a deeper exploration of participants' experiences, it also limited the generalizability of the findings. However, this focused approach is consistent with the study's qualitative methodology and practical constraints. (See the limitations section for further discussion.)

Participant Biographies

Below are summarized biographies of the five participants:

1. Tino: A social worker in Luton, Tino maintains a close relationship with her two young children, who live in Zimbabwe under her mother's care, through WhatsApp. She migrated to the UK in 2021 with her husband, Edwin.

2. Demi: Based in Zimbabwe, Demi cares for her elderly mother and siblings while managing household needs online. She relies on WhatsApp for daily updates and uses Facebook to stay connected with her siblings' activities.

3. Edwin: Tino's husband, Edwin, navigates the emotional complexities of long-distance parenting through video calls while also supporting his mother in Chipinge. His story illustrates the challenges of balancing family responsibilities across borders.

4. Nkosi: Nkosi arrived in the UK as an asylum seeker in 2020. He uses social media to stay informed about events in Zimbabwe while integrating into his new community.

5. Blessing: Having migrated to the UK at the age of 11, Blessing uses Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp to maintain cultural ties and learn about her heritage.

Representation of Demographics and Experiences

To ensure a balanced narrative, I prioritized diversity among the participants, including individuals with varied demographics, migration histories, and levels of engagement with their homeland. For instance, the experiences of someone who arrived in the UK in 1998 differ

significantly from those of someone who arrived in 2022. Incorporating these varied perspectives enriched the documentary, providing a nuanced exploration of the themes under investigation.

These individuals include a Mental Health Nurse who migrated in 1998, who is also my partner, a musician who joined their partner in the UK in 2019, a young couple who relocated to the UK in 2022, leaving their two young sons behind, a young man who left Zimbabwe in 2000 at the age of ten, and a young man in his late thirties who migrated as an asylum seeker.

Qualitative sampling allows for consideration of specific characteristics of the population, and the selection process is influenced by the researcher's context and availability. This approach allowed me to gather valuable insights from five individuals who had firsthand experience relying on technology to care for their loved ones from a distance.

To explore participants' in-depth experiences and perceptions, multiple interviews were appropriate (Hollway and Jefferson, 2011: 11). From this sample, I conducted 30 in-depth in-person interviews in and around Southeast England, North of England, and St Helena, Jersey. These interviews were conducted in the first 12 months of field research from Jan 2020.

Subsequently, my focus shifted to assessing the suitability of each participant and their narrative for the purpose of story re-enactments. As outlined by Mckee (2014), characterization encompasses all observable qualities of a human being, including age, speech style, living choices, education, occupation, personality, and more (145). This involved analyzing key aspects of their stories revealed during interviews and captured in the video B-roll, including familial and social events.

B-roll footage which includes new clips, YouTube videos and stock footage provides visual context to the participants' narratives and interview segments. It helps viewers better understand the setting, environment, and context in which the interviews took place enriching the storytelling by immersing viewers in the participants' lived experiences when a participant discusses their sense of community and belonging within their neighborhood. This visual context helps viewers understand the ever-present nature of mobile phones.



Figure 7: B-roll screenshot from Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

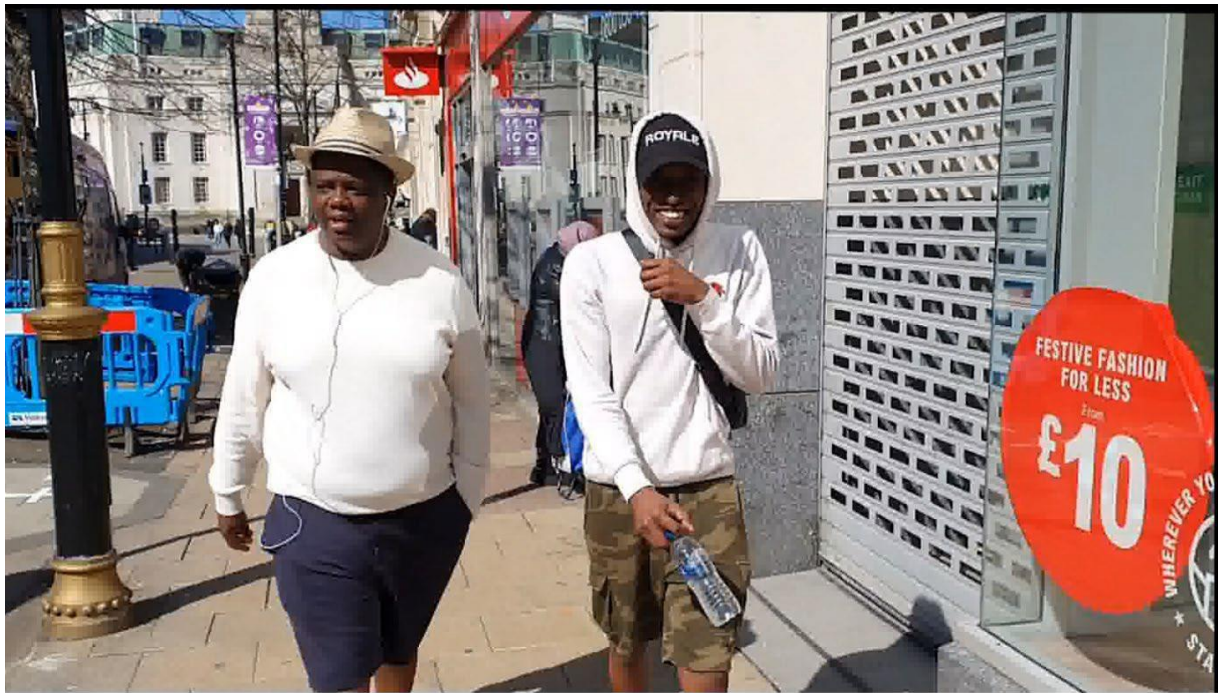


Figure 8: B-roll screenshot of participants captured on the streets of Luton. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Roller and Lavrakas (2015: 73) proposed four factors for determining social research samples: (1) the breadth, depth, and nature of the research topic or issue: (2) the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the population of interest: (3) The level of analysis and interpretation required to meet research objectives: (4) practical parameters such as the availability of and access to interviewees: budget for financial resources, time constraints, as well as travel and other logistics associated with conducting face-to-face interviews" (cited in Leavy, 2017: 78). Given that this research project addresses a complex social issue with a diverse population, varying levels of analysis, and intricate logistics, conducting multiple interviews was appropriate to address the research questions.

Data Collection

For this study, the main data collection approach was informed by Grounded Theory (GT). Grounded theory (GT) is a research approach where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. As mentioned in an earlier section, GT offers rigorous yet flexible guidelines that start with open exploration and analysis of inductive data, ultimately resulting in the development of a theory firmly rooted in the collected data (Underhill and Gist-Mackey, 2022: 25)

However, one crucial factor that I primarily considered was the research questions and objectives of the study. I selected data collection methods that I believed aligned with the specific research goals. For example, to explore participants' in-depth experiences and perceptions, multiple interviews were appropriate. To examine the nature of the limitless communication phenomenon, I employed overt participatory observation. Furthermore, the available resources, including time, budget, and participant access, also influence the choice of data collection. During data collection, it was necessary to carefully assess the practicality and feasibility of different methods considering the available resources and the Covid pandemic restrictions.

The methodological design of this study was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, I planned to conduct fieldwork in various migrant home settings, but due to the pandemic, I was unable to access these households or have face-to-face interactions. This

forced me to reorganize my research methods and focus on a small number of individuals within my community bubble. I initiated my preliminary fieldwork in March 2020, coinciding with the global lockdown. Consequently, I had to rely on individuals who were close to me, such as my family and friends. As the pandemic restrictions gradually eased, I adjusted my methods to conduct more in-depth observations and interviews.

On the positive side, by concentrating on a smaller group of participants, I was able to give them maximum attention and explore their experiences with relying solely on mobile apps to connect with the outside world (Kawulich, 2005) This unintentionally made my research timely, as the entire world, including myself, had to rely on technology to communicate, share information, work, study, and entertain ourselves.

Interviews

Interviews are a widely used method in action research and in documentary films for gathering data. The primary purpose of interviews is to allow research participants to express their views in their own words, which can lead to new insights and directions for the action researcher to explore. For before each interview session, I prepared a set of questions that were designed to address the research objectives while also remaining open-ended enough to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and viewpoints. Combined with a dialogue-based approach the process facilitated a more nuanced understanding of participants' views and allowed for the emergence of new directions for exploration.

By integrating specific questions with dialogue while acknowledging my influence on the interview process on participants' views, I aimed to facilitate a rich and truthful exchange of perspectives that could inform the research process and lead to new insights and directions for exploration.

Avoiding Leading Questions

To ensure the integrity of participants' responses, I employed strategies designed to minimize the risk of distortion during interviews. The interviews were structured around open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their experiences in their own words. This approach allowed for the emergence of authentic narratives without imposing

predetermined frameworks. Follow-up questions were used to clarify and deepen understanding while avoiding assumptions. For example, when participants described their use of digital tools, I asked for specific examples or elaborations to fully capture their experiences. Additionally, the interview guide was pilot-tested with a small group of participants to identify and eliminate any questions that could inadvertently lead responses. This process ensured that the final interviews were as neutral and open as possible.

According to Rapley (2001), cited in Ferris Dobles, the “interview is the central resource through which contemporary social sciences (and society) engages with issues that concern it” (304). Rapley recommends thinking of interviews as open-ended interactions that resemble a conversation. The author points out that the richness of interviews relies on the possibility of having conversations, conducting follow-ups from the questions and answers, and interacting with participants.

My interview structure was divided into two parts: semi-structured interviews and unstructured activity-based interviews. For the semi-structured interviews, I prepared a set of questions before each session to ensure a logical progression of topics during the conversation (Gubrium et al., 2012: 125). Although the questions were not always asked in a specific order, jotting them down before each interview helped me maintain focus on the research objectives, address relevant issues, and maintain a coherent and organized interview approach.

I designed the interview questions to respond to the research question which seek to describe how does the use of technology like social media, messaging apps, and mobile phones affect the immigrant experience in a society where long-distance relationships rely heavily on these channels? Before each interview, I took the time to write down all the questions, to logical flow of topics during the discussion. Although the questions did not always follow a set order, this helped me determine which the issues should be addressed and also it ensured a coherent and organized interview. It did take a couple of interviews with each participant before the process started to feel more natural, but building rapport through the initial interviews was crucial.

Necessity of Face-to-Face Interviews

I chose to prioritize face-to-face interviews to maintain the inkkkkk essential for a documentary film. While online interviews offer undenmm accessibility, the depth and richness of in-person interactions align mor of my research and the artistic vision of the documentary.

The essence of a documentary lies in capturing the human elements such as the expressions, emotions and subtle nuances that shape a participant's story. Face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and even pauses, which often reveal more than spoken words. These details contribute significantly to the depth and authenticity of a narrative, something that digital mediums struggle to replicate fully.

Additionally, meeting participants in person fosters a stronger sense of connection and trust necessary in documentary filmmaking. This rapport is crucial for eliciting honest and heartfelt responses, especially when discussing a subject personal use of digital technology . The physical presence creates a shared space where participants feel valued and engaged, enhancing the quality of the dialogue. Moreover, in-person interviews provide me with control over the environment. I can create a setting that minimizes distractions, ensuring that the focus remains on the conversation. This control extends to the visual elements of the interview, which are vital for maintaining the documentary's aesthetic and storytelling consistency.

That said, I recognize the strengths and potential of online interviews, especially in research about digital technology. They offer wider accessibility, which could enable me to reach a wider pool of participants from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. However, despite these advantages, I found that online interviews lacked the immediacy and emotional resonance of in-person interactions. Technical barriers, such as unstable internet connections or unfamiliarity with online platforms, often disrupted the flow of conversation. Additionally, the inability to fully observe body language or the subtleties of physical presence diminished the depth of the responses.

From a documentary filmmaking perspective, the visual and auditory quality of online

interviews is another concern. Variations in lighting, sound, and background during video calls

can detract from the film's overall cohesion and aesthetic integrity. These inconsistencies may compromise the storytelling aspect that is central to a compelling documentary.

Ultimately, while I acknowledge the practical benefits of online interviews, I chose face-to-face interactions to preserve the documentary's integrity and authenticity. The ability to capture the full spectrum of human emotion, the depth of connection, and the controlled visual quality are indispensable for creating a film that truly resonates with its audience. By grounding the research in personal, in-person experiences, I believe I can convey the story of digital technology in a way that feels both genuine and impactful.

Once I had established a rapport with the participants, I developed probing questions to elicit more detailed and elaborate responses. These questions aimed to look deeper into their experiences and gather rich and valuable information. For instance, I asked a participant who was in a long-distance relationship about his experiences with smart phone technologies and how they impacted the maintenance of their relationship.

I conducted at least three one-hour-long semi-structured interviews and multiple activity-based interviews of varying lengths with each participant. I asked them open-ended questions while also ensuring that specific research questions were addressed. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to explore unanticipated areas of interest, uncovering valuable insights that may have been missed with a more rigid format. By balancing the openness of the conversations with the need to address specific research questions, I was able to gather comprehensive and relevant data for analysis.

The participants' viewpoints, opinions, and personal stories were given space to emerge, adding depth to the research findings. This approach encouraged a collaborative and respectful atmosphere, fostering trust and enhancing the quality of shared information. The semi-structured interviewing technique proved to be a versatile tool, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the research subject while maintaining focus on the core objectives.

I started each interview with a "warm-up" question to help the respondents feel more at ease. These questions were directly related to the research topic itself but they were friendly enough to serve as icebreakers to create a comfortable atmosphere. For example, in our first

dialogue driven interview with one participant, after explaining the aim of the interview, I asked her: (see Interview , in appendix 1: 167

Interviewer: Is communication with people back home important to you?

Participant: It depends, to me it is because that's my family and I value them.

Whereas there are some people who say that's my old life (00.29).

This approach not only helped the participants relax but also made the rest of the interview go much smoother. As they were responding I was listening attentively while also noting any interesting words or phrases or any odd way of moving the hands, facial expressions and any aspect of their response that would provide detail on how they were feeling as they responded to the questions. McCracken (1988) states it succinctly when he notes, unlike hearing which is the capacity to be aware of and to receive sounds, “listening involves not only receiving sounds, but, as much as possible, understanding their meaning” (p. 51: cited in Gubrium et al., 2012). In the context of research interviews, “understanding meaning” is, however, more than a passive task of deciphering what a respondent has in mind. It involves determining the central theme of the respondent’s talk, relating the talk to the research topic and to the questions and prompting of the interviewer, and identifying biographical linkages and other horizons of meaning that the respondent brings to the interview (Gubrium et al., 2012: 226). Active listening entails not only accurately comprehending the speaker’s communications but also demonstrating in some manner that the respondent has been understood. The researcher is actively listening for those potential points of engagement at which he or she will find ways to shape the narrative construction of the respondent.

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Active interviews

The active interview model posits that the interviewer plays an active role in the process of meaning-making, rather than acting as a passive recipient of information (Gubrium et al., 2012: 32). In this model, the collaboration between the researcher and respondent in constructing meaning is considered the primary objective of the interview. Consequently, active interviewing, especially in qualitative research, entails a flexible approach with fewer rigid constraints on how the interviewer presents themselves. Instead of adhering strictly to an interview schedule, the active interviewer engages in a conversational exchange around the topic. From this standpoint, the interviewer actively shapes the interview by suggesting alternative perspectives, identifying conflicts, presenting relevant alternative viewpoints, or facilitating coherence in narrative construction (Gubrium et al: 27). The researcher actively listens for potential points of engagement where they can influence the narrative construction of the respondent.



Figure 9: Screenshot from an active interview in Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

In-depth activity-based interviews.

In many qualitative migration studies I reviewed, the data collection process often overlooked the importance of including the interview setting in the final output, resulting in a limited understanding of how knowledge can be influenced by geographical context (Jones et al., 2008). I took a different approach by utilizing more activity-based interviews.

These interviews focused on engaging participants in related or unrelated tasks or scenarios, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Rather than solely relying on traditional question and answer interview sessions, this methodology provided a more accurate representation of how individuals would navigate and react in real-life situations. In the context of my film research project, these activity-based interviews provided rich and nuanced data that informed the narrative of the documentary. By incorporating participants' voices and experiences directly into the film, I was able to capture the complexities of migration and digital connectivity in a visually compelling and truthful manner. The interviews served as a foundation for understanding the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of migration, enhancing the depth and truthfulness of the film's portrayal of Zimbabwean migrant families' experiences.

Johnson and Rowlands (2012) argue that in-depth interviewing is applied for descriptive and/or exploratory questions that require a greater depth of understanding, "where the knowledge being sought is often taken for granted and not easily expressed by most individuals" (101). In-depth interviewing is typically done without predetermined questions, as it aims to elicit unconstrained discussions and conversations from the participants on a specific topic or issue. The duration of the interviews will depend on the participants' willingness. Markham and Baym state that interviews allow us to explore the life stories of the participants in order to comprehend the significance of technologies in their lives and the ways in which the online and offline realities are interconnected in complex ways. Consequently, this research utilizes in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of how migrants and their loved ones perceive, embody, and experience digital media in their mediated transnational relationships and migratory processes.

Participatory Observation

This research is grounded in documentary filmmaking, ethnography, and participatory video methods. By engaging the Zimbabwean migrant community in the production of the documentary films, the research seeks to empower migrants to share their own narratives, perspectives, and experiences.

Participant observation is highlighted in my documentary through immersive footage that captures everyday moments within migrant households. Through this observational lens, viewers are invited into the intimate spaces and routines of the participants, offering a glimpse into their daily lives, challenges, and aspirations. By presenting these real-life scenarios, the film not only provides visual context to the research methods but also allows viewers to empathize with the participants and understand the complexities of migration on a personal level.

In my observations, as in those by previous researchers, I noticed that prolonged WhatsApp video chats, coupled with frequent real time exchanges of photographs and voice notes play a central role in maintaining what could be termed as 'deep conversations' among migrants. Through these interactions, individuals actively participate in each other's everyday routines such as shopping and provide real-time emotional support in a quasi-face-to-face

manner (Alencar, Kondova, and Ribbens, 2018: 3). The image below is a screenshot which shows a participant engaged in online shopping for her mother in Zimbabwe. The goods would be delivered to her mother's doorstep the day after this footage was captured.



Figure 10: Screenshot from Leaving but Not Leaving observing and participating as the participant does shopping online. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

To examine the nature of the limitless communication phenomenon, I employed overt participatory observation. This method allowed me to immerse myself in various online platforms, social media networks, and virtual communities where communication knows no bounds. Through this approach, I aimed to understand how individuals engage, interact, and connect with one another in the digital realm. By actively participating in conversations, observing the dynamics of online relationships, and analyzing the speed and frequency of information exchange, I sought to gain insights into how technology has revolutionized communication. The findings of my study shed light on the transformative impact of limitless communication and its implications on society, interpersonal relationships, and the dissemination of information.

The comprehensive observation data, comprising not only visual footage capturing everyday life but also recordings of various social interactions, significantly enhanced and added depth to the overall research findings. By incorporating these nuanced observations into the analysis, the research findings are further augmented and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. For instance, in the scene below, I am participating in a group chat with a participant who was visiting Zimbabwe on a WhatsApp video call as he was sharing his experiences and thoughts on communication technology. This scene depicts how I

immersed myself in the participants' world to gain insights into their interactions and connections.

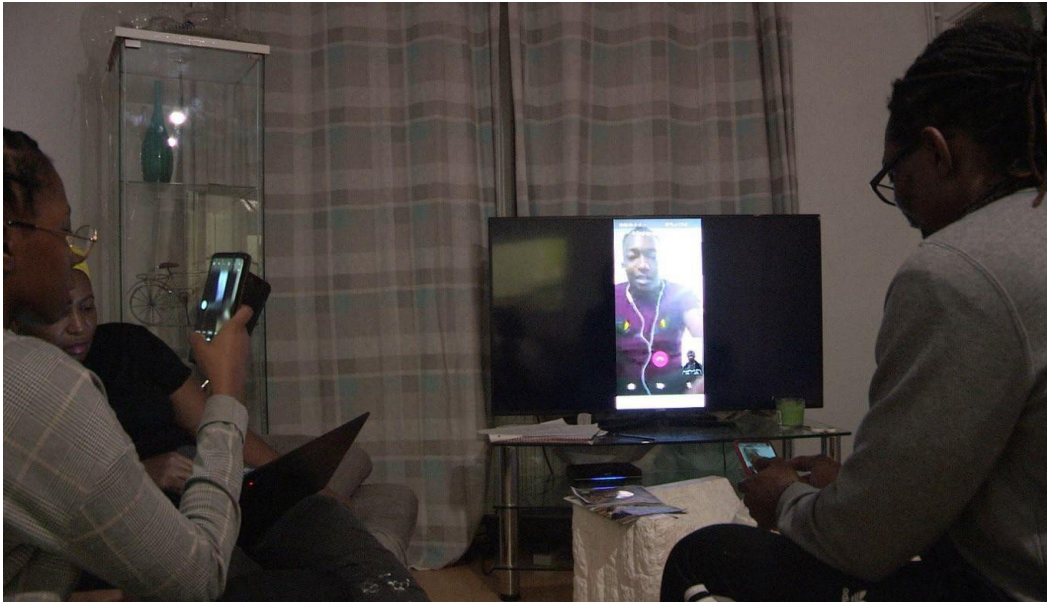


Figure 11: Screenshot chatting with a participant who was visiting Zimbabwe via video call. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Data analysis

The primary analytical approach I utilized was thematic analysis (TA). TA is a method that allows for the identification and analysis of recurring patterns, themes, and concepts within a dataset (Naeem et al., 2023: 2). Qualitative thematic analysis differs from content analysis because it not only examines the content but also explores hidden aspects like metaphors, emotions, and symbolic meanings. According to Ferris Dobles, qualitative thematic analysis, as opposed to content analysis, does not seek to work with large amounts of data. Instead, it aims to observe trends and patterns "on aspects such as themes, frames, discourses, tone, and so forth" (Mendes et al., 2019: 40). Thus, quantity is not the main focus of this approach. Rather, there is a focus on observing different layers of meanings, symbols, metaphors, feelings, and interpretations.

Identifying Relevant and “Interesting” Data

During the interview process, I employed focused criteria to identify data that was both relevant to the research questions and provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrants. Data was deemed relevant if it directly addressed the study’s core

questions about how digital tools mediate transnational connections and intimacy. For instance, responses that illuminated the role of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook in maintaining familial bonds were prioritized, as they aligned with the study's central focus. I paid particular attention to responses that revealed unexpected patterns or contradicted existing literature. These moments often provided opportunities to broaden the research framework. For example, one participant's account of digital fatigue—a phenomenon less explored in existing studies—offered new avenues for understanding the ethical and emotional implications of constant connectivity. Responses that reflected deep emotional connections or cultural nuances were also prioritized. These insights were crucial for understanding participants' lived experiences and for capturing the interplay between digital tools and cultural practices. For example, a participant's description of celebrating a family milestone via video call vividly illustrated how digital tools mediate both connection and longing.

Braun & Clarke (2006: 15-23) provide a six-phase guide which is a very useful framework for conducting thematic analysis: Step 1: Become familiar with the data, Step 2: Generate initial codes, Step 3: Search for themes, Step 4: Review themes, Step 5: Define themes, Step 6: Write-up. By conducting my analysis in this way, TA allowed me to gain valuable insights into the underlying meanings and implications within the data.

Before I could successfully work with the data, I needed to understand it. This meant going through the notes, videos, and audio files to get a sense of the data and to create a first cluster of potential codes. As explained by Braun & Clarke, the first step was to go through the data, transcribe it, and read and re-read the transcripts. This was to ensure I was familiar with the entire body of data or data corpus (i.e., all the interviews, Broll, reenactments, field notes, screenshots, and images). At this stage, I was making notes on early themes and impressions. Below is an example of some initial notes from this process.

The participants emphasized the negative effect of leaving on their relationships with loved ones at home. They agreed that leaving was important, but staying connected with people back home was not just about regular communication. It was also about addressing their emotional needs that stemmed from the act of relocation. Living in a foreign country brought unexpected challenges and surprises, such as extreme loneliness, which even led one participant to consider going back home. They were able to discuss their initial day-to-day

experiences upon arrival in the new country. Furthermore, they highlighted the emotional toll of being apart from their families when smartphones were not available, and communication relied on expensive calling cards. The second step was to generate initial codes. This involved organizing the data in a meaningful and systematic way, reducing large chunks of data into small chunks of meaning. There are different ways to code, and the method will be determined by your perspective and research questions (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 5).

The next step was to search for themes. This involved capturing significant views and unexpected viewpoints that were responding to the research question. As Braun & Clarke explain, there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme. If you have a very small data set (e.g., one short focus-group), there may be considerable overlap between the coding stage and this stage of identifying preliminary themes. After completing this step, I grouped the codes into broader themes that provided insight into the first research question. This question aims to understand the experience of being in exile in today's technology-mediated world. At this stage, the themes primarily consisted of descriptions of patterns found in the data that relate to the research question.

Next, I reviewed, modified, and developed the preliminary themes identified in Step 3. I re-read the associated data for each theme and evaluated its support. Additionally, I assessed the suitability of the themes within the research aims by considering various aspects: Do the themes make sense? Does the data support the themes? Am I merging too many ideas into a theme? If themes overlap, are they truly separate? Are there subthemes within the themes? Are there any other themes within the data? (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 8).

Once I had finalized the list of codes, themes, and sub-themes, I proceeded to analyse them further in Adobe Premiere Pro, which allowed for efficient and in-depth exploration of video-based qualitative data. This process also supported a more holistic understanding of the data through considerations of the linkages between narrative structure, body language, emotional inflection, and language expression by participants. The purpose of this process is to determine the fundamental essence of each theme. What is the main message conveyed by the theme? How do any subthemes interact and relate to the main theme? How do the different themes relate to one another? In this project, the overarching theme is the practical and emotional necessity of smartphones, accompanied by subthemes such as the negative effects

of excessive smartphone use. The themes identified in the analysis were multifaceted and reflected various aspects of the participants' experiences and interactions. For instance, emotional well-being.

This theme focused on the emotional impact of migration and technological connectivity on individuals. I examined patterns of feelings of loneliness, belonging, and emotional support derived from digital communication with family and friends. With this theme, the smartphone becomes a lifeline, as Alencar et al. have stated, that is used not only to seek information and maintain networks but also to experience and express emotions. This aligns with Alinejad and Ponzanesi's claim (631) that social media plays a big role in mobilizing emotions, contributing to contrasting feelings and emotions such as loss, nostalgia, guilt, ambition, affection, and disaffection. As Michaela Riediger et al. (2014) write, emotions are never either positive or negative but are an interconnected 'mixed affect' (11).

Reliability and Validation

Validation of social research is highly important and can be achieved through data triangulation. Social science data triangulation involves utilizing diverse data and methods to reveal different perspectives on a particular topic. In this study, a hybrid method approach was applied to gather information and data from various sources, including interviews, documentary film coverage techniques for nonverbal data, observation, note-taking, and qualitative thematic analysis. In my opinion, triangulation serves not only to validate findings but also to enhance and broaden one's understanding (Olsen, Haralambos, and Holborn, 2004: 1, (Vasileiou et al., 2018: 2).)

In the context of my research on migration experiences among Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, the application of data triangulation played a crucial role in ensuring the validity and reliability of my findings. By employing a hybrid method approach that combined various data collection techniques, including interviews, documentary film coverage, observation, and thematic analysis, I was able to capture a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding migration dynamics.

For instance, conducting interviews allowed me to directly engage with participants and gain insights into their lived experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Meanwhile, utilizing documentary film coverage techniques enabled me to capture nonverbal data, such as facial expressions, gestures, and environmental contexts, which provided additional layers of meaning to complement the interview data.

Documentary Filmmaking as a Research Method

There's a growing belief that documentaries can serve as valuable tools in research, shedding light on issues of social justice and inequities in public education while democratizing research itself (Friend & Caruthers, 2016: 5). According to Friend and Caruthers, the ability of film to capture authentic voices and lived experiences makes it a powerful instrument for addressing existing inequities. Documentary films, through their multi-sensory nature, are found to be particularly impactful in portraying reality and persuading social change. In contrast with other forms of film and video-based media, documentary film has a “particular emphasis on creatively recording reality” (Borish et al., 2021: 2) As a result, they are increasingly utilized in academia for knowledge dissemination.

In chapter 4, I offer a detailed examination of various definitions and claims associated with documentaries to provide a nuanced understanding of their role in research and knowledge dissemination. This examination will help clarify the diverse ways in which documentaries can contribute to scholarly endeavours and public discourse.

During data collection, attention must be paid not only to conducting interviews or focus groups but also to setting up shots, lighting, and interview techniques. Capturing the environment adds context, while framing shots influences the message conveyed to the audience (Borish et al., 2021: 3). Varying camera angles are useful for capturing non-verbal expressions and emotions, enriching the data, and conveying the participants' real-life conditions. Recruiting participants for filming can add complexity, as it may be perceived as intrusive. Therefore, obtaining consent just before filming, even if participants have consented earlier, is crucial to ensure their comfort with being filmed (Friend and Caruthers, 2016: 38).

Ethical Integration of Found Footage

To align with ethical and artistic standards, every piece of external footage was carefully selected and integrated into the narrative to prioritize originality and scholarly rigor. This process was guided by three key approaches:

Transformative Use: Each clip was recontextualized to enhance the film's narrative, providing new meaning and critical analysis. For instance, clips from YouTube were used with voiceovers that linked their content to the broader themes of migration and digital connectivity.

- **Creative Alternatives:** When external footage threatened to overshadow original material, the documentary employed alternative methods such as voiceovers, reenactments, or symbolic imagery to effectively convey key points.
- **Minimalist Use:** The film intentionally limited its reliance on external media, using only what was necessary to support the narrative while respecting copyright limitations.

These strategies exemplify best practices in documentary filmmaking, ensuring that the inclusion of external material enhances rather than detracts from the originality and ethical foundation of the work.

The methodology chapter of this thesis discusses the use of found footage as a deliberate strategy to deepen the documentary's exploration of transnational migration and connectivity. This approach involved several key considerations:

- **Contextual Analysis:** Each clip was carefully analyzed for its relevance to the film's themes, ensuring it contributed meaningfully to the narrative and critique.
- **Ethical Implications:** The process involved continuous reflection on the ethical implications of using external footage, particularly regarding the rights of original creators and subjects depicted in the media.

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- Creative Editing: The integration of external media was complemented by original content, including interviews, B-roll, and reenactments, to ensure that the documentary's primary voice remained grounded in original research.

There are many similarities between traditional qualitative research processes and documentary filmmaking. Both processes begin with a question or questions that seek to focus and understand a given area. The processes involve designing the research project and share similar techniques for data collection and data analysis. Both approaches use individuals' perspectives to tell a story. Documentary filmmaking that are products of research incorporate

the same steps as traditional qualitative methods namely: site selection, participant selection and informed consent, inquiry, meaning making and sharing results (Friend & Caruthers, 2016: 38)

Challenges of Documentary Filmmaking in Research.

One of the primary challenges researchers face in utilizing documentary filmmaking is their lack of experience in visual arts and using video cameras. Learning camera and microphone techniques, framing shots, and filming in real-time can be daunting tasks for those unfamiliar with filmmaking. Additionally, the data analysis and video editing phases can be time-consuming and challenging. Researchers must be reflexive and make ethical decisions about which video clips to include or exclude from the film, as the moving real-time images in video provide more evidence than static images or text. As an alternative form of scholarly work, documentary films have a much wider reach beyond the confines of academia, serving as a powerful tool for public engagement and advocacy.

In conclusion, the utilization of documentary filmmaking as a methodological approach not only enhances the depth and richness of our understanding of contemporary migration dynamics but also resonates deeply within the Zimbabwean context. However, only one film on migration has been produced since Rumbi Katedza's *Transactions* 2018, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4. By presenting the remittances narratives in a visually compelling and emotionally resonant manner, *Transactions* not only enhances our understanding of transnational family dynamics but also brings to light the specific realities of Zimbabwean migrants, shedding light on their experiences and contributing to broader discussions about migration, identity, and globalization.

The examination of migration and social integration within the Zimbabwean diaspora context reveals a complex array of experiences, challenges, and resilience among migrants across the globe. From historical factors driving migration patterns to the multifaceted processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation, Zimbabwean migrants navigate a myriad of social, economic, and political dynamics.

Chapter 3: Migration and Mobile Media in the Zimbabwean Diaspora Context.

Historical Background

In the previous chapter, I explored the methodological framework employed, encompassing sample selection, data collection, and analysis. This chapter provides a historical background of migration and media in the Zimbabwean diaspora context as a case study in the last 25 years, with a particular focus on diasporic participation or lack thereof since the unprecedented outwards movement of the late 1990s (BBC-Immigration Map, 2001). Recognizing Zimbabwean migrants in the UK as the central population studied, examining this background sets the stage for the subsequent discussion of my film's themes and narratives in chapter 4.

Political Context

Zimbabwe's colonial history and subsequent struggles for independence have left a lasting impact on its socio-political structures. The post-independence period, marked by land redistribution policies and political unrest, led to significant economic decline and political instability. The early 2000s, in particular, saw hyperinflation, widespread unemployment, and a collapse of public services, prompting many Zimbabweans to seek opportunities abroad. Unlike migrants from more politically stable regions, Zimbabweans often migrate not only for economic advancement but also as a means of escaping political persecution and socio-economic precarity. The economic collapse in Zimbabwe has had a profound impact on its citizens. Hyperinflation eroded savings and incomes, leaving many families destitute. For Zimbabwean migrants, this economic hardship often translates into heightened pressure to remit funds back home, supporting extended family networks in a context of widespread poverty. This dynamic distinguishes Zimbabwean migrants from groups who migrate primarily for individual or nuclear family advancement. Additionally, the lack of access to formal financial systems in Zimbabwe has led to a reliance on informal remittance channels, complicating transnational financial support.

Social and Cultural Factors

Zimbabwean migrants navigate complex cultural expectations tied to familial and community obligations. The concept of "ubuntu," emphasizing communal support and interconnectedness, often places significant emotional and financial burdens on migrants. These expectations are amplified by the use of digital technologies, such as mobile phones and social media, which facilitate constant connectivity but also create a sense of obligation to maintain close ties with the homeland. This contrasts with migrant groups from cultures with less collectivist traditions, where individual autonomy may play a more prominent role in migration decisions and post-migration experiences.

Comparative Perspective

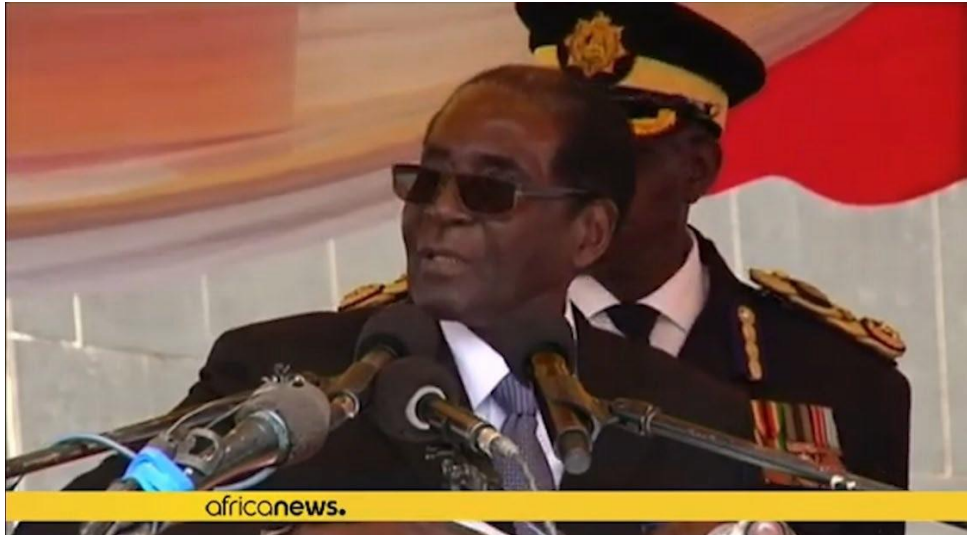
In comparison to other Sub-Saharan African migrant groups, Zimbabweans often contend with unique barriers to integration in host countries. For instance, the perception of Zimbabweans as highly educated and skilled—stemming from the country's robust education system—can be a double-edged sword. While it facilitates access to certain employment opportunities, it also creates a mismatch between qualifications and available jobs, leading to underemployment and frustration. This experience differs from migrants originating from regions with lower educational attainment, who may face fewer expectations but encounter more barriers to entry into skilled labor markets.

By focusing on the unique socio-political and economic challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of migration dynamics. It highlights the interplay between historical context, economic necessity, and cultural expectations, offering insights into how these factors shape the experiences of a specific migrant group. This perspective enriches the broader discourse on migration by emphasizing the diversity of migrant experiences and challenging one-size-fits-all narratives in migration studies.

The censored world: exploring the limitations of government control over media and information.

The media in Zimbabwe experienced a brief moment of freedom when the government deregulated the industry to allow private ownership in the mid-1990s (Ruhanya, 2014: 150). However, this "honeymoon of self-expression" was short-lived as President Robert Mugabe

launched a scathing attack on the private media, labeling them as tabloids and accusing them of employing young Africans as 'puppet editors' and reporters. As a result, the media became heavily targeted by the government, making it challenging for citizens to access trustworthy information about their country (Mungwari, 2017: 89; Nyarota, 2018).



***Figure 12: The late Robert Mugabe maintained an iron fist on independent media.
(Source: africanews, 2016).***

In Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, independent publishers were forced to close their doors. With its motto "Telling it Like It Is," one such publisher was the Daily News, whose editor Geof Nyarota was arrested 6 times and survived numerous attempts on his life. In April 2002, the Daily News offices were bombed, although thankfully there were no lives lost. Its printing press was destroyed. In 2003, the newspaper was forced to close (Mungwari, 2017: 72).

The government-owned broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) retained control over radio and television broadcasts. The government also passed laws that required internet service providers to report any "anti-national activities" by users and later allowed the government to intercept all internet information. These actions were all part of the government's attempt to control what information the public had access to and to suppress any views that went against their own (Mano, 2008: 510-512; Mutsvairo, 2013: 43, 58).

The Mugabe regime's censorship tactics extended beyond traditional media sources and seeped into the digital realm. While some may have believed the internet to be a free and open oasis, it too fell victim to the government's restrictive policies. Rather than an outright ban, Mugabe's government sought to limit access to the internet, granting it strictly to certain areas or subject to rigorous controls. The Mugabe administration's attempts to regulate access to information were a stark reminder of the near-universal desire by authoritarian regimes to quash free speech wherever they can (Mutsvairo, 157).

This virtual blackout of news and information from Zimbabwe to many citizens meant that the only reliable source of news was through external sources such as international media outlets or online portals that were based outside Zimbabwe. These websites provided a space for people to share news and information that were critical of the Mugabe regime as well as other issues that related to Zimbabwe. This made these websites an important source of news and information for many people in Zimbabwe (Ruhanya, 158).

The Emergence of Zimbabwean Independent Media in the UK Digital Space.

In June 2003, a visionary team of Zimbabwean journalists opened the 'virtual doors' of New Zimbabwe.com, a pioneering website that would go on to change the game for the country's residents, both at home and in other parts of the globe. A 24/7 rolling news site, it delivered up-to-the-minute updates on everything from the latest sports matches to in-depth features and editorials. This meant that participating citizens now had the sovereignty to use information and communications technologies to influence political processes (Mutsvairo: 14). This revolutionary platform offered people living abroad access to information on the latest developments in their home country, including sports matches, editorials, and feature stories. For those who had emigrated, it also provided a means of staying connected with their fellow Zimbabweans, allowing them to read about community milestones and even promote their own businesses.

The website was instrumental in creating a sense of unity among Zimbabweans who had been scattered across the globe by political persecution or economic hardship. It allowed people to actively engage in conversations about their homeland so that by 2015, other platforms had emerged. Facebook pages and groups such as Zvinhu Zvirikufaya (translated as

"everything is going alright") and YouTube channels such as Eleven Dogs were providing highly interactive spaces for the Zimbabwean diaspora to communicate (Brooks, 2019: 7).

For Demi, a mental health nurse and fledgling actor who had recently emigrated, the site gave her a newfound sense of connection to her fellow Zimbabweans. She could "keep tabs" on the latest developments from home and within the community, from major events to personal milestones, and even had the opportunity to promote her own work to a global audience by advertising her debut feature film online (Nehanda Radio, 2012).

By the end of 2019, Zimbabweans abroad relied heavily on these self-publishing, social media sites as their go-to connection tool. However, when the lockdown hit in early 2020, social media became the sole lifeline for Zimbabwean expats to stay connected with loved ones back home. Facebook and WhatsApp proved to be critical sources of support during these challenging times. Their widespread adoption in Zimbabwe helped bridge the distance between those abroad and their families, creating a virtual window into their homes and communities. With the pandemic continuing to challenge our normal ways of living, Facebook's role as a vital social connector for Zimbabweans only continues to grow.

How Social Media Activism Is Influencing the Political Arena

In this section, I discuss political participation drawing from Franz Fanon's emphasis on a thorough understanding of the relationship between technologies, social structures, and culture. One's geographical location is no longer a limitation of how much one knows about the political situation in Zimbabwe. From the post-Mugabe 2018 Zimbabwean election, social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook have proved to be powerful tools for political engagement. With high internet usage and mobile phone penetration rates, widespread communication was possible during the campaign period, reaching beyond the nation's borders. Nelson Chamisa and Emmerson Mnangagwa, the main presidential contenders, extensively used these platforms to gain support. The online battles were intense, often marked by the spreading of false information and personal attacks. New internet 'warrior troops' – "Nerorists" meaning Nelson's foot soldiers for Chamisa and "Varakashi" translated as Thrashers for Mnangagwa, were coined (Chibuwe, 2020: 2).

The President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, coined the term 'Varakashi' to describe the faceless online group that attacks his ruling Zanu-PF party. "Some of us are old: you are still youthful and masters of technology, tambai navo mu social media imomo" (Do not play second fiddle, jump in and hammer party enemies online), Mnangagwa said. Today, the 'varakashi' are on call 24 hours a day. Whether an emerging online conversation is about failing hospitals or looming starvation, the varakashi are quickly out of the blocks, as their reach has also expanded. The diligent work of the 'varakashi' is truly commendable, as they tirelessly work around the clock to stay informed and address pressing issues. From discussions on inadequate healthcare to alarming reports of hunger, these dedicated individuals are always there to act. In addition, the varakashi's scope of work has expanded to encompass a broader range of topics and concerns, highlighting their remarkable ability to adapt and evolve over time (Mwayera, 2020).

The political battlefield has evolved beyond physical demonstrations and gatherings. A potent arsenal of weapons has emerged, encompassing everything from videos, memes, and images to text messages and audio clips. A sophisticated army of bloggers, experts in their field, is now utilizing these tools to sway public opinion and make their voices heard. As objectively documented in the film and discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter, the power of these digital maneuvers is substantial, and they may prove decisive in shaping the political landscape, particularly with the upcoming 2023 national elections.

While researchers have extensively studied social media, the rising surge in online activism has opened new doors to the potential of new studies on social media in relation to the future of social justice. The Zimbabwean diaspora is using its social media power to make a change, one post at a time (Chibuwe: 19). In the aftermath of Robert Mugabe's exit, the force of digital activism has surged to new heights within the last four years, with online social activism penetrating the Zimbabwean diaspora in more visible ways. With a few clicks and hashtags, Zimbabweans can share their stories, organize rallies and protests, and amplify their message on a global scale. The impact of this digital uprising and its potential to shape the future of culture and social justice is the problem that this research aims to address.

Having been involved in social media activism for the past seven years, I have observed that the government's current tactics toward media control are not necessarily about censorship.

Instead, they seem to be leaning towards the now common sneaky approach by promoting their own propaganda bloggers to counter any negative commentary. It is a subtle yet far-reaching strategy that demands our attention and further investigation.

Furthermore, their activities have extended beyond solely engaging in online friction. An influential pro-government Twitter user, @CdeNMaswerasei, recently initiated a Change.org petition urging the University of Kent in the UK to sever its connection with Alex Magaisa, a law professor and human rights advocate who played a role in drafting Zimbabwe's constitution and publishes the popular political magazine, The Big Saturday Read. Accusing Magaisa of spreading false information and propaganda about the Zimbabwean government, the petition has garnered minimal support thus far. However, it is important to note that the varakashi's actions are not always harmless (Mwayera, 2020).

However while digital activism enables Zimbabwean migrants to engage in political discourse, it also amplifies the emotional toll of connectivity. Migrants experience "connectivity fatigue," as the pressure to participate in online activism conflicts with the need for personal downtime, highlighting a tension between empowerment and emotional well-being.

The post-digital era, defined by the seamless integration of digital technology into daily life, offers a valuable framework for examining the digital practices of Zimbabwean migrants. In this context, digital tools serve not just as communication channels but as extensions of identity, agency, and belonging. This viewpoint challenges earlier optimistic narratives about the transformative potential of digital technology, highlighting instead its deep connection to broader social, economic, and cultural systems.

For Zimbabwean migrants, the post-digital era is evident in their use of WhatsApp, Facebook, and similar platforms to maintain family ties and cultural practices. While these tools provide unprecedented opportunities for connection, they also bring about complications. For example, the constant expectation of being connected can lead to emotional fatigue, as migrants feel pressured to maintain a virtual presence despite physical and temporal limitations. Building on Alabi's (2024) research regarding the expectation-reality gap among Nigerian migrants, Zimbabwean migrants also face a "double burden" of technological and

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emotional demands. This analysis frames the post-digital era as a space of negotiation, where migrants must balance the advantages of connectivity with its psychological and social costs

As portrayed in my film, Nkosi's explanation regarding his avoidance of political discussions on social media (at 40.12) led to some of the most enlightening findings during my research journey. Since establishing a political activism account on Facebook in 2016, I have diligently monitored its evolution, actively engaging in discussions, and listening to debates while interacting with Zimbabweans worldwide. My personal involvement has proven invaluable in uncovering the nuanced and emotionally charged perspectives of migrants, which I aim to adequately convey in both my writing and film.

According to Pasura (2014 p. 114-138), diaspora politics is not divorced from homeland politics. Drawing on the work of other scholars of diaspora political participation, he highlights the main roles and motivations of transnational diaspora politics. With the penetration of internet tools in global geo-politics, participation in homeland political discourse and events has increased. Immigrants are not passive consumers but active users, mobilizing and incorporating technological devices or objects in the process of reorganizing their political subjectivities away from home (Rohracher, 2005: 11). For example, this was not without challenges, but I contested as a Member of Parliament in my local area in Chitungwiza, even though I was already based in the UK. In Zimbabwe, while citizens who live abroad cannot vote from their foreign bases, they can physically participate in political processes in Zimbabwe. Through fast and accessible engagement on Facebook and WhatsApp, I was able to effectively conduct meetings with my colleagues on the campaign team in Zimbabwe regularly. Furthermore, I created a Facebook platform with 60,000 followers to maintain engagement with the community (Mbewe, 2018). Maston Mbewe, a political blogger, wrote:

Filmmaker Rufaro Kaseke has decided to run for office as an MP in Chitungwiza North. You might know him from his funny political videos, which he regularly posts on his Facebook Page. According to Rufaro in his video below, he will be running as an independent candidate in the next elections.

According to Section 67 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, every Zimbabwean citizen has the right to form, join, and participate in the activities of a political party or organization

of their choice (CONSTITUTION OF ZIMBABWE, 2013: 32). The surge of Zimbabwean Diaspora political activism has garnered significant attention from scholars of Zimbabwean media in recent years (Mushayabasa, 2022: 71). The rise of digital media activism in Zimbabwe can be attributed, in part, to the substantial number of Zimbabweans living abroad, particularly in Europe and the United States, many of whom are professionals relying on the internet as an information resource tool. These diaspora communities have cultivated numerous cyber public spaces where citizens engage in political discussions and access news. According to the well-known Zimbabwean journalist pictured below, he has been arrested several times within the last five years for his work in exposing government corruption online. Popularly known by Zimbabweans as Daddy Hope, in an article he wrote for Reuters Institute of Politics (2021), Chin'ono wrote:

The state controls a massive majority of media outlets in Zimbabwe. The country only has one television station. It is the only country in Africa not at war which has only one television station. And yet, Zimbabwe in 1960 was one of the first two countries, with Nigeria, to have a TV station in sub-Saharan Africa" (reutersinstitute. politics, 2021).

Chin'ono's observation underscores the significant role of media control and censorship by the state in Zimbabwe, limiting the diversity of perspectives and voices available to the public, and the importance of alternative forms of communication and information dissemination, such as digital media and documentary filmmaking, in providing Zimbabwean migrants with platforms to share their narratives and experiences beyond the confines of state-controlled media.



Figure 13: Investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono. (Source: Newsday, 2024).

Hashtag movements, in particular, have leveraged social media platforms to circumvent restrictions on political mobilization within Zimbabwe's closed political space. The ability of these movements to translate online mobilization into street demonstrations underscores the influence of social media in politics and the challenges faced by authoritarian regimes in controlling cyberspace. Through online platforms, Zimbabweans both within and outside the country have connected and strategized, facilitated by the widespread internet use in Zimbabwe, primarily via smartphones (Magaisa, 2016: Mlilo).

Despite the successes of citizen movements in utilizing social media for collective action, they face limitations in facilitating democratic transition. Challenges include an over-reliance on social media at the expense of community structures. Blessing-Miles Tendi, in a widely circulated piece, cautions against substituting social media activism for organized political activity on the ground (Tendi, 2016). He emphasizes the importance of collaboration with traditional civil society groups to mobilize citizens effectively, especially in instances where the state restricts access to social media spaces. Acknowledging such perspectives, my decision to travel to Zimbabwe and participate as a parliamentary candidate in Chitungwiza, my hometown, was driven by a recognition of the importance of grassroots organizing alongside online activism for effecting meaningful social and political change. While my

electoral bid did not culminate in victory, the experience reinforced the significance of combining offline and online engagement strategies in the pursuit of transformative change.

In conclusion, though my film does not exclusively focus on online activism, I draw upon aspects of these experiences and integrate them into the narratives of the characters depicted. This allows for a nuanced exploration of the intersections between digital activism and lived realities, offering insights into the complexities of contemporary social and political landscapes.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, my filmmaking draws inspiration from trailblazing African filmmakers such as Med Hondo and Ousamane Sembene who, according to harvardfilmarchive.org (2023), belong in the pantheon of the Pan African struggle for emancipation and will forever reside alongside historians Cheikh Anta Diop and Joseph Ki-Zerbo; political leaders Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Patrice Lumumba, and Thomas Sankara; critical cultural theorists Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Their contributions, alongside eminent figures in African history, embody a collective drive to reshape perceptions of Africa on the global stage. By aligning my filmmaking approach with their visionary spirit, I aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding African identity and representation in cinema, echoing their commitment to advancing narratives that challenge conventional narratives and empower marginalized voices (harvardfilmarchive.org, 2023).

Chapter 4: Exploring Truth and Evidence Claims through Documentary Film Practices.

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section critically examines documentary film practices and materials, focusing on the techniques and methodologies used in this genre. The second section discusses African films that are relevant to the themes explored in my own film. The goal of this section is to place my work within the broader context of African diaspora cinema, drawing comparisons and distinctions with other notable works. Through this analysis, the chapter aims to provide insight into the background and creative process behind my film, as well as its significance within the field of documentary filmmaking and African diaspora discourse.

In recent years, artistic practice has gained recognition as a vital component of research, particularly in the arts and humanities (Leavy, 2020: 12, 18). As a first-time researcher in diaspora studies, and in alignment with this perspective, I embraced the principles of filmmaking as an integral part of my project. I integrated filmmaking throughout all stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation, as outlined in Chapter 3 - Methodology. In my project, the film, and the thesis itself serve as both creative artifacts and investigations into connectivity and migration.

Additionally, my institution UCA is part of The Conflict & the Creative Arts Research Centre, which explores the relationship between culture and various contexts of conflict, including armed conflict, identity politics, marginalized communities, and issues surrounding sexuality and gender. The centre brings together practitioners, academics, emerging researchers, artists, and activists to explore how artistic and cultural practice can impact individuals and groups to transform their social reality. This practice-based research aims to generate new and meaningful knowledge, methodologies, and practices. This recognition puts my project within ongoing academic projects that explore the use of creative arts in social and cultural research.

The discourse surrounding the legitimacy of filmmaking as a form of research has been ongoing, with scholars such as Glisovic et al. (Insights for Impact, 2016: 1) suggesting that filmmaking, instead of replacing traditional research, serves as a complementary tool, similar to a translated text complementing its original. This perspective is echoed by Kerrigan and

Callaghan (2018: 2), who highlight how filmmaking researchers investigate culturally and socially relevant issues while pushing the boundaries of conventional filmmaking techniques. As Skains (2018) states, when we as practitioners pursue our art as research, we not only offer insights into art and the practice of art as it occurs but can also shed new and unexpected light on a range of topics including cognition, discourse, psychology, history, culture, and sociology (84).

Additionally, there has been debate about whether arts-based research can be classified as its own research paradigm or whether it should simply be viewed as a methodological field within the broader qualitative paradigm. Opposing camps suggest that the two should remain separate, whereas others assert that it merits its own classification as a full manner of doing research. According to novelist and scholar Patricia Leavy, researchers tapping into the power of the arts are doing so in order to create new ways to see, think, and communicate (Leavy, 2019: 183). Sociologist and author of forty fiction and non-fiction books, Patricia Leavy, writes, "dramatic reconstruction, for the stage or screen, can capture aspects of human experience and social life in unparalleled ways" (183). I agree with her that there are aspects of diasporic life that we can see and those that cannot be fully represented through text (Hearing, 2015: 48). For example, as illustrated in the frame below, I utilized data from the interviews I had with one of the participants to recreate her experiences with her as the character. In the interview (see appendix), the participant spoke about the motivation to keep working despite the challenges of straddling between two countries, which was the need to take care of her family back home.

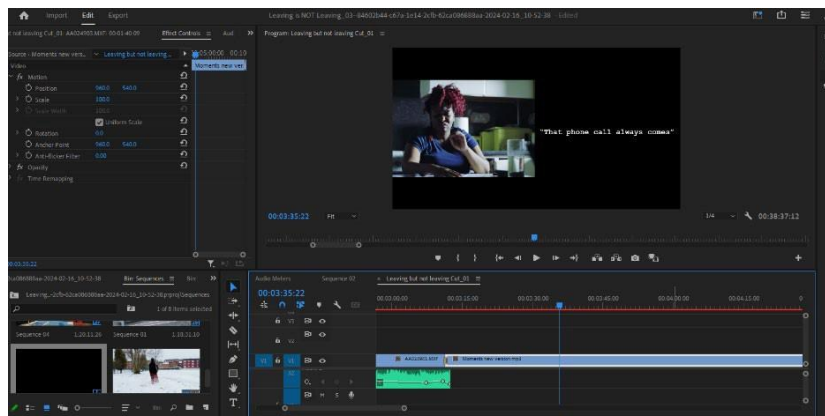


Figure 14: Editing screenshot from Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Trevor Hearing, another filmmaker and arts-based researcher whose work aligns with mine, poses a fundamental question at the outset of his thesis. Hearing writes, "How can we

develop a more complex 'writing' with video to articulate a scholarly understanding of the world?" (1). Hearing's exploration into the possibilities of video as a scholarly tool resonates with the ethos of my own work as a filmmaker and researcher. Central to his argument is the idea that films can serve as narrative libraries, offering students a creative platform to reflect on and transform their perceptions of everyday life. For Hearing, the documentary narrative can be presented for educational purposes and promoted to a wider audience.

Indeed, the tension between "arts-based" approaches, which are often associated with creativity and subjectivity, and "documentary" practices, which are typically perceived as objective and truthful, is a crucial aspect to consider (Friend and Caruthers, 2016: 43). While arts-based research and documentary filmmaking share the goal of exploring and representing lived experiences, they do so through different lenses. Arts-based research often emphasizes subjective interpretations and creative expression, while documentary filmmaking traditionally prioritizes factual accuracy and truthfulness.

However, within this tension lies a rich opportunity for exploration and innovation. Filmmakers like Trevor Hearing and myself are drawn to the challenge of merging these seemingly divergent approaches, seeking to develop a more complex form of "writing" with video that can both articulate scholarly understandings and engage audiences on a creative and emotional level. By embracing elements of both arts-based and documentary practices, we aim to create films that are not only aesthetically engaging but also intellectually rigorous and emotionally resonant. In doing so, we contribute to the ongoing conversation about the nature of truth, representation, and knowledge production in the realm of visual research.

In this thesis, truth is presented as both subjective and relational, influenced by the interplay of personal narratives and broader societal contexts. Within documentary practices, the concept of "truth" questions traditional notions of objectivity, as demonstrated by the use of re-enactments and participant-driven storytelling. This perspective aligns with Skains' argument that truth in visual storytelling can blend factual representation with interpretative authenticity. I acknowledge its role in my discussion of documentary filmmaking and its portrayal of migrant experiences.

Drawing inspiration from Hearing's approach, I adopted a hybrid approach blending elements of fiction and nonfiction. This approach, as emphasized by Leavy, enables the creation of innovative perspectives, facilitating new ways of seeing, thinking, and communicating about social issues, particularly those related to migration. In this way, Hearing's insights provided not only a theoretical framework for my own creative project. As a professional who also started off in the industry before joining the academy, his exploration of documentary practice as a medium for scholarly investigation and expression helped shape the narrative trajectory of my film and inform the methodologies employed throughout its production.

Furthermore, drawing from the insights of Hearing, my film leverages filmmaking techniques to enhance data collection, analysis, and visual data processing. By adopting a research philosophy that integrates artistic and filmic expression, I have facilitated collaborative knowledge creation with participants, leading to deeper insights from diverse perspectives.

Mobile vs. Digital Documentary Filmmaking

The evolution of digital documentary filmmaking has significant implications. Stories, particularly those of migrants, are told and consumed in ways that are characterized by the use of portable devices like smartphones, democratizes content creation, allowing marginalized voices, including migrants, to narrate their stories. This approach aligns with theories of participatory media, where subjects are not merely observed but actively engage in the storytelling process (Cabalquinto, 2019). Conversely, digital documentary filmmaking often leverages advanced tools and platforms to produce polished narratives, reaching broader audiences but sometimes at the cost of immediacy and authenticity.

Scholars like Nash (2014) argue that mobile filmmaking's immediacy and proximity to the subject create a more intimate and authentic narrative. In contrast, digital filmmaking, with its emphasis on high production value, can distance the filmmaker from the raw realities of the subjects' lives. This distinction is particularly relevant in the Zimbabwean context, where the use of mobile tools allows migrants to share their narratives in real time, reflecting their lived experiences of transnational care and survival strategies (Manase, 2013; Mbiba, 2012). For this project, the integration of mobile tools in documentary practices highlights the balance between immediacy and production quality, offering a hybrid approach that captures the essence of Zimbabwean migrants' lived experiences.

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According to Mary Lea Bandy, chief curator of Film and Media Art at New York's Museum of Modern Art, a documentary filmmaker can take any number of approaches—using experimental techniques, archival footage and photographs, interviews, vérité camerawork, animation, and more (see "Hybrid Reality: When Documentary and Fiction Breed to Create a Better Truth" | International Documentary Association, Svetvilas, 2014). There is "no one way to do it. The most perceptive films about the world often mix and match their approach, style, and format—blending the historical and narrative with real or re-created interviews," claims Bandy. As illustrated in the frame above taken from my editing timeline, in my own project, I embraced this approach by experimenting with various techniques during interviews, as shown in the film (06.40) where I was interviewing participants through Teams video while also filming the interview.

The frame below illustrates, how I employed a dramatized short film to depict a woman's experience upon arriving in the UK, where she interacts with strangers while holding a piece of paper containing her aunt's contact details.



Figure 15: A dramatized scene from the short film Maidei Meets Europe: Woman holding a piece of paper with her aunt's contact number. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Referencing several of her recent experimental documentary films that mediate memory, place, and subjectivities: *Not Reconciled* (2009): *The Border Crossing* (2011): *My Private Life* (2013): *My Private Life II* (2015), and *Journey to the South* (2017), Daniels (2019) proposes the notion that film communicates in a sensory mode that may defy written theorisation or interpretation, with a rigor and precision that is quite separate from that of written language. Nevertheless, films, like written language, may add to knowledge (1).

Complementing Daniels' point, Leavy emphasizes that performative approaches to research have the potential to greatly impact public policy by involving the public in the policy development process (191). In particular, she highlights the issue of immigration in the United States as a clear example where those individuals directly affected by policies are often unable to express their own needs (191). This underlines the importance of incorporating the perspectives of emigrants in policy-making research and subsequent policy.

This integration of participatory approaches with documentary filmmaking aligns with the concept I employed in my own film through the inclusion of techniques such as silent speech, montage with sound, graphics, text, and imagery. As I will outline in the last section of this chapter, these methods were utilized to look deeper into the complex interplay between sensory perception and external influences, shedding light on the multifaceted factors that shape our understanding of the world around us. The approach afforded me the time that was required to explore the depths of distance communication living amongst the participants, gathering, and exploring meaning in experience (Friend and Caruthers, 2016: 38).

In this way, patterns and themes emerged organically as the participants considered me an insider and there was an element of trust between us. For instance, an unlikely theme that emerged, which the participants or I had not anticipated, is the idea that being accessible 24/7 could come with emotional burden and a sense of detachment to one's immediate surrounding.

Exploring Relevant African Films

Historically, European dominance has overshadowed African ethnic identities, as noted by Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (1994). However, filmmakers like Med Hondo and Ousmane

Sembene, despite beginning their careers in Europe, introduced themes and styles that continue to influence African filmmakers such as myself and other contemporary filmmakers I will discuss in the upcoming sections. Their works showcased the intricate relationship between culture and society, blending African oral narratives with Western cinematic techniques.



Figure 16: Still frame from Soleil O (1970). (Source: Hondo, M., 1970).

One of the first feature films made by an African director, Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (Mauritania/France 1969) differs from its African social realist contemporaries through the use of avant-garde techniques such as vignettes, pseudo street interviews, and dramatic scenes to illustrate the journey of an unnamed black immigrant from passive assimilation of French cultural values to a politically aware African revolutionary. The story is about a "colonized" African man with hope in his heart and a degree in accounting who relocates to his European "motherland" and experiences a brutal disillusionment.

Hondo opens the film with a compressed history of European imperialism, involving forced conversion to Catholicism and induced tribal warfare, before following his unnamed protagonist (Robert Liensol) to Paris, where, in the first of many misapprehensions, he begins searching for an address that is actually in Marseille.

Throughout the film, different narration techniques are used to expose colonial bias and to uncover the inner psychology of the black immigrant. For example, the film opens with a medium shot of a group of black men, staring out at the camera in a "fourth wall address"

(Añuli Agina, Knorpp and Mano: 16). Their gaze, fixed at the spectator, forces direct engagement, not just with the men, but also with the narration that accompanies the shot.

The narration itself, spoken by a male voice, evokes a memory of what African histories brought to the world, pointing out that "We had our own literature, our own legal terms, our own religion, our own science, and our own education" (17). The way *Soleil O* uses personal memory through narration is significant because it affords the spectator an opportunity to consider the consequences of "whitewashing" African cultural identities through assimilation.

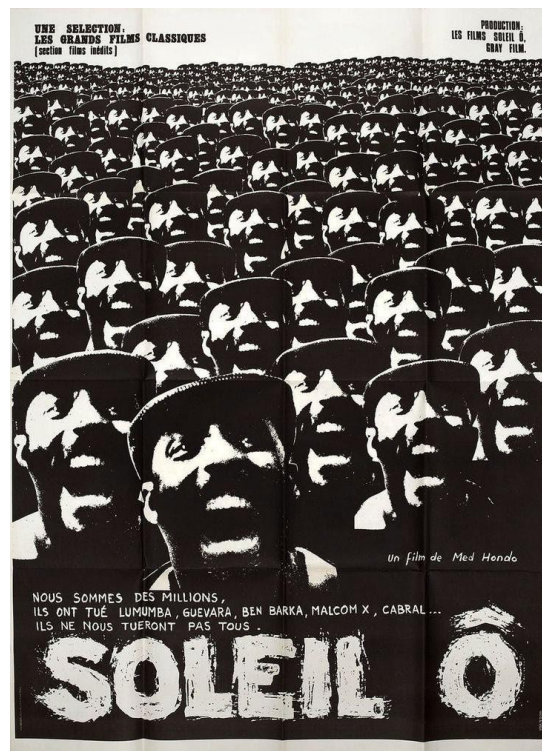


Figure 17: Soleil O film poster (1970). (Source: Hondo, M., 1970)

For example, the black immigrant arrives in Paris with the misguided notion that his education and willing adoption of France's cultural superiority has made him French. According to New York Times writer Hoberman (2020), in certain respects, Hondo's film suggests Jean Rouch's staged documentary "Petit à Petit," in which former colonial subjects make an ethnographic exploration of their colonizer's domain, though "Soleil Ô" is more radical in that the filmmaker himself is a former subject. (Hondo, who was born in Ain Beni Mathar, Morocco, to parents of Mauritanian and Senegalese descent, emigrated to France in the 1950s, employs a number of strategies, including animation, interpolated interviews,

slapstick skits, and staged documentary as when he films the response of Parisians to the spectacle of his protagonist embracing a white woman on the Champs-Élysées. Perhaps because it fits no fixed category being variously or simultaneously autobiography, allegory, cinéma vérité, and guerrilla theater "Soleil Ô" was taken by some as an exercise in the African new wave when it premiered at the 1970 Cannes Film Festival.

The New York Times critic A.H. Weiler found "Soleil Ô" more unsettling when it opened in New York, characterizing it as "sharply direct" and "disturbingly vivid." Hondo does not pull his punches. The movie is not only a bitter firsthand analysis of economic migration but also a similarly cutting critique of systemic white supremacy. Half a century has scarcely blunted and may have even enhanced its relevance, as Hoberman (2020) emphasizes.

In conclusion, I draw parallels between my filmmaking techniques and those of Mohamed Abid Hondo, a trailblazer in African cinema. Hondo's avant-garde approach, incorporating interviews and dramatic scenes to portray the migrant journey, mirrors my own stylistic choices, particularly evident in my film's opening sequence. The raw and brutal disillusionment experienced by the main character upon reaching Europe resonates deeply with Demi's narrative in my film's introduction.

Similarly, Hondo's staged documentary and ethnographic explorations of the colonizer's domain find resonance in my staged re-enactments of Demi's everyday struggles, such as navigating bills and confronting her financial situation. These creative choices not only helped me enhance the storytelling but also served to immerse the audience in the emotional and psychological landscape of the migrant experience.

By drawing inspiration from Hondo's pioneering techniques while infusing my own lived experiences and narrative voice, "Leaving but not leaving" is a portrayal of migration that resonates with audiences and hopefully a testament to the influence of film to bridge artistic practice and scholarly divides to illustrate the shared humanity that binds us all

"Black Girl" - Ousmane Sembene

The fearless Senegalese writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembene leveraged modern technology to challenge societal norms and depict authentic African experiences. Sembène had a talent for reckoning with the past while looking to the future of his homeland. Made over four decades, from the 1960s to the mid-2000s, his films deal with the socio-economic and postcolonial issues facing his country but often resemble parables in their bold outlines and enlightening insights. Incisive and culturally specific, they also have a lucid, universal clarity about human nature and the obstacles that get in the way of building better communities (Rapold, 2023).

Having lived for thirteen years in France, Sembene then returned to an independent Senegal in 1960 and devoted himself to the production of films that restored the dignity of the people whom Frantz Fanon had referred to as the 'wretched of the earth' (12). As an avid filmgoer since his early years, Sembene became critically aware that to reach a mass audience of African workers and peasants, cinema was a more effective vehicle than the written word, a notion that I concur with as outlined in the introduction of this thesis.

According to Guardian writer Jordan Hoffman (2016), Sembene's literary and cinematic work, born out of his experience as a colonial subject and dockworker, and later as a writer and film director, was not just directed at colonialism but also at the failures of the postcolonial state in Africa. His films often confronted viewers with distorted yet profound representations, prompting introspection and dialogue.

Criticisms of his work highlight the complexities of artistic interpretation and the challenges of representing diverse experiences. But I tend to agree with proponents of his work such as Demissie (2007) in that each of his films has a dramatic integrity and the visual images he deploys clearly interrogate crucial issues in African history and culture (309). His literary and cinematic works promoted the cause of freedom and social justice and aspired to restore pride and dignity to the African people and the diaspora.



Figure 18: Still frame from Black Girl (1966). (Source: Sembène, O., 1966)

Sembène dedicated his career to showing the struggles of the downtrodden. *Black Girl* (1966), his first feature and based on one of his own short stories, feels pivotal in the history of cinema. Described by Hoffman as African history and culture, it made a major impact in Europe and North America. *Black Girl* radiates with an expressive tone, despite some script compression and the typical production obstacles of a mid-60s independent film. At just over one hour, it tells the bleak tale, loosely based on an actual news item, of an African housekeeper who reaches a tragic end at her French employers' home.

The film begins as Diouna (Mbissine Thérèse Diop) steps off a ship and is picked up by her never-named boss (Robert Fontaine). They drive along the coast of the Mediterranean and reach a small, sparsely decorated apartment in Antibes. According to Hoffman (2016), the only decor is a prominently placed African mask, which we learn through flashback wasn't a trinket bought at a marketplace, but a gift Diouna gave them back in Dakar. Before coming to Antibes, Diouna was happy as the family's nanny, even gloating about her great new position and happily accepting cast-off dresses from "Madame" (Anne-Marie Jelinek). As Hoffman (2016) succinctly puts it, accepting the move to France is something of a bait-and-switch. The children are nowhere to be seen, and her tasks are reduced only to cooking and cleaning. Promises from Madame to take Diouna out shopping never come to fruition, and soon she feels like a prisoner.

She's asked to prepare an African dish for visiting guests – something she never did in Dakar – and one of the appreciative diners embraces her, shouting: "I've never kissed a Negress!" It's clear her worth is just as a breathing version of the mask that hangs on the wall.

The sound design in *Black Girl* is similar to other low-budget independent productions of the time. There is very little synchronous sound, and most of what we hear from Diouna is in voiceover. Short repetitive music cues, some featuring the Senegalese string instrument called a xalam, recur against tedious cleaning images, aiding us in empathizing with Diouna's trance-like haze. It's an effective technique and works well with the film's second half, in which Sembène chooses to work in a more allegorical, almost mythical framework.

I find resonance with *Black Girl* in exploring the aftermath of independence and subsequent oppression, as experienced by Zimbabweans under the Mugabe regime. Like the protagonist Diouna, many Zimbabweans left their homeland in search of a better future, only to face unforeseen challenges abroad. As Añuli Agina, Knorpp and Mano (20) rightfully put it as regimes rose and fell after Independence in many African countries, the gap between the theoretical construct of Independence and the grim economic realities facing many African nations became increasingly obvious. Similarly, the notion of memory and how it assisted in constituting African identity became less didactic and more inductive in many narrative constructs.

Through storytelling inspired by Sembene's work, I examine the complexities of migration and diasporic experiences, shedding light on the struggles and resilience of individuals navigating displacement and cultural identity in foreign lands, also hoping to honor the voices of those whose stories deserve to be heard and understood. Sembene's legacy serves as a guiding beacon, reminding me of the power of storytelling to convey profound truths about the human condition.



Figure 19: Still from the film Black Girl by Sembène (1966). (Source: Sembène, O., 1966).



Figure 20: Still from Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024)

Matteo Garrone- *Io Capitano*

A notable contemporary filmmaker who has taken up the mantle of telling African stories from the perspective of Africans is Matteo Garrone, renowned for his film *Gomorrah* (2008). In his recent film *Io Capitano* (2023), he shifts his lens to migration. It is a powerful look at the immigration crisis seen from the perspective of two Senegalese teens who undertake a harrowing journey by land and sea to reach Italy. This film is the first in which Garrone doesn't explore Italy from within, but through the eyes of those who make it their destination in the hope of a better life.

Responding to the Guardian's European culture editor Philip Oltermann in 2023, Garrone says, "It's a reverse shot of what we are used to seeing. We are used to having the camera in Europe, watching people arriving over the sea, sometimes alive, sometimes dead. I wanted to show the part we should know about but don't." Jonah Nink, a top critic on the film critique website Rotten Tomatoes, wrote, "*Io Capitano* tells an immigrant story, demanding accountability for both direct evils and everyday complicity." (see Jonah Nink Movie Reviews & Previews Rotten Tomatoes). On the other hand, Andrew Wyatt from the film review site The Take-Up wrote, *Io Capitano* succeeds in opening viewers' eyes to the real-world plight of African migrants, but it works better as a character piece about a nascent adult struggling with impossible demands in unthinkable circumstances. *Io Capitano - The Take-Up*, Garrone efficiently fills in Seydou's everyday life, with its routines and textures, its possibilities, and limitations, through attentive camerawork, his customary eye for detail, and relaxed, measured rhythms.

As I draw inspiration from Garrone's work, my own filmmaking explores the intersection of migration and technology. Garrone's approach challenges conventional narratives by depicting Europe through the eyes of those seeking refuge, urging viewers to confront the realities faced by African migrants. Therefore, by focusing on the communicative, cultural, emotional, and technological aspects of technology usage among contemporary African migrants, I aim to add to the discourse on African migration while highlighting the complexities of transnational caregiving and family ties across borders.

Migration films in Zimbabwe: Transactions- Rumbi Katedza

There is a wide range of documentary films about Zimbabwe. These stories cover politics, poverty, human rights violations, economic instability, environmental issues, education, and the lasting effects of colonialism. Notably, filmmaker Rumbi Katedza broke new ground with the release of *Transactions* in 2022, marking the first documentary to explore the Zimbabwean migration experience. Despite conducting an extensive search, *Transactions-2022* was the only film I could find that deals with the impact of technology on migration among individuals who are forced to separate from their loved ones but still bear the responsibility of caring for them. This documentary sheds light on the impact of technology on migration, particularly among individuals who are forced to separate from their loved ones but still bear the responsibility of caring for them.

Set in present-day Zimbabwe and South Africa, where Zimbabwe's crippled economy and hyperinflation have left many relying solely on remittances from abroad, it illustrates the harsh realities that MaMlilo's children Frank, Miles, and Portia face as they remain dutiful in their responsibilities and continue to send financial aid to their family at home. Although frustrated, MaMlilo's son Frank continues to show how much he is willing to sacrifice to provide for their family back home. In creating the story, Katedza deployed this desire and the struggle to overcome emotional and financial barriers as the motivational framework for the characters. As the sole documentary on this subject matter discovered through extensive research, it underscores the importance of amplifying diverse migration narratives in the documentary medium.

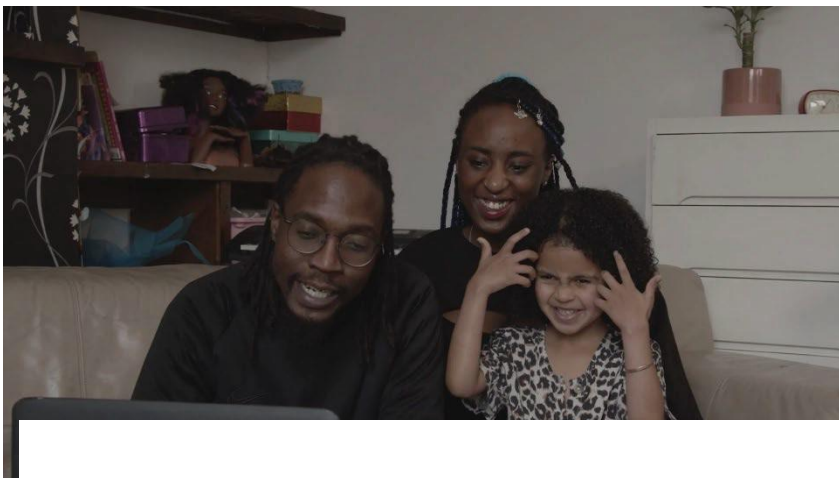


Figure 21: Still frame from Transactions. (Source: Unknown, 2024).

Inspired by Katedza's work, I arranged a meeting with her and one of the characters in my film. The meeting with Katedza served as a pivotal moment, where her encouragement and support fuelled our determination to continue the project. It epitomized the transformative power of storytelling in catalysing positive change. In the next section, I provide a detailed examination of my film, including a discussion on the title, the recurring themes, and messages that thread through its narrative. By dissecting how these themes are explored and developed, I offer insights into the meanings and implications within the film. Each narrative aspect is examined to understand its contribution to the overarching aims of the project and its impact on the viewer's experience.



Figure 22: Still picture of our meeting with Katedza (in the middle). (Source: Unknown, 2024)

Analyzing *Leaving but not Leaving*: Themes, Narrative, and Audience Impact.

The title of the film *Leaving but not leaving* encapsulates the multifaceted nature of the migrant experience, capturing the essence of navigating between two distinct worlds. It reflects the challenges and positives inherent in living in a state of straddling the line between homeland and host country. Moreover, the title holds cultural significance particularly for Zimbabwean migrants, evoking the geographical and social landscapes of places like Luton and Slough, known colloquially as "kumazezuru" (a Shona tribe) and "kwaChirau" (a village in Mashonaland), respectively. These areas serve as hubs for Zimbabwean communities outside of London, symbolizing both a physical and symbolic connection to their homeland. The

personal resonance of the title underscores the overarching theme of leaving one's homeland, a theme that runs throughout the film. As I get into the exploration of recurring themes and messages, such as the concept of dual identity in the next section, we are propelled into the characters' intimate struggles and challenges upon immigrating to the UK.

Themes and Messages

One particularly compelling theme that resonates throughout is the concept of dual identity, vividly illustrated through the experiences of characters like Demi and Blessing. Both of whom are now naturalised British citizens with their children being born British. As we look into Demi's initial struggles upon immigrating to the UK, we are confronted with a poignant portrayal of the stark disparity between her preconceived expectations and the harsh realities she encounters. We feel the palpable sense of disconnect she experiences, highlighting the profound challenges inherent in adapting to a new environment while grappling with the complexities of maintaining ties to one's homeland.

Scenes depicting Demi's remote caregiving for her mother, juxtaposed with her physical presence in her Luton home, serve as poignant reminders of the complex emotional terrain traversed by migrants in their quest for belonging and connection. As the narrative unfolds, technology and connectivity emerge as central motifs, offering migrants unprecedented avenues for maintaining ties with their homeland and forging new relationships in their adopted countries. Through Demi's narrative, the film elucidates the pivotal role of technology in bridging physical distances and nurturing emotional bonds, underscoring its significance in mitigating the challenges of separation and fostering a sense of continuity and intimacy in the lives of migrants.

In the scene illustrated below, Demi has just received a phone call from her mother while she was grappling with a pile of her bills, but to her mother, she projects a pleasant appearance masking her real present situation.

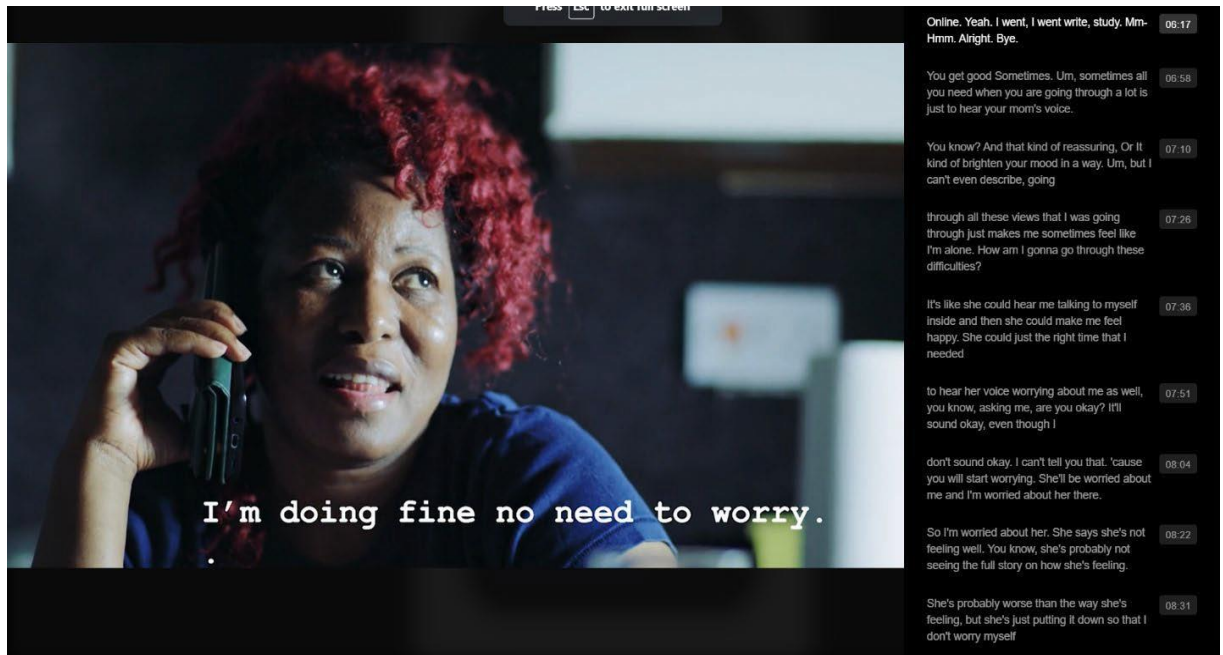


Figure 23: Screenshot from *Leaving but Not Leaving*. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024)

An equally significant aspect of the film's narrative looks into themes of community and belonging, particularly highlighting the pivotal role of technology in the formation and sustenance of migrant communities. Throughout the various narratives, of community and belonging, technology and connectivity emerge as central motifs, serving as indispensable tools for fostering support, solidarity, and a profound sense of belonging among individuals navigating life in a foreign land. This thematic exploration underscores the vital role of community networks in bolstering resilience and facilitating integration. As one participant notes: (*in appendix : 167*)

I mean, when I came to this country, we didn't have those smartphones. There was no internet. Yeah. Uh, we could not use, there was no WhatsApp. There was no social media. Mm-Hmm. There was no Facebook or anything (02.49).

Illustratively, Blessing's journey to the UK at the tender age of 11, under the care of airline stewards, serves as a poignant embodiment of the community and belonging thematic thread. With little access to technology and connectivity, her relocation marked the beginning

of a gradual detachment from her Zimbabwean roots. However, upon arriving in Luton, Blessing's narrative serves as a testament to the enduring bonds of cultural heritage and community. Despite her physical distance from Zimbabwe, she finds solace in the vibrant community of Zimbabweans in Luton, fostering a sense of belonging amidst shared cultural traditions. On the other hand, despite her eventual attainment of professional success as a Cognitive Behavior Therapist, facilitated by advancements in her education, Demi's emotional journey is marked by an enduring sense of detachment from her familial roots. Utilizing both re-enactments and interviews, the film captures moments of intimacy and distance as Demi navigates the intricacies of her relationship with her mother back home and her nephew in Turkey. Epitomized by her dual role as a dutiful daughter, auntie, and mother to British-born children, and a resident of a distant land, her narrative provides the viewer with a comprehensive perspective on dual identity and technology.

Nkosi's journey begins with his arrival in the UK and his initial struggles while residing in an asylum seekers' accommodation. Despite facing emotional challenges and uncertainty about his asylum status, Nkosi maintains a positive outlook and unwavering determination. His resilience shines through, and his story changes as he pursues studies to become a Mental Health Practitioner, demonstrating his unwavering commitment to building a better future for himself despite the obstacles he faces.

This section will focus on identifying and analyzing key scenes or moments within each part of the film. I will discuss their significance in advancing the film's themes and conveying its message. For example, on the themes of Dual Identity and Emotional Resilience and Technology and Connectivity, the film contains a dramatized scene played by Demi as she goes through her bills while also grappling with her responsibilities back home (03:23). On the other hand, Nkosi states in an interview that he would rather "disconnect from the shenanigans back home because they remind him of "issues he ran away from" (29:42) While the two characters express diverse views on how connectivity and its impacts their well-being, These scenes underscore the profound sense of isolation and disconnection and the emotional resilience it takes to navigate dual identity.

In Tino and Edwin, the audience witnesses the emotional struggle of a couple separated from their children in Zimbabwe. Their participation in her son's birthday celebration through

a video call in the beginning of the film, highlight the profound impact of physical distance on familial relationships (1.02). As Tino recounts the moment when her son passed her a virtual cake during the celebration, she reveals the bittersweet nature of their interaction. Despite the distance separating them, this simple gesture holds immense significance for Tino, illustrating the lengths to which she goes to maintain a connection with her family back home.

Tino's experience exemplifies the resilience and creativity of migrants in preserving familial bonds across borders, even in the face of technological limitations. Through her story, the film underscores the importance of family dynamics in the migrant experience and highlights the profound sacrifices made by individuals striving to build a better future for their families. In this resonant moment encapsulated in the screenshot below, Tino's narrative unfolds as she bares her soul, offering a raw and heartfelt reflection on the agonizing decision that defined her journey. In this intimate revelation, the film not only captures the individual struggle of one migrant mother but also magnifies the universal challenges faced by countless others who find themselves torn between duty and desire, sacrifice, and survival. Tino's candid disclosure adds yet another layer of depth to the overarching narrative, illuminating the intricate waves of emotions woven into the fabric of connectivity and migration.

Moreover, Tino's story also touches upon the theme of longing and belonging, as her participation in her son's birthday celebration reflects the enduring family traditions and values that transcend geographical boundaries. Despite being physically distant, Tino remains deeply connected to her cultural heritage, finding solace in the shared moments of celebration with her family. This scene underscores the role of technology in bridging the gap between migrants and their cultural roots, allowing them to preserve and celebrate their heritage even from afar. Overall, the scenes provide a poignant portrayal of the emotional complexities inherent in the migrant experience, while also highlighting the resilience and determination of individuals striving to maintain familial and cultural connections.

Documentary film realism allows for the exploration of the emotional complexities associated with migration. It can portray the multifaceted feelings of longing, nostalgia, fear, hope, and resilience that migrants experience. This truthful representation helps audiences empathize with migrants and understand the emotional toll of being away from their homeland. Visual and experimental aesthetic elements are employed to evoke the intricate layers of

migration and connectivity, enhancing storytelling, and deepening the viewer's engagement. For example, in the screenshot below, the essence of connectivity is ingeniously portrayed through the integration of titles within a smartphone graphic. This symbolic representation serves as a visual metaphor, encapsulating connectivity as one of the central themes that resonate throughout the narrative.

Cinematography plays a pivotal role in capturing the essence of straddling two worlds. Through a combination of A-roll in the form of interviews, which are the primary audiovisual media driving the narrative, and B-roll shots, the audience is transported to both familiar and unfamiliar landscapes. However, as I will explain in the next section, the B-roll in this film is not employed as supplementary footage to cover the coughs, sniffles, and stutters, but it drives the narrative forward in its own way. The wide establishing shots convey the vastness of geographical distances, while conversely, intimate close-ups pierce through the surface, into the raw emotions and personal experiences of individual migrants. For example, a furrowed brow, a tear suppressed, or a leaning back become important aspects of adding depth and dimension to the human narrative unfolding.

Types of footage

For this film, I integrated A-roll and B-Roll in three ways to enhance storytelling depth and continuity. A-Roll footage refers to the primary footage in a documentary film, typically featuring interviews narration or other essential content that drives the narrative forward. This footage includes direct interactions with subjects, experts, or key figures relevant to the documentary's subject matter. In contrast, "B-roll footage" refers to supplementary footage used to visually support the A-roll content, such as establishing shots, scenes of everyday life, news reels, YouTube seminars, social media screen recordings or visual illustrations of the topics discussed. Combining this footage was crucial for conveying information, sharing perspectives, and engaging the audience in the documentary's storyline. Firstly, establishing shots were employed to provide crucial context by immersing viewers in the real-world settings of the narrative.

Central action shots were utilized to capture pivotal activities or events within scenes, serving as focal points around which the story revolves. For instance, during in the scene where

Tino sings a birthday song to her son, a central action shot zooms in on her hand holding a cellphone, emphasizing the film's theme of smartphone capabilities through a real-life scenario.

Moreover, B-Roll footage played a crucial role as lead-in shots, seamlessly guiding viewers through the narrative while highlighting essential elements integral to the story's progression. In a scene where Edwin attends church online via his mobile phone, the shot transitions from Edwin to his point of view, revealing the preacher delivering the sermon. This cohesive camera movement leads viewers from one perspective to the next, seamlessly intertwining Edwin's semi-formal interview with the subject he describes.

Footage Fair Use Considerations

Incorporating found footage into this documentary necessitated a comprehensive understanding of copyright laws and ethical filmmaking practices. The doctrine of 'fair use' played a crucial role in my determining how to use external media, including news clips, YouTube videos, and seminar recordings. Fair use allows for limited use of copyrighted material without explicit permission, especially for purposes like criticism, commentary, research, or scholarship. However, its applicability is contingent on

1. Purpose of Use: The documentary's educational and scholarly nature supports fair use. Each piece of external media was used to critique or analyze media, highlighting the role of digital communication technologies.

2. Nature of the Original Work: The majority of the footage used comprises factual, non-fictional material, which is more likely to qualify as fair use.

3. Amount and Substantiality: Only the segments essential for advancing the documentary's narrative were included, ensuring minimal usage.

4. Market Effect: The use does not impact the market value of the original works but transforms their meaning through critical framing and contextualization.

My minimalist sound design, music, and narration complement the visual elements,

Jonathan Harris
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add line spacings

adding another layer to the storytelling. The film opens with Demi's monologue punctuated by establishing shots. By combining these auditory elements with the visual imagery of the character going through a range of motions, the film effectively communicates the character's experience of perpetual movement and uncertainty . The juxtaposition of the character's

narration with the bustling urban environment serves to underscore the contrast between her internal journey and the external world around her.

One notable inclusion in the film is the song by the late Douglas Vambe, a prolific traditional drummer. The iconic Jerusarema/Mbende drumbeat, which accompanied news bulletins on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's radio and TV stations, reflects the themes that resonate throughout the Zimbabwean media narrative. Vambe was a member of the safeguarding committee established in 2007 to protect mbende jerusarema. He even shared the stage with Colombian singer Shakira during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

The drumbeat is so popular that when the ZTV removed it from introducing and concluding its news bulletins in 1999, viewers across the country voiced their outcry. Vambe was a fearless man, regularly performing at most Zanu PF functions. However, he surprised many when he attended an MDC Alliance Street rally in Cherima, Marondera. Without being asked to speak, the ever-smiling drummer stood up and poured out his heart.

He revealed that he was unhappy with how both Zanu PF and the government had exploited him for their own benefit.



Figure 24: Still image of the late Douglas Vambe (2017). (Source: Unknown, 2017)

In my voiceover narrations, I try to provide viewers with essential contextual insights into the themes of belonging and connectivity, as well as into the innermost thoughts and emotions of the characters. These narrations guide the audience through the complex aspects of belonging and connectivity throughout the narrative, allowing them to gain a better understanding of the context, characters' motivations, struggles, and aspirations

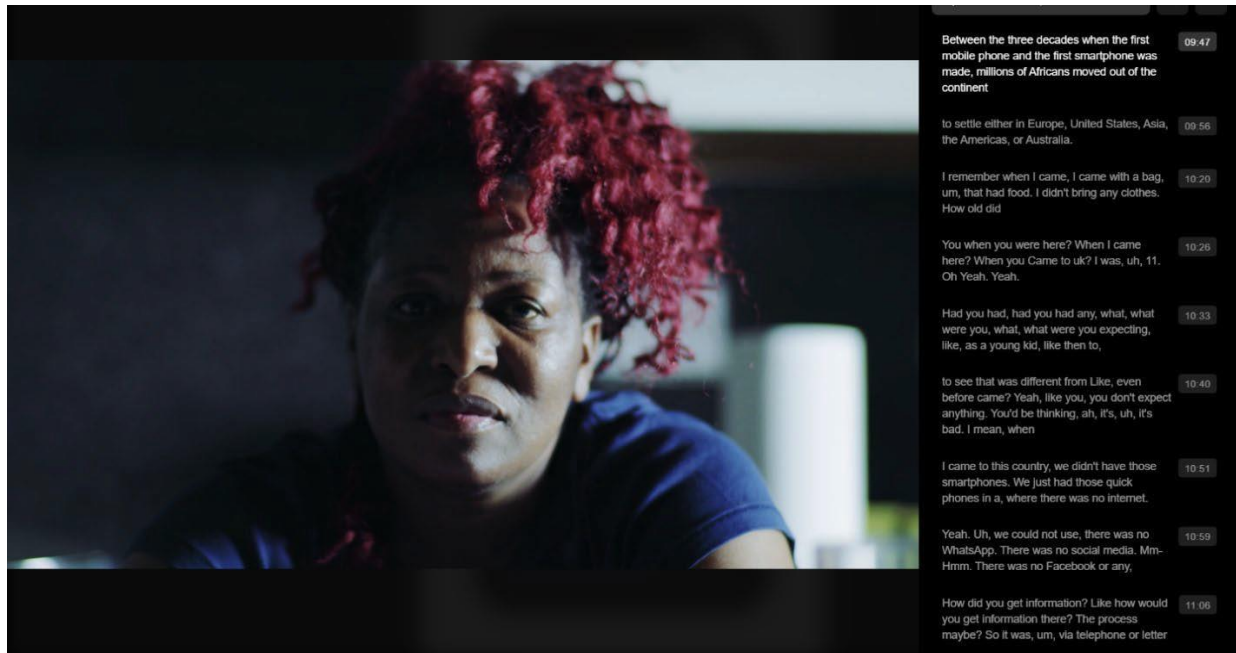


Figure 25: Screenshot of Demi from the contemplative scene in Leaving but Not Leaving. (Source: Kaseke, R., 2024).

Research Implication on Migration and Film Practice

The impact of my film on its audience is multifaceted, resonating emotionally, intellectually, and socially. Throughout the narrative, certain scenes and moments serve to provoke thought, some to stir emotions, and others to encourage dialogue. For example as we watched the film with one of the participants she expressed how much she never perceived mobile technology in the way that film portrayed. Overall, the film serves as a catalyst for dialogue and introspection, encouraging audiences to confront their preconceptions, broaden their perspectives, and cultivate a deeper empathy for the diverse experiences of migrants navigating the complexities of displacement and belonging in the world of technology and

connectivity. For example, Tino's scene and reflections after speaking to her two boys express this longing after a video call, echoing the emotional toll highlighted throughout my research.

According to Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2020), the study of emotions in relation to digital media under conditions of migrancy emerges as being about what emotions 'do' rather than what emotions 'are' (633). The emotions refer not only to transnational families in the traditional sense but also to various forms of digital intimacy such as friendships, queer relations, diasporic motherhood, connective services, and entrepreneurship.

Secondly, the film presents various implications for both migration studies and film practice. It recognizes migrants as active agents who utilize media to express their diasporic experiences and highlights the unique qualities of mobile apps and their users' cultures. By creatively exploring the intricate connection between migration and various facets of connectivity, the film sheds light on the complex dynamics of transnational caregiving and the maintenance of family ties across international borders. For example, through the film's realistic depiction of how migrants use messaging apps like WhatsApp to maintain close connections with family members back home revealed in the conversations and shared moments captured on screen, viewers gain insight into the emotional significance of these digital interactions.

By situating migrant stories within their actual environments, this realism provides a deeper understanding of the factors that influence migration, such as economic hardship, political instability, or cultural traditions. Audiences are taken on a journey through the everyday lives of migrants as they navigate the digital landscape. According to Borish et al. (2021), communities around the world have recognized the importance of documentary film for advancing their priorities, "aligning with their values, and enhancing their lives" (7). In alignment with this thinking, although my own film is set in Luton, where there is a sizable Zimbabwean migrant population, its themes resonate beyond geographic and cultural boundaries, offering a foundation for future projects, particularly in the Sub-Saharan migrant context.

As underscored in my findings and reiterated in the conclusion, future research projects could involve making films with a wider and more diverse array of diasporic participants. For

example the CoS program has resulted in more diverse migrant community which in my opinion deserve more scrutiny. Additionally, employing a longitudinal approach that tracks migrants over extended durations could offer deeper insights into their experiences and adaptations over time. For example, I could create a documentary series that follows the lives of several migrant families from different Sub-Saharan African countries who have migrated through the CoS route.

The use of documentary filmmaking as a research method offers a natural avenue for future studies to explore the complexities of transnational family relationships in the context of migration. By leveraging the creative expression inherent in filmmaking, researchers can provide fresh perspectives on how technology shapes these relationships, making academic topics more accessible to a broader audience. This accessibility not only broadens the impact of research findings but also fosters a wider understanding of migration dynamics mediated by technology.

Petrarca and Hughes (2015) advocate for viewing digital video as an innovation in research practice rather than simply a new medium for recording social behavior. By embracing digital video and other digital technologies, researchers can drive change and improvement in the field of research, while also critically examining the implications of these innovations for ethics, privacy, and societal impact (579).

In addition to its use in data collection and analysis, digital video can also serve as a powerful tool for disseminating research findings and engaging with diverse audiences. Future research could investigate how researchers can effectively use digital video to communicate their research findings to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. This could involve exploring strategies for creating engaging and accessible video content, as well as assessing the impact of digital video on knowledge dissemination and public understanding of research.

Realistic documentary film portrayals challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about migrants by presenting their stories with depth and truthfulness. By moving beyond simplistic or biased representations, realism contributes to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of migrant communities. Future researchers can redefine their approach to migration studies by

examining the impact of smartphone technology on contemporary migration through documentary filmmaking. Collaborating with artists to create, analyse, and interpret scholarly ideas and aesthetic expressions can lead to alternative perspectives on digital migration and broaden the sociological toolkit used to study the impact of technology. These practices challenge ethnic boundaries, break stereotypes, and empower migrants to own their stories. This resonates with Borish et al.'s (2021) observation that the film process places more control into the hands of participants, which helps to mediate the filmmakers' own positionalities (i.e., the preconceived notions and roles that the researchers and filmmakers had about their work) (5).

In conclusion, this chapter analysed my film's components and offered its narrative and themes. By exploring recurring themes such as dual identity, emotional resilience, and family unit preservation, I offered a comprehensive understanding of the film's impact. Reflecting on the film's potential impact, I positioned it within broader migration research paradigms, emphasizing its contribution to mobile connectivity and migration discourse. The documentary realist approach can strengthen scholarly discourse by basing theoretical frameworks on empirical evidence and real-world observations. This ensures that studies on migration and digital media are informed by the actual experiences and perspectives of migrants. As emphasized by Borish et al. (2021), with the growing accessibility and ease of using video-based technology, documentary film has "gained traction in recent years as an increasingly useful strategy for qualitative" research in the social, health, and environmental sciences (10). The following is a reflection on the findings of my research project, as well as a discussion on the implications of documentary film practice in migration research. Additionally, I provide several recommendations for future research.

**Conclusion: Learning from Leaving but Not
Leaving**

Findings

This study has examined the evolving nature of emigration and how it has been impacted by technological advancements. Specifically, by examining the meaning of being a migrant in the present world, my exploration aimed to shed light on how creative practices, such as filmmaking, can depict transnational relationships and family dynamics. By examining the practical effects of apps like WhatsApp and Facebook on migration, it has become evident that migrants can now engage in daily conversations with their families, watch films, eat together, and even celebrate important occasions like birthdays, regardless of the thousands of miles that physically separate them (Plaza and Plaza, 2019: 22).

The thesis provides a comprehensive, scholarly analysis of the impact of mobile technology on the migrant journey. It is grounded in theoretical frameworks and empirical data, closely examining the concept of transnational digital migration. The thesis examines how digital connectivity reshapes the experiences of migrants, from initial planning and communication to long-term settlement. It is structured to engage with existing literature, present detailed methodologies, and analyze qualitative data from interviews and other sources. The goal of the thesis is to contribute to academic discourse and offer a nuanced understanding of migration in the digital age from a scholarly viewpoint. The film, in contrast, translates these concepts into a more accessible and emotional narrative. Through visual storytelling and personal anecdotes, it highlights the lived experiences of migrants. For instance, it features a young mother celebrating her child's birthday through a video call. By emphasizing the human element, the film creates a visceral connection to its subjects and illustrates the profound impact of mobile technology on their lives in a personally resonant way. While the core themes and findings remain consistent across both the thesis and the film, their presentation differs significantly. The thesis aims to engage the academic community with rigorous analysis and theoretical exploration. Its goal is to contribute depth and scholarly context to the understanding of the topic. On the other hand, the film seeks to reach a broader audience and evoke empathy and understanding through storytelling. Together, the thesis and the film offer a complementary perspective.

In Chapter 1, I conducted a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical foundations of digital migrations. This chapter served as a strong starting point for understanding how migration interacts with modern communication technology. Studies by Cabalquinto (2019, 54-57), Madianou and Miller (2012), Ferris Dobles (2022), and Castells (1996) provided valuable frameworks for understanding how digital technologies reshape social networks and facilitate connections among migrant communities. Additionally, research by Leurs and Ponzanesi (2018) shed light on the transformative effects of globalization and the role of mobility in shaping contemporary migration patterns. These findings illuminated the complex nature of migration experiences in the digital age, highlighting the significant impact of technological advancements on mobility, connectivity, and socio-cultural integration.

Moving into Chapter 2, the methodology chapter detailed the research philosophy, design, methods, and procedures used to investigate the experiences of Zimbabwean migrant families in the UK. The chapter emphasized the importance of adopting a qualitative approach rooted in interpretivism to capture the subjective knowledge, meanings, and experiences of participants within their socio-cultural contexts. For example, in-depth interviews allowed for nuanced narratives to emerge, providing deep insights into the participants' lived experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, participant observation provided valuable contextual understanding, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the everyday lives of the participants and observe social interactions firsthand. Methodological considerations also highlighted the significance of reflexivity and ethical considerations in conducting research with migrant populations, ensuring the study's integrity and trustworthiness.

Chapter 3 explored the historical backdrop of migration and media within the Zimbabwean diaspora context, spanning the past 25 years. This comprehensive examination unveiled the evolving landscape of diasporic participation, particularly since the late 1990s, shedding light on the interplay between media representations, migration patterns, and transnational identities. Notable findings from this chapter illuminated the role of media technologies in shaping diasporic communities and facilitating connections across geographical boundaries. For example, the proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have provided Zimbabwean migrants with new avenues for maintaining ties with their homeland, fostering virtual communities where cultural practices and identities can be preserved and shared. Additionally, the emergence of online forums and

digital publications has enabled diasporic voices to be heard and amplified, challenging dominant narratives, and providing alternative perspectives on issues affecting Zimbabwean migrants.

In Chapter 4, an in-depth analysis of the film's components, narrative structure, and thematic elements was conducted. Findings from this chapter elucidated recurring motifs such as dual identity negotiation, emotional resilience amidst adversity, and the preservation of familial bonds across transnational spaces. For example, the film portrayed how protagonists navigated the complexities of maintaining their cultural heritage while assimilating into their host society, showcasing the intricate process of dual identity negotiation. Additionally, scenes depicting the protagonists' struggles and triumphs underscored themes of emotional resilience, highlighting their ability to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges. Furthermore, intimate portrayals of family dynamics and relationships showcased the enduring strength of familial bonds despite geographical distance, emphasizing the importance of connection and belonging in the migrant experience. This nuanced exploration provided valuable insights into the film's potential impact in fostering dialogue around mobile connectivity, migration experiences, and cultural identity within broader research paradigms.

Significant Findings

A surprising finding of this research project was the transformation of migrant journeys and extent to which migrants become dependent on mobile technology. Many migrants reported feeling anxious and disconnected when they lose their mobile phone, face technical issues, or experience internet outages (45.54). This highlights the crucial role that reliable digital access plays in their daily lives.

However, despite the advantages of being constantly connected, this project also reveals a paradox. While these technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for maintaining relationships, they also pose new challenges. The project finds that although digital connectivity enables migrants to sustain close ties with their families, it also introduces unintended emotional burdens. This research project reveals that constant connectivity can create a sense of obligation and emotional strain, as migrants are expected to be continuously available and engaged with both their host and home communities. It can magnify feelings of

guilt and helplessness, particularly when migrants are unable to provide physical assistance for urgent issues back home. They find themselves physically separated from their homeland, yet they remain emotionally and socially connected through digital means. This duality significantly affects their identity and sense of belonging, resulting in a unique migrant experience that transcends both here and there simultaneously. Therefore, the findings suggest that mobile technological advancements are reshaping the narratives of migration.

The traditional view of migration as a complete and often painful separation is being replaced by a more fluid understanding of movement and settlement. Migrants can now experience a hybrid existence, where physical relocation does not necessitate severing ties with their homeland. This research project findings reveal specific ways in which digital communication technologies are reshaping migration narratives. Migrants are using these technologies to maintain connections to their homeland, establish new forms of identity and belonging, and navigate the challenges of living in a transnational context. For example, Zimbabwean migrants in Luton are engaging in social media activism, participating in cultural events virtually, and creating online communities that provide support and solidarity. These activities help them to sustain a sense of identity and belonging while adapting to their new environment.

As part of this research, I recently recorded and posted a video on TikTok encouraging Zimbabweans on the COS visa program to learn trades such as plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, and landscaping. The video quickly went viral, and my TikTok page surged from under 100 followers to nearly 5,000 within a month, with some videos receiving over 1,000 reactions from people globally. This engagement led to the formation of a WhatsApp group comprising 790 Zimbabwean professionals from various parts of the world, including New Zealand, Canada, Zimbabwe, and Dubai. These members actively share ideas, offer guidance on relocation and business setup abroad, and provide training support. In a powerful demonstration of this connectivity, members are set to meet in person in July 2024 to further their collaboration and mutual support. This example vividly illustrates the transformative impact of mobile media in fostering a global network of support and professional development.

Research Contributions

Media researchers have called for explicit attention to emotion in migration phenomena, highlighting how transnational emotion relies on various forms of media. However, as argued by Alinejad and Ponzanesi, the entry of digital media into discussions of emotion and migration has opened up a much broader and more complex field of investigation that cannot be addressed through diasporic media texts and transnational interpersonal communication. alone (633). In alignment with this thinking, my project has argued, therefore, that the utilization of film can offer a unique and powerful avenue for exploring the complexities of emotion in migration phenomena. By capturing visual and auditory elements, film has the capacity to evoke emotions in ways that written or verbal communication alone cannot achieve. Moreover, film allows for the portrayal of nuanced emotions and experiences, enabling viewers to empathize with migrants' journeys and understand the intricacies of their emotional landscapes. Through cinematic storytelling, this project sheds light on the multifaceted interplay between digital media, emotion, and migration, providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of these interconnected phenomena (Borish et al., 2021: 7).

My study contributes to both migration studies and film practice by providing fresh insights into the intersection of migration and digital technology. Focusing on the Zimbabwean community in Luton, known for its large migrant population, the film captured migrants' lived experiences, to advance our understanding of transnational connectivity and constructively challenging stereotypes surrounding migrant communities. As mentioned throughout this thesis, my film serves as an essential component of my research, providing visual context and narrative depth to the arguments presented in the written text. The film, alongside the thesis, allows the audience to gain a better understanding of the concepts explored in the project. Each element of the film is created to resonate with the theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and critical analyses outlined in the written chapters. Through its narrative structure and visual symbolism, the film offers a parallel exploration of themes such as departure, transition, and identity, mirroring the scholarly discourse presented in the thesis. In essence, the film enhances the research by providing a holistic and multifaceted examination of migration experiences, bridging the gap between academic analysis and lived realities. This research project explores the profound impacts of cheap technological communication on the experiences of emigrants,

specifically focusing on the Zimbabwean diaspora in Luton. The study reveals that the availability of mobile phones, laptops, Wi-Fi, and communication apps like WhatsApp and Facebook has fundamentally changed the nature of being an emigrant. Emigrants are now able to maintain daily, meaningful interactions with their families and friends back home, blurring the lines between their host countries and their homeland. This supports the central thesis that in today's interconnected world, 'leaving is not really leaving'.

The integration of a film practice within this research enhances the understanding of how these technologies influence the lived experiences of emigrants. Through capturing the voices and stories of the Zimbabwean community in Luton, the film "Leaving but Not Leaving" provides a nuanced perspective that complements the written thesis. This dual approach allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the ways in which social media and communication technologies facilitate transnational connectedness and emotional mediation.

Overall, this research project and accompanying film aim to contribute to creating a kinder and more understanding world for those adjusting to life in foreign countries. By shedding light on the complexities of migration, promoting empathy and understanding, and advocating for inclusive and compassionate policies and practices, this project seeks to foster empathy, understanding, and social change, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and interconnected global community. By embracing diverse research approaches, including film, we can ensure that the richness and complexity of migrant experiences are adequately represented and understood, working towards a society that recognizes the lived experiences of migrants and values their contributions to the global community.

The research reveals that migrants in Western cities experience a state of double consciousness. Physically distant from their homeland, they remain emotionally and socially connected through digital means, creating a unique experience that exists simultaneously in two places. Modern communication technologies provide a new form of connectivity that transcends geographical boundaries. Emigrants can participate in family gatherings, share everyday moments, and stay informed about events back home, thus maintaining a strong sense of community and continuity.

However, this unlimited connectivity presents a paradox. While these technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for maintaining relationships, they also introduce new challenges.

The constant availability can create a sense of obligation and emotional strain, as migrants are expected to remain engaged with both their host and home communities.

Technological advancements are reshaping migration narratives, moving away from the traditional view of migration as a complete separation toward a more fluid understanding. Migrants can now maintain ties with their homeland even after physically relocating, resulting in a hybrid existence. Digital communication technologies are transforming migration narratives in several specific ways: enabling migrants to stay connected to their homeland, facilitating the formation of new identities and a sense of belonging, and helping them navigate challenges in a transnational context.

To address the emotional strain and constant connectivity challenges faced by emigrants, it is recommended that they establish clear boundaries regarding their use of digital communication technologies and manage expectations about their availability and responsiveness.

Limitations and Recommendations

While this research and the accompanying film shed light on the experiences of migrants in UK, it had limitations worth considering. One notable limitation is the narrow scope of data collection, which predominantly focused on participants from Zimbabwe. While this particular migrant population, served as a focal point, this limitation restricted the diversity of stories and perspectives represented in the film, potentially overlooking the experiences among migrants from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. Integrating a broader, longitudinal, and intersectional approach into both the study and the filmmaking process would address this limitation.

While film can certainly help broaden the representation of diverse experiences, it alone may not fully resolve the limitation of narrow data collection. However, it can serve as a powerful tool to highlight the importance of including diverse voices and perspectives in research and filmmaking endeavors. By showcasing the stories of migrants from different cultural and professional backgrounds, film can raise awareness about the need for more inclusive approaches to data collection and storytelling. Additionally, it can inspire further

research and collaboration to explore the richness and complexity of migration experiences across various demographics.

Ultimately, while film can contribute to addressing such limitations, a comprehensive approach that incorporates diverse methodologies and perspectives is needed to truly capture the breadth of human experiences. For instance, this would involve exploring grants and funding, as well as collaborating with researchers and filmmakers from diverse backgrounds, to create a documentary series that follows a diverse array of migrants over a long period. By featuring a diverse range of migrants from various cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and geographical locations, such a documentary series could provide a comprehensive understanding of mobile technology and migration.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reporting methods, such as interviews, may have posed limitations, as participants may have left out some details and provided only what they deemed useful or socially desirable responses while omitting certain relevant details. Additionally, participants could have been inclined to present their experiences in a favourable light or may have refrained from disclosing sensitive information. This bias could impact the accuracy and reliability of the data collected, thus influencing the findings and results of the project.

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, collaborating with migrants and filmmakers from diverse cultural backgrounds would allow a co-creation of visual narratives that reflect their experiences authentically. By integrating these strategies into my research approach, a researcher can overcome the limitations associated with self-reporting methods and ensure a more robust, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive exploration. This thesis has been much more than a simple academic requirement for my graduation. It has been a project to which I have committed my time and attention for at least four years. Throughout this process, I have had the chance to learn, build friendships, develop discipline and patience, and grow as a researcher, filmmaker, and individual. My goal is for this thesis and film to make a small contribution to creating a kinder and more understanding world for those who have been displaced, forced to migrate, and are adjusting to a new life in a foreign country. By exploring, understanding, and writing about the communication practices, migration experiences, struggles, and dreams of migrants, I hope to play a role in dispelling stereotypes and assumptions about migrant communities. Evaluating how migrants use and envision

technology in emotional, creative, and resilient ways provides a powerful and unique opportunity to hear their voices and amplify them.

In conclusion, I emphasize that it is imperative to diversify the approaches used to examine the role and intersection of mobile technology and transnational connectedness among migrants. I have argued that films serve as powerful vehicles for not only visually capturing the emotional dynamics inherent in long-distance family connections but also for advancing scholarly discourse. By creatively integrating various fields of scholarship, films contribute to a nuanced understanding of migration and digital media, highlighting the divergences necessary for studying these phenomena.

Through films, we can illuminate the complexities of migrant experiences, shedding light on the multifaceted ways in which mobile technology shapes transnational connections and identities. By leveraging the unique storytelling capabilities of film, we can convey the lived realities of migrants in ways that resonate with audiences across diverse backgrounds. Moreover, films provide an opportunity to engage with complex theoretical concepts in a visually compelling manner, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among scholars from different fields. By embracing the diversity of perspectives and methodologies, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in contemporary migration processes. Films, as a form of scholarly expression, play a vital role in advancing this discourse, offering insights into the human experiences that lie at the intersection of technology, migration, and transnationalism.

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Appendix 1

1. **Interviewer:** *How did you get information from home when you first arrived in UK?*

Participant A: *I remember sending letters, you know, using that uh, you know, the letter, you put those stickers, you say by air, if you don't see buy it, it goes by sea. So, it'll take longer to get there. Longer. Yeah. Zimbabwe. Mm-Hmm. But if you said fly, it's gonna fly. Yeah, It, it'll take like seven days or 14 days to get there. Right! So now you, your question about how long it takes you, it would take you that much a week plus, you know.*

2. **Interviewer:** *How useful was the internet during your migration journey?*

Participant B: *So basically, if you are not connected to the internet, in Zimbabwe, you miss out for your lot. So luckily, I had access, so I managed to actually come across my job. And, um, due to that, I, I could actually keep in touch then as to stages through getting a job interview it kind of bridges the gap.*

3. **Interviewer:** *Tell me when you your experiences with mobile technology such as WhatsApp.*

Participant B: *His Mom, Um, During Covid. Just, when Covid was about to start, I mean, yeah, just around Covid time. But she didn't die because of Covid. Just she had cancer. Right. Because she was ill so nobody could go and see him. So, imagine he went through this grieving by himself but the fact is that we could actually talk to him on a video contact, you know, and, you know, spend hours with him talking and talking about his mom with him. He felt like we are sitting together in the lounge talking about it, rather than him being by himself.*

4 Interviewer: *How significant is your smartphone in your day-to-day life?*

Participant: *Oh, I do everything on my phone, all my banking, I catch up with the news on my phone and the algorithm even knows the kind of news I like. I do all my shopping online and almost every part of my life is connected to my phone.*

Interviewer: *Would you say technology has made the life of refugees better or worse... just generally?*

Participant: *I feel generally better ... you get what I mean, because umm for all the bad it also brings good as I said for refugees it can highlight the way you are treated by foreign powers.*

Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM

University for the Creative Arts, New Dover Road Canterbury Kent CT1 3AN,

Title of the Research: Reimagining Migration: Investigating the Impact of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Mobile Phones on Contemporary Migration.

Principal Investigator:

Rufaro Kaseke, Ph.D. candidate Contact: 2017391@students.uca.ac.uk

Director of Studies:

Professor Jonathan Harris, Doctoral College

Contact: jonathan.harris@uca.ac.uk

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Reimagining Migration: Investigating the Impact of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Mobile Phones on Contemporary Migration. which examines the experiences of using the smartphone in the context of international migration. This study is conducted by Rufaro Kaseke, Ph. D candidate at the University for the Creative Arts, under the direction of Prof. Jonathan Harris and in fulfilment of a doctoral degree in Communication.

Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the purpose of the research being conducted and to describe the risks and benefits of participation so that you can make an informed decision.

What is the purpose of this research? This study is being conducted to understand the use of the smartphone among emigrants settled outside their homeland.

What will be involved if I participate? If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to schedule and complete an in-depth interview that will last at least 30-minutes. For your convenience, the interview will be conducted at a time and location of your choice. If you agree the researcher will ask for permission to observe and record audio visual data of your day-to-day smartphone communication with your family and friends back home. Interview

questions and observations will focus on individuals' perceptions and experiences of using the smartphone during the process of migration and not anything outside this scope. The subsequent film will be utilized for research purposes only. Any other public exhibitions will be per you full agreement.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If at any time you change your mind about participating in this research project, you can withdraw by contacting the principal investigator. You will not be penalized in any way for withdrawing from this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality - Your privacy will be protected. Information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Participants can choose whether they agree or disagree to have their interviews audio recorded. If participants agree to have their interview audio-recorded, the electronic file will be transcribed, all identifiable information will be removed. All audio-visual files will be destroyed and replaced with the film and written transcripts. If participants do not wish to have their interview audio- recorded, the researcher will transcribe the interview in real-time.

All data will be safely stored in a password-protected UIC Box account. The master list containing identifiable data (e.g., name, email address, scheduling time, and location) will be stored and secured in a physically separate location from those documents marked in order to minimize privacy risks. The principal investigator and participants are the only authorized persons who will have access to any of the aforementioned information.

Your real name will never be mentioned in the findings or in the film or any part of this study. Instead, participant responses will be assigned pseudonyms and/or referenced by non-gendered pronouns (they, their, them) in order to ensure anonymity among informants. The findings obtained through your participation, while de-identified, will be included in the researcher's dissertation manuscript and may be presented in peer-reviewed journal articles and at conference proceedings.

Are there any risks or benefits if I participate in this research study? The questions participants will be asked during the interviews will have no more risk or harm than one would experience in everyday life. One possible risk related to privacy and confidentiality may occur in terms of participants revealing to others that they partook in the study and doing so would be of their own volition. Participants will not benefit directly from participation in this study. However, by completing an interview, participants will contribute to social science research in the fields of communication.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Your participation in this online interview involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research? This research study is not funded. You will not be compensated for your participation and there are no financial costs or accrued expenses required to participate.

If you have questions at any time during or after this study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator and/or faculty advisor.

Principal Investigator: Rufaro Kaseke, Ph.D. candidate, Contact: 2017391@students.uca.ac.uk

Faculty Advisor: Professor Jonathan Harris, Doctoral College, Contact: jonathan.harris@uca.ac.uk

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the University for the Creative Arts Research Degrees Office at researchdegrees@uca.ac.uk

Consent of Subject I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to contact the researchers and ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

