



University of Venda

# **Mobilities, Migration and Identities in Selected Zimbabwean Fictional Narratives**

**By**

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## Abstract

This study examines the representation of the Zimbabwean migrant experiences in both regional and international migrations. It utilizes narratives that highlight the experiences of the Zimbabweans who migrate thereby exploring issues of mobility and identity. These narratives are *Harare North* (2010), *An Elegy for Easterly* (2010), *Zebra Crossing* (2013), *We Need New Names* (2014) and *The Maestro, The Magistrate and The Mathematician* (2014). These narratives have been utilized in the study to argue that migrants encounter traumatic experiences as they cross either the regional or international spaces they move to in search of better economic prospects. It further explores the kinds of trauma that they are subjected to, ranging from racism, the threat and reality of xenophobic attacks, the intricacy of negotiating an existence and a livelihood in these new spaces, searching for employment, to mention a few. The study argues that the migration experience has a catastrophic effect on the migrants' psychological state, represented as partially being caused by the realization that the host country presents its own set of challenges and is also hostile, a different reality from the preconceived romanticized view of the countries they migrate to. The study argues that the selected novels foreground the inhospitable nature of the Zimbabwean post-2000 political instabilities and the socio-economic meltdown as fostering the forced trans-migrations of Zimbabweans in an effort to escape poverty and political challenges.

**Key words:**

Bulawayo, Chikwava, Gappah, home, Huchu, identity, mobilities, migration, Vandermerwe, Zimbabwe

## **Declaration**

I Saneliso Thambo, declare that this dissertation is my own original work, has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that the sources I have used have been fully acknowledged by complete references. It is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of Master of Arts in English at the University of Venda.

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Saneliso Thambo

## **Dedications**

To my beloved parents, Simiso and Bekezela Thambo and to the Thambo family in its entirety Nkululeko, Similo, Sehlule, Samukeliso, Senele, Bahle, Simphiwe Thambo and Brighton Mahlangu. For your love, support and encouragement I will forever be grateful.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

This study explores the intricacy of the fictional representation of modern international migration and mobilities and the creation of new identities in the diaspora in selected Zimbabwean narratives. I argue that the narratives examined reflect the popular perception that as the migrants are being pulled by the thought that there is economic prosperity in the developed countries, they are often blind to the actual harsh realities that often characterize life in the desired countries. The narratives that are examined are Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2010), Pettina Gappah's anthology *An Elegy for Easterly* (2010), Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013) Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2014) and Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician* (2014). The study utilizes the texts from the specified years because since the year 2000 there has been a significant engagement with issues of desperate migrations, precarious mobilities and the construction of fractured identities in the diaspora in Zimbabwean fiction. However, this increase in fictional representation of these issues has not been met with a similar increase in the theorization of the phenomena. This study will therefore provide the theoretical framing that this increase in fictional narratives seem to clearly demand.

The study illustrates that contemporary complexities of migration affect the migrant in various ways. The selected narratives demonstrate that the psyche of African migrants is negatively affected because of conflicting identities as a result of their experiences from their countries of origin and what they encounter in their new host countries. The selected narratives suggest that African migrants experience debilitating dislocation in their new countries of refuge. These dislocations cause the migrants to be constantly nostalgic, yearning for their home countries as they come to a realization that the developed countries have their own problems that the migrant would not have imagined. These narratives engage with issues of mobility, migration and

identity due to the topicality of these issues in most contemporary post-colonial African societies in relation to developed neo-liberal nations.

Glick-Schiller et al, (1995: 60) defines migration as “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country”. In the light of this definition, 'migrant' in this study does not refer to refugees, displaced people or others forced or compelled to leave their homes. It refers to people who make choices about when to leave and where to go, even though these choices are sometimes extremely constrained. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, migration is the voluntary or coerced movement of people from one country to another for the purpose of establishing a new place of residence.

The concept of mobilities is also central in this study. Mobility is understood through Sheller and Urry (2006) who assert that it is the large-scale movement of people, objects, capital, and information across the world, as well as more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public and private space and the travel of material objects in everyday life. On the same vein, Elliot and Urry (2010) suggest that mobilities encapsulate not only the movement of people as in migration, but of ideas and things as well as the broader social implications of those movements. These definitions have been selected because they bring into focus the implications brought about by mobilities such as identity crisis, another important issue discussed in this study in relation to my selected fictional narratives.

Lastly, the concept identity is utilized in the light of Leary and Tangney's (2012: 69) assertion that identities “are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is”. These authors also suggest that identities can be focused on the past - what used to be true of one, the present - what is true of one now, or the future - the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the

person one fears one may become". Leary and Tangney's definition captures the various contexts of the characters depicted in the narratives that this study examines.

One of the key objectives of the study is to discuss the confluence of fictional representations of the challenges associated with factual presentation of the issues of mobility, migration and identity. The study highlights the relationship between fact and fiction and argues that the selected authors have drawn their knowledge and migrant experiences to fictionalize these issues. Chikwava, the author of *Harare North*, was residing in London at the time of writing his novel but was born and bred in Zimbabwe. The Harare North of his novel's title is a satirical reference to London in the United Kingdom where many Zimbabweans who were from the real Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, sought economic refuge during the height of their country's economic problems. Chikwava himself left Harare for London in 2002 due to Zimbabwe's unprecedented economic collapse. Clearly, then, his novel partly draws from his personal experiences both in Harare during Zimbabwe's economic collapse and in London as an economic migrant.

Although not being a "vernacular cosmopolitan" (Bhabha 1994: xvi) as he is not necessarily an abject migrant, Chikwava's Zimbabwean background places him in a position to write about the migration experience almost similar to that of his nameless protagonist. An artist and writer, Chikwava experienced the harsh Zimbabwean economic and political environment and the attendant lack of opportunities which subsequently forced him to migrate to London to further his career and broaden his horizons. Similarly, NoViolet Bulawayo, born Elizabeth Tshele, spent her childhood and earlier teenage years in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and acquired her basic education there and migrated to the United States of America at the age of 18 years. The touch of her own experiences is felt in her work through the poignant narrative voice of her girl child narrator in *We Need New Names*.

Pettina Gappah was also born and raised in Zimbabwe and went to Austria to do a doctorate degree in International Trade Law at Graz University. She had done her Master's Degree at the University of Cambridge. Gappah therefore writes from personal experience as she is not a stranger to the economic woes and political instability of Zimbabwe. It is no wonder that she focuses largely on the Zimbabwean crisis in her narratives. She has however refused to be called "the voice of Zimbabwe", a title her publisher Faber and Faber attempted attributing to her. Concerning that title, she remarks: "It's very troubling to me because writing of a place is not the same as writing for a place ... if I write about Zimbabwe, it's not the same as writing for Zimbabwe or for Zimbabweans" (Gappa, 2009). Her protagonists' experiences in her short stories are related to the tragic Zimbabwean political chaos and economic collapse of the post-2000 period.

On the other hand, Tendai Huchu was born in Bindura, Zimbabwe, a place he mentions a lot in the narrative. He was educated and lived in Zimbabwe where he did a number of odd jobs before migrating to Edinburgh, Scotland where he currently lives. The novel, *Zebra Crossing* is the only novel utilized in my study with a non-Zimbabwean writer. However, Meg Vandermerwe is familiar with the migration experience as she too was a migrant. She was born in South Africa but raised in Europe and only came back to South Africa towards the 2010 Soccer World Cup like Chipso her female protagonist in the novel. The Zimbabwean political chaos and its attendant economic collapse permeate all the narratives selected for this discussion. Moreover, the migrant experiences of these writers seem to have impacted or influenced their narratives and thus creating the evident confluence between fiction and the factual presentation of the migratory trajectories.

All my selected texts were written after the year 2000 and this year is significant in the modern history of Zimbabwe because it saw the rise in migration as people were in a stampede to get out of the country's spectacular economic collapse which was accelerated by the violent dispossession of thousands of white people of their farms. This migration creates "psychic disorders" (Muchemwa 2010: 135) and physical displacements and results in complexities that

evidently constitute the identities of migrant literary writers and the fictional characters in their novels. Largely, then, these writers are grappling with understanding the creation of new migrant identities.

The migration of their characters force them to occupy “a liminal space, [to] mediate the melancholia of those who find themselves in strange lands and the anomie of those left at home, who experience many types of deprivation” (Muchemwa 2010: 135). This liminal space they occupy has drawn considerable attention from scholars such as Mohapatra (2006:2) who wonders whether migrants have homes “everywhere, irrespective of the borders” and Bhabha (1990: 211) who considers them as occupying a “Third space”. In Bhabha’s formulation, these migrants create identities that cannot be located either back at home or in new spaces they occupy.

However, my study considers some arguments against the above thoughts as pointed out by Mandaville (2000: 23) who argues that the notions of identity, place and the migrants “travel together”. Mandaville views the idea of a “liminal space” which has been propounded by Bhabha and others as problematic and inadequate in understanding the multiple manifestations of migrants’ experiences. As the Zimbabwean state continues to force its population into migrating or what Muchemwa has perceived as a process of “externalis[ing] the population” (2010: 135), migrants recognize the need of defining “one’s home and identity” (Korte 2000:170) as identity according to Freeman (1993: 6) stands as an “inroad into the phenomenon of self-understanding and selfhood”. My selected fictional narratives focus on Zimbabwean migrants who find themselves in this dilemma of self-understanding and rediscovery in the Western and regional countries that they migrate to as they are faced with many challenges they never anticipated.

Central to this study is the question of whether or not the re-arrangement of the notions of home and identity by migrants has problematized the fixed ideas of home and identity and the Zimbabwean literary perspective in general. It can arguably be stated that the migrants' understanding of home can, to a larger extent be affected by their conscious and unconscious contrast of the idea of home and the spaces they occupy which at some point tends to transfigure their previous idea of home and identity. The contrast of the place and the space they occupy problematizes their place of origin especially taking into consideration Muchemwa's insight that "when populations are scattered, imaginaries of home are shattered" (2010: 142). As a result of that dislocation, the migrants heavily rely on their memory to recover fragmented ideas about their home which are merged with the ideas of the spaces they occupy and as a result the fixed notions of home are compromised.

Mohapatra (2006: 2) argues that "since diasporic identities get constantly ruptured together with their language, class, race and gender denominations, and get mutated as well as reconstituted in the translocal spaces, the original notions of "home" which are imagined over and over again in different ways across borders and boundaries become ambiguous" (2006: 2). Mohapatra's observations about diasporic identities are instructive in analyzing the selected narratives of my study. All the texts utilized in this study problematize the notions of home, identity and force the reader to revise, specifically the long held Zimbabwean understandings of the notion of home and identity formation.

In analyzing these migratory experiences, my study borrows its main conceptual bearing from the notion of cosmopolitanism. It also utilizes post-colonial theories to try and come up with a broad and deeply analytic understanding of the issues represented in the selected narratives. Cosmopolitans have been traditionally conceived as sophisticated mobile world citizens having

ease of travel. Selasi (2005) also describes a cosmopolitan as a ‘citizen of the world’, transcending particularistic ties of kinship or nation involving the free movement of capital and the spread of ideas and practices. The notion has over the years been subject to review so as to suit the postcolonial era. Thus, for specificity, the study utilizes Bhabha’s notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism. (Bhabha 2001). This notion gives an ideal framing as it allows considering, for example, Chikwava, Bulawayo and Gappah’s migrant characters as cosmopolitan world citizens but a special kind of cosmopolitans whom Bhabha refers to as vernacular cosmopolitans. These are cosmopolitans who are marked by an agitation that is telling not only of their own subjectivity but also of the context that defines them as hopeless.

Bhabha (2001: 42–43) defines a vernacular or marginal cosmopolitan based upon three main points: i) it is a cosmopolitanism that stops short of the transcendent human universal and provides an ethical entitlement to the sense of community; ii) it is conscious of the insufficiency of the self and the imperative of openness to the needs of others; and iii) it finds in the victims of progress the best promise for ethical regeneration. Vernacular cosmopolitanism is equivalent to Kristeva’s (1991: 274) “cosmopolitanism of those who have been flayed”. Kristeva noticeably shares the conviction of recognition of non-elite forms of travel as cosmopolitan. She challenges the idea that cosmopolitans are necessarily members of the elite.

Suffice to mention, the notion acknowledges that there are different cosmopolitan practices co-existing in the late modernity, with their own histories and distinctive worldviews, and this has led to an exploration of marginal cosmopolitanisms by many scholars apart from Kristeva and Bhabha. Bhabha, who coined the term vernacular cosmopolitanism, is uneasy with the image of the self the center of a series of concentric circles, with universal liberal values privileged above family, ethnic group or nation. Bhabha, like Kristeva, proposes a ‘cosmopolitan community envisaged in marginality’, a border zone which he terms vernacular cosmopolitanism (1996: 195–

196). Despite the fact that there have been reviews on the migrant status as a cosmopolitan, with scholars like Hannerz and Bhabha revising their positions and acknowledging that more people beyond the elite may now be identified as cosmopolitan, Hannerz notes that ‘bottom-up’ cosmopolitans are unlikely to be recognized as such in their own environment Hannerz (2004: 77).

Similarly, Wallerstein (1996: 124) argues that the notion of a cosmopolitan, that is, “citizen of the world” is deeply ambiguous. He observes: “It can be used just as easily to sustain privilege as to undermine it”. There are basically two kinds of cosmopolitans: the powerful and the disempowered, those who have chosen to live with others in different countries, and those who have been forced to do so, such as undocumented labour migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Werbner 2006; Beck and Sznaider 2006: 7–8). The people in the first group, the privileged people living and working in foreign countries in respectable professions are allowed to be elite cosmopolitans. On the other hand, the majority of cosmopolitans depicted by Bulawayo, Huchu, Chikwava, Vandemerwe and Gappah are underprivileged cosmopolitans who have been forced from their countries by desperate economic conditions.

Due to the precarious social, economic and political condition of most of the characters depicted in the selected narratives, this study is also underpinned by Butler’s (2004) notion of the precarity of existence in contemporary post-industrial and neoliberal societies. Precarity as a notion describes modes of contemporary existence across the spectrum. It focuses on the neoliberal societies and also maps modes in which labour markets fix new parameters for production. This notion helps to describe and analyze the modes of existence found in the migration and mobility experience.

Another theory that the study uses is the World–System Theory (Sassen 1988) that directly places international migration as a by-product of global capitalism. As in the depictions of the selected

texts, the contemporary patterns as cited by the theorist tend to be from the periphery (poor nations), to the core (rich nations) as aspects linked with industrial development in the first world generate structural economic problems and thus create push factors in the third world countries. Ravenstein (1889), one of the earliest migration theorists asserts that migration is governed by “push-pull” factors.

These push and pull factors help in the theoretical framing of this study in understanding the causes of migration. A reading of my narratives suggests that while the depicted characters are pushed out of their developing countries by a number of factors, they are also pulled by certain attractions that supposedly exist in developed countries. Therefore, these push and pull factors are on both sides, in the countries of origin and in the countries of destination. In the countries of origin, those factors are called push factors as they propel and “push” people to move out of their original countries of residence, and in the countries of destination they are called pull factors as they pull and attract the potential migrant to the country of destination. The push factors are associated with unfavorable conditions while the pull factors are linked to perceived favorable conditions. All these issues which are connected through the economic, political and social relations of the countries of origin and destination contribute to migration. The migrant is pulled by the economic prospects of the destination country although not fully knowing if they will enjoy the desired life.

This then becomes a combination of uncertainty, risk and investment project for the prospective migrant. The migrants realize that continued residence in the country of origin is detrimental to their progress as they risk economic stagnation and this propels the potential migrants to countries that they identify as economically sound. This is the prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979) and Czaika (2015) calls it the migration prospect theory and points out that it

is based on the reference-dependent expectation. This is to say that migrants evaluate the gains and losses of their migration moves and more so, the economic moves. This is exemplified in the narratives used in this study as the protagonists all migrate with the hope of a better life for themselves.

The hope of a better economic life influences the migration decision making and set the basis for a new economics of labor migration (Stark and Taylor 1991). In the case of Chikwava's protagonist, he migrates to London with the hope of accumulating large sums of money, enough for his late mother's ritual and to pay off people he is indebted to. These become expectations based on economic prospects that create migration incentives even if positive economic differentials between origin and destination country do not exist (Czaika 2015).

## CHAPTER TWO

### ***Zebra crossing: Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa***

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013) is an account of two Zimbabwean orphans Chipo who is seventeen and her twenty-year-old brother George whose migration from Zimbabwe through Beitbridge border crossing to South Africa's Cape Town is overshadowed by saddening and traumatic experiences. Vandermerwe, uses Cape Town as the predominant setting for this novel. However, Vandermerwe uses flashback to relate the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy and other events that contribute to the migration of Chipo and George which ends in tragedy as Chipo, the protagonist of the story, is captured, locked up and abandoned in a room to die a slow and painful death. The novel is narrated by the ghost of Chipo whose gender, albinism together with her migrancy are depicted as factors that make her marginalized by everyone around her.

Chipo and George's journey to South Africa captures the challenges that Zimbabweans without legal travel documents face in an attempt to attain better economic prospects. Their determination to migrate just a year before the historic Soccer World Cup is motivated by their misconception of South Africa as the land of plenty. However, the challenges that they experience during their journey and as they try to settle in Cape Town illustrate some of the challenges that illegal migrants face in South Africa and probably elsewhere in Africa and in the world in general.

#### **2.2 Zimbabwean Political and Economic Challenges as Push Factors**

The novel is initially set in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe in 2009 and the narrator and her brother live in abject poverty that reflects the country's economic collapse that has crumbled the dreams of many "leading to unprecedented migrations to other countries" (Ndlovu 2015: 6). These economic and political challenges are depicted as affecting the Zimbabweans such that children are forced to work or even drop out of school to help their parents. This is the case with Chipo

and George who work but earn very little in their employment as domestic workers. This is the major reason for their migrating to South Africa George assumes that their economic situation will improve if they migrate saying: “In South Africa there are plenty of jobs ... [w]e won’t have to crawl on our hands and knees to earn a pittance” (11). In addition to earning very little, Chipo and George are employed by a capricious Zimbabwean army general who makes his marital challenges the problem of his employees as he involves the duo by requiring them to spy on his wife. As result, Chipo and George live under the constant fear of losing their jobs. The unpredictability of their employer is cited as the immediate reason why Chipo and George migrate coupled with this need for economic empowerment. Moyana (2010: xii) provides a befitting explanation and dimension to this sort of migration when she states:

The current trend in Zimbabwe, therefore, where young and old decide to leave their country to seek economic empowerment elsewhere is strictly speaking not new ...

The current trend where Zimbabweans are going “hunting in foreign lands” falls into the category of the second phase of the liberation struggle, namely, the need for economic empowerment which liberates one from the clutches of poverty.

The novel traces Chipo and George’s problems back to the politically induced Zimbabwean economic collapse of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By the time they leave Zimbabwe, Chipo shows that almost all industrial production had ceased. For example, Chipo encounters a potato vendor and observes: “A few years ago those potatoes would have sold in moments. But money is tight for everyone these days, and what was once a small treat has become an unaffordable luxury for most” (11). As things stand, they keep worsening even in the sight of these desperate orphans who are then forced to try to escape the “clutches of poverty” in this manner (Moyana 2010: xii).

The narrative suggests that the Zimbabwean governments' self-centered actions are largely to blame for the plight of Zimbabweans in general and those like Chipo and George in particular. For example, in 2003 an exercise which was code named "Remove Moral Filth" (12) or Operation Murambatsvina in Shona, led to the destruction of people's homes and small businesses which the government declared illegal and a nuisance. Chipo's mother also loses her livelihood during this operation as her tavern is destroyed. Chipo says:

In 2003 the government declared informal drinking taverns like Mama's illegal. Operation "Remove Moral Filth", they called it. The taverns encourage Zimbabweans to be sinful. That is what the government radio and newspapers shouted. (12)

Although trying to resist the destruction of their source of livelihood, the unsympathetic and determined policemen eventually demolish the tavern a month later. This action plunges Chipo's family into abject poverty which contributes to her mother's premature death.

Musoni's views' is that "the concurrent destruction of informal business and housing structures in this place meant that many families lost accommodation and their only source of income in one day" (2010: 315). The destruction of their source of livelihood not only had economic effects but also physiological effects on their mother and ultimately forces the duo into migration. Chipo confesses: "But there is no denying that, after it was destroyed, within eighteen months, her health took a turn for the worse and so did our fortunes" (13). This becomes a clear indication of a government that is insensitive to the plight of its people by creating these internal displacements and thus creating forced mobilities such as those by Chipo, George and many other Zimbabweans. During this period of economic difficulties and political turmoil, Chipo says that the newspapers and radios confirmed that hundreds "jump[ed] the border everyday" (12).

Apart from job opportunities, the idea of better healthcare and other facilities propel George and other Zimbabweans to consider migrating South Africa. Their unemployment, expensive and inaccessibility of medicines and healthcare in Zimbabwe makes other countries that are potentially able to provide these basic human needs very appealing to the Zimbabweans. George when selling the idea of migration to Chipso embodies this as noted when he juxtaposes the two countries: “And they have proper hospitals and shops *crammed* with cool goods like flatscreen TVs, and all the roads are clean, paved- not these bloody moon craters” (11).

In light of the deplorable state of the Zimbabwean healthcare facilities that are known to offer nothing but consultative services, the duo realize that their own mother died as a result of lack of medication in a time when the HIV virus could be controlled but because she is in Zimbabwe where all things are in short supply she succumbed to it. Chipso relates the conversation with the doctor as he said: “We can do no more for her here. We have no medicines, we haven’t been paid ourselves in five months. Perhaps if you could get her to Harare” (18). Chipso says: “When the doctors sent Mama home to die, George fetched Mai Patricia, the *nganga* (21). This is a sad and solemn indication of the kind of economic downward spiral that the country was taking such that the government could not afford to provide medicines in hospitals while sending the ordinary people who could not afford private hospitals to die at home.

Noting the extent of the economic collapse during that operation, Musoni postulates that “[b]y the time of Murambatsvina, Zimbabwe’s economy had declined so much that some analysts argue that the informal sector [had] become the economy.” (2010: 303). In other words, the businesses that were declared illegal and destroyed by the government had become the country’s economic mainstay. Therefore, government’s seemingly irrational decision to destroy these businesses led to some commentators arguing that this was a calculated political move aimed at disenfranchising the urban poor who were seen as supporters of the main opposition party.

The narrator hints at this when she explains why her mother is targeted during Operation Murambatsvina. She says: “Some say he [the head policeman] had seen Mama at the rallies supporting the MDC. That is why she and Old Trafford in particular were targeted. Whatever the reason, one month later to the day we were woken by the rumble of their trucks” (12). On this, Benyera and Nyera (2015: 6522) concurs that this demolition of structures was a “covert operation targeting voters who had shown a preference for the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). All these factors are consequential and reduce Zimbabwe into a “confined space” and Chipo, George and all the migrants in the novel are prompted to move to what Manger and Assal (2006:11) call an “enabling space”, which is South Africa as it represents hope and opportunities.

Although the novel subverts the utopian mentality that Chipo, her brother and some Zimbabwean citizens have about South Africa, escaping the situation through migrating to South Africa is assumed to be giving them both an economic and political reprieve. Political turmoil in Zimbabwe motivates many people to leave for South Africa where they would not, presumably, encounter politically motivated victimization that they face in their country. Although foreign immigrants are clearly unwelcomed by some South African citizens who resort to xenophobic attacks, most Zimbabwean immigrants stay on and are relatively free from victimization. The challenge for most of them is being underemployed and getting the legal documents to work in South Africa.

Through the depictions of Chipo and her brother’s experiences in Zimbabwe, Vandermerwe reflects on the country’s hostility to children, females and people with disabilities. It does not have the safety nets to cushion those that are vulnerable. This in Butler’s view is a “crumbling welfare state” wherein “social safety nets have been torn asunder or denied the chance to merge” (2009:32). Chipo faces challenges in her education because of her albinism. Chipo’s albinism and visual impairment with the government’s failure to create a conducive environment for her,

can also be seen as the novel's attempt depict the government's insensitivity to the welfare of its disadvantaged citizens.

Such inconsiderateness is seen when Chipo' school and her teachers fail to assist her during her studies as a disabled pupil. This is highlighted in the non-tolerant attitude of her teacher towards her slow pace in writing and reading when she remarks: "Chipo, you must tell your mother to get you stronger spectacles if the ones you currently possess are inadequate. You cannot be allowed to delay the rest of the class. They are falling behind in their studies" (40). The teacher is very condescending even when Chipo's mother goes to the school to explain that it is not the spectacles but Chipo's sensitivity to the sun that makes her slow. She unsympathetically retorts: "Are you suggesting the other pupils work in darkness in order to accommodate your daughter? ... Or perhaps you would like the school to switch its schedule and conduct our lessons at night, by candlelight, so your daughter might better see the board?" (40-41). One would have expected the teacher to be more empathetic to Chipo's challenges. However, the government is predominately responsible for not availing the material that is necessary for the improvement of the visually impaired whether as a result of albinism or otherwise.

Chipo says that at school she got the nickname tortoise because of her slow pace in writing that was as a result of her condition. This inconveniences her in her studies as she has to finish up writing when others are enjoying their lunch break. All that she suffers becomes indicative of the consequences that the ordinary citizens have to face as a result of these heavy economic and political influences that become push factors to the out migration of the Zimbabwean citizens who apparently fail to withstand these elements.

### 2.3 Precarious Border crossing and challenges in transit

Chipo and her brother's experiences at Beitbridge border post highlights the precarity of illegal border crossings. Their challenges illustrate the fact that migration requires resource and networks that are seldom available to those who cross the border illegally. Furthermore, the challenges they encounter while they are in transit to Cape Town refute Cresswell's (2011) suggestion that time in transit is dead time where nothing happens (160). The dangers that Chipo and her brother face both at the border and in the hands of the truck driver who smuggles them into South Africa who even beats up George not only shows how desperate they are to escape Zimbabwe but the extent they are willing to go to get there.

Vandermerwe suggests that the dangers of crossing from Zimbabwe to South Africa are nothing compared to the economic danger that they face by staying in Zimbabwe. Her insights resonate with those of Nkala in *The Crossing and The Bicycle Thief* (2009), where two of his characters, Jacob and Khumbu state that although crossing the border is dangerous, being "Zimbabwean itself was [ more] dangerous and illegal" (16). Pretending to be helpful, the truck driver highlights some of the challenges faced by illegal migrants at the border and during their journey to their South African destinations. He says: "There are plenty of thieves about. They take your money but hand you over to the police. And those border police, they will rob you before they throw you into jail. And even if you somehow manage to escape them, there are the magumaguma gangs" (19). This paints a complex web of challenges emanating from both legal state surveillance mechanisms and the illegal ones that prey on the vulnerability of illegal would-be migrants.

Chipo and George's problems begin right at the border where they risk suffocating in a windowless haulage as they hide away from the border police. Reflecting on this incident Chipo says:

They are searching for us. We hold our breaths. The mattress under which we are buried smells of sweat, beer and unwashed bodies. I want to retch. Something is biting my arms and now crawling towards my neck. Lice? Lice rhymes with nice, but there is nothing nice about them. Only bad. Let them bite. They can eat me alive, I think to myself, if it means we will not be discovered. (20)

The smell of sweat, beer and unwashed bodies that assails Chipo and the lice that feed on her blood are endurable because she hopes that once in South Africa, her economic situation will miraculously improve. At this point, her only concern is not to be discovered. Her entire consciousness is transfixed around crossing. Chipo's experience at this moment rebut Cresswell's (2011) notion of dead time in transit.

Chipo's words indicate that national border posts are spaces that engender feelings of deracination. In the prologue, Chipo pronounces that a border:

Is where you are not wanted, but where you must nonetheless go. It is where you must wait, terrified as you are, for the right moment to take your chance and dance with fate ... it is where you must say goodbye. You cannot afford to turn and look back. The past is the past ... A border is where you swap home for hope. (7)

Chipo's observations suggest that for underprivileged immigrants, the border is a space of unavoidable terror. For the poor immigrants who are fleeing economic collapse in their own countries, the border is as inviting as it is hostile. It is a place that symbolizes homelessness and the uncertain hope of finding another place to call home elsewhere. Chipo's characterization of the border approximate Said's observation. Said wrote: "In a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which encloses us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason and necessity" (2000: 185). Chipo and George and many other Zimbabweans find that their own home country has

become unlivable. However, they also discover that crossing the border to South Africa where they hope for better economic opportunities is a task that involves risking one's life because for those without legal travel documents, crossing the border is actually dicing with death because of the defense given to the border and the alternative of crossing.

For Chipo and George, this involves using not illegal means but dangerous means of crossing. Discussing illegal border crossings, Creswell (2011) talks of "tunnelling" (165), a process that produces "new enclaves of mobility" (167) as evidenced by the alternative method that Chipo and George use to cross the border. The criminal gangs who patrol the border line with the approval of the police can be equated to unsanctioned state mechanism of border control. For example, the truck driver who eventually gives Chipo and George a lift says the border police are involved in corrupt dealings. He says: "Ah, they say you need no entry documents at the moment, but the border police do not care. If you have no passport and no visa they will not let you through. Not unless you give them something in return" (19). This indicates that the police themselves prey on the vulnerabilities of underprivileged would-be migrants.

Borders are shaped by contradictions. They are designed to keep illegal immigrants and those who conform to the law and its requirements out. However, what Chipo and George experience and see at the border shows that it is not necessarily these statuses that govern who comes into South Africa and who does not. In reality, the border is porous for those people who are able to negotiate their way through by paying the border guards money or probably transactional sex for women migrants, something that the driver warns them of. The borders' very existence creates an opportunity for the development of a sub-economy run by migrants, border guards, drivers and smugglers as evidenced by the presence of the magumagumas and drivers who are ready to take advantage of the likes of George and Chipo. These alternative economies create spaces that resist official border restrictions and develop new "rules of the game" that at once subvert sovereign codes and laws, and reinforce the significance of the physical border.

## 2.4 Vulnerabilities of albino female migrants

Vandermerwe's novel depict illegal migration as more dangerous to black females than to males. She suggests that the act of migration causes marginalization peculiar to the black, female and even worse for the disabled migrants. In light of this assertion, Chipo is depicted as being more vulnerable in a foreign country than George is, and other males in the text. This becomes evident and a dark reality that she starts experiencing and being informed about before she even manages to migrate to South Africa. The truck driver who turns out to be double-faced himself captures Chipo's vulnerability to violence when he says: "They [the criminal gangs] roam the two borders, looking for unfortunates like yourself. If they find you, they rob you, beat you, rape or even kill you, or sell you into slavery to other gangs. And you ... you they will take your organs, chop them out and sell them to the muti men" (19). The truck driver's words paint a gendered processes of violence enacted on illegal migrants and more so to females who are the ones who are most likely to be raped as compared to males. Giorgio (2016: 1123) points out that transnational female migrants may also be exposed to sexual violence while attempting to illegally cross borders. In Chipo's case, it is not just gender which militates against her but her albinism too. She is exposed to being killed for ritual purposes because of the belief that is rife in Africa that albino body parts are either medicinal or bring good luck.

The gendered disadvantages she faces even in her migration is illustrated during her stay in Cape Town as Chipo continues to suffer from patriarchal constraints just like she had back home in Zimbabwe. She observes: "In Beitbridge I cleaned for the General and his family, and cooked and cleaned at home for George and myself. In Cape Town I cook and clean for George, David and Peter" (42). This statement proves that Cape Town does not give Chipo freedom from patriarchy neither does it give her economic independence. She is constantly not considered even in decisions that directly affect her as a person. Her alterity emanates not only from her age but also her gender and disability. This is again highlighted even when they are still in Zimbabwe

when she gives this insight upon her brothers' rantings about his boss's treatment. "I listen. *Little sister*. I am seventeen. It is my job to listen. When I am not scrubbing, or sweeping. But most of all it is my job to obey. If I do not obey, how can he protect me?" (9) These are the same patriarchal constraints that are being perpetuated even in Cape Town as the South African national culture, like in Zimbabwe also promotes and tolerates oppressive patriarchy. She has to listen to her brother from the time her mother died by virtue of him being male and that he is older than her. His patronizing nature does little to help given the fact that Chipo is grappling with ascertaining herself as a young black albino migrant.

Her employment by Jean-Paul, a reclusive Rwanda genocide survivor, only sees her earning one hundred rands per week. This is not enough for her to be independent from her brother George. This is because women, according to (Kawar 2004:73) as compared to men, tend to be concentrated in a more limited number of occupations and thus Chipo can only be grateful that Jean-Paul offered her the opportunity to make the little that she gets as her opportunities outside are more limited than those of her male counterparts. Kawar's view that despite the difficulties and constraints, migration offers women new opportunities and financial independence in addition to improved status within their homes and communities never obtains in Chipo's case (73). She continues to share a room with her brother, David and Peter. This is as a result of the fact that she is still not economically emancipated. When they go around the City scouting for opportunities, these are specifically being sought for her male counter-part George and thus her economic opportunities are not bettered to a greater extent.

When grappling with the experiences of migrant women, Krummel (2014:3) states that "their experiences as migrants may also shift; racism or xenophobia may be more evident in the country of settlement, or gendered expectation more pronounced in migrant communities strongly adhering to 'traditional' ways and structures". This is true because the gendered expectation against Chipo are more pronounced in the house that they reside in. They all expect her to wash

for them, clean and cook. She too knows this is what they expect, highlighted by one of her thoughts when after eating, she rolls up her sleeves and thinks, “a lady knows when to do the men’s dishes” (29). Again, this misogynist perception is further illustrated when George, frustrated from an unfruitful day of job hunting, comes back home to hear David praising Chipo that she was probably an “A” student at school. He retorts: “Grade A? Chipo? Ha ha. A good joke ... Yes, A-grade for scrub, cook and clean. Speaking of which, why is dinner not ready yet, hey? Can’t you even manage that, Tortoise?” (39). This snide remarks clearly indicates the gendered disadvantage that she as a migrant woman faces especially in this community as she came to find a better life for herself and not to clean up after the three men in her life.

Men take advantage of Chipo as they use her as a pawn in their dangerous and unlawful business deals. Due to her unrequited love for David, Chipo dabbles in witchcraft and is subsequently blackmailed by Doctor Ongani into participating in a shady business arrangement which ultimately leads to her death. All the males who deal with Chipo do not think that her opinions and feelings matter at all. For example, when discussing their soccer fortunetelling business with Dr Ongani, George says Chipo “has no brain for business” and she must just do as she is told (136). In order to make money for her brother and his male partners, Chipo is treated as a virtual prisoner. Hurst (2008) and points out that migrant women suffer injustices, inequities and unfairness. Chipo’s suffers injustices from fellow migrants. She is deprived of her basic human rights when she has to wait for Doctor Ongani to give her a break to access the toilet and worse still she is commodified. Her hair is forcefully cut and sold for one hundred and fifty rands per envelope.

Doctor Ongani, her brother and cousins all exploit Chipo and fail to protect her when they could. In this regard, in light of those who cannot protect themselves, Ruof (2004) argues that “the idea of human vulnerability ... underlines the claim that one has a moral responsibility towards those who are not able to shield their own fragility, including children, the ill, the severely disabled, or

the very old”. George and the other male characters in the novel fail live up to this moral obligation to protect Chipo first as a woman, as an albino and as a migrant as she is unable to but instead expose her to danger. To them being a woman means that she is less of a human being than everybody else. This belief is illustrated by one of the comments that George makes when he refuses do a vigil at the Home Affairs so that they become the first to be assisted in the morning. He remarks: “I didn’t leave Zimbabwe to sleep on the street in South Africa like a stray dog ... Enough that I must do the job of a maid” (35). This comment reflects the gendered bias that George has on the female sex and as a results he subjects Chipo to a lot of ill-treatment.

Besides the migrant to migrant challenges that she faces, Chipo is also vulnerable to the reality of xenophobia. All the migrants face this xenophobic vulnerability but women are more susceptible to it than men. Xenophobia causes people in receiving countries to regard migrant women as aliens, inferiors culturally and socially. The potential threat to stability arising out of religion and culture makes females more vulnerable to xenophobia, exploitation and sexual abuse. All these factors that make Chipo a victim and vulnerable to everyone create an identity crisis within herself. This need to ascertain self is voiced out when she is at the Home Affairs Department and she questions herself: “Who is this girl? Who is Chipo Nyamubaya?” Her soliloquy, brings to the surface the level of her disorientation that is brought about by the fact that she has been labelled many things to a point that she wants to know who she really is. Jean-Paul becomes is the only one who helps her to know herself. Unlike everyone else, he does not undermine her and acknowledges that she is no longer a child when he says: “You are growing up. And a young lady requires a winter wardrobe” (p. 89). When others regard her as ‘Little Sister’, as George sometimes calls her, Jean-Paul acknowledges that she is an adult, and over and over again draws attention to the fact that Chipo is not reducible to her albinism, but is rather a young woman with her own feelings, desires, skills and opinions. (Wilkinson 2016:43)

Buxbaum (2017:83) suggests that Chipo's albinism even disrupts conventional understandings of race as she seems not to belong. Her place in the African society is different as she is constructed as only being half human. He claims that she is associated with and compared to animals by her brother and others. At one point he shouts: "You look like a zebra!" (76). She also lists some of the ways in which they as albinos are animalized and dehumanized:

Peeled potato. That is what many in Zimbabwe call me. Also 'monkey' and 'sope'. There are other names, too, depending where you go. Name rhymes with shame. In Malawi, they call us 'biri'. They whisper that we are linked to witchcraft. In Tanzania, we are 'animal' or 'ghost' or 'white medicine'. Their witch doctors pay handsomely for our limbs. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they call us 'ndundu' – living dead. If a fisherman goes missing, they call on us to find the body. In Lesotho, we are 'leshane', meaning half-persons, whereas to South Africans, depending on whether they are Xhosa or coloured, we are 'inkawu', meaning ape 'wit kaffir', 'spierwit' or 'wit Boer'.(10)

She is a victim of prejudice all her life such that she is not fully accepted either in her family, school or in the society. These kind of beliefs concerning albinos are bemoaned by Bauxman (2017) as not just fictional and unreal myths but in actual fact the kind of vulnerability that albinos like Chipo face. Reports and data collected from twenty five African countries show 145 albino killings and 226 cases of violations that include mutilations and kidnappings (Wesangula 2015). Additionally, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies reports that "a complete set of body parts ... can fetch up to \$75000" (Wesangula 2015). All these facts and factors attest to the kind of danger and exposure that migration puts Chipo under as she finds herself in a space where there are migrants from different African countries that all hold different myths and beliefs that place her at a perilous position as she becomes a sought after person. All these myths

play to her disadvantage that leads to her being held hostage like a caged animal by Doctor Ongani, her brother and their Tanzanian delinquents. This gives evidence to that being a migrant, female albino she is the most vulnerable as she is the only migrant out of all the migrant characters in the narrative who meets a tragic end.

## **2.5 Myth of Pan-Africanism and the 2010 Soccer World Cup**

Vandermerwe reveals how the 2010 Soccer World Cup held in South Africa was touted as not just a moment of national pride for the host country but a continental African event. However, the fear of xenophobic attacks by migrants suggests that the Pan-African posturing of this event are an illusion and that the idea of nation rather than Pan-Africanism is entrenched in the psyches of people. This is buttressed by Crush who states that: “Xenophobia has become deeply institutionalized in post-apartheid society. Hostility towards migrants and refugees makes South Africa one of the most migrant unfriendly countries in the world” (Crush and Ramachandran 2009). *Zebra Crossing* indicates that in the months leading up to the World Cup, migrants were living on the edge with xenophobic attacks being a perpetual scare. Meanwhile, before leaving Zimbabwe, George had portrayed South Africa as a hospitable country for fellow Africans due to the World Cup tournament:

Back in Zimbabwe, before we left, George dismissed any possibilities of encountering such troubles: “There is xenophobia everywhere. Even here. Besides, that was long ago. South Africa says they will host the World Cup on behalf of all Africa. Does that sound like a country that plans to turn on its African brothers and sisters?” (80)

Judging by what Chipso says here, she is initially convinced and believes the rhetoric that South Africa would be positively receptive to its African counterparts as it is their event too. However, Vandermerwe’s narrative suggests that xenophobia has a class dimension. While those who were

viewed as genuine tourist were busy being welcomed in Cape Town, the desperate poor migrants were being threatened with violence if they stayed on in the country after the World Cup. Chipso captures this whole ironic situation as she watches down the street from her seventh floor window of her Cape Town central business room: “Below in the street, how many are visitors? Tourists or those just passing through Cape Town? Foreigners like us, yet everyone greets them with open arms because they have money” (85). Tourists are exempt from violent xenophobia because they have not come to look for jobs but to “indulge in the beauty of the surroundings and to play” (Fleishman 2015:11). The differential treatment of foreigners with money and those without during the World Cup exposes the fissures in the slogan that this event was Africa’s moment. The desperate African migrants were clearly seen as undesirable because they compete for scarce resources with impoverished South Africans. It is from poor South Africans that migrants receive threats of violence.

For example, the train ticket inspector who suspects that George’s girlfriend is South African threatens: “Just you wait. When the World Cup is finished, we will drive all you foreigners out! If you stay, you will burn” (81). Interestingly, *Zebra Crossing* suggests that some South African men view all women, whether their girlfriends or not as their property that needs to be protected from foreign competition. Peter indicates that is the reason why George was attacked in the train. He observes: “He attacked you because he thought she was a local girl. That you were stealing their women. You know how they all talk about us taking their South African girls” (81). Dodson and Oelofse (2000:14) concur and attribute this kind of perception to an interpersonal competition between South Africans and the migrants were they are blamed for “flashing money around and stealing women from local men”. George also captures the class dimension in the way in which poor foreigners are treated when he says: “It is just like back home, except here they do not abuse you because you are poor, but because you are poor and a foreigner. South Africa welcomes the

world, my shit!” (81). George’s words suggest that in South Africa, as in Africa in general, the poor, whether immigrant or not are victimized and abused.

According to Sharp (2008a:2), this is a South Africa where

Poor South African nationals see foreign Africans as competing with them for jobs, housing, and other services and resources to which they themselves feel entitled, while wealthier South Africans, black and white, resent paying taxes to provide shelter and services to people seen to be pouring into South Africa to escape political incompetence and economic mismanagement further north.

The narrative suggests that the xenophobia against poor African economic migrants is also perpetuated at the level of government institutions. For example, the narrative indicates that the South African laws do not accommodate economic asylum seekers. This is seen when David and Peter are preparing Chipo and George for Home Affairs to get asylum seekers when they have just arrived in Cape Town. Peter tells them:

*Why did you leave your home country?* This is the most important question. Do not tell them you have come here to look for a job. Starvation will not get you a temporary asylum-seeker’s permit. Tell them you were politically active with the opposition party and feared for your life ... if you are lucky, eventually you will receive refugee status. (36)

The lack of acknowledgement by the South African migration system that individuals can be economic asylum seekers creates a situation where migrants weave a web of lies in order to beat the system. The economic migrants are forced to declare themselves victims of political repression in their home countries in order to obtain temporary asylum seekers’ permits. Chipo captures the dilemma of the economic migrant in the following exclamation: “Ha! Back home we’ll starve and here? here we’ll burn” (81).

These representations of nationalist sentiments whereby natives express negative views towards those who are regarded as not belonging to that particular nation are stigmatized. Vandermerwe then suggests through the portrayal of the xenophobic threats that the World Cup's Pan-Africanism mantra was a myth and did the opposite, that is, to magnify the national imaginings. The narrative embodies Andersons' (1983) claim of "imagined communities" and shows how these ideas of community during the eve of this world cup became powerful enough such that the natives killed for them. Vandermerwe further problematizes these "imagined communities" through Chipo who remarks, "Nationalities sounds like irrationalities." (32)

In light of this, Ndlovu-Gatsheni makes an observations similar to those made by Vandermerwe's characters when they witness the sad realities happening around them. They reiterate that rather than being greeted by a country immersed in the professed values of Ubuntu, the foreigners who came to South Africa on the eve of the World Cup with the hope of cashing in on the economic implications of the "African event", became the target of violent xenophobic attacks as the locals sought to protect their jobs and economic gains that they felt were under siege from the migrants (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). Vandemerwe subtly compares even the sense of othering these migrants and the treatment they were receiving to the way the black South Africans were treated during apartheid years. Although David disagrees that it is not what their "pass books" (88) entail, George insists that they have been reduced to apartheid treatment. Chipo also says: "That's what George has started to call our Home Affairs papers. Pass book. He says that when the whites still ruled South Africa, all the blacks had to carry a pass book. The pass book said who could go where and when." (88)

Ultimately, it dawns on the migrants that indeed that the Pan-Africanism of the Soccer World Cup they were made to believe is a myth as they start fearing for their lives and safety. Chipo confesses: "Before, we looked forward to the arrival of the World Cup. It was something to be celebrated. But now we no longer trust it" (86). The result is that when the government asks

everyone to blow their vuvuzelas at noon in solidarity with the national team Bafana Bafana, they desist. As Chipo watches from her window when local citizens celebrate this euphoric moment she says: “No one blows a thing in our building except maybe their noses. We know this World Cup does not belong to us. No amount of government what-what can convince us otherwise” (p. 130). Instead of the festive mood that is outside, the building where migrants reside has a heavy mood as they contemplate what the count down to the end of the World Cup will bring them.

## **2.6 Negotiating an identity and migrant experiences in Cape Town**

In *Zebra Crossing*, Vandermerwe shows the precarious nature and difficulty of negotiating an identity and livelihood as a migrant. The migrants in the narrative experience discrimination on the basis of their nationality and not belonging to South Africa and thus this means that they are at a disadvantage on a lot of things that the native South Africans would enjoy. This notion of “self” and “other” is pervasive in the narrative and it can be read as a contestation of the prevailing stereotypes on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa. The challenges that they were oblivious to before they arrived are shocked when upon Chipo and George’s arrival they have to live in a single room with their Zimbabwean cousins Peter and David, who are clearly under economic difficulties., Chipo and George are struck by the irony of the name of their building, “President’s Heights” when in reality it is a rundown high rise building occupied mainly by illegal immigrants.

Through the experiences of migrants in Cape Town, Vandermerwe explores the notions of borders, nationality, belonging and identity within the atmosphere of xenophobic threats. The first challenge that the migrant has to face is the shift from their old way of life to the new one in South Africa. This challenge is highlighted by Chipo when David and Peter are taking them on a tour along Long Street to familiarize. After taking in the new information, Chipo feels “dizzy from all this newness”. (31) The statement puts into focus that their new home is “unhomely” (Bhabha 1992). This is not because they do not have a home, but, as Bhabha articulates it, because

they are not yet home in themselves as they are at that moment “psychological refugees” Bhabha (1992). There is the painful reality of the limitations in job opportunities because of their migrant or asylum status. At some point after the whole day searching for a job, David warns George that he does not have freedom to choose a comfortable job especially considering his nationality when he says:

Do not complain ... What did you think? That a company would snap you up and make you a CEO? ... You know Isaiah, the tall waiter from Senegal? An accountant back home. And Jeremiah? They say he was studying for a master’s in electrical engineering at the University of Zimbabwe. (35)

When George becomes too comfortable in Cape Town, David reminds him of his status as a migrant. David’s words make him aware of the hindrances that his nationality brings on his success in the foreign country his level of education notwithstanding.

When David is asked which type of employment is associated with Zimbabweans, he responds that they are mostly waiters and chefs, sometimes cleaners and shop assistants. Other nationalities are not exempt from this categorization when it comes to employment and job opportunities. For example, Somalis are said to be spaza shop operators, Congolese are security guards and poor local South Africans are meat vendors. George reinforces this when he says: “You will find it is like that in Cape Town. Certain nationalities, certain jobs.” (31)

Skills downgrading captures the kind of challenges and experiences that the migrant life presents. As pointed above, qualified engineers and accountants find themselves as waiters and security guards in Cape Town because they are foreigners. Moreover, it is difficult for foreigners to secure decent accommodation. Peter explains:

It is tricky for African foreigners like ourselves to find places to stay. Most landlords require a South African ID, which, if you are a foreigner waiting for your papers, you

do not have. Also proof of employment, bank account details, and so on and so forth.

And a large deposit. (28)

This suggests that the marginalization of African migrants is multifaceted. Since most African migrants do not have South African identity documents it means that they cannot access many services as the words quoted above show. Their migrant status structures, and limits their participation in South African economic and social life. Although the asylum seekers' permit that most of them hold allow them to work and study, it also stigmatizes them and prevents from full access to available economic opportunities. Moreover, an asylum seeker may wait for "years" to get an interview to determine whether an application for refugee status is successful or not (IRIN, 2008, CORMSA, 2008). While asylum seekers wait for status determination, they are expected to have their asylum seeker permits renewed every one or two months at a Department of Home Affairs (DHA) office. This state of affairs is bemoaned by Chipo when they spend the whole day at Home affairs without receiving any service. The Home Affairs personnel are depicted as unconcerned about the plight of migrants. They are portrayed as incompetent and unbothered by the throngs of people outside and even exploit them through soliciting for bribes. Chipo says that Home Affairs officials view them "like fleas that need to be squeezed off." (36). (Cohen 1994: 42) supports this view:

State officials (especially the police, home affairs officials, refugee determination officers and customs agents) do not leave their hostile attitudes at home when they come to work. These are the South Africans who have most face-to-face contact with foreign migrants and refugees and such interactions certainly do not appear to soften their attitudes. Like 'frontier guards' everywhere, their mission is to keep out and remove people they believe should not be in the country in the first place.

These migrants are then expected to always have the permit in their possession once they have it. Failure to produce it when a police officer can result in arrest and deportation. In this regard, the narrator observes:

What is a temporary asylum-seeker's permit? A magic piece of paper. It grants you permission to stay in South Africa while the government considers your permanent-residence application. All foreign Africans must carry it. Once they have a permit, most are so afraid they might lose it that they take it with them everywhere. (37)

If found without this paper, for whatever reason, the migrant is arrested and deported to their home country, "no questions asked" (37). This makes their stay in South Africa very precarious and distressing.

Vandermerwe also shows that migrants are often constructed as thieves and criminals. For example, when the ticket inspector identifies George as a foreigner but mistakes his girlfriend for a local South African girl, he attacks him for that. Peter explains the ideology behind the attack: "He attacked you because he thought she was a local girl, 'that you were stealing their women. You know how they all talk about us taking their South African girls' (81). Having a romantic relationship with a South African girl when one is a foreigner is equated to stealing. This is similar to the apartheid era where different social groups were not allowed to have romantic relationships.

Vandermerwe shows that the police also harbor the same xenophobic sentiments. For example, after George's train assault, the police arrest him although he is the innocent party. George angrily recalls: "And not one of those police bastards did a thing! They arrested us and let him go. It is like back home, except here they do not abuse you because you are poor, but because you are poor and a foreigner" (81). Bloch (2010) concurs with this observation saying: "In general, Zimbabwean migrants do seem to be singled out by

xenophobic citizens and state officials” (Bloch 2010). For instance, David tells of a story of a friend who took ill in 2008 and died due to neglect as he was denied medical attention when rushed to the hospital because he was a Zimbabwean. This is what Crush, J and Tawodzera, G. (2014) term “medical xenophobic”.

Vandermerwe’s fictional depictions expose the contradiction between what the South African constitution says and what actual obtains on the ground. For example, Section 24 of the South African Bill of Rights states that everyone (not just citizens) has a right to have access to healthcare services and that no one can be denied emergency medical services. What happens to characters like the Zimbabwean that David refers to actually dies when he was supposed to have been attended to merely because he is a Zimbabwean migrant, mirror actual cases where migrants have been denied emergency treatment.

Ironically, in their negotiating their precarious existences, migrants are depicted as taking advantage of each other. They survive on wit, they are cunning and devious and utilize any chance to make money. For example, in an attempt to survive and meet living expenses, George, Peter and David arrange a business agreement with Doctor Ongani, a cunning fraudster and together they exploit Chipo’s albinism. They take advantage of the superstitions around her condition to make money from soccer betting that takes place along the city’s infamous Long Street. Their plan, though initially successful and lucrative, subsequently turns dreadful and lead to Chipo’s death. This is illustrative of the precarious nature of migrant life in South Africa that creates monsters in people were murder becomes an opportunity for business.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed the traumatic experiences of the Zimbabwean migrants as they cross into South and negotiate existences and livelihoods there. Through the depictions that Vandermerwe undertakes, she destabilizes the conception that the World Cup of South Africa had the capacity

to unite Africa as a global village. The xenophobic attacks that the migrants faced magnify national imaginings and highlights the discrimination of migrants. Vandermerwe's narrative also shows that migrant experiences differ due to issues of class, race, gender and disability. This chapter provides a background to the Zimbabwean migrations by focusing on the regional dimension of these mobilities. The next chapter examines Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. This narrative is read as initiating literary conversations on the impact that transnational migration has on the African migrants.

## CHAPTER THREE

### When staying is like leaving: Collapsed Zimbabwe and Hostile America

#### 3.1 Introduction and overview

*“When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds*

*escaping a “burning sky” (Bulawayo 2014:145)*

*We Need New Names* (2014), is a novel by Noviolet Bulawayo, a Zimbabwean by birth who moved to the United States of America to pursue her Higher education. She has been living there ever since the age of eighteen. The ten-year old Darling is the narrator and protagonist of the novel. The novel has two main parts, the first, set in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in the post-2000 period which is characterized by political turmoil and unprecedented economic collapse, and the second part is set in Detroit, Michigan in the United States of America. Significantly, both parts of the novel focus on issues of forced mobilities and migrations. These migrations are set in the background of a Zimbabwe that is experiencing a politically induced political collapse which causes an outflow of Zimbabwean migrants to different countries.

This economic and political unrest triggers a deep yearning in Darling to also leave Zimbabwe. She desires to migrate to the United States of America where her aunt Fostalina lives. The novel can be read as exploring the complexities of migration and mobility and its traumatic implications. The novel also deals with the construction of local and diasporic identities of the marginalized cosmopolitans who have migrated to the United States under difficult conditions. The chapter utilizes Bhabha’s notion of vernacular cosmopolitans in its discussion of the narrative’s focus on mobility and migration of desperate individuals.

### 3.2 A Paradise of Pain: Internal Displacements and Mobilities

As already indicated, the first part of the novel is set in a slum settlement which is ironically named Paradise. The narrator captures the agonizing poverty that afflicts both young and old in poignant terms. For example, the first chapter opens with the description of a group of desperate and poverty stricken children of Paradise who are invading a neighboring affluent suburb called Budapest for fruits. The narrative indicates that the children's action is not motivated by a mere love for fruits but by abject poverty induced hunger. The narrator would even risk her mother finding out as they are not allowed to go to Budapest. She says: "Even though Mother would kill me dead if she found out; we are just going. There are guavas to steal in Budapest, and right now I'd rather die for guavas. We didn't eat this morning and my stomach feels like somebody just took a shovel and dug everything out" (p 1). This indicates the poverty that is experienced in Paradise where a meal is not guaranteed and the children have to devise ways to feed themselves. That she says her mother would kill her, reveals the seriousness of the restriction she has but because of the hunger and poverty that is apparent in this slum, she is prepared to face her wrath just to put food in her stomach. The raiding of an affluent suburb by these hungry children prefigures the invasion of neighboring and even distant countries by desperate Zimbabweans during the height of the country's economic collapse and political unrest that the novel relates in later chapters. In this light, Paradise then can be viewed as a microcosm of Zimbabwe and Budapest representing all the seemingly affluent countries to which Zimbabweans want to migrate to.

The narrator states that Paradise emerged when people were uprooted from another location and their houses bulldozed in a disastrous government orchestrated urban slums cleanup exercise. This exercise, discussed in the second chapter, was estimated by the United Nations officials as destroying the homes and livelihoods of up to 700 000 Zimbabwean citizens. Similarly, Barrister (2007:4) argues that Operation Murambatsvina was a very violent process which "led to the

displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, destruction of homes, businesses and property, widespread loss of livelihoods and the injury and deaths of some residents.” The annihilation of the informal business sector and shanty towns around many urban areas resulted in homelessness, joblessness and urban to rural migration. Again, commenting on the effects of this operation, Tibaijuka (2005: 31) states that:

The effects [of the Operation] will be felt for many years to come, across all four dimensions. In social terms, the Operation has rendered people homeless and destitute, and created humanitarian and developmental needs that will require significant investment and assistance over several years. Economically, substantial housing stock has been destroyed, and the informal sector has virtually been wiped out, rendering individuals and households destitute. Local municipalities that used to collect taxes from informal traders have now lost this source of income.

Paradise is thus a product of these forced internal mobilities and as the narrative indicates, these internal displacements result in often painful migrations for a number of Paradise residents. The narrator indicates that the government’s action of forcibly removing people from their homes lead to loss of life, property and great emotional and psychological pain to the helpless victims. The narrator captures the trauma both children and grownups experienced during the demolitions. She says: “[T]he bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming” (p. 65). The use of the collective pronoun “we” indicates that these demolitions were a tragedy that affected all residents. The repetition of screaming does not only emphasize the child narrative view point but also highlights the extent of helplessness suffered by everyone as the reality of losing their homes sank in the hearts of the residents and a sense of uncontrolled desperation assailed all. The narrator also states that at least one child was crushed to death while she slept as the bulldozers demolished the house when her mother was away. About this heart wrenching ordeal, Darling narrates:

My son, my son! What happened? I left my Freedom sleeping in there! Then they are helping her dig through the broken slabs and then Makubongwe appears carrying Freedom, and his small body is so limp and covered in dust you think it's just a thing and not a baby. Nomviyo looks at the thing that is also her son and throws herself on the ground and rolls and rolls, tearing at her clothes until the only thing she has on are her black bra and knickers. (67)

This graphic and traumatic ordeal is reflective of the kind of insensitive action of the government that displaced a great number of people without the provision of alternative residences and thus giving rise to the shanty towns that the people of Paradise now live in. The effects of this ordeal is seen not only to have been the physical displacement and the negative impact to the economy but it was also psychological. Bulawayo shows this through Darling's frequent nightmares that were caused by witnessing the police and military personnel ruthlessly demolishing their houses.

Darling relates:

Even if I want to sleep I cannot because if I sleep the dream will come, and I don't want it to come. I am afraid of the bulldozers and those man and the police ... I dream about what happened back at our house before we came to Paradise. I try to push it away and push it away but the dream keeps coming like bees, like rain, like the graves at Heavenway. (64-65)

Her dreams prefigure the real events. On this, Freud's (1976) concept of free association in dream interpretation is enlightening as Darling's manifest dream content disguises the latent dream thoughts which are based on the psychological traumatic effects of Operation Murambatsvina. Her dreams show how all those affected cannot delete in their minds what happened even if they try to. Thus, these painful internal displacements suffered by the

residents of Paradise can be read as a preview of the countrywide migrations that subsequently ensued as the nation sunk deeper into economic and political turmoil.

Clearly, Bulawayo's juxtaposition of Paradise and Budapest is deliberate. The abject poverty that characterizes Paradise brings to sharp relief the affluence of Budapest which is not far removed since children can reach it on foot. Although mere children, Darling and her friends are able to see that Budapest and Paradise are two worlds apart. One of Darling's friends called Bastard observes: "Budapest is not a kaka toilet for anybody to just walk in, it's not like Paradise" (12). The material differences between Paradise and Budapest are strikingly painful. This is what Darling also says about Budapest:

This place is not like Paradise, it is like being in a different country altogether. A nice country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live. But then you don't see anything to show there are real people living here. (4)

This shows the children's desire to escape the poverty of Paradise and enjoy the affluence of Budapest. The children's raiding of Budapest for fruits therefore anticipates the anxious and desperate migration of thousands of Zimbabweans to foreign countries as economic migrants and political refugees during the height of the country's crisis. However, the narrative shows that not everyone can migrate to other countries. For example, Chipso is one of Darling's friends whose mother engages in cross border hawking. She is away from home for weeks on end and leaves Chipso with a sexually predatory grandfather who rapes and impregnates his own 10-year-old grand-daughter. Similarly, Darling's mother has to be on the move engaged in petty trading to take care of her daughter. On occasions when she is not at home, Darling has to stay with her condescending aunt Mother of Bones, which is not a suitable arrangement as she although innocent, yet exposes her to the predatory nature of their Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro who obviously preys on women. This is evidenced when on one occasion Mother of Bones takes

Darling to her Holy Chariot of Christ church and Darling witnesses this abuse when the Prophet prays for a certain lady. She recounts what happened:

[Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro] leaps onto the woman like maybe he is Hulkogen, squashing her mountains beneath him. Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro prays for the woman like that, pinning her down and calling to Jesus and screaming Bible verses. He places his hands on her stomach, on her thighs, then he puts his hands on her thing and starts rubbing and praying hard for it, like there's something wrong with it. His face is alight, glowing. (40)

All this violation of the woman is done in full sight of everyone, yet they do nothing but clap, sing and dance. This is an unsuitable environment even for adults let alone Darling and other children who are also present. The narrative shows that this is an undesirable arrangement for raising up a child but the precarious economy leaves many parents with no choice but to engage in constant desperate movements for survival. Since they see their parents struggling just to put food on the table, it is no wonder that Darling's and her friends' strongest ambition is to permanently get out of the country. Darling and her friends present Zimbabwe as a hostile failed state that has nothing to offer its citizens economically. Unfortunately, the narrative reveals that these children have developed utopian views of the countries that they wish to go to when they grow up. They openly say they want leave the "rags" of a country they live in.

Bulawayo's narrative suggests that against the background of a collapsed Zimbabwe, characterized by political, economic and social instability, migration is seen as the best solution for the desperate citizens and mobility and migration are depicted as forms of resilience and survival. While the people who now reside in Paradise were forcibly moved from where they lived, the narrative shows that the many Zimbabweans who also become economic migrants are

forced by desperation to move. Darling's father for example, migrates to South Africa in search of work. Similarly, many men in his situation are forced to neighboring South African as we saw in Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*. Darling's father has a university degree. Despite this fact, the narrative shows that he cannot get employment and is forced to leave for South Africa like the majority of the men in the narrative.

*We Need New Names* shows that migration and mobility have no straightforward correlation with economic success and social upward mobility. There is a possibility that one might migrate and still not make it economically. However, people are so desperate and are even willing to die trying than staying put in a country that has become like a slum due to economic challenges. The novel presents stories of people who either died as fugitives in countries of their refuge and those who died in the crocodile infested Limpopo River while trying to illegally cross into South Africa. There are also those that come back having caught diseases from working in dangerous mining conditions. The narrator gives the example of Makhosi who comes back from Madante mine, a local mine in Zimbabwe with chronic and potential fatal chest disease. The narrator says:

Two years ago Makhosi went away to Madante mine to dig for diamonds, when they were first discovered and everybody was flocking there. When Makhosi came back, his hands were like decaying logs. He told us about Madante between bad bouts of raw, painful coughs, how when he was under the earth he forgot everything. (23)

This is evidence that these internal and external mobilities do not guarantee an economic upward mobility as migrants expect. Instead some of them come back worse in terms of monetary gain and health. Makhosi comes back with this serious chest disease and subsequently migrates to South Africa after getting better like other men. This is because “growing unemployment and economic hardship prompted some households to look

elsewhere for economic livelihoods, either in the urban informal economy or outside the country or both.” (Crush et al 2015)

The children perceive their own country as dirty and worthless and refer to any country seen as offering better economic opportunities as “country-country”. In their choice of countries in their game called country game were they choose countries they want to be, they fight to be first world countries like Britain, Australia, Canada, Greece and Germany. Even third world countries such as Dubai, Botswana, South Africa are regarded as better than Zimbabwe. Darling especially, reveres America. This is seen in her explanation of her country game. She says: “If I’m lucky, like today, I get to be the U.S.A, which is a country-country; who doesn’t know that the U.S.A is the big baboon of the world? I feel like it’s my country now because my aunt Fostalina lives there” (49). In light of Darling’s challenges when she finally makes it to the United States of America, it is evident that this is a childhood and naïve delusional view that America is a “country-country”. Her challenging experiences as a migrant eventually teach her that even the so-called country-countries have their own problems.

These comparisons become the basis for migration since Zimbabwe is viewed as inferior when compared to America. De Hass (2011: 32) argues that the option of migration becomes even more attractive when the underdevelopment and poverty of a poor country heightens and especially so if there is a community of pioneers that have already gone abroad, providing information, potentially sponsoring families and providing a safe arrival, as in Darling’s case who has an aunt already living in the United States of America.

### **3.3 Privileged Travel and the Flow of Global Finance and Cultural Capital**

As way of contrast, the novel also depicts several movements which I term privileged mobilities as opposed to the desperate and precarious movements just discussed above. For example, while in the desperate guava expedition in Budapest, Darling and her friends encounter a young lady

who is visiting from London and seems to take a keen interest in them. This lady's situation shows the reasons for one's travel determines the kind of lifestyle and reception that one gets in the host country. This young lady travels for amusement rather than for survival. She is a tourist and everything is new and exciting for her. When she gets to the USA, Darling hears of an American young woman who has travelled to South Africa and equates Africans to tourist attractions as she speaks of them in the same note of interest and wonder as when she speaks of The Table Mountain and Robben Island. The way the narrator describes her highlights that her presence in Africa is a result of privileges and this accentuates the poverty of Darling and her friends. While Darling has been in desperate search for food, raiding guava trees, the woman seems unaware of the children's hunger. We are told that she throws away some food that she has been eating and is quite amused about it. Darling says: "We have never ever seen anyone throw food away" (7). The woman is far removed from the children's world of suffering that she cannot even see the obvious hunger that marks their entire being. She tells the kids that she is thirty-three and is from London and adds: "This is my first time visiting my dad's country" (7). The narrative suggests that while she wears a T-shirt written "Save Darfur" her attachment to Africa is merely sentimental as she lacks understanding of the depth of suffering in the continent. When Bastards remarks that the woman looks "only fifteen, like a child" (8), she is amused and says: "Thank you, I just came off the Jesus diet" (8).

This is a biblical allusion to the forty days fast that Jesus Christ underwent and thus suggesting that her thin frame is as a result of her fast. This deliberate refrain from eating is ironic as the children are themselves hungry outside of choice. The narrative contrasts this woman's privileges with the perilous existence of the kids which she seems unable to even imagine.

The narrative highlights that to this woman, the poverty of these kids is mere art. Instead offering some of her food which she has just thrown away, the woman requests to take a picture of these children. Oblivious of the children's real needs, the narrator says the woman's "camera is clinking

and clinking and clinking” (9) until one of the children abruptly moves away in annoyance and the rest follow him leaving the woman standing alone in confusion. Suddenly, the kids start shouting at her. The narrator reports: “We shout and we shout and we shout, we want to eat the thing she was eating, we want to hear our voices soar, we want our hunger to go away” (10). These words emphasize the gulf in experience that exists between the woman and these children. She obviously cannot comprehend the sudden anger of the children who seemed docile and pleasant just moments ago and the angry and threatening crowd of little individuals that she now faces. The narrator captures the confusion of the woman and the turn of events: “The woman just looks at us puzzled ... and then quickly hurries back into the house” (10). The woman’s confusion and fear indicates how little she understands the challenges that these children have to deal with on a daily basis.

This photo incident with the British young woman foreshadows a similar one with the NGO people, who after delivering their aid and gifts to Paradise residents also seem obsessed with taking photos of the poverty stricken residents and children. Darling relates one such incident this way:

After we sit down, the man starts taking pictures with his big camera. They just like taking pictures, these NGO people ... They don’t care that we would prefer they didn’t do it; they just take pictures anyway, take and take. We don’t complain because we know that after the picture-taking comes the giving of gifts. (52)

The narrator suggests that after traveling many kilometers to help the residents of Paradise from their poverty with food aid and other items, the NGO people then hold people at ransom by first taking pictures without the people’s consent. Likely they need the pictures to convince their donors of the poverty of the aid’s recipients. However, the narrator’s tone indicates that there is some coercion in the whole process and the actions of NGO staffers may be an instance of what

Moyd (2016: 96) calls “uncritical and unregulated humanitarianisms”. The people allow themselves to be photographed simply because they know that the food aid and other gifts would follow thereafter.

The NGO camera man seems to be attracted by the negative stereotypical depiction of Africa that characterizes mainstream western media. For example, when the camera man sees the 10-year-old pregnant Chipo he is dumbfounded but when he recovers he photographs her as if she were a celebrity. The narrator says:

When he sees Chipo, with her stomach, he stands there so surprised I think he is going to drop the camera. Then he remembers what he came here to do and starts taking away again, this time taking lots of pictures of Chipo. It’s like she has become Paris Hilton, it’s all just click-flash-flash-click (53).

The photographer does the same with Bastard with his tattered and worn out shorts that reveal his backside. There is a way in which although most Paradise residents will never travel out of their country, their images will travel the globe in international newspapers and magazines. Darling’s questions to her friends show that she is conscious of the mobility of their images. She asks: “Who will look at your picture? ... Who will see our pictures? (53). About the NGO’s people apparent obsession with photos, a character in short story titled “Delivery” in the anthology *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008), observes: “Photographs were needed to placate the unhappy donors – that was the short version” (22). Both this observation and Bulawayo’s attitude towards the role of NGOs in Africa are aptly summarized by Moyd when he writes: “Humanitarianism in its current form relies, whether consciously or not, on a white-savior ideal, which positions the Global North as donors (whether institutional or individual) and the Global South as helpless recipients of aid” (2016: 95). This view leads to instances of what (Small 2015: 342) calls the

exoticization of African poverty; in the case of Bulawayo's narrative this exoticization is seen through the aid's organization obsession with pictures of 'real suffering'.

There is yet another incident that involves the mobility of the images of suffering of Paradise's residents this time through the motion picture of the British Broadcasting Corporation camera man. During the burial of one Bonfree, a political activist apparently murdered by ruling party agents, the actions of the BBC camera man are described exactly in the same manner as when the British young woman takes the group photo of the kids in search of guavas in Budapest. The narrator says: "The BBC man clicks and clicks away at his camera like he is possessed" (136). As already discussed, the NGO photographer who goes into a photo-frenzy when he sees the pregnant Chipu is also depicted in a similar manner. Later, the BBC men return with their cameras to capture Darling and her friends at the cemetery, they are initially unaware that they are re-enacting Bornfree's violent murder and his heart-wrenching burial. When Darling and her friends finally discover that they were being secretly filmed, she reports: "They are watching us with their things, standing there among graves. The camera clicks a few times, taking our pictures" (143-145). The narrative suggests that both the film of the children's tragic-play and their pictures will electronically travel around the world as it will be shown on British Broadcasting Corporation. As this film and the pictures circulate on electronic and other media, there is a sense in which the filmed and captured subjects experience an uncanny motionless mobility around the world as their suffering is commercialized.

While promoting the virtual mobility of the poor in the form of photographs and film documentaries, there is a sense in which the food aid of the NGOs participates in curbing the actual migration and mobility of the poor. Instead of the poor actively moving in search of economic opportunities, or actively seeking for "systemic changes that offer hope for real solutions to dire problems" (Moyd 2016: 94), the narrative suggests that the humanitarian NGO

aid encourages immobile docility and “perpetuate inequalities” (Moyd 96). This is made clear in Darling’s description of the Paradise’s children reaction towards the NGO people. She says:

This time the NGO people are late, they were supposed to come on the fifteenth of last month and that month came and went and now we are on another ... Finally it arrives, churning dust, like an angry monster. Now we are singing and screaming like we are proper mad. We bare our teeth and thrust our arms upwards. We tear the ground with our feet. We squint in the dust and watch the doors of the lorry, waiting for the NGO people to come out, but we don’t stop singing and dancing. We know that if we do it hard, they will be impressed, maybe they will give us more, give and give until we say, NGO, please do not kill us with your gifts! (51)

Even children have memorized the timetable of the aid’s arrival. When it does arrive, the almost choreographed excitement of the children suggests a disturbing dependency syndrome that the aid has nurtured. While this aid is necessitated by the economic collapse of Zimbabwe, Darling’s observations reveal the dependency syndrome that has been fostered by this aid. The aid items that are given to the children illustrate the truthfulness of Fassin’s (2012: 7) argument that the humanitarianism “fugaciously and illusorily bridges the contradictions of our world, and makes the intolerableness of its injustices somewhat bearable”. Some of the items are useless trinkets and at times have a potential to socialize the children negatively, such as the toy guns. For example, Darling says: “Each one of us gets a toy gun, some sweets, and something to wear; I get a T-shirt with the word Google at the front, plus a red dress that is tight at the armpits” (55). Bastard gets a T-shirt written Cornell University. The words on these T-shirt are suggestive of the uncanny mobility of global capital and what Moyd calls the “embeddedness in global capital flows” (2016: 95). Bulawayo’s narrative suggests that privileged travel provides a platform for globalization and multinationalism.

Moreover, the attitude of the NGO staffers betrays a condescending attitude towards those they are giving aid. Darling indicates even children are able to sense this lack of empathy from the NGO staffers. She comments: “We are careful not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them” (54). Of course the negative attitude of the NGO staffers does not necessarily mirror the attitude of those who actually donate the goods or the motivations of the founders of such organizations.

### **3.4 Precarious Mobilities and Underprivileged Cosmopolitans: Migrant Experiences in the United States of America**

*“Leaving your country is like dying, and when you come back you are like a ghost returning to earth, roaming with missing gaze in your eyes”.* (Bulawayo 2014:160)

The second half of Bulawayo’s novel depicts the precarious migrations of the desperate Zimbabweans and also shows that when they arrive in their countries of refuge, they become underprivileged migrants. This second part of the novel, set in Michigan, in the United States of America relates the life of Darling as a migrant. In a poetic passage, the narrator captures the Zimbabweans’ forced migrations:

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing – to all over, to countries near and far, to countries

unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves. (145)

This passage captures the desperation that drove the thousands of Zimbabweans to leave their country. While some were driven by ambition and hope, the majority were propelled by loss and pain. Darling is part of the throng that is pushed by the hope of a better life when she migrates to the United States of American. The repetition of the phrase “crossing borders” in the above quotation points to the focus of the narrative. This is a border that does not simply correspond to the geopolitical lines and territorial divisions between nation states – Zimbabwe and the United States do not, of course, share a national border – but also to a plurality of processes responsible for segmenting, shaping and recombining space and time, to sites of “political, cultural, and social mobility”, as well as to the “symbolic dimension” of the border as a marker of social, linguistic and cultural difference (Sandro and Neilson (2013:14-16) The narrative shows that migrating to first world countries does not necessarily equate to the upward mobility as Darling naively imagined when she was still in Paradise.

*We Need New Names* is structured in the form of bildungsroman. There is an evident development of Darlings’ ideas as she grows older. Before leaving Paradise, Darling has idealistic ideas about the USA and imagines that America is a real paradise as opposed to the misnomer of her squatter settlement home back in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe that Darling and others flee is afflicted by all sorts of political, economic and social challenges. The first half of the novel shows that the country is under a severe economic meltdown that is induced by an irresponsible and violent ruling party. We saw how Paradise is a result of urban displacement initiated and carried out with vengeful zeal by the agents of the ruling party. The economic problems lead to high employment which lives households divided as fathers become economic migrants in South Africa and mothers become cross-border traders. This leads to social problems such as unsupervised children. For example, Darling and her gang no longer attend school and spend time in search of

food. We also saw how the 10-year-old Chipo is raped and made pregnant by her own grandfather while the mother is away at the border post eking a precarious livelihood. Spouses leaving in forced separation also leads to spiraling HIV and AIDS cases as we witness Darlings father coming back home from South Africa suffering from full blown AIDS.

All these problems and many more make Darling and many other Zimbabweans imagine that life in any other country would be much better than what they are experiencing. In the eyes of Darling and suffering fellow citizens, Zimbabwe and many other countries experiencing political turmoil are “rags of countries ... terrible place(s) of hunger and things falling apart” (49). On the other hand, countries in the developed world are cast in idealistic terms. Darlings’ eventual relocation to the USA is used to demolish the idealistic ideas about developed countries that the suffering Zimbabweans hold. Darling and other migrants are depicted as facing different complications in America.

Bulawayo’s narrative suggests that there are numerous anxieties and uncertainties that afflict the would-be migrant, his or her relatives and friends about the anticipated migration. For example, Darling’s aunt Mother of Bones is anxious about the prospect of never seeing her niece again once she goes to America. Bastard, Darling’s friend also remarks: “America is too far, you midget ... I don’t want to go anywhere where I have to go by air. What if you get there and find it’s a kaka place and get stuck and can’t come back?” (14). Indeed, as per Bastard’s fears, Darling and other migrants come to realize, America has its own problems and some of these problems afflict mainly the migrants.

Ironically, Darling suffers a longing for home and cannot fully connect to her new home due to cultural shock and other adjustments she has to make. First Darling has to adjust to the weather. She arrives in Michigan during winter and finds the extremely cold weather disconcerting and it makes her nostalgic of home. About the weather she says: “With all this snow, with the sun not

there, with the cold and dreariness, this place doesn't look like my America, doesn't even look real" (150). This suggests that migrants have their own idealized images about the places they want to go to in their desperate attempt to escape the economic and political challenges in their own countries. Darling's words suggest that for most migrants, the cost of relocating to a distant land needs to be carefully assessed since it cannot simply be measured in monetary terms. Darling's observations about the weather shows that the radically different weather pattern is enough to make some migrants descend into depression.

The dreary weather makes Darling miss home terribly. She says: "If I were home I know I would not be standing around because something called snow was preventing me from going outside to live" (153). But then she reminds herself that although she would enjoy playing in the sunny weather with her friends, they "wouldn't be having enough food" (153). For this reason, she declares: "[W]hich is why I will stand being in America dealing with snow; there is food to eat here, all types of food" (153). Darling's experiences in America can be read as a cautionary tale to all migrants who may have an idealized picture of America. While the migrants will likely have enough to eat in America, the narrative suggests that the migrants have to brace themselves for other challenges that may be very painful to endure in their countries of refuge. Darling hints at one of these challenges; an insatiable hunger for home which cannot be satisfied with physical food. She says: "There are times, though, that no matter how much food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country and nothing is going to fix that" (153). Considering that Darling was obsessed with wanting to migrate to America when she was still in Paradise, her dissatisfaction with America now and her nostalgia about the very place she wanted to escape from, may seem puzzling. Dlamini (2009) calls what Darling is experiencing native nostalgia. This is the kind of nostalgia that imagines positively even those instances of the past which at the time of experiencing them were in fact painful.

Darling also highlights the pressure that female migrants have to conform to the American notions of beauty. Aunt Fostalina for example has become obsessed with strenuous workouts in order to have the idealized body of television models. Uncle Kojo, Aunt Fostalina's Ghanaian husband is concerned with what he calls the un-African physique that his wife is trying so hard to maintain. During one of Aunt Fostalina's compulsive workouts, Uncle Kojo says:

What are you doing to yourself, Fostalina, really-exactly-what? ... Look at you, bones bones bones. All bones. And for what? They are not even African, those women you are doing like ... That there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind. (151)

Aunt Fostalina's case indicates that African women migrants in America have undue pressure to have what is perceived as the feminine physique by mainstream American popular culture. Uncle Kojo's concern suggests that while Aunt Fostalina's slimming regime may seem like a harmless personal matter, it actually has a potential of destroying their marriage. This becomes evident when Uncle Kojo says his mother upon seeing their pictures exclaimed and advised: "Ah ah ah, my son, oh, please please please feed your wife and don't nah bring her here looking like this, you will embarrass us" (152). The fact that by the end of the narrative Uncle Kojo and Aunt Fostalina seem to be drifting apart is evidence of their failure to handle the many pressures of their migrant condition. Darling's experiences in the United States of America demonstrates that migration intensifies the subaltern position of people from developing countries. This is because they can never really rise and be what they want as most of them are undocumented migrants and thus the employment they get is often low income jobs and this maintains them in subaltern positions. Commenting on this, Darling bemoans:

And the jobs we worked, Jesus-Jesus-Jesus, the jobs we worked. Low-paying jobs. Backbreaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat,

tongued the marrow. We took scalding irons and ironed our pride flat. We cleaned toilets. We picked tobacco and fruit under the boiling sun until we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds ... We got sick but did not go to hospitals, could not go to hospitals. (244)

This means that the migrants, because of their statuses as migrants would live in the underbelly and live under the hardest conditions with no hope of an upgrade. This fact that they could not even go to the hospital when they fall sick because they are afraid that they would be sent back to their countries since their visitors' visas would have expired, illustrates the heavy price of being a migrant and the cost they have to pay to be there. They even have to take up more than one job because of the low incomes that they make. This is the case with Aunt Fostalina and Ucle Kojo. Darling notes: "Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo are always at work, and T.K comes home only to sleep, like it's a hotel" (200). Aunt Fostalina has two jobs and when she comes back home "her body look[s] like a sack" (205). As a result, migrants are always exhausted and adults do not have time to supervise children. This lack of adult supervision leads Darling and her friends to entertain themselves with violent pornographic movies. There is also evidence that Uncle Kojo's son TK whom he had with an American woman was brought up with very little parental supervision. He shows complete disregard and disrespect for his father's authority and one time he calls his father a "patriarchal motherfucker" (156).

Darling's migration also results in her subtle loss of identity as she cannot claim American citizenship while at the same time her friends and others back in Zimbabwe assume that she has lost the moral right to identify as one of them. This is dramatized on one occasion when Darling phones home and speaks to her childhood friend Chipu. Darling claims to empathize with people at home due to the economic and political problems that she sees on television. Chipu reacts angrily because she claims that Darling has lost the right to identify with their pain. She says:

But you are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No, you don't, my friend, it's the wound that knows the texture of the pain; it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have a right to even say anything about that or anything and anybody. (285)

In a sense, Chipo equates Darling with the NGO people that annoyed them when they were children as she accuses her of merely taking Zimbabwean problems at superficial level and from afar. Chipo's outburst shows that migration has far reaching complexities since it problematizes the concept of home or ones' claim to a homeland. Chipo clearly begrudges Darling for having left Zimbabwe and then subsequently embracing the suffering of those who remained. She tells Darling: "If it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it" (286). Chipo's words echo what Ranger has called ZANU PF's (Zimbabwe's ruling party since 1980) "patriotic history" (2004: 215). This involves seeing all Zimbabweans who have migrated as unpatriotic traitors deserving to be shunned and punished when they try to come back home. Chipo's words raise problematic questions about belonging or lack of it. For example, Uncle Kojo has been in America for more than 32 years but still does not have an American citizenship.

Bulawayo's narrative suggests that the migration experience results in an internal turmoil in migrants which causes identity crisis. One's identity is the totality of one's self and this is constructed by how one construes oneself in the present, how one construed oneself in the past and how one aspires to construe oneself in the future. This definition is important in the understanding of how Darling and other characters in the narrative construct identities for themselves that are influenced by their past and influences from their home countries but deeply entrenched in the present. In America, Darling, undergoes a gradual metamorphosis of her identity, one that is unconscious and fostered by her status as an underprivileged migrant. This is a forced change, a new identity forged so as to fit in America. This is evidenced when she confesses to the change by stating:

when I first arrived at Washington [Academy]the other kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair [...] the way I dressed [...] When you are being teased about something, at first you try to fix it so the teasing can stop. (165)

She also confesses:

I did write [letters to other kids back home]. In those letters I told them about America, the kinds of things I was eating, the clothes I wore, the music I was listening to, the celebrities and stuff. But I was careful to leave out some things as well, like how the weather was the worst because there was almost always something wrong with it, either too hot or too cold, the hurricanes and stuff. That the house we lived in wasn't even like the one we had seen on TV, how it wasn't made of bricks but planks and how it rained those planks got mold and smelled. (187)

All these things, incorporating colloquial language in her speech, painting a rosy picture to those left behind in Zimbabwe, is the kind of identity that Darling has to create for herself to make up for the psychological trauma that the migration experience has subjected her to. Bulawayo correctly suggests this in the narrative that the migrants will never be the same because they left Zimbabwe, leaving behind who they were and what they were.

Bulawayo's narrative shows that one of the main challenges of being a migrant is the lack of documentation that regularizes one's stay in America. As a result, some migrants engage in devious schemes in order to legalize their residency status. For example, a character called Dumi, marries Stephanie, a fat ugly white Native American woman because he wants to use their marriage to get permanent residence in America. All of them, from Darling who ends up eating less because she fails to adapt to the fork and knife culture, to a fake American accent through learning it from the cartoons from the television, Aunt Fostalina who has to go on a torturous diet and extensive work outs to get the "American body" and the rest of them who have to perform

certain things to survive, are struggling with the burden of being a migrant. The migrants' challenges prove true Berndt's (2005) observation that identity in a hybrid culture consists of different layers that contradict or complement each other.

Another challenge that faces many migrants is that of language. The inability to speak English with a Native American accent impedes their ability to adequately express themselves and enjoy a comprehensive social life. This is illustrated in the narrative on one occasion when Aunt Fostalina has communication challenges with a white girl on the phone because of accent and pronunciation differences. Afterwards, Aunt Fostalina is so agitated by her experience that she goes to the basement to practice pronouncing words the American way. Through an incident like this one, the narrative highlights how migrants are forced to come to terms with the "indelible mark of Africanness on their bodies and speech, creating an identity crisis" (Nesbitt 2005:141).

Bulawayo's narrative highlights the ambivalence of a migrant status. On the one hand, the migrant in the western conurbations suffers many challenges such as a lukewarm welcome, being looked down upon and being viewed with skepticism and mistrust amidst deplorable living conditions and few economic opportunities. On the other hand, in the countries of their origin, migrants are highly regarded and thought of as elite diasporas who have economically made it. This complicates the migrants' life as they are expected to send remittances back home even when they cannot afford it. This results in emotional and physical strain for the migrants as they often overwork themselves in an attempt to keep up with the unreasonable expectations of those who remain home.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

My analysis has revealed that *We Need New Names* is preoccupied with the inhospitable nature of Zimbabwe amidst the period of hyperinflation and economic upheavals and that of America as a host country to those who have migrated there to seek refuge. Bulawayo's narrative exposes

the realities of a Zimbabwean government and ruling party that orchestrated the displacement of its own people through “Operation Murambatsvina” amongst many other brutalities. Bulawayo shows that these brutalities cause the mass out migrations that she likens to the scurrying and scattering of birds escaping from a burning sky. The squatter camp of Paradise is borne out of political instabilities amidst the economic meltdown and migration becomes an enticing possibility and solution for most Zimbabweans. Bulawayo depicts both the deplorable conditions in Zimbabwe and in America in order to show that while they may be economic and political push factors for migration in countries of origin, the economic and social pull factors in receiving countries are not always what they seem. Migrants such as Darling are disappointed when they finally arrive in America because they discover that their idealized picture of the country is incorrect. Through the analysis of Chikwava’s Harare North, the next chapter, illustrates the precarity of the lives of the underprivileged cosmopolitans in developed countries.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Zimbabweans Ways of migrating and Migrants' Dislocations in the post-2000 period**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

*Harare North* (2010) by Brian Chikwava dramatizes the catastrophic effects of President Robert Mugabe's regime by following the challenging lives of Zimbabwean migrants in London, England. At the time of writing the novel, Chikwava himself was an economic migrant in London having moved there in 2004. Narrated by a young male Zimbabwean nameless narrator who has migrated to London, the novel depicts the precarious economic and social situation of Zimbabweans in London. Using a humorously broken English, Chikwava also explores the narrator's sense of self and the journey he takes through the creation of the relationships with relatives and friends. He portrays the internal struggles the narrator and other Zimbabwean migrants go through.

Chikwava depicts the Zimbabwean deplorable political, social and economic conditions as having pushed its citizens into perilous migrations. It is the strife ridden and deteriorating conditions that sees the flocking out of the economically exasperated middle and low class Zimbabweans to London, which they call Harare North because of the huge numbers of desperate Zimbabweans who are now residents there. This satirical renaming of London after Zimbabwe's capital city highlights Chikwava's condemnation of the Zimbabwean government's misrule which has resulted in these desperate migrations of its citizens. The title of Chikwava's novel signals that the author is keen on exposing those responsible for the mass migrations of Zimbabweans who have fallen victim to the country's largely politically induced economic difficulties.

## 4.2 Internal Displacements and Mobilities

Chikwava's novel indicates that the volatile Zimbabwean political and economic conditions create internal displacements and forced mobilities. For example, the farm invasions that lead to the killing of the farm manager by the narrator and his gang result not only in the forced relocation of the white farmers but that of their black workers as well. Similarly, while in London the narrator is told that the government wants to forcibly take the land where his mother is buried because precious stones have been discovered there. The narrator's reaction to this disturbing news shows how the whole process of villagers' forced relocation has psychologically and emotionally destabilized them especially in light of the idea that most Zimbabweans consider the grave sites of their relatives and ancestors as sacrosanct. From this perspective, their forced internal mobilities can be viewed as spiritually disruptive. This is shown by the narrator's desire to conduct his dead mothers' ceremony at the location she is buried and not anywhere else. He is frustrated by the level of the authorities' indifference and that they seem oblivious of the importance of peoples' burial rituals and traditions. The narrator says:

Soon mother's grave maybe end up being dig up by some machine, get wash  
by rain and she bones come out in the open and get bleached by sun just like  
bones of dead bird and no one is going to care. (74)

On the other hand, the narrator's love and fear for his mothers' remains to be dug up and being carelessly disposed of mirrors the love that he has for his nation and the fear of its destiny in the context of a crisis that is forcing people to migrate. Her spirit that is restless and wandering in the wilderness waiting the day of the 'umbuyiso' ceremony can be read as a metaphor the diasporic Zimbabweans who are wandering in foreign lands waiting to 'come back' home after the crisis has been resolved. The narrator also shows that ordinary people have been victims of forced mobilities in both white colonial and black majority governments. He states: "This village,

Mother's family have been there since 1947 when they was moved from fertile land in Mazoe because the land have been given as reward to some British Second World War veteran. Now they have to move again?" (74)

The narrator's remarks reveal a layered process of internal forced mobilities and displacements facilitated by both the colonial and post-colonial governments. It must be noted that even the village where the narrator's mother is buried came into existence as a result of a colonially motivated displacement of indigenous people. Through the narration of these experiences, the novel exposes a double traumatic experience that villagers and their ancestors have experienced at the hands of successive egoistic governments.

The narrative demonstrates that there is an emotional connection to the physical spaces that the people inhabit and shows that forced movements are problematic and disruptive. Mitchell (2004: 12) argues that space brings about place attachment since people connect to places and develop identity bonds, perceptions and practices. This is the reason why displacement, forced or voluntary, proves traumatic to the victims. The narrator indicates that these displacements which are conducted by the elite for their economic aggrandizement and political advantage cannot be limited to the people who live in farms and rural areas but extends to the urban areas. In urban areas, the political leaders are shown as desperately clinging on to political power and at the same time resorting to callous methods in dealing with citizens who are perceived as a threat to their hegemony. In reference to MaiShingi, the narrator says:

[S]he bawl that the government have send bulldozers to demolish people's houses and they new four room house have been demolished in second wave of Operation Murambatsvina. Now many people become homeless, Zimbabwe is no more she cry. (204)

This is an allusion to the events of 2005 and the successive years where the Zimbabwean government engaged in urban demolition of what it called slums and illegal buildings, a process that left many people homeless. In the previous chapter, I also discussed how Bulawayo shows how the Paradise squatter settlement came into being as a result of these same demolitions of people's homes. As I have already pointed out above, some political commentators argue that this was a calculated strategy to depopulate the cities of the discontented citizens who were assumed to be opposition party supporters. For example, Hammar and Raftopoulos (2003: 219) suggests that this operation served to revive a waning hegemony as ZANU PF sought to regain the lost ground brought about by people's discontentment about the unilateral constitution amendments in the year 2000. The formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) prior to this indicated that ZANU PF was losing support. This consequently forced the party to resort to depopulating the cities that were perceived to be opposition party's strongholds. Indeed, the ferocity of the operation and the fact that it proceeded without the government having consulted the citizens, suggests that the operation was more than just mere cleaning up the cities. (Chikwava 301). Clearly, the displacements and forced mobilities served the interest of the ruling party as in the case where the people were violently displaced from their villages when precious minerals were discovered as related in the text. It has been amply documented that the mining of these minerals do not benefit the villagers or the country as a whole but a few political elites. For example, Towriss (2013:101) postulates that ZANU PF politicians and retired national security agents have been allowed to loot the natural resources in the country in a bid to strengthen their political positions. In particular, the Marange diamonds that were discovered in June 2006, that yield up to one thousand seven hundred billion dollars per annum (Towriss 2013:99), had the potential to breathe life into the waning Zimbabwean economy and the immediate communities where they were found. Sadly, at present as Chikwava's narrative shows, these are benefitting only the political elite of the country.

The narrative indicates that the ordinary people are not under any illusion that their relocation by government will lead to the development of their area and to their economically improved livelihoods. This view is voiced by Sekai in one of her telephonic conversations with her relatives who are still in Zimbabwe. She says: “Now that emeralds have been discovered there we will soon hear that the area has been taken over by some minister’s company” (23). This shows that these internal displacements and forced mobilities benefit only those holding positions in government. The so-called urban destruction code-named Operation Murambatsvina, the fast-track land redistribution program and the displacement of villagers from their homes affect them psychologically and further compounds their economic challenges. These internal displacements and forced mobilities become one of the reasons that force Zimbabweans to migrate to the developed countries and surrounding southern African countries.

The fast-track land redistribution exercise depicted in the novel is shown to have aggravated people’s economic woes and further escalated the number of both economic and political migrants. The exercise creates a polarized political situation whereby those that are for the land redistribution are “sons and daughters of the soil” (Chikwava 19) and those who are seen as against are referred to as “traitors and enemies” (19) deserving to be tormented and tortured. This is illustrated by the narrator when he gives an account of their manhandling an opposition party supporter. He says: “When we get to them tall trees we only ask him why they attack the sons and daughters of the soil, but the traitor say the soil belong to the white man” (19). The imagery evoked by the narrator’s words about the goal of Green Bombers “to smoke them enemies of the state out of they corrugated-iron hovels and scatter them across the earth” (8) illustrates this polarization and the resultant displacement of those perceived as enemies of the state. The narrator’s violent vocabulary draws from the Zimbabwean hegemonic discourse that attended the violent land dispossessions of white farmers in the early years of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The irony of cause is that these words are uttered by one who eventually became a victim

of this displacement process although he initially viewed himself as safe because of being the son of the soil.

The narrator correctly points out that the land imbalance which enables the embattled Zimbabwean regime to use it as a survival political tool was a result of violent land dispossession of the natives by white colonialists. The narrator talks of “how in the 1890s them British fat stomachs grab our land, pegging them farms by riding horse until it drop dead; that just mark only one side of farm boundary and that’s where the corner peg go (19). Commenting on this passage, Ndlovu (2016) remarks:

If prevailing post-colonial Zimbabwean land ownership is founded on such obscene injustices, it is perhaps not surprising that nationalist demagogues marshal such a history in order to justify the committing of crimes of similarly disproportionate scale. (36)

Significantly, it was the migration of the whites into Zimbabwe and their dispossession of the indigenous people of their land which is shown to be now causing all these other mobilities and migrations. This highlights the contrast in the forms of migration that are depicted in the text where the colonialist migrations are seen to have been privileged. The previous illustration were the colonialists are said to have ridden a horse until it drops dead to peg a corner and then taking another one to peg the next corner, is evidence of this. The narrator shows that the colonialists’ economic privileges were a result of political conquest and therefore did not face the form of challenges inherent in the forms of underprivileged mobilities that the Zimbabwean migrants in the novel face.

#### **4.3 Time–space and Precarious Diasporic Identities**

Migration involves the traversing of space through movement from a certain point to another, in the case of Chikwava’s narrative characters migrate from Zimbabwe to London. The title of the

novel is itself a reference to the traversing of two spaces that have been connected through unwilling movements of desperate Zimbabweans. Harare North is in fact London so named because of the large numbers of Zimbabwean immigrants who settle in London in the UK, thereby making it symbolically a second Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. In this regard, Ndlovu (2016: 34) observes: “Despite being set in London, *Harare North* has as one of its preoccupations the depiction of the unfolding and on-going economic and political drama in Zimbabwe”. Therefore, *Harare North* can be seen as Chikwava’s attempt to link Zimbabwe as a post-colonial space with its erstwhile colonizer, Britain, through the migration of Zimbabweans at a time of politically induced economic problems whose roots are shown to stretch all the way to colonial processes of over a century ago. Chikwava’s title reduces London to an extension of the Zimbabwean capital, Harare. In Chikwava’s novel, two spaces play an important role. First, is the space or place of origin or departure where the migrant comes from, and second, is the space or place of arrival where the migrant seeks refuge. The narrative shows that both spaces and places are hostile. This is to say that there are conditions in the place of origin that force people to migrate. At the same time, there are conditions at the place of arrival that are perceived as favorable but the migrant soon discovers that this perception was an illusion.

Chikwava intends to contextualize and examine the relationship between location and the construction of the migrants’ identity. The two spaces that are intricately connected in the novel are London in England and Harare in Zimbabwe. The immediate events that connect the two spaces are Zimbabwe’s politically induced economic problems which result in thousands of Zimbabwean seeking asylum in Britain. However, the narrative also shows that the choice of Britain as a refugee destination is determined by a much more complex history of colonial conquest and occupation of Zimbabwe by England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the novel is largely set in London, it nevertheless uses flashbacks, telephone conversations and letters to connect London with various Zimbabwean spaces.

Bakhtin's notion of Time-space or chronotope, refers to how literature represents time and space. This is to say that the spatial and temporal frames of a narrative are closely integrated (space as a trace of time and time as a marker of space) and thus these two make up one "spatial-temporal frame" that is, a chronotope. Thus in this discussion of Chikwava's narrative, the spatial/ temporal frame plays a key role in the production of meaning, as the origin or molder of identities, values, roles, meaning making, boundaries and crossings (Williams 2006:35). Chikwava imaginatively weaves together the temporal and spatial understandings of his migrant characters to demonstrate that desperate and precarious conceptions of time and space have a profound influence in the construction of the often unstable diasporic identities in the developed nations of the Global South. He also astutely uses time and space to bring out the depictions of the lives of the marginalized cosmopolitans who migrated from their politically and economically precarious homeland of Zimbabwe only to find themselves in the hostile space of London which they thought was going to be a hospitable place of refuge.

By these African and Zimbabwean migrants who are suffering in the London inhospitable space, Chikwava interrogates the assumption that the London space has the capacity to improve the migrants' economic status or that it is a place that they are overwhelmingly impressed by the London metropole. This is evidenced by the protagonists' lack of awe concerning the space that he is in before his migration to London. Although he has never been there before, yet he seems uninterested in it and actually wants to go back Zimbabwe as soon as he can afford to go back. This suggests that "London is not in any way an exceptional place but simply another capital city (Perfect 2014:173). The nameless protagonist's existence in London is premised on the preconceived idea that he is temporarily there, he hopes to stay only long enough to get money for the fulfilment of family obligations and for the bribe money to pay off his debt to secure his freedom. As he gradually comes to the realization of how difficult these aspirations are to fulfill,

he descends into some kind of schizophrenia. Manase (2014:63) explains the unstable identities of these marginalized migrants this way:

As a result, their identities are characterized by the state of displacement from the home space and a yearning for home, as well as the acquisition of hybrid identities owing to their living in between the world of exile and that of a home left behind or imagined.

On this, Rushdie confirms:

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behavior and code is very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human. (Rushdie 1991: 277-278)

This assertion intimates that the migrant who depart from his/her homeland and arrives at a host land is subjected to a discrimination from those of the host land and thus he/she suffers a stigma of being othered and this becomes the major cause of the psychological disruptions. The protagonist, though initially not seeming to care much about this state of being othered is however aware of it as defining their migrant identity. This is illustrated on the bus when he eats bread with his friend Shingi. A white child interestedly looks at this bread and Shingi hands it over. The mother of the child observes with a “look of horror” (137) wanting to prevent the exchange. The protagonists’ realization that the mother is too “frightened of the racialism thing” (137) to react and so she “watch[es] with sickly smile

as she son hits the bread with more fire” (137), is indicative of his awareness of this racialized discrimination that they are subjected to as black African migrants.

The hardships and the precarious conditions that impede the protagonist’s plan for a temporary stay in London result in disequilibrium in his psyche. This is evidenced in his anxieties and mental dislocations that are partly caused by memories of the atrocities that he used to perpetrate during his time as political criminal. This creates a scheming personality in him as evidenced by how he for example extorts money from Sekai as blackmail for cheating on her husband with a Russian man. In the first encounter when he gets the blackmail money, he unashamedly tells Sekai: “Next time you should be remind the Russian doctor that he is the one that should be dropping them pound notes and not you because you is my cousin’s wife ...We have to hit this white man’s pocket together until he cry for forgiveness” (105). This is illustrative of the precarious conditions that call for him to be conniving so as to make money in an instance where he was supposed to tell his cousin of his wife’s infidelity, yet he opts to make money out of the situation. His struggles and those of his fellow migrants who have been in Britain much longer traumatize the narrator who arrives with high hopes of a good job and making quick money. The disappointments he experiences contribute to his eventual psychological breakdown at the end of the narrative. The narrative shows that the uninformed depictions of Britain that a would be migrant encounters in Zimbabwe and what the narrator actually sees and experiences result in an emotional and mental shock from which he fails to recuperate.

The threat and cloud of the immigration officials perpetually hangs above the heads of migrants. As a result, migrants are always at high alert holding fake identification cards or trying to avoid immigration officials. This is detrimental in the construction of positive diasporic identities since migrants have to live under false identities. As result of staying and surviving in London, the majority of migrants have had to compromise their moral values. For example, the narrator discovers that the conception of relatives, family, friends and home in London is actually different

from what he understands of it back in Zimbabwe where the societal and cultural norms encourage hospitality to visitors and oneness especially amongst relatives. The experiences of the narrator seem to prove Hall's (1990: 222) argument that identity is "a production which is never complete [but] always in the process". Unfortunately, this is a fact that the narrator fails to learn as he desperately clings to Zimbabwean ways of doing things when he is supposed to adapt to his London migrant status. The narrator also never fully realizes that negotiating life in urban Brixton as a migrant is a complex process and that his dream of quickly going back to Zimbabwe after having achieved his objectives is a futile one.

As a result of the narrator's intransigency, his relationship with relatives and friends in London is very complicated. For example, his relationship with Sekai, his cousin's wife, is a difficult one right from the onset. He seems oblivious of the fact that their cultural identity in this space is forced to transform. The Shona culture that he and Sekai belong prescribes that visitors are warmly welcomed and treated with hospitality. When the protagonist arrives in London, Sekai is indifferent and rude to him at the station and actually expects that he pays for his own bus fare. This does not go down well with the narrator to the point that he calls Sekai a lapsed African, meaning that she has forsaken her Shona cultural values. Eventually, his relationship with Sekai deteriorates to the extent that he is forced to go and live with his friend, Shingi, in Brixton.

Again, the narrative illustrates that the characters eventually assume new identities. For example, the nameless protagonist, Shingi, Aleck and the other migrant characters scout for part time jobs as BBC (British Buttock Cleaner) where they earn 8 pounds per hour" (65). This statement is reflective of the migrant's willingness to compromise their culturally constructed masculinities by working in these "BBC" places. To them, these occupations are somewhat embarrassing and some of them even seek to hide them from each other. Aleck, for example, tries to hide his form of employment from his colleagues by claiming to work at a factory.

By so doing, he attempts to construct and forge a false identity, one that he feels is more respectable to his friends. This is also true for Shingi who tells his relatives back home that he works in the British Parliament when in fact he works in the care houses. He seems to create an identity for himself that he thinks those back home would respect. Ironically, this false identity results in his uncles asking for him to send them Range Rovers and to invest into their mining endeavors in Zimbabwe. Pasura (2012:258) argues that dispersal from a place of origin may create new identities that are threatening both men's self-esteem and the traditional power relations within households. On the same vein, concerning the construction of these diasporic identities, for them to get employment, the narrator resorts to a fake identity. This forging of a new identity is in order for him to find means of survival. This is also true for the majority of the asylum seekers in the narrative who use fake European passports.

#### **4.4 Why they Left Zimbabwe**

The narrator is scathing and unsympathetic in his exposé of the economic difficulties that Zimbabweans are experiencing. Thinking back to a time when he was still in Zimbabwe he recalls how people were criticizing Shingi who had already migrated to London for his failure to financially support his mother accusing him of being haunted by the avenging spirit. His words indicate that before migrating to London even himself imagined that the economic problems of Zimbabweans could not be compared to any sufferings that those who had migrated could experience. Using graphic description that those who closely followed Zimbabwe's economic collapse would easily recognize as true to life, the narrator remarks:

[B]awling they eyes out because price of everything jump up zillion per cent and they cant even afford food or brew now; all them big stomachs gone, they belts is down to they last holes but them trousers is still falling down, big fat cheeks now gone, they heads is thin and overcrowd with teethies. (12)

The narrator's mocking description of the people who are said to be gossiping about Shingi provides an insight into the extent of economic hardships that the majority of Zimbabweans faced at this time. These economic challenges were largely responsible for Zimbabwean's mass flights out of their homeland. The narrator indicates that hyper-inflation has pushed the prices of basic commodities to a "zillion percent" (12). The recent history of Zimbabwe confirms that the narrator's observations are not mere satirical exaggerations. The Zimbabwean inflation was one of the worst in the recent history for any country not at war. It rendered its currency worthless and as a result was abandoned in 2009 in preference of a multicurrency which has favored the American dollar. The narrator shows how bad this hyperinflation was when he indicates that the Z\$1,000,000 that he arrives with in London is equivalent to just four sterling pounds. This unchecked inflationary environment is posited as one of the major causes of Zimbabwean's migrations to the UK and other countries seen as economically and politically stable by Zimbabweans.

The narrator also uses graphic word pictures to expose the starvation that was the result of the country's hyperinflation. Since people's salaries had been rendered worthless, this meant that they could not afford food. The thin figures who have pushed their belts to the last hole but whose trousers are still falling, the stick-thin figures with oversized heads which seemed overcrowded with teeth is a phenomenon that was well-documented in the international media at the height of Zimbabwe's hyper-inflation. The narrator's unflattering description of the effects of starvation serve as an explanation to why Zimbabweans desperately wanted to get out of their own country.

In addition to hyperinflation which turned those who were employed to paupers, the novel also shows that there was a high rate of unemployment especially among youths. The narrator says that no one in the country wanted to employ him even as a tea boy. School leavers have no hope of getting employed and the narrator shows that he had to set up a street shoe-fixing stall as a result. But even with this informal business, the money that he earns is quickly eroded by the

hyperinflation and does not amount to much. This is expressed when he says that “being shoe doctor outside of the community hall is not bringing anything no more” (17). The narrator indicates that lack of employment and economic opportunities make him vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous politicians. For example, this precarious situation drives the narrator and other youths into the hands of a state which is keen on using desperate young people to terrorize its political opponents and other economic protesters. It is behind this background of economic desperation that the narrator joins the notorious Green Bombers, a state sponsored youth brigade which subsequently commits all sorts of crimes against suffering fellow citizens. Justifying his recruitment into this youth brigade, he says:

If you are back home leading rubbish life and ZANU PF party offer you job in they youth movement to give you chance to change your life and put big purpose in your life, you don't sniff at it and walk away when no one is prepared to give you graft in the country. (17)

The narrator occupies an ambivalent position since he is both a victim of the political climate and a perpetrator of political crimes. Together with his youth brigade, they go about meting out “justice”, that is beating and terrorizing those considered to be “enemies of the state” (19). Despite committing crimes, the narrative invites the reader to view the narrator as a victim of that political power since his desperate economic situation makes him vulnerable to being used and then discarded. The youth brigade that he joins is clandestinely empowered to instigate violence and create fear among opposition party supporters. Temporarily, they wield so much power that they can even drag people from police custody without any resistance.

The migration of the narrator and the likes of Mhiripiri, the self-styled leader of the youth brigade, is largely a political flight to escape from the crimes they have committed ostensibly defending the ruling party from traitors. However, since the instructions they get to perpetrate crimes are

vague and undocumented, they find themselves on the wrong side of the law once their usefulness to the ruling party has expired. They find themselves without the immense power which they had exercised unofficially and are now considered criminals who should be prosecuted by the police. For example, the incidence where they drag a farm manager from police custody and beat him to death illustrates the kind of excessive power that they are let to exercise when it is convenient for the ruling party. However, it is this same incident that subsequently becomes the foundation of the narrator's problems leading to his flight to the UK.

The narrator subsequently comes to some measure of realization that the life and death power that he and his fellow youth brigade wielded was transitory at best. When he is in London, he observes: "It is because of giving forgiveness (euphemism for beating and killing perceived political opponents) that my problems start" (19). This complex web of unofficial and official power becomes a see-saw where the police who are stripped of their power during moments of political crises such as when the ruling party is facing serious political threats and then suddenly recover their power again when the ruling power feels politically secure. As a result of their failure to correctly read this complex political game, Mhiripiri and the narrator find themselves at one moment perpetrators of political crimes and then the next moment fugitives, running away from those whom they thought they were serving. It emerges that they were just pawns in a tragic game they did not fully understand.

The narrator indicates that there are several other Zimbabwean migrants who are in the UK as a result of political persecution. For example, the narrator observes that his friend Shingi was connected to Aleck his squat mate by a Zimbabwean old man who "recently start living in Brixton after running away from Zimbabwe because the police are after him" (25). The narrator indicates that those who can prove that they are victims of political persecution easily get documented by British migration officials. For example, the old man who helps Shingi find accommodation had his asylum application approved in a few months while other asylum applications often took

years. This is the reason why when the narrator is detained at Gatwick airport upon arriving in London, he lies that he is a victim of political violence because of being a member of the opposition party. He brags about his lies saying:

The story I tell the immigration people is tighter than thief's anus. Me I tell them I have been harass by them boys in dark glasses because I am youth member of the opposition party. This not try to shame the government in any way, but if you don't spin them smooth jazz numbers then immigration people is never going to give you chance to even sniff first step into the Queen's land. (4)

The fact that the narrator is subsequently allowed into the UK illustrates how complicated the whole system of determining who is a deserving asylum seeker and who is not. This incident illustrates that those who are forced to migrate for whatever reason must construct a narrative that will make them welcome in their respective countries of refuge.

#### **4.5 Underprivileged Cosmopolitans and Shattered Dreams**

Despite the differences in the extent of individual suffering, Chikwava's narrative indicates that all Zimbabwean migrants in Britain are 'underprivileged postcolonial cosmopolitans' (Toivanen, p. 1) or vernacular cosmopolitans. Paul and Sekai, for example, are depicted as better class of Zimbabwean migrants. Sekai is a nurse and Paul is also employed so they have a middle class income and can afford a decent home in London. However, they are not exempt from feelings of deracination engendered by belonging to a minority racial group and being migrants who find themselves in an unfamiliar culture. For example, the narrator becomes aware of his visibility even in public spaces due to being a member of a minority racial group. He observes: "Them shop assistants look at me in that London funny way when them people think you is in a wrong place but don't tell you straight and square" (26). This must be the experience of many migrants of color in Britain. Odoom (2016: 398) reinforces this when he states "although making economic

gains from migration and improving their class status, the struggle to break into new class circles in the host countries is extremely difficult”.

Moreover, the fact that they are perceived as having made it in Britain puts immense pressure on them since they are expectations from the few relatives who are also in England and the majority of relatives left back home who hear of their ‘success’ and therefore expect expensive gifts. Additionally, as the example of the narrator illustrates, Paul and Sekai are expected to host all relatives who come to Britain seeking for better economic opportunities. The presence of the cunning narrator who is in fact Paul’s cousin puts a strain on their marriage since the narrator is keen on blackmailing Sekai for his own financial benefit. The narrator’s words also show that although he portrays Paul and Sekai as financially stable, his presence is actually a financial burden to them as opposed to the hospitality that she shows her friends. The narrator observes: “Sekai is busy putting mars bars in other people’s pockets but can jump on she relative if he touch she bread” (24). Although the narrator attributes Sekai’s rationing of bread to her being stingy, it may also be indicative of Paul and Sekai’s financial challenges.

All the underprivileged migrants depicted in the novel struggle to survive and as a result devise cunning and immoral survival tactics such as those adopted by the narrator. The narrative depicts the majority of the economic migrants as negotiating precarious livelihoods. Ironically, the majority of the migrants, hope to secure employment and live comfortable lives while providing for those left back in Zimbabwe. For example, they arrive in London with unreasonably high expectations of quick economic success. He says: “I just want to get myself good graft very quick, work like animal and save heap of money and then bang, me I am on my way back home” (6). However, he soon experiences a serious reality check. He is told that he cannot even look for a job until his asylum status has been processed and approved. Not only is the narrator prohibited from searching for work, the immigration officials tell his cousin Paul that he will not get weekly benefits since he is Paul and Sekai’s dependent. The narrator explains: “Now it turn out I am not

even allowed to work until my asylum get approved. And I'm not even allowed benefit money. People say asylum sometimes take years to get approve'' (23). Subsequently, he voices his frustration assuming that his cousin is jealous of him and assumes that he wants to trap him in order to get him deported: "I am not supposed to look for job but now he say I can maybe try to find graft but I have to be careful because if they catch me, that's the end of me. I don't know if Paul is trying to set me up or what" (24). This inability to search for proper employment illustrates one of the challenges migrants face despite making it to Britain. The narrator soon realizes that his dream of getting a good job and making quick money is just that, a dream. Therefore, for many like Shingi and the narrator, their envisaged prosperity is never realized but are forced to contend with the reality of being undocumented migrants who cannot even find proper employment.

Then they are those migrants who are underemployed or exploited by employers due to their migrant statuses. The narrator's friend, Shingi, and the rest of his Zimbabwean house mates are examples of vernacular cosmopolitans. Although employed, they live like vagabonds. When the narrator leaves Paul and Sekai's home after accusing them of being inhospitable, he finds lodgings at a squat with his childhood friend Shingi who stays with several other Zimbabweans. Upon arriving at the squat house, the narrator describes the apartment as a dump. He says:

Shingi sleeps on the lounge; he share the room with Farayi. Two mattresses is on the rotting floorboards, blankets all over, small heaps of things telling one story of big journey that is caused by them dreams that start far away in them townships. I can sniff sniff them natives' lives squatting under the low damp ceiling like thieves that have just been catch. (30)

The humour in this description notwithstanding, the poverty that afflicts these migrants is striking and unmistakable. These underprivileged cosmopolitans, to modify Bhabha's phrase, once in the

space of London, live in squatter houses or under bridges. The narrator calls it a “reptile kind of life [a] “life of surviving big mutilation in the big city and living inside them holes” (2). This kind of accommodation is facilitated by the fact that the underprivileged migrants fail to find decent employment and thus are unable to meet living expenses and thus end up replicating these uneasy forms of locality and dwellings in metropolitan, multicultural and multi-ethnic settings (Gikandi 2010:23, 26). This is why the squat houses paperless Zimbabweans only, suggesting that being a migrant is characterized as much by separation as mixing, by ethnic encapsulation and marginality (Werbner 2015:569-570).

The narrator later discovers and learns that certain migrant’s academic qualifications are of little value in Britain. For example, Farai who also lives in the same squalid conditions is a former school teacher in Zimbabwe. In Britain, Farai has to juggle two lowly paying jobs just to get by. Below is the narrator’s initial assessment of Farai’s difficult situation:

Without asking, I already know that he have graft a Tooting where recruitment agency put him to do photocopying and stationery for NHS. He juggle it with another graft at some fried chicken takeaway. His papers is not in order, he have to do that style of getting visitor’s visa and then stepping off with big plan to go back home on the 44<sup>th</sup> of the month. (34)

Farai does not have immigration documents that would allow him to find a better job. The narrator observes that most Zimbabwean migrants with irregular immigration statuses resort to jobs that are despised by the British and are even looked down upon by Zimbabweans still suffering economic and political challenges at home. For example, the narrator points out that Aleck is a “BBCs- British Buttock Cleaners- looking after old people that poo they pants every hour” (39) despite his pretense to holding a better job. In the case of Aleck, there is no way he could have found a better job in Britain because even in Zimbabwe he was a fruit and vegetable vendor. Most

migrants from a low class background took advantage of the weak Zimbabwean dollar against the British pound. Although not earning a lot in British standards, when their money was sent home and converted into Zimbabwean dollars, some of these migrants were able to take care of their families and even buy properties. For example, despite his own economic challenges in Britain, Shingi takes advantage of the exchange rate and sends his mother money to try and cushion her against Zimbabwean economic hardships. It is in this sense that these poor Zimbabwean migrants can be seen as practicing reversal colonialism same way British nationals were taking Zimbabwean resources to their homes in Britain and now the Zimbabweans are repatriating Zimbabwean wealth back to its origin after it was looted to Britain by the colonizers.

The novel shows that Zimbabwe's political and economic problems prevailing since the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes travel documents some of the most prized possessions. Since Britain was one of the favourite destinations by desperate Zimbabweans, the British High Commission in Zimbabwe was thronged by prospective visa applicants after Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth in 2002 and its subsequent exit from the organization in 2003. Prior to this development, Zimbabweans could travel to Britain without any visa requirement. The narrative indicates that the British authorities started to tighten their visa requirements after realizing that Zimbabweans were applying for visitors' visas and then later claim asylum upon arrival in Britain. Those Zimbabweans who had already settled in Britain and were inundated by requests from relatives who also wanted to try their luck, were relieved by the tighter visa requirements because it meant that only a fewer people could make the journey. The narrator indicates that those already in Britain would pretend that they wanted their relatives to join them knowing well enough that they would not be granted travelling visas. That was the narrator's experience with his cousin Paul and his wife Sekai. The narrator comments on this matter:

But it suit all Zimbabweans in Harare North. Even Sekai and Paul; they say yes I can come live with them but now me I know they say that because they was expecting the British High Commission to do the dirty work for them. (6)

Unfortunately for Paul and Sekai, the narrator was able to obtain the British visa against all odds and landed at Gatwick airport. However, the reception he got from both the British authorities who detained him for six days, and by Paul and Sekai who took a further two days after his release to come and collect him from the airport was not a great start in Britain.

These stringent conditions meant that the British visa became one of the most important possessions for desperate Zimbabweans following the country's exit from the Commonwealth.

The narrator humorously comments on this scenario:

[T]he visa is where everyone hit the wall because the British High Commission don't just give visa to any native who think he can flag down jet plane, jump on it and fly off to Harare North, especially when they notice that people get them visitor's visa and then on landing in London they do this style of claim asylum. (6)

In addition, the Zimbabwean passport office also became one of the most important institutions since all Zimbabweans who could afford the passport fee wanted either to migrate or engage in cross border trading with neighbouring countries. While lying to the British immigration officials became the order of the day, corruption became endemic at Zimbabwean passport offices as officials took advantage of the desperation of their fellow citizens.

When it comes to being in the UK, the narrative shows that the social circles of even those who have been in London for a long time is limited to other migrants. For example, the Zimbabwean woman MaiMusindo has been in England for the past twenty years but her associations are limited to Ghanaian, Nigerian and Kenyan illegal migrants with whom she has established a hair salon. Despite her long stay in Britain, she is still involved in illegally activities in order to augment her

income. For example, after helping a newly arrived Zimbabwean girl called Tsitsi to give birth, she in turn exploits this situation by hiring out Tsitsi's baby to other foreign women who pretend that the baby is theirs at the Housing Department in order to be allocated accommodation and a child grant. The narrator explains how this situation would play out:

For 50, any woman can take Tsitsi's baby to the Lambeth Housing Department and play out to be single mother, fill forms and take baby back to salon as soon as she have been interviewed. (61)

The narrator also explains other desperate survival tactics adopted by Zimbabwean migrant girls. Adopting a higher moral ground, the narrator comments: "They is getting funny those Zimbabwean girls, especially in Luton, all of them turning into lesbians or prostitutes nhayi" (93). The narrator himself is involved in identity theft as he sometimes uses Shingi's Insurance Number to hunt for a job as it is a prerequisite when searching for work. This form of identity sharing and merging is indicative of the fact that the migrant's identities are in a process of transformation and evolving as influenced by the spaces, places and times in which they find themselves. Later on, when Shingi is sick, he uses his passport and even assumes his roles when he sends Shingi's mother money so she would not find out about Shingi's condition. These are some of the underprivileged survival strategies adopted by underprivileged migrants. The narrative shows that there is a general stigma associated with being an undocumented migrant. They only interact on their own as Zimbabwean or African migrants or with marginalized whites like the drug junkies Dave and Jenny because of the similarity of their plight.

The psychological pressures of being a disadvantaged migrant in London for example, cause Shingi to resort to drugs. The pressure is so much such that he is deranged and loses his job. Ultimately, at the end of the novel, he dies anonymously at a London hospital. The narrator's own loss of identity is violent and profound that it is worse than the death of his friend Shingi. At

the end of the narrative he suffers mental breakdown like his friend Shingi. Parallels in their lives and psyches lead to a merging of their characters. This is illustrative of the negative impact of migration to the psychological wellbeing of the Zimbabwean migrants living in London.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Chikwava illustrates the catastrophic effects of the migrants' experience as a result of the damage to their psyches. Through the nameless protagonist, Chikwava exemplifies the deplorable conditions that lead migrants' suffering intense identity crisis which leads to the mental break down and the ultimate death of the protagonist and his friend Shingi. The chapter illustrated that the lies that guarantee their admittance into Britain have to be maintained and thus are perpetuated in order to get employment and to avoid deportation. This becomes an indication of the pains and price that the migrants have to pay to try and fulfill the dreams that they have and the hopes pinned on their migration although these are shattered for the majority of them. The characters in Huchu's novel which will be discussed in the next chapter face a similar fate of shattered expectations as they also get a rude awakening due to the hostility of the new space of their refuge.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Gender, Race and Class and the Experience of Migration in Huchu's *The Maestro, The Magistrate and The Mathematician***

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, The Magistrate and The Mathematician* (2014) is a narrative set in Edinburgh, Scotland and pivots around three Zimbabwean migrants; the Magistrate, the Maestro and the Mathematician. The Magistrate and the Mathematician are both black while the Maestro is white. As in the other narratives considered so far, the migrations of these characters are caused by the infamous Zimbabwean political and economic crisis that forces them to seek economic and political reprieve in Scotland. The narratives of these three protagonists underscore their painful relationship to the crisis ridden Zimbabwe. Their subsequent endeavors to have a sense of belonging in Scotland is constructed and depicted as a direct result of their Zimbabwean political and economic victimhood. These migrations are represented as having traumatic psychological and social effects on the migrants. Some of these dislocations are as a result of the culture shock and the isolation from Zimbabwean social connections. The first part of the novel is narrated in the third person from the point of view of the Magistrate, a former judge in Zimbabwe initially unemployed in Scotland and supported by his nurse wife but subsequently gets employment as a care giver in an old people's home. The Magistrate's experiences provide an insight into his feelings of rootlessness, deracination, alienation and dislocation in Edinburgh. The Maestro, whose real name is David is an epitome of the ambivalence of migration as he leads an isolated, depressed and nihilistic life. It is the same isolation that The Mathematician, whose real name is Farai, suffers although on a lesser degree. Farai is a PhD candidate who seems economically cushioned from the negative effects of migration and has friends yet he misses his family back home. The ironic ending of the novel that knits all the protagonists' life paths together draws one to the painful reality these characters can never fully escape the Zimbabwean political

environment that has directly and indirectly brought them to Scotland. Farai is tragically killed by Alfonso Pfukuto, a secret Zimbabwean security agent for his involvement in exposing his political project. The Magistrate becomes actively involved in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a Zimbabwean opposition political party. As a result, he falls under the surveillance of the agents of ZANU PF, Zimbabwe's notorious ruling party. The Maestro also dies as a result of drug addiction and exposure to extreme weather. The tragic end of the protagonists suggests that Huchu sees migration as a destructive process and each of the characters is used to explore a facet in the painful migration experience.

## **5.2 Occupational downgrading, gender and identity crisis**

The novel depicts, through the Magistrate, the downgrading that a Zimbabwean migrant who enjoyed a high social and economic status in Zimbabwe experiences when he finds himself in a racialized space of Edinburgh. The Magistrate's situation suggests that, for some Zimbabweans, migration translates into occupational and social downgrade and a non-utilization or underutilization of the migrants' expertise and skills. The loss of economic and social status creates feelings of alienation and identity crisis within the immigrant. The Magistrate feels emasculated by the fact that he becomes economically dependent on his wife. His wife does not make the situation any easier for him. For example, on one occasion when the Magistrate is playing music, his wife rebukes him like a child for playing it too loudly and adds that "some of them have to work" (38). This unkind remark clearly shows that the Magistrate's wife is also frustrated and it implies that she thinks that her husband is deliberately avoiding caring for his economic responsibilities as the man of the house. His wife's cutting remarks set the magistrate on a painful nostalgic reminiscing. The narrator states that "it pained [the Magistrate] to think of his past, to recall memories of what once had been. If only he had no memory, no sense of his old successful self, then it would be easier to accept his new circumstances" (39). This suggests that for those who had been economically and socially successful in Zimbabwe, the migration

experience proved to be even more disconcerting and deracinating. If despite their difficult situations as migrants, individuals such as the Magistrate decide to stay on in an inhospitable foreign environment, this shows that the situation back in their home country is worse off. In fact, the narrative makes this clear when the narrator observes that the Magistrate was “weighed down with each report that things were in fact getting worse” (36) in Zimbabwe.

The magistrate’s economic insecurity and desperation is as a direct result of the Zimbabwean political landscape. His forced migration is evocative of what Musanga and Manase (2016: 276) regard as linked to “a state that is intolerant of divergent and alternative views and employs repressive state apparatuses”. The narrative indicates that the Magistrate was a victim of the corrupt policies of the Zimbabwe’s ruling party. Apparently, the magistrate loses his job because he refuses to use his position to advance the corrupt political cause of the ruling party. This is revealed by Alfonso, a double agent who coaxes the Magistrate to lead the Edinburgh branch of MDC. Alfonso says to the Magistrate: “A lot of people have heard the story of how you were pushed from the bench because you didn’t do what the government wanted. I have friends everywhere and they say, in Mash Central, you were known for being incorruptible” (151). Although Alfonso makes this statement to advance his evil objectives, the narrative makes it clear that indeed the Magistrate is a sincere and morally upright man who believes in justice and the rule of law. His moral uprightness and the Zimbabwean governments flouting of justice come to a head when the Magistrate refuses to do the biddings of his employer.

Clearly, the Magistrate migrates under duress when he is faced with unemployment and his wife has been offered what looks like a lucrative job offer as a nurse in Edinburgh. The narrative makes it clear that Edinburgh is a racialized space which will never allow the Magistrate to practice his profession. Despite his experience as a magistrate, he finds that the only jobs available to most migrants are lowly paying and often demeaning ones such as being a caregiver for the elderly and sick or some other backbreaking work in the construction industry. For a while, the Magistrate

resists getting a job that would take away his dignity and exacerbate his sense of identity crisis. However, when his unyielding stance starts to cause a serious schism in his marriage he succumbs to pressure.

Although the Magistrate's taking up a job as a caregiver goes a long way in repairing his relationship with his wife, he experiences his new occupation as very emasculating. Capturing a situation similar to that of the Magistrate, McGregor (2007: 802) observes: "For men who have gone into caring, these feelings can be heightened by the double humiliation of having to do not only dirty and demeaning, but also women's work". Stark and Taylor (1991) also state that most receiving economies only open low-skill segments of the labor market to immigrants, offering no rewards for higher skills. It takes the Magistrate close to a year to accept his changed status and to reconcile himself to his job as a caregiver. His finally accepting a job he considers feminine and demeaning is ironic because most migrants expect to experience an upward social and economic mobility when they leave their crisis ridden countries.

The Magistrate experiences a lot of stress when he discovers that his economic opportunities in Edinburgh are determined by his skin color and his nationality and not by the level of his education or work experience. Alfonso who has established himself in Edinburgh and runs a recruiting agency for low paying jobs, has correctly read the racialized and inward looking job market in the United Kingdom. He has been trying to persuade the Magistrate to get a casual job that his agency offers. When the Magistrate finally succumbs to pressure, Alfonso is jubilant and triumphant at seeing the humiliated Magistrate enter his office addressing himself to his receptionist, he says:

I told you he'd come ... This man is like a brother to me. He's smarter than me; he has a degree, a Master's, and many, many certificates. But let me tell you one thing, he doesn't know the UK like I do. I tried to tell Mai Chenai. I said to her "Look, tell

him to stop applying for those posh jobs in the newspapers. They are not for the likes of us.” (41)

Alfonso’s observation indicates that while the migrant escapes some problems from his or her impoverished developing country, he or she is shocked to discover that his place of refuge in the developed world has its own set of problems when it comes to finding suitable employment. Alfonso drives the point home by indicating that chances of practicing his profession in the United Kingdom are remote because of the negative attitude that the British people have about the African justice system. Alfonso says: “They think we come from the jungle. They think we have kangaroo courts. They will say, “How can you practice law here when you couldn’t preserve the rule of law in your own country?” (41). Since he is well-educated and had occupied a socially influential position back in Zimbabwe, the Magistrate battles to accept his new circumstance. After getting a job as a caregiver he is shocked to discover that Brian, an intelligent young man also from Zimbabwe is also employed in this unsuitable profession. When the Magistrate quizzes Brian about the nature of his employment, the young man demonstrates wisdom and the flexibility that most migrant need in order to survive in the race determined United Kingdom job market. Brian says: “No experience in life is ever wasted” (70). It is this positive and resilient attitude that keeps Brian going despite the challenges of being a racially excluded migrant worker. Clearly, what Brian seems to intuitively know takes the Magistrate a long time to learn. As a result of the number of years he has spent in this space, Alfonso knows the employment trends and thus he humorously but accurately indicates that to him.

The narrative shows that the Magistrate experiences multiple forms of alienation over and above the challenge of finding a job that matches his qualifications and experience. He suffers from intense feelings of lack of belonging in relation to the landscape and geography of Edinburgh. This is accurately captured by one of the many comparisons he makes of Bindura and Edinburgh when he thinks: “In Edinburgh the sun was this cold disc, distant, vague, and powerless. For much

of the year it was hidden behind grey clouds and, when it did come out in brilliance, it felt awkward, alien. Here the North Wind reigned. In Bindura, the sun was all-powerful and magnificent” (14). He finds Edinburgh alien and unfamiliar and this in turn creates feelings of unhomeliness and dislocation. He tries to create continuity between his familiar Bindura space in Zimbabwe with the new space of Edinburgh through the Zimbabwean music that he plays on his Walkman as he walks around his new environment. To a certain extent, the Zimbabwean music helps him to map his new space and provides him with some sense of grounding in Edinburgh. He seeks to keep a balance of the two spaces by drawing similarities in the geographies of Zimbabwe and Scotland so as to maintain psychological balance. The Magistrate’s painful migrant status forces him to perpetually evaluate the purpose and value of his life. This resonates with Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and unhomeliness whereby the characters can be regarded as “psychological refugees” (Bhabha 1996:58) as they are evidently not at home in themselves because of the evident cultural identity crisis they are in.

Contemplating his bleak future as a migrant without the support of the extended family also causes the Magistrate a lot of psychological stress. For example, while working at the caregiving industry, looking at the old people there who are sent by their own children to be taken care of by strangers, he wonders:

It was incomprehensible to him that these people, who after all, were fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, could be rounded up in this Gulag, waiting to die. Was that what awaited him should he stay in this country for too long? Would Chennai allow that? She was already too modern, too westernized. (68)

This highlights a sad reality to migration where the migrant is forced to contemplate the costs of migrating and left with longings for his old way of life and with the elusive desire to return to his economically hostile homeland. The alienation of the Magistrate and his desire to return runs very

deep. He says that if he should die in Scotland, his remains should be repatriated to Zimbabwe: “If I die here, make sure my body goes back home. You young ones can be transplanted, but my roots are very deep. It’s too late for us oldies”. His remarks illustrate the complex relationship that migrants have with the idea of “home”. For example, the Magistrate muses as he looks at the city of Edinburgh: “In it he saw the city in which he lived, a city that he dared not call home” (318).

When still in Zimbabwe, the Magistrate had avoided politics completely. However, forced into the lowly profession of caregiver in Scotland, he is eventually persuaded to be part of the top leadership of the MDC, a Zimbabwe political opposition party. It is not an easy decision for the Magistrate to ultimately decide to get into politics. He eventually convinces himself that he enters into politics because he seeks to right the wrongs that their generation committed, that of folding their hands after voting the ruling party into power in 1980 and not holding them accountable of their governance afterwards. Scott (another instance of identity theft whose real name Tamuka Nhamoinesu), another young Zimbabwean migrant who is actively involved in the opposition politics tells the Magistrate that it is their generation that is responsible for the political malaise that has led to economic collapse in Zimbabwe. Scott says: “It’s not our generation that created this mess. I’ve told you again and again, Alfonso, it’s time for these old madharas to make way for us” (150). These words cause the Magistrate a pang of guilt which eventually makes him to decide to get actively involved in politics. Scott drives his point home when pleads with the Magistrate: “We need to find a solution and we want you to be part of that solution” (150). In addition to his strong sense of justice, the Magistrate also joins the UK branch of the MDC because it offers him the opportunity of regaining his lost social status. He is immediately given the position of chairperson which gives him recognition and an opportunity to put his organizational skills into good use.

Huchu's novel shows that the Magistrate's migration to the UK inverts the traditional conceptualization of migration. Balan (1981:228) argues that traditionally, migration was largely tilted in favor of men and women were seen as "secondary" or "associated" migrants, whose "decisions are a consequence of the decision made by the primary movers" which are men. This highlights the fact that traditionally, men would be the ones to engage in out migration to improve their economic fortunes and thus improve their family's standard of lives with their wives and children being left in the home country. Enchautegui and Malone (1997) also point out that women only participated in migration by later joining their husbands; the primary purpose being family reunification rather than economic gain. Men were conventionally regarded as economically motivated sojourners and women, especially married ones or those with children were encouraged to stay in the home country while men migrated (Boyd 1989; Brettell 1986; Hoodar 1992; Kanaiaupuni and Kandel 1995). The Magistrate and Mai Chenai's situation is thus an unconventional one that embarrasses him to an extent that he whines: "I never wanted to come here in the first place" (38). His migration is forced on him as Mai Chenai is compelled by her husband's unemployment and financial strain brought about Zimbabwe's economic collapse to migrate.

Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) contend that migration results in literal and figurative absences that manifest in the forced retreat of the male body from various sites of visibility and authority. The men, especially the Magistrate, is emasculated and seeks to cope with this transformation of the traditional masculinity. This is illustrated when the Magistrate reflects on the conditions under which their maid worked: "The first time this had occurred was when he was bent over, brush in hand, cleaning the toilet bowl. In his entire life, he'd never imagined himself carrying out such a humiliating task" (8). Hibbins (2001) argues that given the significance of paid work in men's lives, the performance of work beneath their skill levels has a significant effect on migrant men's sense of manhood. Mai Chenai now becomes the breadwinner and this humiliates the Magistrate.

This humiliation and emasculation is highlighted when Chenai informs him that they have run out of sugar and he tells her to tell her mother instead. He thinks:

What could he say? That he'd get it? He hardly had a penny to his name. When the gas beeped, or, God forbid, the electricity ran out, he had to wait for Mai Chenai to sort it out. It was not meant to be like this. The shame sat somewhere in his gut, looping round his intestines, a dull ache that was with him every minute of the day. In the time of his father, whom he'd never known, a man's role was clearly defined. He was the provider. Nothing else was required of him. He had no duty towards his kids, save for the occasional moral correction-by the belt. (12)

The changed economic situation whereby Mai Chenai becomes the sole breadwinner results in painful shifts in the patriarchal traditional roles that the Magistrate had up to now taken for granted. Donaldson and Howson (2009) point out that male migrants carry with them their traditional notions of his manliness which suddenly become irrelevant in the countries of their refuge. Trying to adjust to the changed roles causes the Magistrate a lot of psychological pain.

### **5.3 National Prejudices in Migratory Spaces**

Huchu's novel also depicts the kind of migratory experiences of white Zimbabweans who found themselves in Edinburgh who had a claim to British ancestry but experience challenges in lack of full acceptance and integration in the United Kingdom. The Maestro is used to deconstruct the preconceived notions that the migration experience is hostile to a particular racial group. Although white, the Maestro suffers from extreme alienation and dislocation in Edinburgh which are evidenced by his solitary habits and his attempt to find refuge in the lonely world of books. For example, when Tatyana, a Polish immigrant girl friend of his, calls him one night asking for him to visit her, "he mumbles a reply about how he was busy and had a lot of reading to catch up

on” (57). He would rather stay indoors and read than be in company of a person. The narrator again gives insight into his solitary nature when he states:

Of late, he found himself preferring the company of his books to the companionship of people. Tatyana was virtually his only friend, if he could call her that. Everyone else had forgotten him or given up on him once he’d withdrawn, almost as though he’d quietly sunk into quicksand that no one else could see. At work he was friendly, exuding something resembling warmth, but outside of work he kept to himself. There was something safe in the white pages of a book. A book could be opened and set aside ... People, well, people were harder to read. (57)

This comparison and his preference for books rather than people illustrates his extreme alienation emanating from the effects of his migrant status. As time passes, he completely neglects the real world and becomes very paranoid. The Maestro suffers from double alienation and fails to fit in as evidenced by this isolation. This is what Rutherford (1990:211) means when he argues that migrants occupy a “third space” as their identities cannot be located either back home or in the new migrant space. The Maestro then typifies this as he clearly occupies a third space whereby he seeks to create an identity that cannot either be located in Zimbabwe or in Edinburgh where he now lives.

His longing of Zimbabwe, his home country, is different from that of black Zimbabwean migrants. He is depicted as the only one who is extremely alienated and dislocated from Edinburgh, Zimbabwe and even from himself. This is illustrated by the fact that even though characters like the Magistrate and the Mathematician also get feelings of intense dislocation and disorientation, theirs do not impede their daily activities and do not lead to the abuse of substances. He has to take pills that he claims “didn’t seem to do anything” (135) and constantly smokes marijuana, a sign that he is depressed. The Maestro’s case suggests that for white

Zimbabweans, the migration challenges and are deeper and much more psychologically destructive. Although his whiteness means that he can merge with other white people in Edinburgh; this however also means that he lacks a strong sense of belonging to both the UK and Zimbabwe. His sense of alienation and the resultant identity crisis transforms itself into something much more profoundly disturbing. He is bewildered by the fact that his whiteness does not shield him from the loss of nationality which leads him into low paying jobs just like other Zimbabwean migrants. Although whiteness may shield him from racial discrimination, his Zimbabwean nationality makes him a vernacular cosmopolitan and an underprivileged migrant.

He is trapped in the lower rungs of retail work without any hope of an upward social mobility. For four years, he has been engaged in this uninspiring unskilled work. This exacerbates his alienation and dislocation brings about his ruin. It is evident that he does not love his job but he is just enduring it. The narrator reasons: “Everyone moaned about the place, but they kept coming back. Every little helps” (46). This confession that they all loathe what they do but yet are forced to brave it up and work every day as every pound counts is illustrative of the kind of life that migrants live. Even the place he lives in is characteristic of migrants who struggle to make ends meet. About the blocks of flats where he lives, he observes: “Their pebble-dash walls looked rough and grey and cheap in the dim light. Best described as dwellings, rather than houses. But that’s why he lived here, because of the low rents” (136). The Maestro is clearly alienated from his place of abode due to its depressing appearance and lack of a homely atmosphere.

Describing a situation similar to the Maestro’s, Schierup et al (2016) points out that States’ immigrant policies prioritizing national citizenship above all forms of membership deepen precariousness of migrant labor. This may explain why David, although earning the accolade the Maestro from his colleagues for his extraordinary exertion at work, he is not promoted in the four years spent at the supermarket. Under normal circumstances, the fact that he is a dedicated employee, had never taken a sick day off and at some point had worked a solid seventy-two hours

non-stop, would have distinguished him and set him up for some form of promotional recognition. This discrimination leaves Maestro “seeing his dreams vanish in a puff of smoke” (144) and questioning his own contribution to life. At one point, the Maestro compares his job with that of men who work on construction and concludes that although their work is harder than his supermarket work, their jobs were more fulfilling. As a focaliser, he reasons: “His own contribution to society, stacking shelves in a supermarket, paled in comparison to the builders’ in their dirty jeans and high-vis jackets” (143). His alienating migrant status makes him constantly think about the meaning of his life. Also, his failure to file in his change of identity documents to attain a British citizenship speaks of the same kind of amnesia that afflicts a person who finds himself in a dislocating space. He occasionally just looks at the envelope that contains the application for identity documents that have the potential to change his life but is gripped with inexplicable inertia which prevents him from posting it. At some point, he actually manages to go to the post office but suddenly changes his mind about sending the documents. When he gets there he becomes conflicted again as evidenced in this narration:

The Maestro’s turn came, he walked up with his envelope and had it weighed. Where is it going? Are there any valuables in it? Do you want to send it first class? Second class, or recorded? the postmaster asked from behind the glass. I’ve changed my mind, I won’t send it after all, said the Maestro, hastily grabbing the envelope and leaving the post office. (141)

This is very baffling considering that he has finally gone to the post office and overcome the procrastination that kept the envelope at his mantelpiece, unposted. The issues of alienation evidently drain him and give him a sense of powerlessness that stops him from getting things done. It is the complexities of the migration experience, the conflicting identities and the debilitating dislocation that he suffers when he considers his precarious mobility and fractured identity that negatively affects his psyche such that he ends up going mad and eventually dying a

tragic death. David's experience parallels that of other characters in other novels examined in this study, such as the nameless protagonist in Chikwava's *Harare North* who also suffers a mental breakdown as result of being dislocated from his London environment. This reinforces and exposes how traumatic and dislocating the migration experience for African migrants of all racial groups. The tragic end of the Maestro and Chikwava's protagonist can be read as metaphors of the fact underprivileged African migrants, migration is a form of social death.

#### **5.4 Challenges of Privileged African migrants**

Through experiences of the Mathematician, Huchu's novel gives another aspect of the multiple character of migration. The Mathematician is what is regarded as a privileged world traveler and as such does not face the harsh demands and the precarity of life faced by other migrants. He is a PhD student at a university in Edinburgh and is largely economically comfortable because he comes from a very rich family in Zimbabwe. As privileged migrant student, the Mathematician suffers from different kind of challenges when compared to those who migrate for purely economic reasons such as Brian, Scott and David. First, the Mathematician, a nickname for Farai, moves to South Africa where he obtains his Master's degree at the University of Witwatersrand. Due to the fact that the Zimbabwean economy has collapsed, Farai decides to continue studying and that is how he finds himself in Scotland.

Farai's economically privileged background makes him a braggart. He brags to his roommate and friend Scott about his economic stability and the fact that he can go back to Zimbabwe and not suffer any economic difficulties when he claims:

The difference between you and me is, I'm going home after my PhD to run a business. You on the other hand, are stuck here working your dead-end job in a call center, so forgive me if I don't agree with you on sanctions and bullshit that might

harm my ability to run a business, employ people, and make a real difference on the ground. (108)

Farai states that Zimbabwe's economic problems have resulted in many young people like him to migrate to different countries of the world. The novel shows that what makes the Zimbabwean situation exceptional is the large numbers of young people who have left the country. The narrator says the following about Farai:

He thinks about his school mates from high school, scatted across the globe. It's like they all left: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, America, Canada, the U.K, places in the Anglosphere where the natives spoke in strange accents. In the pre-colonial times, when land was plentiful, bad chiefs were not deposed. Instead, people would break away to settle under a different chief or form their own arrangement. A chief without people to rule soon found himself powerless (82).

This observation captures the politically triggered economic tragedy that saw millions of Zimbabwe leaving their country to become economic refugees in different parts of the world. The narrator seems to put the blame squarely on Mugabe and his government for the Zimbabwean economic collapse. In this analogy, Mugabe is equated to a bad chief who misrules and misgoverns his people to the extent that people are forced to migrate to other countries that are perceived as economically stable.

Farai and others like him who are able to migrate but still sustain themselves with funds from home do so in order to continue to enjoy a high standard of living which Zimbabwe can no longer afford them. About Farai, the narrator observes that he deliberately runs away from Zimbabwe because he reckons "it is easier to approach the problem from afar, as a detached academic, than to have to deal with the day-to-day effects of it" (83). Although not facing economic challenges,

Farai still feels that he has been forced out of Zimbabwe and therefore has a longing for going back home which cannot be fulfilled for as long as the economic crisis persists.

Farai misses his family and home and this is demonstrated by how he holds dear to things that attach him to his family and country until he eventually dies in Edinburgh. He still wears a watch that his father bought him when he was a seventeen-year-old and a woolen scarf that he was given by his grandmother. Farai feels happy among his Zimbabwean friends, “reminiscing about the old country. The feeling of community in a foreign country” (230). This longing for home seems to afflict migrants of all classes. For example, Tatyana also suffers from nostalgia. She surrounds herself with things that keep her country alive in her heart. Her house is described as:

A miniature red and white Polish flag stood on it. The walls had photographs of various cities and resorts in Poland. There were books in Polish and Russian on a shelf. Even her cigarettes were a Polish brand. It was as though she had brought a little piece of the old country with her. Her flat was a sovereign territory, an embassy of sorts. It was more than that, a sanctuary, a mausoleum of home. (145)

This recreation of spaces based on the migrants’ collection of memories of homeland is what Boym (2001) regards as restorative nostalgia. Farai, Tatyana and other migrants engage in this active creation of narratives and rituals which include symbols that emphasize the nation or their ethnic group. It becomes clear then that although Farai can easily go back, the migration experience of leaving social networks and homeland behind, creates a sense of loss, alienation and isolation which is equally traumatic.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Huchu’s narrative brings out the effects that migration has on the African family unit. It illustrates that the class between the two cultures of where the African migrant is coming from and that of Edinburgh, creates dislocations and alienations. There is an inevitable shift that the characters

evidently are forced to make, a shift that is illustrated as being easier for the young generation as they can easily be transplanted, as opposed to the older generation. The analysis of Huchu's novel also showed how migration is equally alienating and traumatic to all, irrespective of gender, class and race. However, individuals suffer the effects of migration dislocations at different levels and almost of them long for return migration to Zimbabwe. The next chapter examines Petina Gappah's two short stories by which depict migrants who actually manage to return to Zimbabwe. As it will be seen, the stories suggest that returning has its own complications which are not easily anticipated by the returnees.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Unlivable Home and Hostile Diasporas in Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009)**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyses Petina Gappah's two stories, "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai" and "Something Nice from London" from the anthology *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009). Gappah is a Zimbabwean writer who has been living in Geneva, Switzerland since 1998. The stories in the anthology are mainly about the post-2000 Zimbabwean political, economic and social crises. In an interview, Gappah claims that her stories are "about what it means to be a Zimbabwean in recent times" (Gappah 2009). The selected stories depict characters who are forging a difficult survival in the hyperinflation post-2000 environment. However, in this chapter I analyse these stories because they show how the hostile economic climate in Zimbabwe has led to individuals making uninformed and desperate decisions to migrate to Britain and America hoping for better economic opportunities there. Sadly, once abroad they discover that these countries are not a paradise for migrants as they are largely imagined by most Zimbabweans who have never ventured out.

The two stories show the economically collapsed Zimbabwe characterized by the corrupt and repressive leadership of the long ruling president Mugabe as the primary reason for people's migration.<sup>1</sup> However, the stories also show that although Zimbabwe maybe unlivable, Britain and the United States of America present the Zimbabwean migrant with unique challenges that are only fully understood by those who are there or have been there like the main characters of the selected two stories. The stories satirize the main characters who have migrated to Britain and America by exposing how desperate they are to conceal the difficulties that they encounter as

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<sup>1</sup> President Mugabe was deposed by his former vice president in a bloodless coup in 21 November 2017.

migrants to relatives and friends who remain in Zimbabwe. In “Something Nice from London”, Lisa finds herself in a predicament similar to that of Rambanai. Incidentally, it is the death of a close relative that exposes Lisa’s well-crafted life of pretense. The death of her cousin Peter in Britain exposes her not only as a liar but as a struggling migrant who must be pitied. In the case of Rambanai, it is her travelling to Zimbabwe for her father’s funeral which eventually forces her to drop her pretense and admit that she cannot go back to America because she has become an undesirable alien due to her overstaying her visitor’s visa’s welcome.

It is the exposure of these characters’ lives of deceit which makes the stories compelling migrant narratives. Therefore, these stories can be read as cautionary tales to would be migrants who because of the economic challenges in their countries may be persuaded to gullibly believe that in developed lands, one does not have to struggle or work hard at all to accumulate material wealth. To their credit, the migrant characters in these stories display a spirit of survival and they negotiate a precarious and unpredictable life in the most stringent environments both at home and in the Global North metropolises.

## **6.2 Story Plot overviews**

“Something Nice from London” is about the Chikwiro family who are facing the challenge of repatriating the body of their deceased brother and son, Peter Chikwiro. The hopes of the relatives in Zimbabwe of paying for the expenses of bringing Peter’s body home are on Lisa, Peter’s first cousin who lives in London. The story captures the kind of expectations and demands that those in Zimbabwe exert on their families, relatives and friends who are in Britain. The narrator is Mary Chikwiro, Peter’s sister. As Lisa struggles and fails to gather enough money for the repatriation of Peter’s body, the narrator takes the reader through the economic challenges that the Chikwiro family encounters as the extended family members continue to come in, apparently to mourn Peter, but making demands which stretch the resources and patience of the bereaved family to the limit. Gappah uses the extended period in which the family wait for Peter’s body, which as it

turns out never comes, to satirize the Shona mourning rites which put an unnecessary emotional and financial burden on the bereaved family. The unforgiving Zimbabwean economic climate of the post-2000 period and the exaggerated expectations about the money that those with family members in Britain have, exacerbates the anxieties and difficulties of the Chikwiwo family. The story ends as Mai Peter, Mai Lisa, Jonathan (the younger brother to the deceased), Mary (the narrator and sister to Peter) and Mukai, (Jonathan's wife) awaiting the body at the Harare International Airport, but instead receive a small curio box with Peters' ashes. Apparently, Lisa has been unable to get the required money to send Peter's body to Zimbabwe for burial.

On the other hand, "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai", is told in the first person narrative by Matilda as she relates the story of her cousin sister who comes back from the United States of America to bury her dead father. Rambanai's brother Thomas also lives abroad but it is only Rambanai who goes back to Zimbabwe in order to bury their father. The bulk of the story describes Rambanai's challenges after the burial of her father to try and keep relatives and friends fooled that one day soon she will return to America. The story also highlights the failed hopes of the post-colonial Zimbabwe as it depicts an economy under turmoil and the day-to-day toils of the small scale traders of Zimbabwe. This is shown as Rambanai travels around Harare to re-familiarize herself with places. Due to the hostile Zimbabwean environment, the narrator and her husband eventually do everything they can to send Rambanai to another foreign destination, London in Britain. Rambanai leaves behind a promise that she will repay her cousins and send for them but does not and they only see each other after they negotiate their own way to London.

### 6.3 Creation of Desperate Zimbabwean Migrants

In “Something Nice from London” Gappah explores the question of what it means to die in a foreign land with few relatives to assist with the funeral challenges. In the story, the plight of Zimbabwean migrants in developed countries is framed through the politically induced economic collapse that the country experienced after the government implemented the fast-track land redistribution without compensation after the year 2000. For example, the narrator makes a mental note of the demagoguery patriotic message she hears on the radio as they wait for Peter’s body at the airport. She says:

A voice reminds us that the land is ours, it will not be taken from us again. The message is repeated three times in the twenty minutes that it takes Jonathan to drive us home. In between the repeated message there are songs of histrionic patriotism, including one that I have not heard before in which the singer extols the President as a direct descendant of Christ and implores the Almighty to grant long life to him, to his wife and to all his children. (77)

Political jingles aimed at glorifying the violent appropriation of land and extolling the wisdom of President Mugabe were the order of the day in the first five years of the fateful land redistribution programme. The patriotic message rings hollow for the Chikwiro family whose relative has died a premature death in a foreign land because his own country is hostile to the aspiration of ambitious young people. Capturing the irony of the whole situation, McGregor (2010) observes that “while the increasingly desperate economic situation forced many Zimbabweans to seek their fortunes elsewhere, Mugabe blamed them for not being committed to their country” (186).

The narrative emphasises the general collapse of the Zimbabwean economy as it is evidence by the lack of tourist arrivals in the country. The Harare airport is largely empty as tourist shun Zimbabwe due its collapsed economy and bad political image. The narrator observes:

The Chinese built this airport when the old one became too small for the tourists that poured into the country in their thousands. No tourists visit now. Our almost total isolation means that we have no camera-toting, free-spending visitors to pour dollars and pounds, euros, yen and yuan into our empty coffers. We have an international airport in name only; the twice-weekly flight to and from London provides the only direct link we have to the world beyond our continent. (75)

The Chikwiro family's futile wait for the arrival of Peter's body at the Harare airport can be read as a metaphor for the wait for deliverance from the Western countries which supposedly comes in the form of migrant remittances. The very title "Something Nice from London" suggests that London or those coming from there will bring salvation to the suffering Zimbabweans. In a sense, all Zimbabweans with relatives in Britain and other developed countries are like the little boy that Matilda meets at the airport as she and her relatives wait for the arrival of Peter's body. The little boy tells the narrator that "his mummy is bringing him something nice from London" (75). The Chikwiro family pins its hope on the arrival of the plane the same way most Zimbabweans seemed to be waiting for some kind of economic and political redemption from developed nations. About the migrant's remittances, the narrator observes: "For these passengers bring with them more than their loved selves, they bring something nice from London, the foreign money that will be traded on the black market and guarantee a few more months of survival" (75). Although these remittances allegedly kept many families alive during the worst period leading up to 2008 of Zimbabwe's economic collapse, the remittances generally failed to rescue the politically induced collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Their wait at the airport for the body of their family member makes the title of the novel highly ironic as what they are waiting for from London is not nice at all.

Although migrants have real challenges in America and other developed countries, the narrative suggests that the hostility of these countries is deemed more bearable than the economic hardships

and political restriction obtaining in Zimbabwe. “My Cousin Sister Rambanai” focuses on what death means to both the family of the one abroad and the migrants themselves. Thomas’s sister Rambanai who had been in America risks it all by embarking on a one-way journey to Zimbabwe to her father’s funeral knowing that she will never be allowed back into America. The narrator indicates that her theatrics of mourning and wailing for her dead father may in fact be signs of psychological displacement where Rambanai is mourning for her own difficult situation regarding her migration situation. The conversation that Matilda has with Rambanai highlights the contradiction experienced by Rambanai in her desperate desire to get out of Zimbabwe:

‘I can’t go back, but I can’t stay here’, “What would people say? They would say I can’t go back, that’s what they would say” to which the narrator responds, “I know Harare is not Dallas, but is it then so bad? This question receives the response, “I can’t be myself here. I want a bigger world, I need to go back”. (224)

Although not welcome in the developed countries, Rambanai expresses a strong desire to leave Zimbabwe. Of course in her case it is simply about not losing face because she assumes that people would mock her for failing to go back to what is presumed to be a better life. However, for the majority of Zimbabweans who migrated to other countries, it was not a mere case of saving face but a question of survival. In a way Gappah has minimised the suffering of most Zimbabweans who had to leave the country not because they simply wanted a big world like Rambanai but because they simply wanted to survive. Fanon predicted the unprecedented failure of post-colonial nationalist leaders to bring real material changes in the lives of the majority of the citizens. As a result of the failure of the nationalist project, Fanon (1967:136) pointed out that “the masses begin to sulk; they turn away from this nation in which they have been given no place and begin to lose interest in it”. This is exactly the situation that obtained in Zimbabwe in the post-2000 period when people left the country in their thousands for an uncertain future as asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants in foreign lands.

It has been well-documented that the majority of Zimbabweans who migrated to developed countries experienced a skills and qualifications downgrading. Most of those who went to England found work in the health care system while those who went to America found work in the retail business especially in the fast food industries. Gappah highlights this dilemma of the migrant who had hoped that the first world countries would give him or her an opportunity to widen out his or her skills only to find himself or herself in the very limiting sectors that are frowned upon by the natives of those lands. When Rambanai insists on not even trying to find something to do in Harare and is only focused on what she calls the “bigger world” of the developed countries, her cousin’s husband Jimmy scoffs at the idea saying: “Bigger world *yekutengesa mahamburger*” (224). Jimmy says that Rambanai will only get a menial job like selling hamburgers in the developed world. Dore et al (2010:15) refer to this process as “occupational downgrading and the inability to use skills and qualifications commensurate with pre-migration experiences”. As we saw in the case of the Magistrate in Huchu’s novel, black migrants face challenges related to racial prejudice which render their skills useless and the work that they are trained for is unattainable in the Western nations.

Jimmy’s words are ironic in the sense that when he eventually migrates to Britain with Matilda they experience the occupational downgrade referred to by Dore et al. In Zimbabwe, Jimmy had been an engineer and Matilda a teacher. Lamenting their situation, Matilda says:

I gave up teaching and Jimmy engineering to be in England, where the curse of the green passport condemned us to work in the unlit corners of England’s health care system, in care homes where we took out the frustrations of our existence by visiting little cruelties on geriatric patients. I thought often of how *Ba’muniniBa’* Thomas who had believed that education would guarantee our future. (234)

What Matilda's words do not reveal is the fact that the teaching that she left behind in Zimbabwe and the engineering that Jimmy gave up had become so irrelevant that someone who worked as a cleaner in Britain was earning more than their combined salary due to the hyperinflationary environment of Zimbabwe. So theirs then was not a matter of choosing to migrate but the economic conditions of Zimbabwe forced them out of the country. In the process of occupational deskilling, Longhi (2009) states that in the long run this has a negative effect on the migrants' sense of self-worth and proves to them that their hopes of developing themselves even professionally in Britain are unachievable in light of the circumstances. One can add that their situation would have been worse off in Zimbabwe where they would not even have been able to have three decent meals during the height of the country's hyperinflation environment.

#### **6.4 Migrancy and Familial Obligations**

The challenges peculiar to those who migrate that Gappah presents show that migration has an ambivalent nature. It is both rewarding and destructive. While there is material gain and benefits, there is a lot that is lost as result of migration. Kane (2002:251) observes that migrants have a social debt towards those left behind and the prestige that the migrants gain from assisting those in the country of origin is not only a form of repaying this social debt, but also confirms their success abroad. Kane's notion of social debt helps in understanding the kinds of pressure that Lisa and Peter in "Something Nice from London" and Rambanai in "My Cousin Sister Rambanai" experience as migrants who were helped or sponsored by family members to travel and eventually settle in foreign lands. However, as seen in Gappah's characters, this social debt can prove to be financially and emotionally overwhelming to migrants who are eking out a painful existence in foreign lands with little social or familial support.

In Gappah's stories, the obligation that migrants have for those who remain behind, what Kane (2002: 251) calls a "moral duty", overwhelms them. This is because they largely get low paying jobs while they have the burden of meeting financial obligations back home. While this situation

is challenging for most, meeting their moral duty is a way of celebrating their migratory accomplishments and spreading the benefits of migration within and beyond the family circle. In “Something Nice from London”, Lisa is duty bound to do everything she can to repatriate Peter’s body because her migration to London was sponsored by Peter’s father. As the narrator remembers how Lisa went to London, she recounts his fathers’ conversation with her aunt MaiLisa as he said: “Sister, your daughter has finished her nursing diploma. Instead of rotting in some rural outpost, why does she not try her fortune where others have gone?” (87). This is the same vision that the Chikwiro family had as they used all the savings left by their father to send Peter to London to go and study. In “My Cousin Sister Rambanai” the same kind of sacrifice are made by Mary and Jimmy when they pay for the expenses of Rambanai’s travel documents. This sending of a relative to a developed country is seen as an investment and the migrants are expected to send remittances back home or send for others once they are settled.

Familial obligations become inevitable and expectations are raised that naturally have to be met by the family member or relative that would have been assisted to migrate. Gappah’s stories suggest that these communal efforts from relatives and friends to send one family member abroad creates an intricate web of unstated expectations. The migrant now has an obligation because he or she understands that she was helped for the purpose of also uplifting others. However, Gappah’s stories indicate that these expectations and obligations often weigh heavily on the migrants. For example, it is suggested that Peter was overwhelmed by such pressure and succumbed to a life debauchery in London as way of coping with the pressure. As the first born in the Chikwiro family and as a man, Peter automatically becomes the head of the family after his father’s death. However, this privilege comes with responsibilities and obligations which Peter finds overwhelming as the story shows. Ironically, the reversal of roles where he constantly demands money from his mother instead of sending money back home, subverts the whole logic of sending a relative abroad. This turn of events has a damaging psychological effect on Peter

since he is aware of the cultural expectations. The narrative suggests that his being overwhelmed by these expectations contributes to his mysterious premature death.

Lisa's is also overwhelmed by what she is expected to do related to Peter's death. On a telephone conversation with her aunt she sounds exasperated but she self-defensively lies: "*Mainini*, she says. "I cannot do more than I am doing already. Should I break into the mortuary and steal his body? Or is it that I am to turn myself into Peter *wacho* so that you can bury me?" (96). Lisa is forced to lie about what she can and cannot do because familial obligations. This sort of expectation is apparent in the narrator as she observes: "It was my father who gave Lisa the money for her air ticket" (85). Of course, in the end Lisa's edifice of lies and cover ups come crashing down when the Chikwiro family finally receives ashes instead of the body for burial.

Similarly, in the story "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai", Rambanai's going to London when she fails to go back to Dallas in America is sponsored by her cousin Matilda and her husband Jimmy who see their actions as some form of investment. They also plan on migrating to Britain in the near future, Rambanai is not only expected to reimburse them for the expenses incurred in securing her travel documents but she is also obligated to host them when they arrive in Britain.

Matilda says:

We sold some shares that Jimmy's father had left for him. We postponed buying a new fridge and stove for our flat. These sacrifices caused some strain between Jimmy and me, and I had to make Rambanai promise to send us back our money as soon as she sorted herself out "I will send it within a month of arriving," she said. "You can trust me, you'll see". (227)

Sometime later, when Matilda and Jimmy think of migrating, she says: "We thought of London, and my thoughts turned to Rambanai" (234). Devine (1999:44) states that the kind obligation that Rambanai and Lisa have can be considered as a form of "normative contract" comprising of rules

and guidelines and family wealth contracts between parents and their children, which can incorporate labour, exchange of wealth, emotional and practical support. This is when the family and relatives that render help or who are potential sources of help, have unstated expectation from the ones that are helped. These forms of obligation also exist between siblings as seen in how Peter must help his siblings. However, the narrative suggests that the pressure of these obligations and the unforeseen challenges of being a migrant eventually prove too heavy for Peter to bear and as a result he turns to a self-indulgent and destructive lifestyle which leads to his premature death.

### **6.5 Migrants' Expectations and Misconceptions**

Gappah's "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai" and "Something Nice from London" illustrate the difference between being diasporan and living as a migrant. The former is a person who migrates but is able to live a better kind of a life and enjoy certain privileges as opposed to migrants who live precarious lives in their countries of refuge. McGregor (2010:12) argues that to be diasporan "is honourable since it implies a certain level of consumption and education, and a familiarity with technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. It implies responsibilities and obligations, both towards family and dependents". This central contradiction between the elite connotations of the term "diaspora" and the realities of life in Britain, according to McGregor (2010:122), is the acute loss of status most Zimbabweans have experienced. This is to say that the majority of the Zimbabweans that have migrated in search of greener pastures, like the characters in the two stories, fall under legal categories where they lack basic rights and economic opportunities, like Rambanai who became an "illegal migrant" and was unable to access certain services.

The selected stories expose the painful realities of migrants' situations as opposed to what is generally imagined by those who have never experienced the related tribulations in the developed world. The stories reveal the daunting marginal spaces that migrants occupy in Britain and

America but remain largely unknown to those in Zimbabwe. In “My Cousin sister Rambanai”, Rambanai lives a very precarious life as evidenced by the fact that she is forced to overstay her visitor’s visa for many years and works as an underpaid undocumented worker. When she comes back for her father’s burial, Rambanai confesses that in America she only worked in restaurants and went to a community college only for three months. This is contrary to the lies that she had been telling people about her pleasant migrant experience. She had claimed that she was a university student and only worked part time as an insurance broker, a dancer, and poet among other things.

The writer clearly satirises Rambanai for faking a glamorous migrant life when she was in fact experiencing many challenges. However, her unpleasant experiences are also indicative of the marginal spaces that migrants occupy in America despite the popular image of that country as a land of equal opportunities for everyone. This over-estimated view that most ordinary Zimbabweans have of America is seen in what the hairdresser that plaits Rambanai hair in Mbare asks her to do when she returns to America. She says: “I have a cousin-brother who is willing to do anything, please help him if you can” (217). Rambanai then gives the hairdresser her American phone number and promises that she would definitely see what she can do. This faith in Rambanai is based on the misinformed assumption by most Zimbabweans that life in the developed countries is easy for migrants. The narrative suggests that her lies are enabled by the gullibility of her audience that is ready to believe in even the most fantastic things about America. The authorial voice suggests that by lying about her status and what she is able to do in America, Rambanai is only giving her audience what it deserves. Since Rambanai knows the kind of expectations her relatives and friends have about those who have been to developed countries, especially to America, she feeds people what they want to hear. She pretends to have multiple professions, being a dancer, working in an office and being a poet. (218). By so doing, the narrator condemns both Rambanai for manufacturing lies of a glorious life style in America and

her relatives and friends' unreasonable and uninformed expectations that make it possible for Rambanai to feed them a false narrative about her economic status.

The narrative also indicates that those who have been to the developed world are keen on constructing false identities that are in keeping with the expectations of those at home. For example, Rambanai says to Sisi Dessy their maid and anyone who will care to listen: "In America, you can be anything you want, anything at all" (219). Although Rambanai now knows better that the life of a migrant is characterized by numerous difficulties, she perpetuates this lie because she does not want to be viewed as a failure. She exhibits what McGregor (2010:16) terms the "diaspora syndrome" that has replaced the "been to" syndrome of the previous generation of migrants to the West. The diaspora syndrome being the exhibition of the features which are characteristic of returnees who have been to a Metropole in an attempt to pass as white as shown in the change in language intonation, dress code and other things thought of as white or elite. These are basically typified behaviors of those who have been to the West and returning to African countries. Moreover, Rambanai knows that this is what her audience in Zimbabwe would like to hear. Rambanai exploits her knowledge that most people in the developing world naively believe in the so called American dream.

Sisi Dessy's wholesale buying into Rambanai's stories of a glorious America is largely representative of average Zimbabweans who because of economic problems at home believe that by merely stepping on American soil, all their economic woes would be solved. As the story begins, Martha the narrator, already punctures deep holes into the myth of the American dream. With obvious satirical intent, she observes: "My cousin-sister Rambanai came back from America with two suitcases crammed with too-tight clothes in vivid shades of pink and a new accent" (207). This humour laced description of Rambanai's meagre worldly possessions when she comes back to Zimbabwe after five years of being in America is indicative of the hardships that undocumented migrants face.

Although the migrant protagonists are satirised in both stories for being insincere about their lives in America and England respectively, Gappah also sympathies with them by depicting them as double victims. They are victims of the imaginations and expectations of the people in Zimbabwe and of a racist migrant system in the Western countries where they seek refuge. For example, the narrative satirises Lisa for lacking courage to tell her relatives that she is financially unable to repatriate his cousin's body to Zimbabwe. However, the narrative suggests that Lisa's pretense is a product of unreasonable expectations that her relatives and friends back home have about migrants' economic status in England. The narrative is therefore sympathetic to Lisa by showing that like other Zimbabweans living in the United Kingdom, she is a product of a collapsed Zimbabwean economic and political system and that she was not wrong in desiring to escape her difficulties. Unfortunately, her expectations about life in the United Kingdom like that of most Zimbabweans are shown not to be based on a well-researched assessment of the situation in that country. Although exposing and condemning Lisa for perpetuating a false view of her life as a migrant to her relatives, the authorial voice reserves most of the condemnation for her relatives themselves who fail to realize that they are burdening Lisa with their unrealistic expectations. Instead of acknowledging that the situation is not easy for migrants in general and black migrants in particular, in the so called developed countries, most relatives back home keep on piling pressure on the migrants by making unreasonable demands. In a sense then, while Gappah's satirical humour is targeted at the migrants themselves for not wanting to expose their difficult economic conditions, most of her black humor seems reserved for the relatives at home for their refusal to accept that life is not easy for migrants in the developed countries. Both stories condemn the lack of imagination and the lack of wanting to find out the kind of lives that the migrants experience by the relatives who simply keep on making demands.

In "My cousin sister Rambanai", it is in the gap between what Rambanai tells their gullible maid, Sisi Dessy, and what her worldly wise cousin and narrator Martha reveals about her cousin which

creates painful satirical moments at the expense of Rambanai. The narrator reveals that Rambanai has been living as an illegal migrant in America and was unwilling to come back to Zimbabwe and was only forced to do so by the death of her father.

The stories that Rambanai tells Sisi Dessy and anyone who cares to listen, of an amazing life in America are attempts to live up to the identity that Zimbabweans have created and imagined for her. Unfortunately, this perpetuates a desire to migrate to this America that is imagined as a land of endless possibilities by others who also wish to pursue their own economic prospects and this creates a vicious cycle of falsehoods. This is illustrated by Sisi Dessy's enthusiastic chatter when she reasons: "[I]f I was in America, I would have my own TV show by now" (219). After an encouraging exclamation from her friend Memory, she goes on to confidently repeat Rambanai's well-rehearsed line, declaring: "In America, you can be anything you want, anything at all" (219). Rambanai tries to reinforce the image of an individual who was fully integrated into the American system by adopting an affected American accent. At one point when she is in a car with her cousin Matilda, Rambanai says: "Take that route she said, only she pronounced it rout instead of root" (207). Since she does not have any significant material possessions to prove that she has been to the so-called land of plenty, Rambanai assumes that a cultural acquisition, that is, an insincere but well-practiced American accent will substitute for her material lack and psychological emptiness.

While Rambanai's deliberate misrepresentation of America and her own achievements is reprehensible, these can be viewed sympathetically as attempts at protecting herself from psychological trauma that she experienced when she found out that the American dream for most migrants is just that, a dream. So instead of simply being a pure satirical butt of the author, Rambanai can be viewed as deserving the readers' deepest empathies. Chikowero et al (2015:16) helps us understand some of the challenges faced by young Zimbabweans migrants. He writes:

For young Zimbabweans starved of opportunities in a shrinking economy, migration to more stable yet largely unknown Western countries offered a sliver of hope and a window of opportunity. Unable to prove their worth at home, young Zimbabweans flock, first by the millions into the southern African region and then to the former colonial power, Britain, as well as other distant lands where the expectation remains that they would gain employment and in turn sustain their relatives back home by way of remittances.

Largely as a means of preserving her self-worth by escaping ridicule by those who remained at home, Rambanai dares not burst this bubble that Western nations are a cure it all when it comes to economic success for desperate migrants. Moreover, one can argue that her desperate but gullible Zimbabwean audience needs to live in this fantasy as some kind of consolation that elsewhere beyond their borders, the grass is greener. Rambanai also needs to believe in it as it is seen by her desperate desire to return so as to escape prying questions of those who have so long believed in a lie. Moreover, Rambanai reasons that experiencing economic and social challenges thousands of kilometers from home would be tolerable because they would be few people who know her to witness her suffering. In the end, Rambanai confesses that she has been misleading people all along about having lived a glamorous life in America and that she would soon return there. At one point she breaks down and admits: “There is no way that I can go back to the States ... I was there illegally. They will not let me back in, I overstayed my visitor’s visa” (223).

Adeyanju and Oriola (2011) point out that the migrants hide what they consider as undesirable. They further argue that an immigrant is similar to an actor on stage. S/he will bring out what s/he wants the audience to see. Concerning this, Goffman (1959:13) observes that the presentation of the self in the social world requires “social actors just like artists act[ing] out their scripts on the theatre stage and convey certain impressions of themselves to others.” Adeyanju and Oriola (2011) call this act “garnishing the front stage and concealing the backstage”. They conclude that

in the diaspora, the migrants are smiling to the world as they suffer secretly so as to save face to their peers and thus making the adage that not all that glitters is gold very true and befitting to the nature of their experiences.

Both stories reveal that migrants are faced with the challenge of irregular resident status. Most of them entered developed countries on visitors' visa permits and simply stayed on and started working illegally. As a result, they do not have proper travelling documents. For example, Thomas, Rambanai's brother fails to attend his father's funeral for fear that he may not be able to return to the United Kingdom. Within the Zimbabwean Shona culture, attending a parent's funeral is taken very seriously. In Thomas' case, his attendance of his father's funeral is even more crucial because he is the only son. Showing a lack of appreciation of the travelling challenges faced by illegal migrants, an aunt called Matilda condemns Thomas' failure to attend his father's funeral, saying:

Five years. Five whole years without coming home, not even to bury a father, heh ...

Is this the behaviour of a responsible son? *Handiye nevanji?* Is it not he, as the new head of the household, who is supposed to be here? (208)

As Matilda's words reveal, while to the uninitiated Thomas' actions may suggest that he is a wayward son who has been swallowed up by the pleasures of Britain, those in the know would be aware that Thomas has made a painful but practical decision based on careful assessment of his migrant status.

The narrative indicates that for Thomas, the decision is between blindly following tradition and come back and bury his father, and in the process forfeit all prospects of ever going back to Britain, or stay in Britain where he can at least continue to send some remittances to his mother to cope with Zimbabwe's economic challenges. After assessing his precarious situation as an

illegal migrant, Thomas chooses to send some money to assist with the funeral rather travel to Zimbabwe and get stuck there.

Commenting about Matilda's dismay about Thomas' apparent abdication of his cultural assigned responsibilities as the only son, the narrator observes:

For all she complained, it was the money that Thomas sent that enabled the family to bury my uncle in the splendor of the Paradise Peace Casket, a gleaming white coffin with golden handles and a gold frame on the surface into which my aunt put a photograph of my uncle in his University of Leeds graduation cap and gown. (208)

While these words show the painful decisions that migrants with an irregular status have to make, they also reveal the formation of unique cultural transformations as a result of the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. The story illustrates how serious the attendance of the funeral of a parent is among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. According to this culture, nothing is supposed to prevent one from attending the burial of his or her parents. That is why although Rambanai is aware that when she goes to her father's burial she can no longer return to America due to her irregular migrant status, she still goes home. While it would be culturally embarrassing for the only son not to attend his father's funeral, Thomas is able to compensate for his absence by sending valuable British pounds which enable the family to give his father a very expensive funeral. This in the eyes of some would suggest that Thomas has made it in Britain when in fact what he has merely done is to take advantage of the skewed currency exchange rate during the height of Zimbabwe's inflationary environment.

Concerning death in a foreign land, Mbiba in McGregor and Primorac (2010: 146) point out that not only is this a traumatic experience for the bereaved relatives but "it is also very expensive, and the cost of repatriating a body from the U.K amounts to around £3000 and about R10,000 from Johannesburg, South Africa". Lisa is overwhelmed by the expenses related to her cousin's

death since it seems like she is the only one expected to pay for repatriating the body to Zimbabwe. Although one must sympathize with Lisa due to the familial demands and expectations that she must deal with in arranging for the repatriation of her cousin's body, Lisa is also satirized in the narrative. Before the death of her cousin, she had been making numerous calls to her mother painting a rosy picture of her life in Britain. Capitalising on the strength of the British pound against the extremely weakened Zimbabwean dollar, Lisa had been maintaining the image of a material well-off individual by sending her mother many gifts. Her mother had spread and exaggerated this picture of a Lisa who lacked nothing boasting "Lisa has bought herself a car, Lisa has moved to a bigger flat." "Lisa is flying to America, to Canada, to Italy, to France" (84). Her failure to pay for the expenses required to send Peter's body to Zimbabwe exposes Lisa as a fraud and embarrasses her boastful mother.

The death of her cousin exposes Lisa's precarious migrant status when all along she had been giving the impression of being a diasporan. After Lisa promises that after the post-mortem Peter's body would be on the next flight every time, she eventually arranges for the cremation because it is the cheaper option. Peter's remains are ultimately delivered in a small gift box "wrapped in gaudy purple and silver paper and tied with purple ribbon" (99). This is a devastating admission that Lisa is not a diasporan but an isolated and struggling migrant in Britain.

The force of the story lies in the fact that cremation is taboo in the Shona culture and Lisa has been forced by difficult economic conditions as a migrant to commit one of the most frowned upon taboos related to the treatment of a dead body according to the culture of her people. As the narrator points out: "They cannot mourn [Peter] fully without seeing his body. He came from dust and to dust he must return to be interred whole, intact" (80). But in this case, Zimbabwe's political and economic situation and Peter's migrant status force them to mourn him without the body.

Cremation is foreign to the Shona culture. This is reinforced by Saidi (2017:8) who points out the importance of interring the dead on the ground as opposed to cremation. The Shona believe that the “ground” or earth houses spiritual forces hence much of their expression has direct contact or connections with the ground. When they dance, dances involve stamping the feet on the ground; at birth the umbilical cord is buried on the ground. Contact and allegiance with the ancestral world involves the pouring of beer on the ground as well as the dropping of snuff/tobacco on the ground. Hence, burial eventually is on the earth in contrast with cremation.

This need for the Shona customs to be implemented in Peter’s burial so as to fill this customary void is evidenced when some relatives insist that when Peter’s body eventually arrives from Britain it should be transported all the way to the family rural home in Shurugwi. The narrator relates:

They insist that our customs dictate that Peter be buried with my father and other ancestors hundreds of kilometres away in Shirugwi. Great-uncle Matyatya who arrived last night has been the most insistent. He trembled with passion as he grasped the rounded end of his walking stick and thumped it on the floor in emphasis. “It is bad that Peter died mhiri kwemakungwa, over the oceans where the baleful influence of alien spirits could not be discounted? Never before he said, ‘has a son of Chikwiro been buried away from the land of his ancestors.’” (82)

According to this belief, the dead can only return in the full sense if he or she is buried alongside long dead ancestors. In this way, the spirit of the dead person is assumed will have rest. Ballard (1990:23) reinforces this when he claims that burial becomes the only occasion of full implementation of return to the country of origin. It is a final symbol of family unity, where the graves of the deceased family members lie next to each other. Therefore, Peter’s cremation is a

violation of cherished cultural beliefs and this shows the impact of the migration experience where some leave and never return as anticipated.

It can be argued, however, that the author lacks sympathy for Lisa who herself is very young when it comes to weighty issues of single-handedly dealing with a death situation. Under normal circumstances, Lisa should not have been made to carry the weight of these funeral preparations on her own. Lisa's failure to repatriate Peter's body is a tragic affair and satirizing it shows a lack of empathy. Even if Lisa had the financial resources, death is an emotionally overwhelming event. Gappah herself maybe viewed as a diasporan as opposed to her protagonist. Her privileged economic and social status likely contributes to her downplaying the challenges that struggling migrants face.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The stories "My Cousin-Sister Rambanai" and "Something Nice from London" that the chapter utilized depicted the ambivalence of the migration experience. The stories show that whilst they are genuine economic pressures that compelled some Zimbabweans to migrate to developed countries, they do not necessarily experience upward economic and social mobility. The migrants find themselves in a dilemma where both their home country and the countries of their refuge are hostile. This creates emotional and psychological problems for the migrants which are even detrimental to their physical health as evidenced by Peter's death and Rambanai's and Lisa's lies.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### 7.1 Conclusion

The thesis engaged with narratives written by Zimbabweans about the migration of their fellow citizens in search of better socio-political and economic opportunities. The narratives represent some facets and nature of the migration experience and suggest that there is a relationship between migration and their identity formulation. The process of these mobilities and migrations from Zimbabwe, the home country, a familiar space for them, fosters the transformation of the Zimbabwean migrant and in essence the African migrant in either the regional or Western spaces that they migrate to. The negotiation of new social formations creates tensions that come as a result of the confrontation between ones' culture and the culture of the receiving country.

Moreover, as the Zimbabweans and other migrants move to foreign lands due to push factors in their home countries, most of them cherish a desire of one day returning home. It is an important aspect as the initial movement reveals the ways in which they make sense of their status as migrants and foreigners in the new space. The study also engaged with what it means to leave one's home country and the effects of starting a new life as a migrant. It illustrated the relationship between identity and place through the analysis of the fictional diasporic and migrant experiences. Since the concept of migrants and diaspora connotes a sense of difference and multiple experiences of displacement and mobilities, it is evident that the characters in the examined novels are in a state of entrapment between different selves.

The first chapter provided a background to the study and its significance and highlighted its thematic concerns. It also gave the theoretical grounding of the study, its aims and objectives. The chapter also engaged in a review of the literature on migration, mobilities and identities and their convergence and confluence in relation to this particular study.

The second chapter discussed *Zebra Crossing's* depictions of the African migrants, and particularly the Zimbabweans that find themselves in South Africa in the hope of better economic

prospects. This chapter provided a regional dimension to the migration experience as the focus was on how South Africa receives fellow Africans as compared to the way African migrants are received in the West. The chapter argued that ideas of nation and nationalism and not the Pan-African spirit, still dominate the South Africans as illustrated by how they deal with African migrants. Vandermerwe's narrative exposed the hypocrisy of the "Ubuntu" mantra used by South Africa to market itself for the 2010 World cup as the evident xenophobia proved hollow that South Africa was "home of Ubuntu, an epicenter of the African renaissance, a model of working, multicultural 'rainbow' society and successful transitional African state" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 281).

This was shown by how Chipu, her brother and all the African migrants were faced with the hatred because of their migrant status. Vandermerwe shows that the African Soccer World Cup was divisive as non-South Africans were targeted in violent xenophobic attacks illustrating that the event was for South Africans as opposed to being an African event as initially purported. The narrative underscored the intricacy of home and belonging, shown in how the Zimbabweans and other African migrants like Jean-Paul seem not to fully belong to their adopted South African space. The second class treatment that they receive as migrants was seen to be similar to that of the albino protagonist Chipu, who is regarded as an outcast because of her albinism. On the same vein, the study explored the identity concerns of the migrants as they are dehumanized and pushed to the margins of the South African communities thereby buttressing the idea that migration has a marginalizing effect on those who choose to do so. The Zimbabwean migrants are regarded as intruders who have come to take South African women and jobs, further exposing the inhospitable nature of the communities and the environment that they find themselves in.

The study further examined Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* which directly attributes the mass migration of the Zimbabwean population to the corruption and reckless handling of the countries' economy and political affairs by the ruling elite. These political and socio-economic woes were

seen as the causal factors that pushed out a great number of Zimbabweans who sought to find economic relief from other countries. By highlighting the dwindling economic climate of Zimbabwe with the prices of basic commodities rising beyond what the ordinary Zimbabwean could afford as a result of the hyperinflation, Bulawayo shows that the ruling party is responsible for the mass migrations of the populace. The depiction of the clean-up campaign dubbed Operation Murambatsvina was seen as further exacerbating the dire living conditions of especially those in the urban areas just as Vandermerwe foregrounded it as worsening the lives of the citizens. This was the demolition of informal structures that many depended on for their informal businesses that are ironically the backbone of the country's ailing economy. Such depictions of the worsening fortunes of the ordinary Zimbabweans reveal the ruthless nature of the government that cares less for its own. The study argued that it is the poor governance of Zimbabwe's ruling party that has a direct correlation to their migration to all over the world as evidenced by the mobilities of the residents of Paradise and other areas. The chapter also examined the concept of home and identity through Darlings' migration to America in search of better economic opportunities. Her search for an identity in the hostile American space is problematized largely by the realization that America is not what she had envisioned as a child in Zimbabwe.

The presence of the Non-governmental organizations in their squatter settlement also highlighted the kind of mobilities that the West engages in, that is, unlike the migration experienced by the Africans or Zimbabweans when they move to Western spaces theirs are seen to be privileged as they are mostly on humanitarian basis and tourism purposes unlike the reverse when Africans migrate to the West. The study argued that their presence makes possible the motionless mobility of the Zimbabwean people and Africans at large, even of those who might never leave their home countries. This is through the pictures of the people that are taken back to the Western countries and even those broadcasted by these NGO people through the BBC and other international media.

Chapter Four discussed Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* which focuses on Zimbabwean exiles in Britain who are depicted as living in the underbelly of the urban society. The study argued that negotiating an existence on the margins is a precarious endeavour for the thousands of Zimbabwean migrants. The precarious existence is depicted as being further complicated by their uncertain immigration statuses that cripple their hopes of ever finding decent employment.

Chikwava's novel focuses on the migrant after he or she makes the geographic shift and the text highlights the convolution of individual and national identities in the light of the notion of cosmopolitanism. The novel shows how the migrant seeks to adapt in the new environment and how his or her language, behavior and culture evolves in this setting. The narrative, through the migrant characters in London and the depiction of their migratory patterns was instructive and illustrative of how underprivileged migrants mediate, negotiate and construct their identities.

The nameless protagonist embodied this intrinsic process of mediation and the negotiation of a precarious identity. His initial optimism parallels that of the majority of the migrants upon arrival in London and their gradually changing perceptions as they continue living there. The narrator's friendship with people of dubious personalities and his refusal to accept work that he considers beneath him are all processes of mediating an identity in that hostile environment. Chikwava's narrative indicates the painful realities of migrant lives that the exiles exchanged with their own Zimbabwean woes.

Chapter Five examined Huchu's *The Magistrate, the Maestro and the Mathematician*. The text was used to discuss the positive and negative effects of migration as well as the identity formations that ensue. The text reveals that in the diasporic geographies, the fusion of cultures results in distorted or unconventional identities such as in the case of the Magistrate who initially assumed feminine gender roles as he could not secure employment for a full year after migrating to Edinburgh. This adjustment to a low social status in Edinburgh creates an identity crisis in him.

That his wife secures a job first before he does and she is forced to assume the role of a breadwinner, further reverses the conventional Zimbabwean patriarchal expectations.

The novel also shows that migration challenges are no respecter of class or race as the case of David attests. He experiences a deep social alienation which he tries to cure by being engrossed in the realm of books rather with an engagement with the rest of the people around him. This emanates from his failure to reconcile with the fact that being white cannot shield him from the loss of nationality that forces him to low paying jobs just like the rest of other migrant Zimbabweans.

Huchu's novel also shows that even the privileged Zimbabwean migrants, although cushioned from a precarious economic existence, they too suffer nostalgia brought about by migration. Farai, typifying this class of migrants, desires social connections with people in Zimbabwe as revealed by his longing to be there. He still measures his social standing by what is happening in Harare, maintaining the link between home and exile. Huchu's novel suggests that the migration experience is a destructive process at many levels.

The final chapter discussed Pettina Gappah's two short stories taken from her anthology *An Elegy to Easterly*. The narratives illustrated the disruptive nature of migration to those who return from abroad. It showed the challenges experienced by characters when they want to return or when they return to Zimbabwe after a period as migrants in America or Britain. The chapter also highlights that Gappah satirizes some Zimbabwean migrants for gullibly believing that those who migrated to the Western spaces will automatically make economic fortunes. The narrative suggests that this is partly due to the fact that the Zimbabweans in the diaspora perpetuate this lie by presenting only the positive side of their diasporic experiences. The stories further highlighted that those who remain should be wary of these representations of the diaspora as returning migrants would be retelling them merely to maintain a false picture of themselves.

This misrepresentation of their experiences in the diaspora results in those that remain in Zimbabwe to also desire to migrate to Britain and America. Gappah's stories also show that the economic and political crisis in the post-2000 Zimbabwe period pushed the masses into these desperate migrations. The selected stories show that while the Zimbabwe might be unlivable and hostile, the first world countries present their own set of distinctive problems to migrants.

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