Unhomed: Existential Homelessness as Trauma in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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Abstract

Contemporary Zimbabwean literature is increasingly migrant in content and outlook. This study analyses two novels by Zimbabwean migrant writers, Brian Chikwava and NoViolet Bulawayo, focusing on their portrayals of African migrants' experiences of homelessness, dislocation, and the complex struggles inherent in their desperate attempts to negotiate and transcend borders. Chikwava's Harare North and Bulawayo's We Need New Names are two representative novels that exemplify the traumatic imprints of migrancy on African postcolonial subjects, foregrounding how they grapple with fractured notions of home and the resultant crisis of belonging. The narratives are closely read, employing theoretical insights from Homi Bhabha's conception of unhomeliness and current research in postcolonial trauma studies. In the novels, characters are displaced by the Zimbabwean government's infamous Operation Murambatsvina, leading them to flee their "homeland" through safe and clandestine routes. In the diaspora, the characters are again displaced, having realised only belatedly that "Fortress Europe" selectively bestows its succours. The figure of "umgodoyi"—the stray dog that belongs to nowhere and no one—runs through both novels as a central metaphor, ultimately epitomising unhomeliness. The characters in the novels experience double displacement and lack acceptance and integration at "home" and abroad. Hence, homelessness functions not merely as a narrative backdrop but as both a catalyst and a repercussion of migration, positioning it as the central ontological traumatic stressor that precipitates the mental disorders experienced by characters in Harare North and We Need New Names.

Keywords: *Homelessness, Unhomeliness, Trauma, African migrant fiction, Zimbabwean literature*

Introduction

Bulawayo, the Zimbabwean city from which Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, whose pen name is NoViolet Bulawayo, hails, is described in Brian Chikwava's 2011 Wasafiri article titled *City Portrait: Bulawayo* as a highly multicultural city where one could hear five languages spoken on a bus ride, and a city that was born of migration. Migration dictates not just the content but the texture of contemporary Zimbabwean literature. Indeed, Zimbabwe, like many developing countries in Africa (notably Nigeria, Somalia, Libya, and Morocco), arguably deals more in the exportation of people than in any other "product". Contemporary Zimbabwean literature is

populated by squatters, refugees, migrants, and exiles. Migrant writers as diverse as Petina Gappah, Tendai Huchu, Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, Thamsanqa Ncube, and Emmanuel Sigauke recreate Zimbabwean characters' experiences of migration, return migration, exile, and transnationalism. Brian Chikwava and Noviolet Bulawayo are very prominent among Zimbabwean migrant writers who are crafting the tales of the Zimbabwean dispersion. Chikwava's *Harare North* was published in 2009, while Bulawayo's *We need new names* was published in 2013. Remarkably, both titles bear the names of prominent cities in the novelists' much-loved but dysfunctional nation.

A defining characteristic feature of the African migrant narrative is the representation of migrant characters' experiences in Africa, often choicelessness, joblessness, disillusionment and the hope of a greener pasture; the movement proper on ships, planes, trains and sometimes uncharted routes; the reconfiguration of the character's identity in the host country; and sometimes a physical or physiological return to the native land. Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*, Ali Farah's *Little Mother,* Teju Cole's *Open City*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Fatou Diome's *The Belly of the Atlantic*, Nneoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*, just like NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*, feature characters who migrate at all costs only to become disillusioned in Europe and America. This affirms McLeod's (2000) assertion that migrants often occupy a displaced position. King *et al* (2002) corroborate this when they assert that migration transcends "a mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a wide mode of being in the world- migrancy" (King *et al*, 2002, p. xv). Within the framework of postcolonial trauma studies, migrant traumas then emerge not as isolated experiences but as structural conditions of diasporic existence, produced through disillusionment, displacement, disruptions, fractured subjectivities, identity crises, ruptures, and the persistent double consciousness that defines postcolonial modernity.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine Chikwava and Bulawayo's representations of African migrant subjects' traumatisation by their experiences of homelessness, displacement and estrangement resulting from their homeland's unhomeliness. NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Name*s and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* represent characters' experiences of displacement, dislocation, and unhomeliness as tropes to recreate the postcolonial realities that drive African subjects away from Africa, and their ultimate condition of precarity in the diaspora. In the Zimbabwe depicted across

the two novels, displacement, dislocation, and violence cut across age, class, and gender, shaping the lives of both young and old, rich and poor, men and women alike. Zimbabwe, like many African countries, has had its history dented by colonialism, civil conflicts, military oppression, and domestic violence. Characters in *We Need New Names,* as well as those in *Harare North,* are psychologically stressed by physical, social, psychological, and even political displacements resulting from political instability, economic depression, and volatile security within the nation. The depiction of characters' experiences of displacement, dislocation, and alienation finds ample representation in many postcolonial texts, since the "concepts of place and displacement demonstrate the very complex interaction of language, history, and environment in the experience of colonised people" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998, p. 177). While the colonial enterprise led to linguistic, political, spiritual, economic and social displacement on the African continent, the postcolonial era has witnessed greater displacement of citizens as a result of the abysmal leadership in many states in Africa.

Methodology

The study presents a critical analysis of Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The analysis follows Homi Bhabha's conception of unhomeliness, his recast of what Freud captures as "unheimlich", which presents Freud's reflection of home as a space that can share features of the uncanny or the unhomely, where the home projects familiarity and strangeness, which arouses dread, terror, and estrangement (Tembo, 2017, p. 5). Freud's and Bhabha's subscription to "uncanny" as both psychological and postcolonial conditions, respectively, enable this study's foregrounding of the transformation of the Zimbabwean homely space to an unfamiliar, often repulsive space, which Bulawayo's characters would childishly but remarkably term a *kaka* nation (*kaka* being the Shona word for human excreta). Zimbabwe is captured as a *kaka* country where disillusionment, extreme poverty, and destitution push the citizens out in search of new names, new identities, and new realities. The word *kaka* in the children's estimation effectively captures the desecration of their once-loved nation and its gradual disintegration through the abuse of state power. The unmaking of the home, or the unhomeliness of the home, conceptualises the fragmentation, alienation, and unbelonging that beset configurations of home, nation, and identity. Bhabha's mapping of the loss of home to the uncanniness of feeling out of place constructs dislocation and dispossession as both an affect and an effect.

Zimbabwean migrant characters in the novels closely read are unhomed. They leave to live but fail to find a rooting in the host land. They live in the diaspora, but they are haunted by the legacies of a past that sits "uncomfortably out of joint, ambivalently ahead of their time and yet behind it too" (Cho, 2007, p. 19). Their home has ceased to be one, thanks to many of Mugabe's policies, which assaulted the home spaces. Their home has become a site of violations and a threat to the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the characters. Hence, novels depict unhomeliness as a psychic condition. Since the characters' inner worlds have become invaded by political and social collapse, as the "home" no longer shelters or succours them, their psyche is forced to absorb social catastrophe. For the characters, home becomes unsafe; the diaspora is not home either, so the psyche loses its anchoring ground, so to speak. In the texts, therefore, unhomeliness functions traumatically: it forces subjects to internalise the breakdown of the nation, the family, and the self, thereby producing psychic instability.

Essentially, in *Harare North* and *We Need New Names*, unhomeliness as conceived in this study, operates not merely as a metaphor for displacement but as a traumatic mechanism that actively shapes the characters' psychological realities. So, drawing on Bhabha's notion of the unhomely as the moment when the private sphere is invaded by the "violences" of the public world, both novels show how the breakdown of Zimbabwe's political and social structures becomes internalised in the migrant character's psyche. Chikwava's narrator is seen as "carrying" the failed state within him, and his experiences of illegality, racism and precarity in London amplify his prior wounds, producing dissociation and a fractured identity. Similarly, Bulawayo depicts unhomeliness as beginning in childhood, where Paradise's rubbles, hunger and vices imprint a condition of continuous trauma that migration to America does not resolve but reconfigures. Darling's subsequent linguistic, cultural and social alienation, as the analysis would project, reveals a psyche struggling to manage contradictory worlds that can no longer be reconciled.

The study's conception of trauma follows postcolonial trauma theorists' acknowledgment of the particular social components and cultural contexts of the traumatic experience (Balaev, 2014, p. 3), especially postcolonial critics' assertion of the possibilities for communal and collective traumatisation. Trauma is conceived of as a psychological wound occasioned by African subjects' experiences of repeated, structural, and intergenerational experiences of violence and marginalisation and postcolonial disillusionment. The study subscribes to Stef Crap's insistence that trauma in the postcolony is often gradual, cumulative, and structural. Postcolonial subjects are

traumatised not only by singular catastrophic events but ongoing repeated experiences of chronic hunger, homelessness, racism, failed nationalism, needless losses of lives and property and displacement from every social structure.

Chikwava's *Harare North* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* were purposively selected for their thematic preoccupation with Zimbabwean characters in limbo, characters who are principally traumatised by their sense of rootlessness, often arising from their homelessness, displacement, and dislocation. The two protagonists of the novels, a nameless character in *Harare North* and Darling in *We Need New Names* are displaced subjects who incessantly oscillate between dispersion and anchorage. Hence, the characters in the novel are traumatised not by a single event (in the Caruthian sense), but by ongoing everyday tragedies. Their experiences favour a shift from a conception of trauma as an event-based, individual experience of extraordinary suffering to a collective and continuous experience (as averred by such postcolonial trauma theorists as Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, 2008, p. 3; Stef Craps, 2013, p. 2); Irene Visser, 2015, p. 252) and others). Essentially, trauma theory is employed to engage the two novels' recreations of the psychological consequences of unhomeliness on characters for whom the home (employed in this study as both a physical space and the metaphor for intimacy, refuge, safety, security, connection, and belonging) has become altered and elusive. This is especially significant within the Zimbabwean context, since more people are displaced and forcefully relocated, with diverse psychologically traumatic effects on the people, arising from circumstances where homeliness is increasingly and desperately "conjured out of detritus and longing" (Samuelson, 2008, p. 131).

Homelessness, Unhomeliness and Border Politics in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

The late Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who ruled Zimbabwe for nearly four decades, is often depicted in the Zimbabwean literary imaginary as the sender of the bulldozer. His representation as the sender of the bulldozer in narratives by Christopher Mlalazi, Brian Chikwava, Noviolet Bulawayo, Eric Harrison, and others alludes to his infamous regime's Operation Murambatsvina. The Accelerated Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, also commonly referred to as the Fast Track Resettlement Programme, was initiated in 2000, while Operation Murambatsvina commenced in 2005. Within the decade of 2000-2010, Operation Murambatsvina, which translates to "drive out the rubbish" or "discard the filth" and the government's preferred translation, "restore order," resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. The victims of the operation termed it

"Operation Tsunami" because of the speed with which demolitions were carried out and the ferocity with which the bulldozers employed in the demolition consumed the people's past and present treasures. Chikwava and Bulawayo employed Operation Murambatsvina as a narrative backdrop in *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* to underscore the traumatic realities of the ensuing crisis on their protagonists and other characters. Besides the demolitions that resulted in the displacement of thousands of people, the decade 2000-2010, often referred to as the Lost Decade (Sachikonye, 2012, p. 163), witnessed the devaluation of the currency and other economic crises. This resulted in the migration of thousands of Zimbabweans to South Africa, London and the United States of America. Driven to despair, Zimbabweans fled the erstwhile homeland because it had ceased to be home and had taken on a monstrous demeanour.

In fact, Operation Murambatsvina functions as a psychic wound in both novels. It shapes the narrators' consciousness long after the physical destruction has occurred. Operation Murambatsvina acts as a shared traumatic origin point, generating displacement, insecurity, and unhomeliness. For Darling, for instance, Murambatsvina is beyond a political event; it is the foundation of her childhood environment. The operation is why Paradise, her shantytown, existed in the first place. It is the origin of her homelessness; it is what first fractures the young Darling's sense of national belonging. Similarly, for Chikwava's protagonist, Operation Murambatsvina persists as a psychic scar. This trauma of state-inflicted homelessness becomes a lifelong condition. This vividly demonstrates that unhomeliness resulting from systemic failures, homelessness and displacement does not end when borders are crossed. Its psychic and emotional consequences remain embedded in the migrant characters' identities.

For the nameless protagonist-narrator in *Harare North*, a man in his twenties, a jobless son of a widow, it could be said that Zimbabwe literally evicted him, after a wasted time spent as a Green Bomber. Under Robert Mugabe, the Green Bombers recruited youths who attended the nation's National Youth Service Programme, which began in 2001. The programme's supposed aim was to train people in the acquisition of skills and patriotism. The programme, as depicted by the narrator's story, was a prominent part of Mugabe's government's deception. The name, "green bombers", comes from the colour of the youths' uniforms. "Green Bombers" is largely a derogatory term; it refers to a common green bottle fly often captured among the Ndebele-speaking people as "impukane yothuvi", meaning "feaces fly" (Siziba, 2017). The trainees are taught Mugabe's version of history as written in a manual authored by Mugabe. As to the reason for

Chikwava's employment of an ex-Green Bomber as his protagonist, Mangena and Nyambi (2013) explicates that "green bombers" as depicted in *Harare North* was so represented to present a political commentary that would reinforce the despicability of the National Youth Service Programme since "green bomber" serves to signal the dirty tactics employed by the ruling party in "creating and maintaining hegemony" (p. 81).

The narrator, having tried and failed to secure gainful employment, embraced the opportunity to join the Green Bombers as his only chance at living a purposeful life. However, in the novel, the Green Bombers' primary tasks, according to the narrator, are to kill those they call the enemies of the ruling party, by giving plenty of "forgiveness", the narrator's term for murder and maiming. The narrator tells of a time when he was privileged to murder a member of the opposition party. Besides administering "forgiveness" to Mugabe's enemies, the Green Bombers organise forced disappearances and electoral violence. Essentially, the Green Bombers helped foment trouble and wreak havoc. The ironic twist, however, is that the youths who made up the youth militias for the ruling party were used, abused and then betrayed. The narrator's activities alongside those of other Mugabe thugs land him in Chikurubi Maximum Prison, where his psyche is irreparably damaged. He becomes especially traumatised by his incarceration, where he was raped and probably infected with HIV/AIDS:

> I don't want to leave the country because I have not visit Mother in two years. But I have to go because me I know what Chikurubi Maximum Prison is like; I have been there before and it is full of them people that carry likkle horrors such as them sharpened bicycle spokes and they want you to donate your buttocks so they can give you Aids; if you refuse then bicycle spoke go through your stomach like it is made of toilet paper and you is bleeding inside all night and have no chance of making it to the morning. No one can want to go there again. Life is not fair me I know after they hold the spoke to my heart (Chikwava, 2009, p. 25).

It is solely because of his misery while in prison that he jumps bail and flees Zimbabwe. However, the narrator's time in prison already marred his outlook on life and shaped him irrevocably into a violent distributor of violence.

The narrator flees Zimbabwe on a visitor's visa because home for him has long ceased being one: there has been the transition from *heimlich* into *unheimlich*. The homeland now haunts. This aligns with Bhabha's conception of "the unhomely", as Tembo (2017, p. 5) expatiates is, not as a state of lacking a home, but rather "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place". Home, for the narrator and other characters, becomes a site of trauma. All the

homeland has to offer him is trouble and more trouble. The narrator relates how, everywhere, Zimbabweans are depressed and giving in to pressure. He tells of characters who, out of sheer frustration, embraced suicide. The narrator's uncle, Uncle Nhamo, committed suicide, while the narrator's mother also died of an overdose. Still within the narrator's family, Sekai's brother commits suicide. Sekai's brother's story is especially pathetic. He quarrels with Sekai over the latter's reluctance to send him money. Sekai tells him she does not care about his having HIV/AIDS, and that he could go ahead and jump off his balcony if he so wishes, and that was exactly what he did. Sekai's brother jumps from the eighth-floor balcony and dies. These representations underscore the spiritual, psychological, economic and sociocultural repercussions of the dispossession, dislocation and dissociation experienced by Zimbabweans during the Lost Decade.

For the narrator who flees to London rather than succumb to the pressure to end his life, his lot is hardly better. Right from Gatwick Airport, the narrator is shown his inferior status, as he is detained as soon as he lands at the Airport, where he spends eight days before his cousin's wife graciously comes to "claim" him. At his cousin's place, the narrator suffers rejection. The earlier part of *Harare North* depicts the narrator's amazement at the cold treatment he receives from his host family. Sekai, his cousin's wife, makes it clear by her conduct and words that he is not welcome into their space, so that "before the end of my first day, I already know that Sekai don't want me to stay with them" (p. 12). At Paul and Sekai's place, the narrator is treated like an unwanted package. When he gives Sekai the groundnut, he brings for her from Zimbabwe, she throws it into the bin, claiming it may contain some disease. Paul, his cousin does not talk to him because his wife disallows him from doing so. Out of loneliness, the narrator often sits in the toilet. As much as the narrator longs for a sense of belonging, he is deprived of it. Overcome by loneliness and a prevailing feeling of helplessness, he seeks solace in the fading memories of his mother. In his hallucination, he holds on to his mother who wraps her arms around and holds him tight.

The narrator's dream where he sees his mother offering him solace and warmth betrays a desire for her maternal care, on the one hand and a longing for a rooting, a sense of belonging in the diaspora, on the other hand. His dream affirms Sigmund Freud's assertion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that dreams are largely the expressions of unfulfilled wishes and desires. In his dream-like reconstruction of his utmost desires, the images of his mother and his motherland become an entangled narrative:

> Mother. Home. Early morning. She water bed of tomato plants at the back of house. By doorstep, there is she old shoes. Wet and red with mud… Mother. She wrap me up in she arms and hold tight. My small feet lock together, them small toes coil. I'm back in Mother's arms. 'Did you fall, my child?' I suck thumb and nod. Mother hold me to she bosom and rock me gentle. Then some funny long breast roll out down and swing past my face like pendulum. It come back; dark and dry, it hit my cheek. I miss it. It come back again; now I catch it. Outside, things is now quiet. Inside, breast is cold; the milk dry up long time ago (Chikwava, 2009, p. 20).

It is noteworthy that even in his dream, the narrator's hope is dashed, his efforts frustrated, and his toil unrewarded. The dream, strategically placed between when the narrator suffers rejection at Paul and Sekai's place and when he would seek help from Shingi, explicitly foreshadows the narrator's subsequent arduous but futile attempts at finding a home, a connection and a rooting in London.

Even after the narrator moves in with Shingi, a place that turns out to be a squat occupied by other hustling people, his standard of living hardly improves. The house itself is not much to write about. The house is distinct from other houses because of its grey brick; its two top windows that have red brick arch, and what the narrator describes as the window's big, sad eyes. If the outside of the house presents a hostile place, the inside of the squat is even more unhomely, what with its kitchen that smells of bad cooking, a sink filled with a heap of dirty dishes and the ceiling that grows mushrooms and other things. Added to the house's unfriendly "demeanour" are the menacing rules that stare the narrator in the face and stick to his brain. When time after time the narrator finds jobs only to lose them, the narrator is plagued with intrusive memories from his past. He constantly recalls his poor mother's dashed hopes and how she died of an overdose. He tells of how she was taken to the hospital in a wheelbarrow. He is dejected because he fails to perform *umbuyiso* for his mother, which is one of the two reasons he chose to work tirelessly in London. The other reason is that he needed some money to pay up his real and imagined debts. Chigwedere (2017) elucidates that *umbuyiso* is a Ndebele traditional ceremony that is normally conducted a year after the funeral of a loved one to welcome the spirit of the deceased back to the homestead. It is believed that the spirit of the dead person wanders in the wilderness in the meantime until *umbuyiso* is conducted. By incapacitating the narrator and denying him the means and the resources to perform *umbuyiso* for his late mother, the host society makes him guilty and vulnerable to *Ngozi* (an avenging spirit), believed among Zimbabweans to be capable of inflicting insanity and eventual death. The narrator's traumatic pangs at his failure to perform *umbuyiso* for his mother are further heightened

by the government's planned relocation of his mother's village people to another location because of the discovery of precious stones there.

The intrusive memories from the narrator's past confirm Hartman's (1995, p. 537) submission that trauma often comprises a two-part system: the first being the traumatic event, which is registered, not experienced, after which is the onset of the memory of the traumatic event, one which bypasses perception and consciousness, in a journey into the subconscious, where it falls directly to the psyche, from where intrusive memories emerge. The narrator's dismal realities – his inability to secure a long-term job further aggravates his sense of homelessness and helplessness. He works hard, but he often has nothing to show for the hard work he does. In the novel, migrants, especially illegal migrants are paid pittance for the work they do. At the end of a week's job, he earns so little because the company has put him on an emergency tax code that siphons most of the money. He is pained that in just a few days of working in Brixton, he is already helping to put so much Mars bars in Londoners' pockets. Before getting a job, the narrator had stumbled on a post on the internet on how immigrants slave only to enrich the natives. He had read that the "immigrant people's contribution to this country is equal to one Mars bar in every citizen's pocket every year" (Chikwava, 2009, p. 28). It is after he receives his wages that the truth of the assertion sinks in. In many places around the world, especially in Europe, migrants are welcome only for what they can do, often measured in terms of physical labour.

Saunders explicates in "Uncanny Presence: The Foreigner at the Gate of Globalization" (2001) that migrants, the "global foreigners" of this age, are often the labouring agents of globalisation, but they hardly share its benefits. They are often "perceived as material objects: they are the subjects of reification, their value assessed in terms of capacity for physical labour or embodied service, their presence confined to the body" (Saunders, 2001, p. 92). The characters in *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* belatedly realise that to the migrant, especially the illegal migrant is reserved excruciating labour:

> You spend them weeks shifting mud with shovels and sweat beads come out of every pore in the body because you is putting out heaps of effort while your buttocks point to high heaven and migrant flesh start to stink around you as shirts and underpants get damp. Here you quickly know that the weight of your buttocks increase by the hour and come down only by night when you is sandwiched between blanket and mattress (Chikwava, 2009, p. 47).
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> 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 butchered animals, slit throats, drained blood. We worked with dangerous machines, holding our breath like crocodiles underwater, our minds on the money and never on our lives… We cut ourselves working on meat; we got skin diseases. We inhaled bad smells until our lungs thundered.... We got sick but did not go to hospitals, could not go to hospitals. We swallowed every pain like a bitter pill, drank every fear like a love potion, and we worked and worked (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 163)

The narrator, Shingi, Farayi and even Aleck, all underpaid immigrants in *Harare North* and Darling, Bastard and Aunty Fostalina, immigrants in *We need new names*, provide the labour and surplus-value upon which world capitalism thrives (Foster, 2015).

The protagonist of *We Need New Names*, Darling, is amazed at the volume of work an immigrant does and how migrants are often largely deprived of their rights, when in fact, their often low-paid labour provides the cheap services and goods that the economy thrives upon. On getting to America, Darling realises that she must work. Darling is shocked, even though when she was still in Zimbabwe, Bastard had, in a childish yet factual manner, hinted that she would be expected to work for whatever she got in America. He predicts that she would work in a nursing home also, "cleaning *kaka* off some wrinkled old man who can't do anything for himself" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 14), like he envisaged her aunt was doing. Bastard had sounded silly and jealous, but his words were a prefiguration of what Darling would experience in America. It is at the workplace that Darling discovers the truth about the American dream – that the American dream can often only be embraced by Americans and those who belong to the American society. Since neither Darling nor her aunt is a legal immigrant, they can only hope to eat the crumbs thrown from the centre to the margins.

From Darling's experiences, an extradiegetic narrator underscores how the prices and sacrifices that the migrant characters paid to get into America at all costs were not worth it. He noted that since getting into America was "harder than crawling through the anus of a needle," Zimbabweans "begged, despaired, lied, groveled, promised, charmed, bribed — anything to get us out of the country" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 159). For his passport and travel, a character like Tshaka Zulu "sold all of his father's cows, against the old man's wishes" while Perseverance, another character, had to take his sister Netsai out of school to migrate. For another, Nqo, he had to first work in the fields of Botswana for nine months to earn enough money to migrate. Nozipho, like Primrose and Sicelokuhle and Maidei, slept with the "fat black pig Banyile Khoza from the passport office", just

for a chance to leave Zimbabwe: "Girls flat on their backs, Banyile between their legs, America on their minds" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 160). Pathetically, the characters have no place in America. All that awaits the migrants as presented by the narrator is work, the work which more often than not is cleaning, from cleaning of houses to hospitals, restaurants, cars, clothes and even people (Aviva, 2007).

Just like the nameless narrator in *Harare North* who migrates because he can no longer stay in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo's characters also migrate because it has become almost impossible to stay back. The characters flee because their home has chased them to the shore. They flee because their home, no longer recognisable, has become the mouth of a shark and the barrel of a gun (Shire, 2011, p. 55). The characters flee because they have become strangers in and to their homeland. The narrator in *We Need New Names* relates the gory realities of homelessness and displacement as experienced by both children and adults. In the wake of the Operation Murambatsvina, Darling's family members, like those of her friends, Chipo, Bastard, Sbho, Godknows and Stina, were forcefully uprooted from their homes and made to live in a shanty town ironically named Paradise. They all come to Paradise dismayed, disoriented and traumatised. The narrator speaks of children who are as baffled as their parents, who "held their children close to their chests and caressed their dusty, unkempt heads with hardened palms" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 53). The people's "Paradise" is marked by hunger, violence, disease and pain. The demolition of their homes meant a disruption and a rupture in every aspect of their lives; their makeshift "home" was everything but a home.

Hunger pangs drive the children to Budapest. The children's journey to Budapest, a liberatory displacement in Chidora (2017)'s estimation, affords them access to food and the dreams of living elsewhere. With the assurance of food, basically stolen fruits, the children can take on other quests. Bastard wants to leave Paradise and go to Johannesburg, Sbho dreams of living in one of the fine houses in Budapest, while Darling wants to go to America to live with Aunty Fostalina. Chipo does not disclose her dreams. Darling relates that Chipo has been rendered silent since she was impregnated; this is because trauma silences. In fact, the devastating, disrupting and destructive impact of trauma is such that, depending on the severity of the traumatic experience, it has the capacity to unleash the death drive (Todestrieb in Freudian usage), kill the pulsing of desire as well as language, and foster a disintegration of body, soul and spirit (LaCapra, 2001; Laub and Lee, 2003; Luckhurst, 2008). For eleven-year-old Chipo, impregnated by her grandfather, trauma has become her everyday reality. Chipo's underage pregnancy, malnourished body and traumatised

soul bear witness to children's vulnerability in post-independence Zimbabwe. The narrator relates Chipo's pathetic experience to underline the fact that Darling's traumatisation is not an exception or an oddity.

Darling is especially traumatised by her witnessing the demolition of her previous house; she never ceases to have nightmares:

> Nobody knows that sometimes I do not sleep. I am the hare. 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 men and the police… I try to push it away and push it away but the dream keeps coming and coming like bees, like rain, like the graves at Heavenway (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 45).

Darling and other children suffer from repetition compulsion, the Freudian term for a re-enactment of the traumatic experience, which had been previously repressed, in an attempt to bind their energies and reach a state of balance or even entropy. At the same time, repetitive behaviour points to a desire to compensate for a deep-seated sense of lack (Cavallaro, 2002). Darling's memory of a previously witnessed traumatic event comes to haunt her night after night, and yet her circumstances do not favour a working-through or reparation. Hence, when given a pseudo choice, in a country game, Darling, all the children opt out of Zimbabwe. Years later, Chipo and Darling can leave Zimbabwe for real.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Chikwava's *Harare North* recreate the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants living interstitial lives on the margins of society. Chikwava relates in an interview with Josh Jewell (2018) that his recreation of the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in *Harare North* was borne out of his fascination with people who find themselves on the margins, people who have no control over the kind of spaces they live in and what the world throws at them. Chikwava's characters are actors in what Chambers (1994) presents as "The drama of the stranger":

> To come from elsewhere, from "there" and not "here," and hence to be simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the situation at hand, is to live at the intersection of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive, arrangements along emerging routes. It is simultaneously to encounter the languages of powerlessness and the potential intimations of heterotopic futures (Chambers, 1994, p. 14).

From the nameless narrator in *Harare North* to Darling and the extradiegetic narrator in *We Need New Names*, Chikwava and Bulawayo's characters dwell in an "in-between" space; they are suspended between where they are and where they long to be. McLeod (2000) affirms that the

migrant often occupies a displaced rootless position, since the migrant is usually never fully a part of the host land, nor can he safely be apart from it. The characters are strangers in a strange land. This is why Chikwava's protagonist, in a moment of helplessness while at Tim's Fish bar, relates that he feels like one pushed by waves, who has been washed off unto an unfamiliar place, and soon his fears that his life would "collect into one big shapeless thing and soon the whole thing slip off your grasp" (Chikwava, 2009, p. 86) became his reality.

Existential homelessness and helplessness plague the migrant characters in both novels. Almost all the characters depicted in the narratives find themselves in moments described by Bhabha (1994), thus:

> In the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delà - here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

Their "border lives" resulting from an attempt to make a home outside their homelands only yield more troubles. Invariably, for the migrant characters, as depicted in both novels, home is nowhere. Unfortunately, they are strangers in the homeland just as they are in the diaspora. Their homes evict them, and the diaspora does not accept them. They are foreigners in the sense that Saunders (2001) employs the word; they are unfamiliar, improper, incomprehensible and uncanny, always existing in binary opposition to and are ever being defined against the binary other. Hence, they suffer exclusion. They lack the very thing they yearn for: belonging. They flee Zimbabwe for "Fortress Europe", only to realise that their supposed "Fortress" is made up of crumbling walls.

The lack of belonging has an untold and diverse psychological traumatic impact on the characters. When Shingi in *Harare North* loses his job for the umpteenth time, he does not remain the same again. Shingi's endless joblessness eventually makes him lose his mind. Shingi begins to disappear and reappear without explanation. All of Shingi's attempts to find a sense of purpose in London are futile. The narrator speaks of London as a place where the migrant's identity is ever unstable: it is a place where "you can become labourer, sewage drain cleaner and then French president, being many people in one person" (Chikwava, 2009, p. 51) and yet be no one. Shingi's psychic collapse leads him to the mental backstreets when he gets stabbed on a rainy day. The narrator sees him soaked in his blood, but he himself is too helpless to help: "Around the corner, on them wet pavements of Harare North, Shingi is one untidy heap. Naked tramp has given him forgiveness…

I feel helpless. I am useless. Everything is useless. I don't know what to do" (Chikwava, 2009, p. 160). The narrator is torn between staying back to help his childhood friend and benefactor and fleeing to safety, away from the police and an immigration system that would waste no time in sending him back to Zimbabwe, empty-handed.

At the end of *We Need New Names*, Darling equally feels displaced and disillusioned, having to watch events unfold helplessly and knowing fully well that neither she nor Aunt Fostalina can return to Zimbabwe. She sees the ashes of Tsaka Zulu, and she is lethargic. Through the character and characterisation of Tshaka Zulu, a retired mentally ill Zimbabwean culturalist, Bulawayo nuances the representation of migration as "a ruptured genealogy" (Polo Moji, 2015:9), that ruptures subjectivity and fosters multiple identity translations. Whenever Tshaka Zulu goes beyond control in his psychic displays, threatening people with the imaginary *assegai* that he claims is hidden somewhere inside his room, Aunt Fostalina is called upon to calm him down. This she does by speaking to him in Ndebele because when his craziness starts, the medicines hardly work, and he would usually refuse to communicate in English. Tshaka Zulu's displays, which Moji (2015) terms his elaborate "rituals of remembrance", essentially parade the "traumatic rupture caused by the colonial violence that many African countries have experienced" (Woods, 2007). Tshaka Zulu's physical, mental, cultural and spiritual lockdown are thus traceable to repressed traumatic memories of Zimbabwe's colonial history.

Remarkably, both novels end on the same note. At the end of *Harare North*, the narrator calls for an ambulance to carry Shingi, but he flees before the ambulance arrives. He fears that his illegal status would be used against him, and therein lies the trauma of an illegal existence. The narrator, Aleck, Farayi and Tsitsi are condemned to an illegal existence. Without their papers, they have no work permits, and without work permits, they can hardly better their standard of living. To live always afraid of the police is to live and wake up in fear, a fear that is as humiliating as it is disabling. As the narrative ends, the narrator is homeless and helpless once more. His plight, compared to when he landed in Harare North, is no better; in fact, it is worse. In the end, he leaves the empty house and becomes the metaphorical homeless dog:

> I walk on the white line with suitcase on my head. Nothing can hit my head. I feeling like *umgodoyi* – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi have no home like the winds. That's why umgodoyi's soul is tear from his body in rough way* (Chikwava, 2009, p. 197, emphasis added)

On the final page of *We need new names*, Darling also tells of a wandering dog hit by the big Lobels lorry: "there was red on the road. Two gaping furrows where the tires had plowed into the earth. An unsounded yelp drowned in the hollow of a twisted throat …Big, bared teeth. Crushed meat" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 192).

While only Chikwava explicitly uses the Shona term *umgodoyi*, Bulawayo's narrative is saturated with the same imagery of disposability, scavenging, uprootedness, and rejection, making the stray dog a powerful shared metaphor of homelessness in both narratives. In the Shona cultural idiom, *umgodoyi* is a dog that has lost its homestead or owner. In both texts, *umgodoyi* is the quintessential image of abjection. It is excluded from kinship, protection, nourishment, and recognition, just as the migrant characters portrayed in both texts lack belonging and visibility. They have become migrants largely stripped of national protection (the characters can hardly any longer refer to Zimbabwe as home), postcolonial subjects dislocated by state violence and traumatised characters struggling to return to a coherent sense of self. In fact, Chikwava compresses the narrator's entire psychological collapse into that figure of a stray, ownerless dog. Darling and her friends' raid of guava trees in the affluent suburb of Budapest; their having to move from street to street in search of food, running from guards, and stealing food like street animals forced into foraging, ultimately marked them as "unclaimed lives". Bulawayo's equally tragic and violent ending lines underscore the existential futility of the migrant characters' endless search for a home. It mirrors the migrants' failed border-crossing.

Chikwava's protagonist and Bulawayo's Tsaka Zulu's tragic end and their descent into insanity result from their failed border-crossing, a failure whose roots lie in their underprivileged and abject position (Toivanen, 2018:6). The characters are unable to rightly decode the cultural and material signifiers that bestow success on the immigrant. The nameless narrator of *Harare North*, for instance, becomes trapped in the mental backstreets of Brixton. He cannot move forward or go backwards, and so he walks half naked on Electric Avenue: "You are telling right foot to go in one direction, and he is telling left foot to go in another direction. You tell the right foot to go in one direction, and he is being traitor shoe-doctor and tell left foot to go in another direction" (Chikwava, 2009, p. 201). In a language that effectively captures migrant characters' fractured identities, ruptured dreams, and wounded psyches, Chikwava recreates the miserable life of a nameless migrant character whose life is intertwined with other equally traumatised migrant

characters, to depict the illusory dividends of emigration and question the authenticity of globalisation's decentring of borders.

Similarly, Bulawayo dexterously represents the plight of lonely Zimbabweans, marked by dislocation, displacement, and disillusionment in the diaspora. The protagonist, representative of other Zimbabwean migrants, leaves Zimbabwe, but she really does not leave; she arrives in Michigan, but in fact, she really never arrives in America. She, like many migrant characters, is doubly displaced. Zimbabwe has ceased to be home for her, and America has refused to grant her integration. Like other illegal migrants and legal migrants sometimes, she only has the right to exist in the city, but not the right to the city. Immigrants largely lack the right to the city, even though as Purcell (2002, p. 102) explicates that in Lefebvre's conception, enfranchisement is for those who inhabit the city, since the right to the city revolves around the production of urban space, it is those who live in the city – who contribute to the body of urban lived experience and lived space – who can legitimately claim the right to the city. This is hardly the case with Darling and other migrants in *We Need New Names*, in spite of the fact that they contribute to the body of urban lived experience and lived space. They live out the routines of everyday life in the space of the city, but they cannot fully participate in and appropriate the city space; they inhabit the city but lack the right to it. To Fenster (2005), "the right to appropriate" encapsulates the right to a complete use of the urban space in their everyday lives and "the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterise and occupy urban space in a particular city" (Fenster, 2005, p. 219). It is those who belong to a place who have rights to its resources, and it is those who belong who can hope to have their dreams come true. Darling and others do not belong to the cities they inhabit. They are outsiders and strangers moving through strange places, living on the margins of society.

Conclusion

Both novels present homelessness as both a cause and a consequence of emigration. The characters in both novels flee Zimbabwe because the nation has been stripped of its homeliness, thanks to the ruling political class's maladministration and the miscarriages of globalisation. In both texts, the migrant character is initially envied and then pitied. Emigration is initially perceived as an escape, but it ultimately becomes a launchpad into a precarious existence. In embracing flight, the postcolonial subjects become the very "signs of a dislocated locality, mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism and possessor of that postcolonial identity which derives its legitimacy from the mastery of the culture of modern Europe" (Gikandi, 2010, p. 28). This is because by journeying

from Africa to London (in *Harare North*) or America (in *We Need New Names*), the migrant character transits from a position of mild powerlessness to abject powerlessness. The migrant character moves from the margins to the centre, where he is regarded as the Other, a category that comes with dire consequences. In the discrepancy between what the character has envisioned that the West would offer him and what became his experience lies the trauma of unhomeliness. Essentially, *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* bear witness to the traumatising consequences of migration by depicting migrant characters' journeys that are fraught with subalternity, marginality, and most importantly, existential homelessness: physical, psychic, national, cultural, and linguistic.

The texts then foreground the wounding impact of national collapse, state violence, deprivation and systemic neglect on individuals even long after they have physically departed its borders. In this way, both novels underscore how the failed state continues to haunt the migrant's psyche. Furthermore, the texts articulate postcolonial trauma as slow violence, social invisibility, unhomeliness and psychic disintegration. NoViolet Bulawayo and Brian Chikwava join other migrant African writers (examples include Chimamanda Adichie, Alain Mabanckou, Ali Farah, Chika Unigwe, and Fatou Diome) to represent the other side of the successful migration narrative; they paint a picture of less privileged forms of mobility. By representing Africans on the move as largely abject subjects desperately seeking anchorage elsewhere, but denied access, the novelists underscore the complex dimensions of the discourse of mobility, postcolonial trauma and globalisation within the African context. *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* both reveal how that migration does not resolve the fractures of *home* but extends and reconfigures them, leaving their protagonists suspended in a condition of enduring unhomeliness.

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