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An Elixir to the Claustrophobia of home? Representations of the Diaspora in Harare North and Selected Short Stories in Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Short Stories

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Abstract

The reality of what became known as the ‘Zimbabwean Crisis’ has, from 2000 onwards, been ambivalently fictionalised in the Zimbabwean literary geography of the time. Writers narrativise diasporic reality and migration into the Diaspora as Janus-faced in that these could lead to the opening up of democratic spaces and improving the well-being of those who embark on the hunt for foreign currency. But some view the genesis and execution of the odyssey as analogous to responding to the call of a strange bird that certainly leads to deracination from the family, moral bankruptcy, cultural alienation and, in some instances, metaphorical and physical death. The research therefore intends to interrogate the richly varying ways in which the writers wrestle with this epochal phenomenon and the extent to which they pack and unpack the issues of motive, causality and consequences of diasporanism. In doing this the researchers intend to use the novel *Harare North* and selected short stories from *Hunting in Foreign Lands* (2010). It is the researchers’ contention that the Diaspora option enacted mixed fortunes for the sojourners, their families and the Zimbabwean society at large.

Introduction

The paper examines how contemporary fiction writers in Zimbabwe have imagined the trend of Zimbabwean people leaving their nation and wandering into apparently unknown foreign lands. The paper intends to appreciate the writers’ imagination and interpretation of real experiences of thousands of foraging Zimbabweans following the years after 2000, when life in Zimbabwe had turned unbearable for many, leading to an apparent abandonment of their country and families. It examines the representations of the causes surrounding those movements; the motives, aspirations and experiences of the rovers. It also looks at this phenomenon through the eyes of those they leave behind, with a view of suggesting possible interventions. Literary texts have been chosen to explore the patterns of these mass movements since Manger and Assal (2006:19) have observed that “diasporic reality may also be established through literature, or be displayed in museums.” This means that analysing literary art is one way of studying the

diaspora character, the diaspora’s self representation, his or her counter representation by the remaining local, or the diaspora space as a real or imaginary place of salvation. The appropriation of foreign space hinted at in the titles *Harare North* to denote London and multi-identities, and *Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories* to denote the nomadic poacher’s instinctive sensibility, help us appreciate the Zimbabwean social being as either resiliently or cunningly adaptive during trying times.

The thrust of the discussion is an interrogation of the Diaspora as an elixir or substitute of home. In Zimbabwean society, generally, the strength and character of the individual under trying times is tested in the individual’s maintenance of family ties, relations and responsibilities. The selected literature enacts the anguish of trying to reconcile these latent expectations and the demands of a disrespectful social and economic reality. Through titular encapsulation alone, the chosen texts acknowledge that the experiences painted

therein reflect some apparently exported Zimbabwean group memory, and the spectre of a homeland forest depleted of game, during years of famine and claustrophobia, respectively. The research shall, therefore, treat the diasporic experiences as some form of group memory that can be represented through and recuperated from narrative as it can from ritual, song and dance. Citing Halbwachs (1980), Manger and Assal (2006:20) explain that “narratives are then, not about *preserving* memories, but rather about *reconstructing* them.” Most of the chosen stories seem to delineate the ill-fated resourcefulness of Zimbabweans during bad times as well as denounce the decision to abandon home, an ill-thought, unpatriotic decision that has exacerbated their predicament.

The research is spurred by a concern about how nations and countries could deal with real and imagined causes of diasporanism. The question it seeks to answer is whether writers see ‘migration’ as the solution to problems in the home country or whether they view it as sheer abdication of the responsibility to deal firmly and squarely with a national problem by those who leave. Immersed in a context where there has emerged a denigrating nationalist discourse, highly critical of the idea of going to hunt in ‘foreign forests’ and the creation of a negative image and perception of the menial labourer of the Diaspora, the research assesses the seamier side of the diasporan’s experience. A consideration of the cautiously defensive narrative of the narrator in *Harare North* may help researchers appreciate some of these issues. The research does not forget, however, that since the times of the biblical Joseph, people at home have been known to seek sustenance from their Diaspora relations when the homeland could no longer provide. The story of the success of Joseph in the Diaspora has shown that it is not only possible to have inclusive global communities but that the Diaspora can contribute significantly to the economic and political lives of the host country, as well as support the needy siblings and family back in the homeland. On the other hand, history has shown through the Atlantic Slave Trade that forced migration can be very traumatic, if purposed to deracinate and de-identify individuals and groups of human

beings. It is, therefore, hoped that through this research, some of the problems peculiar to leaving one’s motherland will be unearthed. The paper attempts to demystify the peddled misconception that people who migrate have willfully forsaken their own homes, their fatherland, hence lack patriotism.

Harare North and selected stories in *Hunting in Foreign Lands* are used to illuminate the concept of the diaspora as “a site of possibilities” (Manger and Assal, 2006:21) as much as its reality is “in direct response to state policies” (Muchemwa, 2010:135). Despite the apparent prospects for success attending outward movement, in Zimbabwe’s social life this has sometimes meant break up of marriages or entering into marriages of convenience. This is especially in reference to the Zimbabwean Diasporas of the years commonly referred to as the Zimbabwean crisis. The Zimbabwean crisis is that period the country experienced world record inflation as well as political problems.

Many people have written about the economic and social problems associated with those crisis years (Raftopolous, 2009). This real concern has been witnessed in the fiction writers’ artistic interpretations of that period. Among the few critics who have paid attention to these critical literary works concerning people’s skipping home or periodically slipping beyond borders is Muchemwa who argues that a characteristic of Zimbabwean literature has been that though epochal problems have been different, the style has often been repeated. From Lessing, Marechera, Gappah to Chikwava, there has been reliance on “diasporic creativity to reimagine identity”. This has been especially so at “the millennial juncture of Zimbabwean history, marked by failure of the state following the disastrous consequences of ethno-populism,” which “has implications for freedom of artistic expression, identity politics and the security of populations” (Muchemwa,2010:135). What this seems to suggest is that we might have differing representations between those who write from home and those who write from the Diaspora. This article on Zimbabwean literary representations of diaspora does well to borrow from how Mann in Brubaker conceptualises diaspora discussions, discussions which:

...are often informed by a strikingly idealist, teleological understanding of the nation-state, which is seen as the unfolding of an idea, the idea of nationalizing and homogenizing the population. The conceptual antithesis between nation-state and diaspora obscures more than it reveals, occluding the persisting significance (and great empirical variety) of nation-states... (Brubaker, 2005:10)

All the same, selected fiction should help us establish whether, from the Zimbabwean experience and point of view, the Diaspora can be viewed as an elixir to the claustrophobia of home or not.

The starting point is a look at the node and determinants of movements from Zimbabwe. There are a number of successive factors that go back as far as the 1990s that have caused people to leave Zimbabwe. Muzondidya in Raftopolous and Mlambo (2009) chronicles how Zimbabwe's economy crumbles following government's implementation of the Bretton Woods initiated ESAP, through its payment of a 50 thousand Zimbabwean dollars lump sum to war veterans, to the fast track land reform and hourly replicating inflation of 2008. Moyo and Gonye (2010) assess how fiction writers satirise African leaders for accepting ESAPs at the expense of the general populace while Muchemwa (2010:135) discusses Chikwava and Gappah, especially, as some of the contemporary writers who have responded to the government's "ethno-populism" or land redistribution and other policies that have contributed to the dispersion of Zimbabweans across the world as "a population that has been externalised by the state and whose contribution to the welfare of those left at home cannot be overstated." However, Muchemwa's (2010) analysis does not focus much on that aspect he considers "cannot be overstated." This paper intends to expatiate on the implied claustrophobia at home and the apparent elixir abroad, remaining cognisant of a tense matrix of nationalist and opposition political discourse and the so-called regime change agenda politics. To guide our analysis we pose the questions: Do writers view the atmosphere at home as conflict-ridden or free of conflict? Bearable? Do writers sympathise with characters who migrate to the Diaspora or not?

Is the Diaspora space seen as a morally and financially rewarding substitute of home?

The paper recognises that the narrative about the diaspora brings about a rearranged and wider canvas where characters are not easy to pin down to essentialist identities. We will thus interrogate the migrants' conceptual relationship with the homeland. How much is concern for home evident in the conduct and behaviour of the character? Does home provide any defining centre on the spiritual, cultural levels or is home an albatross around the migrant's neck? How different individuals of diaspora communities react varies since it may not be possible to have a uniform consciousness. As Manger and Assal (2006:21) have argued, variations may be "class based – an economic or political elite of a population may live a life as a diasporic cosmopolitan thus experiencing the reality of the diaspora as a site of possibilities, whereas another segment of the same group may be at the bottom of the ladder of stratification, experiencing life in Diaspora as defined by discrimination and exclusion". Are contestations, conflicts and contradictions along the dominant party lines and ideologies or are these differences imagined and therefore exaggerated?

This article is grounded in a postcolonial approach that combines comparative textual analysis of *Harare North* and selected stories in *Hunting in Foreign Lands* with an evaluation of the stylistic choices by the writers. The study necessarily entails a study of the diasporic consciousness in the sense that readers want to know if the characters will forsake or retain memory of home, particularly the traumatising post colonial reality. Reading *Hunting in Foreign Lands* has shown that you do not have to be away from your previously lived history to come up with perceptive narratives about the Diaspora.

Home no Longer Homely

To give our paper some theoretical grounding into the concept of home we turn to Maslow's conceptualisation of the most basic human needs such as food, shelter and security. A home is where one resides on a permanent basis, a place of refuge for family members, where they can store their property and personal belongings. "A home is generally a place that is

close to the heart of the owner and can become a prized possession” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home> 19/09/11). The state of a person’s home apparently affects that person’s physiological behavior by influencing his or her emotions and mentality. If a home is well-kept and has the basic amenities, members of that family generally enjoy themselves in comfort and peace. For a home to be comfortable, the bread winners of that home need to have an income that can sustain the family. Maslow’s theory expressed in the book *Motivation and Personality* presents a Hierarchy of six stages in the needs of human beings. At the bottom of the pyramid he places the physiological needs, which are the basic requirements for human survival. When these basic needs are not met the human body cannot function. The basic needs every human being needs to survive are air, water, food, clothing and shelter. Maslow also places safety needs as the second most important (Dworetzky, 1988; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_Hierarchy_of_needs). This is what Moyana (2010: xii) means in the context of *Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories* when she refers to Marx and Engels’ argument that, “life involves before everything else eating, drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of material life itself...”

When physical needs have been met human beings need to feel safe. In the absence of safety, maybe due to terrorist attack, war, natural disaster, or, in cases of family violence, child abuse, people experience post-traumatic stress disorder and trans-generational trauma transfer. The absence of economic safety or economic crisis and lack of job opportunities transfer themselves to a preference for job security, financial security, health and well-being and insurance against natural and human disasters (Tevera & Zinyama, 2002).

Maslow further contends that for human beings to be comfortable they need to feel loved and thus develop a sense of belonging and acceptance. In the absence of love and a sense of belonging human beings are susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety and chemical depression.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's>. All human beings need to be respected and to have

self esteem and self respect. Human beings need to feel valued and engage in activities that give them a sense of contribution. At both the lower level and higher level esteem, human beings need to feel that they are useful and respected in order for them to be able to respect themselves. Maslow highlights that self respect and self esteem are a result of competence, mastery, self confidence, independence and freedom.

Maslow’s theory presents self-actualization as the apex of the pyramid. Although self-actualisation differs from individual to individual, it is the basic urge in every human being to be what they must be, their ideal selves. For a man, it could be to be good provider for his family. But for the individual to be able to reach this level, the basic needs: physiological, safety, love and esteem, must be met.

It has been impossible for most Zimbabweans in the past decade to meet these basic needs in their home country. As such, many Zimbabweans have come to view their home as suffocating and thus leading them to lose control of actions. This disorder has manifested itself in many homes, resulting in panic attacks and in people looking for immediate relief in the Diaspora. The lack of basic amenities also created a certain fear in Zimbabweans as they realised they could no longer feed and clothe themselves adequately. The situation in the country had translated into imminent danger for Zimbabweans, with large numbers opting to find solutions in the Diaspora, especially London. The Diaspora seemed to offer a panacea for the ills that had befallen them at the same time helping to separate resilient “hungry patriots” and unpatriotic “economic refugees” in foreign lands (Nyota, 2010).

Zimbabweans have for decades engaged in migrant labour in the South African mines. However, until after independence only a few hundreds of men went to work in the South African mines and returned home. What has come to be viewed as a panic attack has been the large exodus of Zimbabweans leaving the country for other countries in Africa and abroad. The exodus includes male and female, young and old Zimbabweans scattering around the globe. Nyota (2010: vii) observes that, “As

of August 2004, the number of Zimbabweans living abroad stood at about 3.4 million” (Reserve Bank Homelink kumusha/Ekhaya supplement. July 2004). Zimbabweans, stifled by the harsh economic environment at home and the seemingly hostile political environment, decided to look for greener pastures elsewhere. Moyana (2010:xi) also explains that emigration, the phenomenon “where people leave their country to go elsewhere in search of a better life known as “greener pastures”, started long long ago around the world.”

Though the Zimbabwean situation has not been unique or peculiar in this global phenomenon, Zimbabweans had not been previously known to leave the country en-masse. Manger (1999:12) explains that “human migration might be disassembled into a set of seven processes: expansion, refuge seeking, colonisation, enforced transportation, trade diaspora, labour diaspora and emigration.” Zimbabwe seems to have fallen in the process of diaspora labour and refuge seeking. Thousands of Zimbabweans have turned to South Africa and the United Kingdom as asylum seekers. Figures published by International Organisation for Migration suggest that of the largest group of legal emigrants 36.8% of the total go to the United Kingdom while 4.8% go to South Africa (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4416820/13/11>). While the International Organisation for Migration has been publishing figures of Zimbabweans that have left the country using official channels, the number since 1999 has since risen astronomically and does not include those that used illegal means.

It is reported that “So many Zimbabweans have moved to London that they have started calling it Harare-North” (www.voanews.com). Of all the reasons that Zimbabweans have given for leaving their country the most prominent one has been that there is more money to be made elsewhere. However, economic and political grounds are not mutually exclusive (<http://www.reuratl.org/sites/default/files/Zimbabwe-all.pdf>). There are several social factors that push Zimbabweans to leave the country.

Ambivalence and Pessimism in fictional representations of the Diaspora

In *Harare North*, Chikwava ironically explores the adventures of a young man who flees the country after having participated in political attacks against the opposition under the auspices of the ruling party’s militia, christened the “green bombers.” Chikwava’s unnamed protagonist leaves home with a surprising confidence that he will get to London and quickly get a job that will enable him to immediately raise \$US5000, 00. It is surprising in the sense that he and his party fathers have always called for the cessation of bilateral ties between the former coloniser and colony, accusing London and the British for causing all sorts of problems for his country. The desperate protagonist elects to fly to the most unlikely of places, considering his political inclinations and ideology. Only going to London would solve all his problems. The protagonist believes the murder charges facing him will be dropped if he bribes the Zimbabwean police officers handling the case.

However, the United Kingdom does not offer the quick solution that he expected. On arrival in the United Kingdom the protagonist realises that without the proper work permits, jobs are not easy to get. Not only does he fail to get a job expeditiously, but he discovers that he is prone to abuse by his employer. Commenting on the poor reception and maltreatment of migrants by hosting countries, Manger (1999:11) observes: “This also shows that the problem of the diasporas is not only about the migrating population but also about the populations in the countries in which migrants settle, and also about political and bureaucratic systems and their dynamics.” Although the United Kingdom’s London seems a popular destination with Zimbabweans, getting employment and accommodation there is difficult, putting to doubt the myth of London as an elixir to the claustrophobia of home.

Obviously aware that some Zimbabweans and other African immigrants do not have proper documentation; unscrupulous employers in the United Kingdom overwork and underpay them. Similarly, Shingi of *Harare North* laments how the owner of his former company decides to shut down without giving them any notice.

Oftentimes, work available for the immigrants is menial and demeaning. Aleck works at an old people's home but pretends he works as a shop supervisor to avoid embarrassment from family and friends. While the work in the UK may be demeaning, for some Zimbabweans it is the only way they can earn a living. Manger (1999:12) argues that, "for some people diaspora is an enabling space to remake their self and overcome ascribed difficulties or inhibitions." For instance, in Manyarara's *Once Again*, Mariko decides to leave his Zimbabwean profession as a doctor to go and work in South Africa where there are better health facilities and better working conditions. He opts to become a professional nomad than remain in a poor working environment with an escalating death rate and an inefficient health system. The loss of his girlfriend due to a dilapidated health delivery system compels him to abandon his country. Mariko represents part of the 54% professionals interviewed by the South African Migration Project. In their study, researchers found that health professionals were leaving Zimbabwe for South Africa and other countries because of unattractive working conditions, change of government policy, Operation Murambatsvina and political reasons (<http://www.thestandard.co.zw.10810>).

Manyarara's "The Road To Damascus" chronicles the push factors that forced some Zimbabweans to abandon home in search of better living conditions and to sustain the families back home. Among others, these included the 'Black Friday' when war veterans were awarded \$50 000(zim) gratuities each which sent the Zimbabwean dollar crashing. Inflation shot up, making survival nightmarish. Countries like Botswana effectively appeared like an Eldorado for the pauperised Zimbabweans. The story dramatises the fact that young and vulnerable girls were forced to seek sustenance in foreign lands. This made them susceptible to abuse by foreigners in their determined search for the god of gold.

Tino and Nyasha, therefore, embody the reality of how the claustrophobic Zimbabwean economic situation made some people look for menial jobs. The story also captures the fact that the Diaspora was not always a bed of roses

as shown by the exploitation that both characters go through in Botswana. Nyasha, because she wants to denude herself of her Zimbabwean identity in order to curry favour with the Tswana chief for financial gain, becomes a metaphor of those Zimbabweans who become victims of sexploitation and succumb to venereal diseases because they want to get it the easy way. In the end, she becomes mentally deranged. This says a lot about the authors of what became known as the crisis. The politicians were cloistered in their palatial homes, getting everything they needed yet they drove many a citizen into often xenophobic Diaspora. This is why Nyasha talks about the fact that apart from the economic meltdown, the government made many people homeless by deliberately and cynically inaugurating "Operation Murambatsvina" (Operation Restore Order). This was an operation ostensibly meant to clean up the urban areas of slums but in reality it was meant to flush out people seen as sympathisers of the opposition. These were what President Mugabe stigmatised as totemless urban people. Tino and Nyasha, therefore, personify such people driven into the Diaspora by the unhomeliness of home.

In effect this means that however much Botswana becomes inhospitable, they cannot envision themselves going back without money because they have become homeless at home. The irony of this period and political behavior is that it is the state and government's brief to hedge its citizens against any form of harm – be it hunger, shelterlessness, intimidation and violence. This is exactly the aggregate of factors that pushed people like Nyasha and Tino into hostile Botswana. But Tino decides to go back to Zimbabwe after realising that the kind of existence she leads in Botswana is a pyrrhic victory over the factors that sent her away in the first place. Realising that the seeming greenness of the pastures in Botswana is a mirage, she decides to pursue a secure career in nursing back in Zimbabwe. This shows that the Diaspora was not an all-encompassing odyssey of success to all and sundry. Nyasha is metonymic of those who, for lack of existential sagacity, become economic failures so that for them returning was as tedious as moving forward or staying put.

Tino, at least, has the providence to use the little that she works for to empower herself through getting an occupation back home. It may actually be plausible to theorise that, in the case of Nyasha, desperate conditions often force people to look for desperate solutions that often boomerang as captured by her madness.

Such desperation is shown when Nyasha decides to become one of the chief's concubines. Under conditions such as that ushered in by the crisis, some women used their good looks for philanderous purposes in order to mitigate the poverty of this period. Whereas the Pauline Damascene conversion implies seeing the futility and danger of a particular course of action, like Saul in the Bible and Tino in the short story, such a change of life's 'gear' is not always possible for people like Nyasha, thus validating the truism that life has no reverse gear. This captures the ambivalence of the Diaspora in this short story. It has been reported that though Botswana is another popular destination because Zimbabweans do not need visas for short term entry "the immigrants that enter Botswana legally and illegally end up working on farms or doing other badly paid jobs..." (voa news.com). For Tino, washing laundry for several women gives her the much needed pula which back home helps her family to put food on the table. Wilson & Rotberg (1976:3) write as if they had Zimbabweans in mind when they observe that: "He (the Zimbabwean) is everywhere a familiar object, and he is everywhere.... the servant of others... Zimbabwe is distinguished as having served and suffered." Tino and Nyasha suffer in different ways to get enough money to feed themselves and those at home.

The collapse of Banks in 2003 and the closing of the Zimbabwe stock exchange in 1997 all resulted in thousands of Zimbabweans losing their jobs (www.voa.news.com). For many would- be emigrants, economics was the main motivation, as they tried to flee the country's deepening economic crisis. But for many others, the government's hostility towards the press, the political opposition and human rights groups led them to seek political asylum. The protagonist in *Harare North* arrives in London and seeks political asylum. Ironically, he is one of the notorious 'Green Bombers' that had

hundreds of Zimbabweans fleeing their homes for fear of persecution.

"*Burying a Wife from Across the Oceans*", by Nyota is rather strange stories in both form and content. It chooses a relatively new literary technique of using cellular phone conversation to further the anti-London subject. The cellular dialogue is something new in Zimbabwean literary traditions and so is the bizarre account of burial proceedings over the phone. By choosing such a casual style Nyota trivialises the phenomenon of death and overshadows the funeral experience in the background, thus reducing such an experience to the dreamlike levels of the dramatic and spectacular. The narrator, Simbarashe, gives us touching excerpts of the cellular phone conversations he has with his self-exiled brother, Tinotenda, who is in London, concerning the burial and funeral proceedings of the latter's wife. In Zimbabwean African tradition, the burial of a wife is a ritual whose rites of passage the husband has to physically and emotionally partake. In cases where close relatives have not arrived for the burial, the burial has to be postponed even for several days. But the question the telephone conversations raise is why not, of all the people, can the husband not personally pay his last respects to his faithful wife and partner in development?

It turns out the desire to go to London has been so consuming that individuals had to even commit sedition in order to secure political asylum status in England. So intense was the claustrophobia at home that respectable nations like England hardly doubted applications for political asylum from Zimbabwean candidates. Nyota's story represents the boomerang effects of that familiar tactic used by many Zimbabweans who wanted to flee inflation-ravaged Zimbabwe. There is no gainsaying the political disturbances and politically motivated violence, especially against perceived MDC activists and supporters following the year 2000. As the narrator reminds readers, those were the years in which the Zimbabwean economy was in free decline due to a combination of factors: 'smart sanctions'...; ...the unilateral suspension of foreign aid by the Bretton Woods institutions to Zimbabwe...; gross mismanagement of the economy by the powers that be" (Nyota, 2010:138).

Retrenched from his former job, Tinotenda could not bear the stares, in his masculine face, of a higher than 635% inflation, unaffordable and unavailable basic commodities and the prospect of depending on his wife's salary.

Unlike other real Zimbabwean victims, Tinotenda has to concoct a story about political victimisation and an endangered life. It is unfortunate that he creates fictitious violence and threats against his person whilst it is on record that many Zimbabweans die or are tortured in politically motivated violence. His story, however, helps to demonstrate one characteristic of the Diaspora experience – the negotiation and renegotiation of identity, history and experience, something that the Diaspora character has to contend with throughout his or her existence. Rovers have to create a new identity, experience, relatives and all that in the name of survival. The renegotiation of identity is reminiscent of what happens in "The Road to Damascus" where, in order to successfully adapt, characters have to reinvent and reconstitute not only themselves but their relatives and the past. The same happens in *Harare North* with the narrator. This reminds readers of the tragic apartheid story of Sizwe Bansi, a character in Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* who declares himself dead in order to get a job using a dead person's identification particulars.

The question readers of Nyota's story ask is why is this possible? The answer to that is in the low morality pervading the nation then, cynicism. So corrupt and criminal was almost everyone, government institutions and business that it is possible for Tinotenda to "organise" a "death certificate for a non-existent brother" and produce pictures of 'his petrol bombed house'. However, all this points to the desperate need to escape the perceived and real lawlessness and penury. The incident also suggests the experience of the Diaspora character at the hands of receiving authorities and strict host nations. So difficult was it to go to London normally that people have to bribe their way out. The implication is that asylum seekers, migrants or foreign inhabitants might not have been leading such hospitable and glamorous lives as people have been led to imagine.

Though Tinotenda prospers in London, enabling his wife in Zimbabwe to buy two houses in classy Westgate suburb, all his riches and successes remain insignificant for he cannot enjoy them with his wife and more symbolically, cannot help him attend her funeral. One wonders why he cannot cheat his way into the country the way he cheated his way out. There are limits to corruption. What, therefore, had beckoned as an elixir, a panacea to all his earthly problems turns out not only to be an illusion but emphasises his cultural isolation and helplessness epitomised in his "loud sobbing" and "wailing" in absentia, wired from thousands of kilometers across the ocean. He mourns not only for his wife but for his inability and that of many others, to come back home when they really should have.

The moral of the story, like most of the stories, is that people should be content with their homelands despite all vicissitudes. The tone by the brother-narrator is decidedly cynical, evident in his moderating of his brother's successes in London at the expense of the excellent coping mechanisms and strategies of those who have remained in Zimbabwe and his moralising about the madness of mourning a wife over the phone. By focusing on individual tragedies which could have been avoided, Nyota diverts debate from the broader causes of such choices to fully place consequences on an otherwise puny and vulnerable individual. The London-hype is dismissed in the last paragraph of the story which dedicates it to:

...all hungry patriots who have boldly and loudly declared that, in spite of our poverty and all the vicissitudes of life, leaving family and country, in order to earn a pound, a "US\$", or a rand is not an option
(Nyota,2010:140).

The stance Nyota takes through his narrator is informed by a hollow nationalism that tends to mock and discourage those who "abandon" the nation for 'menial' jobs in London and the Diaspora. But a pound earned is a pound secured. The value and power of foreign currency is no clearer than to a Zimbabwean citizen. However, a more mordant response to this 'sovereignty' and nationalist discourse is provided in Chikwava's narrator. The nameless

narrator, a notorious ZANU PF youth leader, political calculations aside, comprehends that his problems in Zimbabwe can only be solved by earning the London pound. And one of the most ironic statements against such pretentiousness is uttered by a character in Charity Chiruka's "Gone with the Whirlwind". Nhamo, the main character reflects that freedom fighters went to war in order to chase out colonialists but "even though colonialists "went away", we soon had to follow them to their own homeland..." (Chiruka,2010:54). So it is really difficult to simply dismiss the London myth and actual pull.

In spite of the evils that befall several hundreds of Zimbabweans in the diaspora such as Nhamo, Sarai and the racially lynched Shingi, ("Gone with the Whirlwind" and "OKRH"), many continue to leave their homes to find solutions to their problems. Shingi in *Harare North* has hosts of family members all waiting to receive money from him for one reason or another.

The short story "Conned" by Aaron Mupondi shows the sacrifices that Zimbabweans had to go through in order to save enough money to make the odyssey to the putative Eldorado in London. Not only had the Zimbabwean crisis made saving difficult, and getting a passport surreal, the situation also created social Darwinism in which you either ate or were eaten. Charlatanism became the order of the day. It is in this context that Tendai, having saved money for a long time to get the elusive passport, finds himself conned by Diva, who quarries a livelihood through using the desperation of fellow Zimbabweans. He makes false representations that he can help Tendai get a visa. This should be understood in the context that whereas a passport is a right elsewhere in the world, in Zimbabwe one had to offer solid reasons why one wanted to travel using that passport. Worse, one had to endure the long and often chaotic queues, part with millions of bearer's cheques (discredited Zimbabwean currency) and, possibly, grease a hand or two. Having succeeded in 'getting' the document, Tendai is so euphoric that he sees himself already in London looking for the magic pound that he falls easy prey to conmen like Diva. The writer describes Tendai's dream, "He couldn't

believe his luck. He was knee deep in pounds as he stashed some of them into sacks he had tied around his hips and back" (Mupondi, 2010:4). Diva represents a particular morality during the period of the crisis in which survival depended less on honest work and more on feeding off other people's sweat. This is why Zimbabwe had become a topsy-turvy society in which to be formally employed was to be certainly poor and to be an agent for one or other of some misty individuals or companies was to be a man about town. Diva personifies this ethos. By claiming to help people get visas, he makes certain that he fleeces off desperate persons and earn a living. The story thus dramatises the fact that the claustrophobia of home started not only with economic hardships, the violence, the lack of money, the process of getting a passport, the visa, the airfare but also having to contend with conmanship that had been elevated to a social ethos. Talk of normalising the abnormal! Predictably, Tendai gets fleeced of his two million dollars and kisses goodbye to the wish to hunt in the foreign lands of London. The troubles of Zimbabweans therefore, started right at home, continued during the attempt to get to foreign lands even as it, in some instances, worsened during their stay there.

Mupondi's "Abandoned" illustrates how Zimbabwe has been transformed in the crisis years. By general standards, Yeukai and Rugare are prosperous. They are simple yet successful vegetable vendors who have managed to buy a residential stand and plan to build their own house. This cannot be said for the generality of the citizens, especially those in formal employment such as civil servants and others. However, the story's concern is not on how Zimbabwe had been transformed into an informal economy but on how even these informal 'success stories' were under threat from the London scourge. "Abandoned" is told from the point of view of the victim, Yeukai, a faithful and determined wife. She and her husband have been managing fairly satisfactorily in the inflationary environment. Their problem is Rita, the woman who 'has been to' and succeeded in London. Rita personifies the morally destructive power of the British pound and embodies the dreaded vices of the London myth. Though we do not know about her London jobs we sense Rita's

miraculous financial transformation. London quickly transforms her from a mere lodger in Katanga high density suburb in Norton into a prosperous, influential woman who owns a high-walled house in Knowe low density suburb, “where only the rich live”. London has facilitated her social climb and her new status allows her to grasp whatever she wants. The story, instead of celebrating the elixir status of London as far as Rita is concerned, reconfirms the destructive myth of London, reconstituting the corrupting effects of big urban centres rife in Zimbabwean literature of the colonial experience of rural to urban migration. Another sad process it repeats is the sexualisation of moral degeneracy where the woman, Rita, retains the seducer figure. So, instead of standing for the success and status of women associated with London, Rita represents moral degeneration and the grasping tendencies that engulf the character of the diasporan citizen. With her own first home broken because her husband is dead, Rita uses the British pound, a car and the prestigious prospects of being relocated to London as bait to lure another woman’s husband.

The story demonstrates that of all the distresses and problems occasioned during Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown and political uncertainty, the weakest target was the family, with the marriage institution the most vulnerable. In “Abandoned” the faithful wife is the soft target, betrayed by a husband and victimised by his own ‘sister’. Characters are presented as animals in a jungle, pouncing predators on one hand and masochist prey on another. In a reversal of traditional gender roles, in this story the man (Rugare) is the one pursued by Rita. And the result is to have a fatherless family on one end where the abandoned wife has to fend for the children and on the other, a puny-minded man who has to be fully funded by the rich, shrewd woman in exchange for sexual services. There is shifting of breadwinners’ roles with women taking charge.

In Zimbabwe of the times depicted in “Abandoned” hard work and faithfulness are hardly rewarding. Rather, it was the London magic that brought in a new class of social pretenders such as Rita, who are bereft of any moral qualms. That class was a rapacious,

boastful lot. To prove the power and security London has conferred on her, Rita defiantly rebukes the women whose husbands she can get at any time: “You poor women are a problem. I’m not a whore. I’m going to get married to Rugare whether you two like it or not” (Mupondi, 2010:29). Rugare is presented as a doting victim of the London magnetism. He is so powerless and lacks the will to repeal the attraction and beckon of London. London is therefore endowed with double significance. It is a source of evil and disruption. However, its power and influence is so great that people want to be associated with the place. It is a place of money, prestige and opportunities hence family men abandon their families at the slightest opportunity to get to London. So it is not so much that Rugare has abandoned his wife for another woman that interests Yeukai’s relatives and friends but the opportunity that has presented itself to Rugare to make his own fortune in London. As such, “some of his relatives say that it is good that he went to London, like others. They hope that he will send them money and buy them clothes. They do not care about me and the children whom he left behind to marry another woman” (Mupondi, 2010: 30). Being played out is the conflict between the individual and the social obligation. In the eyes of the non-committed, everyone who has been able to leave the hardships in Zimbabwe for London should be congratulated and made peace with. As much as these cynical views are those of the majority, the tone and point of view of the story points in another direction. The moral of the story is that London is bad since it has occasioned the destruction of families. Such kind of thinking distracts from the real causes of these problems – politico-economic mismanagement. This story thus illustrates how writers can be in the service of the status quo. By training his lens on the immediate social consequences on individuals, Mupondi ensures that debate on broader causes of all this is suspended as people debate on their supposed moral degeneracy which has to be countered by strength and steadfastness such as Yeukai’s.

Immorality is further explored in “Hunting in Foreign Lands” where Sekai leaves her family in Zimbabwe and goes to London with the hope of making a lot of money but ends up

cohabiting with her British employer. The love of money seems to be the driving force for most characters highlighted in the short stories. However, In *Harare North*; the protagonist highlights the unbelievable expectations Zimbabweans back home have about their next of kin in the Diaspora.

There is a letter for Shingi. It's from home. I take it to my room and open it. It's from some uncle who is rural farmer that the government have resettle with dozens of other families ----. He wonders if Shingi can send him only one land Rover Defender as it will go a long way---- (Chikwava 2007:67).

The unrealistic demands that Shingi's family make are typical of Zimbabweans living in the country with a family member in the Diaspora. Those in the Diaspora are expected to send money to buy new houses, cars, food, school fees and clothing. On the other hand, they are also expected to payback the assistance that was rendered to them in terms of air fares, school fees, accommodation and food. What is peculiar about the Diaspora migration is that emigrants always have to keep in touch with their homeland. Manger (1999:9) asserts that, "At the same time the cases of how diasporic communities are internally organized and how they relate to homelands, to colonial administrators and to nation state" is important. Harare and most of Zimbabwe's beautiful homes have been financed by people in the Diaspora. Relatives back home cannot imagine the sacrifices that those in the Diaspora make in sending these large sums of money. In *Harare North*, Shingi and the protagonist have to starve themselves and scavenge for food from bins outside a reputable restaurant to save enough money for their rent and to send back home.

The ambivalent perspective of Zimbabwean writers regarding the option to go to London in the face of mounting problems at home is seen in writers' mistrust of characters, their motives and subsequent effects on most vulnerable members of the already vulnerable society, the female and the child, particularly the girl-child. The gender and age implications are rape, abandonment and abuse. In most of his stories about effects of sojourning in the diaspora,

Mupondi features the family that suffers, with the child and female being worst affected. Mupondi's "Mother Come Back Home" explores the vagaries of separation of families as a result of parents going to London. In the story, the girl-child narrator narrates a chillingly sympathetic story of the terrors and horrors children face at home when parents choose to both go overseas in search of the pound. The child perspective graphically tells how the extended family ties have come under threat because of the mass movements abroad. The hard times have infected and ruined relations, the extended family now inhospitable and dangerous. The Zimbabwean extended family has been a casualty of the economic plunge claiming moral and economic scalps of Zimbabweans willy-nilly. In the African culture and society your father's brother is simply your father and likewise, the children of your brother are your own children, hence, incest, or rape for that matter were anathema in the African extended family. Children of the extended family were treated equally but Westernisation had earlier on brought the nucleus family concept with its attendant individualism, thus cracking the unity of the extended family. Shortages induced by the state of the economy had only worsened the selfishness and crassness of the hard pressed citizens when the thought of Diaspora came. Disregarding all the signs of changing social and family relations, mother and father in the story entrust the brother to take care of their children. But old traditional habits and assurances fail the test of time and apparently blood seems less thicker than water. It is rather friendship that comes in handy, some generous members of the society and an apparently uncorrupted police who come in to assist the brutalized children. That Mupondi chooses blood relatives to thread his story about the tragic abuse and rape of brother's children is Mupondi's total rejection of whatever benefits accrue from sojourning in London without your children. He uses the image of vampire guardians as a deterrent to parents who might be thinking of hazarding their children's safety and health by leaving them in the custody of relatives. It seems it is not the diaspora sojourner alone who has the predatory instincts. Those left at home also demonstrate the worst predatory tendencies of scavengers- the carnivores that wait for good hunters to catch

prey before they jump onto the remains, denying the children of the real hunter any taste of the game. Babamunini and Mainini behave exactly like scavengers, selfishly taking all the money Rosie and Taka's parents have sent home for the upkeep of their children for their own use, thus fleecing the diasporan worker. That this money from the diaspora could have been put to good use is undeniable but downplayed. But what the story sees as questionable is the morality of choosing to leave children thousands of kilometres away while you go in search of the pound. When mother and father go to England, are they interested in their own marriage more than in their children? Are they more interested in their money and class than in the future of their children? Is it pardonable to sacrifice normal socialisation and upbringing of the child in the name of doing exactly that (excuse of going to hunt in foreign lands). By choosing the perspective of the innocent child whose childhood innocence is smashed on a hard rock the story brings up child concern. The children are vulnerable with nowhere to turn to as parents abandon them to the whims of unreliable, capricious money mongers. The pessimistic story is another example of writers with an agenda against the movement to the Diaspora. It is among those tragic, pitiful tales about hopeless lives, stories which sadly offer little assessment of the underlying causes of why good loving parents are forced to make such drastic choices.

Through contrast, the narrator indicts her own parents for having sacrificed their (children's) happiness for the pound and apparent prosperity associated with London:

I don't know why Esther's parents did not also go to London. But what I like about Esther's family is that they live happily...Although Esther's parents are poor, there is always happiness in their home. I wish Taka and I lived at Esther's home
(Mupondi, 2010:113).

Granted that this is childhood perspective, she cannot clearly assess the penury in every home, the reason her parents have decided to go to London. Because if we take her assessment at face value there would be no reason for anyone ever leaving Zimbabwe. What Rosie gives us is

the ideal family she would like to live with as contrasted to what Babamunini and Mainini, in the absence of her parents, are exposing them to. But it should also be noted that her parents are not the first parents to opt for the flight to London without their children, which brings us to the moral of the story. Why should children who have parents be treated badly as orphans and why should any child, whether orphan or not, be abused in a country that calls itself sovereign? The question readers should seriously ask writers and the nation at large is whether London per se is responsible for the abuse, rape and terror of children? Is it the parent who needs counseling? Is the extended family obsolete in today's world of changing social and family relations? Is the fear of losing a partner in the London jungle more real and terrifying than the prospects of a daughter being raped at home, a son abused or a child's educational career ruined on the altar of the pound?

Similarly in *Esther's Break Through*, a young girl is abused by a maid in the absence of her mother. Esther decides to engage herself in cross border trading after being widowed. She takes advice from a friend who seems to be doing very well in providing for her children and husband. Esther's friend advises that,

Do you think with our grandfathers out in Egoli, Wenela, Joni and as far away as Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and even as far as Burma in World War 1, these families would have survived (
Nyota 2010:83).

Esther is encouraged to try out cross border trading in spite of the bad publicity the trade has received. For Esther things work out well as she does well in her business without involving herself in illegal or immoral dealings. She quickly discovers the abuse her daughter is undergoing and puts a stop to it.

Cross Border trading does not bring joy to some characters as their lives are shattered in the hope of making more money to improve their lot. In *Mountains of ambition* the author depicts a young couple that is poverty stricken and leads a dismal lifestyle. The couple agrees that cross boarder trading will help alleviate their problems. It is however unfortunate that as the

wife begins to bring home money, she also becomes adulterous. The result of the escapade is a painful end to a good marriage. The husband is deceived and emotionally abused. While the wife's trading had on one hand managed to feed cloth and even afford better accommodation, on the other hand, it left the husband scarred by deceit.

Cross Border trading is also depicted as profitable but in some cases a very risky business. In *Femmes Sans Frontiers*, the protagonist is retrenched and left without a source of income to care for her two children. To solve her problem she engages in drug trafficking. At first she deals in small doses and enjoys the way she deceives customs people at the border. Unknowingly she becomes involved in a larger drug trafficking group. She is assisted by her two children to fake her disappearance and to change her identity. Her risky behavior puts the lives of her two children in danger. While she makes heaps of money and even enjoys a lavish holiday, her life is under threat from a person she does not even know and has never met, fortunately for the protagonist she realizes the risks she taking and quickly withdraws from drug trafficking.

It is worth noting that the number of Zimbabweans leaving the country has escalated, while for a few Zimbabweans the results have been a wealthy life style, others have not been so fortunate. The short stories indicate decay in moral values as characters try to earn a living. The moral fabric of the family is torn apart as spouses live apart from each other. Children are not spared the pain, as parents leave them in the care of relatives or they separate altogether. While some families have benefited immensely from the diaspora trek as in the case of Baba Shupi who came home with a fleet of trucks, others have become destitute in their search for 'greener pastures'.

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