

**The Zimbabwean Crisis: Locations of Writing and the Literary Representation of  
Zimbabwe's 'Lost Decade.'**

by

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

This study examines literary representations of the Zimbabwean crisis to ascertain how geographic, race and gender locations of writing influence the interpretation of the internal and external displacement of citizens, resulting from the government's 2000 fast-track land redistribution programme. Because the impact of the crisis on citizens depended on location, this study is framed around three perspectives. The first section, which analyses *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo and *Harare North* (2009) by Brian Chikwava, explores the displacement of citizens to the diaspora. Through an examination of literary devices employed by both authors, the study engages with the representation of Zimbabwean migrants' experiences in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. *Highway Queen* (2010) by Virginia Phiri and *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) by Tendai Huchu are analysed in the second section of the study, where the socio-cultural impact of the crisis on gender, particularly on the performance of masculinity, is explored. The last section looks at post-2000 white identity as portrayed in *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* (2013) by Mandy Retzlaff and *Absent: The English Teacher* (2009) by John Eppel. Here, the thesis reflects on the two authors' framing of the loss of home, identity and belonging experienced by white Zimbabweans in the aftermath of land reform.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek die literêre voorstellings van die Zimbabwiese krisis om vas te stel hoe geografiese, rasse en geslagopstelling van tekste die interpretasies van die interne en eksterne van burgers beïnvloed het. Hierdie ontworteling word veroorsaak deur die regering se versnelde grondhervorming program in die jaar 2000. As gevolg daarvan dat die impak van die krisis op burgers afgehang het van die omgewing waarin hulle was word hierdie navorsing benader vanuit drie verskillende perspektiewe. Die eerste afdeling handel oor die ontworteling van mense in die diaspora deur No Violet Bulawayo se *We Need New Names* (2013) en Brian Chikwava se *Harare North* (2009) te analiseer. Deur die literêre tegnieke van beide skrywers te ondersoek, verken hierdie navorsing die uitbeelding van die worsteling wat Zimbabwiese migrante in die Verenigde Koninkryk en die Verenigde State van Amerika ervaar het. *Highway Queen* (2010) deur Virginia Phiri en *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) deur Tendai Huchu word in die tweede afdeling ontleed, waar die sosio-kulturele trefpunt van die krisis op geslag, in besonder die verrigting van manlikheid, naspoor word. Die laaste afdeling kyk na die wit identiteit na-2000 soos wat dit uitgebeeld word in *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* (2013) deur Mandy Retzlaff en *Absent: The English Teacher* (2009) deur John Eppel. Hier poog die tesis om vas te stel hoe die skrywers die verlies van tuiste, identiteit en toebehorendheid raam soos dit deur wit Zimbabwiërs in die naweë van grondhervorming ervaar was.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Literature results from conscious acts of men in society ... It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes, of a community's wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter, and in the process, creating and recreating itself in history. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 5-6)

The political, economic and social instability that has affected the lives of many Zimbabweans over the last decade is widely referred to as the 'crisis'. The Zimbabwean crisis has attracted global debate and many scholars have attempted to find answers as to who and what has contributed to the demise of a country that was once the pride of Africa. This study acknowledges that the crisis in Zimbabwe cannot be attributed to one single cause but to a trajectory of events, dating from the attainment of independence in 1980. However, it attributes the economic collapse that has led to the internal and external displacement of citizens largely to the political unrest within the country. The research concurs with Nicola de Jager and Catherine Musuva in their claim that the root cause of Zimbabwe's problems can be attributed to a "crisis of governance" and that, for many reasons, ZANU PF has failed to provide its citizens with "[safety, the rule of law, human rights and sustainable economic development]" (17). De Jager and Musuva acknowledge that, although a "colonial economy" was inherited at independence, the economic catastrophe now being experienced is largely due to failed government policies. These include the handing of large amounts of money to war veterans in 1997, Zimbabwe's military involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (21-22). Clearly the causes of the Zimbabwean crisis are complex, hence, this research focuses mainly on the representation of the problems that have emerged in the last decade. It concerns itself primarily with the aftermath of the Fast Track Land Reform programme, which appears to have caused the disruption of the lives of many citizens.

The Fast Track Land Reform programme, initiated by government from 2000, was meant to correct land ownership imbalances that the ‘willing seller, willing buyer’ 1979 Lancaster House Agreement had failed to do (De Jager and Musuva 16). At the commencement of independence in 1980, white farmers owned thirty-nine per cent of the commercially viable land, whilst black small-scale farmers owned only four percent. The remaining forty-two percent, seventy-five percent of which was dry and unproductive, belonged to indigenous black peasants (Hammar and Raftopoulos *Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business* 8). In 2002, the Zimbabwean government forcibly removed white farmers off their land in what is now known as “Jambanja - the fast track land reform programme” (Hungwe 127). The word “Jambanja” underscores the forceful and lawless nature of this programme, which was criticised by the international community and viewed as ZANU PF’s attempt to regain political support lost to the newly formed party, Movement for Democratic Change, the MDC (Pilosof *The Unbearable Whiteness* 44). The MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, former leader of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), emerged in the late 1999s, with a party membership that cut across racial, ethnic and regional lines, and included civil society, churches and workers’ unions. The party had arisen amidst growing unrest and dissatisfaction with structural adjustment programmes adopted by the government at the behest of the IMF and the World Bank. These programmes had increased inflation and made life unaffordable for ordinary people who then took to the streets in protest. In the 2000 Parliamentary elections, ZANU PF lost all its seats in the urban areas and in the whole of the Matabeleland region to the MDC (Hammar “In the Name of Sovereignty” 424). The result shocked the ruling party, and as a counter strategy, the government resorted to wartime rhetoric and declared the ‘Third Chimurenga,’ presented as the final decolonisation of Zimbabwe. The government promised to reclaim white owned land and give it back to indigenous Zimbabweans. The ‘Third Chimurenga’,<sup>1</sup> ZANU PF claimed, was also a new fight against all so-called ‘enemies of the state,’ a category that included pro-MDC black urbanites, white

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<sup>1</sup> The word *Chimurenga* means liberation struggle. The uprising against white settlers by indigenous people was termed the ‘First Chimurenga’ and took place from about 1896-1897. The ‘Second Chimurenga’ was fought against Rhodesian rule in the 1970s. See Terence Ranger “Nationalist Historiography” (215-234).

farmers, and all supporters of opposition parties, particularly the MDC. The MDC was accused of being a Western-sponsored party, bent on reinstating white colonial rule in Zimbabwe. This rhetoric resonated with poor war veterans who then descended on white farms, assaulting, evicting and even killing farmers and their black farm workers. In due course, lack of capital, skills and equipment affected agricultural production, and staple food became scarce in a country once known as the breadbasket of Africa. Economic hardship catalysed urban migration, growth of slums and black market trading in scarce commodities and foreign currency (Hammar “In the Name of Sovereignty” 424). Fearing mounting loss of support from urban dwellers, the government ordered the mass demolition of all ‘illegal’ structures, in an exercise known as Operation Murambatsvina (Remove the Filth) which displaced about 700 000 dwellers (Potts 276). This was soon followed by Operation Taguta (We are Satisfied) in which government seized food from formal and informal outlets and imposed price controls. As hunger and destitution set in, most Zimbabweans placed their hopes on the MDC, the only party seen as capable of correcting what had become a dystopian society. With support from former white landowners, urban residents and Zimbabweans in the diaspora, MDC won the March 2008 presidential elections. Faced with the humiliating defeat ZANU PF mounted Operation Mavhoterapapi (How did you vote?), in which those who voted for MDC were arrested, tortured and killed (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a np). The violence prompted the MDC to withdraw, and Robert Mugabe declared himself the winner. However, due to international pressure, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) could not recognise Mugabe’s government, therefore, a power-sharing deal was brokered which was signed by both parties on September 2008. Mugabe retained his presidency, whilst Morgan Tsvangirai was proclaimed Prime Minister. Although this agreement seemed to bring hope when prices stabilised, state violence against the opposition continued and so did the farm invasions, forcing many black and white Zimbabweans to flee the country in vast numbers. During this time, professionals, particularly doctors and nurses left the country, and this affected the medical infrastructure. Cholera and HIV/ AIDS took their toll (De Jager and Musuva 18). The most important aspect to note about the land reform process was that it

destabilised and totally transformed Zimbabwean society because many citizens lost their homes and livelihoods. Overall, the internal and external displacement of citizens has gone down in history as the most disruptive process, and some critics, such as Lloyd Sachikonye, refer to the period from 2000 to the present as “the lost decade” (xv). It is perceived to be a time when a people, once known for being highly productive, became more concerned with evading violence and looking for means of sustenance.

Ironically, the crisis appears to have resuscitated literary creativity, such that a large body of new writing has emerged which engages with the multiple aspects of the post 2000 crisis. My research forms part of the critical scholarship that seeks to understand how authors frame the various forms of displacement brought about by the land reform programme. This thesis examines literary representations of the post 2000 internal and external displacement of Zimbabweans due to the political, economic, and social instability manifesting from the land redistribution programme. The six texts analysed in this study are: *Harare North* (2009), by Brian Chikwava, *Absent: The English Teacher* (2009) by John Eppel, *Highway Queen* (2010) by Virginia Phiri, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) by Tendai Huchu, *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* (2013) by Mandy Retzlaff, and *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo. Because the Zimbabwean crisis has had distinct implications for different categories of Zimbabweans, along racial, class and gender identity locations, these texts were selected based on writers’ and characters’ geographical and identity locations. Geography, here, refers to the physical location of the writers and the setting of the texts, whilst identity refers to race and gender of the writers as well as the characters within the texts. Thus, Chikwava and Bulawayo’s novels engage with transnational displacement of characters, while both authors write from outside Zimbabwe, as does Tendai Huchu. Huchu, Phiri, Eppel and Retzlaff’s texts examine the impact of the crisis on Zimbabweans who stayed behind. Similarly, where the rest offer black Zimbabweans’ encounters, Eppel and Retzlaff offer white Zimbabweans’ experiences of the crisis. The study also explores different genres of engagement with the crisis, hence the inclusion of both fiction and life writing. The research engages

with aspects of genre, language and style, and examines what bearing this has on the narration and interpretation of the crisis. I propose that such a broad outlook facilitates a multifaceted reading and brings together diverse insights on the representation of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Preliminary research reveals that a significant number of Zimbabwean texts published after 2000 engage with the crisis. However, its representation varies because Zimbabweans have been affected in different ways, depending on their geographic and identity locations. For instance, many former white farmers attempted to start other businesses or left the country whilst most of their black workers moved to the cities or to the communal lands. There is also a substantial number of middle-class, black Zimbabweans who relocated to South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. However, research shows that experiences of life in the diaspora have not been the same for black and white Zimbabweans. In “Makwerekwere: Migration, Citizenship and Identity amongst Zimbabweans in South Africa”, James Muzondidya argues that white Zimbabweans have fared better in South Africa due to the favourable reception and assistance they have received which has enabled them to secure citizenship and documents to live and work. Furthermore, many have taken advantage of family and business networks established in the past. On the other hand, black Zimbabweans have struggled to legitimise their existence, often waiting for many years to acquire legal status, and at times becoming victims of racial prejudice and xenophobia (38-44). On the whole research about post 2000 Zimbabwean literature reveals that white Zimbabweans write about the white experience and black Zimbabweans about the black experience. Furthermore, the study found that a majority of the post 2000 literature by white Zimbabweans is autobiographical, and is written mostly by authors who live abroad, with the politics of land ownership as a backdrop. A large percentage of these authors have chosen the memoir as the mode through which they lament the loss of land, home and belonging. Post 2000 writing by black authors, on the other hand, tends to be fiction, which focuses more on societal problems such as political repression, violence, poverty and disease. In her 2002 interview with Zimbabwean writers, literary scholars and publishers, Patricia Alden investigated “what the crisis in Zimbabwe [had done] to the arts, and what the arts [were] doing about the crisis” (“Dies

Irae” np). One of the respondents, Muchemwa, commented that most of the black writing “reflected an urban dystopia, symptomatic of failures in both culture and politics [and the] breakdown in the traditional family” (“Dies Irae” np). In contrast white writers “frequently mentioned loss, pain, change [and lamented the fact that they] ‘don’t always know where [they] belong and [they] need to belong somewhere” (“Dies Irae” np) Alden’s report clearly indicates the racialisation of the representation of the post 2000 crisis and demonstrates that white and black Zimbabweans engage with the crisis from different perspectives. This situation has prompted this study to examine the textual representation of the crisis from three different angles.

The first section explores the experiences of Zimbabweans who have moved to The United States of America and the United Kingdom, through a reading of *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo and *Harare North* by Brian Chikwava. The second section analyses *Highway Queen* by Virginia Phiri and *The Hairdresser of Harare* by Tendai Huchu, to demonstrate how the post 2000 dystopian landscape has transformed Zimbabwean society and subverted traditional gender roles such that a ‘crisis of masculinity’ is being experienced by those who remained behind. The third and last section focuses on post 2000 Zimbabwean whiteness through a reading of Mandy Retzlaff’s *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* and *Absent: The English Teacher* by John Eppel. In these texts, the study examines the representation of post 2000 white identity and experiences in the aftermath of the land reform.

Research carried out also reveals that there is a growing body of recent scholarship on literary representations of the crisis. One of these texts is *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (2005) which is edited by Ranka Primorac and Robert Muponde. This is a collection of essays that attempts to understand current literature’s relationship to Zimbabwean politics and history. Primorac and Muponde argue that literary texts imagine versions of Zimbabwe and that it is only a “multiplicity of approaches and opinions that can do this variety true justice” (xv). They claim that “the present crisis [has] brought about the beginnings of questioning what was previously kept ‘under the tongue’ – a struggle against spiritual blindness and inertia, and an

opportunity to question past habits of thought” (xv). This outlook is adopted in my study, which comprises authors from different geographic, racial and gender locations in a bid to analyse the portrayal of the crisis from different worldviews.

With regard to gender, sex and sexuality, Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde’s *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* (2007) is the first comprehensive text that focuses on post-independence masculinities. In this collection, the general perception is that there is a need for the academy to move away from the dualistic approach to gender, and to focus on the neglected area of masculinities, particularly as it appears that economic problems in Zimbabwe have created a ‘crisis of masculinity’. The topic of ‘crisis masculinities’ is discussed by Alden in “Coming Unstuck: Masculine Identities in Postcolonial Zimbabwean Fiction” (2011). In this article, she explores the representation of male characters in Stanley Nyamfukudza’s *If God Was a Woman* (1992), Charles Mungoshi’s *Walking Still* (1997) and Shimmer Chinodya’s *Can We Talk?* (1998), and argues that the stories depict a crisis of masculinity, a result of the unstable economy that has threatened men’s dominant position. She suggests that the narratives

show men losing control, becoming violent, and often directing anger against women or becoming hopelessly paralysed, even self-destructive. By contrast, women often gain greater control and demonstrate ability to be comfortable [and] liberated by modernity. (Alden 85)

The place of women in post 2000 is explored by Anna Chitando, in “Narrating Gender and Danger in Selected Zimbabwean Women’s Writings on HIV and AIDS” (2011). Chitando argues that in the past women were depicted by male authors as immoral, dangerous and dependent on men. Furthermore, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, Zimbabwean women have been portrayed as vectors of disease. However, she also observes that some texts show that the crisis has given women agency. This afore-mentioned scholarship is important for this study in relation to Chapter Two, which looks at gender power dynamics with a particular focus on the construction of post 2000 hegemonic masculinities.

In terms of critical scholarship on white Zimbabwean writing, there are two prominent texts published recently: David McDermott Hughes' *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging* (2010) and Rory Pilosof's *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers' Voices from Zimbabwe* (2012). Both authors argue that post 2000 white writing, which mostly laments loss of land, expresses pastoral romanticism and nostalgia. They argue that most of the literature has silences and absences in that it does not acknowledge the white farmers' privileged lifestyle nor the contributions of black farm workers. Hughes maintains that white Zimbabweans carved a privileged lifestyle that excluded blacks and focused on a "symbolic kinship with plants and animals" and that this landed them in a precarious position in 2000 when the land reform began (6). In "Rhodesians Never Die? The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Revival of Rhodesian Discourse" (2010) Primorac expresses similar views. She argues that crisis narratives by exiled white Zimbabweans have revived Rhodesian discourse evinced in colonial writing and that as much as they try to adjust to the conditions of the crisis, their writing "[continues] to reproduce a deep and colonially-rooted ambivalence towards notions of Africa, home and belonging" (203). In her textual analysis of Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat* (2004) and Peter Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (2006), she observes that both writers express an idealistic attitude towards the land and its animals. However, she notes a difference in Catherine Buckle's *African Tears* (2001) in that this writer does not identify her experience as typically 'African' but "presents a complex and specific account of the struggles over space, agency and future identities that were involved in the farm takeovers" (222). This land question is explored by Elda Hungwe, in "A Gendered Approach to the Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwean Fiction: An Assessment of Eames' *The Cry of the Go Away Bird*, Hoba's *The Trek* and Staunton's *Writing Still*" (2013). Here, Hugwe examines the textual portrayal of women within the context of land redistribution and concludes that the land redistribution programme was a masculine narrative with women presented as dependants.

In his thesis entitled "Should I stay or should I go?" Zimbabwe's White Writing, 1980-2011" (2014), Cuthbert Tagwirei argues that within the Zimbabwean literary landscape, white writing is

recognised for its engagement with issues of nationhood and citizenship but is excluded from the country's "literary and cultural systems [because] it is deemed to belong to a subset of narratives that fail to satisfy the demands of 'patriotic history'" (21). He explains that, although there have been several literary works by such authors as Eppel, who have published extensively; white writing continues to exist on the margins. Tagwirei attributes this attitude to the fact that critical scholarship has focused mainly on black writing because some critics, such as Rino Zhuwarara, have applied a black nationalist ideology in their approach. Tagwirei suggests that in Zhuwarara's *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* (2001), there is a deliberate move to exclude white writers because there is no comment on any of their writing; not even the work of major writers like Doris Lessing. These critical insights on white writing are useful to my discussion on questions of white identity and belonging in post 2000 Zimbabwe.

In *Crisis! What Crisis? The Multiple Dimensions of the Zimbabwean Crisis* (2012), Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa argue that Zimbabwean scholarship on the crisis has characterised it as a "mono-crisis" and that it is only recently that some scholarship has highlighted the multifaceted nature of the problems that caused it (ix). These include the unequal distribution of land, ideas about nationalism, economic instability, human rights, autocracy and anti-imperialist discourses. They state that, whilst literary texts such as *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) by Valerie Tagwirei, *Harare North* (2009) by Brian Chikwava, *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) by Petina Gappah; and a "thin diasporic scholarship" have provided some understanding, there is room for further study and theorisation of the crisis (ix). My study builds on, and responds to, Chiumbu and Musemwa's invitation for further scholarly engagement with the Zimbabwean crisis.

The limited diasporic scholarship that is referred to above has of late received a boost from scholars such as Annie Gagiano, Kizito Muchemwa, and Oliver Nyambi who have written on the latest offerings by Zimbabwean creative writers. In "Evoking and Negotiating the Zimbabwean Present" (2010) Gagiano reviews Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*, John Eppel's *Absent: The English Teacher* and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly*. She suggests that all three texts question

Zimbabwean identity in the twenty-first century. In “Old and New Fictions: Rearranging the Geographies of Urban Space and Identities in Post-2006 Zimbabwean Fiction” Muchemwa analyses three Zimbabwean texts including Chikwava’s *Harare North*, by comparing rural and urban settings, and demonstrating how these spaces exclude certain individuals. For its part, Nyambi’s “Nation in Crisis: Alternative literary representations of Zimbabwe Post 2000” (2013) suggests that crisis narratives by Zimbabwean writers are important because they challenge the powerful state forces that exist today and act as agents for democratic change. Gagiano, Muchemwa and Nyambi’s criticism informs the analysis of *We Need Names* and *Harare North*, the two texts that narrate post 2000 diasporic identities as a manifestation of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Displacement or dislocation as a condition experienced by many Zimbabweans after the land reform is a central concern for this study. According to Hammar, displacement, be it internal or external, is an “an act, experience and/or effect of some form of forced dislocation, or confinement” (*Displacement Economies* 4). In this research, all six texts represent dislocation through the narration of loss; of home, identity and belonging. They also portray confinement, which can be caused by stasis, when relocation fails to bring change and instead engenders feelings of entrapment. In *Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival* (2010), JoAnn McGregor and Ranka Primorac explore the post 2000 enforced migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa and Britain due to the instability in their country. They refer to this movement as the “new diaspora,” with ‘new’ emphasising its difference from past dispersals, which were dictated by the demand for labour regionally, and the migration of black political exiles within the framework of the liberation war (4). This anthology of essays explores the causes for the new diaspora and the strategies that Zimbabweans adopt to survive in foreign lands.

This research, therefore, adopts McGregor and Primorac’s definition of diaspora in the analysis of *We Need New Names* and *Harare North*, the texts that represent Zimbabwean migrants’ experiences in the West. The analysis further draws on Simon Gikandi’s theories on globalisation and migration as expressed in “Globalisation and the Claims of Postcoloniality” (2001). Gikandi argues

that Africans leave their countries for the west “neither seeking cultural hybridity [nor] ontological difference. Their quest [is] for a modern life in the European sense of the world; their risky journey from Africa [is] an attempt to escape both poverty and alterity (630-631). Gikandi explains that Africans move to the West because “the nation-state, once deemed to be the defender of postcolonial subjects, [is] now conceived as the major threat to the well-being of its citizens” (637). He argues that postcolonial theorists need to move away from a celebratory view of globalization because it encourages the romanticising of the West and avoids an honest engagement with the hardships experienced by migrants in their search for global identities.

In addition to the disappointment experienced by migrants in the West, this research explores nostalgia as a longing for home, which appears to impede the forging of adaptable migrant identity. To engage with this aspect of displacement this discussion draws on Svetlana Boym’s theory of nostalgia as discussed in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). Boym argues that nostalgia, “from Greek roots, *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing, is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement but is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (xiii). Boym’s work is insightful in reflecting on the effect of nostalgia on migrant characters in Bulawayo and Chikwava’s novels; underscoring the ways in which the intense longing for Zimbabwe makes it difficult for them to adjust to new spaces. In both texts, the protagonists experience intense nostalgia which manifests in mental and emotional breakdown.

The second section of the study discusses the impact of the crisis on contemporary masculinities and argues that the collapse of the economy, coupled with the idealization of militant ‘war veteran’ masculinities, has transformed public and private spaces and destabilized conventional gender roles. The exploration of masculinities in this study relies on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’ which purports that, in most societies, particular groups of people dominate and exert power and control over other groups; that in most cases, the dominant group has more access to economic resources and other forms of capital. Robert Connell extends this argument by suggesting that men usually comprise the dominant group, and by virtue of their biological make-up, are

recognized as superior, hence his idea of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Connell defines ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (77). In the post 2000 Zimbabwean context, militant masculinities formed one of the major hegemonic masculine identities, upheld by the state. Other scholars, such as Muchemwa and Muponde, view masculinities as “sets of ideas that can oppress, repress or liberate, depending on historical and political imperatives [and that] they are not a monopoly of one biological sex or social construct” (*Manning* xvi). Gramsci, Connell, Muchemwa and Muponde’s theories are important for this study because they are a lens through which the representation of post 2000 masculinities in Phiri’s *Highway Queen* and Huchu’s *The Hairdresser of Harare* are read. The study proposes that the post 2000 hegemonic masculinity is a militarist masculinity that is intolerant of and polices poor people, women and homosexual men, rendering them as non-citizens. Furthermore, this research proposes that Phiri and Huchu’s novels resist official government narratives by discussing taboo subjects such as prostitution and homosexuality.

The study draws on Maria Pia Lara’s argument in *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (1998), that such literary texts are “emancipatory narratives [that] create new forms of power [and] configure new ways to fight back against past and present injustices” (5). Lara argues that by entering the public sphere literature gives the subject an opportunity to speak. The same can be applied to narratives by white Zimbabwean writers because they write about their experiences of the controversial land reform. In order to analyze *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family*, *Africa and Exile* and *Absent: The English Teacher* the study utilises Hughes and Pilosof’s ideas on post 2000 white Zimbabwean identity.

In *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging* (2010) Hughes advances two arguments about the construction of white identity. The first he calls the “imaginative project of colonisation” which he defines as cultural work involving “white writers, painters, photographers, and even farmers [crafting] an ideal of settler-as-nature lover” (xiii). Hughes claims that white settlers were more interested in taking ownership of the land, and when they arrived, they

simply ignored the existence of indigenous people, avoiding any direct interaction with them. The second argument is what Hughes calls “Other disregarding” and attitude whereby white settlers did not prioritise forming meaningful relations with blacks; that they were indifferent to them and rather “gained a sense of belonging, negotiated with the land and circumvented the people” (xviii). He applies this theory to white writing from Zimbabwe and argues that post 2000 texts that narrate loss of land reveal the traits described above.

Pilosof’s views on white Zimbabwean identity are similar; and in *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers’ Voices from Zimbabwe* (2012), he claims that white literature on the land crisis largely portrays “white myopia concerning hard work and empty lands” which he defines as myths that express a belief that whites have a right to the land because they have worked hard, trained the black workforce and made the wild, uninhabited African landscape suitable for crops (164). He maintains that the narratives hardly mention the white farmers’ privileged lifestyle made possible by subsidies received from government.

The thesis comprises three core chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of the political history which gave rise to discontent and led to the fast-track land redistribution programme resulting in the displacement of many Zimbabweans. In this section, I also look at the critical scholarship that attempts to understand the framing of crisis narratives by creative writers. Lastly, I outline the theoretical ideas on which the study draws.

Chapter two considers Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* and Chikwava’s *Harare North*, the two novels that focus on the displacement of Zimbabweans to the diaspora and the hardships they face in their quest to integrate into American and British culture respectively. The first section looks at Bulawayo’s novel with a keen interest in the protagonist’s life in the diaspora and the challenges she faces in her new environment. The analysis focuses on the literary strategies the author uses to narrate the crisis including her choice of narrative voice and her experimentation with English, Shona and Ndebele languages. I also explore her naming practices, which I view as important in facilitating the contextualising of her setting and characters. The second section of this chapter focuses on *Harare*

*North* and engages with the reasons why the author chooses a particular narrative voice and how this facilitates the protagonist's articulation of his experiences in the diaspora. I argue that both texts reveal the disillusionment migrants experience when their dreams for a better life in the United Kingdom and America are not realised.

Chapter three offers an analysis of *Highway Queen* by Phiri and *The Hairdresser of Harare* by Huchu with a focus on the subversion of gender roles due to the transformation of Zimbabwean society because of the crisis. In *Highway Queen*, the study looks at Sophie, the main character, whose life changes when the family is thrown into poverty following her husband's retrenchment. The research reveals her struggles to start a business and the physical abuse and rape she experiences until she succumbs to a life as a sex worker. In Huchu's novel, the research focuses on Dumisani, a gay man who struggles to live in Zimbabwe's homophobic society and the physical violence he endures when his affair with a prominent political figure is discovered. In this chapter, I argue that the economic crisis, which has caused many men to lose their jobs, has created anxieties in men, as they are no longer able to provide materially for their families. In order to reclaim their power, some of these men have become violent against women. At the same time, the post 2000 period witnessed increased homophobic sentiment with greater celebration of militant masculinities as the hegemonic male identity.

Chapter four engages with notions of post 2000 Zimbabwean white identity in Retzlaff's *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* and *Absent: The English Teacher*, a satirical novel by Eppel. In this section, the study investigates how the choice of genre — that is the memoir and the satirical novel — influence the way the writers narrate the experiences of the crisis. The study examines Retzlaff's narration of the appropriation of white commercial farms by war veterans and the reversal of roles in Eppel's text when a former white school teacher loses his job and finds work as a domestic 'servant' for a black woman. I argue that the two novels depict nostalgia, a longing for Rhodesia when white Zimbabweans held all the power. They also ask questions about the place of white Zimbabweans in post 2000 contexts after they lose their homes,

identity and belonging. Chapter five is the conclusion in which I consolidate insights from the three analysis chapters and explore the tropes and themes that have emerged.

## Chapter 2

### **“Zimbabwe [is] a State of Mind”<sup>2</sup>: Home, Identity and Belonging in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* and Chikwava’s *Harare North***

NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2009) and Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North* (2013) are narratives of displacement. These novels respond to the social and economic difficulties in post-independence Zimbabwe and the subsequent movement of people within the country and to the diaspora. In *We Need New Names*, the central character, a ten-year-old girl named Darling, leaves Zimbabwe for the United States to escape an unpredictable future in a country whose infrastructure has ground to a halt. Similarly, Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North* presents the life of an unnamed twenty-two-year-old former member of the ZANU PF youth militia — the Green Bombers —, who seeks asylum in the United Kingdom to escape prosecution for murder. Bulawayo and Chikwava’s texts delve into the difficulties of displacement and migrant life as one of the most outstanding impacts of the post 2000 land reform and its attendant economic dynamics. In their respective novels, the two writers disrupt popular perceptions of diaspora as a place for ‘easy riches.’

As part of a crop of new writers that have emerged from Zimbabwe post 2000, Bulawayo and Chikwava engage with the dystopian Zimbabwean landscape and reflect on the mass movement of people, within the country and to the diaspora, to escape political persecution, poverty, hunger and disease. Both authors are migrants living in the United States and United Kingdom respectively, and in my view, their location in the diaspora affords them the creative freedom and insight to explore the post 2000 Zimbabwean crisis without reservations. They differ from writers who still reside in Zimbabwe, who may censor themselves to avoid prosecution by the state.

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase “Zimbabwe is a state of mind”, which is used in the title of this chapter, is borrowed from the conversation Comrade Mhiripiri, the former leader of the Green Bombers, has with the protagonist during their encounter in London. At this meeting Mhiripiri says these words to the Green Bomber to alert him to his naivety and ignorance as to Zimbabwe’s social and political reality. Brian Chikwava *Harare North* (183).

Bulawayo and Chikwava belong to the third generation of Zimbabwean writers whose fiction critiques state policies that have caused untold human suffering. Following in the tradition of second-generation writer Dambudzo Marechera, who often challenged the policies of the post-colonial Zimbabwean government, and questioned identity in relation to home and the diaspora, Bulawayo and Chikwava explore the re-imagining and transformation of post 2000 Zimbabwean diasporic identity. In “Old and New Fictions: Rearranging the Geographies of Urban Space and Identities in Post-2006 Zimbabwean Fiction” (2010), Kizito Muchemwa suggests that the recent mass movement of Zimbabweans in response to state policies has not been fully documented and that existing records consist mainly of the 1970s liberation history. He maintains — and I concur —, that exilic writing in and outside Zimbabwe is important, particularly as the “new millennium has [heralded] the age of the wandering Zimbabwean scattered to all corners of the world” (135). Bulawayo and Chikwava’s texts consider displacement to be a result of tensions between citizens and the state, which are compounded by problems of unemployment and poverty. Indeed, history reveals that the crossing of national and continental borders by Africans has primarily been influenced by their inability to survive in their home countries (Moudouma 19). Similarly, in “Globalisation and the Claims of Postcoloniality” (2001) Simon Gikandi proposes that the “optimistic and celebratory view of globalization” by postcolonial theorists is problematic because it romanticises migration to the West and fails to have a truthful engagement with the hardships of life in the diaspora (629). To illustrate this point, Gikandi cites the story of two Guinean boys who died in the hold of a plane en route to Brussels in August 1998. On their bodies, a letter was found which expressed their hopes for a new life and which implored:

the responsible citizens of Europe [to alleviate] the suffering of the children and youth in Africa [because God] has granted [Europe] all the experience, wealth, and power to ably construct and organise [the African] continent. (Gikandi “Globalisation” 630)

The representation of Europe as possessing divinely assigned powers to rescue Africa is clearly a problematic narrative, which sustains an aspirational desire to move to the West, where it is presumed

that all dreams for a better life will be realised. The letter records the boys' great disappointment with Guinea, which has offered them nothing but war, sickness and hunger. Sadly, they never make it to Europe and, according to Gikandi; their death expresses the failed dreams of many postcolonial subjects who view Europe as their salvation. Gikandi claims that romanticising the West has emerged from the belief that globalisation will offer the African subject 'civilisation' and 'prosperity.' However, he insists, new media is not entirely to blame because narratives that idealise Europe can be linked to older beliefs about 'civilisation'. In light of Gikandi's sentiments, *We Need New Names* and *Harare North* are very important insightful texts in their engagement with the disillusionment that haunts globalisation.

This chapter proposes that Bulawayo and Chikwava's geographic locations in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, which also form the respective settings of their novels, shape their representation of the migrant subject because distance allows for a degree of objectivity and what Tina Steiner terms "different ways of knowing the world" (2). In *Translated People, Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Literature* (2009), Steiner discusses the complexities of migration, and argues that

a 'translated person', [is] one who [has] migrated from Africa to the West and thus occupies interstices of different cultures and languages and accesses different ways of knowing and representing the world. As a result of the authors' cross-cultural positions, they produce 'translated texts' which through content and language, aim to express the multiple worlds the characters have come to occupy. (2)

The fact that Bulawayo has lived and studied in America since the age of eighteen may suggest that distance from home and her interaction with different people informs the way she represents migrant life. Her sensitive portrayal of American culture and migrants' encounters with it is evident in her depiction of the young narrator Darling and her aunt, Fostalina. In an interview with Vanessa Obioha, on 15 March 2014, Bulawayo reveals her own experience of migration: "I went to America at the age of eighteen... you get there, and America makes you realize that you are not really one of us" ("This

Day” np). Such words hint at the possibility that Bulawayo’s personal experiences were similar to those of her two characters, Darling and Fostalina. Similarly, Chikwava’s experiences and those of other Zimbabweans and Africans living in London would offer important first-hand insights into the socio-cultural setting of his novel. Indeed, at an interview with Marius Kociejowki in 2011, Chikwava confirms that he constructed the character of Mai Musindo, the hairdresser, by studying African migrant women as they went in and out of a hairdressing salon situated near his place of residence. He also observed homeless people as he commuted in the London metropolis (59). It is, therefore, possible that his proximity to migrants from other African countries, and to homeless people in general, has meant that his textual representation is from a Zimbabwean, African and global perspective. While it is a common-place assumption that authors’ geographical locations of writing exert some influence on their writing, this effect seems to be intensified in post 2000 Zimbabwean writing, where particular patterns of concerns and perspectives emerge, and seem to coincide with particular geographic locations of writing, among other factors. In this regard, it can be argued that *Harare North* is a novel that treats migrancy as homelessness, thus, echoing, Anu Shukla and Sheobushani Shukla’s suggestion that the work of exilic writers is influenced by their “poetic sensitivity [and is likely to be] shaped by migrancy, by exilic experience [and] by [a] sense of the loss of homeland” (7). The loss of homeland that Sheo Bhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla refer to is prominent in the diasporic imagination because estrangement from home means that one is constantly comparing it to the new space. The comparison is likely to create romantic notions of home, such that home becomes a mythical space, and this invariably influences how one navigates one’s new environment. This chapter draws on Svetlana Boym’s ideas on nostalgia in reading how the constant longing for home shapes the way migrants fail to manage new cultures.

In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Boym suggests that nostalgia is a feeling of longing that all human beings experience, but that each person narrates different stories of belonging and non-belonging. She defines nostalgia as “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed, [it is] a sentiment of loss and displacement, [but is] also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (xiii). In

reading *We Need Names* and *Harare North*, the two kinds of nostalgia, *restorative* and *reflective*, that Boym discusses in her book, are useful in making sense of migrants' understanding of themselves, their relationship to their past, their home and their imagined community. This chapter proposes that most of the characters in *Harare North* experience nostalgia of the *restorative* kind; the one that, for Boym, perceives home as

forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy... Home is not made of individual memories but of collective projections and 'rational delusions'. Paranoid reconstruction of home is predicated on the fantasy of persecution...Nostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement [and] displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. (43)

Chikwava's nameless protagonist embodies the *restorative* nostalgic because he believes that Zimbabwe is under constant threat from Western imperialistic forces and that this enemy should be confronted in order to restore Zimbabwe to its former glory. His patriotism is evident from his declaration: "Some of us have defend the country from them enemies of the state who have break loose inside house of stones" (Chikwava *Harare North* 125). In the text, we observe how the nameless narrator's romantic idea of home and his blind allegiance to ZANU PF hinders him from carving a new identity for himself. On the other hand, most characters in *We Need New Names* experience nostalgia of the *reflective* kind that Boym describes as being

more oriented towards an individual narrative that savors detail and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself. ...Reflective nostalgia [is] ironic and humorous. It reveals the longing and critical thinking that are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection. Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home. [In this case] the 'cure' comes from accepting that the past will exist and that it might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows vitality. (49 -50)

In this text, Darling and Fostalina, express *reflective* nostalgia because they have accepted that Zimbabwe has changed forever and that they may never return home. Their survival as migrants depends on the redefinition of their identities, which entails assimilating into American culture. For *reflective* nostalgics, collective memory brings the idea of ‘home’ into the present when friends and relatives meet to talk, eat and dance. The gathering of friends under one roof demonstrates the power of nostalgia as a uniting force. In relation to *reflective* nostalgia, Boym concludes that:

perhaps what is most missed during historical cataclysms and exile is not the past and the homeland exactly, but rather this potential space of cultural experience that one has shared with one’s friends and compatriots that is based neither on nation nor religion but on elective affinities. (53)

In the novel, Fostalina’s home is portrayed as a space that allows for the imagining of the past and what has been lost, but it is also a place where memory enriches diasporic life. The sharing of Zimbabwean cuisine, music and laughter marks a moment when Zimbabweans can celebrate their collective identity and, for once, temporarily put away the cloak of migrancy. The following section focuses on Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.

*We Need New Names* focuses on the lives of slum-dwellers who reside on the outskirts of the city and highlights the ways in which they struggle with unemployment, political violence and poverty. The text also examines the lives of Zimbabweans who leave the country in search of a better life and highlights their disillusionment when diaspora proves to be a space of estrangement and alienation. Bulawayo narrates these experiences through a young narrator, Darling, whose innocent, almost naive voice allows for a candid critique of the ruling party and the devastation it has brought onto its citizens. The text represents the extent to which all Zimbabweans, despite their different backgrounds, have been severely affected by ZANU PF’s corrupt governance, particularly the chaotic fast land redistribution programme.

*We Need New Names*, is set in two locations; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe’s second largest city and Detroit, a city in the United States of America. It is a literary comment on the displacement of many

Zimbabwean families as a result of political unrest arising from the fast-track land redistribution programme. Paradise, the name of the squatter-camp in the novel, is the author's fictional recreation of slums that sheltered the homeless in the aftermath of the urban 'clean-up.' Darling and her friends, Chipso, Sbhoo, Bastard and Godknows, live in Paradise, where most residents are destitute and their daily lives are focused on surviving hunger and disease. To alleviate lack of food, the group of friends regularly scour Budapest, the neighbouring affluent suburb, and steal guavas. At the age of about twelve, Darling moves to the United States of America to live with her mother's sister, Fostalina, where she discovers that the 'real' America does not resemble the America of her dreams. The pressure of life in America disturbs Darling's well-being, and she suffers a psychological and emotional breakdown. In this novel, Darling's mental instability echoes the kind of disturbance experienced by Nyasha, the young female narrator and central character in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Nyasha has lived in England from a young age, and when she returns to Zimbabwe as a teenager, she is not able to adjust to African traditional expectations and finds herself stuck in-between two cultures. The inner conflict Nyasha experiences tears the entire family apart, particularly when she is hospitalised.

In her representation of the impact of the crisis on the physical and emotional well-being of Darling, her friends and family, Bulawayo employs a number of literary strategies, such as the child's narrative voice, experimentation with language and distinctive naming of characters. Bulawayo's use of a child's first-person narrative voice is central to the novel's plot. Odile Cazenave discusses choice of narrative voice and argues that, in recent years, social problems in the post-colonial state are being addressed by women writers from the point of view of children or young adults because such voices "[confront] the aberrations of the postcolonial urban environment and its madness" (65). Cazenave's argument is applicable here because perceptions of children's innocence make their narrative voices in literature evocative and lends narratives emotional resonance for readers. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo uses the inquisitive nature of a child to engage the reader in a discussion on controversial subjects such as state violence, HIV/AIDS, child molestation and abortion. The narrative voice is

forthright, curious, reflective and, to add emphasis, words are often repeated. This happens when Darling reveals that her friend Chipo, who is only ten years old, is pregnant, and the pregnancy appears to have made her silent. Darling says: Chipo is not “*mute-mute*, [she still] plays ...and does everything else, and if she *really, really* needs to say something she [uses] her hands (Bulawayo 2-3 emphasis added). The repetition of words, “mute-mute” and “really” emphasise the temporality of Chipo’s loss of speech. Stylistically, the repetition adds humour, a device which is useful for storytelling as suggested by Ayo Kehinde when he states in a different context, that “humorous linguistic innovations [in stories give] tragic messages a spice of comedy” (76). In this instance, Darling’s innocence and childlike manner comes through when she repeats words, and although this is amusing, the realisation that a ten-year old girl has been sexually assaulted shocks the reader. Throughout Bulawayo’s novel, the narrative voice has an element of the comic, yet it still carries and exposes the gruesome realities of Zimbabwean life after 2000. The tone only changes in the second part of the novel where its sombreness reflects Darling’s older self and her new struggles as a diasporic subject. In addition to utilising a child’s narrative voice, Bulawayo’s creative use of language presents *We Need New Names* as a unique and compelling text.

Bulawayo is the first Zimbabwean fiction writer to experiment with English and Ndebele, thus creating an idiom that captures the cultural nuances of her community. Bulawayo transposes African expressions that originate from her native Ndebele language into English, and in doing so, introduces readers to the cultural norms of her society (Kwaku 77). Although this novel is in English, the characters switch between English and Ndebele and express themselves in words that are familiar to most Zimbabweans regardless of their ethnicity or social background. This gives the novel a distinct local flavour. At times the author “Ndebelises” English words and Anglicises Ndebele words, and all these aspects inaugurate a ‘new English’ in contemporary Zimbabwean literature. This in some ways embodies Chinua Achebe’s view expressed in his seminal essay “The African Writer and the English Language” (1975), where he states that, although the English language is part of the African colonial legacy, when used, it should be a ‘dialect,’ that will “carry the weight of [the] African experience. [It

has to be] a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, [although] altered to suit its new African surrounding” (62). In line with Achebe’s proposal, *We Need New Names* demonstrates how Bulawayo has created a ‘new English’ but has gone a step further by coining new words and manipulating old ones, to create a distinct Ndebele register. Ndebele-speaking readers can detect the underlying semiotic and syntactic muscles of the Ndebele language, and this, undoubtedly, is the beauty and mastery of this text.

Bulawayo’s focus on language in her novel also interrogates its power as both a signifier of difference and an index of nostalgia for home, particularly when it relates to the way African migrants interact in the diaspora. In their American household, Darling and Fostalina communicate in English and Ndebele. However, Fostalina’s boyfriend, Jojo, does not understand Ndebele, and this erects a barrier which keeps communication between them to a bare minimum. We perceive how the problems of language position Jojo as an outsider in his own home, particularly when Fostalina receives Zimbabwean visitors. Jojo either leaves the house or

sits there looking lost, like he has just illegally entered a strange country [whilst] everybody [speaks their] real language, laughing and talking loudly about back home, how it was when they were growing up before things turned bad, then ugly.

(Bulawayo 161)

Evidently, Jojo is not able to share his stories from his childhood in Ghana in his indigenous language because, being Zimbabwean, Fostalina’s friends would possibly not understand, and this alienates him. Interestingly, when Fostalina and Jojo are anxious, they express themselves in their mother tongues. For instance, Fostalina reprimands Jojo for watching too much television but Jojo “doesn’t seem to bother about listening to her [and he walks away speaking] in his language that nobody understands” (152). Here language acts as a ‘mode of resistance’ that reveals Jojo’s refusal to show interest in Fostalina’s words. Similarly, Fostalina switches between English and Ndebele to express her annoyance when Jojo complains that she does not cook or clean as wives do in his country. She declares:

Yes, in your country maybe, but this is America, and nxa ubona'engani ulebhoi lapha manje uzatshetshela ngereza faname! (Bulawayo 156) [Ndebele to “and do you think that you have a servant here. You will wipe your bum with a razor blade - my boy”]

Jojo does not understand what Fostalina has said so he walks away. The above exchange shows that, when Fostalina and Jojo revert to their indigenous languages, they are in reality escaping into their cultural identities where they feel safe. Failure to understand Ndebele means that Jojo cannot participate in the conversation and is excluded from what would be an interesting exchange with Fostalina and her friends. The same applies to Fostalina seeing as she too cannot understand Jojo's mother tongue. We observe how the lack of an 'indigenous lingua-franca' strains relations and isolates Jojo and Fostalina from one-another. Interestingly, the narrator refers to Ndebele as a “real language” which suggests that there are times when English is not adequate to express thoughts, expressions and frustrations constituted in a different language. Here, we note that language is not just about words but also about local idiom. The razor-blade phrase would not translate well and be as effective if said in English because its meaning is unique and only accessible in the Ndebele context from which Fostalina comes. The same phrase said in English cannot transmit the same message and, thus, we see how the insertion of vernacular speech undermines English as a dominant language, a familiar counter-discursive device in postcolonial writing (Ashcroft et al 38). Most importantly, when Darling compares linguistic problems with “entering a strange country illegally” this marks the desperation with which Zimbabweans have sneaked into other more stable countries, as illegal immigrants, as is also the case with *Harare North*'s protagonist, the focus of the next section of this chapter. In such contexts, language is a border which has to be negotiated in the same way migrants negotiate foreign border posts. In addition to Bulawayo's focus on the power of language, we observe that the naming of places and characters in *We Need New Names* is not arbitrary, but is designed to portray particular contexts.

In *We Need New Names* the practice of naming, de-naming and renaming is used to convey specific messages so that names of people and places signify either hope or despair. This study

proposes that, most often, when the identity of a person or place is changed this signifies some kind of transformation, therefore, the title of Bulawayo's text reflects the author's wish for a change in the way Zimbabweans view themselves and address their country's problems. Bulawayo discusses her naming practices in an interview with Jill Coates, held in Bulawayo on 20 September 2013. She explains that her debut novel is entitled *We Need New Names* because it was written "from a space that was difficult in [Zimbabwe's] imagination and history, and she felt [that] new ways of [imagining realities even] beyond Zimbabwe" were needed (Weaver Press np). In order to analyse the practice of naming and de-naming in this text, I draw on anthropological research by Gabriel Vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn in their book *The Anthropology of Names and Naming* (2009). Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn claim that:

names are always implicated in social relations. These entanglements may be negative as well as positive and clearly are an important factor in the ways that names may define or cross boundaries. Names are as ubiquitous as kinship. They are as caught up in histories as they are in daily social life [and] serve as a means of structuring social relations as well as a powerful medium in which to talk about those relations. (25-26)

The importance of names is conveyed by the title of the novel, as intimated above, and by the meaning of the names of characters in the novel. Bulawayo's naming practices begin with her own change of name.

Born Elizabeth Tshele, the author spent most of her childhood in the city of Bulawayo and left for America at the age of eighteen. Once there, she renames herself NoViolet Bulawayo; Violet after her late mother, and Bulawayo after Zimbabwe's second largest city. As Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn suggest, renaming can be a "way of coping with the present, ... commemorating the past and imagining the future" (2). It is possible, therefore, to argue that Bulawayo's change of name is her way of negotiating her sense of dislocation because her mother's name and the name of the city of her birth reconnect her to her lineage. Linguistically, the innovation of her name is interesting because English speaking audiences understand the prefix 'no' to mean 'without Violet', whereas in

the author's native Ndebele, 'no' means 'with Violet'. This is an example of the author's Africanisation of English and according to Belina Polo Moji this not only "forces the colonial language to refer to an African language for meaning, we also see how [she], as a subject, uses names to renegotiate her identity according to personal and collective histories" (183). Furthermore, Bulawayo's change of name can be read as her nostalgia for her lost mother Violet, and her lost home, Bulawayo, because, by calling herself NoViolet and not just Violet, she reclaims this conventional English name, and inserts it into the Ndebele/African register of names, such as Nomathemba, Nomusa, Noluthando. This, in my view, connects Bulawayo to her Ndebele cultural roots, despite her move to America. Furthermore, the surname Bulawayo signifies a collective identity and defines her, not only as an African and Zimbabwean writer but also as a Ndebele writer from Matabeleland, a region inhabited mainly by the Ndebele. Honouring the people of Matabeleland is a poignant gesture if one considers the massacre of the Ndebele people, "Gukurahundi", which took place by government decree in the early 1908s (Ncube and Siziba 2). Bulawayo's focus on names and naming is interesting when one analyses how and why she gives the child characters in the novel particular names.

In their book cited above, Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn attest that names are "potentially powerful things in themselves [and act as] signifiers of the social person" (10). This statement suggests that one's name identifies a person and is indicative of their social position within the community they come from. Firstly, the name of the central character in the novel is Darling, a name one would associate with love and with a child born in happier times when the parents had great hopes for their 'little darling.' However, in post 2000 Zimbabwe, Darling's life is not what it should have been because the family lives in a slum and her mother travels up and down selling wares to make a living. Her father, an unemployed university graduate, has left for South Africa to look for better opportunities. Similarly, the name Chipso, which means 'gift' in the Shona language, suggests that she was cherished by her parents, but something goes terribly wrong when, at the age of ten, she is sexually assaulted and impregnated by her grandfather. The text does not indicate the whereabouts of

her parents, but her pregnancy signals an unsafe family environment. This study proposes that Bulawayo creates characters with names so disparate to their surroundings to alert the reader to their parents' failed hopes. In this slum, children are vulnerable to 'disturbed' individuals like Chipo's grandfather. Although sexual assault can happen anywhere, in a place like a slum, where adults and children share intimate spaces, the risk of sexual violence is heightened.

Apart from Darling and Chipo, names like Godknows, Bastard and Stina suggest that these children were born right at the beginning of the crisis in Zimbabwe. The name Godknows implies the parent's loss of trust in the powers that govern Zimbabwe and their wish for divine intervention. The second name, Bastard, hints at the boy's illegitimacy, or it could be a reference to a father who absconded, which would not be surprising in a situation where most men cannot sustain their households. The last name Stina, which means brick in Ndebele, may suggest that the boy was born in the midst of violence when bricks and stones were thrown. Whatever the case may be, these names convey the idea that the environment in which these children grow up is not conducive to their safety and happiness.

Although the author pays homage to Bulawayo, the city of her birth, she does not indicate directly that the fictional country in which the novel is set is Zimbabwe. She infers that it is Zimbabwe through street names like Chimurenga, which evoke Zimbabwe's nationalist struggle for independence and Mzilikazi after the founding father of the Ndebele nation, King Mzilikazi. Bulawayo refers to the country in the novel as a "*kaka* country [and] a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart" (Bulawayo 49). Not naming her country of origin is in line with Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck's suggestion that "the act of de-naming [can be used] as a form of political annihilation" (1). The author records her defiance by refusing to acknowledge that Zimbabwe still exists and that the country once known as The House of Stone has perished. The reference to Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart*, is moving because it foregrounds a country that is in pieces politically, economically and socially. Hence, The House of Stone has become The House of Hunger

as depicted in Marechera's 1978 debut novel, which pre-empted the failures of the Zimbabwean post-independence state.

With reference to names of places in the text, Bulawayo's naming practices "eloquently connote" the character of each space (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 4). This is illustrated by the names of the two spaces that Darling and her friends inhabit in the story. Ironically the slum where Darling lives is named "Paradise" and the rich suburb from where they steal guavas is named "Budapest". Darling and her friends refer to Paradise as a "kaka-toilet" a Shona word for faeces (Bulawayo 12). As the word "kaka" appears throughout the text, it acts as an extended metaphor and serves to highlight negative things, persons, places and experiences. When Darling goes to Budapest, she describes feeling as if she is "in a different country altogether, [a] nice country where people who are not like [them] live" (4). This negative attitude is also expressed by Sbho when she yells at Bastard that "Budapest is not a kaka toilet for anybody to just walk in, it's not like Paradise" (12). Darling and Sbho's sentiments reveal that, despite their age, they are well aware that they should not be living in such despicable surroundings. By using the word "kaka," Bulawayo criticises the removal of citizens from their comfortable homes by Operation Murambatsvina, to places not conducive to their well-being. Ultimately "kaka" portrays, not only the squalor of the squatter-camp, but the general decay of the Zimbabwean post-independence state. The text exposes the vulnerability of Zimbabweans who live in temporary structures made from scraps of cardboard, corrugated iron, plastics and whatever available material. The juxtaposition of the two very different spaces, Paradise and Budapest, highlights the inequalities of this society and is a critique of the huge class divide that exists in Zimbabwe today. The dystopian nature of the state that Bulawayo conveys through the names of the characters and places in the novel can also be read from the large number of new churches that have sprung up all over the country.

*We Need New Names* imagines the ways Zimbabweans negotiate the post 2000 problems of unemployment, homelessness, lack of freedom and security, and it reveals people's reliance on religion for solutions. In the text, we observe that Christian and African traditions exist side by side

and characters like Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, Mother of Bones and Vodloza, dedicate themselves to the spiritual world to cope with their daily struggles. Mother of Bones is a staunch Christian who attends church regularly and prays desperately for change. The dismal situation can be read from her deeply lined “face [which resembles] the colour of the shacks, a dirty brown, like it was made to match” (Bulawayo 25). Mother of Bones represents those Zimbabweans who cannot accept the changes that have taken place, and this is illustrated by her refusal to throw away her obsolete Zimbabwean dollars. Daily she looks at the notes and laments:

You know what I don't understand? ... how this very money that I have in lumps cannot even buy a grain of salt ... And the American money they are talking about just where do they think I'll get it do they think I can just dig it up huh do they think I will defecate it? (Bulawayo 25)

Mother of Bones's refusal to accept 'her lot' is demonstrated by her emotional rant, which is emphasised in the text by the lack of punctuation. In her consideration of this character, Moji reads Mother of Bones' behaviour as “semantic dissonance [and] loss of meaning ... as an active rather than a passive process” (6). This means that Mother of Bones performs her exasperation, but, rather than change her life, she places all her hopes on the caricatured figure of Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, and prays hard for a miracle.

Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro's parodic fictional character is based on the many religious leaders of new churches that have mushroomed all over Zimbabwe in the last decade. Through this character, Bulawayo comments on the role of religion during this time and exposes how churches have taken on a new role as social spaces where congregants meet, not only to pray but to share their troubles. She also exposes the voracious nature of some of these churches which are run like capitalist enterprises and headed by unscrupulous pastors like Prophet Revelations, who collect money from destitute people. We note how the author criticizes this particular prophet by giving him a ridiculous name, Mborro, which is a Shona word for penis. Such a name belittles this 'man of God,' and hints at his predatory ways as seen in the way he behaves towards a woman brought to him for healing. The narrator observes that Mborro places “his hand on her thing and starts rubbing and

praying hard for it like there is something wrong with it” (Bulawayo 40). In this instance, we observe Prophet Revelation Bitchington Mborro as a typical example of leaders of the new churches that peddle on hope and sustain themselves through ‘performance’. Through this character, Bulawayo presents the despondency that has taken over whole communities in Zimbabwe and driven people to extreme behaviours.

As indicated earlier, different forms of religious practices have taken root in Zimbabwe, as people search for answers to the chaotic state of their country. In this text, the character of Vodloza, a traditional healer, is utilised to portray the extent of the problems that have materialised post 2000 and the lengths to which people will go to find solutions. Vodloza claims to be able to treat a variety of ailments, including helping people who want visas to go to England and America. Vodloza has a red sign placed outside his shack to advertise his services:

Vodloza, **BESTEST** HEALER IN ALL OF THIS PARADISE AND BEYOND, WILL PROPER FIX ALL THESE PROBLEMSOME THINGS THAT YOU MAY ENCOUNTER IN YOUR LIFE: BEWITCHEDNESS ...POVERTY, JOBLESSLESS, **AIDS**, MADNESS, SMALL PENISES, ...COMPETITION AT WORK, ...BAD LUCK WITH GETTING VISAS ESPECIALLY TO **USA** AND BRITAIN, ETC. ETC. ETC. PLEASE, PAYMENT IN **FOREX ONLY**. (Bulawayo 27 emphasis added)

A glance at Vodloza’s sign reveals the magnitude of problems that exist in this community, some real and some imagined. What one observes is that the words AIDS and USA are written in a larger font to emphasise Vodloza’s two main sources of income: HIV/AIDS which has ravaged the community, and migration, particularly to the United States, which has become a national obsession. Vodloza’s advertisement represents the people’s loss of faith in the state due to the breakdown of infrastructure. Since the late 1990s, the public healthcare system in Zimbabwe has been experiencing a ‘brain drain’ as most nurses and doctors have left for South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand. Zimbabwe has been losing healthcare professionals at an average of twenty percent, per year (Chikanda 163). This has forced people to look for other means to alleviate their problems of ill-health, unemployment, and general lack of well-being, and in turn, this has created a market for

charlatans like Vodloza. For his services, Vodloza requires his clients to pay him in foreign currency, which is ironic because the ZANU/PF government has publicly accused Western powers of destabilising the Zimbabwean economy, and yet it has adopted the United States Dollar as the legal tender. The poverty that Zimbabweans face has manifested in a mass movement of people abroad, particularly to the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The mass migration of Zimbabweans due to the problems manifesting from the land reform is represented in the second half of *We Need New Names* when we focus on Darling's life in the United States of America.

The section on diaspora is introduced by an interlude, a narration by the author which gives the reader time to reflect on what has happened in Zimbabwe thus far. Bulawayo's authorial voice renders a very personal and emotional reflection on the involuntary dispersal of Zimbabweans. She laments:

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambitions are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. ... They are leaving in droves. (Bulawayo 145)

The author's lyrical voice, repetition of words and poetic phrases creates a fast-paced narrative that foregrounds the urgency of leaving. A reader is able to visualise the hurried packing of suitcases, the dash to the airport, and for those with lesser means, the dangerous climb over border fences and crossing of crocodile infested rivers to get to another country. In a subdued tone, Bulawayo declares that the country has 'fallen apart' and that Zimbabweans from all walks of life have left their land, their families, their heritage and "everything that makes them who and what they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay" (146). She suggests that their dislocation is as permanent as the leaving of their umbilical cords underneath the soil; their identities destabilised, for once "[they leave they will never be] the same again because [one] cannot be the same once [one] leaves behind who and what [they] are" (Bulawayo 146). Bulawayo's reference to umbilical cords is important in expressing feelings of extrication that come with leaving one's birthplace for a foreign land. The burying of

umbilical cords is a common ritual in Zimbabwe, performed once it has fallen off the infant's body. It is then buried deep in the ground within, or close to the homestead, as a "mark of indigenous heritage and belonging" (Ndlovu "Where is my Home" 103). This act points to the fact that leaving one's place of birth dislocates one from their space of belonging, therefore, Bulawayo's reference to this birth ritual stresses the fact that Zimbabweans can never settle comfortably in the places to which they relocate. They are "welcome with restraint [because they do not belong, and they know that they must] sit on one buttock lest they be asked to rise and leave" (Bulawayo 146). As migrants, they are not free because they cannot raise their voices, but speak in "whispers because they must not let their voices drown those of the owners of the land... [they must] walk on their toes because they must not leave footprints on the new earth lest they be mistaken for those who want to claim the land as theirs" (146). This strong comment by Bulawayo illustrates the importance of location because spatiality cannot be divorced from identity. Questions of identity are important when one is 'at home' but they take on a certain urgency when one leaves home, with no clarity on the possibility of return. Bulawayo's authorial voice illuminates the impact of moving to a new country on one's identity and understanding of the self.

In the diaspora, a migrant is always viewed with suspicion and like most people who move from the familiar to the unfamiliar, one experiences a sense of displacement, which is "not only a physical condition but also a state of mind, ...a deep feeling of loss, ache and separation" (Sheo Bhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla 7). Sheo Bhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla's statement resonates with Darling's experiences when she leaves Zimbabwe for America. Her sense of loss is expressed in the text through a change of pace in her fast-paced narrative voice, which takes on a deeply grave note, expressing her shock and bewilderment. We note that, in the early stage of her new life in America, Darling is more of an observer than a participant of her own life and that of her relatives. Her narrative voice is distant, matter of fact, and states unequivocally what one should expect on arrival in the United States of America. More importantly, her solemn tone of voice registers her early disillusionment with her new home.

In order to represent the difference between America and Zimbabwe, Bulawayo focuses on Darling's reaction to the cold weather. As she looks out of the window, Darling observes that the snow is "like a greedy monster [that has] swallowed everything [and it feels like the coldness is] telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you come from" (Bulawayo 148). Darling's reaction paints a picture of Zimbabwe as warm, sunny and welcoming, whilst America is cold and unfriendly. The snow imprisons Darling in the house, and all she can do is look longingly through the window. However, what she sees further dampens her mood and makes her nostalgic for home. She narrates:

If you come here where I am standing and look outside the window, you will not see any men seated under a blooming jacaranda playing draughts...Bastard and Stina and Godknows and Chipo and Sbho will not be calling me off to Budapest... Some things happen only in my country, and this here is not my country; I don't know whose it is. (147)

The above words illustrate Darling's sense of displacement when she fails to see anything familiar. Here, the author's use of the second-person narrative voice is significant because it brings the reader closer to Darling's experience of longing and alienation. The character of Darling makes the reader understand that home is experienced through "what one smells, hears, touches, feels and remembers" (Ahmed 341). The reader is able to imagine what it is like to be in a place that looks and feels different to what one is accustomed because the America that Darling finds "doesn't even look real" (Bulawayo 150). However, as a *reflective* nostalgic, Darling appreciates America because she is aware that, were she back in Zimbabwe, she would probably be outside stealing guavas because there "wouldn't be ... enough food, which is why [she] will stand being in America dealing with the snow [because] there is food to eat ... all types and types of food" (153). However, despite having enough to eat, she misses her family and friends terribly and "there are times, though, that no matter how much food [she eats], the food does nothing for [her], like [she] is hungry for [her] country and nothing [can] fix that" (Bulawayo 153). This emphasizes emotional and social displacement as one of the major impacts of the post 2000 disruption of ordinary Zimbabweans' lives. Darling's position is complex because, back

in Zimbabwe, she enjoyed close relationships with family, friends and neighbors, but she was hungry most of the time. In America, where she can eat whatever she desires, there is an insatiable emptiness that no amount of food can fill. Darling complains that the food does not taste ‘real’ in America:

no matter how green the maize looks in America, it is not real. They call it corn here, and it comes out all wrong, like small, sweet, too soft. I don’t really even bother with it anymore because eating it is really a disappointing thing, it feels like I’m just insulting my teeth. (164)

In this instance, Darling experiences alienation in a physical sense through the tasteless American food, but in essence, the search for authenticity, for the ‘real’ America, is a search for the home she left behind. At a wedding she attends with Fostalina, she drinks a coke, and it does not taste “real” (184). American food is not only tasteless; it does not conjure any memories of home. When Darling receives guavas for her birthday, memories of her childhood flood her mind, and the little fruit whose taste she enjoys becomes a metaphor for the life she left. When the smell of guava permeates the room, Darling closes her eyes and reflects:

I look at it [the guava] like I’ve never seen a guava before, then hold it under my nose. The smell hits me where it matters, and I feel like my heart and insides are being gently pried open.

I shake my head, rub the guava in both hands, take a bite, and laugh. (Bulawayo 186)

Guavas are a source of happiness for Darling, and they feed her soul with memories of home, family, and friends. Her reaction illustrates Boym’s suggestion that the nostalgic has “an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds and smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who [remain] at home never [notice]” (4). However, in the same vein, guavas are also representative of ruptured kinships as Darling awakens to the loss of contact with her close friends, Sbho, Chipso, Godknows, Stina and Bastard. Before she leaves Zimbabwe, Darling promises to “write, always, always, always” but she writes only occasionally, and when she does, she is not honest about her life in America (Bulawayo 187). She tells her friends about the food she eats, the clothes she wears and about the lives of the celebrities she sees in movies, but, she says nothing about the horrible weather, and the house she lives in that is made of planks, is moldy and smells when it rains. She

does not mention the prevalent crime in her neighborhood and the beggars in the street, and that at any given time, “police cars zip down the street, lights flashing, sirens screaming” when some crime has been committed (208). Darling does not tell her friends that the way Americans behave confuses her; that when someone smiles, it is nothing but a polite gesture because a smile is

not exactly a smile-smile, just the brief baring of teeth [because] that’s what [is done] in America: you smile at people you don’t know, and you smile at people you don’t even like, and you smile for no reason. (174)

Darling’s sentiments are a clear indication of her feelings of estrangement which arise from the unfamiliar weather, food and culture. Her secrecy portrays her disenchantment with America and yet, like a typical migrant, she refuses to acknowledge this to her friends. Such behaviour keeps the myth of the West as a perfect space alive because her friends and family back home will never know the truth; they will continue to look up to her as someone who has left Zimbabwe for a better place. Darling will not admit to herself or her friends that America is not what she thought it would be, that she is dissatisfied with it because it would mean coming to terms with possible failure. She never mentions that being black and African in America means being viewed in a particular way, not as her own person, but as a member of a group of people who share the same skin colour.

The homogenisation of Africans in the diaspora is explored by Bulawayo to highlight its impact on migrant identity formation. In *Race and Economics* (1975) Thomas Sowell claims that in America’s “racialized society, racial and ethnic identities are very significant, and membership in a specific group often means a cultural or ideological uniformity associated with group membership” (118). This is true of Africans who arrive in the West from different countries because there is an immediate assumption that they all speak the same language and share the same culture. For instance, Darling meets an American woman at a wedding who assumes that because Darling is an African she knows everything about every country within the continent. The American comments that Africa is beautiful, and in the same breath she asks: “but isn’t it terrible what is happening in the Congo” (Bulawayo 175). This reveals the extent to which migrants from Africa struggle to fit into the

American culture because of the constant reminder of ‘Africa’ and their ‘Africanness’. Being African and different impedes Darling’s efforts to make new friends which results in a strong sense of isolation. When she arrives at her new school, her peers reject her for the way she looks, talks and dresses. She tells us:

When I first arrived at Washington, I just wanted to die. The other kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, and the way I talked or said things, the way I dressed, the way I laughed. (165)

Darling, here, registers her sense of dislocation, and her words highlight the helplessness she feels when she is not accepted by her peers for things she cannot change. She begins to doubt herself and completely loses confidence in who she is. On Darling’s alienation, Moji suggests that the “movement from the social matrix of one country to another, changes the way the subject perceives the world and the way in which they are seen by others” (2). Moji’s analysis is persuasive because Darling realises that the only way she can make friends is to assimilate into American culture. She camouflages her real self by changing the way she dresses, applying make-up and cultivating an American accent. However, her efforts are futile because “the teasing ‘[keeps] going and going so that in the end [she feels] wrong in [her] skin, in [her] body, in [her] clothes, in [her language, in [her] head [and in] everything” (Bulawayo 165). From the tone of her narration, Darling is clearly desperate because she realises the ineffectiveness of her efforts. Her behaviour brings to mind Adami Esterino’s comments, in a different context, where he argues that when a person is removed from a familiar social space they have to change many aspects of their behaviour including the way they speak and carry themselves. Adami suggests that this has a negative effect and “frequently climaxes into a form of alienation that produces a doubling of personality” (12). We observe this when Darling is rejected by her school-mates and she works hard to cultivate a new personality which she hopes will get her acceptance, but in the end, it collides with her real self, and she is left unsure of who she really is. The fractured-self that Darling becomes is characteristic of those who find themselves in liminal spaces, caught in-between their original selves and the process of integration. Although Darling works

hard to assimilate into American culture by changing the way she dresses and speaks, part of her is still attached to Zimbabwe. This is evident when she telephones home and has conversations with her friends. She reveals that:

Godknows's and Sbhos's voices stand out, and I get goose bumps just from hearing them talk. There is a strange feeling coming over me, and I feel this dizziness, and I have to sit down. Time dissolves like we are in a movie scene and I have maybe entered the telephone and travelled through the lines to go home. I've never left ... We are hungry, but we're together, and we're at home, and everything is sweeter than dessert. (Bulawayo 205)

The effect of Darling's contact with home is a conflation of time and space, as she feels torn between her present life and the life she had back home. In this instance, the author demonstrates that nostalgia is a difficult condition which is experienced physically and emotionally and that the longing for another time impacts negatively on one's attempt to negotiate the present. Darling's longing for home is intensified by the realisation that life in America requires her to work harder than she would back in Zimbabwe. From the tenth grade, Darling cleans toilets, people's houses and bags groceries at a department store to save money for her college fees. Her resentment is evident in her words:

When I am not working at the store, I have to come here, even though I don't like the idea of cleaning somebody's house, of picking up after someone else, because in my head this is not what I came to America to do. (Bulawayo 263)

Darling's thoughts remind us of Gikandi's view that, as attractive as globalisation is, it might actually be a "discourse of failure and atrophy [because for the postcolonial subject their identification with] globality is not ethical but material [and they] leave what they consider to be a failed polity for a successful one" (639 - 643). Gikandi's analysis refers to migrants from Africa who go to the West expecting to acquire material wealth not available back in their African countries. In their imaginary, the West, particularly Britain and America, represents modernity, progress and a move away from poverty and lack. However, they soon discover that forging meaningful careers in a foreign land is possible, but at a great cost to their physical and mental well-being. We experience this through

Fostalina, who works so hard that “when she [comes] in from her second job [late] at night, her body look[s] like a sack and [she throws] herself on the [sofa] and lets[s] out a tired sigh” (Bulawayo 205). What this suggests is that, for migrants, there is hardly time for leisure, and this realisation makes Darling constantly compare America with Zimbabwe which fuels her loneliness and her longing for home.

Darling’s idea of home as a reliable space is disrupted when she learns that some of her friends have left Zimbabwe: Bastard for South Africa, Godknows for Dubai and Sbho to perform with a theatre group. Chipo and her daughter, who is named after Darling, spend most of their time with Darling’s mother, and this makes her feel replaced in her mother’s affections. When she speaks to Chipo over the phone, Chipo accuses her of abandoning the country. She asks Darling:

Just tell me one thing. What are you doing *not* in your country right now? Why did you run off to America, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, huh? Why did you just leave? If it’s your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it. You have to fight for it no matter what, to make it right. Tell me do you abandon your house because it’s burning or do you find water to put out the fire? (Bulawayo 286)

Chipo’s utterance presents her as the voice of reason speaking on behalf of those that have not left the country. When she calls Darling by her second name, Nonkululeko, which means freedom, it evokes the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, probably the year Darling was born, but also points at the futility of that independence because the country has not lived up to the promise of that name. Chipo probes the reader to ask: What will happen to the future of Zimbabwe, as a nation, if all young people leave? Chipo’s pointed questions about nationhood, patriotism and loyalty remain unanswered in Darling’s mind and impact negatively on her emotions. Out of frustration and anger, she hurls her computer against the wall. The past and the present merge as Darling’s thoughts dart between Zimbabwe and the United States and different images invade her mind: the death of her mentally ill relation, Tshaka Zulu, from an accidental shooting by the police, the death of Osama bin Laden and the death of Bornfree’s dog Ncuncu. At this juncture, we note the convergence of unrelated images

and shifting thoughts, which dart from Ncuncu's bloodied body lying on the road, to "the delicious, delicious smell of Lobels bread", which demonstrates Darling's mental and emotional breakdown (Bulawayo 289). Here, I propose that the disturbing images that the author imprints in the readers' mind could be her way of demonstrating the schizophrenic nature of the Zimbabwean postcolonial state. Darling's cognitive dissonance is symbolic of everything that has gone wrong with her country and discloses her disillusionment with America. Her disappointment is twofold; firstly, it stems from a realisation that home will never be the same and secondly that America is a lonely place for people who come from elsewhere. The metaphor of the dog that Bulawayo uses to end her narrative is poignant, because a mangy dog is a neglected, abused and lonely animal that wanders from place to place scavenging. The dog represents Zimbabwe's homeless migrants who wander from country to country searching for better opportunities as illustrated in Chikwava's novel, *Harare North*, which also closes with his nameless narrator wandering along the streets of London in a confused fit.

*Harare North* (2010) explores the impact of the post 2000 land reform on Zimbabwean youth. The author employs the voice of a nameless narrator, a former member of the infamous ZANU PF youth militia, to counteract the government's 'Third Chimurenga' narrative, which has used land redistribution to alienate some citizens from the country. Chikwava exposes the ways in which the government has co-opted vulnerable young men as tools for the dissemination of its ideology and to carry out violent acts against the opposition. In order to represent the fractured lives of Zimbabwean youth, Chikwava's nameless narrator speaks in a disjointed hybrid language, through which he exposes the failure of the state to guarantee a future for its youth. The text engages with the concept of diaspora as an alienating place and space, where dreams are not realised, and exposes the disillusionment that Zimbabwean migrants experience when they face hardships in foreign countries.

Chikwava's *Harare North* is set in London, United Kingdom, popularly known amongst Zimbabwean migrants as 'Harare North'. This story is narrated by an unnamed young man, a former Green Bomber, who seeks asylum in the United Kingdom to escape prosecution for murdering a member of an opposition party. The nameless protagonist's main desire is to find a job to earn enough

money to buy his freedom and return home. His first home in London is with his cousin Paul and his wife, Sekai, who immediately treat him like a stranger because of his affiliation to the Green Bombers. He is forced to move out into a Brixton squat where his childhood friend Shingi lives with three other Zimbabwean migrants, Aleck, Farayi and Tsitsi. Life is bearable despite the fact that his housemates are suspicious of him because of his complete allegiance to ZANU PF. The nameless narrator uses Shingi's identity to find work at a fish and chips shop, but he leaves when a communication breakdown occurs between him and his employer. During this time, Shingi moves from one job to the next until he starts drinking and taking drugs as pressure of life in the United Kingdom takes its toll on him. Whilst scavenging for food, Shingi is knifed by a homeless person and ends up in hospital fighting for his life. When this happens, the nameless narrator appropriates Shingi's passport, clothes, money and cell phone with the intention of finding employment, but all he does is roam around London in a state of confusion. When Aleck, Farayi and Tsitsi abandon the dilapidated, rat-infested, damp, squat, the nameless narrator is left alone with his fear of deportation. It is at this stage that he abandons his quest for work and appropriates Shingi's identity. However, this is not easy as he is plagued with the ghost of Shingi lying in hospital. At the end of the novel, the nameless narrator is confused about his identity, and we watch him roaming the streets of London in a schizophrenic fit.

As a text, *Harare North* explores the migrant status as one that is enforced on people. The characters in this novel are not privileged cosmopolitans who explore distant lands for pleasure, but people who leave Zimbabwe to get away from political persecution, poverty and an insecure future. The challenges of migrant life are explored by Gikandi in "Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and Claims to Locality" where reveals that "refugees frighten [him] because they are signs of a dislocated locality, a mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism, of that postcolonial identity which derives its legitimacy from the mastery of the culture of modern Europe" (23). Gikandi's words express his sadness at his ability to navigate cosmopolitan spaces quite freely whilst those that are in real need are locked out. In "Intra-and Inter-Continental Migrations and Diaspora in Contemporary African Fiction", Moudouma shares the same views; that most Africans leave the continent not to

“[express] their cosmopolitan desires to discover new places [but are motivated by] the need for survival and [to] escape from political and economic restrictions” (20). This is the case with the Green Bomber in *Harare North*, who joins the militia to improve his lot, but gets embroiled in the state’s ‘Third Chimurenga’ discourse and has to run away to England to avoid going back to Chikurubi Maximum Prison where he suffered a traumatic rape. His reluctance to leave home is expressed in his words: “I never wanted to leave Zimbabwe and come to this funny place, but things force me” (Chikwava, *Harare North* 16). Clearly, his desire is not to relocate to the United Kingdom permanently, like Darling in *We Need New Names*, but rather to find any job that will earn him enough money to reimburse his uncle the US\$1000 used to pay for his air-ticket, and US\$4000 to bribe the police to make his “troubles go away” (18). He also desperately needs to raise enough money to pay for his late mother’s *umbuyiso* an African traditional ritual performed within two years of the death of a family member to appease the ancestors (16). If this ritual is not performed, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased person wanders in the wilderness restlessly. However, at the end of the novel we note his failure to acquire the necessary finances to enable him to pay for his freedom and to perform an important customary ritual. He is, ironically, the one left wandering restlessly, like wind, in a foreign landscape unreturnable and homeless.

In *Harare North*, Chikwava subverts cultural and literary norms by choosing to tell his story through the character of a twenty-two-year-old, semi-literate, former member of the ZANU PF youth militia. In the Zimbabwean social context, Chikwava’s narrator holds the position of the ‘Other’ because he exists on the margins of society and is looked upon with resentment and loathing. He is not well educated, has a criminal record and belongs to the much despised Green Bombers. Choosing such an unpalatable individual as his protagonist means that Chikwava writes against the homogenisation of the Zimbabwean migrant experience, and offers a different viewpoint of the displacement of Zimbabweans and their trials in the diaspora. In my analysis of the narrative voice in *Harare North*, I draw from Adami’s article “Beyond the border and the Word: Wondering Subjects in three Anglophone texts” (2013). In this paper Adami examines three novels, including *Harare*

*North*, and explores the representation of “wandering subjects [who he identifies as] vagrants, homeless [people] and migrants who are ... relegated to liminal social positions” (1). Adami claims that such texts:

subvert the stereotypical vision of vagabonds and squatters and turn them into unusual tropes of alterity and diversity. Their fragmented, exuberant language uses ... re-imagine the contemporary tangling and breaking of different viewpoints, stories and identities via innovative forms of eye-dialect, slang, and, antilanguage. (1)

Adami's statements underscore the importance of giving voice to those who are silenced. In *Harare North* Chikwava achieves this through his nameless narrator, who is a new voice in contemporary Zimbabwean literature because he is virtually a by-product of a dystopian state but who, nevertheless, reaches the reader from his position of marginality. His disjointed register underlines his troubled life of poverty, his traumatic experiences in jail and most importantly, his tongue-in-cheek critique of the chaos in Zimbabwe. This study maintains that by giving such marginalised people a voice, writers challenge the world's false sense of order. *Harare North* offers a fresh critique of the Zimbabwean problem precisely because the narrator occupies an unstable position in society. His voice represents youth from under-privileged classes who face an uncertain future in a country with nothing to offer. Furthermore, Chikwava's unsavoury narrator is not the kind of person one would desire to know in real life, but in the world of the text, we are forced to listen to him and to pause in order to decipher the underlying message that is embodied in his fractured language. By “giving voice to [an] itinerant [subject] originating from the margins of [a] cultural centre” the author asks us to look at the Zimbabwean question from a different angle (Adami 6). The reader can deliberate on the causes of the political, economic, social and moral decay of a country which was once the envy of many. Although Chikwava's central character is a staunch ZANU PF supporter, the satirical manner in which he tells his story reveals the author's subtle prod of the Zimbabwean government. Chikwava forces us to listen to this peculiar, unapologetic narrator even though his ‘broken’ English, crude jokes and dark humour is disturbing. This way, *Harare North* subverts the norm because the story of

displacement is not told through an educated middle-class narrator but through an emotionally disturbed young man, a 'relic' of his society, whose disorganised language conveys the nature of his sad and broken life. Chikwava's narrator breaks a soldier's 'code of silence' and exposes the violence perpetrated by the youth militia on innocent citizens.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon argues that the violence that is prevalent in post-independence African states is a legacy of colonialism. He argues that the postcolony has failed because its behaviour mimics the behaviour of the white settler; that it has merely adopted the same strategies used by the 'master' to subdue the subject. Fanon observes that "the violence that has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms ... [is] the same violence [that is] claimed and taken over by the native" (31). Fanon's observation is compelling when one takes into account state violence perpetrated by the ZANU PF youth militia in *Harare North*. In this text, the brutality of the Green Bombers is transposed via the hybrid language that Chikwava creates for his nameless narrator.

In *Harare North* Chikwava blends Standard English, British and Zimbabwean urban slang, Shona and Ndebele to come up with a pidgin that sounds like 'broken English'. He peppers the narrator's speech with vernacular words, proverbs, metaphors, and songs and uses code mixing to create a distinct register. Most times the author breaks grammatical rules to fashion a disjointed narrative voice which effectively renders the misadventures of this young man. At an interview with Maya G Vinuesa, Chikwava explained that he did not write his novel in either Shona or Ndebele because indigenous languages tend to "isolate experiences [whilst] colonial languages [aggregate]" them ("Playing with Mother Tongue" np). He explains that he chose to use a language that would enable him to converse with readers from different parts of the world who do not speak Shona or Ndebele and that he was keen to come up with

an idiom that, from a purely artistic perspective, best captured the Green Bomber narrator because, in reality, the Green Bomber would express himself in Shona or Ndebele but to translate that into standard English meant losing a lot of colour of the narrator's internal

psychology, logic and other traits drawn from Shona or Ndebele. (“Playing with Mother Tongue” np)

Such experimentation with language by contemporary Zimbabwean authors is new and exciting and is applauded by several critics such as Flora Veit-Wild, who is well known for her work on Zimbabwean writers, particularly her extensive critical work on Dambudzo Marechera. In “Zimbolicious’ – The Creative Potential of Linguistic Innovation: The Case of Shona-English in Zimbabwe” (2009) Veit-Wild proposes that

hybrid languages that [deviate] from linguistic norms of purity ... are highly metaphorical and play flippantly with words and meanings... [and by] inserting [vernacular] expressions and phrases into a narrative [they] add some local flavour in an otherwise English text. (685-693)

Chikwava’s non-prescriptive use of language allows him to formulate a hybrid language flavoured with vernacular expressions to give it a specificity which would delight Zimbabwean readers. However, the inclusion of slang from the streets of London makes this pidgin accessible to a wider readership. This transformation of Zimbabwean languages is also noted by Zimbabwean scholars Tendayi Mangena and Oliver Nyambi who argue that “there are signs of the instability and shifts in the English language in Zimbabwe [and the English used by Zimbabwe’s ‘new writers’] is peculiar to the equally unique socio-political Zimbabwean experience of the last decade” (75). Mangena and Nyambi’s argument is applicable because the repressive nature of the Zimbabwean state has necessitated the invention of words and phrases to facilitate the discussion of topics deemed treasonable. Furthermore, the internet has provided a domain for new, fast and cheaper ways of communication, from anywhere in the world, such that current experiences can be expressed in new forms of speech. The pidgin that Chikwava creates is an anti-language, which disrupts Standard English’s dominance in Zimbabwe and in the London Metropolis itself. In his ‘rotten English’ Chikwava’s *Green Bomber* articulates the pain and suffering of Zimbabweans and projects the anarchy which has caused many Zimbabweans to leave.

The characters in Chikwava's novel are a representation of Zimbabwean migrants living on the margins of British society. He explores their day-to-day existence as undocumented subjects and exposes their struggles to find employment and places to live. As a contemporary text, *Harare North* dispels any belief in the diaspora as a land of opportunity and ease. This is evident in the portrayal of characters whose illegal status hampers any attempts to acquire gainful employment. The author how this impacts negatively on the quality of their lives as they end up existing way below the poverty line. In the novel, Aleck, Farayi, Shingi, Tsitsi and the nameless narrator live in a 'squat,' a dilapidated, abandoned house. Because space is limited, Shingi and Farayi sleep in the lounge on mattresses on the floor. Their poor circumstances are evident in the narrator's words when he observes the

rotting floorboards [with] blankets all over, small heaps of things telling one story of big journey that is caused by them dreams that start far away in them townships. I can sniff them natives' lives squatting under the low damp ceiling like thieves that have been catch. (Chikwava 30)

The narrator's words portray his shock when he realises what life is like for migrants in 'Harare North.' The squat is a temporary abode, a place of hiding; an in-between space where these young people wait and hope that their situation will change. Living in such squalor reveals the hopelessness of their lives and the unfulfilled ambitions concocted whilst back in Zimbabwe. In presenting such a gloomy existence, Chikwava questions whether leaving one's country for a foreign one is worthwhile. His novel is important because it brings the issue of migration into the public domain and lays bare the suffering of some Zimbabwean migrants in the United Kingdom. It is important to note that the Zimbabwean diasporic community in Britain has been in formation since the early 1970s, but a substantial number, mostly professionals like teachers, nurses and doctors, left in the early 1990s due to the failure of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes, amongst other things (McGregor and Primorac 7). However, it appears that the experiences of these early economic migrants have not found their way into much of Zimbabwe's creative writing, which makes *Harare North* a seminal

text, particularly because Chikwava exposes the difficulties of living in England, a place which is perceived as superior in the Zimbabwean imaginary.

The main challenge for most Zimbabweans who relocate to the United Kingdom is the acquisition of work-permits or any other documentation that would enable them to work. Usually, Zimbabweans who intend to apply for asylum travel on holiday visas and when these expire, they disappear into the populace to avoid deportation. An undocumented status hinders any chances of proper employment and benefits in spite of the professional qualification they may have. Whilst they wait for the processing of their asylum applications, the only jobs available to migrants are those in the service industry. Care-work is a popular occupation that most Zimbabweans do out of necessity but which they keep a secret for fear of being ridiculed by those left in Zimbabwe who regard it as being the height of humiliation (McGregor "Joining the BBC" 802). In Zimbabwe and in many other countries, relocating to the West is romanticised and perceived to be an improvement on one's social status. However, when the nameless narrator arrives at his cousin's flat, his wife Sekai warns him that he will become "like many of them Zimbabweans who don't know what else to do in the UK [and] end up becoming one of BBCs – British Bottom Cleaners – looking after old people that poo they pants every hour" (Chikwava 41). Surprisingly the nameless narrator, although desperate, vows not to demean himself in such a manner. He knows that BBC work will earn him more than £2,000 per month, but he tells his best friend Shingi that "it is good money, but that's because you will be wiping posh buttocks, it sounds like. You want to do something – what is better, to try doing it your own way and risk finding small success, or to do it in undignified pooful way?" (Chikwava 143). To the narrator, care work is demeaning, and he will not be enticed by the huge salary. For migrants, BBC work is one of the few forms of employment available without proper documentation, which leaves them open to exploitation by employers, who pay them less, deduct taxes and do not offer any benefits. Furthermore, wages from such work are never adequate to cover living expenses, therefore, it is not uncommon for one person to have three or more jobs.

The other important aspect of dislocation that Chikwava's text highlights is the status of the asylum seeker, which he shows to be controversial and unstable. His text problematizes the idea that all asylum seekers are genuine people with good intentions. In *Harare North*, the nameless narrator is a criminal who should not seek or be awarded asylum anywhere, but he lies his way into England because he knows that, in order to go through immigration, one has to present a very convincing story. He narrates:

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

The above words reveal the fact that some migrants lie their way into England and they signal loopholes within the system. While the nameless narrator waits for his application to be processed, the British Home Office places him under the guardianship of his cousins Paul and Sekai. As their dependent, he is not entitled to any financial assistance from the State and is not allowed to work. This leaves him at the mercy of relatives who do not really want him. Paul hardly speaks to him, and Sekai accuses him of eating all the food in the house, and when she discovers that he is a member of the youth militia she tells him that Green Bombers are "just bunchies of uneducated thugs" and Robert Mugabe is an old president who does not want to die (Chikwava 8). Such hostility from his own relatives engenders a sense of isolation, which most migrants experience when they arrive in the United Kingdom expecting their relations to assist them. The desperation they experience eventually leads them to live duplicitous lives.

In "Dialogues of Belonging: Black and Asian British Womens' Diaporic Writing." *Migrant Voices in Literature in English* (2006), Gina Wisker explains the afore-mentioned condition succinctly when she states that a diasporic existence "means always being a little displaced, duplicitous, different, operating with a double personality and cultural identity [and trying to make]

the best of both worlds, or falling between two stools, unable to find a sense of identity” (21). Indeed, we see how this state of in-betweenness affects the lives of the characters in *Harare North*. Aleck, the ‘landlord’ of the squat pretends to be an honest person who is eager to keep order, but, in reality, he selfishly extorts money for rent and electricity from his flatmates even though they are not required to pay. Aleck pretends to be working as a shop manager, but in reality, he does not possess a work permit and is illegally employed in an old people’s home. When Farayi exposes Aleck’s secret, the nameless narrator comments sarcastically that Aleck is “picking old people’s *kaka* off beds and then coming here walking around like he is district administrator coming every time to collect tax money even when we have nothing” (Chikwava 118). After this discovery, the Green Bomber loses all respect for Aleck and gives his “mouth permission to hit everything that was buy by Aleck in the house” (132) and Aleck dares not complain. He disappears a few days later after the Green Bomber gives him “some very sweet tender loving caress ... and heaps of forgiveness” for physically assaulting Tsitsi, the mother of his baby (132). Here we observe migrants succumbing to the pressures of life in the diaspora by turning against each other.

In *Harare North* Chikwava narrates the lives of young men and women from Zimbabwe who have been displaced by the breakdown of the economy in their country and traces their trajectory from asylum seeker to criminal. Tsitsi, the only female occupant of the squat, leaves Zimbabwe at the tender age of seventeen, and when she arrives in England, she is fostered by an Aunt who uses her as cheap labour. Before long, Tsitsi is an unmarried mother with no means to support herself and her baby. The author portrays Tsitsi as quite a provincial and vulnerable young girl and yet her “sharp look [and] the fizzy behaviour of Coca-Cola drink” (29) suggests some cunning; probably as a result of the struggles she has faced since her arrival in the United Kingdom. Tsitsi’s holiday visa has expired which means she cannot study or work. To make matters worse, the father of her baby, Aleck, appears to have rejected them. In order to survive Tsitsi resorts to crime and rents out her baby to single mothers to enable them to acquire free council flats. We are told that for £50, any woman can take “Tsitsi’s baby to the Lambeth Housing Department and play out to be single mother, fill them

forms and take baby back to the salon as soon as she have been interview” (Chikwava 61). The ‘borrowing’ of babies in order to receive benefits from the state has not been explored in Zimbabwean literature before, which makes Chikwava the first writer to do so. Such criminal behaviour echoes Gikandi’s sentiments that

as long as globalisation is conceived as a culture rather than a structural experience [we will continue to see a situation in which] citizens of the new diasporic sphere live through experiences that are widely at odds from their own inner experience and their interior daily life. (Gikandi “Globalisation” 644)

What Gikandi means is that, taking globalisation as something postcolonial people desire, and not as something that happens because of the failure of their own countries, is a problem because the real lived experiences of migrants are not properly understood. Tsitsi and the Guinean boys we refer to earlier in this chapter are typical examples of young people who are victims of the desire for the West as a solution to their problems at home. Tsitsi does not possess skills that will give her the means to take care of herself, therefore, she fails to live a productive life in England and turns to crime because she lacks agency. However, she is not the only housemate who turns to crime.

The nameless narrator’s best friend, Shingi, acquires a false French passport when overwhelmed by demands for assistance from his extended family back home, who send letters, text messages and constantly call. In this instance, we note the negative effect the connection to home has on migrants because home is a source of anxiety which compromises their attempts to settle in new places. Indeed, home is represented as menacing; it is like an “animal that follow your every step from Zimbabwe, hiding in the dark tailwinds behind you. You can’t see it but only hear its footsteps again” (Chikwava 68). The ‘animal’ makes Shingi very “worryful” because the promises he has made to send money home to his family back in Zimbabwe “hang around his neck” (73). As a *restorative* nostalgic, Shingi hopes to return home one day, but he has only been able to send £1000 to his mother which will go towards building a family home. The responsibility for his extended family back in Zimbabwe and his inability to secure proper employment are an albatross around Shingi’s neck. He

pays for a fake French passport to enable him to get permanent employment, but when that job ends abruptly, and he cannot send money home, Shingi falls into a depression. In the beginning, he drowns his sorrows in alcohol, but when he meets two homeless drug addicts, Dave and Cathy, he turns to drugs and from then on his life falls apart.

Shingi's drug addiction illustrates the trials of living in diaspora, at the bottom of the British social hierarchy, together with other social 'remnants' such as Dave and Cathy, who have been discarded by their first world country to live on its side-lines. As characters, Dave and Cathy's situation reveals that the 'globalised world' does not take care of migrants, and neither does it take care of all its citizens. Shingi's low class status forces him to live in Brixton, an area known for its drug problems, which he would not have been exposed to had his circumstances been different. The chances of him meeting Dave and Cathy would have been minimal. The message here is that a young man who could have had a good life had the Zimbabwean state been functioning as it should, finds himself sharing space with homeless people. Dave and Cathy are pushed to the margin of British society just as Zimbabwe has rendered Shingi homeless. In this instance, the author exposes the vulnerability of people who are un-homed; people who have a low life expectancy because of exposure to violence and disease. Shingi is stabbed whilst scavenging for food and ends up in hospital separated from his country, family and friends. Shingi's injury and hospitalisation destabilise the nameless narrator because Shingi has represented family, someone with whom he could reminisce, laugh and share jokes. Left to his own devices, the nameless narrator's mind begins to wander. He struggles to raise money to return home because his job as a labourer earns him £98 per hour, but he only receives £68 "after they do emergency tax code" (Chikwava 49). Soon he realises that "with this kind of graft ... there is big danger that you can work until you can grow horns and still you won't catch the US\$5000 [because] money is [elusive like termites]" (50;68). The narrator's words expose his disillusionment with diaspora because London has not given him what he needs; instead, he has become a modern-day slave. In this instance, we note how Chikwava's choice of metaphors serves to add light-heartedness to a rather sad situation. Reference to termites and horns, which are drawn from

farming and countryside landscapes, turn a tragic situation into a humorous one. The idea of looking for money until one grows horns gives a comic tone to the depressing situation being described.

Besides having to deal with inadequate wages, the nameless narrator has to face the fact that the English culture eludes him. When he works as cleaner in a fish and chips takeaway shop, he fails to communicate with Tim, his employer. Just as we observed the problems of language in *We Need New Names*, we note the nameless narrator's struggle to understand Tim's English accent which has totally alienated him. He laments:

It has been hard – everything. Even Tim's [working class] accent and cockney thing, you can't even hear anything. And when you hear it don't make sense, and you have to make your anus tight and listen up to figure things out. Even small things. Like when, after a long day, he say, 'I'm cream-crackered. (Chikwava 82)

The nameless narrator struggles to adapt to British culture, and the job at the takeaway shop ends when he has a disagreement with Tim over his treatment of customers. This puts an end to all his dreams of making money and returning home, echoing Gikandi's notion of the disappointments migrants' experience when dreams fail to materialise. The nameless narrator resorts to crime and he starts off by extorting money from his cousin's wife, Sekai, as payment for his silence regarding her illicit relationship with her husband's friend. Once he starts getting money from Sekai, he stops looking for work and decides to 'borrow' Shingi's clothes, money, cell phone, and eventually his life. However, becoming Shingi has its own challenges because everything in the squat is a reminder of him lying comatose in hospital. The fact that he has not been to the hospital to see Shingi disturbs the Green Bomber. He cries out:

I sleep. I wake up. Me I sleep. I see Shingi in one dream. I wake up. I sleep. This Shingi thing now sit tight inside me. ... Once on the bus me I squeeze into the corner and I see my face reflect on the window. It is clenched tight like old demon's. I look down on the floor: I am frightened I will see ghost of Shingi looking back. (Chikwava 201)

The nameless narrator's confused state of mind destabilises his world such that he cannot tell what is real and what is not. According to Boym, one of the symptoms of nostalgia is the ability to confuse "the past and the present, real and imaginary events [and] to hear voices and see ghosts" (3). This applies to the nameless narrator's situation because in some twisted way he feels responsible for Shingi's state, hence, he cannot be at peace despite the fact that he has all of Shingi's documentation to enable him to find work.

The nameless narrator is left completely alone in the squat, and it is during this time that he comes face to face with Comrade Mhiripiri's betrayal. His friend, Original Sufferhead, tells him that there was never a warrant for their arrest, that Mhiripiri was a corrupt leader who took bribes from several people, and that the police were after him. The nameless narrator struggles to accept that Comrade Mhiripiri, who had been like a father to all the young recruits, has turned out to be a fraud and a disappointment. Not only has Mhiripiri lied, he has used them to make money for himself, abandoned the 'struggle' and relocated to London where he now works as a British Bottom Cleaner, of all things. The betrayal is complete when the Green Bomber learns that his mother's village has been taken over by the government to make way for emerald mining, and that when he eventually returns home he will not be able to locate his mother's grave. He cries out:

the rush of whirlwind inside my head scatter me all over. Mother, she lie heavy in my heart.

The head swirl. The air inside our house turn and shift my head into sixth gear. From way beyond the blue hills in my skull, back in my rural home where Mother's bones lie scattered, trampled and broken. (Chikwava 178)

The narrator's words record the disappointment he feels towards the government he trusted, which has now desecrated his mother's grave. The metaphor of the wind is symbolic of the destruction of his country, his mother and himself. He confronts Mhiripiri: "Everything that the boys do you have betray. You have become traitor. So what was it all for to you, the struggle?" (183). In reply the old man laughs at him: "What was it all for? ...Even today you still have milk coming out of your nose, young man. Zimbabwe was a state of mind and not a country" (183). This taunting remark about his

childlike naiveté in not seeing through the deceitful rhetoric that was used to persuade young people like him to participate in the Green Bombers' disruptive activities, makes the narrator realise how gullible they have all been and that Comrade Mhiripiri never believed in the struggle in the first place. Early on in the novel, the narrator expresses his admiration for the old man, who in all intents and purposes, occupies the role of a father and guardian. When he first joins the Green Bombers, the nameless narrator is convinced that Mhiripiri is a

trustful man...He is commander of them boys of the jackal breed and is the first big man that you meet on the first day you arrive on the training camp...He make everyone scatter quick...

But he have no doubt about the straightness of our path and he don't allow them bookish doubts to worry him. For traitors' punishment is the best forgiveness, that's what he say.

(Chikwava 18-19)

When Mhiripiri turns up in London, also on the run from the authorities, he underscores the state's betrayal of the vulnerable young people it mobilised as part of the ZANU PF's foot soldiers in post 2000. The author complicates popular assumptions about these young people as a one-dimensional mass of ignorant and violent youngsters, by creating narrative space for the Green Bomber, and giving the reader access to his mind and thoughts, which, ordinarily, are not accessible, as all we know from such young men is violence. Here, we experience Mhiripiri as a representative of the state that has turned on its own and, it is only because the nameless narrator has been forced out of Zimbabwe, that his story can be told. At this point, the nameless narrator has essentially become a nobody because his identity was based on his connection to the youth militia. The realisation makes him lose his footing because without his Green Bomber identity, and with the two reasons for his journey to London — to raise funds to clear his name and perform the *umbuyiso* ceremony for his mother — rendered redundant, he does not know who and what he is. His world is completely destabilised, and he feels as if “everything is fading away to a great distance” (186). His days become blurry because, if he is not wandering from place to place in confusion, he lies in bed with no desire to bathe or eat. His thoughts reveal his inner turmoil:

Me, I lie on my bed most of the day trying not to think about nothing. I have not have a shower in days because my pubic hair is maybe turning blue. I have animal odour that is always around them stressed people. [...] Days leap quick and die on the horizon [and] Shingi's things is making a frightful silence. (Chikwava 205; 210)

The Green Bomber's state of mind indicates that he has given up hope and that he is sinking into depression. His world, which is engulfed by his nostalgia for the home he desperately wants to return to, has just collapsed on him. He realises that there was never a need for him to leave Zimbabwe in the first place. Here, Chikwava demonstrates that there are some migrants who completely fail to find their way in the diaspora. The nameless narrator's pointless wandering around the streets of London suggests the futility of his life. In the end, he just blends in with the wandering homeless that one sees in metropolitan cities pushing trolleys with blank expressions on their faces.

On the whole, *Harare North* demonstrates the idea of the hybrid person through the nameless narrator's embodiment of two beings, himself and Shingi. His double personality is a metaphor for the life and experiences of African migrants in the West who try hard to adapt, very often suppressing their own identity in order to belong. The result is an inner struggle which manifests in a mental breakdown such as the narrator experiences. His life and the lives of many migrants from all over the world, are harrowing and depict London as a hostile place for economically vulnerable migrants, where only the fittest will survive. The narrator's life as Shingi is controlled by fear: fear of deportation, fear of hunger in the streets of London, fear that he may never go back home and fear of death because he thinks he is HIV positive. His suitcase, which still carries the smell of his mother, is his only source of comfort and connection to home. However, when it opens, and its contents are scattered all over the city, his ties with home are literally and metaphorically broken. At the end of the novel the notion of wandering, as discussed by Adami, is demonstrated by the Green Bomber's roaming around the streets of London in a frenzy of confusion, crying out:

I feel like *umgodoyi* – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with a rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the

winds. That's why *umgodoyi* soul is tear from his body in rough way. That's what everyone want to do to me, me I know. (Chikwava 226)

The Green Bomber's strong feeling of abandonment and paranoia is represented by the image of the stray dog. At this stage, he feels castoff, by his country and by his people and a painful death appears to be his only option. The whirlwind referred to earlier represents destruction, and as readers, we observe how Zimbabwe, like a strong wind, has destroyed its nation and its people. The stray dog, which Bulawayo also refers to in *We Need New Names*, symbolizes homelessness and neglect that Zimbabwean migrants experience in the West. For Chikwava's nameless narrator, the betrayal by ZANU PF, which he has defended vehemently, is so strong that he is left with absolutely nothing to hold on to. The realisation that, all along, he had believed in something that did not exist affects him emotionally and psychologically. The Green Bomber longs for home, which he now realises, is a Zimbabwe stuck temporally and spatially in a state of disillusionment and hopelessness, and the neurosis he exhibits at the end is a result of his inability to live outside his space and time. In this novel, Zimbabwe seems to exist in a time capsule that the protagonist is not ready to transpose himself from. Similarly, to *We Need New Names*, Chikwava's *Harare North* ends on a troubling note, with the reader not sure what will happen to the protagonist and the writer does not offer any solutions. The only thing he does, successfully, is to represent the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants through the narrator's hybrid language that reveals the ruptures in this society. Chikwava's *coup de maître* in this text is that he makes his protagonist all-together unacceptable but through his distorted nature we become aware of the corrupt social forces that co-opted him and other vulnerable young men. We are made to experience their betrayal by powerful politicians who have made them little pawns in the broader scheme of Zimbabwe's political problems. The nameless narrator has been used, discarded, and let loose into society where his violent tendencies are a danger to other people. By depicting the 'broken' protagonist Chikwava locates the real villains that have destroyed the lives of many Zimbabweans.

In this chapter, I have examined Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Chikwava's *Harare North* to explore their representation of the crisis with a focus on its causes and impact on ordinary citizens. My analysis reveals that Bulawayo and Chikwava vividly portray the distress that people in Zimbabwe, and in the diaspora, have suffered following the land distribution programme. Using particular literary strategies, such as child narrators, linguistic experimentation and humour, both authors demonstrate that diaspora can be an alienating space and that migrants who venture into other countries, particularly Europe and America, face a myriad of challenges and often have to grapple with alienation, a sense of loss and rootlessness. The disillusionment that Zimbabwean migrants experience in foreign countries has received significant attention in post 2000 writing on Zimbabwe, with Chikwava and Bulawayo being among the first novelists to explore the subject. The novels do not offer any solutions but call upon the reader, Zimbabwean or otherwise, to reflect on migrancy and what it entails particularly in the globalised world where transnational movement has become common. On the whole, *We Need New Names*, and *Harare North* condemn the Zimbabwean government for bad governance, corruption and violence. They speak against the government's master narrative, which blames Western powers for the ills of the Zimbabwean nation and excludes some groups from participating in the country's political and social life as full citizens. The construction of citizenship in restrictive terms is at the centre of Phiri's *Highway Queen* and Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*, which is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### **Crisis Masculinity: Post 2000 Zimbabwean Manhood and Claims to Citizenship;**

#### ***Highway Queen and The Hairdresser of Harare***

Through a reading of *Highway Queen* (2010) by Virginia Phiri and Tendai Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010), this chapter examines the textual representation of post-2000 Zimbabwean masculinities with a view to understanding how they have been shaped by the crisis. It argues that the current unstable economic climate has influenced the way Zimbabwean men perform their manhood, that the scarcity of resources and reversal of roles, has made it difficult for them to uphold their dominant position as husbands, fathers and heads of households. The chapter proposes that the post 2000 Zimbabwean social and political landscape has re-gendered public and private spaces such that clear-cut traditional gender roles have been destabilized. In this context, men who have lost their jobs have been pushed to the domestic space of the home whilst their wives venture into formerly male dominated spaces. The chapter suggests that while the state emphasizes military masculinities during this period, men's power and authority is simultaneously disrupted by the attendant economic crisis; often resulting in new waves of gendered violence by both men and patriarchal women. *Highway Queen* and *The Hairdresser of Harare* demonstrate the transformation of gender roles in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe and initiate a pertinent dialogue because gender and sexuality are topics not openly discussed within conventional Zimbabwean public discourse.

In the last twenty years, the subject of women and their secondary position in society has been explored extensively, particularly within African Studies. Contrary to this, the study of men has not attracted equal attention as men have been viewed in "essentialist terms – visible but invisible" (Lindsay and Miescher 1). Lindsay and Miescher argue that the invisibility of men emanates from

the assumption that all men occupy the dominant position and have equal access to the ‘patriarchal dividend’. Such a reduction of men into a homogenous group has rendered it unnecessary to study masculinities, hence the minimal scholarship in this area. With regard to contemporary Zimbabwe, masculinity has not been the focus area of study either. In *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* (2007) Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde argue that, in the Zimbabwean academic context, the study of masculinity and fatherhood has “suffered long and unnecessary neglect” (xv). The publication suggests the necessity to move away from a dualistic study of gender to one that encompasses a broader perspective because a “clearer, more nuanced definition of manhood is urgently needed to address the crisis of manhood that has led to the over-manning of the [Zimbabwean] nation” (xx). The essays in this seminal text render different views on current Zimbabwean masculinity with some authors suggesting that Zimbabwean men are experiencing a ‘crisis’ of masculinity as a result of the *crisis* itself.

In her review of this volume, Annie Gagiano, recognizes the importance of this text and comments that these essays question “historical invocations of manliness and constructions as well as performances of fatherhood [such that] one comes away from the encounter with the text feeling far more alert to [gender,] its nuances and ramifications” (95). Gagiano’s comment suggests that being conscious of gender dynamics makes it possible to understand the impact of patriarchy on Zimbabwean society, and marks the examining of ideals of manhood in relation to nationhood and leadership an urgent matter. Her sentiments are important in that they suggest the need to trace the impact of history on the shaping of our understanding of Zimbabwean masculinity. The history of black constructions of masculinity is examined by Praise Zenenga who argues that “masculinity, like imperialism, is a phallogentric, supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subalterns, both male and female” (128). In “Boys: Performing Manhood in Zimbabwean Drama” (2007) Zenenga declares that black masculinity is a legacy of colonialism and that tense relations between white and black men in colonial Rhodesia played a significant part in constituting ‘military’ masculinities that exist today. He argues that within the patriarchal Rhodesian society, white men

held all the power and African men occupied a subordinate position, not only to them but to white women as well. Black women were positioned at the bottom of the social ladder. Zenenga explains that the oppression of African men was necessary for the survival of the colonial capitalist enterprise, which depended on an efficient and subservient workforce. Violence against African men was prevalent, particularly in the urban work space, where they were treated like children and referred to as ‘boys’, “thus conjuring an image of a perpetually immature, deficient and childlike adult who needed constant control” (Zenenga 131). Zenenga underscores the use of force and subjugation in the construction of black colonial manhood, which makes it possible to perceive how black men’s subordinate position may have created the overdetermined manhood evident today. Grace A Musila echoes Zenenga’s reading, and in “A Man Can Try: Negotiating Manhoods in Colonial Urban Spaces in Dambudzo Marechera’s *The House of Hunger* and Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*” (2007), she suggests that black men’s identity in the colonial urban space was so grossly destabilized that it appears to have created a need to “retrieve, construct, and evolve senses of manhood in the continually shifting social terrain of the urban space, and its fluid topographies of gendered relations” (142). She concludes that the colonial urban environment, with its racial tension and conflicts, produced a strong desire for personal freedom in African men, and this manifested in the armed struggle against colonial rule. Eventually when black men took up arms against the Rhodesian regime, the once derogatory term ‘boy’, acquired a more positive meaning because it became associated with strength, bravery and the fight for freedom (Zenenga 132). Zenenga and Musila’s views make it possible to argue that black men, who had been second-class citizens within the colonial order, found a domain where they could, in a way, retrieve their lost manhood. Zimbabwean nationalism, therefore, was born partly out of the need to reconstruct and affirm black masculinity, hence its very strong ‘military’ characteristics evident today.

The above-mentioned hypothesis, which is one way of understanding ‘militancy’ in black Zimbabwean men, can be problematic because its formations exclude the participation and subordination of black women under colonial rule. The exclusion of women from history is discussed

by Pumla Dineo Gqola in *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015) and, through her focus on the TRC, she shows how the harrowing experiences of black South African women were left out of the struggle narrative. This resulted in post 1994 South African nationalism being primarily premised on black men's experiences (165). The South African situation, as described by Gqola, is similar to the one in post-independence Zimbabwe in which the construction of masculinity is shaped by tenuous relationships between black and white men in Rhodesia, and the resultant armed struggle. Both instances show the impact of political and social contexts on behaviour, as suggested by Anias Mutekwa when he states that "masculinities are a product of a particular historical period and reflect the conditions that produced them" (Mutekwa 356). This study proposes that tracing the trajectory of African masculinities from colonial times enables us to comprehend how it is that Zimbabwean men dominate private and public spaces today. It also allows us to attempt to understand the violence inherent in this masculinity and why it has resulted in the over-manning of the post 2000 Zimbabwean nation. Indeed, since attaining its independence from colonial rule, the majority of government ministers have been men, most of whom were former freedom fighters. A change only occurred in 2004 when Joyce Mujuru, a female former freedom fighter, was appointed vice president, however, some quarters perceived this as government's way of honouring her for her role in the war against the Ian Smith's regime (Christiansen 88). This suggests that Mujuru's appointment was not about correcting gender imbalances in government, but is largely framed around her honorary military masculinity as a former soldier. At independence in 1980, military men took their place at the top of Zimbabwean society and became the 'fathers' of the new Zimbabwean nation. Thus, the ideal manhood was mainly characterised by 'militancy', physical strength, courage, the ability to provide materially for wives, children and the extended family.

Three decades later, and with the advent of the 2000 fast track land distribution programme, Zimbabwe has undergone tremendous socio-political and economic hardships. On a daily basis, ordinary Zimbabweans have and still face unemployment, shortage of water, electricity, fuel, food, and medicine (Chiumbu and Musemwa ix). The dwindling resources have created a 'survival of the

fittest' environment, and thousands of Zimbabweans have left the country. This has added another dimension to Zimbabwe's hegemonic masculinity with those left behind forced to adopt a 'hustling' mentality. Hence, aggressive men, adept at acquiring material wealth appear to command authority and respect. Zenenga refers to Zimbabwe's new hegemonic masculinity as hyper-masculinity, and argues that:

besides fulfilling normal dominant gender role expectations like success, enterprise, resourcefulness, competition, aggression, post-independence Zimbabwean masculinities [are identified] with the three Cs: car, cash and cell phone. Additionally, they have a 'small house' (mistress) as a show of affluence. (Zenenga 135)

Zenenga's observation is useful when analysing *Highway Queen* and *The Hairdresser of Harare* whose main male characters display aggressive and violent tendencies towards women, poor working class males and homosexuals.

This chapter draws on Maria Pia Lara's argument that subversive literary narratives speak for the voiceless. In *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (1998), Lara suggests that narratives that attempt to speak on behalf of marginalised groups are:

illocutionary forces [that enter into the public sphere and] mediate between particular group identities and universalistic moral claims, providing new frameworks that allow those who are not members of the group to expand their own-self conceptions and their definitions of civil society. (3)

Lara's ideas are useful when reading Phiri and Huchu's texts as they both challenge traditional understandings of manhood and demonstrate contemporary Zimbabwean intolerance for those who fall outside the accepted gender script. In both texts, we observe the interesting ways in which the authors represent the victimization of poor people, women, and homosexual men due to the political instability caused by the chaotic land reform. These texts demonstrate the impact of the post 2000 Zimbabwean socio-political landscape as not only the general disruption of citizens' lives that led to geographic displacement, but also the socio-cultural redefinition of people's identities. Men and

women have had to adjust to the fact that their social identities and the roles that they were accustomed to fulfilling have changed. In *Highway Queen*, the author depicts this change by employing the voice of a married woman-turned-sex-worker, who speaks on behalf of her society and exposes the impact of the crisis on family life. Her narrative addresses the shifting of traditional gender roles and demonstrates her attempt to hold on to her position as wife and mother while navigating her new identity as a sex worker. By choosing a sex worker as her protagonist, Phiri invites us to reflect on the notion of morality in relation to Sophie and to consider the fact that she sells her body, not out of choice, but because of the need for survival, both her own and that of her family.

In “The Festering Finger? Reimagining Minority Sexuality in Tendai Huchu’s *The Hairdresser of Harare* and Abdellah Taia’s *Une Melancolie Arabe*” (2013) Gibson Ncube explores homoerotic sexuality and its repression within homophobic Moroccan and Zimbabwean societies. Ncube applies Lara’s theories and reiterates that texts which speak against the discounting of ‘minority sexualities’ are important because they provoke readers to engage with a subject that has always been taboo in many parts of Africa. Ncube argues that narratives which

openly depict ‘deviant sexuality’ create a space of resistance in which a ‘homosexual slant/voice’ is unfurled [to] destabilize heterosexuality through a displacement of boundaries of the expressible and the visible and as such conferring legitimacy to ‘abjected experiences and subjectivities’. (72)

Ncube suggests that texts that enter the public sphere and challenge dominant discourses legitimise and vindicate marginalised groups. *Highway Queen* and *The Hairdresser of Harare* are such texts because, by writing, the authors initiate a public dialogue on sexuality and gender. Most importantly, they highlight the policing of individuals who do not fit into the post 2000 idea of nationhood which favours men, particularly those that display a militaristic manhood. In this tense political atmosphere, a new template of hegemonic masculinity emerges; one that is violent, aggressive and intolerant, particularly of women and gay men.

As mentioned earlier, *Highway Queen*, amongst other things, discusses the impact of patriarchy on womanhood and speaks about women's forced engagement in sex work due to poverty. Similarly, *The Hairdresser of Harare* engages with the controversial subject of same-sex desire, and in doing so, challenges the idea that homosexuality is 'deviant' behaviour, which does not belong in Zimbabwe's heteronormative society. Ncube asserts that texts like *The Hairdresser of Harare*, speak the unspeakable, and are, therefore, a "locus of resistance as they give legitimacy to minority sexuality by daring to broach that which is typically left unsaid and resisting the culture that perpetuates silence and denial of "deviant" desire and sexuality" (Ncube 73). In *The Hairdresser of Harare*, Huchu audaciously destabilises traditional black masculinity by constructing his protagonist, Dumisani, as a homosexual character. Dumisani struggles to live as a black, gay man in a country that has no tolerance, whatsoever, for same-sex desire. In this text, heteronormativity as the prescribed sexual orientation is disputed by the author's construction of a male protagonist who has a relationship with another man; and not just any man, but a well-known former freedom fighter who is the epitome of post-independence hegemonic black militaristic masculinity. The following segment explores *Highway Queen*.

*Highway Queen* examines the destabilisation of traditional gender roles as Zimbabwean society transforms due to the land reform programme that destroys the economy and creates unemployment and loss of livelihoods. The author focuses on the family unit and how this is affected when the father, and head of the household, fails to fulfil his obligations as the provider. Through the first person narrative voice of a mother-turned sex worker, the text reveals how poverty forces a woman to discard 'respectability' in exchange for a meagre living made from sex work. More importantly, the text demonstrates how men and women respond to the re-gendering of private and public spaces and highlights the anxieties experienced by some men when they lose their dominant roles in households.

*Highway Queen* portrays the hardships suffered by the Mumba family when Steven, the main breadwinner, is retrenched from his job as a supervisor at a textile factory. This occurs when the

company fails to procure foreign currency to purchase spare parts for its machinery. Steven's efforts to secure employment elsewhere are fruitless because of the "disinvestment in the textile industry" and his attempts to start a small business selling scrap metal fail because his customers do not pay (Phiri 10). His last job is at a sports club where he works as a kitchen-hand, but after three months, he leaves because the wages are too meagre to sustain his family. Steven's wife, Sophie takes on odd jobs; as a street vendor selling ice cream, a street cleaner and a shop assistant, but she also abandons the job because her wages are worthless. With no money, the couple exhaust Steven's retrenchment package and their savings within three months. They run short of food and fail to pay school fees for their four children. Most nights Steven and Sophie lie "awake, cracking [their] heads" wondering how they will survive (Phiri 10). Eventually, their house is auctioned off, and they are forced to move to a squatter camp located "near the sewage works" (17). When this misfortune happens, the couple react differently; Steven turns to drink to manage his frustration, whilst Sophie starts a business selling rice and fish. In the course of trying to establish her business Sophie is raped, and with repeated exposure to rape, beatings and verbal abuse, she succumbs to life as a sex-worker, and this becomes her only means of sustenance. The little money she makes goes towards accommodating, clothing and feeding her husband, mother-in-law and her four children. Sophie works hard to keep the family together in the city, but when Steven falls ill, and his leg is amputated, and their squatter camp is bulldozed to the ground, she relents, and the whole family relocates to their rural village.

In *Highway Queen*, the author highlights the violence Sophie experiences at the hands of most men she meets during the course of her work, a clear indication of the crisis of manhood due to the re-gendering of private and public spaces. The effects of the crisis on manhood, particularly fatherhood, is experienced in the text through the character of Steven, whose life takes a downward spiral when he is retrenched and struggles to provide food and shelter for his wife, children and mother. Being unemployed changes Steven's behaviour; he loses his temper often and fails to eat and sleep. Before his retrenchment, Steven fulfils all his obligations as a husband and father. He is considered "a respectable man ... able to provide for his family, [paying] the mortgage and other

expenses ... on time” (Phiri 7). Failure to take care of his family’s material needs drives Steven to start drinking “*kachasu*, a cheap home brew that [knocks] senses out of its drinkers” (10). The narrator explains that Steven’s “drinking [is] a clear indication of frustration [which occurs when] a man fails to provide for his family [as he becomes] ashamed” (10). In light of what is conventionally expected of a Zimbabwean man, Steven’s behaviour demonstrates the loss of one of the most important signifiers of Zimbabwean masculinity, which is the ability to provide for a family. Steven is destabilised from his dominant position and has to adjust to his wife Sophie being the one with the financial means to take care of their family. His physical and emotional displacement “engenders feelings of emasculation, exacerbated by his wife’s appropriation of the breadwinner’s role [hence] destabilizing the balance of power in the family” (Mutekwa 362). Steven’s situation demonstrates the reversal of roles in the Mumba household and highlights the re-gendering of the workspace in post 2000 Zimbabwe. According to tradition, a woman is supposed to play a secondary role to her husband, taking care of the home and the children. However, in light of the crisis that has created high levels of unemployment, poverty forces women like Sophie to leave the domestic space and venture into predominately-masculine environments. Steven’s transition from an employed man and provider of his family to the domestic space of the sports club where he works in a kitchen, and eventually, to his own home where he spends his day drinking, represent what has happened to some men in Zimbabwe since the collapse of the economy. In a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe, providing for one’s family is an important feature of the performance of masculinity, and a man’s job defines his standing in society. Sophie confirms:

when one has a job, there is hope for a decent life such as having enough food, owning a home, education for the children, health care and peace of mind. When that hope is taken away, one does not want to imagine. (Phiri 1)

Steven loses hope and relies on alcohol to salvage his pride and dignity. Clearly, when he works as a kitchen-hand at the sports club, his manhood is threatened because, traditionally, the kitchen is designated as a feminine space. In this regard, “the kitchen, with its stereotypical mark as a symbol

of women's domesticity and inferiority, emerges as a symbolic space that, in a patriarchal sense, marginalises all who are associated with it (Nyambi "Re-framing the Prostitute" 2). Steven's situation shows the blurring of traditional boundaries as men take on women's work. Furthermore, Steven would never have envisaged that his position would shift from provider to dependent. Sophie's attempts to involve Steven in her new venture fail because the idea of selling anything emasculates him. He insists that he will not be a trader because it is women's work and that "women do it better" (Phiri 33). Here we observe how Steven's masculine pride stands in the way of contributing positively to his family's well-being. When he reluctantly agrees to sell a few dried fish, he immediately spends the money on beef chops on the pretext that "the children are tired of eating vegetables and beans" (35). In this instance, the fact that Steven spends money on meat, which is expensive, demonstrates his refusal to take their situation seriously. He becomes a liability to his family. His alcoholism and angry demands for money cause tension between him and Sophie and damages their marital relationship. Steven's situation degenerates further when he falls and breaks his leg in a drunken stupor. From then, he has to face life, not only as an unemployed man but also as a physically challenged individual dependent on his wife and children.

The loss of Steven's leg and his illness from HIV/AIDS is very significant because it deconstructs the notion of the strong healthy and invincible African male body. The ideal man, according to societal standards "should not be absent, weak, sick, display paranoid delusions, express or enact love for another man ...be a gay father, or die in a non-heroic fashion" (Attree 68). However, in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe, where unemployment is high, and poverty makes people vulnerable to disease, Steven's displacement as main provider and his subsequent physical disability, destabilise conventional notions of what it means to be a man. We see Steven's removal from a 'masculine space' – the factory that he works for – to a 'feminised space' which is his home where he is now confined. On the other hand, Sophie moves out of home into the public space, and Steven has to take over her duties within the home.

We observe Sophie's assertiveness when she leaves a note for Steve informing him of her trip to the border.

Steven Dear,

I have gone to the South Border town to find goods to sell. I will be back tomorrow. Please look after the children. Make sure that mother takes her medication. See you soon. (Phiri 23)

From her words, one notes Sophie's decisiveness because she does not ask Steven for permission as expected of a wife. This demonstrates the change in Sophie's performance of gender, as she is no longer the subservient, 'traditional' wife, and her new position illustrates the destabilising of gender norms as a result of the poor economy. Steven remains at home, having lost his confidence because he can no longer provide for his family and because of his physical disability.

In *Highway Queen*, the author reveals the difficulty of physical incapacitation in a society that constructs manhood as indestructible. Although Steven's state of mind improves when he learns a new trade, making leather shoes and handbags, his 'deformed body' alienates him from himself and other people. Steven's friends make fun of the fact that he now has only one leg, and they do not assist him in any way, which leaves him totally dependent on Sophie and his children, a situation he finds unbearable. Steven's position underlines the idea that in post 2000 Zimbabwe there are people that are excluded from participating as full citizens. As an unemployed stay-at-home father, Steven has gone down the social ladder because he does not portray the kind of manhood that would bring admiration. When the appearance of Steven's body changes due the loss of his leg and illness from HIV/AIDS, Steven ceases to represent an ideal masculinity because he no longer signifies strength and virility. The reaction of his friends to his changed body confirms the idea that "physical disability disrupts heteronormative concepts of masculinity by altering the body, which is the primary referent for the construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity" (Lipenga 1). Without his leg, and with his body slowly weakening from the HIV virus, Steven is not able to perform his masculinity according to traditional norms. In fact, Steven is battling with two forms of stigmatisation, one in

relation to the loss of his leg and the other, his HIV status. He falls into the category of ‘marginal masculinity’ a weak masculinity that cannot perform a dominant role.

As a novel, *Highway Queen* deconstructs traditional understandings of manhood by constructing a character such as Steven whose masculinity presents as weak and vulnerable. Steven’s situation:

problematizes hegemonic masculinity predicated on the fixation with an athletic, strong, healthy, masculine body. Disease, decay, hunger and death in the age of HIV/AIDS in contemporary Zimbabwe, and indeed Southern Africa, deconstruct this privileged figuring of the male body. (Muchemwa and Muponde xvii)

We observe how Steven’s ill health affects his emotions such that when Sophie visits him at the hospital and the rural village, he is not able to hide his physical pain, and he cries openly. It is clear that Steven is wasting away and when Sophie arrives, she finds him “lying under a tree [with] about half a dozen flies buzzing [around him]. He [has] lost a lot of weight [and] there is an unpleasant smell ... from the stump of his amputated leg” (Phiri 173 -174). The above description of Steven’s emaciated, diseased body is a direct cause of the loss of his job due to the economic crisis. Steven’s “vulnerability and susceptibility to the crisis is rendered all the more problematic by the very fact that the economic and political forces informing the crisis are well beyond his sphere of influence” (Nyambi and Mlambo “Emasculated by the Crisis” 291). Had the economy not collapsed, it is likely that Steven would not have fallen so heavily into drinking, but with no means to support his family, it became impossible for him to hold on to his traditional role of family provider.

Ironically, the crisis has presented opportunities for black women that were not available to them before. Although Sophie’s rice and fish business is small, she gains a strong sense of self, which enables her to take care of and make crucial decisions for the family; the main one being to move permanently to the village when all their efforts to remain in the city have failed. Before the crisis, Steven would have made such decisions. However, the downside to the empowerment of women in the context of the crisis is that they enter urban work and business spaces fraught with anxieties and

tensions. In this context everyone battles to make a living and men, in particular, battle to hold on to hetero-patriarchal masculinities. Sophie's entrance into the business world exposes her to verbal, physical, sexual, economic and institutional violence. In this space, men feel the need to exert their power on women as a way of controlling them and protecting a domain they perceive as theirs. The long distance drivers and most of the men that Sophie meets in the course of selling her wares and as a sex worker exhibit what Morell terms a "post-colonial masculinity", which asserts Zimbabwean nationalism by dominating women and poor men (Morrell qtd in Zenenga 140).

The long-distance truck drivers Dhuri, Samson and Danny, represent a hegemonic masculinity which is violent and misogynistic, a type of masculinity that Zenenga suggests is a result of the current "discourse of manhood which is premised on [violence] virility and aggressiveness" (141). These three men rape, beat and humiliate Sophie in a way that makes the reader question the status of men as heads of households and fathers of the nation in contemporary Zimbabwe. When Sophie starts a business selling fish and rice, she moves from the home, a domestic space traditionally meant for women, into the city, which is generally more accepting of men. The truck-stop where Sophie encounters Dhuri, the driver who sells the fish and rice she needs to start her business, is a typical homo-social space which is hostile to female presence. When she arrives at the truck-stop there is a marked silence and the men do not greet her but just "open their mouths [and] anxiously stare" (Phiri 13). Dhuri is an unfriendly, impolite man who demands that she "spend just ten minutes" with him to compensate for the fact that the money she has is inadequate to purchase the rice and fish (18). Although Sophie resists, even biting Dhuri on his thigh, he does not relent; he proceeds to rape her and brags that he does not use condoms "purely on principle" because AIDS does not exist (Phiri 19). In this instance, two things happen to Sophie; firstly, she is physically and sexually violated and secondly, she is exposed to a deadly disease. Ane M Orbo Kirkegaard claims that such risky behaviour fits the modern concept of African masculinity. In this discourse, women and sissies are secondary to 'men's men' not only politically and economically, but also socially... Predatory and violent (hetero) sexual prowess is considered a basic signifier of maleness. (125)

Kirkegaard's argument here mirrors Zenenga's observations about contemporary black masculinity. Dhuri's misogynistic attitude, his violent and risky behaviour, and his assumption that he has a right to Sophie's body demonstrate a 'hyper masculinity' that misuses power. Dhuri recognises Sophie's vulnerability immediately when she reveals that she lives in an informal settlement and that she is short of money. Instead of helping Sophie to make life easier for her family, Dhuri exerts his power and rapes her. What is important to note here is how this unhealthy environment forces Sophie to adopt violence to defend herself, because, even though the truck-stop is full of men who are aware that Dhuri is raping her in his storeroom, they do not react. This lack of intervention by other men is indicative of their lack of interest, fear of Dhuri and/or the condoning of rape. Gqola discusses men's attitude to rape in her afore-cited book, which deals with the prevalence of rape in South Africa, and she observes that some men refuse to see the trauma and far-reaching effects of rape on women. She suggests that some men see rape as a type of sex that they are entitled to, and they think that sex workers and women who are not their mothers or sisters "[do] not matter, therefore, violating them is permissible" (Gqola 3). When one considers Gqola's observations, one observes how the truck drivers that rape Sophie hold the same attitude towards women and their bodies because all of them use rape as a weapon of control. However, in exploring violence between men and women in *Highway Queen*, Phiri exposes the fact that, in poor urban environments, violence is not the "exclusive preserve of men" (Musila 151). Sophie's desperation, which emanates from a strong desire to provide for her family, forces her to behave in a violent manner. In such a volatile situation she has no other recourse but to counteract violently. In this case, the reader is made aware of the impact of the crisis on poor women, desperate to feed and clothe their families. In order to survive the ferocious urban space, Sophie has to transform, and we see violence becoming part and parcel of her life.

The next violent experience for Sophie is in the hands of another truck-driver, Samson who pretends to rescue her from Dhuri and offers to transport her to the border where she can sell her rice and fish for foreign currency. In the middle of the night, he rapes her. And, in the words of the narrator, we are told that "[Samson turns] into a beast" (Phiri 25). The animal metaphor is particularly

interesting here as it puts emphasis on Samson's brutality. It also suggests that the contemporary Zimbabwean city has become chaotic due to the influx of people from everywhere seeking a livelihood; it is a space in which men lose control and adopt savage forms of behaviour. Like Dhuri, Samson takes advantage of Sophie's vulnerability and rapes her inside his truck where she seeks safety. Samson does not use protection either, and this exposes Sophie to the HIV/AIDS virus within the space of two days. Within ten minutes of raping Sophie, Simon is snoring. In the morning, he pushes Sophie out of his truck and "just watches and smiles" as she drags her bags of rice and fish out of his truck (Phiri 27). One can sense the power that Samson has over Sophie from the way he appears to enjoy the encounter, which has availed him an opportunity to exercise his patriarchal control. Through Sophie's experiences we note how "rape is a crime of power, and in patriarchal societies, all men can access patriarchal power" (Gqola 11-12). Although Samson is not a particularly wealthy man, the fact that he is male gives him authority which Gqola perceives to be the preserve of most men in patriarchal societies.

The third assault Sophie's suffers is at the hands of Danny, yet another truck-driver she meets at the border after losing all her belongings whilst running away from the police who have mounted a raid to "flush out thieves, prostitutes and other undesirables" (Phiri 58). From this incident, it is clear that Sophie belongs to the category of marginalised people against whom the state has unleashed its power. Having lost her bags with money, identity documents and the batiks she intended to sell, Sophie is left stranded in a strange city and is forced to accept a lift from Danny, but he tricks her into staying the night in his truck then rapes her. In the morning, like Samson, Danny rudely shakes her and commands her to "get up!" and get out of his truck (62). Like Samson and Dhuri, Danny refuses to pay and when she confiscates his truck keys, Danny calls her a cow and a bitch and, "[charges] like a bull towards [her]" (63). A physical fight ensues and eventually Danny pays Sophie the R200 due to her. Samson is not the last man to rape Sophie; almost all the men she meets after this incident verbally and physically assault her, which emphasizes the fact that the post 2000 hegemonic masculinity is a 'violent masculinity'. However, there are a few men who treat Sophie in a decent

manner, such as Tickie, the tuckshop owner who becomes her business partner and friend. Tickie is a young slum-dweller who makes his living selling groceries from a small make-shift shop. He helps Sophie to source rice and fish, but he does not ask her for anything in return. Such a character is important because it alerts the reader to the fact that there are some men who have not succumbed to the pressures of the crisis and, invariably lost their humanity, like Dhuri and Samson.

The character of Sophie in *Highway Queen* demonstrates the impact of the crisis on the personal lives of ordinary women and men. In this novel, the author highlights what happens in a society when social structures break down and shows post 2000 urban places to be contested spaces. In his analysis of Yvonne Vera's novel *Butterfly Burning*, in which he explores women's place in the city, Muponde asserts that "female protagonists find new paths for their lives and create new forms of belonging in the urban space" (xiv). Muponde's summation is in the context of sexual relations that take place between men and women in the city, and he perceives the bodies of sex workers as giving them power over men. He argues that "through these women's gifted bodies and their sexual pleasure, which gives them power over men, the city not only becomes sexualised but also feminized" (qtd in Veit-Wild and Naguschewskis xiv). This analysis is plausible but does not apply to Sophie's experiences in *Highway Queen* because she does not get pleasure out of selling sex, and certainly, the city in which she operates proves to be a very hostile space. Men like Dhuri and Samson do not give up the power they have over her. Sophie exists in this space because she is poor in a society that commodifies women such that her attempts to sell her rice, fish and batiks are obstructed by violent, predatory men who treat her as a sexual object and refuse to take her efforts seriously. On the other hand, we could argue that, in the context of this novel, the reader's understanding of morality is challenged because the controversial act of selling sex ironically becomes a tool that empowers Sophie and gives her agency. This is evident in the narrative choice of words when at first Sophie is referred to as a 'prostitute' but later as a 'sex worker'. Sophie becomes aware that, in the context of the crisis, her body is the "only commodity that no one [has] control over except [herself]" and she demands to be paid decently for selling sex (Phiri 88). She takes control of her body and makes astute

decisions regarding her business transactions. Just as most of the men in the story live double lives, Sophie lives firstly as a wife and mother, and secondly as a woman who sells sex for survival. This shows how the crisis has forced a reconfiguration of gender in relation to women because the characteristics that define womanhood such as marriage and motherhood are no longer adequate.

My analysis of *Highway Queen* has revealed that the Zimbabwean crisis has created political and economic difficulties such that the social landscape has experienced the re-gendering of public and private spaces. In the crisis atmosphere, Zimbabwean men and women have abandoned their traditional roles because they no longer fit the new social order. The text's representation of masculinity, which is the focus of this chapter, reveals how the crisis has created tensions and anxieties in men, because their function as heads of the family, and ultimately the nation, has been threatened. This comes through in the way Sophie's husband Steven, and most of the men she has met as a businesswoman and sex worker, have resented her entry into domains previously meant for them. Their abusive manner towards her suggests their desire to punish her for what appears as her transgression into their space. We see Steven's reluctant acceptance of his secondary place in the home when Sophie becomes the breadwinner, and the truck driver, Dhuri, refusing to relate to Sophie as anything other than a woman whose sexuality is available to him even against her will. The men's verbal and physical abuse of Sophie demonstrates the post 2000 'crisis masculinity' which is violent, aggressive and predatory towards women.

This study finds that *Highway Queen*'s representation of the crisis demonstrates a change in gender power dynamics, which has made it more difficult for Zimbabwean men and women to interact in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the text depicts a cultural landscape that has become more of a prison due to poverty as daily, men and women have to focus on surviving hunger. Such a situation impedes personal development, and Sophie's life is demonstrative of this because as much as the titular highway, as a chronotope of the road, is meant to represent escape and freedom, in this case, it is an escape to nowhere. Sophie is stuck on this particular road travelling to and fro with no hope of ever leaving Zimbabwe. Her displacement confines her in the same space, unlike Dumisani's,

the protagonist in *The Hairdresser of Harare*, whose displacement forces him to leave Zimbabwe for the United Kingdom.

*The Hairdresser of Harare* presents the story of a young homosexual man and his struggles to conform to a heteronormative lifestyle in post 2000 Zimbabwe. Set in Harare, the novel is narrated by Vimbai, a young single mother who works as a hairdresser at Khumalo Hair and Beauty Treatment Salon, one of the top salons in Harare. Dumisani is a product of a wealthy and politically well-connected family, whose sexual orientation and career choices have been a disappointment, particularly to his father, a self-made man who grew up in poverty but educated himself and amassed a lot of wealth. Without access to the family's fortunes, Dumisani has to work, and he finds employment as a hairdresser at the same salon where Vimba works. Initially, Vimbai is resentful of Dumisani's obvious flair for hairdressing, despite his maleness, but his charming manner wins her over, and they become friends. Shortly after his arrival at the salon, Dumisani moves in with Vimbai and becomes a surrogate father to her young daughter. Although Vimbai senses that "there is something not quite right" with Dumisani, the idea that he may be gay does not occur to her (Huchu 1). In order to please his family, Dumisani initiates a romantic relationship with Vimbai and introduces her to his family at his brother's wedding. The family embrace Vimbai, and Dumisani's mother thanks her for "curing her son", a comment which she does not understand at the time (Huchu 117). Eventually, Dumisani's secret is revealed when Vimbai reads his diary and discovers that, not only is Dumisani a *ngochani*<sup>3</sup> but that he is romantically involved with Minister M's husband, a former freedom fighter renowned for his prowess during the struggle for liberation. Hurt and angry at Dumisani's deceit, Vimbai alerts Minister M who arranges for 'war veterans' to beat him so severely that he lands up in hospital with grave injuries. Vimbai's guilt at putting Dumisani's life at

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<sup>3</sup> *Ngochani* is a term used to refer to same sex relationships between males and it emerged in reference to African men who practiced homosexuality when they were away working in the mines and heterosexuality when they returned to the village. See Marc Epprecht "The Unsayings" 631–651.

risk prompts her to enlist the help of his sister and some of his friends to facilitate his escape to England.

*The Hairdresser of Harare* is a text that destabilises the idea that homosexuality is unAfrican, and through the character of Dumisani, the author reveals that some black men in Zimbabwe do engage in same-sex relationships, but they do so secretly because homosexuality is perceived as ‘deviant’ behaviour. In post 2000 Zimbabwe, in which notions of belonging are based on exclusionary definitions of hegemonic race, gender and sexual identities, Dumisani does not conform to the prescribed and accepted heterosexual masculine identity, which lays claim to nationhood because of its military history. He does not compare to our erstwhile nameless narrator in *Harare North*, whose Green Bomber status allows him some form of recognition in post 2000 Zimbabwe even though it is to his own detriment. Dumisani cannot survive in homophobic Zimbabwe so he sacrifices his friends, his family and his country and relocates to England where his sexual orientation is tolerated. Notably, Dumisani and Chikwava’s nameless narrator both end up exiled by the state which should protect them, given Dumisani’s politically well-connected family and the nameless narrator’s loyal ZANU PF membership.

*The Hairdresser of Harare* is the first Zimbabwean novel to offer a sustained exploration of homosexuality, and in this sense, is an “emancipatory narrative” (Lara 5) that challenges the dominant homophobic discourses in Zimbabwe, which insist that homosexuality is unAfrican, a Western import introduced by colonial white settlers (Epprecht “The Unsayings” 631). Indeed, in a speech that he delivered at the International Book Fair in Harare in 1995, the President of Zimbabwe declared that gays and lesbians are “worse than dogs and pigs” and that there is no place for them in the country (Shaw “Queer Inclinations” 90). This attitude was to subsequently gain traction in the state’s logic in post 2000 and became a way of rendering non-normative sexual identities exiled. This section of my study explores Huchu’s representation of homosexuality in the context of the crisis and proposes that, in a bid to maintain power and the attendant legitimacy of military masculinities associated with the ‘Third Chimurenga’, the ZANU PF government has constructed homosexual men and women as

‘enemies of the state’; together with white people and members of oppositional parties such as the MDC. I propose that in post 2000 Zimbabwe, in which notions of belonging are premised on conservative prescriptions of race, gender and sexual identities, gay men have become victims of state violence; firstly, because they’re seen as deviating from the celebrated nationalistic, militant hyper aggressive masculinity; and secondly, because their quest for acceptance has become a political issue which is a thorn in the side of the ruling party. For this discussion, I draw on Epprecht’s work in queer studies.

In “Recent Trends in the Treatment of Homosexuality in Literature and Film by African Artists” (2011), Epprecht examines African authors’ representation of same-sex relations in literature in the 1950s and early 1970s. He comments that critics of this work reveal that it engages with the topic of homosexuality from a moralistic standpoint, and largely adheres to the notion that same-sex desire does not exist in African traditional culture. Any presence noted is said to be insignificant and is thought to have been introduced by Arabs and Europeans. The perception is that homosexuality is a “social pathology that Africans should resist as with other forms of imperialism or moral corruption” (Epprecht 153). However, Epprecht observes that some of this literature shows ambiguities in that it reflects sympathy and respect towards homosexuality and acknowledges the presence of love in such relationships. He suggests that the emergence of political homophobia from the late 1970s in certain parts of Africa has had a positive influence in that it has initiated a long over-due discussion on the ‘unmentionable’ subject of same-sex desire. Furthermore, Epprecht, suggests that the advent of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s and the rise in political homophobia in many African countries informs the formation of African gay movements and proliferation of literature detailing the lives and struggles of gay people, whilst also challenging the traditional notions of African sexuality (154). An example of this is the emergence in 1997 of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), a Zimbabwean magazine that published short stories and autobiographical accounts narrating the difficulties of living in a homophobic society. Since then, several short stories that explore same sex relationships in the Zimbabwean context have emerged. One of these is “Of Lovers and Wives” (1997) by renowned

Zimbabwean author, Charles Mungoshi. The story portrays Shami, a married woman who discovers, after eighteen years of marriage, that her husband Chasi and his best friend Peter are lovers. However, before Shami can come to terms with her husband's betrayal, Peter commits suicide by driving off a bridge. As one of the first short stories to touch on same-sex desire, this story has received divergent reviews. Although Mungoshi is acknowledged for broaching this subject, some critics suggest that his treatment of the topic is not entirely positive. Patricia Alden argues that Peter's death in the story "[polices] homosexual desire" ("Coming Unstuck" 92). Shaw is of the same view and suggests that Peter's demise is a "forced ending [that] reads more like an anxious authorial intervention than divine intervention, the recuperation of an unsettling text back into the dominant fiction of heteronormativity" ("Queer Inclinations" 100). Alden and Shaw both, nonetheless, applaud Mungoshi for tackling a difficult and controversial subject publicly. My view is that Mungoshi's engagement with a topic which is excluded from discourse on sexuality in Zimbabwe, is a brave move, particularly because the story is published at the beginning of very strong anti-gay movement in Zimbabwe. Like Shaw and Alden, I view Peter's violent death as underlining the idea of homosexuality as deviance. In a largely Christian society such as Zimbabwe, death by suicide is perceived as 'deviant' behaviour, therefore, when Peter takes his own life, this suggests that his sexual orientation deems him unfit to die a conventional death. It also suggests a certain self-flagellating guilt. The portrayal of homosexuality in *The Hairdresser of Harare* is similar to the way it is presented in the short story "Of Lovers and Wives" because Dumisani's relationship with Minister M's husband is a secret, and like Peter, his body is subjected to violence, even though he does not lose his life. His escape to England indicates that there is no room for gay men in Zimbabwe and, therefore, it renders it impossible to imagine a Zimbabwean society where homosexuals enjoy the same rights and sexual freedom as heterosexuals. Mungoshi and Huchu make a statement about the socio-psychological Zimbabwean context in which being gay is so dangerous a condition that their protagonists choose death or exile. Without a doubt, the two writers have challenged conventional prejudices by representing the injustice as well the cruel and destructive nature of this homophobic society.

In *The Hairdresser of Harare*, Huchu's choice of narrator is strategic and enables him to create a voice that conveys naivety, shock and exasperation. The story is narrated by Vimbai; a conservative young woman whose lack of insight into sexual identities makes it difficult for her to recognise immediately that Dumisani is gay. Such a narrator allows the author to present Dumisani's sexual orientation in hints and mild suggestions, which creates suspense. This kind of representation suits the narrative, because, the performance of gay masculinity in homophobic spaces is marked by secrecy, silence and ambiguity so that it is often impossible to read someone's sexual orientation through their appearance. The focus on Dumisani's physicality is important because it is the author's way of pointing out that a person's dress or demeanour does not signify a particular sexual identity. In fact, Dumisani's indistinct style and conduct destabilises the notion that specific characteristics differentiate heterosexual men from homosexual men. Vimbai's detailed description of Dumisani's appearance attests to this: "*I knew there was something not quite right about Dumisani the very first time I ever laid eyes on him. The problem was, I just couldn't tell what it was. Thank God for that*" (Huchu 1 emphasis original). Vimbai's utterance portrays her anxiety and suggests that Dumisani is not 'normal', which prompts the reader's curiosity, as to what could be wrong with him.

In his desire to destabilise conventional performances of manhood, Huchu utilises the stereotype of the 'macho' man and the 'effeminate gay man'. The tension between the two is embodied through the character of Dumisani and his relationship with Mr M. Dumisani's appearance confuses Vimbai because on the one hand, Dumisani has "a well-proportioned boyish physique [and yet] his [hair] glistens in the sun, a sure sign that he [is] using oils" (Huchu 6). There are other markers on Dumisani's body that send mixed messages, such as his "long slender fingers, ... [the] fluidity in his movements and his fashionable clothing" (Huchu 7-36). According to stereotypical understandings of what men and women 'should look like,' Dumisani's body is manly and yet his slender fingers and clothing feminise him because these are assumed to be conventional markers of femininity. Here the author's intention is to show clearly that one cannot assign specific ways of dress or behaviour to a particular gender, although, within the Zimbabwean context, it is generally expected

that a man should look very different from a woman, in the way he dresses, talks and walks. Furthermore, by working as a hairdresser, Dumisani is crossing gendered labour boundaries because hairdressing is understood to be women's work. This is demonstrated by Vimbai's retort: "A male hairdresser, who had ever heard of such a thing" (Huchu 7). In a typical Zimbabwean hairdressing salon, it is customary to find women hairdressers on the one side, braiding and texturizing hair, and men on the other side, working as barbers. Dumisani appears to defy all these assumptions because he braids, relaxes and cuts all hair; whether it belongs to a man or a woman, a black or white person. This detailed analysis of Dumisani's appearance is Huchu's way of depicting polarising assumptions about the outward appearance and demeanour of heterosexual men. Furthermore, the homosexual relationship that Dumisani has with Mr M directs the reader's attention to a nationalistic construction of manhood that is premised on physical strength, militancy and heterosexuality, while destabilising it by demonstrating that it is in fact based on a lie. Mr M represents a stereotypical 'macho, ruling masculinity', which is celebrated in Zimbabwe, and in the text, he is the symbol of the state in all its glory. We are told that:

he had run away from school to join the war against colonial oppression [and] had distinguished himself on many occasions. [He] was [also] known to have been one of the fiercest commanders operating in the north of the country... [He had] a sense of peace and of dignity that ... was the product of him having seen too much suffering. (Huchu 109)

Here, Mr M displays all the characteristics of a militaristic heterosexual. He exudes strength and stateliness which one associates with a powerful, well respected man. However, as the novel unfolds, we see this strong man falling in love with Dumisani and performing a masculinity that goes against the one prescribed by the state. His relationship with Dumisani is clouded in secrecy because, in homophobic Zimbabwe, homosexuals are, in all respects, invisible.

In homophobic Zimbabwe, and to avoid criminalisation, gay people live obscure lives, homosexual by night and heterosexual by day. In the text, Dumisani and Mr M's meetings are clandestine to avoid arrest and humiliation. When Mr M arrives at the hairdresser to arrange a meeting

with Dumisani, his behaviour is different, and Vimbai notices that “when he enters the salon he appears “unsure of himself ... and [he has] left the engine of his car running [and keeps] glancing back at the car as if to comfort himself that he [can] make a quick getaway” (Huchu 134). Such behaviour demonstrates his anxiety at the likelihood of being recognised. Mr M pretends that his meeting with Dumisani is to arrange beauty treatments for his wife for her birthday, but the narrator notices that when they exchange phone numbers, their behaviour is odd. She observes:

The look they exchanged as they took each other’s cell-phone numbers seemed odd...and if I hadn’t known Dumi, it seemed a guilty one. Mr H had to repeat his twice as he seemed so nervous. Men nearly always felt uncomfortable in the very female atmosphere of a salon, but still, his demeanour struck me as a little bizarre – he had been, after all, an intrepid guerrilla fighter. (Huchu 135)

Vimbai’s observation is important in demonstrating the surreptitious nature of conducting such a relationship and the guilt and anxiety experienced by those involved. As gay men, Zimbabwe is not a space where Dumisani and Mr M can declare their feelings for each other openly; they have to behave covertly. What is also interesting is Vimbai’s reaction because it shows her reluctance to imagine that there is more to Dumisani and Mr M’s relationship. Instead, she falls back on a familiar script, that they are threatened by the feminine space of the hairdressing salon. Even when Dumisani gives the housekeeper a day off so that he can meet up with Mr M, and Vimbai walks in on the pair, she insists that Dumi is merely “[asserting] himself as the man of the house” and that the meeting is about Minister M’s birthday surprise” (Huchu 142). Vimbai’s reactions are in keeping with her understanding of heteronormative manhood, and in the text, her refusal to acknowledge that Dumisani is gay is symbolic of the general homophobic stance in Zimbabwe. Her worldview is clearly indicated when she reads his diary and discovers his sexual orientation. The well-ordered heteronormative world that she knows is destroyed. She cries out:

DUMISANI IS A HOMOSEXUAL – *Ngochani*. If it wasn’t written in his hand and before my eyes, I would have denied it. I could not have foreseen this. He spoke like a normal man,

wore clothes like a normal man and even walked like a normal man. Everything about him was masculine. Didn't homosexuals walk about with handbags and speak in squeaky voices?  
(166)

Vimbai's shock is emphasized in the text by the use of capitalisation and the italicization of the word *ngochani*, a Shona word for a gay person. This typographical sign registers Vimbai's alarm and shows that her discovery is beyond her understanding, because, as far as she is concerned, Dumisani behaves like a 'normal' man, in the way he speaks, dresses and walks. The stereotypical assumptions about sexuality are emphasised by the repetition of the word "normal" as if the writer wants the reader to ask themselves: What is a 'normal' man and how is normality defined? Vimbai does not ask herself these questions. Instead, she immediately turns against Dumisani. Her disgust is evident in the way she "scrunches[s] [her] nose when [she] pick[s] up the diary as if it [smells] of something putrid," an indication that, in her eyes, homosexuality is something dirty (Huchu 166). The fact that Dumisani and Mr M had met at her house makes her feel contaminated, and she comments on the day she found them:

The day I came home and found him and Mr M was the day they had consummated their unnatural passions in the bed that I had shared with Dumi. I rubbed my body feeling dirty and needing a long bath. Which one of them was the man and which one was the woman anyway.  
(166)

Vimbai's reaction represents the idea that homosexuals are dirty, diseased people, which echoes the speeches that President Mugabe has issued on the subject. In this instance, one can propose that Vimbai's character in the text serves two purposes; the first one as a focalizer through which the reader experiences the lives of Zimbabweans post 2000. Secondly, and most importantly, Vimbai is the voice of the nation, both in terms of ideology and in the overall Christian world view that is intolerant of same-sex desire. In the text, the moral standpoint on homosexuality is represented by the Church. When Vimbai and Dumisani attend a church service together, the priest blames homosexuals for all the problems in Zimbabwe and claims that the nation is being punished for moral

laxity and sexual deviancy. He warns the congregation that “perverts shall burn [because two men should not be together as] God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve [and in the same manner] a woman and a woman [cannot] make a baby” (Huchu 72). When one examines the afore-mentioned statement, it is possible to argue that it is homophobia and not homosexuality that is a Western import particularly if one takes into account conservative manifestations of Christianity. With regard to homophobia, research reveals that traditional Shona custom was tolerant of male homosexuality for as long as it remained private and that it was not viewed as immoral or evil. The concern was how it impacted on the patriarchal understandings of manhood which were premised on male sexuality being important for purposes of procreation (Shoko 639). However, as a Christian, Vimbai fails to understand why a boy like Dumisani, who has been brought up in a Christian family is gay. She echoes the beliefs of those who view sex between two men as “unnatural passion”, a perversion and Satanism introduced by white people (Huchu 166). She proclaims: “For as long as I can remember there’d been rumours of white tourists coming into the country and corrupting the youth, but I thought they preyed on street children and beggars” (Huchu 166; 167). Vimbai’s entire tirade against Dumisani, as shown above, is indicative of the beliefs about homosexuals within the Zimbabwean state, which are that homosexuality is unAfrican. Although she has known and liked Dumisani, his new identity as a gay man changes her attitude towards him and she starts to think of him as “Dumi the homo” (Huchu 168). In her eyes, Dumisani, whose only fault is loving another man, is worse than Philip, the man who has fathered her child through rape. Philip has behaved in a violent and abusive manner typical of the post 2000 hyper masculinity referred to earlier in this chapter. He has called her a “bitch [to whom he pays] money every month so that [she] can live in a nice house and wear fine clothes” (Huchu 41). He is a drunkard who feels entitled to Vimbai’s body at any time and yet she considers Philip’s behaviour more acceptable despite the fact that Dumisani’s only crime is that he is gay. Admittedly, Dumisani, with the help of his family, has deceived Vimbai and caused her a great deal of pain, however, his sexual preference has not caused her more harm than Philip, who has beaten and raped her. Vimbai appears to have forgotten that, in the past, Dumisani has been loving

and protective of her. She fails to recall the incident when they meet Philip at Dumisani's brother's wedding, and he insults Vimbai by declaring: "This is my whore, and you should all know it" (Huchu 97). When this happens, Dumisani punches Philip in defence of Vimbai. Despite this, Vimbai immediately alerts Minister M when she discovers Dumisani's clandestine relationship with the minister's husband, who then arranges for Dumisani to be assaulted.

Dumisani's beating is Huchu's way of representing the violence that gay men and women have experienced in Zimbabwe since President Mugabe declared that they are criminals. When Minister M is alerted of the relationship between her husband and Dumisani, her reaction is similar to Vimbai's. She refuses to face the possibility that her husband may be gay or bisexual and, instead, like the church minister, perceives this as a lack of morality that has caused the demise of the nation as a whole. She suggests that Mr M is merely bored and is experimenting with his sexuality as most men of his age do. She declares:

You see, men like my husband are funny creatures – when they reach a certain age they feel the need to revive the excitement they once had in their younger days...They begin to experiment, first with younger girls, then they work their way back to the top until they are screwing their own grandmothers, but they still can't get that excitement. So they do something radical, they become beast with their experimentation. That is why this country is in the mess it's in because of being run by stupid men. (Huchu 172)

Minister's M's explanation to her husband's affair as an experiment and as animalistic behaviour indicates her denial that he could be in that relationship purely for love. If she admits that her husband is gay, it would mean that her relationship with him is a lie, and this would go against her heteronormative understanding of masculinity and sexuality. On another level, it would embarrass the party because it would be difficult to explain how such a stalwart of the war of liberation is not a 'real' man. It would be impossible for the ruling masculinity to vilify homosexuality if one of their own is a homosexual. Minister M insists that the whole story be kept a secret, away from her many

enemies who might use her husband's misdemeanour against her. Dumisani becomes the scapegoat, and invariably, a victim of homophobic violence.

State violence is represented in this text by exposing the physical abuse that is carried out against homosexuals such as Dumisani. Minister M arranges for Dumisani to be "seriously beaten up [and he is] found in a ditch ... drifting in and out of consciousness" (Huchu 180). When Vimbai visits Dumisani at the hospital, she can barely recognise him because "his head is the size of a football and his face [is] puffed up so much his eyes [can] barely open" (181). This incident is indicative of the dangers minority sexualities live under in Zimbabwe and underlines the fact that homosexuals are not only stigmatised, they are perceived to be filth; disposable people that have no place in contemporary Zimbabwe. What is interesting about this particular violent incident is that it is perpetrated by a woman who exhibits her endorsement of a stereotypical violent ruling masculinity. One wonders if this can be attributed to her involvement in the armed struggle or to the mere fact that she is a powerful government official. Nevertheless, such a depiction is interesting because it places power in the hands of Minister M, a woman, which subverts and destabilises Mr M's position. Furthermore, the fact that a prominent person can misuse her position in this way is indicative of the anarchy in the Zimbabwean post colony and demonstrates Dumisani's vulnerability as a gay man living in post 2000 Zimbabwe. Dumisani has to flee to the United Kingdom, to a more tolerant society, which enables him to live openly and honestly. At the hospital Dumisani makes it known to everyone that he is gay and he apologises to Vimbai for his deception:

I should have been upfront with my true intentions for you. There were signals that I gave off about us which misled you. You see, for a long time I used to think of my gayness as a cancer for which I needed treatment. And then I met Colin, and he told me how wrong I was. Now I realise it is just something I was born with, and as long as Zimbabwe can't accept it, I'd better live somewhere else. (Huchu 184)

In this instance, the violent attack on Dumisani, although a negative act, works as a catalyst for his 'coming out' as a gay person. Before, Dumisani has only been able to live his sexuality through

writing, and his diary was the private space in which he was able articulate his feelings and to experience his homosexual self. Dumisani explains that he diarised his experiences with the “[hope] that someone like [Vimbai] would read it as an explanation of why things are the way they are” (Huchu 184). This also reveals the lack of a platform from which Dumisani can find comfort because there are no groups or associations that can support him in his struggle. Mr M’s emotional reaction to Dumisani’s beating helps the reader to imagine that, at some point in the history of Zimbabwe, same-sex love will be acceptable. This is because the tenderness and love he expresses for Dumisani whilst he is in hospital presents their affair, not as ‘deviant’ but as a manifestation of a deeper connection between two people. We are told that when Mr M hears about Dumisani’s harassment, he “[sobs] uncontrollably on the phone [and he visits him at the hospital with flowers] and tenderly plumps up [his] pillows to make him comfortable” (Huchu 183).

As the anti-gay voice in the novel, it is important to highlight the fact that towards the end Vimbai’s attitude about homosexuality has slightly changed. This enables this study to concur with Ncube who proposes that *The Hairdresser of Harare* can be read as a Bildungsroman because of the “gradual awakening of the narrator to the realities surrounding homosexuality because there is a noticeable shift in how Vimbai views the subject” (“The Festering Finger” 70). Vimbai’s change of attitude is a result of a conversation she has with her brother, Fungai, a down and out university drop out, whose time is spent on intellectual thought and philosophy. He explains that “the question of what the human body can be or may not be used for is one that is as old as time itself [and that] the illegality of homosexuality is the product of man-made laws” (Huchu 178). The fact that Fungai, who is another ‘deviant’ because he is poor and unemployed, a far cry from the accepted mode of masculinity such as the one Vimbai’s former boyfriend Philip exhibits, is an indication of the author giving voice to those deemed to be social misfits in post 2000 Zimbabwe. At the end of the novel Vimbai acknowledges Dumisani, not as a pervert, but as someone who has made her realise “that there are still some good men out there” (Huchu 189). What is important is that Vimbai recognises that Dumisani does not deserve to be arrested or beaten for being gay. Thus, the novel succeeds in

providing a space in which the societal construction of gender and identity can be interrogated. More importantly, it exposes the nature of the violent post-independence Zimbabwean state which has no tolerance for anyone who threatens the ideals of the current hegemonic masculinity. Homosexuals are constructed as friends of the West, together with members of opposition parties such as the MDC, and white farmers, an illustration that post 2000 citizenship is constructed on very restrictive terms. The question of belonging in connection with white Zimbabweans is the focus of the next chapter which analyses Retzlaff's memoir, *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* and Eppel's *Absent: The English Teacher*, two texts that narrate the post 2000 crisis from a white Zimbabwean perspective.

## Chapter Four

### **Land and Dispossession; *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* and *Absent: The English Teacher***

Mandy Retzlaff's *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* (2013) and John Eppel's *Absent: The English Teacher* (2009) narrate loss of identity and the reversal of roles when some white Zimbabweans forfeit their farms and property to their black counterparts. The texts represent the loss of white privilege, power and authority that most whites enjoyed prior to 2000; before the ZANU PF government stripped them of their homes and livelihoods. Retzlaff's memoir portrays the displacement of a white family when war veterans take ownership of their farm, and they are forced to move from place to place within Zimbabwe, and finally to Mozambique in search of a new home for themselves and their beloved horses. In Eppel's novel, a white English teacher is relieved of his duties at a prestigious private school for drunken behaviour and thereafter has to work as a domestic 'servant' for a black woman. This chapter considers the ways in which both texts represent white Zimbabweans' re-examination of identity and their engagement with issues of displacement and nationhood post 2000.

Retzlaff's *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* demonstrates the sense of loss of home and identity when war veterans violently remove white Zimbabweans from their farms. Therefore, this memoir is important in that it represents the impact of the Zimbabwean crisis from a white perspective and contributes to existing literary archives on the 'land question'. Similarly, Eppel's *Absent: The English Teacher* depicts the destabilisation of white identity when a white man loses his job, his home and his dignity and becomes a domestic servant for a black woman.

*One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* by Retzlaff falls into the category of a large corpus of white literature that has emerged from Zimbabwe articulating the hardships that have befallen white commercial farmers since the beginning of the land reform programme. The destabilisation of white farmers and their relegation to the position of ‘Other’ has inspired an extensive collection of poems, short stories, novels, autobiographies and memoirs — all narrating their dislocation, loss of home and community. The reflective nature of the memoir appears to be more popular with white Zimbabweans perhaps because it enables the author to be involved with the redefinition of post 2000 white identity. It is a space in which writers can express the personal and collective challenges they have faced since the land reform began. This study proposes that the memoir allows Retzlaff to contribute to the strategic relocation of white narratives in a Zimbabwe of the future. The repossession of white-owned commercial farms from 2000 has taken away the power from white Zimbabweans, and it is only through recording their experiences that they can situate themselves and be present in the unfolding of post 2000 Zimbabwean history.

White Zimbabwean writing about the crisis has attracted much publicity and controversy worldwide, and some scholars suggest that authors have constructed whites as victims, so as to sell their stories to a sympathetic European readership (Pilossof 152). In the analysis of Retzlaff’s memoir, the study draws on ethnographic work by American-born academic and writer, David McDermott Hughes and Zimbabwean born scholar Rory Pilossof, who both argue that the indifference that white Zimbabweans showed towards black people, and their focus solely on land ownership is the reason why they failed to foresee the land crisis which resulted in them losing their farms. Hughes and Pilossof claim that white farmers based their identity on their close connection to the land, nature and animals and that they refused to form meaningful relationships with black Zimbabweans. However, despite this standpoint, both Hughes and Pilossof acknowledge the pain and suffering that many white families endured since the beginning of the land reform programme. While the aforementioned views by the two ethnographers are convincing, white writing on the land question offers important insights into the crisis, particularly as it questions race as a prerequisite to

claims of post 2000 Zimbabwean citizenship. The argument in this chapter is that post 2000 white writing narrating the farm invasions is not restricted to the present crisis context but is steeped in pastoral romanticism and nostalgia. I propose that *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile*, demonstrates a longing for Rhodesian days when whites owned vast tracts of land and lived an idyllic life. The text reveals the author's adherence to "white myopia" the belief that land in Zimbabwe was empty and barren before the white settlers arrived and that white Zimbabweans have a right to land ownership because of their hard work (Pilossof 164). This text, like many that fall into this category, barely acknowledges the fact that the workforce on the farm was largely made up of black Zimbabweans, and when it does, the mention is perfunctory.

The controversial land redistribution programme which displaced many white farmers and their black workers has prompted several scholars to visit Zimbabwe to ascertain the extent to which white Zimbabweans have been affected by this programme. In *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problems of Belonging* (2010), Hughes, argues that white Zimbabweans are largely responsible for their own fate because of their negative attitude towards black people. Hughes maintains that most white settlers forged their identity by excluding indigenous people and laying claim to the environment. He names this process "the imaginative project of colonisation [which excluded blacks and] crafted an ideal of settler-as-nature-lover" (Hughes xiii). Hughes claims that, even soon after independence in 1980, many whites Zimbabweans were not really threatened by blacks, that in fact, they tried not to think of them. He refers to this approach as:

Other disregarding ... an attitude of neither hating blacks nor loving [them], but simply not cogitating a great deal upon them. [This way white Zimbabweans] gained [a] sense of belonging, negotiated with the land [whilst] circumventing the people. (Hughes xviii)

Hughes suggests that very few white Zimbabweans were interested in building personal relationships with black people and that they preferred to form a bond with the land. Although after independence some whites welcomed black people into their restaurants and clubs, very few learnt vernacular languages, such as Shona and Ndebele, and they certainly never visited the townships, where the

majority of black people still lived. If there were any genuine inter-racial friendships, very few writers mentioned them. Hughes maintains that black Zimbabweans found this attitude insulting, and this may have fuelled their anger towards white Zimbabweans which erupted later (xv). Nevertheless, Hughes believes that the land reform had some positive outcomes because white Zimbabweans who did not leave the country after 2000 ceased their romance with the environment and instead started working directly with black people (xv). Hughes' afore-mentioned theories are based on interviews with white farmers in Virginia, east of Harare and on analysis of creative writing published before and after land reform. Hughes' main argument about white farmers is that their focus towards land ownership was geared towards building a sense of belonging on which they could base their right to citizenship, without having to engage meaningfully with their black compatriots.

Hughes argues that the first white settlers did not only use military power to claim the land, but they had to find ways to convince themselves that they were right for the landscape. He states that writing about the places they inhabited is one of the ways they used to claim belonging. By "writing and in writing ... European whites ... forged [a] sense of belonging more enduring and resilient than empire" (Hughes 2). According to Hughes, only a few writers disapproved of the way white writers represented themselves, black people, the land and animals in their literature. Nadine Gordimer is one of the few anti-apartheid writers to criticise white attitudes to nature, and in her novel, *The Conservationist* (1972), Gordimer "draws attention to the danger in white imaginings of belonging" (Hughes 3). In the same vein, Breyten Breytenbach's writing suggests that "white Africans' obsession with landscape [slid] toward pathology" (Hughes 4). Clearly, Gordimer and Breytenbach were able to discern the myths of belonging inherent in white writing, but there were not many such writers. Hughes' analysis of written texts reveals that, on the whole, white narratives about Rhodesia and postcolonial Zimbabwe illustrate white identity as strongly predicated on ownership and romanticising of land and the exclusion of blacks.

Hughes examines several texts including Lauren St John's *Rainbow's End: A Memoir of Childhood, War and an African Farm* (2007); Peter Armstrong's *Operation Zimbabwe* (1979),

Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1972), and Alexander Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001). According to Hughes, all of the above texts demonstrate the fact that white settlers desired to live a life separated from black people. In her memoir, Lauren St John narrates that her family "[had] lived alongside [and] been in very close proximity to Africans all [their] [lives] and yet [they] led completely separate lives" (qtd in Hughes 5). From his analysis of this memoir, Hughes observes that the Fullers opted for "the constant peril of drought and disease [to avoid interacting with black people by choosing] the least healthy, most malarial, hot, disagreeable place in Zambia [because] it was far from the maddening crowd" (Fuller qtd in Hughes (11). In a nutshell, Hughes' argument is that the majority of white Rhodesian writers constructed their claim to property and their identity based on the "figure of an absent native" who did not deserve the land (7). European settlers perceived themselves to be the only ones capable of conserving the 'virgin' land, and if their texts featured any black characters, they shifted around perversely and impotently (Hughes 8). Hughes concludes that "literature simplified Africa, sealing its people into two airtight groups and then largely forgetting one of them" (Hughes 7). Similar sentiments are expressed by Pilosof in *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers' Voices from Zimbabwe* (2012) in which he claims that white farmers' representation of the crisis expresses particular myths which reveal how they shape their understanding of the events that took place from 2000.

Pilosof argues that the anti-white government discourse behind the farm invasions has attracted a lot of attention but the framing of debates over land distribution by farmers and their supporters has not. Because of this gap, Pilosof stresses the importance of examining white writing as it "provide[s] an insight into the understanding of place, race and belonging within Zimbabwe" (149). According to Pilosof, discourses around this crisis reveal white Rhodesian/Zimbabweans' ideologies, particularly the latent fears about black rule which were initially allayed by Mugabe's reconciliatory speech at independence. He further argues that these texts have become vehicles and cultural artefacts through which white farmers articulate their identity politics and represent their beliefs, history and place in Zimbabwe. Pilosof claims that much of the literature he reviewed

demonstrates the desire for a lost white community and communicates the same myths about the discovery of empty, virgin lands, absent ‘natives’ and hardworking white farmers. He asserts that these white narratives are largely silent about the contributions made by black farm workers (154). Pilosof observes that such myths can be located in earlier autobiographical works such as *My Life was a Ranch* (1976), in which the author, D M Somerville, who moved to Rhodesia in the 1920s, writes of ‘empty’ and ‘unmapped lands’ discovered by his family. Another white colonial writer, A E Bell, whose family moved to Rhodesia in the 1950s, also lays claim to ‘vacant and virgin’ land. Pilosof reiterates Hughes’ claims that such exclusionary narratives illustrate how white settlers imagined the natives away, and he maintains that such writing denies the indigenous black populations a voice. He explains that when black characters do appear in most of these texts, “they fit the model of pastoral paternalism, whereby they are completely subservient to the white man” (Pilosof 155). Somerville’s comments are particularly interesting because they demonstrate Pilosof’s claim, acknowledges that “the African native was an indispensable factor, without [whom they] could not have made the ranch” his observation that as the years went by, the African native “changed from a primitive man to a much more civilised being, with civilised wants and customs” shows his racist views (qtd in Pilosof 155). Clearly one cannot miss Somerville’s belief that the African was in need of improvement and that his thinking resonates with the notion that black workers would not have been as competent without the training they received from their white employers and that on their own they were incapable. This ideology comes through in Pilosof’s textual analysis.

In *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers’ Voices from Zimbabwe* Pilosof examines several texts including *African Tears* (2001) and *Beyond Tears* (2002) by Catherine Buckle; *Foreshadowed is my Forest* (2005) by Eric Harrison, *Paradise Plundered* (2007) by Jim Barker and *Tengwe Garden Club* (2008) by Rothrock Beatties. He argues that these memoirs share “a remarkable overlap of ideology and justification” that makes it possible to categorise them as Zimbabwean pastoral ‘white writing’ (152). Pilosof echoes renowned scholar and writer, J M Coetzee’s sentiments regarding white South African writing, which he perceives to be applicable to the Zimbabwean

context. Coetzee has claimed that white African writing targets European rather than African audiences and that it “is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African, but who nonetheless train their gaze to fit European or western epistemological frameworks” (qtd in Pilosof 152). With Coetzee’s thesis regarding white writing in mind, Pilosof suggests that the above-mentioned texts by post-colonial white Zimbabwean writers who have lost their farms gives a voice to the white farmers, many of whom feel that the true events surrounding the farm invasions have been misrepresented. Catherine Buckle, one of the first writers to document the farm invasions, states that she wrote *African Tears* “to tell of events on the other side of the farm fence [in order] to let Zimbabwe and the world know what really happened” (qtd in Pilosof 157). According to Pilosof, such narratives are important because they compete with ZANU-PF’s nationalist discourse which has constructed white people as non-citizens. Pilosof believes that these autobiographies and memoirs are a direct attempt to oppose the government and to prove that whites have a natural right to Zimbabwean citizenship owing to their bonds to the land. According to Pilosof, these stories are not only targeted at external audiences, but they also allow the white farming community, regardless of their location, to represent themselves from within Zimbabwe and to reveal the injustices they have suffered as a hard-working community. He states that these writers have taken the role of documenting the traumas suffered by the white community and they “[propagate] the group’s message and identity to those on the outside, as well as distilling information from the outside world to inform and shape the group’s belief and ideologies” (Pilosof 158). One of the most important insights he offers is that the fast track land redistribution programme was politically motivated as suggested by Buckle.

In her memoir, Buckle states that the land reform programme was “nothing but the desperate [move] of a frantic dictator who has lost all popular support” (qtd in Pilosof 160). Ultimately all the texts Pilosof reviews are unflinching in their critique of the land reform and the seizure of farms and homes and reveal the vehement defence of white ownership and control of land. Pilosof observes that, to some extent, Buckle is the only writer who admits that farmers have to bear some of the

responsibility for the land crisis because of their complacency; that even though the government notified them in 1997 about the possibility of compulsory land acquisition, none of them responded. Instead they “made a lot of noise, offered alternatives and suggestions, but left it up to someone else to sort out” (Buckle qtd in Pilosof 161). Pilosof argues that, although Buckle demonstrates some insight, she does not consider that there are some people who genuinely supported the land reform programme. Instead, she represents all black farm workers as opposed to it and depicts them as “gullible fools swayed by Mugabe’s rhetoric, or [as] rent-a-crowd youths with no genuine interest in land or farming” (Pilosof 162). Generally, Buckle, Wiles and Harrison emphasise how hard they worked on “barren, untamed, uninhabited, and otherwise useless or unused bush” (Pilosof 162). But, and in spite of these revelations, Pilosof admits that, undeniably, some white farmers worked hard, but it must be acknowledged that they did so together with their black workforce and with the help of government subsidies and bank loans. Pilosof’s claims can be supported by Amanda Hammer and Brian Raftopoulos who document that, at independence 15.5 million hectares of land, which is thirty-nine percent of the land, was owned by over six thousand white commercial farmers whilst eight thousand five hundred black small scale farmers occupied only 1.4 million hectares, a mere four percent of the land (*Displacement Economies* 2). According to Pilosof, the unequal distribution of land was evident in colonial Rhodesia, but even after independence this obvious privilege is not acknowledged in the texts that he examines. None of them admit that white people in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe generally owned the best agricultural land and that most blacks were to be found in the reserves. The above literature review, by Hughes and Pilosof, is useful when analysing Retzlaff’s memoir and her representation of the farm invasions which reiterates some myths about virgin land, absent ‘natives’ and silences regarding the ownership of land and the participation of black workers.

Mandy Retzlaff’s memoir explores the impact of the land reform programme and documents the displacement of her family, friends and neighbouring white commercial farmers when their land and homes are re-claimed by ‘war veterans’. As her chosen genre, the memoir enables Retzlaff to narrate her personal experiences of the violent and traumatic re-appropriation of farms. It also places

her as a voice that speaks on behalf of the white farming community, exposing their predicament to the world. The writing of these events provides a space in which Retzlaff attempts to make sense of the historical changes in Zimbabwe because the memoir as a genre provides writers with the “opportunity to undertake a strategic repositioning in a Southern Africa of the future” (Da Silva 472). Therefore, it can be posited that, for a white Zimbabwean, narrating the land crises is a way of redefining white identity and acknowledging the radical change in the racial dynamics in Zimbabwe. Most importantly, by discussing the politics of land ownership, Retzlaff speaks against the ‘Third Chimurenga’ narrative that places white Zimbabweans as ‘enemies of the state’ and people who do not belong to the country by virtue of their white skin.

In *One hundred and Four horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile*, Retzlaff narrates the violent removal of her family from a farm on which they have lived for over ten years. In 1991 Mandy and Pat Retzlaff purchase Crofton farm with the hope of living there for the rest of their lives and creating a legacy for their children, Paul, Jay and Kate. A decade later the farm is reclaimed by ‘war veterans,’ and when this happens they move from place to place, sometimes living with friends, whilst attempting to find another home for themselves and their horses. Their first move is to Palmerston Farm, then Braeside Farm, then to the city where they share a townhouse with other displaced farmers, then to Biri Farm, and then finally to Mozambique. As many farms fall into the hands of the ‘war vets’ and white farmers leave the country, Paul and Mandy Retzlaff rescue some of the horses that are left behind and are soon known as the “the *horse people*” (Retzlaff 95 italics original).

Biri Farm is the last farm where the Retzlaffs attempt to reconstruct their lives with the hope that they can still remain in Zimbabwe. They relocate to this farm with one hundred and four horses — which lend the memoir its title —; a mix of their own horses and many left behind by friends who have left for countries such as South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand. But after two years at Biri Farm it becomes clear that they will have to leave Zimbabwe. One day a war veteran hands them a letter which states that they have “only four hours to leave [and if they] dare remain, [they

will] lose everything; [their] horses ...worldly possessions, even [their] lives” (Retzlaff 1). The Retzlaffs drive their horses through the border to Mozambique but their relocation presents them with many challenges such as the loss of many of their beloved horses through theft and disease. When Mandy Retzlaff visits her farm in Zimbabwe with her son in 2012 she is sad to find it in ruins. She observes that most of the farms repossessed by the government have fallen into disuse, that the agricultural sector has ground to a halt and many Zimbabweans face hunger on a daily basis. Most of all, there is a realisation that she will never be able to call Zimbabwe home. Clearly, in her narration of their family’s dislocation as a result of the fast-track land distribution programme, Retzlaff bemoans the loss of home, belonging and identity. Her narrative shows her attempt to make sense of the loss of citizenship experienced by white farmers who perceived Zimbabwe as their home.

One of the main challenges that white Zimbabweans face post 2000 is the legitimacy of their citizenship. Once the land distribution is initiated, nationhood in Zimbabwe is constructed in very restrictive terms. Race, ethnicity and some connection to a rural space defines who belongs to the country (Thompson 2). Retzlaff’s representation of the farm invasions is particularly interesting because of her position as an outsider/insider. Although this suggests that she would be objective in her understanding of the history of Zimbabwe, and the place of white people in the country, the narrative reveals that, as soon as she arrives, Retzlaff wholeheartedly adopts, not only Rhodesian identity, but also the ideology.

Retzlaff was born in Ghana and spent much of her childhood in South Africa. She moves to Rhodesia at the age of twenty-three when she marries Paul, a Rhodesian studying at Rhodes University. Retzlaff arrives in Rhodesia at the height of the civil war and, at her wedding, she observes that her guests are armed with guns and are constantly on the lookout for “terrs”, the word used by Rhodesians to refer to black freedom fighters (Retzlaff 20). Retzlaff’s desire to immediately identify herself as Rhodesian is evident in her tone:

My mind whirred, seeing these men who watched the horizons with such steely eyes throwing back champagne and roaring with laughter. There was something about Rhodesians, I decided,

that made them look at joy and disaster with the same eyes... I found it exhilarating, I found it absurd, I found it frightening and life-affirming all at once. In the years to come, I would know this feeling by one simple word: *Rhodesian*. (Retzlaff 20; italics original)

From Retzlaff's portrayal of Rhodesians, one senses her admiration for their bravery and resilience and their determination to hold on to life. Her memoir demonstrates how she embraces the idea that 'Rhodesians never die' and shows how, together with her husband, they build their Rhodesian, and later, Zimbabwean identity on the close relationship they have with the land. Later, at independence, Retzlaff shows herself to be completely reluctant to identify herself as Zimbabwean. She says: "Pat belonged in Rhodesia. And since Rhodesia was no more, Zimbabwe would have to do. So Zimbabwean we were and Zimbabwean we would stay" (22). The decision not to leave Zimbabwe is clearly a compromise based on the love her husband has for the land.

The idea that white writing on the land crisis reiterates certain colonial myths, one of them being that white settlers arrived in Rhodesia to find virgin land devoid of any human life, is echoed in Retzlaff's memoir. Retzlaff's observation when they first arrive at Crofton Farm is that it is "a place that [is] wild and filled with game [a] rugged, virgin bush [and despite] its wildness, [it is] a place where [they] might test [themselves] like the first African pioneers ... a place [they] could shape and leave for [their] children (9-26). According to Retzlaff, Crofton Farm is "a place to put down our roots, a place to live a good life and never leave ... It [is] scrubby [and] untamed" (23). Clearly, Retzlaff's sentiments confirm Hughes and Pilosof's contention that white farmers imagine black people away; that their focus is on the land and what it can do for them. She portrays herself and her husband as discoverers of empty, virgin land. Her reference to Crofton Farm as 'their land' and not 'their farm' accentuates their need to claim this space and to plant their roots. Her words express a strong desire for permanency and the forging of a relationship with the land that cannot be severed.

According to Hughes and Pilosof, one of the myths propagated by white farmers to justify their land ownership is that the farms they bought were on land that was extremely difficult to farm. Retzlaff's memoir expresses similar claims. She asserts that on arrival at Crofton Farm they soon realised

that the land was “rugged, scrubby [and] the soil was fertile yet difficult to handle... the kind of land that was impossible to cultivate without heavy machinery and careful management (25). Retzlaff’s description of the environment as challenging and her recollection that they worked hard and applied expertise to make it productive echoes Pilossof’s observation that white farmers in Zimbabwe emphasise the hard work they put into the land in order to justify ownership of it. Pilossof argues that white writing depicting the forfeiture of farms reveals a need to “demonstra[te] how tirelessly white farmers worked to create their own success, most commonly claiming that this was effected from barren, untamed, uninhabited, and otherwise useless or unused bush” (Retzlaff 162). Pilossof refers to *Jambanja* (2006) in which the author, Richard Wiles claims that when he bought his farm in 1963, it was small and had little arable land and sixteen years later “by working hard to make a living we managed enough” to make it productive (qtd in Pilossof 162). In turn, Buckle states that Stow Farm was “located on poor, rocky soil and not suitable for cropping” (qtd in Pilossof 162). One can deduce that Retzlaff’s notion of their own hard work mirrors that of Wiles and Buckle. Similarities can be further found in the way Retzlaff is mostly silent about the extent to which the black farm workers contributed to the establishment and maintenance of Crofton Farm and Biri Farm.

One of Hughes’ main arguments regarding the literary representation of the land invasion is that it reveals a return to colonial discourses and illustrates how whites have “imagined the native away” so as to lay claim to indigenous land (Hughes xii). Thus, the idea of belonging, according to Hughes, is found within the white imaginary. The pertinence of Hughes’ analytical comments becomes evident in Retzlaff’s memoir because she adheres to the ‘virgin lands’ ideology. In her text, Retzlaff narrates that when they arrive at Crofton farm for the first time, she notices that for “decades [there had been] no crops and the land had not been cultivated [and only] had cattle [that] roamed from river to river” (26). Retzlaff’s words imply that the area in which they bought Crofton Farm was uninhabited, but this is unlikely because of the presence of cattle. The likelihood is that there were black subsistence farmers living in this area and involved in livestock rearing. Whatever the facts, Retzlaff’s representation demonstrates that she chooses to “imagine away” the likelihood of indigenous people’s presence by

abiding by the colonial narrative of the “absent native”. This demonstrates Hughes’ theory of “Other disregarding” and brings to mind Kizito Muchemwa’s caution that history and memory are important in the construction of people’s identities. Muchemwa argues that

texts [can] demonstrate how history and memory can be used to maintain racial, ethnic and gender privilege. This misuse is marked by either destroying or hiding sites of memory, denying the other the right to speak for [themselves], adopting strategies of false representation and illegitimate mediation and ‘disappearing’ the other. (196)

Muchemwa’s claims are true in Retzlaff’s case because her narration is exclusionary and legitimates her claims to land in the same way the ZANU PF government has rendered white people as aliens. Her memoir confirms the idea that, for the white Zimbabwean to live the pastoral ideal, they had to imagine it first as empty and secondly as bereft of any other human presence. In her memoir, Retzlaff narrates how her husband Pat and their friend Charl would sit “long into the nights, reminiscing and dreaming of things they could do with this land...I began to see how our life at Crofton was the natural conclusion. He and Charl would ride the boundaries and talk about which corners of bush might be conquered next” (45). In this case, it helps the Retzlaff’s claim if they *imagine* that they are indeed, the first people on this piece of land. Unfortunately, separating themselves physically and mentally later causes problems. Instead of acknowledging the disparities of land ownership in Zimbabwe and trying to do something about it, they focus on their land. This is to their detriment when the referendum, which is meant to put into place the new bill that will designate white farms for occupation, is effected by government and they are not even aware of it. Retzlaff admits that most white farmers simply chose not to pay attention. She admits that not

properly [recognising] the importance of the ... referendum would one day come to sadden us. We were really living separately out here in the corner of Africa we had pioneered for ourselves. The referendum was a thing that was happening somewhere *out there*. There were problems enough at Crofton to dominate the day. (51 emphasis added)

Retzlaff's words illustrate how the land and their life was more important than anything happening elsewhere such that they only realised just before they lost their farm how injurious this had been. Clearly this attitude shows how they resisted engaging with any other matter because this would intrude on their idyllic existence. They had constructed their own *unreal-reality* even though

questions of government and land reform had simmered, just below the surface ever since the bush war ended in 1980 [and] they had spent [their] entire married lives with those unanswered questions lying in wait just like crocodiles down in the river [lurking] with reptilian eyes. (Retzlaff 54)

Retzlaff's romantic idea about the land shifts from Zimbabwe to Mozambique. When they finally decide to leave, she begins to fantasize:

My eyes drifted to the mountains, and thought of the lush country of Mozambique sitting beyond ... We would look down the valleys of Mozambique, those untouched lands, and it would suddenly be very real: after years of struggling, we were fleeing Zimbabwe. (176)

The above words demonstrate Retzlaff's insistence on the myth of uninhabited virgin land. Nevertheless, her text expresses the suffering of her immediate family and that of friends and fellow white commercial farmers who are brutally attacked and chased off their farms by war veterans. The inclusion of other people's narratives situates Retzlaff as the voice that speaks on behalf of the collective of white farmers. It is, therefore, important to examine closely how she constructs the confrontations that take place between the white farmers and ZANU PF's war veterans. I suggest that although Retzlaff's narration could be said to be somewhat Conradian, in that she paints a very dark and sinister picture of events, she is successful in portraying the brutal violence inflicted on white farmers and their families. The reader is able to imagine the events of post 2000 because Retzlaff describes the war veterans very vividly as "strangers in the bush ... men with *pangas* [who are] often drunk, seemingly stoned, raising fists and chanting" (59). Such a depiction presents war veterans as heartless criminals and not indigenous Zimbabweans who, for decades, have been deprived of their

land. Furthermore, Retzlaff highlights their cruelty by describing the gratuitous killing of farm animals. At Two Tree Farm, they shoot the family dog, Boerbol and leave it “spread-eagled, on the dirt, its life pumping out of the wound on its side” (68). She describes “pictures of farm dogs shot to pieces and beaten with sticks; horses who had been doused with gasoline and put to the torch; cattle and other livestock hamstrung, speared and axed” (Retzlaff 71). Their own cat has been shot and left there as a “mangled mess” (74). Retzlaff is exasperated that the “farm horses [are] not being butchered for meat, the fate of so much livestock in the land invasions, but only for sport, to incite and inspire hate and fear in the farmers” (75). Such a detailed narration by Retzlaff highlights the cruel and senseless killing of helpless animals and evokes feelings of sympathy for the white farming community. Interestingly, compassion for black farm workers is not solicited because Retzlaff does not include their experiences in her narrative. We are aware that she had quite a large workforce, and yet there is a deafening silence when it comes to black farm workers’ lived-experience of the farm invasions. All she narrates in relation to how they react to the violence by the war veterans is that “two of [her] domestic workers stood, heads bowed... not meeting her eyes” (74). This confirms Pilosof and Hughes’ idea that white narratives construct blacks as apathetic. Her observation presents her employees as docile, almost suspect, as if they are complicit in the violence around them, but she does not pursue this insinuation further. According Andrew Hartnack, black farm workers have become the “forgotten people” although research shows that over fifty percent have been displaced because of the land reform programme (173-174). He argues that black farm workers have been left somewhere in the middle, with regard to the discourse about land, and he attributes this to the fact that most of them are viewed as aliens, because they are descendants of people from Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia; and during the land invasions they are also viewed as people who do not belong in Zimbabwe and should go back home.

The idea of home and belonging is the main theme in most of the white writing published after 2000. On the whole, literature from Zimbabwe reveals that the crisis has affected all citizens, irrespective of race and ethnicity and made them re-examine their identity. Thabisani Ndlovu

comments that “Zimbabweans both inside and outside the country think about their Zimbabweanness” (100). Therefore, when the war veterans start appearing at Crofton Farm, Retzlaff realises that “home had always been a place of safety for [their] children, a place to come and hide away from the world, but now it was beginning to feel as if they were better off staying far away” (59). Her words reveal the vulnerability of home as a space which is meant to protect and nurture a family, especially when war veterans descend on Crofton Farm, take it over and they destroy all their memories. She laments:

This was not a home. All that was left of Crofton were the walls ...everything else had been torn, ruined, ransacked, and stolen... every photo, every keepsake, every piece of our lives had been taken. (73-74)

In a nutshell, the examination of the farm invasions as represented by Retzlaff reveal that it is part of the “representative cultural history that is connected to and shared within the farming community” because it portrays the myth and ideology about absent natives and empty lands (Chennels 132 qtd in Pilosof 178). In her narration, Retzlaff exhibits a desire to return to the golden age of Rhodesia. The displacement from their farms engenders a huge crisis of identity because their wealth, which is attached to land ownership has vanished. Without land under their feet, Mandy and Paul Retzlaff are completely dislocated from Zimbabwe.

Although white narratives that represent post 2000 Zimbabwe are quite substantial, most appear to focus on land and very few address other aspects of living as a white Zimbabwean after the state declares whites as enemies. It would be interesting to read about some of the experiences of white Zimbabweans who opted to stay. One of the few texts that has attempted to explore these experiences is Eppel’s *Absent: The English Teacher* (2009). In this political satire, the author explores what it is to be a white man who has lost power and authority in post 2000 Zimbabwe. *Absent: The English Teacher* is a tragi-comic satire which pokes fun at the failures of the Zimbabwean post-independence state whilst exposing its dystopian nature. Set in Bulawayo in 2008, the story is narrated by George J George, an elderly white man, who is expelled from his job as an English teacher

for supposedly replacing President Robert Mugabe's portrait with one of Ian Douglas Smith; the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia. This incident takes place shortly before a government official's visit to the school. Soon after, George has a car accident and a Mercedes Benz which belongs to Beauticious Nyamayakanuna, the mistress of a government minister, is damaged. Because George cannot afford the repairs, he agrees to settle, "quite amicably, out of court [and keeps] what is left of his Ford, [whilst] Beauticious [gets] everything else, including George's labour – for the rest of his life" (Eppel 28). Within forty-eight hours, George is firmly ensconced in the 'servants' quarters of his former home, having been allowed to take only his clothes and toothbrush. For Beauticious, her new position as George's employer invokes traumatic memories from her childhood, when her parents worked as domestic workers for a white family in colonial Rhodesia. Her father had been a "cookboy, and her mother, a housegirl" and Beauticious, lived with them in the 'domestic servants' quarters where she witnessed them suffer the hardships of subordination (Eppel 30). Therefore, presiding over George, a white male, presents Beauticious with an opportunity for revenge, and she unleashes her racial hatred, treating George like a slave and demanding his services round the clock, whilst paying him a pittance. Affected by old age, poverty and a cancerous growth in his body, George faces a bleak and unstable future.

In the analysis of this text, the study argues that Eppel utilises satire as a mode of representation to offer a way of examining the ways in which the Zimbabwean state's policies influence the everyday lives of its citizens. Through role-reversal and stereotype, Eppel enacts a parody of the colonial master-slave relationship in order to present the reader with insight into the social and economic imbalances in pre and postcolonial Zimbabwe. In *Absent: The English Teacher*, race is treated in a contradictory manner in that the "elevated [white] subject [is] debased, and the lowly [black] subject [is] elevated" (Kreuz and Roberts 104). The subversion enables the reader to reflect on the subordination of black people by white people and the ways in which the black elite have adopted colonial logics of power. The study argues that in this text, the author shows the postcolonial state's uncanny resemblance to colonial Rhodesia. It also proposes that satire has its

limitation in that its comic element, to some extent, undermines the seriousness of the issues that the author wishes to address.

In *Absent: The English Teacher* Beauticious's position as George's madam gives her an opportunity to revisit her childhood and her meanness towards George can be said to be a desire to avenge past injustice. Beauticious's cruelty to George demonstrates Fanon's claim that:

the colonised man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive 'They want to take our place'. It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. (30)

Fanon's statement here is a useful tool in the analysis of Beauticious and George's master-servant relationship. By taking ownership of George's house and life, Beauticious occupies the space formerly inhabited by the coloniser, as intimated by Fanon.

*Absent: The English Teacher*, like Chikwava's *Harare North*, is narrated by an unusual character, an old white man living on the margins of Zimbabwean society. George is poor; his pension is worth, "two jam doughnuts and a soft tomato" after forty years of working as a teacher (Eppel 28). His displacement and sadness are conveyed to the reader through his satirical narrative tone which, while humorous, reveals his desperation, and that of many Zimbabweans living in poverty. Through humour and irony, the novel counteracts ZANU PF's post-independence exclusionary, nationalist discourse and demonstrates the 'culture of laughter' that has emerged amongst Zimbabweans as a way of downplaying (through mockery) the socio-political upheaval in their country. Laughter, as suggested by Gregor Benton, flourishes under tyrannical conditions and can be used as "a device for coping with unpleasantness, uncertainty or boredom in life by way of distancing ourselves from such feelings for a while" (qtd in Musangi 132). Hence, the proliferation of jokes, from and about Zimbabwe, is not surprising as history suggests that subjects of societies under severe political control often adopt humour to cope with repression. In "Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism" (2007), Christie Davies proposes that a large corpus of jokes poking fun at rulers and the state comes

from the former Soviet Union and the communist countries of eastern Europe (291). With regard to Zimbabweans and humour, the internet has facilitated the quick dissemination of news between those at home and in the diaspora, and this has made it easy for people to ridicule the ruling elite, ordinary folk and the chaotic state of the country. However, the nature of the Zimbabwean undemocratic state has made it necessary to try and avoid the law by using euphemisms and metaphors in place of “direct words, which [may be] regarded as politically sensitive, disrespectful and offensive to the ruling party and its leadership” (Kadenge 143). In “A Zimbabwean joke is no laughing matter: E-humour and versions of subversion” (2012), Jennifer Musangi explores the extensive production of internet humour by examining a site that was set up, anonymously, to target President Robert Mugabe. She demonstrates how humour is used to challenge autocratic regimes and suggests that Mugabe is a suitable target because “as the president of a failed state he is the most appropriate symbol or signifier of the Zimbabwean crisis” (173). The site, [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za), which is no longer available, was used by Zimbabweans to criticise the current leadership by running a regular commentary on Mugabe and publishing images of his body in various disfigured forms (Musangi 162). Musangi gives an example of a photo-shopped image showing Mugabe parading with a fellow gay man at the Brooklyn Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Pride March. Such an image is meant to comment mockingly on Mugabe’s vilification of homosexuality in Zimbabwe (172).

Benton, Davies and Musangi’s arguments show the effectiveness of jokes as a means of criticising the state without direct provocation. As writers all over the world are currently under the spotlight for their subversive views, some have come up with different methods to avoid censorship. Eppel admits that he uses satire to ‘hide’ from the authorities because he is “afraid of reprisal [as] he has put things into print that other people have been severely punished for” (Shaw “Narrating” 108). Eppel’s fears are genuine because, in recent years, a notable number of Zimbabweans who oppose the government have had to leave the country to save their lives. Renowned author, poet and critic of the ZANU PF regime, Chenjerai Hove, who died in Norway on 12 July 2015, was forced to flee

the country in 2001 because he was being “tormented and haunted by men and women in dark glasses day and night” (“Nehanda Radio np”).<sup>4</sup>

In his representation of the post 2000 crisis, Eppel does not advocate for a particular group or discourse, but rather exposes pre and post-colonial social inequalities informed by race, class and gender divides. This demonstrates Ralph Goodman’s argument that “satire does not, in general, operate from a specific moral or political agenda [but criticises] any party, group or class” (66). In his text, Eppel targets both white and black Zimbabweans, Rhodesian society under Ian Smith and Zimbabwean society under Robert Mugabe. Characters that represent government ministers, the police and civil servants, are portrayed as cartoon-like figures whose behaviour reveals Eppel’s contempt for all organs of the state. Eppel exposes the shocking greed of people in power who flaunt their wealth with disdain and also highlights the exploitative nature of some Non-Governmental Organisations for the damage they have “unwittingly” done to the fabric of Zimbabwean Society (Shaw “Narrating” 107). His novel reveals that the problems in Zimbabwe cannot be attributed only to autocracy, but include colonial legacies and exploitation by Western developmental agencies. In his conversation with Shaw, Eppel claims that the presence of Non-Governmental Organisations in Zimbabwe is not beneficial because only a few have been useful and that “the general consensus seems to be that 70% of all the aid money goes into expenses incurred by the NGOs themselves, [for the purchasing of] Toyota 4x4 double-cabs [and the organising of] futile workshops” (107). In the novel, we note George’s sarcastic comment that developmental agencies have been “part of NGOs from the so-called First World who, ever since Independence in 1980, had been breaking with salty promise on the landlocked shores of Zimbabwe” (Eppel 39). In his review of *Absent: The English Teacher*, Michiel Heyns endorses Eppel’s use of satire because “satire ... deals in bold outlines and flat surfaces rather than subtly rounded portrayal, and in depicting modern-day Zimbabwe, Eppel employs the bludgeon rather than the rapier” (*Sunday Independent* 20/07/2009). Heyns’ words

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<sup>4</sup> Nehanda Radio, which is named after Mbuya Nehanda, the spirit medium who fought the first Chimurenga in 1986/97, is an internet-based radio station that provides day to day news about the crisis in Zimbabwe.

describe Eppel's brutal critique of the Mugabe regime and his courage in targeting whoever he deems responsible for the crisis in Zimbabwe. The text reveals the poor working conditions and meagre salaries that have prompted professionals, such as teachers and doctors, to leave the country or find other means of subsidising their income.

When Beauticious interacts with her workers, George and Joseph, the gardener, she adopts the mannerism of a stereotypical Rhodesian white woman. She is demanding, mean, abusive, and she emasculates both men by referring to them as 'boys.' In turn, George's subservient demeanour overtly mimics the behaviour of a stereotypical black servant. The fact that Beauticious and George imitate stereotypes of whiteness and blackness demonstrates that race is a performance; for if whiteness and blackness can be imitated it reveals the slipperiness of race as a signifier of identity. This study is in agreement with Curthbert Tagwirei and Leon de Kock's analysis of Beauticious's behaviour in "Whitelier than white? Inversions of the racial gaze in White Zimbabwean Writing" (2015). Tagwirei and de Kock read Beauticious' ill-treatment of George as an imitation of "whiteness [a term that refers to] attributes and practices normally associated with white behaviour, suggesting the possibility that these [characteristics] may be possessed by blacks as much as by whites" (10). They elaborate that superiority is one of the main characteristics associated with "whiteness" and they suggest that it differs from "whiteness" because it does not take into account the colour of one's skin, but is rather a behaviour which one assumes when one acquires cultural capital. Their argument is based on the transformation of the meaning of the word "*murungu*" in contemporary Zimbabwe, the Shona term which means "white person" but has come to mean anyone "who is financially liable at any given time" (Tagwirei and de Kock 10). Brian Chikwava advances the same argument in his short story "Zesa Moto Muzhinji" (2005), which foregrounds the misadventures of Ngoni, a gardener who works for a black couple residing in the suburbs of Harare. Riding in a combi on his way home from work, Ngoni is surprised to hear the conductor addressing the driver as "*murungu wangu*", which means, "my white person or employer" even though they are both black (Chikwava "Zesa Moto Muzhinji" 48). The fact that the driver employs the conductor and

pays his salary, qualifies him to be a “*murungu*”. Hence, Beauticious, who has a big house in a former white suburb, cars and servants, has the space and the means to perform “whiteness”. By virtue of her material wealth, she is white and can, therefore, display white mannerisms to signify her superior position. Firstly, she has to make certain that George looks like a servant and not a teacher, so she strips him of his “powder blue safari-suits of his school-teaching days [and makes him wear] khaki shirt ... shorts [and] white tackies” (Eppel 46). She is also quite happy to see him walk barefoot because walking barefoot is a sign of poverty in her view, a position which she is happy to see George occupying. Like a stereotypical white mistress, she commands George to deliver coffee to her door at six in the morning, daily, a ritual which requires that he “place the tray on the carpet outside [her] bedroom door, knock gently and say, “Coffee Madam!” Then ... tiptoe back to the kitchen to start preparing breakfast” for the family (Eppel 45). In turn, George assumes what Chikwava terms “the body language of servitude” in his description of Ngoni in the afore-cited short story (“Zesa Moto Muzhinji” 42). After delivering tea to his mistress, Ngoni “[backs] out of the lounge wringing his hands and taking extra care not to knock anything over” (50). For a white man who has never been a servant before, George has become adept at performing servitude like Ngoni in Chikwava’s story, who, when he sees his mistress, Mrs Moyo, “immediately takes off his cap, and fold[s] quickly like a deckchair, into a servile crouch, his hands clasped in respect” (“Zesa Moto Muzhinji” 41). When Beauticious wishes to communicate with George she speaks to him in fanakalo or chilapalapa, a ‘kitchen kaffir’ dialect which was used by white settlers in Southern Africa to communicate with their black servants. In the context of Zimbabwe, this pidgin, which was a mixture of foreign and vernacular languages, was limited to domestic work spaces. It facilitated communication between employers who were not conversant with vernacular languages and their uneducated black employees, most of whom were migrants from other parts of Africa. Beauticious goes back in time, adopts white ways and treats George in the way she was treated by her parents’ bosses. In the text, we are told that Beauticious talks to George “for the most part in what the Rhodesians called ‘Kitchen

Kaffir' or 'Fanakalo' or 'Chilapalapa',” because that is how she remembered being talked to by white people when she was a little girl. Her parents' employers would call out to her:

“Hey, picannin, haikona bulala lo ma flowers gatina! Haikona this, kaihona that”. (Eppel 30)

In standard English this reads:

“Hey you small child, don't kill my flowers in the garden. Don't do this don't do that”.

Beauticious remembers these times and makes a point to speak to George in the same way. After fainting one day whilst serving breakfast George wakes up to Beauticious shouting at him in fanakalo:

“Fokkin sheet! Wena bataal zonke lo indaba lapa mathings ka mina! Iswili1 I said ISWILI!”

“Yes, Madam. Ngiyaxolisa.”

“Don't you dare speak to me in the vernacular, boy! Cheeky so and so”. (Eppel 116)

When translated into standard English the words read as follows:

“Fucking shit! You will pay for all my things! Do you hear! I said do you hear!

“Yes, Madam, I am sorry.”

When Beauticious speaks Chilapalapa, she mimics the colonial master and that way she puts George in his place. 'Othering' George stops him from crossing the boundaries she has proclaimed for herself as his 'madam' and reminds him of his subordinate position. However, George's response too is interesting because, despite being a first language English speaker, he apologises in Ndebele. One can argue that George's use of Ndebele is his refusal to endorse Beauticious' superior position as his employer. Tagwirei and de Kock suggest that George's use of Ndebele is his attempt to “endear himself to the community that has alienated him, only to find himself alienated further” (12). To a large extent, this is applicable, however, in this particular instance, I argue that George is deconstructing and ridiculing Beauticious' mimicry of whiteness. This argument is based on the analysis of the narrative tone which appears to suggest George's silent contempt for his mistress. We are told that “he [is] fond of [her] children [but is] perplexed ...that such a vulgar, abrasive mother could produce such polite, well-behaved children” (Eppel 31). George's derisive tone comments on

Beauticious' failure to acquire the correct demeanour of whiteness. She is denied the status she seeks to impose on George, and his behaviour towards her suggests that her performance of whiteness is not convincing. George's attitude conveys his disdain, particularly when he laughs at Beauticious for replacing the Oregon pine table in his former dining room with a Formica plastic table. This reveals that he perceives her to be lacking in taste because she fails to appreciate the comparative beauty and value of pine wood, relative to formica. On the other hand, Beauticious's behaviour is Eppel's way of parodying whiteness and confirms Homi Bhabha's observation that, when a colonised person adopts:

the coloniser's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the coloniser that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. (Bhabha 86)

In light of Bhabha's statement Beauticious is a 'blurred copy' that parodies and destabilises the authenticity of whiteness. From this, one can conclude that the idea of the white race as superior is an ideology made possible by the colonial situation which enabled the construction of the indigenous 'Other'. This superiority is unfounded because there has always been a white working class community in Europe. It is only in the colonies that unskilled work became the preserve of black folk. Historically white men have always been at the top of the social hierarchy from the 1890s when they settled in Southern Rhodesia. In *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (1992), social historian Elizabeth Schmidt argues that the first white settlers were mostly men who came from South Africa and Britain. Schmidt explains that "Southern Rhodesia served as a magnet for poor, unskilled, and semi-skilled whites who aspired to improved status, wealth, and upward social mobility. They wanted the best land at the lowest cost and a plentiful supply of cheap African labour" (9).

To achieve this, they suppressed the education of Africans and demanded that the state protect their interests by "reserving the best land and jobs for settlers, to stem African competition in the produce

and livestock markets, and to force Africans, [initially only] men, to sell their labour power to European settlers at the lowest possible cost” (Schmidt 10). Africans were taught hard work and subservience, and they had to adopt European dress and mannerisms. Whilst black men were taught to earn an honest living, their womenfolk were encouraged to care of the home. It was much later that African women joined the labour workforce as domestic servants. Hence historically and even after independence, it would be impossible to find a white man or woman in a position subordinate to a black person, particularly a black woman. Because of their race and power, white people in Rhodesia have always been prosperous in comparison to the black majority, and they have never been in a position to perform menial tasks for black people.

In terms of characterisation, Eppel can be criticised for creating a black character that, supposedly, has no appreciation for the finer things in life. The notion does not take into consideration that Beauticious is a product of a system that favoured the white race, therefore, it is also a problem that Beauticious’s taste is measured against white standards. In this case, we are exposed to the negative stereotypical ideas white Rhodesians had about black Zimbabweans. George’s perception of Beauticious echoes the fact that, in colonial Rhodesia African women were viewed as “indolent, lazy, slothful, immoral, frivolous, savage and uncivilised... While the men were remarkably receptive of European ideas, women turned a deaf ear clinging to the old superstitions, the old customs and the old methods” (Schmidt 99).

Such an understanding and representation of Beauticious makes it difficult to perceive her as anything else other than a frivolous woman. Colin Haines (2015) argues that “the notion of parody [as undoing a stereotype by overdoing it] is not without risk [as] at stake is the repetition of a stereotype, the very representation or image that one is otherwise attempting to subvert” (32). Haines argues that if the audience does not recognise the parody for what it is and misreads the ironic or satiric features it can reinforce the stereotype. He maintains that “parody must be observable and unmistakable to the audience for whom the recitation is performed” (32). This argument is appropriate in Beauticious’ case because if one is not aware of the relations between black and white people in Rhodesia, it would

not be possible to understand that her mimicry of white behaviour is a critique of it. The idea to note in this instance is that Beauticious' mimicry comes from a desire to avenge her parents for the suffering they endured at the hands of their white employer. She also desires the power and authority reserved for white people in colonial Rhodesia.

When George loses his house and becomes Beauticious' 'houseboy', his life changes drastically. He moves from his large house into the servants' quarters where he shares a toilet and cold shower facilities with Joseph the black 'gardenboy'. George struggles to adjust to a life where he has to cook, clean and take orders from a black woman. In post-democratic Zimbabwe, George is vulnerable to the anti-white ZANU PF rhetoric and is thrown into jail for crimes he has not committed. In a nutshell, George represents the failure of white masculinity in post-independence Zimbabwe and highlights the need for a reconfiguration of this identity. Commenting on George's character in his review of *Absent the English Teacher*, Gerald Gaylard states that George struggles with his "seeming irrelevance in Mugabe's Zimbabwe [and] as a member of a minority ... he is marooned, adrift, [an] anachronism in a world that has no use for him" (62-64). As a white male, relegated to working as a domestic worker for a black woman, George is a misfit in a society in which power is no longer in the hands of the white minority. George has no control over his personal and professional life. He is aware of this but has no recourse as proven by his reflection: "I've had it, finished, though I kept not the faith, though I fought not the good fight. It is time" (Eppel 3). As a teacher, before retiring, he fails to control his noisy students as they appear to have lost all respect for him and his lessons are interrupted by shouting, laughing and the "banging of desks ... murmurs, noise, roar[s] [and] pandemonium" (7-8). Clearly as a teacher, and a white male, George should command respect but he does not. The fact that George's pupils do not take him seriously suggests that he has lost his position of power and authority. As an elderly white man, George has no place in post-independent Zimbabwe where elite black men have taken over as the all-powerful figures. In this new system, being white and male has no advantages and instead, George has dropped to the bottom of the social ladder where

he constantly sees himself through the gaze of the black person. Such a portrayal of a white male in post 2000 Zimbabwe highlights the loss of white power and privilege.

In colonial Rhodesia, black people were subjected to the colonial gaze, and they had no rights to full citizenship. In post-democratic Zimbabwe there is an inversion of the racial gaze and whites find themselves labelled ‘traitors’ and ‘enemies of the state’. In the text, George’s employer constantly reminds him that “the collapsing Zimbabwean economy, [is caused] by his kith and kin in England and America” (Eppel 31). When there is no electricity and George cannot make toast for the family he is blamed:

“Ipi lo toast, Joji? Lo boss yena funa hamba sebenza. Aziko time!”

“Sorry madam, the power has just gone. I’ll have to use the outside fire.”

“No Zesa, no fuel, no food. Who is responsible, Joji.”

“All five faces at the Formica table looked at him expectantly.

“We are, Madam: The British, the Europeans, the Americans.”

“You have raped our country barren, Joji. First our women and girls, next our motherland. Shame on you.” The Minister clicked his tongue.

“Sorry, Madam.”

“Sorry? What is sorry? It is too late for that word, Joji”. (Eppel 46)

The above conversation highlights the fact that George’s white skin connects him to England and America even though he has a very vague idea of where his ancestors come from. The little he knows of “[his] kith and kin is that they may have originated somewhere in Eastern Europe, possibly Lithuania” (31). In his subordinate position, George cannot even defend himself because his white skin is inscribed with the colonial narratives, which he cannot escape from. George’s current reality in life is that he is neither Zimbabwean nor European; he does not belong in either place. Without a national identity, George belongs nowhere. Interestingly his lack of belonging is ironic when we take into account the fact that white Rhodesians identified with Europe despite the fact that the white population in Rhodesia consisted of migrants from different countries (Hartnack “Whiteness and

Shades of Grey” 290). The dialogue between George, Beauticious, and the Minister is presented in a satirical tone which unmask the racial tension between them. George’s sarcastic tone, when he admits that “the British, the Europeans, the Americans” (Eppel 46) are responsible for the shortage of electricity and food, is meant to mock the Minister and point to the absurdity of his claims, seeing as he benefits from ZANU PF’s patronage. Furthermore, the dialogue illustrates the limitations of satire in attempting to critique colonialism because Beauticious and the Minister are compromised comical characters.

As a poor white living in a country dominated by a “rogue regime” George becomes a victim (Eppel ix). He is thrown into jail first for treason and secondly for public indecency even though he is not guilty of these crimes. The first time he is arrested he is accused of racism and voting for MDC even though he does not belong to any party. When his pupil switches Robert Mugabe’s portrait with one of Ian Smith, George is thrown into an overcrowded cell and is accused of:

[insulting the] sovereign state by what is tantamount to an act of treason: replacing [his] Excellency’s portrait with one of that monster who murdered and raped millions of black people – men, women, and children... [and for] causing alarm and despondency among the aboriginal peoples of Zimbabwe. (Eppel 16)

The swapping of portraits in this text is very poignant in that it points to the idea that there is no difference between Ian Smith’s regime and Mugabe’s regime. Just as the colonialists subjugated black people, the Mugabe regime is mimicking the same behaviour. Therefore, on close analysis, the irony of the above extract is unmistakable because the very crimes that George is being accused of are being perpetrated against citizens in the post 2000 Zimbabwean state.

It must be noted though that, as much as Eppel is successful in highlighting the decay of contemporary Zimbabwean society and in exploring issues of identity and belonging this study argues that his portrayal of women is misogynistic and does not give a holistic reflection of the positions they occupy in post 2000 society. In *Absent: The English Teacher*, the two main female characters, Beauticious and Wilhelmine, are presented in a very negative light, the main focus being on their

sexuality and this suggests that Eppel's representation of women is marked by some conservatism. His characterisation brings to mind Rudo Gaidzanwa's analysis of gender representation in *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* (1985) in which she examines the dominant images of black women presented in fiction mainly by black male authors in Shona, Ndebele and English. Gaidzanwa concludes that females are largely portrayed in subordinate and/or negative roles, as "mothers, wives, divorcees, widows, [single and jilted women] and prostitutes [and women's physical beauty is linked] to moral decadence and corruption" (11-12). This analysis can be compared to the author's presentation of some women as "mistresses of chefs, a breed who've been given expensive new cars in exchange for hanky-panky" (Eppel 27). In addition, Beauticious's surname, "Nyamayakanuna", which means "sweat meat" in Shona, suggest that she is available for consumption by men. Similarly, Wilhelmine, the object of George's unrequited love, is said to be available for any man who desires to "feed [his] mamba until it regurgitates" (46). Such a depiction of the main female characters in a text points to the fact that narratives that disempower women are still part of the literary discourse in Zimbabwe. Yes, such women exist, but so do other women who occupy more empowering roles. In his discussion of *Absent: The English Teacher*, Oliver Nyambi argues that the text "can be usefully read as subversively engaging with the sexist barriers to women's participation in the political fraternity ... as autonomous subjects" ("Debunking" 7). He bases his argument on the fact that the male characters in the text, such as Gonzo, Beauticious's boyfriend, inhibit the participation of women in the political arena and confines them to the domestic domain as wives or mistresses. This claim is valid but this study argues that creating one-dimensional characters like Beauticious and Wilhelmine can be counter-productive because it reproduces negative stereotypes. Granted, Eppel has to present these characters as flat, but the objectification and sexualisation of the female body is counterproductive because, for instance, Beauticious's character does not offer us more beyond her 'small house'<sup>5</sup> identity. Such characterisation relies upon the fact that "in a stereotype, one person or group undertakes to represent another, and in so doing, defines that other in terms that are reduced

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<sup>5</sup> 'small house' refers to mistress

[and] general... The persistence of stereotype is not based on truth (but rather on simplicity and ease)” (Haines 31). All the reader knows is that Beauticious’s life is dependent on satisfying the needs of her Minister boyfriend. In the same vein, the focus on Wilhelmina is more on her prolific love life and nothing is revealed about other aspects of her life. This study argues that there is an advantage to constructing powerful female characters because it makes it possible to imagine a Zimbabwe in which women are not perceived as chattels who exist merely to satisfy men’s needs. However, one gets a sense that Eppel prefers to represent the female child in a more positive light and this is done through the character of a young orphaned girl who he adopts.

The inclusion of the young girl in this narrative can be said to represent hope for George and for the Zimbabwean nation as a whole. When George rescues the abandoned child his mundane life as a domestic worker acquires some meaning. From then on he focuses on loving and nurturing the little girl back to life because when he first sees her lying on the road just outside his house she:

is dressed in ... rags of poverty and [stinks] like abject poverty. [Her eyes never [leave] George [and] there [is] no fear in them, no curiosity; just a kind of world-weariness that you’d expect in the eyes of someone like George. (Eppel 61)

The above description is of a child who has been abandoned by those who should be taking care of her. She reveals the decay of the state and the breakdown of societal structures which would enable a child to live a normal life. In this instance, the child’s body can be said to be a metaphor and a measure “of the health or infirmity of the larger social body” (Ball 132). This is because her body is inscribed with narratives of hunger and destitution faced by millions of Zimbabweans and it highlights the terrible social conditions in Zimbabwe. However, George’s careful nurturing of the girl with scraps of food from Beauticious’s table saves her but when he realises that he is at the end of his life he decides to take the little girl back to the convent where she comes from, which also happens to be near Fort Mangwe, his grandmother’s birthplace. As soon as George delivers the little girl to the orphanage he collapses and dies and, thus, his death and young girl’s ‘rebirth’ suggest that only through the annihilation of the old order will Zimbabwe be restored to its former glory. It can,

therefore, be argued that in death George re-claims his Zimbabwean identity because his connection to his rural home proves that he is an indigenous Zimbabwean in spite of his whiteness.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This study examined the literary representations of the Zimbabwean crisis to ascertain how geographic and identity locations of writing influenced the interpretation of the impact of the fast-track land redistribution programme. The research focused on three areas, namely the movement of citizens to the diaspora, the gendered transformations of Zimbabwean society and questions of white identity in post 2000 Zimbabwe. As mentioned in the introduction, the hardships of the crisis were experienced in different ways depending on geographic, race and gender locations. The first chapter explored the representation of migrant life through a reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Name* and *Harare North* by Brian Chikwava. The study concludes that literary devices used by these authors, including the employment of child narrators and linguistic experimentation, are influential in their portraits of post 2000 Zimbabwean experiences. Bulawayo's manipulation of English and Ndebele gives her protagonist a remarkable register which enables the reader to understand and to experience her struggles with dislocation and estrangement in America. Darling's innocent voice is a useful tool in critiquing the ZANU PF government because her childlike voice gives the author licence to ask honest questions. As a text *We Need New Names* renders the actual and metaphoric 'homelessness' of Zimbabweans post 2000 as it represents the 'displacing' of citizens by its own government. Similarly, Chikwava's nameless narrator's hybrid language enables him to narrate his difficult experiences as an unemployed young man in Zimbabwe and later as a destitute migrant in the London metropolis. The text represents "a cultural category of new wandering subjects, often neglected by society against the backdrop of a post-capitalist and postmodern scenario" (Adami 5). It highlights the loneliness, isolation and alienation that migrants experience in foreign environments, particularly the difficulty of acquiring the necessary documentation to access work and live meaningful lives. Instead, the hostile landscape impacts on them so negatively that most suffer from

emotional and psychological breakdowns. Ultimately the two novels demonstrate that life for Zimbabwean migrants who live in the United Kingdom and the United States of America is extremely difficult. In retrospect, Gikandi's theses, that globalization should not be romanticised, is comprehensible when one explores the suffering endured by Africans who venture to the West hoping for better lives. In addition, the texts demonstrate that the desperate longing for home interferes with one's attempts to assimilate into a new culture.

The second chapter analysed *Highway Queen* by Virginia Phiri and *The Hairdresser of Harare* by Tendai Huchu to demonstrate the impact of the economic and social problems on the post 2000 socio-cultural landscape. The study concludes that Zimbabwean society has transformed, such that traditional gender roles have been destabilised and both sexes have had to consider what it means to be a man or a woman within the context of the crisis. This is because, in many cases, men have lost their jobs and have had to move into the private sphere of the home and women have been forced to venture into the public space to look for ways to sustain the family; often under compromising circumstances. Furthermore, the two narratives reveal that men's experiences of the crisis have rendered them powerless, such that violence has been adopted by some to reclaim their dominant position. This aggressive masculinity, which has become the template for the post 2000 hegemonic masculinity is recognised by some scholars as 'crisis masculinity' which has emerged because of the hardships and the failure of many Zimbabwean men to sustain their families and to fulfil their roles as heads of households. Despite its aggression, this hyper masculinity has become the norm and is recognised as befitting of Zimbabwean citizenship post 2000. Poor people, women and homosexual men do not fit into this model, hence their exclusion from participating as full citizens. This is demonstrated in the way the central character in *Highway Queen*, a married woman, who turns to sex-work due to poverty, is raped and beaten by men when she tries to start a retail business. The same applies to Dumisani, the homosexual man in *The Hairdresser of Harare*, who is assaulted and has to leave the country because he does not subscribe to the militaristic, aggressive, violent masculinity

that is admired and accepted. Overall, this scenario shows that there are some citizens who can no longer claim belonging in post 2000 Zimbabwe.

In Chapter three this research engaged with notions of white identity after the land reform programme when some white Zimbabweans have lost their land, homes and livelihoods. Through an analysis of *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* by Mandy Retzlaff and *Absent: The English Teacher* by John Eppel, the study examined how white Zimbabweans are redefining their identity after being stripped of their power and authority. In this chapter I focused on genre and attempted to understand how Retzlaff's use of the memoir as a mode of representation helped her in her narration of the loss of their family farm. The study concludes that the memoir has made it possible for Retzlaff to narrate her personal experiences and also the experiences of other white commercial farmers for the benefit of a global audience. She is the voice that speaks on behalf of the collective and her personal story evokes sympathy from international audiences. However, Retzlaff's narrative is guilty of silences and erasures as foregrounded by Hughes and Pilosof who argue that post 2000 white writing has resuscitated colonial discourses which claimed the land and excluded indigenous Zimbabweans. This is evident in Retzlaff's memoir because she indicates that the land they bought in the early 1990s was empty, wild and devoid of any human life. Furthermore, Retzlaff's narration focuses on white experiences of the farm invasions and leaves out the stories of her black workers. Despite its shortcomings, the memoir is important because it records history, particularly white Zimbabwean history, which is necessary in making sense of post 2000 Zimbabwe. It is also crucial that the violence perpetrated against white farmers be made visible because white people belong in Zimbabwe as do all other groups. With regard to Eppel's text, the research focused on his use of satire in narrating the story of George, an ageing white former English teacher who loses his house and all his belongings and ends up working as a domestic worker for a black woman. The study revealed that satire is a very useful tool which the author used to deride both Ian Smith's regime and the Mugabe regime. Furthermore, Eppel's use of parody, stereotype and the reversal of roles in which the master is black and the servant is white, make it possible to imagine the

terrible subjugation black Zimbabweans suffered in the hands of colonialists. The two texts ask the reader to examine issues of race and belonging particularly in post 2000 Zimbabwe where the government has declared a war against anyone who opposes its mandates.

The six texts chosen for this study all narrate displacement and loss of home, identity and belonging of Zimbabweans from all walks of life. Most importantly, they demonstrate how literature attempts to understand society and how it acts as an agent for change by speaking against autocratic regimes. They render very poignant experiences of the crisis from the perspective of marginalised subjects. Darling and her friends are children who live in a slum but are portrayed as being able to critique the postcolonial state for their situation. Similarly, Chikwava's nameless narrator is a tragic figure who has to "learn a new vocabulary of thoughts and feelings" to articulate his constantly shifting world, and yet he renders a tongue in cheek critique of the government that has used and discarded him (Muchemwa, "Old and New Fictions" 141). Retzlaff and Eppel's narrators, also represent the silenced voices of post 2000 white Zimbabweans, who have been declared enemies of the state and non-citizens. Finally, this study notes the emergence of particular tropes that the six authors utilise in their representation of the crisis.

The trope of the child is evident as the narrative voice in *We Need New Names* and also as the character that represents hope in *Absent: The English Teacher*. This suggests the authors' perception that perhaps it is the next generation that will be able to reverse the dystopia in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The house is another trope that pervades all six narratives; for example, Bulawayo refers to Zimbabwe as the "house of hunger", whilst Chikwava's narrates that the Brixton squat where they live "has windows [that] look like big sad eyes" (29). Retzlaff loses her family home and George in *Absent: The English Teacher* has his house stolen from him by the mistress of a ZANU PF minister. Therefore, the house or lack of it is symbolic of loss, sadness and pain. In addition, the animal metaphor is utilised by almost all the authors. At the end of *We Need New Names* and *Harare North*, the narrators refer to stray dogs that wander around rejected by their communities, and this echoes the state of the homeless migrant who roams the streets of the metropolitan city. In *Highway Queen*,

the brutal crisis masculinity is highlighted when the narrator refers to the rapists, Dhuri and Samson as beasts. Finally, material things such guavas in the case of Darling and the suitcase in relation to Chikwava's nameless narrator signify the longing for home and a time in the past. Although the scope of this study could only allow for the analysis of six books, the research has shown that the post 2000 Zimbabwean crisis as represented from diverse locations of writing reveals that the land reform programme has caused internal and external displacement of citizens and that within the Zimbabwean post colony issues of identity and belonging are predicated on race, gender and sexuality which too can be construed as social 'locations'.

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