

Voices from the wilderness: Zimbabwean Diaspora literature an emerging category

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Abstract

This article draws attention to the existence and emergence of a body of fictional works produced on Zimbabwe's Diaspora between the years from 2000 to 2014. It is the contention of the article that these literary works represent an emerging category within the general canon of Zimbabwean literature called Zimbabwean Diaspora literature. Through the application of existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks based on key characteristics of diasporic writings, the article concludes that Zimbabwean Diaspora literature is in its embryonic stage of development since it typically exhibits not only the common features attributed to diasporic writings, but it also possess the characteristic features often ascribed to a young diaspora. The article does not attempt to offer a rule of thumb definition of Zimbabwean Diaspora literature, for the simple reasons that Zimbabwean Diaspora literature is still very much in its infancy; it is a canon of literary works still growing steadily; still establishing its form, message, primary ideologies and identities. Thus, to offer a prescriptive or restrictive label to define the discourse is subjective and premature. It would be a travesty against the artistic enterprise as it only serves to stifle the creative imagination of the artist and to curtail the objective insights of the literary critic. In essence, therefore, the article seeks to draw attention to, rather than limit understanding of, this literary discourse called Zimbabwean Diaspora literature. However, there are features and characteristics exhibited by said literary discourse which have guided and informed the understanding of the article as to what constitutes Zimbabwean Diaspora literature.

Keywords: poverty of stimulus, xenophobia, systematic rejection, the return motif, Zimbabwean Diaspora literature, "in-betweeness" or "nowhereness"

Introduction

First and foremost, the literary works of fiction from and about Zimbabwe's Diaspora cannot be understood or read in isolation from the meaning of the notion of diaspora(s). Hence, an ideal starting point in an attempt to categorise Zimbabwean Diaspora literature would be an appreciation of the concept of diaspora(s). Shuval (2000 in Dore et al 2010, p. 1) defines the concept diaspora comprehensively as:

... encompass[ing] political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees and ethnic and racial minorities in countries other than their original homeland. What distinguishes diaspora migration from other types of migration is that it is based on claims to a natural right to return to an historic homeland. Crucially therefore, a key characteristic of diasporas is the strong sense of connection to a homeland maintained through cultural practices and ways of life practised in host countries, as well as numerous forms of interaction between diasporas and their home countries.

The diaspora, therefore, constitutes the wilderness; it becomes the jungle and primary realm in which the Zimbabwean Diaspora is created. The "wilderness" provides a centrepiece of experiences out of which numerous voices and a Zimbabwean literature of displacement and the displaced emerges. Pasura (2009) goes on to observe that Zimbabweans in Britain display most of the common features ascribed to a diaspora, such as: involuntary and voluntary dispersion from the homeland; settlement in foreign territories and an uneasy attachment with the host land; strong attachment and connection to the original homeland; and the maintenance of distinct diasporic identities.

Interestingly enough, the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative reflects these features often ascribed to a diaspora. For instance, "the strong and undying attachment with the homeland", is evident in the nostalgic and painful reminiscences of writers as they write about home away from home. Such writers include Tendai Huchu, Emmanuel Sigauke, Pettinah Gappah, Thamsanqa Ncube, NoViolet Bulawayo and Blessing Musariri, among others. These writers' works deal mainly with how they perceive the homeland as they write from the outside. In fact, Sigauke, a writer in the Zimbabwean Diaspora, when asked in an interview with the *Sentinel Literary Quarterly* in 2011, about writing away from home, commented as follows: "Writing is my way of staying connected to home at a deeper level." Furthermore, "The uneasy attachment with the host land", is exhibited through the emergence and treatment of themes such as xenophobia and the systematic rejection of Zimbabweans in host countries. This is especially evident through the portrayal of the hostile reception Zimbabweans receive at visa interviews and various ports of entry around the world. The cold climate of some host countries is often cited as well, in order to reinforce the hostility and isolation Zimbabweans often experience and feel in their adopted homelands. It is, therefore, evident from the foregoing argument that the notion of diaspora(s) provides a rich subtext for conceptualising literature from and about the Zimbabwean Diaspora. As a result, the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative naturally inherits the character and personality of the Zimbabwean Diaspora. The two interweave and intertwine to become a by-product of this voluntary and involuntary dispersion, a voice in the wilderness, articulating the trials and tribulations of Zimbabweans across the globe as they navigate the murky waters of survival.

This article is further guided by Nyota, Manyarara and Moyana's (2010) observation that the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative expresses a Zimbabwean sensibility and the works can be set either in Zimbabwe or the diaspora. The characters, or at least the main character, should be a Zimbabwean. However, a broader conception of Zimbabwean Diaspora literature is influenced by the seminal work of Chinweizu, Onucheka and Madubuike (1983) who outline the criteria for determining the qualities that make a literary work African. In this context they can be referred to as qualities which make a literary work Zimbabwean. The first quality relates to the primary audience for whom the works are intended. It is evident from Zimbabwean Diaspora literature that these works are directed to Zimbabweans living and working in the diaspora and Zimbabweans back at home. Another indicator is the culture and national consciousness expressed in the work whether through the author's voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment and diction. Indeed the diaspora novel is highly sentimental about Zimbabwe the homeland and the characters remain typically Zimbabwean no matter which country they find themselves in, regardless of social standing and adopted mannerisms or identities. The last quality which makes a literary work Africa as identified by Chinweizu et al (ibid) is the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalisation and the language in which the work is done.

All the works analysed for the purpose of compiling the current article are works written by writers born in Zimbabwe: some of whom have sojourned to the diaspora and have since returned; some who have never been to the diaspora; and the last group being those who are in the diaspora and have become naturalised citizens of these countries they live in, and write from. As Zimbabweans foray into the global wilderness, their lived experiences in the diaspora become the oil which lubricates narratives develops in tandem with the country's development.

Key characteristic features of diasporic writing

The available literature on diasporic writing identifies a number of traits which can be used to delineate a text as diasporic. Thilakarathene (2011) identifies five features which can be used to describe diasporic literature. He observes that diasporic literature is based on the idea of a homeland – a place from where the displacement occurs and in this particular case the homeland is Zimbabwe. The homeland provides the necessary stimulus which inspires the non-resident Zimbabwean writer to dialogue with home away from home. Thilakarathene (ibid) further maintains that diasporic literature provides narratives of harsh journeys undertaken for various reasons. Indeed the reasons for leaving Zimbabwe are varied and many, they are also individual and collective as portrayed in the literary works from and about Zimbabwe's Diaspora. Furthermore, Thilakarathene (ibid) notes that the diaspora provides accounts of "another sense of place" away from the homeland, a feature which refers to the feelings of alienation, loneliness, depression and estrangement the characters experience when they are in their adopted sanctuaries. The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative also gives an account of how "homeland-made" protagonists behave in a far off land either adopting or rejecting new cultural codes of their new sense of place. Finally, it is noted that diasporic literature may also represent and delve into concepts such as nostalgia and even

lamentation at losing one's native language, homeland, friends and family, and so on. This theoretical perspective is vital to this particular critical endeavour as it provides an ideal point of reference with which to delineate Zimbabwean Diaspora literature from other literatures.

Albertazzi (in Dwivedi 2012, p. 1) concurs, when she observes how the

... migrant narration [is] a fiction of individuation and self-definition, a kind of travel literature where departure is often forced, transit is endless and one very rarely reaches a point of arrival where present is lived by renaming the past. Migration always implies change: and change involves the risk of losing one's identity. Whilst the migrant does not recognize him/herself in his/her new image, the people around him/her do not accept his/her otherness. Therefore, s/he is compelled to face everyday life through a continuous oscillation between reality and dream.

Albertazzi (in Dwivedi 2012) in this instance notes another critical component of diaspora literature in general and Zimbabwean Diaspora literature in particular, that is, the dual sensibility which runs through most diasporic writings. This dual sensibility often arises as a result of the transnational circumstances in which the characters find themselves; they are torn between the connectedness of the motherland and the luring, trappings and attractions of the host land (in-betweenness, nowhere-ness and rootlessness). In Zimbabwean Diaspora literature this dual sensibility is often portrayed in the contradictory circumstances the migrant characters always find themselves in and the linkages formed between the home and host country through the flow of remittances. And a typical case in point is that of a character who suffers from this divided loyalty between homeland and the trappings of the diaspora, namely, young Darling in Bulawayo's *We need new names* (2013).

Diasporic literature has also been described as being experiential (Anon. n.d.). It speaks of and delves into the experiences that the diaspora undergoes resulting from geographical displacement, alien customs, the problems of adjustment and adaptation, longing for the homeland, the burden of rejection and xenophobia, myths and heritage. In this particular case, Zimbabwean Diaspora literature captures the story of the Zimbabwean persona's struggle for economic and social survival against the backdrop of a harsh economic period spanning a decade from 2000 to 2010. Zimbabwean writers have captured their trials and tribulations abroad. Thus, in this case the expatriate writer [the voice in the wilderness] assumes the double role of being a refugee, on the one hand, and an ambassador, on the other. As a refugee he/she seeks security and protection and as an ambassador projects his/her own culture and helps to enhance its comprehensibility. A double obligation indeed, to their audience in the homeland and in the adopted country, a condition which leads to a state of perpetual anchorlessness as observed by Albertazzi (in Dwivedi 2012).

A diasporic text must also have a structure of location followed by dislocation and relocation (Anon. n.d.). There should be crossing of borders or boundaries, moving from one culture to another and a sense of alienation, resistance, reaction, and assimilation. There must be a longing and memory for home and the feeling of being exiled and displaced. A diasporic text must portray the experience of dislocation. Huchu's debut novel, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2009), does not suit this criterion but it is the strong opinion of the writers of the article that this novel is diasporic in that the writer's [Huchu] impression of the City of Harare is imagined as he last interacted with it. In Huchu's creation, time stands still and as a result it does not move past the year 2006. Huchu writes about Harare as he last encountered the city.

Travel metaphors also characterise diasporic writing (Anon. n.d.). Travel metaphors

are quite useful in understanding the dynamics of diasporic experiences. The conception of the shore also acts as the margin, boundary, periphery, and both the last territory as an exit from a homeland and the entrance to a new land. Zimbabwe is a land-locked country, and unlike most diasporic writings, the shore may not necessarily be a prominent travel metaphor. The shore is, however, replaced by tropes like the airport terminal, the passport and visa, immigrant status, the immigration counter and the often hostile immigration official. In Musariri's "Crossroads" (in Morris 2011), the Beitbridge border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa symbolises the crossing over into a land of limitless possibilities.

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is, however, a literature of survival and as such survival metaphors and metaphors of existence in the adopted country, such as "hunting in foreign lands", feature prominently in this class of writings. The narratives highlight the various means of survival [whether scrupulous or unscrupulous] in which Zimbabweans engage while in the diaspora.

Zimbabwean Diaspora literature has developed its own set of unique characteristics which typify the Zimbabwean migratory experiences. Zimbabwean Diaspora literature also interrogates the impact that the diaspora has, not only on the displaced individual, but on the homeland as well. Thus, themes like the brain drain, dislocated families, the trauma and psychological anguish of separation and economic support to the motherland all take centre stage in these narratives. Furthermore, engaging the Zimbabwean Diaspora in literature is not the exclusive preserve of expatriate writers, but writers back home also dialogue with both home and the foreign country to create works which can be classified as diasporic writing. The short story collection *Hunting in foreign lands and other stories* (Nyota et al 2010) is replete with stories created by Zimbabweans living in Zimbabwe which capture the diasporic experience.

The development of the Zimbabwean Diaspora experience and the Diaspora narrative

The socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe of the decade from 2000 to 2010 has largely been identified, blamed and labelled as being the major driving force responsible for the mass exodus of Zimbabweans from their homeland to different parts of the globe in search of greener pastures. This seemingly bleak and gloomy era of Zimbabwe's history, gives rise to a unique experience for the Zimbabwean persona which in turn inspires and fuels the imagination of both Zimbabweans at home and abroad. The resultant effect is the creation of a body of literary works by Zimbabweans which truly represents and immortalises Zimbabwe's struggle for survival in her darkest hour. As Zhuwarara (2001) rightly points out, Zimbabwean fiction is reflective and responsive of historical processes which affect society as a whole. Thus the emergence of the Diaspora novel is a reflection of the socio-political and economic character of Zimbabwean history and society from 2000 to 2010, especially.

The advent of the twenty first century not only marked a significant turning point in Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political history, but its literary history as well. It is during this period, that Zimbabwean emigrants go on to settle in different parts of the world and some of them have gone on to become artistically productive. They have been productive

in genres like the novel, poetry, music, drama and film; hence the decade 2000 to 2010 has seen the emergence of a new generation of Zimbabwean writers writing from the Diaspora. Established writers in exile like Chenjerai Hove have also continued to be productive. The diaspora has also influenced the content of some locally produced literary works by returnees and patriots who all express their concerns about life in the diaspora. With the migrant community ranging (unofficially) around five million, literary works from the diaspora narrate the typical lifestyle, aspirations, ambitions and yearnings of these millions of Zimbabweans living in their adopted countries.

Alden (2009) in her classification of Zimbabwean literature identifies three distinct epochs in which Zimbabwean literature in English has evolved, namely: Pre-independence/colonial literature (1950s–1979); Post-independence/Post-colonial literature (1980–1999); and Contemporary Zimbabwean literature (post-2000). In her last epoch, Alden notes how a myriad of contemporary themes, such as HIV and AIDS, inter-generational conflict, the Diaspora, politics and political violence, the land question, poverty, urban dystopia, economic issues, and more have come to characterise Zimbabwean literature. The point of departure of the current article is that the diaspora cannot be relegated to being merely a thematic concern or footnote within Zimbabwean literature. Given the huge volumes of Zimbabweans who migrated from the country due to the post-2000 socio-economic and political crisis, on the strength of voices emerging and re-emerging in the wilderness and even the voices at home, and the emerging themes thereof, Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative should not and can no longer be treated as an afterthought in Zimbabwean literary discourse. It is an emerging category within the body canon known as Zimbabwean literature. Asked by the *Sentinel Literary Quarterly* in 2011 about the "current state of Zimbabwean literature", Tinashe Mushakavanhu a Zimbabwean writer and critic responded in part as follows:

... a new Zimbabwean literature is emerging. It is a clear break from the earlier phase which preceded it, a phase that focused on ideas of nationalism and decolonisation and was more concerned with telling us who we are and where we came from. There is now an aspiration for "internationalism" among most of the new writers. It is writing beyond mental and physical geographies.

It is implied and perhaps explicit in Mushakavanhu's response here, that this 'new emerging Zimbabwean literature', which strives for 'internationalism' and transcends both 'mental and physical boundaries' is Zimbabwean Diaspora literature. Indeed the Diaspora narrative emerges after a perceived period of prolonged silence in Zimbabwe's literary history. The Diaspora narrative announces its arrival with works from award winning writers such as Brian Chikwava (*Harare North*, 2009) and NoViolet Bulawayo (*We need new names*, 2013). Such writers are responsible for repositioning Zimbabwean literature on the map of world literatures and as Saha (2009, p. 186) rightly observes: "... a peculiar but a potent point to note is that writers in their displaced existence generally tend to excel in their work, as if the changed atmosphere acts as a stimulant for them." The Zimbabwean writers Chikwava and Bulawayo are both testimony to this assertion as they are past winners of the coveted Caine Prize for African Writing in 2004 and 2011 respectively. Writers like Christopher Mlalazi, NoViolet Bulawayo, Brian Chikwava and Emmanuel Sigauke have been loosely branded as upcoming Zimbabwean writers with no distinction or classification being made about their migrant status and how it has influenced their writings. Although some critics like Muponde

are against categorising Zimbabwean literature in terms of race, language and in this case location, this is necessary as it helps to achieve a certain level of clarity against the backdrop of a changing milieu in Zimbabwe's literary landscape.

Zimbabwe's Diaspora literature appears on the literary scene towards the end of the first decade of the twenty first century. The early years of the period 2000 to 2014 are characterised by silence and an absence of literary works from and about the diaspora. The short story has been the main genre through which the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative develops and this coincides with the advent of the use of Information Communication Technologies in publishing. Short stories like *Snowflakes in winter* (2008) by Rumbidzai Katedza herald the arrival of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative. The years 2008 to 2010 are very productive and the volume of literary works increases astronomically. Chikwava's debut novel *Harare North* (2009) is perhaps the first full length novel which sets the tone for what comes to characterise itself as Zimbabwe's voice in/from the wilderness. Mlalazi's debut novel, *Many rivers* (2009), is another prolific voice which emerges from the wilderness as it interrogates the plight of the illegal Zimbabwean immigrant in the South African wilderness of Johannesburg.

Another debutant, Gappah (*An elegy to easterly*, 2009) adds her voice to this body of literary works being churned out of the Diaspora. Hers is a seminal collection of short stories that talk back to the dying and now largely dysfunctional motherland and can aptly be described as political satire. It is a literature which is in response to an oppressive and abusive political environment; it thus represents flight from a marginalising and stifling space with no prospects of a bright future (Muhwati 2009; Mupondi and Mangena 2011). Huchu's *The hairdresser of Harare* (2010) is also another brilliant and witty debut novel emerging from Zimbabwe's Diaspora. Another debut novella, Moyo's *Coming to London* (2010), is a gripping tale of how the Zimbabwean family fabric is ruptured as result of the diaspora phenomenon. The short story collection *Hunting in foreign lands and other stories* (Nyota et al 2010) is also a ground breaking piece of work as far as the growth and development of Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative is concerned. The collection conceived in 2007 and published in 2010 is the first short story collection wholly dedicated to Zimbabwe's Diaspora. The effect of this publication is that it officially canonises the Diaspora narrative into a literary genre which is emerging in Zimbabwean literature and it is at this juncture that it becomes contentious to relegate the Diaspora to a mere thematic concern in contemporary Zimbabwean literature.

The evolution of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative continues with the publication of various individual online short stories. The *Story time* BlogSpot edited by Zimbabwean migrants Ivor Hartman and Emmanuel Sigauke is a very important platform which affords not only Zimbabweans but Africans in general an artistic outlet to share their diaspora experiences. Online publishing allows voices that would never been heard an opportunity to be heard, such as Sarudzayi Chifamba-Barnes (*UK Lucy*, 2009) and Thamsanqa Ncube ("The visa", 2009). Sigauke also adds voice into the fray through a poetry anthology *Forever let me go* (2008), and a number of short stories, such as "Mukoma's return" (2009) and "Return to moonlight" (2010). Sigauke's work contributes immensely to the development of a notion which the article has identified as the "return motif". In 2011, Jane Morris of amaBooks, a Bulawayo-based Zimbabwean publisher, published the short collection, *Where to now?* Although the short stories in this collection deal with a complex range of contemporary issues in Zimbabwe, three stories stand out as far as the development of the Zimbabwean

Diaspora narrative is concerned, namely: *Crossroads* by Novuyo Nosa Tshuma, *Sudden death* by Blessing Musariri and *The need* by Sandisile Tshuma. Most of the contributors to this collection are Zimbabwean writers based abroad and Morris (2011), notes that even though some [the voices] speak from the diaspora, their inspiration comes from their homeland and their stories tell of Zimbabwe. Bulawayo in her debut novel *We need new names* (2013, p. 292) also acknowledges the motherland as a source of inspiration as follows: “And of course to Zim [babwe], beloved homeland, country of my people. For the gift of stories, for the soul, and for the swag.” This fine novel caps the account at this point in time, of how a unique brand of literature from Zimbabwe’s global citizen is developing.

This indeed is an exciting and promising trend that emerges here as a relatively large body of literary work is produced within a short space of time, among them six debut novels and a flurry of short stories. The diasporic narrative emerges as a vital voice giving credence to the Zimbabwean Diaspora experience(s). However, a worrisome trend is also apparent here. It seems the loudest voices from the Zimbabwean Diaspora are emerging from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) diasporas only. The Zimbabwean Diaspora is large and scattered all over the globe; it is thus the opinion of the article that all these voices be heard through fiction. Furthermore, there is a strong bias towards the production of prose at the expense of verse. With the exception of Sigauke’s *Forever let me go* (2008), the rest of the works stated herein are written in prose. Nevertheless, it is evident from the foregoing paragraph, that the creativity of Zimbabweans knows no boundaries, they are *writers without borders*. In fact, the wilderness seems to have breathed a fresh breath of life into Zimbabwean literature which some critics have described as suffering from a poverty of stimulus. Vambe (2012) laments this poverty of stimulus in Zimbabwean writing as the “unbearable absence of proliferated obstacles in Zimbabwe literature”. The core of the argument is that the Zimbabwean literary landscape has continued to recycle the age old and tired theme of the liberation struggle and political rhetoric associated with this war. However, with the advent of the diasporic narrative, a wholly new Zimbabwean literature has been born, a literary genre of survival in a world which is no longer restricted by imaginative, expressive or physical boundaries. The diasporic narrative captures the paradoxical circumstances in which the Zimbabwean persona finds himself/herself as a result of the post-2000 economic crisis obtaining in the country. The diasporic narrative focuses on the social and economic survival of Zimbabweans in the diaspora and survival of those at home and thus, portrays Zimbabweans at their best and at their worst. It is these tales of survival that spur and fertilise the imagination of artists who weave together brilliant narratives, that will forever immortalise and illuminate Zimbabwe’s darkest hour. Thus, a new sub-genre of the Zimbabwean corpus evolves.

Representations of the persona in the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative

Zimbabwe’s migration narrative is inspired by the lived experiences of Zimbabweans abroad and at home respectively; as a result, the characters in the various works of fiction become an artistic extension and expression of these lived experiences. The characters’ lives become

a statement of Zimbabwean aspirations, hopes, fears, yearnings, trials and tribulations. The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative provides a rich repository of experiences as Zimbabweans negotiate their lives out of an economic and politically confining space (Mangena and Mupondi 2011) and renegotiate their lives as they try to integrate and survive in the world's often hostile and unreceptive metropolitan cities (Manase 2013).

The voice of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is largely dystopian in tone. Things have gone terribly wrong and the voices of the characters and narrators in the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative exhibit a general feeling of discontent, dissatisfaction and disillusionment which grips the nation as a result of the post-2000 economic crisis. The tale of Zimbabwe's Diaspora begins with a strong desire to leave the country. The Zimbabwean populace is frustrated at how their society has suddenly become dysfunctional. The frustration is obviously directed toward the socio-political and economic order of the country which has evidently collapsed at this particular point in time. Thus, for Sekai, a character in *Hunting in foreign lands* (Nyota et al 2010) "things no longer work ..."; she is discontented with her teacher's salary whose value has been eroded by inflation leaving her impoverished. This disgruntlement is aptly captured in Chifamba-Barnes' online short story, *UK Lucy* (2009) when the omnipresent narrator comments:

[A]s with most young Zimbabweans, the dire circumstances and the clear lack of hope had forced Maria to leave her child behind so she could eke out a decent living, not only for herself but her daughter and all the immediate members of her family. Leaving a four year-old young child behind was a painful sacrifice, even under the custody of a trusted sister. Maria joined the exodus of Zimbabwean immigrants flocking to Britain, synonymously called London by Zimbabweans.

Maria's response to the crisis characterising her country at the turn of the new millennium is representative of the mood and feeling at the time. This strong desire to "opt out" of the proverbial "house of hunger" due to the burden of poverty and shame introduces a very interesting dynamic into Zimbabwe's migration narrative. This sense of discontent and dissatisfaction creates a domino effect which sets in motion the scene for intriguing and captivating recollections which come to naturally characterise Zimbabwe's voices from the wilderness. It is out of this vote of no confidence in the country's socio-political and economic systems that the Zimbabwean individual is driven to the diaspora for economic salvation. Travel becomes an economic resource, a viable option and solution to move out of confining space and travel becomes the very voice with which Zimbabwe's story of economic and social survival is told (Manase 2013; Mangena and Mupondi 2011; Muhwati and Mheta 2009). The result of travel is a string of experiences which in turn shape the character and content of Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative.

The Zimbabweans in the diaspora suffer the double tragedy of being the excluded other – both at home and in the diaspora. They live in a parallel universe (Chikwava 2003) and are virtually non-existent back home in Zimbabwe and invisible in the diaspora. Thus, nameless and faceless characters that live on the margins and periphery of society appear in the Diaspora narrative, an epitome of the tragic circumstances in which Zimbabwean migrants often find themselves. The nameless and faceless narrator and protagonist in Chikwava's *Harare North* is a typical case in point. In Muchemwa's (2013) opinion, this faceless and

nameless character represents many of the unemployed and under-educated Zimbabwean youths used as instruments of political violence by the country's political elite during the political crisis of the year 2000 and beyond. Qinesela, the protagonist in Mlalazi's *Many rivers* (2009), is another under-educated young Zimbabwean who illegally migrates to South Africa. Because he is an illegal migrant, he has to find his way into the deep criminal underbelly of Johannesburg. These nameless and faceless characters tell the story of many Zimbabweans who flee to the diaspora in search of the supposedly greener pastures. These characters find themselves in an often hostile and exploitative host country where they cannot be formally employed because either they have to wait for their asylum documents to be processed or they are undocumented immigrants who fear deportation if they join the formal system of employment. Hence, their underground lives result in a vicious circle of exploitation, oppression and poverty.

From the stand point of most Zimbabweans, the favourable exchange rate of the British pound and the American dollar against the Zimbabwean dollar created the impression in the mindset of most Zimbabweans about the diaspora as the "promised land" flowing with milk and honey (Sigauke, Mushakavanhu and Mlalazi 2011). The discontent and disgruntlement which grips the characters early on in Zimbabwe's narratives of displacement and emplacement (Muchemwa 2013) quickly turns to a strong desire and determination to leave the country. It is out of this strong will to leave the country and the obstacle strewn path to successful migration, that a feeling of euphoria hits the characters as they finally touchdown in the "promised lands". In "The visa" (2009), the unnamed protagonist is full of excitement and anxiety as he disembarks from the plane at Heathrow airport in the UK. His excitement is further heightened as he successfully negotiates his way through the British immigration famed for its high rate of deportation of new arrivals to the UK, "I was in and that was all that mattered". In *Coming to London* (Moyo 2010, p. 25) upon her arrival at Gatwick, Edith exclaims: "Uri! London at last!" Qinesela in *Many rivers* (Mlalazi 2009) looks forward to a new and exciting life in Johannesburg as he walks towards the door of Prince's building after alighting from an illegal cross border van from Bulawayo. However, this initial euphoria of having finally arrived in the "promised land" quickly gives way to disenchantment, disillusionment and disappointment as noted by Pasic (2010), as the characters realise that there is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. As their culture collides with the foreign cultures of the host country, the cultural shock, systematic rejection, structural racism and xenophobia all combine to set up an exciting tale of the Zimbabwean persona's struggle to survive in their new found socio-economic and political milieu.

Ncube in "The visa", Chikwava in "Harare North" and Katedza in "Snowflakes in Winter" make use of the hostile weather on arrival to highlight the rude awakening the characters receive as they enter these foreign lands. "He stepped off the... flight right, into the middle of a miserable November morning ..." (Ncube 2009) This initial reception is a precursor to the hostility that characterises life in the diaspora for many Zimbabweans. As the harsh reality of the diaspora quickly sets in, the euphoria disappears and sobering thoughts settle in, and the characters realise that they have to adjust and adapt quickly in order to survive. Some characters fail to integrate completely. The core of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative, thus centres on how Zimbabweans integrate and become economic participants in their new found economic sanctuaries. Zimbabwe's economic refugees often become modern day economic

slaves in their adopted homes. Confirming this notion, Dore et al (2010) and McGregor (2010) observe that occupational downgrading and deskilling is a common feature of migrant and refugee workers entering the UK. A typical case in point is Mudiwa, a character in Manyarara's "Helicopter to view" (Nyota et al 2010) who abandons a managerial job in Zimbabwe to become a "broom pusher" in London and the protagonist in Ncube's "The visa" (2009) who leaves an accountant job in Zimbabwe to join the care work sector in the UK. The immigrants are immediately disillusioned and disappointed as the diaspora turns out to be neither a sanctuary nor a paradise – contrary to their dreams before arriving. An immediate realisation that life in the diaspora is even tougher than that back home settles into the minds of the characters and they have to respond by quickly accepting their circumstances and adjusting to their new situations. This chameleon-like ability of being responsive to changing situations is one quality that Pasi (2010) identifies as essential for immigrants to thrive and not merely survive the difficulties of living and working in a foreign country.

Zimbabwean Diaspora literature establishes linkages between places of exile and the homeland as posited by Manase (2013). The Zimbabwean Diaspora novel is focussed on the social and economic relationship between Zimbabwe and her diaspora. And indeed, characters in the works under review keep the remittances flowing on a regular basis. The loved ones in the diaspora are the country's breadwinners; sending cash, groceries and clothing back home. Qinisela, the main character in *Many rivers* (2009), first sends his mother four hundred rands through the post office for her upkeep. A week or two later he opts to send through Omalayitsha (a cross border driver who delivers anything for a charge from South Africa to Zimbabwe), "... a big colour TV plus DVD player, a four plate stove with an oven, a refrigerator, two suitcases full of clothes, a steel trunk full of groceries and sixty million Zimbabwe dollars" (ibid, p. 156). The economic supporting role of the Zimbabwean persona in the Diaspora is great and it undoubtedly emancipates the family materially as is evidenced from the frequency and nature of remittances sent by Qinisela to his mother. While economic survival is at the centre of the Diaspora narrative, the Zimbabwean family is portrayed as being fractured and fragmented in the whole process. While the family, especially those who remain behind, benefit immensely from remittances sent by those abroad, the social repercussions and consequences on the family are grave. One important message which reverberates throughout Zimbabwean Diaspora literature is that the economic success of the family comes at a high social cost for the Zimbabwean family both at home and abroad. The Diaspora phenomenon is portrayed as tearing the social and moral fabric of Zimbabwe apart, causing families to disintegrate. According to Chiwome (1996 in Mashiri 1998), the family is the microcosm of Shona society – the mirror that reflects the larger society. It is the primary site of transmission for African cultural values to the young ones. In other words, if the family breaks down, society also breaks down.

The Zimbabwean family fractures, dislocates and disintegrates as a direct consequence of the geographical separation which results from the rise of Zimbabwe's Diaspora. The traditional Zimbabwean family setup takes on a new structure and function. The diasporic literature invariably shows a new Zimbabwean family that is characterised by parental neglect, lost childhood, the psychological anguish of separation, financial loss, infidelity and betrayal of trust, spousal neglect and new family formations such as cohabitation and marriages of convenience. Back home in Zimbabwe, the Diaspora orphan emerges. These are

children whose parents have migrated to different parts of the world leaving such children in the custody of relatives or members of the extended family or even domestic workers. The children are portrayed as vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse by those entrusted with their custody. One story which aptly captures the theme of the plight of children in transnational families is Aaron Mupondi's "Mother comeback home" (Nyotaeta al 2010). The story's title is a cry for help, a plea from a suffering and tormented young soul. It is an appeal for a mother in the diaspora to return and save her children from the misery of living with a cruel and brutal custodian. Conjugal separation as a result of geographical distance also leads to high incidences of infidelity and spousal abandonment in Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative. In Moyo's *Coming to London*, Peter cheats on his wife, Portia, materially and emotionally as his demands for money border on extortion. Peter makes outrageous financial demands on Portia so that he can sponsor his extravagant life style and liaisons with hordes of commercial sex workers. On the other hand, he neglects the children back home. Portia works extra shifts to satisfy her husband's outrageous demands believing them to be genuine family needs. A host of unfaithful characters exist in the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative and this trend results in the high divorce rate which then becomes characteristic of Zimbabwean society in the twenty-first century.

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative method and technique

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative adopts a narrative method and technique which enables it to best articulate and represent the experiences and character representations highlighted in the foregoing section of the article. These narrative forms tell the story of Zimbabwe's global citizens while at the same time ushering in a new dispensation in Zimbabwe's literary heritage. The voice out the wilderness is characterised by a high degree of experimentation in terms of form and genre. The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is not restricted by the dictates of form and decorum which have come to characterise orthodox Zimbabwean literature. Instead, the narrative readily lends itself susceptible to literary forms which enable it to aptly articulate the Zimbabwean Diaspora experience. The short story is the main genre through which Zimbabwe's Diaspora experience is captured and transmitted literarily; while the linear and organic plots give way to much more complex unstructured story lines, which are in keeping with the often complex and unpredictable lives Zimbabweans find themselves living. Some stylistic and narrative features common to Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative include: the transnational setting of the narrative, nostalgia, political satire and the return motif.

The transnational setting of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is transnational and is often set both at home and in the adopted home of the individual character(s) in the various narratives. The story is often

told in phases with the action swinging from one location to another. In most instances, the story is told in retrospect, explaining how the characters found themselves in their present predicaments. A common entry point into the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative, is to have the protagonists travelling back home, through a stream of consciousness, to retrace the footsteps of the journey they have travelled. This technique is essential as it aides the reader especially to empathise with the characters' experiences for in most cases the characters are often lost in deep personal crises which are usually the result of their new found socio-cultural existence. This condition is often referred to in diasporic literary discourse as "in-betweenness" or "nowhereness". In Charity Chiruka's "Gone with the whirlwind" (Nyotaet al 2010), the persona Nhamo's depression and loneliness is so patent as he fondly writes to his mother back home. The character's mental drifts to his rural home in Nyazura, Zimbabwe, may be an attempt to mitigate the deep sense of alienation and estrangement he feels in the diaspora wilderness.

The protagonist in Ncube's the *Visa*, is at the crossroads of his existence when the story opens. His loyalty between home and adopted country is severely tested. He has to choose between keeping his promise to marry his long time sweetheart back home in Zimbabwe or marry his new girlfriend in the UK who has already been granted a UK resident visa. For him the second option is quite attractive since it would guarantee his continued stay in the UK as his own student visa is about to expire. When the story closes, the character has still not resolved this predicament. Thus the transnational setting of the Diaspora narratives depicts the dual reality or the double lives Zimbabweans have come live, with their loyalties often divide by the demands of both the motherland and the adopted home. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo wittily contrasts the physical spaces of Zimbabwe and the USA to aptly depict these contradictory ironies in which Zimbabweans find themselves. Acmin (1999, p. 58 in Rubio 2006) captures this dual existence aptly when he asserts: "With their memories perpetually on overload, exiles see double, feel double, are double."

Nostalgia for a country they once knew

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is characterised by a strong sense of nostalgia. Zimbabwe's expatriate writers are preoccupied with the homeland and their works, bear testimony to a deep sense of homelessness, a personal and cultural loss as they seek to locate and navigate their lives in these often hostile and confusing socio-cultural circumstances. This sense of homelessness is intense and genuine. As the 'home-land made' character's culture(s) collide with that of the adopted country, the Zimbabwean persona negotiates and re-negotiates their lives in order to create a new meaning and cultural identity which best suites their new circumstances as the dislocated and displaced other. A deep yearning for the early eighties when Zimbabwe was still economically robust runs through most of the literary works of Zimbabwe's Diaspora. While nostalgia is used to celebrate the country's past glory, it also bemoans the ruins the country has become. Darling, the child narrator/protagonist in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* yearns for home, her friends and guava-stealing adventures she used to enjoy with her friends back home. Moyo's *Coming to London* starts off by recounting Zimbabwe's former economic glory and prosperity of the 1980s. Mike and his

wife Edith are the epitome of a successful professional family of the early eighties. However, as the economic downturn creeps into the country, so too does it creep into their home. They sell their house in the belief that going to London will bring them better fortunes. In *Harare North*, the protagonist constantly smells his dead mother's scent from his old suitcase and he dreams of her often. These nostalgic memories connect not only the character but, the author to the homeland as well. The author's homesickness rubs onto the character and vice versa. Zimbabwean writer Sigauke who is based in the US testifies to this feeling in an interview with the *Sentinel Literary Quarterly* (28 January 2011). He says:

Writing is my way of staying connected to home at a deeper level. Of course, I am always talking to people back home, but rarely do I enter the dialogue with home more deeply than I do when writing. Having been away for 14 years, I sometimes feel a disconnection, or worry that maybe the issues I am dealing with maybe out of sync with the reality on the ground; yet that too can be a good thing, to allow the imagination to work overtime. My initial point of reference when I write about home takes me back to the things I remember, the Zimbabwe of the mid-90s, when change was apparent, but not yet disastrous.

The pervasive occurrence and recurrence of nostalgia in Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative seems instinctive. It is a natural feeling which overcomes the writer in exile, as they continually and perpetually adjust to their new home, yet remain fixated on the motherland, Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's diasporic writers also resort to nostalgia as literary technique to lament the losses they have suffered. For the current generation of Zimbabwe's voices in the wilderness, the diaspora has afforded them the opportunity to write about and to write back to the motherland without fear of political reprisal. As Saha (2009, p. 188) notes:

What these writers benefited from their exile was freedom of speech but they could never forget the shock of their original expulsion. They always believed that it was their right to be home, yet those who were privileged to return home, were often disappointed with the changes.

Gappah's is one such voice who uses satire to bemoan the political crisis which she blames for the economic crisis in Zimbabwe which has led not only to her dislocation, but the displacement of millions of Zimbabweans all over the globe. Muchemwa (2013) observes that the works of authors like Gappah and Chikwava have made the character of the president a literary subject, setting a precedent to an issue which has been sacrosanct in Zimbabwean literary discourse. The title of Gappah's short story collection, *An elegy to Easterly*, is telling in itself, as it is a cry which laments the death of a geographical space once vibrant and full of life which has now turned into a heap of rubble and ruins. Gappah, through stories like "At the sound of the last post", critiques how an intricate network of political elitism, cronyism and self-destructive tendencies have led to the crumbling of Easterly (s metaphor for Zimbabwe). Thus, the diaspora serves as an outlet for pent up emotions and feelings providing a ventilator to grievances and grudges.

The return motif

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is also laced with a passionate desire to return home. A phenomenon Srivastava (2012) describes as "the pull of home"— where the expatriate writer

continually looks back to the country of origin in a hope to return, while also celebrating their presence in the new home. Zimbabwe's writers in exile are constantly imagining and re-imagining the feeling and mood upon their return home. A number of scenarios present themselves in Zimbabwe's Diaspora narrative, ranging from the exciting tale of the heroic return to the painful and disillusioned return as they realise they no longer belong to the sad and sombre return which is punctuated by death in the diaspora. One author who takes a keen interest in the heroic return of the diaspora is Sigauke. This is manifest through his return titles in stories like "Mukoma's return" and "Return to moonlight" (2010). The third part in his anthology *Forever let me go* is entitled "Transition and return". All these works celebrate a return to the homeland after a long-time in the wilderness. The persistent return motif also reflects the author's own homesickness and longing to return home. He advocates a return to Zimbabwe's historical past, a past filled with economic prosperity and cultural wealth. This is evident in that Mukoma and Ranga the protagonists of the respective stories return to the village and not to towns or urban spaces which seem to have been corrupted and polluted by western ideals.

Madzimbamuto's short story "The burden" (2009) is one narrative which depicts the burden the returnee migrant's experiences after a prolonged absence from home. It is the burden of a transnational or dual existence. The tone of the story clearly articulates the profound sense of loss and disillusionment the displaced *other* feels as a result of cultural and identity loss. The narrator says: "...there are none who leave Zimbabwe without losing a part of themselves" (ibid, p.2). This feeling of disillusionment at the ambiguity of life in the diaspora continues in the story when the narrator further notes:

The signs were ambiguous. Are you a 'returning resident' when you live abroad and are coming 'home' for a few days, or are you a 'visitor' even when on a national passport? These thoughts were distracting him because they now held foreign passports and were coming 'home' as foreigners (ibid, p.2).

The ambiguity arises from the fact that the narrator no longer belongs; he has existed abroad for so long and has become such a blend of cultures and identities that he now feels strangely anchor-less. This same feeling is even more traumatic for the children who left the country as infants and are now teenagers: "They were not sure where to call home, where you came from originally, or where you lived now" (ibid, p.4). In *The Zimbabwean* of 5 March 2011 columnist Sibanengi Dube describes a similar but nastier experience with his own children:

My eldest child Sibanengi (jnr) confronted me when we were in my rural home in Mberengwa last December and demanded to be taken back 'home' as he was tired of being in Zimbabwe. The home he was referring to is my bank bonded house in Winchester Hills, Johannesburg, where he was born. When other stunned family members reminded him that he was actually at his 'real' home, he retaliated by boycotting his meals until we left for Johannesburg in a few days' time. This encounter has been constantly coming back to haunt me. It never crossed my mind that I would have kids who regard my home country as a camping festival destination. I was distressed.

The plight of these children also introduces another interesting notion of Zimbabwe's transitional Diaspora. The transitional Diaspora represents those immigrants who bridge generations and the future of Zimbabwe's literary heritage from the Diaspora.

One sad reality of life in the diaspora that is captured in the return motif of the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is the traumatic experience of death in the diaspora (Mbiba 2010). Gappah (2009) interrogates this notion through her short story “Something nice from London”. The narrative highlights how Zimbabweans both in the diaspora and at home attempt as much as possible to preserve cultural practices centring on death in a far-off place. Zimbabwean culture holds that people should be buried in their rural home. This practice is symbolic as it represents the strong umbilical connection people share with their ancestral homeland. Chadya (2010) aptly sums up this situation as follows:

The strong links they still have with Zimbabwe are such that when they die their cadavers are shipped back ‘home’. Simultaneously, the same strong connection with Zimbabweans left behind means that they have to ‘participate’ in funerals of family taking place in Zimbabwe.

Gappah’s (2009) narrative questions the economic sense of the expensive practice of repatriating a dead relative’s corpse from the diaspora for burial back home. Gappah in her story subverts these Zimbabwean cultural practices surrounding death. Her solution to counter this expensive and often traumatic experience is cremation. It is apparent that Zimbabwean cultural practices are under threat as the diaspora has given rise to the unthinkable, abominations and catastrophes as Zimbabweans slowly lose their identity and embrace western values. At the end of the day, the persistent return motif in Zimbabwean Diaspora literature represents hope and an undying attachment with the homeland.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative is still very much in its infancy and it is largely punctuated by the writings of first generation migrants. It is yet to be seen whether this body of literary works will be able to sustain this momentum and whether successive generations of Zimbabwean immigrants will keenly and readily inherit this literary heritage. It is further evident that Zimbabwean Diaspora literature is not merely the tale about the geographical displacement experienced by Zimbabweans due to the socio-economic and political crisis of post-2000, but it is the story of Zimbabwe’s socio-cultural displacement. The scattering of Zimbabweans all over the globe constitutes an indelible part of the country’s history and the Zimbabwean Diaspora narrative aptly immortalises this significant epoch in the country’s history. Although Zimbabwe’s Diaspora narrative maybe a product of a historical accident which most Zimbabweans would love to forget quickly, it is without doubt that Zimbabwean Diaspora literature has emerged to be a literary force to be reckoned with amongst the modern literatures of the world. Zimbabwe’s voice in/from the wilderness refuses to be silenced and it is with a strong sense of urgency that Zimbabwe’s Diaspora writers address the different themes that jump at them, from home and within the diaspora. Therefore, to deny Zimbabwe’s voice from the wilderness the due critical attention and literary space it deserves would be folly as this is tantamount to rejecting a vital part of Zimbabwe’s rich literary heritage.

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