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Entanglements of Diaspora and 'Home' Homes in the Zimbabwean Short Story of Crisis.

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**‘Such a Thing Does Not Have a Name in his Country’: Entanglements of Diaspora and
‘Home’ Homes in the Zimbabwean Short Story of Crisis**

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Abstract

Home, crisis and migration have defined the experience and concept of being post-colonial Zimbabwe(an) for the past two decades. Much has been written about the post-coloniality of this entangled experience and about how, in particular, literary fiction re-discourses normative perspectives of the Zimbabwean crisis, the home, the unhomely and trans-national out-migration. Rarely considered a serious discursive site from which to (re)know the intricacies inhabiting versions, configurations and symbolisms of the home (especially in the context of crisis and mobility), the Zimbabwean short story has largely remained underexplored. This article recentres the short story of migration (Farai Mpfu’s ‘The Letter’ and NoViolet Mkhama’s ‘Shamisos’) in examining how, as socio-cultural and geo-political constructs, diaspora and ‘home’ homes manifest and orchestrate temporalities, processes, relations, attitudes, places, people, and discourses that shape a certain understanding of Zimbabwe as a contested post-colonial ‘home’. On the one hand, the protagonists in the stories live precariously in ‘refuge’ new homes (Botswana and South Africa respectively), and on the other, they attempt to make sense of their precarity through traumatic re-memories of their haunting ‘home’ home (Zimbabwe). We interpret this connection between these unstable ‘homes’ using a conceptual frame that we term ‘ambivalent continuum of precarity’, a concept we coined from the notions of ‘precarity of place’ and ‘continuum of precarity’ advanced by Susan Banki and Julia Ann McWilliams and Sally Wesley Bonet respectively. Our analysis of literary representations of the home(s) therefore focuses on their complex, multiple and shifting layers, signs, symbolisms and ontologies as constructs which reflect on the crisis of post-coloniality manifest in precarious mobilities and ambivalent homes.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, migration, alienation, precarity, home, political violence

Introduction: Focus and theoretical framing

Migration is a predominant theme in the Zimbabwean literary canon. For this reason, there is a vast body of critical work that focuses on this thematic area. A great deal of this scholarly work specifically interrogates representations of intersections between home and diaspora in Zimbabwean fiction (Muchemwa 2010; Nyambi, Makombe & Motahane 2020; Ndlovu 2010; Siziba 2017). In his reading of Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*, for example, Gugulethu Siziba discusses how 'Zimbabwe's structural and physical violence [...] extends to the country's diaspora' (2017: 1). He notes that in London, the novel's nameless narrator lives on the margins and experiences 'precarious and dehumanizing living conditions' comparable to his 'bare' life in Zimbabwe (Siziba 2017, 1). In his discussion, Siziba destabilizes notions of home 'as serene and safe, *and* the outside world [...] as risky and dangerous' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 79). This study seeks to build on Siziba's arguments, using two short stories: Farai Mpfu's 'The Letter' (2005) and NoViolet Mkhwa's (popularly known as NoViolet Bulawayo) 'Shamisos' (2011) to demonstrate how both writers represent the ways in which home can be just as risky and dangerous as the outside world. The short story genre is rarely viewed as a serious discursive and aesthetic site to (re)know the intricacies, versions, configurations and symbolisms of the concept and experience of home (especially in the context of crisis and migration in Zimbabwe). As such the short story has not received significant critical attention. Our study shows, however, the 'genre's disposition to capture the fragmented realities of socio-political transitions' (Fasselt, Sandwith & Soldati-Kahimbaara 2020, 4).

In our analysis of 'The Letter' and 'Shamisos', we provide a novel analytical frame of ambivalent continuum of precarity, which is a modification of concepts, advanced by Susan Banki, and Julia Ann McWilliams and Sally Wesley Bonet respectively, of 'precarity of place' and 'continuum of precarity'. We use this concept of ambivalent continuum of precarity to argue that in as much as immigrants from Zimbabwe experience precarity at home and outside of their country, some of their experiences in 'home' homes and 'diaspora' homes are outside the frame of precarity. In our reading of 'Shamisos' using this framework, we are able to show how precarity of place, what Banki terms 'the tightrope quality of noncitizen life', also extends to poor citizens of South Africa. Banki coined 'precarity of place' as a counter sub(concept) to address the insufficiencies in dominant understandings of the concept of 'precarity', and in particular 'the term's failure to capture the challenges faced by one of its subset populations: that of noncitizens' (2013, 459). In Banki's view, then, precarity of place, refers to 'the

challenges of being migrants and the tightrope quality of noncitizen life' (2013, 459). Banki uses the case of Burmese people living in Thailand to theorise the noncitizen's vulnerability to deportation. Continuum of precarity, on the other hand, represents 'a line of precarity [that] runs through [...] pre-migration histories [...] [in flight contexts] and extends into post-departure social worlds' (McWilliams & Bonet 2016, 153). McWilliams and Bonet refer, in this regard, to the pre-migratory experiences of Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi refugee youth and their postsecondary education and work in the American urban context. In a way, their concept complements Banki's in that it details how migrant precarity has two sites: the migrants' home country and their host countries.

In our study, we use the lens of return to illustrate this ambivalent continuum of precarity. The protagonists in the focal stories are forced to return to their homes through violent, albeit different, means. In 'The Letter', Juba is deported from Botswana, while in 'Shamisos' Method and other migrants are violently ordered to return to their countries by South African locals during xenophobic attacks. In both contexts, host countries define migrants as 'unwanted, undesirable, unwelcome foreigners' (Hall and Hasselberg in De Genova 2019, 95). Even after and despite deportation, Juba plans to re-emigrate. Method, too, refuses to yield to the violent demands for immigrants to return to their countries and he is burnt to death in South Africa. Refusing to go back may suggest that the characters are alienated from their homes, and feel more at home in the diaspora. On another level, however, the characters' ties to Zimbabwe are not severed and they feel somewhat estranged in the 'diaspora'. The writers therefore create complex characters whose experiences pose challenges to the thinking that home can be 'elsewhere' (Nyambi et al. 2020). While both characters have bad memories of their 'home' home, of Zimbabwe, their 'diaspora' homes also prove to be unhomey. This entanglement of the two homes shapes the complexity of the notion of 'belonging'. Writing about immigrants in South Africa, Thabisani Ndlovu observes, in this regard, that 'most Zimbabweans who have 'made it' still hold a Zimbabwean passport or in a most symbolic manner, both a Zimbabwean and South African passport' (Ndlovu 2010, 123). So, while the Zimbabwean 'home' disappoints, it remains 'home' for most Zimbabweans, in that they still have ties with it that are unbreakable.

Brief synopses of the short stories

In this section, we offer short summaries of the two short stories that we analyse in this article. Farai Mpfu's short story 'The Letter' is taken from the short story anthology *Writing Now:*

More Stories from Zimbabwe (2005) edited by Irene Staunton. Its setting is unstable in the sense that although it narrates a deportee Juba's sojourn from Botswana to Zimbabwe, through flashbacks, it recreates his experiences in both countries. Through the trope of the letter, the author weaves together the fragments of the protagonist's life. From Juba's letter to his mother, who is buried in an unmarked grave in Zimbabwe, we learn that he left Zimbabwe for Botswana following his mother's murder. In Botswana, he falls in love with and impregnates a Tswana girl whose parents block their marriage. Prior to his deportation, he is tortured at the Chief's court for crimes related to his status as an 'illegal' immigrant.

The second story, 'Shamisos' by NoViolet Mkhama, is taken from *Writing Free* (2011), also edited by Irene Staunton. The story is set in South Africa. The protagonist, Method, is a Zimbabwean who works as a gardener for a South African lesbian couple. He stays in a 'settlement' together with migrants from other African countries. He is burnt to death in his shack during a violent attack on their 'settlement' by 'locals'. These two short stories offer us a discursive site through which to think through the precarious nature of the life of Zimbabwean immigrants' in 'refuge' new homes (Botswana and South Africa respectively) on the one hand, and to make sense of their precarity through traumatic re-memories of their haunting 'home' home (Zimbabwe) on the other.

Concepts of Home and Diaspora in Zimbabwe

In this study, home is understood to be the original homeland. Zimbabwe is the protagonists' place of birth and the place where family and relatives live and are buried. In both short stories, the characters are 'pushed out' of their home as a result of political violence, which then leads them to associate their homeland with tyranny and persecution (Mallet 2004). Their experiences confirm that Zimbabwe is indeed, in the words of NoViolet Bulawayo, a 'kaka country' (Ndlovu 2017). Kaka as a 'metaphor for Zimbabwe, is used to characterize the country's decayed economy and the moral and cultural filth of residential areas such as Paradise' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 84). The conditions under which Mpofo and Mkhama's main characters, Juba and Method, leave 'their journeys beyond and away from home and their destinations are all said to impact on their [...] understanding of home' (Mallet 2004, 78). One thing is clear, however: even though the protagonists were pushed out of, and are reluctant to return to their homeland, they do not sever ties with Zimbabwe, as is symbolised by the memories that they have of their mothers (one dead and the other alive). So, home, in the context of these short stories becomes a crucial site 'for examining [...] citizenship and human

rights, and the role of government and governmentality. Equally [providing] a context for analysing ideas and practices about [...] family, kinship, [and] ethnicity' (Mallet 2004, 84).

Journeys away from home take Mpofo and Mkha's characters to the 'diaspora' that, in the Zimbabwean sense, is any place outside of Zimbabwe, to which one can escape (see McGregor 2010). This concept of 'diaspora' centres on the Shona term *kumhiri* (literally meaning yonder/beyond, in this case, beyond Zimbabwe's national borders), which communities in some parts of Zimbabwe use to refer to South Africa in particular. 'Diaspora's' symbolic meaning in Zimbabwe, for those who leave the country and those who remain, against the backdrop of recurring economic crises since the 2000s, is that of a place of hope, survival and opportunities. Using *We Need New Names*, Nyambi et al., similarly observe that, in the context of Zimbabwe, 'foreignness is [...] synonymous with safety from hunger, just as locality is associated with susceptibility to hunger and poverty' (2020, 83). However, as most literary representations and research from other disciplines consistently demonstrate, for most Zimbabweans who leave their homeland, the 'diaspora' dream remains elusive. This is aptly articulated in the statement by Brian Chikwava's narrator in *Harare North*: 'Yari yari yari yea when people is in Zimbabwe they fill the air with cries saying they want to come to the big lights but once they is here you find them blinking like lost goats, that's what she say to me' (Chikwava 2009, 41). In Kociejowski's reading, the statement above 'captures perfectly the disillusion that sets in when people [...] come to London, thinking they will find there an escape from poverty and abuse' (Kociejowski 2011, 59).

Home occupies the mind of Mkha's protagonist all the time and it feels like 'he never left home', just as for Bulawayo's character in *We Need New Names*, 'home remains etched in the mind' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 80). For both characters, 'movement to a new place does not necessarily translate into abandoning home' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 80). In 'The Letter', Juba declares that he 'has no home' in Zimbabwe, in the sense of a physical structure, but Zimbabwe remains his home, where his mother is buried in an unmarked grave, and to where he is also deported. This literary scene from 'The Letter' confirms Ndlovu's observation that in Zimbabwe, 'home is conflated with house and family. It is more than just a physical dwelling. It connotes an interaction between place and social relationships' (Ndlovu 2010, 119). For Juba and Method, the host country does not in any way become 'home', in the sense of a space to which they belong. Firstly, this is because it is not their place of origin. Secondly, they are 'unwanted' (De Genova 2019, 95), which is the reason why one of them is deported while the

other is burnt to death. And just before his death, in what we could term ‘a moment of clarity’, Method, in ‘Shamisos’, symbolically discards ‘Xolela’, a name he had adopted to ‘belong’ to the South African community, and reclaims his Zimbabweanness by announcing that his real name is Method.

On the one hand, Juba in ‘The Letter’ and Method in ‘Shamisos’ live precariously in their ‘refuge homes’ or ‘diaspora homes’, and on the other, they remember and associate their ‘home’ home (Zimbabwe) with traumatic pasts. The characters, Juba and Method’s pre-departure (in Zimbabwe) and post-departure (in Botswana and South Africa respectively) contexts are characterised by violence. It is for this reason that Mpofu’s protagonist, Juba and Mkha’s protagonist, Method, refuse to return to Zimbabwe. However, one wonders why Juba and Method would want to remain in a foreign space which has proven to be unsafe for them. Juba explains why he would return to Botswana even after experiencing torture prior to deportation. For him, ‘it is always better to be treated like a dog in a foreign country than to be treated like a dog in your own country’ (205). Juba here invokes a typically Zimbabwean dog which is kicked, scolded and has missiles thrown at it. He deploys the dog metaphor to expose inhuman treatment which he could tolerate if it happens in a foreign country but not at home. Home and ‘diaspora’ are equally precarious, but Juba considers experiencing precarity in Botswana better than having to deal with it in Zimbabwe. The preference has to do with the unacceptability and irony of being treated like a dog in a space that should normally offer security and protection. In their interpretation of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, Nyambi et al. similarly note that the child narrator, Darling, realises that choosing between home and America is like choosing between two prisons, and she ‘settles for America because it is a better prison, but a prison all the same, because it thrives on refusing her integration into mainstream society’ (Nyambi et al. 2020, 90). The dog and prison metaphors, in ‘The Letter’ and *We Need New Names* respectively, serve to not only underscore how home can ‘disappoint, constrict, endanger, and indeed, kill’ (Ndlovu 2010, 119), but to also highlight how ‘refuge homes’ can be more than spaces of opportunities. On his part, Method, reasons, ‘only those who had not endured what they have suffered could open their mouths and say GO BACK, just like that. Go back, return to your country – as if their dream was dispensable, forgettable, as if the scars on their bodies and minds counted for nothing’ (Mkha 2011, 76). For Method, then, the choice to remain in the ‘refuge’ home, where he is not wanted, has to do with what we term the ‘diaspora dream’, where the ‘diaspora’ becomes a site in which he could better his life. His experiences of ‘rejection’ in the ‘diaspora’ and the violence at his ‘home’ home that pushed

him into the ‘diaspora’ reflect how the two kinds of home are entangled and ‘continuous’. The analytical frame of ambivalent continuum of precarity that we use to examine the two short stories allows us to salvage elements of happiness from narrative of migrations that are ignored, for example, in the frame of continuum of precarity as it is employed by McWilliams and Bonet (2016) in their study pre-migratory experiences of Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi refugee youth and their experiences in America. The concept of ambivalent continuum of precarity also provides us with a discursive space through which to reflect on how Banki’s concept of ‘precarity of place,’ especially in regard to Mkha’s ‘Shamisos’, can also be used to reflect on the ‘tightrope quality’ of citizen life for the poor in South Africa.

Violence, Traumatic Pasts, (Un)certain Futures and Inseverable Ties

Mpofu’s ‘The Letter’ opens with an epigraph:

a voice was heard in
Ramah, lamentation
weeping, and great mourning
Rachel weeping for her children
refusing to be comforted
because they were no more

This epigraph is drawn from Jeremiah 31:15. In this biblical extract, Rachel weeps for the loss of her children during the deportations of the Jews into Babylonian captivity. The affective quality of the epigraph is an intertext that foreshadows the sorrowful plot and tone of ‘The Letter’, which begins with the vicious beating of Juba at a Chief’s court in an unnamed village in Botswana, and ends with his deportation to Zimbabwe. In addition to the violent and sad experiences of the present, the reader learns about Juba’s painful past, which includes the horrifying murder of his mother by the soldiers in Zimbabwe, which symbolises that of the many victims of *Gukurahundi* (the state-sanctioned violence which took place in the 1980s, during which an estimated 20, 000 mainly Ndebele civilians lost their lives). This part of the plot brings together Juba’s present and past experiences in Botswana and at home as an illustration of the concept of the continuum of precarity.

Ramah’s bitter tears marking her children’s suffering in the same manner that Juba’s story draws attention to the injustices associated with his migrant life. Juba is tried at the Chief’s court, and is punished for, as the Chief says: ‘crossing the border into our country illegally ... and making one of our children pregnant’ (202). He is viewed as illegal because he crossed

into Botswana by jumping the border. This calls to mind De Genova's idea that 'migrant "illegality" is a spatialized social condition' (De Genova 2004, 161). Juba is also accused of crossing a social boundary by engaging in a sexual relationship with a local girl. The Chief further makes generalisations about immigrants and speaks of how: 'these people steal our hard-earned property, our cattle, and they bring immorality and incurable diseases into our community' (202). The immigrants' so-called diseased status is therefore deployed to highlight their 'undesirability' (De Genova 2019, 92) and the Chief labels immigrants as thieves, different and diseased in order to justify their torture. In the same statement, he constructs the host country as 'free of disease' or morally upright, in a sense. Juba's torture at the Chief's court, for instance, disrupts the host country's purported sense of moral uprightness. The Chief's own perception of illegal migrants is particularly reductive and inaccurate. Such stereotyping misinforms. It is a faulted view of what immigrants (documented or not) bring into Botswana: they are not just a source of labour, in most cases, critical cheap labour (see Campbell 2006, 12) but also 'fulfil a variety of economic functions that would otherwise go unfulfilled' (Agnew 2008, 185).

As punishment for his crimes, Juba is stripped naked. He is basically shamed and forced to sit on an anthill, where he is left at the mercy of ants. Being stripped naked leaves him bare and exposed to other forms of hurt, humiliation and indignity. This calls to mind what Hannah Arendt (1958) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) respectively termed 'naked life' and 'bare life'. Throughout the torture, Juba screams while the villagers 'swallow in anticipation' (202). The corresponding emotions of hurt/pain and joy exemplify the polarised identities assumed by perpetrators and victims in contexts of xenophobic violence. Juba is a 'victim of torture' and is in a precarious relationship with the law if we take the Chief to represent traditional judiciary (see Downey 2009, 109). The torture that Juba is subjected to affords the reader a glimpse into his precarious life as a migrant. Additional punishment takes the form of deportation to Zimbabwe, and through that journey, the reader gets critical details about how deportation worsens the migrant's precarity.

On the way to Zimbabwe, Juba and other deportees are kept in a prison cell in Francistown. The characters are forcibly removed from the country as what Nicholas De Genova, in his 'theory of migrant detainability' calls 'criminal aliens' (De Genova 2019, 96). They are detained in a filthy cell for days, prior to their deportation. In addition to denying Juba of what De Genova describes as 'most elementary liberties' (De Genova 2019, 95), the detention centre

translates into a site of inhuman violence, just like the Chief's court that facilitated Juba's torture. The detention centre is a space in which the police wilfully play out their cruelty, bashing Juba's head and feeding the prisoners food taken from refuse bins. Juba refuses to eat the food that he calls 'shit'. Indeed, he refuses to eat, bath and smile in a bid to protest against dehumanisation and achieve individual agency. If, as De Genova (2019, 97) suggests elsewhere, the police's use of brute force in the detention centre is about enforcing relations of domination, then Juba's symbolic acts (refusing to eat, smile and bath) aim to disrupt that domination.

From the detention centre, the prisoners are further dehumanised as they loaded into a *lorry as if they were cattle*. Along the way, Juba notices 'the two-hundred-and-fifty-volt electric fence' that the Batswana are building on the border, purportedly to stop the 'cattle diseased with foot and mouth from contaminating their healthy herds' (205). Heightening border security, which in the narrative involves putting up a 'two-hundred-and-fifty-volt electric fence', is intended to deter 'illegal' migration. The aforementioned imaging migrants as diseased 'others' them makes them less than human. Juba observes the long queues of Zimbabweans entering Botswana at the border. From his perspective, most of the migrants 'will either overstay or simply throw away their passports as soon as they arrive' (205). This is evidence that in addition to border jumping, there are other alternative 'illegal' routes into Botswana that are not easy to detect and deal with. For his part, Juba plans to 'begin the great trek to Botswana' as soon as he is released (205). The juxtaposition of the deportations, the stricter border enforcements, the new arrivals and Juba's plan to re-emigrate also highlights how Zimbabwe pushes away its people

Juba is afraid of the electric fence under construction on the Botswana's border with Zimbabwe, but remembers that he has other options. If the Batswana close their borders, at least the Zambian, Congolese, Mozambican, Angolan and South African ones are still open (205). Being in a state of constant mobility, Juba has become a nomad. He is therefore at a greater risk of becoming 'stuck in mobility', in Anna Wyss's (2019, 77) words. His mobility becomes an 'unfinished search for a secure destination' (Taylor 2006, 207) because life in Zimbabwe is 'without the promise of stability' (Tsing in Millar 2017, 4). But finding a secure destination, in his case, may be elusive, as his stay in Botswana has already shown. Significantly, the constant mobility lens challenges the homogenising descriptions of the global South, especially a blanket labelling of the entire African continent as a place of 'crisis'. Such

a discourse ignores determinants of South-South migration such as socio-political and economic differences among African countries. South Africa, Namibia, etc, for example, are comparatively safer\better than Zimbabwe. In the words of Darling, the child narrator in *We Need New Names*, South Africa, Namibia etc may not be as developed as the USA, which fits into the category of ‘country-countries, but at least life is better than’ in Zimbabwe (Bulawayo 2013, 49).

Juba connects with his mother through a letter that he writes from the detention cell. That this letter is being written to a mother who was murdered and buried in an unmarked grave shows his desire to connect with her even beyond death. It is an important component of the story, that occupies a large space in the narrative, covering two of the five pages that make up the short story. Mpofo uses the letter as a space from which his character speaks about and remembers his past or personal experiences prior to his departure from his homeland. The letter details of the coldblooded murder of his mother. It is a narration of immense pain in which the reader learns how Juba’s pregnant mother had had her womb slit open by soldiers. This incident evokes a combination of deep and surface meanings. In a deep sense, the mother’s experiences irrevocably alter the concept of the womb as a metaphor of a secure space. If we take the mother’s body as a figure of Juba’s homeland, then the inside or enclosed domain of ‘this home’ becomes an insecure and unsafe space for the inhabitants. The unborn child who is killed represents new life, so the baby’s killing represents the killing of the country’s futures. On another level, and most importantly, the manner in which the mother died invokes a more urgent and violent narrative, that of *Gukurahundi*, which remains a contentious issue in the postcolonial history and politics of Zimbabwe. In the context of the *Gukurahundi*, the slitting open of the mother’s womb is a metaphoric construct of state coercive power and its invasion of citizens’ private spaces with the intentions of causing serious harm. Both Juba’s mother and the unborn child fit into the category of Achille Mbembe’s (2003) contemporary bodies that are wounded or slain in ‘the guise of the fight against terror’ as is suggested in the phrase ‘to kill a dissident’. In the case of *Gukurahundi*, dominant state narratives purport that the violence ‘was instigated by the need to weed out dissidents who were threatening the stability of post-independent Zimbabwe’ (Ncube & Siziba 2017, 232).

In the same manner that *Gukurahundi* continues to haunt Zimbabwean politics, Juba is haunted by the nightmares of his mother’s death. Remembering his mother’s murder therefore voices the silences surrounding the issue of *Gukurahundi*. Writing the letter is therapeutic as it helps

Juba to deal with the painful past and personal losses. Through it, he retells and remembers about the trauma and this provides a degree of ‘cathartic release’ (Kearney 2007). Most importantly, the letter re-enacts the mother’s murder and is the only available window through which the reader gets to know about Juba’s home, and more specifically, the violence that triggered his departure, the violence that simultaneously deters his return. The letter is an interlude that helps the reader to see the connections between Juba’s past, present and possibly future decisions concerning his home. The mother’s horrifying murder triggered Juba’s migration to Botswana, and also justifies his decision to return there even after his deportation. This is a departure from common conceptions of economic crisis as a push factor associated with migration from Zimbabwe. For Juba, it is a search for home, and the push factor is his unsettledness. Juba’s experiences, in a sense, expose the little talked about ethnic dimensions of migration out of Zimbabwe, where migration from Matabeleland has been triggered primarily by *Gukurahundi* experiences and other forms of marginalisation of the Ndebele, what Vera elsewhere termed Bulawayo’s ‘notion of being peripheral’ (Bulawayo in this sense representing the spaces occupied by the Ndebele) (Vera in Larson 2008, 1). Another point to be made is that Juba’s conditions of departure show him to be more than an illegal migrant but a refugee whose migration is forced and a strategy for surviving political violence (see Hugo & Bun 1990).

Juba declares at the end of the story that ‘he no longer has a home in Zimbabwe’ (204). We could therefore read his homelessness in the context of Wardaugh’s argument that ‘those who are abused and violated [...] are likely to feel ‘homeless at home’ and many subsequently become homeless in an objective sense, in that they escape – or are ejected from – their violent homes’ (Wardaugh in Mallet 2004, 73). Maternal attachment to his mother, however, forces him to remember his home country, and becomes a powerful image of an attachment to one’s homeland. His undying love for his mother not only shows in his grief at her murder, but also in remembering her unmarked grave, which draws him towards his home. His home is therefore ambivalently precarious in that it is a site where repulsive violence and maternal attachment coexist. Through this depiction, Mpofo casts the ‘maternal tie ... as inescapable and unbreakable’ (Anatol 2002, 939). In his discussion of *Harare North*, Siziba makes a similar observation about Chikwava’s unnamed narrator whose ‘mother’s grave represents a connection between him and his home’ (Siziba 2017, 6). In contexts where ‘home is constituted by both the living and the dead whose memory and presence in the family are preserved’ by visiting graves, unmarked graves, like that of Juba’s mother, pose problems (Siziba 2017, 6).

The unmarked grave in 'The Letter' is a powerful image of the injustice of *Gukurahundi*, where most victims through non-burial, have been relegated to the unknown. While Juba has an unbreakable tie to Zimbabwe in the mother's unmarked grave, to Botswana he will be forever tied through his unborn child carried by the Tswana girl. His vow that he will go back to Botswana even after deportation is testimony to the fact that in spite of the violence he suffered there, Botswana will, in his mind, remain a place of opportunities. These nuances highlight the ambivalences of precarity in the life of an immigrant from Zimbabwe that Mpofo seeks to expose through his depiction of Juba.

'Not at Home' in a Foreign Land

'Shamisos' centres on Method's stay in South Africa, which ends in his death. The story opens with him taking out white creepers as per his employer's instruction. The destruction of the beautiful flowers foreshadows Method's fate in this story. Method has a degree in French from the University of Zimbabwe, but ends up working as a gardener in South Africa. This represents a form of a downward mobility in that his dignity is downgraded. Ironically, however, the protagonist earns a better salary as a gardener in South Africa than what he would working as a French teacher in a government school in Zimbabwe. This scenario speaks to an economic crisis in Zimbabwe during the 'lost-decade', which saw the erosion of workers' real wages.

Method's thoughts flit back and forth between South Africa and Zimbabwe. In other words, he 'sees things' within the twin contexts of these two countries. Thoughts about 'home' home loom over the story as they shape how he interprets and responds to his encounters in the host country. In his case, 'to be away from home' does not necessarily mean 'to be disconnected from the everydayness of the 'home' of origin' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 80). This is one way in which, in his case, home and 'diaspora' become entangled, 'overlapping territories' as Edward Said suggests (in Hall and Back 2009). This happens because Method's home is 'more than a location' (Ralph & Staeheli 2011, 517). It is also a culture (Mallet 2004). Home's 'cultural meanings and practices' (Nyambi et al. 2020, 79) shape Method's behaviour while he is resident in a foreign land. There is, however, a 'dialectical tension between shaping and being shaped by the world' (Mallet 2004, 80). The flowers that Method grows in a South African garden invoke Shamiso, 'the girl in 3C¹ class at Njube Secondary School' (73) in Zimbabwe. He has thus named them 'Shamisos' after her. This he does, as he says, 'because it brings back memories' from the past (73). Also, by using the name 'Shamiso' to name South African

flowers, Method uses his worldview to shape the 'foreign space'. In other scenes in the narrative, however, it is he who is shaped by the 'diaspora'.

For instance, he is forced to 'tolerate' lesbianism in South Africa, against conventions in his home that label non-normative sexualities as unnatural. About his employer's lesbian relationship, Method thinks:

Such a thing does not have a name in his country, how everybody there know that such people were not people, they were worse than pigs and dogs. If he had been at home, he would have climbed in through the window and beaten them senselessly, especially that one who wore men's clothes. He would have raised an alarm and people would have been happy to drag them out in the open and beat them till they could not scream. But then, he restrains himself and remembers that 'he is not at home' (78)

In the above quotation, the protagonist brings to mind the homophobic statement of the late former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, in which he described homosexuals as 'worse than dogs and pigs'. Method considers using violence to 'knock sense', especially into the mind of the woman 'who wore men's clothes', and to call the community to help in hurting her. The woman 'who wore men's clothes' is targeted because she does not conceal her 'deviance'. Rather, she displays it through dress or, in other words, her clothes *maketh* her queer (Clarke & Turner 2007). But Mkha's character remembers that he cannot handle the situation as he should or normally would because 'he is not at home'. The scene is a reminder to him that he is living in a foreign space with different conventions.

There are similar contexts dotted throughout the narrative in which Method remembers that 'he is not at home' and allows the 'diaspora' to shape his behaviour. When his employer badmouths him, in his presence, during a telephone conversation with a friend, for example, Method gets angry. 'If he were at home, he would have grabbed her phone and slapped her with the back of his hand' (73). In another context, a woman looks at him as if he were a 'fly' (74). The woman's gaze dehumanises, hurts and wounds him. He imagines that 'if he were in his country, he would turn and confront the woman'. The refrain, 'he is not at home' that the reader encounters more than once in the narrative suggests that Method realises how he has no option but to adhere to the cultural ideas, practices, and values of the host land. He does not, therefore, beat up his employer for 'being a lesbian' and badmouthing him, or the woman who dehumanises him, not because he sees anything wrong with such violent behaviour, but because he is in a different space where such behaviour would draw attention to him. Codes of social conduct from his

‘home’ home have nothing to do with *unhu* (the essence of being human). If anything, they are forms of violence that reveal a lack of *unhu*. Fitting into the host land community therefore involves both adapting to local social behaviours and discarding the social ethics of his ‘home’ home.

In another incident, after accidentally cutting his toe while doing the gardening, Method yells for his mother, because ‘where he comes from, people yell for their mothers when they are in pain’ (75). But in this case, his employer, not his mother, comes to attend to him. The home-host land overlap is quite resonant here. The invocation of Method’s mother in the above scene leads us to think about how he continues to interact with his mother who is in Zimbabwe; how he metaphorically remains ‘in touch’ with his homeland.

When Method does not send her groceries, the mother writes to him: ‘this is to tell you that we are dying of hunger’ (78). The mother’s statement establishes home as a place of hunger and the ‘diaspora’ as a source of sustenance, for those who stay in Zimbabwe. The reference to hunger is important, since ‘food serves as a background for the crisis in Zimbabwe, as a push and pull factor’ (Nyambi 2018, 220). Method plans to send his mother some groceries through *Malayitsha* (cross-border transporters). The letters from Method’s mother and *Malayitsha* sustain the social connection between mother and son and thus link ‘diaspora’ and homeland. While he is in his shack, Method imagines having a conversation with his mother, ‘talking to the letters pretending he is talking to his mother’ (82). He even ‘imitates her voice’ (82) as he imagines what she might say to him. Some of these logics are strong illustrations of our concept of ambivalent continuums of precarity of place where, in spite of Zimbabwe’s unhomeliness, as signified by the presence of ‘hunger’, Method does not forget it, because that is where his mother resides. The strong connection with his mother is reminiscent of the one between him and his home country. Our readings of this scene in ‘Shamisos’ resonates with Siziba’s reading of *Harare North*, where he observes that the unnamed narrator’s

poor mother occupies his mind and is one of the conduits through which Chikwava clarifies the protagonist’s marginal life. His dreams about his mother can be thought of as symbolising the subjective fear and unconscious activation of fear of the poverty that he emerges from in Zimbabwe (Siziba 2017, 5).

Method has a Mozambican co-worker whom he once unconsciously addressed using his own first language. ‘One’s first language is often spoken of in terms of maternal connection: it is

referred to as the ‘mother tongue’ (Anatol 2002, 939). In this context, we can interpret Method’s use of his ‘mother tongue’ in a foreign space and in a conversation with a foreigner ‘within a nationalist consciousness’ (Anatol 2002, 939) and frame it as an ‘uncanny slip’. It is significant that the Mozambican, for his part, resents his job as a domestic worker. He says: ‘my wife and children do these things for me back home; do you know that?’ (75). Both Method and the Mozambican man are therefore nostalgic about their home countries while the Somali old man who Method meets on his way from work to the place where he lives is also sentimental about his home (see Mallet 2004). The Somali sings about his home in his language and slips in the name of his country, or the names of cities such as Mogadishu, Hargeysa, Berbera, Chisimayu, and Jamaane. The sadness in the song overwhelms Method, who shares in the sadness. The sadness that pervades the Somali man’s song evokes what Said (1984) terms the essential sadness of exile that can never be surmounted. In the scenes invoked here, Method, the Mozambican man, and the Somali all feel out of place, a sentiment which, as Stuart Hall shows, ‘is inevitably a condition of the diaspora’ (Hall & Back 2009, 670).

In yet another instance, Method’s employer patronisingly uses simple English when talking to him, ‘as if she were speaking to a child’ (73). She also stereotypes immigrants as seen in a telephone conversation with a friend, where she talks about how she fired ‘a Nigerian because they are thieves’; a Malawian ‘because they are lazy’; a Zimbabwean now works for her and these ‘are everywhere like cockroaches’ (73). The employer is, however, depicted ambivalently. In spite of her xenophobic utterances, she is presented as compassionate. She cares for Method after he cuts his toe and gives him a new pair of shoes. She takes such good care of him, in fact, that Method has erotic fantasies about it. Method also earns a better salary than most of his friends. His employer’s benevolent nature serves as a contrast to the violent nature of Method’s South African neighbours in Eden Park.

Eden Park, the settlement where Method lives, is made up of Mozambican, Nigerian, Malawian, Zimbabwean and South African quarters. These quarters reveal something about human movement within the African continent, where South Africa has become a point of convergence for migrants from other African countries. Method feels like he is crossing borders when moving from one of the settlement’s quarters to another. However, to anchor the immigrants’ precarity, the settlement is depicted as being full of murky water, dirt, junk and excrement attracting ‘armies of flies’ (77). The settlement is essentially a slum, and resonates well with Bulawayo’s ‘Paradise’ in *We Need New Names* (2013) as the shacks in Eden Park

are comparable to the tin shacks in Paradise. Poverty in Paradise contradicts the prosperity suggested by its name, just as the violence that takes place in Eden Park contradicts the sacredness suggested by its name. Eden Park is located on the margins of the city, on the urban periphery, and this in itself suggests exclusion and economic marginalisation. The inhabitants are impoverished as the nature of their shacks reveals. This settlement is predominantly home to foreigners, and South Africans who live there are citizens who clearly do not lead good lives either. Similar spaces occupied by poor black South Africans comparable to this imagined slum include Khayelitsha in Cape Town. Unlike Banki's concept of precarity of place, which restricts its focus to non-citizens, the 'locals' poverty invoked in Mkha's narrative exemplifies a different kind of precarity of place involving citizens. To use Anthony Downey's (2009, 109) words, the locals' marginalization disrupts the binary distinctions of outsider\insider. It is plausible, therefore, to argue that Mkha here imagines one of the ways in which poor South Africans are in a sense 'not at home' in their homeland, in the same manner Method and other migrants were not at home in Zimbabwe.

One would think that economic marginalisation and 'exclusion' would be possible motives for unity between poor locals and migrants. On the contrary, the marginalised locals view migrants as the very cause of their suffering. As such, when they see migrants, they act like 'angry gods' (78). Not surprisingly, then, Method's 'body tenses and his stomach knots' each time he passes through the South African quarter in Eden Park. This embodiment of fear depicts the South African quarter of the settlement as a threatening space for immigrants. On one occasion, Method trips over a log when one of the inhabitants, a tall woman who wearing a T-shirt written 'I love Africa', gives him the kind of look that 'one gives to flies, ticks, cockroaches, fleas, to a mound of excrement left in the open' (77). This way of looking at immigrants reduces them to something other than human and ironically contradicts the claim, inscribed on the woman's t-shirt, that she loves Africa. Immigrant (non)humanness is then deployed as justification for xenophobia.

Portraying South Africans – imagined in the story as 'the locals' – as xenophobic and migrants as victims has aesthetic value. It transforms the story into a testimony of how some South Africans are indeed xenophobic. The text as testimony then presents a truth that is often written out of official narratives. For instance, in a speech during Robert Mugabe's state funeral in Harare on September 14, 2019, and against the backdrop of anti-migrant attacks in South Africa that took place in August 2019, the current president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa,

declared that ‘South Africans are not xenophobic; South Africans are not against nationals from other countries’. Ramaphosa’s statement uttered in 2019 echoes similar sentiments articulated by Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma in xenophobic contexts in 2008 and 2015 respectively. It is such persistent narratives of ‘denialism’ (Desai 2008, 54) which are brought to the fore and challenged by stories like ‘Shamisos’.

Method deploys hell figuratively to speak about his experiences. He perceives hell as ‘the road he travelled to reach this country, that hell is the Limpopo River [...] hell is in the eyes of his neighbours who have lately been telling all the foreigners to get out of the shanty towns and go back home’ (78). Although he thinks of his journey to, and stay in South Africa as hellish a perceptive reader also notes that his hell actually began in his pre-departure context of political violence in his home country, a context which is re-lived during social gatherings in the Zimbabwean quarter, where immigrants from Zimbabwe are able to forge solidarity based on national identity (blurring ethnic boundaries in the process). Zimbabweans gather to watch films from home, all of which, in reality, were once aired on Zimbabwe’s national TV (ZTV): ‘Mukadota, Gringo, Kukhulwa Kokuphela, Neria, Paraffin’ (80). The films do not only figuratively take the immigrants back to the social worlds of their homeland, but they remind them of a painful past. During such gatherings, ‘men and women peel [...] off their clothes to show each other their bodies, touch each other’s bodies’ (80). The scars, the deep injuries that they show each other are speechless embodiments of traumas of the past, displays that invoke sad memories. It forces the immigrants to remember the violent elections of 2008, during which the police used batons, soldiers used guns, the militia used machetes to torture and kill people, especially those that supported opposition political parties. In Zimbabwean politics, the soldiers, police and militia referred to here, play the role of what Siziba terms the ‘shadowy, invisible and unnameable figures *that engage* in extra-legal violence’ (Siziba 2017, 1). ‘Buttocks burned; limbs broken. Roofs blazing [...] rape [...] their scars speaking the painful tongues’ (80). Method refuses to watch these films, not because he rejects the social worlds of his home that these bring to mind, but because he wishes to forget the painful and terrifying experiences associated with them. Indeed, he fears the ‘threatening possibility’ of being brought back to a past that he believes he has left in Zimbabwe (Pöttsch 2012, 173). As Mkha shows here, ‘while the memories of home are often nostalgic and sentimental, home is not simply recalled or experienced in positive ways’ (Mallet 2004, 64).

Nonetheless, the violence that Method is later subjected to in the settlement represents a repeat of what he wishes to forget. We take this repeat of violence as a symbol of the entanglements between home and ‘diaspora’ that are central to our reading of this short story. At the end of the story, Method is burnt to death in his barricaded shack. His demise starts with fellow migrants screaming in pain, in a moment of terror-filled suspense. Then his shack is opened using a spear. He sees a crowd brandishing weapons: machetes, sticks, axes and knobkieries. He witnesses ‘fleeing bodies. Bloodied bodies. Screams, pleas for mercy’ (85). In these moments, the settlement represents a place/site of death. ‘Go, get out, go back to your countries. Go! ‘Method does not move from underneath his blankets’ (85). His refusal to *move* is initially a result of paralysing fear and then it becomes resistance to enforced return. Before he dies, he shouts that his real name is Method and not Xolela, the Zulu name he had adopted earlier in a bid to belong to the South African society. Paradoxically, adopting the name was not his idea. A tall thug he had paid for the document had chosen it for him.

An unkempt youth with a scar above his eye, raking fingers through his long dreadlocks while observing Method with bloodshot eyes. ‘Method? As in what? A way of doing things? Mara, what kind of a name is that? Mara. You need a real name. One that makes you belong. You understand? From now on you’ll be Xolela. Xolela Mabaso (76).

This encounter not only exposes an ‘illicit market of immigrant documents’ (Alfaro-Velcamp & Shaw 2016, 990) in South Africa, it also shows immigrants’ desperation to survive in a foreign land. On the verge of death, Method discards the name Xolela and insists on being known by his real name. Through that action, he distances himself from the citizenry which the name ‘Xolela’ had imposed on him. He wants the world to know that ‘Xolela’ was a temporary and survival label, that his real name is Method, and that he is a Zimbabwean.

Another important dynamic to consider in this short story is that the differences between Method’s employer and his neighbours in Eden Park do not only reflect differing attitudes towards immigrants, but also the socio-economic inequalities that are apparent in post-apartheid South Africa. The reader assumes that Method’s employer is white. We could take her failure to pronounce the ‘x’ sound in ‘Xolela’ as indicative of her whiteness. Spatial differences speak to economic inequalities (which, in this case, are racial as well) within South African communities, as is in other communities with histories of especially racial segregation. The same social inequalities and differences are evident in Zimbabwe. Method and others are

victims of political violence and, unlike their victimisers, they are without livelihoods. There are also the most vulnerable, who include the poorest and the oldest, who cannot migrate and are 'left in a situation of captivity' (Fol 2012, 279), like Method's mother. Class here engenders power relations that remain an important force shaping the experience of home for migrants (Pratt in Ralph & Staeheli 2011, 520).

Conclusion

Viewed together, 'The Letter' and 'Shamisos' reflect (on) the causal forces of, and the personally felt, traumas that shape the characters' decisions to leave home and not return, in spite of the fact that 'the conception of "home" promises a sense of security and belonging' (Taylor 2006, 206). Such causal forces are not addressed in economic and other improvements that Zimbabwean political leaders have used in the past to lure migrants back to their homeland. The texts therefore bring to the fore the thinking that the decision to return to one's homeland should always be viewed against the determinants of migration (Makina 2012). By way of example, the Zimbabwean government has not been inclined to bring justice to the kind of political victims evocatively imagined in Mpofo's and Mkhwa's short stories. On the contrary, the state not only continues to repress all forms of political violence and relegating victims to obscurity (Muchemwa 2010) but has accentuated the narrative of its own (economic) victimhood at the hands of Western countries providing refuge to its victims. The painful moments captured in the two short stories speak primarily of the precarious homeland that Zimbabwe has become to most of its citizens. Linked, as it is, to survival, this precarity is so treacherous that 'even deeply symbolic gestures such as the burial of one's umbilical cord at home do not have enough claim to stop Zimbabweans from leaving home' (Ndlovu 2010, 119). Nonetheless, by casting light on the migrants' precarity in host countries as well, the writers 'collapse the two spaces into one zone of tension and restlessness for Zimbabweans' (Siziba 2017, 2). We are making this argument at an important juncture in Zimbabwe's history. The current regime claims that Zimbabwe has become a 'Second Republic' following the forced removal of its late former president, Robert Mugabe. This, in a bid to convince people that there is a clear distinction between the regimes of Mnangagwa and Mugabe. For ordinary citizens, however, the unmitigated economic crisis means that the country has remained a precarious space where (according to Nyambi et al. 2020) the notion of foreignness as safety from hunger and home as susceptible to hunger and poverty persists.

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