

Harare (in the) North: The Metaphor of an Irresolvable Exile Dialectic

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Abstract: *This article foregrounds the argument that Harare North (Brian Chikwava, 2009) and We Need New Names (NoViolet Bulawayo, 2013) communicate, through the experiences of their central characters, the notion that the exile dialectic is irresolvable. What exacerbates this condition of an irresolvable exile dialectic is the ubiquitous presence of Harare (the space the characters are running away from) in the North (the space of the characters' escape), hence the use of the phrase, "Harare (in the) North" in the heading of this paper. The phrase is a corruption of Harare North, the title of Brian Chikwava's novel. The ubiquity of Harare manifests itself in the sense that the same miracles of existence which the characters needed to fall back on in Harare are still required of them in the Northern spaces they have run to for safety. At the same time, their sense of loss, which is at the heart of their exile experiences, begins before their flight, yet is exacerbated by their existence in the Global North, as if there is no final place of safety for them. A close analysis of Harare North and We Need New Names reveals the dialectical and simultaneous existence of running from crisis and running into crisis, being in Zimbabwe and being in London/Detroit, Michigan, both happening in the same text to the same characters, thus confirming the pervasive nature of Zimbabwe.*

Keywords: Harare North, We Need New Names, exile, dialectic, Zimbabwean Literature

1. Introduction

Usually, when Zimbabweans speak of 'Harare North' they are referring to London. This reference to London is based on the understanding that London in particular, or the Global North in general, are just extensions of Harare because of the population of Zimbabweans living there. However, this paper uses Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) to demonstrate that the phrase, 'Harare North' provides interesting representations of the antinomy of exile. This antinomy manifests itself in the ambivalence of the exile's attempted escape from a constricting space called

Harare (Zimbabwe) to an enabling space called Harare North (London in the case of Chikwava's novel, or Detroit, Michigan in the case of Bulawayo's novel). While nicknaming London as Harare North may represent the exile's onomastic attempt to conquer a foreign space, it also represents the exile's failure to completely dissociate from Harare/Zimbabwe because Harare/Zimbabwe reproduces itself in the North, hence the phrase 'Harare (in the) North' that informs the title of this paper. This is a very ambivalent situation with the potential of making the condition of exile irresolvable.

The complexities that arise from the collusions of the space the exile has run from and the one the exile has run to are discussed in McClennen's "dialectics of exile", a perspective which foregrounds the thinking that the exile dialectic is irresolvable.¹ For McClennen, the ludic co-option of the nomad, the migrant, by postmodern theories as a representative of life free from pain and limiting boundaries is for her refuted by accounts of migrant life that are in themselves "a practical denial of theoretical claims that represent these experiences as utopic" (McClennen 2004, ix). The "dialectic", a central component of McClennen's perspective, points to the existence of contradictions "simultaneously within the same text" (2004, 43). A more fluid reading of such texts is, therefore, premised on the recognition of these dialectical conditions existing simultaneously in the same text. The recognition of such contradictions, and how they lend a tragic edge to the experience of exile as represented in the selected texts, is central to this article. The argument here is that 'Harare North' or 'Harare (in the) North' are manifest in *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* as metaphors of an irresolvable exile dialectic. The characters in the selected texts run very fast from a crisis-ridden home, only to remain where they are through home's own reproduction in the characters' perceived places of safety. At the same time, the miracles of existence, like re-invention, that they require in the spaces they run to are the same miracles that are required where they come from. This complicates the notions of 'home' and 'foreign' space, of moving and not moving, so that the terrors of moving and not moving assume a ubiquitous presence in the lives of the characters.

2. The Exile Motif in Zimbabwean Literature

The two novels selected for this article extend an exilic literary tradition that is synonymous with Zimbabwean literature. Writing on his blog soon after the publication of *We Need New Names*, Zimbabwean writer, Memory Chirere (2013) comments, "Ever since Dambudzo Marechera of *The House of Hunger's* 'I got my things and left [...]' in 1978, there has been a quiet but sustained outpouring of narratives about leaving the homeland (Zimbabwe) because of crisis" (n.p.). Thus, narratives of moving out of Zimbabwe, or planning to move out, dominate Zimbabwe's literary landscape. Besides *The House of Hunger*, another notable publication about moving is *Waiting for the Rain* (Charles Mungoshi 1975) in which Lucifer, the central character, sees home as a place of failure and wishes he were "born elsewhere, of some other parents" (Mungoshi 1975, 162). Both *Waiting for*

the Rain and *The House of Hunger*, written during the colonial period in 1975 and 1978 respectively, were the inspiration behind the first full volume critical work to look at Zimbabwean literature, *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* (Zimunya 1982). The title of this critical work speaks volumes concerning the centrality of these texts and their themes in the understanding of Zimbabwean literature. Zhuwarara captures the central cause of exile in these texts when he says that the pre-independence texts of Mungoshi and Marechera represent “a generation that was born into a racially-tortured era with its attendant insecurities, anxieties, humiliations and complexes which gave rise to a mood of despair and bitterness crystallised into a deep sense of exile from the land which, according to tradition, has the capacity to renew life and nourish growth both physically and spiritually” (2001, 14).

Yet it is also apparent that after independence in 1980, the theme of exile cemented its position in Zimbabwean literature with the post-2000 decade of crisis in Zimbabwe aiding the theme’s crystallisation into a leitmotif of Zimbabwean literature. Writing on his blog, Chirere (observes that in texts like Chikwava’s *Harare North* and NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, among many other more recent texts, the theme of going away from home is more dominant and “the central character, who is almost always a young fellow, flees home and country in search of an alternative existence”, away from various forms of crisis and political instability (2013, n.p.)

As noted by Chirere, *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* centralise the leitmotif of exile as well, and the central characters are a young man and a young girl respectively. Both migrate out of Zimbabwe because they think they will make it in London and Detroit, Michigan respectively. Yet, what is apparent is that these two (London and Detroit, Michigan) offer their own forms of turmoil. It is as if Harare is inescapable. The continued presence of this leitmotif also speaks to the failure by Zimbabweans to arrive in Zimbabwe, as if the Zimbabwe on whose soil they tread refuses to be transmogrified into a homely space. By “arrive in Zimbabwe,” we mean the realisation of the joys of feeling at home in Zimbabwe, especially the Zimbabwe that was fought for leading to the 1980 independence. Since 1980, there has been postponed arrival for the majority of Zimbabweans because of the interminable presence of various forms of crisis. Thus, the migrant character is leaving a home that has already exiled him/her, to another space that portends exile again, which in a way encourages the thinking that moving out of crisis is in itself moving into crisis.

3. Ambivalent movements: An Analysis of *Harare North* and *We Need New Names*

Harare North is a novel about a former ZANU-PF² (Green Bomber) operative who, after working tirelessly to prop up the system through beatings and disappearances of ZANU-PF’s political opponents, is allegedly framed for politically motivated crimes and asked to pay five thousand United States dollars for the charges against him to be dropped. He flies to the UK where he intends

to work and gather together this amount. *Harare North* is thus the narrator's account which consists of his time in the UK (Harare North) and his memories of Harare. By the time the narrative ends, it is obvious that there is no hope that the narrator will go back to Zimbabwe with the required amount of money.

We Need New Names is a collection of short stories (that can also be combined to be read as a single novel) that narrate the lives of a young Zimbabwean girl (Darling) and her friends in a fictional shanty town that is named Paradise. The dystopias of growing up in such a space form the central themes in these stories. Later, the girl migrates to Detroit, Michigan (which, throughout her life in Paradise, she named "Destroyedmichygen"). Thus, the second part of this collection features narratives of the girl in Detroit.

Harare North can encourage interpretations that are based on the pre-supposition that the nationalist's exclusion in London is caused by his refusal to shed his essentialist nationalism for a cosmopolitan outlook that engages the world beyond the parochialism of the nationalist state. However, it is also apparent that what the narrator in *Harare North* holds on to is not just what he wants to keep but what others impose on him. One of these things is history: "I lie on my bed listening and wearing my past like it is some very tight gown; I don't want no one tugging at it" (Chikwava 2009, 176). When the past is like a tight gown it means it is constricting and the narrator is expected to explore options of shedding such a disabling past in order to improve his life. However, the narrator's options are limited in the sense that even if he wants to shed his past, including the fact that he comes from Zimbabwe, he has an immigrant identity and the stereotypes that are associated with it. It is through these stereotypes that he is viewed by the inhabitants of the country to which he has escaped. These inhabitants are also responsible for giving him that tight gown and the narrator seems to prefer holding on to it rather than accepting the hypocritical benevolence of those who are tugging at it because, for him, they are also responsible for that same past in the first place. The narrator's constant reference to the British-Zimbabwean colonial past can be understood in this context. When the narrator says, "[i]mmigrant people's contribution to this country is equal to one Mars bar in every citizen's pocket every year", the idea is that the same exploitative relationship of the past when Britain colonised Zimbabwe exists in the present (Chikwava 2009, 24). So he prefers to hold on to the past instead of being freed from it by someone else 'tugging at it'. The identity of an immigrant seems to persist even if the narrator were to shed his gown and wear a new one.³ Some of the characters are therefore understood in terms of where they come from and not in terms of where they are physically located at that particular point in time.⁴ Bulawayo uses Darling, in *We Need New Names*, to capture this very well when it becomes apparent that it is not just Harare that shows up in "Destroyedmichygen" but the whole of Africa, the South in the North. She brings this out more succinctly in the "clichéd schema of questions" (Moji 2015, 187) that Darling is asked in a bathroom by a white American:

I am washing my hands and admiring my interesting face when a voice says:

Are you from Africa too?

...Then she asks me what country I am from and I tell her.

It's beautiful over there isn't it? she says. I nod even though I don't know why

I'm nodding. I just do. To this lady, maybe everything is beautiful.

Africa is beautiful, she says, going on with her favorite word. But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? Just awful.

Now she is looking at me with a wounded face. I don't know what to do or say, so I fake a long cough just to fill the silence. My brain is scattering and jumping fences now, trying to remember what exactly is happening in the Congo because I think I am confusing it with another place, but what I can see in the woman's eyes is that it's serious and important and I'm supposed to know it, so in the end I say, Yes, it's terrible, what is happening in the Congo.

...Tell me about it. Jesus, the rapes, and all those killings! How can such things even be happening? she says...

I mean, I can't even – I can't even process it. And all those poor women and children. I was watching CNN last night and there was a little girl who was just – just too cute, she says. (Bulawayo 2013, 174-176).

It is at this point that we realise why the narrator in *Harare North* calls his past a “tight gown”, because inhabitants of the host country refuse to see the exiles as multidimensional individuals but through where they come from, or through the immigrant identity, thereby making the characters' escape to Harare North very ambivalent and dialectic.

On his first day (that is, if we do not count the detention days), the narrator of *Harare North* realises with shock that Harare North has made people completely re-invent themselves. Paul, the narrator's cousin, writes letters to the narrator in which he depicts himself as an agreeable relative but when the narrator gets to London, his first lesson is that people “reinvent complete” (Chikwava 2009, 127) when it becomes apparent that Zimbabwean hospitalities are overbearing and have to be abandoned by many characters including Sekai, Paul's wife:

We have our first difficult moment when we get to the train station and she expect me to buy my own ticket. That's when it sink into my head that she have turn into lapsed African, Sekai. Me I am a guest and there she is, expecting me to buy my own ticket on the first day? (Chikwava 2009, 5).

Chikwava explains in an online interview why characters abandon these qualities of home in Harare North: “...in the big city, cultural generosity cost time and money, the two things that the city dweller is perpetually short of. So perhaps it's understandable when they dispense with some things that are of intangible utility” (Chikwava, n.d.).

Even though the characters re-invent themselves, the irony lies in the fact that they live in a perpetual state of lack (they lack both time and money) in an environment that they had perceived as enabling. The narrator himself, a parody of a staunch nationalist and cultural icon, soon realises the fallacy of holding on to Zimbabwean cultural contrivances and quickly assumes the discourse of those who live life at its hustle-and-bustle level: “Time is everything in Harare North, you don’t just call someone like you is back home and just talk talk talk without purpose. Get to the point” (Chikwava 2009, 218).

The re-invention is much a feature of Harare North as it is of Harare, which supports the idea that Harare (in the) North speaks to the idea of Harare travelling to the North with those who flee. While in Harare, the narrator in *Harare North*, who all along has been working as a shoe cobbler, sheds his shoe cobbler identity and re-invents himself as a member of the jackal breed, the feared youth militia popularly known as the Green Bombers. In the same vein, Darling and her friend in Paradise (*We Need New Names*) take re-invention to a new level when they play “country game”, which consists of the children giving themselves the names of the countries they love (Bulawayo, 2014, 49). While treading the dusty grounds of Paradise, a shanty town that is situated in a country where things are always falling apart, the children see themselves as “country countries”, that is, countries whose glitz and glamour separate them from the madness of “rags of countries” like Zimbabwe (Bulawayo, 2014, 49). They even extend their imagination to the well-polished and sanitised spaces of *ER* (*Emergency Room*, a hospital series) when they pretend to be doctors in order to abort their friend Chipo’s unwanted pregnancy. For this exercise they need new names, especially the names of the doctors who appear in the series with stethoscopes and other *Emergency Room* paraphernalia. To need new names is to re-invent. It is an act of subverting the names that have been given to them by their biological parents, and by extension, national (read: political) parents whose policies have impacted negatively on the childhoods of these young characters.

While in Paradise, the children embark on various expeditions into Budapest, an affluent neighbourhood that is eponymously named to represent the Global North (Harare North), to steal guavas. This is in itself a representation of Harare North travelling to the South, thus speaking of the fluidity of borders. While in Budapest, they hide in a Guava tree and watch while a white couple is evicted out of their house. They pounce upon the vacant house and feast on the food inside it before re-inventing themselves into adults to do the “adult thing” (Bulawayo 2013, 127). Later, Bornfree, the children’s youthful neighbour and a member of an opposition political party, is murdered by ZANU-PF thugs for voting for change. The children hide in trees to watch his burial. After the burial, they re-invent themselves into Bornfree and the political actors that murdered him to rehearse his murder, some sort of carnival that in a way allows them to access power and demystify it. This is why when BBC reporters who had stayed behind after the burial are shocked by the children’s play and ask, “What kind of game were you just playing?”, Bastard replies, “Can’t you see this is for real?”

(Bulawayo 2013, 144). This is because the re-invention is not just for fun; it is, in Bakhtin's words, "a second life" (Bulawayo 1984, 6).

Detroit, Michigan, like Paradise, demands its own share of re-inventions on the characters in *We Need New Names*. Darling's stay in America also opens her eyes to what it takes to live in it. Aunt Fostalina and her son, TK, become the 'models' through which Darling discovers how far one has to go in order to belong, a belonging that is tenuous and incomplete. She is shocked to discover that even though aunt Fostalina is her mother's twin sister, she does not look as beautiful as her mother. Aunt Fostalina has adopted the stereotypical western image of body style, a style that is abhorred by Uncle Kojo who sees nothing beautiful in "a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind" (Bulawayo 2013, 154). He says the same about his son, TK, whom he says has become more "American" than "African". He accuses him of wanting to be like "these raggedy boys standing around corners and smoking things and talking profanity because they are too stupid to realize how easy they have it [...]" (Bulawayo 2013, 154). What Uncle Kojo does not realise is that Aunt Fostalina and TK have made up their minds to re-invent themselves and belong to America. For TK, this is a project that has less difficulties for him because he was born in America. He is not even part of what Rumbaut calls the "1.5 generation"⁵ because he did not migrate to America after reaching school-going age; he was born in America (2004, 1162). He even enlists in the army and goes to Afghanistan to fight for America, something that baffles Uncle Kojo because he does not see himself as American. For Aunt Fostalina, however, fitting into America also involves accepting the humiliating position of being rendered powerless through her failure to fully pronounce (though she can spell) American brand names, and, thus, feeling as if she belongs to the fringes of American society, a condition that does not resolve her exile dialectic.

Darling too knows that living and fitting in America also means sounding American, what Frasinelli calls "living in translation", itself a form of re-inventing (2015, 717). This is what Darling says:

[T]he TV has taught me just how to do it. It's pretty easy; all you have to do is watch *Dora the Explorer*, *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob*, *Scooby-Doo*, and then you move on to *That's So Raven*, *Glee*, *Friends*, *Golden Girls*, and so on, just listening and imitating the accents. [...] I also have my list of American words that I keep under the tongue like talismans, ready to use: *pretty good*, *pain in the ass*, *for real*, *awesome*, *totally*, *skinny*, *dude*, *freaking*, *bizarre*, *psyched*, *messed up*, *like*, *tripping*, *motherfucker*, *clearance*, *allowance*, *douche bag*, *you're welcome*, *acting up*, *yikes* (Bulawayo 2013, 194, emphasis in the original).

By the time Darling calls her mother, she sounds so American (at least to her mother who is in Paradise) that her mother ridicules her: "Hehe-he, so you are trying to sound white now!" (Bulawayo 2013, 204). Even her old friend, Chipo, pours scorn on her: "[t]hat stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you" (Bulawayo 2013, 286). Both Chipo and Darling's mother seem to be essentialising accents as if one is born with one. At the same time, the

fact that Darling sounds different points to how far she has gone in her re-invention. Even though this re-invention seems to have succeeded, the cultural differences Darling and other characters encounter everyday make their everyday life in America “a continuous act of translation and self-translation”, an act that does not seem to reach complete de-sublimation, hence the irresolvable exile dialectic (Frasinelli 2015, 717).

Language does not only refer to the spoken word but also to kinetic processes – habits, attitudes, temperaments – that can be interpreted as linguistic in nature. The move to the United States does something to the linguistic bravado with which Darling narrates her experiences in Paradise. During an interview, Bulawayo states that,

The older Darling is more subdued, understandably because she has to be — her move is such that she has to forge a new self to exist in the US, and that self is without all of the voice and spunk we encounter in Paradise because those are things that come partly from the location and who she is there (2013, n.p.).

In another interview, author Bulawayo confesses, “I went to America at the age of 18 [...] you get there and America makes you realise that you are not really one of us” (Obioha 2014, n.p.). The habits, attitudes and temperaments of America (its weather, for instance) and its people all provoke the characters to make some adjustments in order to fit. As part of the adjustments, they need not to say what they want to say; they have to play into the American image of Africa as part of their performance to fit. This reminds us of that conversation Darling has with that American woman who thinks that Africa is a country. The questions she asks Darling about Africa represent the popular tropes through which Africa is viewed from outside. Yet, it is that view of Africa that Darling and other characters like her play into by not even trying to correct the misconceptions because, according to Darling, “[w]e were not using our languages [so] we said things we did not mean; what we really meant remained folded inside” (Bulawayo 2013, 140). This itself is a state of the exile not arriving. Even though they need ‘new names’, they let the inhabitants of the new space name them and the new names they hunger for remain trapped inside. They stay in America by allowing it to name them.

Speaking, slimming and joining the American army in Afghanistan are not the only methods of adapting to America; even working manually is a method of adaptation. In order to live in America, the characters have to adapt to being low wage workers. Even though the jobs are underpaid, seasonal and precarious, they are their best shot at staying in America. Darling confesses, “[w]hen I am not cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries, I’m bent over a big cart like this, sorting out bottles and cans” (Bulawayo 2013, 251). The section, ‘How they Lived’, is an interlude between the first section of Darling’s experiences in Paradise and the last section where she recounts her experiences in “Destroyedmichygen”. The migrants are undocumented as shown in ‘How they Lived’, so they opt for underpaying jobs against which they cannot speak because

of the restrictions of physical mobility imposed upon them. Moreover, their lack of documentation also translates into lack of voice. There is here a replay of Paradise in the sense of the restrictions imposed upon Darling. Not speaking is in itself a way of trying to fit into America, a way of retreating into a corner somewhere; to live without disturbance and to ultimately adapt to America's expectations for the migrant. At the same time, it is a form of exile, of being banished from belonging.

While liable to being read as a potentially empowering act of hybridisation this act of re-inventing by characters also communicates Kristeva's view of abjection in terms of human reactions to an impending termination of meaning, aggravated by confrontation with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982, 4). The eruption of what disturbs order, system and identity can be caused by unwilling cues of our own transience (a corpse, or faeces, for instance). In the case of the characters who re-invent, they get reminders of the frailty and abjection of their positions in Harare North.

This abject condition that manifests itself in how Zimbabweans are located (and locate themselves) physically in Harare North and in Global North social discourse (for instance, with panic because of the influx of too many migrants), comes out more clearly in the symbolism of the chestnut tree in Brixton in *Harare North*. This is a place where migrants go to congregate probably because they have nothing to do. This gives them the appearance of tramps, society's cast-offs, or filth in the sense that they seem to be failing to confront the symbolic order of London. The irony though lies in that Chikwava's chance encounter with one of them leads to the birth of *Harare North*. According to Chikwava, the narrator in *Harare North* was inspired by a chance conversation he had with a former soldier of the Lord's Resistance Army which is led by a cultic figure in the form of Joseph Kony. The ex-soldier, who had claimed asylum, still professed to miss his time in the LRA and wished he would be back in Uganda with Kony and his AK47. Kociejowski captures this irony more succinctly:

One day, beneath that tree which grows in Brixton, Chikwava fell into conversation with a man absolutely crazed who, later, transmogrified, would enter, indeed command, the pages of his book. It was also, if one wishes to take a more fatalistic view of the matter, an encounter that would transform his fortunes (2011, 60).

While we do not know how the boy who inspired Chikwava's art fares in Harare North (maybe he ends up like the narrator, a madhouse candidate because of the pressures of Harare North), we know that that encounter transformed Chikwava's fortunes and made exile and the abject space of the chestnut tree in Brixton an enjoyable experience and one which begets art. Thus, one begins to understand why Said (1999) would say that the true aesthetics of exile is a preserve for a special class of people like writers.

The abject pathos with which the narrator speaks of his life in Harare North – a pathos that remains up to the end of the novel – is evidence of his failure to reach

a point of complete desublimation, a point that exile was ostensibly supposed to make him reach. In other words, exile was supposed to give the narrator a sense of his own human worth beyond being used as a Green Bomber back in Harare. But even in London, he is the unwanted one. At one point, he speaks of himself as *umgodoyi*, which means an unwanted and sick village dog:

I walk on the white line with suitcase on my head. Nothing can hit my head. I feeling like *umgodoyi* – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the winds. That's why *umgodoyi*'s soul is tear from his body in rough way (Chikwava 2009, 226).

This gives him an unsanitary and abject quality. What is interesting to note though is that the medicalisation of one's condition in abject terms is a feature, not only of the North, but also of the South. Both *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* thematise *Operation Murambatsvina*. This was a 2005 government-sanctioned operation that destroyed houses that were deemed illegal and, by extension, filthy. This shows how human beings are represented in medicalised terms in the discourse of *Operation Murambatsvina* (Remove Filth). According to Muchemwa, “[t]he term ‘*murambatsvina*’ (dirt) comes from a hygienic discourse that turns citizens into filth and masks the violence that destroyed homes and livelihoods” (2010, 401). The location of Paradise (which the children call “kaka”, meaning “faeces”) in *We Need New Names*, away from Budapest and near a forest, is in itself testimony of the medicalisation of their condition, an act of viewing them as unwanted filth that must be forced to the outskirts of the city. They are not free to roam the city. Budapest itself is securitised, the same securitisation that limits Darling's mobility in Detroit, Michigan.

The link between “filth” in Harare and “*umgodoyi*” in London in *Harare North* communicates the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of Harare. This pervasive nature of Harare is also communicated through the diseased existence of Shingi (the narrator's friend) in Harare North, an existence that begins in the prison spaces of Harare where, according to the narrator, Shingi contracts HIV/AIDS by having infected bicycle spokes inserted into his anus by prison bullies. In Harare North, Shingi is dying not just from the effects of Harare North but also from the effects of Harare. Shingi's condition in Harare and Harare North, just like that of the narrator, is a medicalised one.

The ubiquity of Harare takes a more bizarre form in *Harare North* through one of the most recurring tropes in the novel – *mamhepo* (literally – winds). The idea is that the winds or avenging spirits (*ngozi*) can operate from a distance so that there is no escaping them even if the characters change their physical location. By the end of *Harare North*, the spirits have invaded the text so much that we begin to sympathise with the narrator when he lyrically laments: “The winds is howling through house of stones, tall trees is swaying and people's lives beginning to fall apart, everything start to fall apart now [...]” (Chikwava 2009, 204). The reason why we sympathise is because even as the winds are howling through “house of stones” (Zimbabwe), they are also howling through the

narrator's head even as he walks on the streets of London. The same happens to Tshaka in *We Need New Names*. His connection to the home he left behind through historical nomenclatures like Tshaka, an assortment of parodies of antique African artefacts and through performances of African aesthetic art at various functions, only serves to exacerbate his disintegration into a psychiatric case.

Ngozi, which also means the sins of the past, especially those of murder, catches up with the narrator in *Harare North*. Harare represents what the narrator has run away from including the victims of his Green Bomber philosophy of "forgiveness", which, in actual fact, means severe bodily violence on or even extermination of suspected 'enemies' of the state. The stresses that Harare is going through (winds) because of the political sins of the fathers reproduce themselves in the head of the narrator, a son of the fathers, in Harare North as *mamhepo*. The narrator has killed and maimed at the bidding of the fathers, but only to become a fatherless tramp on the streets of Harare North which, ironically, does not save the narrator from the effects of what the fathers do at home. The pervasive nature of the fathers is captured right on the first page of the novel: "On front page of every one of them papers President Robert Mugabe's face is folded in two. I can still identify His Excellency" (Chikwava 2009, 1).

The narrator in *Harare North* is ostensibly fleeing from prosecution for beating an opposition party member back in Harare and hopes to make enough money to go back and pay his way out of persecution. This means, even in Harare, he is like *umgodoyi*, an unwanted citizen, unwanted by the victims of his brutality and, ironically, unwanted by the very system that made him a brute for its own survival. He is a Green Bomber, a name that is adopted from the Green Bottle fly which usually favours decomposing tissue or human excrement. He fails to get the money in Harare North, and for the majority of his narration, the narrator is merely trying to survive, an attempt that proves futile by the end of the novel. Even for those who have been in Harare North for longer, the circumstance of literally fighting for survival persists. One of these fights turns nasty when Shingi, now a drug addict, fights for food with a homeless tramp and ends up in hospital. When the story ends, Shingi is still in hospital, dying. The narrator's struggle to survive, to earn a living and to relate with those around him keeps him on the fringes of both the British society and the Zimbabwean society in Harare North. His parasitic nature makes him an outsider, a mangy dog (*umgodoyi*) among both fellow Zimbabweans and the British society itself.

Even though he is an outsider, the irony is that this narrator, a newcomer, with his heavy, un-British accent and broken English, tries to teach Shingi, who came earlier than him, how to beat the system:

That kind of style we have to put inside bin, I tell Shingi. It important to pay big attention to some of them subtly things. I know how these things work. Also keep the native way down in the hole because if he jump out he can cause disorder and then no mother is safe in all of Harare North (Chikwava 2009, 147).

The pre-requisite for assimilation which he outlines for Shingi is absent in exorbitant measure in himself. He fails to speak himself into the system. Even though he speaks like someone who has conquered the system, the narrator is doomed to remain an outsider. Like many of the characters in the narrative, the narrator comes with a perception of London that is free of the influences of Harare, where money magically finds its way into someone's hands: "They carry bags full of things and heads that is full of wonders of new life, hustle some passage to Harare North, turn up without notice at some relative's door, only to have they dreams thrown back into they faces" (Chikwava 2009, 5).

The disjuncture between how Harare North is perceived from Harare and how one actually experiences it is something the narrator fails to come to terms with. He discovers that even invitations to come to Harare North by those who are already there and pretend to be having a good time are not sincere because they know fully well that "the British High Commission don't just give visa to any native who think he can flag down jet plane, jump on it and fly off to Harare North" (Chikwava 2009, 6). According to Chikwava,

Sometimes you think of that disjuncture between how people in Zim see England and how Zimbabweans here see it. They have this idea everyone in this first world country is having a great time and that this is where everything is. Meanwhile, you come across all these people struggling to survive, juggling three or four jobs at a time, sleeping for only three hours (cited in Kociejowski 2011, 59).

This lack of sincerity in how people treat him is also very much a feature of Harare because later, the narrator discovers that his mentor, Comrade Mhiripiri, had lied about the USD 5000 that was needed to clear him of all crimes. Mhiripiri was merely trying to fatten his pocket.

The narrator's distrust of people also follows him from Harare. He is suspicious of London, yet he wants London to give him something to go back to Harare with. For instance, when the narrator walks down the street, he has to shove his way past a group of mothers who are standing on the pavement with their pushchairs and they give him "loud looks" (Chikwava 2009, 1; 157; 225). The narrator also gets a job as a chip shop cleaner and is alien to the spiteful attitudes of London kids who make fun of him and he threatens to chase them away (Chikwava 2009, 8). In Harare, he would have dealt with this easily, Green Bomber-style, but this is a new space whose semiotic codes complicate things for him. He is even more suspicious and distrustful when Dave and Jenny, two homeless Londoners, move into the house (Chikwava 2009, 167-168). What baffles him is how such homeless and poverty-stricken people, also a feature of the home he left behind, can find time to protest for the rights of whales when they cannot even feed themselves. It looks like London has many surprises for him.

The narrator's emigration to London lands him in a space whose semiotic codes are alien to him and therefore fails to earn a degree of acceptance. He remains on the margins like the village *umgodoyi*. He does not even know the kind

of performative acts required to give him a modicum of belonging. Considering that he was at the centre of things in Harare as a harbinger of violence, his condition in London is what Triolet calls “the existence of a poor relation” where one is “forced into humility, into a marginal life”; meaning he will not be able to go far in his quest to gather together US\$5000 to cover for his crimes back home (cited in Tabori 1972, 17). Going far, in this case, means fulfilling one’s dreams. Because London denies him that opportunity, it becomes as disabling as Harare itself and so what the narrator perceived as an enabling space is actually an illusion. This supports Frischauer’s verdict that, “They [the foreign-born] may go far – but not too far” (cited in Tabori 1972, 403).

This is the same problem that Darling encounters in *We Need New Names*. She cannot go far, physically (as in sometimes flying back to Paradise) and metaphorically, because if she tries, according to the warnings of Aunt Fostalina, she might just as well “kiss this America bye-bye” (Bulawayo 2013, 191). Thus, her nostalgias for Paradise cannot be satiated by physically visiting it, a condition that spells an irresolvable exile dialectic. Besides, going back for good is a choice Darling is not prepared to make because going back home means confronting the same horrors of things falling apart, of Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro fleecing money from congregants and raping some in public, of national fathers blooding the national flag in the name of “Blak Power” (Bulawayo 2013, 130), of grandfathers raping granddaughters and the horrors of excreting guava-speckled excrement and feeling like giving “birth to a country” (Bulawayo 2013, 16). In any case, going back home will mean confronting emptiness because only Chipso remains from the group that used to make numerous exits to Budapest to steal guavas; the rest have migrated like Darling – Godknows, Bastard and Stina. With eyes coloured by foreign experience, Darling decides that she will stay in her America, endure the alienation as long as she is eating. She remains overcome by the feeling of estrangement, of something left behind so that one day, her sorrow breaks her down and makes her colour the walls of her room with raw graffiti. That Paradise invades her consciousness is in itself testimony that Paradise is what she forever carries on her back, a case of Harare (in the) North. This fulfils the observation of Cucinella and Curry when they point out that, “Exile literature exposes the layers of pain experienced by the exile at the time of separation as well as the pain experienced in an ongoing way” (2001, 198). This means the exile dialectic is irresolvable.

Darling’s life is that of a poor relation, a marginal life which demonstrates that her chances of going far in life in Detroit, Michigan are as limited as they were in Paradise, except that here, she can eat as much food as possible without the dangers of birthing a country that the guava-speckled excrement of Paradise portended. However, America’s food has its limits, because one day Darling begins to miss Budapest’s guavas, and when she receives a consignment of them from one of her childhood friends, she begins to miss Paradise with its tin-tin structures, and were it not for the securitisation of America, chances are that she would have paid Paradise a nostalgia-provoked visit. Darling seems to be heading

for a future that mimics a future in Paradise in the sense that in Paradise she lived an impoverished and oppressed childhood. In Detroit, Michigan, she joins an army of oppressed immigrant labourers who are engaged in low paying jobs: “Back breaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow” (Bulawayo 2013, 246).

Through Darling’s story, we come face to face with the ubiquity of loss. Because when she was in Paradise she did not own it, she transferred her affections to America, which she called her own. Yet when she arrives in America, she discovers too that she does not own it. So, this feeling of loss is something she flies with to America, something she is bound to experience in an ongoing and more aggravated way.

4. Conclusion

This article pointed out that the characters in both *Harare North* and *We Need New Names* experience exile in both Harare and Harare North because of the terrors of Harare/Paradise. The same miracles they needed to perform to survive in Harare/Paradise (like re-invention), remain the key features of the North to which they escape. Even when they try to shed off the burden of what they have left behind, the inhabitants of the North insist on seeing them through the tight gown of the past, a past that includes Harare and, in the case of *We Need New Names*, the whole of Africa and its madness. Thus, the characters are shocked to discover that how they perceived the North from afar was part of this illusion which complicates their notion of escape: they seem to have escaped to remain where they are. Thus, Harare (in the) North can be understood as the metaphor of an irresolvable exile dialectic. These dialectical tensions surrounding the conditions of the characters lend “a tragic edge to exile” (McClennen, 2004, ix), and point to the simultaneity of moving out of crisis and into crisis, of being in the South and being in the North, so that moving and not moving appear like two sides of the same coin for the characters. At the same time, the experiences the characters go through demonstrate to the reader how living on the margins is so much a feature of the Global North where they have run to as it is of the Global South from which they are fleeing. This ubiquity of abject existence demonstrates the movement of centres because cities influence each other. Also, centres are always being moved because the characters in the selected texts have moving minds. Thus, Darling is thinking of America while in Paradise. Bastard wears a Cornell University T/shirt and the children visit a shopping mall that is bringing global brands to their spaces. So they have all these things from global centres in their minds. When minds move, they carry centres with them so that even as the moving bodies invade London or Detroit, the mind still makes Harare or Paradise tag along, hence influencing how the characters relate to their places of safety. Therefore, there are moments when Chikwava’s narrator misses the Green Bomber days, and moments when Darling misses the guavas of Budapest. This explains why Harare is in the North and why the exile dialectic is irresolvable.

Notes

- ¹ Sophia McClennen, a professor of International Affairs and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University, professes that the inspiration behind the writing of her book, *The Dialectics of Exile*, was the playful way that exiles had been “appropriated by theory and stripped of their tragic edge” (McClennen 2004, ix).
- ² The Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) has been Zimbabwe’s ruling party since 1980. Among other things, it has been famed for electoral theft, state capture, and disappearances and beatings of political opponents (a duty that the narrator in *Harare North* executes with panache).
- ³ For example, in NoViolet Bulawayo’s short story titled ‘Shamisos’, (in the Irene-Staunton edited collection, *Writing Free*), the central Zimbabwean character’s name is Method. When he migrates to South Africa, he also nomenclaturally migrates to Xolela Mabaso in order to hoodwink South Africans into accepting him as someone who belongs. This does not save him from xenophobic indulgences of the inhabitants of the host country. This is so because ‘Harare’ has invaded many of the options that he has due to its ability to turn up in the North or the South. However, this does not mean that Harare/home is a monolithically negative experience, even at the level of metaphor for all emigrants.
- ⁴ Taiye Selasie (2015) expresses discomfort with this identification.
- ⁵ Rumbaut coined the phrase with reference to Cuban youth and the dynamics of identity formation in adolescence and believes the phrase best applies to children who migrate with their parents from the country of origin after they reach school-going age but before reaching puberty, that is, roughly at 6-12 years.

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