Moving Out of Confining Spaces: Metaphors of Existence in the Diaspora in Selected Zimbabwean Writings

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Key Terms: Diaspora, out-movement, identity, immigrants, belonging, political disillusionment, transnational movement.

Abstract
This paper explores the literary representations of out migration by Zimbabweans in the last decade in selected short stories in Writing Still (2008), Harare North (2009) and Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories (2010). The four parts that make up this paper are; Desire for Flight and Escape: Lucifer’s Example, Identity Issues in ‘Everything is Nice Zimbulele’ and ‘Snowflakes in Winter’, Existential Possibilities Represented by Departure in Harare North and The Diasporic Idea of ‘hunting’ in Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories (2010). The first part demonstrates that Lucifer’s desire to escape the confining elements of Manyene village in Waiting for the Rain should be a useful departure in the discussion of transnational movement undertaken by many Zimbabweans in the last decade. The two stories selected from Writing Still are discussed in the second part of the paper. In these stories, it is highlighted that Zimbabwean immigrants in the Diaspora grapple with identity issues. Some illegal immigrants work towards becoming part of their host nations through illegal means. On the other hand, some insist on respecting those values that make them a people, such as family ties. The third part of the paper mainly focuses on how Harare North represents Zimbabwean individual immigrants who are not necessarily enjoying the perceived ‘greenness’ of the United Kingdom. The fourth part of the paper focuses on the ambivalent notions of the Diaspora from stories selected from Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories. The concluding part of the paper highlights some of the questions that need to be asked in relation to the position of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora.
Introduction

Human movement across the globe is vast and has a long history. There are two well known significant human movements. The first movement was the Atlantic Slave Trade which ‘resulted in the various communities established in America and the Caribbean’ (Manger & Assal, 2006: 8). This was a good example of forced movement. The other was the adventurous flight by Europeans to Africa and other parts of the world. This saw the formation of ‘the European Diaspora’ as well. Both movements represent defining moments of African history and had lasting impact on the African’s existence. Likewise, human movement from Zimbabwe to other parts of the world is not a new phenomenon and has a long history. This history stretches back to the colonial period when people moved to South African mines and cities in search of economic opportunities. From the mid 1980s, people from Matebeleland and Midlands moved out of these areas into South Africa due to the “Gukurahundi” killings. “Gukurahundi” was the code name for the Zimbabwean government’s military operation against “dissidents” in Matebeland and Midlands in the early 1980s with the use of the North-Korean trained Fifth Brigade. Quite a number of people from drought prone areas like Mwenezi, Chipinge and Matebeleland South have a history of migrating to work in South African farms. The last twenty years have seen an increasing rate of migration from Zimbabwe to mainly South Africa, Botswana and the United Kingdom. However, ‘it was only after the year 2000 that large numbers left as a result of political violence, forced removals and the general economic meltdown’ (Raftopolous, 2008: 222)

Moyana in the “Critical Introduction” in Hunting Foreign Lands and Other Stories (2010) concurs with us on the migration of Zimbabweans into the Diaspora but also provides a new dimension when she writes that:
The current trend in Zimbabwe, therefore, where young and old decide to leave their country to seek economic empowerment elsewhere is strictly speaking not new...The current trend where Zimbabweans are going “hunting in foreign lands” falls into the category of the second phase of the liberation struggle, namely, the need for economic empowerment which liberates one from the clutches of poverty (xii).

At a continental level the movement, forms a good example of ‘a contemporary African Diaspora that is being formed as a consequence of the ongoing crises within many African states’ (Manger & Assal, 2006: 10). These internal oppressions account for the present forced migration that lead to internal displacement and refugee migration. Overall, this shows that ‘the euphoria of political independence from colonial rule was not necessarily accompanied by economic independence and prosperity’ (ibid). Primorac demonstrates how moving outwards by black people in Hove’s Bones is an act of rebellion against the inward pressing space. In the same way, when many Zimbabweans left the country, especially in the last decade they were challenging the limitations of constricting space – time they inhabited (2006: 89).

From the late 1990s, Zimbabwe entered a period that has come to be associated by “the millennial crises”. This upheaval consisted of a combination of political, social and economic decline (Raftopolous, 2008: 201). The position of this paper is that the crisis reduced Zimbabwe to a ‘confined space’. Subsequently, Zimbabweans made efforts to move out of this space to what Manger and Assal would call ‘enabling spaces’ (2006: 11). So in essence, the Zimbabwean Diaspora is a result of ‘forced migration’ and the Diaspora itself, to the sojourners appears a location of hope and opportunities.
What could have happened to Zimbabweans during this period is documented in so many sources. One of the clearest voices on Zimbabwe’s political, social and economic failure between the late 1990s and early 2009 and the subsequent scattering of Zimbabweans almost all over the world is that of ‘tellers of stories’. A number of literary works represent Zimbabwe’s decline and some reflect on the fate of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. This discussion shall assess the contribution of selected stories in Women Writing Zimbabwe (2008) and An Elegy for Easterly (2009), Harare North (2009) and Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories (2010) towards an understanding on Zimbabwean diasporan related issues.

Desire for Flight and Escape: Lucifer’s Example

Lucifer is one of the well-known characters in Zimbabwean literature. In our view, he is a useful point of departure in the discussion of circumstances surrounding Zimbabwean people’s movements from their homes to spaces that may be conceived greener. In Waiting for the Rain Lucifer is dealing with ‘colonially induced poverty’ (Zhuwarara, 2001: 65). On the other hand, so many Zimbabweans who left the country since the beginning of the new millennium were dealing with poverty induced by ZANU PF government’s misrule.

In a soliloquy Lucifer says:

I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere – of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and I never shall and if ever I leave this place, I am not going to come back. It is the failure’s junk heap. Those who go to the towns only come back here to die. Home is a cluster of termite eaten huts clinging on the slope of a sun-baked hill. What is here that is worth loving? What is here in this scrub, in this arid flatness, in
this sun-bleached dust to love? You go for a mile after mile in this swelter and not here, not there, not anywhere is there a tree big enough to sit under. And when you look everywhere all you see is this naked white earth criss crossed by the eternal shadow of the restless vulture. I have been born here but is that a crime? That is only a biological and geographical error. I can change that. Or can I? Can’t I change anything here if I want to? Must I live with what I no longer believe in? Because I have been born here and here is home where everyone is and the roots of the family are – is that the only reason why I must come back to die in this desert? (1975: 162)

Lucifer recognizes that he was born in Manyene, but he thinks that this was a curse, he could have been born somewhere of some other parents. His declaration that if he leaves he will never come back should be understood in the context what makes up his home. What characterizes his home is ‘the physical desolation of all those overcrowded reservations which in colonial parlance were known as “Tribal Trust Lands”’ (2001: 51). We do not intend to go into the politics of the creation of these reserves. Nevertheless, some points seem clear here. This particular space is so desolate that it cannot sustain human life. In search of greener pastures, some people have already moved out of this space to the towns and they only come back to die. Therefore, Lucifer is not alone in his rejection of home.

The aridity of the place that is home pushes Lucifer into being an angry man that he is. Going by the look of things no one should blame Lucifer for thinking of leaving this space. Any normal human being in a position of making choices would opt going out. Opting out of a potentially confining space makes a lot of sense given that ‘every human being has a right to a decent and dignified existence’ (ibid). Lucifer sees that he cannot improve his social status in Manyene that is why he opts to go to England. Moving out of a confining space also
usually widens the sojourner’s experience and mental horizons. Lucifer’s parents, Tongoona and Raina expect their share of money and material goods from Lucifer once he is abroad. Their view of the Diaspora is positive despite Raina’s reservations on Lucifer’s impending trip abroad. Lucifer’s parents are aware that one who goes abroad is better placed to have a better life than those who remain in Manyene. Hence, Tongoona makes Lucifer his heir, displacing Garabha the eldest son from the position. His cargo cult mentality and the prospect of wealth from the Diaspora makes him violate a respected traditional custom. Even the Old Man (his father) fails to make him change his mind. However, there are issues that we can say Lucifer is quite mistaken. He cannot change parents or his place of origin. He cannot certainly survive running away from his family; these are part of his identity.

Early critics on Zimbabwean literature were harsh on Lucifer. Zhuwarara thinks that Lucifer becomes hostile to his background because of his ‘early missionary – cum – colonial education which relentlessly criticizes the African worldview as backward, savage and primitive – something to be either discarded or outgrown in favor of colonial modernity’ (2001: 53). He also thinks that Lucifer’s revulsion against the desolate Manyene village translates him into a ‘cultural renegade fallen from grace’ (ibid: 50). Since Manyene is a colonial creation, it cannot be said to be representative of the ‘African worldview’ that Lucifer runs away from. He goes on to argue that Lucifer is a ‘cultural caste raring to embrace the material comfort promised by a western lifestyle’ (51). The critic here misses a vital point, in our view, Lucifer’s response is a practical one given the circumstances. Here is Manyene, barren as it is, failing to sustain even the smallest insect that depends on its soil, and on the other side Lucifer has a chance ‘to go out of Manyene’ and get life. Although Lucifer is bashed by Zhuwarara, Zimunya and other critics for rejecting his home, there is some truth in his statement that Manyene
(his home) is, to him, a “geographical error”. Zimbabwean history informs us that such areas like Manyene Tribal Trust Land were not the original homes of blacks represented by Lucifer’s family. Blacks like Lucifer’s family were displaced from their ancestral homes to areas such as Manyene to make way for white settlers. Thus, in other words, Lucifer is rejecting sub-standard land which was not originally theirs. His rejection of Manyene could be seen as a form of protest because no one would want to live in Manyene, which is, to use Muponde’s words “a colonial desert”. Manyene is a site invaded and degraded by colonialism. What is perhaps indefensible about Lucifer is his narcissist attitude towards his people including members of his own family.

Lucifer’s character is further elaborated through the hunter analogy told by Matandangoma. As the storyteller explains, the hunter thinks ‘things will get better there’. Lucifer too ‘is looking for home, but home he will never find by going away from home, it is only to more darkness that he is going’ (1986:140). The novel does not go beyond Lucifer leaving his birthplace; we can only speculate that as a foreigner he had a tough time as implicated in the hunter analogy.

We are quite sure that the feeling that Lucifer had in Waiting for the Rain that ‘home/ is an aftermath of an invisible war/ a heap of dust and rubble’ (1975: 52) is the same feeling that most of those who left Zimbabwe had at their moments of departure. For many the aforementioned ‘crisis’ transformed Zimbabwe into ‘a failure’s junk heap’ (1975:161). They may not have thought that they were born in Zimbabwe against their wills, but what pushed them to leave was probably the same feeling that Lucifer had:

I do not like the look of this land at all ... in five more years this land will be useless, too tired to support any form of
life … very soon people will have to go and find somewhere else to live. Already some of them, those less attached to roots and family and our ancestors are moving out (1975:161)

Lucifer was right in seeing nothing but desolation and poverty in Manyene village. In the same way, those who left Zimbabwe particularly in the last decade were right in seeing no ‘life’ in Zimbabwe. The economic decline had reduced almost everyone to a destitute. The political environment was characterized by so much repression and violence such that so many people lived in fear. Everything that mattered in people’s lives such as food, clothing, accommodation, electricity, clean water, money and transport was in short supply. Moyana rightly asserts that:

It is this pursuit of basic human requirements for food and shelter
In their entirety, for survival, that is sending some Zimbabweans
to foreign lands (ibid: xiii)

To make matters worse, those who were supposed to find solutions denied that there was ever a crisis in Zimbabwe. Chikwava captures this situation well when he says “It was like no one was starving because there is plenty of food in the supermarket shelves, if basic commodities are in short supply, it meant that it was “being hoarded by enemies of the state” (2003: 4). Gappah recreates the moment in the short story “In the Heart of the Golden Triangle“, in which she writes, “wives of cabinet ministers...did all their shopping in Johannesburg, even as their husbands promise to end food shortages’ (2008: 17). These are some of the complexities that were part of the crisis; a crisis that prompted so many Zimbabweans opting to go out of the country in search of ‘new life’ and possibly freedom.
Though many Zimbabweans left their places of origin, we do not think they felt that their being Zimbabweans was in any way a curse. Some things are obvious here; they moved out of the country not because they were ‘less attached to roots and family’. We are also sure that none of them ever vowed that they would leave home forever. Nevertheless, the fact that they left Zimbabwe does not mean that they are less attached to their place of origin; rather the nation had become a confined space that forced people to move out.

Achebe declares that

Nigeria is where God, in his infinite wisdom, chose to plant me therefore; I don’t consider that I have any right to seek out a more comfortable corner of the world which someone else’s intelligence and labor have tidied up (1983:10).

His words are quite important in an effort to understand the usefulness of moving out of a confining space as a form of a liberating project. Central in the movement is the self and an attainment of economic and material freedom. In this respect, Achebe suggests that inhabitants of a possibly confining space should labor to tidy it up rather than escape. The favorable position is well delineated by Ranka Primorac who demonstrates that “the liberation of the self is also possible in a context where the liberation of the land and the nation are concurrently addressed. That way, the liberated self does not become an a historical entity” (2002: 125). In other words, what are the political contributions of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora?

Matandangoma in a dream tells Lucifer the story of the hunter. A strange bird lured the hunter to death. The story is meant to allude to Lucifer’s journey to Europe. The implication is that by going overseas, Lucifer is heeding the call of the ‘strange bird’ and there he will face his death. Literary critics have understood this particular
death as cultural death. Generally, the allusion points towards an unsuccessful expedition. Closely linked to the hunter story, stories of the living conditions of Zimbabweans across borders show that for some ‘spatial movement usually does not bring about an improvement in the conditions of life that the characters hope for’ (Primorac, 2002: 104-105). Some of the elements discussed in this section are reflected in selected Zimbabwean short stories and a novel discussed below.

Identity Issues in ‘Everything is Nice Zimbulele’ ‘and ‘Snowflakes in Winter’

Because of border restrictions, Menzis and Feziwe in ‘Everything is Nice Zimbulele’ face problems when they cross from Zimbabwe to the other side of the Limpopo. They are ‘border jumpers’ because they do not have the required papers. Since they are illegal immigrants, one of them is unfortunate, is caught by South African soldiers, and faces the possibility of being returned to Zimbabwe. This illegal immigrant status forces Menzis to do away with his Zimbabwean identity. As a solution to the immigration restrictions and difficulties, he becomes ‘Paul Khulu’. Becoming ‘Paul Khulu’ means a lot. Besides paying R1000 for the new names, other payments have to be made. These other payments are not necessarily made in cash terms. Primarily, being Paul Khulu gives Menzis courage and boldness; he can now break into other people’s cars and assume ownership of their belongings. As Menzis, he had a duty to his family back in Zimbabwe, but ‘Khulu is not expected to achieve things’ (2008: 93). He has a wife who has attained the title ‘Paul’s wife’. He also has two children with two different women. So these children are ‘Paul’s’ children. It also means that when he dies, his body cannot be taken to Zimbabwe. He has to be buried as Khulu not Menzis Ndlovu. It is as if ‘Menzis never existed’. What it actually means is
that Menzis died the moment he decided to do away with his real name. Menzis sold his life for the material things that he expected to acquire in South Africa.

The restricting conditions in Zimbabwe prompted individuals to leave from their places of origin. Since these individuals are not accepted in the communities that they joined, they find ways of coping in the new environments. Unfortunately, for the likes of Menzis, the available option is to run ‘from themselves’. As Achebe once said, ‘this is a statement of defeat. A man is never more defeated than when he is running from himself’ (1989: 49). This same scenario is also captured in Harare North where Zimbabwean illegal immigrants get French passports thereby becoming ‘many people in one person’ (2009: 53).

In a contrast to what Menzis does in ‘Everything is nice Zimbulele’, characters in ‘Snowflakes in Winter’ insist on their values and customs as Zimbabweans though they are in the United Kingdom; a foreign land and environment. The extended family value pushes ‘Babamukuru’ to give Tendai a ticket to London. In the same manner, Tendai buys the ticket for his younger brother who joins them in London. These kinship ties prompt Tendai to declare that Sam cannot go ahead with the engagement ceremony without Babamukuru. For him going on with the ceremony is just like having ‘a Mickey mouse ceremony’ (41). In his view, insisting on things that bind them would at least show that ‘they come from somewhere’ (ibid) Yet the likes of aunt Marble and Lolo think that since they are in England, ‘things are different … they don’t have to be like they are at home’ (2008: 40). However, at the end Sam patches up the conflict after the realization that he needs his family. He follows the demands of kinship ties.
Existential Possibilities Represented by Departure in Harare North

The Zimbabwean community in the United Kingdom is a large community and that is why the place has come to be termed “Harare North”. The implication in the title is that there are so many Zimbabweans in this part of the world to such an extent that it is viewed as an extension of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. This group consists of ex-Zimbabwean professionals mainly teachers, doctors, nurses and other prominent professions. This kind of reality deflates the passionate utterance of the President of Zimbabwe when he told Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister that “Keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe”. In the context of part of England metaphorically becoming an extension of the capital city of Zimbabwe, what does it mean to keep one’s Zimbabwe? It becomes a classic denial of the reality of transnationalism and globalization.

From Chikwava’s point of view in Harare North (2009), Zimbabweans in London consist of a mixture of individuals suffering and only a few are enjoying its perceived ‘greenness’. First, the immigrants have to content with the host nation’s efforts to restrict movement into its national space. The book does not tell us the difficulties that Zimbabweans faced in getting UK visas but it does well in enlisting the unwelcome atmosphere on arrival. On arrival, immigration officers detained the nameless narrator at the airport for eight days. Since he is an ‘illegal immigrant’ he has to flout immigration rules by using Shingi’s passport until his asylum application is processed.

It is generally agreed that the contribution of immigrants to the host nation is immense. Most of these do not stand to benefit much from their sweat. When the narrator looks for a job on the internet, the story that he encounters is that, ‘immigrant people’s contribution to this country is equal to one Mars bar in
every citizen’s pocket every year” (2009: 24). However, the foreigners are lowly paid compared to the local workers. In Finsbury Park, the nameless narrator and others were offered a drain repair project for 2.4 pounds per hour. This was a take it or leave offer. Being in desperate situations normally leaves them with no options.

According to the nameless narrator, the old man from Tulsie Hiss Estate “have reinvent complete; you will never think he is Zimbabwean if you don’t know him” (2009: 128). He is now known as MFH, Master of Foxhounds, an indication that not only moving out of Zimbabwe, is a sign of “unbecoming” even the name that he adopts has no links to his being a Zimbabwean. His behavior prompted him to be labeled that “kind of homeboy that can visit Germany for one week and come back to his native country putting on big funny American accent and spinning clouds of jazz numbers playing out the I don’t understand his native language” (ibid). This is how some of the Zimbabweans behave once they become part of the Diaspora.

However, in most cases immigrants make an effort to remain connected to their homes in an effort to remain belonging. Some immigrants always get in touch with family members who are back home. Throughout the novel characters in the UK connect with those back home through letter writing. Part of the deal is that those in the Diaspora send all the necessary material support to those back home. Such a relationship is one that the narrator thinks Shingi’s relatives are abusing. Their demands are excessive as if “Shingi is a governor of the reserve bank” (2009: 2). The likes of Aleck are busy “buying them stands back home”. Towards the end of the story, Sekai is reported to have gone back to Zimbabwe to attend her brother’s funeral. All these aspects highlight
individuals’ efforts towards physical connection with their places of origin.

The various values and beliefs that shape Zimbabweans’ lives in the United Kingdom are an indicator that the effort to remain connected is not only at the physical level as discussed above. What shapes their lives abroad is not so different from their experiences back home. Besides MFH, most characters in Harare North continue using their real names and some of these are Shona names (Shingi, Sekai, Tsitsi and Fatso). Mai Msindo was a spirit medium back in Zimbabwe, and in London, she performs some rituals and she is accorded the respect that she deserves as a spirit medium. In Zimbabwe, people from Chipinge area are believed to have knowledge of sorcery. This belief shapes how other characters view Shingi who comes from Chipinge. The nameless narrator challenges him to do rituals that would kill the President of Zimbabwe since most people wished for his death during the ‘crisis’. When Shingi is fired from Caps, others around him think that it is because of ‘the winds that he get from his father that are giving him the bad luck’ (2009: 59). ‘Winds’ is a direct translation from the Shona word mamhepo which means bad spirits.

Chikwava in Harare North also demonstrates how the political polarization that affected the Zimbabwean population especially since the inception of the MDC party is reflected among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Not all Zimbabweans that are in the Diaspora are against the Zanu Pf government that according to many people has taken the nation to an economic downturn that has seen so many Zimbabweans suffering. Where Aleck thinks is ‘an evil dictator’ who does not know when to leave power like other unnamed African dictators. On the other hand, the narrator demonstrates in various ways that he is a staunch ZANU PF party
supporter. From time to time, he defends the ZANU PF leader. Responding to aleck’s proposition that Mugabe is an, evil dictator, the narrator states that ‘Mugabe Bob has never set fire on people’s roofs, he never raped women’ (2009: 12).

Surviving in the host nation is a challenge especially for the majority of immigrants who are not gainfully employed. Most characters in *Harare North* do not have permanent stable jobs, meaning that they do not have reliable sources of livelihood. Tsitsi was brought to London by an aunt for babysitting, but she became homeless when the aunt ‘became a tyrant’ (p24). At 17, she becomes a mother. For the 17-year-old mother, getting money for everyday is so much a challenge that she loans her child to women who want to apply for council houses as single mothers. The mother manipulates the child into a survival instrument but for the child it translates into child abuse. There are moments when the immigrants are forced into living like street men and women. In one of their talking escapades Shingi tells the narrator how he ‘always go trawling through them neighborhood’s bins’ (ibid).

“For a growing number of Zimbabweans, the west is first and foremost the location of displaced relatives who keep them alive by remitting parts of their overseas incomes” (Primorac. 2006: 75). She goes on to demonstrate how the same exiled individuals are officially regarded as “fugitive economic saboteurs” (ibid). Many Zimbabweans in the Diaspora applied for asylum, not necessarily because they are political fugitives, but most of them are economic fugitives. Applying for asylum has seen all of them-labeled “traitors” and opposition sympathizers by the ruling ZANU PF government.
The Diasporic Idea of ‘Hunting’ in Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories

_Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories_ (2010) is, up to date, the most recent collection of short stories about the Zimbabwean Diaspora by different Zimbabwean authors. All the writers in the collection concur that Zimbabweans who went into the Diaspora had been metaphorically forced to “vote with their feet” due to unbearable economic and political conditions in the country especially in the years just after 2000. Life then for the majority was characterized by grinding poverty, unrelieved suffering, repression and “the uncertainty of hope” to use the title of a novel by Valerie Tagwira. There was rampant corruption in the government that also ruled without responsibility. It was painful indeed, to live like destitute in a country that has such a lot of potential. However, the writers in the collection have ambivalent views about the Diaspora. The overwhelming picture of the Diaspora in the book is a fearsome one. The Diaspora is seen as a place that leads to the destruction of marriages, entrapment and misery for the unfortunate sojourners and the smashing of important African socio-cultural taboos as new values displace traditional ones among others problems. Be that as it may, very few stories (or voices in the wilderness) view the Diaspora as a better alternative to Zimbabwe as Zimbabweans in the Diaspora or those who make occasional business trips there are able to fulfill their dreams of a better life. To highlight our discussion, we will just use three stories from the collection: Aaron Mupondi’s “Hunting in Foreign Lands”, Barbara Chiedza Manyarara’s “The Road to Damascus” and Ruby Magosvongwe’s “Esther’s Breakthrough”.

Vol. 5, No. 3

Africana

December 2011
In the title story, “Hunting in Foreign Lands” by Mupondi, Mai Teclar decides to go to London to work as life in Zimbabwe had become unbearable as she says to her husband, “Our teachers’ salaries can hardly sustain us for even half a month” (p.32). The husband, Tigere has reservations about his wife’s trip to London, as he fears that the distance between them might lead to the break-up of the family. At the end, his fears come true when he discovers through the phone that his wife was in love with a certain white man, Jack Stevens. Subsequently, Tigere divorces his wife as he vows to “look for a woman who will not leave (him) for another (man); a woman who doesn’t put money first before everything else” (2010: 36). Mai Teki hopes to marry Jack but that fails. She is deported for not having a work permit and attempts to return to Tigere, but it is too late. The hunt, as Moyana puts it, “yields rotten fruits” (ibid: xvi).

Manyarara’s “The Road to Damascus” is about two girls, Nyasha and Tino who go to Botswana hoping to advance themselves materially. Nyasha lies about her identity to be accepted by Kgosi Moraka the chief in a certain village in Botswana. She ends up one of Moraka’s wives. However, misfortune strikes, and as she tells her friend Tino later, she was walloped in public for “theft” by the Kgosi and then secretly sent away by the chief’s senior wife. The last Tino heard about Nyasha was that: “…the series of STI’s had left her so mentally debilitated that she now existed on the periphery of the squatter camp alongside Gaborone’s city’s sewage farm. With her Khoisan looks, she belongs, but from without” (2010: 26).

While Nyasha’s hunt is fruitless and appears to end in her demise, Tino’s stay in Botswana is an eye-opener for her (Tino). Ironically, it is in exile rather than at home where Tino is advised that she can work hard and uplift herself in her own country. The title of the story, “The Road to Damascus” refers to the turning point in Tino’s life that is parallel to that of the biblical Saul (Paul) whose life changed
dramatically after an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. After separate pieces of advice from Mr Tlou and MaLetshego, Tino returns to Zimbabwe to train as a nurse at Nembudziya Hospital. Although Zimbabwe would be the basis of her success, the seeds of that possible success were sown in exile. What we learn from the story, therefore, is that exilic experience lends the sojourner with very important new knowledge or revelation and valuable life experience.

While the only positive things in “The Road to Damascus” are the new knowledge and experience, in Magosvongwe’s “Esther’s Breakthrough”, exile is rewarding materially. Esther, who is a widow, ends up becoming a successful businesswoman due to her occasional business trips to Botswana. She is encouraged in the venture by Dorcas, another cross-border. Her business enables her to fend for herself and her daughter Lorna. This story is one of the most optimistic stories in the whole collection.

From the above stories, we noted that “hunting in foreign lands” can yield both positive and negative results just like the hunting of yore our forebears used to do in the past.

CONCLUSION

The creative works discussed in this paper reveal that Zimbabweans, faced by all sorts of problems ranging from abject poverty, repression, and lack of viable economic opportunities especially during the decade of crisis (2000-2010), opted to go into the Diaspora to try their luck. This was an understandable expedient move done by characters like Nyasha and Tino in “The Road to Damascus”, Mai Teclar in “Hunting in Foreign Lands” and the characters that populate Harare North in the book of the same title. As already shown, Lucifer Mandengu in Waiting for the Rain had already set the trend in the mid-1970s before Independence. Some characters benefit from the
Diaspora, for example, Tino in “The Road to Damascus” and Esther in “Esther’s Breakthrough” while to others such as Mai Teclar in “Hunting in Foreign Lands” and Nyasha in “The Road to Damascus” the Diaspora is a disaster that worsens their situations. Going to the Diaspora was/is, however, a worthy undertaking. It should not be seen as a criminal move. It constitutes the individual’s infinite quest to add value to his/her life. After all, the Zimbabwean society always encourages the search for material things as reflected in the Shona proverb, *Chitsva chiri murutsoka* loosely translated into English as “Something new is got through travelling”.

To show that the Zimbabwean nation had become a ‘confining space’, in the last decade its international airports were mainly processing out migration. Such forced movements are quite representative of the post independence disillusionment that gripped many African states. The affected states include Zimbabwe, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Mozambique and The Democratic Republic of Congo. A closer look at the literature on Zimbabweans in the Diaspora demonstrates that for most immigrants, their journeys were cyclic. They ran away from poverty and political violence only to find themselves facing challenges as foreigners in host nations. Zimbabweans and other foreigners in South Africa were affected by xenophobic attacks in 2008. So in this respect does movement bring better security? The concept of Diaspora helps in an understanding of cross culture, borrowing of and mixed hybrid cultures. For instance, we may want to know what will eventually happen to Zimbabweans in the Diaspora who do not intend to repatriate to Zimbabwe. What will happen to children who are born of intermarriages between Zimbabwean immigrants and the host nation’s inhabitants? Are Zimbabweans in the Diaspora likely to form a community of their own, like what happened in Zimbabwe for Moscans and Malawians, who are found in specific locations? Can Zimbabwean immigrants be incorporated into their host nations’ history?
References


