Reading the Fear of (Not) Returning to Zimbabwe: The Politics of (In)security in the Novel *Harare North*

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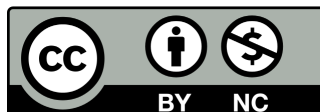

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Abstract

Old and recent migration studies have demonstrated the ubiquity of fear in acts, processes, and beliefs defining and characterizing various forms of human mobilities, particularly those involving transnational and transoceanic displacements. While much has been written, especially about the politics of this fear and its relationship to contested narratives of push and pull factors, only an insignificant number of studies has put fear at the centre in enquiries about the various forms and formations, constructs and constructions of what and where is (in)secure. Noting how much of the available scholarship on fear related to transnational mobilities uses mainly empirical data around causes, processes and contexts of displacement, settlement, and sometimes returns to one's origins, this study shifts the focus to Zimbabwean fiction. It explores how a Zimbabwean fictional text has sought to interject and re-direct epistemological appropriations of fear as a reflective and refractive condition that is bound up with migrants' processing of threat, security, and space. The article centres the motif of fear – particularly the fear of (not) returning to the homeland – in understanding fictional modes of re-discoursing crisis-driven mobilities in Zimbabwe since 2000. Focusing on Brian Chikwava's novel *Harare North* (2009), the article converses with various (especially) sociological concepts of fear and space in its examination of the potential function of 'literary fear' as a complex epistemological site from which to rediscover the Zimbabwean migrants' ambivalent attraction to (and repulsion from) a threatening homeland and to their entangling foreign havens.

Keywords: Fear, *Harare North*, (in)security, return migration, transnational mobilities, Zimbabwean crisis

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Introduction and background: What else to know about the Zimbabwean exodus

Zimbabwean transnational mobilities have been widely studied, especially as socio-political and economic symptoms of the Zimbabwean crisis, since the turn of the century. The interest is easy to fathom. Having progressed remarkably well in most development indices in terms of the economy, education, health care, and social services in the first two decades post-independence, Zimbabwe suffered a dramatic reversal of fortune in the wake of the economic structural reforms of the early nineties and its military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the late nineties. Although many scholars have highlighted Zimbabwe's steady decline, leading to the post-2000 cataclysm (see Gordon 1997; Potts and Mutambirwa 1998; Bond 2007), just as many have noted the dramatic intensity of the country's collapse when Mugabe's regime, buoyed by veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war (1966–1979), orchestrated violent farm seizures which peaked around 2000 (Mkodzongi and Lawrence 2019; Dande and Mujere 2019; Shonhe 2019). The land invasions, which were racialized and politicized, triggered massive disinvestment from the country, which saw the country's currency free-falling at unprecedented levels. American and European Union sanctions further intensified Zimbabwe's financial isolation, making the country a global economic pariah. The resulting massive disinvestment, consequent de-industrialization, shrinking fiscal space, and hyper-inflation made life unbearable for many Zimbabweans, who lost jobs, could not keep up with the cost of living, and expected no safety nets from the struggling State.

For many, the crisis situation described above gave them only one option – to leave. This naturally made migration one of the most popular units of analysis in scholarly enquiries on the Zimbabwean crisis. Although Jaji (2019, 4), like a few other scholars, has warned in her aptly titled book *Deviant Destinations* against "very little if any attention [being] (…) paid to migrants living in or moving to the country (Zimbabwe)", much of the available literature on post-2000 Zimbabwean mobilities has focused on migration and its significance as a socio-economic and political dynamic of the Zimbabwean crisis. Most of these studies focus on the economic impact of remittances and how they reveal close ties, not only between those who leave and those who remain (see Bracking and Sachikonye 2010; Makina 2013), but also between migrants and the state, symbolized, in particular, through government facilities for diaspora remittances such as the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe's money transfer service Homelink.

In the broad discipline of the humanities, scholarship has explored various dimensions of the Zimbabwean migrant experience and their impacts and implications for personal and group identities in the context of the inevitability of difference and its tendencies to cause migrants to feel isolated, disliked, and marginalized in their supposed 'safe havens'. McGregor and Primorac's volume, *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival* (2010), is a good example of studies that reflect this scholarship. Contributions in this book engage with a range of themes that touch on the cultures and cultural productions of migration, such as the socio-politics of (il)legal status (Kriger 2010), the complexities of (re)claiming dignity in excluding foreign places (McGregor 2010), and how social(ly) media(ted) communities are re-defining the concept of family, social relations, cultural identity, and sense of belonging (Mano and Willems 2010; Primorac 2010; Peel 2010). These issues have been widely explored as major themes in literary analyses of *Harare North* (see Toivanen 2021; Musanga 2017; Chigwedere 2017; Manase 2014). The available literature on these themes has mainly focused on

the complexities of identity (re)formation as characters go through endless cycles and methods of negotiating their deterritorialization. Musanga's (2017) study, for instance, centres the trope of the *ngozi* (the avenging spirit) to read the nexus between Zimbabwean transnational migration and restorative justice in *Harare North*. Musanga (2017) argues that, for the Zimbabwean migrant in the novel, a critical part of settlement in the receiving nation involves negotiating inevitable ties between culture and place, particularly the tendencies of the 'home home' to haunt the foreign home's capacity for homeliness. The trope of the *ngozi* opens up complex factors, forces, and relationships that complicate the migrant's imagining and experience of the foreign place as a new home. In Musanga's (2017) reading, the *ngozi* is symptomatic and symbolic of the baggage of the 'home home', which dooms the nameless narrator to experience England in certain negative ways and not in others.

Like Musanga above, Chigwedere (2017) explores the interconnected themes of identity, place, and culture in *Harare North* through the lens of trauma. The trauma related to the narrator's past service in the Zimbabwean ruling party's machinery of electoral violence (the 'Green Bombers') manifests the subconscious unravelling of the old home in the new one. Thus, for Chigwedere (2017), the narrator's trauma exemplifies the ways in which place, space, and time condition the mind, feelings, and experiences to enable certain diasporic identities and to disable others. Chigwedere (2017, 170) argues that the narrator's trauma in England – even though he was the perpetrator of political violence in Zimbabwe – is a neurocognitive symptom of mental and emotional entanglements with the past and how it impacts the protagonist's strategies and experiences of settling in a foreign country. As Mangena (2018, 281) observes, such mental and emotional presences of Zimbabwe in the narrator's memory and psyche mark his foreign subjectivity and entrench his otherness. The narrator's migrant subjectivity onion-layers his unbelonging and reflects the intersectional forces influencing his relationship with places and spaces.

More relevant to this current study on the fear of (not) returning to Zimbabwe, however, is Nyambi, Makombe, and Motahane's (2019) recent article on home, transnationality, and belonging in Zimbabwean literature. Using NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names,* Nyambi et al. (2019) read the complexities, in foreign places, of constructing, deconstructing, and re-constructing the home in the context of the homeland's crisis situation and the migration 'crisis' of the receiving country, the USA. For Nyambi et al. (2019) in this novel, 'home homes', and foreign homes are symbolic cultural constructs that reflect deep structures and defining facts of becoming and being Zimbabwean economic refugees. The home is therefore theorized by Nyambi et al. (2019) as allusive of multiple dimensions of distances moved, cultures acquired, rejected, and transferred, languages adopted and adapted to, foods eaten, contacts (un)made, and pasts forgotten, remembered, and re-membered. However, what this study and the others mentioned above do not do is to interrelate the migrant experience represented with some of the ways in which migrancy is intimately expressed and performed, in order to understand the politics, economics, sociology, and psychology of migrants' decisions, once in receiving countries, to stay or return.

It is clear, from the studies above, that migration and migrants are conventionally conceptualized in relation to the causal categories of a precarious 'pushing' home and a 'pulling' foreign 'refuge'. We argue in this article, using Chikwava's *Harare North*, that, in the context of Zimbabwean economic migrants, these categories are unstable and that their instability unsettles fixed notions of security, insecurity, and where is (un)secure. We therefore flip the categories and instead

engage with what else can be learned about Zimbabwean migrants and Zimbabwean transnational mobilities when, in their foreign 'refuges', the migrants begin to feel 'pulled' by the threatening home they have escaped and 'pushed' by the 'haven' they have escaped to. We are thus concerned with the resultant entanglements of place (identity) and how the migrants' impulse to either stay or return reflects their liminality and the deeper processes of negotiating precariously evasive, ambiguous, and ambivalent places and place identities. The main question we ask concerns the implications of the characters' fears; that is, how certain ontologies of fear, in its various forms and contexts, hermeneutically characterizes and reflects (on) Zimbabwean transnational mobilities post-2000. Thus, our analysis of fear as a socio-psychological category of the migrant experience in *Harare North* goes beyond the usual "competing meanings of the diaspora [in] the case of Zimbabweans in Britain" (Pasura 2010, 1445). Rather, our study of fear interrogates what occupies the volatile interstice between place (identity) and the migrant's choice to stay or return in the context of unstable manifestations of what and where is (in)secure.

In *Harare North*, the fear of (not) returning to Zimbabwe is closely associated with place. It follows, then, that a fruitful understanding of this fear cannot be divorced from considerations of spatiality. Lefebvre's (1991) Marxist theorization of space as socially produced has had a somewhat cultic following in studies on the production of space. Lefebvre is, however, more concerned with how relations of power impact space and less with space as an impacted entity that produces its own conventions of relations of power. The terms 'relations' and 'power' imply agency and its lack vis-à-vis the action required to have an impact. Agency is, in turn, related to consciousness – the awareness that certain aspects of place can be mobilized to trigger and/or sustain "a sequence of actions with a certain 'objective'" (Lefebvre 1991, 71). This has led scholars such as Fuchs (2019, 135) to conceptualize space as "part of a dialectic of production" where, according to Lefebvre (1991, 142), "space is at once result and cause, product and producer". In the light of our focus in this article, perhaps the most important takeaway for our discussion concerns the connection that Lefebvre establishes between space, action, and agents of action. For him, space is "always, and simultaneously, both a field of action (…) and a basis of action" (Lefebvre 1991, 191). Along these lines, we conceptualize migration as being about places as much as it is about emplacement – the politics of moving, (un)settling (in) places, and sometimes returning to the source. Our primary interest in the migrants' (the characters') fears is, in fact and effect, an interest in the relationship between their threat construction processes, their "field of action" (space) (Lefebvre 1991, 191), and the basis for their decisions to stay or return.

Entanglements of place (identity): Insecure homes and threatening refuges

Place is not only intimately connected to personal, social, and cultural identity in *Harare North*. It is also implicated in the complexities, complications, and ambiguities attendant on its immanency in the characters' varied consciences and consciousnesses of their migrancy in England. Many scholars have theorized the intricate relationship between spatial mobility and (in)stabilities in repertoires of self and group (re)identification (see Castles 2017; Tomlinson 2018). These scholars highlight what Gilmartin (2008, 1837) has put succinctly as "the relationship between mobility and belonging, particularly through the concepts of transnationalism and translocalism, and through scales of belonging that range from citizenship to the home". As it

seems that in most cases, such studies have centred in-betweenness as *the* site of knowing migrants, it is critical to examine what lies at the interstice between place, (place) identity, and the different forms of 'trans'-formations steeped in space; that is, space as a product of impacted place.

Our site for encountering the threat construction processes of entangled migrants is fear, particularly the fear of losing oneself, which is tied to and/or manifest in the fear of losing one's (cultural) identity and, as in the case of the nameless narrator in *Harare North*, one's political identity. In *Harare North*, this fear, especially as it is reflected through the narrator and his antagonist Sekai, is affective. It complicates conventions of (in)security and, in the process, unsettles normative modes of imagining, feeling, and performing (in)security. Fear is, of course, a subjectively experienced feeling. This means that its causes and meanings depend on who experiences it and, in the same vein, on the spatiotemporal idiosyncrasies of places and spaces. In this light, a critical site to understand the narrator's fear of England (a presumed haven) and, consequently, his fear of not returning to Zimbabwe, concerns how his Mugabeist ideology and past experiences as a ZANU PF functionary inform his different attitude to and experience of England as a place and space of 'security'. We can best understand the aesthetics and politics of who fears and what they fear – (not) returning to Zimbabwe – by knowing the subject and how their subjectivity informs both the objects of their fears and their threat construction processes.

As the title of the novel suggests, *Harare North* is about places – all aspects of placeness, including a symbolic direction ('North'), but chiefly those that make places attract and/or repel certain people in certain times. As used by the narrator, "Harare North" is a metaphor of England derived from both its geographical location north of the original Harare (Zimbabwe) and its popularity amongst Zimbabweans as an economic and political haven in the wake of the crisis. The novel is also about movement – the movement of people in the act of migration and also the movement, transformation, and mutations of fear as the movements, their causes, and people's expectations constantly make dramatic shifts. The narrator in the novel is a young, fanatical, and naïve supporter of the country's President Robert Mugabe and a former member of the Zimbabwe National Youth Service – a quasi-military programme created by ZANU PF, ostensibly to inculcate patriotic values in young Zimbabweans. Historically, the programme is notorious for the violence with which its indoctrinated members were synonymous; hence the youths' disparaging nickname of 'Green Bombers' (see Mangena and Nyambi 2013; Nyambi 2019). When the narrator gets embroiled in the murder of an opposition party member, the authorities demand a bribe in foreign currency from him to quash his charges. As the national economy is in crisis, the narrator has little option but to join fellow Zimbabweans heading to the United Kingdom, mainly as economic refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the political violence of Mugabe's regime. In England, the narrator manipulates the 'asylum narrative' and is able to spin his identity as the perpetrator of violence, gaining entry into the UK on the false pretence of being a political victim belonging to the opposition. In England, the narrator fears many things, including arrest (his asylum application is never approved), joblessness, vagrancy, being duped by fellow Zimbabwean migrants, and getting ideologically warped by the 'colonizer'. But even though he is an ardent supporter of Mugabe, he also fears that his dead mother's grave will be desecrated by Mugabe's government as it forcibly moves his people from their ancestral village in order to establish mining operations there. However, his greatest fear is the fear of not returning to Zimbabwe, which is also the fear of staying in England. It is an atypical

fear in the context of the normative fear of Zimbabwe as a place of crisis and popular imaginings of England as an economic and political haven. Our discussion centres the narrator's fear, particularly its atypicality, reflecting on how his fear is aesthetically leveraged in the narrative to reflect on other characters' fears of Zimbabwe. This interaction between fears and their implications for how we understand Zimbabwean transnational mobilities and the subjectivity and politics of (in)security is reflected in the relationship between the narrator and his cousin's wife Sekai. Sekai is the typical Zimbabwean economic refugee, who perceives England as a haven. Her typicality, as dramatically displayed by her exaggerated sense of belonging to England and her distaste for everything Zimbabwean, is cast in a dialectical relationship with the narrator's politically motivated attraction to Zimbabwe, Mugabe, and ZANU PF's anti-Britain ideology. This relationship, which is marked by ideological, experiential, and perceptual antagonisms, unravels deep structures of the fear they have of each other which symbolically mirrors their opposing fears of Zimbabwe and England as (in)secure places and spaces.

As a legal migrant with a formal job and what the narrator calls 'papers' (Chikwava 2009, 106), Sekai considers herself both settled and assimilated in England. Besides her economic refuge, reflected in her stable job and good quality housing, settling, for her, entails her acceptability and England's acceptance. Her sense and performance of acceptability implies her awareness of English criteria for acceptance and an equally conscious undertaking to condition herself to sync with set parameters. Acceptability, therefore, implies the possibility of rejection, where assumed subjectivities, identities, cultures, and politics either fail to conform to expectations or conflict with them. In its treatment of the problematic of agency, relations, and relationalities in social relations, Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space does not hold social actors to have equal power to influence the production of space. Without implying that Sekai, by virtue of her exotic origins, cannot be anything but subaltern in England, written (immigration) and unwritten laws of her acceptance are created, regulated, and enforced by the English. Acceptability and acceptance are, in this sense, essentially demarcational – they delineate possibilities and seal the limits of social influence on the basis of one's relationship to place – that is, whether one is of a place or from elsewhere. Acts of accepting and being accepted manifest and characterize positions and conditions of power and powerlessness vis-à-vis the social production of spaces occupied by the English and by migrants. This means that Sekai's sense of belonging is regulated by English terms of reception and settling and this has implications for how she interrelates her past and new places in constructing an acceptable identity. Yet beyond her feeling of acceptance, bolstered, in part, by her sense of economic security, the spectre of the homeland never leaves her. In the early parts of the novel, the homeland and its insecurities manifests through the narrator's steadfast Mugabeist nativism, which constantly interrupts and disperses her notion of security, acceptance, and belonging by revealing the underlying aspects of what her attempts at acceptance have cost her.

What it takes Sekai to integrate or at least acquire a sense of acceptance furtively hints at what, in the eyes of the narrator, she has lost or risks losing. The losses or risks taken as part of satisfying the criteria for acceptability are the narrator's objects of fear of England and of not returning. They are connected to how the procedures and processes of adapting to (and adopting) England as a refuge estrange Sekai from essential elements of her identity connected to her Zimbabwean roots. Cultural estrangement here occurs as an inevitable consequence of compelled adjustments and negotiations of difference and foreignness to fit standards of acceptability. So, while Sekai

prides herself on her acquired Englishness, its various demands, manifestations, and performances are evoked as threatening to the narrator, who views them as worse threats than the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. We can infer the narrator's fear of England from his satirical representation of Sekai's new mannerisms, material successes, and performances of her assimilation. This fear of a 'haven' reveals underlying factors informing his and Sekai's different experiences of places and notions of (in)security. He says, in his broken English, which constantly reminds us that he is a school dropout:

> Big TV, ready-made meals from the supermarket, funny long silences, grunts and making funny faces – that is Paul and Sekai's life. They have been married for ten years. Paul, if he have only once put Sekai through pain of birth, maybe she will have know she place and start to give his relatives the respect that she have to give them. They also have likkle sausage dog that do kaka on the carpet while Sekai cry, 'Sheila, darlin', stop it.' As if this is naughty likkle girl (…) I go out and sit at the doorstep and start to use the screwdriver to pick off the mud that have cake under my boots from walking around outside. But Sekai follow me and ask me to look down on our street and tell she if I see anyone sitting on they doorstep. Me I don't get the score what this is all about until she tell me that this is not township; I should stop embarrass them and start behaving like I am in England. (Chikwava 2009, 13)

Clearly, the narrator's hypermasculinity, and especially his belief in the possibility of his cousin's impregnation of Sekai potentially making her "know she place" (Chikwava 2009, 13), borders on misogyny. It forms part of his crude and naïve character, traceable to his fanatical patriotism and masculinist nationalism as a former member of the ruling party's youth militia in Zimbabwe. As an 'imported' attribute connected to his indoctrination, his character is a product of place identity, whose incompatibility with Sekai's acquired Englishness makes him feel vulnerable to cultural and ideological attack. His fear of assimilating in the manner that Sekai has assimilated is also the fear of cultural and ideological corruption. It triggers his ironic instinct to escape the 'haven', which he calls "this funny place" (2009, 16). However, aware of how the narrator's scheming character, ideological naivety, and political indoctrination problematize his reliability, we would like to dwell more upon how his fears of Sekai's securities illuminate deeper fears that complicate his and her easy concepts of (in)security in a transnational space that both harms and secures migrants in different ways.

In the quotation above, Sekai's fear of the homeland – the economic crisis and ZANU PF – leads to her uncritical notion of assimilating, marked by a credulous consumption of Englishness. Her fear of the homeland informs her desperate readiness to integrate and this desperation blinds her to the risks posed by the English system of integrating migrants. These risks are manifested in her snobbish character, which leads to her naïve internalization of English behaviours, mannerisms, and attitudes. She strikes the reader as pathologically simplistic in her mimicry of colonial repertoires of (de)valuing 'cultures' on the basis of learned Eurocentric North/South and Centre/Periphery binaries. In this logic of integration and security, "behaving like [one is] in England" (Chikwava 2009, 13) is tantamount to unlearning prior (Zimbabwean) codes and epistemes of seeing, knowing, and relating, for the simple reason that their difference complicates integration into the

receiving space's framework of social acceptance. Acceptability is thus premised on one's readiness to reject oneself through a mimicked acquisition of Englishness, as exemplified by Sekai's tutelage of the narrator, for instance, to "look down on our street and tell she if [he] see anyone sitting on they doorstep" (2009, 38). Acquiring Englishness, as implied in the acts of "looking down our street" and "see[ing]" (2009, 13), is essentially a process of merely copying it. This act is assimilative in the ways in which it leaves nothing in the migrant's agency to influence what can(not) be (un)learned as part of the processes of settling and integrating. We gather from Sekai's tone that her exaggerated Englishness is not out of the proverbial 'need', when "in Rome, [to] do as the Romans do". Advising the narrator to follow English codes of 'acceptable' manners and social behaviour simply because England "is not township" (2009, 38) (a metonym for Zimbabwe) suggests a form of mimicry that differs fundamentally from Bhabha's famous theorization of mimicry and hybridity in the colonial context.

In Bhabha's (1994, 121) typology, mimicry involves the ways in which colonial subjects mimed certain dominant cultures in order to position themselves for material favours. Noting how, "for Bhabha, mimicry is not a simple aping of the imperial master", Ahluwalia (2012, 35) highlights "the menacing side" of mimicry – its "potential to become mockery and parody" – which he connects to the metaphor of camouflage "as practised in human warfare". In Bhabha's concept, although the mimicking person is subordinated, mimicry is not entirely a performance of the docile confirmation of inferiorization. More importantly, it is a symbolically menacing act which always produces something that is fundamentally different from the mimicked object, idea, behaviour, or culture. Musselman (2003, 133) notes that this certain difference is revolutionary in the way that it "masks what actually happens beneath the surface in the colonial subject's psyche". It would seem, however, that the potential menace of the mimicking person's difference to marginalizing systems can materialize with relative ease when their subordination occurs in their original spaces where local factors can support its revolutionary potential. In the quotation from *Harare North* above, although Sekai's mimicry as a culturally subordinated migrant manifests her difference, its subversive potential is obstructed by her fear of Zimbabwe and of dissimilation in England. This fear leads her to attempt to negotiate her difference, rather than encouraging its dissidence. So instead of inspiring Sekai to re-negotiate England's marginalizing framework of acceptance, difference is, for her, an obstacle to swift assimilation.

Sekai's exaggerated performance of acceptance manifests her naïve sense of English integration in a way that betrays her ideological and cultural insecurities as a Zimbabwean intend on staying in England. She is numbed to the cultural implications of these insecurities by her fear of dissimilation, which is also the fear of rejection and, as a consequence, the fear of returning to Zimbabwe. To go back to the quotation from the novel above, we note that the misunderstanding between the narrator and Sekai concerning the (in)appropriateness of sitting on the doorstep in England is not simply a clash of Zimbabwean and English norms. Rather, their conflict stems from their antagonistic positions on how their translocality shapes their (in)securities. Symbolically personified by the narrator and his coming to England, Zimbabwe continues to stake a claim on Sekai's social habitus, regardless of her wish to the contrary. Its encroachment into her English space not only 'imports' its precarities and old fears but also disrupts her escape strategy. Thus, the danger that the narrator poses to Sekai in England has less to do with the threat that he embodies in Zimbabwe as a member of the ruling party's militia, but with how what he embodies as a fanatical ZANU PF patriot relates to her strategies of integrating.

Sekai's attitude to the narrator's 'township' habits precipitates telling responses from her. These responses are driven by and explain her and the narrator's different and oppositional fears of places. However, the narrator's fears are not merely oppositional to Sekai's. His fears are more complex, not least because they reflect a less anticipated migrant habitus, related to his wish to return to the source. Beyond his exaggerated Mugabeist cultural nationalism, which borders on nativist zealotry, what the narrator calls 'principles' (Chikwava 2009, 58) of home, informing his notion of (in)security, are discursively constructed through a dialectical relationship with Sekai's fears of home (Zimbabwe). As a first-person narrative account in which the narrator can function as both the narrator and the focalizer, the narrative's "distribution of the sensible" both stems and departs from "sense perceptions" (Ranciere 2006, 12) in Sekai's fear of her difference, of rejection, and of returning. The narrator's fear of and reactions to the double threat of assimilation and of not returning is discursively rendered 'sensible' through blatant and furtive inscriptions of 'insensibility' on Sekai's fears. To the narrator, Sekai's discomfort with his presence in her house and her proclivity for jettisoning Zimbabwe to facilitate her assimilation means that she has lost herself – *kurasa hunhu* (the Shona version of *ubuntu*), particularly the now clichéd aspect of the moral ethic that obliges people to be kind to one another.

The immediate question, then, is what is entailed by *hunhu* in transnational metropolitan spaces and what does Sekai's refusal to be guided by its codes of social conduct reveal about her fear of the narrator and of Zimbabwe? In his book *Indigenous Shona Philosophy: Reconstructive Insights*, Mungwini (2019, 144) defines *hunhu* as "indigenous wisdom (…) including morality, on whose basis social relationships were defined". Citing a few maxims in the Shona culture that locate the individual in group schemes of relations and socio-cultural production, Mungwini (2019, 144) notes how aphorisms such as "*iva munhu pavanhu* (be humane among other humans); *munhu vanhu* (a human becomes one through other humans)" reflect the culture's code of moral conduct. We cite this philosophy here because it is, in many ways, directly and surreptitiously behind what informs the narrator's notion of Zimbabweanness and how he implements it aesthetically to judge both Sekai's fear and her securities. This, however, is not to imply that the narrator functions, on the whole, as the novel's moral compass – his past and his ideological warping by ZANU PF indoctrination make him too conflicted to be reliable. There are multiple layers of meanings inscribed in Sekai's notions of threat and security, as well as in her attempt, as a self-defensive measure, to cut off social, cultural, and spiritual 'umbilical cords' tying her to Zimbabwe. It is therefore important to explore how the meanings of her fears are manifested in her symptomatic and symbolic attempts to stay.

Fear and the souls of settled, settling, and unsettled migrants

We have noted above how Zimbabwe – embodied by the narrator's physical and ideological presence – persistently censors and scuttles Sekai's English refuge through inescapable re-connections with the homeland. These connections mystify England's securities and complicate its notions of refuge. Although her choice of England over Zimbabwe makes sense in the light of the economic and political threat at home, the narrator's disruptive appearance in her life reveals how she is torn between her attraction to England's securities and Zimbabwe's claim to her soul. She occupies an ambivalent space that unsteadies allegiances to place and, in the process, complicates her desire for an unproblematic transition. The resultant sense of in-betweenness of

place and place identity reveals a psychological quagmire that, in certain ways, both takes and departs from DuBois's (1994) notion of 'double-consciousness'. Writing in *The Souls of Black Folk* with particular reference to the black condition in America in the years leading up to the Civil Rights protests, DuBois (1994, 186) described double-consciousness as "a peculiar sensation (…) this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity". However, unlike in the American context, where, according to DuBois, black people's unbelonging was a result of racist American structures of ordering (by racially hierarchizing) society, Sekai's 'twoness' is linked more to her translocality or, better still, to her attempt at rejecting its bearing on her assimilation.

Sekai's obsessive keenness for assimilating is symptomatic – not only of her fears of rejection and returning, but also of psychosomatic impacts, on her social habitus, of England's framework of acceptability, acceptance, and integration. Besides her deliberate actions and conscious decisions in her displays of acceptance, particularly her condescending attitude to 'the township' (Zimbabwe), the connection between her fears and ambivalent Zimbabwean and English place identities can be gleaned from her unconscious actions and (lack of) agency in their cause. Our concept of agency here goes beyond the usual capacity, for instance, to cause the actions that define and characterize her migrancy. Rather, we deliberately extend the notion of agency to cover the delicate relationship between her power to cause action and the idiosyncrasies of the spaces in which both the power and the action occur. This approach is necessary to avoid what Grossberg (2006, 99) has called "the problem of agency" – that is, the tendency to conceptualize agency only in terms of will and capacity for action. Instead, Grossberg (2006) advocates a holistic approach to agency that considers conditional factors as shaping situations in which will and capacity cause certain actions. This is what Grossberg has to say in relation to how agential performances of identities relate to positionality and conditions of empowerment to act:

> within cultural studies, the question of agency involves more than a simple question of whether or how people control their own actions through some act of will. In classical modern terms, the issue of agency raises questions of the freedom of the will, or of how people can be responsible for their determined actions. But in broader cultural terms, questions of agency involve the possibilities of action as interventions into the processes by which reality is continually being transformed and power enacted. That is, in Marx's terms, the problem of agency is the problem of understanding how people make history in conditions not of their own making. (2006, 99)

We are citing this notion of agency here because it best explains how Sekai's unconscious performance of her 'twoness' reflects the conditions in which places and place identities threaten or secure her. Considering how she fashions her migrant identity "in conditions not of [her] making" is critical to our understanding of what else, beyond will and determination, shapes her fears of rejection and returning. In this light, Sekai's "problem of agency", to cite Grossberg's words above, makes her character an important site in which to understand the geopolitical instabilities of England as a haven.

Sekai's attempts to rid her consciousness of the homeland as a mechanism for enhancing her acceptability reveal a pathological notion of safety and ontologies of (in)security

that unsettle what Noxolo (2014, 302) has called the "'true story' format that conventionally tells a story of (migrants') movement from danger to safety or from 'rags to riches, overcoming adversity'". Though safe from Zimbabwe's economic crisis, the English environment in which Sekai's logic of safety makes sense to her (and loses sense to the narrator) reveals some of the complex ways in which her fears and objects of fear shape-shift and, in the process, demand different strategies of negotiation than what England allows her. The persistent spectre of the homeland fractures her concept of belonging and distorts her perceptions of place (identity), leading her to exaggerated performances of acceptance into English culture. At the immigration office, where she has come to receive the recently arrived narrator, her conceited reception of him and where he has arrived from is informed by her internalization of stereotypes of 'sophisticated' modern England and backward Africa. This strand of modernity, as we have learnt from colonial history, thrives on the systematic othering of places and of people it seeks to dominate. Sekai's internalization of a received place identity reproduces, in a way that naturalizes and even resuscitates, colonial stereotypes of her homeland, as can be seen in the description of her encounter with the narrator below:

> Sekai stand some few metres from me, she back straight like that of a soldier on parade (…) she not even bother to shake my hand and only greet me from safe distance and look at my suitcases in funny way. It is one of them old-style cardboard suitcases that Mother have use before I was born and have carry roosters in the past, but it's my suitcase. It still have smell of mother inside (…) Sekai lead the way out. 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 inside my head that she have turn into lapsed African (…) Sekai no longer remember who she is or where she come from, I can tell. I am she husband's cousin (…) Sekai snort in mocking way, roll she eyes and look at me. (Chikwava 2009, 2–5)

Clearly, there is a subjective bias in the narrator's self-construction as a victim of Sekai's snobbish displays of assimilation, which is meant to shift the blame from himself for not taking responsibility for his own welfare in England. However, beyond the narrator's self-vindication and attendant biases, a closer look at what else influences the narrator to see "a lapsed African" (2009, 5) in Sekai's conduct reveals her unconscious 'twoness' – unconscious in the sense that it results from the fact of her transnationality – a condition she wishes to expunge from her consciousness as a strategy for limiting the homeland's grip on her identity.

The narrator's unreliability aside, Sekai's 'lapse', especially when manifested in her unconscious displays of her 'twoness', reveals how the psycho-social costs of assimilating undermine what her economic security has afforded her. The 'costs' involve cultural and identity losses that, nevertheless, play out in Sekai's illusions of acceptance, shaped by her fear of the homeland, as gains. Sekai's economic safety from the Zimbabwean crisis and political safety from ZANU PF violence morph into a new 'threat' of identity loss – a psychotic experience in which her inflated performances of assimilation threaten her sense of self (identity). This threat is unknown to and ignored by her, but it is known and feared by the narrator, who immediately expresses his desire to return to Zimbabwe as soon as he earns enough money to bribe the Zimbabwean Police to drop the charges against him of

murdering an opposition supporter. The insecurity of England as a haven, reflected in Sekai's cultural schizophrenia, and how it triggers the narrator's fear of England, can be inferred from the ways in which her excessive sense of Englishness and self-importance makes her reproduce old stereotypes of the disease-free metropole and diseased Africa, as the following quotation illustrates:

> Before the end of my first day, I already know that Sekai don't want me to stay with them. But me I really don't want to stay in Harare North too long (…) I just want to get myself good graft very quick, work like animal and save heap of money and then bang, me I am on my way back home (…) Then me I'm free man again (…) I have bring Paul and Sekai small bag of groundnuts from Zimbabwe; groundnuts that my aunt bring from she rural home. Sekai give the small bag one look and bin it right in front of me. She say I should never have been allow to bring them nuts into the country because maybe they carry disease. Then she go out and buy us McDonald supper. (Chikwava 2009, 6 –7)

There are multiple layers to the characters' antithetical relationship, informed by, among other things, the antagonistic meanings they attach to places. These layers superimpose tensions on the characters' conceptions of threat and refuge. The narrator's keenness to return home is juxtaposed with Sekai's eagerness not only to stay in England but to make England her new home. As noted above, the (un)written rules of making England home cause deliberate and sometimes unconscious shifts in Sekai's attitude to the old home. Sekai and the narrator's ideas of home(land) clash and their antagonism can be linked to what they bring to considerations of what and where is (in)secure.

On a symbolical plane, we can read Sekai's fear of the groundnut gift from Zimbabwe not only as reflecting her fear of her homeland but, perhaps more importantly, its capacity to entangle her with it and, in the processes, disrupt the 'intrapsychic processes' (Wigand et al. 2019, 1078) informing her sense of security in England. Groundnuts are invoked for the aesthetic potential of their metaphorical significance as cultural symbols – they link place with what it has cultured as the ethics of inter-and-intra-personal relations. Groundnuts are not just a gift from the old home, whose acceptance by Sekai would, of necessity, have confirmed the stability of home values and the ethics of social relations abroad. Groundnuts and the peanut butter they are often synonymous with have an iconic importance in Zimbabwean culinary culture as the authenticating marker of *chivanhu* (indigenous culture) (see Madovi 1981). This cultural significance can be connected to persistent food and spatial stereotypes in Zimbabwe, where groundnuts, because of their association with the farming and rural areas where they are usually grown, carry nuances, often idealized, of authentic Zimbabwean food as opposed to western(ized) urban food. So, when groundnuts travel as gifts to cities and towns, they become the quintessential 'taste of home' that spiritually re-connects the city dwellers with their rural roots.

Similarly, when groundnuts travel outside Zimbabwe as gifts from one Zimbabwean to another, they can easily symbolize the spirit of the 'home home'. Their rejection by Sekai can be read as signifying the rejection of the ties they can potentially forge between Zimbabwe and Sekai. Unlike the narrator, whose experience of England is regulated by "heaps of ['patriotic'] history" (Chikwava 2009, 19) which allows him to control what England can and cannot do to his concept of (in)security, Sekai's spectacles and materialities of security

render her an unaware pawn in England's self-construction as a haven. Her ethic of safety is thus evoked as defeatist – not only because it is symbolically connected to the health risks of the "McDonald supper" (2009, 7) that she prefers to Zimbabwean groundnuts, but also because it locates her consciousness of place in old binaries of European civilization and African barbarism – of African disease and English hygiene. However, it should be mentioned that the 'diseased' groundnuts of the 'authentic' home do metaphorically symbolize the 'dis-ease' crisis in Zimbabwe, which triggers both Sekai and the narrator's flight from the country. Yet Sekai's fear and subsequent rejection of the groundnuts is not only based on a preconceived concept of their potential risk to England but also on her ironic sense of duty to protect England from their diseases.

The unanswered call of *umbuyiso*

The fear of becoming a 'lapsed African' drives the narrator's consciousness of place and informs his decision to return. Although his decision never materializes in the novel, the fear as well as the intention casts some light on a critical dimension to Zimbabwean transnational mobilities that, as Jaji (2020) has noted, have received little attention; that is, forced return migration. Besides the fact that the narrator never returns – his savings never reach his target – we can glean, from his intentions, aspects of his fear of staying which disrupt, problematize, and subvert the dominant narrative of the threatened refugee who 'comes to stay'. The narrator's fear of England is connected to his cultural nationalism, which can be connected to his National Youth Service training and its notoriety for its violent implementation of Mugabe's radical Afrocentrism. Thus, the narrator's notion of the 'lapsed African' is not merely a statement mocking Sekai's sycophantic desire to be assimilated. Rather, for him, the 'lapse' signifies the loss of African identity and consciousness, which he takes to reveal England's continuing subjectivation of African subjects.

Although unglorified by his past as a terror foot soldier of ZANU PF, the narrator claims a patriotic disposition – not only by declining England's material lures but also by refusing to be assimilated. This refusal is manifest in both his fear of staying and his static character. Unlike Sekai, who ends up becoming a 'forced' circular migrant, only returning to Zimbabwe to bury her deceased brother, the narrator's fear of England constantly pushes him to seek a return. Besides his reservations about England's securities, the narrator is also pushed from the 'haven' by a persistent sense of familial and cultural duty to perform the *umbuyiso* traditional rite of passage – a ritual to bring his dead mother's wandering spirit back home to become the family's next ancestor. His fear of abdicating on this ritual is greater than his fear of England, but both fears converge to inform an inescapable and yet enthusiastic desire to return. So, unlike Sekai, whose disinclination to re-connect with the homeland is apparent in her fear of contamination from its cultural objects, particularly the gift of groundnuts, the narrator's keenness to retain his Zimbabwean roots is connected to the performance of an iconic cultural practice – *umbuyiso*. The narrator's mother and her *umbuyiso* take on symbolic functions as pull factors that exacerbate England's push factors. His fear of not returning is, in part, a fear of violating *umbuyiso* and, consequently, his connection with his mother and the nation that she comes to symbolize, as the following shows:

> I wake up in the morning thinking of Mother. You die and your spirit go into wilderness. One year later, your family have to do *umbuyiso* ceremony to bring your spirit back home so that it can live with other ancestor spirits. Mother, she die

> of overdose (…) Me I have to go back home and organise *umbuyiso* for she. I never wanted to leave Zimbabwe and come to this funny place but things force me (…) I have to keep big focus and soon I'm back home to organise *umbuyiso* for Mother. (Chikwava 2009, 16–17)

The mother's scattered soul is thus a discursive site for moralizing the narrator's claimed sense of duty to the culture and nation that he has been trained, as part of the National Youth Service, to love and defend. This is ironic alongside the fact that, throughout the novel, the narrator is constantly haunted by the fear of the government violently displacing his people from their ancestral lands and, in the process, desecrating his mother's grave. So, although the narrator's planned return to gather his mother's spirit and restore it in the home is symbolically connected to his sense of patriotic duty to restore the country, this patriotism is tested when he learns, towards the end of the novel, that the government has indeed forcibly displaced his family. Upon hearing the news, of which he is suspicious because it comes through what he calls an "opposition newspaper" (2009, 168), the narrator is forced to dig deep into his radicalized patriotism to find a 'nationalist' excuse to exonerate the Zimbabwean government.

The symbolic returns to the source of Sekai and the narrator reflect on how their oppositional fears of places inform attachments and detachments to them and also how the source can use them. Unlike Sekai, who briefly returns to Zimbabwe to bury her dead brother, the narrator aims to return to "bring Mother's spirit back from the wilderness" (Chikwava 2009, 17). Although, like the narrator, Sekai returns to perform a related cultural practice, she returns as a visitor to participate in a 'rite of loss' that ironically mirrors the loss that the narrator believes she is to Zimbabwe. In contrast, the narrator hopes to earn enough money to return to facilitate continuity in a symbolic tradition of recovery where the spirit of an equally symbolic figure – the mother – is given a new lease of life as an ancestor. Whereas Sekai visits Zimbabwe from her new home in England, the narrator identifies his Zimbabwean home from England in terms of his mother. The narrator's desired return from England is linked to the recovery of the mother's spirit from the 'wilderness'. His fears about her spirit wandering in the 'wilderness' waiting for the *umbuyiso* ritual echo his own fear of perpetual wandering in England. Zimbabwe thus becomes the 'motherland' in the literal sense of the mother's land where, as implied in the Shona idiom "*Kusina mai hakuendwe*" ('don't go to places where your mother is not'), the narrator belongs too. This gendering or rather feminization of the narrator's sense of the homely home has come under attack, especially from feminist scholars and gay rights campaigners. Citing the example of Sumathi Ramaswamy's ideas on the constructedness of the concept of 'Mother India', for instance, Wattenbarger (2014, 21) argues that "'motherland' and 'fatherland' invoke a heteronormative view of family and reproduction which marginalizes GLBTQ communities and individuals". In Wattenbarger's (2014) logic, another reason why notions of 'motherland' are being censored is that they cast mothers as embodiments of national territories which renders them delimitable and therefore surveilable.

However, in *Harare North*, the connection that the narrator establishes between his mother and the home(land) in fact evokes her as unlimited and uncontainable. Not only has she transfigured into an unsurveilable spirit form – she will also become an ancestor who wields remarkable power over the living. The novel ends with the narrator failing to return to Zimbabwe due to lack of funds. He is unemployed, a fugitive from immigration officials, homeless and in conflict with virtually

every Zimbabwean he has come to know in England. His dire situation recalls his original fear that despite his disinclination to stay, he "will spend all of [his] life working (…) and will never be able to go back [to Zimbabwe]" (Chikwava 2019, 39). The narrator's fear of the prospect of a forced stay opens us to the psychological torture of a precarious haven manifest in the dramatic inversion of threatening and secure places. As he wanders the streets of London half conscious, he holds on to symbolical objects, particularly the suitcase, which still has the "smell of mother" (2009, 237). These homely objects present him with alternative escape roots which, even as they are illusory, create spaces of refuge from the tormenting haven that is England.

Conclusion

Migration studies have, for a long time now, accentuated transnational migration's "transgression of national boundaries and bounded communities" (Siziba 2013, xv), stressing the inevitability of change both in those who arrive and in what and who existed before their arrival. However, as Lefebvre's theory of social space has it, the agency to cause this kind of change is not evenly or equitably distributed amongst the groups of people who inhabit the places affected. The above discussion has demonstrated how, resulting from the historical and structural facts of places that immigrants are powerless to influence, the characters' fears of (not) returning to Zimbabwe in *Harare North* can be useful in probing the spatio-temporal layering of multiple and diverse experiences of England as a refuge. Going beyond the factors informing the characters' peculiar relationships with Zimbabwe and notions of England's refugeness, this article has revealed how different forms of fears, objects, and situations of threat precipitate the problematics of pinning down (in)security and secure, threatened, and threatening places. In Chikwava's novel, fear results from and archives complex, subjective, and psychological factors from the migrant characters' pasts. The characters' fear is thus a palimpsest of their conscious, sub-conscious, and unconscious processes of experiencing and relating to space. Our discussion of who fears, what they fear, and why and where they fear it has revealed and explained the underlying structural complexities of space informing the contestedness of what and where is (in)secure.

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