7 Transcontinental migrations to the West

> When populations are scattered, imaginaries of home are shattered. The exilic experience is one of retrieving fragments from memory to re-assemble home. Harare is a complex of such fragments that travels north to inhabit London and south to appropriate Johannesburg in a process that marks the Diaspora as the new site of construction of national imaginary.
>
> (Muchemwa 2010b, p. 141)

The final analysis chapter focuses on two novels which relate the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in two British cities. Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009) is set in London and centers on an unnamed ZANU-PF supporter who has gained entry to the UK via a fabricated asylum claim and plans to stay only temporarily. Tendai Huchu's novel *The Maestro, the Magistrate* and *the Mathematician* (2014), by contrast, foregrounds arrival. At the center of this novel are three Zimbabwean men who try to build new lives in Edinburgh: a magistrate who wanders through Edinburgh while listening to Zimbabwean music in an attempt to overcome his sense of unbelonging, a PhD student who enjoys a Western lifestyle and seems largely detached from home, and a lonely Tesco employee who looks for connection and meaning in literature until he becomes homeless and meets an early death in the Scottish winter. Despite the numerous difficulties encountered by his protagonists, Huchu imagines exile as mobilizing and as a liberating space. But, as in Chikwava's novel, the stories and agents of Mugabe's regime also journey, and the protagonists' fates are to a large extent determined by the cruel machinations of ZANU-PF. Although Muchemwa refers to Chikwava's *Harare North* in the chapter epigraph quote, his observation is relevant to my reading of both texts. In each novel, the protagonists travel far but find themselves wandering through the political and ideological landscapes of home.

Like South Africa, Britain is particularly prominent in Zimbabwean histories and imaginaries of migration. Complex and troubled historical and political ties have shaped a "special relationship between the two countries" (McGregor 2010, p. 2), which has influenced Zimbabwean migrations to the UK since colonial times and led to an increase in numbers since the onset of the Zimbabwe Crisis. According to McGregor,

> the exceptional place Zimbabwe occupies in the British public sphere has been produced through the legacies of Rhodesian settler colonialism and the struggle for national liberation, and this 'presence of the past' is reflected in today's diasporic claims and transnational engagements.
>
> (ibid., p. 2)

Legal structures created routes for regular migration and structures of opportunity, in particular in the 1990s and early 2000s. Until November 2002, Zimbabweans could enter the UK without the visa restrictions which applied to migrants from most other African countries. This, in addition to the high level of education of many Zimbabwean migrants, opened employment opportunities and long-term prospects (Mbiba 2012, p. 84). McGregor further notes:

> Zimbabweans had been encouraged to come to Britain partly because of the labour market opportunities, and there was a degree of flexibility for those arriving speculatively that allowed them to regularise their stay (for example, by enrolling for nursing bursaries, or taking out student visas to legitimate work).
>
> (2008, pp. 470–471)

According to Mbiba, between 1999 and 2005, the numbers of Zimbabwean immigrants to Britain rose to at least half a million (Mbiba 2012, p. 51); others suggest that the numbers are even higher (Ndlovu 2010; Bloch 2005). Apart from these more recent developments, there is a long history of migration to the UK which stretches back to the colonial era. After Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, and in particular during the independence movement and the liberation war, black and white Rhodesian students moved to the UK in large numbers. In a study of Zimbabwean student movement in the years 1965 to 1980, McGregor explains that these migrants'

> legal status in the UK varied according to race. White dissenters expelled from Rhodesia could mostly enter Britain as citizens or 'patrials', while non-whites occupied the 'grey' zones of imperial subjecthood, as Rhodesian passports were not recognized after UDI and British subjects' passports did not confer rights of entry to Britain.
>
> (2017, p. 63)

She also explains that, in an effort to "keep non-white Rhodesians out of the asylum system", Britain offered "scholarships specifically targeting 'Rhodesian Africans'" (ibid., p. 64). Among those who went to the UK as students during that period and returned to an independent Zimbabwe are some of the most influential authors, such as Dambudzo Marechera and Stanley Nyamfukudza (who both studied at Oxford University) and Musaemura Zimunya (who studied at University of Kent at Canterbury).

Although many of the legal routes to Britain were closed after the adoption of more restrictive visa and migration policies, Britain remained an attractive

destination. Deportations of irregular migrants were suspended between 2002 and 2008, following evidence of political persecution and torture in Zimbabwe (McGregor 2008, p. 471). It must therefore be noted that the situation differs in many respects from that of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa. As McGregor has also noted, Zimbabwe holds a prominent place in British public discourse, and she refers to the "unique embeddedness of Zimbabweans in Britain" (2010, p. 2) and a welcoming attitude towards Zimbabwean migrants which exists across the political spectrum:

> The special relationship between the two countries helps to explain why events in Zimbabwe make headline news in Britain for days on end, and why moves to resume deportations can spark protest not only from Zimbabweans themselves, the churches and groups promoting migrants' rights, but also from members of the Conservative Party, the House of Lords and the xenophobic right wing tabloid, *The Daily Mail*. Friends of Zimbabwe include members of both conservative and liberal establishments in Britain – those with connections to Rhodesia through farms and other investments (and their friends and relatives), as well as those involved in the solidarity movement against white minority rule or post-colonial NGO networks.
>
> (ibid., p. 2)

These strong ties notwithstanding, diplomatic relationships deteriorated. Official ZANU-PF rhetoric has, in particular since 2000, brandished Britain as the face of Western imperialism and a threat to Zimbabwe's independence. The reason for this lies in the grievances against Britain's imperial history, but the vitriol was further fuelled when 'the land question' became more acute in the late 1990s. ZANU-PF accused Britain of breaching the conditions of the Lancaster House Agreement (1979) by declining to fund the transfer of white-owned commercial land into more equal ownership patterns. According to Blessing-Miles Tendi,

> Britain–Zimbabwe relations began to be characterised by demonisation discourses from 2000. ... The ZANU(PF) government and public intellectuals aligned to it, as well as state media, demonised Blair's government by casting declining domestic economic and social conditions as caused by the predatory machinations of 'evil' New Labour. ... By the end of 2000, high-level diplomatic relations between Britain and Zimbabwe had broken down to the extent that direct communication between Mugabe and Blair was non-existent.
>
> (2014, pp. 1261–1262, 1265)

The literary ties between Zimbabwe and Britain, however, have intensified. Migrations to Britain (and, very often, the return to Zimbabwe) have been the subject of numerous short stories (for example, in the anthologies published by Weaver Press), of Daniel Mandishona's collection of short stories, *White Gods,*

Black Demons (2009), as well as in novels. Particularly worth mentioning are two novels which depict contemporary forms of student mobility and follow the paths of their protagonists from Zimbabwe to university in Britain and back: in Petina Gappah's first novel, *The Book of Memory* (2015), the protagonist studies at Oxford; in Bryony Rheam's *This September Sun* (2009), a white Zimbabwean goes to university in London and also decides to return. Many of these texts explore the mercurial historical relationship keeping Britain and Zimbabwe entangled by portraying the large and diverse diasporic community in Britain, engaging with the imperial past, or, as in Chikwava's and Huchu's novels, exploring Britain as an extension of Zimbabwe. The texts by both of these authors point to the "embeddedness" of Zimbabwe in Britain, to borrow from McGregor, but, as we will see, this does not necessarily make life easier for the migrant characters. The presence of home renders the exilic space uncomfortable and insecure because even in Britain, "the eyes of that House of Hunger" (Marechera 2009, p. 11) hover above them.

7.1 Rattling heads and haunted houses: Traveling ideological topographies in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009)

Harare North allows us to return to the figure of the blue-stomached lizard, his theft of color and truth, and his distortion of his people's story.[1] What happens when the lizard's story travels in the luggage of one of those "ordinary folks [whose] tongues are petrified and laid to waste" (Chikwava 2006, p. 19) and who hence knows no other version of reality?

Harare North takes us into the mind of a former recruit of the 'Green Bombers' (ZANU-PF's youth militia), schooled in the lessons of Patriotic History and the Third Chimurenga in a ZANU-PF indoctrination camp and once an effective tool in the hands of Mugabe's henchmen in their war on 'traitors': "Comrade Mhiripiri ask me to lead them boys on account of me I know heaps of history" (Chikwava 2009, p. 19). After the abduction and murder of an opposition supporter, an arrest warrant is placed on his head, and he flees to London, where he claims to be a member of Zimbabwe's opposition and seeks asylumn on the grounds of political persecution. In truth, he plans to make enough money to be able to return to Zimbabwe and bribe his way back to freedom:

> US$ 1000 for my uncle because that's what I owe him for my plane ticket and US$ 4000 to sweet that pack of them hyenas that chase me. . . . That's what Comrade Mhiripiri tell me and he is trustful man.
>
> (ibid., p. 19)

After staying with relatives for a short while, the narrator shacks up with his childhood friend Shingi and a community of mostly undocumented Zimbabwean migrants in a squalid Brixton squat. His presence causes a range of disturbances, one housemate after the other leaves, and the little community breaks

up. The narrator also undergoes various crises which cause his plans of returning to Zimbabwe to fall apart and lead to the disintegration of his mind. Eventually, he too leaves the house and begins a life of homelessness and isolation which, we suspect, will lead to his early death. The final passages picture him wandering aimlessly through the streets of London, disoriented and helpless "like umgodoyi – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock" (ibid., p. 226).

At first glance, this novel appears to be a familiar story of postcolonial destitution and plight awaiting a migrant who attempts to gain a footing in a foreign country: a young, penniless asylumn seeker arrives in London and finds himself confronted not only with the confusing environment of a Western metropolis which does not take kindly to strangers but also with his rejection by his middle-class relatives, Paul and Sekai, who are not thrilled to have their cousin on their hands. Hence, scholarly discussions of *Harare North* have often focused on the novel's portrayal of the predicaments and oppression awaiting African migrants in the Western metropolis and drawn attention to the role of the dehumanizing asylum process and the harsh living conditions in the narrator's downward turn.[2] And yet, *Harare North* does not lend itself easily to a postcolonial reading often applied to 'migrant writing' that is focused on the ways in which Britain continues to marginalize and oppress the former colonial subjects. Instead, Chikwava blurs the distinction between victim and oppressor, home and foreign, strangeness and familiarity. He presents us with a protagonist who does not unequivocally invite sympathy but leaves us wary and distanced and whose narrative voice is highly unreliable, characterized by "hazzling, brazen lying, theft, forgery and subterfuge" (Muchemwa 2010b, p. 143), but whose picaresque exploits make him nonetheless appealing because they create moments of hilarity.

We must also consider that, unlike in many literary texts depicting migration, the narrator does not undertake an attempt to arrive. He neither seeks a new home in Britain nor desires belonging and recognition in the 'Mother Country's' capital. What he fears most is not Britain's rejection but its welcome, that he might adapt too much and find a place in Britain's society and, as a result, become unable to leave: "I have to sit tight and resist changing my life ... or else my plan will fall apart and I end up staying in this funny foreign place forever" (Chikwava 2009, p. 17). This is hence a narrative built on circularity, a story about a migrant who does not wish to settle but is focused on going back. A central idea I wish to explore is therefore that *Harare North* is as much a novel about Zimbabwe as it is about the migrant experience in Britain, and that Chikwava investigates Zimbabwe and its ideological topographies through Britain. The gaze back is not nostalgic. On the contrary, Harare is a haunting presence and represented as something which cannot be left behind or escaped from. Here, Muchemwa's idea that "Harare travels north to inhabit London" (2010b, p. 141), cited in the epigraph of Chapter 7, comes into play. This does not only relate to the idea that "by fleeing, refugees and asylum seekers may escape immediate violence and insecurity, but the memories, trauma and physical injuries travel with

them" (Noxolo 2014, p. 294). Transported are not only traumata, but ideological topographies. My discussion explores how Chikwava situates his story within a literary history of depicting migrations from the former colonies to London, and how he develops this theme into an investigation of a Zimbabwean national state of mind. Central motifs are madness, spirit possession, and the haunted house. My concluding section will relate this thematic complex to Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* and Marechera's *The House of Hunger*.

Harare North *and black British migrant literature*

Its choice of setting and title place *Harare North* at the heart of the crisis-related 'exodus' of Zimbabweans since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Due to its significance as a major recipient of Zimbabwean migrants, Great Britain, and specifically London, has been dubbed 'Harare North' colloquially "to refer to Britain as a diasporic extension of Zimbabwe itself" (Primorac 2010b, p. 252).[3] However, Chikwava's novel also speaks to a longer tradition of black British migrant writing. In reference to Sukhdev Sandhu's study *London Calling* (2004), Oyedeji helpfully summarizes the key traits of this literary tradition:

> There has been and there remains a literary tradition, a succession of writers of colour who have depicted the experience of new black and Asian arrivals to the city of London. ... For the most part, these and many early novels written by writers of colour carried similar themes, touching on the horrors newly arrived immigrants faced, challenges that included racial abuse, harsh living conditions and the difficulty of securing employment. ... London became a place where the notion of 'belonging' was vigorously contested in the work of black writers. Racial politics and the space people of colour occupied in the city grew from discursive deconstructions of oppression to interrogations of notions of identity, nationalism, nation formation and more.
>
> (2013, p. 47)

Like many black British texts, *Harare North* concentrates on the lived, daily experiences of new arrivals in the heart of the former imperial metropolis and provides a detailed portrayal of their struggle to survive. Indeed, Chikwava seems to deliberately position his novel in the literary tradition of the Windrush generation. The echoes of Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) are particularly noticeable. Although more than 50 years separate the two texts, Chikwava's migrants are given the same cold welcome as Selvon's characters, which is captured in the characterization of London's atmosphere offered at the beginning of each novel. When Chikwava's narrator steps out of the underground and describes a "white, ice-cold sun hanging in the sky like frozen pizza base ..., some chilly wind is blowing piece of Mars bar wrapper diagonal over pedestrian crossing" (Chikwava 2009, p. 1), we find ourselves reminded of Selvon's opening line:

> One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if it is not London at all but some strange place on another planet.
>
> (2006, p. 1)

In each novel, London seems rigidly compartmentalized into official versus hidden, precarious spaces. And both novels focus on a male protagonist who has a fractured sense of self and moves among lonely and disenfranchised immigrants who live a "reptile kind of life, that life of surviving big mutilation in the big city and living inside them holes" (Chikwava 2009, p. 2). Style and register constitute a further parallel. Both authors decided that Standard English would not be a suitable medium to convey their migrant characters' experiences and sensibilities. Selvon explained that his writing only became fluent when he infused Standard English with Trinidadian vernacular:

> When I started to write that particular novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, I just could not do it with Standard English. Suddenly, when I started to use 'nation language', I just got on the right vehicle. It shot along and in six months the whole book was finished.
>
> (1992, p. 106)

Chikwava provides a similar explanation for his use of a playful, experimental form of English which "melds together elements taken from Zimbabwean, British and Caribbean English, as well as Shona and Ndebele" (Primorac 2010a, p. 247) to create a fictitious form of Patois:

> I tried standard English and it just didn't work. The manuscript read stilted. . . . That's when I thought of – is it Achebe, I can't remember? – who talks about bending the English language in order to make it carry the weight of the African experience. The language that I use in *Harare North* is not a true language in the sense that it is not spoken on the streets of Zimbabwe, but I believe it expresses the Zimbabwean sensibility better than standard English.
>
> (2010, n.p.)

Given these parallels, we can argue that *Harare North* continues themes and concerns inaugurated by black British writers such as Selvon and relates them to the experience of contemporary Zimbabwean migration to Britain. It is, however, equally important to highlight where Chikwava departs from Selvon. This concerns, in particular, the ways in which his protagonist's personal past and ideology stand in the way of arrival and a future in London, which is radically different from the way Selvon's characters use what they bring to make London work for them. The Windrush migrants in Selvon's text carry their cardboard suitcases, their pasts, and their stories, which provide an anchorage in a cold city and form an important basis for the construction of a future in the Mother Country:

> Their London is primarily a present-oriented world buoyed up on insecure foundations and driven by the tales used to carve spaces in it. … The language that the 'boys' bring with them – far more than the cardboard suitcases or tropical suits they arrive with at Waterloo – is a vital survival kit, a means to successfully accommodate them in the city.
>
> (Nasta 2006, p. xii)

Chikwava's narrator arrives similarly equipped. He, too, brings a cardboard suitcase and his story, but the contents of each are of a less comforting kind. His suitcase contains a screwdriver, which can hurt and maim – a symbol of his violent past – and the smell of his mother, which gives no comfort, because "mothers go and leave you alone" (Chikwava 2009, p. 165). Most importantly, he continues to believe in the blue-stomached lizard's tale. In so doing, he creates a maze of lies and conflicting versions of truth, which leads to his spiritual and, in all likelihood, physical death. What takes place here is not an incorporation of elements of home into London (as performed by Selvon's characters), or a 'tropicalization of London' in the sense of an appropriation and reinvention of foreign space as undertaken by the migrant character Gibreel in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1998, p. 354), but a 'Hararization of London' which renders any positive relationship between the migrant self and foreign space impossible and leads to various disturbances. The following sections therefore discuss how, for Chikwava's migrant characters, life in exile is determined by uncertainty, which makes London resembles Harare in socio-economic terms. As we will see in the second half of the discussion, the story to which the narrator clings – the ideological narrative of the Third Chimurenga – stands in the way of a viable engagement with foreign space and renders a future in London impossible.

The Hararization of London: Layering the socio-economic topographies and the space-time of kukiya-kiya

Chikwava transports prominent motifs associated with the struggle for survival in the post-2000 Zimbabwean city to the Western metropolis. In his depiction of Zimbabwean migrant life in London, we notice the same restlessness, fast movement, and fluidity discussed as central to literary engagements with urban Zimbabwe in Chapter 4. A discussion of the parallels between the migrants' situation in London and urban life in 'the South' opens up links to portrayals of Zimbabwean city life in Tagwira's and Bulawayo's novels and reveals the diasporic Zimbabweans' lives in London as defined by a similarly accentuated mobility: although they migrate to the North, they have to endure precarious and unstable economic conditions comparable to those that characterize urban life for the majority of Zimbabwe's city dwellers. Ideas of fixed boundaries and fundamental difference between places implode because transcontinental migration entails a degree of circularity. Chidora (2017, 2019) describes this as an example for what he calls the "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" (2019, p. 79). Chikwava's characters inhabit a similar socio-economic plane as their compatriots at home and have to resort to similar tactics in order to survive. Here, this is not engendered by the socio-economic conditions of the Zimbabwe Crisis but by the crisis of asylumn.

Like Zimbabwe's urban centers discussed in Chapter 4, London is experienced by the Zimbabwean migrants in Chikwava's novel as a "city of uncertainty", to use Simone's term for southern megacities (2013), and it is characterized by the contradictory coexistence of nervous restlessness and fluidity on the one hand and standstill on the other. There are few certainties and there is little stability, and the migrant characters have to be constantly active and mobile just to remain in place. Echoing the experiences of Onai and Darling in Zimbabwe, but also of Mlalazi's protagonist Qinisela in 'Harare South'/Johannesburg, Chikwava presents us with numerous tales about the dangers of moving through a space where one is not wanted, where basic commodities are scarce and difficult to obtain, and where irregular and at times even illegal measures have to be taken to master the task of daily survival. Among the narrator's housemates in Brixton is Tsitsi, a teenage mother who rents out her baby to women who try to claim housing benefits for single mothers. The squat's self-appointed leader, Aleck, rips the others off by collecting rent – on behalf of the owners, he says. In addition to further compromises on work safety and income and food security, life in London requires a certain flexibility in regard to one's name and identity. Some members of the Zimbabwean community in Brixton obtain work permits through forged identities, stolen passports, and fake social security documents. This practice does not protect them against labor exploitation, and neither does it enable them to aspire to something beyond their underpaid jobs in the care industry and at construction sites. The narrator's experiences illustrate this particularly well:

> Me I get 2.45 per hour. Eight hours per day. ... You spend them weeks shifting mud with shovels and sweat beads come out of every pore in the body because you is putting out heaps of effort while your buttocks point to high heaven and migrant flesh start to stink around you as shirts and underpants get damp. ... Then one day you hear: Take them your things and move it. That's what they say to us in Wimbledon. The graft end without warning. ... We have been stitch up, I know straight away. But there is nothing we can do, so we scatter without quarrel.
>
> (2017, p. 7)

Siziba also comments on this passage: "Migrants are reduced nearly to the level of animals where they are forced by the situation to do anything to survive. ... Desperation leads to degrading forms of employment which are at times at odds with their qualifications"

So London really is Harare North in the sense that the migrants in the West, like the Zimbabwe-based characters in Tagwira's and Bulawayo's novels, have to engage in kukiya-kiya in order to survive, "normal solutions" (Jones 2010, p. 290) do not work, and long-term planning is impossible because the immigration and asylum process imposes a state of suspension on them. Noxolo's characterization of the asylum process as a prolonged "moment of waiting [which] is empty of meaning" (2014, p. 307) poignantly expresses that these characters' situation not only involves spatial displacement but also temporal stasis. Noxolo further writes:

> This creates a crisis of narration in asylum – the moment of waiting resists the forward momentum of flight, claim and resettlement or refoulement. In this prolonged period of transition, asylum seekers have become embroiled in both security-development and security-migration nexuses, not just sequentially (i.e., moving from a location in which they experience threat and insecurity, to a situation in which asylum seekers are themselves viewed as a threat to security), but also simultaneously and recursively.
>
> (ibid., p. 294)

The predicament described in this quote – of being unable to move forward, specifically in the sense of migrating *into* Britain, while the way back is also closed – together with the newcomers' need to resort to the informal and irregular, rings strongly of the temporal aspects related to the Zimbabwe Crisis, discussed in Section 3.1. These migrants shift their geographic location, but cannot leave the socio-economic order and spatio-temporal conditions of kukyia-kiya. In the experience of being 'stuck in movement', the spatio-temporal relations characterizing the Zimbabwe Crisis and the chronotope of the narrative of the Third Chimurenga overlap. Normal standards are unhinged, development is suspended, and the present is experienced as a state which exists outside the normal order, as the in-between of two polarities: the past at home and a future in which these migrants' claims for asylum and rights to a dignified life are recognized. Like their compatriots who remain in the cities in Zimbabwe, they find themselves locked in a perpetual struggle of securing survival which includes fear of official authorities as well as hustling, lying, and pulling tricks.

It must also be said, however, that Chikwava does not portray these migrants in a one-sided fashion as helpless victims who are at the mercy of the rules of others. Indeed, there is a specific quality to the crisis of asylum that we do not find in the novels portraying urban life in Zimbabwe discussed earlier. It is true that there are few viable prospects for social mobility and that Chikwava's characters have limited control over the recognition of their rights to asylum, shelter, and safe working conditions. Compared to the Zimbabwe-based urbanites discussed in Chapter 4, however, they are more in control of their movements. This is illustrated by the frequent swapping of identity documents, which enables them to obtain work permits and cross a range of boundaries – of nations and even self. Names change, loyalties shift, ties are formed and soon

forgotten, and people cannot be pinned down for long. Herein lies the liberating and mobilizing quality of strangeness which is often overlooked in discussions of migrant writing which see the Other's experiences in the West primarily in terms of victimhood and loss of agency but allows us to see uncertainty in some sense as a resource. Such a perspective surfaces in a comment by Robert Muponde on his life as a Zimbabwean in Johannesburg:

> I don't have to know anyone that much beyond 'heyta' [hello]. You know, I don't have to say what I do. I don't have to explain anything if I'm not greeted, or I don't say hi to anyone. The place is so full of us, you would think that space wouldn't exist – the space, I mean, to be someone else.
>
> (quoted in Nuttal and Mbembe 2007, p. 282, insertion in the original)

Chikwava's characters do not simply utilize this freedom to be someone else. They revel in it. Shingi, for instance, plans to buy a French passport on the streets because he heard from others how easy it is to travel to the European mainland on "them fake EU passports" (Chikwava 2009, p. 53). Apparently, he also thinks this newly acquired Frenchness will boost his success with women. Aleck, once one of the innumerable informal vendors clustering around Harare's bus termini, has invented a middle-class background for himself, which enables him to assume a position of leadership and prestige among his compatriots in Brixton. His demeanor speaks of a certain level of education, and he carries himself as someone who is "used to giving orders" (ibid., p. 34) and comes "from proper family, one that don't have to load they children with bags of fruit and vegetables and send them to bus station" (ibid., p. 95). More sinister pasts are discarded (or suspended), as evidenced by the lies through which the narrator and his former superior, Commander Mhiripiri, gain entry to the UK. Whether movements across identities and national borders are actually performed and translated into structures of opportunity appears to be of little consequence to these characters. Much more important is knowing that this space to be someone else, as Muponde puts it (and, one might add, to be some*where* else), exists and that it allows for new stories which, in turn, also travel. As the narrator suggests to Shingi: "Maybe when you get back home you can tell big story about life in Harare North; big story about how you can become labourer, sewage drainer and French President; being many people in one person" (ibid., p. 53). And if all else fails, one can "simply jump into sea of 10 Million Londoners" (ibid., p. 133).

The comfort offered by false identities and new narratives, however, can only be temporary. This is something the narrator immediately grasps when he spots Mhiripiri (whom he had believed to be in Zimbabwe, dealing with his arrest docket) among a crowd of homeless people in Brixton: "In foreign place, sometimes you see each each with different eyes for the first time and who you are and your place in the world suddenly become as easy to see as any goat's tail" (ibid., p. 127). The effect is uncanny in the

classic Freudian sense, not so much because the repressed returns but because the secret and unhomely pertain to home and familiarity; in other words, what is known and familiar and what is hidden and secret are revealed to be one and the same. And it is significant that foreign space is where this comes into effect. This allows me to return to the question formulated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, which relates not only to the reencounter of a familiar socio-economic order in the West but also to the transportation of ideological topographies.

Engagements with ZANU-PF's ideological narratives

Discussions of *Harare North* have often drawn attention to Chikwava's engagement with power structures in which the African migrant finds himself in a subaltern position in the former imperial metropolis. This also applies to commentary on the novel's narrative structure and Chikwava's take on the English language. According to Oyedeji, the narrator's "broken English is a legacy of the imperial influence, a hybrid, which Chikwava brings back to its 'roots' in order to engage in a cultural conversation. *Harare North* is, then, the result of the Commonwealth talking back to Britain" (2013, p. 49). Chigwedere takes a similar standpoint in regard to the use of an invented vernacular. She argues that Chikwava subverts British hegemony by appropriating the English language:

> Through this experiential inflection of a vernacular flavour in his English narrative, Chikwava writes back to the Empire – ironically from its soil. Like Audre Lorde, he seems acutely aware that the master's tools can never take apart the master's house. ... Chikwava skilfully manipulates the imperial language in order to create what I want to describe as a Zimbabwean-flavoured English. ... Combined with an obvious post-modernist writing style, this deliberate deconstruction succeeds in subverting the power structures that the English language represents, that is, the hegemonic domination of the imperialists over the ex-colonized.
> (2017, p. 172)

Rather than adopting these more conventional postcolonial perspectives,[4] the next sections will pay attention to Chikwava's portrayal of the colonization of London by a Zimbabwean narrative of power and hegemony which travels with the protagonist and leads to his undoing. In this interpretation, *Harare North* is not so much "the result of the Commonwealth talking back to Britain", as Oyodeji suggests. Instead, I read this novel as talking back to a post-colonial regime which manipulates its citizens by distorting language and truth.

Harare North is a novel about lies, theft, and deception. This is built into its narrative structure and use of language. We are never quite sure what to believe, and even language itself is treacherous: "It's no accident that 'skill' and 'slaughter' start with a crooked letter" (Chikwava 2009, p. 69), the narrator tells us, "remove the crooked touch from each of them two words and suddenly you kill laughter" (ibid., p. 69). This quote speaks of the narrator's liberal use of the literal

meaning of words. It is also an example of Chikwava's playful and inventive use of English, which requires the reader to pay close attention to recurring terms and phrases and the often unexpected shifts and twists in meaning they undergo.[5] Like the narrator, who slips into different identities which leave the reader puzzled, the meaning of numerous recurring terms (such as wind, head, house, and the narrator's screwdriver) is not fixed. As they 'travel' through the texts, their meaning shifts just as we think we have deciphered 'what they stand for'. Such recurring figures create a sense of cohesion, but at numerous points in the text, all certainty collapses and turns out to be an illusion.[6]

Whereas the author's creativity is an important source for the novel's humor and wit, which make it fun to read despite its sinister content, his narrator's linguistic playfulness is never innocent. We are, instead, provoked to consider Hove's reflections on the corruption of language by a ruling elite in Zimbabwe and its role in the upkeep and abuse of state power (2002; 2008). A central passage referred to in Chapter 3 and which we can helpfully recall here concerns the despotism which expresses itself in the arbitrary reinterpretation of meaning:

> Of course, the person who is in political power . . . is in charge of defining who is a patriot, who is a nationalist, and what is sovereignty. All of a sudden these words are being given a new meaning. So the corruption of language, for me, psychologically and emotionally, is the beginning of a multiplicity of other corruptions.
>
> (Hove 2008, p. 139)

Chikwava has his protagonist echo these ideas. In fact, his narrator is a product of this corruption of language, but he also has a clear understanding of the mechanisms described by Hove. In a passage in which he defends the government's abuse of power and violence against oppositional Zimbabweans such as his cousin Sekai, he unwittingly reveals his awareness that truth is malleable, treacherous, and can be used as an instrument of despotic leadership:[7]

> The president can come and whip you with the truth. Truth is like snake because it is slippery when it move and make people flee in all directions whenever it slither into crowds, but Sekai doesn't know. Comrade Mugabe is powerful wind; he can blow snake out of tall grass like it is piece of paper – lift it up into wide blue sky for everyone to see. Then when he drop it, people's trousers rip as they scatter to they holes.
>
> (Chikwava 2009, p. 8)

The portrayal of the narrator's loyalty to an ideological correctness in exile (where, after all, 'Comrade Mugabe' cannot wield his 'truth' in the way described in the quote prior) shows how Chikwava develops Chenjerai Hove's analysis one step further. Who tells the story is immensely important, too. In Chikwava's novel, it is not the powerful politician who corrupts language but the ordinary foot soldier of the Third Chimurenga. As Pucherová puts it, "While the government no longer hides its intentions, it is the citizen who

distorts the truth" (2015, p. 163). According to Chidora, political terrorism is in this case inflicted through "lingustic terrorism" (2017, p. 155), a form of "violence on language ... controlled by vicious machismo represented by Comrade Mhiripiri" (ibid., p. 154), through which both urban Zimbabwe and the exile city are "transmogrified into a perilous and unreliable space" (ibid., p. 154).

We need to pause here and consider the gradual disintegration of the narrator's mind, which leads to his madness and disorientation, in its relation to the novel's central motifs of doubling, spirit possession, and haunting, which help unlock the core of Chikwava's complex engagement with a traveling hegemonic narrative. What ends with the narrator's loss of self starts with his 'possession' of another. When he moves to the Brixton squat, life becomes worse for the housemates because of his selfish manipulations and exploitation, which, for his friend Shingi, prove to be literally parasitical. The unnamed protagonist first borrows Shingi's identity by using his documents to apply for jobs and gradually usurps his friend's entire being, leading to Shingi's "displacement from all sites of identity" (Muchemwa 2010b, p. 143). Or so it seems: although Shingi vanishes from the narrative as a character, relegated to dying in the hospital, the narrator's two identities are in a constant conflict with each other. At the novel's conclusion, when the narrator loses his mind and wanders the streets aimlessly, Shingi's spirit takes over, immobilizing him:

> Shingi is now coming back. Already there is struggle over your feeties; you are telling right foot to go in one direction and he is telling left foot to go in another direction. You tell the right foot to go in one direction and he is being traitor shoe-doctor and tell left foot to go in another direction. You stand there in them mental backstreets and one big battle rage even if you have no more ginger for it.
>
> (Chikwava 2009, p. 230)[8]

The theme of spirit possession – or, more specifically, the violent takeover of another person's being – connects the unnamed narrator very closely to Chikwava's essay "Free Speech", in which Mugabe appears as the lizard, thief of stories and color: "In Shona folklore, the lizard and the chameleon are objects of suspicion: a lizard became a chameleon by biting people and sucking the color out of their bodies" (2006, p. 19). This idea surfaces in the possession of Shingi by the narrator and in the layering of ideological topographies which results from the narrator's inability to leave the familiar grounds of a narrative he had internalized in the course of his Green Bomber career. Chikwava's protagonist perceives the world entirely through the narrow perspective of the Third Chimurenga. His language is that of ZANU-PF's vocabulary of war and violence, and the binaries which determine the narrative of ultranationalist rhetoric recur throughout the text: truth vs. propaganda, traitors vs. patriots. His migration to London appears therefore as a mere physical shift in location because he never moves outside of the symbolic and conceptual boundaries of Zimbabwe as it is defined by hegemonic ideology.

The narrator's confused mind, and not the external landscape, is foregrounded, and the conceptual geography through which he moves is Zimbabwe, not London. Thus, Chikwava does not simply write back to the "male-centered, ZANU-PF constructed monologue of the nation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, p. 7) by giving its voice to a narrator who is untrustworthy, cruel, and increasingly deranged. He has his protagonist overwrite London with the imaginary of the Third Chimurenga ideology, which forms a layer of distortion and untruth under which the topography of London vanishes. In the same way that the narrator takes over his friend's identity and finally possesses Shingi, Harare increasingly possesses 'Harare North'. Furthermore, there is a direct causal link between the narrator's rising doubts concerning the Mugabeist narrative and his 'madness' and eventual 'stuckness' in Britain. The narrator knows of the dangers of stepping outside the boundaries set by ZANU-PF's ideology. Realizing the truth, looking beyond the story told by the lizard means death, means not being able to return to Zimbabwe. In numerous passages, he reflects on this and feels the need to close his ears to news which contradicts the ideology of the Third Chimurenga, including reports about the impending destruction of his ancestral village (the site of his mother's grave) by the government:

> Never listen to too much propaganda from people like Sekai telling you that your mother's village is going to be take over by mining company that belong to some minister. You always know more than you believe in but always choose what you believe in over what you know because what you know can be so big that sometimes it is useless weapon, you cannot wield it proper and, when you try, it can get your head out of gear and stop you focusing. Soon you lose the game and end up dying beyond your means in Harare North.
>
> (Chikwava 2009, pp. 43–44)

The narrator becomes increasingly paranoid. He feels stalked and haunted by such 'propaganda', which, despite his resistance, begins to corrode the neat construct of his 'truths'. He is unable to shake off a "news-animal" (ibid., p. 68), which follows him with news about the village's invasion and which, little by little, colonizes his mind with what he had previously considered as propaganda:

> You can't see it but only hear its footsteps; you stop, the footsteps stop, you walk and you hear them footsteps again. All the news of emeralds and diamonds and the government wanting to take Mother's village – is this propaganda or what? You have to catch the termite before this thing comes out for you, that's the catch. Otherwise it scatter your mind all over like leaves at the mercy of the winds and you lose what you believe in and have no weapon to fight with. Then you never get out of Harare North.
>
> (ibid., p. 68)

The narrative climax and turning point occur when the narrator finds out that there had never been an arrest warrant and that he has been the victim of Mhiripiri's cunning trick to defraud him of money. Outraged, he seeks him out and accuses him of being a traitor to their common "struggle" (ibid., p. 183). Mhiripiri's reply tells us a lot about the way truth has been replaced by a preferred version of the narrative of the nation, which falls to pieces as soon as one steps outside of this conceptual construct:

> He start going kak kak kak kak so loud like I am fool; his mouth is open like cave, the rotten back teethies is pointing. 'Even today you have milk coming out of your nose, young man. Zimbabwe was a state of mind, not a country'.
>
> (ibid., p. 183)

The narrator has come to 'Harare North' for nothing, and his life in Zimbabwe was also built on lies. In this moment, the blue-stomached lizard lifts his head over the common citizen and releases the full force of his cynicism. Powerful old men create a story and laugh at those who believe in its truth.

Wind and madness: The haunted house in Brixton

As we have seen, the novel's recurring motifs of doubling, spirit possession, and haunting combine to produce an effect of the uncanny and are employed to reveal the unreality of what the narrator had considered truths. The novel's conflation of the two spaces of Zimbabwe and Britain, and in particular the portrayal of the ideological topography of Harare overwriting the geography of London, complicate the binaries governing the hegemonic Zimbabwean model of spatio-temporal relations, which strictly differentiates between foreign, outside spaces and the space of home. Muchemwa has noted that this provides the ground for Chikwava's critique of ZANU-PF's state fiction:

> The city that is/is not Harare enables the narrator of *Harare North* to engage in the process of re-writing the city and country within and beyond the grand Chimurenga narrative. Migration entails a shift in both the physical and conceptual geography of home in which new maps of identity and aesthetics are drawn. From the space of exile, distance allows the writer to disengage with the aesthetics of the Chimurenga narrative using the strategy of entering the psychology of an extremist nationalist.
>
> (2010b, p. 141)

The conflation of the identities of the two cities, Harare and London, is also centrally developed through the theme of wind, or mamhepo, a central motif in this novel which has, in accordance with its traditional association in Shona cosmology, the meaning of spirit possession and a haunting curse leading to 'madness'.[9] Consistent with the traditional idea that "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" (Chidora 2019, p. 87), ill winds travel with the unfortunate main character into exile and drive him insane. This motif connects Harare and London in other ways as well. Referencing the literal translation of 'Zimbabwe' – 'House of Stone' – Chikwava has his narrator refer to Operation Murambatsvina as a ravaging storm: "The winds is howling through house of stones, tall trees is swaying and people's lives beginning to fall apart" (Chikwava 2009, p. 204). But the winds also blow through London and into the house in Brixton, where it scatters papers and brings disorder.

The connection of wind and madness leads me to my concluding consideration, which allows me to link Chikwava's novel to Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools*. In Section 4.3, I argued that the episode of protagonist Farai Chari's mental illness and unrest can be read as a device to explore wider political and social questions and a disturbed national state of mind, a poetic gesture which finds a precursor in Marechera's work. The 'madhouse' to which Chinodya's main character, Farai, is temporarily confined is central to this thematic complex and allows the author to extend the main character's mental disturbance to a national state of mind: the House of Stone as a madhouse. As the discussion of *Harare North* has shown, Chikwava speaks to very similar ideas but relocates this thematic complex to foreign space. Both *Harare North* and *Chairman of Fools* portray male protagonists who 'go mad', and in both texts, these characters' descent into mental illness is mirrored in aimless and erratic movements through urban space. A further parallel consists of both authors' use of the metaphoric nexus of house, mind, and nation. In Chikwava's novel, we have the same association of house with mind and of a disorderly house with mental disorder. The echoes of Marechera's exploration of the link between an individual's mental disorder and 'madness' which had befallen the nation because of colonialism through the trope of house/mind are probably not coincidental. "The House has now become my mind; and I do not like the way its roof is rattling", says Marechera's protagonist in *The House of Hunger* (2009, p. 24). "Your house is like your head," Chikwava's protagonist remembers his mother saying to him, "you have to keep sweeping it clean if you want to stay sane" (Chikwava 2009, p. 14). Soon, the house is no longer *like* the head, but, as in Marechera's text, is referred to as *becoming* the head: "So Shingi live inside this head?" (Chikwava 2009, p. 29); "our house, this Shingi's head" (ibid., p. 55); "suddenly there is darkness inside Shingi's head" (ibid., p. 217). The house becomes increasingly chaotic, dirty, and derelict, and its crumbling down and the disintegration of the community mirror the disintegration of the narrator's mind. As the narrator runs off after his disastrous encounter with Commander Mhiripiri, he thinks: "The trees, they is swaying around because of wind. The winds is causing havoc inside our house I know; the window was open when I leave" (ibid., p. 184).[10] The encounter with Mhiripiri reveals that the 'truth' the narrator had clung to was a lie, an invention, the product of a 'mad' state of nation and a mad state of mind. It furthermore seals

the narrator's fate and marks the beginning of his mental breakdown. The prologue, which presents us with a narrator who has already progressed in his descent into disorientation and paranoia, is reproduced almost verbatim towards the end of the novel, suggesting infinite circularity on the level of both content and form: the text travels back to its opening, indicating that the narrator will remain stranded in London, which confirms his initial fears. This is a central contrast to Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools*, whose protagonist, Farai Chari, is granted the chance to grow and heal in the mental hospital in Harare and eventually leaves Zimbabwe. Chinodya's narrator, by contrast, is already far away from Harare in terms of physical distance but nonetheless stuck – in London and in the circle of his own narrative.

Chikwava expands the black British literary tradition of writing about the postcolonial migrants' arrival in London by exploring an unusual perspective on foreignness, power, and colonization. Despite the dangers and insecurities inherent to living as an undocumented migrant, mobilizations occur. The spaces inhabited by the migrants are at once removed and part of London; they are an 'elsewhere' in relation to Zimbabwe but also in relation to London's 'official' spaces. Here, different stories and identities are imagined and brought into existence. This is highly ambivalent: the migrants journey into insecure and precarious lives but also experience what Muponde refers to as "the space ... to be someone else" (quoted in Nuttall and Mbembe, p. 282). In contrast to many other stories depicting migrant experiences, these characters seem unconcerned about the rules and demands of mainstream society. Like Mbare as portrayed by Tagwira, the migrant spaces in London are a 'place apart' where different rules apply. The migrants are at risk of being found out and deported, but they also step out of the radar of the official migration system and bend its rule, often in a picaresque manner similar to that of Mlalazi's protagonist. In a powerful reversal of the common story of postcolonial migrant plight, notions of power and its abuse are exclusively attached to Zimbabwe. Far greater than the injustices of the Western nation are the cruelty and fear produced by home. Although the migrant community in the Brixton squat hide from the police and other official organs, they do not feel terror. When the narrator discloses his Green Bomber past, however, they look at him with "black-eyed fear" (Chikwava 2009, p. 234). The oppression of the Other is effected not by postimperial Britain but through the narrative of the Third Chimruenga and the blue-stomached lizard's docile disciples.

7.2 Necessary illusions? Moving beyond crisis in Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician* (2015)

Like Chikwava, Tendai Huchu continues and innovatively enriches the black British tradition of imagining Britain's cities through the perspective of recent arrivals from the former colonies. In *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician*, the focus is not on the great literary city of London but on the more

peripheral capital of Edinburgh, where the three Zimbabwean migrants referred to in the novel's title have settled. Thereby, Huchu explores diasporic sites which are frequently overlooked in the London-centric narrative of Zimbabwe's 'exodus' in the twenty-first century but also in older histories of black postcolonial migration to Britain. Huchu also fills a blank spot in the 'narrative' of this study by offering an optimistic, hopeful perspective on Zimbabwean migrations and other forms of mobility in the twenty-first century. Across long stretches, this novel creates a sense of freedom and unlimited movement which we have not encountered in the texts discussed so far. The three characters are largely unencumbered by the ideological barrage which Chikwava's main character carries into exile, and they seem unhindered by the boundaries set by a Zimbabwean ideology. For the first time, we read of experiences of movement which do not lead into another state of immobility but, instead, suggest that there are mobile Zimbabweans who not only move away from the Zimbabwe Crisis but beyond crisis. And yet, narrative unreliability, deceit, and the idea that the authoritarianism of the ZANU-PF government is effected to a great extent by way of a story which corrupts language play equally important roles as in the previously discussed novel, with equally devastating consequences: the main characters suffer physical or political death, and their stories are truncated. In this case, however, the false story which plays the decisive role is not told by any of the three main characters but by a subordinate figure, Alfonso, who suddenly becomes the center of attention in the final chapter.

At this point, it is helpful to jump forward and take a look at the novel's conclusion before proceeding to an analytical reading of the text, even if it means giving away the story's central mystery. The final passages, which relocate the action from Edinburgh to London, lift the mantle of stupidity from the goofy and garrulous Alfonso, until then a minor character who latches on to the Magistrate as a friend and admirer and appears briefly in the other narrative strands as well. In a similar fashion to the unmasking of Verbal Kint/Keyser Soze in the final scenes of Bryan Singer's film *The Usual Suspects*, Alfonso is disclosed as a secret ZANU-PF agent and the evil genius behind the miseries befalling the novel's protagonists. As 'Comrade A' delivers his report about his successful mission – the infiltration of the Zimbabwean opposition movement in the diaspora – he demands to know why he had been ordered to manipulate the Magistrate into taking a leadership position in the MDC's Edinburgh branch: "Why help strengthen the opposition by giving them someone like him?" (Huchu 2014, p. 270). "We're creating necessary illusions", explains Alfonso's contact at Zimbabwe House in London, who continues, "what they've learnt here is that the illusion of choice is the key to stability" (ibid., p. 271). This scene has affinities with the central passage in *Harare North*, in which the unnamed narrator is forced to see through the unreality of his accepted truths and understand that "Zimbabwe was a state of mind, not a country" (Chikwava 2009, p. 183). In both texts, it seems, the corrupt story is privileged over the fictional character's freedom and agency. In Huchu's novel, however, it is only revealed

to the reader. The Magistrate will, in all likelihood, never understand the role he plays in the illusion created by someone else.

I emphasize the illusion as a central aspect not only because it points to a shared concern of Huchu and Chikwava but because it is also at the core of Huchu's take on mobility. As mentioned before, the greater part of the novel foregrounds the migrant characters' capacity for movement and creates vivid moments of freedom. At the novel's conclusion, when Alfonso's schemes are disclosed, this positive perspective on mobility is collapsed and shown to be an illusion, an untrue narrative generated by the Zimbabwean state and its agents who follow its expatriate citizens into exile. Despite the novel's optimistic beginning, it takes a somber turn when readers realize that Huchu's migrant characters had at no point been free from Zimbabwe's political and ideological shackles. This ending does not necessarily determine the readerly perspective of this text. Instead of aligning the interpretation with the course of the events, readers might ask themselves whether the freedom of movement of the novel's first part is the illusion (fabricated by the agents of the Zimbabwean state to secretly manipulate in its citizens abroad), as the ending suggests, or whether illusion and deceit also lie in the author's gesture of shattering all optimism by killing off his protagonists and handing the narrative agency over to the ZANU-PF agent in the final chapter. In other words: is this an unreliable ending? The central interest of this chapter lies in tracing an irreconcilable contradiction between what the novel sets out to do in its first part compared to the complete annihilation of the positive visions of mobility and escape in the concluding sections. As we will see, this dual impulse is also reflected in the author's statements about his novel.

Moving beyond crisis

In *The Maestro, The Magistrate and the Mathematician*, Huchu makes a deliberate effort to turn the 'victim narrative' of African migrations to Europe upside down. In an interview about his novel, he reacts with noticeable indignation when his characters' autonomy is questioned:

> I would not say they're 'unable' [to return to Zimbabwe], rather, they choose not to, and that's an important distinction. I would never try to portray these expatriates as being without some degree of control over their circumstances. All my characters are fully autonomous and they make certain choices. … They have the same autonomy and same agency that the Western character who goes to Africa or Asia has to return to their place of origin.
>
> (Huchu 2016, pp. 200–201)

This freedom of movement not only exists in the option of return but becomes apparent to an even greater degree in the way these migrants relate to Edinburgh and pursue very personal goals, seemingly unhindered by the

boundaries of race, class, and ideology. In a cycle of alternating chapters, we follow the paths of three Zimbabweans who have migrated to Scotland under very different circumstances but share the experience of legal travel, free movement, material security, and personal safety. The first character introduced to the reader is the Magistrate, a snobbish but morally upstanding family man who formerly served at the court in the provincial capital of Bindura until he was "pushed from the bench because [he] didn't do what the government wanted" (Huchu 2014, p. 123). Homesick and frustrated because he does not find work commensurate with his education and depends on his wife's salary, he resents Scotland and "western society" (ibid., p. 11) in general, until taking walks through Edinburgh during which he listens to Zimbabwean music enable him to experience the city in a positive way. Eventually, a position in the diasporic MDC gives him a new sense of purpose, and the birth of his grandchild enables him to fully embrace Edinburgh as home and accept that the family's future will be in Scotland.

The Mathematician, Farai, belongs to a younger generation of Zimbabweans but is the Magistrate's peer in terms of education and shares the same consciousness of belonging to a Zimbabwean elite. Farai is pursuing a PhD in 'freakonomics' at the University of Edinburgh and plans to return to Harare, where a bright future beckons. The offspring of a "hotshot lawyer who ... found a niche in human rights law when the situation started" and a "trauma specialist" (ibid., p. 152) who grew rich by treating the battered opposition supporters defended by her husband, he has inherited his parents' rational eye for business and opportunity. Unlike the Magistrate, he has no deeper reverence for Shona culture or sentimental attachment to home. He sees Zimbabwe primarily as an undervalued economy he wishes to tap. His desire to return is therefore mainly part of an anti-cyclical and speculative but not unreasonable investment plan:

> Wars damage infrastructure, ours is largely intact. ... We were churning out graduates we could'nt employ anyway. Already investors are snapping up assets at rock bottom prices and just riding it out, waiting for the thaw. ... Labour will be cheap for investors. ...
>
> (ibid., p. 189, final elision in the original)

This is kukiya-kiya worthy of any enterprising (and morally flexible) Zimbabwean urbanite encountered in Chapter 4 but carried out on the solid ground of education, financial resources, and formal economic expertise on which it is transformed from an emergency measure to a viable long-term business strategy.

The third character is a white Zimbabwean named David Mercer, known as the 'Tesco-Maestro' after a 'masterly' 72-hour supermarket shift. Of the three main characters, he appears to be the most 'stuck', socially and economically. Unlike his compatriots, he does not occupy a secure position in society but has traveled from working class to working class: "he'd left school after his O-Levels and drifted from job to job, staying with family friends, never

quite finding the direction in which to point his life" (ibid., p. 133). With little formal education and no social connections and further incapacitated by mental instability, he has accepted that "the limitless potential of his youth had finally made a home for itself in retail: shelves and checkouts" (ibid., p. 169). Nonetheless, his is not a story of standstill, because he follows a grand ambition of searching "the secret of life itself" (ibid., p. 133). This hackneyed phrase aside, Huchu sends his character on a quest during which he experiences complex moments of elevation and movement. The Maestro's "journey of discovery" (ibid., p. 221) leads him first through the canon of world literature in order to "circl[e] the globe through the page" (ibid., p. 133) and later into the streets of Edinburgh, where he spends an entire winter as a homeless vagrant. This leads to illness and death, but he finds human closeness and, through this, catches a glimpse of "the meaning of life" (ibid., p. 221). These three narrative strands are largely independent of each other and can be read as "three separate but slightly interconnected novellas" (Huchu 2016, p. 203). One link between the stories is Alfonso, whose scheming interlinks the fate of the Magistrate and the Mathematician in a most unfortunate way.[11]

In contrast to Chikwava's *Harare North*, and also to the circular and temporary forms of transnational migration discussed in relation to Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Mlalazi's *The Border Jumper*, these characters do not move in order to remain. Instead of looking back to Zimbabwe, they follow trajectories with an eye on contexts beyond Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Crisis. In accordance with his express intention, Huchu's novel is (at first) more concerned with the idea of moving somewhere else, with finding different forms of freedom, unrelated to crisis. This is not only a contrast to the dominant characteristics of the mobility dynamics discussed so far. Huchu also counters the somber note of other grand narratives determining public discourse on African migrations to Europe today, such as the 'refugee story' with its tropes of destitution and helplessness, the right-wing calls for protection of 'fortress Europe' against alleged masses of 'unskilled Africans' seeking economic refuge, and Zimbabwean nationalism's anti-diaspora 'BBC discourse', which claims that most of those who move away will inevitably 'end up' in the frequently denigrated occupation of nursing, or 'British Bottom Cleaning'.[12] Against this, he sets the story of three Zimbabweans who are granted an escape from crisis and are unrestricted in the movements they make. They are the Zimbabweans who get away. Or so we think.

In the novel's concluding sections, each journey is brought to an abrupt end. Farai is murdered by the ZANU-PF agent Alfonso, and the Maestro's journey to spiritual freedom ends prematurely in the Scottish winter. The Magistrate finds happiness in his activity in the MDC. Unbeknownst to him, however, his entire path in Edinburgh is determined by the agents of the regime he fled. Moving away – from home, from crisis, from the past – towards somewhere else is revealed to be an illusion for which both the enterprising Zimbabweans and the gullible reader have fallen. In one of those

characteristic moments of sad irony which emerge in many of the depictions of Zimbabwean life and movement under ZANU-PF, Alfonso is the only Zimbabwean character for whom migration to Scotland is ultimately mobilizing. In the novel's concluding passages, his boss at Zimbabwe House prepares him for the next steps of his mission, which includes a deployment in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "The sun was rising over London and, as it did, Alfonso's star was rising with it" (Huchu 2014, p. 272).

Moving in a borderless world?

In his depiction of his characters' movement from south to north and within the city, Huchu creates the image of an exilic space which is remarkably open and whose internal and outside boundaries are permeable. The world charted by Huchu, at least as experienced by the Zimbabwean migrants, appears to be almost borderless and deterritorialized. This impression stems, first of all, from the novel's silence on the physical experience of travel, which implies that moving from Africa to Europe is easy. With the exception of a minor character – Farai's flatmate Scott – the migrant claims of these Zimbabweans are official and approved. In fact, none of them seems to have faced much difficulty in moving to Edinburgh. Farai has entered Scotland through the 'academic route', via Witwatersrand University. The white character, David, has an official job at Tesco's and is entitled to citizenship by ancestry. The Magistrate, we speculate, is a recognized political refugee. Moreover, his middle-class home in suburban Edinburgh, where he slowly eases into his new role as a househusband, implies a comparatively smooth transition in socio-economic terms, his own misgivings about "falling out of the middle classes" (Huchu 2014, p. 47) notwithstanding. But we never learn about the circumstances through which the characters entered the UK, as there is no reference to their journeys or the immigration process. Such ease of movement is all the more remarkable when we recall how important the journey as such is to previously discussed depictions of transnational travel – compare, for instance, the dangerous crossing of the Limpopo to which Mlalazi devotes much space and attention in *The Border Jumper*, the lies told to migration officials by Chikwava's protagonist and the fear of deportation endured by the 'illegals' in this novel, Darling's dependence on her American aunt to 'get her out' of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, or Onai's inability in *The Uncertainty of Hope* to travel to South Africa because she does not have a passport. In this respect, Huchu's depiction of movement is most closely related to that of Chinodya's in *Chairman of Fools*, where the protagonist, Farai Chari, travels frequently overseas – but we remember well that even this well-to-do, mobile character's journey is temporarily interrupted by his stay in the 'madhouse'. Huchu's main characters, by contrast, seem unencumbered by the economic, political, or legal hurdles which affect other mobile Zimbabweans. Hence, the interstitial and informal spaces to which Chikwava's characters have to withdraw after their arrival in the foreign city play no role for them. Ironically, the only

character (besides Farai's friend Scott) who is forced to adopt a false identity and maintain caution is the ZANU-PF agent Alfonso, but even he chooses the center of mainstream society as his hiding place.

Fluidity is not only explored through the movement of people but also through Farai's business activities. His story begins with a phone conversation with his father during which they discuss the respective merits of speculative investments in Congolese nickel and Zimbabwean platinum: "Mwana's[13] dead, I told you to get out of nickel ages ago", says his father, but Farai thinks that "commodity prices keep going up, China's insatiable, they can't get enough of the stuff" (ibid., p. 16). Afterwards, Farai switches on his TV and watches graphic news footage from the Iraq war with concern, not for the suffering population, however, but for the development of his portfolio: "He should have bought into defense" (ibid., p. 16). This passage certainly conveys the truism that national borders are all but obsolete to the flow of global capital, and is perhaps a bit overt in its intention to make wide-eyed readers (Western?) gasp that, yes indeed, believe it or not, Zimbabweans invest in the stock market. It nonetheless constitutes one of the novel's most intriguing moments because it points to directions of movement not contained in the conventional idea of a linear south-north flow and shows that upwardly mobile, ambitious Africans have long moved past the idea that economic opportunities lie primarily in Europe. Farai's educational biography follows a 'traditional' south-north trajectory, but his money flows south and east, not in the form of remittances for less fortunate compatriots 'back home' but as a way of tapping into the resource exploitation in Africa *by* Africans, among stakeholders from elsewhere, and as an attempt to benefit from a Western power's war on an Eastern nation.[14]

Furthermore, the text itself transports the idea of border crossing and mobility by way of intertextuality and a metapoetic reflection on language and storytelling. Very early in the novel, the Magistrate's daughter, Chenai, picks up *Harare North* from the coffee table and comments:

> 'Dad, if this guy cannae be bovvered to learn proper English, why did he write a novel?' Chenai slapped *Harare North* back on the table. The Magistrate didn't have an answer. . . . He couldn't get into it either. It appeared to have been written to deliberately turn the English language inside out. He wondered how the book had ever got published.
>
> (ibid., p. 5)

With this humorous wink at his colleague Brian Chikwava, Huchu locates his writing within a national and generational context and trusts that his readers are familiar with the recent 'ZimLit' canon and get the joke. Nonetheless, he avoids the limitations of a national literature perspective. Huchu references numerous other African authors and their work: two girls in a café mistake one of the minor characters for Alexander McCall Smith (ibid., p. 23), and another character receives an email which begins with the line "I do not come to you by chance" (ibid., p. 154), no doubt an allusion to Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's

novel of this title.[15] This attests to the self-reflexivity of African literatures identified by Mwangi, who argues that African authors are today more interested in "writing back to themselves and to other local texts" (2009, p. 2) than in subverting the metropolitan gaze. However, the intertextual dialogues staged by Huchu are even more complex and transcultural. They affirm the distinct Zimbabweanness of the text and simultaneously root it in other traditions and canons. Allusion to 'great classics' from diverse cultural contexts are numerous, so I will simply point to three examples to illustrate this point. The Maestro commits spiritual suicide by burning his beloved book collection, which contains most of the canonical works of world literature, an act which is accompanied by quotes from Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. His 'atonement' for this act of destruction references world literature as well as local Zimbabwean narratives. As April Jackson (2008) points out, his voluntary homelessness and isolation evoke the protagonist Kirillov from Dostoyevsky's novel *Demons*. The Maestro's decision to spend an entire winter walking through Edinburgh and sleeping rough reminds us of the traditional Shona atonement practice of Kutanda Botso, which requires the penitent to dress in rags and temporarily live as a homeless vagrant.[16] In addition to this, Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) can be seen as a further possible inspiration for this character's development and life choices.[17] There are also numerous references to popular culture, including video games such as *Pac-Man* and *Mortal Kombat* and films such as *Dirty Dancing* and *Transformers*. In this context, it is interesting to point to the elements of multimodal narration through which the novel challenges the boundaries of traditional written narrations while, overall, remaining faithful to the conventional form of the novel and the linear plot. The text includes emails and text messages (which are set in a different typeface and indented), emoticons, icons, and visual elements from computer games, such as the line-up from *Pro Evolution Soccer* (a football video game played by Farai and his friends) and the ghost from the *Pac-Man* series. A further example of the novel's experimentation with multimodality is the map of Edinburgh which the Magistrate pencils on a piece of paper and which is 'drawn' on page 262 of the novel.

In conclusion to this section, I will take a look at Huchu's use of language, which also transports the idea that Zimbabwean migrants are particularly mobile and capable of crossing borders. As in Chikwava's novel, language as a theme is foregrounded, and the text is self-referential in its emphasis on language. Huchu's novel is written in mostly Standard English, but it also includes Shona expressions and passages which mix British and Zimbabwean colloquialisms (traffic lights are referred to as robots, for example). Huchu echoes Chikwava's and also Sam Selvon's thoughts when he explains his experimentation with language as follows:

> When I first drafted the work, it was one integrated conventional novel, but somehow that didn't work. I simply could not see these three characters inhabiting the same linguistic universe, particularly when the points of

> view changed, so I had to make the necessary technical adjustments to the book.
>
> (Huchu 2016, p. 206)

The depiction of the migrant characters' use of language recalls Mlalazi's engagement with language in the context of South Africa in *The Border Jumper*. Like Mlalazi, Huchu transports his Zimbabwean characters' capacity for movement through their ability to switch between different languages and registers. This is set into sharp contrast to the linguistic proficiency of the 'native' population, who are portrayed as monolingual (and, by implication, as linguistically less 'mobile') and also as provincial, which is tied to questions of class and language prestige in regard to different regional varieties of English. Whereas the accent used by Zimbabwean migrants is never specified and thus is represented as the unmarked, standard form, Scottish varieties are frequently transcribed in passages containing direct speech. This is especially the case when the speaker has a low level of education and comes from a poorer background – for instance, when the Magistrate is approached by a woman whose front teeth are missing and whose hair is "tied back à la Croydon facelift" (Huchu 2014, p. 71) or in the case of Farai's girlfriend, Stacey, who is portrayed in a rather clichéd manner as belonging to the working classes.[18] As in *The Border Jumper* (where the exceptional mobility of Zimbabweans in Johannesburg is tied to their linguistic competence), the migrants are portrayed as having an advantage over the locals. The indication is that Zimbabweans know how to speak 'proper' English (while the 'natives' do not), and their ability to switch between different registers and infuse their English with Shona expressions (or switch to Shona altogether) gives them a sophistication and proficiency which the Scots, as they are represented here, do not have. This is particularly true for those parts of the novel where the Magistrate and Farai (the two middle-class characters) are the focalizers. More than once, the Magistrate sneers at the local variety of Scottish English – for example, when he finds that "his daughter had been here too long. Already her speech had a slight Scottish inflexion, those rolling Rs, the coarse tongue, guttural Gs" (ibid., p. 3) or when he is horrified at her inflection: "God forbid his daughter should speak with this rough, guttural accent. What were they teaching these kids at school?" (ibid., p. 92). Although these passages are always clearly framed as ironic and show the limitations of the Magistrate's judgment rather than the author's, it is also noticeable that, as in Mlalazi's novel, the Zimbabweans have a more varied linguistic repertoire at their disposal and are able to use a more standardized (and, in their eyes, a more sophisticated) form of English and are hence portrayed as more worldly than most of the Scottish characters.

Edinburgh: An open city

The theme of free movement is particularly strongly developed in the novel's depiction of intra-urban movement. In this aspect, Huchu brings African city

experiences and Edinburgh together and creates a sense of openness which makes the novel's ending even more astonishing. Through his characters' movements through the city, Huchu engages intensely with Edinburgh's urban geography. The depiction of different topographical and social spaces (including numerous references to street names and landmarks, shops, and cafés) is evidence of his knowledge of the city which has been his home for the past years and shows a commitment to realism which is very similar to Valerie Tagwira's depiction of Harare in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and to Huchu's own 'Harare novel', *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010). This detailed 'map' of Edinburgh also roots the novel in a longer tradition of writing Edinburgh, which includes works from nineteenth-century literature such as Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), James Hogg's *The Private Memories and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886) and recent texts such as Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1997), Ian Ranking's city novels, and Alexander McCall Smith's popular 'light' novels.

Like Huchu's first novel, *The Hairdresser of Harare*, his book *The Maestro, The Magistrate and the Mathematician* is a city novel whose focus is predominantly on the middle classes. This distinguishes it from the other urban fictions discussed in this study (with the exception of *Chairman of Fools*) but also from many of the 'native' Edinburgh novels mentioned prior. Huchu does not portray the city's dark and secret underside, where Zimbabwean urbanites have to move cautiously and clandestinely. Here, the focus is on the city's official face, and each character moves openly and confidently. When movement in the city is not conditioned by symbolic or spatially manifest boundaries, journeys are geared towards more disparate and more personal ends. Accordingly, Huchu's main characters move through Edinburgh in very different ways. The Magistrate walks in order to meet his desire for familiarization with the foreign city. Farai hops through Edinburgh's night clubs. The Maestro walks out of his council flat into the cold Scottish winter to go on a "journey of discovery" (Huchu 2014, p. 221). The following will first discuss the Magistrate's intra-urban movements in detail and then shed light on the Maestro's because these men's experiences of freedom and the city complement each other.

Free from professional responsibilities and alimented by his wife's salary, the Magistrate has a lot of free time on his hands, which he devotes to the "timeless, comforting ritual" (ibid., p. 9) of taking long strolls through Edinburgh, which take him through diverse spaces: poorer areas like Craigmillar, more affluent parts of the city like Duddingston Village, parks, and natural heritage sites such as the mountain Arthur's Seat. As in *Chairman of Fools*, *Harare North*, and also *Of Beasts & Beings*, geographies of the mind are as important as the physical urban topography. In contrast to the protagonists of these novels, however, his intra-urban movements do not lead to entrapment but set him free:

> It was as though the act of perambulation was complemented by a mental wandering, so he could be in two, or even more places at the same time. His physical being tied to geography and the rules of physics, his mental

> side free to wander far and wide, to traverse through the past, present and future, free from limits, except the scope of the imagination.
>
> (ibid., p. 9)

The contentment and freedom expressed in this quote are not consistent. Initially, the Magistrate experiences the opposite. In the earlier part of his story, he constantly compares Edinburgh negatively to his hometown of Bindura. One of his central grievances is the loss of a panoptic view of the city, which he enjoyed in Bindura and is unable to assume in Edinburgh. The loss of his elevated position in society and home – loss of profession, class status, and role as provider – is translated into a perspective from below, which reduces the Magistrate to an ineffective pedestrian literally and figuratively, stripped of power and authority and easily lost. His feeling of being contained in a single site and perspective and his longing for a more complete vision of the city's topography are illustrated by way of an awkward, if not orientalist, image:

> The thing about Bindura was that he could understand its boundaries. He had a mental map of the town. He knew in which direction the sun rose and where it set. In Edinburgh, he was hemmed in by buildings on all sides. . . . His experience of the city was a series of micro-environments, no different from that of a tribesman in the Amazon with a limited range.
>
> (ibid., p. 75)

What is most significant about the Magistrate's urban experience in Edinburgh is not, however, his exclusionary view of absolute difference between home and exile but his ability to move beyond this narrow vision. In the course of the story, walking is transformed into a strategy of familiarization by way of infusing the foreign urban topography with Zimbabwean cultural experiences, first and foremost with music. Eventually, he overcomes the limiting perspective of seeing the city in fractions from below by being uplifted, in the literal and metaphoric sense, to the top of the mountain which overlooks the city and by integrating the parts of the city into a more complete, personal map of its urban geography.

Huchu's treatment of city space through the Magistrate's experiences allows for a revisiting of the idea of layering Zimbabwean topographies, which was central to the discussion of *Harare North*. This motif can be related not only to Chikwava's novel. It also has a clear precursor in another example of transcultural British city writing: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Much like Rushdie's character Gibreel, who brings to London the tourist guide *London A to Z: Street Atlas* and uses it to "redeem the city square by square" (1998, p. 326) in an attempt to "mark his transforming presence on the streets and walls on the city" (Baucom 2001, p. 209), the Magistrate sets out to 'redeem' the city by remapping it. But while Rushdie's character uses the London tourist guide as a "master-plan" (Rushdie 1998, p. 326) for remapping the city before he floats high over London and cries: "I am going to tropicalize you!" (ibid.,

p. 354), the Magistrate uses traditional Zimbabwean Sungura music, which he listens to while walking the streets of Edinburgh. He thus sutures the rhythms of traditional Shona music and urban walking. In so doing, he achieves a musical topography which is consistently connected to movement – note that he does not associate landmarks, buildings, or anything static with music, but bus lines and routes taken while walking: "Now this song would fix his memory to the [bus route] 14 going past the Craigmillar high rises" (Huchu 2014, p. 71). His cartography does not rely on the authority of a tourist guide or any other 'outside' text but follows a deeply personal trajectory. Moreover, his walking is not geared towards an appropriation of the foreign in the sense of transcribing his presence into it. Rather than impressing himself on the city, he wants the city to transform *him*. Like Tagwira's character Onai, he walks coyly and leaves no traces. He touches walls and stones with the desire of a gentle communion with the city's material history and often walks even long distances instead of taking the bus in order to experience "the full topographical awareness of how he was oriented on gradient" and feel the city "in his limbs" (ibid., p. 48). In Rushdie's novel, the agency for change lies in the city – London refuses to budge to Gibreel's systematic rewriting of its text because it "contains within itself the principle of its own transmutation and redemption" (Baucom 2001, p. 209). In the Magistrate's story, the city remains unchanged.

The 'Zimbofication' of Edinburgh occurs through the migrant's conscious attempt to draw a personal map of the city. Thus, the signifiers of home are not impressed on Edinburgh in order to colonize and appropriate the city but to develop an intimate connection, which in one passage is described as "falling in love" (Huchu 2014, p. 73). In his walking, the Magistrate manages to transcend the borders of nation and achieves a spiritual marriage between the two places: "When he thought about home, the Magistrate often looked to Arthur's seat. … There was a hill in Bindura too, right in the middle of the town" (ibid., p. 10). It is from the top of this hill that he is finally able to reassume the desired gaze from above and a feeling of elevation and being in several places at once. The passage which pictures him on top of Arthur's Seat reads as if it is directly inspired by de Certeau's passages on the view from atop the World Trade Center:[19]

> The Magistrate felt like a colossus striding over the narrow world. Everywhere he turned the view was breathtaking. Right then the saudade hit him pretty bad and for a moment, he could see Bindura, the low prospect, the giant mine chimneys in the distance, but the memory was like a flicker from an old videotape that had been dubbed over. He could only hold the image in his mind for a brief second before it vanished into the mist hovering over the Forth.
>
> (ibid., p. 13)

Eventually, he draws a map of Edinburgh in which he merges street names with the names of Zimbabwean artists:

> This way he hoped that, when his memories abandoned him, they would return if only he played his cassettes. When he was finished, the pages were full of lines tracing bus routes that terminated at nursing homes. Along each line he wrote the bus number and the artists he had listened to en route. He compared his map to the one he bought from the gift shop. In it he saw a city in which he lived, a city that he dared not call home. (ibid., p. 261)

Experiences such as these lay the ground for an arrival and commitment to diasporic space and contain a powerful political message. In a touching passage, the Magistrate holds his granddaughter and reflects about the rite of burying her umbilical cord in their back garden, "binding Ruvarashe and, by extension, themselves to this place" (ibid., p. 241). This echoes Mugabe's vision of reconciliation formulated in his Independence Message as "love that binds you to me and me to you" (1980), which, however, became replaced by a grand narrative in which the future is built on war for land and past. Against this, Huchu sets a quiet and poetic moment in which the Magistrate literally and metaphorically trusts the foreign soil with his granddaughter's roots. He gestures towards a future which does not involve the struggle for the past but allows the embrace of the foreign as home and a reconciliation of former colonizer and colonized.

The passages relating to the Maestro's urban experiences read at first like a sad counterpart to the Magistrate's experience of arrival. In contrast to the older man, who values family and community and lives in relatively comfortable circumstances, the Maestro is a recluse who "prefers the company of his books to the companionship of people" (Huchu 2014, p. 44) and lives in a run-down estate where "addicts queue up for their meth" (ibid., p. 109). Whereas the Magistrate looks for sites of beauty, this character deliberately seeks the "dark underbelly, the grotesque sector that never made it to postcards in tourist shops" (ibid., p. 110). The reader is told very little about the Maestro's past. There are a few hazy memories of what we presume to be a rural childhood in Zimbabwe, but they do not add up to create a story. When the Magistrate volunteers to notify relatives in Zimbabwe of the Maestro's death, he finds no one. The absence of a past and the fact that we learn this character's real name only after his death convey the impression that he is grounded nowhere, an ephemeral white existence who has left no traces (and no story to tell his only friend, who repeatedly presses him to talk about his childhood) and who remains socially and economically hamstrung in his new environment – "a lot of jobs were closed to him, not enough experience, no qualifications" (ibid., p. 169) – despite the fact that his ethnicity renders him eligible for citizenship. This is a central difference from the Magistrate, whose groundedness in his personal history and in Shona culture provide a rich ground on which he builds a future in exile, which becomes particularly clear in a pitiful passage in which the Maestro attempts to enjoy an experience similar to the Magistrate's leisurely musical walks through Edinburgh. On one

of his rare strolls through Edinburgh's popular and enjoyable 'postcard' sites, he walks from "Frederick Street ... down to the gardens" (ibid., p. 170) and follows the sounds of Zimbabwean music, which lead him to a street band from Bulawayo. Unlike the Magistrate, who connects to Edinburgh via Sungura rhythms, the Maestro feels isolated and out of place:

> He swayed to the rhythm of the marimbas and clapped along with the beat. It was some time before he noticed something strange. A small space had opened up between him and the other spectators. While the rest of the crowd was tightly packed, it was as though there was something repulsive about him that kept everyone away. ... The Maestro stopped by many acts, and, each time, ... the crowds disconnected from him as though he was undesirable, like a beast that had a strange, alien disease. He could not blend in.
>
> (ibid., p. 170)

This experience might be attribtuted to mental illness, but it is noteworthy that it also recalls Tagwira's depiction of flânerie in Harare, in particular a passage where her protagonist Onai stops to mingle with a crowd and enjoy street music but is jolted from her reverie. The Maestro's impression that people recoil from him as they would from "a beast that had a strange, alien disease" also evokes, in a very subtle way, the discourse of Operation Murambatsvina, which employs images of dirt and disease to 'medicalize' the right to a place in the city and the nation (Harris 2008; Muchemwa 2010b). The images characteristic of this discourse, which in the Zimbabwean context is used to exclude and even harm people like Onai and other "lumpen elements" (Mugabe 2001, p. 88), is mapped onto the white working-class Zimbabwean in Edinburgh. This aspect links back to the misconception of Lang's character Vaughn that white Zimbabweans belong to Europe, a view often found in critical whiteness studies literature – for instance, in Hughes's description of white Zimbabweans as "children of the glaciers" (2010, p. 13; see also endnote 6 in Chapter 1 of this study). Despite the color of his skin and his documented British ancestry, the Maestro does not belong.

Despite these discrepancies, both men share the desire for elevation and connection: the older man seeks a place in society, while the Maestro searches for "kinship" (Huchu 2014, p. 41) in literature and philosophy. When he reads Boethius, he feels "as though he too was in bondage, searching for a higher meaning to life through reason" (ibid., p. 41). His desire for a superior vision involves breaking away from society and choosing the solitary activity of reading: "If he devoted himself wholeheartedly to literature and gave up his soul to it, then he hoped that at the end of his inquiry he would have glimpsed the secret of life itself" (ibid., p. 133). A seemingly contradictory "longing for self-obliteration" (ibid., p. 111) and a deeper knowledge drive his movements through the city and his reading. When he runs, he experiences a desire for life and evanescence:

> He carried on, one foot after the other, just running, leaving everything behind, edging closer to the zone … , reaching a state of grace where the only thing that mattered was movement … free from the shackles of reality into a running-induced nirvana, becoming not himself but pure movement, becoming steps within the haze and the blur of the world around, until it was not he that moved but the earth itself under him.
>
> (ibid., p. 113)

These passages speak of a desire for an ephemeral, transient existence. He turns isolation into an art form and harbors the fantasy of dissolving. This desire is what drives his running as well as his reading, which is defined by a similar sense of restlessness and alacrity: "He hopped and hoped from one to the next, searching, trying to unlock the secrets of Kafka, Sartre, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, hoping that one of them had peered behind the veil, into the unknown" (ibid., p. 43). While running, he steps across the barrier dividing the present in Edinburgh and the geography of home left behind, whereby Scottish experiences are mapped onto Zimbabwe and vice versa: "He listened to the low roar of traffic on the bypass. It sounded like a river and, if he closed his eyes, he could see it, a wide river, powerful like the Zambezi" (ibid., p. 143). His decision to live purely for reading involves giving up his civic existence (he no longer goes to work and isolates himself from society) but enables him to overcome greater distances and live in a world where "the physical world blended with the world of books" (ibid., p. 173), and he is able to accompany a character "on the journey form Okinawa, around the globe and back to Tokyo" (ibid., p. 173). Eventually, he burns his books and sinks deeper into isolation. Like the protagonist in *Harare North*, he ultimately leaves his flat to wander the streets of Edinburgh as a homeless vagrant, sleeping on benches, in parks, and in graveyards until he catches a fatal chest infection and decides to look for his only friend, Tatyana, and rekindle their former closeness shortly before his death.

At first glance, the Maestro's story reads like a sad counterpart to the Magistrate's. He walks out to find the meaning of life and instead finds death. Despite the sad and premature end of his life, we should not, however, miss the numerous moments of freedom and elevation which the Maestro experiences during his quest. Here is, after all, a character who defies common understanding pertaining to white privilege, someone who moves beyond the limitations of his education and the "predicament" of the "bottom-feeder workers in the capitalist hierarchy" (ibid., p. 169) to determine his own movements, beyond the boundaries of domesticity and material concerns. Therefore, it is apt that he perceives his homelessness as completely different from Chikwava's narrator. While the latter roams the streets aimlessly and sees himself as "a homeless dog" scavenging and awaiting death (Chikwava 2009, p. 226), the Maestro finds freedom in his aimless journey through Edinburgh and uses a much more positive image: "He did not know where he was going. … He was a migratory bird" (Huchu 2014, p. 214). Despite his death, his story

closes with a sense of peace and reconciliation which echoes the hopeful sentiment of reconciliation experienced by the Magistrate. On his deathbed, he tells his friend that his search has been successful:

> I discovered that [the meaning of life] is many things to many people at many times, and that, for me, and for me only, because you can only discover the meaning of your own life and not someone else's, that the meaning of life lies in giving a bit of yourself to someone else. It lies in love.
> (ibid., p. 221)

An Edinburgh counterpart to Harare North?

At one stage during his months-long mission to manipulate the Magistrate into assuming a leadership role in the MDC, Alfonso talks about the desire to live on through a story:

> That's all our lives amount to, nothing but stories that we hope will live on after we are gone. We have hope that our names will be remembered. Mere men like me are soon forgotten, but great men like you, if they have a story, then their names will be remembered for all time.
> (ibid., p. 209)

He goes on to tell the Magistrate about a poor Zimbabwean woman whom a Swedish journalist mistakenly assumed to be rescuing dogs from invaded farms. When the journalist's article made the woman famous and donor money from animal welfarists started to flow in, she quickly decided to capitalize on this misunderstanding: "That's now her business, saving animals. What came first was the story, then the deed" (ibid., p. 209).

The two final texts analyzed in this study allow us to circle back to the complex entanglement of storytelling, the corruption of language, and the abuse of state leadership discussed in Chapter 3. Like Chikwava, Huchu explores aspects of Zimbabwean diaspora life in Britain but is also centrally concerned with the question of how authoritarian state power travels and determines the fate of citizens in exile. In both texts, state power is attached to a story, here the 'necessary illusion' of freedom which obscures the vision of the Magistrate, leaving him vulnerable to the manipulations of the state's agents. In this sense, both texts attest to the centrality of discourse and rule and affirm the central role of language in the upkeep and abuse of power in Zimbabwe's ideological landscapes. There are further parallels between Huchu's and Chikwava's novels. In the figure of Alfonso, an undercover agent of the Zimbabwean state who leeches on to the Magistrate materially and emotionally and 'possesses' him – that is, manipulates his thinking and political activity for his own ends – we can also recognize some of the traits of Chikwava's parasitic narrator and his usurpation of his friend Shingi. In that sense, Alfonso and the system he operates for thousands of miles away from home can also be likened to the angry ancestral

sprit ngozi, or evil wind, which blows all the way from Zimbabwe into London and causes havoc in the life of Chikwava's protagonist – Alfonso and the authoritarian state he represents waft around the exilic Zimbabweans like mamhepo, a harbinger of bad luck which they simply cannot shake off. A further aspect concerns the centrality of the urban. In both texts, African city textualities and Western urban experiences are put into close proximity, and at times one is layered over the other. Given these parallels, it is tempting to look at Chikwava's novel as the Edinburgh counterpart to Chikwava's London novel, a perspective which Huchu seems to encourage by referencing *Harare North* early into the pages of this novel. However, these two texts do not work in the same way, and I see the reason for this in the ending, in the moment when deceit is disclosed. Chikwava's text illuminates the power of the lizard's story by creating an effect which Huchu's text does not achieve. Readers are likely to be saddened by Huchu's ending but not wholly convinced.

The central moment in Chikwava's text, when the narrator recognizes his former commander in the shrivelled figure of a beggar and his illusion begins to fall apart, is harrowing. It is also credible and sets the tone for the inevitable destruction of the narrator. Alfonso, by contrast, remains a weird and absurd figure, although the text explicitely positions him as the powerful evil genius. The deceived Magistrate, by contrast, remains a figure of respect who can be trusted to help push a process of democratic development forward through his work in the MDC. After all, he courageously fought the influence of the government over the magistracy in Bindura and chose exile over corruption, so why is it conceivable that he will become a puppet to the regime in exile, remotely controlled by Alfonso? The ending is puzzling not because it is inconsistent with the characters' experience of migration but because it is implausible. An all-powerful Zimbabwean state and its secret service watch from afar and determine every step taken by its citizens in exile? Enterprising, smart Zimbabweans imagine themselves free but inevitably fall prey to the scheming of an individual ZANU-PF guy? The grand Keyser Soze moment falls flat because the stories of these three protagonists refuse to be rewritten by it. The ending also seems contrived because ideology and state power do not play the role they do in most other texts discussed in this work: the narrative is not driven by a dialectic of the individual's agency and the state's authoritarian power or by a conflict of loyalty to internalized ideology and a different version of the truth which gains weight when the character steps onto new terrains (as is the case for both Chinodya's Gwanangara family and Chikwava's narrator). Huchu's text is silent on the matter of ideology until the last chapter confronts us with the machinery of the Zimbabwean state. The text is strong, poetic, and courageous in the way it envisages new forms and contexts of Zimbabwean movement in the post-2000 period in a manner where the conditions of the crisis only play a role *before* the character goes into exile, but not *after*, and where Zimbabwean migrants are mobile cosmopolites in a globalized world (in fact, much more so than the Scots depicted in this novel!). And it adds to the wit and satiric edge

that Huchu does not choose London or New York as the setting for 'yet another Afropolitan story', but Edinburgh.

In the interview cited earlier, Huchu maintains: "These Zimbabweans are not victims, Alfonso, for instance, is a player in the great game, so are the rest, with varying levels of active engagement, and this is how politics plays out all over the world" (Huchu 2016, p. 209). At the novel's ending, this is very much what they are, despite the fact that the author's intention is palpable during the first three quarters of the text, which portrays Zimbabwean migrants who are decidedly not victims but fully autonomous, sovereign, and not afraid of the state. The text points to a double impulse in the author: Huchu ventures forward and allows his characters distance from the authoritarian state and explores forms of mobility beyond the crisis paradigm. With one swipe of the pen in a concluding chapter which seems more like an addendum than a part of the novel (what adds to this impression is the fact that it is set apart from the rest of the text structurally by way of a blank page and by way of the subtitle 'London' while the entire first part is given the subtitle 'Edinburgh'), Huchu renders the rich and generous moments of mobility, freedom, and escape experienced by his characters – which until then function as a countermobility to the familiar bleakness of the Zimbabwean migration story – untrue and irrelevant. The vivid and striking moments of prose happen when the characters are portrayed as experiencing freedom and autonomy. These experiences are subsequently written off and dismissed as untrue or irrelevant by a ending which affords the ZANU-PF officer not only narrative agency but also the prospect of moving on.

What, then, is the illusion? There is the illusion of freedom to which the three characters fall prey and which is disclosed in the last couple of pages, which suggest the regime's all-pervading power – an unpalatable political message, for sure. Or is *this* the illusion and readers must be careful not to fall prey to this witty and humorous author's prank? Huchu suggests that the former is true when he says:

> It was a lot of fun for me, dragging the reader in the wrong direction, but the whole idea was to try and show how this political and ideological world is 'inescapable' because it is the superstructure that governs our very ordinary existence.
>
> (ibid., p. 209)

So, indeed, try as they might, even Zimbabweans with very reasonable political and economic visions like the savvy, enterprising Farai or the honest and principled Magistrate cannot get away from the power of the Zimbabwean state. One wonders why they left at all. And yet, this statement by the author and his ending should not make us dismiss the text's positive vision of mobility. As readers, after all, we are not hemmed in by a 'necessary illusion' – neither that of the blue-stomached lizard nor the one generated by Huchu's closure. Ultimately, readers enjoy the freedom to decide which version of the

narrative they believe and which notion carries greater meaning and makes a more lasting impression – the poetic moments of movement and freedom in the first three quarters of the text or the ZANU-PF agent's glorious departure in the last few pages? Structurally, the novel's final chapter is the conclusion, but we are allowed to question whether it should have the final say.

Notes

1 See page 32 of this study.
2 Oyedeji (2013); Noxolo (2014); Chigwedere (2017). Contributions which depart from traditional postcolonialist perspectives include Chidora (2019; 2017) as well as the texts mentioned in note 4. Chidora argues that Chikwava blurs the boundaries between Harare and London: "The post-colonial city of Harare and the post-imperial one of London are linked, not as opposed disabling and enabling spaces respectively, but as sites where the socially and culturally invisible and voiceless (subalterns) try to speak against the grain of nativism, exclusion and xenophobic threats in both cities" (2017, p. 153).
3 As mentioned before, 'Harare South' is an ironic moniker for Johannesburg.
4 For discussions of Chikwava's language which move away from this pattern, see Gunning (2015); Okonkwo (2016); Siziba (2017). Gunning reads Chikwava's novel as being primarily concerned with Zimbabwean realities: "A tension between London and Zimbabwe is built into not only Chikwava's content, but also at the level of form" (2015, p. 128). Okonkwo analyzes the function of jazz and blues in Chikwava's *Harare North*: "There is arguably no other younger African novelist of the contemporary era in whose works the expressive codes of jazz and blues are threaded and recircled as a matrix, as a signature topos, of the writer's oeuvre" (2016, p. 153). Siziba analyzes the connection between the narrator's namelessness and political violence in Zimbabwe and draws attention to the humor in Chikwava's language: "His unreliability and lack of remorse about state violence and his role in it suggest an unmasking of official state narratives that cover-up endemic repression. The humour allows for laughter at the absurd situation in the country" (2017, p. 2).
5 One of the most prominent examples concerns the use of the noun 'wind' and its Shona equivalent, 'mamhepo,' to which I will return later.
6 See also Primorac: "As the novel progresses …, certain words and phrases acquire complex and ominous new meanings" (2010b, p. 252). See Krishnan:

> It is not possible to simply read the novel and construct a single version of the story; instead, the reader of Harare North is left in a continual process of comprehension and revision, leading to a perpetual slippage in signification.
>
> (2014, p. 52)

7 Passages which illustrate the slipperiness of truth associate it with a weapon – for, instance a granite rock: "If someone hit your head with it, you feel sore" (Chikwava 2009, p. 89). In other passages, truth is related to a termite (which otherwise stands for money): "You don't catch it by its head while it try to come out if its hole or it go back and you don't see it again" (ibid., p. 101).
8 Note how this text passage corresponds to the notion of being locked in a perpetual struggle, in particular through imagery relating to struggle and conflict ("battle rage inside you") and being stuck while moving.
9 'Wind' is the literal translation of mamhepo or mhepo, but the Shona term has the additional meaning of evil or bad spirits, which the literal translation does not convey, suggesting ngozi. 'Mamhepo' as used in this sense can relate to a calamity as a result of disappointing the ancestors, a curse by enemies, or an avenging spirit of a dead person. In contemporary usage, it also occurs in the more general sense of

misfortune and standstill, that "things are not moving in a person's life" (Chidora, personal conversation 2017). Chikwava's use of 'wind' or 'mamhepo' clearly has this association: "mamhepo – the winds; them bad spirits" (ibid., p. 21). Musanga (2017) offers a detailed analysis of the motif of ngozi/curse and restorative justice in *Harare North*. For a discussion of traditional Shona use and understanding of mamhepo and curse, see Matiure (2011); Mutekwa (2010).

10 It is further noteworthy that the image of the wind blowing into the house through the open window has an intertextual ring with the opening passages of Marechera's *Black Sunlight*: "Through the open window. The fucking window, a slashing wind blows. Through the open window. Within this pale womb with its beard, a brutal story writhes" (Marechera 1980, p. 1).

11 Unlike the Magistrate and the Mathematician, the white character, the Maestro, never directly interacts with Alfonso, who appears only once in the Maestro's story, when the Maestro sees him during one of his walks and overhears a phone conversation.

12 Huchu appears to consciously take the disrespectful discourse about Zimbabweans in the British care industry to task by portraying it as a financially rewarding, highly qualified, and respectable occupation (without being silent on the toll of shift work). The Magistrate's wife, a nurse, supports the entire family with her salary, and Farai's flatmate Brian, a nursing student, does his work with "enthusiasm" (Huchu 2014, p. 55). While the privileged 'Afropolitan' Farai – who belittles care work when he says "every fucking Zimbo's a nurse now" (ibid., p. 55) – does not live to hand in his PhD, the text affords Brain success and portrays his graduation ceremony.

13 The name of this fictitious fund allows us to link it to a region in the Democratic Republic of Congo; ironically, Alfonso is sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo for his next mission.

14 Huchu has said that the character of Farai was conceived as "the kind born with a silver spoon and red carpet laid out ahead of them right up to the grave.... For Farai...., the UK, and the world itself, is nothing but one big playground" (Huchu 2016, p. 203). Huchu sounds almost apologetic for daring to introduce an affluent Zimbabwean when he explains Farai away as a narrative device to make the novel more interesting: "I think the novel as a project is richer for having the one guy who does not give a fuck and will not fit readily into that easy stereotype of the struggling dark-skinned migrant" (ibid., p. 205).

15 *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009) depicts criminals engaging in Nigerian advance fee scams, often referred to as 419 scams.

16 Kutanda Botso is a traditional form of atonement for an offence against mother or grandmother. This practice is also portrayed in Tagwira's novel: the wealthy Tapiwa Jongwe from Borrowdale performs Kutanda Botso by living as a beggar in Mbare. See Musanga (2014) and Muchemwa (2010a) for a discussion of this character.

17 The link to Keyes's novel is obvious; it is mentioned in passing that the Maestro reads *Flowers for Algernon*; furthermore, the relationship between the Maestro and his only friend, Tatyana, mirrors the relationship between Keyes's protagonist, Charlie, and his teacher, Alice. Shortly before his death, the Maestro arrives at the understanding that "the meaning of life lies in giving a bit of yourself to someone else. It lies in love" (Huchu 2014, p. 221), which echoes almost verbatim the moment of happiness experienced by Keyes's protagonist shortly before his mental deterioration:

> I don't pretend to understand the mystery of love, but this time it was more than sex . . . It was being lifted off the earth . . . being part of something greater than myself. I was lifted out of the dark cell of my own mind, to become part of someone else.
>
> (1989, p. 293)

18 The socio-economic differences between Farai and Stacey play a large role and cause Farai to feel superior to her: when he visits her family, Farai wonders how so many houses can be built in such a small place, "he reckons his parents' place in Highlands would have

taken up half the street" (Huchu 2014, p. 68). Once more, Huchu is quite overt in his intention to subvert (presumed) conventional ideas about race, nationality, and income/class status by contrasting an urbane, smart black migrant with a parochial and quite stupid white Scottish girl; Stacey works in a shoe shop after a short stint in the porn industry, has not traveled further than Glasgow and cannot imagine "leaving this place" (Huchu 2014, p. 80), has no formal education, and is unable to repeat even a simple Shona word: "Your mum is a *mutorwa,*" says Farai; "*Mut-wa*", Stacey mouths. '*Mu-to-rwa*,' Farai corrects her, knowing full well she'll have forgotten it in a few minutes" (ibid., p. 89).

19 See de Certeau:

> When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.
>
> (2011, p. 92)

It is interesting to note that Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* features a very similar scene in the chapter 'Darling on the Mountain' in which Darling looks at the shanty town from atop the mountain Fambeki. The panorama overlooked by each character is very different – shocking poverty, dirt, and dereliction in Darling's case, stunning natural beauty in the Magistrate's – but both passages connect their character's experience of a panoptic view to the feeling of being uplifted and to the sublime.

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