# Kaka country: An intertextual reading of national dysfunction in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Jinga's *One Foreigner's Ordeal*

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Reading fictional narratives is a complex process that has been a preoccupation of scholars and critics in linguistics and literary criticism since Plato and Aristotle. The contention that texts are constructed (and reconstructed) through a network of prior and concurrent discourses problematises the view that a text functions as a hermetic, self-sufficient, closed system. This article examines selected Zimbabwean fictional narratives that are Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Jinga's *One Foreigner's Ordeal* focusing on how the texts speak to each other and reconfigure the African literary canon. The article draws from post-structuralist, Julia Kristeva's intertextuality theory in order to interrogate stylistic and thematic (re)configurations in the selected novels. Close textual analysis shows that the act of reading plunges the reader into a maze of textual relations and meanings that emerge from this never-ending interaction. Intertextuality is an insightful and essential interpretive framework that draws our attention to the complexities and multiplicities of discourses in fictional narratives. The framework points to the complex matrix of textual relations that oppose the fixation of meanings but rather suggests an infinite range of interpretations. This brings into sharp focus and conversation the question of the author's intentionality, the need for critical evaluation of textual interactions and the role of the reader in the production of meanings. Intertextuality engenders new horizons of reading and understanding literary texts by generating multiple sites of textual meanings. In other words, intertextuality theory posits that the textual interpretative trajectory is inconclusive, calling on readers to explore the textual entanglement and dialogic selves which facilitate a (re)discovering and (re)constructing of ambivalence and negotiation of meanings.

**Keywords:** Intertextuality; Kaka; Post-Structuralism; Style; Canon; Dysfunction.

## Introduction

Linguists and literary critics have suggested the need for increased sensibility to both the internal and external worlds of fictional works during the reading process. These debates seem to propose alternative interpretive practices that go beyond linguistic signification and acknowledge the significant role of contextualisation of literary discourse, as well as an awareness of the influence of related texts in the manner the reader interacts with the present text. Such insightful discussions destabilise, subvert and call for a re-evaluation of previously held epistemologies that have informed reading of fictional discourse. The article investigates the idea that a text is never independent and original, which presents a departure from critical realist interpretive paths. This has profound implications for analysis and interpretation because a more complex conception of fictional works emerges. The interaction of the present text, related texts and the reader, foregrounds essential constructs and actors in the meaning-making process. This advances interpretive practices that privilege assessment of the nature of these interactions (Cresswell, 2008). It is this background that informs this article, where the central questions that prime the article are the following:

- Are there evident stylistic and thematic interactions in the selected narratives?
- What interpretive insights can be gained by exploring stylistic and thematic conversations through the lens of intertextuality in selected Zimbabwean literary texts?

The selected texts examined in this article are debut novels by Zimbabwean writers living in the diaspora. They are contemporaneous in that Tavuya Jinga's *One Foreigner's Ordeal* was published in 2012, while NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* followed closely in 2013. The first part of each novel is set in Zimbabwe and later on, *One Foreigner's Ordeal* takes a South African setting, while *We Need New Names* takes an American one. The article examines this Southern African fiction as it demonstrates a connection to other texts that convey a striking

conjunction of scatology and political satire, borne out most clearly in two landmark novels of the 1960s: Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Soyinka satirises political and corporate misdeeds in terms of unhealthy digestion. In Armah's grotesque vision, shit (including its corporeal familiars phlegm, drool, vomit, sweat, piss and blood) emerges as an index of moral and political outrage in a new Ghana bedevilled by greed and bureaucratic corruption. The two texts examined here are extensions of these indices, to the extent that kaka (shit) and its scatological meanings in the postcolonial state bear significant ways of understanding the malfeasance in the politics of vulgarity.

## The messiness of making sense

As the article examines how the selected narratives stylistically and thematically interact, it is significant to define style. The term style carries a variety of meanings and its polysemic nature presents definitional problems because there is no consensus among scholars on what it means. Leech and Short (1981) define style as the way in which language is used in a given context by a writer for a specific purpose. Although the definition of style is complex and always contested, a working definition of style as a manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse is adopted (Abrams 1981). Style facilitates the conveyance of significant meanings. Thus, style generally refers to the expressive aspects of language and artistic ways of expression that recuperate the iconicity of semiotics.

Although the narratives studied in this article seem to challenge rigid canonisation of fictional texts, it could be still argued that the novels are part of the African literary canon. The term canon is derived from Greek and it has been a problematic word mostly contested and ill-defined. The word is used to refer to generally defining qualities of a body of artistic works that give the literary artefacts a group identity. According to Kehinde (2004), the African literary canon focuses on the experiences of the peoples of the continent and beyond. Thus, canon refers to a body of creative writings that have common classification criteria.

Dysfunction in this article means a country in a perilous situation. It refers to the Zimbabwean nation on the verge of collapse and where citizens feel incapacitated. Images of dilapidation and collapse of primary services such as health and education become tropes of dysfunction in Zimbabwe and the writers design meanings through the circuit of signs and narratives that seek to project, in various ways, the social and political parlour created by political actors through lying, deceit, mischief and often outright malice.

## Post-structuralism and the birth of intertextuality

The article draws from critical insights on intertextuality. Allen (2000) states that the origin of the conceptual praxis of intertextuality is rooted in Saussurean structural linguistics and Mikhail Bakhtin's keen interest in the poetics of language. Intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva, a French linguist, who initiated engagements with post-structuralism and was herself influenced by Bakhtinian thought. She combines Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories of language to query the transparency of signs in relation to reality. In the post-structuralist tradition, Barthes and Bakhtin questioned structuralist linguistics which studied texts as autonomous and self-contained, singularly meaningful entities. De Saussure, who is perceived as the father of modern linguistics, regards language as a self-contained semiotic system. Allen (2000) posits that in post-structuralism, the literary and artistic work is an ensemble of the semiotics of already existing art. Post-structuralist theorists therefore challenge this view and also disrupt notions of stable meanings and objective interpretations (Allen 2011). Kristeva demonstrates that a literary text is a construction of several ideas with diverse meanings embedded in it. Barthes therefore argues that literary meanings can never be fully stabilised by the reader because the literary work's intertextual nature always leads readers on to new intertextual relations. Kristeva (1966) views the text as a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static linguistic structures. In other words, post-structuralism challenges the closure of the text. Allen (2011) adds that readers keep discovering multiple potential meanings in each text. From this conceptualisation, the meanings of fictional works are in a flux and dynamically changing (Allen 2000). Therefore, no interpretation is ever final: every utterance is a response to previous other utterances and elicits further responses constantly entering into dialogue with past, present and future texts and utterances (Bakhtin 1984). An intertextual analytical framework becomes indexical in assessing these significant interactions and their implications for the processes of meaning construction.

Kristeva (1986:37) posits that every text is constituted by 'a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text'. Kristeva's intertextuality theory argues that a text's meaning is not specific to itself because every text is an intertext. This is informed by Bakhtin's (1981) observation of the dialogic self and how this generates a polyphonic, carnivalsque realisation that no utterance is independent but rather all utterances respond to previous utterances and to pre-existent patterns of meaning and evaluation. Halliday (2003) asserts that each text is a combination of intertextual cycles of the chain of texts which make the history of that text. These observations, culminating in what Peirce (2001) calls phaneroscopy (the holistic signifying process), provide useful insights for the interpretation of Zimbabwean literature post-2000.

Allen (2011) suggests that a network of prior texts or textual cross-fertilisation provides the context of possible meanings of the present text, arguing that identifying intertext is a case of interpretation. Kehinde (2003) asserts that intertextuality is well established in the works of contemporary African writers who generate and project stylistic and thematic conversations

in their artistic works. He also adds that African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment. The emergent African literary canon is fettered to the experiences of the peoples of the continent and beyond (Kehinde 2004), contending that African literature does not evolve in a vacuum but rather is informed and shaped by the sociopolitical realities of its milieu and the preceding texts. Emphasis is on the interactive relationship between the writer, present text and other earlier texts, the reader and their knowledge of other related texts, and thereby some semantic open-endedness is generated in reading selected texts.

## Lexis as style

The choice of lexical form, together with the emotive elements of language, helps to convey the multiple ways of seeing and making sense of the world (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008:150). In both novels, Zimbabwe is described as a 'wretched' country and its citizens inherit this wretchedness: 'A perception was fast gaining momentum that Zimbabweans were "the wretched of the earth"'(Jinga 2012:8).

This perception is mirrored, almost laminated in the following from *We Need New Names*:

> Darling's father, a frustrated unemployed university graduate also says 'we should have left this wretched country when all this started'. (Bulawayo 2013:92)

In both texts, without any explicit overstatement, we are engaged in reading these narratives as post-texts whose genesis is Frantz Fanon's magisterial text, *The Wretched of the Earth*. This wretchedness is the reason why Zimbabwean citizens are 'fleeing in droves' in both novels. However, leaving one's motherland is a stressful business, migrants narrate painful encounters:

> How hard it was to get to America – harder than crawling through the anus of a needle. For the visas and passports, we begged, despaired, lied, grovelled, promised, charmed, and bribed – anything to get us out of the country. (Bulawayo 2013:240)

The excerpts of utterances above are lexically dense. A string of plosive verbs is employed to convey a painful and stressful process of migration, and getting the essential documents is complicated by both a Deleuzian panopticon and an inveterate bureaucracy that reeks of corruption. The choice of lexical terms, together with the emotive elements of language, help to convey feelings of bitterness and frustration.

Mangena and Mupondi (2010) note that the strong urge to escape the limiting national space sees migrants through the frustrating and prolonged process of migration because consolation comes from the perceived but elusive greenness of the diaspora. South Africa and America are both regarded as sites of many opportunities. The myth of America as a land of promises and fulfilment of dreams encourages immigrants to seek necessary documents. However, the narratives here expose the fallacy of such a myth. There is evidence from the selected novels of ill-treatment of immigrants by Home Affairs officials, where one South African official beats up immigrants with a sjambok and threatens them with imprisonment. Readers comprehend the extent of helplessness and vulnerability of immigrants who fear deportation. The fear emanates from being '*makwerekwere*' and the looming possibilities of the foreigner getting exposed. Even well-educated immigrants are abused and cannot seek legal recourse. This is the fate of the 'strangers' in a foreign land, providing a glimpse into the lives of (il)legal foreigners in a space where they are unwanted. This is understood as administrative (in)justice, pushing to the periphery all non-citizens, as rightly observed by both Hove (2017) and Jukka (2018). This is the new testament and manifestation of several borders within the 'outside' borders which follow the '*makwerekwere*'. Such discriminatory practices police and regulate conditions of living for immigrants. There are legal, social, cultural and linguistic borders within diasporic spaces where exclusionary practices and attitudes are inscribed and reinforced.

The wording in the children's game is also loaded with meanings:

> Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in – who wants to be in a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (Bulawayo 2013:48)

Here again is the interweaving of Bulawayo's narrative with the precursor texts, where the immediate text insists on its co-construction from Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1983) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959). Zimbabwe is described as a place of hunger, echoing Marechera's eponymous title, and the centre cannot hold because things fall apart. Despite the fact that Zimbabwean immigrants in America encounter multiple problems, the idea of going back home is unattractive:

> We recalled the tatters of our country which are held together by American dollars, by monies from other countries, and our blood went cold. (Bulawayo 2013:243)

Zimbabwe is personified and its sad state is projected through solid and evocative, if not provocative, imagery. The image of a country resembles a poor and emaciated person in 'tatters and rags'. It is a picture that reeks of apathy, evident in the multiple financial currencies that it uses to conduct business because its own currency has bred unimaginable inflation to the extent that its minting has been called off. Such wretchedness again serves to emotionally tug the readers and draw sympathy for a nation whose centre can no longer hold in both the Yeatsian and Achebe logos.

The plight of illegal immigrants who are taken advantage of by employers offers yet another sordid insight into the plight of the displaced. The illegal immigrants have no choice but to take any type of job they are offered:

> And the jobs we worked, Jesus-Jesus-Jesus, the jobs we worked. Low-paying jobs. Back-breaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow … We cleaned toilets. We picked tobacco and fruit under the boiling sun until we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds. (Bulawayo 2013:244)

Immigrants secure jobs that are physically straining and these jobs are ignored by natives because they are not only dangerous but also embarrassing. This citation has images that reveal how immigrants feel dehumanised and exploited. The jarring syllables in 'jobs' and the plosives in 'devoured the meat, tongued the marrow' invite the reader to get a palpable sense of the hunger and the voracious eating characteristic of 'lost hounds'.

The ineffable name of 'Bitchington Mborro', a character in the novel, mocks and criticises the prophet's unreined sexual appetite. In this case, lexical choice in naming the prophet foregrounds the hypocritical behaviour of this man of God where 'Mborro' has its eponym in the both the penis and a contemporary South African-based maverick of a prophet. The theme is also expressed in *One Foreigner's Ordeal* where a pastor whose wife was left in Zimbabwe keeps condoms in the church and is exposed by one of his followers:

> It turned out there was a bunch of condoms in the box. The pastor had recently lent eight of them to Widza with strict instructions for him to 'please remember to honour your debt because I will also need to wear them. My supply is dwindling'. (Jinga 2012:18)

# Matters of positioning: Point of view

Fowler (1986:9) posits that angle, perspective or point of view 'concerns a position taken up by the speaker or author, that of the consciousness depicted by the text, and that implied for the reader or addressee'. Tagwirei (2016) observes that positioning is an important stylistic dimension of narrative text. The unnamed narrator in *One Foreigner's Ordeal* is from the 'wretched of the earth'. Although the narrator's name is not disclosed, readers are told that he is a teacher fleeing from the economic woes in Zimbabwe. Darling, a narrator in *We Need New Names*, narrates from a position of marginality. The impact of the double-prism narration is the focalisation of the worldview of the oppressed people. Prominence is given to Zimbabwe's political and social problematics as well as the daunting ordeals and anguish of those who fled from the misery and 'kaka-ness' of their motherland. Reminiscences and flashbacks are constituent parts of the narrative techniques employed to present extremely touching accounts of the victims and sufferers. Both protagonists are from marginal sites of the Zimbabwean society and their narratives move from personal to collective experiences of the marginalised sections of this nation state, ordinary citizens who have been turned into decrepit strangers by circumstances at home. Theirs are voices that belong to the wounded and hounded citizens speaking for Zimbabweans in the diaspora who are haunted by a sense of alienation both at home and abroad. The narrative voices in both storylines privilege the harrowing experiences of immigrants occupying liminal zones or sites on the periphery, an experience that Bhabha (1997) eerily describes as 'to be un/homed is not to be homeless'. The marginalised people voice their concerns. This is what Mangena (2015) calls writing from a position of subalternity. Both narrators contest state-

manicured narratives that obscure the government's failures: in their vocative and phatic functions, these voices mobilise tonalities of rage, angst and the scatological to subvert the grand master narrative projected by the Zimbabwean state.

# Excreta galore: Languaging agony and anger in subversive discourses

The use of vulgar language by Bulawayo's characters represents a protean space inhabited by the marginalised communities. It also conveys the fact that normative and sanitised language is not part of slum life; the normative is excised and replaced by vulgarity. Vulgarity becomes an invented construction of a new linguistic identity of the inhabitants of a location provocatively named Paradise. Bulawayo constructs children who violate and subvert all linguistic taboos and norms. The linguistic frankness shown by shack inhabitants is peculiar to these sites where all specimens of human vileness and vice prevail, again harping on the intertextual scatological focus in *The beautyful ones are not yet born*. Vulgarity is therefore conveyed as a realistic construction and representation of the linguistic codes in slums. In other words, the linguistic code of the slum becomes privileged because it is deviant from the moralised national linguistic norms in Zimbabwe. Language is utilised as a powerful stylisation and thematisation strategy, especially with the realisation that Paradise is a creation of state brutality and ruthlessness towards its citizens. Paradise inhabitants are all victims of Operation Murambatsvina, the 2008 Zimbabwean moment of obscene impunity when the government razed the shanty settlements of urban dwellers who had dared vote against a kleptocracy hell-bent on retaining power at all costs. Thus, vulgarity here demonstrates how the brutalised, angry and displaced citizens express their raw experiences. It is an emotive linguistic code that also serves to project contemporary realities in displaced and dispossessed African societies. This reveals a contemporary artistic sensibility to the realities of the world of the characters. Children living in the ironically named Paradise, a shanty town, are exposed to sexual orgies and verbal abuse. Chipo is sexually abused by her grandfather and gets pregnant at the age of 10, while Darling watches Reverend Bitchington Mborro sexually abusing one congregant from his church. The mother of the violated girl invites a boyfriend into the shack at night and Darling, then a 10-year old child, listens to the two 'moaning and panting' and the bed 'shuffling like a train'. This certainly explains the children's knowledge of 'big penises' which they draw on walls in Budapest, another oddly named affluent locale in a fictional Zimbabwean town. Budapest intertextually connects the failed Zimbabwean economy to that of the failed socialist contraption of Hungary. Darling remembers her childhood days in Zimbabwe when she says:

> Once, when we hit Budapest, we took with us a bag of black markers we had gotten from the NGO people and we went crazy on the durawalls. We drew penises, big penises, rows and rows of them, since we didn't know what vaginas looked like, then we complemented the penises with words like golo, beche, (vagina) mboro, mhata, svira, ntsbompi, bolo, (male organ) zeka and every other obscenity we could think of. (Bulawayo 2013:276)

Darling, who is the protagonist, and her friends use obscene language to express their frustration and anger at being forced to live on the fringes of society. The sordid details of the slum compel the reader to sympathise with these children who live on the margins of a dysfunctional slum. They have been jettisoned out of a dysfunctional economy epitomised by hyperinflation and a devalued Zimbabwean currency. Jabu, who had millions of Zimbabwean dollars, could not even buy a plate of sadza. Jabu decides to use the notes as souvenirs for his wife and children (Jinga 2012:7). In *We Need New Names,* the mother of Bones laments the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean currency she kept in her shack has lost its value overnight. She registers her pain and condemnation of the government in the following citation:

> And the American money they are talking about … just where do they think I will get it, do they think I will just dig it up, huh, do they think I will defecate it? (Bulawayo 2013:25)

Jakobson (1995) observes that language should be understood in its communicative context, alluding to the pragmatic considerations in approaching the expressivity of discourse. The word *defecate* serves as an emotive intensifier of the utterance. The emotional tenor jars the reader's sensibility to the scatological imagery evoked here. The inhabitants of the marginalised spaces are so overburdened by the collapsing Zimbabwean economy to the extent that defecating and all its unsayable concomitants become metonymic of their emasculation. Citizens feel insulted and cheated by their government; therefore, they vent their disappointment through deliberately scatological and raw language.

The term 'kaka', which is found in both Shona and Ndebele, the Zimbabwean indigenous languages, literally means human faeces. It is deployed as a recurring motif that captures the grim image of a nation mired in its own filth. Kaka is a repulsive homeland frequently associated with images of excrement, rags, wretchedness, sickness and newly-dug graves. Moyo, Gonye and Mdlongwa (2013) hint at the claustrophobia of home in their explanation of the dire conditions in the post-2000 era that have made Zimbabwe generally unhomely. Humanitarian challenges caused by poverty, violence, social injustice and inequalities, dehumanisation of citizens, starvation and deterioration of living standards, disillusionment, hyperinflation, exclusion and marginalisation, the AIDS pandemic, unrelieved suffering, moral and social decay are some of the many challenges highlighted in the selected fictional narratives which inscribe the hostility and unhomeliness of home. It also conveys a citizenry whose revulsion is incensed by the kakaness of the homeland. Citizens flee from a state of paralysis in their home country. This idea is reinforced by an image of a kaka nation that has become a place where citizens look 'worn out from sickness (starvation) and troubles' (Bulawayo 2013:27). Kaka also evokes disgust that triggers an urge to 'escape, leave, flee, quit, emigrate, move', desert the debilitating poverty, entrapment and crippling economic implosion (Bulawayo 2013:145). Such presentation of Zimbabwean society also subverts the state narrative about nationalism and patriotism. Wodak (2011:7) calls this 'fictionalisation of politics' where the political sphere finds expression in poetics.

In *One Foreigner's Ordeal*, the last chapter of the novel is entitled 'But I am not a Zimbabwean', suggesting alienation and detachment from a choreographed national identity that makes one despicably vulnerable (Bulawayo 2013:168). Migrants adopt 'outsider' status because home is a place of hunger and a source of shame. They attempt to disconnect themselves from the burdensome identity. It is also important to observe that immigrants sometimes discard and disguise their national identity because of the insecurities in host countries. The insecurities drive them to make a concerted effort to acquire the languages of the host communities in order to fulfil their socio-economic goals. Both (un)documented foreigners have a deep-rooted fear of inescapable stigmatisation and xenophobic attacks (Hove 2017:5).

The university graduates such as Darling's father, and skilled workers such as teachers, flee in great numbers (Mavezere 2014). Children living in Paradise no longer attend school. Darling says 'I don't go to school anymore because all the teachers left to teach over in South Africa and Botswana and Namibia and them, where there's better money' (Bulawayo 2013:30–31). The country is disintegrating and it has become a 'house of hunger'. As if to reinforce the ugliness of the state, thus children's game is loaded with meanings:

> Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in- who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart. (Bulawayo 2013:48)

## Multilingualism and coping strategies of crossing linguistic and cultural borders within borders

One other plane of interaction for these fictional narratives is evident in ways of languaging and textual construction. It is important to examine closely the linguistic construction of these interactions from the lens of the multilingual settings of the novels. The selected narratives resonate in their utilisation of multiple languages which affirm the multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multinational landscapes that characterise them. According to Canagarajah (2011), multilingual interactions promote hybrid linguistic practices and enactments. These environments are characterised by discourses enacting language diversity. Code-meshing and code-mixing become evident where different languages are fused together in multilingual and multicultural contexts (Canagarajah 2011). Readers also encounter multiple viewpoints and propositions that are embedded in the blending of languages within the novelistic discourse. Thus, Bakhtin's heteroglossic and polyphonic models of discourse are intertextually articulated. This allows a tension-filled intermingling of native and *makwerekwere* discourses. The idea of multiple perspectives and inconsummerability of various discourses of the novel establish a dialogic orientation of the narratives (Bakhtin 1984). The novels adopt multilingual

and multicultural modes of address to represent transnational spaces which are characterised by multilanguaging and translanguaging (Blommaert 2010). In *We Need New Names*, English, Shona and Ndebele are deliberately interwoven into the fabric of multilingual discourse that gives texture to the novel. Multilingualism in these narratives needs to be further understood as a way of 'breaking down' linguistic and cultural borders. For instance, the following citation reveals code-mixing; the linguistic repertoire of migrants demonstrates a multiplicity of codes: 'Madoda, vakomana how we worked, how messages of hunger, help needed and kunzima, it's hard, things are tough', came from home (Bulawayo 2013:244). When immigrants receive such messages about starving relatives back home, they take any job available.

Immigrants grapple with numerous challenges of living as strangers and foreigners. They learn new codes of expression as a language assimilation strategy as well as creation of distinct linguistic identity. In *One Foreigner's Ordeal*, English, Shona, Sesotho, isiZulu, isiNdebele, Afrikaans and tshiVenda are mixed to generate an intricate panoply of experiences and voices in the discourse. Even within this tapestry of voices, immigrants still suffer because of social, cultural, linguistic and economic marginalisation despite their concerted efforts to belong. Exclusion of immigrants by both South African and American insiders is articulated. The respective governments seem not to be bothered by the plight of immigrants. The narratives convey the complexity of existence in marginal spaces as *makwerekwere*. Immigrants in both spaces struggle to cross the linguistic divide even in the midst of efforts to sound like natives. This is seen when Fostalina, who has lived and worked in America for several years, repeats and practises her English in front of a mirror. Fostalina finds it difficult to place an order because the white saleslady on the phone declares Fostalina's accent incomprehensible: 'I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean, ma'am', she says finally (Bulawayo 2013:195). Darling makes the following observation about the problematics of language and languaging faced by immigrants in America:

> The problem with English is this: You usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that – first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the words quietly to yourself, to make sure you got them okay. And finally, the last step, which is to say the words out loud and have them sound just right. But then because you have to do all this, when you get to the final step, something strange has happened to you and you speak the way a drunk walks … It's as if you are an idiot. (Bulawayo 2013:193–194)

The condition of nervousness in multilingual contexts and multilingual interactions to portray transnational relations is detailed by Canagarajah (2011) where free and natural expression is curtailed when one is not using one's native language. People in such transnational spaces as depicted in Bulawayo's novel are always conscious of such linguistic dissonance. Darling says:

> In America we did not always have the words. It was only when we were alone, we summoned the horses of our languages and mounted their backs and galloped past skyscrapers. Always, we were reluctant to come back down. (Bulawayo 2013:240)

Immigrants not only miss their home countries but they also miss the flexibility and expressive capacity of their native languages, a complication that approximates disjunctive episodic structures, and hallucinatory bouts of 'in-betweenness' in communication.

The novels have intriguing linguistic stylistic and thematic conversations. Both protagonists are conversant in more than one language. Representations of migrant identities and how they are constructed in the process of 'becoming' is projected as a prominent concern in these texts. Implications of displacement and dispersal from one's motherland are more pronounced and intricate. This foregrounds the difficulties encountered and experienced by migrants in crossing linguistic and cultural borders across transnational environs (Hove 2017:6). When migrants in foreign countries interact with their family members back home, they are accused of using strange accents, thereby pointing at a new version of 'linguistic estrangement' and the state of in-betweenness. What emerges in these ambivalent crossroads is a shattering sense of placelessness in the migrants. Conflicts and violence based on linguistic and cultural differences characterise the experiences of migrants in host countries. The narratives therefore project this polyphonic and heteroglossic (dis)orientation where a multiplicity of voices, cultural and linguistic diversity typically engender the realities and fluidities of transnational spaces.

## Polysemy, figurative language and 'unlocking' the artistic tongue

Wales (2001:151) writing on figurative meaning in semantics, describes 'a very common type of extension of meaning for a word', resulting in polysemantic meanings through metaphoric transfer. Mazuruse (2010), commenting on protest literature in Zimbabwe, asserts that artists resort to satire, irony, metaphor and sarcasm usually because they fear getting arrested and convicted on charges of treason or incitement to cause 'alarm and despondency' in their own home(s).

The political terrain in Zimbabwe has been characterised by both the military and secret police silencing 'dissident voices' (Nyambi 2013). If these state apparatuses do not physically eliminate dissident voices, then they hound writers out of the country as they did in the case of Chenjerai Hove, or else resort to a heavy-handed blackout of the Internet and other modes of writing torture to the world. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who are cognitive linguists, view figurative language as an integral part of human cognition as well as a source of multiple meanings. The polysemic nature of figures of speech offers artists' opportunities to 'speak to power' thereby 'unlocking' the artistic tongue. Reddy (2007) notes that idiomatic and metaphoric features of language are utilised to convey topical and sensitive issues. Lakoff (1992) and Crystal (1995) are of the view that figures of speech acquire meanings from

the context of textual construction. Particularly important here is that metaphorical mapping assumes semantic effects from the socio-cultural and political contexts.

## Thematisation of sociopolitical circumstances through symbolism and imagery stylisations

Budapest and Paradise are juxtaposed to show a stratified and polarised society: the spatial locations enjoin in acclaiming the schisms and rifts between the affluent and the wretched of the earth. Through parallel depiction of the two communities, the narrative invites attention to Derridean difference. This sharp contrast magnifies inequalities evident in the huge gulf between the privileged class and the depraved people in shanty communities. The sordid image of the 'wretched of the earth' is further compounded by detailed description of Paradise, a slum with tiny shacks whose naming ironically mocks the realities of its inhabitants. This stands in marked contrast to Budapest which is an affluent suburb with 'walled and gated houses'. The description of the two environments makes the reader visualise that these two sites are semiotics of worlds apart. Bulawayo's children are conscious of their marginal existence and they endure the shame of being shack dwellers. This otherness prevails in the form of social and political borders within the national space. Bastard, one of the children from Paradise, comments that 'Budapest is not a kaka toilet for anybody to just walk in. It's not like Paradise' (Bulawayo 2013:12). This juxtaposition problematises the concepts of home and (un)belonging and the ambivalence of such notions. The narratives bring into tense conversations the problematic normative construction and conceptualisation of home. Is home a geographical place where one is born? Or a place where one feels secure, comfortable and free and enjoys a sense of belonging? Is there a home at all for the marginalised people? These are some of the questions we grapple with when reading and investigating the politics of exclusion and discourses of differences in these novels. Apparently, one's sense of identity and experiences of (un)homing are cultivated by social, cultural, linguistic and economic circumstances.

A Lamborghini, which is a very expensive car, is seen by the children driving into one of Budapest houses. This Lamborghini is an European import suggesting neocolonial capitalism, which becomes a symbol of material wealth for the elite in Zimbabwe, while the shack in Paradise where the child narrators come from symbolises squalid poverty. The slum has 'tiny shacks crammed together like hot loaves of bread' and 'dusty red path, piles of junk and faeces' (Bulawayo 2013:26). Such visibility of poverty serves as a sociopolitical critique. The faeces that are used to write 'Blak Power' on the bathroom mirror tell a story of political betrayal. The bold imagery of excreta and the wrongly spelt 'Blak' are masterfully crafted in this graffiti to mock the black empowerment promise which has only turned out to be an enactment of violence against white and black people

presumed to be opposition members. State discourse about black power and black empowerment is just as disgusting as kaka because it has not materialised into a promissory reality for common Zimbabweans. Each time the children from the shanty town eat stolen guavas, they go through a painful defecating process, enacting the pain of living in a failed postcolonial Zimbabwean society.

When they become tired of and exasperated with their home country, citizens flee. Unfortunately, a new set of problems awaits them. The foreignness of a new environment further alienates immigrants. The snow and 'coldness' in America, for instance, serves to reveal unfamiliarity with the American landscape and the strangeness of this new environment. Immigrants dislocated to this alien space find the place cold and markedly different from home. Darling says this about the American weather:

> What you will see if you come here where I am standing is the snow. Snow on the leafless trees, snow on the cars, snow on the roads, snow on the yards, snow on the roofs … snow, just snow covering everything like sand … It is a greedy monster too, the snow … it has swallowed everything. Where are the flowers? The grass? (Bulawayo 2013:143)

> The ants? The litter? Where are they? As for the coldness, I have never seen it like this. I mean, coldness that makes like it wants to kill you, like it's telling you, with its snow, that you should go back where you came from. (Bulawayo 2013:148)

This depiction of the unfriendly weather is profoundly dramatised in this novel as much as it is reconfigured in *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 1983) whose narrator laments the coldness in London. Both novelists depict the unwelcoming weather of these places as a symbol of the unhomeliness of these sites to immigrants (Naidoo 2017). The repetition of the lexical term 'snow' reinforces its ubiquity, and its cumulative presence inscribes an uncanny gesture that pushes the migrant outside of the new borders.

America entices and lures non-Americans from afar. It is initially viewed by Darling and other immigrants as a place of fortune, pleasure and promise. America is regarded as a land of promises where dreams are fulfilled, a respectable place according to the children's country. This, however, is an illusion and a fallacious view of America because there are 'dividing lines between the frontiers of humanities in America. Americans maintain the "stand your ground policy"' (Masemola 2014), and in the present-day politics of Donald Trump seeks to erect new walls to stem the entry of Latin Americans into its territorial borders. There is a disjuncture between a mythical view of America as a biblical land of milk and honey and the bitter American realities experienced by black people and immigrants. Segregation and surveillance are ever present. Immigrants are in a state of in-betweenness, a 'third space' according to Bhabha (1994) that is neither inside nor outside. This third space is uncomfortable: it is what Fanon (1967) terms a zone of non-being. Darling encounters such harsh realities about America and she registers her shock: 'The place does not look like my America, doesn't even look real' (Bulawayo 2013:150).

Likewise, the narrator in Jinga's novel finds the behaviour of South African Home Affairs officials shocking. The realities of the rainbow nation are horrifying, as black migrants are alienated and segregated (Naidoo 2017). Navigation into and within South Africa is strictly regulated. In *One Foreigner's Ordeal*, the protagonist's education is rendered irrelevant and useless as he struggles to secure legal status. He is mocked and humiliated by a less educated South African 'boss' when he becomes a '*mothusi wa mosomi*', a worker's assistant during the construction of *mokhukhu*. The narrator says, 'Cognisant of my diminished social standing, I made serious efforts to seek any form of employment' (Jinga 2012:45). Educated Zimbabweans are reduced to a laughing stock as another former Zimbabwean teacher becomes a cattle minder in South Africa.

The passage above highlights the hostility of the host country which is further shown when some South Africans launch a programme code-named operation '*Buyela Ekhaya*' (Operation Return Home) meant to deport all non-South Africans. The operation is characterised by violence in the form of 'pangas, assegais, sjamboks, fire, fists and booted feet' (Jinga 2012:108). The narrator is reminded of Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina (Clean up trash) enforced by the state and targeting poor urbanites assumed to be opposition supporters. In the South African context, the immigrants reincarnate the trash that has to be cleaned up, dredging up the uncanny drama back in Zimbabwe.

## Artistic armoury in semantic ambiguities, metaphor and allusion

Metaphor is considered one of the essential features of language and thought. Reddy (2003) posits that human thought processes are largely metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) and Reddy (2003) explain in detail the semantic frames evoked by metaphoric language. They also argue that creative use of metaphors foregrounds aspects of meaning. A fascinating insight comes from Saeed (1998) who claims that metaphor reaches its most sophisticated forms in poetics where most metaphoric words are polysemous and such semantic ambiguity is advantageous in repressive states. The following citation demonstrates the use of metaphoric language to capture the reader's attention. The narrator in *We Need New Names* says:

> When things fall apart the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky … Look at them leaving in droves despite knowing they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave, knowing they will speak in dampened whispers because they must not leave footprints on the new earth lest they be mistaken for those who want to claim the land as theirs. Look at them leaving in droves arm in arm with loss and lost, look at them leaving in droves. (Jinga 2012:146)

Here, the implosion of the Zimbabwean nation is rendered as extremely scary: citizens leave in great numbers, equated to flocks of birds. Repetition is forcefully used to invite the reader to 'look at them', making the gaze a monumental verb.

The metaphor of a 'burning sky' shows that the lives of citizens are at stake; therefore, they flee for dear life despite the fact that they would not be unaccepted in the new borders. It is worth noting that the narrative does not present a direct critique of the hand behind the 'falling apart of things', but rather mourns the plight of citizens. Semantic ambiguity here is employed to condemn the Mugabe government for making ordinary citizens vulnerable. Disambiguation in reading such semantic representations is usually achieved through contextualisation of the utterances. The isolation and segregation of migrants cause extreme discomfort and anxiety arising from a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, hence they 'speak in dampened whispers'. Fear is deeply entrenched in the psyche of the migrant. Both visual and auditory sensual domains evoke sympathy for the migrants who are victims of forced departure. In *One Foreigner's Ordeal*, the uneasiness of immigrants is expressed through intertextual reference:

> An immigrant feels uneasy whenever a thought crosses the mind that the residence status is yet to be regularised. To borrow from Chinua Achebe, people without travelling papers feel the same discomfort that old people do when 'dry bones are mentioned in a proverb'. The mere sight of a police van is enough to send shivers down the spine. It gives people an awkward feeling to discover that for the first time in their lives, their status has changed from being law-abiding citizens into something else whose spoor the police or immigration officers are keenly interested in. (Jinga 2012:41)

Similarly, the narrator in *We Need New Names* further says:

> When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. […] And because we were illegals and afraid to be discovered we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind and shied away from those who were not like us. We did not know what they would think of us, what they would do about us […] We hid our real names, and gave false ones when asked. (Bulawayo 2013: 242)

> […] And when at work they asked for our papers, we scurried like startled hens and flocked to unwanted jobs, where we met the others, many others. Others with names like myths, names like puzzles, names we had never heard before. (Bulawayo 2013:243)

In *One Foreigner's Ordeal,* through historical allusion, the narrator also bemoans exclusionary policies as a brainchild of colonialists who left Africa divided. The narrator has this to say about the Limpopo River that serves as an artificial boundary between South Africa and Zimbabwe:

> This is the river whose majesty way back in 1884, at the Berlin Conference, the hawk-like eyes of the colonialists did not miss. It became a useful physical feature for their partition of Africa agenda. Communities which had interacted closely for centuries, which in some cases spoke the same language or sister language varieties, found themselves belonging to separate countries. Some suddenly became insiders and others outsiders. This is the river whose mere existence some people believe is enough to result in many biological, intellectual and behavioural differences between the black people who inhabit opposite sides of its bank. This is the river which Ngugi wa Thiong'o might have wanted to call 'the river between'. (Jinga 2012:9–10)

The direct intertextual reference to the eponymous title of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel, *The River Between*, together with the metaphor of the river here serves to show artificiality of borders and how they have been invented by colonialists to classify and differentiate African peoples. The sad contemporary reality is that even after the demise of colonialism, Africa maintains such demarcations to divide its own people.

Political suppression is a major theme in the selected narratives. The metaphoric deaths of Bornfree and Freedom convey political intolerance, curtailment of freedom of expression and use of brute force by the those in power. In Zimbabwe, members of the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), are labelled 'sell-outs, friends of colonialists, paid by America and Britain' to sell the country to white people (Bulawayo 2013:141). The incident where Bornfree in butchered to death tells a macabre story of the death of conscience and the genesis of autocratic tendencies in Zimbabwe. It reflects betrayal of the fecund ideals of independence by postcolonial black leaders. Historical allusion to the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina is made in both novels. Baby Freedom, for instance, dies during the violent 'clean-up' programme. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, a novel by Tagwira, two toddlers die when the shacks they were sleeping in were bulldozed by the state police.

Because of the gross violation of human rights by the Zimbabwean government, citizens become enervated but still determined to change the leadership. One of the slum dwellers, Messenger, says:

> Well your God is listening because the change everybody's been crying for is finally here. Yes, it is, watch, Bornfree adds. He waves his stack of papers and I see the words Change, Real Change at the front. (Bulawayo 2013:29)

These young people are impatient with an inchoate Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) leadership such that they boldly campaign for change. However, Mother of Bones, who epitomises elderly people, is very cautious in her approach to change in Zimbabwean politics. She would welcome change but she warns against extreme excitement in removing Mugabe and ZANU PF leadership through popular protest marches or the ballot box:

> Fools, Mother of Bones says … What do they think they are doing yanking a lion's tail? Don't they know that they will be bones if they dare? … You will ask me tomorrow when there are real bones, she says and just looks away at the sky. (Bulawayo 2013:30)

Her prediction comes true when Bornfree is brutally killed by state sympathisers for supporting the opposition. This narrative allows the historical telescope to provide impetus to the fictive world, etching in the process the politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe. The metaphor of a ruthless lion acquires full meaning in the Zimbabwean political context where Robert Mugabe made history for prosecuting and 'silencing' opposition members who dared challenge his political authority. The expressiveness of figurative language serves to defy artistic immolation distributed by the powerful politicians. In this case, metaphor is used to remove all expressive barricades and no 'sacred cow is spared'. (Nyoni 2015:12)

## Satirising the unpalatable social and political problematics

Satire is used to ridicule social and political ills. Even taboo subjects find expression in satirical texts. Satire gives writers some latitude to raise questions about serious and sensitive subjects that are often controversial to discuss openly. Its expressive capacity resides in semantic ambiguities that rely on contextual background for interpretation of the text. Satire is often strategically deployed to reveal the follies and ineptitudes of man in political, social and religious realms. Jinga (2012) appropriates satire to fire a salvo of injunction, showing that it is irresponsible and ridiculous that the Zimbabwean government tarries in issuing travelling documents to its citizens:

> Acquiring the second official travelling document – the passport – was even a more gruelling task. More enemy currency was required. At least the time when my friend and I were making our entry into South Africa, it took a couple of years to get a passport – about half a decade to be exact. It is not my intention to bore you to death with trials and tribulations of acquiring a Zimbabwean passport, dear reader. For this, I refer you to the office of the Prime Minister, one Morgan Tsvangirai, an incumbent to that high office has a personal testimony. (p. 12)

The government's attitude also portrays hypocrisy in its relationship with the West. The immediate quotation criticises inefficiency in service delivery by the Home Affairs Department in Zimbabwe. The narrator ridicules Zimbabwean politicians for recklessly labelling the West and members of the opposition party 'enemy of the state'. This official state rhetoric is contested by Jinga's narrator who shows an awareness of government's distortions and misrepresentations of the West. The West is used as a scapegoat by the ZANU PF leadership. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair (former British prime ministers) and George Bush (former US president) are blamed for everything that goes wrong in Zimbabwe. The Mugabe-led government misinforms the nation through a spurious blame game. Ironically, Zimbabwe needs the 'enemy's currency' more than its own worthless currency for economic and social survival. The Zimbabwean government's sadistic treatment of opposition members is also alluded to by mentioning the MDC president and then Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, the late Morgan Tsvangirai, who had a torrid time securing travel documents. The narratives underscore the complex perceptions of (un)belonging. They are in conversation with the ambivalent notions of national identity and the rights of citizens. Opposition members are victimised by the state for not being politically correct. In *We Need New Names*, the same theme of the politics of displacement, homelessness and belonging is articulated. Those who are labelled enemies of the state are either brutally killed or violently displaced. Readers are left to the defining dialectics of a citizen-non-citizen and the insider–outsider.

Nyambi (2013) comments on Murambatsvina in the novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, and concludes that politically motivated exclusions were dramatised through the clean-up programme. It is apparent that some citizens are more Zimbabwean than others in the Orwellian sense. The narratives destabilise the perception of citizenship as a construct linked to race and indigeneity.

Furthermore, mockery and ridicule are employed to condemn vices in the religious sphere. Desperation makes people seek intervention and intercession from the supernatural world. Sadly, the unsuspecting citizens are manipulated and exploited by religious pretenders and bigots. Both traditional healers and men of cloth are driven by greed and egocentric motives. Satirical elements expose religious charlatans such as fake prophets and traditional healers who are deceitful, pretentious and manipulative. A large sign at Vodloza's shack in Paradise has got the following inscription:

> Vodloza, BESTEST Healer in all of this Paradise and beyond will proper fix all these troublesome things that you may encounter in your life: Be-witchedness, curses, bad luck, whoring spouses, childlessness, poverty, joblessness, AIDS, madness, small penises, epilepsy, bad dreams, bad marriage, competition at work, dead people terrorising you, bad luck with getting visas especially to USA and Britain, nonsenseful people in your life, Things disappearing in your house etc. etc. etc. Please payment in FOREX ONLY. (Bulawayo 2013:27)

Ironically, Vodloza claims to have solutions to poverty yet the healer lives in a shack in an impoverished slum. Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro also takes advantage of the collapse of the health services in the nation and demands 'two fat white virgin goats and five hundred US dollars' for his cleansing prayer sessions (Bulawayo 2013:101). Both Vodloza and prophet Mborro are liars. Mborro, just like the eponymously named pastor in South Africa, has embarrassing carnal weaknesses. Through these characters, the narratives criticise wayward and selfish people who use the mystique of religious healing to scam the wretched of the earth, à la Fanon.

## Narrative titling and the quest for becoming

Pes (2006) posits that titles to literary works are significant stylisation and thematisation strategies that guide interpretations of the texts. The hermeneutical purpose of the titles deserves attention. The titles *One Foreigner's Ordeal* and We *Need New Names* could be interpreted in many ways. The former suggests an urgent craving for reconstruction and redefinition of present humanity, new forms of (un) naming, new homes defined by political and social landscapes that promote the dignity of both citizens and non-citizens. Citizens register their rejection of a kaka national space that is tension-filled, replete with a kaka political leadership that is selfish, divisive and ruthless, a kaka existence that dehumanises ordinary people and kaka identities imposed on others. The use of the collective pronoun 'we' reflects a common craving for new beginnings. It could also be read as a call for some restoration of social,

economic and political sanity in the postcolonial state. The need for radical changes and a return of conscience and democratic practices primes the narrative. In addition, the title also projects an ineluctable longing for new human relationships that remove foreignness and allow meaningful interaction of humanity across ethnic, cultural, national and linguistic boundaries.

New names are identity inscriptions that restore dignity, respectability, security, confidence and acceptance in both national and diasporic spaces. This is a call for new national identities that are neither pitiable nor expendable. The title could also be understood as a desire to discard the ascribed '*makwerekwere*' identity and other names that bolster shame (Naidoo 2017). It is a title that portends change from a life that is dogged by endless suffering and disillusionment. Nyoni (2015) observes that the selection of the word 'need' instead of 'want' reflects the gravity and urgency of the matter. The need to abandon the unpalatable names and assume new positive defining categories and labels is fundamental. The need for new names further implies revolt against victimisation that comes with naming and definitive categories where some citizens or non-citizens become 'us' and 'others' fit into 'them' binaries. Such rigid polarities of inclusion or exclusion are put into conversation. It is again a call for political and social transformation where the repressive state must respect human rights.

The semantic significance of the title *One Foreigner's Ordeal* lies in the lexical choices made. The title foregrounds the catastrophic consequences of poor governance that has led to the demise of a nation and the difficulties of migration. The foreigner (*makwerekwere*, the unwanted stranger) experiences a torrid ordeal. The title summarises the otherness of immigrants and the painful existence in isolated sites, the precariousness of the underclass (Moji 2015; Siziba 2017). The title registers immigrants' nightmare which is a collective experience of (il)legal or (un)documented 'foreigners'. The ordeal entails the elusive search for sanctuaries, documents and jobs. Agony in this ordeal is punctuated by rejection, isolation and exclusion. Unrelieved misery of the common man is foregrounded in both texts. The narratives interrogate names used to define the poor, immigrants and members of the opposition parties labelled enemies of the state or 'Mhandu and hooligans' in the present politics of Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The unnamed protagonist is a foreigner who is denied any stable identity and dignified existence in both the homeland and the host country. Despite the fact that Jinga's protagonist acquires legal migrant status in South Africa, he feels insecure because of xenophobic attacks. In addition, linguistic and cultural differences are easily detectable by South Africans:

> Wherever I go, I always get surprised at how conspicuously foreign I look. Some South Africans just give me a cursory glance and begin to address me in English long before I open my mouth for them to sample my 'rather strange and unfamiliar' accent. (Jinga 2012:180)

This points to the difficulties encountered in trying to form a new identity. One's identity is deeply entrenched in their biological DNA and the novels problematise this construct in multi-layered stylistics such that we get the sense that identity construction is a messy, elusive and unfinished process.

The conditions of migrants in South Africa and America resemble conditions depicted in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* where the characters in these narratives are haunted by anxieties and possess acute awareness of a schizophrenic existence. Because of their status at the periphery, on the margins as immigrants, they are denied a sense of worth. The titles therefore offer interpretive clues that significantly open up multiple semantic possibilities.

# Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it has been observed that the selected novels have interesting stylistic and thematic strands. They are rich intertextual novels, with a focus on the precarious conditions of the ordinary people. The anxieties and experiences of migrants are inscribed through artistic expression. Apparently, the narratives reflect post-2000 realities in Zimbabwe and how these lived and invented conditions impact on the livelihoods of common Zimbabweans. It is particularly important to note that none of the three localities, namely America, South Africa and Zimbabwe, is idealised, although Zimbabwe's sociopolitical problems are more visible and complex than those of the other two countries. Although the migration process is characterised by multiple challenges, it is also essential to acknowledge that diasporic sites offer emancipatory opportunities to migrants. For instance, both protagonists are economically empowered because they earn stable currencies in their respective diasporic places. Darling, in *We Need New Names*, gets both educational and employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the novels do not just speak to each other but rather, they go beyond the confines of national boundaries and interact with other texts from renowned African and non-African writers and critics such as Ngugi, Achebe, Selvon and Fanon. Thus, the narratives contribute to the postcolonial meta-narrative of African fiction. In addition, the narratives make a compelling case for transnational consciousness whereby even writing is no longer confined to the national and regional borders. Both novels depart from such restrictive writing practices thereby subverting and destabilising rigid canonisation of literary works. The diverse meanings of these fictional narratives as perceived from the lens of intertextuality are protean in nature and should not be read and interpreted as autonomous entities but rather as products of previous works offering a mosaic of meanings. The novels give account of the perennial problems faced by ordinary citizens and the dreaded process of migration. They also delineate contemporary topical discourses of boundaries and the crises of (un)belonging in (trans)national spaces. The conscious awareness of territoriality in the contemporary societies is symbolically articulated through the Limpopo River. It is clear that these narratives call for the reconfiguration of the river between the peoples in modern societies that hinder the fluidity of healthy human relations.

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