

Versions of Home in Mutasa's Novel *Nyambo DzeJoni*: Unlocking the Message and the Messenger

by

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Abstract

This paper critically analyses Mutasa's vision of home(s) in *Nyambo DzeJoni* (2000) 'Jest from Joni.' Writing from the Diaspora, the author introduces a novel technical approach in Shona novelistic discourses by blending the narrative and epistolary forms. This technique becomes appropriate as it perfectly links work and home-country, thereby setting the stage for a problematic discussion of home. The contention in the paper is that, through Tom, the writer of the letter, Mutasa brings out various versions of home which are supposed to be mutually compatible. Part of the versions of home decipherable in the letter include, home-country, Africa as confraternal home, home as place to be defended, home as where one escapes from and escapes to. The construction of the versions of home is consciously built around the dialectical tension between inclusion and exclusion. The friction engendered between the two opposites is what gives the epistle its intrinsic dynamic outlook as the author strives to disvalue exclusion while valuing inclusion.

The basis for the realisation of these versions of home is travel or mobility which leads into various encounters – good and bad. In the process, the author also indicts home(s) for an armada of pitfalls which identify this space with problems. Some of the problems find revelation in Tom's indictment of xenophobic behaviours as the mechanics of exclusion. While discourses on home have largely become synonymous with the postcolonial theory, it seems the author discusses the concept of home through what appears to be the lenses of Pan Africanism.

Introduction

Mutasa's *Nyambo DzeJoni* (2000) expands the literary turf in Shona novelistic creations by discursively experimenting with the narrative and epistolary forms. The novel is a personal letter addressed to Shona speakers. Shona speakers constitute the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe. In the letter, the author re-defines and re-draws the contours of dialogical engagement in the Shona novel through a conscientiously undertaken discussion of the concept of home and homes. Of note is the manner in which the author blends the narrative and epistle forms in weaving and constructing a deliberately problematized conception of home(s). Against this backdrop, this paper contends that, Mutasa problematized and simultaneously notion of home(s) through what may appear to be lenses of Pan Africanism. Pan Africanism is a movement mobilized around the idea of African or Black solidarity. Simultaneously, the paper also advances the contention that the writer's conceptualization of home derives from Shona ontological assumptions in which home is not an exclusive enclosure.

Part of the writer's discursive paraphernalia on home include, home as a place where one comes from (home-country), Africa as confraternal home, home as place to be defended, home as a place where one escapes from and escapes to, home as exclusion and home as inclusion. These versions of home are not mutually exclusive as they concatenate to form a seamless discourse on home(s). Writing from the Diaspora, the epistolary form becomes an omniscient mirror through which the author kaleidoscopically imagines and re-imagines, questions and answers, draws and redraws the contours of home(s), space and location. Similarly, the epistle passes as a messenger that affirms and at the same time concretises his spiritual links with home-country. The significance of the messenger, in this case the epistle, lies in the fact it has a long history of facilitating links between migrant workers and their home-countries. In the late 1890s and beyond the letter proved to be a very important tool in facilitating communication between the migrant workers on the plantations and mines in South Africa and their home-country. As such, its historical significance cannot be overemphasized.

According to Jaas, a Shangaani informant, 'letter writing enabled the migrant to respond swiftly to appeals for help from home, and it provided a conduit for the information and knowledge that brought home and work into a single geographical space' (Harris, 1994: 217). In this regard, it becomes an important technology in the dialogues on home.

It should also be pointed out that, through the letter, Mutasa fulfils what the Shona expect from their sons and daughters. Ontologically, the Shona expect their sons and daughters who have travelled to be their eyes and ears. In fact, they are ambassadors of the community. It is against this existentially and culturally sanctioned awareness that reporting back becomes an inescapable social and cultural duty. This epistemological and ontological duty of reporting to the community is linked to the fact that Shona people have at different times engaged and interacted with different communities in their quest for survival.

Travel as Indigenous Technology

Travel as indigenous resource is inalienably linked to the architectonics of political, economic and social engineering of home and home-country. It expands and re-fashions the conceptual turf and cognitive construction of home(s). Similarly, travel and home are intricately intertwined. Travel presupposes organized mobility away from home. The destination engendered by such mobility may be a home that is different from home-country. It is this awareness and the struggle to create an overlapping conception of home that concerns Tom in *Nyambo DzeJoni*. In the epistle, travel is profoundly fundamental in that it shapes Tom's conceptualization and attitude towards home-country and home in general. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, philosophical expressions like *Chitsva chiri murutsoka magaro haana chawo* 'It is through travel that one finds new things, sitting has no rewards,' *Tsoka ndimandirase* 'Feet can lead anywhere,' *Kugara nhaka huona dzavamwe* 'Good things are learnt from others,' expressly project travel as an investment necessary for the transformation of the individual and the group. For that reason, it is a form of transcendence which diversifies human possibilities. And the consequent diversification of human possibilities is in itself an act of humanization.

In the letter to Phianos, Tom has no condemnations for travel. To him, travel is not flight or escape from active engagement, but an attempt to derive from the power of mobility life-furthering possibilities. Thus, Shona people have always exploited travel as one of the several indigenous knowledge and technology systems available to them to transcend crises and pursue 'higher resolves in their search for total liberation [and happiness]' (Ngugi and Mugo, 1983: iv). Investment in mobility as resource is defended by Tom, because Shona people's 'fears are not of motion. We are not a people of dead, stagnant waters; hence reasons and promptings of our own have urged much movement on us - expected, peaceful, repeated motion' (Armah, 1973: 5). According to Tom, to invest in travel is an act of courage. His aggressive defence of travel as technology of survival falls into what p'Bitek presents as, 'The African...lived and lives in the thick battle of life, here and there' (1986: 21).

Among southern Africans, South Africa has been a historical destination for many people seeking fortunes because of the diamond fields in Kimberley and gold in Witwatersrand. Wilson (1972: 1) states in bold that ‘migrant labour is nothing new in South Africa’ Harris gives an illuminating account of migration patterns into South Africa as various people from different countries left their home-countries to work on the sugar plantations and the gold, coal and diamond mines. Tom’s grandfather migrated to South Africa where he lived from 1916 to 1944. This comes out when Tom sought advice from his friend, Phianos, in order to make an informed opinion.

Chounotya ikoko chii? Kuti Hakuna vanhu here? Inga sekuru vako vakagara Joni kubva 1916 kusvika 1944 (7).

What are you afraid of there? Are there no people? Your grandfather lived in Johannesburg from 1916 to 1944.

Though we are not given reasons that prompted him to travel and stay in South Africa for almost three decades, we can estimate that he was seeking employment. Maposa, too, has been in South Africa for almost four decades. Just like Tom’s grandfather, VaDhibha migrated to South Africa in 1944. It is highly palpable from his discussion with Tom that he migrated to South Africa in order to seek employment. He makes reference to the horrendous and dehumanizing experiences on the farms and plantations as follows:

Unoona mumapurazi umu? Vanhu vaiitwa mufudze mumunda. Tarakita dzaikunguruka dzichifusira zvitunha. Iwe nyika ino yakaerera ropa (27-8).

The white people were very bad; ... You see these farms? People were turned into manure in these fields. Tractors made several trips burying corpses. Blood was shed in this country.

For these men coming from Rhodesia, their land had been expropriated and the whole population condemned to overcrowded and life-negating reserves. Hunting and other food producing activities had been completely outlawed. Yet people were expected to survive and pay various taxes. The monetization of the southern Rhodesian economy meant that people had to look for alternative sources of acquiring money for taxes. It is against this backdrop that they invested in mobility, a traditional resource. These men would repatriate part of their earnings for the sustenance of those at home. When home becomes a penitentiary and triggers inordinate existential discomfiture, travel is one of the several reactions. Those travelling away from home after the attainment of independence from colonial Rhodesia are prompted to do so mainly by economic reasons.

However, such economic reasons cannot be separated from the political realities obtaining in a country. Tom leaves home because he has been offered a lucrative contract at Murroy and Robins in South Africa. The conditions of service and benefits are irresistible. Earlier on, he had rejected a managerial offer at Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation because *Mari yacho yakange isingafadze sezvave kuita mazuva ano* (3) 'The remuneration was not pleasing unlike these days.' Zvichemo, a graduate from the University of Zimbabwe, and now a holder of a PhD has also trekked down South where as of now: ... *agarika. Akatotengawo motokari nekombuyuta mbiri* (51) 'He is sitting pretty well. He managed to buy a car and two computers.' The unmistakable impression is that, with the conditions of service in Zimbabwe, he could not have afforded these basics. Josiya Dadirai, who graduated with a Masters in Economics from South Korea, came back home and failed to get employment. Tom tells us that:

Akabva nedhigiri rake reMasters muEconomics. Aiti akauya kumusha kuZimbabwe basa rikamunetsa saka akabva angonanga kuno ... Zvisinei iko zvino ave kushandira kune imwe kambani yehwaini uko kwaakaitwa mumwe wemadharekita ekambani (88).

He came back with a Masters in Economics. He says when he came to Zimbabwe he could not secure a job and decided to come here. Now, he is working for a wine manufacturing company as one of the directors.

At the same time, Tom refers to many attempts to leave home-country through illegal and dangerous means like border jumping. What is worrying is the number of academics and other professionals who have embraced travel as resource. The danger is that Zimbabwe ends up in a severe crisis of human resources.

While home-country experiences a severe shortage of human resources, South Africa as alternative home experiences a boom in skilled manpower. The extent to which a country realizes development is commensurate with its capacity to train and retain its professionals. The consistency with which Mutasa brings out such images is an indictment of the economic policies in the home-country. d'Andrade 1907 establishes a nexus between such mass mobility and poor performance of the Mozambican economy. He 'saw the economic malaise affecting Mozambique as an "*organic sickness*" caused by "*the lack of production*" and the exportation of its life force – the natives' (Harris, 1994: 226). Mass travel from and mass desertion of home-country by the economically productive citizen's means that the Zimbabwean economy is not only in a quagmire, but is likely to remain in such a nadir for a long time. In this regard, travel becomes a statement of protest. Evidence from the above indicates that this protest is directed at the shrinkage of social, economic and political spaces. Such restricted spaces become prohibitive in the realisation of various intellectual talents. Travel as response to such circumstances can be likened to what the Igbo refer to when they say 'you do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade; you must imitate its motion' (Achebe, 1989: 65).

Tom's concern about the wretchedness and degradation of the environment in home-country is a scathing metaphor of the general desolation and despair that is stampeding people out of Zimbabwe.

Nyika yandakasiya iri mateve, nzizi dzichishinyira nemvura nhasi ndonzwa kuti dzaoma. Checheni rwaiva nengwena nhasi ndonzwa kuti rave jecha chete. Nyika yave gwenga. Zvinorwadza sei, hama yangu, kunzwa kuti n'ombe dziya dzandakatenga dzose dzakatsvairwa? Dzababa dzasara dzofura ivhu chete. Handifari kunzwa kuti vanhu vopera nenzara (1).

For a country that I left lush, with rivers overflowing now I hear the same rivers have dried up. Checheni, which used to harbour crocodiles now I hear it is filled with sand. The country is now a desert. How it pains me, my kin, to hear that all the cattle I bought died. Father's cattle which are left now graze the soil. It makes me sad to hear that people are perishing from hunger.

Other Zimbabwean writers have also captured or referred to the metaphor of drought in their works. These include Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and *Coming of the Dry Season* (1981), Marechera in *House of Hunger* (1978), and Chiwome in *Masango Mavi* (1998) 'Hostile Jungle.' The drying up of rivers symbolizes the total collapse of various social, political and economic support systems and safety nets that ameliorate living conditions. As a result, human beings become completely elbowed out of the process of living and are aborted by events. Crocodiles which used to be in Checheni River show the formidable nature of the nation before the 'drought.' Home-country is likened to a great human desert in which it is almost impossible to live. It has become a vast expanse of nothingness and emptiness. Such conditions promote travel in search of verdant homes. Tom also depicts other Zimbabwean women who frequently travel between Zimbabwe and South Africa in order to circumvent this drought.

Pan African Construction of Home

Through Tom, the author seems to construct and advertise the idea of overlapping homes. Such fluid and interlocking homes are expressed as part of the writer's Pan Africanist vision. At the same time it is a vision that cannot be separated from mobility or travel as resource. He believes in the idea of one Africa where inclusion rather exclusion is sine qua non. In this scheme of things, the domestication and visualization of home as an exclusive category is detrimental to African progress and the image of the continent.

The confraternal philosophy which underlies the writer's contentions is also echoed in Shona proverbs like *Mweni haapedzi dura* 'A visitor does not finish a granary,' *Chenga ose manhanga hapana risina mhodzi* 'Do not discriminate pumpkins because all have seed' and *Imbwa yomupfuuri haipedzi sadza* 'A dog in transit does not finish sadza.' The nature of these Shona oral traditions is participation, inclusion and not isolation or exclusion. While Mutasa writes glowingly about such fluid constructions of home, he believes that one must do so from the point of groundedness. To attempt to participate in the notion of overlapping homes outside the context of such centeredness is to stand on intellectual quicksand.

The idea of a commonwealth of African homes united by their Africanness resonates throughout the letter. This is meant to rescue Africa from a carnage of emotions and a wreckage of identities visited upon it by successive Arabian and European colonialisms. The impression that has been created is that Africa is a hopelessly divided home made up of conflicting and irreconcilable homes and ethnic groups. This has been done by emphasizing the 'differences in language, and customs - even physique - from one society to the other. They do this with good reason' (Ani, 1980: 1). It is against this backcloth that Tom, in his personal letter to Phianos, emphasizes the idea of a Pan African home.

Throughout the letter, Tom makes several references to some of the languages that are used in South Africa. These include Afrikaans, Sotho and Venda among others. While such an act might appear insignificant, it reflects a profound desire by Tom to be part of the community he is living in. It is an act of inclusion inspired by the desire to be an active participant without any prejudices. Instead of confining himself to his Shona and English, he embraces an openness that debunks and explodes exclusion. This act falls squarely into the writer's Pan African desire of home. One also realizes the same perception of African realities in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* where the author draws his characters' names from across the African continent. He uses names like Dovi, Gwelo (Zimbabwe), Kamuzu (Malawi), Abena (Ghana), Isanusi (South Africa) and many other African places. Such creative engagement trivializes Western perceptions of Africa as a fragmented continent. It also popularizes the idea of African union as possibility rather than mere wishful thinking. Armah has justified such inclusiveness as shown by Mutasa and himself in the following words: 'That we Black people are one we know. Destroyers will travel long distances in their minds and out to deny you this truth...' (Armah, 1973: 3). For that reason, it is narrow and narrowing to contend that Tom refers to various excerpts from the above languages because of his migrant status. At the same time, some might also argue that since Tom is a member of the excluded groups, he feels the pressure and urgency to be included. The author clearly canvasses support for a vast ideological, philosophical and pedagogical curriculum which transcends difference. His vision is, therefore, intellectually and pedagogically satisfying as he questions and provides answers to the governing principles of exclusion and inclusion.

As a result of his Pan African notion of home, he satirizes some characters for their xenophobic tendencies which are based principally on exclusion. Terms like *Makwerekwere* (13, 14) 'Foreigners' and *Mabhurandaya* (91) 'Those from Malawi' are not only derogatory but also function to subvert the idea of overlapping African homes. He gives a lot of descriptive attention to such practices which seem to validate European contentions of an ethnically diverse Africa. While discussing with Ngobeni, a South African, Tom informs him that students at the University of Zimbabwe also commemorate the 16th of June every year. Ngobeni is surprised to hear this.

Ndakasunungura mwoyo wake nokutaura izvo zvataiita nevamwe vadzidzi paYunivhesiti yeZimbabwe South Africa isati yave kuzvitonga. Ndakataura zvose zvokuswera nenzara paYunivhesiti musi wa16 Chikumi wegore roga roga... Ngobeni akashamisika kunzwa kuti dzimwe nyika dzainge dzichivabatsira (15).

I relieved his heart by telling him what students at the University of Zimbabwe used to do before South Africa attained its independence. I told him about how students at the University would eat nothing on the 16th of June every year... Ngobeni was surprised to hear that other countries were also supporting them.

The idea of African solidarity is further buttressed by the fact that this day has become the official day of the African child. Zimbabweans themselves are also victims of the machinations of imperialism where several innocent and unarmed civilians were massacred at camps like Nyadzonya and Tembwe. The commemoration of the Sharpeville Massacre by Zimbabweans is based on an awareness of a shared philosophy of African home(s), brotherhood and sisterhood. It also symbolizes a united front against imperialism. The same obtains when South Africa wins the African Cup of Nations. All southern Africans, including Tom celebrate what he considers a victory for home. *Gore riya takapembera sokupembera kwatakaita vatema vawana masimba muno. Takaita svondo dzinokwana nhatu tichingopemberera (68).* 'That year we celebrated like we did when Blacks attained independence here. We spent three weeks in celebration.'

According to Tom, the victory was not just a South African victory, it was a victory for southern Africa. South Africa, therefore, represented all SADC nations that failed to win. This is why Tom and other southerners celebrated. They considered the victory to be theirs as well, which puts Southern Africa on the map of international recognition while increasing its visibility. Yet, such regional cognition of home does not in any way undermine the author's Pan African notion of home, and thus, it represents a statement on good neighbourliness.

Because of Tom's attitude and definition of home, he feels betrayed when fellow South African brothers fail to embrace him. *Ndaifunga kuti Africa ndeyedu tose vatema...nyika yamarudzi namarudzi...ndiyo nyika yataiti hativhunduke kutsika; ine miganhu yataive tisina matyira kuyambuka...* (43). 'I thought Africa belonged to us all Blacks...a country made up of different people...this is the country we were never afraid of traversing; with boundaries we were not afraid to cross.' Similarly, Tom makes reference to Ngirandi's song sung during the all-night gatherings in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. The song is titled "*Africa ngaikudzwe sedzimwe nyika...*" (43) 'May Africa be respected like other countries.' This song is more of an equivalence of *Ishe Komborera Africa* 'God Bless Africa'. It redounds with echoes of a united Africa. In this scheme, Africa should be accorded the respect it deserves. Apart from the call for justice for Africa, there is also an appeal for unity and harmony on the African continent. Tom therefore vacillates between aggressively vituperative attacks on his fellow South African brothers and a moderate and persuasive discursive mode in which he tries to convince them about the benefits of mutual existence.

At the same time, Tom feels that he stands available to serve Africa. This is particularly the case where his services are essential and stand to benefit fellow African sisters and brothers. Therefore, territorial demarcations and geographical spaces must not be elevated to a position where they preclude flexible participation in Africa. *Izvi ndakafunga kuti ndaifanira kunge ndichizviitira kunyika yandakazvarirwa. Zvisinei, pandakafunga kuti ndakaberekerwa kushandira Africa ndakanzwa mwoyo kunyevenuka* (44). 'I thought I should be doing this for my country of birth. However, I felt relieved the moment I thought that I was born to serve Africa.' And being Zimbabwean should not be a fixating label. In the eyes of Tom, it becomes too reductionist to attempt to embrace such an attitude. Africa is envisaged as a family. Therefore, by rendering his services to South Africa, Tom feels that he is working for the development of Africa. Thus, he seeks to cultivate a consciousness of home in which all Africans are brother and sister to the other.

This vision of a universal African brotherhood and sisterhood leads to the rethinking of home(s) and place in Africa. As has been indicated before, African people can best survive in the context of the group. When they were colonized, they were colonized as a supposedly inferior race. All racist parlance like 'At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit...' (Hegel, 1952: 199) was directed at African people and not individual African nations. Against this background, the canonization and construction of an inclusive African philosophy of home must partly be based on this terrible and indelible fact. Hence, in the words of Hoffer, 'we are united by hating in common and by being hated in common' (1955: 129).

As a result of such a temperament, Tom has no mercy for incompetent characters like Stein who fail to accommodate other Africans just because they are non South Africans. Their actions are inspired by jealousy and a narrow and moribund conception of life. All the violence against so-called foreigners is condemned by Tom as a failure to appreciate the richness of the collective African experience. He feels apartheid infected some of the citizens with a deformed consciousness shows that the system was based on separation and exclusion of all Black people. Hence, it appears that characters like Stein and others in the letter have unconsciously subscribed to the same subversive philosophy. Unfortunately, this acquiescence seems to have reincarnated a new form of apartheid which is rather bastardized and morbid; hence, this version of apartheid is accused of undermining the relatedness, rejuvenating and constant communion among Africans.

In the townships, some foreigners who include Zimbabweans, Malawians, and Mozambicans are brutalized for trespassing on a home that is not theirs. Muzondiwa, a Zimbabwean is murdered. Zakaria, a Zambian was arrested in Pretoria. And as Tom sees it, this is some kind of reverse apartheid. They are subjected to inhuman treatment, which reminds one of apartheid. For instance, Tom informs Phianos that:

Kurukisheni runonzi Zanda vatema vanobva kwedu nedzimwe nyika vakabudiswa mudzimba dzavo navakomana vaive vakapakatira pfuti...Nyaya yakanyanyorwadza ndeyevakomana vaya, vanoti vaviri vokuGambia, mumwe wokuMalawi, vamakanzwa vachinzi vakarohwa muchitima vakakandirwa panze napahwindo rechitima (53).

In one of the locations called Zanda, Blacks from our country and from other countries were force-marched out of their houses by gun totting boys ... The most painful story was that of two boys, one from Gambia and one from Malawi, whom, as you heard, were thrown out of a moving train.

Apart from reflecting the exclusive nature of home, the life-obliterating violence is presented as a hangover from apartheid. The manner in which the citizens of Gambia and Malawi are thrown out is a metaphor for total exclusion; which symbolizes the total elimination of other human categories that are non South African.

Like apartheid which sought to eliminate all Blacks and create an exclusively white South Africa, Black characters have acquiesced to the mechanisms of exclusion represented by apartheid. Ani gives a graphic presentation of what apartheid sought to do in South Africa by referring to P. W. Botha's speech delivered in 1985 and addressed to his "beloved White Afrikaansers":

Priority number one, we should not, by all means allow anymore increase of the Black population lest we be choked very soon. [He advocates the use of] chemical weapons...to combat any further population increases [and] fertility destroyers. I am also sending a special request to all Afrikaner mothers to double their birth rate...we should engage higher gear to make sure that Black men are separated from their women and fines be imposed upon married wives who bear illegitimate children (Ani, 1994: 288).

In a television programme hosted by Mulaudzi, various characters justify their exclusion of foreigners from their home because of a number of reasons. Mabhena, who represents the Unemployed Association of Zanda, is of the opinion that his members are unemployed because of the influx of foreigners. However, this is countered by a Zimbabwean who informs viewers that he filled a vacant post. At the same time, he challenges characters like Mabhena to apply for the four hundred posts that require qualified engineers. No one responds. *Zvino hama dzangu kambani yedu inoda mazana mana akaita injiniyarin'i, kana paine akaita kosi iyi andione chironywa chisati chapera (57)*. 'Now, my relatives, our company requires four hundred engineers. If there is anyone trained as an engineer, may he or she see me after the programme.'

From the above, one can discern that as a result of unequal opportunities between Blacks and whites under apartheid, Blacks were radically disadvantaged and disempowered. They were not afforded opportunities that would make them compete with whites as equals on the job market. The fact that no one comes up to take the offer can also be attributed to the South African economy's overdependence on migrant labour. This seems to have had a subversive effect on the local people's ability to acquire skills. It is against this background that some characters seem to be disadvantaged on the job market. This also leads them to see foreigners as subhuman. Towards the end of the programme Mulaudzi encourages coexistence among members from different African nations in the following words:

Munhu munhu chete...Sevanhu venyama tose tine zvido, shungu dzokubudirira. Tinofanira kubatana, kugarisana nevamwe, kuitirana mutsa, zvisinei kuti anobva kupi (58).

A human being is a human being...As people of flesh we have our own interests, and the desire to succeed. We must embrace each other, stay together with others, and have mercy on others regardless of where they come from.

It is this philosophy of home that Tom believes in. The above Pan African philosophy is further concretised through Jerry's sojourn in Sweden. Jerry, a South African, goes through a painful learning experience. At this point, the letter becomes a moral narrative through which the author seeks to discursively banish xenophobic and other exclusion-oriented tendencies. He shows the imprudence behind upholding a rigid and exclusive notion of home. When he travels to Sweden, Jerry is betrayed by his European pen pals who had promised to wait for him at the airport. Without any where to go and lacking knowledge of the place, he is hosted by David Musavengana, a Zimbabwean living in Sweden. Musavengana gives him first class hospitality based on a firm understanding of African collegiality. He is part of Shona culture which trains its progeny that *Shiri ipinda haipedzi mhunga* 'A bird in transit does not finish sorghum' (107). Another African brother, Sizinyo, from Mozambique introduces him to campus life in Sweden.

What is most striking in this experience is that Zimbabweans and Mozambicans are the targets of most violent attacks back home in South Africa. As a result of the treatment that he gets from fellow Africans, Jerry is born again. He regrets the ill-treatment of other Africans back home and vows to educate his family and other citizens. He fully appreciates that human beings everywhere constantly seek transcendental possibilities which shift them from their home-countries. In this regard, the moral pedagogy of the epistle finds unambiguous expression through Jerry's testimony. The challenge for Africans is to transcend narrow colonial boundaries and participate in a pool of African collegiality. It is counterproductive and subversive to be handcuffed with the disarming philosophy of exclusive African homes. However, such consciousness of home must be built on a firm appreciation of the value of home-country in any attempts at mobility.

In Defence of Home-Country

According to Tom, failure to vindicate home-country is a sure sign of acquiescence into the logic of defeat. This is unlike Mugoshi's characters with a vague understanding of home. To them, home is neither here nor there. There is no justification in defending it because it offers nothing in return. Characters in Mungoshi's novels see home as *dondo* 'bush' where one is in danger of losing his or her bearings. Lucifer in *Waiting for the Rain* pathologically detests home and wishes he were born somewhere else, neither in Zimbabwe nor in Africa. He contemptuously says of home:

I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere...of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and never shall...and if ever I leave this place I am not going to come back...I have been born here but...that is...only a biological and geographical error...(1975: 162).

Eric in *Kunyarara Hakusi Kutaura?*, he believes home is where there are...*up-to-date facilities zvokuti hapana chaunoshaya* 'up to date facilities where you find everything' (1983: 44). Under such circumstances, the link between the characters and their home is very remote. They all want to run away from it and permanently sever all tissues that bind them to it. On the other hand, Tom believes that home-country is the source of life and inspiration. Despite the problems that it might experience, the urge to defend and believe in it remains resolute and deathless. It should be '... a natural, perhaps even an instinctive reaction of all living organisms...' (Ramose, 1999: ii).

This seems to be the case because a people without a clear sense of home; *just as a tree without roots is dead, a people without roots is dead, a people without history or cultural roots becomes a dead people ... You know, you can take a tree, you can tell what kind of a tree it is by looking at the leaves. If the leaves are gone, you can look at the bark and tell what kind it is. But when you find a tree with the leaves gone and the bark gone, everything gone, you call that a what? – a stump; and you can't identify a stump as easily as you can identify a tree* (Malcolm X, 1970: 16).

In order to avoid being an anonymous stump, VaDhibha exhorts Tom that: *Musha chinhu chakakosha, mwana...Ibasa ratagarira kuno mwana, asi kumusha kumusha wena. Mupote muchienda kumusha* (27) 'Home-country is a very important place, my son...It is just work that keeps us here, but home-country is best. Do not forget to visit home.'

In this dialogue on homes, home-country affords individuals an identity, culture and history without which they degenerate into a motley array of anonymous and nameless travesties. The presence of home-country also lends purpose, direction and credence to one's travel abroad. Otherwise, there is a danger for individuals to be viewed as '... dry leaves, smoke or clouds which are blown here and there by the wind' (p'Bitek, 1986: 13). In this regard, Tom feels home-country should be defended. One can note that, since he is writing to Phianos who is in Zimbabwe, the defence of home is intended to cast him as patriotic. This is borne out of awareness that the possibility to be labelled unpatriotic and escapist by those who are at home is very high.

At times Tom believes in the aggressive defence of home-country especially when it is slandered. To him, it is a kind of an intellectual warfare. Such an aggressive defence of home is a counter discourse to the xenophobic tendency of some characters who deride Zimbabwe. *Angoti chakati ndinomubvunza kuti iye pachake anei. Vazhinji vanogara muzvitangwena* (67) 'If anyone says anything unpalatable, I will ask him what he has himself. Most of them leave in shacks.' While South Africa is an attractive destination, it also has extensive scenes of poverty. Joram's daughter, Ruramai, expresses her shock on finding out ubiquitous shanty settlements. She thinks South Africa has beautiful highways because the road department has many workers. She comes to that conclusion because the settlements that she has seen in Zimbabwe are for temporary workers.

Such revelations which run with predictable consistency throughout the epistle are meant to put home-country in positive light because it is in danger of being submerged and made invisible by the magnetic power of South Africa. The message is that, South Africa, which is economically powerful, has got numerous problems which are not found in home-country. For instance, there is criminal activity which the law cannot cope with. This includes rape, armed robbery, murder, and etcetera. The nostalgic reconstruction of home is part of this counter discourse which defends home-country.

To some extent, one notices a worrying ambivalence in Tom's construction of home-country. This comes out when he blames those back home for engaging in violent demonstrations in which cars were burnt and houses destroyed. He says:

Nhau dzokutsva kwezvimwe zvitoro, dzimba nemotokari vanhu vari pasitiraiki mudhorobha reHarare mugore ra1996 dzakatirwadza nokutinyadzisa zvikuru. Izvi zvakaitika apo vashandi vazhinji vakati vanoda kuwedzerwa mari...Isu zvinotirwadzisa nokuti tinenge tave kusekwa (98).

News about the burning of shops, houses and cars during a strike in Harare in 1996 pained us a lot. This happened when workers said they wanted their salaries to be increased... This brings a lot of pain to us because people will be laughing at us.

The reason why various characters have resorted to travel as a resource is a result of the state of the economy. As said before, some even risk their lives through illegal travel into South Africa. While Tom is fully aware of the deplorable state of the economy, he blames those back home for sending wrong signals to the outside world. In this regard, he is mainly concerned about the welfare of those who are outside who end up being ridiculed by foreigners. In our opinion, such a concern becomes individualistic, because it is largely the context which determines people's reactions.

There are times when deprivation becomes a threatening violence which Fanon has described as an unthinking 'machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence' (1963: 48). Under such circumstances people's reactions cannot be based on deliberate rational decisions because the urge to survive supersedes such rational making processes. Here Tom seems to blame the individuals and not necessarily the conditions that make them behave like that. Viewed in the context of Tom's commitment to the defence of home, it can be contended that he varnishes home-country by camouflaging and masking the forces which trigger violent demonstrations and push people out of the country in order to salvage the Zimbabwean image internationally.

Certainly, such a disposition is perfectly understandable as it serves as a bulwark against xenophobes like Stein, Mabhena, Sergeant Ntuli, Sergeant Sibiya and many others. Tom's vision and attitude towards home-country has been summarized by George as:

What the hyphen in "home-country" makes explicit are the ideological linkages deemed necessary for subjects who are at home in a social and political space and even ore acutely for those who are, because of geographic distance or political disenfranchisement, *outside* their "legitimate" space. Home-country and home resonate differently from different locations for different subjects and often even for the same subject at different locations (1996: 17).

The point is, those who are at home might have a different view of things from that of those who have travelled. Tom even expresses and accepts this fact when he says '*somunhu asiko handingazivi hangu*' (100) 'Since I am away I may not know.' Nonetheless, one fully appreciates Tom's concern as it disadvantages him and others in the battle for visibility, beingness and authenticity in other homes. It functions effectively for the xenophobes and defectively for the migrants.

The numerous instances of xenophobic behaviours by various characters in the epistle can also be viewed as defence of home-country. However, Tom does not appreciate a defensive strategy based on exclusion and the need to monopolize home. It is against this background that he condemns various characters with xenophobic tendencies.

Conclusion

Tom's migrant experience in South Africa has given him an intriguing consciousness of home(s). Coming from a culture which celebrates and acknowledges openness, he canvasses for an inclusive philosophy of home. He decries exclusion and closure as impediments towards an African renaissance. The consistency with which he exposes and at times lambastes xenophobic behaviours is one of the several ways by which he preaches the gospel of a united Africa under the banner – Africa as collective home. Xenophobia is presented as part of the mechanics of exclusion which stand opposed to an African Union of homes. The idea of Africa as home for African people is understood within the context of group insurance. Against this background, blueprints, models and other examples on political and economic policies must be drawn from successful African countries. South Africa is presented as one such country that must inspire Zimbabwe and other African nations to contain problems at home.

Thus, this paper has argued that, the writer, Mutasa, firmly believes in African collegiality. In the letter, African collegiality is part of the Pan African agenda, a concept critical for the survival of African people as a group. In this conceptual scheme, it is counterproductive for African people to fortify and pay homage to the divisive policies of colonialism and apartheid in which Africa is projected as a hopelessly divided continent. For that reason, the challenge for African people is to gravitate towards a dispensation in which Africa is a collective home that is open to all African people. And last, we have shown that while the letter serves as a link between work and home, it raises several important pedagogical and ideological issues on home(s).

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