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# Metaphors of Migration and Survival: Negotiating Crisis Times Through Seeking Alternative Spaces

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## Abstract

This paper is about the fictional representation of the tenacity, innovativeness and agency displayed by people who seek to better their living conditions and survive socio-economic and political cesspools. The aim is to demonstrate how political boundaries are surmounted and the various means used to migrate as a way to be in the diaspora and better one's condition. A worst case scenario of Zimbabwe under a crisis is used to demonstrate the resilience and resourcefulness of ordinary people as they struggle to migrate and embrace global citizenry.

*Keywords: Survive, agency, migrate, space, Zimbabwe, crisis, ubuntu, negotiate*

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the literary representation of migration, survival and how the ordinary people negotiate times of crisis through seeking alternative spaces, as represented in selected short stories set in crisis-hit Zimbabwe. The paper specifically centres on out-migration and does not intend to discuss other forms of in-migration. It is an axiom that the history of migration is essentially an account of the variegated struggles of people who seek to survive, to make ends meet and thereby escape the incessant crises occasioned by various factors which include natural disasters, drought, war, as well as economic and political turmoil. For Galbraith, "Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good?" [1]

The action of migration abounds in canonical and literary texts, and goes as far back as biblical literature as it was taken by Jacob the founding father of the nation of Israel. Because of a famine in Canaan, Jacob and his extended family moved to Egypt. In periods of crisis, what is significant is the fact that spatial and physical dislocation in the form of internal and external migration is often pervasive, as people facing difficult situations move away from their places of residence to seek new livelihoods and other forms of survival [2]. Significant is the fact that when modern states go into terminal decline due

to a myriad of tempestuous causes or fail altogether as evidenced by the Zimbabwean case study in question, the most predictable response of the ordinary people is to get out - as soon as they can and to wherever they can. The imagined existence of these tactics of survival, the fictionalisation of how spaces are reconfigured and "owned" as people negotiate the national borders to seek alternative livelihoods is a worthy cause in Afro-centred literary circles which finds representation here. The short stories analysed are purposively selected in as much as they hinge upon specifically outmigration, which is the core of this paper. As a literary study, the theoretical framework applied is resilience theory. Resilience is the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life, so as to survive and move beyond survival. According to Mlambo [3] analysing literary texts through the lens of resilience theory means focussing on people's survival techniques, their responsiveness in exploiting opportunities, and their capacity to prop up agency even in the worst of situations.

## **2. Escaping home by any means necessary in search of a better life**

This section looks at the making of global citizens as metaphors of survival, and contributes to an understanding of the lived experiences of the ordinary people as they "escape home" in search of better livelihoods. It demonstrates the critical idea that, as shaped by the crisis, Zimbabwe's social, economic and political spaces are not confined to the territorial or geographic space within the Zimbabwean borders, and that to survive a crisis, one of the tactics is certainly to move.

It may be dangerous, uncertain and life-threatening, as well as life-taking, but the journey out of the crisis-hit environment still remains one viable option available to the ordinary people; however, this might have paradoxical results. This paradox of migration as a curse and blessing is graphically captured in Mlalazi's story aptly titled "The border jumpers" [4]. Through the use of simple, ordinary and unpretentiously descriptive diction, the reader is carried into a vortex of the chilling, tranquil and eerie atmosphere of an escape route used by illegal immigrants into South Africa. The story begins in *medias res* and through this literary style Mlalazi manages to inject a sense of urgency and life into the narrative; an urgency which by extension also spells out how the ordinary man urgently needs to escape home and seek alternative livelihoods. The panoramic view presented to the reader is equally enchanting in Aristotelian terms of tragedy, where the reader both fears and falls in love with the horrific incidents.

In this story, as a group of thirteen men are guided through the dangerous and crocodile-infested Limpopo which is an escape route for those who

want to cross illegally into South Africa, a freak incident takes place. The only names which are mentioned in the story are those of Mbedzi, the paid-for guide, who is leading them and those of Zenzo and Vusa, whilst the other characters remain nameless. Some of them are just described as if the author Mlalazi wants these unnamed characters to be representative of the vast majority of people who have illegally crossed the Limpopo into South Africa. As they are crossing the river, the omniscient narrative voice only records how Zenzo panics whilst midway across the river and feels as if something has gripped him. The scream from Zenzo causes pandemonium as the group thinks of crocodiles which find easy prey in the border jumpers. After they have managed to cross, a head count is ordered by Mbedzi the guide and they discover that two men who were at the rear have gone missing and it is not clear whether they have been eaten by the crocodiles or returned to the Zimbabwean side of the river. But despite all the doubt and uncertainty, Mbedzi urges them on so that they can get at the rendezvous in time as he says, "Whatever happened back there, just forget about it", he told them. "Your way lies only forward, and while we are standing here like the opposition discussing the Party, time is moving, and if we are late to the pickup point, the van won't wait for anyone. I don't have to mention to you the kind of shit you will be in should that happen [4].

One critical observation is that Mbedzi is one of the survivors of the crisis who accepts the reality of life and sees a niche that he exploits as a coping strategy. Mbedzi becomes a "professional" guide who gets paid to lead the migrants across the borders through secret routes. In this story, this is one of the groups he is ushering into South Africa with a success rate of 11 out of 13. From the quotation above, what is clear is that this is possibly a lucrative syndicate that works together as there is a designated pickup point and there is also a van so that they can beat the notorious "border patrol" which tries to stop illegal immigrants. The process of border jumping may sound haphazard and rudimentary, but there is a sense of organisation in the operation and with these basic structures, people manage to escape home. Therefore, Mbedzi represents one form of a set of survival tactics and the crafty coping mechanisms devised for survival. Despite its illegality and crudity, the trade he plies leaves the reader justifiably guessing that Mbedzi can manage to see another day due to the earnings he gets from this activity and this is despite its precariousness.

One more important observation is that despite the vulnerability of the border jumpers, Mbedzi does not prey on and dump them. There is a twinge of empathy that flavours the story, and Mbedzi's concern is registered in the tone of the narrative voice in the story, which shows that despite the terrible and dehumanising dimension of the crisis, some people still remain humane. The African concept of *ubuntu*, African humanism and togetherness, still persists and this is the spirit that binds people together despite all the odds.

This Afro-centric lens of reading the story goes a long way to fight and dispel Afro-pessimisms, and shows that there is hope expressed through African literature. The artist, like Mlalazi, becomes a raconteur, whose duty is in true *Achebean* terms, a teacher to the community.

Furthermore, another seemingly mundane but necessary point to make in this story is on the spiritual dimension. Not only is the spiritual dimension symbolised by the snuff which Mbedzi the guide, pinches and sniffs, but also from the incantation he pronounces in case the missing two border jumpers are dead, "Wherever you are my two brave sons. Let it be known that it was not through your friends here that you got left behind. I plead with you to grant them a safe journey to Johannesburg, where you also headed. Also to grant them a safe haven from the poverty from which they are fleeing [4]. This prayer, uttered in a sombre, sincere and serene tone, closes the short story as Mbedzi leads the border jumpers onto South African soil and their intended destination is made clear – Johannesburg. Like the biblical Israelites led by a pillar of cloud and a star by night, this group also seemingly travels through the guidance of the supernatural; the spirits of their colleagues have been pleaded with to be guides and not to be haunting spirits in quest for vengeance. The group has crossed the river and jumped the border to the metaphorical Canaan which is Johannesburg. The critical argument to be made and emphasised from this story is that national borders become meaningless to the poor yet determined people in times of serious socio-economic crises. The border jumpers do not merely sit idly while hunger and extreme lack tear them to pieces. They are active participants in determining their destiny as they refuse to play the helpless victim – they devise ingenious ways of escaping and thereby seeking means of survival. The border patrol, national governments and immigration officials may criminalise such activities, yet such informal and "illegal" pursuits assist the poor where the state has failed. Denied the opportunity through bureaucratic processes to go to where they can sell their labour where it is needed, the ordinary people devise new ways and routes to escape home by any means necessary; this story highlights that such a survival strategy works for some of them.

This story brings to the fore the predicament of those ordinary people who could not raise enough money to acquire a national passport in Zimbabwe. During the crisis-hit and institutionally weak Zimbabwe, affording and obtaining a passport was a nightmare to many people. To make matters worse, even if one was fortunate enough to acquire a passport, another stumbling block was the South African government's conditions to get a visa which were prohibitively stringent. Therefore, the surest escape route available was through the act of border jumping.

Yet still, from Mlalazi's characterisation, a quick reference to onomastics

indicates that Mbedzi, Vusa and Zenzo are Ndebele names, hence, historically pointing to a South African origin of the border jumpers in the story. Therefore, given the life threatening circumstances in their present country, the national boundaries set up by the colonial regimes can but only be ignored. The artificial, man-made border becomes a barrier to be circumvented. The need to survive dictates the *modus operandi* and border jumping is the surest way to escape home. Hopefully, the eleven who survive the Limpopo waters and crocodiles as well as the border patrol will manage to survive the poverty they are running from.

In the story "Crossroads" [5], the idea of escaping home and crossing the national border is furthered and the representation of survival tactics is extended. Whilst the previous story gives the reader a glimpse into the lived experiences of those who use illegal or informal entry points, in "Crossroads" the emphasis is on the legal or formal entry points. Narrated from a first person point of view, the reader is easily entrapped in the literary world of the plight and - most importantly - determination and ultimate success of the protagonist. The nameless narrator journeys to the South African embassy in Harare for a visa, and the story takes us through the road trip to South Africa and finally to Park Station in Johannesburg. The escape from home is complete, despite the challenges the narrator faces and the author's economical use of characterisation makes the story more involving and easier to understand. Just like Mbedzi in "The border jumpers", in the short story "Crossroads" there is another survivor of sorts who sees an opportunity that exists in those masses trying to escape home. First the narrator takes note of how, at the South African embassy in Harare, "Hawkers march up and down with their wares, pens and cigarettes, *freezits* and cool drinks, bananas and *mabhanzi* [buns]. There is even a photographer, who points at a makeshift studio under a tree and yells, "Passport size photos, visa photos, any photo that they want I take, cheap-cheap photos ... [5].

The above scenario can be looked at with two lenses of interpretation. First is the tourist-like gaze which only sees the pitiful and desperate situation of the urbanites. Second, and the one propagated in this paper, is the gaze that sees and gives credit to the efforts of the urban poor to better their condition. The spatial location of these actors, the city of Harare, is a hunting ground of possibilities, and despite the meanness of the conditions, survival is possible through such entrepreneurial activities.

Given the gravity of the situation, those attempting to escape home, whilst waiting in snaking queues, are desperate for food and also for such utilities as a simple pen to use for filling in a form, hence the reason why some enterprising urbanites capitalise on such situations. This shows that agency is ubiquitous and the survivor personality of the people comes in a plethora of forms. This is further corroborated by the narrator's observation of how, "The most amazing type of hawker approaches you the moment you join the

tail of the queue. "Sista, it is obvious from your place in the line, that you will not make it. They only take fifty people a day". A dramatic pause. "But I can help you sista, my place is number twenty three. I will happily sell it to you."

[5]

This is by no means an exaggeration nor hyperbolism as the reading can be verisimilitudinous to someone who has had firsthand experience of life during the Zimbabwean crisis. This "amazing type of hawker" has no intention of escaping home but certainly has found a rich ground for making it through those who are trying to escape home. This type of survivor personality, as soon as the sun sets, goes to the embassy to sleep at the gate, so that when other people come in early in the morning the hawker already occupies a couple of positions in the queue which he/she sells off to those whose position is after the fifty mark, the maximum number of those who are served by the visa authorities per day.

When approached by the hawker for the first time, the narrator is shocked that the amount the enterprising hawker charges is a hundred Rand, which is a very significant amount in crisis-hit Zimbabwe. However, after a couple of days of failure to make it in the top fifty, the narrator accepts the offer and one can imagine how much the hawker who sells her places in the queue makes per day, let alone per week and ultimately per year. Even professionals could probably not get that amount of money. This is also a further demonstration that whilst the crisis may have made making ends meet almost impossible, for the determined and inventive urban sleaker, possibility abounded. The lady hawker in the story ensures that she "owns" some of the fifty places every day which makes it a sellable commodity and becomes her own form of employment. Even the narrator, through a discernible authorial intrusion which permeates through the story, concedes that as much as the crisis in Zimbabwe has multiple dimensions, the people are also protean and crafty. To attest to this, there is a wry commentary made that, "Another ingenious method of making a living. Sleeping outside the embassy, queuing for those who do not have the means to be here early, charging a fee for 'services rendered'. There is nothing that one cannot do here anymore. One's ability to make money is limited only by the scope of one's creativity [5] The creative artist, the writer of this short story, is hereby expressing the value of creativity, innovativeness and resiliency, especially when applied to make ends meet. This apt quotation illustrates that survival is possible in spite of the impossible circumstances. Those escaping home, like the protagonist, also provide opportunities for others to survive. This is in the same manner as Mbedzi's case in "The borderjumpers". People make things happen for themselves and are active agents instead of the false perception of African apathy and docility.

Furthermore, the narrator's travails did not start with the scenario at the South African embassy in Harare. In crisis-hit Zimbabwe getting hold of the

passport to get out of the mire was a difficult and almost an impossible task. However, the people devise ways of getting the document. The narrator recounts how she produced all the required documents for she was aware of the fact that at the embassy she had "... heard the most horrific stories about these people, how they will find practically any excuse to turn you away" [5]. Hurdles are lying everywhere for the ordinary citizen yet the human spirit to endure and surmount difficulties is inspirational.

Given such difficulties which have been explored above, therefore, it becomes interesting to note how the protagonist not only observes and comments on how others like the hawkers survive, but also how she herself manages to cope with the crisis. Determined to escape home and its attendant problems, the narrator approaches the visa counter with everything in order because she has managed to acquire all the documents, "Police clearance: seduced out of an officer old enough to be your father. A phone number had to be proffered, fake promises of a get-together made. You intend to be long gone by then. Two thousands Rands worth of traveller's cheques. Money borrowed from Mi, your aunt who lives in South Africa, which you must give back upon arrival. A valid passport. Palms greased for this one. Corruption grins at every stage of the hierarchy [5].

Out-migration is, therefore, a survival mechanism for the urbanites that cannot stay in crisis-hit Zimbabwe. Whilst the South African government puts stringent visa mechanisms in place like that of requiring one to have two thousand Rands worth of traveller's cheques, people devise ways to surmount this as we see happening between Mi and her niece, who is the protagonist in the story. These are the various coping strategies devised by the ordinary people who want to go beyond their borders in search of better livelihoods.

Moreover, the fictionalisation of coping strategies is further presented through the journey into the proverbial "promised land". As a graduate of the "University of Life" called experience, the narrator, whilst in the bus prepares for the unexpected. As a novice and initiate into diaspora life, the narrator forms friendships and alliances with those who have been there before. That is why she talks of a new found friend for strategic reasons and she reminisces, "Tari is a friend I picked up on the bus, a friend I will drop when we get to Park Station in Johannesburg. Somebody to show me the ropes at the border" [5]. The narrator's survival instinct guides her to benefit from Tari, whilst not compromising herself, for instance like when she seduced the police clearance from a police officer with fake promises. This is the pragmatic morality that assures her a safe crossover; such situations call for wisdom, wit and a cunning mind, lest one gets run over by the forces at play in tempestuous and ever-changing Zimbabwe.

Tari is yet another metaphor of the diasporic survivor personality; a typical global citizen. He refuses to allow the fate of one country to be his as well.



Tari becomes a transnational personality who enjoys the global connectivity of countries, which is a reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To understand Tari's personality in terms of survival, Mbiba's concept of global citizenry can be useful here. For Mbiba [6], "The term "global citizen" is used in an effort to imagine and bring into being a person whose social, economic and political life is not bound by the confines of a single country's political boundaries. He or she can settle and contribute to the welfare of any place on the globe, and make home anywhere without restrictions. In reality, legal and social prejudices often constrain the development of this kind of citizen, but the term is used here as a way of stressing the dignity and positive contributions of displaced Zimbabweans.

Tari typifies this definition of a global citizen and also shows that for the sake of survival one does not have to forsake the home of origin. Survival as a coping strategy can be further understood to include straddling the national borders and malleably embracing the complexities of change. Tari brags about his coping tactics, as he flows with the current, and as the crisis trends shift, in a versatile and protean manner, he follows suit. Tari's coping and survival strategy is through crossing the border. Under such circumstances the idea of home becomes blurred as one becomes a global citizen. He explains it thus, "My dear, I pass through here every two to three weeks. Two weeks in South Africa, two weeks in Zimbabwe... I am into buying and selling, I do everything and anything. It used to be petrol, even rands for forex. That is until those bastards top-up-there made forex legal tender [5].

As a typical survivor, Tari does not rely on only one form of survival strategy as if programmed, but has the plasticity to change and adapt. Given the phenotypical and linguistic semblance between some Zimbabweans and the majority of South Africans, this choice of destination is most ideal. Tari deciphers the laws of supply and demand so as to chip in where there is a niche and his survival is made certain through the cunning observations he makes, then taking the necessary steps.

Kadenge [7] discusses how talking about the crisis figuratively became an imperative survival strategy, mainly to "save face" or to protect oneself against victimisation and/or possible arrest. Such metaphorical and stylised communication that is distilled to make acceptable the otherwise unacceptable in strict social settings is also exemplified in this story. The narrator uses the phrase *greasing palms or hands* when referring to bribery or corruption as if this is literally making the hands more lubricated so as to release whatever the other party wants. When in the story there is a girl who attempts to get into South Africa with an almost expired visa, she is denied entry and pleads with the immigration officer loudly and those who are used to the system tell her, "You went about it the wrong way. How can you expect to change her mind when you are pleading so publicly? Are you trying to make a fool out of her? You need to talk to someone, one on one ... *Grease*

*a few palms* [5].

The linguistic register of the day is a descriptor of the new code of conduct occasioned by the crisis. The constant use of the substitute and more acceptable metaphors is also indicative of an adopted pragmatic morality. The concept of *greasing the palm* being referred to ceases to be a Zimbabwean phenomenon only, but a trans-border phenomenon which has to be and is being practised by South African officers as well. When the narrator sees graffiti admonishing travellers to use pure toilet paper in the toilet and “NO ZIM DOLLARS”, she takes a photo of the inscription as, “A keepsake, to show my children one day, when my country is no longer lying on its back with its legs spread apart, in an act of incest with its fathers and their children [5]. This statement further reminds the reader that these are not normal circumstances; therefore, the moral logics of everyday life have to be adjusted accordingly. It is a crisis situation and for people escaping home, the line between what is legal and illegal is quite blurred. The determining factor in what one does is couched upon the desire to survive and make it.

Leaving a country where food shortages are acute, with shops virtually empty and foodstuffs on the black market beyond reach and rarely available, incessant power cuts and erratic water supplies, the narrator sighs in great relief as she crosses into South Africa. Her perorations justify the reason for escape. Even though she has not acquired any money, the joy at being able to spend the little that she has is satisfactory. It has been worthwhile escaping home and in a state of euphoria she marvels thus, “Even the lights here seem brighter, more cheerful. It’s amazing the things that will make one leap with joy. No more power cuts. No more water shortages. No more queues. Joy is an emotion that never matures. I buy in a frenzy. A packet of Simba chips, Cadbury chocolate, a can of coke, bottled water, a chicken and mushroom pie. A packet of pinky sweets. Haven’t had those since I was a child. I feel like such a kid [5].

If in the short story “The border jumpers” the story teller left the story cliff hanging to allow the reader to imagine how the escapees feel; in “Crossroads” the reader is allowed a peep into the inner contentment and relief of the successful escapees. The long-buried emotions of joy and exhilaration are not pent up anymore but find full expression.

The uses of contrasts by the writer are quite illuminating as “The promise of auspicious beginnings” [5] take root and sprout in the narrator. A world of possibilities has been opened up for the narrator and she can dream big. Even the street posters urge her to think outside the box, whereas “Where I come from, we’ve learned to think without the box” [5]. Tari, the friend, also urges her to be on Facebook, which is yet another illustration of progress; potentialities abound and both can be seen at the practical and metaphorical level, as survival and hope are beginning to hatch. Despite the caution from

Mi, the narrator is adamant that "... after a year or so, I should have saved up enough money for university" [5]. Certainly Mi is right in saying that without papers it is difficult but at least one can afford to dream and with the strong will of the narrator, she refuses to bow down.

The mark of a survivor personality is discerned, when against all odds and where others falter, the person pulls through. Mi's words are dampening the spirit of the faint-hearted as she says "School and all that crap, my dear, forget it. I came here, as naive as you are, with nothing but a pocketful of dreams. But look at me" [5]. Mi represents another breed of the diasporans who, though they have made it across the border, are content with only existence. However, according to the protagonist, in a world of possibilities, it is worthy moving beyond existence into flourishing mode. Ultimately the story ends with her vowing that she will be different and undeterred; "That's you, I want to say. It's not gonna be me" [5]. That is the audacity of hope in a narrator who escapes home in order to make it beyond borders. As the story comes to an end, she has set her goals and says "I keep smiling" [5].

The eleven men who cross over to South Africa in "The border jumpers" as well as Tari and the nameless narrator in "Crossroads" are, therefore, a representational fragment of the many people whose coping strategy is through escaping home. These fictionalised lives represent Zimbabwe's exodus and their lived experiences bring another important dimension to survival through out-migration. Statistically, the number of people who left Zimbabwe is mainly based on estimates which range from the barely plausible to the totally outlandish. Whilst there is lack of clarity and some disagreements with regards to the statistics, the importance of fiction is illustrated. Fiction goes beyond mere numbers and represents the flesh and blood of the people, the pulse of their lived experiences and this is what the stories demonstrate. The reader metaphorically experiences the trials, tribulations and triumphs of a people who are trying to survive through escaping a nation under siege.

In addition, to show the multiplicity of these coping strategies in relation to escaping home, a look at the short story "My cousin-sister Rambanai" [8] is of critical importance. The story is about Rambanai who has been in America but who has returned for her father's funeral. Her brother, who is in the United Kingdom, does not come back but instead sends the cherished pounds in crisis-hit Zimbabwe. Rambanai comes back a changed person and the envy to many, but after the funeral she does not go back to America. Later it dawns upon the narrator that Rambanai cannot go back to America because she no longer has a valid visa. Rambanai's passport has been crossed out as an illegal immigrant possibly because of her overstay. But she does not give up

and sets on a shrewd mission to get herself out of the country so that she can escape the misery around her. She manages to surmount the challenges she faces and goes to an alternative destination, the United Kingdom, whilst the narrator (Rambanai's cousin) and her husband also follow suit.

Rambanai is a typification of the "been-to" personality whom the prominent African writer Ayi Kwei Armah writes about in his novel *Fragments* [9]. She has been to the diaspora and for that she has a lot to show off with - two suitcases crammed with clothes and an accent being at the top of the list, let alone a venerable status in the society. This is evidenced when, "Having been in America for five years without coming home, she was the star at the funeral; everyone wanted to look at her" [8]. To survive, she chooses to join the diaspora community and instead of the traditional trend of going to South Africa, she goes to the United States of America. This illustrates the fact that the Zimbabwean exodus as a coping strategy is not limited to regional destinations but the people virtually make the whole globe their potential destination, more like a modern version of the conquistador of 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain.

Whilst the previous short story talks of South Africa as a metaphorical symbol of a perfect choice for outmigration of all regional destinations, in "My cousin-sister Rambanai" the destination is beyond the seas. For the sake of survival, one therefore does not need to be limited by regional or continental boundaries but needs to think beyond the immediate and intermediate environment like what Rambanai does. Instead of the typical Booker T. Washington adage in classical African-American literature, that to make it in life one has to "cast your bucket where you are", in this instance, we see a different worldview altogether. At times there is a need to realise that people are not trees, they can move from one place to another in order to embrace a better livelihood.

To attest to the idea that where agency abounds, opportunity is equally plenteous this is what Rambanai says, "Our housemaid *SisiDessy* worshipped Rambanai and could not get enough of her stories. "America is the land of opportunity, *SisiDessy*," Rambanai told her. There you can be anything you want, anything at all. Someone like you can be a housemaid today, and before you know it, you have your own TV show. [8].

For people who are in a crisis, opportunities are certainly limited and some have to cast their bucket where they are. Yet for the likes of Rambanai, opportunity lies in far off places and she goes for these greener pastures

What needs to be underlined is the fact that this is a crisis situation, so

whatever the world has to offer one has to grab with both hands. The underlying fact is that survival is made possible and through the story writer the coping strategies are presented. The dream of escaping home is not limited to the Rambanais of the world but even the downtrodden masses from the “ghetto” like the Mbare hairdressers who are keenly aware of the value of being in the diaspora. That is why Rambanai’s hairdresser pleads with her, “I have a cousin-brother who is willing to do anything, please help him if you can’, and Rambanai gave Manyara her number in America and said she would definitely see what she could do” [8].

After being denied entry into America, surely there is “... the death of her American dream” [8], but survival in a cruel world with its multiple constraints like the one Rambanai lives in, means that she also has to devise multiple strategies. First, Rambanai has to accept the reality of her circumstances of the present so that she can map the way forward. Initially she has lived a delusional life, pretending that she is only taking long to go back to America because of problems with connecting flights and she even shops for her friends in America. However, to survive a crisis, it may be at personal, family or national level and to come up with practical solutions; one has to face the present reality. Finally Rambanai decides to face the truth, which also liberates her both metaphorically and practically, “America is a non-starter, she said cheerfully. They will never give me a visa now. I will go to London. At least we don’t need visas for England, being in the Commonwealth. In England, I can get an office job. I will continue my dancing. Or maybe acting, I have always wanted to be an actress. I will get a proper job, go to school at night. I will do something” [8].

Rambanai is a resolute and resilient individual who has a strong-willed determination and once she purposes in her heart, she does something. Resigning oneself to fate is not an option at times like this and Gappah created a resolute character like Rambanai to communicate the myriad of opportunities which await those determined to escape home and survive. Rambanai looks at life full circle and explores all the alternatives in search of the most viable niche. She confronts her problems head-on and claims her place in the word. Yet, it is still not enough to just discover a niche. There must be the means to get to that desired goal of being once again in the diaspora. With her passport endorsed she has to get a new one. This is yet another nightmare she has to contend with and her resourcefulness in this regard is worth celebrating by the author.

Significant to note in Rambanai’s tactics is the value of realising that despite stifling circumstances, the human spirit to resiliently pursue multiple options and possibilities is a survival and coping strategy of note. Unlike the 13 men

in “The border jumpers”, who swim their way across the river, she cannot swim across the Atlantic waters to the United Kingdom, nor can she smuggle herself into the country, given the sophisticated border controls of the first world, yet there has to be a way. Rambanai devises a way out of her problems and this is what she says, “Exactly. I can’t go as me; they have records, you know. I need another passport in another name. That’s what lots of people do when they have been deported; they just get new passports” [8].

This is yet another celebration of pragmatic morality by the author. She just has to choose another name she really likes and for Rambanai the opportunity of choosing her own name is a joy – it is a symbolical marker of self-determination. Her name means divorce each other, or disunion, or break up; yet now she can decide her own name. Whilst she is of the ruling Shona tribe (and possibly tired of being associated with the ruling tribe which is blamed for the crisis, after all), Rambanai, by changing her name, can afford to be “transported” to another tribe as she says, “I know, I will choose aNdex name. They have some really cool names. Nonhlanhla. Busisiwe. Sihle. Gugulethu. I know, Langelihle, that means a beautiful day. You can just call me Langa for short. I can be Ndebele. Oh, I could even be a Ndebele princess” [8].

Indeed she has the power to make her day beautiful and Rambanai goes on to do just that, remarking at the fact that even Oprah Winfrey is part Zulu. The Ndebeles are a splinter group of the Zulus and Rambanai is proud to choose her own name and change her identity as well as determine her future and destiny. She is equally unfazed by the fact that her Ordinary and Advanced level certificates are in her original name. She will simply explore other interests. This is an indication that to survive, one has to be protean enough to be able to adapt and explore virgin territories. Limitations are never absolutes and in the diaspora one can have a better chance to start afresh.

However, as has been indicated, one cannot escape home only through bright ideas, like the one Rambanai has of changing her name. A lot of money is needed to smooth the whole process and that is when the narrator and her husband Jimmy decide to assist. They sell some of the shares that Jimmy’s father had left for him and also postpone the buying of a new refrigerator so that they can help Rambanai. A significant amount of money is needed for “greasing” the many palms that are involved in acquiring a new birth certificate, identity card and finally, a new passport. This aspect of the narrator and her husband Jimmy helping out Rambanai further illustrates the concept of *ubuntu* and the role of the extended family in Africa as a support mechanism to help out those in need.

From another angle of analysis, instead of seeing it only as pure and unadulterated *ubuntu* and a benevolent gesture, this can also be read as a calculated move, meant to make Rambanai reciprocate and invite them to the United Kingdom as well. For later on the narrator searches all over for Rambanai, including searching on the internet sites like ZimUpdate as well as ZimUnite, which are used by the Zimbabweans outside the country who are homesick and want to reconnect. Finally, despite the fact that Rambanai does not at all communicate, they find their own way out of the country, “Two and a half years after, Jimmy and I decided to join the three million who had left the country. It was an economic decision, we explained to everyone who asked, it is an economic decision, we said to ourselves, but in our hearts, we knew that leaving our families was the only way to save our marriage. The time had come for our families to expect something, translucent ears, a bulging stomach, an aversion to strong scents, anything that could be evidence of a baby on the way [8].

The economic meltdown has bitten hard and surviving it requires ingenuity that culminates in leaving home thereby escaping the fangs of poverty. However, other than the national crisis, the clichéd scapegoat which is measured in economic terms, there is also often a private or personal one which faces the couple. Being married and taking long to have children, Jimmy and the narrator are pelted from all angles by relatives who see procreation as the ultimate goal in a marriage. Their marriage is heading for the rocks and the only way to save it is through escaping home and also the people at home and their mentality. The crises of life are therefore presented as multi-fold, and the means of surviving are equally multiple, with the idea of going into the diaspora being one of them as has been presented here.

Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasise that another look be cast on how Jimmy and the narrator buy their way out of their country which is facing pronounced economic and political difficulties. Like Rambanai they have some challenges. During the time when Rambanai was planning to emigrate, there was no need for a visa, but now the British have put in place some stringent measures for granting a visa. Zimbabwe is no longer in the commonwealth, and the easy route to the United Kingdom is now curtailed, but for one bent on surviving, there is always a way into the diaspora. This is how the narrator explains it, “In the end, we got our visa the same way Rambanai had got her passport, we used the Harare way – someone knew someone in the British embassy with whom we exchanged envelopes stuffed with cash. I gave up teaching and Jimmy engineering to be in England, where the curse of the green passport condemned us to work in the unlit corners of England’s health care system, in care homes where we took out

the frustrations of our existence by visiting little cruelties on geriatric patients [8].

Leaving for the diaspora has been made possible for both of them. The easiest way could have been through the links with Rambanai, but Rambanai having vanished into thin air in the United Kingdom, the narrator and her husband, Jimmy, have to find another alternative and it is “the Harare way”. This metaphorical statement, like “greasing” shows that the urbanites, the urban sleekers in crisis-hit Zimbabwe, do not wallow in apathy but learn to find means and ways of making it in life. By saying that they had to use “the Harare way”, what becomes clear is that the urban character is by all means a survivor. Even Rambanai, once in the United Kingdom, is not limited to a single place, but explores all the cities, hopping from Birmingham to Newcastle, to Leicester and London. If the international borders cannot limit her, then the town boundaries cannot at all curtail her adventurous spirit, all in the name of survival.

One of the diasporans is Rambanai’s older brother, Thomas. Through Thomas the value of the diaspora as a survival mechanism in crisis-hit Zimbabwe is made clearer. Thomas has been away for five years now and instead of coming for the funeral, “... Thomas wired seven hundred and fifty pounds through Western Union from Manchester, England where he lived” [8]. This is the tactful adjustment that is required in the diaspora, especially if one does not have the required papers to stay in the host country. Rambanai chooses to come, and it results in her passport being endorsed such that she cannot go back. But Thomas is wise enough to realise that he would rather send money than come in person for the funeral. As a result, through the effort of the diasporan, Thomas, the remittances he sends, “... enabled the family to bury my uncle in the splendour of the Paradise Peace Casket, a gleaming white coffin with golden handles and a gold frame on the surface into which my aunt put a photograph of my uncle in his University of Leeds graduation cap and gown [8].

The diasporan is making things happen, as testified in this short story. The situation in crisis-hit Zimbabwe and its attendant economic-meltdown are so dire and a funeral spells a mini-crisis for an ordinary family. Yet for those with a family member who is abroad, things are much better. They do not just use a coffin like everyone else but stand out even through death and mourning as the mourners observe, “It is a *casket* Vatete, not a coffin. A *casket*” [8]. Also noteworthy is that the late (who is Thomas and Rambanai’s father) was educated at the University of Leeds. Therefore, despite Jimmy being an engineer, leaving home for the diaspora is not always an indication of brain drain. It can as well be a form of brain gain. In colonial Zimbabwe and shortly



after independence, crossing the national borders in search of education was yet another form of seeking a livelihood through investing in education but now it is through going to sell one's labour, whether skilled or unskilled.

### **3. Conclusions**

What has been made clear in the foregoing analysis is that when times are hard, one way of surviving is through leaving the boundaries which define the crisis. This manner of leaving or escaping home is in the form of using the illegal means of border jumping, through manoeuvring past the hurdles of visa applications and also getting legal travel documents as well as buying one's way out of one's country. Without downplaying the drudgery of life in crisis hit Zimbabwe and also condoning the political malaise, the ultimate conclusion reached is that the characters in these stories provide an alternative understanding of ordinary people's subjectivity and resourcefulness. Agency, resilience and innovativeness are all indicators militating against afro-pessimisms and these stories are inspirational and insightful.

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