

# Literatures of nation and migration: Charles Mungoshi, Nadine Gordimer, and the post-colonial

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Returning now to the more general question—are there any national literatures in sub-Saharan black Africa yet?—the simple answer is still no; but a fuller answer that takes into account the linguistic, political, and literary complexity of the sub-continent would have to be: ‘No, but maybe there will be fairly soon’ (Lindfors 1975:9).

I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation, or a specific race, then fuck you (Marechera 1986 quoted in Veit-Wild 1992:297).

America leads to Africa; the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis (Bhabha 1990:6).

The forging of a national literature is assumed to be a natural part of the rise of nations: so, from the eighteenth century on, we have iconic writers like Shakespeare in England<sup>1</sup>, Goethe in Germany, and Racine in France established in their respective national literary canons. And, if we accept Benedict Anderson’s influential argument that twentieth-century nationalisms ‘draw on more than a century and a half of human experience and three earlier models of nationalism’

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dobson (1992) and Bate (1997).

(Anderson 1983:123), we recognise that in the post-colonial world too, new nations aspire to having their own national literatures. In Africa, the constituting of a national literature has invariably had an anti-imperial dimension, so that Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example, self-consciously writes back against the cultural imperialism that sought to install European writers in Kenya. In a famous statement, Ngugi and colleagues at Makerere University declare: '[w]e reject the primacy of English literature and cultures. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and then Africa in the centre'<sup>2</sup>. What remains in place even in such radical attempts to re-conceptualise literature is the category of the nation as a defining reference point.

Critics of Southern African literature have for the most part obediently followed national boundaries in writing about the region's literatures<sup>3</sup>. What I argue here is that such an approach is severely limited, in that by accepting the principle of a 'national literature', certain important questions are suppressed. In particular, certain crucial relations and connections that exceed the nation state-forms of community as well as circuits of exploitation—are either ignored or treated as secondary. To demonstrate the need to think beyond the nation in conceptualising the literatures of Southern Africa, I first juxtapose two Southern African short stories, and then consider how certain post-colonial critics have installed 'migration'—as opposed to 'nation'—as the key term in theorising literature.

### **Charles Mungoshi: Mozambique to Rhodesia.**

Charles Mungoshi was born in 1947 in Enkeldoorn in Eastern Rhodesia. His father had returned from working as a cook in Cape Town to purchase a small plot of designated tribal trust land. After spending his early childhood on his father's small-holding, Mungoshi attended boarding school, first Daramombe from 1959-1962, and then St. Augustines from 1963-1966. Leaving school at the end of Form Four, he worked in 1967-1968 as a research assistant with the Rhodesian Forestry Commission in Mutare near the Mozambican border. From 1969-1974, he was an invoice clerk for Textbook Sales; from 1975-1981, he was an editor for the Literature Bureau; and from 1982-1988, he worked for the Zimbabwe Publishing

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<sup>2</sup> Ngugi (1981:94). See also Ngugi (1993:60-75) for an updated version of the same argument. For a useful discussion of Ngugi's understanding of anti-colonial nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial periods, see Ogude (1999:15-43).

<sup>3</sup> See for example, studies by Chapman (1996) and Chabal (1996). There have been a few notable exceptions that have examined the function of borders and migration in Southern African fiction, like Stotesbury (1990), Crush (1995) and Nixon (1996).

House. He lives with his wife and five children in Chitungwiza Township bordering Harare. Mungoshi's trajectory is unusual among recent Zimbabwean authors in several respects: he never attended university, he has never spent any significant time abroad, and he has published extensively both in Shona and English.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he published in a range of genres in English: short stories (*Coming of the Dry Season* 1972; *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories* 1980; and *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* 1988); a novel (*Waiting for the Rain* 1975); and a collection of poetry (*The Milkman Doesn't Only Deliver Milk* 1981). After a long silence, he published in 1997 another collection of short stories, *Walking Still*. His publications in Shona include three novels, a play, and collections of children's stories, and he has also translated Ngugi's *Grain of Wheat* into Shona. Zimbabwean critics have greeted his work with acclaim, though to date it has received little critical attention from outside Zimbabwe<sup>4</sup>. Flora Veit-Wild has categorised Mungoshi as a Generation Two writer, which she defines as follows:

The public voice of Generation One has given way to the private voice, the extrovert author-politician has been replaced by the introverted lonely poet; heroes and the fate of the nation have given way to everyday events and ordinary people; the didactic impetus to better humanity has been succeeded by the therapeutic, cathartic impulse of self-discovery .... (Veit-Wild 1992: 267).

She continues with warm praise: 'Mungoshi's style is outstanding and quite unique in Zimbabwean, and even African literature, in its sensitivity, depth and density of thought and style' (Veit-Wild 1992:268). Tim McLoughlin is equally generous, describing Mungoshi as 'Zimbabwe's most substantial writer' (McLoughlin 1984: 109), and emphasising Mungoshi's acute sense of his context:

Mungoshi's fiction is more subtle and elusive. Opposition between black and white, traditional and urban life, Christianity and traditional religion are the context rather than the object of his writing. The prose is not self-conscious about its subject matter. It does not gesture to an international audience. Mungoshi writes for Zimbabweans with whom he shares the

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the critics quoted here, Mungoshi has also been acclaimed by Stratton (1986), Alden (1994) and Nyandoro (1994). In general, however, Mungoshi has to date received far less critical attention than his Zimbabwean contemporaries like Dambudzo Marechera, Chenjerai Hove, Tseti Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera.

problems of being an individual in a society that demands many irreconcilable responses (McLoughlin 1984:108).

Finally, in her study of representations of women in Zimbabwean fiction, Rudo Gaidzanwa notes that while in general women characters in English (as opposed to Shona) literature 'are more sensitively drawn and explored' (Gaidzanwa 1985:47), in Mungoshi's case, '[m]ost of the women characters in his writing are very strong, large in life and domineering' (Gaidzanwa 1985:35).

Mungoshi's short story 'The Flood' is from his 1980 collection *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories*, and is set on a forestry plantation in the Eastern Rhodesia of the late 1960s<sup>5</sup>. Using a third-person narrator, Mungoshi alternates between flashbacks and extended passages of dialogue to tell the story of Mozambican worker Mhondiwa. Oblique fragments of narrative disclose the traumatic violence of Mhondiwa's Mozambican childhood, when his family were burnt to death in their hut, his long trek to find work in Rhodesia, his experience as a worker on a Rhodesian forestry plantation, his unhappy marriage to a 'Rhodesian' wife, and his ultimately murderous conflict with co-worker, Chitauro. There are three aspects of the story that provoke difficult questions about the relation between nationalism and literary representation: the unsentimental evocation of the pre-colonial past; the descriptions of labour relations on the plantation; and the contradictory ideas of 'home' expressed in the story.

The pre-colonial past is evoked initially through the memories of Old Makiwa. The heavy rain in the opening passages—the 'flood' of the story's title—prompts a comment from Old Makiwa which establishes an ominous tone: 'I think it is a bad sign. In the old days it rained like this before a paramount chief died' (Mungoshi 1980:156). Chitauro rejects Makiwa's gloomy predictions as superstitions, as beliefs rightly banished by the church, but Makiwa refuses any optimistic interpretation of the heavy rain, insisting that it serves only 'to soften the earth for the grave-diggers' (Mungoshi 1980:164). Even though Chitauro is the character described as being in sympathy with western values, he too has doubts: 'He knew where Mhondiwa came from and, in that land, they had the best witchcraft practitioners of any land' (Mungoshi 1980:164). Like Old Makiwa, Mhondiwa's fears are expressed in terms that derive unequivocally from an African social universe at odds with the modernising language of the church and plantation. His first unsolicited words allude to the bad omen of seeing a squirrel cross his path

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Mungoshi returns to this setting in his 1997 short story 'The Little Wooden Hut in the Forest' (Mungoshi 1997: 151-62), though he sets it during the Zimbabwean war of liberation.

twice. Secondly, Mhondiwa is described as afraid of his wife, whose 'mother was the worst witch in her village, [and the] daughter had inherited this hard formidable I-get-what-I-want streak from her' (Mungoshi 1980:166). Mhondiwa also remains deeply in thrall to the lion-skin belt the medicine man Muganu had given him after healing him from the trauma of his family burning to death in their hut. In the violent conclusion of the story, these disparate images derived from African folklore and his own painful past coalesce as Mhondiwa kills Chitauro for sleeping with his wife:

Somewhere in the back of his eyes, Mhondiwa saw the tiny black animal cross the path, twice, crash into the jungle, then come back from behind and now it was sniffing his heels. He felt the smoke thickening, rising and curling into tiny coils inside his throat and chest and way back beyond memory he felt the river crashing, breaking over the banks and scattering into the jungle (Mungoshi 1980:178).

Unsентimental in its presentation of African belief systems, the conclusion to 'The Flood' nonetheless emphasises the residual power of pre-colonial allegiances. Further, the tale suggests that recently-imposed national boundaries do not impinge upon these allegiances, as the 'westernised' Rhodesian Chitauro is set in opposition to the Mozambican Mhondiwa with his portentous vision of the 'tiny black animal', and the Rhodesian Old Makiwa with his grim interpretation of the heavy rain. Thus the opposition between tradition and modernity in the characterisation of the story cuts across national boundaries.

National allegiances are also shown to be secondary in Mhondiwa and Chitauro's dealings with the white plantation manager Mr. Gardner. Plantations like the one in "The Flood" relied heavily on 'boss boys' and supervisors, described by economist D.G. Clarke (1997:150) as 'the ever-present symbol of "absentee landlords" or "invisible employers". [They] often absorb a lot of the immediate discontent of workers, being both the first "object" of respect and also resentment'. What Mungoshi emphasises in narrating the class tensions between the worker, 'boss boy', and supervisor is the precarious and compromised status of the 'boss boy'. There is no internal focalisation of supervisor Gardner's thoughts, only the monologue of his orders, whereas the conflicted emotions of competing 'boss boys' Mhondiwa and Chitauro are elaborated in detail. When Mhondiwa loses his position as 'boss-boy' for fighting in the compound, Chitauro gets his job, and they effectively swap roles as 'worker' and 'boss-boy'. The exchange, however, is complicated. Although after his sudden elevation Chitauro 'walked at a leisurely boss-boy's pace towards the men who immediately shut up and bent down to their

work' (Mungoshi 1980:161), he tries desperately to apologise to Mhondiwa for being promoted at his expense: 'I don't understand it. I didn't ask for it. I know [Gardner] is going to do the same to me one day' (Mungoshi 1980:161). Also of some satisfaction to Mhondiwa is the fact that his humiliation is accompanied by unspoken sentiments of sympathy from the other workers:

The other men kept away from him but he knew he had some friends among them and they just didn't want to intrude on his fresh pain with useless condolences. He knew he had friends because he had never been hard with anyone. In fact every one of the men in the gang had once received a favour of some sort from him (Mungoshi 1980:162).

These passages suggest that the forms of common identity in the work-place are based primarily on class: the workers wearing blue overalls have a common bond, and they are loosely united against the khaki-clad 'boss boy' and the white manager. What gives Mungoshi's story particular force is that the forms of class conflict he depicts between Mhondiwa, Chitauro and Gardner were integral to the economy of the region, as the scale of Mozambican migration into Southern Rhodesia escalated in the 1950s. By 1957, there were an estimated 183 000 Mozambican migrant workers like Mhondiwa in Southern Rhodesia employed in agriculture and mining<sup>6</sup>.

While Mhondiwa's blue overall might give him some sense of identification with his fellow workers, his notion of belonging is hardly secure, as the references to 'home' in the story suggest. There are three references to 'home' in the story, and each one has a very different connotation. The first refers to Mhondiwa's dilemma when his wife leaves him with her children: 'The trouble was he couldn't go back home to Mozambique because it was so long ago now since he had left home and his parents were no longer there' (Mungoshi 1980:167). The connection between 'home'/Mozambique/parents is registered here, but in the second reference 'home' is associated with his new woman and by extension with Rhodesia. This second reference is chronologically prior, and describes the first night with his wife:

And when he woke up in the night wondering where he was she held him tight and said it was all right he was at home, at home, she kept on repeating this and it sounded better than anything he had ever heard till then. He thought it was the best sound in the girl's language. And when he

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Paton (1995:153), and on changing patterns of Mozambican migration to Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe and South Africa, see also Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman (1991: 101-113).

cried later towards dawn and she said the words again to him, at home, at home he went with them, following them with something in himself, something that pleased him and he went to sleep for the first time in a long while and it was the first dreamless, most restful sleep of his life (Mungoshi 1980:175f).

The psychic transfer described in the attenuated second sentence is explicit: the trauma of losing his parents in Mozambique, the loss of his first home, is healed by her repeated words 'at home'. In 'following them [her words "at home"] with something in himself', Mhondiwa stabilises his sense of identity for the first time since the death of his parents. It is worth noting that as with Gardner, there is no internal focalisation of the wife, though (again as with Gardner) she has enormous power over Mhondiwa's condition, first conferring a sense of psychic unity, and then withdrawing it. The second positive identification, however, is dramatically undercut in the final reference to home. After Mhondiwa has killed Chitauro, the story concludes on a deeply ambivalent note: 'Wisps of cloud. A rainbow-haloed misty moon, the best sounds he had ever heard: rest now you are at home, at home, at home ... In the distance the river purred' (Mungoshi 1980:178). The associations of home in this final reference are extremely bleak: to feel at home once again, Mhondiwa has had to kill fellow worker Chitauro for cuckolding him. Mhondiwa's conception of 'home' in the course of the story therefore shifts: from his parents' hut in rural Mozambique before their death; to his wife's bed in a Rhodesian forestry compound when they first sleep together; and finally to the riverside near the compound immediately after he has killed Chitauro. As in the presentation of the pre-colonial past, and of labour relations on the plantation, the fragile and contradictory evocation of Mhondiwa's sense of home prompts questions about the extent to which national boundaries provide an adequate frame for understanding such literature.

What is most striking about 'The Flood' is that several of the key elements of the story rest upon social connections that transgress the boundaries of the nation: pre-colonial community; sexual and marital bonds; and collective ties forged between workers as a result of economic exploitation. To place the story in its historical context requires that the literary critic attend closely to pre-colonial social systems; to the migrant labour system in Southern Africa; and to the fraught nature of transforming gender roles and sexual relations. Fractured identities have resulted as the economies of countries like Mozambique have been subordinated to the needs of multinational companies in South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the term 'nation' forms but one element of emergent forms of subjectivity and collective identification.

## Nadine Gordimer: from Mozambique to South Africa

Born in 1923, Gordimer shares with Mungoshi a personal history strongly marked by the experience of migration. The daughter of a Jewish immigrant father from Latvia, many of Gordimer's early short stories explore the experiences of dislocation and displacement that assail first-generation migrant communities in apartheid South Africa. Gordimer's writing has of course enjoyed far more critical acclaim than Mungoshi's, though it is worth noting the contrast between the relatively poor sales of her books in South Africa and the rest of the world<sup>7</sup>. Characterised for much of her career as the liberal conscience of the apartheid state, Gordimer has continued writing since 1990<sup>8</sup>. She has published two novels (*None to Accompany Me* 1994 and *The House Gun* 1998), a collection of short stories (*Jump and Other Stories* 1991) and two volumes of essays (*Crimes of Conscience* 1991 and *Writing and Being* 1995). Although South Africa provides the backdrop for most of her writing, Gordimer has set one novel in a fictitious African country that resembles Zambia (*A Guest of Honour* 1970), and the collection of short stories *Livingstone's Companions* (1972) has a number of stories set in parts of Africa other than South Africa. In the collection *Jump* (1991), there are two striking stories that venture imaginatively beyond the borders of South Africa. The first story 'Jump' is set in the 1980s and concerns a troubled anti-government agent from Mozambique taking stock of his involvement in the violent destabilisation of his country. The second story, 'The Ultimate Safari' complements 'Jump' in that it recounts the journey across the Kruger National Park of a Mozambican family from their war-torn homeland to a refugee camp in South Africa. The actions of the agent in 'Jump' are part of the process that precipitates the flight of the family in 'The Ultimate Safari'.

Although the narrator of 'The Ultimate Safari' is a young Mozambican girl, there is an irony in the title that suggests a South African perspective. For South Africans the Kruger National Park is a game reserve, a safari park; for Mozambican refugees, it is murderous terrain between their war-torn country and the relative security of a South African refugee camp. The juxtaposition of impoverished black and privileged white experience is a standard of Gordimer fiction, and this story concludes with a familiar scenario of the well-meaning white character looking on uncomprehendingly at black suffering: 'I don't think [our grandmother] was going to answer the white woman. The white woman put her head on one side and smiled at us' (Gordimer 1991:46). However, there are several aspects of this story that represent new departures for Gordimer.

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<sup>7</sup> For a useful overview of Gordimer criticism, see Driver (1998).

<sup>8</sup> For sympathetic commentaries on Gordimer's post-1990 output, see Lazar (1992), Collieran (1993) and Head (1996).



The first is that the pre-colonial ties between the indigenous communities of Mozambique and South Africa are registered. Once on the South African side of the border, the narrator recounts:

The people in the village have let us join their school. I was surprised to find that they speak our language; our grandmother told me, That's why they allow us to stay on their land. Long ago, in the time of our fathers, there was no fence that kills you, there was no Kruger Park between them and us, we were the same people under our own king, right from our village we left to this place we've come to (Gordimer 1991:44).

This passage conveys economically how pre-colonial communities on the eastern seaboard of Southern Africa were divided between the competing colonial powers of Britain and Portugal in the late nineteenth century. What it suggests—perhaps romantically given the harsh reception Mozambican refugees have often received in South Africa—is that such communal allegiances retain some residual force.

Whereas the impetus for migration from Mozambique to Rhodesia in the 1960s was caused by economic pressure, the influx of immigrants from Mozambique to South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s was accelerated by the civil war between the FRELIMO government and the apartheid-backed RENAMO forces<sup>9</sup>. In the post-apartheid era, the movement of migrants from Mozambique into South Africa has increased further<sup>10</sup>. Gordimer's story opens with descriptions of the devastation caused by the war: 'The people my father was fighting—the bandits, they are called by our government—ran all over the place and we ran away from them like chickens chased by dogs (Gordimer 1991:33). With the disappearance of the narrator's mother, the escalating civil war, and the lack of food, her grandmother and grandfather decide to undertake the journey across the Kruger Park to South Africa. The naïve voice of the narrator makes it clear that flight is the only option: 'We

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<sup>9</sup> See the excellent political and economic histories of this fraught period of Mozambique's history by Hanlon (1986:131-150 and 1991), and also Finnegan (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Detailed statistical data and analysis on the movement of migrants into South Africa has been published by The Southern African Migration Project. Especially relevant in relation to Mozambican migrants are the publications by Fion de Vletter (1998), David McDonald *et al* (1998) and Belinda Dobson (1998). For a general overview of post-apartheid migration, see Jonathan Crush (1998). On how migrants have been and continue to be treated in the South African legal system, see Murray (1986), Klaarens (1996) and De la Hunt (1997).

wanted to go away from where our mother wasn't and where we were hungry. We wanted to go where there were no bandits and there was food. We were glad to think there must be such a place; away' (Gordimer 1991:35).

The trauma of the migration produces in the conclusion of the story a disagreement between the narrator and her grandmother over the location and meaning of 'home'. The white woman's question as to whether they want to return to Mozambique after the war produces the following response:

Our grandmother looked away from them and spoke—There is nothing. No home. Why does our grandmother say that? Why? I'll go back. I'll go back through that Kruger Park. After the war, if there are no bandits any more, our mother will be waiting for us. And maybe when we left our grandfather, he was only left behind, he found his way somehow, slowly, through the Kruger Park, and he'll be there. They'll be home, and I'll remember them (Gordimer 1991:46).

The grandmother's pragmatic notion of 'home', as opposed to the narrator's wishful fantasy, is based on a realistic appraisal of where her family's best chances of survival lie. Whereas the narrator still yearns for her Mozambican home, the grandmother says that she wants to remain in South Africa where her grandchildren have some opportunity 'to learn so that they can get good jobs and money' (Gordimer 1991:46). Given the irresistible forces of poverty and civil war, the claims of 'home' are rendered meaningless, and crossing the border into South Africa an imperative that supersedes all other considerations.

Much like Mungoshi's 'The Flood', Gordimer's 'The Ultimate Safari' exposes the limits of placing national boundaries between the literatures of Southern Africa. By drawing attention to the horrors of the Mozambican civil war, the histories of African communities divided by the colonial powers, and the instability of what we might call 'home', Gordimer confronts the reader with difficult questions. Not that Gordimer herself is immune from the growing xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. In an interview with Karen Lazar in 1995, she speaks of the problems facing South Africa as follows:

**NG:** [W]ho would have thought that we would have the problem of illegal immigration which we have now—that we'd have Koreans selling watches in the streets, Zaireans talking French in the streets. Who would have thought this? It's something we couldn't possibly have imagined.

**KZ:** Why do you think this has happened? Is it that we are seen as a place of extreme bounty relative to these other countries?

NG: Oh absolutely, but we can't afford this. We must think of our own people first, and somehow this has got to be stopped. Of course this ill becomes somebody like myself who comes from immigrant stock. All of us who are whites here originally do. So who are we to say that the Koreans must be kicked out? (Lazar 1998:440)

Gordimer's contradictory response highlights an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, 'the new racism' of post-apartheid South Africa ('We must think of our own people first'), and, on the other hand, the more sympathetic sentiments that underlie 'The Ultimate Safari'.

### migrant literatures

Migration in the 1990s has continued to escalate globally, with the number of migrants in 1998 estimated at 100 million, and the number of refugees at 20 million. These figures include: 30 million migrants who have moved within their own countries; 10 million people who have left their homes since 1990 because they can no longer make a living from the land; 80 million migrants who have moved to cities in search of work; and 35 million people who work overseas. Certain cities in particular have experienced dramatic demographic changes, with increasing percentages of their population comprised of migrants: 42% in Toronto, 33.4% in Perth, 40% in Los Angeles, and 17% in Johannesburg, to cite but a few examples<sup>11</sup>. In the same period, literature dealing with themes of migration has enjoyed a greater degree of prominence in US and UK publishing houses and universities, and critical studies examining this literature have proliferated. There have been studies both of migrant literature in general<sup>12</sup>, and also 'area studies', focusing on South Asian writing<sup>13</sup>, US/Latin American border fiction<sup>14</sup>, European (including British) migrant literatures<sup>15</sup>, as well as even more specific case studies on the writings of particular

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<sup>11</sup> *The New Internationalist* (1998:18). On contemporary patterns of migration globally, see Stalker (1994) and the websites of the International Organization for Migration (<http://www.iom.ch/>) and the International Labour Organization (<http://www.ilo.org/>).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example, Chambers (1993), Bromley (2000), Brennan (1997), Crane and Mohanran (2000), George (1996) and King *et al* (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rushdie (1991), Brah (1996), Kain (1997), Needham (2000) and Nelson (1992).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kaminsky (1991) and Flores (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Brinker-Gabler and Smith (1997), Hall (1992) and Gilroy (1993).

migrant or diasporic communities<sup>16</sup>

Exorbitant claims have been made for these recent migrant literatures, both by the writers themselves, and by critics championing their work. Salman Rushdie, for example, certainly expresses little sense of disadvantage on account of his migrant position when he reflects:

I have constantly been asked whether I am British, or Indian. The formulation 'Indian-born British' writer has been invented to explain me. But my new book deals with Pakistan. So what now? 'British-resident Indo-Pakistani writer'? You see the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports (Rushdie 1992:63).

Indeed, rather than as serving as any kind of impediment, Rushdie believes that the experience of migration affords the migrant writer unique insights into the modern condition, although his narrator in *Shame* concedes a certain pathos:

What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nations? I think it is their hopefulness .... And what is the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one's luggage .... We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time (Rushdie 1984:71).

Rushdie's optimistic sense of the literary possibilities attendant upon the experience of migration is shared by Edward Said, who acknowledges that not all forms of migrancy are equal, but who argues nonetheless that the diasporic or migrant writer has unique insight:

And while it would be the rankest Panglossian dishonesty to say that the bravura performances of the intellectual exile and the miseries of the displaced person are the same, it is possible, I think, to regard the intellectual as first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity—mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and forced immigrations (Said 1993:403).

The majority of critics who write on migrant literature embrace the Rushdie/Said view, and make considerable claims about the capacity of this literature to challenge the assumptions of Western readers on a variety of political issues, but particularly

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ang (1994) on the Chinese diaspora and Parati (1999) on migrant literatures in Italy.

on the exclusive nationalism and systemic racism of the West. Roger Bromley (2000:16), for example, argues that migrant literatures 'can become a fundamental resource, not in connecting culture and imperialism, but in disconnecting and fracturing hegemonic relationships by giving shape to utterances which are outside the sentences of power and control'.

The few dissenting critics concede the general argument in favour of migrant literatures, but insist upon limiting and qualifying the ambitious claims made by the likes of Bromley. Elleke Boehmer (1995:237) points out that the writings of authors like Rushdie from the former colonies accord not only 'with the political and critical agendas of Western universities' but also with 'the global system of transnational information flow which so deeply informs late twentieth-century culture'. Furthermore, for Boehmer (1995:239), the much-praised 'hybridity' of these authors often lacks a political edge, and in their work 'hybridity ... remains primarily an aesthetic device, or a source of themes'. Timothy Brennan notes that the distinction Said draws between middle-class professionals from the Third World and the more numerous poor migrants fleeing poverty and civil war is but an empty routine, and is only rarely followed by any significant attention to the latter category of migrants. Brennan identifies James Clifford's version of the opposition as symptomatic, and argues that the general tendency to focus on the trope of 'travel' rather than 'displacement' contributes to the highly selective reading of migrancy and migrant literatures. Brennan (1997:17) suggests that "'travel" is the more theoretical term, and "displacement", far from being neutral, is designed precisely to force readers to remember the involuntary travel of deportation, migrations, and war'. Aijaz Ahmad emphasises the class divisions between different types of migrants, but, unlike Clifford, goes further in paying extended attention to the economic and political history of the late twentieth century as a preliminary to his critical assault on Rushdie and Said's self-aggrandising version of the migrant intellectual:

Needless to say, the ideological ambiguity in [Rushdie and Said's] rhetorics of migrancy resides in the key fact that the migrant in question comes from a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from the *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation—this, in turn, makes it possible for that migrant to arrive in the metropolitan country to join not the working classes but the professional middle strata, hence to forge a kind of rhetoric which submerges the class question and speaks of migrancy as an ontological question, more or less (Ahmad 1992:12f).

Ahmad (1992:13) declares his primary interest to be 'the relation between the internal structure of such rhetorical forms [like migrancy] and the historical coordinates within which they arise', and accordingly makes every effort to contextualise both the rise of the postcolonial migrant intellectual and her/his writings.

## **Conclusion**

The three quotations heading this article—by Lindfors, Marechera and Bhabha—represent three stages in the contested and uneven shift from conceptualising literature in national terms to thinking of literature in terms of migration. Lindfors's 1975 inquiry into the existence of national literatures in sub-Saharan Africa now reads at best as a well-intentioned attempt to promote the work of anti-colonial and nationalist African writers, and thus provide a literary-critical correlative to the struggles for national liberation from colonial rule. At worst, it reads as a patronising and misconstrued aspiration at odds with the economic, political and social issues that were confronting emergent nations at the time, not least issues of economic migration. The short stories by Mungoshi and Gordimer, I have argued, demonstrate the limits of conceiving the literatures of Southern Africa in such exclusively national terms, as both stories dramatise the powerful allegiances that exceed the vocabulary of the nation, and demand an expanded frame of critical reference.

Marechera's impatient refusal of the kind of critical pigeon-holing undertaken by critics of the 'Commonwealth Literature' generation like Lindfors also attests to the limitations of corraling writers into national categories. Marechera's hostility towards being classed as an 'African writer' or 'Zimbabwean writer', derives in part from his experience of censorship in post-independence Zimbabwe, a phenomenon he associates directly with unchecked nationalism. Marechera (1992a: 39) declares that 'all nationalism always frightens me, because it means that the products of your own mind are now being segregated into official and unofficial categories, and that only the officially admired works must be seen'. However, his desire to exceed the category 'African' or 'Zimbabwean' writer is further fuelled by his experience of travelling between Zimbabwe and Britain, and by his aspiration to fly beyond all parochial literary-critical classifications. Marechera's 'fuck you' registers in particular his wish for his writing to escape the reflex condescension directed at all writers inhabiting what he sees as the literary ghetto of African literature, and for it to be accorded the same critical recognition as (the mostly Western) writers of universal Great Literature.

Finally, Bhabha's breathless celebration of migrant intellectuals from the periphery returning to 'rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis' represents

an optimistic view of how migrant writers might through their work articulate central social tensions inaccessible to writers more securely settled in the national canons of the West. The strenuous criticisms by Boehmer, Brennan and Ahmad of the metropolitan reification of the middle-class migrant intellectual, however, suggest that extreme caution is required when applying the pre-occupations and critical methods of Rushdie, Said and Bhabha to all forms of migrant literature. For critics like Boehmer, the displacement experienced by the vast majority of poor migrants—as opposed to the travels of the privileged professional classes—deserves prominence, and the ‘historical co-ordinates’ of migrations precipitated by poverty and war warrant detailed scholarly attention, rather than peremptory footnotes servicing formal literary analysis. The Mungoshi and Gordimer short stories discussed here answer these salient objections in that they focus on the experiences of poor migrants, and require a keen sense of Southern Africa’s recent economic and political history in order to appreciate their complexities.

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