

# Narrating the *Japa* Syndrome in the African Novel: A Post Colonial Evaluation of Selected Novels of Chika Unigwe and NoViolet Bulawayo

PATRICIA NGOZI ANYANWU (PhD)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES,  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES,  
FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OTUOKE, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0009-0002-1078-5481>

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**Abstract:** The recent pattern of desperate migration of many Africans across international borders for survival generally known as *Japa* in Nigerian parlance has become worrisome. This is not only due to the vacuum created by the departure of these future leaders from their respective African nations, but also because of the inhumanity and annihilation inherent in this movement. The everyday predicaments of these Africans who embark on this journey of uncertainty to the diaspora are vividly portrayed in many contemporary African novels, including the novels of Chika Unigwe from West Africa and NoViolet Bulawayo from East Africa. In *On Black Sisters' Street* and *We Need New Names* respectively, these two African novelists bring to the fore, the numerous factors responsible for 'pushing' citizens away from their respective nations in Africa, as well as their detailed everyday experiences in their host nations in Europe, America and even South Africa. This study adopts a critical analysis of related issues portrayed in both texts in order to investigate the factors responsible for this desperation to 'escape' from their home lands, irrespective of the uncertainty of survival in these strange places. Using the qualitative research methodology as well as the Third stage of Franz Fanon's strand of postcolonial theoretical paradigm entitled "Literature of Combat", we have discovered that the desperation of African youths to migrate to other climes in Europe and America is occasioned by leadership failure in their homelands since decolonization. The study therefore recommends people oriented and more accountable leadership in all African nations in order to dissuade the ongoing migration in droves. The study also aims to emphasize the powers of the novel to create awareness and transform society, particularly its ability to address national challenges. In this case of massive migration out of the continent, the African novel educates and leaves the reader to make informed decision on whether or not to join the *japa* syndrome.

**Keywords:** The African Novel, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, neocolonialism, Fanon, Migration, *Ja'pa*, *Ja'ku Ja'pada*.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern African fiction is replete with the portrayal of everyday challenges of the people of the continent since independence. From the eve of decolonization in the continent till date, African novelists have dared to approach these myriads of challenges bedeviling the continent wearing different socioeconomic lenses in their choices of subject matter. Foremost of these socioeconomic challenges of the people of the continent, which form raw materials for creativity are

issues of war and insecurity as portrayed in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*; poor educational system, migration, political fraud as portrayed in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Okri's *The Famished Road*; unemployment, sexual abuse and annihilation of the girl child as portrayed in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Darko's *Faceless*; economic waste and irresponsible leadership as portrayed in Ike's *The Chicken Chasers*, and Wa Thiong'o's, *Wizard of the Crow*. The insensitivity of people in leadership positions is glaringly clear and loud enough for the blind to see and the deaf to hear, as no one is spared of the debilitating hardship in most contemporary African home lands, including Nigeria and Zimbabwe from where our primary texts emanate. Any attempt by the unemployed, displaced, oppressed, dispossessed and marginalized masses to challenge the status quo is usually met with debilitating punishments, including incarceration and annihilation. These unfortunate situations leave the masses perpetually impoverished, hungry and hopeless. Unfortunately, no one seems to care or make sincere efforts at addressing these life-threatening challenges. These dehumanizing conditions now leave the citizens with no other choice than to 'escape posthaste' for survival. This decision to flee from one's country in order to survive is known as *Japa* in Nigerian parlance! In other words, the ongoing migration of Africans in droves for greener pastures to Europe, America and Asia is an effort to survive existing hunger and dehumanization in their respective home lands. Often, such escapees rarely return back home, even when they do, their lives are rarely the better. Interestingly, this mode of migration is contrary to what obtained in the years of yore. In other words, migration in Africa has gone through different phases before the current voluntary migration in droves to more developed parts of the world.

The First phase of African migration abroad was the Trans-Atlantic slave trade era. During this time, Africans were forcefully kidnapped and sold as commodities to Europeans. As recorded in many slave narratives, including Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narratives*, captured victims fought so hard in order to either escape or be set free to return back home to no avail. Olaudah bemoans the traumatizing manner in which their neighbor's son was kidnapped when grown people were away in the fields. He records that "he was surrounded by the stoutest of them, who entangled him with cords so that he could not escape, they secured him" (47). He equally narrates the unfortunate incident of his own forceful kidnap alongside his sister "ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked and be carried off. Two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment, seized us both; and without giving us time to cry out or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, tied our hands and ran off with us into the nearest wood" (47). Thus, in this era of forceful dislocation from one's homeland, the victims were comfortable and contented within their family and sociocultural spaces of existence and could do anything to be free and to remain in their home land. Unfortunately, majority of them never regained their freedom nor made it back home from this journey.

The second phase was in the years immediately before and after decolonization. During this time, Africans travelled for purposes of education, skill acquisition or even business. At the completion of their studies, training or business abroad they returned back to their home lands in order to be part of leadership and development of their respective newly emancipated nations. In *Second Class Citizen*, Buchi Emecheta, through the protagonist, Adah, narrates the story of her town's man known as Lawyer Nweze. Lawyer Nweze had travelled to the United Kingdom to study law, has graduated and is being expected back home by his Ibuza kinsmen in Lagos, with lots of pomp and pageantry. She tells us that:

Ibuza women who lived in Lagos were preparing for the arrival of the town's first lawyer from the United Kingdom. The women of Ibuza bought identical cotton material from the UAC department and had it made into *lappas* and blouses of the same style. They died their hair and straightened it with hot combs to make it look European. Nobody in her right senses will dream of welcoming a lawyer who had come from the United Kingdom with her hair left naturally in curls. They composed songs, weaving the name of the new lawyer into them (8).

Adah further tells us of Lawyer Nweke's expected messianic role of saving his people of Ibuza from poverty and underdevelopment. Unfortunately, in reality, Lawyer Nweke and his contemporaries failed to take their nation to the expected height of development. Soon after the inheritance of power from their colonial masters, Lawyer Nweke and his ilk, metamorphosed into colonialists in black skin. They turned out to be more selfish and corrupt than their departed colonial masters. Hence, after over six decades of decolonization in this nation, their descendants are now scampering back to the United Kingdom, United States of America, Europe and Asia for greener pastures with no plan of coming back to their home lands. Some even take risky routes of dangerous terrains like the deadly Sahara Desert and turbulent rivers and seas in order to make it to their destinations in the developed world. Many African migrants have lost their lives in the course of this journey and ended up with no marked grave.

This desperation to relocate to more developed nation abroad, is necessitated by the heightened degree of unemployment, insecurity, inflation, lack of basic amenities of life and general underdevelopment in most African nations. There is an obvious vagueness in the future of these nations including Nigeria and Zimbabwe which are the home lands of Unigwe and Bulawayo respectively. These multifaceted challenges have necessitated the decision of youths to travel abroad in search of greener pastures. This desperation to 'escape' from the myriads of challenges bedeviling the citizens of one's nation is what has come to be known as *Japa*. *Japa* implies "escape". It is also synonymous with "run hastily" or "flee posthaste" However, in this study, we shall pay particular attention to the lives of these fleeing citizens from the two nations as depicted in *On Black Sitters' Street* and *We Need New*. In the evaluation of these two texts, we shall not only examine the push factors that are necessitating the unfortunate desperation to escape or *japa*, we shall also travel with these fictional citizens to their host countries abroad in order to ascertain the impacts of relocation in their lives. Incidentally, these impacts which are multifaceted have also found expression in the Yoruba language of the people of Western Nigeria in such phrases as *Jaku* and *Japada*. In other words, *japa* may lead migrants to either *ja'ku* or *ja'pada*

## II. LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE IMPLICATION OF NIGERIAN MIGRATION SLANGS.

What is *JA'PA*? (Escape hastily, Run, flee)

What is *JA'KU*? (Escape to die)

What is *JA'PADA*? (Escape back home)

*Ja'pa*, *Ja'ku* and *Ja'pada* are etymologically Nigerian phrases from the language of the Yoruba ethnic group of Western Nigeria. Within this terrain and beyond, these phrases have come to serve as slangs deployed in the description of different experiences of Africans who embark on the current wave of massive migration from their respective nations. In everyday struggle for survival, both humans and animals tend to move away from unfavourable conditions. The pace of this movement is usually determined by the degree of danger or harm in such unfavourable conditions. When the degree of danger is intense, unbearable and life threatening, the concerned being is expected to 'flee' speedily away or 'escape' from the dangerous or unsafe environment to safety. This hasty movement away from danger is what is denoted by the phrase *ja'pa* in Nigerian linguistic parlance. Derived from the Yoruba verb '*Ja*' and adverb '*Pa*'. The word *ja* means 'Run'; while adverb '*pa*' means speedily. Thus, the phrase *Ja'pa* or *japa* as it is widely written and used, literarily implies 'escape speedily'. *Japa* therefore connotes the urge to flee speedily away from an environment of danger. When applied to citizens in any given nation particularly most nations in Africa, to *japa* or 'Run or escape speedily' away from one's nation implies that there are objects of chase or push factors which have necessitated the need to 'escape' or 'run' away speedily from their nations of birth. In the case of contemporary African nations, particularly Nigeria and Zimbabwe from where our primary texts emanate, these push factors are primarily hinged on electoral fraud, corruption, greed and selfishness on the part of the nations' leaders. Other debilitating push factors in these nations include unemployment, low wages, hunger, poor infrastructure, war, insecurity and injustice occasioned by corrupt legal system. These and more constitute danger, misery and push factors to the helpless citizens. As humans, citizens in these nations are left with no other choice than to *japa*! Run, flee and 'escape speedily to saner climes in Europe, America and even Asia in search of functional infrastructure safety, comfort and greener pastures.

However, experiences have revealed that "not every relocation abroad results in a positive experience" (Michael, np.). While some who relocate for these unfortunate reasons record resounding success in their host nations, others are not so lucky. In the struggle for survival in their host nations, many African migrants face multifaceted challenges abroad. These challenges, include extreme weather conditions, sickness, weariness from excessive work schedule, crime, inability to acquire legal documentation for continued stay, imprisonment and even death. In other words, some of these immigrants from Africa are unable to succeed due to their exposure to unfavourable conditions which are strange to them. Within this category, some either lose their lives in the struggle for survival, or are forced to retrace their steps back to their African homelands. Those who lose their lives in this process are described as victims of *Ja'ku*, in Yoruba parlance which literarily means 'escape to die'. Yet, others who are unable to find their feet and adapt to unfavourable conditions in their host nations are forced to retrace their steps back to their home lands. Those within this category are described as victims of *Ja pada*. Thus, *Japada* literarily connotes 'escape speedily back' home. It is these three categories of migration experiences that are translated into three Yoruba language phrases as *ja'pa*, *ja'ku* and *ja'pada* respectively. In other words, in the contemporary African nations, some citizens migrate to success (*japa*); some migrate to suffer untimely death (*jaku*), while others who migrate, only to

soon return hastily back to their homelands in Africa (*ja'pada*). These and more issues constitute the subject matter and experiences of the characters delineated in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* as we shall discover in our analysis.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chika Unigwe and NoViolet Bulawayo are two female novelists who were born in Africa but now reside in Europe and America respectively. Having experienced life at home and in the diaspora, they both deploy their creative writings in the dissemination of the everyday challenges of the people of their respective nations. This is with the aim of raising awareness and engendering the desired developmental change in their respective nations and Africa at large. In *On Black Sisters Street* and *We Need New Names*, Unigwe and Bulawayo respectively, bring to the fore the 'pull and push' factors responsible for the ongoing migration in droves of their people as well as the challenges they face in their host nations. Thus, their preoccupations in these narratives have attracted critical reviews which are focused through various lenses. Uzodinma Iweala in his article entitled "Difficult Terrain in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" commends Bulawayo's power of description, especially in the creation of believable picture of Budapest and Paradise landscapes. On his part, Sanai Leyla in his "Review of *We Need New Names*" dwells on the humanity and humor as well as the author's effective management of the trauma in her Zimbabwean nation "without being unremittingly bleak". Helon Habila commends Bulawayo's capability in "covering every African topic in the novel as if she had a checklist from the morning news in Africa." The convincing combination of innocence and knowingness capture the attention of Jim Hannan. He is perturbed by "the early intimate depiction of Darling and her sub-teen gang." Unigwe has severally granted interviews in which she gives readers insight to her reason for writing on *Black Sisters' Street*. According to her, "Migration has affected the way I view the world and consequently the way I write, as have all my lived experiences. There are many stories I could tell but the ones that keep hammering at me to be told are those about the 'other', about women as 'other' in a place other than 'home', those about women at the margins of existence, about domestic violence, about choices we, as women, are sometimes forced to make" (Azuah et al, 115-16). Daria Tunca in "Redressing the Narrative Balance", harps on the fragmented structure of *On Black Sisters' Street*. She also notes the manner in which African characters indulge in the exultation of subjectivity typically associated with the white Europeans and concludes that the narrative rejects the idea of a unified Africa. Deirdre Flynn in "Sex Work and the City" bemoans the growing number of women illegally trafficked to Europe to engage in sex work. She concludes by declaring that poverty and lack of opportunities for self-realization make girls vulnerable and easy prey for the likes of Dele.

The foregoing critical evaluations of Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* reveal that the subject matter encapsulated in both texts are issues requiring immediate attention and solutions in the nations from where they emanate. Indeed, the novels fidelity to everyday realities of the people of the nations from where the writers emanate is a confirmation that the African novel is replete with issues confronting the people of the continent

### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Fanonian strand of post-colonial theory. In intellectual scholarship, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define the scope of Post colonial theory in its comprehensive sense when they declared that "it covers all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." (*Empire Writes Back 2*). However, the term 'postcolonial' can be used in two distinctive ways. Firstly, it can be applied in the description of the period of time 'after' a nation is no longer governed by a colonial power. Secondly, 'postcolonial' is used in the description and evaluation of the huge body of art, literature, political Science, Sociology, philosophical and any academic theory that addresses the long-lasting consequences of colonization on former colonies of the West. According to "Armchair academics", in contemporary times, the term "postcolonial" implies an "appraisal of the effects and legacies of colonialism on former colonies of the West many decades after their independence." On his part, Habib succinctly defines it thus "Postcolonial criticism reexamines the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources" (272). Thus, Postcolonialism offers a critical approach to studying the socioeconomic and cultural relationship between former colonial powers and current state of postcolonial nations. Issues of the relationship between colonial powers and their colonies are encapsulated in the works of the Algerian psychiatrist and Political Philosopher Franz Fanon, precisely

in *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Other notable postcolonial scholars include Edward Said in his landmark work entitled *Orientalism* (1978), as well as Homi Bhabha in “Narrating the Nation” and *Location of Culture*; and Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. The argument in this study is anchored on Fanon’s strand of postcolonial theory contained in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Though written before the attainment of independence in most African nations, the book is considered prophetic because it encapsulates notions on current African issues such as colonization, neo colonization, politics, capitalism, corruption, dictatorship and poverty and the role of literature in the quest for emancipation of the colonized. In the section entitled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” found in the third chapter of the book, Fanon identifies the important role of literary scholarship in the development of national consciousness and eventual emancipation from the grip of colonizers. He perceived three stages in the development of the literature of the colonized. According to him, the first stage is when the native elites learn the ways and languages of their colonial masters and deploy it in the same style as their metropolitan counterparts in Europe. According to Fanon, this stage is full assimilation and has nothing concerning the colonized in it. The second stage is when the native elites turn to their indigenous or local subject matters which they express in borrowed aesthetics. He terms creativities by native elites at this point as “Literature of combat literature.” The third stage is when the native elites and authors deploy their literary creativities in the expression of the hearts, desires and experiences of the colonized. He engages his literary creativity in educating the colonized on the urgent need for emancipation and retrieval of lost rights and entitlements from those who hold them down. Fanon brands the creativities produced at this third stage as the literature of combat. According to him, the work is “A literature of combat in the sense that it calls on the people to fight for their existence as a nation ... it is a literature of combat because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space” (193). With the foregoing, it is obvious that our two primary texts *On Black Sisters’ Street* and *We Need New Names*, written by Unigwe and Bulawayo respectively can be located within the literary critical terrain of Fanon’s Third Stage in the development of national consciousness. This is because the subject matter contained in the two texts revolve around the everyday realities of the people of Nigeria and Zimbabwe from where the protagonists emanate. In these two nations, the challenges of irresponsible leadership have culminated in lack of infrastructure, unemployment, hyperinflation, hunger and impoverishment of the people, leaving them with no other choice than to migrate, or *japa* to more secured nations in the West, the slave masters and colonizers of their forefathers. Adhering to Fanon’s recommendation of literature in the drive for emancipation of the colonized, Unigwe and Bulawayo have deployed the genre of the novel in the exposure of the frustrations of their people in order to raise consciousness on prevailing realities in their respective nations with the aim of engendering the desired positive change.

## V. SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION OF TEXTS.

Written by Chika Unigwe and published in 2009, *On Black Sisters’ Street* tells the pitiable story of four young female African immigrants in Antwerp, Brussels in faraway Belgium. They are here on a *japa* journey for the illusory greener pastures which they have been deceived to believe that Europe holds for them. Three of them Sisi, Efe and Ama are Nigerians while Joyce is from Sudan. They have been trafficked to this country for prostitution because their respective nations have failed them in various ways. They are victims of insensitive and irresponsible leadership and various sociopolitical challenges in their respective nations. These challenges include issues of war, unemployment, weak and nonexistent legal system for the protection of minors, the girl child and vulnerable women from sexual exploitation by men and the privileged in the society.

Sisi is a victim of unemployment in a nation of over six decades of decolonization. As an only child and a university graduate, Sisi dreamt of gainful employment with which to care for her aging parents who had made huge sacrifices in her upbringing and education. Unfortunately, after many years of futile search for the nonexistent job opportunity in the nation, Sisi falls victim to Dele, the ruthless and greedy human trafficker. He tells her, “If you *wan* comot from this our nonsense country, come and see me make we talk” (32). She quickly signs a bond of thirty thousand Euros with Dele who sponsors her to Belgium for prostitution on the extremely cold streets of Antwerp. Tired of the unholy profession which earns her nothing due to the bond servicing, Sisi falls in love with a Belgian named Luc and plans to quit prostitution and settle with him. But, unfortunately, for daring to conceive the idea of quitting the sex trade without Dele’s consent, Sisi is brutally murdered by Segun, under the direction of Dele from Nigeria. Sisi is therefore a victim of untimely death in Belgium.



Obviously, as a young woman, her early demise is caused by the decision to Migrate to Europe for greener pastures; She is therefore a victim of the *japa* to *Ja'ku* syndrome.

Sisi's colleagues in the sex trade Efe and Ama are trafficked from Nigeria to the red street lights of Antwerp. They are both victims of weak legal system needed to protect vulnerable girls from sexual abuses and exploitation in the hands of men who are old for their fathers. The demise of her mother when Efe was only sixteen years old exposes her to various faces of abuse in the hands of both her father and lover named Titus. At home, Efe is exposed to psychological and verbal abuses by her alcoholic father who expects so much of her including the care of her three siblings, regardless of the fact that she is a minor and out of school. The omniscient narrator tells us that Efe's father, "a loquacious man left it up to Efe to cook, look after the house and her siblings. The money he gave her every month was barely enough for food" (58). Despite his poverty and irresponsibility, he constantly harasses Efe and her siblings, "She could not remember the last time they had a proper conversation. Mostly he yelled at them, 'how long does it take for breakfast to be ready in this house full of women?'" (62).

Outside her home, Efe falls victim in the hands of Titus, who does not only rob her of her virginity, but also impregnates and abandons her. When she requests him to take responsibility for her baby Lucky Ikponwosa, Efe is humiliated and sent away by Titus and his wife. Efe's search for a job as a cleaner to eke out a living to care for her son drives her into the trap of Dele the human trafficker. After seven months as a cleaner in Dele's office, he approaches her with the *japa* for greener pasture option. Efe jumps at it and is soon flown to Belgium for prostitution. Ama is also a victim of sexual abuse in the Nigerian nation without social security for vulnerable children. The over pious Christian Brother Cyril, her step father engages her sexually from the night of her eighth birthday. "Every night her father came, but she would not share what her father did to her with anyone else, not even her mother" (133). Frustrations from her mother's neglect and her father's abuse arouses in her the desire to escape abroad where Brother Cyril will not be able to reach her. When Brother Cyril's bubble is burst, Ama escapes from Enugu to Lagos to stay with her mother's cousin, Mama Eko runs a local restaurant known as *buka* in local parlance. Dele is one of their very regular customers at the *buka* reputed for occasionally doling out gratifications to the unsuspecting Ama. Dele soon introduces Ama to the *japa* option: the opportunity to seek wealth through prostitution abroad. Though skeptical about the job description, but, left with no better alternative, Ama jets off to Antwerp for the sex trade.

Joyce is a victim of war from Sudan. She was Rescued by members of the Nigerian peace keeping force following a serious attack on her community in which she was raped and also lost all family members. One of the Nigerian peace-keeping soldiers named Polycarp takes a special liking to her. He returns with her to Nigeria with the plan of getting married to her. But his family will not hear of it. This, according to him is because as the oldest son in his family he is not permitted to marry a foreigner, except an Igbo girl. Determined to properly settle her before his marriage, Polycarp engages Dele to facilitate her journey to Europe, precisely Belgium. But she is deceived into believing that she is going to work as a nanny in Belgium. Having lost all members of her family to the war in her homeland Sudan, and, having also lost her benefactor Polycarp, Joyce leaves Lagos in deep sadness, ruminating on the predicaments of her life, "The soldiers that raped her that night had taken her strength, and Polycarp's betrayal had left her unwillingly to seek it back" (231). To her greatest chagrin, she arrives Belgium to discover the conspiracy of Dele and Polycarp in sending her to Belgium. She has come from Nigeria, not as a domestic staff in a white family, but as a common prostitute. This further deepens her despair.

Thus, in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Chika Unigwe portrays the frustrations, risks and dehumanization suffered by these young women in search of greener pastures in Belgium. Their dehumanization begins as soon as they arrive Antwerp for this ignoble enterprise. Firstly, they are robbed of their identity and given names that will be easy for white men to pronounce. Thus, Chisom is renamed Sisi and Alek's name is changed to Joyce Jacobs. They are also made to declare false origins. Sisi is told to seek asylum by claiming that she is a victim of war, a Liberian Madingo with no living family member. Ama is to claim to be an orphan, whose mother died giving birth to. She is also to lie that her father had died in an accident. leaving her with no other family member alive.

Secondly, on arrival in Belgium, Dele's proxy who is simply known as Madam seizes their passports to ensure strict compliance to their own side of the bond deal. Thirdly, the narrative voice tells us that their accommodation is a disappointment. It is "A ground floor flat with a grubby front door and, five bedrooms not much bigger than telephone booths. The sitting room was a cliché" (99). With a bond of thirty thousand Euros to pay to Dele, each of the girls work

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endlessly and still have little or nothing for themselves and to send back home. As sex workers, they are usually out in the cold, and must necessarily display their body. They often sleep with strange men with stranger requests faced with strange demands from their customers. We are further let into the many predicaments of Sisi before the decision which cost her, her life, "Sisi had barely any money left over after paying off Dele. And paying her part of the rent on the Zwartezusterstraat. And paying rent on the Vingerlingstraat room (253). Sisi is ashamed of the condescending aspect of the job, especially during the times when customers are scarce. During this time, they allow the few who turn out to engage in more risky styles, just for the money. Sisi has swallowed her pride and chucked her shyness in the bin. She allows her customers to "penetrate, blow job, no condom! "Wearing push up bras, rapping her gold plated ringed middle finger on her window to attract the men. Ratatat, see me here. Let me be the one to satisfy you tonight." (275). Unfortunately, Sisi's attempt at emancipating herself from this life of immorality and debasement soon leads her to death. Like Sisi, Ama and Joyce had dreams of paying off Dele's bond money, regaining their freedom and engaging in different decent businesses both back home and in Belgium. Unfortunately, Sisi's murder casts a gloomy shadow of uncertainty on all their dreams and over their lives. As they are afraid of who could be the next victim.

The *japa* syndrome intensely plays out in the lives of characters in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Set in both Zimbabwe and the United States of America, the novel harps on the consequences of elongated and insensitive leadership in her independent Zimbabwean nation. In the years following the nation's decolonization, particularly the regime of the old president Robert Mugabe, citizens were bedeviled with multifaceted challenges including electoral fraud, unemployment, Underemployment, galloping inflation, poverty, hunger and diseases. Other predicaments of the nation's vulnerable citizens include lack of basic amenities and privileges such as education, decent housing and healthcare. These challenges and more, constitute serious existential threat to the people, leaving them with no other choice that to emigrate overseas in search of greener pastures. The story is narrated by a ten-year-old protagonist named Darling. She and her pre-teen friends namely Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sbhho and Stina are neglected, abused and left on their own to struggle for survival. Chipo is eleven years old and already pregnant with her grandfather's baby. Bastard is eleven, Godknows is ten years old, Sbhho is nine years old. Stina's age is unknown because he has no birth certificate. As the narrative begins, we see these neglected children moving from their ironical Paradise slum to privileged Budapest neighborhood to steal guava. To them, stealing is right and a necessity because it is their only means of survival. Hunger drives Darling and friends into making wishes of life after death "When I die, I want to go to where there's lots of food," (105). Aside of hunger and unemployment, the nation is devastated by hyperinflation with its inherent reduction in the people's purchasing power. Darling's grandmother known as Mother of Bones expresses this frustration when she laments "I have lumps of money that cannot buy even a grain of salt." (26). While contending with the harsh realities of inflation, the vulnerable citizens wait patiently for the next season of election for the opportunity to elect credible and people-oriented leadership. On the day of election, they diligently exercise their franchise. They stayed up late, desperately waiting for the 'change' while dreaming of living better lives after the election: "I'll get a house where I'll stand up to my full height ... I'm going back to finish my final year at university. I'll go and get my child from those ugly streets ... call back those who have gone abroad ... we'll start living ... come change, come now! They waited and waited and waited" (136). Unfortunately, their much-desired change never came. The electorates soon realize that they have been defrauded of credible election result. Old men in power have succeeded in tightening their grip on power, leaving in its trail, victims of political and electoral violence, including a young man named Bornfree. The sign on his grave says BORNFREE LIZWE TAPERA, 1983-2008, RIP OUR HERO. DIED FOR CHANGE (141). With no hope in sight for the end of myriad of challenges in their homeland, the nation's youth left behind, soon join the exodus overseas in search of greener pastures.

In the two-page section entitled 'How They Left', the narrative voice bemoans numerous sad realities and consequences of youths' migration in droves out of her beloved country. She laments:

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing the borders- moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting ... quitting, flying. They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be pacified in foreign lands, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. Look at them leaving in droves. When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be pacified in foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strange lands (147-148).

This lamentation aptly captures the meat of this study. The *japa* syndrome from Africa to more developed climes is at its crescendo, a pitch that has never been experienced since the end of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. The disadvantages of the

vacuum created by this migration in droves have begun to negatively impact on the future leaders of the nation. Darling and her friends represent the future of this nation. Unfortunately, they are homeless because their homes have been demolished with bulldozers of the agents of government in power. They are out of school because schools have long been closed due to the departure of all teachers for overseas in search of greener pastures. She tells us why they left “All the teachers have left to teach where there is better money” (33). Aside of teachers, nurses and doctors have also migrated in droves out of the country. Those left back home are always on strike. The absence of doctors and nurses in the hospitals results in the loss of lives of sick citizens who should have been saved.

The list of those who have migrated is endless. Even darling and all her friends dream of travelling abroad. According to them, “who wants to be in a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart?” (51). Thus, Stina’s uncle who used to live in Budapest has migrated to Britain. His house is empty. Darling and her friends now steal guava from his uninhabited house. Darling’s father migrated and returns sick and in a pitiable physical state. He cannot be taken to the hospital because the doctors are on strike (101). He migrated to South Africa in a healthy state and returns with a debilitating sickness. Godknows confirms his healthy state before migration “He wasn’t sick when he left” (10). Darling describes the pitiable features of her chronically ill returnee father when she tells us that: “Father is perched there like a disappearing king, with long bundle of bones, at the shrunken head, at the wavy hair, most of it fallen off, at face that is all points and edges from bones jutting out, the pinkish-reddish lips, the ugly sores, the skin sticking to the bone like somebody ironed it on, the hands and feet like claws” (103). He is a victim of the deadly AIDS disease which is currently ravaging citizens of the nation. Aside of Darling’s father, the girl who earlier hanged herself had the disease. This was revealed in the letter found in her pocket. Many young people have been lost to the disease. The children’s visit to Heaven way cemetery reveals the extent of havoc caused the youth by this incurable ailment: “It is that sickness that is killing them. Nobody can cure it so it just does as it pleases-killing, killing, killing like a mad man hacking unripe sugarcane with machete” (135).

Darling soon joins the list of those who have left the country in search of greener pastures. Her Aunt Fostalina takes Darling to America to give her a better life and a brighter future. Two days after darling’s arrival in America, Aunt Fostalina’s cousin Prince arrives America as well (151). On arrival, Darling lets us into the astonishment of good quality and large quantity of food. She lets us into the numerous pull factors in America. She tells us that she now goes to school and that school is easy; She makes ‘A’ in Mathematics and science subjects, “there is a lot of food in America; some are even thrown away.” Their menu include pizza, burger, hot dog (158). The youth spend free time playing computer game, they have a young President, unlike their old African President; there is respect for human dignity in America, here, children are not exposed to physical abuse, irrespective of the offence. Darling also lets us into the lives and frustrations of many African migrants in America. Aunt Fostalina does two jobs in order to meet up with her needs and requests of those in her homeland. Darling joins the band of hard-working immigrants in America. She takes up a job and even works extra hours to save money for college because, according to her, “it is pretty more expensive for foreign students.” (259). The likes of uncle Kojo and Tshaka Zulu are stuck in America because they have over stayed the time in their visiting visas and now live in America as “illegals”. Tshaka Zulu paints a vivid picture of African migrants in America “When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything. Because we are illegal and afraid to be discovered, we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind” (244). They live in America as prisoners and only encourage those in their African homelands to come over to America. Apart from Chipo, majority of Darlings friends also join the band of those escaping from their Zimbabwean homeland, “Bastard went to South Africa, Godknows is in Dubai. Sbho joined a theater group and they travel and perform all over the world. To fill the vacuum left by Darling’s departure, Chipo delivers her baby and names her Darling (212).

Bulawayo also bemoans the frustrations of ageing parents whose children have joined the exodus for greener pastures overseas. Their longing to see their children and grand-children is never realized. “They waited and waited.” Majority of them die waiting and their children never attend their funeral because they have no valid visas and documents to reenter their host nations (252). Thus, the narrator lends the voice of these vulnerable parents when she laments

Look at the children of the land leaving in droves, leaving their own land with bleeding wounds on their bodies ... and hunger in their stomachs and grief in their footsteps, leaving their mothers and fathers and children behind, leaving their umbilical cords underneath the soil ... leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. Look at them leaving in droves (148).



## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current desperation of citizens of most African nations to migrate to Europe and America, leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. This migration in droves irrespective of the many decades of decolonization with its expected human and infrastructural development has created deep vacuum in many African nations: aging parents are sick and lonely with no one to care for them because their children have all left for better life in Europe and America. Like Darling many children are deprived of proper upbringing and education because their parents and teachers have all left for greener pastures. Greedy, incompetent and irresponsible leaders are having a field day and repressing their citizens in the midst of hyperinflation because most youths and elites have left, ailing citizens are dying in their numbers because nurses and doctors have all left for greener pastures. These predicaments and more are depicted Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The Persistence of these unfortunate realities ve incited different phrases deployed in the expression of the multifaceted experiences of those who embark on this journey of uncertainty. Foremost of these phrases are *Ja'pa*, *ja'ku* and *ja'pada*. These phrases are etymologically from Yoruba language and they are slangs which literarily mean "Escape" for the better life, "escape to suffer death", and "escape back home" respectively.

As clearly portrayed in these two texts written by Nigerian and Zimbabwean female novelists, the desperation to escape is necessitated by multifaceted push factors in their respective homelands. Push factors in these two West and East African nations which are vividly portrayed in the two narratives, include unemployment, hunger, war, diseases, electoral fraud and greedy and irresponsible leadership. In *On Black Sister's Street* and *We Need New Names*, Unigwe and Bulawayo respectively, delineate characters who undergo these various migration experiences. The *japa* group are uncertain of when to return to their homelands, and they include the likes of Aunt Fostalina, Uncle Kojo, Tshaka Zulu and even Darling. These have migrated with no hope of returning to their homelands any time soon. Majority of them are stuck because they lack visas and legal documents for re-entry into America if they ever dare to leave. They can only encourage those back in Zimbabwe to come over to America. The characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* have been forced into making wrong choices due to bad leadership. Their desperation for survival leads to the decision to engage in the sex trade outside their country. In this narrative, Sisi belongs to the *Ja'ku* group, those whose early demise is occasioned by the decision to migrate to Europe. Sisi is a victim of unemployment ravaging her Nigerian nation. As an only child, her death in Belgium portends a miserable old age for her parents who are now childless. Darling's father belongs to the *Ja'pada* group, those who escape back to their homelands because of their inability to achieve the expected success and good life abroad. Unfortunately, he returns in a pitiable state and soon dies of the incurable Acquired immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Using the Fanonian strand of "Literature of Combat" which is within the postcolonial theoretical paradigm, this study has established the symbiosis between the novel and the nation from where it emanates. Emanating from the West and East African Sub regions, precisely the Nigerian and Zimbabwean nations, *On Black Sisters Street* and *We Need New Names*, encapsulate contemporary challenges bedeviling the people of these nations. In these narratives, Unigwe and Bulawayo, have deployed their creativity in raising consciousness on the subsisting massive migration of the people of their respective nations to Europe and America. Through the use of the technicalities of setting, voice and character, these two novelists have not only brought to the fore the reasons for this unfortunate reality, they have also portrayed the consequences of this massive migration. The study therefore recommends a people-oriented leadership in these two nations, and Africa at large. These will certainly control the desperation of people from these African nations to migrate with its inherent despicable experiences of *Ja'pa*, *Ja'ku*, *Ja'pada*!

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