

*Mobility in Contemporary Zimbabwean Literature in English: Crossing Borders, Transcending Boundaries.*

Magdalena Pfalzgraf

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Magdalena Pfalzgraf's *Mobility in Contemporary Zimbabwean Literature in English: Crossing Borders, Transcending Boundaries* examines mobility in and across a number of spaces, therefore fulfilling the expectations raised in the title. The study is part of a burgeoning contemporary interest in mobility and migration in the arts, humanities and social sciences, defined as a "mobility turn" or "migration paradigm" (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, "Mobilities" 1). This mobility turn has also inspired a body of African literature of migration to which some of the Zimbabwean literary texts examined here belong. It has a particular relevance in understanding the post-2000 period as an age of the "wandering Zimbabwean." In wandering, different modes of mobility are implied –walking (*flânerie*), automobility and aeromobility– and their connections with race, class and gender emerge in the texts selected for study. These modes, and the ambivalence of mobility acknowledged by the author, have the capacity to either reinforce or disrupt the spatial regimes created through particular ideologies.

Adopting Ranka Primorac's deployment of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and Terence Ranger's take on patriotic history, Pfalzgraf reveals uncanny similarities between colonial and postcolonial times. Focusing on post-2000 mobilities while acknowledging prior ones, she reveals the ways in which the ZANU PF Third Chimurenga –an ultranationalist, autochthonic and Afrocentric metanarrative of the nation– shaped the Zimbabwean crisis (economic and political) that shook the nation to trigger both desired, unpredictable and unwanted mobilities across (trans)national spaces. The Third Chimurenga is described by Brian Chikwava in his short story, "The Blue Stomached Lizard," as a hijacking of the ordinary person's capacity to imagine the nation. This, as ideology, seeks to produce and enforce what Pierre Bourdieu terms *habitus*, or individual patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. This is consistent with what Pfalzgraf terms "state fiction" that is "surprisingly mobile; it can travel with the characters into exile to colonize the topographies of northern cities such as Edinburgh and London" (3). This allows her to identify

what she describes as the ambivalence of mobility that emerges in each of the chapters, which focus on literary representations of the crises of movement and stasis as they respond to monologic metanarratives of space, nation, and identity.

Mobility, by combining particular physical and political regimes, becomes interesting when viewed through the lens of aesthetics. Concepts of borders, boundaries, crossing and transcending are extended to literary canons to reveal the entanglement of writing and travel. Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord (2007) and Jill Bennett (2011) deploy the term “migratory aesthetics” for writing that is related to the mobility turn in twenty-first century literature. In the context of Zimbabwe, literary texts that attend to mobility reveal the possibility of flight from the tyranny of nationalist aesthetics, associated with what Moyo *et al.* (2020) view as “the maintenance of rigid artificial borders, exclusivist, populist and securitized nationalism, the continuity of restrictive and draconian colonial policies of migration” (*Migration Conundrums* 4). Examples of African writers whose work is shaped by migratory aesthetics are many (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Taiye Selasi, Chinelo Okparanta, Yewande Omotoso, and Nurruddin Farah, among others). Zimbabwean writers who have joined this migrant movement include Brian Chikwava, Tendai Huchu, NoViolet Bulawayo, Tsitsi Jaji, and Irene Sabatini. In a move that does not privilege migration to the Global North, this study offers interesting insights into local and transnational mobility. Out of the eight chapters of this book, only one chapter focuses on transcontinental migration to the West, which reveals Pfalzgraf’s resistance to the two temptations in much migrant writing: migrantizing the mobility of travellers from the Global South, and assuming an “overly sanguine mobility of the poor” (Clifford, *Routes* 34).

Using her mobility prism, Pfalzgraf offers useful insights into texts that contribute to the migration turn, although her selection leaves out other texts that could have contributed to the development of her argument. She must be credited, however, for acknowledging some post-2000 texts that for reasons of space are not “part of the primary focus” of her book: *The Highway Queen* (Virginia Phiri), *The Boy Next Door* (Irene Sabatini), *The Hairdresser of Harare* (Tendai Huchu), *The Book of Memory* (Petina Gappah), *This September Sun* (Bryony Rheam), and *The House of Stone* (Novuyo Rosa Tshuma). There are, however, other post-2000 Zimbabwean literary texts that escaped scrutiny at the time of the book going to press: *This Mournable Body* (Tsitsi Dangarembga), *The Theory of Flight* (Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu), and *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse* (Robert Muponde). While the text selection shows a preference for the novel, other genres in Zimbabwean literature have received less attention –although a

reference is made to the poets Musaemura Zimunya and Chenjerai Hove. Literature in the local languages has typically had a dynamic relationship with texts written in English, as demonstrated by the way Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* writes back to Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso* – an epic that channels the revolutionary spirit of *Nehanda*. Other examples of these literary themes, approached from different linguistic traditions, include Ignatius Mabasa's *Mapenzi* and Shimmer Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools*. This should alert critics and writers to the possibilities offered by under-examined translingual aesthetics as they enrich conversations in mobility studies.

What has been noted above does not devalue Pfalzgraf's book, which offers a way out of the trap of "monological approaches which see the literary system as uniform, static and closed" (Tagwirei, "White Zimbabwean Writing" 5). By including texts by white writers in her study, Pfalzgraf breaks the artificial internal borders of the Zimbabwean literary canon; in Zimbabwean literary criticism influenced by the Third Chimurenga, white writing is marginalized and often viewed as not Zimbabwean. Critical studies by non-Zimbabwean whites are also viewed as suspect, Eurocentric and not suited to addressing the demands of the ultra-nationalistic agenda. In this context, Pfalzgraf's book is a brave assertion that history, cultural production, and national identity need to be "re-theorized as multiple, in the torsions and tensions of different, sometimes incompatible, perspectives, stories, times" (Young, *White Mythologies* 3).

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