

MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET*, NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES* AND IMBOLO MBUE'S *BEHOLD THE DREAMERS*

BY

**Fumnanya Cecilia EBITEH
PG/ART/2015143**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY**

FEBRUARY, 2026

MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET*, NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES* AND IMBOLO MBUE'S *BEHOLD THE DREAMERS*

BY

**Fumnanya Cecilia EBITEH
PG/ART/2015143**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS IN ARTS (M.A.), ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

FEBRUARY, 2025

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this dissertation entitled “Migration in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*” was carried out by **Fumnanya Cecilia EBITEH** with the matriculation number **PG/ART/2015143** in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, under our supervision.

Prof. (Mrs.) Abigail Eruaga
Supervisor

Date

Prof. (Mrs.) H.O. Okolocha
Head of Department

Date

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION ON PLAGIARISM

We, the undersigned, attest and declare that the dissertation of Fumnanya Cecilia EBITEH, entitled “Migration in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Noviolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*” has successfully passed the plagiarism test and does not violate any copyright regulations.

Prof. (Mrs) Abigail Eruaga
Supervisor

Date

Prof. (Mrs) H.O Okolocha
Head of Department

Date

ATTESTATION OF CORRECTED THESIS

We, the undersigned, attest and declare that Fumnanya Cecilia EBITEH has successfully carried out all the required corrections as recommended by the external and internal examiners in her thesis entitled “Migration in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*”.

Prof. (Mrs) Abigail Eruaga
Supervisor

Date

Dr. Lilian Onyeiwu
Internal Examiner

Date

Prof. (Mrs) H.O Okolocha
Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to EL-ROI, (THE GOD WHO SEES ME).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I give thanks to God Almighty for His protection, guidance, mercy, grace, and provision throughout the course of this study.

My profound gratitude goes to the one who stood firmly in ensuring that I attained this additional degree, Engr. O. E. I am also deeply grateful to my family for their prayers, care, and constant encouragement over the years.

I sincerely appreciate my supervisor, Prof. (Mrs.) Abigail Eruaga, for her guidance, supervision, and contributions to the successful completion of this research. I also extend my appreciation to the intellectuals in my department, our scholarly lecturers - most especially Mrs. Florence Okpalaku, my school mother, for her continuous support and guidance from coursework to this present stage. I equally acknowledge: Prof. (Mrs.) H.O. Okolocha, Prof. (Mrs.) S. I. Akhumokhan, Prof. E. O. Okwechime, Prof. A. P. Mamudu, Prof. E. B. Adeleke, Dr. E. C. Odia, Dr. E. J. Legemah, Dr. R. N. Chikogu, Dr. A. I. Egbah, Dr. Lilian Onyeiwu, Dr. Jacinta Benjamin-Ohwodede, Dr. Toyin, Mrs. D. L. Efobi, and Mrs. U. U. Kalu-Bazuaye for their academic support and contributions.

My appreciation also goes to my course mates, especially my friend, Precious Ossai, for her motivation and support. Finally, I appreciate my doctor friend, Dr. Obuh, for his care and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Certification	ii
Certification of Thesis on Plagiarism	iii
Attestation of Corrected Thesis	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	ix
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Purpose of Study	1
1.2 Scope of Study	1
1.3 Research Methodology	2
1.4 Theoretical Background	2
1.5 Review of Related Scholarship and Justification of Study	7
1.6 Thesis Statement	22
 CHAPTER TWO: FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS	
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 Transnationalism and Economic-Driven Migration	23
2.3 Transnationalism and Politically-Induced Migration	29
2.4 Hope and the Quest for a More Prosperous Future	38
2.5 Conclusion	43

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

3.1	Introduction	45
3.2	Fear of Deportation	46
3.3	Economic struggle: A Transnational Perspective	55
3.4	Homesickness and Frustration as Emotional Consequences of Migration	61
3.5	Conclusion	66

CHAPTER FOUR: RESPONSES TO MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

4.1	Introduction	68
4.2	Poverty Alleviation and Employment Creation	69
4.3	Good Governance and Political Stability	72
4.4	Education, Skills Training, and Youth Empowerment	75
4.5	Protection of Women and the Fight against Trafficking	77
4.6	Fair Migration Policies and Legal Protection for Migrants	79
4.7	Emotional Support, Family Connection, and Community Care	81
4.8	Correcting False Images of Europe and America	82
4.9	Return, Reintegration, and Dignified Homecoming	84
4.10	Conclusion	86

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, FINDINGS, AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

5.1	Summary	89
5.2	Conclusion	89
5.3	Findings	91
5.4	Contribution to Knowledge	92
	Works Cited	94

ABSTRACT

Migration is a complex global phenomenon influenced by economic, social, political, and environmental factors. It involves the movement of individuals or groups from one location to another, often driven by the pursuit of improved economic opportunities, safety from conflict, or escape from environmental challenges. The study therefore examines how selected contemporary African literary texts portrayed migration and reveal its causes and consequences on the characters.

The data for this study were drawn from selected African novels that portray migration and its related experiences. The study adopts a qualitative research design using textual analysis to examine the themes, meanings, and realities of migration represented in the texts. A purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the novels and characters relevant to the study in order to achieve a focused and detailed analysis. The selected characters were chosen based on their relevance to the theme of migration and their contribution to the development of the study. In addition, the theory of transnationalism was employed to analyse how migrants maintain social, emotional, economic, and cultural connections across national borders.

The findings revealed that the major drivers of migration in postcolonial African society, as depicted in the three novels, were poverty, political unrest, and the search for better opportunities. The novels revealed that migrants experienced impacts on their identity and sense of belonging, reflecting emotional and psychological struggles that extended beyond physical relocation. Additionally, migrants in the diaspora faced significant and overwhelming challenges, including homesickness, fear of deportation, and frustration. The study contributed to knowledge by examining migration across the selected African novels through the lens of transnationalism, thereby deepening the understanding of migration as not only a physical movement but also an emotional, psychological, and transnational experience shaped by postcolonial realities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of migration and transnationalism in selected African novels in order to explore how these texts portray the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions driving migration, the consequences of migration and responses to migration as implied in these literary novels, with a view to contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding migration, identity, belonging displacement, and migrant experiences in African literature. The specific objectives of the study are to identify the socio-economic, political and cultural factors that drive individuals to leave their home countries in search of better opportunities abroad, analyse the consequences and transnational experiences of migration on migrants and their communities, examine the responses to migration challenges as suggested through the experiences, struggles, and relationships presented in the selected novels.

1.2 Scope of Study

The study focuses on the thematic exploration of migration in three selected African novels drawn from three distinct African regions, namely: Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) - West Africa, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) - Southern Africa, and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) - Central Africa, to show how migration is experienced in different parts of Africa. Each author writes about the realities of their region, but together their stories show that migration is a common African experience. The selection of these novels is informed by the thematic similarities among them and the shared concerns explored by the authors, despite their different African regional backgrounds.

1.3 Research Methodology

The study adopts textual analysis using a qualitative research approach. This study highlights the power of qualitative research in uncovering meaning, understanding complex themes, and drawing insights from African novels that address the realities of migration. As Josephine Oranga and Audrey Matere explain, qualitative research explores and provides a deeper, more detailed understanding of phenomena through non-numerical data, rather than testing hypotheses with numbers (1). This method is particularly useful for interpreting complex realities, such as behaviours, values, opinions, and social contexts. For this research, comparative interpretation was used to select three novels from different African regions, namely: Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, with the aim of exploring shared themes. To support this analysis, secondary sources such as scholarly articles, reviews, and critical essays were consulted; these materials provided valuable context and insight into both the public and critical reception of the novels.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The study adopts transnationalism as its theoretical framework. This theory is suitable for studying migration in the selected African novels. Transnationalism helps us understand how migrants stay connected to their home countries while adjusting to new places. It highlights cultural exchanges, mixed identities, and conflicts that come with living across borders. This framework provides a clear understanding of migration in the novels. According to Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, transnational theory emphasises on the creation of social, cultural, political, and economic networks that link people and communities across nation-states (131). It reflects globalisation and international mobility,

and indicates a departure from traditional ideas of nation-states to a more flexible, trans-border approach (Schiller and Levitt 48).

These scholars argue that transnationalism is the process through which people and communities maintain connections beyond national borders. This leads to the formation of networks that cross traditional geographical boundaries, including the construction of transnational identities and communities and the flow of people, ideas, wealth, and goods across borders (Schiller and Levitt 23). In the late 20th century, the rise of transnationalist theory was driven by globalisation and increased worldwide migration. Critics like Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc viewed transnationalism as a departure from traditional nation-state concepts towards transborder, deterritorialised social formations (23–48). In the 1990s, research on diaspora populations and the mobility of cultural identities popularised this theoretical framework in academic circles (Michael Kearney 549). Transnationalism theory is grounded in sociology and anthropology, particularly in migration, diaspora, and globalisation studies (Portes et al. 219). Steven Vertovec argues that transnationalism incorporates anthropological ideas of cultural hybridity and diasporic groups with traditional sociological concepts of migration, social networks, and identity formation (Vertovec 450). Globalisation studies have also influenced transnationalism by examining the interconnectedness and interdependence of societies on a global scale (Arjun Appadurai 33). The intensification of transnational social, economic, and cultural interactions due to globalisation has reshaped traditional ideas of territoriality and sovereignty (Basch et al. 4). Migration studies and transnationalism theory, therefore, work together to provide new insights into migration, diaspora, and belonging (Peggy Levitt and Nina Nyberg Sørensen 207). The theory focuses on transnational aspects of migration, such as maintaining ties with

one's home country, building transnational social networks, and navigating multiple identities within transnational contexts (Peggy Levitt and Nyberg Sørensen 213).

Several scholars have contributed to the development of transnationalism theory. Peggy Levitt is known for her pioneering work on migration and transnationalism, especially in areas such as identity, citizenship, and globalisation. Her research examines how migrants maintain links to their home countries while engaging in transnational activities and relationships (Levitt and Jaworsky 102). Vertovec has also made significant contributions, particularly in conceptualising and theorising transnationalism. His studies clarify the complexities of international social fields and the flexibility of transnational identities, in the context of globalisation (Vertovec 447). Nina Glick Schiller, a renowned anthropologist, has expanded our understanding of transnational migration by studying the effects of globalisation on social networks, diaspora groups, and migration patterns. Her works shows how migrants navigate identities and environments in transnational settings (Glick Schiller et al. 48).

Transnationalism is a key term that refers to how people and groups maintain social, economic and political relationships across national boundaries (Levitt et al. 206). Transnational social fields and communities originate from the movement of people, ideas, commodities, and capital. Developing this idea, Schiller and Fouron characterise transnational places as venues that span national borders and enable interactions and activities between individuals and organisations (542). These places might be factual, like diasporic communities; virtual and made possible by technology; or symbolic, like transnational identities. Also, transnational practices include a variety of behaviours and viewpoints that people and organisations adopt to practice transnationalism (Vertovec 507).

Remittances, cross-border communication, transnational activism, and preserving several identities are a few instances. These activities are essential to creating and maintaining global networks and social relationships.

Transnationalism theory has faced various criticisms and debates. One major debate involves the tension between essentialist and fluid ideas of identity. Essentialist views see identity as fixed and tied to factors like nationality, ethnicity, or religion. However, critics argue that these views ignore the flexible and changing nature of identity in transnational settings. Such perspective can reinforce stereotypes and fail to consider how individuals manage multiple identities across borders (Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky 136-137). Another criticism focuses on the theory's handling of power and inequality in transnational social fields (Portes et al. 230). While the theory acknowledges migrants' ability to adapt to different social contexts, it may overlook structural barriers and power imbalances that shape these relationships. Critics suggest that transnational theory should give more attention to how class, gender, race, and citizenship affect migrants' experiences (Portes et al. 231). The theory also faces challenges in research methods. According to Thomas Faist, transnational social fields are fluid and constantly changing, which makes them hard to study using traditional methods (9). Scholars suggest using innovative methods like multi-sited ethnography, network analysis, and digital ethnography to better understand these complex relationships (Faist 10).

Despite these challenges, transnationalism is evolving and has the potential to influence future research and political discussions. Its dynamic nature means continuous study is needed to understand its effects. Geopolitical conflicts, globalisation, and

technological advances are reshaping transnational networks, which require ongoing research.

Applying transnationalism theory to literature involves studying how literary works reflect and engage with transnational experiences, identities, and realities. Levitt and Glick Schiller note that literature sheds light on the complexities of transnationalism by addressing themes such as diaspora, cultural blending, and migration (207), while Appadurai adds that characters in literature often navigate identities shaped by global experiences (295). Similarly, Vertovec highlights how transnational literature explores the challenges of identity creation in a globalised world (450). Literature often crosses geographical and cultural boundaries and reflects the world's interconnectedness. Faist argues that literature is a powerful way to trace the movement of people, ideas, and goods while showing the interdependence of transnational networks (Faist 5) and Brah emphasises that it serves as a space for cultural translation and adaptation, bringing together diverse perspectives (128).

The frame work of transnationalism theory focuses on how these connections go beyond the traditional boundaries of nation states, creating ties that cross countries and affect identities, cultures, and loyalties. It helps in understanding how people, institutions, and social, political, and economic processes link and interact across national borders. The theory also explains how globalisation, migration, and communication technologies contribute to a world where people's lives and activities are interconnected beyond one nation alone. The knowledge gained from this theoretical background will be used to examine migration in the selected texts in the following ways: to show how migrants stay connected to their home countries; to reveal how migrants deal with cultural differences, create new identities, and belong to multiple groups; to explore how society affects

migrants' decisions and lives, including the economic, political, and social factors that shape their experiences; and to investigate the effects and consequences of migration across borders.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship and Justification of Study

Several scholars have, over time, unravelled various subject matters in the selected texts. This section presents a detailed examination of these scholarly positions and demonstrates how each position differs from the focus of this study. In a study on Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Clarisse Gabsa evaluates Unigwe's fiction as a 'political satire which exposes the illusion of the West' - a place that looks or seems different from what it is (14). Gabsa argues that the novel shows how Africans generally think of the West and how such conceptions contribute to their emigration in search of solutions to the various socio-economic and political problems (14); however, upon arriving in the West, they suffer profound disillusionment. Thus, the novel provides a social commentary on immigration founded on unrealistic expectations (16), examining its tragic consequences through the lens of the four black sisters' stories - 'a biting satire that depicts the clash between illusion and reality, as well as the effects of romanticised notions of Europe pervading African societies' (21). Gabsa further reveals how colonial histories and patriarchal structures uniquely affect women through feminist postcolonial theory, seeing the fiction as pushing back against typical Western stereotypes of African women (8). In Western portrayals, African women are often shown as backward, unintelligent, and sexually promiscuous, but the novel provides a countering opinion by revealing the complex identities and struggles of the black sisters. Therefore, it not only reveals the difficult situations that often lead African women into sex work in Europe but also challenges Western biases concerning their choices and

intelligence, serving as a talk back to Western cultural ideas that misrepresent African women among a host of others. Consequently, this research departs from the scope of previous studies to uncover factors responsible for migration in home countries.

According to Ijeoma Ibeku's analysis, Unigwe's fiction reveals the experiences of African women who migrate to Europe to earn a living "with their God-given endowments" (3), noting that the novel describes migration that stems from poverty, unemployment, corruption, and failed governance in their nations (6). The protagonists - Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce - migrate to Europe in search of a better life (3), yet the outcomes remain bleak, as they become trapped in prostitution, an understanding they held even before departing. Hence, through this diasporic view, Ibeku asserts that the novel exposes the sarcastic realities of economic desperation and the exploitation of women's bodies in the globalised world (8), while also revealing the corrupt practices of Nigerian leaders and the high rate of unemployment that leads many astray, as demonstrated by the protagonist's behaviour. Ibeku's submission is summarised thus:

Most scholars posit that the novel is about prostitution but it is obvious that the story of the four women goes beyond prostitution as could be deduced from their different situations that led them to accept Dele's offer. It exposes the high rate of corruption, unemployment, immigration, poverty, child molestation and gender issues in most African countries, especially Nigeria. The issue of Nigerian women working as prostitutes across Europe is of great concern as no woman would want to engage in such except being forced by the harsh realities in Nigeria, the bad economy and the government's lackadaisical attitude toward her citizens' welfare. The novel also portrays

the plight of these women and how they use their sexuality as a form of bargain (4)

While this paper focuses on the socio-economic issues of migration, they differ notably in their theoretical frameworks and literary approaches.

In this paper, Khalid Ahmed, Hassan Mahmood, Sardaraz Khan, and Aasia Nusrat analyse *We Need New Names* through the framework of intersectional feminism, examining how race, gender, and language shape Darling's migrant experience. The scholars argue that the novel reveals "the complex social forces" surrounding Darling's cultural and geographic transition (Ahmed et al. 1). This suggests that migration exposes migrants to multiple forms of oppression and identity struggles. The researchers further notes that "code-switching functions not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a marker of cultural negotiation" (Ahmed et al. 6), showing how language reflects Darling's attempt to balance her Zimbabwean identity with American culture. In addition, the article asserts that the novel's "episodic, fragmented form mirrors the fractured realities" of displaced people (Ahmed et al. 31), highlighting the instability and emotional dislocation associated with migration. While the article focuses mainly on intersectional feminism and identity formation in a single text, the present study differs by adopting transnationalism and examining migration experience across selected African novels.

In another insightful paper, Florence Orabueze illuminates the stark reality of how 'the legislation designed to protect vulnerable women and girls from sexual exploitation has failed to deliver on its promises' (37), observing that despite national laws prohibiting the trafficking of minors and international bans on human trafficking enacted over the past two decades, the horrific practice of sex slavery persists on a massive scale. Thus, the novel

exposes the reality of ‘sexual abuse and commodification of female bodies’ that transpires both domestically and globally (39); for instance, within local communities and private residences, the rape of daughters, domestic workers, and other young women remains an appalling reality (41), while practices such as polygamy and wife inheritance similarly enable men to satiate their sexual appetites with no regard for women’s dignity or rights. This seems worse in international communities where young girls are trafficked to serve as prostitutes in brothels regarded as a lucrative business and sub-culture that operates outside the bounds of law. Thus, Orabueze asserts that the novel issues an urgent call to action to confront the hypocrisy of laws that outwardly defend human rights yet tacitly enable the commodification of human bodies and lives (44). This is captured below:

On Black Sisters’ Street presents two forms of sex slavery - domestic and transnational.... Both domestic and transnational sex slaves are regarded as inferior beings by their traffickers. There is no difference between the treatment Madam gives to the trafficked in Antwerp and Ama’s mother’s treatment. In Europe, the sex slaves are stripped of their identities. Sisi’s real name is Chioma but before she leaves Lagos for Antwerp, she decides on her own to use the name of Sisi, and that’s what she even tells her boss, Madam. Before her death, the other three women - Efe, Joyce and Ama do not know her real name or anything about her. (62-63)

Orabueze’s study shares similar focus with this present study in its depiction of political mismanagement and instability but differs in terms of mediums and specific examples.

Salman Mohamed Salama Abdul-Hamid offers an ecofeminist reading of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* to examine how environmental degradation intersects

with gender oppression in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, he argues that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature are closely linked, noting that “the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing” (5). This framework allows him to interpret the novel as a critique of patriarchal systems that marginalise women while destroying their physical and social environments. Through Darling’s fragmented narration, Abdul-Hamid demonstrates how women bear the heaviest burden of poverty, pollution, poor housing, and social neglect. He expands the concept of “environment” beyond the natural world to include housing conditions, health challenges, and other socio-economic realities that shape women’s lives. He further emphasises central ecofeminist claim that “no attempt to liberate women [or any other oppressed group] will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature” (5).

Abdul-Hamid concludes that *We Need New Names* powerfully exposes male-centred systems of domination by revealing the interconnectedness of environmental injustice and gender oppression. Thus, rather than centering on ecofeminist concerns within a single text, this research foregrounds migration as the primary analytical focus.

Bryan Jachukwuike Udeh examines Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* to expose the socio-economic conditions that drive Nigerian youths into migration. He argues that unemployment, poverty, and distorted social upbringing are the major factors pushing young people to seek a better life abroad (52). Using realism as his theoretical framework, Udeh presents the novel as a reflection of real-life migrant experiences, noting that “realism represents true life experiences in literature” (52). However, Udeh emphasises that migration often results in greater hardship rather than improvement. He explains that migrants encounter social injustice, inequality, unemployment, and harassment in host countries,

where they are treated as social burdens rather than contributors (52). Drawing on Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's view that literature reflects societal realities, Udeh positions the novel as a critique of both Nigeria's economic failures and the hostile conditions migrants face abroad (54). Udeh concludes by calling on parents, society, and government to address unemployment through job creation and skills-acquisition initiatives, arguing that equipping young people with sustainable opportunities at home is crucial to reducing forced and ill-informed migration (52). Rather than limiting the analysis to socio-economic factors within one novel, this study examines migration as a transnational experience by comparing its motivations and consequences across three texts.

A. Di Pietro examines *We Need New Names* as a transnational coming-of-age narrative shaped by Zimbabwe's socio-political crisis and migrant displacement. He argues that the novel foregrounds the alienating effects of migration, where Darling's experience reflects a fractured sense of identity caused by geo-cultural relocation. According to Di Pietro, the novel "results to be an alienating experience for the character" (Di Pietro 155), highlighting how migration disrupts belonging and stability. This suggests that displacement is not only physical but also emotional and psychological, reinforcing the instability of migrant subjectivity.

Di Pietro further emphasises that Darling's development is marked by a condition of suspension, describing her migrant experience as a "prolonged period poised between childhood and adulthood" (Di Pietro 156). This notion of "waithood" illustrates how migration interrupts normal developmental and social progression, trapping migrants in liminal space. The critic's argument shows that Darling's identity is neither fully Zimbabwean nor fully American, but constantly negotiated within an unstable transnational

space. In addition, Di Pietro highlights the symbolic breakdown of Darling's reality, stating that the narrative reflects "the breakdown of the narrative's temporality as an opening to an image of a flourishing Zimbabwe" (Di Pietro 158). This indicates that even moments of psychological collapse in the novel carry a symbolic function of resistance and re-imagination. However, while Di Pietro focuses on world-making, unworlding, and narrative temporality within a single text, this present study differs by adopting a comparative transnational framework across multiple African novels, examining how migration operates through economic, social, and psychological dimensions beyond a single narrative structure.

Laura Haruna-Banke examines the striking realism embedded in Unigwe's hard-hitting novel, despite the text's focus on the tragic and often hidden world of sex trafficking (32), arguing that while the daily horrors endured by the novel's four central characters as enslaved prostitutes in Belgium seem far removed from most readers' realities, Unigwe skillfully grounds her story in larger social contexts that lend the tale an air of authenticity and immediacy (35). Hence, it effectively depicts the economic desperation and ethical failures that enable the horrific exploitation of vulnerable young women; therefore, by interpreting this novel through a realist lens, Banke underscores how Unigwe peels back the layers of a normally invisible world, revealing it in all its ugly, unpleasant, yet undeniably realistic contours, making a persuasive case that this wrenching tale of trafficking and dehumanisation sheds necessary light on ongoing social crises impacting disenfranchised groups. Through her analysis, she calls for collective social responsibility and concrete political action to combat the injustices and inequalities that enable the victimisation of society's most vulnerable members (17). This study is closely related to the current research on the harsh realities of migrants but differs in approach and the medium.

Okache C. Odey offers a direct analysis of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, challenging the long-held myth of America as Africa's "golden ticket." Using the postcolonial theory, Odey examines characters such as Darling in Bulawayo's novel and Jende in Mbue's novel, showing how both figures are trapped between the failures of their home countries and rejection in the host nation. Their experiences reflect the emotional and psychological dislocation of migrants caught between hope and disillusionment (68). He argues that harsh socio-economic and political conditions in African countries drive large numbers of people to migrate, particularly to the United States. However, upon arrival, many migrants are confronted with a reality that sharply contracts with their expectations: "things are not the way they imagine it to be" (66). Odey notes that while some migrants return home after experiencing disappointment, others remain abroad due to shame over economic failure or other social constraints. This situation demonstrates that "travelling to America may not offer socio-economic emancipation for every African migrant" (66). He further explains that idealized images of Western success-what he calls migrants "imaginaries"-fuel migration, but these dreams often collapse when migrants encounter marginalisation, otherness, and unfulfilled aspirations in the United States (67). Odey also emphasises the urgent need for new mind sets, innovative approaches, and genuine leadership reforms in Africa to make the continents more liveable and to curb mass migration. Whereas Odey compares *We Need New Names* and *Behold the Dreamers* to dismantle the myth of America as a "golden ticket" through a postcolonial lens, this study extends the scope by incorporating *On Black Sisters' Street* and foregrounding migration.

M. Rocio Cobo-Pinero examines NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* to reveal the precarious position of African migrants caught between postcolonial instability in Africa and marginalisation in the United States. Drawing on diaspora studies and Paul Gilroy's notion that diaspora disrupts fixed ideas of belonging, she argues that this framework can obscure the social, political and economic invisibility experienced by migrants, particularly in Zimbabwe's post-independence "born-free generation" (11). Cobo-Pinero shows how the novel's characters migrate in search of freedom but instead encounter exclusion, unstable identities, and a lack of genuine belonging. She concludes that Afrodiasporic literature exposes these precarious conditions while calling for new identities and forms of political agency to navigate contemporary migrant life. Unlike Cobo-Pinero's focus on diasporic precarity and identity formation in *We Need New Names*, this study adopts a comparative transnational approach to examine the root causes, emotional consequences, and lived realities of migration across *We Need Names*, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Behold the Dreamers*, foregrounding migration as a continuum shaped by illusion, disillusionment, and structural inequality across different migratory contexts.

Dr. Adaoma Igwedibia and Christopher Ezeonu analyse Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* through the lens of Everett Lee's push-pull migration theory showing how Nigerian women are compelled to leave by "push" factors such as poverty, political persecution and personal hardships like family pressure, abuse, or failed dreams (66). At the same time, they are attracted by "pull" factors in Europe including better job opportunities and improved living conditions (66). However, the authors emphasise that migration is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Each woman negotiates her own combination of push factors against obstacles like immigration barriers and the physical and emotional distance from

home (64). Often, the dream of an “El Dorado” turns sour, resulting in alienation, exploitation, or even death, as seen in the tragic story of the protagonist Sisi. The review also examines the so-called Japa syndrome, highlighting how personal perceptions and desires influence the decision to migrate. Yet reality quickly undermines these utopian expectations: host countries often treat newcomers as outsiders, and government neglect in Nigeria perpetuates the cycle of migration. As the authors conclude, “different shades of results are usually experienced by migrants as against the straight-jacket ‘Golden Fleece’ utopia that is usually expected” (64), showing that pull promises rarely meet expectations, while push factors affect individuals in diverse ways. In summary, they both effectively demonstrate that migration is shaped by a complex interplay of personal circumstances, societal pressures, and structural barriers-revealing the stark contrast between migration dreams and realities. Thus, rather than limiting the analysis to push-pull explanations within one novel, this study foregrounds migration as a shared yet varied experience across three texts, highlighting its causes, emotional costs, and consequences.

Monica Udoette and Joy I. Nwiyi investigate immigrant women and transnational sex trade in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, exploring Unigwe’s preoccupation with black women's survival and positing that “survival has become a more complex endeavour in the postcolonial era; especially for immigrant and subaltern African women who plunge beyond continental borders to renegotiate their social and economic status through sex trade” (242). This paper concludes that Unigwe projects sex trafficking as a complicated and justifiable aspect of global economy as she juxtaposes Europe with third world countries that force these women into bizarre paths of survival; however, this present study extends the discussion by examining immigrant women across multiple literary works.

Similar to Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* is Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, which has also received some critical attention. According to Shruti Haryana, Bulawayo's novel explores the formation of hybrid identities for migrants in a postcolonial society where the struggles of migrants are often marginalised and ignored, arguing that throughout colonial and postcolonial history, the experiences and perspectives of migrants have often been overlooked (29). Migrants have been relegated to mere silent observers of their own stories, without a voice, opinion or choice, their silence frequently misinterpreted as passive acceptance rather than understanding the complex social, political and economic realities constraining them. Hence, Bulawayo's narrative highlights the necessity for migrants to reclaim their voices and assert their agency in shaping their own identities and narratives (29). Moreover, Bulawayo employs the character of Darling to express complex, difficult issues like violence, poverty, and exploitation in her home country with honesty and clarity, her story beginning in "Paradise" but reaching a crisis when she cannot find belonging in America (31). This study is similar to the current study in uncovering the socio-economic factors responsible for migration but differs in their advocacy.

Azetsu Azashi Agyo, Martin Okwoli Ogbu and Materclaus Isah explore NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* to show how the legacies of colonialism continue to affect life in postcolonial Zimbabwe, causing emotional dislocation and identity struggles. Drawing on postcolonial theorists like Said, Bhabha, and Fanon, along with trauma theory, they argue that colonial structures persist through economic hardship, cultural mixing, and psychological stress, pushing characters like Darling to migrate in search of better lives-only to encounter confusion and alienation abroad. The study highlights Darling's journey as one of identity fragmentation. Colonial shame and hybrid cultural spaces distort language,

memory, and self-perception, particularly affecting women who carry intergenerational trauma. As the authors conclude, colonial influences continue to shape life in Zimbabwe through “economic struggles, cultural hybridity, and emotional alienation,” and Darling’s move to the United States makes her fractured sense of self painfully clear (41). The authors show how literature like this exposes the lingering effects of colonialism, providing insight into the emotional and cultural work needed for postcolonial healing. While they read the novel through postcolonial lens, this research foregrounds migration as a transnational experience, examining how displacement, disillusionment, and emotional struggle unfold across three African migrant narratives.

Laura Roldan-Sevillano analyses Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* tears down the American Dream myth. She points out that this whole meritocracy idea promises hope through hard work, but it often just breeds false optimism and self-blame when things go south (174). The Cameroonian Jonga family arrive full of belief in the US as a land of opportunity, only to hit the brutal wall of the 2008 recession, with millions jobless and a cutthroat system exploiting immigrants like them (175). What hits hard is the gap between those global tales of America as the “Promised Land” and the real racial and economic roadblocks that make non-white migrants feel disposable (176). Roldan-Sevillano highlights Mbue’s use of social realism to expose this limited and cruel myth tracking the family’s tough awakening. While Roldan-Sevillano examines the failure of the American Dream in *Behold the Dreamers*, this study compares three African migrant novels to analyse migration as a broader experience shaped by hope, disillusionment, and harsh realities.

Debi Erlanda and Desvalini Anwar examine how Bulawayo depicts the main character, Darling, as possessing self-awareness that drives her determination to transform

her life circumstances, delving into the depth of Darling's confrontation with the challenges involved in enacting profound life changes amid adversity; hence, it resonates deeply among many Zimbabweans because it reflects the struggles and aspirations of individuals striving for a better life despite facing daunting obstacles (52). Likewise, Erlanda and Anwar examine how Bulawayo's use of plot, conflicts and setting reinforces the thematic issue of Darling's life transformation journey, for example growing up in the poverty and chaos of the shantytown shaping Darling's powerful survival instincts from a young age, her experience with traumatic events like being displaced from her home by bulldozers and living amid rampant deprivation instilling in her the determination to persevere and improve her circumstances. Thus, this highlights the effectiveness of these literary techniques in portraying the rawness of Darling's experiences and the broader societal issues they represent (53), the findings revealing that the goal of every migrant is for a better future.

Moch Syaiful Anwar's study explores false consciousness of the American dream as portrayed in Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, revealing how the false consciousness experienced by two immigrant characters in their pursuit of the American Dream ultimately leads to their failure to achieve material wealth, as their belief in the American Dream's promises only grants them the power to compete with others' perspectives on class structure rather than enabling them to transcend their socioeconomic status (3). These two migrants, Jende and Neni, initially harbour aspirations of upward mobility and success only to encounter disappointment and hardship, toiling tirelessly and sacrificing greatly just to make ends meet; however, they eventually realise that the American dream they pursued fervently is but a mirage, unable to fulfil its lofty promises of wealth and happiness. Hence, the two

immigrants' dreams of achieving material prosperity in America remain unfulfilled. Anwar asserts that,

Most immigrants tend to misunderstand the meaning of the American dream so they come and move to America and then think that the wealth will just fall from the sky or that they will get rich directly overnight...The American dream is not just coming and earning money, it is rather a lot more. It pledges not only freedom to do whatever people want, but also freedom to start a dream and that dream asks for a risk and sacrifice. Immigrants must not think that they compete for material success only for being better than others. Furthermore, the false consciousness becomes the reality for immigrants to understand their dream in America (2).

While this paper focuses on the economic and political factors for migration, Syaiful explores the American dream.

In "An Analytical Approach to Nomenclature in Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*," Ansa Maria Lincon examines the significance of names and naming practices in *We Need New Names* using textual analysis and literary onomastic. The scholar argues that names in the novel are closely connected to identity, culture, migration, and displacement. According to Lincon, "names are indisputably essential elements in the formation of a person's identity" (115), showing that names in the novel function as symbols of history and belonging. The article further explains how Bulawayo uses names such as Bornfree, Freedom, and Nomoreproblems to reflect poverty, oppression, and political instability. Lincon notes that "Bornfree even dies at the end while trying to be free from the government" (118), revealing the irony behind the character's name. The study also analyses place names like

Paradise and Budapest as symbols of inequality, migration, and survival. However, this article differs from the present study because it focuses mainly on naming practices and literary onomastic, whereas the present research examines migration, identity crisis, and transnational experiences in African diaspora novels from a broader postcolonial perspective.

In another study, Mary Onuoha examines the extent to which the Jonga family in Mbue's novel strive to realise their dreams while simultaneously maintaining their African identity within American society, their supposed dream country, asserting that migration is an age-old phenomenon driven by various reasons ranging from voluntary emigration to forced exile (1), also presenting outcomes where some dreams are realised while others remain elusive. However, the effects of migration on people's identity and culture have emerged as intriguing questions that occupy a prominent place in the minds and works of contemporary researchers and literary writers, as evidenced by Adichie's *Americanah*, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*, which ostensibly expose the identity crises, rejection, deportation, and cultural bereavement that migrants face in their struggle to find their footing in their supposedly new "homes" (1). Hence, Onuoha's study tends to decry the protagonist's unspoken agonies without undermining the optimism that spiced this story, concluding that while a break from poverty could be a primary reason for emigration, the preservation of one's identity would compel an average African migrant to return to their roots (5). This paper speaks on how characters resist and maintain their original identity but differ in theoretical framework.

Migration is a common theme in African literature, but there are gaps in how it has been studied. Many works focus on migration within a single region or novel, and few compare its portrayal across different parts of Africa. By examining *On Black Sisters' Street*

(West Africa), *Behold the Dreamers* (Central Africa), and *We Need New Names* (Southern Africa), this study offers a broader perspective. Although, existing scholarship on migration literature often centres on questions of identity, this study is limited to the examination of migrants' transnational experiences, particularly their negotiations between home and host societies, cross-border connections, and the sense of belonging across nations. While migration is a transnational issue, few researchers have applied transnational theory to African fiction; this study fills that gap by employing this theory in the selected texts. Most existing research considers only one dimension of migration, such as economic or social effects, but this study explores economic, social, and psychological aspects for a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, while many studies discuss the causes and impacts of migration, few investigate how literature suggests solutions or advocates for migrant rights; this focus brings fresh insights and a new angle to migration in African fiction.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This study argues that migration in *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names* and *Behold the Dreamers* reveals transnational inequalities that produce displacement and force migrants into a continual struggle over identity, belonging, and survival.

CHAPTER TWO

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

2.1 Introduction

Migration has become a recurring subject in contemporary African literature, reflecting the realities of individuals who leave their home countries in search of survival, stability, and improved living conditions. This chapter examines the major factors responsible for migration as portrayed in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. It focuses on how economic hardship, poverty, political instability, and social conditions compel characters to move across national borders. By analysing the motivations behind these movements, the study reveals that migration in the selected texts is largely driven by the desire for economic survival and better opportunities. The chapter also employs transnationalism as a theoretical framework to examine how migration connects characters to broader global networks and new socio-cultural spaces.

2.2 Transnationalism and Economic-Driven Migration

Transnationalism provides a useful framework for understanding migration in the selected novels because it explains movement not merely as physical relocation but as a continuous connection between home and host societies. In the context of economic-driven migration, the theory helps to show that migrants do not simply leave one nation for another; rather, they become part of overlapping social, cultural, and economic networks that operate across borders.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the migration of Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce goes beyond the search for economic survival: their movement places them within a transnational space where their lives are shaped by forces from both Nigeria and Europe. Although they leave

home due to poverty and lack of opportunities, they remain psychologically, emotionally, and economically tied to their countries as their identities are constantly negotiated between their African roots and the realities of life in Belgium. This reflects a core idea of transnationalism: migrants live across borders, maintaining links with home while adapting to new environments. Similarly, in *We Need New Names*, Darling's migration from Zimbabwe to America is driven by economic collapse and political instability, but her life in the Diaspora illustrates transnational existence. She occupies an in-between space where she is neither fully Zimbabwean nor fully American. Her memories, language, culture, and emotional attachments continue to connect her to home even as she struggles to survive and adjust abroad. The novel therefore presents migration as a transnational experience shaped by economic necessity and identity displacement. Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* also portrays migration as transnational and economically motivated. Jende migrates because Cameroon offers no viable future, yet his dreams are rooted in both places. America represents opportunity, wealth, and social mobility, while Cameroon remains the measure of his struggle and ambition. His desire to return home as a successful man shows that migration is not a total break from the homeland but a process that links two socio-economic spaces. Through Jende, the novel reveals how migrants pursue economic advancement while simultaneously negotiating belonging, identity, and expectations across borders. Across the three novels, transnationalism helps to show that economic hardship is not only a push factor but also a force that drives characters into global systems where identities, values, and survival strategies are reshaped. Migration therefore becomes a transnational process involving continuous interaction between home and host countries rather than a one-time movement.

The characters' desire to escape poverty and improve their living conditions drives their decision to migrate. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, economic hardship and poverty are significant reasons for migration. One of the protagonists, Sisi, faces the crushing weight of poverty and lack of opportunities in Nigeria, which encourages her decision to go to Belgium. Throughout the novels, Sisi repeatedly reflects on the harsh realities of the life in Lagos, describing it as a place where she "wanted to escape the poverty, the desperation, the hopelessness" (12). Her frustration deepens when she declares that "this place has no future" (18), revealing the despair and emptiness that motivate her desire to leave. Unigwe further intensifies this haplessness through the metaphorical description of Lagos as "a city of death" from which Sisi believes she is escaping (81). The metaphor presents the city as destructive and lifeless, symbolising a society that kills dreams, ambition, and opportunity. Similarly, the statement that "the poverty was suffocating" and constantly reminded them "that we were not enough, that we were not worthy" (25) highlights the psychological effects of poverty, particularly feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and low self-worth. These emotional and economic pressures ultimately shape Sisi's migration aspirations, as she openly admits that she "wanted to go to Europe, to make money, to live a better life" (50). This statement reinforces that her migration is driven not merely by the pursuit of wealth, but by the desire to escape a society that repeatedly limits her ambitions and leaves her feeling hopeless about the future.

Similarly, Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* illustrates how extreme economic hardship and poverty in Zimbabwe's shanty town compel youth like Darling to migrate. Economic collapse, hardship, poverty, unemployment, currency instability, and the destruction of livelihoods serve as significant push factors. Migration emerges as a necessity

driven by both the lack of opportunities and the desire to escape poverty. The author captures this in the excerpt below:

They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be pacified in foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strange lands, the wounds of their despair bandaged in faraway lands, their blistered prayers muttered in the darkness of queer lands. Look at the children of the land leaving in droves, leaving their own land with bleeding wounds on their bodies and shock on their faces and blood in their hearts 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 the bones of their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. They will never be the same again because you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same. (Bulawayo 68)

The excerpt above emphasises the severe circumstances that compel Darling's family to seek better possibilities abroad. It highlights the harshness of their economic situation, where even basic necessities like food are scarce. Through vivid imagery, the text portrays characters departing their "wretched land" in search of relief from hunger, tears, and despair in "foreign lands" and "strange lands." The repetition in phrases such as "leaving... leaving... leaving...you just cannot be the same...you just cannot be the same," conveys the emotional and physical exhaustion of migration and illustrates how leaving home permanently alters individuals. Bulawayo's use of metaphors such as "their blistered prayers," "bleeding wounds," "shock on their faces," "blood in their hearts," "hunger in their

stomachs,” and “wounds of their despair bandage” depict the deep suffering, pain, and hopelessness experienced by the characters. The personification in expressions like “tears wiped away in strange lands,” and “griefs in their footsteps” shows how their sorrow accompanies them, even as they search for comfort abroad. Furthermore, the hyperbolic imagery, particularly in “look at the children of the land leaving in droves...leaving everything that makes them who and what they are,” demonstrates that migration, while necessary for survival, often severs people from their identity and cultural roots. This reinforces the emotional and psychological weight of economic-driven migration.

Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* also identifies economic hardship and poverty as main reasons for migration. The novelist narrates thus:

He was leaving Cameroon in a month! Leaving to certainly not return after three months. Who travelled to America only to return to a future of nothingness in Cameroon after a mere three months? Not young men like him, not people facing a future of poverty and despondency in their own country. No, people like him did not visit America. They got there and stayed there until they could return home as conquerors as green card or American passport bearing conquerors with pockets full of dollars and photos of a happy life. (Mbue 15)

The excerpt provides insight into the motivations and goals of migrants seeking a better life in America. Through a vibrant narrative voice, Mbue draws the reader into Jende’s inner world, showing his desire for economic security and social mobility. The rhetorical question, “Who travelled to America only to return to a future of nothingness in Cameroon after a mere three months?” conveys the desperation and hopelessness that push individuals like

Jende to migrate. The contrast between the “picturesque town in Cameroon” and the “future of nothingness” highlights the harsh economic realities driving migration. Phrases such as “people facing a future of poverty and despondency” underscores the dire circumstances that compel risk-taking for a better life. Mbue also portrays the ultimate goal of migration through the metaphor of returning home “as conquerors...with pockets full of dollars and photos of a happy life,” symbolising economic success, social status, and personal achievement. The use of “conquerors” evokes triumph and determination, illustrating that migration is not only a physical journey but also an emotional and psychological process through which migrants seek fulfilment and self-worth. The author further gives insight into Jende’s past poor living condition in Cameroon: “His father a farmer, his mother a trader, and his four brothers in their two bedroom carabout house in New Town, Limbe” (21). She uses a flashback device to recall Jende’s humble background as he reminds himself of his roots and inability to marry Neni, the love of his life. The excerpt serves as both a push factor for migration and a lasting memory of his family’s struggles. The image of the “carabout house” evokes the impoverished condition of his home, emphasising the constraints that compel Jende to pursue opportunities abroad. Mbue employs juxtaposition to contrast dreams versus reality. Jende is unable to marry Neni as his financial incapacity in Cameroon prevents it; only after migrating and working in America can he realise this dream.

Additionally, the inability to pay the bride price exemplifies structural obstacles tied to poverty, restricting Jende’s personal choice. His decision to migrate is therefore not only about seeking a better life but also about breaking free from economic burdens and proving

his worthiness for love and respect. Migration, in this context, is a strategy for achieving financial stability, social mobility, and personal fulfilment.

2.3 Transnationalism and Politically-Induced Migration

Transnationalism provides a critical framework for understanding migration caused by political instability and violence in the selected novels. It allows us to see migration not just as a physical displacement but as a continuous engagement between home and host societies, where individuals remain connected to their roots while navigating new socio-cultural, economic, and political spaces. In contexts marked by political unrest, corruption, and state neglect, migration becomes both an escape from danger and a process of negotiating identity, security, and belonging in foreign lands. In *We Need New Names*, the political upheaval following Zimbabwe's 2008 elections forces Darling, her family and friends to migrate. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the women's decision to leave Nigeria and Sudan reflects the consequences of post-independence political mismanagement and insecurity.

Similarly, in *Behold the Dreamers*, Jende and Neni's migration from Cameroon is influenced by corruption, political neglect, and a lack of opportunities, pushing them to seek safety and prospects abroad. Through a transnational lens, these migrations are shown as complex processes; the characters carry with them the trauma, memories, and constraints of their home even as they attempt to adapt and survive in new countries. Migration is therefore both a response to political instability and an engagement with transnational networks, highlighting the continuous negotiation of identities, loyalties, and aspirations. This theoretical framing sets the stage for analysing how political violence and mismanagement in the novels compel characters to migrate, shaping not only the movement but also their

transnational experiences. The excerpt below highlights the failure of political leadership, which has stolen the future of Zimbabwe's children:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47s between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them put in prison and all, there where they are dying of cholera - oh my God, yes, we've seen your country; it's been on the news. (Mbue 10)

The protagonist and her peers are forced to migrate in search of safety and stability. It shows the severe consequences of political turbulence on individuals and communities. The repeated "smiles" of the characters functions as an irony for loss of voice. The magnitude of brutality arising from the political upheaval renders them powerless, leaving them with no response other than silence disguised as smiles when confronted by their intimidators. The children are unable to defend their country because violence has stripped them of their identity. There is also vivid imagery that reflects the harsh political violence and suffering experienced, such as "vultures waiting for famished children to die," "dissidents shoving AK-47s between women's legs," and "people dying of cholera."

These images make the suffering concrete and relatable. Furthermore, the reference to the 2008 elections serves as a historical allusion to real events in Zimbabwe, including

election rigging, political torture, and cholera outbreaks. As a result, many are compelled to leave their homeland in search of safety and security. The passage also portrays the simplistic and often erroneous perceptions outsiders hold about Africa. Through the characters' forced smiles, Bulawayo conveys resignation and helplessness in the face of these stereotypes. The series of anaphoric, parallel questions highlights multiple tragedies associated with the continent's famine, violence, disease, and political corruption exaggerated through media representation. This moment emphasises the burden of representation and the emotional toll on characters that have lived through such realities, revealing a deep gap between lived experience and external perception.

Across different sections of the novels, Bulawayo employs the juxtaposition of Budapest and Paradise to portray the dreams and harsh realities of Zimbabwean children.

When we get right to the middle of Budapest we stop. This place is not like paradise, it's like being in a different country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live...Budapest is big, big house with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat graveled yards or trimmed lawns, and the tall fences and the Durawalls and the flowers and the big trees heavy with fruits that is waiting for us since nobody around here seems to know what to do with it. It is the fruit that gives us courage... (Bulawayo 5)

Bulawayo presents Budapest as a place of wealth, comfort, and abundance, described with "big houses," satellite dishes; neat gravelled yards, trimmed lawns, tall fences, Durawalls, flowers, and "big trees heavy with fruits." These images symbolise prosperity and excess, suggesting a world that exists beyond the reach of children from Paradise. The fruit, in particular, becomes symbolic; it represents both material wealth and the hope that draws the

children toward Budapest, serving as a temporary source of courage and longing for a life they cannot access. The statement that Budapest is “like being in a different country altogether” further emphasises the extreme social and economic divide within the same nation. Through this description, Bulawayo exposes the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The personification of the fruit as “waiting for us” deepens the children’s sense of exclusion, presenting abundance as something visible yet inaccessible. This not highlights economic imbalance but also reveals the psychological effect of inequality on the children, whose dreams are shaped by what they constantly see but cannot attain.

In contrast, Paradise is presented as a neglected and marginalised settlement marked by extreme poverty, decay, and social abandonment. Unlike Budapest, which reflects comfort and privileged, Paradise symbolises the harsh realities faced by the urban poor postcolonial Zimbabwe. The environment reflects not only material deprivation but also hopelessness and insecurity. Bulawayo uses the physical condition of Paradise to mirror the struggles of its inhabitants, particularly the children, whose lives are shaped by hunger, overcrowding and limited opportunities. The ironic naming of the settlement as “Paradise” further intensifies the tragedy of their condition, as the place offers neither comfort nor fulfilment.

We pass tiny shack after tiny shack crammed together like hot loaves of bread...Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin, nailed on the ground to dry; the shacks are the muddy colour of dirty puddles after the rains. (Bulawayo 14-17)

Bulawayo employs situational irony through the contrast between the name “Paradise” and the harsh realities of the settlement. Although the name suggests comfort, beauty, and peace, Paradise is instead portrayed as a place of deprivation and hardship. The simile “crammed together like hot loaves of bread” vividly conveys overcrowding and lack of space, while the description of Paradise as “all tin” stretching in the sun “like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry” creates harsh and degrading imagery that reflects vulnerability and neglect. Furthermore, the muddy colour of the shacks and their comparison to “dirty puddles after the rain” reinforce the bleakness, hopelessness and lifelessness of the environment. Through these opposing descriptions of Budapest and Paradise, Bulawayo highlights class and racial divisions within Zimbabwe and critiques the failure of postcolonial governance to bridge the gap between the bourgeois residents of Budapest and the marginalised poor in Paradise. Thus, these contrasting images underscore the children’s daily struggles while reflecting their aspirations for a better life beyond the confines of Paradise.

Similarly, in *On Black Sisters’ Street*, migration emerges from political and institutional collapse in Nigeria and Sudan. The women’s relocation to Belgium is driven not only by economic hardship but by a system that has failed to provide stability and protection. Sisi’s frustration reflects how individual struggles are rooted in national mismanagement. She states that: “It is not Peter’s fault, after all, that she has no job or that he did not earn enough or that the entire economy was in a mess, or her father had nothing to show for his 24 years in the civil service” (21). Unigwe shows how poor governance and economic failure, which are rooted in political mismanagement, force characters out of their homeland. Through Sisi’s reflection, the author reveals that personal struggles are deeply connected to wider systemic collapse. Sisi does not blame Peter for her suffering; rather, her

frustration is directed at a failed national system that has denied citizens opportunities and stability. The statement exposes how corruption and poor leadership in post-independence Nigeria have destroyed the economy, leaving educated people unemployed and hardworking individuals underpaid. There is situational irony in the fact that Sisi's father has nothing to show after twenty-four years of service in the civil service. This highlights the injustice of loyal labour without reward and demonstrates how political instability devalues honest work. The hyperbolic expression "the entire economy was in a mess" further emphasises the severity of the country's condition and reflects the hopelessness experienced by ordinary citizens. Through this, Unigwe links economic hardship directly to political failure, showing how state neglect becomes a major force pushing individuals like Sisi toward migration.

In another excerpt, the author expresses the emotional state of political violence and decadence:

Sometimes, before she fell asleep, she saw her parents lying on the floor of their bedroom. She tasted her fear as she hid in the cupboard with her brother. She heard the laughter of the soldiers as they tore her dress and squeezed her breasts. Sometimes she wished the soldiers had killed her. Having been left alive, she felt an obligation to survive, but what kind of survival did I have, living in a tent? I hated the camp. I couldn't make friends with the other refugees. Their singing and laughing irritated her. As if all was well with the world! She did not like the ease with which they adapted to camp life. She detested the sessions when the women gathered in a tent for coffee magnanimously distributed by aid workers who encouraged them to talk to one another. To tell one another about their lives in the belief that the

exercise would help heal them of the trauma they had gone through. (Unigwe 162-163)

The above passage summarises the deep trauma of Joyce, who endures sexual violence. She recalls “seeing her parents lying on the floor of their bedroom” and “hiding in the cupboard with her brother” as the soldiers “tore her dress and squeezed her breasts.” This visual, auditory and tactile imagery paints a disturbing picture of violence and memories that haunt her, especially before she falls asleep. The line “she tasted her fear as she hid in the cupboard” presents gustatory imagery that conveys how bitter and traumatic the experience remains. The author also employs flashback (“sometimes before she fell asleep”) to show how past violence continually invades Joyce’s present. Although the refugee camp offers physical safety, it is portrayed as stifling and emotionally isolating, preventing her from finding comfort even among fellow refugees. Her trauma makes the singing and laughter of others irritating to her, revealing the psychological burden she carries. Unigwe further uses irony to emphasise that survival without dignity or healing feels empty. Through Joyce’s experience, the novel demonstrates how violence, political instability, and forced displacement leave lasting emotional scars. Migration, rather than bringing relief, becomes a painful extension of her suffering, showing that political conflict not only displaces individuals physically but also traps them in continuous psychological trauma.

Lastly, in Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*, the poor political situation in Cameroon is the root cause of this unrest. Bad leadership, corruption, lack of opportunity, absence of rule of law, state neglect of citizens, and denial of rights, are the silent but powerful forces shaping the characters’ lives. Mbue explores the destructive impact of state neglect through this tragic episode:

“But I hate them! I really hate money doublers! Bosco scream his face suddenly unpleasantly twisted like that of a child about to ascend into a tantrum. My mother gave them my school fees to double so she could use the second part to pay for my sister’s school fees, but they never brought the money. My Mother lost everything! That why I never finished school. They stole my school fees.” (Mbue 168)

The experience presented in *Behold the Dreamers* exposes the harsh political and economic realities in Cameroon, where vulnerable citizens fall prey to fraudulent schemes such as the “money doublers.” The promise of quick financial gain reflects widespread corruption and exploitation within a broken system that takes advantage of desperate people. The woman’s death after consuming rat poison reveals the devastating consequences of poverty and political mismanagement, which push individuals toward irreversible actions. The “money doublers” symbolise political deception and false hope, while the rat poison becomes a powerful symbol of despair and the toxic reality produced by economic hardship. Mbue employs irony here, as the woman seeks to secure a better future for her son but instead loses her life. The vivid image of her death underscores the severity of her suffering and sacrifice. The failed doubling of money also foreshadows the shattered dreams that many characters experience, demonstrating how corruption and systemic failure destroy families and ultimately drive migrants in search of dignity and survival elsewhere. Jende narrates below:

Where did he go wrong? He rubbed his face with his palms. What would he do in Limbe if he returned there? Maybe the council would have a job for him, but it would probably be a laborer job. No way in heaven and earth was

he going back to sweeping streets and packing up dead cat and dead dogs.

(Mbue 70)

Mbue explores the destructive impact of state neglect in this excerpt. Jende's situation illustrates how political mismanagement in Cameroon traps many people in low-paying, degrading jobs with little hope for a better future. With few opportunities at home, Jende clings to any chance to build a life in America, despite its own challenges. The author uses vivid images such as "sweeping streets" and "picking up dead cats and dead dogs" to emphasise the harshness of his work. She also employs contrast to highlight Jende's fear of returning to these tough conditions compared to his uncertain life in America. These literary devices symbolise the neglect and economic stagnation caused by the failing political system in Cameroon, reflecting broader social problems and decline.

Jende further reflects on the maladministration of the Cameroonian government, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer: "...he would have to return to a country where visions of a better life were the birthrights of a blessed few, to a town from which dreamers like him were fleeing daily..." (60). The visual imagery "visions of a better life" and "birth rights of a blessed few" depicts opportunities as distant and largely inaccessible for most people. It implies that success is not earned through hard work but inherited by small elite. The passage paints Cameroon as a society rigged in favour of a tiny privileged group. Through this excerpt, Mbue suggests that political corruption and state neglect have profound personal and social consequences, shaping migration experiences and the quest for dignity beyond one's homeland.

2.4 Hope and the Quest for a More Prosperous Future

Transnationalism provides a useful framework for understanding how hope and aspiration shape migration decisions in the selected novels. Beyond economic hardship and political instability, migration is driven by the desire for a better future and the belief that life across national borders offers opportunities unavailable at home. Transnationalism explains migration not only as movement from one country to another, but as a process through which individuals imagine, pursue, and negotiate new possibilities while remaining connected to their places of origin. Hope becomes a powerful motivating force that encourages characters to endure risks, uncertainty, and displacement in the pursuit of social mobility, dignity, and self-improvement.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*, characters are motivated by dreams of prosperity and the promise of a better life abroad. These dreams are often shaped by idealised images of Europe and America as spaces of opportunity, abundance, and transformation. The desire to escape poverty, hopelessness, and limited opportunities fuels their aspirations and pushes them to cross borders, despite their awareness of the dangers involved. Migration, therefore, becomes both an act of survival and an expression of hope for renewal.

Through a transnational lens, hope is shown to operate across borders - characters imagine future success in host countries while reflecting on the failures and constraints of their home nations. Their movement is not only physical but emotional and psychological, as they carry dreams, expectations, and memories from one space to another. This hope sustains them through hardship and shapes their identities as migrants who believe that a more prosperous future is possible beyond national boundaries.

This section examines how hope for a better life motivates migration in the novels, revealing how aspirations for prosperity, stability, and personal growth drive characters to leave their homelands and seek new beginnings in foreign spaces. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the characters' dreams of a wealthier future drive their desire for social mobility and a better quality of life. The author highlights their yearnings and aspirations when she describes America as "the Promised Land that many heard of but only the chosen few got to see it..." (114). this description reveals how the idealised image of America attracts the characters and shapes their migration aspirations. From a transnational perspective, the impoverished and deprived are motivated to migrate to a place where everything seems better. In other words, the characters believe America is the answer to their prayers. Mbue also presents similar in *Behold the Dreamers* when Jende says, "my country is no good, sir... it is nothing like America... America is America" (39), illustrating how America is romanticised in the novels. The repetition of "America is America" emphasises the superiority and admiration associated with the country in the minds of the characters. The use of antithesis further highlights the tension between fear and hope, or risk versus reward, emphasising how strong the desire for a better life can be. Characters such as Sisi, Efe, and Ama, are fully aware of the dangers of leaving home but still take the risk because life abroad seems more promising than a life of poverty and hopelessness at home. Risks versus reward are illustrated as standing before two doors: one marked "danger" with the chance of freedom, and another marked "safety" leading to continued poverty. The conversation between Efe and Sisi is significant, as it reflects both loss and hope. The dialogue goes thus:

Efe: so, how was Naija when you left?

Sisi: same as always, Sisi said, nothing would be the same again.

She has watched her dreams and those of people around her scatter every which way. Like having a jar of marbles, glossy with promise, tip and scatter, bidding them from sight, under chairs and under cupboards. Antwerp was where she would tease out those marbles, gather them and have them fulfill their promise. It was a place to be when your dreams died, the place of miracle: a place where dead dreams resurrected and soared and allowed you to catch them and live them. (Unigwe 86)

When Efe asks about Nigeria, Sisi's response reveals deep disappointment and emotional exhaustion. The author uses juxtaposition to place Sisi's painful past alongside her hopeful vision of Antwerp, emphasising her desire to move from despair to renewal. Through simile and metaphor - "like having a jar of marbles, glossy with promise, tip and scatter"- Unigwe presents a vivid image of shattered dreams. The marbles symbolise aspirations that were once bright but have been lost and hidden by hardship, Antwerp is imagined as the place where these scattered dreams can be gathered and fulfilled. The imagery of marbles rolling out of sight under chairs and cupboards makes Sisi's loss tangible and relatable. Antwerp becomes a symbolic space of rebirth, "a place of miracles," where dead dreams can be resurrected. This reinforces the idea that migration is driven not only by economic need but by emotional longing and hope for restoration. Sisi's migration reflects a transnational desire to reconnect her broken past with a promised future.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, the hope for a successful future is also a key motivation for migration. The story centres on the Jonga family, who leave their poverty-stricken life in Limbe, Cameroon, to seek a better life in the United States. Their desire to escape poverty and limited opportunities drives their choice to migrate. On the one hand, Jende strongly

believes that America was something for everyone. This hope drives people across oceans, holds families together across continents, and sustains the quiet belief that a better life is possible across nation borders. Mbue's employs juxtaposition to reveal the theme of hope for a better future, drawing attention to the contrasts between their home country and host country in a lamenting conversation between Jende and Mr. Edward:

My country is no good, sir" he said. It's nothing like America. I stay in my country, I would have become nothing. I would have remained nothing. My son will grow up and be poor like me, just like I was poor like my father. But in America, sir? I can become something. I can even become a respectable man. My son can become a respectable man. (Mbue 39)

This passage contrasts hopelessness in Cameroon with opportunity in America - the repetition of "I would have" and references to generational poverty emphasise how stagnation destroys hope at home. America represents the possibility of breaking this cycle. Migration is therefore imagined as a path to dignity, self-worth, and social mobility. Through transnationalism, Jende's hope is shown as a force that connects his present reality with an imagined future across national borders.

Furthermore, in *We Need New Names*, the characters leave their country in search of a better life. Their migration is driven by the desire to escape difficult circumstances and build a new life where they can thrive and feel hopeful about what lies ahead. It also reflects the human spirit's need to grow, improve, and find happiness despite the challenges faced at home - as a result of the failed leadership, the characters in the novel all share a strong desire to go abroad. They lament below:

Darling: I'm not really worried because when that time comes, I'll not even be here, I'll be living in America with Aunt Fostalina, eating real food and doing better things than stealing.

Bastard: I'm blazing out of this kaka country myself. Then I'll make lots of money and come back and get a house in this very Budapest. (Bulawayo 8-9)

Despite knowing the threats of terrorism and the reality of menial jobs abroad, these characters are determined to leave their struggling homeland, motivated by the hope for a better future: Key moments in the story also highlight the collapsing economy, scarcity of jobs, and lack of basic necessities, which make migration not only a necessity, but also a source of hope. For example, the author writes, "Look at them leaving in droves, even those who have never been anywhere are leaving. But they will be back. I know they will be back. They will be back when the craziness is over, when it is safe again" (67). This passage captures the desperation driving characters to leave their homes in pursuit of safety and better opportunities, while holding onto the hope of returning once conditions improve.

The characters' willingness to face difficulties and make sacrifices shows the strength of their hope for a better life. While the promise of a brighter future drives migration, the narrative also portrays the struggles and disillusionments that come with it. Initial hopes often clash with the harsh realities of immigrant life, yet the goal for a better future remains a powerful motivation. The author further emphasises this when she writes: "This country was a land of overflowing, a land of honey, and we were determined to be a part of it" (19). This metaphor of a land overflowing with honey illustrates the wealth and opportunities migrants hope to find, keeping their aspirations alive even in challenging circumstances.

Overall, the hope for a more prosperous future pushes characters to leave their homes and seek better lives abroad. Despite the challenges and adjustments in new environments, the desire for stability, opportunity, and personal growth continues to inspire migration.

2.5 Conclusion

Economic, political, social, and environmental factors work together to drive migration, as revealed in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. These literary works explore the motivations behind migration and show how characters are compelled to leave their countries in search of stability, safety, and better opportunities. Poverty and financial hardship are key motivations for migration in all three texts. Major characters like Sisi, Darling, and Jende leave their homelands for economic stability and prosperity. They seek to escape the harsh realities while holding onto hope for a brighter future. The stories reveal how deeply people desire financial security and how far they can go to break free from the grip of poverty. In addition, the novels underscore that political unrest and violence are also critical factors driving migration. Political upheaval and violence disrupt the protagonists' lives, pushing them to seek safety and protection abroad. The novels highlight the strong desire for security that drives migration and show the harmful effects of political instability on individuals and communities. The characters choose to relocate for the promise of a better future, and this idealised hope empowers their determination as they endure the challenges and pains of migration. Despite disillusionment and despair, their expectations for a better life remain strong. Ultimately, the novels comment on the personal and societal issues that force people to migrate, remind us of the hardships and human costs of migration,

and examine political, economic, and aspirational factors. These works help us understand this global phenomenon and highlight the ongoing search for a better life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

3.1 Introduction

Although migration is often viewed as a pathway to better opportunities, it is also accompanied by serious challenges that affect migrants physically, emotionally, and psychologically. This chapter examines the consequences of migration as experienced by characters in *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*. These consequences include fear of deportation, economic hardship, homesickness and frustration. While migration is driven by hope for safety and improved living conditions, the realities migrants encounter in host countries often expose them to new forms of insecurity and suffering. The chapter highlights how these challenges shape migrants' identities, relationships, and sense of belonging across borders. Migration does not end with physical movement from one country to another. Instead, it introduces migrants to complex transnational experiences in which they must constantly negotiate between their home countries and host societies. The characters in the selected novels continue to live with the effects of displacement long after migration, showing that migration carries lasting consequences that redefine their lives.

Transnationalism provides a useful framework for understanding the consequences of migration in the selected texts. It explains how migrants maintain connections with their countries of origin while trying to survive and adapt in host societies. These ongoing connections intensify the emotional and psychological consequences of migration, as migrants are caught between two worlds. They are physically present in new environments but emotionally tied to their homelands.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*, migrants experience fear, instability, and uncertainty as a result of their transnational status. Their undocumented positions, economic struggles, and social exclusion expose them to constant anxiety and vulnerability. The fear of deportation, in particular, becomes a defining feature of their lives, shaping their decisions and limiting their freedom. Migrants live with the awareness that their stay in the host country is fragile and can be taken away at any moment.

Transnationalism also reveals how migration creates emotional distance and identity conflict, characters struggle with homesickness, guilt, and frustration as they compare life in their host countries with the realities they left behind. Their hopes for success are often challenged by discrimination, exploitation, and loneliness. These experiences show that migration does not automatically guarantee stability or happiness. Instead, it produces new forms of hardship that migrants must endure. Through a transnational lens, the consequences of migration are shown as continuous and deeply personal. Migration reshapes migrants' lives, not only through physical displacement but through long-term emotional and psychological effects that persist across borders. The novels reveal that while migration may offer possibilities, it also carries heavy costs that define the migrant's experience.

3.2 Fear of Deportation

The continuous fear of deportation is one of the most common problems encountered by migrants; their everyday lives are shaped by this fear, which also causes anxiety and feelings of insecurity. The novels under investigation address how the characters' interactions, choices, and general sense of identity are impacted by this anxiety. For example, Jende Jonga, a Cameroonian immigrant attempting to provide a better future for his family in

America, is greatly affected by his fear of deportation in the novel, *Behold the Dreamers*. This fear turns into an all-consuming force that influences his mental and emotional health as well as his decision-making. A serious psychological struggle begins the moment Jende gets the tragic news that his asylum application has been denied. His lawyer, Bubakar, informs him: "The asylum application was not approved...the case was being referred to an immigration judge. Jende would need to appear in court because the government was going to begin removal proceedings against him" (51). The impact of this revelation is immediate and overwhelming as Jende is struck silent, unable to respond as "his heart was pounding too fast for his mouth to open" (51). This physical response accentuates the acute fear and worry that engulfs him upon realising how unstable his circumstances are. He fears that his time in America may be limited, and the prospect of being deported weighs heavily on his mind, threatening to undo everything he has worked for. In his desperation, Jende contemplates his options, but they are limited. He considers seeking help from his employer, Mr. Edwards. The author reveals his thoughts in the following lines:

What were his choices? What could he do to stay in America? Nothing, except ask for the judge's mercy, Bubakar had said. Or maybe he could talk to Mr. Edwards. Yes, he could tell Mr. Edwards the truth about his immigration situation. Mr. Edwards might help him. He might give him money to hire a better lawyer. (Mbue 61)

The excerpt above uses internal monologue to reveal Jende's desperation and limited choices: The narrative provides a glimpse into his thought process - it reflects his uncertainty and fear. By using rhetorical questions, "What were his choices? What could he do to stay in America?" - the author captures Jende's anxiety and shows his sense of

helplessness. The repetition of “might” in “Mr Edwards might help him. He might give him money...” emphasises Jende’s uncertainty and the fragility of his hope. The use of direct discourse for Jende’s inner thoughts makes the reader feel his personal struggle more intimately. Also, the contrast between Mr. Edwards’ power and Jende’s weakness also shows themes of inequality and dependence that run through the story.

The vulnerability of Jende and his sense of helplessness over his destiny are brought to light in this excerpt. The idea of depending on Mr. Edwards, a man of considerable power and influence, shows how far Jende is prepared to go in order to prevent deportation. But this also reveals the power dynamics at work, as Jende feels obliged to ask for help from those in positions of authority since he is an immigrant. It further reveals how helpless he feels. For Jende, the fear of deportation permeates every aspect of his life and is not merely an abstract idea.

His lawyer bluntly tells him, “We’ll keep on trying our own way, and you keep on sleeping with one eye open, eh? Because until the day you become American citizen, Immigration will always be right on your ass, every single day, following you everywhere, and you’ll need money to fight them if they decide they hate the way your fart smells” (64). This statement clearly captures the relentless nature of Jende’s anxiety; the metaphor of “sleeping with one eye open” shows how Jende must remain perpetually vigilant, unable to fully relax or find peace. The fear of being pursued by immigration authorities is depicted as an inescapable reality, one that shadows Jende’s every move and decision.

The prospect of citizenship represents a distant hope, a potential escape from the constant fear that dominates his life. The lawyer’s words, “But Inshallah, one day you’ll become a citizen, and when that happens, no one can ever touch you - you and your family

will finally be able to relax, you'll at last be able to sleep well, and you'll begin to really enjoy your life in this country" (64), reflect the deep longing for security and stability that Jende yearns for. Citizenship is portrayed as the ultimate goal, the point at which him and his family can finally breathe easy and truly enjoy the life they have sought in America. Until that day comes, Jende remains trapped in a cycle of fear and uncertainty, where the threat of deportation is ever-present and the dream of a better life remains elusive.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, the fear of deportation is a powerful and pervasive force that shapes the lives of the immigrant characters. It influences their behaviours, interactions, and even their identities. This fear is deeply rooted in the uncertainty and precariousness of their legal status. It manifests in both psychological and social ways. The following statement made by Jende captures the intensity of this fear: "When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken borders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals" (108). This demonstrates how discussions about immigration in the public are received by those living as undocumented immigrants - the repetition of the word "illegals" emphasises the dehumanising nature of such debates; it reduces the characters to their legal status and instil fear in them. Migrants self-isolate to avoid exposing their legal status; the novelist emphasises the lengths migrants go to protect themselves thus: "We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We built mountains between us and them, we dug rivers, we planted thorns" (108). This imagery suggests that belonging in the host society is conditional, dependent on legality rather than humanity, and sustained through silence and self-erasure. The characters' reactions (stopping their breathing, laughter, and all activity) show how deeply this fear permeates their lives. It halts their

ability to live freely and fully. The fear of deportation forces these immigrants into a state of constant anxiety and vigilance. They “bit [their] tongues till [they] tasted blood, sat tensely on one butt cheek, afraid to sit on both buttocks, because how can you sit properly when you don’t know about your tomorrow?” (108). The situation described above conveys the physical tension that accompanies their fear, where even something as simple as sitting becomes a fraught action. The uncertainty about their future prevents them from finding any comfort.

The fear of deportation dictates the characters’ social life. It compels them to “keep to themselves, stuck to their kind and shied away from those who were not like them” (108). The need for self-preservation leads them to withdraw from broader society - it causes them to avoid interactions that might expose their legal status. This withdrawal is a protective measure, because they “did not know what they would think of us, what they would do about us” (108). The fear of being discovered and the potential consequences of deportation create an insurmountable barrier between the immigrants and the wider community. They avoid attention at all costs: not meeting stares or gazes, and even go so far as to hide their true identities. The novelist reveals thus: “We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We built mountains between us and them, we dug rivers, we planted thorns” (108). These metaphors of creating physical barriers symbolise the emotional and psychological walls they erect to protect themselves from the dangers of being exposed.

The following statement made by Jende also stresses the deep sense of loss and desperation that comes with the fear of deportation: “We had paid so much to be in America and we did not want to lose it all” (108). The sacrifices made to reach America, both financial and emotional, heighten the fear of losing everything if they are deported - this fear

becomes all-consuming. It affects every aspect of their lives, from their social interactions to their mental state. The statement made by Jende which says, “When they talked about employers checking on workers, our hearts sank” (108), encapsulates the omnipresent dread that the mention of immigration enforcement brings; the possibility of being discovered by employers and reported to immigration authorities is a constant source of anxiety. It underscores the fragile nature of their existence in America.

Through the novel, *We Need New Names*, the reader is also given a window into the harsh realities faced by those who live in the shadows, where the threat of deportation hangs over them like a dark cloud, influencing every decision and interaction. Fear of deportation in *We Need New Names* is portrayed as a disturbing force that compels migrants into degrading choices in order to secure survival in a hostile foreign land. This fear is rooted in the instability of undocumented status and the constant awareness that one mistake can result in expulsion; it operates silently, yet powerfully. It shapes decisions that affect the most private aspects of migrant life. Bulawayo does not reveal this fear through overt state violence but through the extreme personal sacrifices migrants are forced to make in their pursuit of legal security.

This reality is clearly illustrated through the experience of Aunty Fostalina’s friend, Dumi. Darling narrates that Dumi “married an obese white lady who looks like an anthill for the paper” (77). This statement captures the intensity of deportation fear and the extent to which it distorts human relationships. Marriage traditionally associated with love, companionship, and mutual commitment, is reduced here to a legal transaction. The phrase “for the paper” foregrounds documentation as the sole motivation for the union, emphasising how legal status becomes a matter of survival rather than choice. The simile “looks like an

anthill” employs grotesque imagery to convey Dumi’s emotional detachment and internal resistance. It reflects the absence of desire and highlights the humiliation embedded in the decision. Through this imagery, Bulawayo exposes how fear of deportation strips migrants of dignity and forces them into relationships that violate personal dignity.

Darling’s reflective comment further deepens the portrayal of this fear. She observes, “But the things people do for these papers, my sister, I tell you” (77). The tone of this statement is weary and resigned; it suggests that such extreme compromises are not isolated incidents but common experiences among migrants. The repetition implied in “the things people do” underscores the normalisation of desperation - fear of deportation is an accepted condition of migrant life; it pushes individuals to cross moral and emotional boundaries they would otherwise reject. The informal address “my sister” creates a sense of shared suffering which reinforces the collective nature of this fear among migrant communities. This moment demonstrates how undocumented status redefines personal relationships, forcing migrants to prioritise legal security over dignity and emotional fulfilments. In addition, fear of deportation compels migrants into constant vigilance and extreme personal sacrifices. The fear of deportation functions as a form of psychological confinement; it dictates intimate decisions, it controls bodies and relationships, it forces migrants to prioritise legality over self-respect. Dumi’s marriage symbolises how migrants surrender autonomy in exchange for protection from removal. This fear does not only threaten physical displacement, it invades personal identity and reshapes self-perception. Migrants are compelled to view themselves through the lens of legality and documentation. As a result, migrants experience identity disruption, as they are forced to suppress aspects of themselves in order to survive within hostile transnational spaces.

Through this episode, the author demonstrates that migration does not necessarily result in security or fulfilment; instead, it often produces new forms of vulnerability sustained by fear and uncertainty. It reveals how migrants survive in places where belonging is conditional and dignity is continually negotiated.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the fear of deportation is always present in the women's lives, shaping their thoughts and actions. This is exemplified thus:

“I have spoken to them,” she says. “Everything will be all right. No need for any of you to worry.” “Them” being the police...on the women's minds, is also the thought that they might be deported. Madam has often said that she knows enough of the right people in the police force to ensure that as long as they do not try to cheat her, the women are safe in Belgium. “Everybody has a price, even oyibo police! Pay the right price and you are safe. (Unigwe 232)

The above excerpt shows how the presence of law enforcement hangs like a dark cloud over their lives. Even though Madam intervenes and negotiates with the authorities, the women remain tense and careful; demonstrating that fear of deportation is psychological as much as it is legal. It quietly controls their minds, forcing them to live in a state of alert.

This fear acts like a shadow that follows them everywhere, shaping their behaviour and making them constantly cautious. They move through the house and streets with careful steps, aware that even small mistakes could draw attention or risk exposure. While the women are technically free to move, the fear of deportation creates a form of mental confinement: they self-police their actions, monitor their speech, and act in ways that reduce risk. Madam's protection provides a temporary sense of safety, but the thought of police

intervention remains ever-present, highlighting how fear can regulate behaviour even in the absence of physical barriers.

From a transnational perspective, the women's situation reflects the liminal position of migrants, who exist between two worlds - physically in Belgium but socially and legally marginalised. Their sense of belonging is conditional, based on documentation, obedience, and the favour of others rather than their presence or humanity. The fear of deportation limits social life, encourages withdrawal, and affects identity; the women are forced into invisibility, their autonomy constrained, and their sense of self shaped by anxiety. In this way, fear works as a tool of control, directing behaviour through worry rather than direct coercion.

Furthermore, the fear of deportation in Unigwe's novel emphasises the connection between personal experience and structural inequality, a central concern of transnationalism. The women's vulnerability is not only personal; it is shaped by global and local migration rules, economic disparities, and legal precarity. They live between the economic hardships of their home countries and the strict legal environment of Belgium, creating constant tension that affects their emotions, social interactions, and mental well-being.

In conclusion, Unigwe presents fear of deportation as an ever-present shadow that limits the lives of migrant women. It shapes social interactions, restricts freedom of thought and action, and produces a state of ongoing anxiety. The novel demonstrates that migration in transnational spaces is not merely about moving from one country to another, but about living with uncertainty, dependence, and conditional belonging, where safety, security, and dignity are never fully guaranteed.

Overall, fear of deportation emerges as a defining consequence of migration in transnational spaces. It shapes migrants' emotions, identities, and social interactions, producing lives marked by anxiety, withdrawal, and compromised dignity. Through the experiences of Jende and other migrant characters, the novels reveal that migration does not simply relocate individuals geographically but places them in a prolonged state of uncertainty where belonging remains fragile and conditional.

3.3 Economic Struggle: A Transnational Perspective

Economic challenges form a harsh reality for many migrants. Despite hopes for better prospects, many find themselves trapped in poverty, unable to achieve the financial stability they seek. The novels under investigation portray the economic hardships faced by migrants and reveal the gap between their expectations and the realities of their new environment.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, economic struggle is a central theme that highlights the harsh realities faced by immigrant families in America. The characters' experiences demonstrate the difficulty of achieving financial stability in a system that often seems stacked against them. Neni Jonga's aspiration to become a pharmacist sharply contrasts with the harsh financial realities she faces as an immigrant. During a conversation with the Dean of students, she confronts the stark truth:

“I want to be a pharmacist,” Neni said, no longer trying to disguise her anger.

“That’s great, and I commend you for that. But you came here today because you are desperate for money to finish school. You have two children, your husband doesn’t make enough money, and, by all accounts, you’re having a hard time making ends meet. Pharmacy school is very expensive, Ms. Jonga, and you’re an international student...Unless you change your legal status it’s

going to be hard for you to get loans to get the degree, if you can find a way to get your associate's from BMCC in the first place.” (Mbue 238)

This dialogue reveals the significant financial barriers Neni faces in pursuing her educational goals. Her legal status complicates access to loans, making her dream of becoming a pharmacist seem almost unattainable. The struggle to balance her ambitions with the immediate need for financial stability creates constant tension. The phrase “no longer trying to disguise her anger” highlights her frustration and determination, showing her refusal to accept vulnerability silently. Her aspiration represents hope, while the obstacles she faces reflect structural inequalities. Jende, Neni's husband, also struggles with the crushing weight of financial insecurity. He reflects on the pressures of supporting his family while ensuring Neni could continue her education:

My wife is supposed to return to school to keep her student visa, and I don't know if I'll be able to afford her international student tuition by washing dishes at restaurants. She may have to drop out of school and live without any kind of papers. Maybe she'll end up in front of an immigration judge, too, begging to please be allowed to remain in the country so she can find a way to finish her school. Forget about school, we don't even have enough to cook a good meal with chicken some days. I am holding on tightly to my savings so that I'll be ready for the day when worse comes to worst, but now I ask myself what am I saving it for? The worse has come to the worst, and my back is breaking. (Mbue 244)

Jende's reflections reveal the desperation of living paycheck to paycheck, where even basic necessities like food are a struggle; the financial burden of supporting his family while

also ensuring Neni's education weighs heavily on him. The repetition of "worse comes to worst" emphasises his hopelessness, highlighting the tension between survival and ambition.

Beyond material hardship, economic struggle deeply affects Jende's sense of self. His inability to provide consistently for his family causes feelings of shame, frustration, and failure. Poverty does not only limit his income, it undermines his dignity and identity as a husband and father. Economic struggle therefore becomes a psychological burden that reshapes how he views himself and his place in society.

Jende's desperation intensifies when he loses his job, as shown in his plea to Mr. Edwards:

"Don't be sorry for me!" Jende cried, slamming the book on the desk. "I don't want sorry. I want a job! I need this job, Mr. Edwards. Please don't do this to me! Please, I'm begging you, Mr. Edwards, for the sake of my wife and my children and my parents! For the sake of me and my family, please, please, sir, I'm begging you ... don't do this to me." (Mbue 202)

This moment demonstrates how critical employment is to Jende's survival and that of his family. The repeated pleas emphasise his helplessness, while exclamatory sentences convey urgency and frustration. The action of "slamming the book on the desk" shows his emotional breakdown. The direct speech allows readers to feel his fear and vulnerability immediately, and his appeal to family adds emotional weight, showing that his struggle extends beyond himself. The psychological toll of unemployment is further illustrated when Jende reflects on his joblessness:

He went into the living room, sat on the sofa, and turned on the TV.

Less than a minute later he turned it off. He couldn't watch. To be sitting at home jobless seemed the worst punishment of all. The idleness, the worthlessness. Watching television when others were at work felt completely profane. It was what little children and old people and sick people did, not able men. (Mbue 206)

Here, the text captures the deep sense of worthlessness that accompanies unemployment; Jende equates idleness with moral and social failure. The repetition of "the idleness, the worthlessness," emphasises the intensity of his shame; the comparison to children, the elderly, and the sick highlights his feelings of inadequacy. Poverty affects material conditions and mental wellbeing, undermining identity, dignity, and social belonging.

In *We Need New Names*, economic struggle is a central theme, highlighting the difficulty of achieving financial stability. Darling and her community face a world of deep poverty in Zimbabwe, where basic necessities are scarce, and opportunities for a better life are almost non-existent. Upon arriving in America, the characters quickly realise that economic struggles continue, as we are told that: "Darling and her aunt worked multiple jobs in America" (114-115), demonstrating how migration even replaces one form of hardship with another. The author emphasises the intensity of their labour: "And the jobs we worked, Jesus-Jesus-Jesus, the jobs we worked. Low-paying jobs. Backbreaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tonged the marrow. We took scalding irons and ironed our pride flat. We cleaned toilets. We picked tobacco and fruit under the boiling sun until we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds. We butchered animals, slit throats, drained blood" (106-107). The repetition of phrases like "Jesus-Jesus-Jesus" and "the jobs we worked" conveys the relentless and exhausting nature of their work,

while metaphors such as “gnawed at the bones of our dignity” and “ironed our pride flat” show how labour erodes their self-respect. The simile “we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds” captures the physical and emotional exhaustion they endure. From a transnational perspective, these hardships reflect broader structural inequalities: although physically in the United States, Darling and her aunt remain trapped in precarious economic positions, illustrating how migration often displaces rather than resolves poverty. Economic struggle in America leads to disappointment and emotional exhaustion. Darling’s expectations of prosperity gradually fade as financial hardship persists, replacing hope with disillusionment and revealing the emotional cost of survival in a foreign land. The economic struggle in America is not just about money but also about dignity; the characters navigate a system that marginalises them and offers little support, illustrating how poverty forces migrants into lives of fear, isolation, and relentless labour.

Similarly, in *On Black Sisters’ Street*, African women migrate to Europe seeking better economic opportunities but become trapped in sex work. Characters like Sisi, Ama, Joyce, and Efe are lured by the promise of financial stability but face exploitation. Sisi narrates below:

Sisi had barely any money left for herself after paying off Dele. And paying her part of the Zwartzusterstraat. And paying rent of the Vingerlingstraat room she was subletting from Madam. All of madam’s girls sublet from her. Five hundred and fifty euros a week they paid. She did not see how she could do this job long enough to save anything. (Unigwe 208)

This passage shows the relentless demands of poverty. Sisi works constantly yet cannot save; the repetition of “and paying” shows her endless obligations - her life revolves around

survival. Poverty restricts her independence and forces dependence on others. The narrative shows both material and emotional strain; Sisi's struggle reflects the broader theme of economic exploitation faced by immigrant women. Economic dependence increases vulnerability and fear because the women rely on Madam for work, shelter, and protection, poverty forces obedience and silence. Their financial insecurity leaves them with little power to resist exploitation, as survival depends on compliance and the avoidance of exposure or removal. Their daily lives depict survival as a constant struggle, where isolation and stigma compound their hardships. The novel shows how economic desperation can strip individuals of dignity and autonomy, trapping them in cycles of exploitation with little hope of escape.

Transnationalism theory helps explain the gap between migrants' expectations and the challenges they encounter in their host countries. In *Behold the Dreamers*, Neni's inability to access loans and Jende's struggle to maintain employment highlight how economic hardships are shaped by structural inequalities that transcend borders. Their experiences reflect the broader transnational reality in which migrants' aspirations clash with systemic barriers. In *We Need New Names*, Darling's struggle demonstrates how economic challenges persist across borders. Menial work and financial insecurity reveal the gap between the dream of a better life and the reality of migration. Transnationalism shows that these economic struggles are not isolated but part of a global pattern of marginalisation. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the women's exploitation reflects the darker side of transnational migration. While they migrate seeking financial security, global networks of trafficking and economic desperation perpetuate cycles of suffering; transnationalism theory highlights how

global economic forces shape migrants' experiences, often replacing the promise of opportunity with hardship.

Overall, economic struggles as depicted in these novels, demonstrate the human cost of migration. While migrants pursue better lives, they often encounter financial hardship, exploitation, and psychological stress. Transnationalism underscores how these challenges are connected to global systems, showing how economic forces transcend borders and deeply affect migrants' lives.

3.4 Homesickness and Frustration as Emotional Consequences of Migration

Transnationalism offers a useful framework for understanding homesickness and frustration as emotional consequences of migration. The theory explains how migrants remain emotionally, socially, and psychologically connected to their home countries even after physical relocation. These sustained connections often generate emotional tension, as migrants struggle to balance life in the host country with enduring ties to home. In the novels under study, homesickness and frustration are closely linked; homesickness produces longing and guilt, while frustration emerges from separation, legal uncertainty, economic hardship, and the inability to fully belong either at home or abroad. This connection between longing and emotional strain becomes evident across the migrant experiences portrayed in the selected novels.

In *We Need New Names*, homesickness is a recurring emotional experience that shapes Darling's migrant identity; her longing for home is closely tied to her emotional connection to her family, particularly her mother. This is evident when Darling reflects: "Today, it's Mother on the phone. I am glad to hear her voice so I start smiling. I miss her so much sometimes it makes me dizzy but then there is nothing I can do about it" (91). This

excerpt reveals the emotional complexity of homesickness; the joy Darling feels upon hearing her mother's voice is quickly overshadowed by intense longing. The expression "it makes me dizzy" suggests how overwhelming this emotion is, showing that homesickness affects her both emotionally and physically. Her admission that "nothing I can do about it" reflects a sense of powerlessness, which introduces frustration into her experience. Although the phone call provides temporary comfort, it also reinforces the distance separating her from her family; thus, even moments of connection become reminders of separation.

Darling's homesickness is further complicated by emotional withdrawal and guilt. She explains below: "With time I stopped writing altogether. I just started putting it off, telling myself I'd write soon and that was it, before I knew it I'd lost touch" (83). This withdrawal does not indicate indifference. Instead, it reflects emotional exhaustion and avoidance. Darling later clarifies that her silence does not mean she has forgotten those at home, she said: "But it didn't mean I'd forgotten about them; I missed them, missed them very much" (83). The repetition of "missed" emphasises the depth and persistence of her longing. Homesickness accumulates rather than fades; this feeling is intensified by guilt, as Darling further lists what she misses: "I also missed Budapest, missed Fambeki, missed Paradise, missed Mother and Mother of Bones and Motherlove, all those people, even prophet Revelations I missed them all" (83). This group of people and places shows that home exists as a network of relationships and memories. Migration, therefore, does not sever emotional ties; it intensifies them, creating frustration rooted in distance and inability to return. As time passes, this attachment deepens emotional strain; as prolonged homesickness gives way to explicit expressions of frustration rooted in uncertainty and a deferred return.

In *We Need New Names*, frustration is also expressed through delayed promises and loss. Darling narrates:

We did not want to tell them we still had no papers... we said, we are coming soon, we are coming next year. And next year came and we said Next year...As the year pass, their parents continue to wait. First with hope, then with frustration and despair...their parents stop believing the promises and begin to curse America as the greedy monster that swallowed their children.
(Bulawayo 108–109)

The passage captures the emotional rupture between those who leave and those left behind, showing how distance transforms hope into resentment and frustration; it powerfully illustrates frustration as emotional consequence of migration, operating on both side of the migratory divide. The repetition of “next year” emphasise prolonged frustration and emotional strain; the personification of America as “the greedy monster that swallowed their children” (108) intensifies the sense of injustice and powerlessness: the parents continued waiting, followed by their decision to curse America, reflects a shift in tone from hope to bitterness, highlighting growing frustration. Through symbolism, America becomes a force that “steals” children and fractures families. Bulawayo uses these techniques to show how migration intensifies homesickness and frustration, transforming expectation into emotional loss.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, homesickness is closely tied to emotional loss and strained family relationships. Efe's longing for her son reveals the emotional cost of migration. She confesses: “Efe says she wishes she could see L.I. She says that when she talks to him on the phone it's like talking to a stranger, and that bothers her” (81). The

phrase “like talking to a stranger” highlights the emotional distance created by prolonged separation; homesickness here is not only about missing home but about the painful awareness that relationships have changed. This fear deepens when Efe worries that: “L.I. does not see her as his mother” (81). This statement reveals how migration disrupts identity, particularly motherhood. Efe’s frustration stems from her inability to fulfil her maternal role, despite migrating to provide a better life for her child. Her experience reflects a broader migrant reality where economic survival comes at the cost of emotional connection. Thus, emotional sacrifice becomes inseparable from frustration.

Homesickness in *On Black Sisters’ Street* also manifests through memory and regret, particularly in Sisi’s experience. The narrator observes: “Sisi let her thoughts be consumed by the boy and his antics, so there was no space in her head to think of her family, or of Peter” (114). This suggests an attempt to suppress memory as a coping mechanism. However, the effort fails, as the narration continues: “She had thought that leaving him would be easy after all, they had no future together but she was starting to realise that she could not have been more wrong” (114). This realisation reflects emotional miscalculation. Physical separation does not weaken attachment; instead, it intensifies it. Homesickness then becomes embodied through sensory memory: “She saw him whenever her eyes were closed. And even in the room right now, she could swear she smelled him that she could smell the mentholated powder he always rubbed on his back for pimples and for the heat” (114). The sensory imagery shows how memory collapses distance; Homesickness invades Sisi’s private space and refuses suppression. When she recalls “their moments of intimacy” and “wonders if she was wrong to have given him up,” homesickness transforms into frustration and regret over irreversible choices. In this way, emotional longing evolves into sustained

dissatisfaction; this sustained dissatisfaction finds fuller expression in material deprivation, exploitation, and shattered expectations.

Frustration in *On Black Sisters' Street* is also linked to exploitation and unfulfilled dreams. Ama reflects on Sisi's aspirations: "Just yesterday, just yesterday, Sisi was telling me about the bag she was saving up to buy...She finds something inconsolable in the fact and the tears that came down are furious" (93). The repetition of "just yesterday" underscores the abrupt loss of hope. Sisi's simple desire symbolises broader frustrations faced by the women who labour endlessly without reward. This frustration becomes collective when Ama declares: "We're not happy here. None of us is. We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals. Why are we doing this?" (237). The rhetorical question expresses disillusionment and emotional exhaustion. The simile "treats us like animals" highlights dehumanisation and exploitation, intensifying frustration rooted in injustice. Their inability to return home further deepens this emotional strain.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, homesickness is a constant presence in the lives of Neni, Jende, and other characters, shaping their thoughts, emotions, and decisions. Jende's homesickness is evident in his aching nostalgia for Limbe, while his growing frustration emerges as America repeatedly fails to match his expectations, especially under the pressure of legal insecurity. Jende admits "he missed Limbe with an ache that surprised him" (7). This captures emotional attachment to home, showing how migration intensifies longing rather than erasing it. In Jende's frustration, he also remarks that "America was not what he had imagined" (7). This understatement reflects disillusionment and unmet expectations central to migrant frustration. Frustration emerges from legal uncertainty, economic hardship, and emotional strain. Frustration for Jende is thus multi-layered-intertwined with

homesickness, economic uncertainty, and the constant negotiation of belonging in a transnational context. It impacts his emotional well-being, his interactions with Neni, and his sense of agency, revealing how migration can impose long-term psychological strain that transcends legal and financial concerns. Through these experiences, *Behold the Dreamers* shows homesickness and frustration not as isolated emotions but as interwoven consequences of migration, highlighting the tension of living across borders while maintaining enduring ties to home.

In all three novels, homesickness and frustration function as intertwined emotional consequences of migration. Through a transnational lens, these emotions emerge not as personal weaknesses but as structural outcomes of living across borders. The novels reveal that migration reshapes identity, disrupts relationships, and imposes enduring emotional costs that material improvement alone cannot resolve.

3.5 Conclusion

The examination of the consequences of migration in this chapter reveals the emotional and psychological toll that displacement inflicts on individuals and communities. Through the themes of fear of deportation, economic struggles, homesickness and frustration, the novels: *Behold the Dreamers*, *We Need New Names*, and *On Black Sisters' Street* x-ray the challenges faced by migrants. Fear of deportation manifests as persistent anxiety that shapes the daily lives of the characters, while economic struggle further increases their vulnerability, leading to feelings of hopelessness and resentment as they toil under exploitative conditions. Homesickness serves as a constant reminder of emotional ties to family and home, revealing the deep longing for familiarity and belonging that often accompanies migration. Frustration captures the overwhelming sense of powerlessness experienced by the characters as they

navigate the challenges of their new lives while grappling with the sacrifices made in pursuit of a better future. Together, these themes present a vivid picture of the immigrant experience, highlighting the resilience and strength of characters who confront seemingly insurmountable challenges. The novels stand as a testament to the enduring human spirit, revealing the complexities of identity and belonging in a world that can be both alienating and hopeful. Ultimately, the consequences of migration explored in this chapter emphasise the need for empathy and understanding toward the experiences of migrants, reminding us of the shared humanity that transcends borders and boundaries.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESPONSES TO MIGRATION IN THE SELECTED LITERARY NOVELS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have examined the factors and consequences of migration in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. The novels demonstrates that migration is often caused by poverty, unemployment, political violence, gender oppression, failed leadership, social inequality, and the search for a more secure future. They further reveal that migration does not always produce the stability and fulfilment that migrants anticipate. Instead, the characters encounter exploitation, homesickness, fear of deportation, financial struggle, family separation, and emotional frustration. This chapter therefore examines practical responses to migration as reflected in the experiences of the characters in the selected novels. It does not condemn migration itself, as human movement has historically occurred for reasons such as education, marriage, trade, employment, safety, and personal-development. Rather, the problem presented in the selected novels is desperate migration; which emerges when individual perceive that their societies can no longer guarantee dignity, security, or the possibility of advancement. Sisi does not leave Nigeria simply because she desires Europe, nor does Darling leave Zimbabwe because she lacks affection for home. Jende and Neni do not leave Cameroon because they are disconnected from their country. Instead, these characters migrate because their societies fail to provide dignity, safety, economic opportunity, stability, and hope for the future.

Consequently, the implied solution to forced migration must begin within the home countries that generate these pressures. If poverty, unemployment, political instability,

gender violence, and inequality encourage migration, then poverty alleviation, decent work, good governance, safety, education, and the protection of women can help reduce involuntary movement. Nevertheless, the novels also acknowledge that migration will remain an enduring global reality. For this reason, host countries must also protect migrants from exploitation, legal insecurity, and social exclusion. The selected novels therefore emphasise the importance of both local and transnational efforts in addressing migration-related challenges.

4.2 Poverty Alleviation and Employment Creation

The first major response to desperate migration is poverty alleviation through decent employment and economic reform. In the selected novels, poverty is not merely a background condition; it fundamentally shapes the decisions, aspirations, and survival strategies of the characters. It makes migration appear as a form of rescue, even when the journey leads to exploitation and danger. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi's desire to leave Nigeria is closely connected to unemployment and economic disappointment. Although, she has acquired a university education, her qualifications fail to secure meaningful employment. Her statement that "This place has no future" (18), reveals the depth of her disillusionment with Nigeria. Though brief, the statement captures the despair of a young graduate who no longer perceives her country as a space for growth and opportunity.

Unigwe further connects Sisi's personal frustration to a broader social-economic crisis. It is not Peter's fault, after all, that she has no job or that he did not earn enough or that the entire economy was in a mess, or her father had nothing to show for his 24 years in the civil service: "Sisi knew this. She knew that the problem was larger than Peter. Larger than her father, Larger than her own degree and all the hopes attached to it" (21). The

excerpt demonstrates that Sisi's migration is not motivated by laziness or mere material ambition, but by structural economic failure. Peter is employed, yet his income remains insufficient. Her father spends twenty-four years in the civil service, but his labour produces no visible stability or comfort. Sisi earns a degree, yet, remains unemployed. Through these examples, Unigwe presents a society in which education and labour no longer guarantee dignity or economic security. The study therefore suggests the need for sustainable employment capable of absorbing both educated and uneducated citizens. Governments must invest in industries, agriculture, public works, technology, local production, and small-scale enterprises. A nation that educates its youths without creating opportunities for them simultaneously cultivates frustration and encourages dangerous risky migration pathways.

Economic reform must also address the issue of fair wages and humane working conditions. Employment alone cannot resolve poverty if workers remain unable to sustain decent lives. Peter's condition demonstrates that labour without adequate income cannot support a household or preserve hope for the future. Likewise, Sisi's father represents the emotional damage caused by long years of service without reward. The economic system must therefore ensure that labour is adequately valued and compensated. Workers should earn enough to provide food, housing, education, and stability for their families. When honest labour guarantees dignity and security, migration becomes a voluntary choice rather than an act of desperation,

In *We Need New Names*, poverty is represented through hunger and poor housing conditions. Darling and her friends go to Budapest to steal guavas because of the severe deprivation that shapes their childhood experience. Although Budapest is not outside

Zimbabwe, it appears foreign to the children because it embodies a level of comfort and privilege from their own environment:

When we get right to the middle of Budapest we stop. This place is not like paradise, it's like being in a different country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live. But then you don't see anything to show there are real people living here; even the air itself is empty: no delicious food cooking, no odors, no sounds. Just nothing. (Bulawayo 5).

The contrast between Budapest and Paradise reveals how social inequality can alienate citizens within their own nation. Budapest contains order, abundance, and comfort, whereas Paradise is associated with hunger and deprivation. The children steal not because they are naturally criminal, but because poverty has made food uncertain and survival difficult. Bulawayo therefore suggests the need for policies centred on food security, child welfare, decent housing, and social support systems for vulnerable families. A society that adequately feeds and protects its children addresses one of the earliest pressures that encourage migration. Children raised in conditions of severe deprivation often begin to imagine escape long before they fully understand national borders or migration itself.

Bulawayo also describes Paradise as a settlement of “tiny shack after tiny shack crammed together like hot loaves of bread” (14). The imagery emphasises the physical and psychological reality of poverty. It affects space, privacy, health, sanitation, and personal dignity. Effective implied solutions must therefore include affordable housing, clean water, accessible healthcare, sanitation systems, and community development programmes. Poverty cannot be eliminated through political rhetoric alone; citizens must experience tangible improvement in their everyday living conditions.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, Jende's migration is shaped by inherited poverty and the fear of generational suffering. He tells Clark that if he remains in Cameroon, he will remain "nothing," and his son will become poor like him, just as he became poor like his father (39). Jende's statement reveals that migration is not merely an individual decision but also a family survival strategy intended to interrupt the cycle of poverty. The solution implied by the experiences is the creation of social mobility within the home country. Poor families need access to quality education, health care, employment opportunities, fair credit systems, and support for entrepreneurship. When individuals can rise economically through education and hard work within their own societies, migration no longer appears to be sole path to dignity and advancement. Jende also imagines America as the place where he can become "a respectable man" (39). His aspiration demonstrates that economic reform is not words show that economic reform is not solely about material survival, but also about restoring self-worth and social respect. People require forms of labour that allow them to live with confidence, responsibility and dignity within their communities.

4.3 Good Governance and Political Stability

The novels also imply that good governance and political stability are necessary in addressing forced migration. The selected novels demonstrate that people often leave their countries when governments fail to provide security, justice, health care, and public order. In *We Need New Names*, the children carry the shame of a country damaged by hunger, violence, disease, and political instability. When outsiders question them about Africa, their homeland is reduced to images of suffering and catastrophe:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes.

What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled? Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47s between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. (Bulawayo 10)

The repeated smile does not communicate Joy; rather, it reflects shame, discomfort, and emotional helplessness. The children are unable to respond with confidence because the questions refer to forms of suffering that mirror the realities surrounding them. Bulawayo therefore illustrates how political and social failure can damage not only national stability but also childhood identity and self-worth. Effective measures must therefore include credible elections, respect for human rights, protection from political violence and armed abuse, as well as stronger public health systems. A nation defined by insecurity, hunger, and disease will inevitably continue to push its citizens toward migration.

The novel also suggests that return migration is possible when national stability is restored. The statement that people will come back “when the craziness is over, when it is safe again,” (67) connects return to national recovery. Here, safety extends beyond the absence of armed conflicts to include access to food, employment, healthcare, education, fair policing and trust in public institutions. People may retain emotional attachment to their homeland and still choose to leave if survival and dignity cannot be guaranteed there. Political stability must therefore be experienced in practical and visible ways within everyday life.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Joyce's story shows how war and sexual violence force migration. Her memory of the attack on her family reveals the deep wound caused by armed violence:

Sometimes, before she fell asleep, she saw her parents lying on the floor of their bedroom. She tasted her fear as she hid in the cupboard with her brother. She heard the laughter of the soldiers as they tore her dress and squeezed her breasts. Sometimes she wished the soldiers had killed her. Having been left alive, she felt an obligation to survive, but what kind of survival did I have, living in a tent? I hated the camp. (Unigwe 162–163)

The passage demonstrates that violence destroys far more than physical structures; it damages family bonds, bodily safety, memory, and emotional stability. Although Joyce survives, her survival is filled with pain. Her hatred of the refugee camp further suggests that temporary shelter alone cannot heal the psychological consequences of violence and displacement. The novel therefore points toward the necessity of conflict prevention, civilian protection, prosecution of sexual violence, and psychological support for survivors of war. Governments must regulate armed forces effectively and hold perpetrators accountable for crimes committed during conflict, especially against women and vulnerable civilians.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, poor governance is reflected through inequality and restricted access to opportunity. Jende imagines returning to “a country where visions of a better life were the birthrights of a blessed few” (60). The statements suggest that social and economic advancement is reserved for a small privileged class, while the majority remain excluded from meaningful opportunities. In societies where wealth, influence, and political connection determine success, disadvantaged citizens are more likely to seek fairness and

opportunity elsewhere. Good governance must therefore include anti-corruption measures, transparent employment systems, and equal access to education, judicial fairness, and social support for economically vulnerable populations. Leadership should function in the interest of the wider population rather than serving only a small elite class.

4.4 Education, Skills Training, and Youth Empowerment

Education and skills training are essential responses to migration because they provide young people with the means to survive, develop, and achieve stability within their home countries. The selected novels demonstrate that migration increases when educational systems fail to create opportunity or when children are denied access to stable schooling. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi's university degree does not protect her from unemployment. Her experience suggests that education loses much of its value when it is disconnected from economic opportunity and social mobility. A certificate that cannot provide access to meaningful employment may intensify frustration rather than reduce it. Sisi's desire "to go to Europe, to make money, to live a better life" (50) reveals her search for economic dignity and personal advancement. The novels therefore point towards the need for educational systems that prepare young people practical and sustainable forms of work. Universities, polytechnics, technical institutions, and vocational centres should establish stronger connections between learning with sectors such as; agriculture, healthcare, technology, manufacturing, education, and local enterprises. Graduate internship programmes, apprenticeships, entrepreneurial grants, and career-development initiatives can further assist young people in transforming education into economic stability. When education creates realistic pathways to employment, migration becomes less attractive as a survival strategy.

In *We Need New Names*, the children's disrupted education illustrates how poverty and social instability damage the future of young people. Stina recalls that his teacher said one needs education to make money (9). This memory is significant because it demonstrates that the children already understand the importance of education and its connection to survival and progress. However, hunger, poverty and disorder interrupt the possibility of a stable childhood and formal learning. Bulawayo therefore suggests the importance of accessible and functional educational systems supported by school feeding programmes, safe learning environments, adequate teaching materials, trained educators, adequate teaching materials, trained educators, and assistance for economically disadvantaged families. A child who remains in school is more likely to imagine a meaningful future within the home country rather than elsewhere.

Skills acquisition should be treated as an essential aspect of national development. Not all young people will proceed through university education, but all require sustainable means of livelihood, and economic participation. Training in farming, tailoring, construction, mechanics, transport, technology, food processing, health assistance, and small business management can help reduce the migration pressures among unemployed youth. Nevertheless, vocational training alone is insufficient if young people lack access to tools, funding, infrastructure, or markets through which they can apply their skills productively. Youth empowerment initiatives must therefore include equipment, start-up funds, mentorship programmes and market access. Young people require concrete institutional support capable of transforming acquired skills into long-term economic independence.

4.5 Protection of Women and the Fight against Trafficking

The protection of women emerges as an important suggested response in *On Black Sisters' Street*. The novel demonstrates that poverty, abuse, unemployment, and gender inequality make women highly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce travel to Belgium in search of better livelihood, yet, they become trapped in prostitution, debt bondage, and emotional suffering, Ama's statement that "We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals" (237), exposes the exploitation that shapes the women's lives in Belgium. Her words reveal how migration can transform women's bodies into instruments of economic profit within systems of trafficking and abuse.

The novels further suggest that effective protection must begin before migration occurs. Girls and women require access to education, employment, opportunities, safe domestic environments, legal protection, and functioning system of justice. Ama's childhood abuse and Joyce's experience of violence indicate that vulnerability frequently begins within the home and community. When young girls are silenced, neglected, impoverished, or exposed to abuse, traffickers can disguise migration as a pathway to safety and survival. Governments must therefore enforce laws against sexual abuse, domestic violence, and trafficking and gender based violence. Protective measures should also include shelters, psychological counselling, legal assistance, and rehabilitation programmes, and vocational support for women at risk.

Host countries likewise carry significant responsibility in addressing trafficking and migrant exploitation. Madam maintains controls over the women partly because they fear arrest, deportation, and police authority. She manipulates this fear in order to ensure their obedience: "I have spoken to them," she says. "Everything will be all right. No need for any

of you to worry” (232). “Them” being the police. But on the women’s minds is also the thought that they might be deported. Madam has often said that she knows enough of the right people in the police force to ensure that as long as they do not try to cheat her, the women are safe in Belgium. “Everybody has a price, even oyibo police! Pay the right price and you are safe” (232). The passage illustrates how fear, corruption and legal insecurity reinforce systems of exploitation. Madam positions herself as the women’s only source of protection from deportation and police harassment, thereby deepening their dependence on her authority. Their undocumented and vulnerable status prevents them from seeking legitimate institutional help. A meaningful solution must therefore distinguish trafficked women from traffickers both legally and socially. Women who are deceived, threatened, indebted, or coerced into prostitution should receive protection rather than punishment. Support systems should include safe accommodation, healthcare services, trauma counselling, legal representation, and access to dignified forms of employment capable of restoring independence and self-worth. Because trafficking operates across national boundaries, response to it must also be transnational. Dele recruits women from Nigeria, while Madam controls the women in Belgium. The trafficking network therefore extends across multiple actors, including Recruiters, transporters, document handlers, brothel operators, and corrupt officials who collectively sustain the system of exploitation. African and European governments must cooperate through information sharing, stronger border monitoring, prosecution of traffickers, and protection for survivors. Public awareness campaigns are equally necessary in order to educate vulnerable women about false employment promises, debt bondage, passport confiscation, sexual exploitation, and the dangers associated with irregular migration routes.

4.6 Fair Migration Policies and Legal Protection for Migrants

Since migration will continue to exist as a global reality, fair migration policies and legal protection remain necessary. The selected novels demonstrate that migrants experience severe emotional, economic, and social difficulties when their legal status is uncertain. In *Behold the Dreamers*, Jende and other migrants live under the constant fear of deportation. Their reaction to public debates about immigration is described in intensely physical and psychological terms: “When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken borders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We built mountains between us and them. We dug rivers, we planted thorns” (108). The repeated use of “illegals” reduces migrants to a legal label category while erasing their identities, labour, relationships and personal aspiration. The passage further illustrates how fear compels migrants to live in secrecy and emotional isolation. Their decision to hide their names and creates “mountains” and “rivers” between themselves and society symbolises the deep psychological barriers produced by legal insecurity and social hostility. Mbue therefore presents immigration policy not merely as a legal matter, but as a force of shaping migrants’ emotional and social existence. A fair migration system should provide transparent procedures, impartial hearings, accessible legal assistance, and protection from exploitation. Jende works and provides for his family, and attempts to obey the law, yet his unstable immigration status continually threatens his sense of security and belonging. The novels suggests that humane migration policies must recognise migrants not simply as legal subjects, but also as workers, parents, and contributors to society, This does not imply the absence of immigration regulations; rather, it

emphasises that such regulations should operate within the framework of human dignity and fairness. Migrants engage in honest work, pursue education, and support their families, yet often lack access to regular pathways to secure their status.

In *We Need New Names*, legal uncertainty also damages relationships across borders. Darling explains that migrants repeatedly promise to return home “next year,” but the promise keeps moving because they still have no papers (108). What begins as a temporary separation gradually develops into prolonged emotional distance and disappointment for both migrants’ and their families. America becomes “the greedy monster that swallowed their children” (109). This metaphor presents migration not as a simple movement across borders, but as a process capable of consuming family bonds, emotional intimacy, and the hope of reunion. Legal insecurity therefore affects not only migrants themselves, but also the relatives and communities left behind. Bulawayo’s novels consequently point towards the importance of migration systems that support lawful mobility, family connection, secure employment, and dignified return. When migrants can travel legally, visit home, and renew documentation, and return safely to the countries of origin, migration becomes less destructive to personal relationships and community ties. Legal protection also benefits host societies because migrants are more able to work openly, pay taxes, report exploitation, and participate in public life without fear of detention or deportation. Fair migration policy therefore functions not only as a form of humanitarian protection, but also as a means of promoting social stability and mutual responsibility between migrants and host communities.

4.7 Emotional Support, Family Connection, and Community Care

Migration is also an emotional and psychological experience. The previous chapter has shown that homesickness, loneliness, and frustration affect the characters deeply. Material success and economic survival are often insufficient to heal the emotional wounds created by displacement and separation from home. In *We Need New Names*, Darling says she misses her mother so much that “it makes me dizzy” (91). Although brief, the statement reveals that homesickness affects both the emotional and physical condition of the migrant. Home continues to exist within the migrant as a site of memory, longing, attachment, and pain.

Darling later explains that “she stops writing to those at home, although she has not forgotten them” (83). Her silence reflects the emotional burden and psychological exhaustion associated with migration. Migrants may withdraw from communication because of shame, overwork, legal insecurity, emotional distance between migrants and their families. Bulawayo therefore suggests the importance of emotional and social support systems capable of sustaining relationships across borders. Counselling services, migrants community networks, accessible communication channels, and family support structure can help reduce the psychological strain associated with displacement.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Efe's separation from her son L.I. illustrates the emotional cost of migration on motherhood and family life. She migrates in order to provide financially for him, yet physical distance gradually weakens their emotional connection. When speaking to her son begins to feel like speaking to a stranger, the novel demonstrates that financial provision alone cannot replace physical presence, affection, and everyday care. The emotional consequences of migration therefore extend beyond migrants themselves to

include children and families left behind. Migrant parents require institutional and community support capable of helping them maintain emotional bonds with their children despite geographical separation. Children left behind likewise need stable caregiving, emotional guidance and social support so that migration is not experienced solely as abandonment and loss.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, migration also places significant strain on the marriage between Jende and Neni's. Legal insecurity, economic pressure and conflicting expectations about life in America gradually increase financial stress, and different expectations about America affect their relationship and emotional stability. The novels suggest that migration frequently produces psychological tension within families as individuals' struggle to adapt to unfamiliar social and economic realities. Migrant families therefore benefit from support provided by religious institutions, schools, social workers, immigrant organisations, and diaspora communities. Such institutions can offer counselling, legal guidance, childcare support, and sense of belonging capable of reducing isolation and emotional distress. Although these forms of support cannot completely eliminate the causes of migration, they can lessen the emotional suffering and social fragmentation that often accompany displacement.

4.8 Correcting False Images of Europe and America

Another implied critique is the correction of false images of Europe and America. The selected novels demonstrate that many characters imagine the West as a space where dreams are naturally fulfilled and suffering automatically disappears. Such idealised perception often increases migrants' vulnerability to exploitation, disappointment, and emotional disillusionment. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi imagines Antwerp as a place where broken

dreams can be restore: Antwerp was where she would tease out those marbles, gather them and have them fulfil their promise: “It was a place to be when your dreams died, the place of miracle: a place where dead dreams resurrected and soared and allowed you to catch them and live them”. (86) The image of dead dreams rising again emphasises the intensity of Sisi’s hope and desperation. In her imagination, Antwerp becomes a miraculous place capable of restoring lost dignity and opportunity, however, her later experience reveals the incompleteness of the fantasy, as the city also become associated with prostitution, debt, fear, and exploration. The novels therefore suggest that migration education should be grounded in honest rather than illusion. The objective is not to portray Europe as entirely negative but also provide realistic information about migration experiences and conditions abroad. Young people should be aware of legal migration pathways, employment conditions, racism, emotional isolation, trafficking risks, and the financial implications of documented status. Access to balanced and accurate information can help potential migrants make decisions based on reality rather than fantasy or desperation.

In *Behold the Dreamers*, Jende imagines America as the place where he can “become something” (39). His aspiration reflects both personal ambition and disappointment with the economic limitations of Cameroon. Yet, his later experiences in America expose him to job insecurity, immigration anxiety, and increasing family pressure. Similarly, In *We Need New Names*, Darling imagines America as the place where she will eat “real food” and do better things than stealing (8). Her dream emerges directly from hunger and deprivation, but migration later introduces new forms of emotional and social loss. These selected novels therefore suggest the importance of public education concerning the realities of migration. Schools, religious institutions, media organisation, community leaders, and diaspora groups

should provide balanced account of both the opportunities and difficulties associated with migration. Potential migrants need access to truthful narratives that acknowledge not only economic possibilities abroad, but also loneliness, discrimination, legal insecurity, cultural displacement, and exploitation. At the same time, correcting false images of the West cannot succeed independently of social improvement within the home country. As long as poverty, insecurity, unemployment, and hopelessness persist at home, warnings alone are unlikely to discourage desperate migration. Individuals may still choose dangerous migration routes if remaining at home appears to guarantee suffering and stagnation. The novels therefore imply that realistic migration awareness must operate alongside meaningful economic and social reform within migrants' countries of origin.

4.9 Return, Reintegration, and Dignified Homecoming

Return migration emerges as an important response in the selected novels, but such return must be both dignified and practical. The novels demonstrate that many migrants remain abroad despite suffering because they fear shame, humiliation, or social disappointment upon returning home. In *Behold the Dreamers*, Jende fears returning to Limbe because he associates return with low-paid and degrading labour (70). His fear suggests that return migration cannot succeed if the social and economic conditions that initially encouraged departure remain unchanged. Return therefore requires institutional support in the form of employment opportunities, housing assistance, and education for children, counselling services, and economic reintegration programmes.

On Black Sisters' Street further complicates this idea of return by showing that return migration is often shaped by imagined futures, aspirations, and survival strategies rather than simple homecoming. The characters construct different visions of what return could

mean, depending on their experiences abroad and their personal circumstances. “Efe believed that within the next two years she would be free of debt. She would see L.I again. She was already taking of becoming a madam herself. She would buy girls from Brussels; because it was more convenient... she would do well in the business, buying more girls to add to her fleet” (228). This projection reveals how migration can distort moral expectations, as economic survival reshapes ambition. Instead of representing dignified reintegration, Efe’s imagined future suggests the continuation of exploitation, showing that without structural reform, return may simply reproduce the same cycles that migration created. Joyce, however, imagines a more constructive form of reintegration: “she would go back to Nigeria with enough capital to set up a school in Yaba, employ teachers, support disadvantaged pupils, and name the institution after Sisi, the friend she would never forget” (228). This reflects the possibility of return migration as empowerment, where migrants translate their experiences into meaningful social contribution. Ama, on her part, would open a boutique and employ Mama Eko as manager, reflecting entrepreneurial reintegration and social mobility, even though the irony in these aspirations highlights their uncertainty. Taken together, these imagined futures show that return is not uniform but shaped by different emotional, economic, and social realities.

We Need New Names likewise connect the possibility of return to the restoration of safety and stability. The statement that migrants will return “when the craziness is over, when it is safe again” (237) indicates that emotional attachment to home alone is insufficient to guarantee return. Migrants are more likely to return when their societies can provide security, stability, and the possibility of dignified living. Safety in this context extends beyond the absence of violence to include employment opportunities, healthcare, education,

reliable institutions, and social trust. Return programmes must therefore operate alongside political reform, economic development, and social reconstruction. A nation that invites its citizens to return without improving living conditions merely reproduces the same pressures that encouraged migration in the first place.

The selected novels also suggest that social expectations within migrant communities can discourage return. Many migrants fear returning because families and communities often measure success through visible signs of wealth such as houses, cars, financial support, or foreign citizenship. These expectations may trap migrants abroad even when they experience loneliness, exploitation, undocumented status, or emotional exhaustion. Migration thus becomes sustained not only by economic necessity but also by the fear of social judgment and perceived failure. A more humane understanding of return migration should therefore treat homecoming as a legitimate and respectable decision rather than as evidence of defeat. Returnees may contribute valuable skills, experiences, professional knowledge, and transnational networks even when they do not return with material wealth. Home countries should encourage reintegration by creating secure investment systems, reducing corruption, supporting returnee businesses, and welcoming migrants without ridicule or suspicion. The novels ultimately suggest that dignified return becomes possible only when migrants are able to reconnect with home without sacrificing their dignity, safety, or sense of self-worth.

4.10 Conclusion

The selected novels demonstrate that meaningful responses to migration must address both the structural causes of movement and the emotional, social, and economic suffering that frequently accompanies displacement. *On Black Sisters' Street* emphasises the importance of

employment creation, women's protection, anti-trafficking measures, and economic reform. Sisi's unemployment, Joyce's trauma, and the exploitation experienced by the women in Belgium illustrate the consequences of a society that fails to protect vulnerable citizens from poverty, violence, and exploitation. *We Need New Names* highlight the necessity of political stability, food security, affordable housing, education, and child welfare. Darling's hunger and the deprivation associated with Paradise reveal the dangers of raising children in environments where migration appears to be the only path toward hope and survival. Similarly, *Behold the Dreamers* underscores the need for decent employment, equitable opportunity, humane migration systems, and dignified return policies. Jende's fear of poverty in Cameroon and deportation in America demonstrates that migrants often suffer when institutions fail them both within their home countries and abroad.

The selected texts therefore suggest that responses to desperate migration must be practical, humane, and multidimensional. African governments must reduce poverty, create sustainable employment opportunities, combat corruption, protect women, improve educational systems, and ensure public safety and social stability. Host countries likewise carry responsibility for guaranteeing fair legal procedures and protecting migrants from exploitation, discrimination, and abuse. Families and communities also play an important role in reducing migrant suffering by offering emotional support and rejecting narrow definitions of success based solely on wealth and material achievement.

Ultimately, the selected novels suggest that migration becomes most destructive when individuals are compelled to leave because remaining at home no longer appears possible or meaningful. The most effective response, therefore, lies in creating societies

where people can live with dignity, migrate safely when necessary, and return home without shame, fear, or humiliation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, FINDINGS, AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

5.1 Summary

This study examined migration in three African novels: *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*. The research focused on the factors responsible for migration, the experiences of migrants after displacement, and the implied responses to migration challenges within the selected texts. The analysis identified poverty, unemployment, political instability, gender oppression, social inequality, and the search for security and opportunity as the major factors driving migration in the novels. It further revealed that migration frequently results in fear of deportation, economic hardship, homesickness, exploitation, family separation, and emotional distress. Chapter four expanded the discussion by arguing that meaningful responses to desperate migration must address the structural conditions that make remaining at home increasingly difficult. It therefore emphasised poverty reduction, sustainable employment, good governance, political stability, women's protection, anti-trafficking measures, education, child welfare, fair migration policies, truthful migration awareness, and dignified return as important responses to migration pressures. Through the use of imagery, symbolism, metaphor, contrast, and characterization, the selected novels ultimately portray migration as a deeply human experience shaped by displacement, survival, memory, identity, and hope.

5.2 Conclusion

Migration in postcolonial African societies emerges from interconnected social, economic, and political failures. In the three selected novels, characters leave their homelands because

poverty, failed leadership, violence, unemployment, and social pressure make life at home appear insecure, restrictive, or without opportunity. Although migration initially represents hope and advancement, the novels consistently demonstrate that movement across borders does not automatically guarantee fulfilment or stability. Sisi, Darling, Jende, Neni, Joyce, and other migrant characters experience legal insecurity, exploitation, loneliness, economic pressure, family tension, and persistent fear of failure. The study therefore concludes that migration should not be understood merely as physical relocation from one country to another, but also as an emotional and psychological experience that reshapes identity, belonging, relationships, and personal dignity. Chapter four reinforces this argument by suggesting that the most effective response is not the condemnation of migration itself, but the reduction of forced and desperate forms of movement.

The selected novels collectively imply that African societies must become more liveable through sustainable employment, accountable leadership, accessible education, public safety, and the protection of women and children. Host countries likewise carry responsibility for ensuring fair treatment, legal protection, and freedom from exploitation for migrants. Families and communities must also reconsider narrow definitions of migrant success that focus exclusively on wealth, immigration papers, houses, or foreign status.

Ultimately, the selected novels suggest that migration becomes most destructive when individuals feel compelled to leave because remaining at home no longer appears possible, meaningful, or dignified. A humane and sustainable response must therefore create conditions in which people can live securely at home, migrate safely when necessary, and return without shame, humiliation, or loss of dignity.

5.3 Findings

This study uncovered the following findings:

First, the study found that poverty, unemployment, and poor living conditions constitute major causes of migration in the selected novels. Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Darling in *We Need New Names*, and Jende in *Behold the Dreamers* all perceive migration as a means of escaping economic hardship and attaining dignity and opportunity. The analysis further revealed that access to decent employment, fair wages, food security, housing, and quality education can reduce the pressures that compel citizens to view migration as their only path toward survival and advancement.

Second, the study revealed that political instability, corruption, state neglect, and violence function as significant forces driving migration. Darling's experiences in Zimbabwe, Joyce's traumatic experiences, and Jende's fear of returning to Cameroon illustrate how individuals leave when public institutions fail to provide safety, justice, and opportunity. Chapter four therefore emphasises good governance, credible electoral systems, and respect for human rights, effective healthcare, and stronger social institutions as necessary responses to desperate migration.

Third, the study established that migration frequently produces legal, economic, and emotional difficulties within host countries. Fear of deportation, exploitation, loneliness, family strain, and emotional frustration make the migrant experience painful even when migration initially appears hopeful. The selected novels consequently point toward the importance of humane migration policies, transparent legal procedures, anti-trafficking protections, access to social services, and emotional support systems for migrants.

Fourth, the study demonstrated that women and children experience some of the most severe consequences of migration and displacement. *On Black Sisters' Street* presents trafficking, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence, while *We Need New Names* portrays child hunger, poor housing, and insecurity. The findings therefore highlight the need for stronger protection for women and children through anti-trafficking measures, survivor counselling, child welfare programmes, safe educational environments, and community-based support systems.

Finally, the study found that idealised images of Europe and America contribute to risky migration decisions, while shame and social expectation often trap migrants abroad even when they experience suffering and disappointment. The selected novels therefore stress the importance of truthful migration awareness and dignified return policies. Potential migrants require balanced information before departure, while returnees need access to employment opportunities, counselling, business support, and communities that do not interpret homecoming as failure.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing scholarship on migration in African literature through a detailed analysis of *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*. The research demonstrates that migration in postcolonial African societies is shaped by interconnected factors such as economic hardship, political instability, gender oppression, social pressure, global inequality, and the search for a more secure future. By adopting transnationalism as its theoretical framework, the study advances an understanding of migration as an ongoing relationship between home and host societies rather than a one-time physical movement across borders. It further reveals that migrants continue to maintain

emotional, cultural, and economic connections with their countries of origin even while struggling to survive and adapt abroad.

Beyond examining the causes and consequences of migration, the dissertation introduces a practical and interpretive dimension to the discussion of African migrant fiction. It argues that the selected novels do more than portray suffering and displacement; they also suggest meaningful responses to the social and political conditions that produce desperate migration. These responses include poverty reduction, decent employment, good governance, political stability, women's protection, child welfare, truthful migration awareness, fair treatment within host countries, and dignified return policies.

Through this multidimensional approach, the research expands existing knowledge by interpreting the selected novels not only as representations of migrant pain and displacement, but also as novels concerned with social reconstruction and human dignity. The dissertation therefore enriches African literary studies by combining textual analysis with transnational theory while also demonstrating how fiction can encourage critical reflection on migration, public policy, family expectation, identity, and human survival.

Works Cited

- Abdul-Hamid, Salman Mohamed Salama. "An Ecofeminist Reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *CDELT Occasional Papers in the Development of English Education*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2020, pp. 5-27.
- Agyo, Azetu Azashi, et al. "Postcolonial Memories and Emotional Dislocation in Zimbabwean Literature: A Study of Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2025, pp. 41-53, doi:10.15294/rainbow.v14i1.221.
- Ahmed, Khalid, et al. "Race, Class, Gender, and Language in *We Need New Names*." *Genealogy*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2026, p. 45.
- Anwar, Mohammad Syaiful. "False Consciousness in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*." *Journal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–12.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1990, pp. 295–310.
- Bivan, D. Amos, and Bahago Ishaku. "Transnational Migration and the Forging of a New Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and *Kehinde*." *Journal of the Literary Society of Nigeria (JLSN)*, vol. 7, 2015, pp. 27-37.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge, 2010.
- Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Little, Brown and Company, 2013.
- Cobo-Piñero, M. Rocío. "From Africa to America: Precarious Belongings in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, Dec. 2018, pp. 11-25, doi:10.28914/atlantis-2018-40.2.01.

- Di Pietro, A. "Colliding Worlds in *We Need New Names*." *World-Making Narratives*, Springer, 2026, pp. 155-159.
- Erlanda, Debi, and Desvalini Anwar. "Life Transformation in NoViolet Bulawayo's Novel *We Need New Names*." *English Language and Literature Online Journal*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2019, p. 52.
- Faist, Thomas. *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Places*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Gabsa, Clarisse Bobyegha. *From Illusion to Disenchantment: A Study of Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street*. Université de Yaoundé, 2016.
- Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1, 1995, pp. 48–63.
- Haruna-Banke, Laura. "A Realist Interpretation of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2022, pp. 32–40.
- Haryana, Shruti. "Identity and the Language in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *The Creative Launcher Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 27–32.
- Ibeku, Ijeoma A. *Sexuality and Diasporic Experiences in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sister's Street*. Federal University of Oye Ekiti, 2013.
- Igwedibia, Adaoma, and Christopher Ezeonu. "Push-Pull Factor Theories of Migration: An Analysis of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJAHS)*, vol. 3, no.1, 2023, pp. 64-77.

- Kearney, Michael. "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1995, pp. 547–565.
- Levitt, Peggy, and B. Nadya Jaworsky. "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2007, pp. 129–156.
- Levitt, Peggy, and Nina Glick Schiller. "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society." *International Migration Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2004, pp. 1002–1039.
- Levitt, Peggy, and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen. "The Transnational Turn in Migration Studies: New Perspectives and Challenges." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2004, pp. 207–222.
- Levitt, Peggy. "Transnational Migration: Taking Stock and Future Directions." *Global Networks*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2001, pp. 195–216.
- Lincoln, Ansa Maria. "An Analytical Approach to Nomenclature in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *The Voice of Creative Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2026, pp. 115–124.
- Mbue, Imbolo. *Behold the Dreamers*. Vintage Books, 2017.
- Nwajiaku, Chiwedu. *Migration and Identity in African Literature*. Ahmadu Bello University, 2018.
- Odey, Okache C. "Migration and the Notion of Return in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*." *Tasambo Journal of*

- Language, Literature, and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, Dec. 2022, pp. 66-74, doi:10.36349/tjllc.2022.v01i01.008.
- Okuyade, Ogaga. "Blackening the West: Steve Efe Ogunde's Contributions to Diasporic and Transnational Formations in African Imaginative Art." *Journal of the Literary Society of Nigeria (JLSN)*, vol. 7, 2015, pp. 252-266.
- Onuoha, Mary. "The Challenges of Immigrants: A Diasporic Study of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*." *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, vol. 7, no. 7, 2022, p. 1.
- Orabueze, Florence O. "The Law and Slave Trade: An Evaluation of Sex Slavery in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister Street*." *Nsukka Journal of Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2021, pp. 47-72.
- Oranga, J., and Matere A. "Qualitative Research: Essence, Types and Advantages." *Open Access Library Journal*, vol.10, 2023.
- Portes, Alejandro, et al. "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, pp. 217-237.
- Roldán-Sevillano, Laura. "Against a Limited and Cruel Myth: Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, a Realist Counter-Narrative to US Meritocracy in the Post-Recession Era." *Alicante Journal of English Studies*, no. 44, 2026, pp. 173-194, doi:10.14198/raei.29440.
- Scot, Wilbur S. *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Swingewood, Alan D., and D. Laurenson. *The Sociology of Literature*. Macmillan, 1972.

Udeh, Bryan Jachukwuike. "Migration and Diasporic Experiences in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*." *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJA)*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, pp. 52-63.

Udoette, Monica, and Joy I. Nwiyi. "Immigrant Women and Transnational Sex Trade in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Journal of the Literary Society of Nigeria (JLSN)*, vol. 7, 2015, pp. 242-252.

Unigwe, Chika. *On Black Sisters' Street*. Grove Press, 2011

Vertovec, Steven. "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, pp. 447-462.