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CARTOGRAPHIES AND GEOGRAPHIES OF MIGRANT SPACES: A GEOCRITICAL EVALUATION OF MIGRANT SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN DIASPORA LITERATURE

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Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between geography, space and African literature. Using texts from three regions of Africa, this work evaluates how African diaspora literature engages in a sort of mapping to detail the experiences, silence, and patterns of and within African migrant spaces. It looks at storytelling as a form of mapping used to represent migrant spaces in Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, Helon Habila's *Travellers* and Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is my Mother Tongue*. It further explicates these narratives to reveal the crevices and interstices hidden within migrant spaces concealed by the writer cum cartographer. It draws on ideas from Bertrand Westphal and Robert Tally Jr's geocriticism and spatiality to engage in a detailed analysis of African literature and demonstrate how African writers use their writing as cartographic designs that could guide Africans embarking on transnational journeys. This paper thus reveals that African literary writers map migrant spaces to present the African society with the realities of cross-border migration and just like maps, these kinds of narratives become guides to future Africans that want to embark on journeys across borders. It concludes that spatiality offers multidisciplinary trajectories of envisioning and understanding the African migrant spaces just as maps could guide strangers in unfamiliar terrains.
Keywords: cartography, mapping, geography, geocriticism, migrant spaces, African diaspora literature

Introduction

Space, generally, is a broad concept with roots in different disciplines including mathematics, geometry, philosophy etc. Lefebvre (1991) believes that originally it was strictly a term associated with geometry and has always evoked the image of an empty area. In the humanities and social sciences, approaches to the study of space have varied and intersected in different ways giving rise to the multi- and interdisciplinary study of space. Within the context of this research, the concept becomes relatable to the space of human existence, the physical or geographical space human beings occupy and the implications such spaces have on them. The poetics of space incorporates various trajectories of diverse theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, David Harvey, Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, Fredric Jameson, Homi Bhabha, Doreen Massey etc. These theorists project different aspects of space and its relationship with humans.

The spaces of the African writer and the African are constantly shifting, chronicling Africa's "epoch of simultaneity … of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" put in Foucault's words. The spatiality of human existence as explained by Bollnow "means that the

human being is always and necessarily conditioned in his life by his behaviour in relation to a surrounding space" (23). The relationship between geography and literature is detailed by Prieto as one that emphasises the power of fiction to influence our understanding and attitudes about our real environments (2). Westphal punctuates that his goal for writing and propounding geocriticism is to attempt to provide "a spatiological inventory" that goes beyond the linguistic boundaries of fiction and the confines of specific disciplines to establish an interdisciplinary perspective to the understanding of literature within the context of geography, environment, urban planning and many other disciplines (2011). The geocritic evaluates the relations between the fictional and real spaces with a critical lens to ascertain its structure and impact on the reader, the writer and the society at large. The simplest way to articulate the idea of geocriticism is perhaps from the perspective of Prieto which refers to the vacuum in the study of spaces, interstices, and imaginative arts and suggests the necessity for a study that links specific kinds of knowledge that imaginative literary works generate to social and spatial sciences. An approach that could be termed "geocritical" (2).

Spatiality in African literature follows the various depictions of how the continent's spaces have been altered, first by the earliest European invasions, then the transatlantic slave trade, then by colonisation, globalisation and neocolonialism etc.; how the individuals in Africa cope with their ever-changing spaces and how they, in turn, affect their everyday life. The traveller tales, expedition narratives and literary depictions of Africa by early Europeans were all cartographic designs used to exploit, explore and dissect the territories of Africa into colonies. The art of writing itself is a form of mapping. Literary writers have used the work of art as a form of map-making or cartography to delineate places and detail the experiences they embody. Colonial literature and conquest stories depict accounts of territories that were besieged, surveyed, conquered and mapped to suit the interests of the intruders. African writers have absorbed whatever drives migrations, the subjects of this movement and the geographical sites of their occurrences into cartographic documents. Postcolonial critiques of cartography stress the hidden discourse of maps and the intentional and unintentional cartographic silences evident in the visual and (literary) representation of landscape and political or social boundaries (Howard 2010 cited in Harley) and the power of these representations in the projection of colonial landscapes and spaces as an 'other' world- unhuman and mostly crude.

The power of literary cartography lies in the understanding that the writer is a sort of map maker, irrespective of the genre. Tally Jr agrees that sometimes the very act of storytelling can be equated to the process of producing a map and vice versa because as much as stories point to cartographic designs, maps also embody stories, and the interconnections between writing and space have the propensity to create new places and new stories (46). He further explains that the genre is a sort of map as it presents frameworks that help to establish the 'projected world' of the artist because they are essential in organizing knowledge in such a way as to make things meaningful, and both the generic form (prose or poetry) and the map, project a world, which reflects a domain of norms, meanings and values (49).

This article analyzes the novels of Meg Vandermerwe, Helon Habila, and Addonia Sulaiman from the perspective of the writers' depiction of spatiality, that is, how the narrative which in itself is a form of 'world-representing' has been used to map African migrant spaces. Employing a geocritical approach, this work evaluates the dimensions of cartography in the novel and how the spaces are representative of the characters' experiences and real African and African diaspora realities. Westphal makes reference to Pageaux's assertion about the relations between the travel writer and the storyteller - that the fact that the travel writer writes, he

becomes a storyteller too (119) - emphasising that storytelling 'coexists' with travel writing and all forms of writing. The angles and nature of writing adopted by African writers of the diaspora are distinguished and also unified by the immensity of the experiences of these writers. Onukagu and Onyerionwu believe that the achievement of the African diasporic writer centres on how well he effectively contextualizes the African character he is presenting within the socio-political, cultural and economic conditions that recognize and account for the relationship between the character and the diasporic universe (2010).

The immigrant crisis that is evident in Africa is real as much as refugee camps are real-life spaces with both fictional and non-fictional documents available to validate the claims about African immigrant situations. The novels selected are all contemporary texts that were produced between 2013 and 2019. Each novel is a product of a specific region of Africa. Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013) recounts the story of Chipo, a Zimbabwean, and her brother who runs to South Africa during the World Cup in search of better opportunities outside of an economically crumpling Zimbabwe. Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is my Mother Tongue* (2018) portrays the tragic experiences of Eritreans fleeing war to the refugee camps in Sudan while Helon Habila's *Travellers* (2019) details the experiences of different African immigrants from different parts of Africa seeking home and opportunity in Europe.

Mapping African Migrant Spaces in the Selected Novels

Padron buttresses the relations between the text and cartography to emphasize that texts allow readers to produce mental images and illustrations of the places they describe even without actual pictorial representations. In other words, texts produce mental pictures of places and spaces by telling stories about them or by 'sculpting characters' that are associated with such places thereby giving life and meaning to the places or spaces (2007).

The concept of mapping is not new in African literature, many African writers engage in detailed mapping of territories, cities, countries, urbanscapes and rural areas. For instance, Chris Abani's depiction of the city in his narratives places the urban setting at the core of most of his narratives, where he depicts in detail the dynamic and multivalent character of each city to symbolize and embody the converging relations and overlapping populations that contribute to the complexity of each city's cosmopolitanism over time (Crowley, 2015). Most anti-colonialist African novels flourish narratives about the African territory referencing the disintegrated dilapidated spaces and their uninhabitability which results in the reverse migration of the colonized subjects into different parts of the world. Garuba explains that postcolonial studies are rich with maps and metaphors of mapping because colonialism as a regime of power was largely spatial and subjective and it focused on capturing spaces and controlling subjects. Exploring and mapping the land is the first step in capturing it. 'Tribes' must be defined, territorially delineated, and culturally described to contain the subject, not only physically within territories, colonies and protectorates, but also culturally and territorially (2002).

The novels used in this study have strong underpinnings with the effects of colonialism and the scramble for Africa. The authors of the primary texts used in this research place their characters in inflexible, disruptive, unhomely and often marginalising spaces that offer a broadened view of the wide geographical spread of migrants. However restrictive these sites appear, Habila, Vandermerwe and Addonia present them as the only other option. Their representations of the migrant spaces of Berlin, Basel, Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Bulgaria, Italy, London, South Africa, and Sudan (some of which were glossed over) offer a multifocal and multi-thematic dimension

of perceiving African migration. Habila's novel, *Travellers*, as the title implies presents the process of escaping home in search of another home as a journey, with each character being an acute expression of the spatial impact on a migrant. Named after the collection of portraits Gina, the unnamed protagonist's wife was painting during her Berlin Zimmer Fellowship for the Arts. Gina was looking for characters whose immigrant experiences reflect on their faces and bodies. The first character, Mark has previously been discussed as a revolutionary person whose African heritage haunted and continued to haunt. Being brought up in the African nation of Malawi that rejected western sexual orientations, Mark is faced with the challenge of journeying from country to country, seeking a space where 'the self' is respected, not rejected, abjected or treated with indifference. The narrator affirms:

> Mary Chinomba. A preacher's daughter who loved to dress in drag, who loved to perform male roles onstage, who wasn't interested in the nice boys nudged in her direction by her parents. Who ran away from home to stay with her uncle, the only one who must have known and sympathized with what or who Mary was. The scholarship to Germany must have been the perfect solution for everyone involved, a godsend, literally. (2019, 67)

The reader and the unnamed protagonist who was the narrative voice of the first book is an observer in the stories of Habila. From his perspective, the characters Mark and Gina are revealed. While Gina's painting was a collection of immigrant experiences, she was looking for characters whose body and face map their tragedies. So when Mark does not embody his ordeals, he is rejected by Gina for not being deep enough.

The expression, "Even in Berlin, I miss Berlin" repeatedly said by Mark, is weighty, loaded with the burden of a weary neglected traveller whose dream about a city was at variance with the reality of that city. The unnamed narrator describes him as someone that was constantly moving from Stockholm to Stuttgart, to Potsdam, and Berlin. From the character of Mark, Habila portrays the power of place over life, not just identity because Mark does not really exist anywhere but in the streets of Berlin, however, Mary Chinomba did until Mark sent a letter saying that she was dead as he wanted Mark, his new self to live. Habila's impossibility to guarantee the safety of Mark in the Heim presents the influence of Africa as a home on the now liberal Mark and his likes who despite fleeing home to Berlin in search of freedom only get to be dumped at the Heim with fellow Africans who quickly saw through his difference and sacrificed him because the Heim may be in Berlin but it was also an African space. The question then is "what exactly was Mark/Mary running from, her parents or her space?

In *Zebra Crossing*, Vandermerwe keenly maps the journey of George and Chipo across the Zimbabwean border, giving the readers a detailed cartographic representation of illegal border crossing from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Zimbabwe for Vandermerwe is a nation crippled by a corrupt and highly incompetent government, the nation left its citizens "out of options." The process of crossing the Zimbabwean/South African border is a traumatic experience for George and Chipo, the way they had to hide from the border police, the driver's sudden change of attitude towards them as soon as they crossed the border; the abiding anxiety inherent in the new space, all contributed to their fear. The driver sent them to the back of the truck where they hid under the driver's "stinking blankets." Chipo immediately begins to feel the claustrophobia that comes with unfamiliar spaces. She laments how they have to hold their breaths as though underwater and imagines that the truck was the Limpopo River where the water tastes like mud and hungry crocodiles hunt for prey. This imagery reflects the terror of illegal border crossings. Their inability to meet the driver's demand for more money made him

send them again to the back of the truck where they were caged like prisoners. That space for George and Chipo was oppressive. It was foreshadowing the realities they were going to confront in South Africa. They were both afraid and even George, who never liked his sister, takes her hand.

Border crossing has a psychological impact on people as the reader can see the temperamental swing the driver takes from being chatty in Zimbabwe to being viciously conservative and exploitative. Even for him, the diaspora is a place of making wealth out of poor orphans. According to Johnson and Michaelson's assertion, "The idea of the "border" or "borderlands" has also been expanded to include nearly every psychic or geographic space which one can thematize problems of boundary or limit" (1997), Vandermerwe maps the South African border as a space where the driver and the immigrants experience a psychological deviation from the understanding of a friendly space. The notion of survival kicks in almost immediately with the driver demanding more money from George even after he had paid the agreed sum.

Addonia's refugee camp posed a lot of challenges for its inhabitants. It was uninhabitable by many standards yet the refugees try to manageably adapt to that environment. People were constantly dying in the camp, like the girl that was "dying during the labour of a baby conceived in rape" (9) and the three men that suddenly died. There was insufficient food, and on one occasion, the refugees were served expired sardines. Addonia's cartography of the Sudanese refugee camp proves the way refugee camps become home for most persons. When Tahir, the lorry driver, told his passengers, Saba, her mother and Hagos, that they were at the camp, Saba repulses at the sight of the place, a place covered in dung. The narrator notes:

> The silence made the place feel more remote and deserted than she'd ever imagined. She looked up. She looked up. There were no fighter planes, only a half-moon that hung in the sky like the gold crescent ring her grandmother wore on her nose. (2018, 22)

The refugee camp was a lot of things for the different characters in the novel. For some (Saba, Zahra) it was a temporary place, for most it was a new home, an alternative home, much safer than the one in chaos. Saba, though repulsed by the environment, believes that things could get better in the camp. She sees the place as a place of reunion where she could share dreams with Hagos and bond better to make up for the years she neglected Hagos. But for some other characters, like Hagos it was home, it was a place of expression - verbal and sensual.

For a place in the middle of the bush, the only way of survival is by searching for alternatives. People search for familiar faces, some others search for alternative ways of living their previous lives. The camp becomes a place of recreating lost lives and memories with most of the refugees trying to assert the relevance of their professions on people. Jamal narrates how the structureless refugee camp began to gain form through solidary and the spirit of kinship among the dispossessed. Some persons also began to enforce moral codes that were mostly convenient for them, however, the "unwritten law of silence" still prevailed and blinded these refugees from accepting certain truths and fighting the vices and atrocities that were committed in the camp. For instance, the judge who claims to be a senior judge in Asmara high court is made to precede the trial the reader encounters in the first chapter of the novel because he was a judge, the midwife assumes the role of treating and circumcising people. Jamal, who used to work in an Italian cinema - Cinema Impero- sets up a Cinema Silenzioso in the camp and asks the refugees to come to live out their lives for people to see. She suggests that they should set up a *qebele* in the camp which Zahra's grandmother explains as a tradition that promotes

patriarchy. The midwife becomes the image of an over-righteous pretender who tears families apart to uphold the suppressive traditions of their home country.
The narrator's constant reference to 'darkness' and 'dark' in and about camp maps the place as an ominous space where heinous crimes and unimaginable things occur. The narrator notes:

> The moon disappeared behind the clouds. Saba vanished in this momentary darkness, her face resurfacing as she drew on her cigarette. But darkness always returned in this place. Lamps ran out of oil. Batteries expired. Half our lives were spent in darkness. (Addonia 2018, 4)

Nasnet, the prostitute experiences this darkness from Tedros who is always violent with her. For Saba, it is her mother, the midwife and Hajj Ali who raped her and her brother for her freedom. But Jamal's narration about his observations when he shared huts with other refugees points further to the inhumanity that thrives in lawless communities. He tells of a man who molested his son and a woman who hits her children out of rage and scares them. Hagos becomes a willing victim of Saba's ambition when he accepts to be raped by Hajj Ali for Saba to be free.

While Addonia's characters were trapped in the Sudanese refugee camp despite some people's willingness and failure to fully escape the camp (except for Saba), Habila's characters journey through nations and borders seeking home in Europe and other politically and economically stable nations. Every character is an embodiment of a place or space he or she is or has been to which is in turn a representation of Habila's creative conceptualisation of African 'real' spaces. All the countries and regions he maps present varied expressions of mobility and responses to the issues of hybridity, marginalisation, victimisation, alienation etc which are central to all these migrants' geographical sites. In Habila's words, "every departure is a death, every return a rebirth. Most changes happen unplanned, and they always leave a scar" (12). From the character of the unnamed protagonist and sometimes first-person narrator, the reader is introduced to the character of Mark and Manu. From Mark's pathetic story, the reader is taken to the story of Manu, a medical doctor in Libya, who is forced to flee home because of war only to get separated from his wife and son in the sea by the tides and waves. He constantly goes to Checkpoint Charlie, a place he and his wife both agreed to meet when they get to Germany. Basma and Omar, Manu's wife and son, on the other hand, were driven by the tides to Italy, where they floated on the Mediterranean Sea to a refugee camp in Italy. There she gets discovered by a native who instantly falls in love with her and takes advantage of her amnesia into making her his spouse but when she recovers her memory, she embarks on a journey to Berlin to meet her husband and daughter at Checkpoint Charlie.

Habila moves his reader to another space, Basel, where a Zambian woman embarks on a journey to discover why his brother's Swiss wife, Katrina killed him. Basel became a place of unravelling the devastating toll exile takes on Africans, both those who willfully exile themselves like Portia's brother David/Moussa and those forced into exile like Portia's father, James Kariku. The character that seems to have journeyed the most with the most tragic stories is Karim Al Bashir. The reader is taken through his rigorous journey of survival, from Somalia to Yemen to Turkey to Syria to Bulgaria and on his way to Germany. Whereas cartography deals with hard boundaries, literary cartography looks at a "soft boundary whereby less accurate definitions about where exactly the 'edge' of a world of a particular piece of literature ends" (182). These boundaries or spaces softened by the writer's creative imagination but are apt illustrations of real spaces. Habila's reader is peripatetic. Like his characters, the reader is

engulfed in the world of travel, traversing territories and mapping stories, pauses and silences with the writer and his characters.

Habila maps Karim Al Bashir's Bulgaria as a poor country with little or no employment opportunities for citizens let alone immigrants. Bulgaria is mapped as an uncivilised space within civilised Europe still dragging the mannerisms of poor Asian countries yet to obtain European polish. Al Bashir's search for a home leads to the loss of his son, Fadel, who probably got tired of living in the fear and constant anxiety of being an unsettled African immigrant and decides to join the Jehovah's Witness, and psychological displacement on his other son, Mahmoud. Habila carefully weaves his story to project a kind of mapping for home and abroad. The home - Africa - reflected in the novel is mostly a restless, war-ridden, conflicted space, which can not account for the future of its inhabitant. This is not particular to Habila alone, even Vandermerwe and Addonia, (re)presenting different countries produce a similar mapping of the continent as a place of anarchy and revolution. Mark's Malawi had no room for transgender males or crossdressers; Manu's Libya was ridden with rebels that kept killing and bombing schools, hospitals, and people's homes, Portia's Zambia failed to retain the activists that tried the question corrupt post-independent policies of the government of the new Zambian nation, it failed to satiate the hunger of an ideal family for David, Portia's only brother; Karim's Somalia was a terror to his existence, a place of assault and abuse; Juma's Nigeria broke into a political cum religious strife with the butchering of non-believers, the unnamed protagonist's Nigeria rejected him because he returned from America unfulfilled (poor). Habila's mapping of the continent is concomitant with his mapping of the migrant spaces the immigrant fled to as being unhomely too for them. What or where then can these travellers find a home? Basma tells Matteo "Pray you never do. Pray your country never breaks up into civil strife and war, that you are never chased out of your home" (Habila 221).

Similarly, Chipo's Zimbabwe was suffering a crumbling economy and political corruption that was affecting everybody. Chipo and George's mother cannot be treated in the hospital because there were no medicines and the staff were being owed for five months. When the doctor suggests they take her to Harare which they obviously could not afford, and offers them only Paracetamol, Chipo declares that the doctor "was not unkind, only out of options, like the rest of us" (24). Most people were leaving Zimbabwe for South Africa because home was becoming more and more unhomely.

The Contemporary African Gaze

The various points of view that present the African migrant space give credence to the fact that the African migrant space is one space that duplicates itself in multiple places as in Habila's Berlin, Italy, Bulgaria; Vandermerwe's South Africa; Addonia's Sudan; Adichie's US and London; Bulawayo's United States of America; Mengetsu's United States of Americ; Unigwe's Brussels to mention but a few writers and their representative places. The experiences of the characters in these texts are similar and the gazes of the authors capture the same images of dejection, unhomeliness, racism, rejection, abjection, adversity and so on.

Conrad's fiction constructs a kind of mapping that *Heart of Darkness* reflects. Joseph Conrad engages in what Bertrand Westphal conceptualizes as the gaze which is central to colonialist cum centre-periphery discourses. The author cum narrator, Marlow, first adopts an observatory stance to get acquainted with the space he maps as "one of the dark places of the earth" (7). The gaze of the African writers on the non-Oriental spaces has helped to understand the relationship between the Orient and the Occident in cases of reverse migration. African literary

writers have mapped gazing differently from its presentation in Western conquest and colonial literature by using African texts on diaspora experiences to depict the Global North which is usually a site for immigration and its cantankerous relationship with the citizens of the non-Occidental countries as that of an oppressor and an oppressed. One gazes in intimidation, the other gazes in fear; one is the Self, and the other is the Other. What Westphal regards as the history of the gaze which is the story of the world's conquest by vision should be revisited to reflect a broader history that adopts the gaze as a reserve technique of decolonisation, deterritorialisation, reterritorialisation, transculturalism and multiculturalism, resulting to a re-worlding that debunks prejudiced projections and reaffirms the humanity of the once 'gazed-upon' cultures.

Gazing in this context presents the ways of representation of geographical sites of migration by the characters. In *Travellers*, the writer places the entire novel's geosphere on the gaze of his unnamed protagonist. Through his eyes, the reader can see the geography of African migration in the novel, from Berlin to Basel to Germany to Italy and then London. Every site he traverses reveals the relations between the place and the immigrants he meets, hears of or encounters there. Through his gaze, the reader discovers the immigrant situation in Berlin, termed "the most liberal and welcoming of all European cities" yet people are still scared when they are in the elevator with a person of colour, that liminal space becomes a place of terror even when these people are visibly unarmed. Mark narrates how women 'hug' their bags whenever she's around an area and how it became so obvious that she couldn't ignore it.

The reader follows the protagonist's gaze to the Mediterranean where he suffers displacement because he lost his passport. The tragic experiences and dehumanising conditions of living of immigrants in the Mediterranean show the dangers of migration. There is always uncertainty as to whether or not home is beyond the border; no concrete proof that migration would present safety or insure lives, rather everything is shrouded in uncertainty. Habila maps the camp as:

> The ground underneath was hard and pebbly; this stark, ugly landscape was somehow offset by the sea, white foam turning to soft aquamarine. Between the hill and the sea was the camp. A central structure dominated the entire camp—rectangular and unremittingly utilitarian, its aluminium roof arched over the concrete building, square windows cut into the concrete at precise, regular intervals. This was the medical center where all newcomers were examined by doctors, nurses, and other volunteers. Matteo had volunteered here before, more than once. On busy days it looked like a marketplace, men and women and children dehydrated from their long ordeal on the sea were stretched out on cots and hooked to drips for dehydration—it was never a pretty sight: some had feet rotting in their wet shoes, some had shit and vomit caked to their skin and hair, some were delirious with fright from being trapped between dead bodies for days in the boat—pregnant women had to be checked to see if the baby was still alive, or not, in which case emergency cesarean sections were performed right there on the floor, more serious emergencies were flown out by helicopter to bigger and better-equipped facilities in Palermo and nearby cities...Toilets had been converted into sleeping spaces, it was either that or leave women and children exposed to the weather. (201)

This overcrowded space that was meant to shelter about five hundred persons but overflooded with over two thousand persons, presented a very unhealthy environment. Most of the migrants were traumatised after being uprooted from their homes by whatever circumstance that separated them from their families. For the protagonist, his documents got missing after he

mistakenly took Karim's bag instead of his and what the beginning of his journey as a victim of the immigration process of the North.

Chipo, one of the most abject characters in the lot, almost fits into Baudelaire's concept of the flaneur who is a silent observer among the crowd. The novel begins with the voice of a first-person narrator but by the end of the novel, the reader realises that the narrator is a floating spirit that has the power to permeate through time and space to recount her experience.

The Body as a Map: Cartographing Silence

Many contemporary African writers have presented new ways of perceiving the body. The body can be seen as an embodiment of a world - a map - an angle of perceiving a world in the world. Nuttall explains that "much work on the postcolonial body has focused on what could be called macro-processes of the embodied self: the body of the self in relation to the body of the Other, the body of exile, and the body as a site of multiple political and social inscriptions" (2005, 188). The authors of the texts selected for this research have presented the body as a site that carries experiences, expressions and consequences of actions. These bodies become metaphors that symbolise society-induced meanings, oftentimes derogatory. Sow notes that "For these (African) writers, the mad man, the beggar, the blind, the disabled and the leprous are recurrent characters that bring to light the drama of poverty and exclusion. Neglected and unwanted, and therefore marginalized, these degenerating bodies are powerful indicators of deep social incongruity" (2005, 207). Chipo's body became a map of her life's journey. Being a female albino, she experienced ostracisation and stigmatisation. Her body becomes a means to an end, including hers. Her brother, George, does not like her, and constantly, he equates her to a tortoise which symbolises sluggishness till she begins to accept their perception of albinism as who she is. She notes:

> People back home say the name you give your baby affects his character. Gift rhymes with shift. Sometimes I forget my name is Gift and think it is Tortoise instead.

The whole narrative was drawn from Chipo's memory, that is, the memory of a ghost. Chipo's physical body could not experience joy, peace, or acceptance, so when it crossed the border between the living and the dead, the body which was a hindrance to the freedom of her spirit and essence had already decayed. As a map of wealth, like a treasure map that leads to wealth, Dr Ongani and George used Chipo as a way of surviving hardship in South Africa. The white skin of the albino, finally, represents the anomalous body with the 'wrong' skin colour, which places it not far from the deformed or crippled body (Viet-Wild and Naguschewski, 2005). Throughout the global economy, Scheper-Hughes contends that the body is perceived as an object, which is often fetishized and one that is seen and treated as "a commodity that can be bartered, sold, or stolen in divisible and alienable parts" (2002). The albino body is made to serve as an African fetish that could gratify financial needs as well as fortify people spiritually.

> Peeled potato. That is what many in Zimbabwe call me. Also 'monkey' and 'sope'. There are other names, too, depending where you go. Name rhymes with shame. In Malawi, they call us 'biri'. They whisper that we are linked to witchcraft. In Tanzania, we are 'animal' or 'ghost' or 'white medicine'. Their witch doctors will pay handsomely for our limbs. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they call us 'ndundu' – living dead. If a fisherman goes missing, they call on us to find the body. In Lesotho, we are 'leshane', meaning half-persons, whereas to South Africans, depending on whether they are Xhosa or coloured, we are 'inkawu', meaning ape, 'wit kaffir', 'spierwit' or 'wit Boer'.

The excerpt presents the various ways the albino body has been mapped in different African societies. For some they are suprahuman, they are ghosts, for some they want body parts for potent medicine and so on.

Chipo's body was a border cum bother to her and everyone except her mother, David and Jean-Paul. It was restraining and destabilizing rather than privileging or enabling because of social constructs of the albino body as a mystic. Chipo's body was anomalous because society had already decided that its relevance was beyond the world of the living after it must have been used by the living as a ritual. Dr Ongani tells Chipo that she is a gift that must be taken care of. The need to protect their 'moneybag' makes them lock her up in a room without letting her leave the room. Chipo probably died in the room because the narrator reveals that she has been liberated from cooking, and running errands and all she has to do is to serve as the fetish for accurate prediction in the 2010 World in a room alone with Dr Ongani visiting with clients intermittently. When the immigrant crisis began and other Africans were butchered by xenophobic South Africans, Chipo was locked in that room without water, or food and she fizzled away like that.

Vandermerwe foreshadows a dispossessed body constantly referring to how the body of an albino never really dies, but just disappears. Chipo's discussion with Jean-Paul about *fantomes* and how spirits of persons that die mysteriously never become ghosts that continuously hover around without 'going away.'

> Yes yes, a ghost. They say his ghost still haunts this place. I can believe it. You see, it does not know what to do. It died far from home and its own people. It is a fantôme caught between home and here, between this world and the next. Very bad.

The ending of the story questions the writer and narrator's perception of albinos. Are they really not human? Do they not die but just disappear? First, Chipo's predictions about the football matches seem accurate because she is an albino with psychic powers unknown to her, then, Vandermerwe's epilogue that portrayed Chipo as a free spirit, flying from one place to the other proves that Vandermerwe perceives albinos as suprahuman.

Juma's body in *Travellers* maps hunger and resilience. He resorts to fasting to tell his story of survival in the Sahara desert and to subdue the only enemy to an immigrant's survival in dire places - hunger. While Karim Al-Bashir's son, Mahmoud, lost his leg amidst journeys across countries and continents in search of home. His disabled body grows silent and exhausted from travelling since he was four till now, he is fifteen.

Harley describing silences in maps posits that "maps - just as much as examples of literature or the spoken word - exert a social influence through their omissions as much as by the features they depict and emphasize" (2001, 67). He interprets such omissions as silences. In other words, these silences are informed by some sort of absence. Vandermerwe uses silence as an absence of willpower and maturity to map the naivety of Chipo who represents an entity depicting the crippling effect of silence on her across borders. Chipo is an image of the stifled girl-child. For some characters in these selected works, silence was as a result of an absence while for some it is a survival strategy. Chipo, the protagonist of *Zebra Crossing*, can be described as a silent observer. Though the story is told from her perspective and her voice is the loudest in the narrative because of the narrative power bestowed on her by the author, she is not a bold audible character like her female counterpart Saba, the protagonist of *Silence is my Mother Tongue*. Whereas Vandermerwe uses Chipo to project the power of society to

completely silence the other, Addonia uses Saba to project the revolutionary spirit of a bold woman.

Chipo is presented as a very silent, gullible, pitiable character who takes orders from her brother George, and is willing to go to any length to get David's love, since he seems to her like the only person that had any kind of interest in her. She notes, "Borders rhymes with orders. You follow your brother's orders. You have no choice. Time to go forward, he says. To look forward. (11). Living as the other - an albino lady - for Chipo translates as living in silence, becoming voiceless and invisible because not George nor Peter, nor the society that calls her *sope* seems to notice her. George makes all the decisions about them, and she feels some kind of indebtedness to him because he cares at all to do so. Chipo declares "...you should be grateful, Chipo. They could have told George that they would not take you too" (37). Vandermerwe maps Chipo's dejection from the words she utters, she sees herself as the problem and George, Peter and Dr Ongani see her as the solution. She shows very little faith in herself. Chipo laments, "I could not bear to hear Stanley say that I was the problem. Grace rhymes with face. It is my face he doesn't want close. So I went to stand at the edge of the road like someone waiting for something or someone important to arrive. But I was waiting for nothing" (2013, 30). Chipo can also be described as what Spivak calls the 'subaltern' and just like Spivak asks, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Can Chipo, a sope from Zimbabwe have a voice in South Africa, an openly liberal country? Questions like what subalterns like Chipo speak, for whom, and for what, help to aptly project the image of the many Chipos that have been stifled into silence by society in general. Chipo could not stand the stigmatisation she is meted and she shrinks into being unnoticeable, invisible even, to avoid attracting the attention of her abusers. Her silence exposed her fragility, her fractured sense of reasoning and self-esteem, and deprived her of a home both in Zimbabwe (after her mother's death) and in South Africa. The character of Chipo can be seen as a "double other," or even 'multiple others' depending on the society's list of stratification. Here we see Vandermerwe's creative skill of mapping the postcolonial subject, Chipo, first as a woman, second as an albino female and third as an immigrant - silent, incapable, unopinionated, miserable, and a helpless observer in her own story and demise stresses how lack of will, blindness to truth (Chipo's unnecessary blindness to David's sexuality), weakness, and so on lead to her sorry end. Chipo is the silent narrator, afraid to fight because society sees her as a potential good luck charm. Her silence finally fed their fetish.

Addonia uses silence differently from Vandermerwe. For Addonia, silence is survival, silence is denial; it is a method of living, and it is also as loud as the human voice. First, there is Saba's mute brother, Hagos, who Addonia deprives of a means of communication - he cannot speak, read or write. He is seen as a pitiable character in the story. Hagos, though mute, was beautiful and was a good cook that loves to look up to his sister for courage. Despite being one of the major characters in the novel, it is impossible to understand Hagos because every meaning attached to his existence is derived from Saba's inferences. The reader cannot know Hagos without Saba, in fact, Saba is the voice of Hagos. Saba tries to let him live through her. He dresses her the way he would dress his woman, she allows herself to experience some things for him. From the first chapter of the novel, the reader gains a level of understanding of the title of the text. Jamal narrates the kind of things done in silence in the camp and the ones questioned. The refugee camp became a site of unjust pretentious silence. During the trial of Saba, Jamal notes how the camp is getting choked with the loud silence of the sins committed by people in it.

The midwife's major role has been to stifle the voices of ambitious women without considering the loudness of her audacity. She tries to circumcise Saba and greatly scarred her thighs. Saba laments to Nasnet, the prostitute that they wanted to "silence me head to toe. Shut my mouth and cut off the lips of my vagina. But I am still talking. (2018, 123)

Conclusion

Mapping African literature is not novel since the act of emplotment is a form of mapping, however, looking at migrant experiences as a map reconfigures one's understanding of borders. Each writer examined in this study engaged in a form of cartography that is distinct yet similar. Vandermerwe's Chipo, Addonia's Saba and Habila's Mark carried bodies that were living maps of survival. Their bodies were spaces that detailed their stories and formed the first point of their migration for them. The writers used them to catograph women who have been silenced severally by societal constructs and morality. Addonia's focus on sensuality as a mode of mapping life in refugee camps almost obliterates the severity of these camps but he adopts that style to project sensibilities that are realities in such places. However, Habila engages in a more blunt representation of the horrific sights in the Mediterranean, attaching seriousness to the inconceivable sufferings in these migrant sites.

Even though *Zebra Crossing* and *Silence is my Mother Tongue* present migration within Africa and *Travellers* presents migration from Africa to Europe and America, all emphasise the same ideals - the migrant experience often embodies tragedies for the African and survival in such spaces comes at a high cost. This work, therefore, presents these writers as cartographers that reveal real spaces through their presentations of imagined ones. In other words, literary migrant spaces are a reflection of real migrant spaces as well as their experiences. Reading African diaspora literature from a geocritical angle is still novel as there are not many African researchers that have engaged in geocritical analysis of African literary texts. This article does not only engage in a structural explication of the concept of cartography in African literature, but it also presents and proposes new trajectories of reading contemporary literature from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives.

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