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Unhomeliness and Escapism in Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay and impact of unhomeliness and escapism on the physical and psychological lives of postcolonial subjects in Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*. Drawing on the postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories of Homi Bhabha and Sigmund Freud, the paper finds that the feeling of unhomeliness stems not only from places of ex-territorial and cross-cultural initiations but also from the stigma and marginalization associated with existing genetic conditions, such as albinism. It also finds that the character victims often deploy escapism as a coping strategy, but it only provides temporary relief as the character victims still see themselves as the rejects of society. The paper argues that the reconstruction and reconstitution of the discourse of cultural, racial, or ethnic difference in postcolonial settings cannot be complete until the genetically, physically, or mentally challenged individuals are given a sense of belonging in the domains of psychic and social identifications. It concludes by calling for reevaluation and re-articulation of some African cultural beliefs that create the sense of otherness as this will help provide the real escape route for the postcolonial malaise of unhomeliness within Africa's socio-cultural space.

Keywords: *Unhomeliness, Postcolonialism, Escapism, Psychoanalysis, Albinism.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the significant objectives of the postcolonial discourse is the "reappropriation of [the] presence" of minority identities (Derrida, 1976, p. 144). Thus, for Homi Bhabha (1992), "The wider significance of the postcolonial conditions lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of ethnocentric ideas are exposed such that 'boundaries' created between binary identities 'become the place from which something begins its presencing" (pp.4-5).

Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* exposes "the epistemological limits" and the consequences of the ethnocentric beliefs surrounding albinism. In many African societies, the existence of this genetic condition often creates social, cultural and even tribal tensions that disrupt the victim's sense of home and belonging, instigating a penetrating feeling of unhomeliness. According to Mohamed Daghar, (2022), persons living with albinism in Tanzania have a price tag on their heads – whether dead or alive, adults or children.

Thus, in Tanzania and some other African countries like Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Congo and South Africa to mention but a few, trafficking of albinos thrives, as their body parts attract high market value. The sublation of their human identity, Daghar further notes, takes extreme form in such derogatory terms as "ghosts" and "white goats" which they are associated

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with. Consequently, they are not allowed to fully participate in socio-economic activities or access essential social services. In fact, their freedom of movement is limited.

Daghar also reveals that they are blamed for natural disasters like famine, drought or locust invasions by those who believe that albinos are cursed. Hence their limbs, bones, skin and internal organs are seen and used as valuable components in preparing charms, amulets or other magic concoctions. In Zimbabwe, Glenn Erickson (2021) avers that many believe that albinism is a curse and brings bad luck upon a family. Hence, parents of babies with the condition are often encouraged to discard them.

If they are females, when they grow and get married, they are usually accused of infidelity, or of being abnormal resulting to their husbands leaving them and their communities ostracizing them. These traditions and beliefs surrounding albinism breed the thoughts of “not wanted, not accepted and not needed” in the mind of victims, a situation that makes them feel unhomely even while in their homes. Thus, there seems to be a construction of a postcolonial identity that is not based on race, gender, color, or culture but by genetic conditions. This paper, using Vandermerwe’s *Zebra Crossing*, explores the social and cultural circumstances that pushed the construction of this unhomely postcolonial identity and the attempt made by some of the character towards a reconstruction of a more homely identity via escapism.

Since its publication, Vandemerwe’s *Zebra Crossing* (hereafter *Zebra*) has generated many critical studies. For instance, Juliet Sylvia Pasi and Josephine Olufunmilayo Alexander (2020) argue that the novel "highlights the devastating consequences of being a minor transnational immigrant as it interrogates the concepts of borders, identity, displacement, xenophobia, homosexuality and albinism"(p.1). In other words, it “demystifies the notion of ubuntu in South Africa and the belief that South Africa is a safe and secure haven"(p.1). They emphasize that "the trauma of displacement and Othering is ever-present in the lives of minor transnationals"(p.4). This, for them, is evident in the lives of such characters as, Chipo, George, Peter and David who are asylum seekers who do not have the right to travel because they do not have legal travel documentation.

This idea of othering is further elaborated by Roby Wilkinson (2019). He maintains that the kind of Othering in the novel is the one that results in violent consequences. For him, "Vandermerwe warns that if we do not truly embrace the values of forgiveness, compassion and acceptance, we face a dark future in which a cycle of conflict and injustice is repeated instead of being broken"(p.34). The hosting of the FIFA World Cup in the textual world could have helped engender this much needed “compassion and acceptance". But according to Wilkinson, the fact that, after the World Cup, Chipo and some other characters face increased xenophobic experience in South Africa shows that it has become a common practice for people to define their world through the construction of differing, separated and othered national groups"(p.37). Holding a similar view, Mustafa Muhammad Adullah et al. (2020) connect the issue of xenophobia to the formation of human identity.

Utilizing the concept of Neocosmos' citizenship, they believe that "xenophobic violence in South Africa is due to state politics and the governmental discourse that generates [sic] and triggers [sic] xenophobia" (p. 759). The fact that 'Chipo', the heroine of the novel, reveals many incidents of xenophobia orchestrated by South African officials, a situation that encourages and stimulates citizens to be more xenophobic against black foreigners, is for them indicative (p. 762). In all, their study brings to the reader's knowledge that the culture of exclusion due to citizenship was exclusively rooted in South Africans.

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However, Isaac Ndlovu (2022) examines the issue of identity in the text from a different perspective. He interrogates the challenges encountered by the orphan teenage girl with albinism, 'Chipo', not only in crossing the physical border but also in her tragic failure to negotiate various socially constructed boundaries that result when destructive post-colonial African national imaginings collide with the global economy's insatiable, anti-egalitarian logic of capital accumulation. For him, the interplay of ghost character of Chipo and her illegal migration, brings to the fore that "the novel takes a ghostly amphibian undecidability indicating the story's intention of troubling both the creation and existence of territorial borders and the socially constructed boundaries that curtail people's freedom within modern post-colonial African nations"(p. 3).

He suggests that *Zebra* adopts and then disrupts this fundamental aspect of fiction's participation in the creation of national imagination by employing a ghost narrator. He further explores transcendence and the narrative point of view, explaining that the symbolism of Chipo, being a ghost narrator, "emphasizes Chipo's gender alterity, her albinism condition and her illegal migrant status in a country characterized by xenophobia of varying kinds" (p.3). Again, for him, "the use of a ghost narrator, ingenious as it is, since it gives Chipo a voice and a view that transcends the limitations of the embodied narrating 'I,' also, reveals fiction's limits when it attempts to empower the Zimbabwean girl"(p. 4).

Further, he establishes that through Chipo's voice, Vandermerwe also deploys strategies that expose a strong sense of her main characters' entrapment by reason of national belonging and identity in other African countries. He concludes by underlining that the novel's usefulness lies in its indication that in post-colonial African states, the alienation of human life visible in Chipo and other illegal migrants will amplify in the event that national borders and profit-driven social boundaries continue to covert and favour the interests of privileged groups.

Remarkably, what is common in the above critical opinions is the critics' emphasis on race, colour, and transnational migration and how these continue to problematize the identity of the postcolonial object. Ndlovu broaches the issue of albinism, but he associates Chipo's challenges with her illegal migration, which makes it difficult for her to negotiate socially constructed boundaries. However, this paper problematizes albinism as a genetic condition that creates the feeling of unhomeliness in the postcolonial subject.

In other words, it sees unhomeliness as a postcolonial state that is caused not only by the disorientating realities of race, colour, and transnational migration but also by the complex cultural and ethnic beliefs surrounding albinism. Accordingly, the paper highlights the devastating consequences of being an albino in African societies, exposing the physical, emotional, and mental struggles of character victims in Vandemerwe's novel as they try to craft identities that can help them be accommodated or counted.

The theoretical frameworks the paper deploys are the postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories. Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness and Sigmund Freud's notion of escapism drive our close reading of the selected text. According to Bhabha (1994), "Unhomeliness is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations…. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself…taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of incredulous terror." (p.9). Bhabha establishes that the feeling of unhomeliness captures the broader postcolonial condition, highlighting the psychological and existential dimensions of colonial encounters.

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Again, it underscores how colonialism not only reshapes physical spaces but also reconfigures identities and social relations. Thus, unhomeliness is a central experience that reflects the complexities and contradictions inherent in post-colonial societies. Bhabha also avers that unhomeliness comes as a result of migration. When there is a disruption in the usual sense of comfort, familiarity, and normalcy, what is familiar and what is unknown becomes blurred creating disorienting realities. In his words,

> In the strings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of the enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home -in-the- world. (1992, p.141)

However, being "a paradigmatic post-colonial experience," Bhabha also holds that unhomeliness "has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions"(p.142). Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* is one of those fictions that problematizes the "powers of cultural differences" surrounding albinism. Hence in our reading, unhomeliness is seen not only as a postcolonial or migrant experience but also a socio- cultural experience that indeed creates "a state of incredulous terror" for the albino characters.

Escapism, on the other hand, is a phenomenon that is deeply ingrained in human psychology. According to Sigmund Freud (1917), it arises out of the human need for fantasy and wish for fulfilment as a way to cope with reality. Freud explains that humans require a certain level of escapist fantasy, or (quoting Theodor Fontane) "auxiliary constructions" to cope with the limitations of reality and to fulfill their desires (p. 423). Hence, in escapism, there is "a nostalgia for a cancelled future" or a "desire to leave one's physical or emotional circumstances [for] an ideal alternative" (Greg Sharzer 2022).

Accordingly, escapism passes as a defense mechanism from feelings that threaten to lower self- esteem or create uncanny moments. The uncanny for Freud (2003) is that which "belongs to the realm of frightening of what evokes fear and dread" (p.123). Bhabha citing Freud explains that it represents a moment when the familiar becomes strange, and the comfortable becomes uncomfortable, leading the postcolonial subject to experience a feeling of "insider's outsideness" (1992,p.14).

In Vandermerwe's novel, albinism, among other conditions, is shown to create the "insider's outsideness" state and some of the characters' resort to escapism is read in this paper as an individual response to a postcolonial "disorienting" reality that demands a socio- cultural response.

Unhomeliness in Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*

David Harvey (1989) has posited that postcolonial novels have narrative worlds in "which an uncommunicative otherness prevails in a space of coexistence, [exposing] an uncanny relationship [that depicts] the increasingly ghettoization, disempowerment, and isolation [of] minority [identities]" (pp.113-114).

This is evident in Vandermerwe's *Zebra*, as we see characters who become burdened and unhomely amidst the prevailing feeling of isolation and disempowerment. Chipo is one such character. The socio-cultural contradictions associated with albinism make her world shrinks

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and then expand enormously throughout the narrative. At the early stages, the reader immediately senses Chipo's unhomely feeling as she recounts how names that rhyme with shame are foisted on albinos:

> 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.... 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'. (Vandermerwe, p. 11)

For Chipo and other albinos, the disconcerting nature of these dehumanizing labels does not only lie on the fact that they come along with the burden of stigmatization and marginalization but also that they portray the albinos as those who already have a web of fate weaved around their destinies. As an albino, Chipo finds this cultural reality a "shock of the world- in -the home, and home- in- the world" (Bhabha, 1992, p.141). Hence, on different occasions in the novel, she sees the outside world become so terrifying that she has to grapple with the 'uncanny' thoughts of being a social pariah. The occasion when Grace Mai Mupfudza turns her back at her is noteworthy. She narrates: "She spat at [my] feet and turned her back on me. It was local superstition – spit and you will protect your unborn child from catching the sope's curse" (Vandermerwe, p.18). By implication, Grace Mai Mupfudza sees Chipo, on this occasion, as a cursed child and, therefore, a threat to the narrative society.

The creeping of the outside world inside Chipo's life world is made more burdensome when her brother George, calls her "Tortoise", because she "performs' her 'tasks slowly" (p.11). Her name 'Chipo' means 'Gift', but, in consistently, being called "Tortoise", she laments, that "Sometimes I forget my name is Gift and think it is Tortoise instead" (p.33). This highlights how stigmatization discourages cohesion, even down to the family unit. George equally blames Chipo for their misfortune and the reason why their mother's heart was twice left in shreds.

Their father left them after Chipo was born, accusing her mother of sleeping with a white man. As Va Stanley comes into their lives, George and Chipo thought that love has found their mother again, for they would love to have someone they could call father. But Va Stanley eventually abandons them because of Chipo's genetic condition, as George states: "It is because of her" (p.19). This ungodly accusation increases the intensity of Chipo's unhomely feeling, as she sees herself being treated as the cursed 'other' even in the supposedly cordial space of her family home. Thus, at some stage in the novel, she sees herself as the only albino that exists in Zimbabwe (p. 17).

Bhabha has stated that the postcolonial subject often finds himself/herself confronted with such "social pathologies [as] loss of meaning and conditions of anomie" (1994: 171). In the novel, Chipo is confronted with these pathologies when her family stops going to church because people feel uncomfortable at the sight of her. The last time they did go to Church was when children, going into their teens, were to be prayed for by the new Priest. On this occasion, Chipo is happy about the idea, but her happiness is short-lived as the Priest prays for other children except her, leaving her alone at the altar and giving the congregation the impression that she is possessed. By this act, the Priest blots out the sense of belonging that the religious community should have provided for her.

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The academic community does not also provide this sense, for we read that she is rejected to continue at the senior level after she has managed to go through primary school. The reader sees the social character of this rejection when the political actors relieved Chipo's family of their source of livelihood. Bhabha has underscored how colonial encounters disrupt traditional modes of belonging and force individuals and communities to adapt to new social, cultural,, and political realities.

The demolition of Chipo's mother's tavern called "Old Trafford', named after her beloved Manchester United's home ground" (Vandermerwe, p.11) by the Zimbabwean government in the "operation remove moral filth" (p.12) makes the family face new social and cultural realties of displacement and alienation. On this occasion, the feeling of unhomeliness is not caused by transnational migration but the imposition of national cultural representations and structures of power.

Unhomeliness usually triggers the desire for homeliness, an attempt towards a "reappropriation of presence" (Derrida, 1976, p.144). But Chipo's search for this presence gets her into more severe uncanny experiences that subject her to exploitation. For instance, she falls in love with David, who has been somewhat kinder to her. However, David's attention is on Jeremiah, the choir boy. This makes her jealous of their closeness, as she wants David all to herself. But, Chipo finds out that David and Jeremiah are homosexuals in such a way that "every moment Jeremiah offers up to him, David takes it... as though each word, each gesture, were meeting a hunger so deep, so private, that only Jeremiah has the medicine to satisfy it. And Jeremiah? His eyes sparkle when he looks at David" (p. 77).

Her meeting with Doctor Ongani to help her make some spell that will make David fall in love with her, on the one hand, shows a postcolonial subject who wants to re-inscribe her presence within the symbolic domain of social identifications But, on the other hand, Doctor Ongani's instruction to her to write a letter to Jeremiah, anonymously, explaining that Jeremiah's homosexual act has been discovered and "If he doesn't end it immediately, she "will let the whole community know what sort of homosexual filth he has got up to" (p.78) affirms Chipo's status as the rejected "other", who is fated to criminalize her existence, through blackmail, to be able to enjoy any sort of social inclusion. Moreso, in her failure to attract Jeremaih's love, despite writing the letter, Vandermerwe underscores how cultural and psychic boundaries sublate the "activities of articulation" of the genetically challenged individuals (Taylor as cited in Bhabha 1194, p.177)

The FIFA World Cup features as a symbolic event in Vandermerwe's novel. It is portrayed as an event that is meant to celebrate Africa's rich cultural heritage and the strength of unity in diversity. The slogan of the marketing campaign: "It's time. Celebrate Africa's humanity" (Vendermerwe, p.25) is indicative. However, the disappointments Chipo and her brother George face in South Africa as they join other migrants to navigate the complexities of the world outside their home again expose the epistemological "limits" of ethnocentric ideas (Bhabha 1994). Noteworthy is the inhuman treatment meted out to non-South Africans at Home Affairs as they take the identity of refugees and asylum-seekers. Chipo recounts: "Refugee sounds like flea. That is how, we are warned, many at Home Affairs view us. Like fleas that need to have their heads squeezed off" (p.26).

Here, Chipo's choice of words creates the picture of another unhomely world, this time, with the images of apartheid: identity cards, police frame-ups, prison mug-shots, etcetera. Despite his dream of a better life, George's option to take up the job of "cleaning plates and

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mopping floors" (p.26), like other immigrants wholly portrays a racialized society where the details of life are calibrated as “where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not” (Bhabha, 1992,p. 150). Shockingly, for Chipo, the home they reside in, ‘President Heights’ is not different from the world outside it, for she also experiences uncanny moments as she is often left alone and maltreated by George who continuously accuses her of being responsible for their suffering.

For the reader, Dr Ongani’s idea to use Chipo to get more money to be able to start a new and better life in Zimbabwe, after the FIFA World Cup, by situating her as the eye of the gods, creates a significant moment in the novel. While, on the one hand, it reinforces the peripheral existence handed to albinos within the socio-cultural space of the narrative world and, therefore, their expendable status. On the other hand, Vandermerwe uses it to critique what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the “genealogies of ‘origin’ that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority” (p. 730).

Chipo’s intense feeling of unhomeliness as she realises that the people she sees now as her only family- George, Peter, and David- are in collaboration with Dr Ongani, in using her genetic condition to satisfy their selfish desires, no doubts, makes the rhetoric of” cultural supremacy and historical priority” a mere postcolonial sensationalism. The totalizing assumption that the family or cultural space is the site of postcolonial subjectivity is rubbished by not only the commodification of Chipo but also her ghettoization, disempowerment, and isolation (Harvey,1989).

This is well foregrounded when George” smacks” Chipo for trying to back out from their plans (p.102). He tells her: “[You have] no brain ...just do what we tell you, OK, Tortoise? No one even sees you these days, anyway. You are behind the curtain (pp.92-96). What George does here constitute what Denis Ekpo (1995) calls the “radical and violent deflation” (pp 121-135) of the postcolonial subject. For Chipo it is a deflation that creates the horror of contingency. She laments:

“I am so hungry that all I can do is lie on my bed all day...Last night I ate the last of the toothpaste. Toothpaste doesn’t take away hunger, but it tricks the mind into thinking that maybe it has eaten something. I do have water…. But I have no stove and no pot, and so I have to drink the water cold, directly from the tap. It only makes my stomach gurgle” (Vandermerwe, p .106). No doubt, this state of abandonment is the clearest indication that the contested terrains of identity constructions in the narrative society cannot be resolved. Thus, in Chipo’s eventual death, Vandermerwe underscores how the feeling of unhomeliness can undermine the meaning of one’s life and ultimately lead to the erosion of one's true identity.

Escapism in Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*

Bhabha has established that the uncanny represents a moment when the familiar becomes strange and the comfortable becomes uncomfortable. It is the discomfort that generates the desire to escape the anxieties and ambivalences associated with unhomeliness. Thus, unhomeliness affects one's psychological status or orientation. This is evident in the lives of George and Chipo as they make an escapist move at the early stage of Vandermerwe’s novel.

Fed up with the General's wife's behavior, they seek to travel to South Africa, leaving their three weeks' wages. On their way, we read that "George repeats the same promises about life over the border that he has been reciting...daily since [their mother] passed away three years ago" (Vandermerwe, p.11).

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For Chipo, she unconsciously escapes from the thought of having to start their lives afresh, as she recounts:

> On the opposite pavement, a woman is selling delicious, roasted sweet potatoes smelling of caramel. A few years ago, those potatoes would have sold in moments. But money is tight for everyone these days, and what was once a small treat has become an unaffordable luxury for most. I watch her poke at them with a fork as George repeats the same promises about life over the border. (p. 11)

Again, we are told that since they are crossing the border illegally, following a truck, the driver instructed them to stay hidden under some dirty clothes, not to breathe or move, in order not to get caught. While they are there, Chipo tries to suppress the thought of the taste of "Limpopo River mud and sweat ", of dirty rugs that cover them, thus:

> Try to imagine something else. This driver at home? His family? On the dashboard there is a photo. Six children, girls of different ages. Neat school uniforms. Smiling proudly. And a wife. Must be why he agrees to take travellers like us... For some company... I tell myself as I try not to think about the border guards, about getting caught. Lonely. Lonely because you are the only. The only one. I am the only sope I know. Is that why I am lonely? And the driver? Must be lonely for him, too. To drive all day, all night. No wife. Children growing taller and ready for marriage. Without you". (p.17)

Here, what we see is the interplay of unhomeliness and escapism as she exposes her loneliness that arose from the unhomely moment. Again, Chipo's harsh experiences have made her believe that she is nothing special. For instance, during the World Cup, as earlier hinted, Chipo is exploited to make magic happen, and the people's wish miraculously comes true. But she does not believe it herself, and so she says to herself: "No, I tell myself. You must not start to believe their lies. There is nothing magical about you. Nothing special. You cannot start to believe. If you do, then you will be lost. Lost for good, and there will be no way to find your way out once all of this is over. All these lies. All this deceit" (p. 101). This discourse of the inner self is shown, on this occasion, to also help Chipo escape from shameful thoughts that have become part of her life as an individual living with albinism.

Further, Zimbabwe was not much of a home as it should have been, and so Chipo believes that South Africa would be different, a place to escape from disorienting realities as she says to herself: "You are here now, Chipo, you must find a way. You will find a way. I whisper the words into the darkness like a soothing prayer. You must find a way. You will find a way. You must, you will, you must, you will... Stop worrying and go to sleep, Chipo, I tell myself. Sleep, sleep, sleep" (p.24). Of course, this escapist consciousness can put her to sleep from time to time. But when awake, the harsh realities of her life go on to stare at her face. Chipo is shown to be constantly frightened by her uncanny experiences in South Africa. Hence, on some occasions, she unconsciously creates a scene with her mother in the form of imaginative dialogue:

"Chipo?'

'Yes, Mama.'

'Is the window open?'

'No, Mama.'

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'I'm so cold. Can you find me another blanket? (p. 90),

This mental flight to her mother's company is shown to transcend to a mental vision of home as a safe haven whenever the feeling of unhomeliness, in South Africa, appears to be on its climax. For instance, on the occasion she was coerced to function as a magician by Dr Ugani, during the World Cup, she dreams at some stage:

> A dream. I am walking home. Walking back to Zimbabwe. The sky is blue, the sun not too intense. George is with me. The hills are green, thick and dense with forest. We are happy. There is a gentle slope and a path that leads through the vegetation. Birds are singing. 'Just a little bit further, Chipo,' he says. 'Soon we will be there.' I try to follow George, but suddenly the path becomes very steep and narrow. Sunlight is shining in my eyes and I have forgotten my umbrella. George pushes on ahead. 'George!' I cry out, 'George!' The path is too steep for me now and the soft greenery has been replaced by rocks and dry earth. 'George, where are you? I cannot keep up!' But George has already disappeared. (p.96)

The images of the 'blue sky', 'the sun not too intense', green hills', 'singing birds' 'gentle slope' and a path that leads through the vegetation' suggest a character who in an escapist fashion desire freedom from her state of "insider's outsideness"; an individual who wants a revision and inscription of her subjective agency. Of course, this forces the reader to "rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive liberal sense of [the textual] cultural community" (Bhabha, 1994, p.177).

That Chipo cries out to George who is supposed to be her only family "but has already disappeared" reinforces this thought and substantiates Bhabha's argument that the "unhomely" cannot be easily accommodated in [the] familiar division of social life [as well as] into private and the public spheres"(Bhabha,1992, p. 141) But Chipo's continuous effort to provide herself with mental "auxiliary construction" (Fontane as cited in Freud 1977), outside her demeaning circumstances, is further seen when the World Cup begins.

As she is not privileged to watch the opening scene of the "parades of beauty queens", because "everyone wanted to have a closer look," she appears not worried since she has her imagination. She states: "I am in the players' straining muscles and their pounding hearts. And I am in the ball. The new Jabulani ball... Inside the referee's silver whistle. I make him itch to pull out his yellow and red cards... I take a deep breath, close my eyes and inside my head I scream, LOSE!" (pp.90-91).

The screaming of Chipo is indicative of what Ranajit Guha calls the "rebel consciousness" (as cited in Bhabha, 1994,p.186). For Bhabha, this consciousness is "strongly suggestive of agency … and it indicates the return of the subject" (p. 187). However, the return of Chipo's subjective agency only gains relevance in the realm of her escapist fantasy. In the cultural world of the novel, it appears elusive, for her interior monologues during her mental flights continuously expose the intensity of her unhomeliness. For instance, when she and her brother George are about to cross the border to South Africa, she muses:

Will we soon be in a truck? I wonder to myself. Jumping the border? Every day, they say, hundreds are doing it. That is what the radio and newspapers tell us. And then what? That truck will carry us from here to…? I look up in the direction of the border, over and beyond. From here to…? I cannot imagine what it looks like, in spite of George's stories. What does it look like? Johannesburg.

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Cape Town. (Vandermerwe, p. 12) Here, the ellipsis and rhetorical questions belie Chipo's fears and, consequently, her doubts about the possibility of South Africa offering a better homely setting for albinos. As already hinted, her harrowing experiences during the World Cup, masterminded by Dr Ongani and George, affirmed these doubts. And the execution of her human identity at the altar of superstitious beliefs surrounding albinism substantiates the argument that unhomeliness as a postcolonial pathology is also identifiable at that cultural space where the "epistemological limits of ethnocentric ideas are exposed" (Bhabha, 1994, pp 4-5) The reader sees the tragic character of these "limits" in Chipo's death.

But it is a death. Vandermerwe assigns an escapist relevance by giving Chipo's ghost a voice: "The day is well on its way. I can see all the activity down below. The cars. The pigeons. The people. I can see what haunts them and I can see who will live, thrive and who will soon be swallowed by this city and die"…. I am never lonely. Apart from my memories, I have my own ghosts for company" (Vandermerwe, p.107).

Ndlovu (2022) had earlier argued that the symbolism of Chipo as a ghost narrator "emphasizes Chipo's gender alterity, her albinism condition and her migrant status in a country characterized by Xenophobia of varying kinds" (p.3). But what is ascertainable in Chipo's ghost's voice is the presence of the rebel consciousness and an inscription of her human identity as against the inhuman identity ascribed to her while alive. Thus, in an escapist fashion, death offers her an ontological space to relive her subjective agency. We see her subsequent description of her new ghostly state affirm this agency:

Never shone, but now that I am gone, I can do as I wish. I start each day by putting myself back together. Dead hand, dead heart, dead leg, dead head. From head to foot, I make the puzzle of me fit, and that which in life I found ugly I now find beautiful…. I am the memories of hope and of loss, of victory and of despair, which lingered there, like damp morning mist, not so long ago. (p.107) However, the fact that Chipo "Never shone" and can only do as she wishes only after her death shows the intractable nature of the socio-cultural beliefs that strip albinos of their human value in the world of the novel.

So, while on the one hand, Vandermerwe appears to condemn the "class antagonism" (Bhabha 1994, p.171) that leads to what Harvey (1989) has described as "the ghettoization… and isolation [of] minority [identities]" (pp 13-114) within the postcolonial cultural space, on other hand, she reveals, through Chipo's ghostly assertive personality, that the human identity is ontologically inherent and should not dependent on one's genetic or physical conditions.

CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated, in this paper, that unhomeliness is a postcolonial malaise that is found not only within the symbolic borders of transnational migrations but also class antagonism inherent within indigenous cultures. The superstitious beliefs surrounding albinism fuels this antagonism in Vandermerwe's *Zebra*.

The ascriptions of names that rhyme with shame and curse is revealed to be one of the ways through which the human and cultural identities of albino characters are sublated. The paper foregrounds the life of Chipo, the heroine as a case study. Throughout the novel, she is portrayed as an unhomely character because the rejective and exploitative treatment meted out to her by her outside and inside worlds continuously fill the measure of her physical and psychological dwellings with incredulous terror.

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Her adoption of escapist fantasy as a measure of temporary relief is interpreted as Vandermerwe's way of critiquing the symbolic domains of psychic and cultural identifications, underscoring, in the process, the need for deconstruction of the politics of cultural beliefs that sublate those that are regarded as the genetically or physically challenged.

Vandermerwe also deployed death as form of escapism to foreground the ideas of rebel consciousness and to force the recognition of human subjective agency that is not bounded by socio- cultural classifications. Overall, the interplay of unhomeliness and escapism in *Zebra* does not only call for a renegotiation of the postcolonial intersubjective realm, but also a reevaluation and re-articulation of some African cultural beliefs that create the sense of otherness.

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