

## Bulawayo NoViolet's Vision of Otherness in *We Need New Names*

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### Abstract

The term "Otherness" is used by the cultural theorist Edward W Said to notify the condition of the minority group with different culture and belief from the mainstream, completely alien to the social apprehension, giving way to social and racial exclusion with the label of subordination and marginalization from the rest of the society. Darling is used as a voice to depict the subordination of the African community which is alienated and separated from the mainstream with its social, racial, and economical subjugation in *We Need New Names*.

Bulawayo purposefully uses "Displacement" as a key term to integrate with Postcolonial theory which applies to all migrant situations. It refers both to physical displacement and a sense of being socially or culturally "out of place". Darling's migration to America is associated with an acute sense of dislocation that is rendered analogous to the destruction of her embodied self. The innocent children the "other" and the victims are displaced, dislocated, and dominated distinctly in the novel. Things are stolen from them: their happiness, freedom, individuality, their community living, and their future as they are considered the "other" the insignificant living beings. This situation to be changed as the whole world is moving towards multiculturalism, globalization, and uni-culturalism.

**Keywords:** Bulawayo NoViolet, *We Need New Names*, Otherness, subjugation, displacement, migration, dislocation.

### Introduction

African Literature has many notable writers focusing on issues such as black community, black people's suffering, and displacement as slaves, double consciousness, colour line, racism, negritude, and subaltern. African literature is enriched with the upcoming of numerous women writers to produce works portraying the reality of the African society, women condition, displacement, rootlessness, identity, feminist view upon the society and so on. Bessie Head, Nadaine Gordimer, Aminatta Forna, Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi, Margaret Busby, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Doreen Baingana are some notable African women writers in the current scenario. *We Need New Names* was included in the 2013 Man Booker Prize, making

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Bulawayo the first black African woman and the first Zimbabwean to be shortlisted for the Priza. Bulawayo sat on the board of trustees of the Pan-African literary initiative Writivism between 2014 and 2018. *Snapshots* by Bulawayo published in *New Writing from Africa 2009*. *Hitting Budapest* was published in *Boston Review* and *The Caine Prize for African Writing 2011*.

## Discussion

Paradise is a fictitious city that Darling and many others were forced by the government to live in after their homes were destroyed. Bulawayo could have chosen a real village in Zimbabwe or named Paradise something like “tin-shack Ville” but chose to use indirection with associating a village of poverty with a synonym for heaven. In naming Paradise as Darling’s land Bulawayo summons the reader to see this space as home and a form of paradise its own to entire Darling. *We Need New Names* opens up the door to discuss and see a side of Zimbabwean history, not through the lens of the media or Western textbooks, and to read an experience of a girl who, at times, painfully finds a voice and identity in a Western sphere who just thinks “she’s another girl from poor Africa”.

The term “Otherness” is used by the cultural theorist Edward W Said to notify the condition of the minority group with different culture and belief from the mainstream, completely alien to the social apprehension, giving way to social and racial exclusion with the label of subordination and marginalization from the rest of the society. The representation of Zimbabwe depicted in the novel does address the topic of Othering through the names used to describe the economic, social, and historical aspects of Zimbabwe. Darling is used as a voice to depict the subordination of the African community which is alienated and separated from the mainstream with its social, racial, and economical subjugation. As Edward Said in the discourse of “Orientalism” discussing the Western oppression that “an absolute distinction being made between the dominant colonizing West and other peoples or ‘underground selves’ not only ‘Orientals’ as such, but also Africans...” (Waugh 351).

Bulawayo purposefully uses “Displacement” as a key term to integrate with Postcolonial theory which applies to all migrant situations. It refers both to physical displacement and a sense of being socially or culturally “out of place.” In literature of second generation migrants, a location “between” two cultures, sometimes called an “interstitial” space. This is often mentioned as a way of expressing a sense of belonging in neither the guest nor the host community. Those whose experience has been more positive may reject the notion of “between” and feel that they live, rather, in the cultural overlap, not a void but a place of particular richness. The world as a global village is both multi-ethnic and multi-cultural and so Africans have to compromise neither their ethnicity nor their cultural values to belong to the cosmopolitan society of the modern world. In fact, African festivals and diasporic gatherings are increasingly getting highlighted in the West. Bulawayo portrays the diasporic experience through the central

character, Darling to highlight the concept of subjectification to pour out the sufferings and hardships of the subaltern woman in America.

The binary opposition employed in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, and race on a dichotomy, the representation of opposing the value of “self” defining with norms and significant discriminations in lieu with feminism, Marxism, and Postcolonialism. Patricia Collins observes that “even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in white feminist organizations” (7). Black women can never become part of “white feminist organization.” When Women are sidelined as “Others” because of gender dominations, what is the condition of the children belonging to the subaltern? The condition must be worse than the former. Gayatri Spivak talks about “subaltern” the synonymous term to highlight the oppressed state of the Orientals. Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* strongly proclaims that “everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie...in postcolonial terms, everything has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism-a space of difference” (45). Bulawayo’s Darling undergoes such immigrant identity while living in America as “she’s another girl from poor Africa” after leaving her native place Paradise forcefully.

### **Interpretation**

Darling migrated to the United States of America not on her own interest but on the external force by abducting her place and bulldozing their home at Budapest with the low economic and social condition which lead Zimbabwe went through a desperate political and economical turmoil. The children “ate like pigs, like wolves, like dignitaries” and “ate like vultures, like stray dogs, like monsters” as they ate for all their past hunger, for their parents and brothers and sisters and relatives and friends who were still back there” and they “uttered their names between mouthfuls, conjured up their hungry faces and chapped lips” and when they “carried” their “dense bodies with the dignity of elephants” in America (Bulawayo 239). Darling and her friend undergo the hardships on their displacement and the want of food and other resources which are the real challenges to lead their lives. As she reached Washington, she could not tolerate the kind of treatment she received from her friends:

When I first arrived at Washington I just wanted to die. The others kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, the way I talked or said things...When you are being teased about something, at first you try to fix it so the teasing can stop but then those crazy kids teased me about everything, even things I couldn’t change... I felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes in my language, in my head, everything. (Bulawayo 165)

Darlings's eleven year old friend Chipo, the victim of gender violence screamed "he did that, my grandfather...my grandfather was there and got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain" (42-43). She was raped by her grandfather and became pregnant, the postcolonial problem of gender violence "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but onto a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" (Spivak 102). The innocent children wanted to "get rid of her stomach" and her announcement puts an end "once for all" (80) with their own tricks avoiding the elders though frightened to do that due to the message overheard that the village woman had died as she delivered a baby. While the process was going on they got their new names so as to act as people belonging to America with their transformation to do the operation. Boehmer explains how "colonized peoples were represented as lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or headless mass" (Boehmer 76). Bulawayo challenges these images of colonized people by presenting the need for new name or identity. Finally, it was Motherlove who came to the rescue of the innocent children and their activities.

## Conclusion

Darling's migration to America is associated with an acute sense of dislocation that is rendered analogous to the destruction of her embodied self. This is topographically represented by the chapter title 'DESTROYEDMICHYGEN', deliberately misspelt M-I-C-H-Y-G-E-N with the two words literally smashed together. Their political and social status is nullified by the colonial power as they are crushed in their buds. It is an endless battle between the colonizer and the colonized though amendments have been passed and developments have been attained. As many of the African families, Darling's family is a fractured: more confusing things - her mother is home infrequently, her father has not come home in years, and her aunt and cousin moved to America long ago to lead a life which Darling can only imagine. There are many Darlings in the country who are left without any support. The innocent children, the "other" and the victims are displaced, dislocated, and dominated distinctly in the novel. Things are stolen from them: their happiness, freedom, individuality, their community living, and their future as they are considered the "other" the insignificant living beings. They don't have proper parenting in shaping their personality. What kind of justification we have when Darling says that she wants to die as the others kids teased her about her name, her accent, her hair, the way she talks or says things and she feels wrong in her skin, in her body, in her clothes in her language, in her head, everything. This situation to be changed as the whole world is moving towards multiculturalism, globalization, and uni-culturalism.

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