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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# SCHOLARLY LITERARY CRITICISM ON THE EFFECT OF THE CHILD NARRATIVE VOICE IN RE-PRESENTING ZIMBABWEANS' DIFFERENT IDENTITIES IN NoVIOLET BULAWAYO'S NOVEL. *WE NEED NEW NAMES*: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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**ABSTRACT**

The child narrator is a popular narrative technique in children's literature, especially magical stories and fantasies. However, most authors prefer adult narrators when narrating issues like political instability, gender-based violence, the AIDS scourge and religious exploitation, as this voice projects a feeling of seriousness and authority of experience to potentially attract a bigger readership, especially the adults in the society. Nevertheless, child narrators are an interesting choice because of the degree of emotions they inject in a story, which gives it an earnest tone and makes the reader want to empathize and sympathize with the narrator. Further, since their identities are in the process of formulation, the reader can see, understand and critique how ideologies play a role in the formation of identities and worldviews. Child narrators also appeal to child readers who form a large section of any country's population and future leadership. The objective of this study was to interrogate the deployment of the child narrative voice in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) in its effectiveness in re-presenting Zimbabwean's different identities. This study critiqued the effectiveness of the child narrator in presenting, representing and (re)presenting experiences of and challenges faced by Zimbabweans within their country and diaspora. The study targeted blooming authors who are hesitant to use child narrators as the protagonists in their works, and readers and critics who might be interested in discovering ways in which child narrators can be used by an author to address myriad concerns.



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## INTRODUCTION

*We Need New Names* is set in Zimbabwe in the years after her independence. The author, Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, prefers to go by the pseudonym NoViolet Bulawayo. "No" in her Ndebele language means "with", whereas Violet is the name of her late mother. In an interview with Ben Greenman on 19th March 2014, Bulawayo said that she chose to call herself NoViolet, to mean "with Violet" in memory of her mother who died when she was 18 months old. Bulawayo, her second name, is a reminder of her yearned-for home city in Zimbabwe, home to the Ndebeles. Bulawayo was born in Zimbabwe but moved to the United States when she was 18 years old to attend college.

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She left her father and siblings back home and joined her aunt. Upon returning to her motherland thirteen years later, all she could see around her was mere disillusionment. In an interview with *The Guardian* (2016) she states that:

> It was a strange country, I went there in search of the Zimbabwe I knew and it was a shock: power cuts, water cuts, just driving down the streets the potholes were amazing, and 80% of the population not working. Just seeing the desperation, wherever you went, people were struggling. That was a picture of the country that I never knew (…) my generation is known as the born free generation: we really don't buy this stance against the west because we are aware of our problems, and our problems are really specifically home grown.

Svetlana (2001), observes that there are two types of nostalgia, restorative and reflective nostalgia.

The former stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home. The latter thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming - wistfully, ironically, desperately. Bulawayo had longed to go back to her home country. She was filled with restorative nostalgia; the kind of longing to be home and relive the beautiful moments she once had in her country. Unfortunately, political turmoil had taken a toll of her country. She coined the term "born free," to refer to the Zimbabweans like herself who were born after the country gained her independence. The freedom is however a mirage, since it worsened things for them. The state of the country was more deplorable than before; high poverty levels, the AIDS scourge, unemployment, poor health facilities and political instability were among a host of many other problems affecting her country. Literature can be used to bring to the attention of the masses the happenings in the society. Probst (1998) notes that while we read literature, some of our beliefs concerning the world are re-affirmed, modified, or even refuted. Bulawayo, through her novel, brings to the attention of her readers the experiences of Zimbabweans at home and the diaspora. The issues she represents in her text can be said to be raising awareness about the experiences of Zimbabweans. During a television interview with Greenman (2014) Bulawayo confessed that: "I must say I come from a place with colourful names (…) in the title of the book I was trying to speak to the need of the new ways of imagining our identities, new ways of seeing the world and seeing our future." It is evident that Bulawayo was trying to reach out to the masses concerning the plight of Zimbabwe and its citizens. My study will therefore examine how the author portrays the various images of Zimbabwe in public imaginaries and how the characters she chooses negotiate their identities and realities as Zimbabweans.

Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia, is a landlocked country in southern Africa. It is a former British colony that earned her independence in 1980. The country has to date had two presidents, the first president being Robert Mugabe and the current president is Emmerson Mnangagwa. Zimbabwe is mainly composed of two major ethnic groups, the Shona and the Ndebele. The Shona are the largest group and they live in the northern part of the country. The Ndebele occupy the south-western part of Zimbabwe, primarily the city of Bulawayo. The Ndebele have borne the brunt of being in the opposition. Minority Rights Group International (2018) postulates,

> Throughout the implosion of Zimbabwe's economy, which accelerated in 2000, the Ndebele people, prominent among the opposition MDC and distrusted by the government of President Robert Mugabe, continued to feel the brunt of his regime. Prior to elections in 2002, human rights organizations reported that the ZANU-PF allegedly threatened the Ndebele with starvation, and a document surfaced which allegedly contained a plan to exterminate the Ndebele. (http://minorityrights.org/ minorities/Ndebele.

It is evident from the above observation that the Ndebele have been a disadvantaged ethnic community for a long time. Their allegiance to the opposition worsened matters for them. Described as Zimbabwe's largest minority, the Ndebele comprise around 17% of Zimbabwe's total population. Other minority groups include the Tonga, Sotho, Venda and Hlengwe. The realities that inform what Zimbabwe is inform the content of Bulawayo's novel and my reading of it.

**Research Objective:** The research objective was to: To interrogate the deployment of the child narrative voice in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) in its effectiveness in re-presenting Zimbabwean's different identities.

**Synthesis of related literature on scholarly literary criticism on zimbambwean's different identities:** Muponde (2005) argues that childhood can be used to represent history, politics and resistance. In his study, which explores the ways in which childhood is constructed and represented in a wide range of black Zimbabwean novels and short stories written in English from 1992 to 2000, he suggests a possibility of viewing childhood not in romantic or idyllic terms, but as a contested terrain that facilitates the negotiation of tensions and conflicts of the society. Muponde's focus on representation of history, politics and resistance from the pre to post-colonial Zimbabwe sets the background for my inquiry into how child figures represent Zimbabwe's post-independence realities. One of the key issues that have re-invented Zimbabwean identities and reminiscent in Bulawayo's novel as evident in my preliminary review is migration. In her paper, Moji (2015) examines how names in *We Need New Names* function as a literary technique in the novel to negotiate the dislocation of Zimbabweans. Moji views naming practices and the real and metaphoric migrations executed by and experienced by the characters in the novel the characters in the novel as symbolising physical translation of selves and their identities. The critic, through discourse analysis, reads semantic and cognitive dissonance as signs that represent characters' dislocation. He then suggests that (re)naming be conceived as a strategy to decode translated selfhoods.

Therefore, Zimbabweans can be considered subaltern and hybrid subjects due to their post-coloniality and diasporic existence. Bamiro (1997) who focuses on representation of Zimbabwean subjects in literature, considers the representation of Zimbabwean marginalised identities in literature as a form of protest. He examines how the construction of identities in and through language is a kind of resistance to the homogenizing, assimilative practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism. He looks at the nativisation of English in selected Zimbabwean texts and its use together with other indigenous languages to articulate social norms and situational imperatives. He also studies English as a tool of domination, manipulation, oppression, reproduction of unequal power relations, constructor of elitist identities and finally resistance to social justice. He focuses on how novelists have used various linguistic devices to contextualize the English language in their respective cultures. In so doing, Bamiro explores how English has reinforced colonial, counter-colonial and heteroglossic social discourses arising from conflicts of race, class and gender. My study will however discuss the language issue in terms of code-switching and social classes. Manase (2011) explores the ways in which Catherine Buckle presents the connection between identity and land ownership in post-colonial Zimbabwe. He uses Buckle's novel, *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* (2002). The novel, which can be considered semi-autobiographical, tells of the tribulations of a White land owner in Zimbabwe. Ownership of land in Zimbabwe is a largely emotive issue owing to the fact that the natives felt short-changed by their colonial masters when it came to land ownership. Manase therefore focuses on the history and cultural significance of land in the formation of personal and social belonging and other identities in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Manase focuses on identity in Zimbabwe in terms

of land ownership. He however ignores other issues that constitute identity like names and language. I intend to expound further on the identity issue in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study involved a critical reading of the novel *We Need New Names* (2013) which was treated as primary data. Secondary data was obtained through library and desk top research. Therefore, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research involves the study of things in their natural settings in an attempt to interpret them. This kind of research aims at understanding the social realities of groups, individuals and cultures as its participants experience it. Qualitative research was therefore appropriate in my study, since literary data is mainly non-numerical. Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. He further states that the process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The target population was Darling, the protagonist in the novel, and the other child narrators namely Godknows, Sbho, Chipo, Stina and Bastard.

The text *We Need New Names* by Bulawayo was purposively selected despite the availability of other literary texts with a child narrative voice. This is because the novel has a child protagonist. It also addresses the various issues in post-independent Zimbabwe that the study wanted to discuss. The study focused on Bulawayo's representation of the experiences of Zimbabweans during the post-independence era in the context of *We Need New Names*. This was conducted through analyzing events as depicted by Darling and other child characters in the novel. The study mainly focused on Darling and the other child narrators namely GodKnows, Sbho, Chipo, Stina and Bastard. They were deliberately picked on because the study intended to discuss the child narrative voice. Darling and her friends were all children, aged between nine and eleven. Data collection was done through a close critical text analysis of *We Need New Names* (2013), by NoViolet Bulawayo and other secondary sources like online journals, theses, dissertations and newspaper articles. The researcher also listened to interview clips with the author, carried out by the press. Data was also collected through note-making as the researcher interacted with the primary and secondary data sources. The collected data was presented by a logical sequence of discussions. Analysis of the data was done by organizing information in a logical sequence and eventually presenting them as themes. These themes were presented and discussed according to the findings from each research question. The tenets of post-colonial and narratology theories guided the researcher in the discussion of the objectives of the study. Information obtained from different sources and used in this research was acknowledged in order to avoid plagiarism.

**Scholarly liberary criticism on the effect on the child Narrative voice's representation of zimbabwean's different identities in noviolet bulawayo's novel. "*we need new names*"**

**Preview:** The novel under study, *We Need New Names,* is geographically set in Zimbabwe and America, although other landscapes are narrated within the text. Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia is a landlocked country in southern Africa. Zimbabwe was named Rhodesia after Cecil Rhodes, who played a key role in its creation. It is a former British colony which earned her independence in 1980. Zimbabwe is ethnically composed of two major ethnic communities, the Shona and the Ndebele. There are however other smaller ethnic communities like the Sotho, Venda and Hlengwe. The Shona are the largest ethnic community and they live in the northern part of the country. The Ndebele occupy the south-western part of Zimbabwe, primarily around the city of Bulawayo. According to Nations Encyclopaedia, the Shona comprise Zimbabwe's largest minority, making up around 16% of the total population. Historically, the novel is set in the early 2000s, a few years after Zimbabwe got its independence. This period is key in understanding Zimbabwe's post-independence realities as it is a time when the country faced innumerable challenges, ranging from health crises, joblessness, indigence, political instability and a host of other problems. The events in the story revolve around and are influenced by these post-independence realities and the novel, against this backdrop, reflects on and deconstructs the realities of this historical period of Zimbabwe. The mimetic potential of Bulawayo's novel in terms of its historicity can be understood through Thiong'o (1972) observation that, "(a) writer responds, with his (sic) total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varied degrees of accuracy and success, the conflict and tensions in his (sic) changing society (…). For the writer himself (sic) lives in, and is shaped by, history" (47). Evident from Thiong'o's observations above are two key issues. Firstly, that the novelist is arguably male, and secondly, that history is an adult and masculine practice. The fact that Bulawayo is a woman and the story in her novel is told by a child female narrator makes her novel deconstructive and revisionist.

The post-colonial novel is regarded as deconstructive and revisionist because in its original form, this genre was created to refute the mis-representation of the colonial subject by the White coloniser. This trend was especially prevalent in the creative output of the first generation of African writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o among others. Marandi and Shadpour (2011) observe the following about Achebe:

> Achebe, of course, did not believe in the stereotypes that European writers have created about Africa in their works. Hence, he has always been trying to create a new Africa, one which is closer to reality. As a writer he believes in certain rules and obligations. He believes that in societies in which solidarity and community is more important than individuality, the didactic potential of novels is very important (2-3).

What emerges in the observation above by Marandi and Shadpour is that most African post-colonial writers attempt to portray an image of Africa that is true to its realities as opposed to images of Africa in Western colonial/imperialist discourses. These post-colonial African writers often narrate the challenges, triumphs and nature of post-colonial selves and environment from an African perspective. However, in the post-independence era the novel has evolved in ways that capture more contemporary realities that are not necessarily

hinged on colonisation. The dominant narratives that these post-colonial novels contest, and the hegemonic cultures that the post-colonial subjects narrated therein negotiate, are some of the factors that lead to the post-colonial novel being considered as a subversive text. This deconstruction is often facilitated by post-colonial subjects who often bear the characteristic of being exiles dislocated either physically, culturally, socially or politically from their homes, languages, cultures, localities, etc. The narrator becomes the mouth-piece that voices the above histories, identities, and realities. The story is narrated from a first-person point of view (focalisation) by the main character, 10 year-old Darling, who also functions as a first person narrator. Her voice is complemented with the voices of other child characters. The experiences of Darling, which are portrayed in the novel, share similarities with those of Bulawayo, the writer of the novel. It is for this reason that the novel can be classified as an auto/biographical text. Fitzpatrick (2015) hints at the autobiographical nature of the novel by stating that, "(t)he author of the novel's own name is representative of her ties to her homeland of Zimbabwe. Bulawayo's writing in *We Need New Names* is a conglomeration of her own personal life, the stories of those she knew, and the story meant to reach every immigrant, who like herself, needed a new name"(7). The text is divided into two parts; the first part narrates Darling's childhood in Zimbabwe, and the second part is about her life in the diaspora after migrating to the United States of America.

Bulawayo's diasporic location has rendered her novel *We Need New Names* as not only post-colonial, but also diasporic. The deconstructive capacity of her diasporic (post-colonial) novel to question norms, re-imagine histories, identities, and realities and to transform societies is best understood through Seraphinoff's (2007) view that "novels are a response to this loss of homes and fields, the uprooting of whole communities, this dispersion of the people, often in foreign lands where their children become assimilated and lose all memory of a lost homeland, a lost language and culture, way of life and identity "(2). In the same vein, my analysis in this chapter is based on the assumption that as a diasporic and post-colonial Zimbabwean writer, Bulawayo uses literature as an agential tool to voice the concerns of the Zimbabwean populace within and outside the country. Her novel further (re)imagines a Zimbabwe marked by utopia rather than the dystopia prevalent in Zimbabwe. To achieve this transformation, Bulawayo re-invents herself as a curator and historian. She then uses a child narrator who tells of a post-colonial reality shared by many post-independent nations. As I will show, Bulawayo intertwines historical facts and fiction in ways that complement each other to present a text that captures the post-colonial contemporary realities of Zimbabwe (ans). Literary analysis seeks to examine how form facilitates the expression of content. Thus, our study appropriates both theories of form and content to show how Bulawayo makes use of specific formal components to represent particular issues affecting Zimbabweans. In view of the objective of this study, that is, to show how the child narrative voice/child focaliser narrates Zimbabwe(an)'s histories, identities and post-independence realities, our analysis of Bulawayo's novel in this study was guided by narratology as a theory of form and post-colonial theories as theories of content. To begin with, narratology theory serves as a theoretical lens that will be used to show two narrative aspects; narrator/narrative voice and point of view/focalisation serve as narrative techniques that facilitate the representation of history, identity and post-independence realities. We will demonstrate how the homodiegetic narrator, that is, Darling, tells a story in which she is a participant, giving a first-hand account of events as they unfold in the novel. This study sought to complement Darling's voice with voices of other child narrators who assist Darling in the narration of the events in the novel. Darling and her friends are intradiegetic narrators. i.e., they are inside the fictional world created by the story. We will show how these intradiegetic narrators front various issues as they unfold. Similarly, the events in Bulawayo's novel are portrayed predominantly from the point of view of child characters like Darling and her friends Chipo, Godknows, Sbho, Stina and Bastard. It is through the eyes of these children that we discover/learn how Zimbabweans navigate the everyday intricacies of life in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora, especially the alienation faced by Darling and other immigrants while in the United States of America. We sought to examine how their ages notwithstanding, the children manage to reflect on and voice issues deemed serious and 'adult' like political instability, abject poverty, religious exploitation and the AIDS scourge among other challenging realities that affect Zimbabweans' day to day encounters in their various homes in Zimbabwe (slums and suburbs) as well as the Zimbabwean diaspora. As mentioned in chapter one, narratology only focuses on formal aspects of a text and not thematic concerns. To examine the content (thematic issues) in the text, in this case historical concerns, issues of identity and post-independent realities, requires another theoretical lens, hence my deference to post-colonial theory. My choice of post-colonial theory is informed by the post-independence setting of this novel. Thus, I read *We Need New Names* as a post-colonial text. Post-colonial theory will guide my discussion of Zimbabwean histories, identities and post-independence realities. The post-colonial concepts that will be used as theoretical lenses include subaltern, strategic essentialism, hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and Otherness.

Strategic essentialism is a theoretical concept that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak advances as an agential tool that subalterns can use to voice their struggles. By subalterns Spivak means those groups in any society invented as subordinate by a dominant group. A subaltern refers to the dominated or subordinate group(s) and is often applied to explain power relations the colonised as well as non-colonised societies. Closely related to subalternity is the concept of Othering, also advanced by Spivak. As quoted by Ashcroft et al (2000), Spivak (1985) defines Othering as "the process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes" (171). She uses this concept to express how the subalterns have been marginalised and pushed to the periphery of societies and discursive practices. In this study, we sought to discover how Othering emerges through cultural practices like religion, politics, etc that lead to the treatment of some members of the indigenous communities in ways that subordinate them to dominant groups. In Bulawayo's novel the following can be understood as subalterns: children, women, Black people, Zimbabwean citizens and the Ndebele. Conversely, the dominant groups are adults, men, the Whites, the African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) Government and the Shona. Some of the strategies used as strategically essentialist to enable these subalterns speak are: child play, use of unique names, making claims to orality, and so on. Strategic essentialism therefore, enables the subalterns to narrate history, an event that had previously been undertaken by the dominant groups. Hybridity is a post-

colonial theoretical concept advanced by Homi Bhabha. Hybridity is defined as the mixing of two cultures. The concept was first advanced by Bhabha to refer to colonial subjects especially from Asia who have been transformed through their exposure to both Eastern and Western cultures. A hybrid subject exhibits both indigenous and Western attributes. In its present usage, hybridity is used to refer to all colonial subjects as well as other individuals who have experiences any aspect of cultural mixing. Hybrid forms can be at the level of text, subjects, or languages. We intend to use this concept to discuss the identities and cultural post-independence realities in *We Need New Names* like religion and other traditions, specifically cultural practices like modes of dressing. We will examine how the concept of hybridity is realized through the mannerisms of religious leaders like Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, games that Darling and her friends engage in like Andy Over and the language which the children use. Another post-colonial concept that we used, that is associated with Bhabha is the concept of mimicry. Bhabha (1984) defines mimicry as "the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is therefore the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriated the other as it visualises power" (7). He considers mimicry as the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behavior, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers. It was essential in the analysis of how Zimbabweans imitate western mannerisms like modes of dressing, manner of speaking and rituals during church services conducted by Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, which while displaying aspect of Zimbabweans indigeneity, also borrow from Western religious services. In addition, We also used the concept of ambivalence which is advanced by Homi Bhabha.

Apart from Hybridity and mimicry, we also used the postcolonial concept of ambivalence as theorised by Bhabha. According to Bhabha (1984). (T)he discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. (126). Ambivalence basically describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion which forms the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This study sought to discover Zimbabweans' experiences of ambivalence by Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe and its diaspora by various characters beginning with Darling and her family, friends and neighbours as they interact with people from different backgrounds including ethnic, religious, and national. Post-colonial concepts like ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry and the other was used to analyse Zimbabwe's post-independence/contemporary realities. These realities are experienced by Zimbabweans both locally and in the diaspora.

**Scholarly liberary criticism on the effect on the child narrative voice's representation of zimbabwean's different identities in noviolet bulawayo's novel. "*we need new names":*** This section examines how the child narrative voice represents Zimbabwean diverse and multiple identities. I analyse how the narrative voice represents ethnic, racial, and diasporic identities. It further foregrounds the narrator's presentation of dominant and peripheral identities by focusing on how the child and adult narrators/characters negotiate different notions of ethnic, national and diasporic selfhoods. Like history, the Zimbabwean identities narrating and narrated in Bulawayo's novel are post-colonial (and diasporic). Therefore, my analysis of Zimbabwean contemporary identities will draw on post-colonial theory, especially but not limited to Bhabha's theoretical concepts of homeliness, hybridity and mimicry, and Spivak's concepts of subaltern and strategic essentialism. Other post-colonial issues that will be interrogated in the context of Bulawayo's novel related to identity include Othering, migration and exile. Moreover, I will discuss how different identities are constructed politically, economically and socially. The argument herein is informed by the assumption that identity is a social construct and it is negotiated (produced, re-created) through performance. The meanings that inform the performance of identity, as Butler (1988) suggests, are influenced by social, cultural and political norms as well as interactions between individuals and institutions. The narrators/characters in this section, as I will show, negotiate normative and subversive expectations and notions of identity and citizenship recommended or expected by dominant groups like the Shona, the colonizers and the ZANU-PF Nationalist government.

The key construct that forms the basis of the argument in this section is identity. The Oxford Dictionary defines identity as "who or what somebody is" or "the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others." As a social construct, identity is a concept that bears multiple meanings which are subjectively and relatively understood. The constructedness and dynamism of identity has been highlighted by Fearon (1999) in his observation that:

> Identity is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed "social" and "personal." In the former sense, an "identity" refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable (2).

In reference to Fearon's definition above, I consider identity as a personal or social entity that is performed, hence fluid and subjective.

Identity is often presented by many post-colonial writers as a contentious issue. The emerging concerns in relation to identity which post-colonial writers present in their texts include identity crisis, alienation, as legacies of colonization. In this section, I focus on identity crisis, which I view as a consequence of post colonialism. Identity crisis in the novel is presented as a predicament of the Ndebele and the white Zimbabweans. To begin with, the Ndebele took part in the liberation war but unfortunately, their efforts have not been recognised. They are treated as second-hand citizens in their country by the Shona-led government. Their houses are demolished by the government leaving them homeless. Darling narrates their sentiments thus, "(w)hat? But aren't you a pauper now? Aren't these black people evil for bulldozing your home

and leaving you with nothing now?"(75). Secondly, the white Zimbabweans are also treated as the Other, just like the Ndebele. Young black Zimbabweans invade Budapest and forcibly evict the white people living there. They refer to the whites as Boers and "khiwa" (111). Darling narrates the eviction of one white couple which takes place during one of their visits to Budapest to steal guavas. The young African men come chanting slogans against the whites. They try to break into the house of the couple and the couple is left with no other option but to open the door. They are served with an eviction notice which angers the man and he begins protesting. The man angrily retorts, "I am an African (…) this is my fucking country too, I was born here, my father was born here just like you!" (119). The children are confused by the white man's allegation and Godknows innocently inquires, "(w)hat exactly is an African?" (ibid). The identity crisis in the country creates confusion in the Zimbabweans specifically the whites who are being evicted from their legally acquired property and the Ndebele who are internally displaced. Asma(2015) recognises the post-coloniality of identity crisis in his postulation that "(w)hen considering pre-colonialism, we notice that (in) the original culture, the beliefs and customs of the postcolonial subjects were functioning in an ordinary way without feeling the need to identify with a place or to prove they are not inferior to anyone" (8). In the above quote, Asma insinuates that there is an original culture and an unoriginal one. The former refers to the culture which existed in the pre-colonial era, before the people were subjected to a new culture. The original culture, in Asma's view, promoted equality among all members, as opposed to the unoriginal one which divides people along social stratifications.

Like Asma, I am convinced that in a society where equality exists, there is no pressure to outdo one another. Identities resulting from social stratifications would therefore be none-existent. For instance, Darling and her friends would not be treated as subalterns by their own government and the white Zimbabweans. They would freely traverse Budapest without being harassed by the security guard who refers to Bastard as a "pathetic, fatally miscalculated biological blunder" (109). The reality of this assumption is however that egalitarianism does not exist in post-colonial contexts. Contrarily, in many post-colonial societies, a section of the group often feels superior over the other(s) by virtue of belonging to a dominant race, ruling party, ethnic community, religion, or culture. In Zimbabwe's case, the identity crises result from neo-colonialism, ethnic prejudices, and dictatorship. The portrayal of slum-dwellers as inferior citizens and the ensuing identity crisis is reflected in the novel when Darling and her friends face prejudice from the watchman in Budapest. He forbids them from walking the streets of Budapest since to him they don't belong to that social class. From Darling's description, even the guard is not fit to live in Budapest though he imposes too much authority on them. She comments, "Everything about him looks like a joke and we know he is a waste of time- if we weren't this close we'd probably call him names and laugh and throw stones"(105). The guard is keen on stopping them from walking any further but the children challenge him. In an outburst of frustration, he tells the children:

> You filth; do you think you can just come here and desecrate the place as you see fit? Do you know I can perform a citizen's arrest on you right now and ferry your despicable personage to jail? You really wish to see the inside of a cell, don't you, big head? You are begging for it, huh? You want me to take you there? (107).

From the guard's outburst, it is observable that the children are viewed as lesser citizens due to their race and social status. They are unwanted in the rich suburbs because they are poor and dirty. They however do not succumb to the guard's pressure, but instead engage him in an altercation and finally have their way. As observed, inequality leads to feelings of inferiority since the non-dominant groups begin to question their role in a society where they are treated the other. It is important to note that the guard referring to Darling and her friends as filth devalues the children. They know that it is their failed government that has made teachers flee to other countries and caused joblessness. The children therefore feel that they deserve equal rights with all other Zimbabweans, despite their impoverished status.

The identity crisis demonstrated by the characters in *We Need New Names* can best be understood as a consequence of the political crisis in post-independence Zimbabwe. The interrelatedness between identity crisis and political instability has been recognised by Asma in his observation that"(c)olonialism transforms and displaces everything. Through this process, traditions, beliefs and cultural standards of the imperial canon are forced upon all of their subjects who find no choice but to accept these new ways of life" (8). Asma implies that the aftermath of colonialism is not just a change of guard but also a change in the culture. It is these notions of propriety stipulated by imperialism that categorises individuals into specific identity categories, most of them displaying power imbalances. The reality of this situation is evident in the novel through characters like Chipo, Sbho, GodKnows, Stina, Bastard, and Darling, who occupy the lower social classes by virtue of living in Paradise, a slum area. Although their slum-dwelling is due to their prior displacement orchestrated by the government under the guise of slum clearance, in reality, they are victims of ethnic prejudice. Therefore, the ensuing exile/displaced/slum identities are actually products of ethnic bias. The irony behind the name paradise signifies the absurdity of life in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, things are not what they seem to be. For instance, Independence does not really mean freedom and in actual sense Paradise is a slum and its occupants are viewed as, and then re-defined as pests who leech off the rich occupants of the affluent suburb next to it.

The inhabitants of paradise are dehumanised due to their economic conditions. To live in Paradise means to live under terrible conditions like tin houses, lack of food and proper clothing and joblessness, factors that have contributed to the dehumanising of these slum-dwellers. Darling's grandmother, Mother of Bones, goes to church wearing mismatched shoes, but Darling is quick to point out that it is not because she is crazy. Darling herself is barefoot. She has outgrown her shoes and the ones made in China which her mother bought turned out to be substandard. Her friend God knows always walks around in torn shorts. When the NGO man takes photos of his torn shorts, Darling comments, "(n)ow the cameraman pounces on God knows black buttocks. Bastard points and laughs, and Godknows around and covers the holes of his shorts with his hands like that naked man in the Bible, but he cannot completely hide his nakedness" (53).

It is obvious that Godknows feels embarrassed by his torn clothes, especially when his friends laugh at him. A

consequence of this dehumanisation is loss of pride in oneself, evident in Darling's sentiments concerning the NGO cameraman who keeps taking their photos. She complains,

> They just like taking pictures these NGO people like maybe we are their real friends and relatives and they will look at the pictures and point us out by names to other friends and relatives once they get back to their homes. They don't care that we are embarrassed by the dirt and out torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it; they just take pictures anyway, they take and take. (52)

As dehumanised beings, the child characters in the novel are always expecting mal-treatment from rich people, hence when on a mission to steal guavas from Budapest they chance upon a rich woman, they expect to be patronised. Therefore, when the woman behaves contrary to their expectations, they are disturbed because she is operating outside the unwritten rules of social organisation. Granted, there are a number of dynamics at play here that might account for the patronising of the children like age, but the narrator strategically suggests socio-economic differences as a major contributor to the bizarre interaction between the rich woman and the six children. Darling vividly describes the woman's physique and how she eats her doughnut. She says, "(t)hen there's the red chewing mouth I can tell from the chord thingies at the side of her neck and the way she smacks her big lips that the whatever she is eating tastes really good"(6). The woman looks at them curiously, especially at eleven year-old Chipo who is pregnant. She later on takes their photos. The children get disappointed when she does not offer them any food yet she has just thrown the remaining doughnut in the dustbin. It is important to note that the white woman does not open her gate and let the children into her compound. To her, they are an object of curiosity, so it is not surprising that she asks to take their photos. The taking of photos is a way through which the woman exoticises the children, further subjecting them to a patronising gaze. As subalterns, the children have been subjected to dehumanizing conditions by people like the woman. Instead of giving them food, which is what they are looking for, she takes their photos, an act that commodifies their poverty. Disappointed, they leave, shouting and hurling abuses at her but of course she does not hear because of the noise created by the language barrier.

Evident in the novel under study is that identity is a construct, produced by historical forces, social contexts, cultural upbringing, religious influences, and economic contexts. The emerging identity constructs are produced by socialisation, as noted by Yinger (1976) who argues that an individual identifies/conforms with "a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and share segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (200). Yinger observes that social and cultural activities bind people together. Resultantly, these people form an identity since they can be identified through these concepts. In the novel, a number of issues can be considered as influencing the construction of and performance of identities as follows.

To begin with, several historical developments especially colonisation, Matebele wars in pre-colonial era, and the post-independence evictions have realised a number of identities like postcolonial, racial and exile. The consequence is ethnic strife, class warfare and alienation. I intend to focus on racial and exile/dislocated/displaced identities and ethnic identities in detail. Post-colonial identities come about as a result of the government establishing national ethnic identities. In this case, the Shona emerge as the dominant group whereas the Ndebele are the subversive. Darling belongs to the Ndebele community, which despite having taken part in the liberation war, is considered inferior. The homes of its members are destroyed by the government and this leaves the adults who took part in liberation wars dissatisfied. A character named Gayagisu and Darling's grandfather happen to be freedom fighters. Further, racial and exile identities are brought out through the eviction of white Zimbabweans. The white Zimbabweans become the subversive while the black Zimbabweans are the dominant. The black Zimbabweans forcefully evict the white Zimbabweans since they view them as part of the colonialists. Additionally, Africans in the diaspora are subversive while the whites constitute the dominant group. Darling and other Africans abroad live in fear of deportation since they are illegal immigrants. It is worth noting that although ethnic identities precede colonial times, colonisation has intensified ethnic awareness. The second influence on identity construction and performance is social contexts/practices. These two entities have produced Zimbabwean identities in ways that have created dominant and subversive identities. One social practice that has led to production of cultural identities is patriarchy. Patriarchy is a form of social organisation where the male gender is given preference over the female one. According to Milton (2002), gender is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female. Gender Identity is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine. It is observable that as we grow, we copy the behaviour of those around us. Children will also be introduced to roles which are stereotypically linked to their biological orientation. They are ascribed some gender roles which are based on norms or standards created by society. For example, in the African setting the girls are assigned the kitchen roles as the boys look after the livestock. In Darling's community, the first-born in any family is expected to be a boy. It therefore becomes unfortunate if one turns out to be a first-born and a girl. This part of culture forces Darling to struggle with the identity of being a first-born female. She tells Chipo that her baby will be a male because "the first baby is supposed to be a boy" but she is born a girl, a sign of bad luck (5). When she is questioned as to why she is a girl, she readily responds, "I said supposed didn't I?"(5). The problem also recurs when her father comes back home very sick. He refers to her as a boy. Darling notices this but she does not correct him. In her reminiscence, she makes the following observation: "His voice sounds like something burned and seared his throat. My son. My boy, he says. (…) My boy, he keeps saying, but I don't tell him that I'm a girl" (90). It is therefore evident that even the children are aware of the gender biasness in their society. They know that prestigious positions like being a first-born are a reserve of the male gender. The female gender has been considered as an Other thereby coming second-place after the males.

Evidently, the children have been socialised to believe that being a female is a subordinate position to the males. Bastard is one of the friends of Darling who is portrayed in the novel as exerting dominance over the other children probably because he is male and the eldest (eleven years old). Bastard's bossy attitude is revealed when they witness the white couple being evicted from their house by the gang of young men. When

Sbho is overcome by emotions and starts sobbing, Bastard is irritated and admonishes her telling her, "(w)hat, are you crying for the white people? Are they your relatives?" (120).Then Sbho responds, "(t)hey are people, you asshole!" (ibid). Darling is taken aback for she has never heard anyone insult Bastard. She says, "I almost fall out of the tree because nobody has ever called Bastard that. Never ever. I wait to see what he will do but he is looking at Sbho with confusion in his face" (ibid).The confusion witnessed by the children uncovers that the females are considered as subordinate/subaltern while the males are seen as dominant. Bastard has invoked fear in the other children and no one dares to question his actions.

Fourthly, religious affiliation has also brought about different identities. Those who have adopted Christianity despise the ones who still visit local healers and vice versa. In the novel, Darling espouses her grandmother's dislike towards people whom she considered pagans, more particularly those people who do not go to the Holy Chariot Church of Christ. Thus when Darling's friends call out to her on her way to church with Mother of Bones, her grandmother warns her to "leave those little heathens alone" (28). Although Darling does not understand the importance of going to church she has to climb the mountain with her grandmother to attend the service. Part of the service involves confession of sins. Darling listens keenly as one woman confesses having visited Vodloza the diviner. She then comments, "(w)e are waiting for Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro to pounce on Simangele for going to see a pagan, which is how he refers to Vodloza…"(37). From Darling's observation, all people who did not attend church were considered pagans. Religion has therefore brought about dominant and subaltern groups of people. The former are the ardent church goers while the latter are those who do not go to church. Darling does not see any seriousness displayed in the church. She rightly criticises the pastor and his congregation because of the charade that goes on in their church. Darling's observations can be linked to Ngoshi (2013) who states that "the Holy Chariot Church is an African Independent Church and its practices are hybrid, but also substantially different from Christianity as practiced in traditional churches with European origins" (7).

Lastly, economic hardships have produced migrant identities. In the novel, the narrator shows us how poverty has pushed Zimbabweans to migrate to other locales within their country especially from rural to urban areas or from rich to poor neighbourhoods and vice versa. They have also migrated to other countries they consider as affluent like America and South Africa. This migration/exile is both voluntary and forced. The motivating factors of these migrations include poverty, censorship, ethnic warfare, and displacement by the government. Poverty is one of the most common causes of migrant identities. Joblessness in Zimbabwe has forced people to traverse borders in search of jobs. Darling is one casualty of this condition. Her father leaves for South Africa to find a job. She is left with her mother who has to go to the border to trade so that she can provide for her child. This results in Darling living with her grandmother, Mother of Bones. She hardly sees her mother. They live in a slum named Paradise. On her way to church Darling's description of her surrounding reveals the squalor that comprises their existence. As they pass, she says, they "pass tiny shack after tiny shack crammed together like hot loaves of bread. (she is) not wearing shoes because they are too small now and the other made-in-China ones that mother brought (her) from the border just fell apart, so (she) walk(s) carefully and make(s) sure to lift (her) feet to avoid things on the dusty red path: a broken bottle here, a pile of junk over there, a brownish puddle of something here, a disembowelled watermelon there"(26). From Darling's description, it is evident that the occupants of Paradise live in dehumanising conditions. It is this poverty that has made people migrate.

Displacement by the government has also resulted into migrant identities. In the chapter titled "How They Left" Darling narrates the mass exodus experienced in Zimbabwe. Among the reasons that people emigrate is political strife in the country at that point in time. She resonates, "(w)hen things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. They flee their own wretched land so their anger may be pacified in foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strange lands, the wounds of their despair bandaged in faraway lands, their blistered prayers muttered in the darkness of queer lands"(146). Darling's sentiments foreground the subaltern status that immigrants attain in a foreign country. Political instability forced many Zimbabweans to migrate, not only to other nearby countries like South Africa but also faraway countries like the U.S. Darling also leaves later to join Aunt Fostalina in Detroit Michigan. In expressing the immigrants' subaltern nature in diaspora, Darling observes that while there, "they will have to sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they are asked to rise and leave" (ibid).

Geography is a map against which identities in the novel *We Need New Names* are plotted. The writer presents us with three main identity categories namely: ethnic, national and diasporic, all affiliated with places. To begin with, ethnic identities as represented in the novel are affiliated to local geographies. The novel's geographic setting in the city of Bulawayo is deliberate because Bulawayo is home to the Ndebele. The writer Bulawayo has named places in the novel in inferential ways. We can deduce that the novel is set in Bulawayo, which is Matabeleland due to roads like Mzilikazi as mentioned in the novel. King Mzilikazi is the founding father of the Ndebele kingdom, therefore the road was most likely named after him in commemoration of the great work he did for the Ndebele. Darling comments, "(w)e are going even though we are not allowed to cross Mzilikazi Road"(1). It is ironical that Darling and her friends are not allowed to cross this road, named after their freedom fighter. They have been denied a privilege that came from the efforts of one of their ancestors, King Mzilikazi. Therefore, the geography of Bulawayo becomes the space within which Ndebele nationhood is performed and re-invented in relation to or opposition to Zimbabwean nationhood.

Despite the fact that Bulawayo is home to the Ndebele, political instability coupled with the state's tribal and nepotism practices have disadvantaged most residents of Bulawayo. However, there still exists a number of rich individuals who live in the affluent neighbourhood of Budapest, thus social stratification has led to feelings of unbelonging among the poor inhabitants of the slum dwelling called Paradise. To be a Ndebele therefore comes with feelings of unhomeliness out of the awareness that they do not belong to the national imaginary of Zimbabwean citizenship. Bhabha defines unhomeliness as "the condition of extra-territorial and cross cultural initiations" (9). He further explains that "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (ibid). In other words, Bhabha equates the word "home" to freedom and therefore if one does not feel free in

their home, then they undergo a state of "unhomeliness". The privilege of national belonging that is denied the Ndebele is possessed and enjoyed by the Shona. This is evidently displayed during the evictions leading to displacements. In the novel, we see the people protest about the demolition of their houses but their protests fall on deaf ears. The bulldozers just go on demolishing houses. Darling reminisces, "(w)hen they get to Mai Tari's house she throws herself in front of a bulldozer and says, Kwete! You'll have to bulldoze me first before I see my house go down, you dog shit" (66). The policeman hits the woman with a gun on her head when she continues protesting. Darling comments on the blind obeisance to dictatorship exhibited by this policeman when she says, "(t)he policeman does not kill Mai Tari, he only hits her with a gun on the head because all eyes are on him and maybe he has to do something important" (ibid). From the extract above, it emerges that the Ndebele have been highly disadvantaged for long, rendering then marginalised/peripheral subjects and their overwhelming support for the opposition party has worsened their situation. This situation is affirmed by the Associated Press (2018) report that,

> Of all the scars from former leader Robert Mugabe's 37-year rule of Zimbabwe, the deepest is the Matabeleland killings. The army's Operation Gukurahundi - "the early rains that blow away the chaff," in the local Shona language - ran from 1983 through 1987, when the Fifth Brigade rampaged through the southwestern provinces of Matabeleland.

The observation above is a clear insight into the inhumane treatment projected to the Ndebele because of their allegiance to the opposition. Darling may not have been born during the massacre, but her grandmother definitely witnessed it. Mother of Bones therefore knows what it means to be a Ndebele and oppose the government.

Darling brings this to our attention the historical violence against the Ndebele when she reports that her grandmother, Mother of Bones', views are concerning the youth fighting for change. According to Mother of Bones, the fight for change is useless, thus her saying that: "What do they think they are doing yanking a lion's tail. Don't they know that there will be bones if they dare? You will ask me tomorrow you will ask me what I'm saying now tomorrow when there are real bones" (30). True to Mother of Bones' words, the leader of the youth fighting for a change, Bornfree, is brutally killed. I read the name of Darling's grandmother 'Mother of Bones' as an allegory of the Ndebele's unbelonging in Zimbabwe. As her name suggests, she is mother of the dead, or people who are about to die, to be rendered extinct, perhaps through genocide as was orchestrated through the Operation Gukurahundi that Associated Press has reported on above.

Ethnicity in Zimbabwe preceded colonisation. The two warring ethnic groups were the Shona and the Ndebele. History records that the sour relationship between the two ethnic communities began even before Zimbabwe became a British colony. Many scholars have pointed out this standoff. One such scholar is Lindgren (2002) who notes that the Shona government intentionally misrepresented the Ndebele, especially when it came to production of history books. The books have Zimbabwe's history recorded in a way that makes the Ndebele appear inhuman. Lindgren (ibid) states that, "In the same way as the colonial state had an interest in the death of Lobengula and the end of the Ndebele state, the Zimbabwean state has no interest in making Lobengula a hero or in resurrecting the Ndebele state or nation" (20). The Ndebele experience Othering, since their contribution towards the liberation of Zimbabwe are not recognised.

Language is one of the markers of ethnic identity. Characters in *We Need New Names* infuse Ndebele words in their conversations. This is especially so when they are faced with oppression from the national government, which is coincidentally composed of mainly Shona-speaking individuals. The appropriation of language as a tool of resistance is evident in the novel during the demolition of the houses. The narrator, Darling, tells us that the adults were expressing their various reactions to their dislocation through isiNdebele. In the novel, one of the characters, Gayigusu, says that: "I got this from the liberation war, salilwelilizweleli, we fought for this facking lizwe mani, we put them in power, and today they turn on us like a snake, mpthu, and he spits" (66-67). Writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o have acknowledged the power inherent in language as a tool of socialization or resistance. English, the coloniser's language, a legacy of colonialism in post-independence, becomes the language of dominance over the Ndebele by the government, which continues to dominate over the masses through neo-colonialism. Conversely, local languages become markers of resistance to colonialism and its legacies. Evidence of both languages in the novel is a sign of code-mixing.

When asked if the language of her characters expresses a confused/mixed identity during an interview with Peschel (2015), Bulawayo said, "I wouldn't say it's a confused identity. I would say it's an identity that comes from negotiating two cultures. English came to Zimbabwe as with most African countries through colonization." She uses code-mixing in her writing to symbolise the new identity that has sprang up amongst the Zimbabweans as a result of their interaction with the European culture. She further adds that English was a language she encountered and used in school. She was more comfortable using her Ndebele dialect. Bulawayo concludes thus:

> Now, when it comes to me writing I'm juggling two languages, obviously, Ndebele is my ancient language, the language of intimacy. And as much as I'm fine with communicating in English it doesn't have that weight for me. But of course I have to produce a book that looks like English on the page. So it takes me back to that point of negotiating. And of course there is the love of language. I really want my language to be in my work. So I come to it through a process of translation.

In the novel, Darling and her friends mix English and Ndebele during their conversations. This is especially evident when they are conversing about very important issues like politics and migration. The children vent out their frustrations using words and phrases from the Ndebele language. An instance is when Sbho, one of the children, tells her friends that she would get married to a man from Budapest then he will take her to a much better place. When Godknows dismisses her, she puts him off, saying, "Well, I don't care. I'm blazing out of this kaka country myself" (13). Cultural hybridity has led to the code-mixing that is observed in the conversations the children and adults engage in.

Sbho and the children feel that their country is "kaka", which translated means human excrement, mainly because of the political instability being experienced. However, not all the children accept that other countries are faring better than Zimbabwe. Thus, when Darling boasts to her friends that she will travel to the US to live with her Aunt Fostalina, Bastard dismisses her saying, "(t)hat's what your Aunt Fostalina is doing as we speak. Right now she's busy cleaning kaka off some wrinkled old man who can't do anything for himself" (15).

The children also make use of obscene language in their conversations, and I read these taboo words as markers of strategic essentialism. Their deference to obscenities is due to a number of factors, the most prominent one probably the fact that they live in the slums. Slum dwellers have an identity in their diction. As expected, the society is stratified along social classes. This stratification is not just on the lines of material wealth but also language. Those children who hail from the suburbs speak 'refined' language, as opposed to their counterparts in the slums who use curse words. Darling and her friends were reduced to slum dwellers and school dropouts when their country suffers political turmoil. They are forced to adapt to the deplorable condition in their new home. The children then inadvertently become subalterns and their linguistic choices identifies them as such. The fact that they were once in school makes them know some English words, but due to cultural hybridity, they infuse Ndebele words in their speeches especially when expressing disappointment.

The second geography that Darling narrates in the novel that maps identities is the country Zimbabwe, a place that configures and re-configures national identities. In the novel, national belonging is a complex issue because theoretically, all people who belong within the geographical boundaries of Zimbabwe are citizens. However, the reality is that some people are not accorded citizenship privileges like freedom of movement. Darling demonstrates this awareness in her capacity as a narrator. In the novel she says that "we are on our way to Budapest (…) we are going even though we are not allowed to cross Mzilikazi Road" (1). Darling and her friends are aware that they are not allowed to cross over to the other side of town since they do not belong there. They experience unhomeliness while in Budapest. During one of their visits there, Darling resonates, "(i)ts the fruit that gives us courage, otherwise we wouldn't dare be here. I keep expecting the clean streets to spit and tell us to go back where we came from" (4).

Other issues pertaining to national identity addressed in the novel include joblessness, disillusionment, and autocratic rule in post-independent Zimbabwe. Darling represents these identities in a number of ways. To begin with, Darling presents most of the citizens of Zimbabwe as jobless. The men spend all day playing draughts while the women just gossip. Both adults and children are dependent on the NGOs for food. Joblessness has reduced them to paupers. Darling narrates,

> (a)fter we get our things, it's the adults' turn. They stand in their own line, trying to look like they don't really care, like they have better things to do than be here. The truth is that we hear them all the time complain about how the NGO people have forgotten them, how they should visit more often, how NGO this and NGO that, like maybe the NGO are their parents. (55)

Without the help of these NGOs most families would go completely hungry. Such desperate situations are what drive Darling and her friends to steal guavas from Budapest. As subalterns, the non-dominant groups like the Ndebele are jobless and this forces them to wait for aid from NGOs for free food, clothes and shoes. It is dehumanising to see citizens in an independent country miserable because of lack of means of survival. It even becomes more perplexing to discover that most jobless adults have gone through university but are still jobless. The inability of the men to provide for their families until they resort to playing draughts all day is also an indication of hopelessness. In conclusion, to be jobless is a form of identity in Zimbabwe as expressed above by Darling.

To be a citizen means to possess the ability to practice one's sovereignty, but that is not always true as evident in the novel. For example, Darling and her friends have become kleptomaniacs and their parents, especially fathers, have been emasculated so much that they have lost their masculinity. Darling comments,

> Generally the men always tried to appear strong; they walked tall, heads upright, arms steady at the sides, and feet planted firmly like trees. Solid, Jericho walls of men. But when they went out in the bush to relieve themselves and nobody was looking, they fell apart like crumbling towers and wept with the wretched grief of forgotten concubines. (76)

Darling's community are the subaltern. They have to live with the consequences of being the minority and belonging to the opposition. This is what identifies them.

The political assassinations in Zimbabwe also serve as a way to define Zimbabwean national identities and to deconstruct the notion of a Zimbabwean national citizenship. Citizenship is the state of being a member of a country and having legal rights because of this. On the contrary, the Ndebele, who have been rendered victims of ethnic atrocities, have been re-defined as aliens on whom genocide is exercised. For this matter, Zimbabwe has become unhomely for them. While theoretically the Ndebele are considered citizens, in actual sense they do not enjoy the rights that citizenship presupposes. In the novel, Darling tells of the assassinations that took place in Zimbabwe in the quest for democracy and details Bornfree's experience as a case of reference. Political assassinations are characteristic of a self-governed country under an autocratic ruler. Kehinde (2004) observes that "*Kill Me Quick*, like many other postcolonial African novels, reveals an atmosphere of fear, hate, humiliation and an aura of repression, in forms of arrest, exile and execution. It highlights the dictatorial and oppressive tendencies of the imperialists and neo-colonial rulers in African nations" (2). Kehinde's focus was on a Kenyan text, but he observes that post-independent Africa falls under one umbrella in which neo-colonialism coupled with a host of evils are a daily occurrence.

One atrocious act propagated by Mugabe's dictatorial regime is the killing of Bornfree. Darling and her friends hide on top of the trees and watch silently as the adults go to bury Bornfree, a young man who is assassinated because he belonged to the opposition. Darling notices the flag on top of Bornfee's coffin and comments, "(w)e have seen quite a few coffins like that lately; it's the Change people, like Bornfree, in the coffins" (133). By Change people, Darling is referring to those people

who belong to the opposition. During their playtime, they re-enact the scenario as follows:

> Stina takes off his What Would Jesus Do? T-shirt and waves it because it's now the flag of the country, and we point to it with our weapons and sing the president's name…By now we are laughing and chanting and signing war songs and waving our weapons. We are proper drunk with verve; we are animals wanting blood. But first, we dance…. Our faces are contorted now; we look at each other and we have become fierce and really ugly men…After the dancing we pounce on Bastard who is now Bornfree. We scream into his face while we clobber him…With all our weapons clamouring for one person like that, it looks like we are hitting a grain of sand…But we only laugh and keep hitting. (140-141)

The tension that Bornfree's death elicits is dealt with by the children through humour. In the novel, we see Darling and her friends laugh as they act out Bornfree's death. This is evident in the novel when Godknows plays the role of a car, then takes off his Arsenal T-shirt and starts waving it in the air like a flag. This is followed by chants and laughs from the other children. In the above excerpt, it emerges that the children are aware of the consequences of one opposing the government. It amounts to death, just as Bornfree is killed. Mob justice would apply to those who openly express criticism of the government in place. Darling and the other children play the role of those who are pro-government while Bastard plays the role of a revolutionist. Borrowing from Gayatri Spivak's idea of a subaltern, which can be described as the un(or under)represented group of people in the society, we can describe the opposition as the subaltern. Their voices are stifled and therefore they cannot raise their concerns freely. Such people like Bornfree are the ones who end up dying for agitating for democracy.

Also evident in the excerpt above, is Bulawayo's strategic essentialisation of the innocence of the child narrative voice to satirise the killing of those who oppose the government, people like Bornfree who Darling calls "Change people" (133). Moji (2015) observes that, "Chapters such as *Real Change* (ch.4) and *Blak Power* – deliberately misspelt B-L-A-K (ch.8) actually illustrate lack of political changeand the continued powerlessness of Darling's community" (12). B-L-A-K, in my view, is misspelt to signify some form of resistance to the new government. It could also be a symbol of the high rates of illiteracy in Zimbabwe since most of the children are school drop-outs. They were forced to drop out of school since their teachers went to look for jobs in other countries. In summary, political assassinations taking place in Zimbabwe have led to the deaths of many young people observed by Darling and her friends.

The third geography that maps out identities in the novel is the diaspora, particularly South Africa and America. Diasporic identities are also migrant/exile identities. Darling represents diasporic identities in the novel in ways that capture the challenges of living in the diaspora. According to the narrator, diasporic identities are enforced due to the crisis in Zimbabwe that has seen several people leave the country in search of greener pastures elsewhere or to escape imminent punishment from the government. Firstly, Darling presents joblessness as one key precursor to the migration that has produced migrant/exile subjects/identities. The better pay offered in neighbouring countries has propelled the young and energetic Zimbabweans to search for greener pastures there. Mpofu and Sylod (2016) comment on unemployment in Zimbabwe,

> The economic hardship experienced over the past decade has seen the largest flight of skilled work force ever witnessed in post-colonial Africa. It is estimated that as many as three and half million of the country's close to 14 million population (25 per cent) left the country to seek employment and a better life elsewhere. (10)

The above observation suggests that unemployment has forced many skilled workers to leave Zimbabwe, rendering them exile subjects. For example, Darling has no first-hand knowledge of her father but relates with him through anecdotes told to her by her grandmother and a picture that has a place of pride in their shack. She says that "Mother of Bones says the picture was taken when my father was finishing university, just before I was born (…). Now father is in South Africa, working, but he never writes, never sends us money, never nothing" (22). The name given to Darling's grandmother, Mother of Bones, symbolises her childlessness in the face of her son's disappearance in South Africa. Darling and her grandmother are only reunited with her father when he returns to Zimbabwe bed-ridden.

Like Darling, the other children in the novel are all of school going age but the lack of well-paying teaching jobs in their country has made their teachers to cross the borders in search of better-paying jobs. This migration has also produced another cadre of migrant identities. The children have thus been rendered school drop outs. Stina reminisces as follows: "When we were going to school my teacher Mr. Gono said you need an education to make money. And how will you do that now that we are not going to school anymore?" (13). Stina's observation is valid, since without an education, their future will be bleak. She is aware that their lives have been ruined since they no longer have a chance to get an education that will secure them a bright future. When Darling and her grandmother are walking to church, she listens keenly as her grandmother sings the wrong lyrics to an English song. In her introspection, she observes, "I don't go to school anymore because all the teachers left to teach over in South Africa and Botswana and Namibia and them, where there's better money…" (30-31). Moreover, the children make fun of the security guard in Budapest when questions what they are taught in school. Godknows responds, "(a)h, we don't go to school anymore. The teachers left, don't you even know what's happening?"(109).

Darling's sentiments expressed in the previous paragraph depict the height of desperation that filters right down to the children. Unemployment is a major issue in post-colonial African texts. This majorly results from poor leadership, as Kehinde (2004) posits,

> In fact, African literature exists in a historical continuum. (…)They show their disenchantment to the present landscape and socio-political structures of their nations. They assert bitterly that the collective joy of the events of independence in which the entire nations at different times seemed to be swept up as an enormous celebration has been a nightmare and betrayal. The postcolonial African writers always depict their continent as a place where the rulers have failed woefully to protect their nations' truncated authority and

> integrity from the ravages of neo-colonialism and globalization. (238-239)

As observed by Kehinde, failure on the part of leaders to protect their citizens is one of the causes of problems like joblessness, which in turn leads to other social evils like thievery and prostitution. In Darling's case, the high levels of unemployment have had a negative effect on them. It has resulted into school drop outs like Darling and her friends. Furthermore, they have become kleptomaniacs and their morality has degenerated. Later in the novel, Darling also migrates to America in search of a better life. Immigration has always been associated with an affluent life. The upward social mobility associated with it is the major contributing factor to these movements. Darling migrates to the U.S. to join her aunt Fostalina. In so doing, Darling forms part of the statistics of African immigrants in the diaspora. She recounts,

> Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing- to all over, to countries near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. (145)

Many Zimbabweans left the country whenever a chance presented itself. The political strife in Zimbabwe and longing for a better environment propels them to migrate. Moji (2015) posits that, "Although presented as a collective of escape from material lack in *How They Left* (ch.10) migration is once again linked to post-independence disillusionment through the intertextual reference of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; 'When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky'(145). Darling and her friends are aware of the deplorable state of their country, which has led to massive self-imposed exiles. Darling longs for the time she would go to America and join her aunt Fostalina. When she finally gets there, she observes that the political discord and economic challenges back home have made most Africans migrate. She recalls the questions immigrants are asked by their hosts,

> And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides (…) Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47s between women's legs? Where people run about naked? That part where they massacred each other? Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them put in prison and all, there where they are dying of cholera- oh my God, yes, we've seen your country; it's been on the news. (238)

These questions are a reflection of the challenges most African states are experiencing. Political instability that has rocked Zimbabwe and its residual effects has made Darling to leave. Exile is an element of post-colonial texts which is evident in the novel.

Darling is among those who get an opportunity to leave Zimbabwe, a move that re-invents her as a diasporic subject. She gets to America only to realize that all her expectations were a fallacy. In America, African immigrants are living a miserable life. Once in a while, some would congregate in her aunt's house. While there, they would cook their native dishes, dance to their local songs and speak their dialects without fear of discrimination. This is done so that they do not lose their African identity because of residing in a foreign land. Darling posits, "Because we were not in our own country, we could not use our own languages (…) In America we did not always have the words. It was only when we were by ourselves that we spoke in our real voices" (240). Language has thus been portrayed as a vital marker of identity by Darling both at home and abroad. The immigrants would only feel at home when they met their fellow immigrants and conversed in their own dialects. Most of the Africans abroad have mimicked the culture of the Americans. Darling notes this with a lot of concern. One has to fit in so that he/she is not made fun of. Darling is slowly immersing herself in the new culture. As she converses with her mother through a telephone call, she almost uses curse words but restrains herself. She avers, "I start to call her crazy but I hold it and tell myself that it is one of the American things I don't want to do, so I just roll my eyes instead" (204).

Darling is also cognizant of the mimicry that African immigrants in the diaspora practice in an attempt to fit in. Most have mimicked the dressing and mannerisms of the natives in their new countries. She joins aunt Fostalina's family in "Destroyedmichigen" (Detroit Michigan). Darling observes that most immigrants there, her aunt inclusive, have adopted the American culture. Her cousin, T.K, uses curse words like "shit" "fuck" and "motherfucker." He wears his trousers so low that he ends up exposing his underwear, plays video games on his own and shuts himself up in his room. Darling knows that games should be played out in the field with friends. She wonders that T.K can actually play a game alone. She asks him, "What kind of game do you play by yourself?" (153). Moreover, her aunt keeps up with fitness programmes on TV, so that she remains slim. Darling does not really understand what aunt Fostalina is doing. She innocently comments, "(i)n the sitting room, Aunt Fostalina is busy walking walking and walking. It is very strange how she just walks in one place" (148). Her aunt's husband, Uncle Kojo, unimpressed by his, wife's desire to attain Western markers of beauty, observes that "there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind"(151). It is at this point that Darling understands why her aunt keeps walking, counting and punching the air. Darling's stay in America brings to her realization that most African immigrants have abandoned their African culture and are instead copying that of the whites. This is what the post-colonial theorists would term as mimicry. Mimicry is defined as the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behaviour, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers. The colonized are made to feel inferior and they therefore resort to copying the mannerisms of the colonizers. The Africans in diaspora are mimicking their hosts' culture just as Darling observes concerning her aunt, cousin and friends. The child narrative voice has also highlighted alienation as a challenge faced by Zimbabwean migrants in the diaspora. According to Darling, their hosts have a negative image of Africa, viewing it as a place of war, diseases and death. Darling encounters a white woman in the toilets when she goes to attend a wedding. The woman upon seeing her begins to question her about Africa. She says, "(b)ut isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? (…). Tell me about it. Jesus, the rapes and all those killings!" (175). Darling is not amused when the woman keeps referring to Africa as one

country, as such statements reflect either her ignorance about the continent, or her patronising attitude towards Africa.

Darling also experiences alienation while schooling in America. At school, her classmates laugh at her accent and mannerisms. She says,

> When I first arrived at Washington I just wanted to die. The other 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. (165)

The teasing does not only happen to Darling, but all African newcomers. One of her classmates is taunted to the point of committing suicide. Despite these challenges, Africans are still compelled to migrate to and live in the diaspora. Darling talks of Africans who travelled using student visas but were not students. Others had to sell their kidneys. Once there, they were forced to work as illegal immigrants. This puts them in precarious positions since they would be deported the moment it is discovered. The jobs also happened to be low paying despite the risks involved. Darling is also forced to find a job to supplement aunt Fostalina's income. She bags groceries, cleans toilets and sorts out cans. At some point she becomes a maid in a rich man's house. Her life in America is not as flashy as she had imagined it would be. She is however hesitant about going back home. She posits, "One part is yearning for my friends; the other doesn't know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people I've never met. I feel a little guilty but I brush the feeling away" (210). The hardships encountered by Darling and other immigrants in America makes Darling realize that there is no perfect home. Her experiences there disapprove the fallacies of affluent lifestyles associated with life abroad.

In this section, I have discussed how the child narrative voice has adequately captured and represented the intricacies of Zimbabwe's post-independent identities. I have discussed the various identities as brought forth by Darling and her friends. These identities have been formed due to social, political, cultural and religious practises. I have also talked about how post-colonial concepts like the subaltern, migration, exile, mimicry, hybridity and homeliness have played out in identification of the diverse Post-independent identities in Zimbabwe. Moreover, I have explored the ways in which identities are constructed by places/ geography. The children have focalized the issues which have had constructed the various identities namely ethnic, national and diasporic/migrant/exile identities.

**Conclusion**

In line with the objective of this study, the researchers set out to analyse, interpret and discuss the child narrator's presentation of Zimbabwe's post-independent and contemporary histories and identities in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). The analysis was done using Homi Bhabha's post-colonial concepts of ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry. Spivak's concepts of strategic essentialism, subaltern and the Other were also used. Aspects of narratology like the narrator and focalization enabled me to classify the narrators as intradiegetic and homodiegetic. They are also the focalizers of the narrative. Through use of styles like child play, dialogue, vivid descriptions, humour and satire, Bulawayo manages to express the various thematic concerns. In conclusion, it is argued that Bulawayo has succeeded in shaping and re-shaping the history of Zimbabwe. Using the child narrators, she has castigated the hegemonic practices advanced by the ruling Shona government. The children's naiveties have been capitalized on to view serious issues from a humorous/interesting angle, yet still send the message home. Bulawayo has used the innocence of the child to make them question things an adult cannot, for instance Darling's confusion about Jesus' race. The child narrative voice has successfully given an authentic account of suppressed and untold (hi) stories of Zimbabwe and their contemporary realities and identities. Bulawayo presents the child as a frank being who readily speaks their mind. Darling and her friends' sharp criticism of serious issues is a pointer to the fact that they are affected by these experiences.

**Recommendation**

Based on the literally criticism on the effect of the child narrative Voice in re-Presenting Zimbabweans' different identities in No Violet Bulawayo'**s** Novel, the following recommendations were made: Firstly, literary critics should venture more into child narrators and discuss not only troubled childhoods but also the milestones independent countries have achieved. Secondly, literary scholars should also use child narrators in their stories to debate on the scientific inventions and how these affect the young generations.

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