Covenant Journal of Language Studies (CJLS) Vol. 11(1), June 2023
ISSN: p. 2354-3582 e. 2354-3523
An Open Access Journal Available Online

Between Sociopolitical Nightmare and Nativitist Longing: Ambivalence of the Vernacular Cosmopolitan in Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

Nnaemeka Ezema, PhD
Use of English Unit
State University of Medical and Applied Sciences
Igbo-Eno, Enugu State, Nigeria

Abstract
Drawing from NoViolet Bulawayo's pungent depiction of the horrid state of an African state in *We Need New Names* this paper argues that the modern African states constitute a sociopolitical nightmare that prompts exilic impulses in their citizens. The paper contends the point that the novel simply aims to satisfy an African voyeuristic appeal of the Western audience as argued by some critics. Against a vast growing literary production that focuses on the global cosmopolitans of African descent often referred to as Afropolitans, Bulawayo portrays a different category of migrant Africans that reflects Homi Bhabha's term, Vernacular Cosmopolitans. This paper, therefore, examines how the socio-political crisis necessitated by leadership failure and various forms of external interferences in modern African states constitutes foreboding reflexes against the African homeland. It is observed that while the experience in the homeland prompts exilic desires, challenges of integration into the mainstream culture and nostalgic yearnings instigate a longing for the homeland. Hence, the characters form an ambivalent disposition towards global mobility.

Keywords: Ambivalence, homeland, exilic consciousness, global mobility, NoViolet Bulawayo, Vernacular cosmopolitan

Introduction

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* leverages the sociopolitical chaos in an African state of Zimbabwe and the challenges of adaptation in a foreign land to project shared experiences of the homeland and the discontent of African migrants. *We Need New Names* appears to be an exception to Ojaide (2008) views that among third generation African writers, 'there appears to be a lack of realistic reflection of the place, people, worldview, and sensibility of Africa. In this regard, setting a novel in Africa becomes a convenient tool rather than a true reflection of relevant milieu toward an artistic function' (45). Bulawayo, a fast rising literary voice from Zimbabwe, gives a palpable realistic reflection of her country and by extension, other postcolonial African states. Her adroit portrayal of the soul-wrenching reality of the depraved leadership in her home country, akin to, if not worse than, Ayi Kwei Armah's Ghana in *The Beautyful Ones are not yet Born*, that has prompted the barrage of criticism that has

trailed the award winning short story, *Hitting Budapest,* which is later to become the first chapter of *We Need New Names*. Some literary bloggers expressed disappointment that Bulawayo conforms to the stereotypes expected of African writers, accusing her of projecting a negative image of Africa, exactly the kind of writing that Wainaina (2008) lampoons in his *Granta* article.

Referring to the novel as 'poverty porn', a mere rehash of too familiar social experiences, Habila (2013) also tags it a creation of 'an African aesthetic of suffering' (13). He appears to accuse the Caine-prize of promoting this negative depiction by awarding the book its prize. But for some linguistic deftness he credits the text with, Habila dismisses it as a mere social commentary. Moji (2015) acknowledges the skilful use of language in the text and describes it as 'the poetics of "Africanized" English' (182). Habila, further argues that African literature should be liberated from portrayal of poverty. He queries, 'what is the purpose of suffering in literature?' This is the position of many diaspora writers, a group that quite fits into Taiye Selasi's notion of the Afropolitans. This position does not only rob African literature of its artistic commitment but also skews it against the demotic in favour of the aristocratic. Bwesigye (2013) response to Habila's position addresses this. Bwesigye's question as to whether Afro-politanism is Africa's new single story raises many questions. Is suffering not part of African experiences? Is African literature given boundary on what experiences to reflect? If the answers to these questions are in the negative then, *We Need New Name*'s high literary acclaim cannot be simply diminished by its reflection of another reality of Africa. No wonder the text was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and also won the Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2013. In this particular text, Bulawayo simply deviates from an emerging single story that dominates the Afropolitan narratives, which makes her exploration of the sordid state of the continent worthy of serious intellectual attention.

Despite the disparate critical reception of Bulawayo's novel, it has continued to receive a remarkable number of serious critical attention. Ede (2015) and Ndaka (2020) align with the view that *We Need New Names* reinforces the pathological stereotype that satiates the Western quest for a voyeuristic gaze into Africa. The seeming discomfiture usually witnessed among critics whenever the lurid aspects of the continent are laid bare to the outside world is understandable. Such portrayal usually brings back a familiar historical reality of the Eurocentric literary, historical and anthropological accounts that bolstered colonial ideologies and regimes. Narratives with such bizarre and shocking events as is seen in this text, especially coming from an African writer, seem to reinforce what Mbembe (2001) describes as the portrayal of 'a vast dark cave where every benchmark and distinction come together in total confusion, and the rifts of a tragic and unhappy human history stand' (3). While such narratives appear to have characterized Africa for too long, making 'a single story' of the continent, necessitating a counter narrative from new diasporic African writers, such horrific tales constitute an incontrovertible reality of African postcolonial experience. The new writers, 'the children of post-colony' (967), as Adesanmi (2005), echoing Ali Waberi, refers to them that are either born or educated in the West among the privileged cosmopolitans who could have hardly been involved in the raw bite of sociopolitical nightmare that constitute a significant daily

life experiences in some parts of the continent. This is why the analogy between Bulawayo's story, which is laden with lucid experiential realities, and the detached tone of daily newspaper reports is not only unfitting but also misses the artistic complexities imbued in the story and the vital place of literature as purveyor of diverse and peculiar, cultural, political and economic human experiences.

Other hermeneutic prospects of *We Need New Names* have further been explored. Instances are Frassinelli (2015), Ndlovu (2015), Toivanen (2015), Arnett (2016), Chitando (2016), Cobo-Pinero (2019), Stobie (2020) and Ndaka (2020), which all agree that the text portrays deep interpenetrations of the African continent occasioned by the overwhelming global interconnectedness of the present century. Apart from Chitando (2016), who reads the text as part of the growing body of Zimbabwean children literature, the others view it as a narrative about massive exodus, abandonment and reinvention of heterogeneous identities in the modern world. While Frassinelli acknowledges the 'affective displacements and ruptures that accompany the experiences of migration' (721), Ndlovu examines the concept of African identity in the text. Toivanen's study brings the dimension of class in the global migrant studies. While Toivanen relies on the poor background of the major character, Darling, and her global mobility in *We Need New Names,* to challenge the traditional conception of the African cosmopolitan as just the educated mobile world citizens, Arnett's focuses on the consumerist culture of the poor black population. In each of these studies, the dynamics and challenges of ethnoscapes, Arjun, Appadurai's term for physical migration, appears to dominate the critical concern with little attention given to the protagonist's longing for cultural belonging, convoluted forces that form the migrants' push factors, as well as strategies of survival adopted by the migrants on the lower ladder of global mobility. Critics, it appears, have not closely examined how racism in the foreign land and the deplorable socio-political culture, the steady degeneration of socio-cultural essence in the homeland index the chaotic sense of belonging in the child protagonist in the texts.

This paper explores the strong nativist desire that connects the home and the diasporic characters in *We Need New Names*. While migration in the text appears to be a reflexive response to a collapsed state structure, poverty and economic ruins in Zimbabwe, there remains a persistent, if not uncanny desire to remain connected to the homeland. This paper therefore examines how the complex nationalistic attachments of the migrant coexist with turbulent sociopolitical realities of the homeland. It explores how the 'double consciousness' that is engendered in the desire to be simultaneously integrated into the foreign land and the strong quest to be identified with the homeland constitute the dilemma of the vernacular metropolitan. It also examines the strategies adopted by these migrants to beat threatening existential challenges and the generational transmutation of these migrants to global cosmopolitans.

Conceptualising the Vernacular Cosmopolitan

Vernacular Cosmopolitanism is a term that joins contradictory notions of 'local specifici ty and universal enlightenment' which define the relationship in a complex of global network of existence. Bhabha (1994) uses this term to discriminate against what he calls 'global cosmopolitanism' which is used in attempting to configure 'the planet

as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages' (xiv). By this Bhabha refers to the cosmopolitans as the privileged and prosperous class which is founded on the neoliberal ideals of 'world culture' and 'world market'. Global cosmopolitanism of this type privileges the boundless power of technology and global communication with, sometimes, a multicultural mix of a demography that is often dominated by educated migrant professionals. While the global cosmopolitans appear elitist, the vernacular cosmpolitanism privileges the demotic population of global mobility. It intends to embrace the multiple consciousness of the under privileged, the refugees, the political exiles and the poor or what Gikandi (2010) refers to as 'strangers caught in the cracks of the failed state' (23). This is where the protagonist in *We Need New Names* clearly belongs.

According to Webner (2006) the concept poses the question about the paradoxical coexistence between the local and the translocal, the parochial and the transnational, the rooted and the transcendent. It is about 'whether boundary-crossing demotic migrations may be compared to the globe-trotting travel, sophisticated cultural knowledge and moral world-view of deracinated intellectuals' (496). In other words, the vernacular creates a new model of intercultural contact that does not just align or totally gets assimilated with the mainstream culture but also attempts to contemplate on the enduring vestiges of peripheral culture as well. Neumann (2018) shares the same thought when he points to the fact that the vernacular is used as 'a means of staging a conflictual interplay between trans-cultural relationality and the formative impact of locality' (242). The cosmopolitan intellectuals are therefore placed side by side with this new inhabitants of the global space. This is the part of the African migrants that are not accommodated when Selasi (2005) observes that the Afropolitans are '…the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes'. It is curious that many mobile characters in Bulawayo's text are not found in this category. It becomes necessary that this aspect of globally mobile Africans be closely examined in this essay.

Dislocated Locality and the Anxiety of a Failed Homeland

Bulawayo's book is a horrid tale of a dislocated homeland. The progression of the displacement, dislocation and subsequent loss of cultural heritage of the people is succinctly traced by the child-narrator.

> There are three homes inside Mother's and Faustina's heads: home before independ ence, before I was born, when black people and white people were fighting over the country. Home after independ ence, when the black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come here. Home one, home two and home three. There are four homes inside Mother of Bone's head: home before the white people came to steal the country, and a king ruled; home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war, home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then home

> of now. … When someone is talking about home you have to listen carefully so you know which home he is referring to (*MNNN* 191-192).

Bulawayo's portrayal of several stages of home does not only depict the socio-cultural transcendence within this geographical space, but also represents the most crucial stages of Africa's collective historical experiences. The narrative uses these homes to represent the pre-colonial and colonial eras, periods of struggle for Independence and, then, the period of postcolonial disillusionment. 'The home of things falling apart', 'the home of now' which represents the period of disillusionment and despair in Zimbabwe is central to Bulawayo narrative. This constitutes the real existential challenge that make the characters leave as seen in Fostalina's instance or desire to leave as seen in Darling's case. Irele (2001) refers to this realistic representation of the postcolonial disillusionment as against a utopic undercurrent of the earlier romantic portrayal of the continent as the New Realism. Disillusionment according to Irele is located in the 'deployment within the imaginative work of particular symbols, which register a negative apprehension of the African world' (214). The symbol of this negative apprehension as deployed by Bulawayo is clear: excruciating hunger, homelessness and general lack. These negative symbols become the tangible instances of leadership failure and the attendant disillusionment of the people in the postcolony. Rather than be drawn into such dysfunctional local dynamics in the form of militant revolution as seen in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*, precarious exile seems to be the alternative left for the characters in *We Need New Names*. They simply 'leave in droves despite knowing that they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands' (146); so, emboldened by misery and frustration, the characters head west daring the consequences. It is actually this mass departure that accentuates the state failure; the dislocated locals pushed outside the shores of the continent. This is how the vernacular cosmopolitans are created.

The idea of home and displacement is not only reflected in its temporal essence; Bulawayo also depicts the spatial displacement within Zimbabwe. She illustrates the reality and impacts of an endless shifting of home and how it disempowers and immiserates the citizens. The mindless and repeated case of demolition of houses by government has brought Darling, and her family from their former home where Father had a job, and food was available to her own home too: 'Paradise, with its tin tin tin'. Paradise is the ramshackle home where the narrator and his parents have been relocated to. While Darling appears witty in this narrative, the bluntness of the agonising reality of the family cannot be effaced by her humour. At best, it is dark humour. It is actually this kind of humour that has situated *We Need New Names* as a political satire. This aligns with Moji's (2015), who observes that 'Darling's child voice enables Bulawayo to employ satire, a mode associated with political disillusionment' which in effect allows the book to lend 'itself to a double reading where humour encodes tragedy' (186). In essence, the humour does not assuage the raw anguish necessitated by this unending displacement. It rather highlights the insensitivity of leadership and the brutality of the police as seen when the houses are being demolished. All these form the pulsating painful memories constantly gnawing at Darling's heart even when she is already in the United States. Bulawayo's critical and incisive tone in depicting the

lack of such basic necessity as food highlights Irele's idea of New Realism. Bhabha describes people subjected to this treatment as 'those whose citizenly presence has been annihilated or marginalized'. In other words, constant shifting and renegotiation of home gives the families a sense of exclusion in a country that should be theirs.

Beyond suffering and lack, the dislocation also causes the loss of people's history and defilement of cultural essence. Bulawayo represents the loss of the collective heritage of the people with the loss of Mzilawulandelwa's family stool after relocating to Paradise. The man's lamentation highlights the significance of this stool: 'My greatest grandfather Sindimba passed it on to his son Salile, who passed it on to Ngalo who passed it on to his son Mabhada, who passed it on to me, Mzilawulandelwa, to pass on to my son Vulindlela. And now it is gone!… [T]hat stool is my whole history' (*WNNN*74). This example does not only establish the patrilineal family structure in the story, but also establishes the value attached to a family heritage, the totality of the historical essence of a people. It is a symbol of the loss of cultural identity, the ethical imperative and a people's sense of belongingness. It is easy to question the real importance of a mere family stool that is not likely to add any material value to the wellbeing of the people. Why among all the things lost - houses, clothes and means of livelihood – it is the stool that the man laments most about? This clearly highlights the great symbolic status of the stool in the narrative. The man mourns a past of dignity and honour that vanishes as the man helplessly stares. This also symbolises the intangible heritage that gives the people a proud sense of being, but which dwindles with relocations. The loss of the stool further accentuates the prevailing sense of loss of cultural authority, casting questions on their sense belonging and essence of their being.

In line with this thought, Taylor (1991) notes, 'I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters' (40). Taylor's argument, here, basically suggests that history, nature, society and demand for solidarity are among the things that matter in the definition of identity. It is the loss of the family history that prompts Mzilawulandelwa's lamentation. He finds himself responsible for this loss of family heritage which ultimately brings about loss of cohesion and cultural values. While Mzilawulandelwa blames himself, he fails to see the external forces that are responsible for this loss of heritage. He seems not to be aware of the prominent effect of the dislocated state on the loss of the communal heritage. The lack and deprivation of means of livelihood and enduring cultural values establishes a conflictual relationship between the state and the citizens, hence necessitating the urge to abandon the homeland.

The stark contrast between Budapest and Paradise further highlights the lack in Paradise. The lack that makes the children know that there could be a better life beyond where they reside and then the longing for a life beyond their immediate sphere. Darling happily announces to her friends amidst envy and jealousy, 'I am going to America to live with my aunt Fostalina, it wouldn't be long, you will see' (*WNNN* 14). America resonates hope and appears to be a veritable solution to a long excruciating suffering that has denied the children their childhood. This is why Blommaert and Donckt (2002)

observe that 'spaces are filled with symbols and attributes, and using them creates indexical ties to such places' (241). Bulawayo therefore contrasts the indexicalities associated with America and Budapest on the one hand and Paradise and Africa on the other. While Paradise portends hunger, suffering, despondency and failure, America exudes a hopeful solution to all that Paradise lacks. It is with this semiotic representation that Budapest becomes the closest space of hope and serves as a constant reminder of America to the children. This reflects Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Foucault uses this term to refer to all those spaces, in real life, that 'are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which . . . all other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (24). Budapest therefore becomes a mirror that exerts a counteraction on the place that the children occupy, and therefore urges them on for a real experience of this projected world. Budapest is the area where white settlers and the black elite, most of whom are returnees from America and Europe, reside. In contrast to their shacks in Paradise, Darling observes, 'Budapest is big, big houses with satellitedishes on the roofs and neat gravelled yards or trimmed lawns…the big trees heavy with fruitthat's waiting for us since nobody around here seems to know what to do with it' (*WNNN* 4). Siting Budapest, the capital of Hungary, in Zimbabwe has two significant implications. Bulawayo connects the historical significance of Hungary in the independent struggle of Zimbabwe and also demonstrates how global presence is brought to the local space.

Similarly, the location of Shanghai in the text and the brimming presence of international media organisations, CNN, BBC and Non-governmental organisations do not just suggest the global interpenetration but also the occupancy and domination of the African state, which is well represented by Zimbabwe in the text. The media and the Non-governmental organisations appear to be on a humanitarian project but they also, as Ndaka rightly observes, perpetuate the state's 'peripherality within global structures of power' (7). While Budapest is marked with luxury and quietude of the ancient colonial power, Shanghai represents the industrialising paradigm of the global world and another phase of aggressive dominance now by the Chinese. Of all the items to be sold in the Chinese mall being built, none is of Zimbabwean content, rather it is all 'Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace and so on' (*WNNN* 46). Darling further narrates, 'It's just madness inside Shanghai; machine hoist things in their terrible jaws, machines maul the earth, machines grind rocks, machines belch clouds of smoke, … Everywhere machine. The Chinese men are all over the place…' (*WNNN* 42). The capitalist dominance of the industrial and market space of the homeland raises the lingering question on the true sovereignty and independence of the postcolonial African state. Mdlongwa and Moyo (2014) is an analogy between the dreadful beast of ogre and Chinese enterprise in Zimbabwe that highlights the aggressive nature of this economic dominance. Darling further acknowledges this fact when she observes, 'China is red devil looking for people to eat so it can grow fat and strong' (*WNNN* 47). The beasts here are not the Chinese alone. America is also implicated in this aggressive competition for the soul of the peripheral states when Bastard, one of Darling playmate remarks, 'Let's go and play war, and then we take off and run to kill each other with our brand-new guns from America' (*WNNN* 57). This alludes to the

accusations of the increased merchandise of weaponry in America in the event of wars in Africa and elsewhere. It speaks to the implicit involvement of the West in the crisis in some African states. It is this mixture of geopolitical spaces with its cultural interconnectedness that gives *We Need New Names* its global perspective and further highlights the collapse of an African nation state. It depicts how metropolitan intrusion and the irresponsibility of the indigenous government signals state failure. The wrenching poverty of the local people glaringly signifies their status as the underprivileged mass even in their homeland, when contrasted with the luxury of the foreigners.

Similarly, Chipo's pregnancy also demonstrates the contrast between the deteriorated homeland and the working structures in the foreign space. The children are discomforted with Chipo's pregnancy and want to get rid of it. Chipo is the eleven-year-old friend of Darling who has been impregnated by her grandfather. Chipo's pregnancy depicts the morbid reality associated with a progressively dysfunctional society where physical displacement manifests in normative disorientation. The repeated physical displacement leads to an unsettled family life which creates a breeding ground for all sorts of immorality, including incest. Beyond that, this scene demonstrates how cosmopolitan sensibility is transposed on the local. The children, Darling's friends, are mimicking *ER*, an American medical television series that Sbho, one of the children, watched when in Harare. That is why she is leading this team. She believes that efficiency is in the name of the doctors in the series and they now adopt new names. '*ER* is what they do in a hospital in America. In order to do this right, we need new names. I am Dr Bullet … you are Dr Roz …' Sbho clarifies (*WNNN* 82). The renaming, which indicates identity transfer, does not only bequeath excellence on the metropolis, but also removes confidence in the ability of the local. It is this mental projection that ultimately stirs up the urge for migration and abandonment of the local and its trappings. This is what Jameson (1997) refers to as the 'colonisation of … the Unconscious' which he attributes to 'the rise of the media and the advertising industry' (36). In a country that wobbles in the face of poor medical facilities, *ER* creates a simulacrum of the real. Vodloza, the spiritualist who lives in Paradise and claims to have a cure to all the innumerable diseases in the world, appears to be the major health provider in the locality. So, fascinated by the cutting edge medical facilities they have watched and damped by the deplorable medical facilities at home, the children become overwhelmed by the craving to leave the country.

Indeed, *We Need New Names* presents the centre-periphery dichotomy in a very conspicuous way. The movement pattern signals the fact that departure from the periphery to the centre guarantees success. The movement is not only by Fostalina. Darling's father leaves for Johannesburg. Makhosi, Darling's cousin, first left for Madante mine to dig diamonds, was not successful, came back and went to South Africa, like Father. These movements have formed a strong exilic motif that is reflected in Chidora and Ngara (2019). Their position is that 'narratives of moving out of Zimbabwe, or planning to move out, dominate Zimbabwe's literary landscape' (79). While these movements and the urge to move signify a total loss of hope in the local and its indices, it also signifies the movement pattern in today's global world and the pervasive ideological framing that goes with such movements. The country

game that the children play makes the point clearer:

> …(First,) we have to fight over names because everybody wants to be the USA and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France ... These are country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for countries like Dubai and South Africa… . They are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here. Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even the one we live in – who wants to be a place of hunger and things falling apart? (*WNNN* 49)

In what appears to be a roll call of successful and failed states, Darling's narration of the country game suggests a global competition that globalisation portends, it suggests a global hierarchy, and consequently, as Ndaka (2020) rightly observes, 'global asymmetries of power'. Unmistakably, it points at the leaders in the comity of nations. Everybody wants these names that signify success, which is the new names that form the title of the novel. These new names are reflected at both individual and community levels. The children's struggle for these new names evidently underlies their craving for a new identity and a total rejection of the associated attributes of their present senses of self. Bulawayo personally explained this situation: 'I wrote the book when things were pretty difficult back home. It's my own way of saying we need new leadership, new ways of thinking and so forth' (Obioha, 2014: np). It is through this new leadership that Bulawayo believes that changing the trend of extraterritorial identification is possible. In other words, a better leadership in the homeland will ultimately make Africans proud of their own identity and locality.

More than that, the country game indicates the sharp division among countries usually regarded as the first, second and third worlds and the growing inequality resulting from it. Krishna (2009) traces the history of this growing polarity when he observes 'that different parts of the world were not so unequal until around 1500 A.D., and the distribution of affluence and poverty was nowhere near as polarized as it is today' (9). This traces to about five centuries ago which is, as Krishna correctly points out, just about 'a blink of an eyelid in comparison to the length of time that human civilizations have existed'. The point that is being made here is clear. It was this century that marked the beginning of an active pervasive dominance and strong hegemonic influences of Europe. That was the period that the New World was discovered, the beginning of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which was later transformed to colonialism. This was the period that a lot of economic exploitations were carried out by Europe in Africa, Asia and South America. All these influences greatly impacted on the radical development that increasingly narrowed the gaps among climes and marks the very beginning of the thoughts that surround global mobility. Ironically, while spaces get narrower and closer, economic gaps among nations and people continue to widen, thereby designating many regions in the third world with repelling symbols of hunger and disease. It is this widening gap, the influences of more developed countries, the failure of indigenous leadership that cause the collapse of Zimbabwe – just as elsewhere in Africa – and the cravings for

the abandonment of the local in Bulawayo's text. Bulawayo appears to be highlighting Bhabha's argument which advances the possibility of a more integrated world system that go beyond the simple 'polarity of majority and minority, the center and the periphery' (xx).

Dislocation and the Formation of the Vernacular Cosmopolitan

Darling's dislocation and vernacular cosmopolitan status is made more prominent with her travel to the United States. Necessitated by survival and quest for acceptance, Darling and her Aunt are split between the new environment and their indigenous home, bringing about the Du Boisian 'double consciousness.' By double consciousness W. E. B. Du Bois means a situation where the Black subject experiences a white world. While Du Bois refers to the black Americans who, mostly, have never left America, the present condition is about a people who have had their earlier life lived with the full awareness of their ancestry and identity but now live in a place with different sociocultural orientations. It is through this way that Bulawayo projects language as major signifier of this consciousness. Darling's effort in breaking the barrier of language reveals the determined commitment of the vernacular cosmopolitans to survive, to be part of the system:

> …the TV has taught me just how to do it. … all you have to do is watch *Dora the Explorer*, *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob*, *Scooby-Doo*, and then you move on to *That's So Raven*, *Glee*, *Friends*, *Golden Girls*, and so on, just listening and imitating the accents. If you do it well, then before you know it, nobody will ask you to repeat what you said. … I also have my list of American words that I keep under the tongue like talismans, ready to use: *pretty good*, *pain in the ass*, *for real*, *awesome*, *totally*, *skinny, dude, like, freaking, bizarre, psyched, messed up, like, tripping, Motherfucker, clearance, allowance, douche bag, you're welcome, acting up, yikes*. (*WNNN* 194)

While Darling is attempting to negotiate this linguistic challenge in a manner that reflects what Fanon (1967) refers to as 'sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry', Fostalina has not been very successful in this regard. She has lost the youthful flexibility that will make it easy for her to adapt. Besides, her tight job schedule does not spare her the time to learn these new ways like Darling. To emphasise this point, Bulawayo dedicates almost a full chapter to demonstrate a supposed intelligibility failure between Aunt Fostalina and a white telesales agent during a telephone conversation on a single disyllabic word, 'angel'. This is an example of linguistic exclusion that reflects postcolonial othering. It is clear that the interest of the telesales agent is not in what is said but how it is said and the identity the manner of speech signifies. There is an expected conformity, a supposed universalist manner of articulation that Fostalina has failed to conform to. However, Darling's relative success in this regard has rather taken her further away from homeland, thereby bringing some strain in her relationship with her friends and relatives back home in Zimbabwe. In one of such bitter encounters, her angered mother retorts, '… America has taught you to speak English to your mother, and with that accent' (204). Darling is split between integration into the cosmopolitan identity and her local community. This is why one of her friends from home derides her in another telephone conversation, 'that stupid accent … that doesn't even suit you' (*WNNN* 289).

Bhabha captures this instance when he observes that 'identity is claimed either from position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre' (1994: 177). While those in Darling's village are within the position of marginality, Darling and others are constructing a new identity in an attempt at gaining the centre. The attempt at gaining the centre has however become an attempt at losing one's local identity.

Through this way, Bulawayo has demonstrated the tension that exists between translated existence and indigenous identity. Even though these characters, both those at home and those abroad largely speak English, 'a foreign language', accent establishes a sort of uniqueness that codifies a strong sense of identity in this language. This is a common experience among vernacular cosmopolitans in the second part of this story. Apart from Fostalina, Kojo, her Ghanaian husband, shares in this linguistic exclusion. That is why as Darling narrates, whenever 'he finds someone from his country, everything about him is different – his laugh, his talk, his eating – it's like something cuts him open to reveal this other person I don't even know' (179). It is this switch on and out of liveliness as a result of language that contributes in suspending the characters within the liminal line. Bhabha observes, along this line of thought that, 'the "language" metaphor raises the question of cultural difference' (177). It is the language difference that marks the cultural distinction between him and Fostalina and TK, his son, his immediate family in America and so stifles the high-spiritedness in Uncle Kojo even in his own home. Bulawayo appears to argue here that language difference does not allow for heart-felt outpour of the mind and, therefore, strains relationships. As the narrator remarks, 'the problem with English is this: you usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that – first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the word quietly to yourself to make sure you got them okay' (193). This frustration is not only faced by the ten-year-old Darling who has just come to America from a poor African country. The fact that even older Kojo and Fostalina also face the same situation underscores the unbelongingness and the alterity that language can bring about. As Darling affirms, 'In America we did not always have the words. It was only when we were with ourselves that we spoke in our real voice' (240). In other words, the linguistic exclusion of these characters categorise them into what Bhabha refers to as 'the disasporic minorities' (xvi), but the will to preserver and integrate themselves into the main stream American culture marks the stubborn spirit of vernacular cosmopolitans.

Apart from that, Bulawayo presents a clear illustration of how human phenotype also becomes part of cultural negotiation and affiliation and the determination to surmount such an obstacle. Aunty Fostalina is determined to lose more pounds of flesh to be able to affirm herself into the American social matrix. 'Kick. And punch. And kick. And punch' (*WNNN* 151) the child-narrator observes Fostalina constant drills. When her schedules become too tight, she engages in dieting. Even though physical exercise and dieting have been credited with a lot of health benefits, Aunty Fostalina's daily drilling is not just necessitated by the quest for a healthy living, it is for assimilation into the universalist culture. Uncle Kojo, her husband, highlights the underlying mimicry. 'Look at you, bones bones bones. All bones. And for what? They are not even Africans, those women you are doing like, shouldn't that actually tell you something?' The reproach from Kojo, who later relapses into

alcoholism, echoes the underlying nativist longing that subsists despite his daily encounter with the metropolis. Nasser (1997) observes that 'Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are among the few psychiatric syndromes with a plausible sociocultural model of causation' (i). Nasser argues that concern for weight gain appears more prevalent in non-western cultures and ethnicities. It is this global trend that put the characters at the risk of this eating disorder. Anorexia and bulimia pose debilitating health threats that are usually ignored when the health risks of body weight are discussed. It, therefore, means that there is more to the rave for slimness than health. While Kojo is projecting the indices for binary oppositions in line with this phonotypical perception, Fostalina is engrossed in her attempt to consciously affiliate with the centre, with the desire not only to be accepted but to be absorbed. While this forms the multiple factors of alterity that restrains the characters from being absorbed into the mainstream Western culture, this process of aping or, according to Frassinelli (2015, 718), 'continuous act of translation and self-translation' for acceptance define the struggles of the vernacular cosmopolitan.

The varied confusing and complicated consciousness associated with cross-cultural initiations as explored in this text necessitates home-ward longing in Darling which ultimately underlies her unhomely life. According to Bhabha, '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' (9). Darling is in the United States but the crises of integration, acclimatization and acceptance continue to transport her mind and thought back home. She engages in all sorts of menial jobs, 'cleaning the toilets and bagging the groceries' (251) and now she can eat food, not stolen guava from Budapest. Beyond food, Darling explains 'There are times, though, that no matter how much food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country and nothing is going to fix that' (153). This portrays the very core of NoViolet Bulawayo's exploration of diasporic ambivalence: the major survival challenges at home and the unsettled spirit in the diaspora. Edward Said (2000) calls this the 'essential sadness' of exile, 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'. It is this restlessness of the mind which prompts unending musing about home that foregrounds the unhomely life in and the ambivalence of the vernacular Cosmopolitan in *We Need New Names*. It reflects Denis Walden's (2011) position, 'the paradoxical nature of dislocation as a "cure" as well as a "poison" for those who migrate' (8). Despite that, Darling has already braced himself to deal with the snow that to stay with hunger. Bhabha relates with Darling's predicaments when he affirms that, 'Out of a spirit of resistance and forbearance emerges the minoritarian will to live, …'(xx). In other words, exile opens up more existential strategies to survive. The wound of unhomeliness and the discontent on the mind of the migrants appears to be buried beneath the quest to satisfy the basic needs of life.

Different characters adopt different strategies to cope with the challenges of exile among this category of African migrants. While Darling often goes into momentary musings on the homeland, Tshaka Zulu is almost lapsing into derangement. Tshaka is the character who, emboldened by the fantasies of the wonderful promises of America, sells his father's cow to sponsor himself to America only to be confronted with a sad tale of

exclusion on his arrival. Consequently, to him, homeland becomes a constant object of regular romanticisation with the pictures of African hero-figures like Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Kofi Annan, Desmond Tutu, Miriam Makeba, Brenda Fassie, Hugh Masekela, Lucky Dube, Credo Mutwa, Bebe Manga and Wangara Maathai adorning corners of his room that has become a museum of a sort. While this highlights his nativist longing, it also provides a soothing relief for him as he fantasises the home in the face of the debilitating alterity. These hero-figures constitute the memories of the envisioned greatness of Africa that have been scuttled by the new African bourgeoisie, the crop of African leaders that have misruled the continent. Apart from the obvious postcolonial disillusionment that is signified here, a nationalist nostalgia is also implied. Tshaka is entrapped in the unfulfiled philosophical visions of African solidarity that these personalities represent. It is clear that this vision is only awakened by his exclusion in America. Again, the name Tshaka Zulu, which alludes to the ancient warrior and father of the Zulu nation known for his bravery and vigour, has symbolic implications here. The Tshaka we see in the text is no less than a relic of a kind, whittled away in mind and body by the enervating experiences of exile. When contrasted with the might and glamour of the ancient king, it suggests the rescinding influence of the postcolonial Africa. In any case, he has adopted nostalgia as a coping mechanism to survive in the foreign land.

Bulawayo's projection into the future sustained by a progressive cultural transcendence does not only depict how a nation of immigrants, like America is formed and populated but also how the vernacular cosmopolitans, persevere, transformed and constitute a formidable bloc in the metropolis. In the last but one chapter, entitled 'How They Lived', the comic child-narrator suddenly transforms into a woman in a voice that now appears more strident on the swift changes that she witnesses. Giving accounts of a sustained identity shift, the narrator observes: 'And then our children are born. We held their American birth certificates tight. We did not name our children after our parents, after ourselves … We gave them names that would make them belong in America, names that did not mean anything to us' (*WNNN* 247). This is, perhaps, the most potent way to erase identity through naming, but this is also a veritable way of gaining a new identity. Here, the vernacular cosmopolitans, stumbling from the challenges of paper and language become vessels for the formation of the global cosmopolitans who become the central part in the construction of a monolithic universal essence of a global community. As the narrator now an older adult observes: 'And those children, they grew and we had to squint to see ourselves in them. They did not speak our language, they did not sound like us' (*WNNN* 248). Bulawayo shows not just the shifting nature of identity, the relationship between the provincial cosmopolitans and the global cosmopolitans but also how the former transmutes to the latter. This is basically the story of most immigrant nations, if not the story of the migration realities of the world. The global cosmopolitans are often the descendants of the vernacular cosmopolitans. The story also shows the gradual break away from the rituals of provincial cultures. As the narrator notes: 'When our children became young adults, they did not ask us for the approval to marry. We did not get bride prices'. While there is a tinge of lament on the narrator's tone, on the loss of certain cultural values – marital rites, death rites and care during old age – these for the narrator, become the price for their migration. The price in this

case, appears to be the trading of cultural otherness on the universal market of migration. Gikandi describes this as ‘the journeys from the impoverished and marginalized sectors of the global south to the ideals and institutions of western Europe and the United States’ (24). Bulawayo depicts, in this story, how the marginal cultures are suspended and subsumed into the mainstream cultures of the West through the combined forces of state failures in the global south and the economic prosperity of the global north.

Conclusion

Bulawayo shifts the gaze from the migrant life of the African elite to the destitute life of the demotic African immigrants. While this elicits diverse responses, it is clear that Bulawayo’s story does not only bemoan the challenges of the migrants in the diaspora and their strategies to survive but also redirects attention to the condition of the homeland. The story evokes the dilemma of homeward longing. While the nostalgic sensibility of the migrant is usually triggered by the daunting challenges of assimilation and outright exclusion, the socioeconomic chaos in the homeland dampens the yearning and then prompts a self-reflective consciousness on the home state. In other words, it draws attention for a deep introspection into the condition of the nation state. Bulawayo delves deeply into the cultural and economic factors that lead to the formation of vernacular cosmopolitan. It is obvious that beyond the global asymmetric power relationship, the failure of the indigenous political leaders is also implicated on the deplorable state of the African nations as depicted in *We Need New Names.* Bulawayo presents raging hunger, government inflicted internal displacement, fractured family life and a decaying social system, as not just the direct consequences of leadership failure, but also as triggers for exilic consciousness, the desire to immigrate. It clearly shows that while the desire to integrate into the nuances of American culture is basically motivated by the yearning for economic survival, the desire to be alive, the lack of acceptance stirs the migrants homeward. While poor socio-economic condition in the homeland constitute the basic push factor of the characters examined in this narrative, their inability to adapt into the mainstream American society stokes a homeward craving despite the luxury of life in the diaspora. Their ability to withstand the challenges of cultural difference and harsh climate underlies a strong will to survive, to live.

References

Adesanmi, P. (2005). Redefining Paris: Trans-modernity and Francophone African migritude fiction. *Modern Fiction Studies,* 51(4), 958-75.

Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7, 295-310.

Armah, A. K. (1968).*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Arnett, J. (2016). Taking pictures: The economy of affect and postcolonial performativity in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 47(3), 149–173.

Bhabha, K. H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bulawayo, N. (2013). *We Need New Names*. London: Vintage.

Bwesigye, B.(2013). Is Afropolitanism Africa’s new single story? *A Journal of Literature and Art Criticism*. Nov. 22.

Chidora, T. and Ngara K. (2019). Harare (in the) North: The metaphor of an

irresolvable exile dialectic. *Kairos: A Journal of Critical Symposium*, 4(1).

Chitando, A. (2016). “The girl child’s resilience and agency in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 32 (1), 114–126.

Cobo-Pinero, M. R. (2019). NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*: Mobilities and the Afropolitan picaresque. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55(4), 472–485.

Ede, A. (2015). Narrative moment and self-anthropologizing discourse**.** *Research in African Literatures,* 46(3), 112-129.

Fanon, F. (1967). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove.

Frassinelli, P. P. (2015). Living in translation: Borders, language and community in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 51(6), 711-722.

Foucault, M. (1984). Of other spaces: utopias and heterotopias. Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuite* October.

Gikandi, S. (2010). Between roots and routescosmopolitanism and the claims of locality. In J. Wilson, C. Şandru & S. L.Welsh (Eds.), *Rerouting the Postcolonial/New Directions for the New Millennium*. Routledge: New York.

Habila, H. (2013). *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo: Review. *The Guardian*, June 20.

Irele, F. A. (2001). *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Krishna, S. (2009). *Globalisation and Colonisation: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mdlongwa, T., & Thamsanqa M. (2014). Look East or look least? The Zimbabwean experience of Chinese economic investment in selected texts and examples. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 3(2), 5-15.

Moji, P. B. (2015). New names, translational subjectivities: (Dis)location and (re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27(2), 181-190.

Nasser, M. (1997). *Culture and Weight Consciousness*. London: Routledge.

Ndaka, F. (2020). Narrating global asymmetries of power: Children’s play/games and photography in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 1-15.

Ndlovu, I. (2016). Ambivalence of representation: African crises, migration and citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. *African Identities*, 14(2), 132–146.

Neumann, B. (2018). Vernacular cosmopolitanism in Anglophone world literatures: Comparative histories of literary worlding. *Arcadia*, 53(2), 239–257.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o. (1991). *Petals of Blood*. 8th ed. New York. Penguin Books.

Ojaide, T. (2008) Migration, globalization and recent African literature. *World Literature Today*, 82(2), 43-46.

Obioha, V. (2014). Africa: NoViolet Bulawayo – The new African voice. *This Day*, 15 March.

Said, E. W. (2002). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Selasi, T. (2005). Bye-bye Babar. LIP. *The LIP Magazine*, March 3.

Stobie, C. (2020). Precarity, poverty Porn and vernacular cosmopolitanism in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 1-15. DOI:1080/17449855.2020.1770494

Taylor, C. (1991). *The Ethics of Authenticity* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Toivanen, A. (2015). Not at home in the world: Abject mobilities in Marie NDiaye's *Trois Femmes Puissantes* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. *Postcolonial Text*, 10(1), 1–18.

Wainaina, B. (2008). *How to Write About Africa*. Nairobi: Kwani Trust.

Walder, D. (2011). *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory*. Routledge: New York.

Werbner, Pnina. (2006). Vernacular cosmopolitanism. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23, 496-498.