

**The Displacement Experience:
Exploring Diaspora in *We Need New Names* through a Cultural Studies Lens**

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Abstract

Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, a Zimbabwean author, writes under the pen name NoViolet Bulawayo. She was born in 1981 and was raised in Zimbabwe before attending college in the United States. Her short story Hitting Budapest won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2011. NoViolet Bulawayo's novel We Need New Names (2014) explores the concepts of diaspora, nostalgia, and how migrants feel about leaving their homeland. Diaspora theory examines the experiences of diasporic communities, which is a subfield of cultural studies. It also investigates how diasporic communities interact with their host country, and how this connection shapes their culture. Meanwhile, cultural studies theory investigates how various social, economic, and political variables shape culture. Cultural Studies provide a good framework for analyzing We Need New Names' theme of diaspora. This paper tackles the complicated ways in which culture and society impact the lives of refugees and migrants by evaluating the novel's representation, regulation, globalization, and counter-memory.

Keywords: *We Need New Names, Diaspora theory, cultural studies theory, Globalization, Counter memory*

Diaspora highlights the sense of displacement when people are forced to migrate and leave their homeland. The term "Diaspora" refers to "the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland" ("Diaspora"). It is originated from "a Greek term meaning dispersion. In Jewish history, it represents a concept which has meaning for different periods in the millennial existence of the Jewish people" (Ages 3). It refers to people who live outside their homeland, whether they are expatriates, refugees, or migrants, often feel separated from one another and disconnected from both culture and history of their homeland. Diaspora studies is an area of cultural studies theory that focuses on the experiences of dispersed populations, as well as the cultural, social, and political consequences of this dispersal. Pramod K. Nayar mentions that "Diaspora culture is the effect of migration, immigration, and exile" (187). Thus, some people may favor being diasporic for the sake of looking for a career or studying.

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The struggle to exist in the diaspora is a path to self-realization as diasporic groups are marginalized people who have used cultural production to fight. They attempt to manage their ethnic and national identities in reference to both their country and their location of the settlement (Tiwari, "Assimilation or Elimination of Diasporic Sensibilities"). Therefore, by reading diaspora literature, readers can comprehend the reasons why some people may decide to migrate to another country, either voluntarily or obligatorily, as well as how they adapt to living situations. Hence, studying diaspora helps to emphasize the importance of understanding different cultural experiences and perspectives.

This paper aims at examining *We Need New Names* through the lenses of diaspora studies and cultural studies. Besides, it examines how the novel portrays the experiences of the diasporic community through the character of Darling. The paper also aims to present a better understanding of the novel's themes since it engages with issues of representation, regulation, globalization, and counter-memory.

The most popular figures in the diaspora field are Salman Rushdie and Robin Cohen; they have published several books and novels representing diaspora. In Rushdie's works, he shows the changes and challenges faced by the characters living in diaspora. He explores the feelings of alienation and cultural shock faced by migrants when they live in foreign environments. It is clear that "in the process of searching the homeland, Rushdie as well as his characters ... face a calamity of identity, disintegration of disposition, and geographical as well as cultural dislocation" (Tiwari, "From Routes to Roots"). Furthermore, Rushdie draws the feelings of loneliness, experienced by the characters, in a society in which they are not accepted by others because of their different beliefs and cultural backgrounds. He uses some elements in his writings, such as dreams and memories, to show the challenges that can be faced when exposed to different cultures.

While Salman Rushdie cares about exploring diasporic characters and the complexities of identities, Robin Cohen examines wider diaspora experience. In Cohen's book "Global Diaspora", he classified diaspora into five categories. The first type is the victim diaspora, which includes people who were driven into exile, like Jews, Africans, and Armenians. The second type is the labor diaspora, which stands for people who move in pursuit of work and better economic opportunities, such as Turks and Indians. Trade diaspora is the third type that refers to migrants seeking to establish greater trading ties, like Chinese and Lebanese migrants. The fourth type is imperial diaspora, which includes serving empires, like the British and French empires. The final type is cultural diaspora, in which families and friends migrate together, like the Caribbean people (Cohen, 39-83).

Similar to Salman Rushdie and Robin Cohen's ideas, Bulawayo presents the struggle of her ten-year-old character "Darling" who is indulged in emotional fights against her country's injustice and America's inequality. Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* was shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize in 2013, making her the first black African woman and Zimbabwean to be included. Darling, a young girl who grows up in a Zimbabwean shantytown before fleeing to the United States, is the protagonist of the novel. Bulawayo addresses the difficult issues of diaspora, identity, and globalization through Darling's story, shedding the light on the lives of

migrants and refugees worldwide. *We Need New Names* is set in two different locations: Zimbabwe and America. In the first part of the novel, Bulawayo represents the political crisis in Zimbabwe through the narrative given by a ten-year-old girl, named Darling. She does not only represent the circumstances of poverty, hunger and diseases, but she also reflects the reality of Zimbabwe as a destroyed country, which led its citizens to search for a better place. The second part of the novel displays the reality of being a migrant in a strange country. Darling represents how migrants face diaspora, nostalgia, and hard circumstances while looking for a better life. According to Darling, moving to America is not what she expected, as she suffers a psychological and emotional breakdown. As a migrant, Darling faces diaspora besides her need to a new identity to live in a host country among unfamiliar people.

Based on the five types of diaspora which Robin Cohen describes, *We Need New Names* represents the victim diaspora, which represents alienation and a sense of loss and displacement for the characters. The protagonists face hunger, violence, and identity confusion. Victim diaspora and cultural studies are two distinct fields of study that can overlap in a variety of ways. They may study cultural practices and traditions that help diasporic people to survive and live with the pain of their experiences. The intersection of victim diaspora and cultural studies emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural and social contexts in which victimization occurs, as well as how those contexts shape both victimized individuals' experiences and the broader public's understanding of those experiences.

Accordingly, diaspora studies plays an important role in cultural studies because it provides a framework for understanding dispersed groups' experiences besides the cultural, social, and political effects of their dispersal. Cultural studies facilitate understanding the concept of diaspora in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Moreover, it allows the recognition of the diversity and complexities of cultural identities besides the investigation of the effects of globalization on cultural interchange and hybridization. Cultural studies enable researchers to investigate the function of cultural creation and representation in diasporic societies, as well as the obstacles and opportunities of cultural translation and marginalization.

Exploring diasporic experiences demands a theoretical approach that acknowledges the role of culture in defining identity and power relations. Cultural studies theory is an interdisciplinary field that explores the interconnection between power and culture (Zeeshan). Being an interdisciplinary field, it stems from other fields of study, including philosophy, history, psychology, and literary criticism. The theory emphasizes how culture, power and identity affect the lives of individuals who are displaced from their homelands. It also presents a good framework to analyze the complex experience of diasporic community. Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall are considered the main figures in the field of cultural studies. They consider culture to be an intriguing field with several parts that require investigation. Additionally, they believe that researching the effects of media, political, and economic variables on society aids in understanding their implications on cultural values. Moreover, culture refers to a certain society's practices, representations, and languages as well as the way of thinking that spreads and influences popular culture (Barker and A. Jane, 9). This emphasizes the significance

of comprehending actual practices and representations within a certain community as well as the role they play in shaping culture.

E.P. Thompson contributes to the formation and growth of cultural studies as a discipline. In Thompson's 1963 book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, he examines the working-class experience in England throughout the Industrial revolution. He thinks that working-class culture is a creative process that develops new means of expression as well as resists the dominant culture. Furthermore, Thompson tries to understand the working-class cultural practices and beliefs on their own terms, rather than dismissing them as ancient or useless. He believes that despite the challenges and failures that may have come with the working classes' attempts to maintain their way of life, people must respect and understand their experiences and aspirations within the context of their own historical and cultural circumstances (12). He contends that, even though these groups were, eventually, unsuccessful in their efforts to fight industrialization and capitalism, their experiences and goals still worth consideration and respect. According to Thompson, working-class experiences and conflicts were not only about economic exploitation but also about cultural and social resistance. His focus on the significance of researching class's cultural components has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of class as a complex and dynamic social entity. Similarly, the reference of poverty and harsh conditions in Zimbabwe implies that Zimbabwean people belong to the working class in *We Need New Names*. This means that they rely on low-paying jobs; they have limited economic resources; and they struggle to live a normal life.

Raymond Williams emerged as a notable figure in cultural studies, introducing fresh insights to the study. In Raymond Williams' 1958 book *Culture and Society*, he defines culture as an active and dynamic process that is essential to the development and reproduction of social existence. He contends that culture is a widespread and daily phenomenon that impacts the lives of all members of a society, rather than the domain of elites or intellectuals. Raymond Williams investigates the relationship between culture and social change. According to Williams, culture is continually growing and changing in response to social and historical circumstances. In addition, he refers to the historical development of culture, in which Williams contends that culture is not a timeless or universal phenomenon, but it is rather historically unique and shaped by social and economic forces. Williams highlights the significance of knowing culture as a lived experience as opposed to an intellectual concept (Williams, 93). He claims that people's everyday experiences and interactions generate cultural meanings and practices; this cultural analysis should be based on an extensive awareness of these experiences.

Like E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall uses cultural studies to investigate the structure of power and inequality within the colonized societies. Hall presents encoding/decoding concepts that are developed within the field of cultural studies to explain how messages are produced and analyzed in different cultural contexts. Encoding refers to messages that are produced with using different codes, such as images, symbols, and language, to communicate with the audience. On the other hand, decoding refers to the way the audience receives, understands, and responds to these messages. The correlation between

encoding/decoding and cultural studies lies in the idea that cultural texts are intentionally produced to portray specific social, economic, and political issues. Cultural studies help to analyze how media messages are received and constructed in different cultural contexts according to the audience's social and cultural background. Hall's notion of "encoding and decoding" proposes that producers encode cultural signals, such as television programs or advertising, with specific meanings, but those meanings can be decoded differently by viewers based on their social and cultural settings. This approach emphasizes the active role of the recipient in the interpretation of cultural messages besides its contribution to shifting the focus of cultural studies away from textual analysis and towards an examination of cultural production and consumption processes.

Since each recipient will respond differently to the cultural contexts, Hall divides the encoding/decoding process into three positions: dominant-hegemonic position or preferred code, negotiated position, and oppositional position. Hall states that "When the viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs program full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer is operating inside the dominant code" (Hall et al. 125). In this dominant-hegemonic position, the recipient accepts the message from the producer's point of view and accepts it without questioning. In the negotiated position, "Majority audiences probably understand quite adequately what has been dominantly defined and professionally signified" (Hall et al. 126). The recipient tries to negotiate the message that they receive from the producer in the first stage; they think about it and question its aims. Finally, the oppositional position occurs when the recipients completely disagree with the receiving message. The oppositional position is "the point when events, which are normally signified and decoded in a negotiated way, begin to be given an oppositional reading. Here, the 'politics of signification'-the struggle in discourse- is joined" (Hall et al. 127). It is where the recipient cannot believe or accept any message from producers as it may be a deceptive message.

In *We Need New Names*, the representation of the three positions appears clearly throughout Darling experience. Firstly, she decodes messages presented by radio or television about America, and she accepts them through a dominant/hegemonic position. The media's influence in shaping impressions of Zimbabwe and America is a major issue in *We Need New Names*, as the novel shows how media depictions may sustain stereotypes and hide the complex nature of these countries and their people. The representation of the media and how it manipulates the truth appears through Darling's idea about America before and after migrating. When Bastard insults Darling and her aunt, who lives in America, she says, "I'm thinking how if I had proper strength, I would turn right around and beat Bastard up for saying that about my aunt Fostalina and my America" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 14). After decoding the media's messages, Darling believes the perfect representation of America is throughout media, and she dreams of living there and leaving all the suffering behind. She dreams of America, and how life could be easier if she left Zimbabwe.

Despite her initial hegemonic stance, Darling changes her perspective as she suffers a different life experience in America. She begins to negotiate the current situation and tries to hold

on to her dreams as much as possible. In order not to pass her confusion to her friends, she re-represents America through her eyes and recreates its shape in order to keep her friends' dream alive. The substantial power of representation and its negotiation position appears in Darling speech:

I didn't tell them how in the summer nights there sometimes was the bang bang-bang of gunshots in the neighborhood and I had to stay indoors, afraid to go out, and how one time a woman a few houses from ours drowned her children in a bathtub, all four of them, how there were poor people who lived on the streets, holding up signs to beg for money. I left out these things, and a lot more, because they embarrassed me, because they made America not feel like My America, the one I had always dreamed of back in Paradise. (Bulawayo, *New Names* 116)

The confusion comes into view in Darling's character through the description of these incidents. She writes letters to her Zimbabwean friends, and she never tells them the truth about America or her feelings towards it. She re-represents and recreates her reality as she only writes about food, clothes, and how life is so great. She never writes about bad weather, crimes, or beggars in the streets. She never tells them how she is confused and lost in a strange country. One reason is to encourage her friends to keep holding onto their hopes with regard to America. She may also want to inform Bastard that she is not washing dishes as he had imagined at the beginning of the novel in order to preserve the image of her dreams for America and the possibility that she will find happiness.

Finally, there is an contradictory position as a third type of encoding/decoding; Darling becomes confused about her struggle to negotiate the harsh reality after decoding media messages and believing them, and finally, the oppositional viewpoint arises following the character's incapacity to believe anything offered by the media. After her suffering, confusion, and discomfort in America, Darling believes that "This place doesn't look like [her] America, doesn't even look real" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 94). Darling thinks that by migrating to America, her life would be better; nevertheless, in order to live in America, she has to start working at the age of ten. While her friends play and live their childhood happily, Darling has to work to make a living. She says, "When I'm not cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries, I'm bent over a big cart like this, sorting out bottles and cans" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 44). Besides, Darling works hard to save money for college and complains about how expensive it is, "it's like maybe you're trying to buy a country or something" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 182). Bulawayo expresses Darling's disagreement with the whole situation throughout her writing. For example, she represents how foreigners are mistreated by Americans and their country through Darling's feelings when her boss mistreated her and says, "Come on, now, back to work, he says when he reappears. You don't have cockroaches in Africa? ... You're just acting up, I know you've seen all sorts of crazy shit over there, he says, speaking over his shoulder" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 182). Darling faces inequality, racism, and poverty

through her experience as a migrant, which finally leads her to a sense of displacement and disagreement of her situation.

In addition to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding approach, he highlights the importance of representation, and how it shapes culture. In *We Need New Names*, the representation of suffering as a migrant strengthens the theme of diaspora in the novel as it provides a vivid portrayal of the experiences of Zimbabweans who have migrated to other countries and explores the challenges and opportunities that come with living in a new culture through Darling's eyes. The story gives a detailed analysis of the difficulty of transitioning to a new society through Darling's experiences in both Zimbabwe and the United States. The novel represents the complexity and diversity of the Zimbabwean diaspora, showing how different individuals and communities experience migration and displacement in different ways. For instance, Darling struggles to navigate the complex social and cultural norms of the United States, and they often feel like they do not belong to their new environment. Through Darling's eyes, readers, vividly, picture the issues and hardships that ordinary people face in the country, as well as the intricate power dynamics that affect their lives. *We Need New Names* explores the stories of Zimbabwean migrants through diverse means of representation. These representations include: images of both internal and external suffering, the role of the media in creating opinions of Zimbabwe and America, and the portrayal of America as a host country.

According to Stuart Hall, there are three approaches of representation: reflective, intentional, and constructive. The first approach is the reflective approach in which "meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall, Representation 24). According to him, the reflective approach to representation points that cultural representations are a mirror of reality; they can easily be understood without much effort or interpretation. Secondly, the intentional approach that "holds that it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean" (Hall, Representation 25). Intentional representation emphasizes the role of writers in cultural representation. Hall asserts that the cultural representations are intentional acts with a certain aim or message in mind. The meaning of representation is, thus, dictated by the intentions of its producer and can be decoded by analyzing the producer's motives. Finally, the constructive approach in which "we must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate" (Hall, Representation 25). In addition, he believes that "it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts" (Hall, Representation 25). While the reflective and intentional approaches seek to reflect harsh realities inside and outside Zimbabwe, the constructive approach seeks to build readers' comprehension of Zimbabwean problems through their empathy towards the novel's characters.

The reflective representation approach appears in *We Need New Names*, which takes place during the 2000s, a period of huge conflict after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Zimbabwe

faces a series of crises during this period and “the pain experienced by the people of Zimbabwe as their country’s economy tumbled, poverty soared, food insecurity and social problems worsened was acute” (“Conflict in and Around Zimbabwe”). The economic crisis in Zimbabwe causes unemployment, poverty, and economic hardship. Besides, Zimbabweans struggle to meet their basic needs such as healthcare or education. Also, the Zimbabwean former fighters begin to occupy farms owned by the white minority to correct the disparities inherited from the colonial era trying to return land to their possession. This movement takes place in February 2000, when:

President Mugabe initiated the ‘Fast Track’ land reform program to redistribute land to the black majority. Many independent critics view this as an unruly process that did not redistribute land within the judicial framework. Farms were taken by force and many farmers were given a one day ultimatum to evacuate their farms without prior warning. (Munangagwa)

To reflect the actual struggle between the white people and Zimbabweans during this period, Bulawayo gives an example of the Zimbabwean soldiers who try to expel white man from his house. When he argues them the boss says “Somebody please tell this white man here that this is not fucking Rhodesia!” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 74). Rhodesia is the name of Zimbabwe before the independence. This reflects the suffering experience of the Zimbabwean citizens after independence since they struggle to get their homes back, causing damage to their country and hurting their people.

Moreover, the reflective approach appears in the representation of both internal and external suffering of the characters in *We Need New Names* since they suffer different political and social circumstances inside and outside their country. Darling, for instance, represents the poverty and political struggles that many Zimbabweans suffer before and after their diaspora. At the beginning of the novel, Darling and her friends are forced to leave their own homes in Zimbabwe and live in a slum because of political problems and social crises. Through Darling’s description, she used to live inside a “real house... with ... real walls... and real running water” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 41). That is, being diasporic is not their choice; they suffer the cruel circumstances of war and political situations. Darling, constantly, dreams of moving to America in order to live a better life. Unfortunately, she suffers racism, poverty, and a sense of displacement after moving to America.

Bulawayo, vividly, portrays the harsh realities of life in Zimbabwe through the experiences of her characters in the novel, using a reflective approach in which she imitates reality. After the economic collapse of Zimbabwe in the 1990s, poverty and hunger portrays the Zimbabwean history. *We Need New Names* reflects the reality of living in poverty, violence and unemployment in Zimbabwe. To emphasize this, Bulawayo expresses the image of hunger through children’s suffering. That is to say, Darling and her friends used to go to Budapest, a neighborhood where white and rich black people live, to steal guavas in order to survive hunger. She reflects violence that harms children’s innocence by presenting the character of Chipso “who used to outrun

everybody in all of Paradise but not anymore because somebody made her pregnant” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 6), and she is only eleven years old. Through Bastard’s speech, Bulawayo mentions how Zimbabwean workers are used as slaves; they do not get any money, and they, sometimes, get killed. He describes how Zimbabwe is full of treasures that were taken by the colonists by saying, “My uncle Jabu told me. He worked in the mine, remember? He said it was yellow and sparkling, but he never mentioned any heavy. He was going to bring it for us to see but then those kaka soldiers shot him down there”(Bulawayo, *New Names* 79). With different presentations and examples, Bulawayo reflects Zimbabwean citizens who suffer corruption, violence, and hardship.

Furthermore, the novel touches the history of colonialism in Zimbabwe. To criticize the colonial situation, the novel presents real-life manifestations of colonialism as experienced by the people’s harsh feelings. Bulawayo describes how Darling is afraid of sleeping because when she sleeps, she dreams of “bulldozers and those men and the police, afraid that if [she] lets the dream come, they will get out of it and become real. [She] dreams about what happened back at [their] house before [they] came to Paradise” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 43). Another striking example of harsh reality is when Darling and her friends came across a woman who has hung herself. Instead of feeling fear or sadness, they think of taking advantage of her death by selling her shoes to buy bread. Bulawayo states through Bastard’s speech “did you notice that woman’s shoes were almost new? If we can get them then we can sell them and buy a loaf, or maybe even one and a half” (*New Names* 16). The children’s actions, on the other hand, highlight how the difficult circumstances change their way of thinking and force them to mature, robbing them of their childhood. Through this scene, Bulawayo emphasizes the tragedy of a society where basic needs, like bread, has become more important than human life. In conclusion, with the reflective approach, Bulawayo succeeds in representing the reality of suffering and struggles as a way to criticize the Zimbabwean conditions. Throughout Darling and her friends’ stories, Bulawayo gives the reader a true reflective image of daily life struggles of children in Zimbabwe.

While reflective approach is the representation of historical and social realities, intentional approach involves encoding of a specific messages and perspectives by the writer. Thus, Bulawayo uses narrative and language techniques to convey a particular ideas or comment on the Zimbabwean problems. Her narrative technique appears in her pattern of writing as she goes back and forth between present and past events by using flashbacks. This technique allows Bulawayo to provide background information about characters, Zimbabwe, and the colonial experience. By showing how Darling’s present circumstances are shaped by her past, Bulawayo intentionally helps the reader understand the political and social transformation in a colonized country. Besides, the contrast between the past and the present highlights the difference between the characters’ peaceful and stable past and their present struggles. Furthermore, when Bulawayo describes how Darling and her friends enter the white people’s house, she gives proof that when the British people enter Zimbabwe they destroy it. She presents the house as a big and great from outside but everything inside it is “strewn about and broken. Chairs, the TV, the large radio” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 77). When the children enters the house they feel “disappointed by the senseless damage... as if it’s [their] own things that they have destroyed” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 77). Bulawayo

intentionally represents the devastation caused by the colonial period and she tells the reader that the Zimbabweans must take back their properties.

On the other hand, Bulawayo uses language to prove that there is a difference between Zimbabwe and other countries. She intentionally uses Shona phrases -Zimbabwean mother tongue- to emphasize the differences and lack of understanding between Zimbabwean, British, and Americans. For example, Darling repeats the phrase “our language” many times through the novel to signify the differences between Shona and English and show the difference in culture and the way of thinking. Besides, Bulawayo mentions Zimbabwean phrases to show the anger and revolution of Zimbabweans. For instance, when Darling’s big sister screams on her she speaks in Shona to assure that the NGO people do not understand her. She says:

What are you doing, masascum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya, you think these expensive white people came all the way from overseas ipapa to see you act like baboons? Do you want to embarrass me, heh? Futsekani, don’t be buffoons zinja, behave at once or else we’ll get in the lorry and drive off right this minute with all this shit! (Bulawayo, *New Names* 37)

Writing a strange language that readers may not understand invites them to engage with the novel on a deeper level. On the other hand, Bulawayo presents the lack of understanding between Zimbabweans and British even when Darling speaks in English. When Darling tries to thank the white lady in English “to show her that [Darling] know English. She doesn’t say anything back, like maybe [Darling] just barked”(Bulawayo, *New Names* 38). This shows the intentional message of Bulawayo that the British and Americans do not care about Zimbabwean even they speak the same language. Since language is the fundamental tool for expression and communication, its role is significant throughout the novel. Bulawayo succeeds in creating a novel which is “an anguished, angry, hilarious novel that uses language like a weapon” (Freeman). Although the novel is written in English, the characters switch between English and Shona. They tend to express themselves in words that are familiar to most Zimbabweans. Accordingly, this intensifies the novel a local flavor.

The third representation approach is the constructive approach which means that the novel is constructed by its readers as they may feel attached to the novel’s events and bring their own experience to their interpretation of the novel. This may lead to shape the readers’ understanding of the author’s purpose. Since readers construct the meaning of the text through representational techniques, Bulawayo highlights the strength of her characters facing struggles. Although she criticizes the collapsed society, Bulawayo shows that characters can find a creative way to face hard situations, whether it is through strong friendship, pure souls of children, or religious representations. Moreover, the idea of dreams and friendship suggests that it is possible to have a better future. That is to say, when Darling moves to America and faces many obstacles, she finally relies on her aunt and her migrant community to support her in a strange country. Besides, when Chipso faces violence, she is able to laugh and play with her friends. By presenting political, social,

and cultural problems that impact individuals, Bulawayo invites the readers to consider how these problems might be addressed in a real life context.

The representation theory that is displayed in *We Need New Names* aims to clarify the real image from different perspectives as a way of rejecting the ideal image of America; one way to represent reality is by portraying regulation. While the novel primarily describes Darling's troubles outside her country, it provides a harsh commentary on the defective regulations and policies that exist in America. Regulation refers to “a rule or order issued by an executive authority or regulatory agency of a government and having the force of law” (“Regulation” def. 2.b). In the context of cultural studies, regulations operate to control cultural practices, and how law affects people in many ways. In *We Need New Names*, these regulations cause injustice, demonstrating how they influence the lives of those who are poor and disadvantaged. One example of regulation is the rigorous migration requirements that limit Darling's eligibility to remain in the United States. Bulawayo expresses that in Fostalina's speech “Child, it's not like your father is Obama and he has the Air Force One; home costs money. Besides, you came on a visitor's visa, and that's expired; you get out, you kiss this America bye-bye” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 117). She is, constantly, frightened of being deported and must navigate a complex set of rules and procedures to remain in the country. Besides, Darling is unable to return to her country due to legal barriers. This is an illustration of how regulations can affect people's lives and alter their experiences. Consequently, they choose to stay in America despite feeling like prisoners “only [they] chose to be prisoners and [they] loved [their] prison” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 151). The complex experience is presented when the migrants decided to stay, and they “pulled [their] shackles even tighter and said, [they] are not leaving America” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 151). This navigates the challenges of displacement, belonging, and search for identity.

Another example is Darling's encounters with regulations in the novel, which extends to her relationships with the US healthcare system. She cannot afford medical care and must navigate a complicated system of insurance and healthcare providers. Darling states that when they get sick, they “could not go to hospitals. [They] swallowed every pain like a bitter pill, drank every fear like a love potion, and [they] worked and worked” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 150). The medical system is very expensive, and restrictions can affect people's access to healthcare and their overall well-being. All these circumstances support the idea that America is not the place that Darling dreams of, and facing this reality enhances the idea of displacement. Although regulations serve to maintain stability in any society, they are presented in the novel as a restrictive force against migrants.

Regulations have a significant impact on the representation of culture in global media. Although globalization may lead to cultural exchange, it may also be deceiving. Governments attempt to control the flow of information and media across borders, using global media as a means to idealize realities. In *We Need New Names*, Globalization plays a significant role in deceiving migrants to move to America without mentioning the harsh truth of regulations. The representation of America's harsh reality aims to alter readers' perceptions of the idealized view of the American society formed by globalization. Globalization is defined as, “a situation in which available goods

and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar in all parts of the world” (“Globalization”). Globalization has impacted the ways in which cultures interact and influence one another on an international level. Cultural studies theory aims to understand how culture operates within specific social and historical settings. The cultural images and representations, conveyed through worldwide media and popular culture, impact the protagonists' perceptions of America in the novel. These images, frequently, illustrate an idealized version of the American society that does not reflect the daily experiences of America's diaspora groups. The forces of globalization have created a worldwide image of America that is detached from the everyday realities of migrant and diaspora communities, resulting in this gap between perception and reality. Darling and her friends are exposed to the forces of globalization as they navigate the obstacles of daily life in Zimbabwe. The children admire the American life and try to imitate everything they hear and watch. They reached the extent that when they are happy, they sing American songs “Let’s sing a Lady Gaga” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 41). They idealize American lifestyles that are portrayed in Hollywood movies. Unfortunately, they quickly realize that the promises of the American Dream are usually misleading, and that the reality of life in America is just as harsh as life in Zimbabwe.

We Need New Names exposes the reader to the forces that shape the characters' experiences and perceptions in America, highlights the ways in which the false impression of America (created by globalization) leads to the suffering of diaspora communities, and finally sheds the light on the essentiality of counter-memory in challenging dominant narratives of the American society. The French philosopher Michel Foucault presents the concept of counter-memory as the idea that dominant or official narratives about history and culture frequently aim to maintain power relations and suppress opposing viewpoints. Dominant narratives are stories or concepts that are widely accepted, influential, or popular. They impact how readers understand and interpret events, histories, civilizations, and society; they are built by individuals with power or wealth and can be supported by institutions, such as media or government. Foucault believes that counter-memory challenges dominant narratives by elevating marginalized or excluded voices and reconstructing history in a more inclusive and democratic manner.

According to Foucault, power is a diffuse and widespread force that functions through social structures, organizations, and discourses rather than something possessed by individuals or groups. This suggests that power is not only wielded by people in positions of authority, but it is also presented in everyday practices and traditions. He believes that “counter-memory [is] a transformation of history into a totally different form of time” (Foucault 160). By bringing marginalized and oppressed voices to the center of cultural discourse, counter-memory challenges dominant narratives and power systems. It involves finding and enhancing alternative viewpoints, experiences, and histories that have been silenced or excluded by dominant discourses and institutions.

The concept of counter-memory can be used to represent Zimbabwe and its people in the context of *We Need New Names*. The novel challenges conventional perceptions about Zimbabwe, frequently promoted in western media. Such media tend to focus on the country's negative

characteristics, such as poverty and political unrest. Instead, the novel portrays Zimbabwe and its people in a more complex light, emphasizing the tenacity and humanity of individuals who are frequently portrayed as helpless victims.

Furthermore, the novel portrays a counter-memory of the American ideal through Darling, who acknowledges the challenges and obstacles that migrants from disadvantaged backgrounds confront in pursuing a better life in an unfamiliar country. As George Lipsitz argues:

Counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal ... Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives... counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past... Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience (213).

Darling's experiences in America are not the ideal ones that are frequently portrayed in popular culture and media but rather ones defined by poverty, racism, and misery. Bulawayo questions the popular narrative of the "American Dream" and presents an alternate viewpoint on the realities of the American society by representing the reality of diaspora populations in America.

In her attempt to live as an American citizen, Darling is lost between missing her home and friends and her new personality. The writer asserts the self-struggle of Darling between what she wants to be and what she really is since this life is way different from the life she dreamed about "because in [her] head is not what [she] came to America to do" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 161). Darling thinks that she will "be living in America with Aunt Fostalina, eating real food and doing better things than stealing" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 11), but unfortunately, the opposite happens. Even her aunt, Fostalina, works two jobs in order to acquire a livelihood. To illustrate, the picture that Bulawayo paints is of the hard times that migrants face in a foreign country, and how their lives are completely different from what they have imagined. That is to say, "What do Detroit and Paradise have in common? ... for Darling, the answer is almost nothing-except they're places she has lived" (Iweala). As Darling struggles to exist in both, there is, undoubtedly, no difference between the two nations.

Darling's childhood recollections in Zimbabwe serve as a counter-memory to the dominant narrative of Zimbabwe as a country of poverty, violence, and suffering. Bulawayo emphasizes the beauty, complexity, and resilience of Zimbabwean culture and society through Darling's memories and challenges the basic and reductive depictions of Zimbabwe portrayed in media. According to Darling and her aunt's point of view, collective memory brings the idea of home into the present. In other words, when friends and relatives meet to talk or even gather under the same roof, this will make them feel more comfortable. In the novel, her aunt's home is portrayed as a space that allows for the imagining of the past and what has been lost (Bulawayo, *New Name* 100).

Moreover, the idea of counter-memory and missing home becomes visible in Darling's feelings towards everything around her. Darling suffers from feelings of displacement, nostalgia, and longing for a return to her home. She uses memories of the past to hold on to her hopes of returning home. Bulawayo presents Darling's feelings through her reaction towards the American food. Despite having enough food to eat, she misses her family and friends. She cannot taste the food, and "there are times, though, that no matter how much food [she] eats, the food does nothing for [her], like [she] is hungry for [her] country" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 95). Life is tasteless, even the food does not taste real, and Darling does not "really even bother with [food] anymore because eating it is really a disappointing thing, it feels like [she] is insulting [her] teeth" (Bulawayo, *New Names* 102). For Darling, American food does not invoke any memories of home. On the contrary, when Darling receives guavas for her birthday, the memory of her childhood fills her head; this brings her memories of home, family, and friends. When Darling receives guavas, "The smell hits [her] where it matters, and [she] feels like [her] heart and insides are being gently pried open" (*New Names* 115). Guavas are connected to her memory of home; she remembers how she and her friends were happy after eating them. It has a different taste than American food, for guavas have the taste of home. Being a migrant changed Darling; she cannot be the same once she leaves her home. The idea of losing identity is not only limited to migrants themselves; it also appears in their countries. When the citizens leave to look for a safer home, the idea of a homeland collapses and becomes only a hope in their hearts.

Further, Bulawayo expresses counter-memory through the concept of the lost identity. The novel delves into the lives of diaspora communities that have fled their home nations and are fighting to find a sense of belonging and identity in a new environment. Bulawayo declares the following as an illustration of a lost identity and a missing home:

Whenever somebody crosses geographical spaces, whenever we cross cultures, something is lost....So that is exactly what is happening to Darling. Part of her identity is tied to space. So without her language and without the specific group of people she interacts with, she has to become a different person (Chat with NoViolet Bulawayo).

The novel allows counter-memories to arise through investigating the experiences of diaspora communities. As "The sleazy catalogue of American life at its very worst, is intended to shock and confront the reader just as much as the first part of the novel set in Zimbabwe" (Hill), the reality of both places makes readers believe that there is no difference between them. The novel challenges dominant narratives and presents an alternate view of the realities of diaspora communities through the characters' hardships and experiences. This is a key component in Foucault's notion of counter memory, which emphasizes the significance of challenging dominant narratives and bringing alternate points of view to the forefront of cultural discourse.

Another example of counter-memory can be found in Darling's reaction to the cold weather in the early stages of her new life in America, which signifies the difference between America and

Zimbabwe. Darling observes that snow is like “a greedy monster... has swallowed everything... telling you with its snow, that you should go back to where you come from” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 92). Snow and winter are always connected to sadness and fear; by bringing them up, the feeling of hesitation has, clearly, appeared in Darling’s reactions. She tells herself that she is not as comfortable as she thought she would be. Despite all the unpleasant things that occurred in Zimbabwe, Darling’s reaction to the cold weather portrays Zimbabwe as a warm, sunny, and welcoming place. America is nothing like Zimbabwe, for it is described as a cold, unfriendly, and unwelcoming place for migrants. The sense of displacement is clearly displayed in this scene when Darling fails to see anything familiar, she feels “like we’re in the crazy parts of the Bible, there where God is busy punishing people for their sins and is making them miserable with all the weather” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 94). Despite all these feelings of displacement, “The question [the novel] asks is not why things fall apart in modern Africa, but what the costs of feeling when it does” (Freeman, *Harsh Vision of the African Diaspora*). Accordingly, all these aspects exhibit Darling’s ferment and confusion as she cannot find any difference between suffering in Zimbabwe and in America. On the contrary, she feels that suffering among her friends and family is better than suffering alone in a strange place.

While there are no differences between living in Zimbabwe and living in America as they are both suffering places for the characters, Bulawayo seeks for a better change in lives with her writing. Bulawayo expresses these emotions for the changes in identities, environments, and mentalities from the very first line of the novel until the very last. She hopes that by raising the readers’ awareness and highlighting negatives, they will change reality. When the identity of a person or place is changed, this signifies some kind of transformation; therefore, the title of the novel reflects the author’s wish for a change in the way Zimbabweans view themselves and address their country’s problems.

The novel contains a whole chapter named “Real Change”, where Bulawayo expresses her view on voting, and how the country will be better if a good president tries to change. Her wishes for liberty and for real change are presented through the kids’ speech. She expresses how people pretend to be good to take the position of a president, but finally they do not care. The politicians “smile and wave like they can actually see us... We are surprised that they still remember how to smile, but we don’t smile back... and we know that this smiling at us means nothing” (Bulawayo, *New Names* 39). The image conveys a shallow and disingenuous attempt to connect with the people rather than a genuine attempt to comprehend their challenges and concerns.

In conclusion, with her style, language, and strong technique, Bulawayo succeeds in imitating the reality of migrants’ hesitation and loss in a foreign country. All migrants through the novel are looking for freedom by leaving their countries; ironically, they just suffer disillusionment, unhappiness, nostalgia, and diaspora. The confusion that Darling faces through the novel as a migrant demonstrates how life can be worse after leaving home; she faces mental and emotional breakdowns. Darling discovers that America is just a lonely place for whoever comes from elsewhere. The way that Bulawayo divides the novel into two parts reflects the reality of the difference between Zimbabwe and America and supports the sense of displacement.

Through the analysis of representation, regulation, globalization, and counter-memory, the novel provides a deeper comprehension of its messages.

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