IDENTITY CRISIS IN BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES*

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Abstract

This paper examines identity crisis in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, focusing on the protagonist, Darling. The study explores how Darling's journey reflects the broader postcolonial struggle of negotiating between native cultural heritage and the pressures of assimilation in a Western-dominated global order. Drawing on postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly the works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall, this paper argues that *We Need New Names* critiques the consequences of forced and voluntary migration, exposing the emotional and psychological violence inflicted on immigrants as they attempt to reconcile their past with an unfamiliar present. Findings from this study suggest that Bulawayo's novel presents migration as both a site of possibility and a source of deep existential conflict. While migration offers opportunities for reinvention and economic stability, it simultaneously results in a fractured sense of self, cultural detachment, and an unresolved longing for home.

Key Words: Identity crisis, postcolonialism, cultural dislocation, migration, assimilate on, African diaspora

Introduction

Migration, both voluntary and forced, has historically shaped the socio-political and cultural landscapes of nations. In recent years, Africa has witnessed a significant increase in migration, particularly among its youth, who are often driven by economic hardship, political instability, insecurity, and the allure of better opportunities abroad. This trend is especially prominent in Nigeria, where the phenomenon is popularly referred to as *"Japa"*—a Yoruba expression meaning "to flee" or "to escape." This movement reflects deep-seated frustrations with systemic failures in governance, education, and employment, and has grown into a cultural moment that defines a generation's response to socio-economic disillusionment.

Scholars such as Adepoju and Aderanti have noted that migration in Africa is not a new occurrence, but its intensification in the 21st century is marked by desperation, high risks, and a widening disconnection from native identity Adepoju (56). This underscores the vexing nature of contemporary African migration: while it may offer hope, it is often shadowed by the emotional, psychological, and cultural toll it exacts. According to Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2013), migration is a "complex phenomenon" that does not merely involve geographic movement but also a transformation in identity, belonging, and social integration.

Given that literature often mirrors the realities of society, African writers have increasingly turned their focus to themes of migration, displacement, and cultural identity. Their works portray not only the aspirations and hopes of those who leave but also the challenges of assimilation, alienation, and the fracturing of identity that often follow. In *We Need New Names* (2013), NoViolet Bulawayo offers a compelling narrative that captures these tensions through the eyes of Darling, a Zimbabwean girl who relocates to America in pursuit of a better life. Bulawayo's novel aligns with other contemporary African

diasporic narratives in exploring the emotional aftermath of migration and the dissonance between homeland memory and host land reality.

Scholars have critically engaged with Bulawayo's depiction of identity and displacement. **Muponde (2020)** argues that the novel "functions as a powerful vehicle of memory and protest," emphasizing the protagonist's internal conflict as symbolic of Zimbabwe's fractured national identity (23). **Eze (2019)** focuses on the linguistic hybridity in the novel, suggesting that Bulawayo's blending of English and African vernacular is a literary strategy that reflects the fluid, shifting identity of migrants (40). Additionally, **Nyahunzvi (2018)** observes that *We Need New Names* transcends the typical migration narrative by highlighting the psychological violence of dislocation and the paradox of achieving material comfort at the cost of cultural alienation (32). These studies collectively affirm that Bulawayo's work not only engages with the socio-political realities of migration but also contributes meaningfully to postcolonial discourse by humanizing the immigrant experience.

While migration promises escape and opportunity, it also demands difficult negotiations of selfhood, particularly in postcolonial contexts where the legacy of colonialism continues to shape perceptions of identity and worth. As Stuart Hall notes (45), cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of positioning within history, culture, and power dynamics. Similarly, Bhabha's notion of the "third space" helps articulate the in-betweenness experienced by immigrants, who find themselves caught between the cultures they leave behind and those they must adapt to.

This paper contends that the protagonist Darling's identity crisis in *We Need New Names* is emblematic of the broader postcolonial dilemma of cultural dislocation. Drawing on postcolonial theory, especially the works of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, the paper explores how migration reshapes identity and generates internal conflict in the diaspora experience. Moreover, by examining the

experiences of secondary characters such as Uncle Kojo and Fostalina, the paper situates Darling's story within a larger generational and communal context, shedding light on different coping strategies and levels of cultural retention among African immigrants.

Identity crisis refers to in this paper is a period of intense self-examination and uncertainty regarding one's sense of self and place in the world. This term is often associated with psychological and sociological.

Identity Crisis in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo portrays Darling as a Character whose life oscillates between dual cultural societies. Her daily existence in America is punctuated by flashbacks to her time in Paradise and Budapest with childhood friends like Chipo, Bastard, Godknows, Sbho and Stina in comparison with her friends in America: Marina and Kristal. This spurs hidden conflicts in her life that plays an essential role in forming her identity. When Darling arrives in America, she immediately registers her nostalgia for Zimbabwe. She finds the snow severe and strange. She feels alienated, experiences cultural shock, and finds it difficult to connect with the environment. Darling becomes a confused person or the "other" in a new environment. The constellation of the pressure of cultural detachment and the attempt to decipher the workings of her new environment in America is responsible for her confusion. This affects her sense of self and shapes her identity. She finds solace or a means of coping with this tension by reminiscing on where her mind finds peace. In comparing America with the Zimbabwe of her childhood, she said:

> If you come here where I am standing and look outside the window, you will not see any men seated under a blooming jacaranda playing draughts. Bastard and Stina and Godknows and Chipo and Sbho will not be calling me off to Budapest. You will not even hear a vendor singing her wares, and you

> will not see anyone playing country-game or chasing after flying ants. Some things happen only in my country, and here is not my country; I don't know whose it is. (147)

As evident in the above, Darling, the protagonist in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, undergoes a sense of alienation in America after she is separated from her root. As she moves from Zimbabwe to the United States, she experiences a disconnection from her familiar cultural environment, leading to a feeling of being an outsider in the new society. This alienation is a common theme in postcolonial literature, reflecting the challenges individuals face when adapting to a foreign culture. This is in line with Said's statement that displacement complicates the ability of individuals to believe in the "comforting myths of cultural belonging" (216). In other words, when people are displaced from their original cultural context, they find it challenging to maintain a sense of belonging to that culture. The myths or comforting narratives that once supported their cultural identity may be disrupted or eroded.

After Darling's shift to America, she confronts the hostility of a serene and silent atmosphere, the discomfort of snow which she describes as "white as a clean teeth and is also very, very cold. It is a greedy monster too." (150) To manage this phase of strangeness, Darling identifies herself with her Zimbabwean roots. Here, her identity is solid and unflinching. Her mind escapes the harsh environmental reality in America by identifying with the Zimbabwe of her past. Identity for Darling becomes a strategy for creating selfhood. There is an idealization of Zimbabwe in her imagination, and an emotive connection to the milieu that gave her an adventurous childhood. Zimbabwe is where she ties her identity to and home for Darling is a place that is engraved in her heart. Each passing day in America reminds her of what she is missing, thus Darling laments:

> If I were at home I know I would not be standing around because something called snow was preventing me from going outside to live life. Maybe me and Sbho and Bastard and Chipo and Godknows and Stina would be out in Budapest, stealing guavas. Or we would be playing find bin Laden or country game or Andy-over. But then we wouldn't be having enough food, which is why I will stand being in America dealing with the snow; there is food to eat here, all types of food. 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 is at variance to Darling dissociating herself from her host society. Bulawayo through the character of Darling espouses the fact that African diaspora characters at the initial stage of arrival to the diaspora maintain ties with their nationality, race, familial ties, old friendships, and language and thus becomes frames that shape their identity. Sacks (413) buttresses this in his analysis of the intersection that exists between identity and a person's physical environment. He argues that "neurology of identity" deals with the neural foundations of the self, the age-old problem of mind and brain. It is possible that there must, of necessity, be a gulf, a gulf of category between the psychical and the physical." Darling's attachment to Zimbabwean cosmology is emblematised when she laments the seizure of the bones that were meant to protect her at the airport. Her belief in this 'charm' is apparent in the way she mopes its absence. The bone was for her a "weapon to fight evil in America" (150).

> The separation of Darling from the bones meant to keep her safe and connected to her homeland of Zimbabwe symbolizes a profound and multifaceted violence that transcends mere physical displacement. This violence is both personal and cultural, embodying deeper themes of loss, disconnection, and identity.

Darling's uprooting from Zimbabwe, especially from the cultural and familial objects—her "bones"—that symbolize her connection to home, constitutes a deep emotional and psychological rupture. These bones are more than just physical artifacts; they carry the memory and spirit of her homeland. Their removal not only signifies physical distance but also marks a fragmentation of Darling's emotional and psychological state. In America, this absence creates a void where these symbolic bones once provided security, belonging, and a sense of self. Darling grapples with feelings of being "wrong in [her] skin, in [her] body, in [her] clothes, in [her] language, in [her] head" (165), reflecting her inner turmoil and disconnection resulting from her displacement.

This personal violence is compounded by the cultural violence Darling experiences in her new environment. In Zimbabwe, the bones are tied to a shared cultural heritage and communal memory, serving as a tangible link to her ancestral past and collective identity. In America, however, Darling is immersed in an individualistic society that undervalues communal bonds. This cultural disconnect further exacerbates the violence as it dismantles the traditional practices and communal ties that once defined her identity. The bones, thus, come to symbolize not only the loss of physical objects but also the erosion of a collective cultural history.

The broader loss experienced by many immigrants is mirrored in Darling's journey. The violence of separation is not just about physical relocation but involves the erasure of cultural memory and identity. As Darling becomes more entrenched in American culture, she distances herself from her African roots, evident in her rejection of her heritage and the adoption of new American behaviours and attitudes. This symbolic violence is reflected in her interactions with new American friends and her shifting language, behaviour, and social circles, demonstrating a profound erosion of her cultural identity (167).

Bulawayo uses Darling's separation from these symbolic bones to offer a poignant commentary on the immigrant experience. The

violence of displacement extends beyond the physical move to encompass significant psychological and cultural impacts, highlighting the painful negotiation between preserving one's heritage and adapting to a new cultural reality. Darling's journey represents a broader struggle faced by many immigrants, emphasizing the conflict between past and present identities and the violence inherent in this reconciliation process.

As Darling craves the opportunities that America offers, she finds that, psychologically, America cannot fully address the gaps left by her dislodgement from her ancestral land. Her relationship with America, therefore, is contingent upon its ability to meet her needs, both material and emotional. In this context, Edward Said's concept of postcolonial identity and the impact of colonial history on individuals becomes relevant. According to Said "Identity is intricate and problematical; it is made up of innumerable histories and cultures, some dead and some still active" (210). Darling's struggle with her identity reflects the complex layers of history and culture that shape her being, influenced by her encounters with the legacies of colonialism.

The novel's portrayal of other characters, such as Uncle Kojo and his wife Fostalina, further enriches this exploration of African identity in America. Although the story primarily follows Darling, Bulawayo also delves into how these characters, coming from different African backgrounds, navigate their cultural identities in a foreign land. Their experiences illustrate the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation, community, displacement, and generational differences. Through these characters, Bulawayo sheds light on how issues of identity crisis are interwoven with cultural adaptation and the challenges of living in the diaspora, highlighting the broader implications of Darling's personal journey.

Cultural adaptation and retention are central to how Uncle Kojo and Fostalina navigate their lives in America, reflecting the complex interplay between their African heritage and the American

environment they now inhabit. Like many African immigrants, they face the challenge of striking a delicate balance between adapting to American culture and retaining their African roots. This balancing act is evident in their everyday lives, where they maintain elements of their cultural identity through food, language, and traditions. For example, they prepare traditional African meals and engage in cultural practices that remind them of their roots. This creates a sense of home away from home, not only for themselves but also for Darling, who lives with them. By sharing these cultural practices with Darling, they help her hold onto her African identity, offering her a sense of belonging and continuity even as she adjusts to the new realities of life in America. This shared cultural space allows them to connect with their past while trying to fit into the present, highlighting how cultural adaptation is both a survival mechanism and a source of identity conflict.

Uncle Kojo is portrayed as deeply loyal to his African roots, which often puts him at odds with the new cultural environment and even with his wife, Fostalina. His occasional wrangling with Fostalina over her obsession with maintaining a slim body size reveals his resistance to fully embracing Western ideals. Uncle Kojo's belief that "there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind" (p.151) reflects his commitment to traditional African aesthetics and values. He strongly believes in the opinions of his kinsmen back in Ghana and relays to Fostalina their verdict concerning her body size, saying, "last time I sent family pictures to my mother, she actually cried, ah ah ah, my son oh, please please please feed your wife and don't nah bring her here looking like this, you will embarrass us" (p.152). At his private moments, Uncle Kojo speaks his native language to himself, further emphasizing his connection to his roots. He also condemns his son TK's adoption of Western pop culture, especially TK's habit of wearing sagging pants, which Uncle Kojo sees as a betrayal of their cultural identity. This

resistance to cultural assimilation illustrates the identity crisis he faces as he tries to assert his African heritage in a foreign land.

> Uncle Kojo comes home from work and says to Aunt Fostalina, you know, me, I actually don't understand why there is never any hot food in this house, Fostalina...ever since you started this weight thing you never cook. When was the last time we actually had a real dinner in this house, huh? You know in my country; wives cook hot meals every day for their husbands and children. And not only that, they actually also do laundry and iron and keep the house clean and everything (p.156).

Kojo usually reverberates and is transported into a realm that is far from America at the sound of Ghanaian music. Darling complains of this weird behaviour when she said "Uncle Kojo who is driving, nodding to that weird Ghanaian Music that sometimes makes him forget himself, like maybe there's something inside his head that's calling him away to somewhere far." (76). But for Uncle Kojo, his identity is bereaved of any form of conflict. His loyalty lies in the Ghana of his mind. The anxiety that develops within him is an offshoot of the conflict in negotiating the ideal America he envisioned before coming to America and the reality of facing a racist America that rejects his kind. He escapes by identifying with Ghana to cope with this rejection. His best moments in America are "whenever he is with 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." (p.79). He becomes blissful and confident.

On another scale, Uncle Kojo belongs to the old brigades that are fully committed to the Pan African struggle and the anti-imperial/anti-colonial struggle. It is this mind-set and coping mechanism that makes him to associate with and defend an African leader like Robert Mugabe by claiming he "is the only motherfucker

with balls on our continent. Africa's leading statesman!" (p.193). He celebrates Mugabe for opposing western ideologies and dictates to African countries. Uncle Kojo's loyalty to his African roots and his coping mechanism through identification with Ghana find resonance in Said's examination of postcolonial subjects seeking refuge in their pre-colonial cultural identities. Said highlights the importance of such identifications in dealing with the psychological impact of colonialism. Postcolonial subjects, according to Said, often seek refuge in their pre-colonial cultural identities (211). This means that individuals, like Uncle Kojo, find solace, stability, and a sense of self by reverting to or preserving aspects of their culture that existed before colonial influence. This may involve embracing traditional practices, language, or values that were prevalent before the intrusion of colonial powers.

In addition to cultural retention, community and solidarity among African immigrants are crucial ways the characters use to navigate their identity in the novel. Despite their different African origins, Uncle Kojo and Fostalina experience a shared sense of solidarity, stemming from their common experiences as immigrants facing similar challenges in a foreign land. This solidarity often transcends specific national or ethnic differences, allowing them to find common ground in their broader African identity. In a predominantly non-African society, this sense of community becomes a source of strength and support, enabling them to navigate the complexities of their new environment while maintaining a connection to their cultural roots. For instance, the gatherings of African immigrants that Uncle Kojo and Fostalina participate in offer a space where cultural expression and shared experiences can be openly celebrated. However, these gatherings also remind them of their dislocation, triggering an identity crisis as they confront the reality of living between worlds, unable to fully belong to either.

The shared experience of displacement among African immigrants is a recurring theme that underscores the identity crises

faced by characters like Uncle Kojo and Fostalina. Both characters have left their home countries in search of better opportunities, safety, or stability, a narrative common to many immigrants. This displacement brings with it feelings of loss and longing for a place that feels familiar. In America, they confront issues such as racism, stereotyping, and the feeling of being 'othered,' which further complicates their sense of belonging. Despite these challenges, their shared experiences create a sense of unity and mutual understanding, enabling them to navigate the difficulties of displacement together. The characters' ongoing struggle with displacement highlights a sense of duality in their identities—torn between their African heritage and the pressures to conform to American norms. This duality is a source of internal conflict and identity crisis, as they grapple with who they are in a world that constantly challenges their sense of self.

Negotiating identity and belonging is another central theme in the novel, illustrating the identity crises that arise from living in the diaspora. Uncle Kojo and Fostalina's relationship, despite their different African origins, reflects the broader challenge of navigating multiple identities in a space that often views Africa as a monolithic entity. They strive to maintain their unique cultural identities while also integrating into American society. This negotiation involves a constant balancing act, as they work to assert their individuality and cultural heritage while adapting to the social and cultural norms of their new environment. For example, the characters often feel the pressure to conform to American cultural standards, which can lead to a sense of erasure of their own identities. The novel explores these broader complexities, depicting how African immigrants must navigate the duality of being African in a predominantly Western context, a struggle that often leads to feelings of alienation and an identity crisis.

The text also highlights generational differences in how African identity is navigated, which contributes to the identity crises experienced by different characters. As adults, Uncle Kojo and

Fostalina have a more conscious and deliberate approach to maintaining their cultural heritage, drawing from their experiences and memories of their homeland. In contrast, younger generations like Darling find themselves caught between fully embracing American culture and holding onto their African roots. The generational gap can lead to different perspectives on identity, belonging, and what it means to be African in America. For instance, Darling often experiences a clash between her desire to fit in with her American peers and the expectations of her African heritage, which creates an internal conflict about her identity. This generational divide underscores the diverse ways in which African immigrants and their children navigate the complexities of identity in a multicultural and often challenging environment.

Through these dynamics, NoViolet Bulawayo portrays the immigrant experience as one filled with both challenges and opportunities, highlighting how cultural identity can be a source of strength, connection, and sometimes conflict. Uncle Kojo and Fostalina's relationship, despite their different African origins, embodies the multifaceted nature of African identity and how it evolves in the diaspora. The novel suggests that while the experience of African immigrants in America is marked by displacement and the need to adapt, it is also enriched by the resilience of cultural retention and the power of solidarity among those who share similar journeys. Yet, these experiences also bring to the fore profound identity crises as characters grapple with their place in the world, caught between their African roots and their American reality. Through the lens of Uncle Kojo, Fostalina, and Darling, *We Need New Names* poignantly captures the complexities of identity, belonging, and the search for a place to call home.

Bulawayo's depiction of these characters' struggles with identity is deeply rooted in the cultural contrasts between their African heritage and their new American environment. This cultural clash highlights the

significant impact of differing worldviews on the identity of African diaspora characters. As scholars such as Triandis et al. have observed, Western cultures, including those in Europe, North America, and Australia, are predominantly individualistic, while most cultures in Asia, South America, and Africa are collectivist (56). These cultural differences significantly shape how individuals from these backgrounds construct their identities. African diaspora characters in the novel find themselves at a crossroads, torn between the individualistic values of their new environment and the collectivist traditions of their homelands.

Markus and Kitayama further illuminate this cultural tension by explaining that people in individualistic cultures tend to develop an independent sense of self, whereas those in collectivist cultures have an interdependent self (9). Although both seek a coherent sense of identity, the independent self is grounded in a view of oneself as autonomous, separate from others, and revealed through inner thoughts and feelings. In contrast, the interdependent self is rooted in one's connection to and relationships with other people. This distinction is crucial in understanding the identity crises faced by characters like Uncle Kojo and Fostalina, who struggle to reconcile their interdependent, African sense of self with the independent, individualistic culture they encounter in America. Their journey to navigate these conflicting cultural identities highlights the broader struggles faced by many in the African diaspora, illustrating the complex interplay between cultural adaptation, identity, and belonging.

The African notion of communalism plays a huge role in shaping Darling's identity in America. She identifies with this spirit of togetherness at moments or events that bring together African diaspora characters. Her interdependent self finds happiness only at gatherings that foster intermeshing of various persons and celebration of African values and traditions. Darling observes, "The onliest time that it's almost interesting here is when Uncle Themba and Uncle Charley and

Aunt Welcome and Aunt Chenai and others all come to visit Aunt Fostalina. I call them uncles and aunts, but we are not related by blood, like me and Aunt Fostalina are I never knew them back home, and Uncle Charley is white, for instance. I think that the reason they are my relatives now is they are from my country too- it's like the country has become a real family since we are in America, which is not our country," (p.161). Here, they are united by a bond of language, race and culture that is alien to their American milieu. It is this cultural bond that Darling was referring to when she said:

> The uncles and aunts bring goats insides and cook ezangaphakathi and sadza and mbhida and occasionally they will bring amacimbi, which is my favourite relish, umfushwa, and other foods from home, and people descend on the food like they haven't eaten all their lives. They tear off the sthwala with their bare hands, hastily roll and dip it in relish and pause briefly to look at one another before shoving it in their mouths. Then they carefully chew, tilting their heads to the side as if the food speaks and they are listening to the taste, and then their faces light up when they cook home food. (p.161)

This becomes their yardstick for seeking spaces that allows them to experience and practice the activities or ways of life that delineate their African identity, a life that replicates home.

However, Darling's acculturation in America lends her a fluid or dynamic identity as she experiences a partial fixation with the American value system and begins to develop an American accent in her spoken English. She makes a conscious effort to maintain this accent. His attitude gives credence to the assertion that "Identity or self-concept is worthless unless it is recognised and validated by others. Identity requires validation for it to persist and serve a useful function" (Swaann etal.78). Darling undergoes a self-transformation to be

identified and accepted as an "occident'. Her experience of racism subjects her to an irreconcilable conflict between her Zimbabwean roots and her adopted country. An idea of these racist encounters is projected when Darling said "when I first arrived at Washington I just wanted to die. The other kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, the way I talked or said things, the way I dressed, the way I laughed...I just felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes, in my language, in my head, everything," (p.165). Being ridiculed by these kids gives Darling that feeling of self-deprecation. As a diasporan in need of recognition, her social rejection in society and bouts of racism she endures makes her to begin to loathe her African heritage and all those features that link her to an African identity. She now aspires and craves for the American way of life and begins to enmesh herself in American popular art forms and American accents. She draws her inspiration from the crisis between Rihanna and her Boyfriend. Her newfound Friends in America like Kristal and Marina introduce her to the world of porn movies in the basement of Uncle Kojo's house. She goes to shop with them and have recreational drives in Marina's mother's car.

In the euphoria of this newfound way of life, Darling begins to distance herself from all that is African about her. She does not call her mother as frequent as she used to. Her friends from Budapest are relegated from her mind. Darling on one occasion borrows TK's lexicon to express her anger at uncle K when she says, "leave me alone, motherfucker" (p.167). She aptly captures what can be refered to a cultural conflict when she said, "it is hard to explain, this feeling; it's like there's two of me. One part is yearning for my friends; the other doesn't know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people I've never met. I feel a little guilty, but I brush the feeling away" (p.210). An earlier observation about the crisis of the individual-self by Dubois (1965: 215) lends weight to this when he posits "one ever feels his twoness-an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body." It is this

fight to maintain two cultures that characters in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* grapple with both at the level of language and behavioural patterns. We could confidently argue that while characters like Darling fight with these 'unreconciled strivings' in her daily life, others are not even aware of it let alone fight because they have been consumed by the 'greedy monster' which is both America and the American situation: adaptation, cultural pluralism and either the search or maintenance of identity. Darling's experience and her revelation about her culture and that of the alien culture is in line with Edward Said's assertion that the more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance (Said 23). Thus, as Darling immerses herself into a new culture, she becomes familiar with new culture and new practices. She learns the smells, the sounds and the feel of new location and begins to judge her cultural home and practices. All of this is incorporated into her new identity.

Conclusion

In *We Need New Names*, NoViolet Bulawayo uses the character of Darling to explore the complexities of postcolonial identity. Darling's experiences of alienation, cultural dislocation, and nostalgia for Zimbabwe underscore the psychological and emotional challenges faced by immigrants. Through other characters like Uncle Kojo and Fostalina, the novel broadens its scope to examine generational differences and coping mechanisms in the diaspora. Ultimately, the novel offers a poignant commentary on the duality of belonging and the enduring impact of colonial legacies on identity formation.

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