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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF THE CHILD NARRATIVE VOICE'S (RE) PRESENTING ZIMBABWE'S HISTORY IN NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S NOVEL, WE NEED NEW NAMES: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

The child narrator is a popular narrative technique in children's literature, especially magical stories and fantasies. However, most authors prefer adult narrators when narrating issues like political instability, gender-based violence, the AIDS scourge and religious exploitation, as this voice projects a feeling of seriousness and authority of experience to potentially attract a bigger readership, especially the adults in the society. Nevertheless, child narrators are an interesting choice because of the degree of emotions they inject in a story, which gives it an earnest tone and makes the reader want to empathize and sympathize with the narrator. Further, since their identities are in the process of formulation, the reader can see, understand and critique how ideologies play a role in the formation of identities and worldviews. Child narrators also appeal to child readers who form a large section of any country's population and future leadership. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the deployment of the child narrative voice in NoViolet Bulawayo's novel, We Need New Names (2013) to interrogate its effectiveness in (re)presenting Zimbabwe's history. The objective of this study was to analyze the impact of the child narrative voice in (re)presenting Zimbabwe's history in the novel.

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INTRODUCTION

We Need New Names is set in Zimbabwe in the years after her independence. The author, Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, prefers to go by the pseudonym NoViolet Bulawayo. "No" in her Ndebele language means "with", whereas Violet is the name of her late mother. In an interview with Ben Greenman on 19th March 2014, Bulawayo said that she chose to call herself NoViolet, to mean "with Violet" in memory of her mother who died when she was 18 months old. Bulawayo, her second name, is a reminder of her yearned-for home city in Zimbabwe, home to the Ndebeles. Bulawayo was born in Zimbabwe but moved to the United States when she was 18 years old to attend college. She left her father and siblings back home and joined her aunt. Upon returning to her motherland thirteen years later, all she could see around her was mere disillusionment. In an interview with *The Guardian* (2016) she states that:

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

Svetlana (2001), observes that there are two types of nostalgia, restorative and reflective nostalgia. The former stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home. The latter thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming -wistfully, ironically, desperately. Bulawayo had longed to go back to her home country. She was filled with restorative nostalgia; the kind of longing to be home and relive the beautiful moments she once had in her country. Unfortunately, political turmoil had taken a toll of her country. She coined the term "born free," to refer to the Zimbabweans like herself who were born after the country gained her independence. The freedom is however a mirage, since it worsened things for them. The state of the country was more deplorable than before; high poverty levels, the AIDS scourge, unemployment, poor health facilities and political instability were among a host of many other problems affecting her country. Literature can be used to bring to the attention of the masses the happenings in the society. Probst (1998) notes that while we read literature, some of our beliefs concerning the world are re-affirmed, modified, or even refuted. Bulawayo, through her novel, brings to the attention of her readers the

experiences of Zimbabweans at home and the diaspora. The issues she represents in her text can be said to be raising awareness about the experiences of Zimbabweans. During a television interview with Greenman (2014) Bulawayo confessed that: "I must say I come from a place with colourful names […] in the title of the book I was trying to speak to the need of the new ways of imagining our identities, new ways of seeing the world and seeing our future." It is evident that Bulawayo was trying to reach out to the masses concerning the plight of Zimbabwe and its citizens. My study will therefore examine how the author portrays the various images of Zimbabwe in public imaginaries and how the characters she chooses negotiate their identities and realities as Zimbabweans.

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

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

It is evident from the above observation that the Ndebele have been a disadvantaged ethnic community for a long time. Their allegiance to the opposition worsened matters for them. Described as Zimbabwe's largest minority, the Ndebele comprise around 17% of Zimbabwe's total population. Other minority groups include the Tonga, Sotho, Venda and Hlengwe. The realities that inform what Zimbabwe is inform the content of Bulawayo's novel and my reading of it. As Plato observed, literature is mimetic. By mimesis, he meant that literature is a reflection of the happenings in a society. Authors base their texts on what happens in their environment. These occurrences form a raw material for them. Molvaer (1997), states that, "Good literature reflects the life and spirit of a people. Through literature, writers hold a mirror up to their society. A society finds expression through its author and in this way it is the co-author of literary works."Therefore, Zimbabwe and its history are co-authors of Bulawayo's novel. The text can be read as a reflection of what happens in Zimbabwe. It is for this reason that my study proposes a reading of *We Need New Names* to examine how the author, through the narrator and characters therein represents Zimbabwe's histories, identities and realities (social, political and economic). In the novelistic form, the narrative voice becomes the strategy through which an author shows the audience the realities of their society. A narrator is a creation of the author used to communicate an idea. It could be a child, adult, man, woman or an omniscient being. The choice of a narrative voice therefore solely depends on the author. This study seeks to investigate why Bulawayo chose a child narrator and the impact of this voice in portraying Zimbabwe's contemporary realities. This study is cognisant that literary writers use a narrative voice to achieve mimesis, and as a literary critic I consider the narrative voice a vehicle through which Bulawayo reflects the realities in her society. This study thus seeks to investigate why Bulawayo chose a child narrator and the impact of this voice in portraying Zimbabwe's contemporary realities.

A number of scholars have studied the effectiveness of the narrative voice as the eye/mirror to the society. For example, Kawira (2013) explores the use of adolescent narrators in expressing the challenges faced by young adults. She explores how young adult literature can be used to instill behavior change in young adults. Kawira's major concern is the challenges young adults face and the ways in which literature can help counsel them. Kawive (2003) explores how Derek Walcott uses an adult narrator in presenting how alienation affects individuals. She views alienation as cultural rootlessness and goes ahead to present ways in which it affects individuals in the Caribbean society. Another scholar, Rodgers (2013), discusses the ways in which Tsitsi Dangaremba and Kopano Matlwa use young women in their novels to represent the unfair treatment meted out on women in their societies. These novels are drawn from Zimbabwe and South Africa. Rodgers' main focus is the young women's tribulations as representative of what happens to other women. This study has departed from this trend to examine on how the child narrative voice in Bulawayo's novel functions as the mirror to the Zimbabwean society.

The Oxford Dictionary defines a child as a young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority. The legal age of maturity is eighteen, therefore anyone under that is considered a child. In the case where an author selects a narrator below the age of eighteen to tell a story, then that is considered as a child narrative voice. Literary texts which have deployed this technique include J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and fairy tales like *Snow White, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast* among others. However, few of postcolonial texts and historical novels have used the child narrator as protagonists in their texts. The few exceptions include V. S. Naipaul's anthology of short stories *On Miguel Street* (1959), George Lamming's novel *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Honwana (as cited by Bainito, 2014) observes that,

> Children have in most cases not been listened to, and when their voices are not silenced, their talk is never unconstrained […] children's voices reach a broader platform only in rare, and sometimes tragic, cases, but even then these subaltern voices are often immediately recovered, transformed, and inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups.

Honwana's assertion above is a clear indicator that the adult voice has overshadowed that of a child. My preliminary literature review thus has led me to conclude that children's voices have been ignored in literary writing concerning the histories and politics of nations. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by examining the impact of the child narrator in highlighting the pertinent issues facing a politically unstable nation. This study therefore, examines the deployment of the child narrative voice in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* in (re)presenting Zimbabwe's history, identities and post-independence experiences

Research Question

The research objective was: What is the impact of the child narrative voice in (re)presenting Zimbabwe's history in NoViolet Bulawayo's novel?

Synthesis of related literature on impact of the child narrative voice in (re)presenting Zimbabwe's history in Noviolet Bulawayo's novel

Scholarly Literary Criticisms on the Child Narrative Voice: As noted earlier in the background information to this study, literature is mimesis and Bulawayo uses the child narrative voice to represent Zimbabwe's identities, histories and post-independence realities. Chitando (2016) who categorises *We Need New Names* as belonging to the sub-genre of Zimbabwe's children's literature, notes that while children's literature normally address children's themes, *We Need New Names* addresses adult concerns, a factor that makes this novel unique. She reads *We Need New Names* as a social commentary about the challenges faced by the girl child and her resilience and reads Darling as a symbol of female agency in negotiating patriarchy and post-independence realities.

Wilkinson (2016) comments on the effectiveness of the child narrative voice in representing Zimbabwe's realities. The title of his paper, "Broaching 'themes too large for adult fiction': the child narrator in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" hints at the problematic deployment of a child narrative voice in representing issues considered too serious, which is the main justification for my study. He notes that although the ten-year old narrator Darling is old enough to understand some of the issues in her society, she is not yet fully socialized. In a brilliant twist, he picks on this liminality as the strength behind this novel; that it is precisely this threshold positionality that accords Darling the agency to innovatively criticize the radical issues facing Zimbabwe as she is not fully biased by her ethnicity. He pegs on Darling's childhood brashness and the honest register of child-speak that enables Darling to transcend social correctness and public opinion to say the unsayable in Zimbabwe.

Though not a technique favoured by many post-colonial writers, the child narrative voice still appears to be an effective device for capturing issues affecting children and adults alike. For example, Kawira (2013) studied how the adolescent narrator is used in expressing the challenges faced by young adults. She explores how young adult literature can be used to instil behaviour change in young adults. Kawira's major concern is the challenges young adults face and the ways in which literature can help counsel them. She, however, does not explore how societal challenges affect adolescents, an issue that my research aspires to delve into.

Nabutanyi (2013) also examines how the child narrative voice represents troubled childhoods. He emphasizes on four areas namely: physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse of children. He chose contemporary African fictional texts drawn from different parts of Africa; West, East and Southern Africa. In his dissertation, Nabutanyi explores various thematic concerns in the selected texts. Nabutanyi posits that most authors use adult narrators to address contentious issues in socio-political crises in which children become victims of these atrocities. Nabutanyi therefore decides to study these issues from a different angle. He states, "My reading centrally focuses on the particularity of these children's experiences as articulated through their eyes. This is because authorial use of child narrators/protagonists offers an intimate understanding of children's experiences in contexts of socio-political crisis". As he explores the various thematic concerns in a bid to bring to the fore the troubled childhoods of children in Africa, Nabutanyi's main aim is to reach out to the masses so that the plights of these children can be addressed effectively and a lasting solution provided. He, however, mainly deals with the problems affecting children as narrated by the children themselves.

Some of these issues affecting children have been analysed by Jones (1988) who highlights the ill treatment of children in some African societies. Jones argues that African authors use child narrators to disclose the "grim reality of cruelty, harshness, parental (particularly paternal) egocentricism and extraordinary bruisings of the vulnerable child psyche and the vulnerable child's experiences". This in my opinion is true since it is a reflection of what truly happens in the society. Children are neglected and their rights violated by the people who are expected to protect them. My study intends to tackle cruel parenting and children's exposure to sexual violence, basing on a text from an author who skilfully infuses all these concerns in her novel.

It therefore appears that in post-colonial societies, children are continuously becoming victims but even more alarming, perpetrators of violence. Bainito (2014) discusses the various violations meted out to children during times of war. Focusing on Sierra Leone and Liberia, Bainito observes that the involvement of children in war is an issue that has attracted many authors. Many scholars and critics have however ventured into investigating this phenomenon in texts that employ an adult perspective. Bainito states that an adult's imagination lacks a deeper access into a child's consciousness appropriately, and this in my view can be considered valid observation, since the child participants in the war have first-hand experience of what took place. Bainito bases his analysis on the thematic concerns raised in the text and the narrative strategies employed by the author, the major focus being Kourouma's use of the child narrator to portray the violent nature of the use of children in situations of war. He postulates that when children are involved in war, their childhood pleasures are curtailed. Bainito's major concern is the children who are recruited into the armies and the effects of child involvement in war. He basically focuses on children in civil war societies in West African countries. My focus, however, is Southern Africa, a different geographical location, specifically Zimbabwe. I intend to discuss the effects of authoritarian rule on a country; how the problems brought about by a dictatorial leader affect children and adults as narrated by the children themselves.

Muchiri (2003), who studied the deployment of the narrative voice in the Caribbean context, analyses the issues raised by the author through the child narrator. She pays attention to narrative voices that exist alongside that of the child in the novel in discussing colonialism in Barbados. Muchiri's examination of how Formalism enhances the mutual relationship between theme and style thus acknowledging the role of the narrative voice in concretising the themes treated in the novel will be of great importance to my examination of how the child narrative voice represents contemporary realities. My study, contextualized in an African setting, Zimbabwe, will

explore how a child narrator represents a dictatorial state that has had a single president for over three decades and the ensuing challenges. Kiguru (2012), who also studies how the child narrator represents trauma, makes reference to Narratology and Historical Revisionism theories in her research to investigate the role of the child figure in telling narratives of violence. Her study, which is based on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), places emphasis on the female child narrator as a voice of reason. She lays emphasis on violence at the family level, meted out by the father. Kiguru's area of interest is paternal violence in a family. This leaves out other challenges faced by citizens of a country.

Scholarly Literary Criticisms on Zimbabwe's History: A number of scholars have written literary criticisms on Zimbabwe, tracing its historical trajectory. Muwati (2009) examines the interface of history and fiction. His major focus is on the liberation war fiction written in Shona, Ndebele and English after Zimbabwe gained her independence in 1980. His study aims at proving that historical fiction is a bona fide stakeholder in the history of Zimbabwe and should thus be highly regarded. Muwati compares the historical fiction written in the early 1980s and that written and published in the late 1980s. The former, according to him, presents nationalism as humanizing and as being the sole legitimate political brand capable of leading the nation. The latter, on the other hand, represents alternative historical truths that contest nationalism and debunk official definitions of nation. He studies historical fiction written in the three major languages spoken in Zimbabwe, Shona, Ndebele and English to show the various trends in the development of liberation war fiction in Zimbabwe. However, Muwati only pays attention to historical fiction written in the early and late 1980, and my analysis of *We Need New Names*, published in 2013, represents issues post 1980.

Javangwe (2011), whose study is contextualized within literary studies, analyses Zimbabwean political auto/biographical narratives in contexts of changing culture, race, ethnicity and gender identity images of the self and nation. He posits that each of the stories analyzed in his study contributed a version of the multiple Zimbabwean narratives that no one story could ever tell without being contested by others. This leads him to exploring the discrepancies between the white Rhodesian auto/biographies and Black Nationalist life narratives. He observes that those written by whites depended on the imperial repertoire to construct varying, even contradicting, images of white identities and the Rhodesian nation. Their views are however contested by the Black Nationalist life narratives. Javangwe further argues that narratives by women writers, both white and black, introduce further instabilities to the male authored narratives. This is because those narratives told by women move beyond the conventional understanding of what is 'political' in political auto/biographies. For example, stories about HIV and AIDS narrated by women thrust into the public sphere personalized versions of self. This, according to Javangwe, was meant to not only image Zimbabwe as a diseased society, but one desperately in need of political solutions to confront the different pathologies inherited from colonialism and which also have continued in the post-independence period. Javangwe uses auto/biographical texts to reflect on the different histories of Zimbabwe as told by different people. His narrators are adults. The current study however focuses on the retelling of this same history by a child. Arguably, therefore, the story of the self is most often a story of the nation. In an interview with Bulawayo, Hartselle (2015) describes Bulawayo as a diasporic subject who has lived in America but whose childhood was in Zimbabwe. This interview discloses key moments in Bulawayo's life and Zimbabwe's history that draw parallelism with Darling's experiences narrated in the novel *We Need New Names*. Arguably, then, *We Need New Names* can be read as a fictional autobiography of Bulawayo and a Biography of Zimbabwe. Thus the social histories narrated therein can be read as palimpsests of the official history of Zimbabwe, complementing and contradicting each other.

Fitzpatrick (2015) analyses how Bulawayo translates names and naming practices in *We Need New Names* into a technique of re-writing Zimbabwe's history. She observes that through privileging Darling's voice, Bulawayo makes Darling, a black female child, the eyes to Bulawayo's rendition of Zimbabwe. An interesting observation she makes is that the writer subverts conventional Western discourses of the media or history, and this calls for a reading of *We Need New Names* that will highlight naming practices as one of the unique narrative strategies deployed in the novel to de-construct dominant and hegemonic discourses of power. For example, she comments on how Bulawayo's renaming of historical events in Zimbabwe and the immigrant experience reclaims stories of Zimbabweans like that of the Ndebele put under erasure by nationalist rhetoric. For Harris (2014), this 'awkward form' that characterises *We Need New Names* is a literary strategy that facilitates the writing the Africans present and its brand of modernity amid competing realities of cosmopolitanism. Towards this end, Halliday (2016) argues that multiculturalism enables migrant subjects to transform their cultural identities while in exile and to navigate alien environments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study involved a critical reading of the novel *We Need New Names* (2013) which was treated as primary data. Secondary data was obtained through library and desk top research. Therefore, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research involves the study of things in their natural settings in an attempt to interpret them. This kind of research aims at understanding the social realities of groups, individuals and cultures as its participants experience it. Qualitative research was therefore appropriate in my study, since literary data is mainly non-numerical. Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. He further states that the process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The text *We Need New Names* by Bulawayo was purposively selected despite the availability of other literary texts with a child narrative voice. This is because the novel has a child protagonist. It also addresses the various issues in post-independent Zimbabwe that the study wanted to discuss. The study focused on Bulawayo's representation of the experiences of Zimbabweans during the post-independence era in the context of *We Need New Names*. This was conducted through analyzing events as depicted by Darling and other child characters in the novel. The study mainly focused on Darling and the other child narrators namely GodKnows, Sbho,

Chipo, Stina and Bastard. They were deliberately picked on because the study intended to discuss the child narrative voice. Darling and her friends were all children, aged between nine and eleven. Data collection was done through a close critical text analysis of *We Need New Names* (2013), by NoViolet Bulawayo and other secondary sources like online journals, theses, dissertations and newspaper articles. The researcher also listened to interview clips with the author, carried out by the press. Data was also collected through note-making as the researcher interacted with the primary and secondary data sources. The collected data was presented by a logical sequence of discussions. Analysis of the data was done by organizing information in a logical sequence and eventually presenting them as themes. These themes were presented and discussed according to the findings from each research question. The tenets of post-colonial and narratology theories guided the researcher in the discussion of the objectives of the study. Information obtained from different sources and used in this research was acknowledged in order to avoid plagiarism.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the effectiveness of the child narrative voice in (re)presenting of histories on/of Zimbabwe and by Zimbabweans in *We Need New Names*. My analysis is informed by narratology and post-colonial theories, specifically the post-colonial concepts of subaltern and strategic essentialism advanced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The section foregrounds the narrator's presentation of official history on Zimbabwe's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence periods and social histories that though not metahistorical or overtly political (like love, marriage, etc.) they nevertheless shape history. Towards this end, I explore how child narrators, through narrating social histories deconstruct hegemonic historical narratives that have been normalized as official by the colonizer and the Nationalist government. These social histories, as I will show, are narrated by the common masses, the oppressed, and marginalised groups thus their accounts might serve as alternative historical accounts mis-represented by dominant groups like adults, men, the white colonisers, the ZANU-PF government and the Shona. The analysis in this section is set against the premise that literature and history are complementary texts that can be analysed concurrently. Tyson (2006) likens history to a narrative and he suggests that history can be studied just like any other literary text. He further presents history as a matter of interpretations, not facts, and therefore suggests that its interpretation always be conducted within a framework that pays attention to its social constructedness (286). In view of Tyson's assertions above, I intend to study Bulawayo's novel as a historical text. I seek interplay between actual historical events that shape Zimbabwe and their mimetic representation in the novel as different facets of Zimbabwean history. Thus, I treat versions of history re-presented in the novel under study as palimpsest texts. These palimpsest texts are the (hi)stories narrated by the Ndebele to uncover versions of history put under erasure by dominant groups identified earlier. The section considers the historical narratives/anecdotes recounted in the novel as subjective accounts of what has been/is represented by hegemonic groups like the colonisers and ZANU-PF as dominant/monologic histories. Conversely, I view historical accounts by Othered/subaltern groups as turning what has been presented as a monologic account by dominant groups into dialogic social events, hence palimpsests that are revisionist/deconstructive.

Bakhtin as quoted by Nessari (2015) states that "a monologically understood world is an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (1). This in simpler terms means that a monologic account is discourse that is limited to only one point of view. The problem is that such accounts are not always reliable since they only highlight views by only one segment of the society, hence one-sided. Despite the attempt to hegemonies history, the text itself rejects such dominant practices. In fact, as I will show, the more a historical account attempts to assert its objectivity, the more its exclusionary practices become visible. This is why Bakhtin, as cited in Marchenkova, (2005) suggests that "any utterance, whether spoken or written, that people use in communication with each other is internally dialogic" (72). Towards this end, the goal of this section is to highlight the dialogic nature of historical accounts. In dialogism each point of view is considered important thus given a hearing. For that matter, each individual is given a chance to express their opinion. What is important for us is the realisation that history is a social construct thus subjective rather than an objective fact. Thus I view history, identity and reality as existing in plurality, and as having different facets. An important matter that needs clarification is that the fiction of historical accounts once declared truthful or rather the fictionality of history does not necessarily mean that fictional accounts are in any way untruthful. In fact, what is most important for a literary critic is the versions of 'truth' generated by various individuals, in other words, multiple meanings. The tendency to tear fiction/literature and history as binaries is reminiscent in White's (1987) observation that what distinguishes "historical" from "fictional" stories is their content, rather than their form (3). He goes on to assert that, "the content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events" (ibid). My discussion in this chapter takes White's observations as its point of departure to suggest that fiction and 'real' historical events are in fact complementary and of equal weight in contemplating about key milestones in Zimbabwe's pre and post-independence (hi)stories.

This revisionist essence of the novel, I argue, is inscribed in the title of the novel, We *Need New Names*. As established in the background section to this study, Zimbabwe has an arguably troubled history. The intricacy of its history of violence can be said to have stemmed from the pre-colonial period in the form of liberation wars that were and are still being fought either physically or ideologically. The violent nature of its history is evident, for example, in the silencing and marginalisation of the Ndebele within the mainstream historical narrative of Zimbabwe. My preliminary research has pointed to the possibility that this silencing/marginalisation may be due to the belief that the Ndebele are immigrants in Zimbabwe. They are said to have originated from South Africa, around KwaZulu-Natal and are believed to be descendants of the Khumalo people. Kunene (2016) reports that the Shona allege that in the pre-colonial era, the Ndebele launched illegal raids on Shona villages, destroyed their property, looted their cattle, murdered them, enslaved them, and forced them to pay tax to the Ndebele King. The Shona therefore made use of the opportunity to pay back when they won the elections in 1980. [https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-opinion-sc-columnist-byo-93485.html] These events might then have marked the beginning of serious marginalization of the Ndebele by the Zimbabwean government which was majorly composed of the Shona. The conflict between the Shona and Ndebele, which

had started way before Zimbabwe got its independence have been extended to the post-independence period. I therefore read the title of this novel, *We Need New Names*, as a metaphorical call for Zimbabweans to reconsider and re-invent their historical, social, cultural, and political practices. During an interview with Peschel (2015), Bulawayo commented on the title of her novel. She stated,

> I wrote the novel at a specific time of my country's history. Recent history, I should say, when the country was coming undone, due to failure of leadership. And by saying "we need new names" I was speaking for the need for us as a people to sort of re-imagine, rethink ourselves, rethink our way, think about where we were going. We needed new ways of seeing things, new ways of doing things, new leadership. It was basically a call for renewal.

As stated in Bulawayo's novel, Zimbabweans need for new names is used metaphorically. Their post-independent challenges arose due to poor leadership and as she called out for new names, new leadership was the main change she was agitating for. She observes that this change rested squarely on the shoulders of the Zimbabweans. She therefore calls out for this transformation through her novel. Bulawayo uses her protagonist, Darling and her friends to engineer this re-invention. Together, they (re)present marginalised histories, identities, and realities. All the child characters are strategically crafted to represent a unique anomalous aspect of Zimbabwean history, identities and realities that needs to be re-invented. The ten-year old Darling, who is also the eyes through which all events in the novel are seen, also represents the Zimbabweans who leave the country in search of a better life. Eleven-year old Chipo is a symbol of young girls who are sexually abused and their voices suppressed. Eleven year-old Bastard is a representation of activists who agitate for rights of common Zimbabwe masses who are trampled on by dominant groups. Ten-year old Godknows can be considered as the epitome of poverty, for he is the only one among the six children walking around in torn shorts. The other children, who are equally poor chide him because of his shorts. Darling fondly calls him "chapped-buttocks Godknows" (127), a sentiment that expresses the poverty that encumbers his existence. Nine-year old Sbho is a symbol of hope. She represents those Zimbabweans who look forward to a brighter future despite the on-going challenges. Stina's age is unknown for lack of a birth certificate. She represents those Zimbabweans who have been denied access to the crucial element of citizenship/national belonging. These children, in their capacity as intradiegetic narrators and focalisers, expose the realities of Zimbabwean nationalist history, which they also deconstruct and re-construct as they negotiate their everyday realities as 'bornfree' Zimbabweans.

The child narrators, led by the protagonist Darling, can be classified as reliable narrators for a number of reasons. To begin with, they have the authority of experience because they are Ndebele, Zimbabweans, as noted in the previous paragraph, these children are poor, a factor that highlights their marginalised position and gives them the agency to vocalise the challenges of people who occupy the peripheries of metahistories. It is this authority of experience that gives the children the courage to boldly challenge issues they deem improper in their society. Bastard, for instance, demonstrates this courage in the novel during one of their escapades in Budapest. The security guard sends them away from the neighbourhood, ignoring their desperate need for food. Bastard does not allow him to bully them, since the guavas in Budapest are their only sure source of food. Bastard tells him, "[s]ince when did you even start guarding this place? We've never seen you before" (108). The children have strategically essentialised themselves by speaking out their minds anytime they are picked on. This has enabled them to survive the harsh living conditions that they have been exposed to. Secondly, the children are part of the Zimbabwean (hi)story that they narrate in their capacity as Zimbabweans and Ndebele, and therefore give a first-hand account of events taking place. An example is when they discuss about China being a dragon that has come to devour them. In the novel, Bastard comments, "I think China should be like a dragon. That way, it will be a real beast, always on top" (48). Bastard and the other children have noticed that the Chinese in their country are privileged and use this opportunity to oppress them. Their observations tell that they have experienced the negative effects of foreign investors. The construction of the mall has cost them a playing field and eroded the morality of young Zimbabweans. This is in reference to the girls who are lovers of the Chinese foreman. This makes them intradiegetic narrators. Their knowledge of events is therefore not limited because they experience, perceive and even give their own opinion on issues. Their position as subalterns authenticates their observations because they talk from experience.

Thirdly, Darling and her friends can be considered as reliable narrators because they focalise the concerns raised in the novel. The narration is dialogic thus giving different accounts of the same historical event. For instance, when the children discuss about African presidents, Stina informs Bastard that he would have to be a grandfather before he becomes the president of Zimbabwe. This is evident in the novel when Stina says, "[b]ut you have to be an old, old, man to become president" (60). Stina's response to Bastard is a pointer of the situation in Africa, where the young have almost no chance in leadership. Bastard questions the truth of Stina's statement and Stina goes ahead to explain that he has actually seen photos of their president with other African presidents and they were all old. In the novel, Stina's perceptive nature with regard to post-independence African leaders emerges when he says that "I saw a picture of the president in a magazine. He was also with the president of Zambia and Malawi and South Africa and other presidents. They were all old; you have to be a grandfather first." (61). Stina mocks the state the presidency in Africa, where a young person has to wait to grow old before dreaming of leading their country. The children's dialogue reveals that they are informed concerning the happenings in their country.

A crucial adult character in the novel, who is also allegorical, is Bornfree, an activist who gets killed for exercising his democratic rights. He is portrayed in the novel as bearing posters agitating for change during the campaign period. On the way to church, Darling and her grandmother meet Bornfree and another character, Messenger, carrying posters while wearing t-shirts with the slogans "*Change* written in red just below the hearts" (28). Messenger tells Darling's grandmother that "your God is listening because the change everybody's been crying for is finally here" (ibid), then Bornfree adds "[y]es, it is, you watch" (ibid), while waving his stack of papers bearing the words "*Change, Real Change*" (ibid). This phrase, which alludes to earlier unsuccessful attempts by the people to end bad leadership, a core aspect of Zimbabwe's history, is

poignant in this novel. The ironical aspect of the phrase lies in the repetition of the word change, which implies that politicians who sometimes claim to effect change do not always facilitate this change. The unchangeability of the Zimbabwean society is manifested later in the novel when we learn through the children characters of Bornfree's atrocious murder in the course of their child-play. Bornfree is therefore allegorical in the sense that he represents those Zimbabweans living under independence but are actually repressed. Like Bornfree, several Zimbabwean writers have had to write texts criticizing the state of events in Zimbabwe from exile for fear of retaliations from the ZANU-PF government. Sisulu (2015) identifies Chenjerai Hove as one of those Zimbabwean writer-activists who have been rendered victims of this censorship. Sisulu reports that "[d]uring his tenure as president of PEN Zimbabwe, [Hove] incurred the wrath of the Mugabe government. His outspokenness resulted in intense harassment and death threats that forced him to leave the country in 2002". [www. theguardian.com] Hove ended up dying in the diaspora. He could not come back home in Zimbabwe for fear of being killed. Bulawayo and fellow contemporary writer-activists can therefore, like the character Bornfree in the novel, be considered as falling under the category of Zimbabwean writers whom she refers to as the "bornfree" (those born after Zimbabwe gained her independence and fell into dictatorship). In actual sense, the term Bornfree is ironical, as it intones bondage. I therefore view her novel as telling a story featuring the diverse historical milestones and challenges that make Zimbabwe what it is. In Zimbabwe, the ruling government has considered the opposition as another and by so doing, the opposition has no voice. Members of the opposition for instance likes of Bornfee are used as sacrificial lambs.

One such example of an event that can be categorised as social history is the demolition of houses belonging to the Ndebele, which not only dislocated them but also rendered them homeless. In the novel, Darling narrates the reaction of the adults when their houses are demolished by bulldozers: "Gayigusu kicks broken bricks with his bare feet and rips his shirt off and jabs at the terrible scar running across his back and bellows, I got this from the liberation war, salilwelilizweleli, we fought for this facking lizwe mani, we put them in power, and today they turn on us like a snake, mpthu, and he spits" (66-67). We learn about Gayigusu's role in the fight for liberation from his outburst, which is presented to us through Darling. Gayisugu's outburst reveals the dissatisfaction that some of the people who fought for Zimbabwe's independence are experiencing under the leadership of their post-independence state. He, like fellow Zimbabweans who have been marginalised by the government, are rendered subaltern by the ZANU-PF government. The fact that the novel is set at a point in Zimbabwe's history when revolutions sprang up to oppose the hegemonic leadership of ZANU-PF, necessitates a recourse into the historical past of Zimbabwe to understand the root of this exclusionary practice. Although most of the events in the novel are set in the post-independence era, the writer intones that the genesis of the post-independence crisis lies in the violent colonial past of Zimbabwe. Therefore, Bulawayo subtly ventures into the colonial past to build a basis for the current unstable state of Zimbabwe. Towards this end, the narrator strategically essentialises the children as mouth-pieces of the broader community of marginalised Zimbabweans. In one of their excursions into the affluent neighbourhood of Budapest to steal guavas. Darling talks of her country being "stolen" as she comments about the colonial history of Zimbabwe when they were under the British rule. In this reminiscence, Darling expresses amazement at how a whole country can be stolen. Ironically, she is thinking about this 'grand' theft after her friends and her, petty guava thieves, have successfully embarked on a project of acquiring fruits from Budapest. Basing on her experiences, she wonders how the colonisers could not just steal things that are "hideable" and could easily be done away with like guavas. She remarks that:

> If you're stealing something its better if its small and hideable […] that way, people can't see you with the thing to be reminded that you are a shameless thief and that you stole it from them, so I don't know what the white people were trying to do in the first place, stealing not just a tiny piece but a whole country. Who can ever forget you stole something like that? (20)

It is through this amusing reminiscence that Darling recounts about how the White colonisers dispossessed Zimbabweans of their land. I suggest that through this recollection, Darling is establishing the current dislocation of subaltern Zimbabweans as a colonial legacy. Bearing in mind Darling's age, it is obvious that she could not have been present when her country was "being stolen." This is information she has acquired from her elders who have narrated to her the stories concerning Zimbabwe's fight for liberation. Another narrative technique that the narrator appropriates to strategically essentialise Zimbabwe's colonisation is when she metaphorically refers to Zimbabwe as the home of "things falling apart" to mean the political strife which Zimbabwe was undergoing. This implies that young as she is, Darling is familiar with the different historical periods that her country has gone through. She authoritatively comments on them as she has got the information from the adults who actually lived through these periods of history. Darling also knows that her country is unstable.

Since Darling and her fellow child characters/narrators were born after independence, a key challenge in Bulawayo's novel is that the child narrator and main focaliser, the ten-year old Darling and her friends are removed from the pre-independence past they re-present in the novel. Arguably, therefore, they lack the authority of experience to convincingly represent that historical epoch. However, Bulawayo complements Darling's (and the children's) voice(s) with voices of older characters whose experiences in the colonial and pre-colonial Zimbabwe give credibility to these narrators' accounts of events. Thus rememory enables Darling and the other children's accounts to be believable. Rememory refers to when a memory is revisited either physically or mentally by someone who did not exist when that event took place. Morrison (1995) defines rememory as "the process by which multiple memories are re-membered" (160). Rememory is therefore an important tool that enables Darling to narrate pre-colonial (hi)stories of Zimbabwe.

A good example of rememory from *We Need New Names* is when Darling recalls the different "homes" people have lived in, basing on their generations from what the adults in her life told her. Darling herself recognizes two homes, before Paradise and home in Paradise. The former was a better home with a complete family and all basic needs provided. The latter, ironically called Paradise, is immersed in high levels of penury, characterized by what she terms "all tin" (34). Darling's home one was the place her family resided before Mugabe's government displaced the Ndebele, condemning them to the

slums. However, she informs us that while she knows of two homes, her mother and Aunt Fostalina have three homes in their heads: home before independence, home after independence and the home of "things falling apart" (191). Her grandmother, Mother of Bones, has four homes inside her 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 the home of now. (ibid)

Bulawayo taps on the innocence of children to present the different historical periods in Zimbabwe. I am cognisant of the technicality of terming a child as innocent, as it is to assume that a child's mind is a "*tabula rasa*", as suggested by John Locke (1689), that "at birth, the human mind is a blank slate without rules for processing data" (2). Nevertheless, the fact that the child is yet to be corrupted by political stand-points makes the child the best narrator to voice such intensely political events. In fact, it is the assumed ignorance of the child and the lack of arrogance that one acquired with maturity that makes the child the best person to fill in the historical gaps that have been politicised to adults. In this instance, the narrator only functions as a curator since they did not experience the events they narrate and cannot be said to be biased therefore ignored but nevertheless heard (it is like when Imbuga uses drunkards as the voice of reason or when Henrik Ibsen uses stock characters). The burden of proof is therefore extended to the adults from who the child heard these events. The fact that the novel is set at a point in Zimbabwe's history when revolutions sprang up to oppose the hegemonic leadership, necessitates recourse into the historical past that has borne these realities. Thus my analysis of how the child narrative voice negotiates these diverse dynamics to narrate a comprehensible and inclusive history. Towards this end, this study examines the effectiveness of the child narrative voice(s) in reflecting, shaping and re-imagining Zimbabwe's (hi)stories.

A point of emphasis in this section is that there is no single accurate rendition of Zimbabwe's history. Zimbabwe has several histories as opposed to one history. It is for this reason that I consider *We Need New Names* as one such attempt to reconstruct Zimbabwe's histories. The importance of fictionalised historical narratives has been recognised by Huck (1977) who posits that, "[w]e cannot take [readers] on a field trip into the past, but we can recreate a sense of history so powerful that [they] enter imaginatively into the past and explore the "the conflicts, suffering, joys and despair of those who lived before us" (469). This is what Bulawayo, through Darling does in the novel. She imaginatively takes us back in the history of Zimbabwe, even before the coming of the British. Basing on the above observations made by Darling concerning the multiple homes its people have, it is clear that Zimbabwe has had a political history in phases; pre-colonial, colonial, post- colonial and neo-colonial. This is best illustrated by Mother of Bones' homes. Her first Home was a land that was called Great Zimbabwe ruled by black kings. Her second Home was called Southern Rhodesia, led by Cecil John Rhodes and his proxies. The third home was born following resistance from the Zimbabweans who wanted their independence back from colonisation. The war against the colonialists was spearheaded by the then secretary general of ZANU called Robert Mugabe and others like Edgar Tekere who managed to help Zimbabwe gain her independence. Reed (1993) who observers that Robert Mugabe and Edgar Tekere had to travel to Mozambique to join the war effort after being released from prison.(44) Darling's third Home is post-independence Zimbabwe, under the leadership of Robert Mugabe who won the general elections in 1980 and became Prime minister. Zimbabwe thrived until Mugabe started his land reforms in 2000. This ushered in Mother of Bones' fourth home, where things start "falling apart" Darling narrates this palimpsest history of her country with a perceptiveness that is biting especially for such a young person. The historicizing of Zimbabwe is a hegemonic practice executed firstly by first men, secondly by the coloniser, and thirdly by the Shona-dominated ZANU-PF. It therefore emerges that history is a discourse of power. Powers (2001) in making reference to Focault's definition of power states that:

> Power is known from the strategies and practices in and through which the force relations take effect. One example of strategies and practices is the process of marginalization. Marginalization is the process by which non-dominant discourses are not eliminated, but tolerated as alternative speaking positions of resistance that provide the target and therefore the tension to sustain the dominant discourse. This process is necessary because power and resistance are defined in relation to one another. The institutional manifestations of these strategies and practices of power may be found in bureaucracy, law, and various social hegemonic discourses such as science, medicine, and education. (28-29)

In reference to the observation above, history can be considered as a discourse of power, since those in authority would want to use their positions to decide which sections of history are narrated and how, and which versions of history to be silenced or narrated in a manner that will not challenge the authority of the dominant group. The non-dominant group will in that case resist this so that they can narrate their side of the story. In the novel *We Need New Names*, Darling, the protagonist is a homodiegetic narrator who facilitates the negotiation of the hegemonic nature of historical practices. I consider Darling a homodiegetic narrator in view of Genette's (1980) observation that:

> If the narrator lets signs of his [sic] presence appear in the narrative he is recounting, he may acquire a particular status, depending on the way the story is rendered. We will therefore distinguish here two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells [...], the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells [...]. I call the first type, for obvious reasons, heterodiegetic, and the second type homodiegetic. (244-245)

Darling's participation in the narrative in the capacity of a homodiegetic narrator makes her historical observations to be considered as authentic because she is an active participant in the events that take place in the novel. She contests certain preconceived notions on Zimbabwean history, that it is narrated by an adult, a male and who is either British or Shona. She contests such dominant versions of history by the fact that firstly, she is a child and female, secondly a black African, and thirdly a Ndebele. To begin with, the child narrator contests mainstream historical practices by showing how men have been normalised as public historians. This can be traced back to the African past when the passing of history from one generation to another, a duty deemed sacred, was in most cases accorded to

men. In pre-colonial Ghana, for instance, these historians were referred to as griots. Niane as cited by Muwati (2009) observes that:

> The griot who occupies the chair of history of a village and who bears the title of 'Belen-Tigui is a very respectable gentleman and […] has gone from village to village to hear the teaching of great masters; he has learnt the art of historical oratory through long years; he is, moreover, bound by an oath and doesn't teach anything except what his guild stipulates. (33)

It is evident from Niane's sentiments above that the telling of history was a preserve of men. This is why in this study I consider history as a masculine imagination. Consequently, women and blacks are silenced, or misrepresented in dominant versions of history. Bulawayo uses the child narrator to question the hegemonic practice of history being narrated by adult men as detailed above and uses Darling, the main character in *We Need New Names*, a female child, to contest this notion of history as an adult and masculine invention. She does so by narrating the history of Zimbabwe through strategically essentialising herself as a child and woman and using narrative strategies like children's games to provide social histories that complement official histories. For instance, when they play the country game, Darling gives a detailed explanation as to why they prefer some countries over others. She says,

> But first we have to fight over the names because everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be the U.S.A and Britain and Canada and Switzerland and Australia and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and them. These are the country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for countries like Dubai and South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. 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 this one we live in – who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (49)

From the above explanation, it emerges that Darling's status as a subaltern does not hinder her from telling the troubled histories of various countries. In fact, it is from her position of subalternity that she is able to speak through strategically essentialising herself as a citizen of those 'rag countries' that nobody wants to belong to. Her ability to speak is evident when she refers to the countries she considers good as country-countries, equating her own country Zimbabwe which has a myriad of problems as a rag country. Bulawayo also uses names as another narrative strategy to contest the dominant practice of portraying the Shona as truthful citizens who should exclusively enjoy the benefits of independence. Towards this end, she has intentionally given her characters symbolic names to strategically essentialise them so that they, as subalterns, can suppress the "noise" that prevents them from speaking. In the novel, there are several instances that attest to this suggestion. For example, Darling's grandmother is called Mother of Bones, perhaps because her son goes to South Africa but comes back "all bones" suffering from AIDS. Bastard and Bornfree happen to be activists. The name Bastard means one without a father, without roots. I read his name as symbolising the Zimbabwean citizens who are not embraced by the leaders of the nation, who feel as if they do not belong in the post-independence nation. Bornfree's name, as noted earlier, is ironic as it symbolises lack of freedom. This lack of freedom is foregrounded when he is killed when for expressing his freedom of speech as an activist. It is his dissatisfaction with the ruling government in independent/free Zimbabwe that leads to his death. Like Bornfree, Nomoreproblems is a child who was born after the demolitions, so perhaps her name is a symbol of hope for the future. Bulawayo admitted that her country is a place with colourful names during an interview with Ben Greenman on 19th March 2014, and that was why she picked on symbolic names for most of her characters. Fitzpatrick (2015) comments the following concerning Bulawayo's naming system in the novel:

> Through naming and privileging the voice of a black-female-child Bulawayo challenges the oppressive Western discourses of Othering, the act of a monolithic entity placing people in a subordinate position based upon their race, gender, age and nationality. Additionally, Bulawayo's use of naming draws attention to the status of Darling as a subaltern, an individual that is usually one who was colonialized and/or a female of color that is rendered completely powerless because of their social status. The oppressive forces of Othering and the subaltern are represented by Bulawayo naming the economic, social, and historical chaos that has occurred in Zimbabwe under Mugabe's rule, the remnants of British white colonists and their presence within Zimbabwe, and Darling's experiences in America as an immigrant. (4)

Fitzpatrick resonates that through naming, Darling and her friends have been identified as the Other, who are fighting against the oppression from the dominant group i.e. the Shona and ZANU-PF under Mugabe. Characters with names such as Bastard, Messenger, Bornfree, Godknows, Motherlove, Freedom amongst others define them as products of their socio-economic/cultural conditions. For instance, Messenger becomes the carrier of message of hope and Motherlove, who arrives just in time to stop the children from procuring a deadly abortion, becomes the symbol of selflessness. Freedom is an infant born after independence, who ironically dies because of unfair demolitions of their house by the government bulldozers. Godknows is the poorest child amongst Darling's friends, perhaps communicating to the reader that God knows about his status and will change it for the better. Darling the protagonist happens to be the apple of her mother's eye i.e. a darling. The second category of history that the narrator of *We Need New Names* deconstructs then reconstructs is the white coloniser's version of the history of Zimbabwe. In the novel, Darling acts as a representative of the black Ndebele who have been mis-represented by the White colonisers. Lindgren (2002) observes that,

> Many of the Zimbabwean history text books share three characteristics. The first characteristic is that they all are influenced by British history writing and colonial sources. […] As a consequence, in these books the descriptions of the end of the Ndebele state are similar to the colonial representations. In the same way as the colonial state had an interest in the death of Lobengula and the end of the Ndebele state, the Zimbabwean state has no interest in making Lobengula a hero or in resurrecting the Ndebele state or nation. The second common characteristic of Zimbabwean schoolbooks is that they are all very anti-

> colonial, often with a strong leaning towards Marxist theory. The old, colonial image of the Ndebele as cruel warriors is still evident in some of these Zimbabwean schoolbooks, not always in words but often in pictures. These pictures are almost always reproductions of colonial drawings and photographs of the Ndebele. The third characteristic of Zimbabwean history textbooks is that they are all strongly nationalistic, describing pre- and post-colonial times with pride, and colonial times as times of oppression. Some of these schoolbooks are, however, in Pathisa Nyathi's terms, rather 'pro-Shona' and 'not very kind to the Ndebele '(15-16).

In view of Lindgren's observations above, it is evident that the history of the Ndebele as narrated by the Shona and white colonialists is dominant/hegemonic. This has been done in a skewed manner such that the Ndebele appear as cruel people. Being a Ndebele, Darling's representation of the history of her ethnic community becomes a counter-narrative to the hegemonic/dominant (hi)stories told by the White colonisers. For example, in the novel, Darling talks about her great grandfather who was a freedom fighter who lost his life in the course of fighting for his country's liberation. She comments, "[t]hey say I'm possessed because they say my grandfather isn't properly buried because the white people killed him during the war, for feeding and hiding the terrorists who were trying to get our country back because the white people had stolen it" (20). As a Ndebele, Darling's assertion that they too took part in the fight for Zimbabwe's independence becomes a revision of the historical narrative that Zimbabwe's independence was fought for by the Shona. It is therefore vital that Zimbabwean (hi)stories be narrated from a Ndebele point of view, and Darling as well as other characters living in Bulawayo represent the Ndebele perspective. The coloniser's depiction of Africa is through Eurocentric eyes, thus Africa has been imagined as a land of evil, impoverishment and poor leadership. This misrepresentation of the colonial subject has been recognised by Said (1977) who observes that:

> Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf. None of this takes place in the abstract, however. Every writer on the Orient […] assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies. (28)

In reference to Said's observation above concerning the Orient, I am convinced that the colonial subject has always been misrepresented by the imperialists, and Zimbabweans are such colonial subjects rendered victims of such discursive practices. In this case I equate the Orient to the Ndebele, who have been negatively portrayed by the colonialists and later on in the post-independence period by the Shona. This misrepresentation comes about as a result of the assumptions made about black people by white historians from the pre-historical era. Therefore, it is my recommendation that post-colonial writers like Bulawayo be considered as challenging the portrayal of Africans through the white gaze. Such an undertaking, I believe, will correct the false information about their backgrounds. Darling and her friends come to terms with Africa's re-invention as a third world, their country falling under this umbrella term through the games they play like the game about China. Sbho suggests, "I think it must be an angel [China], with like some superpowers to do exciting things so that everybody will be going to it for help, like maybe pleading or dancing to impress it, singing, China, China mujibha, China China wo!" (48). Further, Darling and her friends have nicknamed the construction site where some Chinese men are working "Shanghai", after the capital city of China. They compare China to a monster which has come to devour their country. The children pity those adults who work there, because they are all covered up in dirt. The thin workers are juxtaposed with the fat Chinese foreman whom the children have nicknamed "Fat Mangena" (45). These constructions have led to the displacement of families. It has also been a blessing in disguise since the jobless men have obtained a source of livelihood from the construction sites. Darling and her mates being intradiegetic narrators enable us to re-imagine this economic history of Zimbabwe where foreign investments have had diverse effects in Zimbabwe. Thirdly, the child narrator in the novel presents the dominant histories as documented by the ZANU-PF and Shona as a hegemonic practice.

In the novel, Darling reflects on the social events that have been suppressed by Zimbabwe's government. One such event is the illegal displacement of Ndebele families as engineered by the government. Darling and her friends, who are aware of the state of political instability in their country, are ruthlessly rendered victims of bad political decisions. She and other families watch in despair as their houses are demolished by the bulldozers thus rendering them homeless. As a child, she does not understand why this is taking place. She is dumbstruck. This is an event that went down in the history of Zimbabwe. It was dubbed Operation Murambatsvina. Potts (2006) resonates,

> Operation Murambatsvina was enacted by President Mugabe to eradicate poverty by using violent force on those who were lower class. The Operation began: "In mid-2005 the Zimbabwean government embarked on […] Operation Murambatsvina ('Restore Order') was designed to eradicate 'illegal' housing and informal jobs, which directly affected hundreds of thousands of poor urban residents. (1)

In the above report, Potts foregrounds the forceful evacuation of people by the government, under the guise of illegal structures. The truth of the matter, however, was that the government was hitting back at the Ndebele, who were in the opposition. The destructions led to loss of homes and livelihoods. Darling's father had to immigrate to South Africa to seek employment. Darling thus grants the reader access to the role of the Ndebele in the fight for freedom and their mistreatment by the ZANU-PF government. The creative rendition of the historical event of eviction of the Ndebele in *We Need New Names* has been orchestrated by Darling. She vividly recalls the eviction of the Ndebele by the ZANU-PF government as they play while observing the events as they unfold. Darling reminisces:

> Everybody is standing on the street, neck craned, waiting to see […] The men driving the bulldozers are laughing […] and we run and hide inside the houses, but it's no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming. […] When the bulldozers finally leave, everything is broken, everything is smashed, everything is wrecked. (65-66)

Darling suggests that their parents' affiliation with the opposition made them targets of the government and that the demolitions had nothing to do with illegal housing. It was the government fighting back. In the excerpt above, Darling expresses the damage caused by the bulldozers, specifically its dislocation of the Ndebele by rendering them homeless. As the men kick broken bricks, tear their clothes and the women scream their heads off, the Ndebele spectators/victims are forced to accept their fate as people who do not matter in ZANU-PF's Zimbabwe. Having been forcefully evicted from their homes, the spectators are forced to construct tin houses in shanties. According to Potts (2006),

> Mugabe's corrupt leadership in Zimbabwe resulted in no infrastructure or legal land allotment for people to build homes and communities. This concluded in people, usually of lower economic class, to build homes wherever they could find space. It is estimated that "in July 2005 that around 650,000 to 700,000 people had lost either the basis of their livelihoods or their homes, or both". (1)

Potts' observation that a majority of the people affected by demolitions had to start their lives afresh is captured in *We Need New Names*. Since their houses were completely demolished and they were forced to move, the desperation led them to build substandard houses with whoever materials they got. Darling questions the logic behind destroying good houses only for people to construct tin shacks to live in. She narrates about the state of joblessness and homelessness that resulted from the exercise, leading to disillusionment. She says that the shanty-dwellers did not come to Paradise, "Coming would mean that they were choosers. That they first looked at the sun, sat down with crossed legs, picked their teeth, and pondered the decision. That they had the time to gaze at their reflections in long mirrors, perhaps pat their hair, tighten their belts, check the watches on their wrists before looking at the red road and finally announcing: Now we are ready for this. They did not come, no. They just appeared" (73). Darling clearly informs us that the event came as a surprise and left them with no choice but to move elsewhere and that was how they ended up in the slum. Darling and the other people whose houses were demolished represent the struggles and interests of the subalterns who suffer under the dominant group. As observed by Darling above, these demolitions only took place in their neighbourhood. She does not mention any demolitions in the rich suburbs of Budapest, and we therefore assume that this event did not take place in the affluent neighbourhood.

Darling comes to terms with their predisposition as homeless individuals through narration. She recalls their decent lifestyle before the bulldozers; a real house with real walls, windows, floors, doors, showers with running taps, sofas, beds, clothes, tables and T.V. These luxuries, which she no longer enjoys in their tin shack of a house, draw a stark contrast with her home before paradise. The emergence of paradise is as dramatic as the dislocation of the people from their previous homes. Darling, in remembering how the people finally built their current homes, captures the emotional turmoil of her neighbours as well as their resilience amid such turmoil. She says that the people:

> appeared with tin, with cardboard, with plastic, with nails and other things with which to build, and they tried to appear calm as they put up their shacks, nailing tin on tin, piece by piece, bravely looking up at the sky and trying to tell themselves and one another that even here, in this strange new place, the sky was still the same blue, a sign things would work out. (74)

In the above excerpt, Darling describes to the readers how their new home, Paradise, came into existence. The families whose homes had been demolished by the bulldozers had to build new homes from scratch. The tin houses they were forced to construct become a symbol of their impoverishment hence their inability to procure decent housing materials. Darling also notes the capacity of these displaced people to cope with trauma. She explains that even in these turbulent times, they hoped that things would take a turn for the better soon. Okune & Timothy (2017) observe that in post-independent Africa, "independence] is merely a change of garb, with no change in administration style. And nothing more than dehumanizes a people than dictatorship or a totalitarian regime" (49). Timothy and Okune have spelled out that independent African states are laden with corrupt leaders who stick to power at all costs. The dissenting voices are silenced in the crudest way. In the Zimbabwe represented in the novel, the Ndebele were first targeted by the British for they were seen as a threat. This harsh treatment meted towards them does not change, however, with the change of leadership. They still remain a target of the government especially because of their political standing. Darling's and the other affected families are reduced to paupers because they hold a different opinion from that of the government. They as subalterns are casualties of hegemony propagated by the Shona-dominated government.

The violence meted on the Ndebele has not been recorded in Zimbabwean history as accurately as it happened. For instance, while the government termed it as slum clearance, it was not the case. Although Darling does not boldly declare it as such, this explanation is available on academic and journalistic writing on Zimbabwe. One such critic, Campbell (2017) reports that:

> Genocide and other massacres cast a long shadow over contemporary politics. In Africa, the genocide in Rwanda and massacres in Burundi and the eastern Congo come immediately to mind. As Zimbabwe spirals down under Robert Mugabe and the unresolved questions about his successor, the 1983-84 massacre of Ndebele in Matabeleland will be part of the context of whatever regime finally emerges. The International Association of Genocide Scholars estimates that the 5th Brigade of the Zimbabwean army murdered some 20,000 Ndebele in Matabeleland (1).

As observed by Campbell above, many lives were lost in the Gukurahundi (a Shona word meaning spring rains that sweep away dry season chaff) upheavals. Mugabe's Fifth Brigade army killed more than the reported 20,000 Ndebele to silence them. This was done to stop the forces opposing the government, since Mugabe aimed at making Zimbabwe a one party state. Reports concerning the massacre were however not reported in mainstream media. The killings were blamed on armed bandits. It took the intervention of the western ambassadors for the killings to tone down. The true account of events was never brought out to the public domain. It is through literary artists like Bulawayo that such truths can be narrated to the rest of the world. Darling, who lives in Matabeleland, which is home to the opposition, exhibits in narration a critical stance against the government's authoritarian practices. The atrocities of ZANU-PF have been

discussed in public platforms, an example being Campbell's (2017) blog that also recalls the 2015 article written by Stuart Doran and published in South Africa's The Daily Maverick which exposes Mugabe's leadership malpractices. Doran's story republished by London's The Guardian, repeats Campbell's bold declaration that "Mugabe almost certainly orchestrated the massacre" [https://www.cfr.org/blog/Matabelel and-masacre-and-contemporary-zimbabwwe]. His criticism is insightful as it voices the probability that the "massacre appears to have been caused by a desire to eliminate or neuter opposition to [Mugabe's] regime by his chief political rival Joshua Nkomo" (ibid). He also recognises "ethnic rivalries between Mugabe's Shona and Nkomo's Ndebele" (ibid) as another motivating factor for the atrocious killings. Campbell's report documented above espouses on the challenges that the opposition wing of the government was undergoing. This bit of Zimbabwe's history is rarely told because of fear of victimization. Being an intradiegetic narrator, Darling's sentiments can be considered valid since she reports what people who actually experienced the atrocities say.

The child narrative voice also challenges electoral practices in Zimbabwe as narrated in the text. For example, Darling notes that the adults look forward to the polling day. They are hopeful that once they exercise their democratic right of voting, then things would change. They will elect a better leader. Darling and her friends watch keenly as their parents and other adults go to cast their votes. On voting day, the children "stand at the edge of Paradise, near the graveyard, and watch them leave. They are silent when they go, none of the talk-talk of the days before" (68). She says they want the adults "to open their mouths and speak. To talk about elections and democracy and new country like they have been doing all along" (ibid). It is obvious that even the children have realized that there seems to be something wrong with the leadership in their country. This stems from their parents' change of attitude towards the elections. It is no longer an activity that excites them. The adults wear desolate faces as they go, probably because they know that it is a waste of time. This gloomy atmosphere is a complete contrast to how they had behaved some few weeks back when the electioneering process was drawing near. Back then they were hopeful. The men even smiled at the children, something they had not done in a long time and talked about change, democracy and a new country. The women were also excited and even wear makeup; everyone is gearing up for the change that is coming soon. The children had been tasked with the responsibility of putting up posters written "Change, Real Change" (29). Their excitement is however short lived. The election results are announced but contrary to everyone's expectations, no change is realized. The events that follow are assassinations of those people who are opposing the ruling government. Ethnic violence targeted at the Ndebele instils fear in the people. They are victims of ethnic nationalism. Cohen (2011) describes ethnic nationalism as;

> One wherein ethnicity, political preferences and other traits either (biological or chosen) are used as a measure of true membership in the nation and affect subsequent rights, freedoms, and benefits provided and protected by the state. Traits that fall outside a state's national identity can be considered subversive to that state's security. (9)

Basing on Cohen's definition of ethnic nationalism above, it can be argued that Darling's community was targeted because it was considered subversive to the state. Darling and her friends act as the focalizers who expose the atrocities levelled at the Ndebele by the Shona-dominated nationalist party ZANU-PF represented in the text by Robert Mugabe. As they reflect on the (his)stories of Zimbabwe, the children challenge their marginalisation through irony and satire. For example, Bastard, one of Darling's friends, is hopeful that one day, he will rule Zimbabwe. He goes ahead to declare that he will become the president of Zimbabwe when he grows up. The others chide him. "But you have to be an old, old man to become president […] I saw a picture of the president in a magazine. He was also with the president of Zambia and Malawi and South Africa and other presidents. They were all old; you have to be like a grandfather first" (60-61). Interestingly, however, Bastard is not bothered that he will be old and white-haired before he becomes the Zimbabwean president. "As long as I'll have money. Presidents are very rich" (61). It is worth noting that the political environment created by poor leadership has adverse effects on the young generation. This is the reason why Bastard only focuses on enriching himself when he becomes president.

It is evident from the above example that African presidents hold on to power for very long periods, as observed by the child narrators. Months later when Darling goes to America to visit Aunt Fostalina, it is equally an electioneering period. She is surprised that unlike in her own country, the aspirant there is a youthful man. She observes,

> On TV that pretty man Obama who has been saying Yes We Can, America, Yes We Can, is becoming president. He does not look old like our own president; he looks maybe like our president's child. There are crowds […], just people, and they are happy and cheering and clapping. Prince looks at it all with tears in his eyes and shakes my hand until I think he wants to break it, and says, See? That is democracy, we can't even say that word back home…. (156).

It is obvious that Darling is accustomed to the old African presidents who have totally refused to relinquish their presidential seats. Therefore, the youthful Obama impresses her and she wishes that the same could happen back home. She feels that perhaps a younger president would improve things in her country. The observation by Darling is a pointer to the possibility of Zimbabweans effecting change through strategic essentialism. In their capacity as ethnic groups or minority groups marginalised and rendered subalterns, they can claim power from their peripheral locations to present themselves as better leaders as Obama did. Additionally, Darling and the other minorities could join forces and fight for their rights then bring change in their country.

The child narrative voice also (re)presents the social histories in Zimbabwe. These social histories include emasculation of the fathers and religion. To begin with, Darling and her friends focalize the emasculated father. Traditionally, it is the duty of a man to be a breadwinner for his family. Mothers have been tasked with the responsibility of raising children while fathers provide for the family. Darling and her friends lack basic human needs like food and proper clothing. Their houses are also made of tin shacks. The penury in their neighbourhood is so high that they have resorted to stealing guavas lest they die of hunger. Despite the constipating effect of consuming too many guavas, the children still risk being hurt by the security guards in Budapest just so they can eat guavas. As subalterns,

Darling and her friends have no choice but to find means of survival. Their fathers have no jobs because of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe at the time. The crisis which was caused by ZANU-PF's misrule leads to joblessness. Mlambo (2011) resonates that,

> The twin major productive sectors, industry and agriculture suffered the brunt of a combination of a poor political strategy and western economic sanctions and were forced to lay off thousands of workers Industry and agriculture, formerly dominated by western multinational investors were immensely affected by the sudden anti-western indigenization policies of ZANU-PF government which best manifested in the so called Fast Track Land Reform Programme in which the government expropriated white-owned farms for black settlement.(8)

From Mlambo's observations above, it is clear that ZANU-PF's idea of reclaiming white owned farms and giving them to the blacks did more harm than good. It resulted in sanctions from the European Union. Many countries refused to trade with Zimbabwe and this led to the collapse of very vital sectors of the economy. Resultantly, jobs were lost and so were livelihoods. The fathers lacked means of providing for their families. The desolation of these fathers led to some immigrating to other countries. For instance, Darling's father relocates to South Africa to look for a job, amid protests from his wife and mother. He disappears and never writes to tell them how he is faring on. He also does not visit or send money and presents like he had promised. This creates resentment towards him from Darling. The only time he comes back is when he is bed ridden, suffering from AIDS. He does not even recognize his daughter, Darling. He calls her "my boy" and she does not bother to correct him (91). The same family he abandoned is the one tasked with the responsibility of nursing him. As a breadwinner, he has failed his family. Other men spend their day playing draughts for lack of a better thing to do. Darling and her friends supposedly get an opportunity to go to Budapest because their fathers are not concerned with their whereabouts. The security guard in Budapest admonishes the children's fathers for having failed in their duty and that was why the children had become petty thieves. He tells them, "It's your fathers who've been coming here, preying on the sweat of decent citizens, isn't it? Isn't it? And now you're surveying this place on their behalf, aren't you?" (108). It is evident from the guard's outburst that the children's fathers have neglected their responsibility as providers and as a result, their children have resorted to thievery as a means of survival. Darling is keen enough to note the desperation in their fathers as having been brought about by dictatorship and joblessness. In the African set up, a man who cries is considered weak. Darling affirms this when she explains that the men only put up brave faces in the presence of their women. They walk with their heads held high looking strong. This was however not the case when they were on their own. Darling narrates,

> They fell apart like crumbling towers and wept with the wretched grief offorgotten concubines. And when they returned to the presence of their women and children and everybody else, they stuck hands deep inside torn pockets until they felt their dry thighs, kicked little stones out of the way, and erected themselves like walls again, but then the women, who knew all the ways of weeping and all there was to know about falling apart, would not be deceived. (76)

It is clear from Darling's observation that the men feel emasculated by the fact that they are unable to take good care of their families by providing their basic needs. This is an issue which lowers their esteem as the heads of the homes. Mlambo (2011) resonates this when he observes that "[w]hen fatherhood delineate ability in a man to provide the basics of his family needs, an emasculated father easily comes to be identified by his inability to provide- the distinctive mark separating him from real able fathers" (2). Fathers in Paradise who are a representation of the Zimbabwean fathers have thus been emasculated due to their predicament of being jobless. Escapism has become their sole recourse. They do so by immigrating to other countries. Darling recalls an uncle who went to work in the mines in South Africa and came back with a serious lung infection. The emasculation of Ndebele fathers in Zimbabwe can be symbolic in the sense that it represents the dystopia experienced in a self-governed country. The hegemonic practices propagated by the Shona government towards the Other i.e. the governed are responsible for the sorry state of affairs. Another social history which the children discuss is Christianity. Most of their parents have subscribed to the new religion wholeheartedly. I propose that their allegiance to Christianity is propelled by their desperate economic status. The high levels of poverty have made them faithful to the new religion. Darling's grandmother, Mother of Bones, forces her to go to church even though she doesn't understand much about Christianity. She laments about going to church during Easter to commemorate Christ's death. Innocently, she remarks that her grandmother insists that they go to church because it is the least they can do since they are all dirty sinners whom Jesus did to save. She however questions, "what I know is that I myself wasn't there when it all happened, so how can I be a sinner?" (19). Darling's observation is an indicator that the doctrines of Christianity have not been explained to her well. She is therefore in a state of limbo. Her friends ask her to join them as they go to play and when she responds that she is going to church because Jesus died on this particular day, Bastard retorts, "My father says your church is just kaka, and that your Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mboro is an idio[t]" (21). Bastard's response to Darling discloses that not all natives have embraced Christianity.

Religious hybridity is an accepted practice in Paradise. The inhabitants have adopted the new religion but this has not stopped them from also engaging in their cultural activities and beliefs. This is evident when Darling is about to leave for America. Before her departure, her mother takes her to Voldoza, the traditional healer. He is supposed to ward off any evil that Darling may encounter on her way there or while in America. In the novel she recounts how "A few days before I left, [m]other took me to Voldoza who made me smoke from a guard and I sneezed and sneezed and he smiled and said, [t]he ancestors are your angels, they will bear you to America" (150). Voldoza then calls on the ancestral spirits to take care of Darling in the diaspora. Furthermore, he ties a bone to a rainbow coloured string and ties it on her waist. This is to become Darlings "weapon" against evil spirits (150). She is however disarmed at the airport when found with her bone. Moreover, when Mother of Bones calls her pastor, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro to come and pray for her son, Darling's father when he comes back from South Africa suffering from AIDS, he claims that he has been infested by a spirit which is making him sick. As a man of the cloth, he is expected to pray so that he casts out the spirit. Ironically, apart from praying he asks for two white virgin goats to be taken to

the mountain to be slaughtered for sacrifice. Afterwards, Darling's father would be bathed in their blood (99). It is evident from the above discussion that Christianity as an effect of colonization is embedded in the Zimbabwean culture. Religious hybridity has however been achieved since the people have not fully abandoned their indigenous religious cultural beliefs. Marriage as a social history is also focalized by Darling and her friends. Hardships have led to the rise of infidelity in marriages. These hardships are brought about majorly by joblessness. An example is Darling's father who leaves for South Africa with the promise that he would send money, gifts and write back home. These promises are not fulfilled. He only comes back home later bed-ridden with AIDS, after having led a promiscuous life there. In his absence, Darling's mother engages in an extra-marital affair with an unknown man who sneaks into their tin shack house at night and slips away in the wee hours of the morning. Darling is a witness to her mother's infidelity, even though they imagine that she is deep asleep when he comes visiting. Darling comments, "I hear the door creaking open, and [m]other whispers something to the man and he whispers back. I cannot hear the words properly; they are speaking like they are stealing" (64). Darling's observation that her mother and the stranger are speaking as if they are stealing is symbolic in the sense that their affair is illicit, which can be equated to theft. Moreover, Darling and her friends observe that it is not only the women who engage in extra-marital affairs, but so do the men. As they enact a scene in ER in preparedness for "removal of Chipo's stomach" (78), Darling comments, "[w]e heard the women talking yesterday about Nosizi, that short, light-skinned girl who took over MaDumanes's husband when MaDumane went to Namibia to be a housemaid" (ibid).

In conclusion, this section has examined how the child narrative voice in *We Need New Names* has been used effectively to reflect, shape and re-imagine Zimbabwean histories. Darling and her friends have executed this through their discussion of the different phases of history in Zimbabwe. They have also openly discussed aspects of Zimbabwe's history which have been suppressed by the government, for instance the extrajudicial killings of the Ndebele. Moreover, the child narrators have also commented on the dictatorial reign in Zimbabwe, where and election malpractices have secured leadership for one individual for too long. They have also discussed the social histories in Zimbabwe for instance religion, marriage and emasculation of their fathers. Through their status as subalterns, the children have strategically essentialised themselves to speak about the various suppressed (hi)stories of Zimbabwe as discussed.

Conclusion

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

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Firstly, authors should venture more into child narrators and discuss not only troubled childhoods but also the milestones independent countries have achieved. Secondly, authors should also use child narrators in their stories to debate on the scientific inventions and how these affect the young generations.

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