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The Liberated Child: Explorations And Experiences of The Girl-Child in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo (2013).

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Abstract: This study examines the representation of girlhood in NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names*, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the liberated girl child in post-colonial Zimbabwean literary context. The narrative follows the life of Darling, whose experiences move between the harsh realities of her home in Zimbabwe and the promises of a new life abroad, in America and through this journey, the novel challenges conventional notions of childhood liberation and interrogates the impact of socio-economic instability, migration, and cultural dislocation on children, especially girls. The study integrates developmental psychology theories from Freud and Piaget to assess how children construct their identities against the backdrop of crisis-related challenges. The study argues that the Zimbabwean crisis severely constrains children's freedom, positioning them as the ultimate victims in turbulent socio-political environments as they navigate the challenges of urban poverty, familial disintegration, and the longing for a better future. Through contextualizing Darling's experiences within broader discussions of globalization and diaspora, this study contributes to the discourse on childhoods, suggesting that the concept of the liberated child is complex and multifaceted. The study adopts thematic analysis of broader themes such as societal responsibility, the intricate relationship between family and identity, and the pervasive effects of crisis on the hopes and dreams of a generation to question whether child liberation is synonymous with freedom from societal constraints and to assess if child liberation instead comes with new forms of oppression and struggle for children.

Keywords: liberation, girlhood, social protection, Zimbabwean literature

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INTRODUCTION

The concept 'liberated' is contested in as much as it is multifaceted. *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (2002) defines the concept as behaving in the way an individual wants and not accepting traditional rules about behaviour. This definition is too broad in approach especially if referenced closer to the experiences and development of children. In a socio-economic landscape increasingly characterized by instability and vulnerability, formal social security mechanisms often fall short of addressing the diverse needs of communities, especially the girl-child. *We Need New Names* is a debut novel by NoViolet Bulawayo, a Zimbabwean writer who lives in the diaspora but was born in Tsholotsho, Zimbabwe. The setting of the novel moves to the United States of America but it is first set in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city and on the background of the post 2000 crisis in Zimbabwe wherein the crisis is captured through the experiences of a girl-child narrator, Darling. Darling tells the story about the Zimbabwean situation and the world around her together with her childhood friends, Chipso, Stina, and Sbho.

We Need New Names can be classified under the category of 'fiction of crisis' which according to Gikandi (1987), is not overtly concerned with specific social modes, but more with the symptoms rather than the

socio-historical dynamics of the people's experiences. This justifies why the novel is so obsessed with the hungry children, political violence among the Paradise residents, people dissenting Zimbabwe to various regional and international destinations without dwelling much on and critiquing the historical dynamics that are part of the causes of this crisis befalling the society. Masten and Narayan (2012) argue that the family is the primary agent of socialization and, during periods of crisis, serves as the principal protective system that promotes children's safety, resilience, healthy development, and the continuity of societal values despite adverse socio-economic conditions. In a crisis situation, the family guarantees a positive development of children and must socialize them into orthodox adults ensuring their safety, prosperity and society's continued existence despite the prevailing adverse socio-economic environment. However, children facing a crisis situation employ avoidance and engagement strategies to adapt positively and function effectively as individuals, at home, school and within the community. (Berejena and Lombard 2020). Unlike adults, children in *We Need New Names*, rarely look back at their childhood depravities but they always look forward and are always optimistic about life despite the crisis that might seem to hinder their ambitions. Whenever there are no regulating structures such as adults, children may appear 'liberated' but to a limited extent. Thus, in *We Need New Names*,

Bulawayo presents children generally as carefree, naive, and often adventurous, hence they never seriously consider matters affecting their families or society.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a desktop research method and adopted a qualitative, textual analysis approach to examine how the girl child is represented as well as interrogating the exploration of childhoods and child liberties in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* which is the primary source of data. The study explores how the girl child negotiates social, political, economic, and cultural challenges in Zimbabwe and the diaspora using literary criticism, child development and postcolonial theories to situate the 'liberated' child within contexts of migration, neo-colonialism and cultural dislocation in Zimbabwe and America.

LITERATURE REVIEW

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly within feminist and postcolonial studies for its representation of childhoods, gender and cultural challenges in Zimbabwe and its diaspora. According to Chitando (2016) the novel foregrounds the resilience and agency of the girl child and demonstrates girls negotiate oppressive social and political environments through creativity and humour among other survival strategies. Chitando (2016) investigates the resilience and agency of the girl child in the novel and contends that Darling embodies strength despite the socio-economic challenges surrounding her. Chitando further posits that the girl child in Bulawayo's narrative is neither passive nor powerless, instead, she develops survival strategies that enable her to navigate poverty, displacement, and uncertainty. African women writers have increasingly foregrounded the experiences of young girls to challenge patriarchal structures and expose the social realities that shape female identity. Similarly, Makokha (2020) examines Bulawayo's use of the child narrator, arguing that it allows readers to engage more deeply with Zimbabwe's post-independence realities, because the child's voice exposes social inequalities, gendered experiences and even political failures with remarkable honesty. Wilkinon (2016) also examines Bulawayo's use of a child narrator and argues that Darling's perspective enables the novel to address complex social and political issues that might be difficult to articulate through adult narration. This perspective is significant because it positions Darling not merely as a victim of circumstance but as an active observer and interpreter of her world.

Other scholars such as Gikandi (1987) and Ashcroft (2002) argue that postcolonial African literature functions as a site where marginalized voices can contest dominant narratives and reclaim agency. Within this tradition, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) presents the experiences of a young girl

navigating poverty, displacement, and social upheaval while striving to construct a meaningful identity in the crises hit Zimbabwe. The experiences of children during Zimbabwe's political and economic instability in *We Need New Names* are inseparable from the broader collapse of the country's social institutions. Job-Wota and Nwayanwu (2025) suggest that the novel portrays how economic hardship and failed political promises accelerate children's emotional and psychological development. Darling's childhood is shaped by displacement, hunger, and insecurity, yet these hardships contribute to her growing awareness of social injustice and her determination to pursue a better future. Ngoshi (2016) argues that the child characters, especially Darling and her friends, are not merely innocent observers but hey function as critics of society who expose corruption, poverty, violence, and hypocrisy through their playful language and behavior which allow them to question authority in ways that adults cannot. Although Ngoshi's article focuses on carnival and protest, it shows how Darling and other children acquire agency by speaking back to authority, questioning social norms, and exposing injustice and supports arguments about the empowerment and liberation of the girl child within oppressive postcolonial circumstances.

Moji (2015) argues that the process of migration in *We Need New Names* involves the translation and reconstruction of identity, which ultimately bears on the liberties of the girl child as presented in *We Need New Names*. Relatedly, Abdul-Hamid (2020), argues that the oppression of women and girls is closely connected to broader structures of political and environmental domination. His study demonstrates how female characters endure poverty, social exclusion, and patriarchal control while continuing to sustain families and communities. The analysis highlights the burdens borne by women and girls but also acknowledges their resilience and capacity for resistance. Matsika (2025) argues that Bulawayo foregrounds women's power and agency despite the realities of poverty, displacement, and marginalization. The study suggests that female characters actively negotiate oppressive circumstances and contribute to personal and communal regeneration. This perspective aligns with feminist readings that interpret Darling's journey as one of empowerment rather than victimhood.

Despite this growing body of scholarship on *We Need New Names*, there remains limited research specifically examining the concept of the liberated girl child. The existing studies have addressed resilience, migration, identity, and childhood narration separately, but few have utilised these themes to explore how liberation is constructed through the experiences of a girl protagonist. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how Darling's experiences of poverty, displacement, cultural transition, and personal growth contribute to the emergence of a liberated girl-child identity.

The liberated child: Needs and social upbringing in *We Need New names*

Children need proper socialisation but, the process of socialising them seems to be at odds with their liberty as depicted in *We Need New Names*. Chastising children is part of socialisation but Social upbringing of the children is dependent on one's socialisation which refers to the way children learn to behave like people around them and in so doing, children require conditions that would allow them to understand their environment and to identify with it. The term socialisation has been defined by Chambers (1973:16) as the process by which the individual is adapted to his social environment and in the process, the individual becomes recognised as a member of that particular socialisation. In an African context, the socialisation of children is initially a prerogative of the immediate family which later transforms to be a communal responsibility with time as the child develops. The African socialisation process, according to Nondo and Mhlanga (2014:3), is centered on the concept of *Hunhu/Ubuntu* which constitutes the African way of life, basing on a bundle of values such as honesty, hard work, human dignity, and respect for human beings among other values which bind the African community together. There are innumerable categories of children's needs presented in *We Need New Names* which affects the liberation of the girl child. As much as Darling is portrayed as a liberated child, she strikes readers as a victim of that liberty. She becomes a child who lives against the values of *Hunhu/Ubuntu* as expressed by Samkange and Samkange (1980). Darling's exposure to unregulated technology whilst in America has heavily affected their innocence and humane character typical of African children and thus reflecting the impact of uncensored liberty on the development of children. Darling becomes unreasonably engrossed and drenched in the online schooling and she confesses that the TV has taught her that if she is talking to someone, she has to look him in the eye, even if it's an adult and even if it's rude (Bulawayo 2013). Darling's new experiences in America reflects the difference between African and Western methods of bringing up children. Bulawayo first presents Darling initially as a child who is cognizant of the fundamentals of African humanity which she has internalised as part of her childhood upbringing. She, at this juncture, has the liberty to remain "African" in her values but unfortunately, upon coming into contact with technology, Darling's values and childhood is gradually eroded. Without the necessary parental guidance which informs the upbringing of the African child, Darling becomes a victim of cyber influence.

Whilst in America, Darling lacks a constructive social relationship because she spent most of her time with her "corrupted" friend, Marina, on the internet watching explicit content. Darling herself, observes that the film which they were watching contains some disturbing images as a result, it erodes the innocence of the viewing children who ended up acting along the film. Therefore, Darling loses her African

values in pursuit of her personal liberty. Darling's migration from Zimbabwe to the United States forces her to negotiate compound cultural identities which resulted in feelings of alienation and disorientation. While migration offers opportunities for advancement, it also creates new challenges that influence one's understanding of selfhood. This analysis is particularly relevant to discussions of liberation because it demonstrates that freedom is not simply geographical mobility but also the ongoing struggle to define oneself within changing and mutating environments.

Darling lacks family and responsible society around her, which have the obligation to protect her and other children as well as to mould them to be valuable stake holders in its affairs. Darling and her friends are presented as serial adventurers which signifies how the crisis in Zimbabwe had incapacitated the family and society's obligation to look after children. The economic meltdown, forces Darling's mother to leave her family and home in search of money to keep them alive. This activity severely hampers the mother's ability to protect Darling in a nation bedevilled with socio-economic problems. The children do not have positive role models as those who are supposed to show them a positive future such as Bastard who points out that when they were older, they would steal the bigger things in the houses in Budapest.

The 'crisis' period in Zimbabwe rearranged the father-daughter relationship in negative ways. Darling hates her father for going to South Africa and coming back sick and, she wishes that he dies so that she can have the liberty to go out and play with her friends. She accuses her father of failing to fulfil his moral obligation of fending for the family. Muchemwa in Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) has noted that the space that separates children from their fathers engenders emotions of endearment, strongly mixed with violence. Darling's father by leaving her without sitting her down and explaining things creates within Darling a sense of abandonment. In terms of social and economic responsibilities, Darling feels that she was 'fathered' by her mother and this leads to her patricidal feelings when the father is on his deathbed. Darling's feelings towards her father brings lots of questions to the concept of fatherhood and leaves both the narrators and the readers in a situation where they cannot know if it is justified to love the father or to hate him. As a result of the deepening crisis in Zimbabwe, different characters in *We Need New Names* have according to Raftopoulos (2009), devised various ways to sustain their developing children and their families at large. Darling becomes a divided soul on this matter, on one hand she inwardly wishes death for her ailing father because he dumps his family in pursuit of unachievable economic hopes in South Africa. On the other hand, she feels socially responsible for caring for him during the absence of other family members and she tries in vain to conceal the father's sickness from public scorn, especially from her peers. It is through Darling's

experiences that readers are made to understand how the father figure is played in the Zimbabwean society during the height of socio-economic crisis.

Identity and childhood liberties

We Need New Names portrays a fractured African identity which is preserved and promoted beyond the post-colonial state through institutions like churches and formal schools which control the psychology of the local population and resulting in the alienation and exile of their subjects. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo presents an education system offered by Zimbabwean schools as one which de-centres the African educated and creates confused identities. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo expresses the importance of the fulfilment of the children's need to know. This defines children's access to information and how they use the available information in their developmental stages towards adulthood. The need to know rears the unlimited anxiety and the inquisitiveness that characterizes children's character. The family and social institutions like the formal schools and churches plays a central role in the empowerment of the information accessed and utilised by children as they develop. In formal schools, the colonial syllabi were unfortunately adopted by the post-colonial state despite some of their shortfalls. The education system is designed to further foreign interests at the expense of indigenous values as it emphasis on the glory of the West and the praising of foreign history and heroes. Even the social games played by children are socially engineered to control the psychology of the locals. The games such as 'Country game' and 'Find Bin Laden' played by Darling and her friends helps in the furtherance of the West supremacy over the rest of the world.

Darling is a product of such education. Despite the closure of the schools due to the deepening crisis, during the period of her attendance, Darling was schooled to embrace the West and hate her own kind. According to Darling, the best and loveable President is Barrack Obama whom she compares with his Zimbabwean counterpart with whom she describes with negativity. Even Stina shares similar sentiments with Darling, when she describes the age group trend of African Presidents from Zambia, Malawi and South Africa whom she saw in a magazine. To Stina, it appears as if one has to be a grandfather first to be an African President. On another level the magazine pictures reflect the extent to which the media can be used to manipulate public opinion. It is through the magazine pictorial that the children develop a perception and are sensitised towards African politics. Consequently, Darling vilifies the Zimbabwean government and valorises the opposition parties and its supporter's. The irony of Western education is that it creates social gaps between the educated elite and the uneducated members of the society as presented through Darling, who often laughs at her friend's illiteracy. Even the children's social perception is altered as reflected by Darling's social

choices where the best musicians are the likes of Celine Dion and the best footballers, to Darlings world are foreign such as Drogba and not local legends who are part of her identity. Whilst the researcher acknowledges individual taste to choices, Darling's choices in this novels are well informed by a cultured ideology which seem to have been implanted as part of the education curriculum. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo uses the inquisitive nature of a child to engage the reader in a discussion on controversial subjects such as state violence, HIV/AIDS, child molestation and abortion". Instead of assisting her fellow playmates, Darling feels that she is a better 'being' than her peers. Darling feels that she is the 'smartest' amongst her peers because she can read, write, speak, and comprehend English better than them. Darling is very proud to have talked to a white person over the phone. What is of interest about this is the fact that she never internalises the gravity and importance attached to the conversation by the other speaker, who cannot contend with the evacuation of their kind from the property they had acquired rights for and held its title deeds.

Most of the educated characters in *We Need New Names*, decide to escape and dissociate themselves from the poverty of their people and society instead of using their education to find solutions to the problems. They decide to be associated with seemingly blooming economies like the one provided by South Africa and other international destinations such as the United States of America. As Gikandi (2001) further observes that the risky journey is simply an attempt to escape poverty because of perceived or real economic and political threats to their lives back home. Raftopoulos (2009) further postulates that, the economic hardships of post-2000 Zimbabwe made exile the immediate escape plan from the problems caused by the dwindling economic opportunities. This is represented in the text by Darling's father, a local graduate, who escaped to South Africa and Aunt Fostalina who 'escaped' to the United States of America. These 'escape' movements by these characters reaffirm Gikandi's (2001) theories on globalization and migration argues that Africans' motivation to leave their countries for the West is neither seeking cultural hybridity nor ontological difference, but theirs is a quest for a modern life in the European sense of the word. *We Need New Names* exposes how Zimbabweans leave the country in 'droves' to destinations some of whose names they cannot even pronounce. Many leaving their families and children behind, but leaving with the hope that the unknown destination might yield fortunes for the upkeep of the self and the family. For the likes of Darling, leaving the country is nothing much besides escaping the 'kaka', hunger and poverty in Paradise, (Bulawayo 2013). On the other hand, Darling had a strong feeling of nostalgia as she could not withstand the near life-denying American climate which limited her freedom of associating with her friends. She laments that if she were at home, in Zimbabwe, she knows she would not be standing around because something called snow was

preventing her from going outside to live life. She felt that there are times though that no matter how much food she eats, she finds the food does nothing for me, because she was hungry for her country and nothing was going to fix that. In this instance, Darling's longing for home appears to impede the forging of adaptable migrant identity, (Charles 2016). In this situation, Darling is presented as a child who is in social detention in America where snow is depriving her of childhood spirit of going outside and socialising. As a result of the solitary confinement, a nostalgia for friends and home develops in her and she misses playing games with her childhood friends. As she meditates, Darling feels that she really misses and she is yearning for her country showing that the supposed liberating journey to America is indeed imprisoning the children. Hunger for one's country defines one's sentimental and nationalistic attachment to the country, which is normally imparted from childhood. This symbolises the reason why those who emigrated from Zimbabwe during the crisis period still want to be associated with it despite leaving it. Darling's experiences in America reflects that with all its imperfections, home is best but what it needs are 'new names' who will change its fortunes, to make it a sweet home.

Darling is also part of the group of children in Paradise who manage to escape from the 'kaka', the poverty and filth in Paradise for the United States of America. Darling escapes with the hope of enjoying both the commodities that are in short supply in Zimbabwe, as well as enjoying the American dream. This allows Bulawayo to question the concept of the liberated child through Darlings experiences in America. Initially, like the majority of Zimbabweans living in the crisis period, Darling believes that going to America or some other destinations beyond Zimbabwean borders means that they are liberated. Through Aunt Fostalina, Darling and Tshaka Zulu, Bulawayo demonstrates that migration has its problems which are more complex and challenging than the crisis at home, in Zimbabwe. On top of working numerous and dangerous jobs, Tshaka Zulu, has to dodge the immigration authorities and cede the power to mould his family to the dictates of America. Tshaka Zulu laments the fact that he could not beat his children when they stepped out of line because of the dictates of American law (Bulawayo 2013). He sees this as problematic as it produces a weak family in the diaspora as opposed to the family, he had back home which had strong connections. NoViolet Bulawayo contends that, the liberty of children is determined by the nature of the child's upbringing and the society in which the child is growing. In order to produce a model African child, foreign lands may not provide the best socio-cultural environments that suits the expectations of Africanism, without conflicting the children's liberty.

Contrary to the escape route adopted by other sections of the population, is the portrayal of the conservative members of the Zimbabwean society who

are not easily moved from the founding ideology of nationhood as portrayed through Mother of Bones and MotherLove. Mother of Bones is optimistic that every member of the Zimbabwean society is part of the solution to the challenges at hand. As if to confirm her ideology, Darling's father returned from the South African mines empty handed and unfortunately laden with 'the sicknesses' (Bulawayo 2013). He unfortunately wasted himself for the benefits which neither he nor his family have enjoyed and as such, his daughter, who he now confuses for a 'son' out of his sickness hates him with a passion for dissenting her and the whole family and his sickness has heavily impacted on the social life of his daughter. Hence in the text, one finds that Darling and the rest of the children cannot wait to leave the country. Despite the wave of 'change' sweeping across Paradise as spread by the youths such as Bornfree in *We need new names*, Mother of Bones remains resolute to the founding ideology of Zimbabwe to the extent that even the children who were distributing the flyers of change on behalf of Bornfree and his cronies dare not to slide the flyer under Mother of Bones' door. In the process of mobilising for political change, Bulawayo shows how politicians take advantage of vulnerable members of the society. The unemployed youths and young girls like Darling engage in the distribution of political flyers and mass mobilisation. Bonfree's murdered in a spate of politically motivated violence purported to be instigated by state sympathisers indecently exposes the children who witnessed the unfolding of violence within their midst and they ended up rehearsing the violent episodes whilst in their playground. Rehearsing the violent episodes also shows how the culture of violence is passing down to the next generation. The fact that the children are able to rehearse Bonfree's death shows how they have stored (in their minds) the actions of the perpetrators for future use.

Characters like Mother of Bones, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, and Vodloza, dedicate themselves to the spiritual world as a coping mechanism to their daily struggles and this provided an opportunity to escape the daily struggles and hope in Zimbabwe's ability to turn its fortunes around. Muzondidya in Raftopoulos (2005:196) has it that, because of the crisis in Zimbabwe, people turned to the church for both moral and spiritual support but the church became critical of the state this is because the people wanted spiritual fulfilment from the church. In *We Need New Names*, religion is regarded as a form of temporary 'escape' from the socio-economic problems affecting the society by many devout congregants such as Mother of Bones. Although African socialisation plays an important role in the development of the African child, and has some positives to draw inspiration from, Okolie in Jones and Jones (1988:33) observes that it appears intimidated and disarmed by its Western counterparts when it comes to some certain challenges. Even the African Church in *We Need New Names* is less attractive according to Darlings wishes and expectations. The church in *We Need New*

Names has attained two important metaphorical meanings. To the adults, the church seems to be a point of salvation, where they would get temporary solace from spiritual matters assaulting them as well as the crisis affecting the whole society. On the other hand, religion is brought to test through Darling and Chipó's experiences. Darling has many questions which reveal her dislike of the church and its processes and proceedings.

The two children watch the prophet's healing process of the pretty woman who was brought by her family and the traumatising experience resurrects memories of sexual abuse in Chipó. It is at the church healing session that the circumstances behind Chipó's pregnancy, which is a result of rape by her grandfather is revealed. The novel reflects on the impact of the sexual abuse on Chipó's esteem and she consequently loses confidence in public, even with her own peers. Darling reports that, Chipó could not run along with others, she is mute and she looks around like she was lost but has found herself, (Bulawayo 2013:40). Instead of the children enjoying the church proceedings, they instead endure, not only the traumatising healing process, but the singing and the sermon reflecting the level at which religion seems to oppress and undermine the children's spirit of carefreeness as there is a requisite deportment for congregants in church which Darling is always transgressing.

However, the irony of Chipó pregnancy is that, the adults have decided to take no action against the rapist grandfather and have left the minor to her own means, which exposes the vulnerability of the girl child. It is Darling's conviction that this social wrong, against the girl child, must be corrected and she teamed up with her colleagues to attempt an abortion. This symbolises the need for a collective effort by the victims of the crisis in Zimbabwe to mobilise efforts to improve on their situation, no matter how small their effort might seem. The crisis is regarded a social evil on the Zimbabwean society which now needs collective intervention to improve, as symbolised by the children's adoption of names physicians before they could execute the abortion.

Darling and her colleagues, young as they were, were quite aware that Mother of Bones does not tolerate opposition politics (Bulawayo 2013). On the other hand, MotherLove's character also represents some local Zimbabwean nationals who believe in hard work and staying put as an alternative to national and family sustenance. MotherLove is also a symbol of the local Zimbabwean people who object the idea of depending on foreign donor funded hand-outs. She simply stands and observes as locals were receiving hand-outs from the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) people and she declined the packages offered to her by the two NGO white women. The presentation of characters such as MotherLove and Mother of Bones represents those people who assured that Zimbabwe did not implode

during the crisis period, although such characters are constantly looked down upon by both the narrator and the novelist. Through MotherLove's conduct, it can be deduced that the NGO's donations were not directly addressing the needs of the Paradise residents. This is because, as alluded to by Darling, the consignment is made up of consumables such as clothes and food stuffs yet the people should have been assisted with more valuable donations which would improve their livelihoods. As Darling observes, that the adults were getting small packets of beans and sugar and mealie-meal but you can see from their faces that they not satisfied but, in the end, they turn and head back to the shacks with the things, (Bulawayo 2013). At such a critical moment of socio-economic malaise in Zimbabwe, Paradise residence and their children needed tangible and durable donations such as restoration of basic social services, improved accommodation, restoration of teachers and basic health care as opposed to the toys and food hand-outs they were given by the NGO people. The irony of the distributed toys as suggested by Darling, is that they are symbols of violence and distributing them to the children cultivates a mentality of violence in them. Having received the toys, Darling and her peers immediately play 'war' with the hope of killing each other with their brand-new guns from America.

However, the option of 'escape' from the marauding crisis bedevilling Zimbabwe in *We Need New Names* is a reserve for the protagonist just like in Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, where only the narrator manages to escape from Miguel street and leaves Trinidad with the hope of making something of his own. In light of these two seemingly related 'escape' routes, the convergence point is on the idea that, hope for progress is somewhere else not within the society in which the characters find themselves. Darling is likewise the only fortunate one from among her peers who 'escapes' the Zimbabwean crises to the United States of America. This situation negatively impacted on the identity of the immigrants especially the girl child, as represented by Darling who upon reaching America developed an extremely negative perception about Zimbabwe and its poverty stricken people.

There is an important link between Darling's family history and that of Zimbabwe as a country. Darling states that the prophet at the church says that she is possessed by her grandfather who did not have a decent burial after he was killed by the whites during the war for feeding and hiding 'terrorists'. Darling says:

Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro was trying to get the spirit inside me out, they say I am 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... so now the church people say his spirit

is inside me and won't leave until his body is buried right, (Bulawayo 2013:20).

According to Darling, the 'terrorists' were trying to get the country back because the whites had stolen it. This reference to history and critiquing some important historical epochs and facts is important for the development of an African identity as enshrined in the Kawaïda philosophy. According to Karenga (2008), Africans should always have an ongoing dialogue with African culture and seek answers which concerns central issues of life and the world. Symbolically, the horrors of being possessed which is haunting Darling are a result of irregularities in the family history. The horrors symbolise the crisis which is haunting Zimbabwe as nation, which is a result of a warped national history. The spirit in Darling's body will not leave her until the grandfather's body is properly buried. By the same token, Bulawayo seems to be implying that, Zimbabwe's problems will not end unless Zimbabweans revisit and recover what they lost as a nation, the point referred to by Achebe (1988), as the point where the rain began to beat us.

The church does not even provide the answers to problems affecting its congregants, and instead, the Reverend is fond of stealing from the unsuspecting church members. Darling cannot find a convincing explanation about religion and some spiritual and religious myths associated with the church. Among other issues, she cannot understand how she could be a sinner and be one of the people whom Jesus had died for when she feels that she was not there when it all happened. She also fails to understand how her grandfather's spirit can be said to be in her yet she does not feel it. Such unfulfilled questions from children increases their anxiety to interrogate realities around them, hence children are regarded as inquisitive. According to Sutherland *et al* (1991:21), the duty of the parents to positively respond to children's questions and they should not regard this curiosity as being bothersome but should find answers that satisfy the paused questions hence stimulating new curiosities. The former colonisers, just like the spirit of Darling's grandfather, have employed a host of tactics to maintain their grip on the independent African nations such as Zimbabwe. According to Ashcroft *et. al* (2006:2) all post-colonial societies, are still subject in one way or the other to overt or subtle forms neo-colonial domination and that political independence has not solved. Some of the tactics have been exposed in *We Need New Names* which include the availing of foreign aid as a means to perpetrate post-colonialism because the aid is often attached to conditions which favours and advances Western ideology such as regime change agenda through funding and supporting anti-government and opposition politics, as represented by Bornfree, in the case of Zimbabwe.

Bulawayo also utilizes Darling's freedom and carefree character to make a reflection on Zimbabwe's contested

history and the contentious post-independence land and agrarian reform programme. As presented through Darling's comments, in *We Need New Names*, the whites stole Zimbabwean land and not just a piece but the whole country. Darling says:

If you are stealing something its better if it's small and hideable or something you can eat quickly like guavas. 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 we're trying to doing the first place, stealing not just a tiny piece but a whole country, (Bulawayo 2013:20).

When Budapest is 'overrun' by the Zimbabweans, Bulawayo does not delve into the real reasons why the Police Chief is able to attract such a large crowd which he uses to occupy Budapest. Budapest and its subsequent occupations becomes a metaphor of the year 2000 fast track land reform programme adopted by the Zimbabwean government to reverse the colonial land imbalances. However, instead of delving into the socio-historical dynamics that lead to the occupation of Budapest, Bulawayo, decides to focus on the chaos and violence suffered by the whites as well as their loss in the wake of the occupations. One might be tempted to counter-argue that Bulawayo this out by using the scene where Darling points out that the colonisers were foolish to try to steal a whole country. This observation is very important because besides stealing the country, they granted themselves rights over stolen the property and resources and they expected the Zimbabwean people who they had disadvantaged to preserve and uphold the same rights after a protracted war of liberation which they lost to Zimbabweans. Of interest to note, is the fact that when Zimbabwean land was 'stolen', the people's identity, freedom and spirituality was also stolen and damaged during the period colonial dominance. As a result of some deliberate distortions of African history, the children have been made to believe and indeed internalized the Paradise's view of blaming the Zimbabwean government for the crisis of which the government is also a victim of. Scholars such as Primorac (2006), blame the Zimbabwean government on engaging on the historic Agrarian reforms which she argues has affected private property rights and led to the free fall of the economy. Contrary to Primorac's view on land and property rights is Bulawayo's presentation through Darling's comment of how the former colonialists obtained the land and granted themselves rights over the same.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that the girl child is not liberated especially in a crisis affected society. In such a society, if the girl child tries to exercise their liberty, they will be exposing themselves to precarious conditions which further impede their positive development. It has been established in the discussion

that, parental and societal guidance help to keep checks on the developing children especially girls because with little care, they are very vulnerable and may develop into anti-social adults. It has been noted in the discussion that, what one teaches their children in the home or family will not restrict the children's freewill in social circles and even in their general development.

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