RAINBOW Vol. 14 (1) 2025
Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies
https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/rainbow

Postcolonial Memories and Emotional Dislocation in Zimbabwean Literature: A Study of Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

Azatu Azashi Agyo[1] ✉, Martins Okwoli Ogba[1], Materclaus Isah[1]
[1]English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

Article Info

Article History:
Received
8 March 2025
Approved
12 April 2025
Published
30 April 2025

Keywords: Maxim flouting, humor, clip

Abstract

This study examines the intersection of colonial and postcolonial memories, gender, and emotional dislocation in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). It explores how the novel portrays the enduring legacies of colonialism in shaping identity, cultural hybridity, and psychological experiences. While previous research has addressed themes of migration and cultural alienation in Bulawayo's work, there is limited analysis of the novel's engagement with colonial and postcolonial memories, particularly through the lens of gender and emotional trauma. This study addresses this gap by investigating how colonialism's lingering effects continue to shape individual and collective identities in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This research is grounded in postcolonial theory and trauma theory. Drawing on Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon, the study examines hybrid identities and the internalization of colonial hierarchies. Additionally, trauma theory, as articulated by Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch, provides insight into the emotional and psychological dislocation experienced by the characters, particularly in relation to migration and the intergenerational transmission of colonial trauma. A qualitative methodology is employed, using textual analysis and discourse analysis to examine the novel's representation of colonial legacies. *We Need New Names* was selected due to its critical engagement with postcolonial identity and migration. Findings reveal that colonial structures persist in economic struggles, cultural hybridity, and emotional alienation. Darling's migration to America highlights identity fragmentation, while language and cultural hybridity shape postcolonial selfhood. This research contributes to discussions on postcolonial identity, migration, and trauma. It underscores literature's role in reflecting historical and socio-political realities and deepens our understanding of identity formation in postcolonial societies.

How to cite (in APA style):

✉ Corresponding author:
English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Wukari, Nigeria,
agyo2016@fuwukari.edu.ng

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Agyo, A.A., Ogba, M.A., & Isah, M. (2025) Postcolonial Memories and Emotional Dislocation in Zimbabwean Literature: A Study of Noviolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names. (n.d.). *Rainbow : Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, *14*(1), 41-53. https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v14i1.22137

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial literature serves as a critical lens through which the enduring legacies of colonialism—its cultural, social, and psychological impacts—are examined. As Young (1995) asserts, postcolonialism is not merely a historical period but a body of writing that challenges dominant, often Eurocentric, narratives about the relationship between Western and non-Western societies. By foregrounding the perspectives of those marginalized by colonial and neo-colonial power dynamics, postcolonial literature reinterprets the world from the vantage point of the periphery, offering alternative and salient experiences that contest Western-centric narratives. NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) is a poignant example of such literature, engaging with themes of displacement, cultural hybridity, and socio-economic inequalities rooted in colonial legacies. The novel explores the far-reaching effects of colonial history on Zimbabwe and the complexities of the immigrant experience in the United States, emphasizing issues of cultural dislocation and identity crisis.

Colonialism, as a complex historical and cultural phenomenon, has been the subject of extensive analysis by scholars and historians, yielding diverse perspectives on its definition, scope, and origins. Many historians trace the genesis of colonialism to the era of "the Great Discoveries," a period marked by European exploration and the expansion of European powers across the globe, particularly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ferro, 1997). This epoch is inextricably linked to the establishment of colonies by European nations. While the term "colonialism" itself emerged in modern contexts, historical evidence indicates that practices associated with colonization date back to earlier periods. The etymology of the English word "colony" can be traced directly or indirectly to the Latin verb *colere*, signifying "to cultivate or till the land" (Benjamin, 2015), reflecting the early economic imperatives that often accompanied colonization, such as the exploitation of land and resources. The term "colony" entered the English lexicon in the fourteenth century, as documented by the *Encarta Dictionary*, marking a discernible shift in how nations perceived and categorized territories beyond their immediate borders.

It is essential to acknowledge that while the term "colony" has historical antecedents, the full conceptualization of "colonialism" as a systematized and organized structure for domination, exploitation, and control crystallized during modern Western history. As Bush (2006) elucidates, the Latin term *colonia*, denoting "a farm or settlement," served as the precursor to the English term "colony," but the conceptual framework of colonialism as a structured system of power and governance did not fully emerge until after 1850. This transition signified the formalization of imperial structures, frequently legitimized through ideologies of racial superiority and economic exploitation, which persisted into the late stages of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Colonialism, in this context, is construed as a product of modern Western history, intrinsically linked to the ascendance of European powers that engaged in territorial expansion through conquest, settlement, and the subjugation of non-European lands. The conceptualization of a systematic colonial structure was also closely intertwined with the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of capitalist economies, which relied heavily on the extraction of resources from colonies to fuel their industrial growth. This evolution in the historical understanding of colonialism is crucial for comprehending the enduring ramifications of imperialism on global power dynamics, cultures, and identities. Ongoing scholarly debates surrounding the definition of colonialism and its continued influence on contemporary issues are integral to postcolonial studies, as scholars endeavor to uncover the intricate legacies bequeathed by colonial powers.

Critics often draw parallels between colonialism and imperialism, although distinctions exist in their scope and application (Loomba, 1998). Loomba defines colonialism as the "conquest and control of other people's land and goods" (p. 2), suggesting that it is an ancient phenomenon. She distinguishes between two types: pre-capitalist, pre-European colonialism, and modern European colonialism, which arose alongside capitalism. Loomba further argues that while imperialism can function without formal colonies, colonialism involves direct and immediate control over a territory's economy and politics.

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Young (2001) differentiates between colonialism and imperialism, describing colonialism as "pragmatic" and imperialism as driven by ideology from the colonizing metropolis. Colonialism is seen as a practical means of exercising power over a colony's inhabitants to extract wealth, while imperialism seeks ideological dominance. Both are products of modernity, with their impacts extending globally from 1500 to 1950, during which most of the world fell under European or settler state control (Levy & Young, 2011).

Marxist critics associate colonialism and imperialism with capitalism's development, with Karl Marx noting that the discovery of new territories, such as the Americas, fueled capitalist expansion through trade, navigation, and industry (as cited in Young, 2001). Horvath (1972) defines colonialism as a form of "intergroup domination" where settlers from the colonizing power migrate permanently, exerting control over the indigenous population. He argues that colonialism is central to the capitalist world-economy, driven by the need for political and economic control.

This study seeks to address a significant gap in existing scholarship by examining the intersection of colonial and postcolonial legacies in *We Need New Names*, with a particular focus on identity formation, gender, and emotional dislocation. While previous studies have explored themes of migration, cultural alienation, and the politics of belonging in Bulawayo's work, there is a notable lack of comprehensive analysis that rigorously examines the novel's portrayal of colonial and postcolonial identities within the specific geographical and cultural context of Zimbabwe. By addressing this gap, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how colonialism continues to shape postcolonial identities and societal structures.

Said (1978), in his influential work *Orientalism*, introduced the concept of how Western powers created biased and stereotypical portrayals of Eastern societies to justify their control over these regions. Said argued that Western literature and culture depicted the East as exotic, backward, and inferior, which served as a way to maintain colonial dominance. This concept is particularly important for this study as it helps to understand how the colonial gaze shaped the identities of the colonized, which can be explored in the way Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* presents the tension between colonizers and colonized people and how the characters navigate their complex identities.

Bhabha (1994), another key figure, developed the idea of hybridity, which refers to the blending of cultures that occurs when colonizers and colonized interact. Bhabha argued that postcolonial identities are not fixed but are constantly changing and evolving in response to these cultural encounters. He also introduced the concept of the Third Space, where new cultural identities emerge through the interaction of colonized and colonizer. This theory is essential for this study as it helps explain how the characters in the novel create hybrid identities, influenced by both their traditional cultures and the colonial forces that have shaped them. Bhabha's work allows us to analyze how these characters are caught between two worlds and how their identities are shaped by the collision of these different cultural forces.

Fanon (1952), in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, focuses on the psychological effects of colonization. Fanon examined how colonized people often internalized the negative stereotypes imposed upon them by the colonizers, which led to feelings of inferiority and alienation. His work emphasizes the mental and emotional struggles of postcolonial subjects as they try to reclaim their identity and assert their worth outside the framework imposed by colonial powers. This aspect of postcolonial theory is particularly useful in understanding the psychological conflicts faced by the characters in *We Need New Names* as they struggle to define themselves amidst the lingering effects of colonialism.

Postcolonial theory thus provides a critical lens for understanding how the characters in the novel wrestle with their identities in the aftermath of colonization. By applying Said's critique of Western representations, Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and the Third Space, and Fanon's exploration of the psychological trauma of colonization, this study will examine how the characters in *We Need New Names* negotiate their postcolonial identities. These theories help shed light on the ways in which colonialism continues to shape personal and national identities, and how individuals from postcolonial societies strive to reclaim and redefine themselves outside the shadow of their colonial pasts.

NoViolet Bulawayo

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

NoViolet Bulawayo, born Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, is a Zimbabwean author and novelist. She was born in 1981 in Tsholotsho, a small town in Zimbabwe. Bulawayo grew up in a rural setting before moving to the city of Bulawayo, which later inspired her pen name. She completed her primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe before pursuing higher education abroad. Bulawayo holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Cornell University, where she was a recipient of the Truman Capote Fellowship. She has also taught creative writing at various universities in the United States. Her debut novel, *We Need New Names*, was published in 2013 and received critical acclaim. The novel tells the story of a young girl named Darling, who grows up in Zimbabwe and later moves to the United States. *We Need New Names* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won the Etisalat Prize for Literature. Bulawayo's writing is known for its vivid imagery, powerful storytelling, and exploration of themes such as displacement, identity, and the impact of political turmoil. She is considered one of the leading voices in African literature and continues to write and engage with audiences around the world.

Statement of the Problem

Existing scholarship has extensively examined postcolonial identity in literature, with particular emphasis on themes of displacement, migration, and the impact of colonial governance. Scholars such as Bhabha (1994) have elucidated the concept of hybridity within postcolonial discourse, while Said's (1978) seminal work, *Orientalism*, explores the construction of identities for the colonized through colonial narratives. Previous research on *We Need New Names* has often focused on broad themes of migration, cultural alienation, and socio-economic disparities, with some attention to the experiences of female characters within these contexts. However, a gap exists in scholarship that comprehensively integrates the analysis of colonial and postcolonial memories, gender, and emotional dislocation within *We Need New Names*. While the novel's portrayal of displacement and cultural alienation has been noted, a deeper investigation is required to understand how the characters' memories of both the colonial past and the postcolonial present contribute to their emotional states and gendered experiences. Specifically, there is a need to examine how Bulawayo's narrative explores the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the ways in which gender shapes the experience and expression of emotional dislocation, and the role of memory in perpetuating or challenging colonial legacies.

Postcolonial Memories and Emotional Dislocation in Zimbabwean Literature

Zimbabwean literature engages deeply with the legacies of colonialism, exploring themes of historical trauma, identity reconstruction, and cultural hybridity. Rooted in the country's colonial and post-independence struggles, this literary tradition examines how individuals and societies negotiate the enduring effects of oppression, violence, and transformation. Through the lens of postcolonial and trauma theory, Zimbabwean writers capture the fractured identities and emotional dislocation that characterize the nation's historical and contemporary experiences.

Theoretical Foundations: Fanonian Psychology and Postcolonial Identity

Frantz Fanon (1961) argues that colonial rule sought to "distort, disfigure, and destroy" the African past, resulting in fragmented identities (210). This psychological violence created what he describes as the "colonized subject," trapped in a cycle of self-doubt and alienation. Achille Mbembe (2001) expands on this, noting that postcolonial subjects must continuously navigate "fluid identities" to assert agency in an ever-changing socio-political landscape (4).

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga illustrates this struggle through Tambu, whose education represents both liberation and entrapment. She internalizes colonial ideals, yet remains alienated from her own Shona heritage. As she reflects, "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor was I glad that he had died. It had happened, and that was that" (Dangarembga, 1988, 1), showcasing her emotional detachment as she navigates colonial structures. Similarly, George Mujajati's *Victory* (1992) exposes the persistence of colonial power structures after independence. The protagonist's disillusionment with post-independence Zimbabwe highlights what Ranger (2004) calls the "fracturing of the nationalist front," where the promise of freedom is replaced by new forms of oppression (122).

Literary Hybridity as Resistance

Zimbabwean writers use linguistic and cultural hybridity to challenge colonial discourse. Homi

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Bhabha (1994) defines hybridity as the "third space," where new identities emerge from the collision of colonial and indigenous cultures (37). In *Victory*, Mujajati weaves Shona folktales into the narrative, disrupting the dominance of Western literary forms. This technique reflects Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that reclaiming indigenous storytelling is an act of resistance against "the cultural bomb" of colonialism (3). By blending oral traditions with written narratives, these authors amplify marginalized voices and reject Eurocentric literary norms.

White Memoirs and Nostalgic Ambiguities

White Zimbabwean memoirs, such as Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001) and Peter Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (2006), present a counter-narrative shaped by "postcolonial nostalgia" (McGregor & Ranger, 2010, 88). These texts depict the colonial era as orderly and productive, often contrasting it with post-2000 Zimbabwe's instability. While acknowledging Rhodesian racism, they frequently downplay colonial violence, portraying white settlers as reluctant participants rather than active beneficiaries of colonial rule. Fuller (2001) reflects, "We were the last of the whites, clinging to a land that no longer wanted us" (54), evoking a sense of loss while failing to address the injustices that enabled white landownership. This selective memory reinforces uneven power dynamics in postcolonial memory-making, commodifying trauma for Western audiences while marginalizing black Zimbabwean perspectives.

Memory, Trauma, and the Unresolved Past

The liberation war (1964–1979) and the Gukurahundi massacres (1980s) haunt Zimbabwean literature, appearing as motifs of dislocation and loss. According to Veit-Wild (1993), Zimbabwean fiction acts as a form of "statist mourning," preserving suppressed histories while challenging state-sanctioned amnesia (p. 65). Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) confronts post-war trauma through the protagonist, Tambu, whose psychological breakdown symbolizes the nation's unresolved past. The novel echoes Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of "postmemory," where trauma is transmitted across generations, shaping identity and perception (31).

Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988) similarly foregrounds women's voices, revealing how gendered violence compounds postcolonial alienation. The protagonist's suffering mirrors Zimbabwe's national struggle, as she laments, "My bones tell the story of hunger, of land, of a stolen country" (Hove, 1988, 102). These narratives resist closure, reflecting a melancholic engagement with history that refuses to be forgotten.

The forgoing review reveals that Zimbabwean literature encapsulates the paradoxes of postcoloniality: liberation struggles that breed new oppressions, hybrid identities that defy purity, and memories that both heal and haunt. Focusing marginalised perspectives and dismantling nationalist myths, these texts map the emotional landscape of a nation grappling with its past. As Bhabha (1994) asserts, literature serves as a "space of enunciation," where histories are contested, identities reshaped, and voices reclaimed (55). In illuminating Zimbabwe's complex postcolonial experience, these works affirm literature's role not only as cultural critique but as a vital archive for societies confronting the aftershocks of colonialism.

This study seeks to add to the above discourses by analyzing how Bulawayo depicts the complex interplay of colonial and postcolonial memories, gender, and emotional dislocation in her characters. The research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and emotional landscape of postcolonial subjects, particularly women, as they navigate the legacies of colonialism and the challenges of contemporary Zimbabwe and the diaspora.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of colonial and postcolonial legacies on identity formation in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate how colonial and postcolonial legacies influence the characters' identities in the novel.
2. To analyze the role of migration and displacement in shaping postcolonial identity in *We Need New Names*.

Significance of the Study

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

This study offers valuable contributions to academics and researchers by augmenting the existing body of knowledge on postcolonial literature through a focused analysis of a significant literary work. By exploring how Bulawayo portrays colonial and postcolonial identity, scholars in literary and cultural studies will gain a more nuanced understanding of the enduring impact of colonial structures on individual and national identity in former colonies. This research will also provide a robust foundation for further scholarly investigations into how literature reflects historical and socio-political realities in postcolonial societies. For students of literature, this study will serve as an analytical resource for examining themes of identity, migration, and colonial legacy in literary works. This will help broaden their perspective on the diverse ways in which literature represents the effects of colonialism and its aftermath.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining close reading and thematic analysis of *We Need New Names*. It draws on postcolonial theory and trauma theory to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis. Primary sources include Bulawayo's novel, while secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, books, and internet materials related to postcolonial literature, trauma theory, and gender studies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in postcolonial theory, particularly the works of Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), and Fanon (1952), as well as trauma theory, which provides a critical lens for understanding the psychological and emotional impacts of colonialism. Said's concept of *Orientalism* elucidates how colonial narratives construct identities for the colonized, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing power imbalances (Said, 1978). Bhabha's theory of hybridity explores how cultural identities are negotiated in the aftermath of colonial encounters (Bhabha, 1994), while Fanon's work on the psychological effects of colonization highlights the internalized inferiority and alienation experienced by colonized peoples (Fanon, 1952).

On the other hand, trauma theory, particularly as articulated by Caruth (1996) and Hirsch (2012), offers a valuable framework for analyzing the emotional and psychological dislocation experienced by Bulawayo's characters. Caruth defines trauma as a response to an overwhelming event that is not fully understood at the time of its occurrence but returns to haunt the survivor in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, and other symptoms (Caruth, 1996). Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which describes the relationship of the second generation to traumatic experiences they did not directly witness but inherit through stories, images, and behaviors, is particularly relevant to understanding the intergenerational transmission of colonial trauma in *We Need New Names* (Hirsch, 2012). Through these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to explore how Bulawayo's characters grapple with the psychological and emotional dislocation caused by colonial and postcolonial legacies. It will examine how the novel portrays the tension between traditional cultural identities and the hybrid identities shaped by colonial encounters, as well as the emotional toll of displacement and migration.

Review of *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo

Concilio (2015) explores the theme of migration in *We Need New Names*, emphasizing how Bulawayo portrays the psychological and cultural struggles of displacement. She argues that the protagonist, Darling, initially views migration as an escape from poverty and political instability in Zimbabwe, only to later confront the harsh realities of alienation in the United States. Concilio highlights how Bulawayo challenges the conventional perception of migration as a path to success, demonstrating that migrants often experience disillusionment, loss of identity, and a deep sense of nostalgia for their homeland. She further examines Bulawayo's narrative technique, particularly the use of a child narrator, which captures the innocence and rawness of migration's impact on identity formation.

Alexander (2014) provides a multilayered analysis of displacement in *We Need New Names*, identifying three key levels: physical displacement due to forced evictions in Zimbabwe, migration to the United States, and internal psychological displacement resulting from cultural alienation. She argues that Bulawayo effectively uses child narration to portray the dissonance between expectation and reality in the immigrant experience. Alexander also examines how the protagonist's hybrid identity leads to difficulties in cultural integration, as she finds herself caught

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

between two worlds—unable to fully belong in either. The study concludes that Bulawayo presents migration as a paradoxical experience, where the promise of a better life is overshadowed by a persistent struggle for identity and belonging.

Hannan (2013) focuses on Bulawayo's writing style and its impact on the novel's structure. He praises the author's ability to infuse humor and energy into a narrative that deals with serious issues such as poverty, political violence, and exile. Hannan contrasts the vibrancy of Darling's childhood in Zimbabwe with the subdued, introspective tone of the American section of the novel, arguing that Bulawayo uses this shift to reflect the protagonist's increasing alienation. He suggests that *We Need New Names* is a coming-of-age novel that not only captures the socio-political realities of Zimbabwe but also critiques the American dream, showing that migration does not always lead to fulfillment.

Habila (2013) offers both praise and criticism of *We Need New Names*, acknowledging Bulawayo's rich linguistic style and vivid storytelling while critiquing the novel's structure. He argues that the Zimbabwean section is the strongest, as it vividly captures the children's survival tactics and the socio-political turmoil in their homeland. However, he finds the American section less compelling, suggesting that the protagonist's struggle with cultural displacement is less developed. Habila further critiques the fragmented nature of the second half of the novel, arguing that it weakens the emotional depth of Darling's character. Despite this, he commends Bulawayo for her ability to present an authentic depiction of the immigrant experience.

Sanai (2013) highlights the novel's balance between hardship and humor, noting that Bulawayo effectively uses the children's playful language and perspective to portray their grim realities. She argues that Bulawayo's stylistic choices, including code-switching between English and Shona, reflect the hybrid identity that many immigrants struggle with

Exploring Colonial, Postcolonial memories, Gender, and Emotional Dislocation in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

In *We Need New Names*, NoViolet Bulawayo examines how colonial and postcolonial legacies shape identity in Zimbabwe. The novel portrays a society still grappling with the effects of colonial rule, where economic hardship, political instability, and cultural displacement define the experiences of the characters. Through Darling's journey from Zimbabwe to America, the novel explores the struggles of identity formation, showing how migration further complicates the search for belonging. This analysis will discuss the impact of colonial history on identity, the role of displacement in shaping postcolonial experiences, and how the novel represents the lingering effects of colonial influence in Zimbabwe. Additionally, a **trauma theoretical lens** will be applied to analyze how colonial histories and migratory displacement generate intergenerational trauma, emotional fragmentation, and psychological distress in the novel's characters. The work of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth (1996) and Marianne Hirsch (1997) will be used to examine how historical trauma, embodied memory, and diasporic alienation manifest in Bulawayo's narrative.

Colonial and Postcolonial Impact on Identity

The impact of colonial and postcolonial legacies on identity is vividly depicted through the lives of the characters, particularly Darling. The novel highlights how historical trauma is transmitted across generations, shaping individuals' perceptions of self and community. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is not simply an event of the past but an experience that continually haunts the present, shaping identity in unconscious ways. In the novel, the aftermath of colonial exploitation continues to shape the lives of Zimbabweans, even after independence. This unresolved trauma is seen in the economic hardship and corruption that persist, as Darling reflects: "Things were supposed to be better after independence, but look at us now still stuck, still hungry, still waiting" (45). The disappointment with independence reflects what Dominick LaCapra (2001) describes as "post-traumatic melancholia," in which individuals remain trapped in cycles of grief over a lost, idealized past.

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

The novel also explores the psychological dislocation caused by the colonial imposition of Western values, which complicates the characters' sense of cultural belonging. The younger generation, particularly Darling and her friends, engage in imaginative play centered around America: "We played America, because it was better than playing our own country" (20). This moment signifies the internalization of colonial trauma, where Western ideals are seen as superior, leading to an erasure of indigenous identity. Marianne Hirsch's (1997) concept of "postmemory"—the way second-generation individuals inherit and relive the traumas of their ancestors—can be applied here. Even though Darling and her friends were not directly subjected to colonial rule, its impact on their families and society shapes their perceptions of self-worth and cultural identity.

Furthermore, migration becomes a key site for the manifestation of cultural trauma. As Darling moves to America, she struggles with the loss of her Zimbabwean identity, reinforcing the idea that displacement does not erase trauma but transforms it into a continuous process of identity negotiation and loss (Alexander, 2004). She reflects on the difficulty of maintaining her native language: "I can't even remember the last time I spoke my own language without twisting my tongue" (120). This linguistic dislocation highlights the psychological fragmentation caused by migration, where characters exist between two worlds, unable to fully claim either as their own. Through these themes, *We Need New Names* illustrates the intergenerational and psychological impact of colonial trauma. Economic hardship, disillusionment with independence, Western cultural influence, and the loss of cultural identity all reflect the deep-rooted effects of colonialism that continue to shape the lives of postcolonial subjects. The characters' experiences reflect what Edward Said (1993) calls "contrapuntal consciousness"—a fractured sense of self that oscillates between nostalgia for the past and the alienation of the present.

Migration, Trauma, and Emotional Dislocation in Postcolonial Identity

Darling's migration to America is not only a physical journey but also a deeply psychological experience of trauma and emotional fragmentation. Migration, rather than providing a sense of stability, exacerbates her sense of loss, alienation, and rootlessness. Scholars such as Edward Said (1993) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have examined how diasporic displacement creates a double-consciousness, where immigrants must navigate multiple, often conflicting, cultural expectations. For Darling, this process is marked by a persistent sense of non-belonging, which is characteristic of trauma survivours.

Darling, the protagonist, experiences significant shifts in her sense of self after moving to America. Her journey is not just geographical but emotional, as she must adjust to an entirely different cultural environment. Darling's move to America forces her to reconsider her identity, as she faces challenges in adapting to the new ways of life there. Initially, she holds onto the memories and values from Zimbabwe, but as she navigates through the complexities of American culture, her sense of belonging becomes uncertain. Darling reflects, "I can't even remember the last time I spoke my own language without twisting my tongue" (120). This expression captures her struggle with losing touch with her roots and adapting to a new language and culture, highlighting how migration reshapes her sense of self.

The theme of immigrant experience is further explored through Darling's emotional and cultural alienation. Once in America, she finds herself caught between two worlds. She is disconnected from her roots in Zimbabwe and feels like an outsider in her new American environment. For example, her cousin, Pastor, who has lived in America for many years, shows how deeply these feelings of alienation affect immigrants. He has adopted an American lifestyle but still holds onto some aspects of his Zimbabwean identity. Darling observes, "Pastor's accent is so American now, but

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

when he speaks in Shona, it's a mix of both, like his tongue doesn't want to choose" (70). This illustrates how even those who migrate and become part of a new culture still carry the complexities of their heritage. Darling's feelings of being in-between echo the broader experience of immigrants, who often struggle to find a place where they feel at home.

Darling's longing for home versus the reality of life in Zimbabwe further complicates her sense of self. When she returns to Zimbabwe, she is confronted with the stark contrast between her nostalgic memories and the harsh realities of life back home. She says, "Things were supposed to be better after independence, but look at us now still stuck, still hungry, still waiting" (45). This statement shows her disillusionment as she returns to Zimbabwe and realizes that the country has not improved as she had hoped. The country, which she had idealized while in America, is far from the place she imagined. This experience of returning to a homeland that no longer feels like home reflects the emotional dislocation that many immigrants feel. The characters around Darling, like Chipo, who also faces struggles, highlight how difficult it is for those who have migrated to find comfort, even when they return to their homeland. Zimbabwe, much like the immigrant experience, becomes a space of disillusionment rather than solace.

Darling's fragmented identity is another key element of the narrative. She is torn between her Zimbabwean heritage and the American lifestyle she has come to know. This internal conflict is not unique to Darling but is shared by many of the characters in the novel, like Bastard, who embodies the struggles of those caught between two cultures. Darling reflects on her sense of fragmentation, saying, "I played America, because it was better than playing our own country" (20). As Darling tries to navigate both her life in America and her connection to Zimbabwe, she becomes increasingly aware of her displacement, unable to fully belong to either world. The tension between these two worlds, and the difficulty of balancing them, is a central part of the novel's exploration of post-colonial identity. Bastard, who is deeply rooted in the traditions and realities of Zimbabwe, finds it difficult to reconcile the American ideals that Darling encounters, showing how difficult it is for the characters to maintain a sense of unity in their identity.

Cathy Caruth (1996) suggests that trauma is often relived in the present through memory and nostalgia, which can prevent individuals from fully integrating into new environments. This is evident in Darling's interactions with her past and present. In America, she initially tries to hold onto her Zimbabwean identity, but as she adapts, she begins to feel emotionally distanced from her homeland. When she finally returns to Zimbabwe, she finds it transformed beyond recognition, stating: *"*Things were supposed to be better after independence, but look at us now still stuck, still hungry, still waiting*"* (45). This moment reveals the traumatic rupture between past and present, as Darling realizes that her nostalgic memories no longer align with the reality of her homeland.

Darling's emotional dislocation is also mirrored in her relationship with language. Unable to fully embrace her mother tongue, yet not entirely comfortable in English, she embodies the linguistic dissonance of postcolonial trauma. Trauma theorists such as LaCapra (2001) describe this phenomenon as "acting out" versus "working through" trauma—where survivours remain stuck in repetitive cycles of longing for a lost past rather than actively processing their experiences. This is evident in Darling's increasing detachment from her cultural roots, as her memories of Zimbabwe become more abstract and distant.

The novel also explores the trauma of racialized identity in the diaspora. Once in America, Darling faces the burden of racial othering, as she is constantly reminded of her foreignness. When she struggles with fitting into American culture, her cousin Pastor's observation captures the experience of diasporic identity: "Pastor's accent is so American now, but when he speaks in Shona, it's a mix of both, like his tongue doesn't want to choose" (70). This moment reflects

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

the psychological burden of assimilation, where immigrants are forced to negotiate their identities in a society that often marginalizes them. Darling's journey illustrates how migration exacerbates psychological trauma rather than resolving it. As LaCapra (2001) argues, unresolved trauma "haunts" individuals, manifesting in feelings of alienation, identity confusion, and persistent grief over a lost homeland. For Darling, the act of migration is not a solution but a process of ongoing emotional exile, where neither Zimbabwe nor America can truly offer her a stable sense of belonging.

Frantz Fanon (1961) discusses how colonial subjects internalize the inferiority imposed upon them, leading to a fractured identity. This is evident in Darling's linguistic dislocation. Unable to fully embrace her mother tongue, yet not entirely comfortable in English, she embodies the linguistic dissonance of postcolonial trauma. This aligns with Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," where hybrid identities exist in an in-between state, neither fully belonging to the colonized nor the colonizing culture.

Colonial Influence, Cultural Trauma, and the Burden of the Past

Despite the country's liberation from British colonial rule, the enduring legacy of economic hardship and corruption still plagues society. Darling, the protagonist, struggles with the unfulfilled promises of independence and the continued exploitation of the nation's resources by those in power. Characters like Auntie, who stays behind in Zimbabwe, voice the disillusionment with the political system, stating: "Even after the independence, nothing had really changed. The same people were still in charge, and the promises of a better life seemed like a joke" (54). This expression emphasises the continued struggles that Darling and other characters face, showing that the colonial systems of power and inequality persist long after political liberation.

Language and cultural hybridity also play a significant role in Darling's internal conflict between her Zimbabwean heritage and her exposure to Western ideals. When Darling moves to America, she finds herself struggling to adapt to a new way of life, one that causes her to distance herself from her cultural roots. Colonialism had imposed English as a dominant language, which now serves both as a tool of survival and a barrier to her true identity. Characters like Bastard, a boy from Darling's neighborhood in Zimbabwe, also grapple with language as a reflection of their shifting identities. Darling reflects on this experience in a moment of self-realization: "In America, I spoke the language of the West, but in my heart, I spoke in my mother's tongue. Yet, it felt like I was losing pieces of myself with every word that I didn't know how to say in English" (91). This illustrates Darling's struggle to reconcile the language that enables her survival with the language that connects her to her Zimbabwean identity. It symbolizes the broader effects of colonialism, where English has become both a tool of empowerment and a symbol of cultural displacement.

The social structure in the novel also mirrors the inequalities that were established during colonial rule. Even after Zimbabwe's independence, the gap between the wealthy elite and the impoverished masses remains vast. Darling's experiences reflect the ongoing class struggle in the country, where the promises of equality and social mobility have not been fulfilled for the majority of the population. Her friend Chipo, another character from the neighborhood, embodies the tragic consequences of this social divide, as she is forced into an early marriage as a way of securing a better life. One quote that highlights this is: "The rich were still rich, and the rest of us were still hungry, still forgotten, still waiting for a life that would never come" (112). This statement underscores the stagnation of social mobility in post-colonial Zimbabwe, where economic power is still concentrated in the hands of a few. Despite formal independence, the structures of wealth and poverty remain largely unchanged, reinforcing the class divisions that were created during colonial rule.

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Migration, for Darling, is initially seen as an escape from the struggles of life in Zimbabwe. She believes that moving to America will provide the freedom and opportunity she has always dreamed of. However, once she arrives in the United States, she is confronted with a new set of challenges and emotional alienation. Even characters like Auntie, who sent Darling off with high hopes, express disillusionment. Auntie's words linger in Darling's mind: "I thought leaving Zimbabwe would make everything better, but when I got to America, I realized that it was just another version of the same emptiness" (124). Darling's experience speaks to the broader theme of migration as a coping mechanism. While migration is often seen as a solution to post-colonial struggles, it also brings its own set of disappointments and identity challenges. In America, Darling faces a new kind of loneliness and cultural dissonance, which complicates her sense of belonging and self. This highlights how migration, although a way to escape one's circumstances, does not always lead to the fulfillment of one's hopes.

Despite Zimbabwe's independence from colonial rule, the psychological and structural aftermath of colonialism remains deeply entrenched. Darling's experiences reflect the historical trauma of colonization, which continues to shape Zimbabwe's present. Her Auntie, who remains in Zimbabwe, expresses her frustration with the unfulfilled promises of independence: "Even after the independence, nothing had really changed. The same people were still in charge, and the promises of a better life seemed like a joke" (54). This statement echoes the ideas of Frantz Fanon (1961), who argues that postcolonial societies often replicate colonial power structures, leading to continued cycles of oppression and disillusionment.

The novel also explores the trauma of economic and social instability that colonialism has left behind. The class inequalities in Zimbabwe remain stark, as the rich continue to dominate while the poor remain in cycles of deprivation. As Darling observes: "The rich were still rich, and the rest of us were still hungry, still forgotten, still waiting for a life that would never come" (112). This reflects the systemic trauma of colonialism, which does not simply end with independence but is carried forward through generations in economic and social disparities.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how colonial and postcolonial legacies shape identity in Zimbabwe. The novel portrays a society still grappling with the effects of colonial rule, where economic hardship, political instability, and cultural displacement define the experiences of the characters. Through Darling's journey from Zimbabwe to America, the novel explores the struggles of identity formation, showing how migration further complicates the search for belonging. The analysis further discusses the impact of colonial history on identity, the role of displacement in shaping postcolonial experiences, and the lingering effects of colonial influence in Zimbabwe. Additionally, a trauma theoretical lens reveals how colonial histories and migratory displacement generate intergenerational trauma, emotional fragmentation, and psychological distress in the novel's characters. The work of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth (1996) and Marianne Hirsch (1997) was used to examine how historical trauma, embodied memory, and diasporic alienation manifest in Bulawayo's narrative. Furthermore, the study integrate postcolonial theory, particularly the works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon, to explore the novel's representation of hybridity, colonial mimicry, and the enduring structures of colonial power. By weaving together themes of colonial trauma, emotional dislocation, and migratory alienation, *We Need New Names* highlights the lasting psychological scars of colonialism and displacement. Through a trauma theoretical lens, the novel illustrates how historical violence continues to shape individual and collective identities, emphasizing that the past is never fully left behind, but rather, it is constantly relived and renegotiated in the present. Postcolonial theorists such as Said, Bhabha, and

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Fanon provide a critical framework for understanding these dynamics, demonstrating how the novel captures the ongoing struggle of postcolonial identity formation in a world shaped by colonial legacies.

REFERENCES

Abernethy, D. B. (2000). The dynamics of global dominance: European overseas empires, 1415–1980. Yale University Press.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). Key concepts in postcolonial studies. Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures. Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). The empire writes back: Theory and practice in postcolonial literatures (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Benjamin, W. (2000). Illuminations. Harcourt.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The location of culture. Routledge.

Bush, B. (2002). Colonial encounters: Essays in colonial and post-colonial histories. Routledge.

Bush, B. (2006). Colonial encounters in new world writing: 1492 to the present. Routledge.

Cell, J. (1999). Colonialism and imperialism: The impact of European expansion. Blackwell Publishing.

Colony. (2000). Encarta dictionary.

Crystal, D. (2000). Language death. Cambridge University Press.

Dangarembga, T. (1988). Nervous conditions. Ayebia Clarke.

Dangarembga, T. (2018). This mournable body. Graywolf Press.

Egerton, H. (2003). The rise of the British Empire: Colonial expansion and its consequences. Routledge.

Fanon, F. (1961). The wretched of the Earth (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.

Ferro, M. (1997). Colonialism: A history of the colonial powers in the nineteenth century. Macmillan.

Ferro, M. (2000). Colonialism: A history. Routledge.

Ferro, P.-Y. (2003). Colonialism: A history of the European colonies and their impact. Routledge.

Fuller, A. (2001). Don't let's go to the dogs tonight: An African childhood. Random House.

Godwin, P. (2006). When a crocodile eats the sun: A memoir of Africa. Picador.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (p. 235). Lawrence & Wishart.

Hegel, G. W. F. (2001). The philosophy of history. Dover Publications.

Hirsch, M. (2012). The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust. Columbia University Press.

Horovath, R. (1998). Colonialism and capitalism. University Press.

Horovath, R. J. (1972). A definition of colonialism. *Current Anthropology, 13(1),* 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1086/200231

Horowitz, D. (1985). Ethnic groups in conflict (p. 12). University of California Press.

Johnson, R. (1994). Colonial encounters and their impact. HarperCollins.

Kasongo, J. M. (2011). Westernization and its consequences in Africa. Journal of African Studies, 12(2), 314–326.

Lenin, V. I. (1917). Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism.

Levy, D., & Young, R. (2001). Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction. Routledge.

Loomba, A. (1998). Colonialism/Postcolonialism. Routledge.

Loomba, A. (2005). Colonialism/Postcolonialism (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Mamdani, M. (1996). Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism. Princeton University Press.

Marinescu, C.-G. (2014). Postcolonial identity in Wole Soyinka (p. 90). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mehta, P. B. (1995). Colonialism and its legacy. In D. Levy & R. Young (Eds.), The legacy of colonialism. HarperCollins.

Mimiko, D. O. (2007). Colonialism and its aftermath in Africa. African Journal of Social Sciences, 4(3), 641–656.

Muir, R. (1921). Imperialism and colonialism: A historical overview. Oxford University Press.

Mbembe, A. (2001). On the postcolony. University of California Press.

McGregor, J., & Ranger, T. (2010). Violence and memory: One hundred years in the dark forests of Matabeleland. James Currey.

Mujajati, G. (1992). Victory. College Press.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature. James Currey.

Okoduwa, A. O. (2010). The impact of colonialism on African culture. African Cultural Review, 18(1), 18–30.

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540

Ranger, T. (2004). Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies, 30(2),* 215–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305707042000215338

Rothermund, D. (1986). Colonialism and post-colonial identity in Sri Lanka. Oxford University Press.

Rutherford, J. (Ed.). (1990). Identity: Community, culture, difference. Lawrence & Wishart.

Taiwo, O. (2009). Western education and the African experience. University of Lagos Press.

Veit-Wild, F. (1993). Teachers, preachers, non-believers: A social history of Zimbabwean literature. Hans Zell Publishers.

Young, R. (2001). Postcolonialism: A very short introduction. Oxford University Press.

Young, R. J. C. (1995). Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture, and race. Routledge

.

p-ISSN: 2252-6323
e-ISSN: 2721-4540