

New Names, Translational Subjectivities: (Dis)location and (Re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* – shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and winner of the Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2013 – is a novel in which the leitmotif of (re)naming associates the trope of migration to the (dis)location and translation of subjectivities. Based on the premise that the movement of subjects from one social context to another is analogous to the translation of text from one language to another, this paper proposes a translational mode of subjectification. However, I argue against reading Darling's journey from Zimbabwean shanty dweller to illegal immigrant in America as a linear progression from an original (located) to a translated (dislocated) subjectivity. I further argue that the novel goes beyond the idea of 'transparent translation' – a visible layering of a translated subjectivity over a discrete original subjectivity – by privileging their inter-permeability. Semantic and cognitive dissonance are read as textual markers of the psychic (dis)location experienced by displaced subjects. This analysis of Darling's childhood and adolescent subjectivities leads me to conclude that the novel's leitmotif of (re)naming as a call for a new hermeneutic code through which translational subjectivities can be understood.

Keywords: translation; subjectivity; migration; NoViolet Bulawayo; Zimbabwe

Reading African literature that is written in colonial languages can be considered a process of translation, through which colonial languages are appropriated through the incorporation of the lexical structure of African languages into colonial languages. This, according to Kwaku Gyasi creates a code or hermeneutic through which meaning in African literature written in colonial languages is decoded through the structure and semantics of the writer's native language (Gyasi 177). The Africanization of colonial languages or the poetics of Africanization suggest that there is an original – largely

symbolic – African text which the writer has translated, for readers of colonial languages. If we consider language to be a reflection of the way in which the human subject sees and names the world (subjectivity), the writing of this type of African literature would suggest the existence of an original and a translated self.

Subjectivity and translation can therefore be considered key concepts in the present study of most postcolonial African literature. The term subjectivity not only refers to how a collective or individual human subject experiences the world but also how it is named or names itself. Postcolonial theory links subjectivity to the Du Boisian notion of double consciousness, through which the Black subject experiences a white world – one simultaneously seeing the world and seeing one's self from the perspective of others (Du Bois 1903). Naoki Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity – on Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (1997), elegantly links subjectivity, cultural identity and translation by through the notion of a 'homolingual' mode of address – through which translation mediates between two homogenous languages, identities or collective subjectivities (Sakai 1997, 4). The link between translation and subjectivity can also be conceptualised in terms of displacement. The displacement of human subjects from one social context to another be considered analogous to linguistic displacement made during the translation of text from one language to another, thus privileging translation as a mode of subjectification. Movement from the social matrix of one country to another to another changes the way the subject perceives the world and the way in which they are seen by others. This is mediated by a process of subjectification or code through which, based on Gyasi's reading of Africanised colonial writing, the meaning of the translated subjectivity / text is decoded through references to the original subjectivity / text. The article therefore defines transnational subjectification – how the

human subject experiences the world and names itself as result of migrating from one country to another - as translational process.

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* – shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and winner of the Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2013 – conforms to the poetics of an 'Africanized' English, yet it transcends simply decoding migrant subjectification in terms of an original African language and a migrant English language. Although we follow the protagonist, Darling, from a shanty-town childhood in an unnamed country resembling Zimbabwe to troubled adolescence in suburban America, it would be simplistic to see the novel in terms of a linear schema of migration; a linear progression from an original (located) subjectivity to one that is transnational (dislocated). *We Need New Names* depicts a cycle of displacements and ruptured kinships, starting with the forced removal of Darling's marginalised community from the shanty town of her childhood, which leads to the migration of her father to Johannesburg and her own eventual illegal immigration to America. The novel's use of satirical irony is used as a narrative mode that frames Darling's subjectification in terms of the psychic and social (dis)location brought about by these displacements. This reflects the semantic and cognitive dissonance created by shifts in ways of experiencing and naming the world.

This paper adopts Walter Benjamin's theoretical model of transparent translation as conceptual tool; 'A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully' (Benjamin 1968, 79) . According to this model, a static original subjectivity is not erased by the renegotiations around identity that the subject undergoes when displaced from one social matrix to another. Transparent translational subjectification could therefore be seen as a layering

of new ways of being (translated subjectivity) over existing ways of being (original subjectivity). While Gyasi proposes a hermeneutic code through which meaning is decoded, Benjamin proposes a symbolic ‘pure language’ that mediates the movement between original and translated subjectivities.

Although this model provides the theoretical basis for the study of a translational mode of subjectification in *We Need New Names*, this paper will argue that the novel goes beyond the idea that transparent translation – a translated subjectivity which is a transparent layer over a static but visible original subjectivity. It proposes a reading of the novel’s leitmotif of (re)naming that associates names with the inter-permeability of local and global sites of meaning or affiliation. Semantic and cognitive dissonance are read as textual markers of displaced sites of meaning and therefore symbolic of the psychic and social dislocation experienced by migrant subjects. Darling’s childhood and adolescent subjectivities are therefore analysed through the concepts of (dis)location and inter-permeability. The article further argues that the novel’s leitmotif of (re)naming further denotes a hybrid code of (re)negotiations between multiple sites of identity (meaning) which (re)constitute subjectivities on the basis of the translational process (perpetual movement).

Naming: Zimbabwean childhood and the co-present global

The leitmotif of (re)naming foregrounds the semantic dissonance created by the Africanisation of English in *We Need New Names*. Zimbabwean naming practices are such that names such as Darling, Chipo or Godknows would not seem overtly unusual, nor would the mixture of Africanised names such as MaBetina, MaDube and Mother of Bones – a direct translation of the prefix ‘Ma’, meaning ‘Mother of’, into English. Given Southern African naming traditions through which children are sometimes named

after events, Bornfree would suggest a child born during the liberation era. Likewise, the tradition of protecting infants from death by giving them an ugly name could in a name like Bastard. The author's own renaming suggests that this act of self-naming is of greater significance in the novel.

Having grown up in Zimbabwe under the name Elisabeth Tshele, the author of *We Need New Names* has relocated to America and renamed herself NoViolet Bulawayo. She symbolically adopts the surname Bulawayo – the name of Zimbabwe's second largest city – where she spent part of her childhood (Obioha 2014, np). NoViolet, adopted in honour of Violet – her deceased mother (Obioha 2014, np) – is a name which causes semantic uncertainty though its Africanised lexical structure. This is particularly true for English speaking audiences who think the prefix 'No' means 'without Violet' while it actually means 'with Violet' in the author's native Ndebele. Although this illustrates Gyasi's notion of translation as forcing the colonial language to refer to an African language for meaning through the Africanization of English, we also see how the author as a subject uses names renegotiate her identity according to personal and collective histories. The author's careful considered renaming reflects the importance of names in contemporary society. *The Anthropology of Names and Naming* confirms the new power of names in globalised societies; 'That identities can be stolen, traded, suspended and even erased through the name...illustrates the property-like potential in names to transact social value' (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2). Names, although powerful signifiers of subjectivity are paradoxically rendered precarious by transacting social value in a globalised world. This is particularly true of the names of categories of being – race and nationality – when one considers colonial hierarchies of being, and global economic inequities that drive migration from Africa to the West.

Bulawayo affirms (re) naming as the central leitmotif of *We Need New Names*; ‘I can explain the names because I wrote the book when things were pretty difficult back home. It’s my own way of saying we need new leadership, new ways of thinking and so forth’ (Obioha np). In the eponymously named chapter Darling and two friends attempt to abort the baby of 11 year old Chipso with a rusty clothes hanger. Despite the comic mimicry of the American TV series *ER*, the scene poignantly reveals the tragedy of an 11 year old girl who is raped and impregnated by her grandfather (Bulawayo 2013, 82-86). More importantly, the transposition of *ER* onto a Zimbabwean shantytown illustrates the permeability of the local space to global influences. This key chapter, concurrently configures translation as movement from a space characterised by lack to a televised land of plenty. This globalised fantasy is both known; ‘This is what they do in *ER*’ (Bulawayo 2013, 82)– and unknown ‘I wish I had a stethoscope, Dr Bullet says, which I don’t know what it is’ (Bulawayo 2013, 84). After Sbho declares that they will need new names in order to ‘do it right’, the girls rename themselves Dr Bullet, Dr Roz and Dr Cutter.

The novel opens with the evocation of movement; ‘We are on our way to Budapest...’ followed by a paragraph that starts with; ‘Getting out of Paradise is not hard...’(Bulawayo 2013, 1). This immediately opposes the two locations while indicating the desire and imperative to move between the two. Paradise – the shanty town in which the children know hunger – is described as a ‘kaka toilet’(Bulawayo 2013, 12), while Budapest – a relatively affluent suburb where the child steal guavas to appease their hunger – is ‘like a different country altogether’(Bulawayo 2013, 4). Although some would argue that the principal function of proper names is denotation – literal meaning without identity (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006) – Bulawayo’s naming practices eloquently connote the character of each space. Budapest, although a

neighbouring suburb, is as far removed from the reality of Paradise as the eponymous European city. This contrasts with the ironic naming of a shanty town as Paradise, when life there is hellish. Naming is also used to anchor the story in a Zimbabwean location. Referentiality gives meaning to names such as Chimurenga Street (Bulawayo 2013, 5) – which evokes Zimbabwe’s nationalist struggle for independence – or Mzilikazi Road, with reference to the founding father of the Ndebele nation, King Mzilikazi. The Ndebele are the ethnic majority in the author’s native city of Bulawayo. These names can be read as signifiers that inscribe the novel as a certain history of the Zimbabwean nation, given the post-independence dominance of the Shona majority and the political marginalisation of the Ndebele ethnic group.

The children are trapped in a ceaseless quest for survival. Hunger is what prompts them to cross the border into Budapest, just as material lack prompts them to dream of escape and migration. Sbho, the prettiest one declares; ‘I’m going to marry a rich man from Budapest. He’ll take me away from Paradise’ (Bulawayo 2013, 12). Bastard, the bully of the group, dreams of Johannesburg; ‘I’m blazing out of this kaka country myself. Then I’ll make lots of money, come back and buy a house in this very Budapest’ (Bulawayo 2013, 13). Here, Darling’s real possibility of escape – her aunt Fostalina in America – puts her in a position of superiority. This representation of migration as a potentially liberatory displacement is introduced through the children’s fantasies but undermined by the reality of adult lives. Darling’s immigrant father returns from Johannesburg with AIDS while her cousin Makhosi gets lung disease from working in the mines. Social precarity is demonstrated by the community’s obsession with migration despite evidence that migrant labour might lead to illness and the breakdown of family structures. Indeed, one of the many services advertised by the local traditional healer alongside ‘DEAD PEOPLE TERRORIZING YOU’ is help with

‘BAD LUCK GETTING VISAS ESPECIALLY TO USA AND BRITAIN’. Yet the last line of this advertisement; ‘PLEASE PAYMENT IN FOREX ONLY’ (Bulawayo 2013, 27), is most revealing. It highlights the gritty reality beneath the fantasy of migration, namely the global economic inequities that govern the permeability of the local space.

While the novel cleverly subverts the clichéd tropes of childhood purity, it maintains the innocence of the child voice through the semantic dissonance created by adult and child perspectives. For example, when Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro publically rapes a woman who accused of being a devil (Bulawayo 2013, 39-40), only the children (Darling and Chido) see this as a transgression while the congregation cries ‘Sweet Jeeesus’ or ‘Glory, glory’ (Bulawayo 2013, 35) throughout the so-called exorcism. Because of the children’s ignorance, *Cornell* becomes a brand name associated with Bastard’s social precarity rather than the American university but they are not ignorant of their material lack. This is made poignantly clear by their violent reaction to the bitter irony of a pizza munching British-Zimbabwean woman in Budapest, who takes pictures of them– asking them to say *cheese* and smile at the camera when they don’t even know what it tastes like (Bulawayo 2013, 9-10).

The global power relations that govern this permeability are reinforced by the children’s visit to Shanghai, a Chinese construction site, to beg for cheap Chinese trinkets that they call ‘*zhing-zhongs*’. Here a Chinese construction worker proudly declares ‘We build you nice big mall. All nice shops inside, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace...’ (Bulawayo 2013, 46). These global brand names, like the faded Cornell University t-shirt worn by Bastard (Bulawayo 2013, 12), highlight the state of lack that characterises the lives of the residents of Paradise. They transact the material imperative to migrate. Therefore despite their ignorance, the representation of the children refutes the notion of an ‘untainted’ original subjectivity. They are ‘porous’ beings, who absorb

and make their sense of the combined influences that surround them through fantasy – *ER*,– and the creation of a translational ‘glocal’ language – *zhing-zhongs*.

Trapped in movement: displacement and the laughing-cry of (dis)location

Bulawayo describes the difference between Darling’s childhood and her own as two different Zimbabwe. Hers being a successful newly independent nation-state while Darling’s Zimbabwe, a country in crisis, serves as a reminder that this ‘original’ Zimbabwe is no more. This difference between the idealism of nationalist liberation and the current era of political disillusionment is captured by the reference, Chinua Achebe’s canonical *Things Fall Apart* (1958) through Darling’s rhetorical question; ‘who wants to be a place of hunger and things falling apart?’ (Bulawayo 2013, 49). Intertextuality further links this rhetorical question ‘who wants to be a place of hunger and things falling apart?’ (Bulawayo 2013, 49) to Marechera’s *House of Hunger* (Marechera 1978). Fellow Zimbabwean writer, Dambudzo Marechera, elegantly describes the political disillusionment in the wake of African independence in terms of displacement; ‘something has changed metamorphosis as myth into metamorphosis as a historical nightmare. We are caught in the very act of changing into some other form; we are frozen in that monstrous midway... We are not at the beginning, we are not at the end — we are at the mid-point of the scream, the eye of the storm’ (Marechera 1987, 99). What Marechera’s describes is an in-between state or a hybrid moment that has become a permanent state of limbo. There is a paradoxical sense of being entrapped in movement, which I believe is best described by the nationalist term, *Chimurenga* – a Shona word denoting an ongoing struggle.

NoViolet Bulawayo associates the novel’s leitmotif of (re)naming with this political disillusionment; ‘I can explain the names because I wrote the book when things were pretty difficult back home. It’s my own way of saying we need new leadership,

new ways of thinking and so forth' (Obioha 2014, np). She further affirms being inspired to create Darling by the photograph of a child sitting in the rubble after their home had been bulldozed during the Zimbabwean government's Operation Murambatsivana in 2005; 'I became obsessed with where the people would go, what their stories were, and how those stories would develop – and more importantly, what would happen to the kid in the first picture I saw... The country was a backdrop, and of course it was a time when it was unravelling due to failure of leadership' (Guardian). Given her age, Bulawayo would not have lived through this period. The Zimbabwean civic movement, Sokwanele, argues that if one is to take the literal meaning of Operation Murambatsvina, translated by the government as 'Operation Clean-Up', it actually means 'Operation Clean Out the Filth'. Anthropologist Joost Fontein, who was in Zimbabwe at the beginning of the campaign, notes a tension between official pronouncements about the need to 'restore order' by reasserting formal planning procedures etc. and the reality of the arbitrary and often violent destruction of good-quality although unplanned housing which left whole areas of Zimbabwean cities under a pile of rubble. These were replaced by the kind of shanty towns that had been comparatively rare in Zimbabwe (Fontein 2009, 371).

But first we have to fight over names because everybody wants to be the U.S.A. and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France... These are country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for countries like Dubai and South Africa... They are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here. Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq... and not even the one we live in – who wants to be a place of hunger and things falling apart? (Bulawayo 2013, 49)

This description of the Country Game, played by 10-year old Darling and her friends relates to several key elements in the novel. These include the relative power of

names – notably African and international country names - the trope of migration and the association of political disillusionment with material lack. Political disillusionment is highlighted by chapters such as *How They Appeared* (ch.5), *How They Left* (ch.10) and *How They Lived* (ch.16) in which the third person plural, ‘they’ represents this as collective displacement and a communal sense of (dis)location. This is symbolised depicted through examples of the violent rupture of kinship experienced during the forced removals, such as Nomviyo who loses a son – symbolically named Freedom – beneath the rubble (Bulawayo 2013, 67). This rupture brings a global presence into the local space. BBC and CNN cameramen inscribe this local tragedy within a narrative of global disasters, callously comparing it to a ‘fucking tsunami’(Bulawayo 2013, 67). Global inequalities are also at play as Mother of Bones, engages in a ritual of counting her devalued bricks of Zimbabwean notes while muttering ‘Money is money no matter what this is still money’(Bulawayo 2013, 25). Her refusal to burn the devalued currency piled in a suitcase beneath her bed betrays an inability to accept her current location – socially, economically and politically. Mother of Bones is anything but crazy; she may wear mismatched shoes and obsessively count her stashed bricks of Zimbabwean notes but she is actively performing her sense of displacement. This performance represents semantic dissonance – a loss of meaning – as an active rather a passive process. Driven by the need to make sense ‘make sense’ of loss through a new narrative, Mother of Bones adopts a religious narrative of material loss and eternal salvation, through the caricatured figure of Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro.

Darling’s child voice enables Bulawayo to employ satire, a mode associated with political disillusionment by Francophone African writers such as Henri Lopès (*Le Pleurer-Rire* ;1982), as a critical literary device (Mongo-Mboussa 1988, np). Laughter, or rather the *Pleurer-Rire* [laughing-cry] as Henri Lopès calls it, is produced by this use

of language to mean the opposite of what is said or done. It is through this paradoxical nature of language (Billig 2005, 177) that *We Need New Names* lends itself to a double reading where humour encodes tragedy. Significantly, the act of laughing is foregrounded by the paratext; ‘Then we are rushing, then we are running, then we are running and laughing and laughing and laughing’ (Bulawayo 2013, back cover).

To borrow Marechera’s expression, subjectification is represented as that ‘mid-point of the scream’ or being trapped in that movement where the contortion of the face could be read as laughing or crying. Chapters such as *Real Change* (ch.4) and *Blak Power* – deliberately misspelt B-L-A-K (ch.8) actually illustrate lack of political change and the continued powerlessness of Darling’s community. The resultant semantic dissonance is associated with the violent rupture of kinship as illustrated by the chapter *For Real* (ch.9). Here the children witness the killing of Bornfree – a political activist whose name suggests the hope of the liberation era – by a mob of government supporters. This prompts them to engage in a macabre re-enactment of the scene:

Stina takes off his What Would Jesus Do? T-shirt and waves it because it’s now the flag of the country, and we point to it with our weapons and sing the president’s name...By now we are laughing and chanting and signing war songs and waving our weapons. We are proper drunk with verve; we are animals wanting blood. But first, we dance.... Our faces are contorted now; we look at each other and we have become fierce and really ugly men...After the dancing we pounce on Bastard who is now Bornfree. We scream into his face while we clobber him... With all our weapons clamouring for one person like that, it looks like we are hitting a grain of sand...But we only laugh and keep hitting (Bulawayo 2013, 140-141)

Despite their laughter, the children’s ‘play’ locks them into adult violence which is only stopped by the symbolic death of the nation; ‘The flag of our country is bloodied’ (Bulawayo 2013, 143). This brings the novels satirical criticism of the nation to the fore, particularly when the children affirm the seemingly paradoxical reality of their game’

(Bulawayo 2013, 144).

Migrancy, subjectification and categories of being

The cognitive dissonance created by the change from childhood ignorance to more adult knowledge, becomes apparent in the second half of the novel. Darling develops a greater consciousness of the categories of being – gender, race, and nationality – which are used by others to define her within the American social matrix. This highlights Du Boisian double consciousness and its link to the Black subjectivity to ways of seeing and being seen. This shift in Darling’s voice is explained by the author as a change in subjectivity; ‘The older Darling is more subdued, understandably because she has to be — her move is such that she has to forge a new self to exist in the US, and that self is without all of the voice and spunk we encounter in Paradise’ (Cameron 2013, np). However the depiction of the adolescent Darling in America seems to draw directly from Bulawayo’s own experience of migration; ‘I went to America at the age of 18...you get there and America makes you realise that you are not really one of us’ (Obioha 2014, np). This shift accounts for the more subdued use of satirical narrative devices.

Although presented as a collective of escape from material lack in *How They Left* (ch.10) migration is once again linked to post-independence disillusionment through a reference of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*; ‘When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky’ (Bulawayo 2013, 145). *How They Lived* (ch.16) illustrates how the dream of escape to a land of plenty becomes a cycle of dangerous unwanted jobs and the constant fear of deportation. It also subverts the trope of migration being a form of liberatory movement through a collective entrapment by the label ‘African’ as within the migrant space; ‘What part of Africa?...Is that the part where vultures wait for famished children to die?... Is that where dissidents

shove AK-47s between women's legs?' (Bulawayo 2013, 237). This clichéd schema of questions which are actually affirmations of preconceptions, foregrounds the ignorance of those who 'name' Darling when compared to her own knowledge of being African. The chapter traces a collective genealogy whereby America, initially seen as a place of unimagined plenty and all-you-can-eat gluttony, creates dissonance by robbing the African of sites of meaning 'Because we were not using our languages we said things we did not mean; what we really meant remained folded inside' (Bulawayo 2013, 140).

The novel illustrates how names give power to the one who does the naming; 'Because others usually name us, the act of naming ... ultimately will act upon, a social matrix. Individual lives thus become entangled – through the name – in the life stories of others.' (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006, 3). Clichés and stereotypes associated with being named therefore problematize Benjamin's notion of transparency by questioning the ways in which an original subjectivity is perceived to be visible. Darling's Aunt Fostalina who lives the satirised American dream because she makes enough money to send to her relatives and subscribes to American beauty aesthetics is rendered powerless by being labelled as 'foreign'. Upon hearing her accent her American telesales agent simply becomes unable or unwilling to understand what 'the foreigner' is saying. This dissonance forces Fostalina into the humiliating position of spelling out the name of her desired product despite knowing that she can actually say the brand name. (Bulawayo 2013, 196).

In Darling's case, her insertion into the American social matrix – or translational subjectification – is impacted by the connotations associated with the name 'African'. This is represented through clichéd interactions such as a stranger at a wedding declaring 'Africa is so beautiful... But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo' (Bulawayo 2013, 175) or her boss asking 'You don't have cockroaches in

Africa?’ (Bulawayo 2013, 253), as though it was a country. Through the homogenising connotation of the name ‘Africa’ Darling finds her subjectivity entangled in the history of the continent and the life stories of those that she would not normally affiliate herself with; ‘Others with names like myths, names like puzzles, names we had never heard before: Virgilio, Balamugunthan, Freehem’ (Bulawayo 2013, 243). However, the novel’s critique of the ignorance associated with ‘African’ as a category of being is nuanced by the concept of multiple affiliations as sites for renegotiating meaning / identity. Darling renegotiates of a heterogeneous African identity through her friendships with Nigerian Marina and African-American Kristal in *This Film Contains Disturbing Images* (ch.14). *Hitting Crossroads* (ch.15) depicts Darling and Marina negotiating their immigrant African and Black identities so differently from Kristal, that she mocks them; ‘it’s called Ebonics, and it be a language system, but it be our own ... Uh-huh, I beg your pardon, my ass, trynna sound like stupid white folk’ (Bulawayo 2013, 222). Kristal’s negotiations around her African identity can be read as a form of resistance to being contained by a radicalised hierarchy of categories of being. This refusal is made visible by her ‘untranslatable’ use of Ebonics, as a means of claiming a African subjectivity is not fully translatable or knowable to others (Coetzee 2013).

(Re)Naming, kinship and translational subjectivity

Darling’s migration to America is associated with an acute sense of dislocation that is rendered analogous to the destruction of her embodied self. This is topographically represented by the chapter title ‘*DESTROYEDMICHYGEN*’ (ch.11), deliberately misspelt M-I-C-H-Y-G-E-N with the two words literally smashed together.

When I first arrived at Washington I just wanted to die. The others kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, the way I talked or said things... When you are

being teased about something, at first you try to fix it so the teasing can stop but then those crazy kids teased me about everything, even things I couldn't change... I felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes in my language, in my head, everything. (Bulawayo 2013, 165)

The destruction of ways of being (subjectivity) is associated with the loss of kinship; 'Some things happen only in my country; this here is not my country'(Bulawayo 2013, 147), coupled with the daunting reality of new kinship or new ways of being; 'That fat boy, who is supposed to be my cousin even though I've never seen him before' (Bulawayo 2013, 147). The character of Tshaka Zulu nuances this representation of migration as a ruptured genealogy. Symbolically named Tshaka Zulu due to mental illness that leads him to sometimes believe that he is the founder of the Zulu nation, Tshaka sold his father's cattle in order to immigrate to America. Although trapped there until death, Tshaka engages in elaborate rituals of remembrance with a wall full of news clippings of Nelson Mandela, photos of icons such as Hugh Masekela and Kwame Nkrumah, meticulously maintained photos of his family and an unfailing memory of the names of families old and new. The legend of Shaka Zulu, often associated with pre-colonial black power and a resistance to colonising influences, is a somewhat essentialised representation of an 'authentic' or original African subjectivity. Tshaka uses naming rituals to remain inserted in the social matrix of his country of origin; 'he remembers every detail, like he lives with all these people. He has named all of his children and grandchildren...each name carefully thought out and finally given over the phone'(Bulawayo 2013, 236).Despite his co-presence in both the American and Zimbabwean social matrices, Tshaka's sense of being entrapped in movement leads to a psychotic episode, during which he conflates his 'self' with that of the legendary Zulu warrior. His proclamation '*death or victory*'(Bulawayo 2013, 272) evokes Marechera's nightmare of metamorphosis 'frozen in that monstrous midway' (Marechera 1987, 99)

Trapped ‘in translation’ between an original and a translated self , the psychic dislocation produced by Tshaka’s need for stasis is such that it becomes a desire for death.

This schema of being ‘frozen’ in translation does not romanticise the psychological hardship that accompanies translational subjectification. Darling’s social immobility is highlighted by working in a grocery store, becoming a domestic cleaner and unable to return to Zimbabwe for even a simple visit because her illegal status. This entrapment between two social matrices is foregrounded when the boss’s daughter arrives wearing a Cornell T-shirt (Bulawayo 2013, 267) which immediately she refers to as ‘Bastard’s Cornell shirt’. This illustration of the porosity of her subjectivity in America to Zimbabwe as a site of meaning highlights the translational or dynamic process of encoding her experience of the world through multiple social matrices (texts). With reference to Benjamin’s schema, she is not merely a ‘translated’ subjectivity through original ways of seeing the world is visible. The adolescent Darling now knows the Cornell brand name and decodes its meaning through the bitterness of exclusion – knowing that she will never be able to afford the tuition fees. These concurrent processes of decoding meaning depict translational subjectification as multiple ways of perceiving and naming the world. In an inversion of the global permeating the Paradise through the Cornell t-shirt, it renders Zimbabwe co-present in the American space through kinship (affiliation) with Bastard. The Cornell name also transacts the global economic inequalities that prompted Darling’s displacement while exposing the fallacy of the migrant fantasy of social ascension. This inter-permeability is reinforced by the smell of guavas brought over by a recent migrant, which – like Proust’s madeleines – act as a vehicle of bringing Darling’s Zimbabwean childhood being into the migrant space. (Bulawayo 2013, 186).

As the novel draws to an end, Darling's own psychotic episode during which she scrawls the Zulu words '*iBioiyirabishi*' [Biology is rubbish] with blood-red ink on her bedroom walls (Bulawayo 2013, 275) draws her into a vortex of childhood memories. These are interspersed with text messages from her American friends and her observations of Uncle Kojo. Her thoughts and actions oscillate wildly between here and there, and then and now, foregrounding how the present gives new meaning to the past and vice versa. Thus the country game, played as child returns to her adolescent self with the added significance of her cousin becoming a soldier in Iraq (Bulawayo 2013, 282). Likewise, a childhood song about the explorer Vasco Da Gama acquires the significance of a bereaved Uncle Kojo driving aimlessly to escape the loss of his son to an American war (Bulawayo 2013, 280). In this final chapter, time and space are compressed to reveal a cyclical re-configuration of meaning or subjectivities. This culminates in Darling's mirror moment, when she learns of the existence of another Darling – daughter of her childhood friend Chipu – living in Paradise as she once did (Bulawayo 2013, 285). When Chipu accuses her of no longer having a country to come back to, Darling's reaction is to smash her computer – an act of violence that reflects dissonance of being trapped in a never-ending process of translation. This is symbolically captured by the dissonance of the novel's closing passage in which the 'delicious' smell of American Lobels bread signifies the bloodied carcass of a dog crushed by the wheels of a Lobels truck in Darling's childhood shanty town.

Conclusion

Through narrative strategies that privilege semantic and cognitive dissonance, the *We Need New Names* foregrounds the (dis)location of being displaced from one social matrix to another but paradoxically trapped in the movement or 'in translation'. This conceptualisation of subjectification as perpetual translation between multiple sites

of meaning (affiliation) reconfigures Walter Benjamin's model of transpiration translation – a static original and a transparent translated text / subjectivity. The first half of the novel global hierarchies of power through country names foregrounds the material imperatives that compel the subject to migrate. It simultaneously illustrates permeability to global economic forces through brand names. The second half of the novel depicts America as a mid-space in which the migrant renegotiates a heterogeneous subjectivity despite the homogenising naming of cultural identities. Kinship, rituals of naming and memory are used to simultaneously illustrate the permeability the migrant sees or creates meaning in American space through references to their past. The final chapter of this second section is particularly innovative because it reconceptualises migrant subjectivity as a process translational subjectivity (in motion), rather than a final 'translated' subjectivity. Darling's psychotic episode and subsequent oscillation between her childhood subjectivity in Zimbabwe and her adolescent subjectivity in America literally compresses time and space together. This depiction of an overwhelming co-presence and inter-permeability of the multiple sites of meaning / affiliation conceives of translational subjectification as a perpetual process that resists stasis. Translational subjectivities paradoxically trapped in a cycle of mutual (re)constitution that does away with the dichotomy of original and translated subjectivities. (Re)naming can therefore be read as a performative act – an active mediation between multiple sites of affiliation that mirrors Benjamin's notion of 'pure language' and Gyasi's formulation of a hermeneutic code. We can therefore read the novel's title, *We Need New Names*– the need for new names – as a call for a hermeneutic code through which through which translational subjectivities can be understood.

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