

## Realistic Features in No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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**Abstract:** This article deals with realistic features in No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Its objective is to show how Bulawayo succeeds to combine African migrants' true facts with her fiction. In other terms, the analysis of this study lies on the different features Bulawayo resorts to for their achievements in defining each fact in this novel. As for the method, realistic, sociological and psychological approaches are prominent for the success of this study. It results that, Bulawayo succeeds to combine African migrants' true facts with her fiction in attributing realistic features to fictitious facts. She attributes realistic features to migrants from Africa to the West, departure motivation to the new land, Africans' positive and negative experiences in the United States, cultural experience in the new land. Additionally, it results that Bulawayo also attributes realistic features to the death of Bornfree which is also an African fictitious country knowing revolution for its change.

**Key-words:** realistic features, African migrants, combine, facts, fiction

### Résumé

Cet article étudie les caractéristiques réalistes dans *We Need New Names* de No Violet Bulawayo. Son objectif est de montrer comment Bulawayo réussit de combiner les vrais faits des migrants Africains avec sa fiction. En d'autres termes, l'analyse de cette étude se base sur les différents éléments dont Bulawayo fait recours pour définir chaque fait dans son roman. Pour la méthode, les approches réalistes, sociologiques et psychologiques sont prépondérantes pour le succès de cette étude. Il résulte que Bulawayo réussit à combiner les faits des migrants Africains avec sa fiction en attribuant les caractéristiques réalistes aux migrants de l'Afrique pour l'Occident, la motivation de départ pour le nouveau monde, aux expériences positives et négatives aux États Unis, et à l'expérience culturelle dans le nouveau monde. De plus, Bulawayo réussit à attribuer les aspects des vrais faits à la mort de Bornfree qui est aussi un pays fictif Africain qui connaît la révolution pour son changement.

**Mots-clés :** caractéristiques réalistes, migrants Africains, combiner, faits, fiction

## I. Introduction

Throughout the world, writers of different countries are attracted and influenced by various events or phenomena which occur in people's daily life. In this respect, the deportation of African children towards Europe, America and other parts of the world is highly regarded in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. In fact, African children move from Africa to Europe or America for many reasons as it is quoted by Bondo (2021, P.1) as follows: "The deportation of the African children is caused by many reasons but most of the common are: social conditions, education and dictatorship".

Honestly, *We Need New Names* has already received many critics. For example Bondo (2021) deals with the search for an Eldorado in No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, similarly, Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom (2020) deals with "Migration and its Discontent" in *We Need New Names*, and Elizabeth Adesunmbo

Omatoye (2019) writes her article entitled “New Names, New Identity in *We Need New Names*. To quote only few, this article studies in scrutiny realistic features in No Violet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, a realistic novel. Because, Roman Jakobson (1987, P.20) thinks that: “A novel is said to be realist if it is conceived by its author as a display of verisimilitude, as true life”. But what matters in this study is to show how Bulawayo succeeds to combine African migrants’ true facts with her fiction. In other terms, this study lies on the different features Bulawayo resorts to for their achievements in defining each fact in this novel. As for the method, realistic, sociological and psychological approaches are prominent for the success of this study. In other terms, they help for the understanding of the realistic features through the analysis of migrants from Africa to west, departure’s motivation to the new land, positive experience and undesirable conditions in the new land, cultural experience in the new land and death of Bornfree and outcomes.

### **1-Migrants from Africa to West**

This section illustrates realistic features which show that African children leave Africa and go to America and other lands. In fact, from its discovery by Christopher Columbus, America was and still is a land of dream till today. Besides children from other parts of the world, African children truly have in their minds America as a place of dream for everyone to be settled in. They are determined to cross risky borders to achieve their goals. Once in America, African children can now describe through letters and other means of communication different sights such as towns, cities, houses, buildings, and streets they can see for their families or friends still in Africa. Thus, No Violet Bulawayo (2013, P.1) a Zimbabwean writer, in her role of an artist, portrays the true fact that is African children migrate to America in her novel entitled *We Need New Names*:

We are on our way to Budapest: Bastard and Chipo and Godknows and Sbho and Stina and me. We are going even though we are not allowed to cross Mzilikazi Road, even Bastard is supposed to be watching his little sister Fraction, even though Mother would kill me dead if she found out; we are just going.

This extract is the first paragraph of *We Need New Names*. It opens in describing the fact of moving to Budapest. This is a remarkable realistic feature as true fact that Bulawayo emphasizes on. He casts light on the fact in using clearly ‘we are on our way to Budapest’. This sentence confirms that African children become ‘migrants’ towards America because Budapest is in America. Additionally, Bulawayo succeeds to combine true facts with her fiction in attributing realistic features to Aunt Fostalina:

Then I look up at the sky and see a plane far up in the clouds. I’m thinking it’s just a bird, but then I see that no, it’s not. Maybe it’s a British Airways plane like the one Aunt Fostalina went in to America. It’s what I will take myself when I follow Aunt Fostalina to America, I whisper in Chipo’s ear... But I don’t know why I have to take a British Airways plane to go to America; why not an American Airways one? ... Now I’m talking to myself because I don’t think she will understand (P.34).

This betrays how African children dream to go to America. It sounds that they can go by a British Airways plane or an American Airways one. Aunt Fostalina is a source of her family dreams. For example, her nephew is dreaming to go to America like her. To this connection, it is opportune to note that *We Need New Names* can be seen as a realistic novel through the different true facts portrayed in it. In this novel, readers can easily understand African children’s experience on migration facts. In this regard, Anzar Ahme, quoted by Bondo (2021, P.19) points it out: “Novels give you a chance to rich into other’s lives and experience, their emotions and struggles. Novels open the window where you can become the other person, it opens ways for you to think along different perspectives and understand people better in life”.

African children’s realities as experience can be highly seen as No Violet Bulawayo’s source of inspiration for *We Need New Names*. In her novel she makes readers know African people’s dreams to go to America: “ I am going to America to live with my aunt Fostalina, it won’t be long, you’ll see, I say, raising my voice so they can

all hear”(P.14). Even when speaking among them, African children again dream of America. Every thought is dominated by the dream of America: “When I go to live with aunt Fostalina in America I’ll send you the doll. There are lots of nice things over there, I say” (P.84). The portrayal of the different realistic features attributed to aunt Fostalina and to her people by Bulawayo, confirms African children’s realities for the migration as fact from Africa to America and other continents of the world. Then, why are African children so motivated to join new lands throughout the world? The next analysis brings light to this interrogation.

## **2-Departure’s Motivation to the New Lands**

The preceded section confirms the realistic facts in analyzing migrants from Africa to America. However, this one casts light on the “why” the existence of migrants from Africa to America? A close reflection on this interrogation reveals the results of several reasons as key motivation for the observation of migrants from Africa to the New Land. In this connection, there is the problem of politics and mismanagement of power in many African post independent countries as Alayna Hamilton, quoted by Bondo (2021, P.4) states: “Among the factors that undermine politics in Africa is the problem of mismanagement of power”. In the same way, Gordon, quoted by Bondo (2021, P.5) adds that:

Politics in Africa is still a serious problem, most post-independent government perverted into military dictatorships characterized by corruption and incompetence. Those who oppose, face ruthless oppression and imprisonment. To escape from that, are forced to migrate...

In *We Need New Names*, politics and mismanagement of power as realistic features can be seen through the action of the “bulldozers”:

The bulldozers are already near, big and yellow and terrible and metal teeth and spinning dust. The men driving the bulldozers are laughing. I hear the adults saying; why, why, why, what have we done, what have we done? Then the lorries come carrying the police with those guns and baton sticks and we run and hide inside the houses, but it’s no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming (P.65).

Realistic features are attributed to the action of terror perpetrated by bulldozers. Bulawayo succeeds to use bulldozers to represent a very terrible device as a monster that the government uses to cause terror towards the people. The remarkable fact here is that, the emphasis is put on the drivers of the bulldozers and the police men’s lack of humanity. Because when people are screaming and screaming the bulldozers are bulldozing and bulldozing. This shows how people live under a constant oppression in African countries. It is not easy to run because the Lorries will be coming with police men. In addition, people can no longer hide in their houses because the bulldozers will come and start bulldozing again. Bulawayo uses the figure of speech “repetition” with bulldozing and screaming to draw readers’ attention to this oppression. People’s houses are demolished and lives are under insecurity as it is put in this: “What, but aren’t you a pauper now? Aren’t these black people evil for bulldozing your home and leaving you with nothing now? You are all wrong” (P.75). People also live under permanent conflicts, there is no peace at all. In this connection, Devilor, quoted by Bondo (2021, P.12) writes:

There are considerable differences in people’s reasons for migrating, either internally or internationally, depending on where they come from and their personal circumstances. Often cited reasons are to escape conflict, get a better job, provide remittances to their families, or to help family member.

The image of oppression can be noticed again in: “The men knock down our house and Ncane’s house and Joseph’s house and Bongyi’s house and Sibbo’s house and many houses. Knockiyani knockiyani knockiyani: men driving metal, metal slamming brick, brick crumbling”(P.66). In the same time: “When they get to Mai Tari’s house she throws herself in front of a bulldozer and says, Kwete! You’ll have to bulldoze me first before I see my house go down, you go shit...when the bulldozers finally leave, everything is broken, ... smashed...wrecked”(P.66).

This passage presents the image of trauma that is true in African post independent countries. People no longer feel at ease in their own countries. They lost rights on their own land. Many countries are dominated by terror, disillusion, injustice, assassination and many other evil facts. The improper conditions of living actually reflect the bad governance of political affairs in the African post independent countries. For example in education, African children lack teachers and they lost the envy of going to school as it is declared in this conversation: "I don't go to school anymore because all the teachers left to teach over in South Africa and Botswana and Namibia and them, where there's better money"(PP.30-31).

In short, all of those reasons turn around bad conditions of education in African countries. That is why African children migrate to Western countries where they can have good education and achieve all they want.

### **3-African Migrants' Positive Experience in the New Land**

Politics and the mismanagement of the power in African post independent countries have been illustrated and considered in the preceded section as source of poverty, trauma, terror, bad conditions for African children education and of no good hospitals taking care of people's health. However, this section presents African migrants' favorable and true facts encountered in the New Land. In fact, this section reveals that African children are astonished and satisfied by good conditions of living in the New Land. In *We Need New Names* for example, Bulawayo succeeds to attribute realistic features related to African migrants' favorable conditions first, to food:

In America we saw more food than we had seen in all our lives and we were so happy... We ate like pigs, like wolves, like dignitaries; we ate like vultures, like stray dogs, like monsters; we ate like kings. We ate for all our past hunger, for our parents and brothers and sisters and relatives and friends who were still back there. We uttered their names between mouthfuls, conjured up their hungry faces and clapped lips-eating for those who could not be with us to eat for themselves (PP.238-239).

This means that food is available for everyone and at anytime in America. Interesting fact is that Bulawayo uses various figures of speech such as comparison to illustrate the fact on food abundance and its availability that migrants can find, and how they look like when eating it. Hyperbole as a figure of speech is used with "We ate like pigs, wolves, dignitaries, vultures monsters ...we ate for all our past hunger, ... parents and brothers and sisters ...". This figure of speech illustrates how migrants' hunger was. It also shows in the past and in their countries of origin that, they were very hungry and other people are still very hungry over there. Thus, when eating, they are also thinking about their parents and relatives who are not with them in America. Furthermore, the abundance of food as a true fact can be seen through the following saying: "All that food T.K. eats in one day, me and Mother and Mother of Bones would eat in maybe two or three days back home" (P.157).

African migrants' experience in America sounds positive as far as food is concerned. The quantity of food is so sufficient for them. Food for one day in America equals food for two or three days in African migrants' countries of origin. Secondly, *We Need New Names* casts light on the true fact on education as favorable to African migrants' children: "And besides, I have been getting all As in everything, even maths and science, the subjects I hate, because school is so easy in America even a donkey would pass ..." (P.167).

Here, the problem of education is revealed very favorable to migrants. This is a true fact observed by Darling as the first impression when comparing to the one of African countries. The system in teaching and learning appears very different from that of African countries. In America everything is easy to learn thanks to the educational system and conditions. Even animals can also be taught and they can learn easily and then understand too. What is very difficult with African countries. It seems that, conditions convince the mind to easily understand whatever the type of subject. In addition, realistic features are again attributed to Washington Academy as it is pointed out in this passage: "We're all finishing eighth grade at Washington Academy. Right now the three of us are hanging out at the basement of my house"(P.199). This information creates a kind of hope and dream to African children. Darling, from a mere family and poor country now dreams to go beyond

and have a good job. Beside, favorable conditions in America, there are also undesirable facts encountered by African migrants.

#### **4-African Migrants' undesirable Conditions in the New Land**

African migrants encounter various conditions when they succeed to set their feet in the New Land of West. Actually, they are subjects of good conditions on the one hand, and undesirable ones on the other hand. However, the objective of this section is to show how African migrants live in the New Land under some uncomfortable conditions. *We Need New Names* is also colored by many realistic features of negative facts encountered by African migrants in the New Land of West. The first undesirable fact that African migrants encounter is the climate conditions:

What you will see if you come here where I am standing is the snow. Snow on the leafless trees, snow on the cars, snow on the road, snow on the yards, snow on the roofs- snow, just snow covering everything like a sand. It is as white as clean teeth and it is also very cold. It is greedy monster too, the snow, because just look at how it has swallowed everything, where is the ground? Where are the flowers? The grass? The stones? The ants? The litter? Where are they? As for the coldness, I have never seen it like this (P.148).

There is a terrible experience as realistic feature attributed to the snow. In African migrants' countries of origin, Bulldozers and Lorries carrying policemen have been the source of all painful problems. However, in the New Land, the snow is seen as a very big monster. African migrants have never seen and experienced the snow. People are prevented to move from one place to another one. They are forced to stay home till a long period of time. Cars, Lorries, Trucks and the ground are all covered by the so called snow, the big monster. Thus, Bulawayo (2013, P.148) points out Darling's reaction: "I mean, coldness that makes like it wants to kill you, like it's telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you come from". This greedy monster cannot allow African migrants to live life: "If I were at home, I know I would not be standing around because something called the snow was preventing me from going outside so to live life"(P.153). If snow is qualified as a greedy monster preventing people from going outside, Visa is however, a precious paper that holds and prisons people's freedom and peace in the New Land of West:

When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken birders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We bit out tongues till we tasted blood, seat tensely on one butt cheek, afraid to sit on both because how can you sit properly when you don't know about your tomorrow?(P.242).

The remarkable fact here is that, Bulawayo succeeds to attribute realistic features to illegals. The fact is that, she illustrates the reason why illegal migrants can be deported and sent back to their countries of origin. Illegal migrants are aware of their situation or conditions. That is why they walk and live with anxiety in the New Land because they do not know about their tomorrow: "And because we are illegal and afraid to be discovered, we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind and shield away from those who were not like us(...). We hide our real names, gave false ones when asked"(P.242). Realistic features are attributed to Darling's reaction. It shows the miserable conditions in which she shares with other illegal migrants in the New Land. They avoid to be caught by the authorities of the New Land. Then, they decided to hide every time. Before having legal papers, they have to endure this so called miserable life. The lack of Visa actually, is a very tough problem: "Darling it is not time yet (...). Child, it's not like your father is Obama and he has the Air Force one; home costs money. Besides, you come on a visitor's visa, and that expired; you kiss this America bye-bye"(P. 189). In the new land, it is revealed that African children experience various situations as facts such as cultural facts.

#### **5-Cultural experience in the New Land**

The process from illegal conditions to legal ones takes many times for some African migrants and few for other ones. The end of African migrants' paper problems leads or gives the place to African migrants to adapt

themselves properly and then face cultural experience in the New Land. In this respect, this section casts light on migrants' cultural experience: the language, marriage, in short, the way of living in the New Land. In *We Need New Names*, realistic features on cultural experience are attributed to the wedding ceremony as fact:

I'm just going to see who he's marrying, that's all, Aunt Fostalina said (...). The first thing I notice when we get inside the hall are the white people. I know that of all the Americans, it's really the white people who love Africans the most, but still, looking at how many of them are at the wedding, I can't help but think, this can't be just love (...). We sit through the reading of messages from home. The MC explains that Dumi's parents and family couldn't make it to the wedding because they couldn't get visas so they wrote down their messages, which were later sent by e-mail (PP.170-171).

Cultural experience as realistic feature also has a great influence on people's life. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo presents African migrants' cultural experience on the English language use in the New Land:

When we hear the ringing (...). We hunt for the phone in the living room and quickly find it under a towel. Stina flips the phone open and says, Hallo. Then he laughs and gives it to Sbho, who laughs and gives it to Bastard, who laughs and gives it to me. I am the one who speaks better English, so I say, Hallo, how are you, how can I help you this afternoon? (P.127).

There is a question of the adaptation to the English language by a group of African migrants. Bulawayo attributes realistic features to the English language use for the telephone. She demonstrates that there are manners to adopt when receiving a telephone call. You cannot say only hallo! And stop. The best way is to say: Hallo, how are you, how can I help you this afternoon. This is the way white persons use and speak. Bastard laughs at Stina because Stina still has difficulties to accustom to the new culture of the New Land. This reality also makes *We Need New Names* a realistic novel because Yves Reuter (1996, P.134) states that: "any realistic novel is presented in the form of a "section of life", cut out in the history of "real people" belonging to our universe". Thus, the section below is also illustrative.

## **6-Death of Bornfree and Out Comes**

This section deals with realistic features through the death of Bornfree, dead for the change of his country named paradise replacing Zimbabwe. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, death is "The cessation of life and all associated processes; the end of an organism's existence as an entity independent from its environment and its return to an inert, nonliving state". In this respect, Bornfree has been beaten to death after trying to vote for change in paradise. He has been fighting for the change of his country which has been confronted to incurable sickness, social injustice, democracy, freedom and human rights. People's injustice as a realistic feature in paradise is expressed when Bornfree has been beaten to death by some armed men, and people have been there seeing like nothing is happening. It has been like in a cinema, beholders or spectators watching a horrible film but, they cannot interact. Then, Bornfree mother comes and sees her unique son has been beaten. She starts screaming and crying constantly. She addresses to people around and present over there, assisting that horrible stage.

"Why isn't nobody rescuing my son ", she insults those people because they have been afraid of being killed when trying to act against those killers. They beg Bornfree's mother not to act so that they can kill her too. Finally, the poor insists and unfortunately they cut her hands and then she fainted. In this connection, Bulawayo (2013, P. 133) resorts to repetition: "nobody can cure it ... it pleases killing killing killing", to mean that many people are killed without break.

Moreover, Bornfree is buried at heavenway. First, Bulawayo shows how graveyards look like at heavenway, the way that how people are buried. Since graveyards are not well maintained, they do not take care of that. Graveyards should be cleaned, that is a good thing, respecting the dead people. Bulawayo shows disappointment about the way that people are dying in paradise. For him, a person deserves a long life. There is the persistent murder in paradise, with such a killing of people without any break. Thus, people are dying early, they do not

enjoy a full life at all. In this respect, Bulawayo (2013, PP.132-133) uses comparison: “...they died young, their lives short like those of house mice ...”. He also uses anaphora: “our voices... our faces ... our weapons ... our clothes...” (P.143), that exemplifies that the blood is constantly everywhere.

Afterwards, the burial of Bornfree is unusual. Since nobody saw that one. The coffin of Bornfree is decorated by flag of his country Zimbabwe, with a white heart on the front. That is to say, Bornfree has been fighting for change. As the mourners, with the black t-shirt and a white heart on the front, shouting the word change so as to honor their friend and hero, died for change. In this regard, Bulawayo (2013, P.133) plays with oxymoron: “up-down, left-right, up-down ...”, to express how the coffin is shouldering in several directions and positions like a dance in the way to the burial. After Bornfree’s death, his mother was disconsolate. During the burial day, she becomes like a lion and raging bull. So everybody is in anger. There are angry speeches and prayers at the funeral and then the coffin is lowered and must be restrained. It has been unbelievable for her to see her unique son ready to be buried. So much that she tries even to go and enter into the coffin but she is captured. Once the coffin is buried and the group begins to sing, but she run off screaming partway through the song.

Afterwards the coffin has been set into the grave. The prophet Bitchington Mboro interfered by saying holy words. He reads a bible path and he made a prayer for Bornfree’s funeral and congratulated him for his courage, so he was like Moses. Moreover, he calls everyone to come and pray for change of the country. They climb the mountain to sing, worship, but nothing happens, change does not come at all in paradise. Thus, they think, they have been all disappointed so that god ignores them.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, realistic features have been the main concern under this analysis. It comes out that, in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, realistic features have been attributed to African children and their true facts. African children leave Africa and go to America. They can go by a British Airways plane or an American Airways one. Aunt Fostalina is a source of her family dreams. For example, her nephew is dreaming to go to America like her. In *We Need New Names* Aunt Fostalina and her relatives are attributed realistic features through the different true facts portrayed in it.

It has been also revealed that, there are several reasons as key motivation for the observation of migrants from Africa to the New Lands. Among those reasons, there is the problem of politics and mismanagement of power in many African post independent countries. Governments perverted into military dictatorships are characterized by corruption and incompetence. People who oppose to governments’ policy, face ruthless oppression and imprisonment. To escape from that, they are forced to migrate. In addition, there are considerable differences in people’s reasons for migrating, either internally or internationally, depending on where they come from and their personal circumstances. Often cited reasons are to escape conflict, get a better job, provide remittances to their families, or to help family members. Apart from African migrants’ negative experience due to the lack of precious legal papers, they also know positive experience in the new land.

As far as food is concerned, the quantity is so sufficient for them. Food for one day in America equals food for two or three days in African migrants’ countries of origin. Secondly, *We Need New Names* casts light on the true fact on education as favorable to African migrants’ children. Bulawayo attributes realistic features to Darling’s first impression when comparing to the one of African countries. The system in teaching and learning appears very different from that of African countries. In America everything is easy to learn thanks to the educational system and conditions. Even animals can also be taught and they can learn easily and then understand too. This information as reality creates a kind of hope and dream to African children till now.

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