

We need new names: By NoViolet Bulawayo. London: Reagan Arthur Books, 2013; pp 290.

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The novel captures the Diaspora experience of a young girl, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, after experiencing hardships in the Zimbabwean economic meltdown. It is therefore a critique of moving to the Diaspora as a solution to challenges in one's country. Darling constantly refers to the pain of missing home but stuck in the knowledge that she can never return because she has become an illegal immigrant in America. Once she visits 'home' she will not be allowed to come back as her papers are not in order. What intensifies the pain is the misunderstanding by those that remain in the troubled country that those in America are sitting pretty, with no worries at all. This pushes aunt Faustina and others to work double shifts so that they can send money home. The chapter "How they lived" fully captures the experience of those in the Diaspora from third world countries which gives the book a universal feel. Bulawayo writes:

And the jobs we worked, Jesus- Jesus – Jesus, the jobs we worked. Low paying jobs. Back breaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow. We took scalding irons and ironed our pride flat. We cleaned toilets. We picked tobacco and fruit under the boiling sun until we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds. We butchered animals, slit throats, drained blood.

We worked with dangerous machines, holding our breaths like crocodiles under water, our minds on the money and never on our lives....

We swallowed every pain like a bitter pill, drank every fear like a love portion, and we worked and worked

Every two weeks we got our paychecks and sent monies back home by Western Union and MoneyGram. We bought food and clothes for the families left behind; we paid school fees for the little ones. We got messages that said Hunger, that said Help, that said Kunzima, and we sent money. When we were asked, You guys work so hard, why do you work so hard? We smiled (*We Need New Names*, p. 244).

Most of the time is spent at work but those at home assume money is easy to come by as all their requests are met. They do not realize how much sacrifice is made on their behalf. The title of the novel becomes relevant as the immigrants acquire names that enable them to fit in the new society; they also give new names to their children who have no link with their country of origin or languages. They trade culture and identity for economic stability. The reader is called upon to evaluate the situation and empathize with the

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immigrant workers. Chipo, the teenage mother's critique of Darling and others who left the country is therefore cruel. Aunt Faustina and Darling's wages enable them to live in the long coveted suburb of Budapest. Chipo says to Darling:

But you are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No, you don't, my friend, it's the wound that knows the texture of pain; it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have the right to even say anything about that or anything and anybody, (...) Just tell me one thing. What are you doing not in your country right now? Why did you run off to America, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, huh? Why did you leave? If it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it. You have to fight for it no matter what, to make it right. Tell me, do you abandon your house because it is burning or do you find water to put out the fire? And if you leave it burning, do you expect the flames to turn into water and put themselves out? You left it, Darling, my dear, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country (*We Need New Names*, pp.285-286)?

Admittedly, all Zimbabweans suffer as a result of the situation in their country albeit the form of suffering differs (physical versus mental breakdown epitomized by Tshaka Zulu and uncle Kojo). There is need for unity among all Zimbabweans in rebuilding the nation. Studies carried out on the decade of crisis, 2000-2010, show that the nation survived due to remittances from those in the Diaspora (Murithi & Mawodza, 2011). Most of the people that left were on study visas which enabled them to acquire skills that can be used to develop the nation. The novel is thus good in opening debate on the validity of the paths chosen by various people.

The names of the characters in the novel are striking, one of Darling's friends is called Bastard. The opposition activists are called Bornfree and Message. One wonders though at the naming of the reverend in the text; is the author oblivious of the Shona meaning or it is intended to provoke? What is the significance of obscenities in the novel? If they are to show how wayward society has become, how is that to be remedied? What are the implications of public sexual molestations of women in the name of exorcising demons? In other words what is the author's social vision for the people of Zimbabwe or immigrants in America? If her aim is to teach as Achebe highlights as the main role of an artist, what is she teaching? In creating dystopia in the novel, is it a true reflection of the represented societies?

The novel is interesting in the way that language is handled and does aptly capture the pain and experiences of a turbulent time. Of note in the events covered is *Operation Murambatsvina* (2005) that saw the destruction of houses that had been built without approved plans from relevant local authorities. This is what leads to the squatter camp called Paradise where Darling and her friends live, depended on the charity of NGOs. The child narrator is effective in capturing the mood of the community at each event including the euphoria for change in the 2008 Presidential elections and the enmasse movement into the Diaspora that followed as the masses were disappointed. From then we have reported speech of what was happening in Zimbabwe as Darling moves to Michigan. The child pronunciations are also very humorous as Detroit Michigan is expressed as "Destroyedmichygen".

The book is definitely a must read for all Zimbabweans especially in the Diaspora. The issues it raises are very contemporary in the same vein as other contemporary Zimbabwean writers in English like Christopher Mlalazi, Tendai Huchu, Pettinah Gappah, Valerie Tagwira, Ivor Hartman and Brian Chikwava. The Diaspora experience poses a lot of questions as people face very difficult circumstances that require making difficult choices and compromises. The only point of regret is the obscene language in naming and pornographic sections that make it not suitable for young impressionable readers.