

MEDIAS AND THE IMMIGRANT'S CULTURAL METAPHORSIS IN NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES*.

COULIBALY Ibrahima
coulibalyibrahima0@gmail.com
Université Alassane Ouattara de Bouaké

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to highlight the process of cultural alienation of the migrants' subjects through Medias in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Indeed, like other immigrants' characters, the protagonist Darling is culturally upset when she arrives in the host society and discovers other values different from those of her home country. In the process of her interaction with Western culture, a "third culture" (Bhabha, 1994) emerges, one that gradually leads to her deculturation. Noticeably, the novel shows that the main factor of the immigrant's cultural mutation is connected to the Medias that play the role of cultural metamorphosis.

Keywords: Interculturality, Deculturation, Alienation, Immigration, Medias.

RESUMÉ

L'objectif de cette étude est de mettre en évidence le processus d'aliénation culturelle des sujets migrants à travers les médias dans *We Need New Names* de Bulawayo. En effet, à l'instar des autres personnages immigrés, la protagoniste Darling est bouleversée culturellement lorsqu'elle arrive dans la société d'accueil et découvre d'autres valeurs différentes de celles de son pays d'origine. Dans son interaction avec la culture occidentale, une « troisième culture » (Bhabha, 1994) émerge et conduit progressivement la protagoniste à sa déculturation. Le roman montre notamment que le principal facteur de cette mutation culturelle de l'immigré est lié aux médias qui jouent le rôle de métamorphose culturelle.

Mots clés: Interculturalité, Deculturation, Aliénation, Immigration, Medias.

INTRODUCTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o defines African culture as follows: "African culture is a product of a African peoples' history. But it also reflects history and embodies a whole set of values by which African people view themselves and their place in time and space" (Ngugi, 42). This definition of African culture by Ngugi wa Thiong'o implies that before the phenomenon of immigration, African people's history was shaped by values through which they constructed their community. However, with the effects of immigration on African people's homely identity and culture, their cultural heritage struggles to coexist with the alien values, hence originality is lost in their process of integrating the host society and their history is distorted. It is this cultural metamorphosis that is at stake in the novel of Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The objective is to make known how the cultural interactions in this host society can influence negatively the African homely ethics, hence the following topic: Medias and the immigrant's cultural metaphors in Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.

In fact, the migration of the African people to the West in the global age prompts an interweaving of their cultures, languages and societies with those of Westerners. The interweaving is marked by the predominance of Western culture upon the immigrants' cultures, due to the power of Medias such as new technologies, television, internet, smart phones, radio, news paper. That western cultural domination not only distorts the immigrants's cultures but also, brings about the alienation of their personality, hence the cultural shock they face. Mary Linda Vivian Onuoha contends that, "Migration whether forced or voluntary is one factor that uproots an individual from her erstwhile culture" (Onuoha, 64). That cultural deracination is the condition of the African migrant portrayed in Noviolet Bulawayo's narrative.

The writer was born as Tsholotsho a year after Zimbabwe's Independence from British colonial rule. She moved to the United States in her eighteens. Her writings depict immigration as a central feature that helps to explore cultural and racial dichotomies between Africa and the West. Certainly based on her own experience of immigration, her novels try to re-scrutinize the tensions that occur in the immigrant. Her literary works explore the everlasting cultural and racial complexities. Her novel *We Need New Names* is the story of Darling; a young woman who moves from her native country to the United States in search of better living condition. In America, her immersion in the western social culture via new

technological devices, leads her to lose her homely cultural and moral values. The transformation the female character undergoes corresponds to Schiller's argument about the immigrants. The word "immigrant", Schiller puts, "evokes images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture" (Schiller, 1). The African immigrants' culture is completely shifted through their contact with the new technologies abroad. They disregard old patterns endowed with ethics and morality and adopt western life style.

The immigrant's experience foregrounds the objective of the present article which consists in exploring the impact of Medias on the African immigrants' homely culture as represented in the novel.

In "Migration and its Discontents: A Postcolonial Rendering of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*", Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom portrays the manifold discontents that provoke the migration. He argues that migration is an old phenomenon that has grown in the twentieth-century but still continues to increase in the twenty-first century. His article develops the issue related to the causes of the mass migration of African to the west in Bulawayo's narrative. Nonetheless, Ngom overlooks new technologies which impact the life of the immigrants' characters in the novel. Contrastively to Ngom's opinion, Babacar Diakhate analyzes Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* in the context of disillusionment. For him, the novel explores "how political disillusionment has triggered off the search for utopia in relation to migration" (Diakhate, 39). He shows that although they flee poverty in Zimbabwe in search of better life in America, disillusionment is unavoidable. Utopia is often associated with disillusionment.

Therefore, to paraphrase Hédi Bouraoui, these critics write in a specific context that needed to be understood but limited for an authentic contribution, (Bouraoui, 49). In other words, none of the critics has analyzed the impact of new technologies on the African homely culture. Accordingly, this study takes a different path. It looks at the African tradition as a culture endowed with ethics and moral values. Then it explores how Medias as electronic components distort and transform the Africans' domestic culture.

The central question that guides therefore the study is expressed as follows: How do Medias contribute to the homely cultural distortion of African immigrants in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*? How does Bulawayo describe the immigrants' homely culture before their contact with the new technologies? What is the impact of Medias on the African immigrants' homely culture?

The protagonist Darling's immersion in the western world shocks her culture endowed with morality, ethics, and values in her community Paradise by transforming and mishaping these values.

1- PARADISE¹: A METAPHOR OF HOMELY CULTURE

This section aims at describing the immigrant home community Paradise as a community endowed with morality and ethics before their cultural interchange with the Western world. The work shows that without any access to the Medias, the new technological devices, the inhabitants of Paradise communities live in harmony, solidarity, hospitality, and nonviolence. It brings to the fore the African cultures as an Africanity endowed with ethical values. It shows the African inhabitants as culturally well-educated and dignified people.

In fact, in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, African homely culture is characterised by hospitality and solidarity. Without being in contact with the Medias, Darling and her friends in Paradise bestow brotherhood and unity. Darling narrates, "we are back in Paradise and are now trying to come up with a new game; it's important to do this so we don't get tired of old ones and bore ourselves to death, but then it's not also easy because we have to argue and see if the whole thing can work" (*WNNN*, 48).

The "we" being the mark of the plural shows the community life, the unity of the children. They do not live individually. They rather live as a family for they perform each palys in group. In Paradise, Darling's daily routine consists in playing games with her friends. The fact of performing the games in groups unveils the sense of unity, fraternity and peace they demonstrate. They go from Paradise to Budapest in group as the following passage shows their coming:

Going back to Paradise, we do not run. We just walk nicely like Budapest is now our country too, like we build it even, eating guavas along the way and spitting the peels all over to make the place dirty. We stop at the corner of AU Street for Chipu to vomit; it happens most of the time she eats. Today her vomit looks like urine, only thicker. We leave it there, uncovered. (*WNNN*, 11)

¹ Paradise is the living community of the fictional characters in *We Need New Names*

Since Chipo has difficulties, all the members of the group are eager to bring her assistance. They do not leave her alone in her difficulty. The solidarity around Chipo shows that in Paradise, the children live a community life like their parents.

More than the hospitality and fraternity, Darling and her friends in Paradise incarnate the value of nonviolence. In fact, through the game “For real” (WNNN, 139), the characters make the promotion of love and nonviolence. Darling voices:

Stina can fight Bastard if he wants, but he only to looks at him without answering to his insults ...It is Bastard's turn to decide what the new game is about and even after this morning, he still wants it to be about china, for what, I don't know...after, all the people leave... I start, Bastard interrupts me and says, I am Bornfree, Kill me! At first we just stand there, looking at the grave like we want him to give the how to instructions for a game about the dead since we have never played one before. Then Godknows starts making hooting and groaning... (WNNN, 139-140)

The young perform everything in group that show their mutual respect in their community. Their policy is an intermutual friendship and collaboration, one that contrasts with animosity and violence. It is Bastard's turn to decide on the type of game the group must play. Though he is not the elder in the group, but for the sake of the solidarity, peace and fraternity the members of the group have for each other, they do not show any resistance to him. Together, they rather perform the games. The children's togetherness shows the extent to which the people from Paradise live in harmony. Life in their community is based on the values of solidarity and mutual acceptance. They live like brothers and sisters.

The people in the community of Paradise can be considered as the prototype of well-educated and disciplined people. In Paradise, Darling learns from her community that there are certain attitudes to adopt in the presence of adults. When her grandmother Mother of Bones is present, she knows that she has to act in a good way. From the onset, in the day that Jesus dies, Mother of Bones teaches her grand-daughter Darling to go to church with her, instead of playing with her group. Because Darling is obedient to her grandmother, she accepts to be disciplined by the old woman. She reports :

Jesus Christ died on this day, which is why I have to be out here washing with cold water like this. I don't like cold water and I don't even like washing my whole body unless I have somewhere meaningful to go. After I finish and dress, me and Mother of Bones will head off to her church. She says it's the least we can do because we are all dirty sinners and we are the ones for whom Jesus Christ gave his life. (WNNN, 19)

Mother of Bones does not only discipline Darling, she also teaches her the importance of going to church on that day. From this, Mother of Bones transmits the value of religious belief to her grandchild.

Furthermore, Darling assimilates other cultural values from her grandmother. Darling mentions, “Inside the shack, Mother of Bones has already laid out my good yellow dress, which I wouldn’t dare wear if my mother were here ; she went to the border to sell things so I have to stay with Mother of Bones until she returns” (*WNNN*, 21). This action of Darling shows that the grandmother succeeds to teach her how and when to talk to adults. She must also be obey her grandmother when her mother is not present. The grandmother in this context shows Darling how to be disciplined, obedient and respectful. All this discipline is cultural virtues that help Darling to be well-educated culturally. The cultural virtues help Darling to be respectful towards an adult. Though Mother of Bones is ignorant about the useless of the money she keeps secretly, Darling does not dare raising her voice to show Mother of Bones’s stupidity. Darling claims :

Now Mother of Bones is patting the money like it is a baby. Like she is trying to put the baby to sleep. It’s old money, Mother of Bones, it’s useless now, don’t you even get it? You just have to throw it away or use it to make fire like everybody else. Now they say we’ll start using American money, I say, but to myself so Mother of Bones doesn’t hear. (*WNNN*, 25)

The cultural virtue transmitted from the grandmother to the daughter brings Darling to be how she can speak to an adult. Darling knows that a child does not have right to interfere in a conversation between adults. This is the case of Mother of Bones and Darling. She knows that Mother of Bones does not speak to her, therefore she cannot say anything to her. Through this action, she demonstrates respect and submissiveness towards her grandmother. The grandmother and Darling are thus characters who bears the African culture in its true ethical context.

In addition, the African culture is portrayed through the involvement of parents in the education of their children. In the Zimbabwean community Paradise, the narrator represents parents as people who take care of their children whose behaviour and actions are codified in the frame of parental authority. Children are taught values of acceptance and tolerance towards others. Darling’s mother recommends her to accept her father ‘s authority despite his sickness. Because the girl is, disciplined in this way of the father’s importance in the

family, she stops avoiding her father, and her respect for him grows proportionally. Darling describes her father in the following terms :

His voice sounds like something burned and seared his throat. My son. My boy, he says. Listening to him is painful; I want to put my hands on my ears. He is like a monster up close and I think of running again but Mother is standing there in a red dress looking dangerous. My boy, he keeps saying, but I don't tell him that I'm a girl, I don't tell him to leave me alone. (*WNNN*, 90)

Though she intends to leave her father and contradict him for his use of referring to her as “a boy” (*WNNN*, 90), she feels the authority of the mother who orders her to stay close to her father and avoid contradicting him even if he refers to her as a boy. In this respect, the mother insistently teaches her the values of obedience to parents. The narrative implies that parents are involved in children's education in African tradition.

In addition to the mother's recommendations that pose as teachers, her own conduct displays African women's sense of dignity and nobility. Bulawayo's fictions represents Mother of Bones as a dignified African woman. When the children are given poster to stick on the houses in Paradise for voting, Mother of Bones shows nobility by warning the children to leave her shack with no poster of vote. Darling puts, “When we're finished, there's a poster on every shack, except Mother of Bones's because she told us she would kill us if we ever put our nonsense on her door. Now, with all the posters, Paradise looks like a colourful thing. We are proud of ourselves ; we clap and we dance and we laugh” (*WNNN*, 61).

The rejection of the posters by Mother of Bones refers to her rejection of Western domination. It can be held that she refuses to be influenced by the negative effects of western life style. She implies that she defends ethics and virtues which she aims to transmit to others immigrants in the community, namely Darling. In this sense, the name of the community Paradise becomes significant, as the place of such values, ethics, hospitality, fraternity, nonviolence, mutual respect, tolerance, dignity and submissiveness to adults. Nonetheless, like any edenic myth, the space Paradise tends to disappear due to the negative impacts of Medias and new technological devices, which distort the ethical values. When the African immigrants access the western instruments of communication, their cultural values alter, and the loss becomes deculturation for these African descent populations.

2- MEDIAS AND DECULTURATION

Deculturation is a socio-cultural process through which people are alienated from some of their core cultural values and practices. This definition refers to Ani Yurugu's view. In fact, according to her, "the deculturation process has its ultimate aim the devalorization and depreciation of the African cultural thought and behaviour in the world" (Ani, 54).

The aim consists in showing that as the African characters migrate to the West, they lose all values from Paradise through their contact with the Medias.

In Bulawayo's *We Need News Names*, Darling's first contact with western values is achieved and reinforced by Medias. As a result, she becomes a decultured person who gradually loses the moral values learnt at home in her country. The value of respect and submissiveness towards adults that she learns in Paradise is substituted for disobedience. The protagonist's behaviour, as well as her ways of dressing and speaking change. When she arrives in United States, and discovers the Western people's ways of life through TV, Darling's ways of speaking towards adults also changes. The following passage discloses this disrespectful attitude:

I start to call her crazy... I just roll my eyes instead. On TV, on the marry show and jerry springer and stuff, I have seen these kids calling their mothers crazy and bitches and whores; leave me alone motherfucker, the TV has also taught me that if I am talking to someone, I have to look him in the eye, even if it is an adult, even if it is rude. (WNNN, 206-207)

Darling addresses these words to her own mother and her uncle, the husband of her Aunt Fostalina. Words that she never uses towards an adult when she was in Paradise. But now, she is disrespectful and insolent to adults. The young immigrant is being altered through the Television. She devalorizes and depreciates the African cultural ethics she has learnt from her community back in Paradise.

Moreover, the internet or social Medias so much impact Darling that she loses her dignity. Under the negative influence of Redtube, Xtube via computers and internet, Darling adopts immoral attitude such as perversion. In the novel, the female character and her friends often hurry home and watch pornography on socio-media platforms. They substitute their studies for pornography sessions. Her detailed portrayal of their time reads:

The days, when we get off school we hurry home to watch flicks. We always do it at my house because there's nobody there in the afternoons since Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo are always at work, and TK comes home only to sleep, like this is a hotel. When we come in from school we fling our book bags by the door and head straight to the downstairs computer. Before, we used to watch Xtube, but now we have discovered RedTube, which is way classier and doesn't have any viruses.

We have been watching the flicks in alphabetic order so we're not all over the place...we have learned to do noises, so when the boy starts working the woman we moan and we moan and we groan, our noise growing fiercer with each hard thrust like we have become the woman in the flicks and are feeling the boy's thing inside us, tearing us up. Usually, Kristal is the loudest because she has a high-pitched voice, but today Marina surpasses us all. (WNNN, 200)

They eventually graduate to depravity actions in the absence of the parents. Back in Paradise, Darling bears nobleness, but her interaction with the Medias leads her to adopt bestiality and become practitioners of sexual acts. Their attitude shows the devalorization the socio media is causing. The girl and her friends are taught by new technology, instead of the lessons they are given at home. Their principle teacher turns to be the screen that metamorphoses their cultural ethics. In Paradise, during her spare time, she is used to playing games like "country-game, Find Ben-laden, For real" (WNNN, 139) with her friends. Contrastively in America, her spare time is devoted to obscene and immoral acts with her host friends Marina and Kristal. Technologies become a major's tool of Darling's depravation.

Aunt Fostalina is another immigrant impacted by the Medias. She spends days in front of television. Because of her training session on Television, Aunt Fostalina does not play her role of wife, to the extent that she does not have time to cook diner for her husband. The narrator depicts the woman's attitude through her total addiction to the screen:

Uncle Kojo, TK's father who is like Aunt Fostalina's Husband...comes in from work and says, Fostalina, the Lions and the Giants actually on, no ?... Aunt Fostalina doesn't not reply; she has to keep up with the women on TV.... Uncle Kojo comes home from work and says to Aunt Fostalina, you know, me, I actually don't understand why there is never any food in this house, Fostalina. ...and he says, Fostalina, ever since you started this weight thing you never cook. (WNNN, 151-155)

This description shows that Aunt Fostalina loses cultural values in two ways. First, the fact of imitating the TV program distorts her. As Homi K. Bhabha contends in *The Location of Culture*, any imitation is an image, and any image is distortion, therefore this TV program imitation distorts her leading to her dishonor since she is becoming slimmed worryingly. Secondly, she loses her dignity since she no more fulfil her role of wife. The relationship between Aunt Fostalina and her husband Uncle Kojo gets worst as he complains about Fostalina's disrespectful attitude. He even accuses his wife of having lost sight of African culture which teaches the wife to take care of the family, that is, cooking and taking care of her children and husband. The portrayal demonstrates the negative influence of the

social Medias on African immigrants represented by Darling and Aunt Fostalina. The Medias are a factor of depreciation of African values such as respect and submissiveness to the husband. The image of the screen in the novel is associated with ethical distortion, and physical disability, just like Fostalina whose life is described in terms of disobedience to her husband, carelessness, and laziness that impacts on her body. She is portrayed as being captured by the power of TV culture that influences her:

I actually don't understand why you are doing all this. What are you doing to yourself, Fostalina, really-exactly-what? Kick. And punch. And kick. And punch. Look at you, bones bones bones. All bones. And for what? They are not even African, those women you are doing like, shouldn't that actually tell you something? [..]. That there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind (WNNN, 151).

These sport programmes on television oriented towards the loss of excessive weight produces absurd results as Aunt Fostalina's addiction to the screen causes the loss of family.

Aunt Fostalina and Darling are not the only immigrants impacted by the Medias. Uncle Kojo is equally under the negative impacts of the Medias Television. While he is an important pillar of the family, he abandons his role of father and educator because of television programmes of football games. Proportionally, his role of husband and father decreases in importance to the detriment of his family. The narrator mentions:

When Uncle Kojo comes from work, all he does is to sit in front of the TV. Aunt Fostalina says, when are you going to do something with the kids, Kojo? You are never home, and when you are, you just park in front of that damn TV and watch that damn football. Can't you take them to the movies or the mall or something? Uncle Kojo doesn't seem to bother about listening to her; he only says, Touchdown! (WNNN, 152)

It can be inferred from this description that Uncle Kojo's family is threatened because of the Medias. Aunt Fostalina does not have any time to accomplish her role of African mother such as taking care of her husband and cooking for the family because of her sport session on Television. Uncle Kojo is not any longer committed to the education of his children because of his football program on Television. The loss of ethical values learnt in Paradise is achieved by mother and father or wife and husband.

TK, Darling' cousin, Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo's son reproduce the same addiction to Medias, specifically with video games. These video games are so much influential that they replace the values of family education. TK is also ignorant of the virtues

of solidarity and fraternity, because of the rupture of family ties. In Paradise Darling, has been taught the values of brotherhood and harmony transmitted through games with her mates. In the United States, however, Darling discovers individualism embodied by her cousin TK. TK prefers to stay alone and play his video games, instead of playing with his cousin Darling. These video games cause TK to adopt individualistic attitudes. The conversation between Darling and her cousin TK is illustrative of the latter's sense of individualistic life, "I said, what are you doing, and he said, Can't you see I'm playing a game? and I said, what kind of game do you play by yourself? and he said Get the fuck out. I will not be friends with TK; he shuts himself up there like he lives in his own country by himself" (WNNN, 153).

Because of the videos games, TK rejects and disdains Darling. In her Paradise community, Darling uses to play with many children. It is part of the norms of the community of Paradise as Darling puts it, "If I were at home ... me and Sbho and Bastard and Chipo and Godknows and Stina would be out ... playing Find bin Laden or country-game or Andy-over" (WNNN, 153). Life and values in Paradise are different from those the immigrants live, in America. Like their parents, the immigrants' children become culturally deformed, being disconnected from the cultural values of their home countries, and being torn between traditional values and Western lifestyle that tends to de-naturalize the social norms of the immigrants.

Thus, the Medias contribute to the cultural alteration of the African immigrants whose life praises ethical values. Darling's cultural transformation is exemplified by his insubordination and perversity. TK becomes cantankerous and obstinate. Aunt Fostalina disgraces herself. Uncle Kojo is careless about his family. Consequently, such cultural ethics as dignity, respect, brotherhood, friendship, harmony, and peace in Paradise, disappear in the family. Medias lead to the deterioration of these cultural values.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the African community fictionalized in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* has been deciphered as a community founded on cultural ethics that characterise the Africans

before their cultural interactions with the Western ways of life. The values of their home country stress solidarity, hospitality and nonviolence, all of which are dismantled in the host country. These values picture their community Paradise as a promised land imbued with good moral qualities.

However, when the African characters migrate to the West, their contact with western culture and habits is achieved through the Medias and new technological devices. Their cultural alteration and cultural conversion hardly create Homi Bhabha's "third culture". By contrast, the cultural metamorphosis is observed through their loss of dignity and respect, as well as their perverted conduct, depravity and indifference towards others. The cultural alteration is also depicted through the loss of hospitality and fraternity, the immigrants' cantankerousness towards people. Definitively, the Medias read as factors of cultural devaluation and metamorphosis.

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