

**INTRACONTINENTAL MIGRATION AND THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT: A
STUDY OF NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES***

Nahiri Jean Charles NAHIRI
Littératures et Civilisations Africaines des Pays Anglophones
nahiri93@gmail.com
Université Alassane Ouattara de Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Abstract: This paper intends to demonstrate the way movements across national borders within Africa foster the development of the continent. It explores NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names* and brings out how the author has imagined such development capacity in the construction of the narrative. The novel, mainly, tells about Africans' immigration towards western worlds, such as the United States of America and Britain. However, in the process of telling the events, the narrator subtly gives indications pertaining to African intracontinental migration. In this regard, this paper considers characters' cross-border movements within Africa and uses them as a means of development. This analysis will be achieved based on the theory of narratology. Actually, it lays emphasis on characters, spaces and events to relate migration and continental development.

Keywords: Africa, Bulawayo, Development, Displacement, Migration, Movement

Résumé: Ce travail vise à démontrer la manière dont les mouvements transfrontaliers au sein de l'Afrique favorisent le développement du continent. Il explore le roman *We Need New Names* de NoViolet Bulawayo tout en mettant en lumière la manière dont l'auteure y a construit une telle capacité. Principalement, le roman traite de l'immigration des Africains vers les pays occidentaux, tels que les Etats-Unis d'Amérique et la Grande Bretagne. Toutefois, esquissant son art narratif, le narrateur met, subtilement, en avant des indices ayant traits à la migration intracontinentale africaine. Ainsi, ce travail s'intéresse aux mouvements transfrontaliers des personnages au sein de l'Afrique, les avançant comme canal de développement. Pour se faire, il utilise la narratologie comme cadre théorique. En clair, il s'agira de mettre l'accent sur les personnages, les actions et les espaces, les mettant en relation avec la migration et la question du développement continental.

Mots-clés : Afrique, Bulawayo, Développement, Déplacement, Migration, Mouvement

Migration is a phenomenon which is part of human history. It is “synonymous with the movement of people across space(s) and time(s) to settle outside their homeland” (S. Gupta, T. Omoniyi, 2007, P. 116). Its proliferation within writings gives evidence of the interest of authors about it. For instance, Chantal Lacroix writes to shed light on one of the common beliefs about migrants. She points out the beliefs that “immigrants ‘steal’ the few remaining good jobs from deserving nationals” (C. Lacroix, 2010, P. xi). From this quotation, it appears that migrants are considered as obstacle to natives’ opportunities. In other instances, they appear as unhomey. It is said that “immigrants experience disparate levels of... exclusion from, the same host society” (S. M. Bucerius, M. Tonry, P. 551). “Exclusion” from the host society is nothing but a way of showing how migrants feel not at home in their host countries. From these perspectives, it stands out that migrants are perceived negatively. However, should they always be ascribed with negative considerations? Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo has incorporated migration within her novel from a vision which portrays migrants as positive agents. Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* is a contemporary novel which focuses on movements across national and continental borders. The chaotic representation of Africa as a reason of migration has caused some critics such as S. Sibanda to identify the novel as a means Bulawayo uses to “gain literary capital” from western audiences (S. Sibanda, P. 85). In this paper however, emphasis is laid on cross-border-movements within a spatial locality that represents the African continent. This paper is interested in bringing out the way migration of African characters across borders within Africa, though less dealt with compared to international migration, fosters the development of the continent.

The exploration of the novel, with the purpose of debunking development strategies therein, will be achieved on the basis of narratology. M. Bal defines narratology as “the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’” (M. Bal, 2009). This paper focuses mainly on items such as space, character and events to reveal the artistic representation of development strategies pervading the novel. The first chapter is devoted to sketching out a hermeneutical competency vis-à-vis the construction of an African space. The chapter lays emphasis on the way the African continent, where movements are realized, is represented. The second chapter explores development strategies. It focuses on events and characters and their movements across African geographical spaces to show how they work out development.

1. The fictionalization of Africa in Bulawayo’s novel

Writing a novel is a space where identity is, in many ways, expressed. Though not attempting to make it an absolute truth insofar as the relationship between a text and its author is concerned, it appears in many instances that novels are indicators of the attachment of their authors to their origins. While dealing with figurative development strategies, this paper argues that NoViolet Bulawayo shows interest as far as the African continent is concerned. In this chapter, while expressing a close attention to writing techniques, light is brought on how Bulawayo has fictionally constructed Africa. Indeed, this chapter lays emphasis on some items of the narrative such as space, character and event to highlight the representation of Africa.

We Need New Names is NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel. It is a novel about migration. Therein, Bulawayo has constructed characters moving from African countries to Western countries. In this respect, the novel tells about Darling, the main character, who leaves Africa, Zimbabwe precisely, to America, her dreamt destination. Pier Paolo Frassinelli says in this sense: "*We Need New Names* is a novel about migration and displacement – experiences it brings to the fore by having the main character cross the borders that separate an unnamed place that looks very much like Zimbabwe and the United States, to which she relocates at page 147" (2015, P. 715). From this quotation, it appears that the navigation of characters across borders is central to the novel.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* is a metaphorical construction. The plot, characters and settings are literary devices used to represent Africa and its people. P. P. Frassinelli shares a similar opinion, which can be perceived through the text quoted above. In the expression of his point of view, P. P. Frassinelli uses the expression "looks very much like" to identify the countries where migrations are operated. The use of such an expression puts into correlation places in terms of real existence and fictional creation.

Africa is fictionalized within Bulawayo's novel. Bulawayo uses literary devices such as event, space and temporal location to help her readers imagine Africa. For instance, she constructs places bearing the names of some African countries. As illustrations, it is found in the novel places named "South Africa" (N. Bulawayo, 2014, P. 44), "Botswana and Tanzania" (P. 49), and "Sudan and Congo" (P. 50). In addition to places, she names her characters after the names of some African figures. For instance, she gives the following names to her characters: "Miriam Makeba, Lucky Dube, Brenda Fassie" (P. 161) and "Tshaka Zulu" (P. 272). Finally, but not exhaustive, she incorporates events reminding readers about African events. As an illustration, the narrator tells about Mai Tari, a character from the novel, who tries to resist a destruction operation but who ends up failing. Despite her efforts, the narrator says: "When

the bulldozers finally leave, everything is broken, everything is smashed, everything is wretched. It is sad faces everywhere, choking dust everywhere, broken walls and bricks everywhere, tears on people's faces everywhere' (P. 66). This event resembles a governmental operation launched in Zimbabwe. In this perspective, Silindiwe Sibanda states: "The temporal location of the novel is reminiscent of the post-Operation Murambatsvina (remove rubbish) era of 2005 wherein the Zimbabwean government deliberately destroyed thousands of homes in a bid to clear the cities of slums, informal businesses and disease" (2018, P. 75). S. Sibanda agrees on that the destruction event which leaves the characters with "sad faces" is nothing but the incorporation of an operation implemented by the Zimbabwean government, in real terms.

Thus, these few items constitute a writing technique used by Bulawayo to fictionalize Africa. In this sense, the African space is therefore represented as a place of wretch. This is probably the reason why the characters identify their homeland as "kaka country" (P. 13). For them, home is unpleasant. In this regard, N. Motahane and R. Makombe remark that: "The word kaka literally translated as "filth or excrement" which means they now associate home with the undesirable (N. Motahane, R. Makome, 2020, P. 7). Associating such a term as "kaka" to the African space alludes to the representation of an Africa with poor conditions. Nevertheless, the novel expands its interest by bringing forth some strategies worth working out development. These strategies are explored in the following chapter.

2. Bulawayo's Writing: An imagination of Africa's Development

This chapter is concerned with the question of the development of Africa. It explores the relationship between society and literature. This chapter analyses Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and demonstrates how the development of a place resembling Africa is achieved. Actually, the chapter focuses on characters' movements across a space the author has constructed and delimited as their continent of origin while highlighting the way such movements can contribute to its development.

In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo imagines strategies worth developing the continent. Such development strategies are elaborated through characters' migrations. In fact, characters' movements across national borders within the African space are allegorical to transformational achievements. In this paper, migration is equated with other terms such as movement, circulation and displacement. To highlight the similarity between the terms, S. Gupta and T. Omoniyi say that "The notion of migration is synonymous with the movement of people across space(s) and time(s) to settle outside their homeland" (2007, P. 116).

The movements of peoples across borders foster development. The movement of a people, from the homeland to the hostland, can be beneficial for both, the home and the host countries. As a consequence, “migration should be embraced within development planning. This ensures that migration is viewed as an issue that affects all aspects of human development, and is entrenched in the broader development strategy and therefore fosters a coherent and coordinated approach” (African Union, 2020, P. 152). This text highlights the fact that migration is a means of development. Bulawayo has shown interest in the movement of persons and has portrayed it as a means of development of the African continent.

We Need New Names is a novel about migration and displacement. It contains the movement of African characters toward countries of the West. In the narration process however, Bulawayo empowers her narrator so as to subtly shed light on the migrations of Africans within the African space. Such movements by Africans in Africa constitute a development springboard. Whereas some characters immigrate, for instance, to America like Darling (P. 147) and to Britain like Stina’s uncle (P. 4-5), others rather migrate to African countries, thereby circulating within the continent. To bring light on the movement of characters, the narrator says:

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambitions are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing – to all over, to countries near and far; to countries unheard of, to countries whose name they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves. (Bulawayo, 2014, P. 145)

The narrator reveals the migration phenomenon which is vivid in the country. She emphasizes the way those migrant characters are experiencing desperate situations. Living then in a country where “things fall apart” (P. 145), characters make it their objective to search better life opportunities in other countries.

In the portrayal of migration, Bulawayo has constructed characters who are rather interested in making African countries their destinations. For characters in this category, African nations are the right place where they can enjoy new life opportunities, compared to those who are driven toward western countries. Through the insertion of such intracontinental itinerary, Bulawayo’s novel highlights the way such movements can engender development. In fact, migration is qualified as a catapulting factor as far as development is concerned. In this regard, N. G. Schiller and T. Faist argue that “migrants are seen as vital agents of international development” (2010: 2). According to this point of view, it comes out that migrants act in such a way development is attributed to migration.

Considered the fact that migrants are identified as agents of development, it stands out that migrant characters rushing towards other African countries are meant to create African continental development. Actually, the representation of African intracontinental migration is constructed through characters such as Darling's Father, Makhosi, Moshe and her teachers. These characters have all headed towards other African countries, in quest of better life experiences. The narrator says about them: "Now Father is in South Africa, working..." (P. 22), "After a while, he too", Makhosi, "went to South Africa, like Father" (P. 23). About her teachers, she says: "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..." (P. 31). About Moshe, she says: "Moshe went to South Africa a few days ago" (P. 44). All these characters are presented as experiencing desperate lives in their home country. As a consequence, they all move to other African countries where they aim to work in order to make money.

The movement of persons fosters socio-economic development. Bulawayo imagines such reality through characters who move across African national borders, which is pivotal in uplifting economic productivity. In this respect, N. G. Schiller and T. Faist say:

For example, a United Nations Development Programme report, *Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development* (UNDP 2009: 3), argues that migrants "boost economic output, at little or no cost to locals. Indeed, there may be broader positive effects ... In migrants' countries of origin ... [m]oving generally brings benefits, most directly in the form of remittances sent to immediate family members. (2010, P. 2)

N. G. Schiller and T. Faist highlight a bipolar benefit which can be applied to the African context as analysed in this paper. They highlight the fact that migrants "boost economic output", both in host and home countries. Thus, the movement of Africans across African borders boost economic output which, in turn, results in the growth of African economy. Bulawayo has represented such accomplishment through her characters.

The movement of African characters across spaces reflecting African regional borders achieves economic development. The movement of Darling's Father, Makosi and Moshe to South Africa and that of the teachers to places such as Botswana and Namibia are ways of imagining means of economic development in the continent. Actually, as Schiller and Faist underline, the arrival of these characters within these African countries are means towards the economic growth of these host countries and their countries of origin. As they also underscore, migrants contribute to the economic growth of their home countries by sending money back to their relatives. Such practice is well illustrated through Darling who complains about her Father who is in South Africa but does not send money. She says: "Now Father is in South Africa,

working, but he never writes, never sends us money, never nothing” (P. 22). Her discontent regarding her Father reveals the fact that migrants send money home. In fact, at this point, Bulawayo lets her readers imagine transfer of money by migrants along with her. In clear, Darling’s complaint stands as a symbol to reflect such economic output. Thus, Makhosi, Father, Moshe and the teachers, among other characters, are agents of financial growth for their new environment as well as their respective homes. Though more details are not given about these characters’ daily experience within their new countries, their economic contribution can be perceived through the protagonist, Darling, who immigrates to America, her dreamt destination. Darling, the narrator, gives a description of what her life looks like in America:

When I’m not cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries, I’m bent over a big cart like this, sorting out bottles and cans with names like Faygo, Pepsi, Dr Pepper, 7-Up, root beer, Miller, Budweiser, Heineken. They are collected over at the front, where they have been returned for deposit, and then wheeled back here, where I have to separate the cans and put them in the rows of tall boxes lining the wall. When the boxes fill up, I pull over the giant plastic bags that hold the cans, tie their mouths, and pile them into a colourful mountain. The glass bottles go into small cartoon boxes that are supposed to be stacked separately. (P. 251)

This paragraph of the narrative sheds light on Darling’s life as an African immigrant in America. She is presented as working in a shop under the supervision of “Jim, the short, hairy manager” (P. 252). Through her work within this shop, the author highlights the way migrants in America contribute to the economic boost of the country. Similarly, migrants within African countries boost the local and African continental economy.

Just like Darling in America, Makhosi, Darling’s Father, Moshe and the teachers, by their works outside of their home, boost the economic outputs of their new countries, namely, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The achievement of these characters can be perceived through the following argument:

In Côte d’Ivoire, immigrants’ contribution to economic growth is higher than their percentage in the population (OECD/ ILO, 2018). In South Africa, immigrants have a positive net impact on the Government’s fiscal balance. Similarly, in Ghana, the contribution of immigrants to the Government’s fiscal balance exceeds the contribution of the native-born population (on a per capita basis). (African Union, 2020, P. 177)

From this argument, it, therefore, comes out that the aforementioned characters are economic development agents for their countries of arrival, including their home countries where they are supposed to send money to their relatives. In this chapter, light has been shed on how African characters boost the economic outputs of Africa as they circulate across African borders. However, the economic growth is not the unique asset brought forth in the novel as capable of

working out development. The exploration of the novel puts forward culture as a means of development.

Contacts between peoples engender cultural reconfigurations. Such experience is constantly observed in relation with movement of peoples. Moving across spaces organizes encounters between people which, in turn, influence individuals' living ways. Crossing cultural borders happens to be so beneficial for and within a society that the African Union has made it a core value in its political engagement. Such engagement aims at creating interactions between individuals and populations from different African backgrounds. In fact, African Union's African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which is a development strategy, is "mainly based on a deliberate effort of cooperation between individuals and groups of different nationalities. It is a process of social cohesion between nationals and other populations from a given community" (African Union, 2020, P. 27). The objective behind the effort of creating cooperation between individuals and populations is to work out development strategies as far as culture is concerned.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* is about cultural reconfiguration and development. It brings to the forefront how encounters between peoples give birth to cultural restructuring, which in turn, engenders cultural development. Culture refers to "the body of moral, religious, political, and scientific theory, and the customary practices of a society" (K. A. Appiah, 1992, P. 20). It is the set of rules guiding the mind and social behaviours of people. In this regard, F. Fanon says that "A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (1963, P. 233). From this quotation, it stands out that culture is a source of identity for a society. Thus, the encounter between peoples from different backgrounds give rise to a new form of culture deriving from the culture of each one of them. Bulawayo has meticulously constructed such cultural contact in her novel.

As mentioned earlier, the narrator tells about the movement of the natives. She says: "Look at them leaving in drove, the children of the land...Moving, running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing, - to all over, to countries near..." (2014, P. 145). Through these words, Darling, the narrator of the novel, highlights the movement of Zimbabwe's native children to "near" countries. The use of "near" in the narration brings light on the fact that emigrating characters do not only move to the West but also stay in Africa as seen above. This narration shows interest in cultural development within the continent. Earlier in this paper, characters such as Makhosi, Darling's Father, Moshe and the teachers are

identified as going from their home, Zimbabwe, to nearby countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania and Botswana. The displacement of these characters from their home to the neighbouring countries equates the transfer of cultures. As the characters emigrate, they carry along with them their home cultures. T. Falola (2003, P. 282), highlights such fact by saying that “the transfer of culture was made possible by ... migrations”. For him, in their movements, migrants transport their home cultures to their places of arrival. Thus, it comes out that, as they emigrate from Zimbabwe, the characters transfer their Zimbabwean cultures in the new environments. Even though less has been said about the characters’ lives in their new African environments, their cultural encounters can be perceived through those in America whom the narrator tells about with more details.

Cultural development in Africa engendered by intracontinental migrations can be imagined through the lives of the characters who immigrate to America. As an illustration, the narrator says:

The uncles and aunts bring goat insides and cook ezangaphakathi and sadza and mbhida and occasionally they will bring amacimbi, which is my number one favorite relish, umfushwa, and other foods from home, and people descend on the food like they haven’t eaten all their lives.

After the food comes the music. They play Majaivana, play Solomon Skuza, play Ndux Malax, Miriam Makeba, Lucky Dube, Brenda Fassie, Paul Matavire, Hugh Masekela, Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi – old songs I remember from when I was little.... (2014, P. 161)

Darling relates what the lives of her African relatives look like as immigrants in America. As a consequence of their nostalgia about home, they organize occasions where they revive home. Revitalizing home culture while in America is well illustrated through foods and music from home they enjoy on such occasions. The way the uncles and aunts “descend on the food like they haven’t eaten all their lives” refers to the transfer of their cultures in a foreign country, which they desperately enjoy on such particular occasions. Their attitude differs in no way from those African characters migrating to African countries. In fact, just like the uncles and aunts cited in this American setting, characters from Zimbabwe, including Makhosi, Father, Moshe and the teachers, occasionally, if not always, resort to their home cultures.

This displacement experience of the characters sheds light on the cooperation between individuals and populations from different backgrounds. It brings to the fore encounters between Zimbabweans and other natives. As a consequence of their encounters, each group of individuals, or population, borrow from each other. Indeed, in South Africa for instance, characters such as Makhosi, Father and teachers will act their home cultures which will, in turn,

give rise to a cultural contact. In such contact, characters borrow from one another out of assimilation and eventually experience progress as far as their cultural manifestations are concerned. Compared to the aforementioned Zimbabwean characters in America, it can be said that Bulawayo lets her narrator transition into imagining living experience as far as South Africa-relocated-characters are concerned. In fact, her narrator switches space focus as she only tells readers about Makhosi who “went to South Africa, like father” on page 23, without further details. At this point, it would be necessary to raise interrogations such as: what does Makhosi’s, father’s and the teachers’ life, in relation to culture, look like in South Africa? How do they live? Considering the narrator’s telling who only indicates that Makhosi went to South Africa like her father, it can be argued that the narrator silences their South African daily experiences. Notwithstanding the silenced details, their life can be pictured through her characters who, in America, act their home culture, manifested through home “food” and “music”. In one word, in this perspective, Bulawayo drives her readers into imagining cultural reconstruction in South Africa.

The movement of the characters within these African countries is beneficial for the continent in different ways. Firstly, as (im)migrants in South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania and Botswana, native Zimbabweans become economic growth agents. In fact, through their works they “boost the economic output”, both for the home and host countries. Their contribution towards economic growth is achieved as they work in the host country and send money home. At this point, it is important to insist on money transfer in the novel. As indicated, details in this line have been silenced. However, Darling’s complaint is used as a symbol to justify the fact migrants send money home. The narrator does not clearly tell about Moshe, Makhosi or the teachers sending money to their relatives back at home. But, the way she complains about her father not sending money means she is aware of the fact that migrants naturally send money home. Her complaint therefore translates migrant economic contribution as far as home is concerned. Secondly, as (im)migrants, they contribute to the cultural development. This cultural contribution is made possible in that when they leave their home country, they carry along with them their own cultures. Cultures inherited at home are then transferred and implemented in their new environments, which, in turn, engenders cultural contacts. From these contacts, individuals borrow from each other’s cultures, which leads to socio-cultural development. Even though less has been said about cultural exchange in the case of Moshe, Makhosi, Darling’s father and the teachers, cultural development can be perceived through Aunt Fostalina, for instance, who is in America. In America, she starts exercising in order to reconstruct her body.

Her exercising in America is significant of her interest toward this cultural practice, performed by American female characters. It is said about her:

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? Three-four-five-six, and kick. And punch. That there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind. (P.151)

The narration makes it clear that she is an outsider regarding the exercise. However, her interest in practicing translates her acceptance of a new culture. As a consequence, her acceptance of the new practice indicates how cultural development is achieved. She incorporates within her personality what was absent in her pre-migration status. This incorporation of new culture can also be imagined about Moshe, Makhosi, Darling's father and the teacher who moved to neighbouring African countries.

Conclusion

This paper intended to show how migrations within Africa can contribute to the development of the continent. The analysis was achieved on the basis of the exploration of some narrative items such as space, character and event and was elaborated around two chapters. The first chapter is about the fictionalization of Africa. Indeed, it brings light on how the continent is represented in the novel through the names of the characters, places they circulate in and events they experience. The second chapter lays emphasis on the movements of African characters across spaces bound to be a figurative construction of Africa, while indicating how these internal migrants foster socio-economic and cultural development. In fact, the beneficial contribution of African migrants within the African space is imagined through international migrants. In the analysis, Darling is presented as contributing to the economic output of America through her work in a shop under the supervision of Jim and Aunt Fostalina and the uncles and the aunts as contributing to the industry of culture by transferring their home culture. Comparatively, characters such as Makhosi, Darling's Father, Moshe and the teachers are presented as development agents for nearby countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania and Botswana where they migrate to from their homeland, Zimbabwe. As a result, like international migrants, they contribute to the development of Africa through their works and transfers of their home cultures.

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