Dimensions of History and Imaginative Re-Creations in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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Abstract

Fiction has been the means through which the writer makes his/her experiences known. The writer is a lens through which the past is recovered or reconfigured and, as well, offers the means to its understanding. It represents an elucidation of social reality. It is also in this sense that literature is seen as a national biography, recounting the social conditions of certain periods in a nation's history. It is within the above milieu that the research highlights the gap, nature, and extent to which the novelist NoViolet Bulawayo through characters, styles, plots, settings, and events, portrays the interaction of fiction and historicity in We Need New Names (2013). The research also provides the understanding and interpretation of the selected works in its use of historical facts and imaginative re-creations. The research also investigates the different scopes of history prevalent in the selected novel as regards its political, cultural, economic, religious, social, and aesthetic patterns. New Historicism is the theoretical framework majorly used as it advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history it textualizes, that is history codified. Methodologically, this study is Content Analysis-based. Some critical works on the writings of the novelist by other critics are used as secondary sources. It is discovered that some critics disagree with the interplay of fiction and history, but the result reveals the

various dimensions this interplay can be achieved and how the selected writer has re-creatively blended fiction with historical facts.

Keywords: Literature, Fiction, History, Imagination, African

1) Introduction

Fiction, being one of the genres of literature, is created in the imagination of its writer, though it may be based on a true story or situation. It encompasses an act of creative invention so that reality is not typically assumed or affected. Science fiction, fan fiction, flash fiction, mysteries, romance, thriller, fantasy, and crime fiction are all genres of fiction in the form of prose, especially short stories and novels. In fiction, the author invents the story and makes up the characters, the plot, the dialogue, and the setting. A fictional work does not claim to tell a true story, instead, it immerses the reader in an experience that he/she may never have in real life, introduces him/her to various types of people one may never visit in any other way and takes him/her to places he/she may have never been to. The writer creates an imaginary story and is free to deviate from reality. The truth that applies to history may or may not apply to fiction.

Historicity is an essential part of history, which helps us to know about the past through historical accounts of myths, legends, and tales of the people, which have proven over the years to be the bag of knowledge, information, and fertile sources of materials for novelists. This brings us fully to the idea of historicity, which is the historical actuality of persons and events, meaning the quality of being part of history as opposed to being historical myths, legends, or fiction. Historicity focuses on the true value of knowledge of the past and, as well, is seen as the characteristic of having been in

history. Historicity is also viewed as a feature of human ordinations by which we are located in historical circumstances. Octavio Paz is of the view that

> History has the cruel reality of a nightmare, and the grandeur of man consists in his making beautiful and lasting works out of the real substance of that nightmare or to put in it another shapeless horror reality— if only for an instant by means of creation. (104)

It is known that fiction is the lens by which a society is mirrored, while historicity itself is seen as a reflection of time and period as regards the identification of authenticated events, characters, peoples, and patterns in the study of man's past. So historicity through fiction regards texts, not only as a reflection of the culture that produces them but also as a product of that culture playing an active role in the social and political conflicts of a period. This results in the interaction between the historical context of the work and the understanding and interpretation of the work.

Various periods in world history have been associated with some dominant literary trends; these literary trends do not exist in a vacuum. They are a result of life experiences. These experiences are portrayed literarily as artistic truth and historical truth. An artistic truth applies to every situation of life imagined, while a historical truth appeals to a specific situation of life that is factual. It is a known fact that most experiences in history account for some major literary trends. To this end, most of the literary outputs have been received to be a worthy example of novelists' hybrid of fiction and history. This is hinged on the fact that there have been bids to articulate social and historical reality and, as such, harness the intricate recourses of fiction and history as socio-historical aesthetic imperatives in the human discourse.

Various periods in world history, also, have been associated with some literary trends which have effectively discussed or related humanity to the ideas of fiction and history. According to Terry Eagleton, "Literature draws strength from actual life, it deals with the joys, sorrows, poverty, plenty and above all, death to which man is subjected and which is man's enemy" (33). To this effect, the result of this research is based on the accounts of historical spheres in which the selected writer has drawn her sources from the second and third Zimbabwean Chimurenga Wars.

Furthermore, the concept of fiction as historical or deriving value from historical reality is the result of the theory of its origin because a good fiction writer or novelist should possess some sense of history as espoused by T.S Elliot. Here, fiction and historicity are interlinked discourses and what they have in common is the fact that they are based on knowledge concerning the human mind. Their method of approach is the specific understanding of human valuations, of the way people react to the challenges of their natural, social, political, and economic environment. Therefore, historicity has traditionally been seen as producing a factual account, while the subject of fiction is considered fictional. Patrick Brady comments:

> History… refers to a "real" past, a belief or set of belief about that past, and purports to report the "truth" about that "real" past. The historical novel, on the other hand, like the autobiographical novel, refers to a "real" past but neither aims nor claims to reproduce it with scrupulous accuracy. (17-18)

Fiction and historicity are more alike discourses as they communicate with humanity because they tend to evaluate and analyze how humanity reacts to the events in their environment or the role they play in such events. This brings to mind the idea of the

faction which is the blend of fiction and facts as used by any creative writer. Faction, in short, as regards this research embraces historicity. This is because history is also a fact. Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times*, in a review called faction,

> An unfortunate genre of writing that evades the responsibilities of both history and fiction. While it trades on the news value of a story, it obeys none of the rules of journalism; while it exploits the liberties of fiction, it demands the little exercise of the imagination. (1)

Thus, the researcher analyzes NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need Names* and examines how her work is simultaneously understood through cultural and historical contexts; how it is influenced by historical facts of the time in which it was produced, as well as the social sphere in which it moved, the books and theories that may have influenced it, especially the author's country's recent or pre-independence history.

2) Statement of the Problem

A historian and a fiction writer create essentially the same thing: a narrative. Part of the difference seems to lie in their motivation, their intent, and their ultimate goal. A historian will try to approach history and his work with at least an objective of adhering to the truth, with no injection of fiction or creativity as far as this is possible. A fiction writer may have the same goal. But in this case, the possible motivations are endless and may be very different from the truth objective a historical writer has. In modern African literature, the interplay of fiction and history has been complementary as well as problematic. Its problematic dimension is

that some critics disagree with the blend of these categories (fiction and history); hence, the problem of this study is to solidify the interactive possibilities and dimensions between fiction and historical facts as well as their interaction, interpretation, and understanding in *We Need New Names*. And analyzing how the novelist fictionalizes history in her novel as regards events, characters, contexts, styles, settings and techniques reflect historical facts and project literature. How the novelist employs literary aesthetics and elements to clothe history realistically, authentically, yet imaginatively.

3) Theoretical Framework

For this research, the theory of New Historicism majorly framed the study. The New Historicism is a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 when he collected some essays and then, out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, he wrote that the essays represented something he called a 'new historicism', which became popular in the 1980s, reacting against both the formalist view of the related texts to the economic infrastructure. (Habib, 266)

As a literary theory, New Historicism identifies the authenticated events, characters, people, and patterns in a situated context. Habib explains further,

> New historicism saw the literary text as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses—religious, political, economic, aesthetic—which both shaped it and in their turn, were shaped by it. Perhaps what was new about the procedure was its insistence, drawn from Michel Foucault and poststructuralism, that "history" itself is a text, an interpretation, and there is no single history. (266)

It also rejects any notion of historical progress or teleology and breaks away from any literary historiography based on the study of genres and figures. In the same way, the "culture" in which New Historicism situates literary texts is itself regarded as a textual construct. Hence, New Historicism refuses to accord any kind of unity or homogeneity to history or culture, viewing both as harbouring networks of contradictory, competing, and un-reconciled forces and interests.

New Historicism views literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire complex in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalizations or to commit to any definite political stance. It looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts colour the critic's conclusions. This advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history it textualizes, history having been codified. No privileging of text over the history it textualizes or vice versa. No back-dropping. This equal weighting of literary and non-literary texts to reveal the truth is what Louis Adrian Montrose terms "the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (qtd. In Abrams 219). It means that history is taken to be "textualized". Therefore, New Historicists consider "historical" accounts as equally interpretable as literary texts, since both are seen as "expressions of the same historical moment" (Barry 173).

As a literary theory, New Historicism owes its impetus to the work of Foucault. Habib states, "Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limit of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents to understand the episteme of a particular time" (267).

4) Dimensions of History and Imaginative Re-Creations in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

To help understand how the selected author from Zimbabwe has made use of the interplay of fiction and history, one must discuss the main factor in them, which is the *Chimurenga* war(s). The author portrays in great detail the dire consequences of the second and third *Chimurenga*. *Chimurenga* is a Shona word that means struggle. According to Gunner, "the Zimbabwean *Chimurenga* was a guerilla war and it was in important ways a people's war with land and a sense of dispossession at the center" (qtd in Ogbazi 1). The second *Chimurenga* War is also known as the Rhodesian Bush War or the Zimbabwe Liberation War; it refers to the guerrilla war of 1966 – 1979 which led to the end of white-minority rule in Rhodesia and the independence of Zimbabwe. Its physical manifestation was, however, as a conflict between the predominantly white-minority government, headed by Ian Smith, and the Black Nationalist movements of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), respectively led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo.

The third *Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe was an extensive repossession of land by the majority of local indigenes from the white minority commercial farmers. It was initiated by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government on the 15th of July 2000 under the leadership of Robert Mugabe to repossess and redistribute land. The centrality of land at the heart of this scheme resulted in the third *Chimurenga* (Ranger, 14)

Zimbabwe, as a nation, has undergone a series of national instabilities, strife, and development as regards power: the interpenetration of power shaped developments in Zimbabwe during

the 1980s and 1990s. World-system unevenness manifested specifically in the struggle of the new Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government to consolidate political and economic control while foreign powers and International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) continued to interfere. National sovereignty and global capitalism battled for control over Zimbabwe's economic policy, coupled with violent civil strife that was driven in part by foreign intervention. In Zimbabwe, the inextricability of foreign investment from the legacy of colonialism is particularly evident: independence from the minority-white government was not accompanied by the redistribution of the ownership and control of land and finance to black African leadership.

From independence in 1980 onward, world-system control encroached on national sovereignty. The Lancaster House Constitution was composed and signed in a room in London that included a delegation of twenty-two British dignitaries and military personnel. Its provisions prevented the economic agenda of ZANU-PF for nationalization and redistribution of majority white-owned land from coming to fruition ("Report of the Constitutional Conference"). Instead of codifying the land policy agenda of the black nationalist parties, post-independence law entrenched private property rights and allowed land redistribution only with a "willing-seller, willing-buyer" approach (Hammar et al 4). The policy of "national development" the Constitution effected was "aimed at convincing a skeptical international community—given Mugabe's explicit Marxist predilections—of the sufficiently liberal-democratic (or at least modernizing) credentials of the new government, to generate much-needed financial support" (Hammar et al 24-25). Thus the Zimbabwean state, from its inception, was subjected to world-system economic coercion. Notably, no women,

Zimbabwean or otherwise, were present at the Lancaster House talks (Charumbira and Christiansen-Ruffman 87-88).

In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, a story is presented about the circumstances the people of Zimbabwe are found in. These circumstances include poverty, squalor, filthiness, and destitution. First, one should know that Zimbabwe is made up of two major ethnic groups: Ndebele and Shona. The Shona people believe they have been marginalized by the Ndebele because most seats in the government are occupied by the Ndebele. The hold of power by the Ndebele group has created a lot of disputes like granting less ownership of lands and properties to the Shona group. The animosity or political struggle between the two major groups is so real and strong; it resulted in various squabbles that the Shona group once voted against a candidate from the Ndebele group. As the Shona group failed with their plan, it resulted in almost all of their population being homeless.

These facts about the second and third *Chimurenga* wars are what NoViolet Bulawayo, in the bid to recount her historical background through fiction, exposes in her debut novel, *We Need New Names*. The novel deals directly with the victims of the ruined state of Zimbabwe, identifying a group of six homeless children, friends amid the ruins, as the most vulnerable victims of President Robert Mugabe's democracy-turned-dictatorship.

In the fusion of fiction and historicity, the novel opens in Paradise, the Zimbabwe shanty town where Darling and her mother have lived since their house was bulldozed by the government. Starting in 2005, the government's program operation *Murambatsvina* (clear out Rubbish) destroyed entire neighbourhoods in a few hours, leaving more than 300,000 people homeless. The operation was ordered by Robert Mugabe to wipe out the people, which are the Shona people, who voted against him

during the 2005 election, and whom he termed *Rubbish*. This terming of human beings as *Rubbish* exposes the state of no respect and devalues and decries the Shona people. But Darling, a ten-year-old and the main character in the novel doesn't know any of this, only that their house is gone.

Bulawayo describes Operation *Murambastsvina* which was carried out not only to eradicate poverty and rubbish but also to oppress the Shona people of Zimbabwe. She does not name it in the novel; it's arguably alluded to through Darling's vivid dreams of bulldozers that she experienced when she was younger. Darling remembers her past trauma through the bleary eyes of a child, "Then the Lorries come carrying the police… and we run and lids inside the houses, but it's no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming" (New Names, 67).

The memories of the bulldozers and their violent interjection into the lives of the people in Zimbabwe are not just seen by the natives but also displayed for the world to witness through the media. Darling reflects that: "Then the people with cameras and T-shirts that say BBC and CNN come to shake their head and look and take our picture… it's like a tsunami tore through this place, Jesus it's like a fucking tsunami tore this place up" (New Names, 69). The statement reveals how devastating it is the word "tsunami" used to describe Darling's place.

To help the reader understand Zimbabwe well, Bulawayo gives a well-deserved insight into the history and image of the country in her novel. She narrates:

> There are three homes inside of Mother's and Aunt Fostalina's head: home before independence before I was born when black people and white people were fighting over the country. Home after independence,

> when black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come here. Home one, home two, and home three. There are four homes inside Mother of Bone's head: home before the white people came to steal the country, and a king ruled; home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then the home of now. Home one, home two, home three, home four. When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly the one the person is referring to. (193)

The above is Bulawayo's attempt to make known her country's historical background by explaining the various stages Zimbabwe has undergone before and after its independence. It tells the reader how the country's crumbling status is perceived in the minds of the characters: Darling's Mother, Aunt Fostalina, and Mother of Bones. Nkiacha Atemnkeng throws more light when he says:

> …Mother of Bones. Her home was a land called Great Zimbabwe ruled by kings. Her home two was called Southern Rhodesia, stolen by a Whiteman Cecil John Rhodes and his proxies (the colony was named after him). Then there was war spearheaded by the secretary general of ZANU called Robert Mugabe and others like Edgar Tekere who managed to york the country back from Ian Smith's claws in the Rhodesian bush war from bases in Mozambique. Her home three is the country now known as Zimbabwe currently under the leadership

> of Robert Mugabe who won the general elections in 1980 and became prime minister of Zimbabwe in April 1980… Her home four is that snapping Zimbabwe of the lost decade (2000 to 2010), the period when the economy shrunk largely due to Robert Mugabe's land reforms. It is that Zimbabwean decade of things falling apart. (1)

Mugabe's paramilitary forces raze Darling's family's home with his operation *Murambastsvina*, and they, along with many others, establish a new village called Paradise. The name of the village could not be less apt as people live in shacks; there is governmental chaos, death, illness, and the threat of violence. Darling and her friends are mischievous while dreaming of better lives in other places including America.

The Zimbabwe in which Darling and her friends live is one of poverty. Bulawayo captures, in her novel, the years between independence from British colonial rule and the present day, the oppressive government, the country's decaying economy, and the diseases ravaging the masses. The government's inability to build well-equipped hospitals leaves the people to seek herbal medicine for cures, and mostly they rely on religious miracles. Paradise is stricken by AIDS, which is uncontrollable and the government is doing nothing about it. Darling's father is affected, "He coughs some more and I listen to the awful sound tearing the air. His body folds and rocks with each cough but I don't even feel for him because I'm thinking…" (New Names, 98). The family deals with the situation privately, leaving her mother the task of providing for the family solely which often takes her to the border to engage in trade for days. Darling's Grandmother, Mother of Bones, is left to run the family while Darling's mother is away. She takes care of her stricken son, Darling's father, and believes that her spirituality will

help him get well. She gets involved in a religious leader's crusade, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, who demands she pays in dollars for the healing services he renders to his sick son. She is unable to obtain the dollars due to the devastating state of the country and its currency. The Prophet's activities are a technique used by Bulawayo to project the opportunistic tendencies of the religious people to oppress and take out money from the poor. This is due to the country's degeneration caused by the wars and the political power hunted by Mugabe.

The country suffers inflation and a record of violent human rights abuses against anyone who questions the state. As Bulawayo shows in her novel, *We Need New Names*, Zimbabwe's early promise, and strength have been eroded to rubble by too many years of Mugabe and his ZANU-PF political party's brutal, misguided leadership.

The name "Paradise" given to the place Darling's family lives is a paradox. It is a sprawling suburb of hell and devastation. It echoes the sounds of despair, the reverberation of people living without any hope triggered by the repressive rule of resident president, Robert Mugabe. It is a smelly place with thousands of tin shacks and no real houses. To understand the outlook and disposition of "Paradise" better, Darling describes it, "Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry.… The shacks themselves are terrible but from up here, they seem much better, almost beautiful even, it's like I'm looking at a painting" (New Names, 36).

The novel also delves into the environmental state of Zimbabwe in a bid to expose its bad governance. Everywhere is filled with filth and hunger and violated children. Bulawayo in her novel creates this atmospheric disposition where children's lives are viewed amid the ruins of Mugabe's tortured nation. In this space,

the children become like stones themselves, hardened against absurd choices in their tireless quest for survival. Mugabe's rule rendered the nation squalor and tremendous poverty. Extreme hunger prompts Darling and her friends to go and steal guava in a neighbourhood called Budapest, a place very different from where they live. Darling describes it: "Budapest is big, big houses with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat graveled yards or trimmed lawns… the big trees heavy with fruit that's waiting for us since nobody around here seems to know what to do with it" (New Names, 5).

Due to the distressing state of the country, Bulawayo shows us the dispositions of the parents. This is an attempt of re-telling the state the government's oppressive rule has imposed on the parents too. It has killed their hopes and also drained their sense of responsibility. Parents and adults are no longer in full guidance of their children as they are busy searching for food and arguing about government schemes. This leads Darling and her friends Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sbho, and Stina to wander the streets freely as they are mostly left to look after themselves. They are also left on their own because they cannot go to school: their teachers have all left since their houses have been destroyed. There's nothing else to do but to play and steal guavas. Sometimes they are overtaken by emotion. They are found behaving nicely to the strange woman living in Budapest, but they are suddenly fed up with her wasting of food, her questions, and her photos. They are overtaken by the urge to scream and scream, even hurting themselves in the process:

> We shout and we shout and we shout, we want to eat the thing she was eating, we want to hear our voices soar, we want our hunger to go away. The woman just looks at us puzzled, like she has never heard anybody shout, and then quickly hurries back into the house but

> we shout after her, shouting till we smell blood in our tickling throats. (New Names, 12)

The people in their quest to find solace, all gear towards religion. Mother of Bones is seen as a core religionist. She goes to church every Sunday on the mountain and has calendars of Jesus Christ all over the house. Darling, on her part, has many interesting questions and thoughts about religion that reveal her views on the Zimbabwean society. In this case, she, through her childish actions, questions the problematic colonial history connected to Christianity in Africa: why should God, the saviour of the people with brown skin and eyes look so different from them?

> After the curtain comes to the calendar; it's old but Mother of Bones keeps it since it has Jesus Christ on it. He has women's hair and is smiling shyly, his head tilted a bit to the side; you can tell he wanted to look nice in the picture. He used to have blue eyes but I painted them brown like mine and everybody's, to make him normal. Mother of Bones walloped me so much for it though; I couldn't sit for a whole two days… (New Names, 25)

The government's misuse of power contributes to the shutdown of schools. Children no longer do a thing each passing day; they play and observe their parents. Bulawayo uses Darling and her friends to capture this state. In her novel, they are seen playing Games most times to keep busy and forget about the adults who are not even mindful of their welfare and are occupied with their fights against the bad government. Through these Games, the readers are taken into the damaged psyches of the children and how they view the devastated country. The children grapple with global politics and

the disparities in quality of life between world powers and impoverished, politically unstable countries like their own:

> To play the country–a game you need two–rings: a big outer one, then inside it, a little one, where the caller stands… Each person then picks a piece and writes the name of the country on there, which is why it's called country–game. But first we have to fight over the names because everybody wants to be certain countries: like everybody wants to be the U.S.A and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and them. These are the country–countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for countries like Dubai, South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. They are not country–countries, but at least life is better than here. Nobody wants to be the rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia like Iraq like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in – who wants to be in a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (New Names, 51)

Bulawayo not only fictionalizes her historical background but also the way the world views and reacts to it. This idea explored in the novel is simply about the way the world creates and consumes media about Africa, especially Zimbabwe. The children have their photos taken twice in the early chapters of the book by the people from the NGO and by a woman living in Budapest whose father emigrated from Zimbabwe to England. Darling speaks about how uncomfortable she is with the constant pictures NGO people take and show the world in the news,

> They just like taking pictures, these NGO people, like maybe we are their real friends and relatives and they will look at the pictures later and point us out by name to other friends and relatives once they get back to their homes. They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it; they just take the pictures anyway, take and take. We don't complain because we know that after the picture –taking comes the giving of gifts. (New Names, 54)

Writing with poignant clarity and hard-hitting imagery, Bulawayo recalls images from 2005, the year Zimbabwe held its Presidential election. As stated initially, Mugabe was re-elected under questionable premises and in the same year undertook a sort of punishment "cleansing" program--the demolition of whole neighborhoods that had voted against him. This was called *Operation Murambatsvina*. In the novel, before the election, the adults organize themselves, led by Bornfree and Messenger, to vote against Mugagbe and have for themselves a president who will restore their country to a better home. Darling narrates this:

> He waves his stack of papers and I see the words Change, Real Change at the front. His voice is bright and bold, like the red ink on his posters. We're demonstrating tomorrow, on Main Street, come and walk for a change! Be the future! Messenger shouts after us. We can hear them whistling and chanting about change, and in no time we hear the children's voices chanting as well. I turn to look and I see everybody has abandoned Andy-over and is now running after Bornfree and Messenger. Fists above their heads. Running and jumping and chanting, the word

> change in the air like it's something you can grab and put in your mouth and sink your teeth into. (New Names, 24)

On the Election Day,

> The day the adults go to vote we stand at the edge of Paradise, near the graveyard, and watch them leave. They are silent when they go, none of that talk-talk of the days before. We are quiet because we've never seen them silent, not like this. We want them to open their mouths and speak. To talk about elections and democracy and new country like they have been doing all along. We want them to look over their shoulders and tell us they will know what we are doing while they are gone. We want them to say something but they are just silent like they are suddenly unsure, like something crept upon them while they slept and cut out their tongues. When they eventually disappear down Mzilikazi, we don't go running to Budapest even. (New Names, 26)

When Election fails and the men return to their disillusioned lives their hopes for a better country shatter. Furthermore, seeing major political moments in Zimbabwe's history through the eyes of the children opens up big questions. Darling and her friends watch from a guava tree as the house of a white couple living in Budapest is taken by force and ransacked. The children, who have lived their whole lives in Zimbabwe and interact with other black people, question what it means to be black, question what it means to be African: how much of one's status as an African involves racial descents and its intersection with Zimbabwe's colonial history,

> No, you listen, the white man say, like he didn't just hear the boss warn him about telling black men to listen. I am

> an African, he says. This is my fucking country too, my father was born here, I was born here, just like you. His voice is so full of pain it's as if there is something that is searing him deep in his blood…. What exactly is an African, Godknows asks. (New Names, 121)

At a point, the people begin to leave Zimbabwe in search of greener pastures as the inherent situation becomes more unbearable for them. We find Darling leaving Zimbabwe for America to live with her Aunt's family. People sacrifice their comfort and identities to get out of Zimbabwe:

> Look at them leaving in droves despite knowing they will be welcomed with restrain in those strange lands because they do not belong, knowing they will have to sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave, knowing they will speak in dampened whispers because they must not let their voices drown those of the owners of the land, knowing they will have to walk on their toes because they must not leave foot prints on the new earth lest they be untaken for those who want to claim the land as theirs. Look at them leaving in droves, arm in arm with loss and lost, look at them leaving in droves. (New Names, 148)

Towards its end, when Darling finally leaves Zimbabwe for America, Chipo accuses Darling of leaving Zimbabwe behind. She tells her that she cannot call Zimbabwe her country anymore. Darling tries to defend herself but without any standing point,

> You are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC mean you know what is going on? No, you don't my friend, it's the world that knows the texture of the

> pain, it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have a right to even say anything about that or anybody and anything, she says… 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. (New Names, 287 – 288)

The intricate relationship between fiction and historical facts is seen throughout the novel. Bulawayo uses her novel to capture the mood of those years in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe: the agitations, the stubborn hope, the sufferings, the squalor, and the devastated people and their environment.

5) Conclusion

Clearly, this research has shown in its result that history and fiction can intersect and blend in many different ways as artistically explored by the selected novel, and most importantly in the depiction of its central character(s). The author attempts to represent the daily reality of these characters, which she characterizes as interpretable from multiple perspectives. In essence, the novel is the author's discourse about the past, and it shows her relationship with that past. As White points out, we can only access history through language, and its discourse must be written before it can be digested (5). In this line, a historian refers to facts about the past and portrays a belief or set of beliefs about the past, and purports to report or outline the past by adhering to the truth. In doing so, readers do not relate to the complete actual happenings of the past which embraces the emotions, loss, happiness, joy, businesses, relationships and interactions, sex or celibacy, and all other involvements of a particular people in a given past. That is to say, a historian doesn't

involve the intricate day-to-day lives of the people and their relationships with one another, which is an important aspect of any society, in what he/she has recorded. On the other hand, historical fiction merges historical reality with imagined reality, that is to say, the writer takes from the facts and re-imagines them, thereby involving the exact day-to-day lives of the people who own the past. The creative output of a writer is well appreciated when we comprehend its relevance to the other two worlds, the writer's world (his experiences) and our world (the society). This is the view this study has intricately elaborated and pointed out. In this manner, emotions, loss, happiness, sex, joy, and all other attributes of human interactions and relationships are relayed to achieve a striking goal in the reader's mind and the development of society.

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