



Home as an Impossible Return: Trauma and Postcolonial Belonging in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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Abstract: This study examines NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) through the combined perspectives of trauma theory and postcolonial criticism. It investigates how migration reshapes perceptions of home, belonging, and identity, arguing that the novel presents home not as a recoverable destination but as an impossible return. The study employs a qualitative interpretive approach based on close reading and thematic textual analysis. The theoretical framework draws on Cathy Caruth's and Dominick LaCapra's trauma theories alongside postcolonial concepts developed by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. The analysis focuses on four interconnected themes: trauma and displacement, memory and the construction of home, the impossibility of return, and postcolonial belonging. The findings reveal that migration in the novel functions as both a geographical and psychological experience, producing emotional fragmentation, cultural dislocation, and unstable forms of identity. Memory emerges as a crucial mechanism through which migrants maintain attachment to the homeland, yet it simultaneously transforms home into an imagined and idealized space. Consequently, return becomes increasingly unattainable as both the migrant and the homeland undergo transformation. The study concludes that Bulawayo challenges romanticized notions of homecoming by portraying belonging as a continuous process of negotiation rather than a fixed condition. By integrating trauma theory and postcolonial criticism, the study contributes to contemporary discussions of migration, displacement, memory, and identity in African postcolonial literature.

Keywords: NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, trauma, migration, home, belonging, postcolonial literature.

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1. Introduction

Today, one of the most striking aspects in postcolonial literature is migration, especially in stories that stem from Africa in which the political crises, economic hardships, and historical inequities have produced massive migrations across the national boundary. Migration is not only expressed through geographical relocation, but also through issues of identity, memory, displacement and belonging that are increasingly represented in literature. Recent research on Ngom (2020), Ahmed (2022), and Akhtar et al (2024) has demonstrated the impact of migration on the individual and collective construction of selfhood that is explored in the novel. The discussions contained in this section suggest that the

experience of migration is not merely one of movement from one place to another, but that it can have social, cultural and psychological significance.

The connection between migration and trauma has grown in the field of literary and cultural studies. Migration can be seen as an opportunity and a freedom of movement, but it can also be a feeling of loss, of separation, of emotional dislocation. When migrants try to "tread water" in unrecognizable spaces and "disidentify" with their new surroundings, they may experience alienation, cultural otherness, and psychological disintegration. The studies on *We Need New Names* has uncovered the negative impacts of migration, such as the long-term emotional disruptions that can happen to migrants after coming back to their countries of



origin (Edlund, 2020; Luci, 2020; Agyo et al., 2025; Akhtar et al., 2024).

Home is a related theme to migration and trauma. In the current postcolonial and diasporic discourses, home is not defined as a fixed geographical place, but is rather a fluid and ambiguous territory that is created through the process of remembering, belonging and cultural identity. The study of migration literature has been growing in complexity and the concept of home, belonging and unbelonging has been introduced in the study of the displaced migrants who have established the relationship with their country of origin through imagination and memory (Akpome (2019) Motahane & Makombe (2020) Gwambiwa (2022) Zevnik & Russell (2025).

These concerns are especially relevant in modern Zimbabwean literature that has answered the huge political and economic challenges that have defined Zimbabwe since the early 2000s. A major cause of significant intra and inter-continental migration has been the economic downfall, joblessness and political unrest in Africa (Chigora, 2018; Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2021). The questions of migration, displacement, identity and belonging have thus become the focus of Zimbabwean literary production in light of the lived experience of those who are caught between various cultural and geographical worlds.

We Need New Names (2013) by one of the most influential literary examinations of these issues is NoViolet Bulawayo. The process of migration superficially seems to offer opportunity and change, but as time goes on, Darling is estranged from his culture, his emotions are fractured, and he becomes increasingly disheartened and out of place. Her emotions for Zimbabwe are central to her existence but the prospect of going back becomes increasingly more complicated as she lives between two worlds.

The scholarship that has been produced on *We Need New Names* has thoroughly explored issues of migration, diaspora, identity and displacement. The articles in this collection, in contrast, look at issues of identity and voice in diasporic contexts, and issues of migration and gender and identity displacement in the articles by Ezidimma (2025). In the same vein, there are discussions on "questions of home and (un)belonging" and "the subjectivity of migrants" by Motahane and Makombe (2020) and Akpome (2019) respectively on "cultural dislocation" of migrants. The effects of emotional trauma and psychological fragmentation as a result of migration and displacement have been examined by other scholars (Edlund, 2020; Agyo et al., 2025).

While these contributions are well received, very little focus has been put on understanding the psychological unliveability of return and the reconfiguration of the home concept in the aftermath of trauma. The connection between trauma and the impossible return of home, however, has not yet been sufficiently explored. Especially, the impact of traumatic displacement on the migrants' capacity to be reunited with the homeland, despite the fact that physical return is still theoretically possible, has received little attention. To fill this gap, this study explores a genealogy of trauma and postcolonial belonging that shifts home from the place of origin to an impossible place of return.

Thus, this study is an examination of home as an impossible return, in NoViolet Bulawayo's work *We Need New Names*, based on postcolonial theory and trauma theory. It aims to explore, first, the

ways in which trauma influences the migrant characters' notions of home and belonging, and second, Bulawayo's reconstruction of the site of return as an impossibility in postcolonial times. The study adds to the current debates in migration studies, trauma studies and postcolonial literary criticism and provides a more nuanced understanding of the interconnection of the concepts of displacement, memory, identity and belonging in modern African literature.

The study is guided by the following research question: How does *We Need New Names* represent home as an impossible return through the interconnected dynamics of trauma and postcolonial belonging?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Migration and Diaspora Studies

The migration and diaspora have been main themes of modern African literature, especially from a postcolonial perspective, as seen in the works of those whose lives are shaped by political instability, economic hardship, and postcolonial inequalities. In this, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* has generated significant scholarly interest for its examination of displacement, transnational mobility and diasporic identity.

For Ngom (2020) the migration in *We Need New Names* is an indicator of the long effect of colonialism and neo-colonialism on contemporary African societies. Migration is not simply a choice of the individual, but is an outcome of broader historical and socio-economic forces, from this perspective. Similarly, Ahmed (2022) points out the transnational character of African migration, emphasizing that identities are continually negotiated in multiple cultural spaces and not necessarily in a single national space.

Elnahhas et al. (2023) look at the novel from a cultural studies perspective, and contend that diasporic experiences produce dynamic manifestations of cultural displacement. Likewise, Akhtar et al. (2024) contend that migration in the novel generates new diasporic identity and voice since the migrants assert the belongingness to other social and cultural contexts.

The novel's theme explores Konar's search for selfhood and the uprooted must question and revisit ideas of identity and belonging. In the same way, Goyal (2017) suggests a need to 're-think diaspora' as 'homecoming', that is, recapture the 'complex and dynamic nature of the present day migration.' These are also corroborated by the discussion on migrancy by Motahane (2022) who frames migration as a condition instead of a transitional period between leaving and coming back.

The current research, however, mostly centres on migration from a diaspora, transnationalism and identity negotiation perspective. Migration and traumatic belonging is an area, however, that still does not have an in-depth exploration and there is potential for further research.

2.2 Trauma and Psychological Dislocation

In recent years, there has been a significant amount of academic interest in the inter-connections between migration research and trauma theory. Previous migration scholarship has tended to concentrate on issues of mobility, adaptation and identity formation, whereas more recent scholarship has begun to focus on the psychological impacts of displacement. Displacement therefore

is not only a geographical event, but also a psychological state of instability, uncertainty and emotional lack of attachment.

Trauma has become a more central theme within scholarship on *We Need New Names* over time. Edlund (2020) believes that the novel is composed of several layers of trauma, suggesting that Darling's miseries are affected by her personal, social, and historical traumas. Similarly, Agyo, Ogba and Isah (2025) examine the concept of emotional dislocation in literature in Zimbabwe, dealing with the issue of the presence of memories of political and economic crises in literature despite geographical dislocation from the homeland.

Positive displacement/trauma relationships in *We Need New Names* are examined in more detail by Akhtar, Hassan, and Ilyas (2024) who highlight migration's capacity to produce a strong psychological separation in the novel. According to their research, the sense of cultural estrangement and emotional fragmentation is generated by displacement processes and they influence the process of migrants establishing stable identities in new places.

There is also theoretical support for this perspective, from the theory of displacement. Luci (2020) also claims that displacement can be a form of trauma and that trauma can be a form of displacement: it can disrupt a sense of place and belonging. Likewise, Korte and Chen (2020) have demonstrated that economic dislocation can create emotional stressors and that structural instability can create a sense of chronic psychological insecurity. These attitudes are particularly relevant in Bulawayo's new novel seeing that it is a tale of migration, but not solely in terms of a person opting to move, but also because of economic crisis and political uncertainty.

What has appeared in these studies is that trauma is frequently experienced in memories. Similar observations have been made in studies of intergenerational trauma, where memory functions as a mechanism through which traumatic experiences continue to shape identity and belonging across time (Farhan, 2026 a). Loss, separation and displacement can be experienced in ways that become entrenched in memory that impact the present and influence perceptions of self and community. Migrants can then continue to have a psychological attachment to a space that they have left behind, leading to dissonance between memory and real experience. *We Need New Names'* Darling's sense of identity and place remains impacted even years after her move to the United States, as memories of Zimbabwe remain.

However, the current literature on trauma tends to focus on trauma as a result of migration and displacement. Much less research has focused on the impact of trauma on the migrant's perception of home. Emotional dislocation, alienation and identity fragmentation have been topics of study, but the impact of trauma on the construction of home as an unachievable desire have not been sufficiently developed. Bulawayo's story is complicated by the relationship between memory, belonging and return, which is important to keep in mind when this limitation is taken into account. Therefore, an integrated approach is needed to explore trauma and home to understand the experience of displacement and the possibility of return in the postcolonial migrant experience.

2.3 Home and Belonging in Postcolonial Fiction

The idea of home and of belonging has become a central focus of modern postcolonial, diasporic and other scholarships. In the face

of growing patterns of migration and displacement worldwide, the concept of "home" has come into focus as a fixed geographical domain with security, familiarity and cultural continuity. Home, however, has been seen more as a multifaceted and problematic concept that is influenced by memory, identity, attachment and social experiences. Home is often a place where migrants and displaced people are physically gone, but emotionally present, or a place of longing and a place of uncertainty.

The themes of home and belonging have been a focus of scholarship in *We Need New Names*. In his view, Akpome (2019), home in the novel is presented as a palimpsestic space where past, present, and future memories, identities, and experiences overlap and interact. Similarly, Motahane and Makombe (2020) talk about the home, the unhomely and migrancy, creating a sense of continual disembarkation in Bulawayo's characters both within Bulawayo and elsewhere. Their study reveals that migration does not always lead to "new attachments" but can also lead to greater feelings of disbelonging and unbelonging.

In home, Gwambiwa (2022) posits that it is flexible and ever-changing as it is difficult for the migrant to maintain any type of connection to either the home country or the host society. This condition creates a sort of in-betweenness – an individual can't belong to one or the other place. Likewise, Lazarenko (2026) refers to the relationship between home, identity and belonging and how displacement can transform home from a real to an imagined place, one that can be maintained through memory and emotional resonance.

The concept of 'unbelonging' now has gained in salience in modern migration studies as well. For Okab (2020), home is frequently created and shaped by what is not included, as well as what is included, indicating that 'migrants' engage in constant negotiations regarding their sense of belonging with social and cultural difference. Likewise, Zevnik and Russell (2025) theorize that belonging and unbelonging are not alternative states but are interdependent. Their approach focuses on the lack of stability in belonging and illustrates how in many cases, displaced persons oscillate between several attachments, without giving rise to a genuine integration in one or more social or cultural context.

They are supported by a more general discussion of displacement and placelessness. Displacement often engenders aspects of placelessness which calls into question traditional notions of home and identity, as suggested by Ganguly-Scrase and Lahiri-Dutt (2016). Home is not necessarily a place of safety, but can be broken apart by distance, memory and shifting social conditions. When this happens, migrants tend to have emotional ties to locations that no longer reflect their current realities, which can leave a conflict between "remembered" and "received" forms of "home."

Together, these studies yield much insight into the relationship between migration, home, and belonging in *We Need New Names* and related postcolonial texts. They show that home is often described as insecure, contested and dislocated and that it is an arena of memory. To date, however, scholarship has concentrated on home as a place of nostalgia, identity or cultural attachment. Few attempts have been made to study the impact of traumatic events on the home as an impossible place to return. In spite of scholars recognizing the challenges of belonging and unbelonging, the contribution of trauma to the unfulfilled potential for return is

not yet deeply explored. To this end, the link between trauma, home and postcolonial belonging needs to be explored, especially in terms of Bulawayo's depiction of the migrant experience.

2.4 Research Gap

A review of the previously published scholarship indicates three main themes in the study of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. To begin with, the study about migration, diaspora, and transnational identity has received much attention with a specific focus on the novel and on how it depicts displacement and cultural negotiation in African and Western settings (Ngom, 2020; Ahmed, 2022; Elnahhas et al., 2023; Akhtar et al., 2024). Second, there is an increasing body of scholarship on psychological impacts of migration, such as traumatic, emotional, and fragmented identities among migrant subjects (Edlund, 2020; Agyo et al., 2025; Akhtar et al., 2024). Third, the study of the concepts of home, belonging and unbelonging as a result of migration has been explored by several studies that showed how migration affects the traditional understandings of the concepts of home, belonging and unbelonging (Akpome, 2019; Motahane & Makombe, 2020; Gwambiwa, 2022).

As much as these are valuable, the scholarship on migration, trauma, and belonging has largely remained separate from one another. Although there have been discussions on displacement, emotional rupture, home and identity, comparatively little focus has been placed on exploring the meaning of home itself as it is transformed by trauma. In particular, there is little research to explore how traumatic displacement changes the nature of home and that of a potential return home into an impossible site of belonging.

In this regard, the present study aims to fill this gap and seeks to explore the trauma, memory, and belonging dynamics in *We Need New Names* through a lens of trauma theory and postcolonial criticism. The study does not look at migration just as a phenomenon of geographical relocation and/or as a process of identity negotiation, but at the way traumatic experiences have the effect of changing the chances for return and make home an unattainable place. It does so, creating a more holistic understanding of the intersections between displacement, trauma, memory, and postcolonial belonging in today's African literature.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study proposes an integrated theoretical framework, which incorporates trauma theory and postcolonial criticism, to explore how the theme of home, displacement, and belonging are portrayed in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo.

3.1 Trauma Theory

Trauma theory is an important conceptual tool for examining the psychological aspects of displacement and migration. Trauma is not fully registered at the time of the event but later via memory, repetition, and remembered parts, as Cathy Caruth (2016) explains. Traumatic experiences, Caruth writes, do not allow themselves to be fully represented, because they "out-narrate and out-understand" the normal processes of understanding and narration. As a result, trauma often resurfaces in the form of flashbacks, mood swings and unprocessed emotions of grief.

Migration can be a journey towards new opportunities, but also a journey of emotional injury that can encompass feelings of displacement, loss and uncertainty.

Trauma theory is further elaborated by Dominick LaCapra (2014), who identifies two differences between "acting out" and "working through." Acting out is the recurrent recurrence of traumatic experiences, in which people are psychologically stuck in unresolved memories. Similar approaches have been employed in contemporary studies of literary trauma, where memory functions as a continuing force in the reconstruction of identity across historical and generational contexts (Farhan, 2026 a). In working through, by contrast, you face and confront and negotiate traumatic experiences one by one without being totally consumed by them. This distinction is especially valuable when considering migrants' lived realities; displace often creates perpetual dilemmas between attachment to the past, and adaptation to the present.

The novel does not suggest that migration was a process that had been finished, but rather one that was a psychological state that affects the characters' understanding of belonging and return.

3.2 Postcolonial Theory

Trauma theory is accompanied with postcolonial criticism aimed at exploring cultural and historical aspects of migration and belonging. In post-colonial theory, the lasting impacts of colonialism on identity, culture, representation and power are explored. It has special regard for the histories, experiences and histories of people and communities who have been affected by colonial domination, displacement and cultural transformation.

Edward Said (1978) has connected the idea of a 'colonial discourse' and how identities are created by the systems of representation that differentiate self from other. In postcolonial migration narratives, these dynamics are frequently manifested in the sense of exclusion, of being marginalized, and of cultural difference faced by migrants in the host societies.

The notion of hybridity, which Homi Bhabha (2012) has introduced, is another significant analytical lens to explore migrant identities. Bhabha believes that cultural identities are not static or inherent, but rather are dynamically created in the process of interaction, negotiation, and change. Migrants often live in transitional zones between cultures, languages and social worlds and thus experience hybrid Identities that defy categorization. Recent studies have continued to employ hybridity and counter-memory as useful concepts for understanding fragmented postcolonial identities shaped by displacement, migration, and historical experience (Farhan, 2026 b).

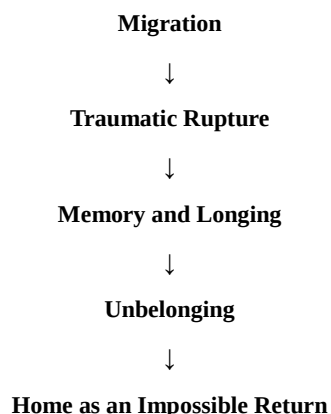
The theory of the postmodern period, the postcolonial theory, also helps to bring these two elements of the discussion, home and belonging, into question. Postcolonial scholars deconstruct the home as something fixed and lasting, rather, home is fluid, and relies on memory, culture, and social relations. This, in turn, can produce multiple attachments and disattachments which are difficult to resolve with the physical return alone.

3.3 Analytical Model

Trauma theory helps to articulate the emotional disorientations and long-standing recollections of loss arising from displacement, and postcolonial theory helps illuminate the larger structural contexts

of identity, belonging and cultural negotiation in which such disorientations and recollections take place.

Based on this, the following analytical model was used in the study:



The analysis that follows is based on this model. It proposes that migration creates its own traumatic disruptions and that these disruptions and the memories of them and the longings for them persist and lead to experiences of unbelonging which then make home an impossible place of return.

4. Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative interpretive research method by close reading and thematic textual analysis. Qualitative literary inquiry allows researchers to analyze the connection between the form of the narrative, its historical context, and its cultural meaning in a piece of literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

We Need New Names, a novel by NoViolet Bulawayo, 2013 is the major literary text that was used for analysis in this study. The novel was chosen for its rich exploration of themes of migration, displacement, identity, belonging, and the psychological effects of transnational mobility.

Data collection is based on documentary analysis. Selected passages, episodes in the novel, character experiences, and patterns of themes are the primary data. The secondary material consists of scholarly books, critical studies of postcolonial literature, migration studies, trauma theory and African diasporic writing.

The chosen text evidence is analyzed using a trauma theory and post colonialist lens. Writings that draw from postcolonial theory of Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (2012) are drawn on to discuss issues of identity, displacement, hybridity and belonging.

The analytical thread is developed around four themes that are closely linked: trauma and displacement, memory and the making of home, impossibility of return and postcolonial belonging. It explores how Bulawayo depicts migration as a traumatic experience which alters migrants' perception of home and makes the return a psychological and cultural challenge.

5. Analysis

5.1 Trauma and Displacement

Migration is not just a geographical process in *We Need New Names*, but a traumatic one that has a significant impact on personhood and emotional resilience. Darling and her friends live

in a social world that is impoverished, politically unstable, and uncertain, from the beginning of the novel. The effects of displacement are manifest in the community of Paradise itself, where residents try to survive in the context of economic deprivation and social disintegration.

These experiences can be understood in the context of trauma theory. Trauma can be traumatic not just at the time of trauma, but at later times and in bits and pieces (Caruth, 2016). While migration to the U.S. offers a potential for a better future, it does not solve the emotional challenges of displacement.

Darling's feeling of exile in America is increasingly apparent as a result of the traumatic nature of displacement. She has trouble adjusting to a new culture, and often finds herself torn between the memories of Zimbabwe and the realities of life in America. These experiences illustrate what LaCapra (2014) calls: persistence of traumatic rupture individuals may not be able to make sense of the past and present attachments.

Moreover, the novel proposes that displacement is not confined to the realm of what is physically called 'border'. Social and psychological displacement occur in Darling long before migration, due to political and economic insecurities.

5.2 Memory and the Construction of Home

We Need New Names is one of the most important aspects of memory that it depicts as a tool by which migrants can stay connected to home. Home in the novel is more than just a place, it is a place developed by memories, by longing, by emotional bonds.

Trauma and memory are key components of this process. Traumatic events tend to come back in broken-up memories, rather than whole stories as stated by Caruth (2016). The homeland is not a space that is present, but rather a space that is remembered, one that is kept alive through the memory of the individual.

Darling's memories of childhood, community, language and everyday life provide points of connection for something else that, in the diasporic context, might be lost. Memory is thus a resistance to the erasure of the culture.

The novel, however, also gives glimpses into the fragility of memory. The distance between home and reality increases with the progress of Darling's time in exile from Zimbabwe. Remembering is now more about desire and more about a sense of "unforgettable. Therefore, the reconstruction of home is a process of imagining rather than recollecting, and conflicts arise between the remembered homeland and the actual homeland.

5.3 The Impossibility of Return

In *We Need New Names*, return is a central, but highly problematic, concept. Even though one is geographically separated, memories of the homeland remain and there is a continual need to reconnect with the homeland. But Bulawayo shows how much more complex return can be than a physical return to a place of origin.

One of the main reasons that this is impossible is the transformation of both the migrant and the homeland. Migration alters the social experiences, cultural practices and sense of identity of individuals in Darling. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe is undergoing a political, economic and social transformation in her absence. This tension is between the memory and the reality, and in the

psychological sense, return is challenging even if it is still possible physically.

Traumatic experiences often create a sense of disruption or temporal dislocation between past and present, according to LaCapra (2014). *We Need New Names*' memories hold an emotional bond to Zimbabwe, but they also show that there's no way to bring back a past that was impossible to study as a historian or researcher.

The novel also implies migrant citizens make an interstitial space between leaving and returning. They are emotionally attached to the homeland and at the same time emotionally removed from the homeland as a result of long absences. Darling is not completely American, but she can't be completely Zimbabwean, either. The prospect of return is, then, made more complicated by an awareness that neither place can offer full belonging.

Migration in the novel is a product of structural factors related to political insecurity, economic distress and postcolonial inequalities. Return is unable to fix the experiences of displacement that migration has created, and such experiences can be found in these conditions, which challenge traditional notions of home and belonging. Bulawayo thus disrupts romanticised notions of homecoming by asserting that the migrant's relationship with home is forever changed by movement, memory and history. The homeland is absent but remembered and desired, but it is not yet fully recovered. In this way, home is an "imagined" place, a kind of ideal place that continues to impact identity even when it is not fully recovered.

5.4 Postcolonial Belonging and Identity Reconstruction

The theme of (im) possibility of return directly engages another important theme in the novel, the rebuilding of identity and belonging. Bhabha (2012) suggests that identities are constructed in a process of negotiation in a hybrid cultural space, where one individual is influenced by multiple identities and affiliations.

Throughout the novel, there are several examples of how belonging does not come easy because of one's physical surroundings. Even though Darling resides in the USA, he still feels excluded, different, and alone. Meanwhile, her absence from Zimbabwe has created a sense of disconnection from the homeland for her. The construction of identity is an ongoing process in which past experiences and present reality are juxtaposed. Memory is important to this reconstruction. But these memories do not just "freeze" an original sense of belonging, they help construct a new and deeper sense of belonging. These dynamics are also highlighted in Said's (1978) discussion on identity and representation. Many migrants find themselves confronted by social arrangements that categorise them as "other" and as "difference".

The challenges of displacement also bring opportunities for new ways of self-understanding and community to come together. The novel proposes that the concept of belonging can be reconceived from the traditional sense of a "nation," a "territory," or an "original. Migrants do not return to their "original homeland", but rather create other kind of "homes" in the form of memory, cultural adaptation and social relationships.

The home no longer exists and is not recoverable, but the migrants still make their attempts to make sense of the past and present. This

lens allows *We Need New Names* to consider postcolonial belonging as a process and a work in progress that is impacted by trauma, memory, displacement, and cultural change.

6. Discussion and Synthesis

The analysis of *We Need New Names* shows that migration is not just a matter of geographical mobility. Instead, Bulawayo portrays migration as an intricate process that is defined by trauma, memory, displacement and constant quests for belonging. The discussion validates the results of previous research, which highlighted the importance of migration and diaspora to Bulawayo's story. The novel's theme of migration has been seen as mirroring the wider postcolonial experiences that were driven by economic turmoil and historical injustice (Ngom 2020), and by the transnational dimensions of the migrant's process of identity construction (Ahmed 2022). Likewise, Elnahas et al. (2023) and Akhtar et al. (2024) illustrate the production of new forms of cultural negotiation and diasporic subjectivity in the wake of displacement. The current research further supports these understandings and proposes that migration in the novel is inextricable from the traumas that are experienced.

The results also corroborate past research that defines emotional dislocation as a key element of the migrant experience. Edlund (2020) and Agyo et al. (2025) highlight the traumatic effects of forced migration, and Akhtar et al. (2024) focus on psychological disintegration among migrants. Traumatic displacement changes the nature of home in the memory and the longing, and in the symbolic space which is inaccessible to actual return.

The same trend occurs with a study of home and belonging. Both *We Need New Names* by Akpome (2019) and *We Need New Names* by Motahane and Makombe (2020) confront the conventional idea of a home by showing that belonging is not fixed and unchallengeable. Similarly, Gwambiwa (2022) highlights the challenges of keeping alive ties to the homeland and settling into new places. The present study is able to support these interpretations as it shows how less home is a geographical place and more a place of emotions and symbols in the context of Bulawayo's new.

The most important dimension of the present research is the level of relationship between trauma and the inability to return. Previous scholarship has covered a range of topics on migration, identity, trauma and belonging, but these issues have been addressed in isolation. This study illustrates how trauma theory and postcolonial criticism can complement each other, and how trauma functions as a means of making home an unobtainable space of belonging.

The study thus offers a conceptual trajectory that connects with migration, trauma, memory, unbelonging and the impossibility of return. In this light, *We Need New Names* offers a critique on the romanticized ideas of homecoming, and instead ascribes belonging as a process that is not complete and continues.

In the end, Bulawayo's novel shows that the migrant experience is one in which home is never fully recovered and in which memories and identities are continually negotiated. Trauma and its impact on the ways home, belonging and return are understood in contemporary African literature, *We Need New Names* contributes to the wider postcolonial debates about migration and displacement.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the study of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* has been approached from a trauma theoretical and postcolonial lens to explore the connection between migration, displacement, home and belonging. The results indicate that trauma is a central aspect of the migrant experience. The concept of migration is not only understood as a geographical movement but also as a psychological rupture, impacting the person's relationship with both their homeland and the host society. The study has also demonstrated that memory is an important process that helps to sustain links with home. But memory does not just serve to retain the homeland as it was. Instead, it is a recreation of home as an affective and symbolic place created through the desire for something else, repetition, and experience.

One of the main tenets of this study is that *We Need New Names* is a study of home as a return that is impossible. A sense of home and restorative desires for a homeland are still intense but the novel shows that going back to the past and reclaiming a lost sense of belonging is impossible.

The analysis also suggests that the belonging to the postcolonial era in the novel is not preordained or predetermined. Rather, belonging becomes a continuous negotiation of the processes of displacement, cultural hybridity, memory and adaptation. Bulawayo is a challenge to essentialist ideas of identity as it introduces the migrant subject as a fluid, dynamic, and continually changing identity within various cultural settings.

Scholarship on migration, diaspora, identity, and displacement has occurred in *We Need New Names* but these themes have tended to be approached singularly. The present study has illustrated the intersection of trauma theory and postcolonial critique, by showing the ways in which traumatic displacement alters notions of home into an impossible return and of this change in turn, affects migrant experiences of belonging.

Lastly, future studies could further pursue this research theme by investigating how trauma intersects with notions of "belonging" in other narratives of migration from Africa, or by deepening the exploration of the intersections of gender, memory, and displacement in Bulawayo's works. Comparative analysis with recent African diasporic fiction might also help enable a deeper understanding of the representation of home, migration and the quest for belonging in the mobile world today.

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