
Border-crossings and Reconfigurations in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo

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Abstract

The Zimbabwean novelist NoViolet Bulawayo belongs to the emerging generation of African immigrant writers in the US. Her debut novel, *We Need New Names* (2013) is the coming-of-age narrative of a resilient and resourceful ten-year-old girl, Darling, who grows up in a shanty town under Mugabe's ruthless regime before being sent to America to live with her aunt Fostalina in "destroyedmichygen" (Detroit, MI). Through Darling's singular child voice, Bulawayo represents the newcomer's adjustments, her dreams and disillusion, and the need to reinvent herself. We will thus explore the novelist's narrative strategies to expose the African immigrant experience, the transformation of black female subjectivities across boundaries, and the negotiation of new identities through language switching and appropriation in a "speakerly" text. Border-crossing as both a transformative and a subversive act, hybridization, the state of migrancy are the central themes of the novel; they also characterize Bulawayo's own way of writing. We will examine how the author reconfigures the Bildungsroman genre and how she also revises the canons of American immigrant fiction so as to raise questions about national belonging and the construction of fluid cultural and ethnic identities in a globalized world.

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