

Embodied Selves/Disembodied Subjects: Homing the Body in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have focused on NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* through its depictions of Africa, borders, and humanitarian aid, but have not yet fully engaged with the gendered aspects of displacement and home in the novel. Central to the text is the main character, Darling's, longing for a sense of home. Drawing on the concept of 'homing', this article examines how Darling's search for a home is tied to her body and the gendered bodies that surround her. This article argues that Darling can be read as undergoing a journey towards embodiment as she strives to find a home, in both her own body and in the USA; Darling's body comes to serve as a fraught home, a site where seemingly different worlds collide. It is not until she begins to accept her body and her new destination in the USA that she becomes embodied and moves towards a feeling of home. Ultimately, Bulawayo's text demonstrates how attention to gendered notions of displacement better allows the reader to understand contemporary migrant experiences in literature.

Keywords: home, narratives of displacement, NoViolet Bulawayo, embodiment, gendered bodies

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, an influx of widely circulated and celebrated transnational novels reached their first audiences in the United States. Works presenting 'relatable' international characters to U.S. readers (including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*) were released within months of each other. NoViolet Bulawayo's debut work, *We Need New Names*, originates from this same literary moment. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo grapples with the ongoing search for a sense of 'home' as experienced by female migrants. She presents the journey to feeling at home as both a psychological and physical experience. She captures this through the layering of memories, experiences, and places in the main character, Darling's, life. Darling's conception of home and her conception of self are linked to her relationships with other women's bodies. Yet, Bulawayo hides Darling's body from the reader by avoiding descriptions of her appearance and making her a passive subject rather than an active agent in scenes where her physicality functions as a bridge. It is only in the final chapter when Darling accepts a limited sense of home in her body and in the U.S. that readers receive a glimpse of her appearance, reflecting her shift to embodiment.

Upon release, *We Need New Names* received praise in literary circles alongside controversial mainstream reviews. Despite winning the Hemingway Foundation/Pen Award for a debut work of fiction, a review by Helon Habila in the UK newspaper *The Guardian* labelled Bulawayo's novel 'poverty porn.' Habila claimed that Bulawayo's creation of 'suffering African' images 'lead to a desensitization to the reality that is being represented' (Habila, 2013). This was not the only critical review of the novel, with other mixed reviews appearing in *The New York Times* where reviewers critiqued representations of Africa as well, while also claiming the writing becomes 'less vibrant' as Darling 'becomes an American' (Iweala, 2013).¹ Yet, the book still appealed to readers and achieved commercial success and acclaim.

¹ A second review in *The New York Times* from Michiko Kakutani praised the novel but did call attention to Bulawayo's privileged position in writing it, referring to Bulawayo's life as 'a dream achieved.' See <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/books/we-need-new-names-by-noviolet-bulawayo.html>.

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Given the mixed reception, it comes as no surprise that a robust collection of writing on the novel has emerged in recent years, ranging across disciplines including postcolonial studies, border studies, and African studies. Few have taken Habila's side (Ndlovu, 2016; Sibanda, 2018), while the majority of scholars have challenged the novel's dismissal by the literary establishment, and attempted to reinstate its importance (Arnett, 2016; Brooks, 2018; Frassinelli, 2015; and Moji, 2015). These latter readings have explored how Africa and African migrants have historically been represented in relation to Bulawayo's text and offer possibilities for future literary representations. However, there has been a notable lack of scholarship that accounts for the gendered aspects of the novel, and Anna Chitando's² research stands alone. Chitando's piece views the novel as a work of Zimbabwean childhood literature and proposes that Bulawayo's construction of girlhood in the character of Darling demonstrates the resilience of Zimbabwean children. To further the conversation on gender as it relates to *We Need New Names*, I will contend that Bulawayo's novel is one of significance, aiming to go beyond accusations of 'poverty porn,' in order to focus on providing an affective, gendered reading of her presentation of themes of migrancy, home, and self.

I will argue that Darling's search for a home in her body and the world around her is fundamentally a journey towards embodiment. My argument centres on the role gendered bodies play in constructing home, the homing of gendered bodies, and seeing the potential for embodiment as disruptive. I look at 'affective homing' as it arises in the intimate moments between Darling and other women in Zimbabwe. Then, I explore how the distinction between dichotomies of public and private, past and present, living in the USA and Zimbabwe, become blurred through Darling's gendered positionality. Through the manipulation of Darling's presence in the text and the erasure of her body, Bulawayo continually subjects the reader to the feeling of 'homing' as an ongoing and perhaps delayed practice, emulating the ways in which homing is experienced by gendered selves in conditions of displacement. The article will conclude with Bulawayo's manipulation of the narrative function as a means for critically engaging with gendered narratives of displacement as presented in contemporary literature and in the character of Darling in particular.

NOVEL SYNOPSIS

A contemporary coming-of-age story, *We Need New Names* follows the young Zimbabwean protagonist, Darling, from age ten into her adolescence across national borders as she travels from Zimbabwe to the U.S. suburbs. Opening in a Zimbabwean town of tin shacks misleadingly named Paradise, Darling and her friends, with colourful names such as Godknows, Bastard, and Chipi, navigate the chaos of everyday life in the poverty-stricken landscape. In these early chapters, Darling provides a 'child's-eye view of a world where there is talk of elections and democracy but where chaos and degradation become everyday reality' (Busby, 2013). The children dream of one day escaping, and Darling seems to actualise their desires when the opportunity arises to move to Detroit, Michigan with her Aunt Fostalina. However, the transition to life in the United States is much more complicated than Darling could have ever imagined as she faces life as an undocumented migrant, the challenges of adolescence, and the longing for home. The novel's title succinctly offers 'new ways of imagining our realities' for those diasporic subjects whose names no longer resonate with the same meaning (Bulawayo, 2013). In calling for 'new names,' Bulawayo draws attention to the inability for migrants to seamlessly blend into a new culture without the risk of losing a part their identity.³

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME AND THE GENDERED BODY

The nature of home exists both symbolically within the imagination and as a lived experience. As stated by Devika Chawla and Stacy Holman Jones, 'the home is viewed as a multidimensional theoretical concept that can have contradictory meanings' (Chawla and Jones, 2015: xi). Homes can be understood as spaces, which Doreen Massey defines as the 'dimension of the world through which we live, as well as places, which might be thought of as specific physical locations or destinations' (Massey, 2013). Homes may be associated with feelings, practices, and active states of being and moving in the world and are not stationary in definition. There is a tendency to think of home as grounded in a structure, but this is not always true. Avtar Brah similarly describes the complexity of

² In 2020 conference proceedings from the International Conference on Education and Social Sciences held in Dubai from January 20-22, Elizabeth A. Omotayo, Omolola A. Ladele, and Charles O. Ogbulogo also engage with the gendered aspect of the novel. They question how Bulawayo's presentation of female characters compares to that of male authors, arguing that Bulawayo enervates her female characters.

³ Bulawayo further discusses the title and her relationship to Zimbabwe in conversation with Ekene Oboko for the African Writers Trust. See <https://africanwriterstrust.org/2013/06/13/noviolet-bulawayo-discusses-why-we-need-new-names/#:~:text=The%20title%20of%20her%20novel,ways%20of%20imagining%20our%20realities%E2%80%9D>.

the site of home, writing that on the ‘one hand, “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination (...) On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality’ (Brah, 1996: 192). For Brah, the home is paradoxically both based on life in a physical location, while on another level it can also be thought of as a mental construction, and symbolic. These two understandings are simultaneously valid, pointing to how home is both physically and psychologically constructed. Homes of the past and present influence one another forming, according to Salman Rushdie, imaginary homelands. Rushdie states:

But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge... that our physical alienation (...) almost inevitably means we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (Rushdie, 1991: 9).

In migration, the remnants of lived experiences combine with new hopes, spaces, and memories; the result is a pluralistic notion of home and identity which is associated with these imaginary homelands. When a migrant turns back to look at where they migrated from, they must recognise the influence of their new experiences on their memories. The homeland becomes a combination of memories influenced as much by the past as by the present.

While the homeland may be constructed of memories from the past and present, the act of ‘homing’ suggests movement towards a future home. ‘Homing,’ or the process of home-building, links with gendered, affective qualities of home as well as these memories. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller describe this phenomenon in their introduction to *Uprootings Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. They write, ‘affective qualities of home, and the world of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materiality (...) Homing, then, depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted’ (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9). In thinking through the process of homing as intertwined with memory and longing for security, homing is innately connected to the temporality of home, with the past, the present, and the future colliding, a network of potential insecurities for a migrant. The making of home is about ‘creating both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present,’ a duty that falls heavily on the female migrant (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9). Homing is, thus, a ‘continuous act of production and reproduction,’ making it an inherently gendered process (Gedalof, 2003: 106). Tied to the female body, homing is a never-ending process for women, both those who travel beyond their initial homelands and those who work to maintain a sense of home in a fixed place. Homing can also be applied to the cultivation of a home within oneself, a movement towards feeling ‘at home’ within one’s gendered body and identity.

In the novel, in the leading character Darling’s case, both senses of homing are true. Reflecting how the concept of homing is tied to the gendered body, Darling’s narrative voice layers memories, times, and places with women’s bodies, attempting to ‘home’ these seemingly unrelated moments for the reader. While Darling’s body is representationally absent throughout the novel, she goes to great lengths to describe the female bodies that surround her both in Zimbabwe and in the United States. In Zimbabwe, Darling finds home and comfort in Mother of Bones’ body. Mother of Bones functions in the narrative structure as a guardian figure who looks after her while Darling’s parents are away; Darling simultaneously fears and respects her. In the house, preparing for church, Mother of Bones occupies the centre of Bulawayo’s descriptions. Darling describes how Mother of Bones lays out her dress, hangs the photos and the curtains, and how she desperately counts their money. Darling also describes Mother of Bones’ face carefully: ‘Mother of Bones’ face is the color of the shacks, a dirty brown (...) There are deep lines on it; when I was little I thought somebody had taken a mirror and carved and carved and carved’ (Bulawayo, 2013: 27). Mother of Bones’ body is the centre of action moving through the house; the chapter’s lingering attention on her face connects it to Darling’s younger days. Mother of Bones’ body/face comes to be associated with a certain type of home: a home without Darling’s parents that is filled with comforts, but also subjected to economic strife. There is a longing and comfort for the days of the past associated with Mother of Bones, and Darling’s nostalgic reconstruction provides a fictional account of the clash between homes of the past and the home of the present.

Moreover, Darling’s interactions with other women’s bodies in Zimbabwe provides ambivalent accounts of herself and home. In the scene where a woman is violently sexually assaulted at the church, Darling is filled with ‘shame’ as she watches (Bulawayo, 2013: 41), vividly recalling the woman’s dress, knickers, and skin. She describes the woman as ‘the devil’ wearing, ‘a purple dress that’s riding up her thighs and revealing smooth flawless skin like maybe she is an angel (...) I’m worried about her dress and knickers, about her skin getting scratched’ (Bulawayo, 2013: 40). Darling views the scene with childhood innocence, and it is never explicitly identified as an assault or rape. Nonetheless, Darling acknowledges that what she is witnessing should not happen to a woman’s body. She describes the woman after the event as ‘look[ing] like a rag now, the prettiness gone, her strength gone. I’m careful not to look at her face anymore because I don’t want her to find me looking at her like this’ (Bulawayo, 2013: 42). Similarly, when the children stumble upon a dead woman hanging from a noose, Darling is petrified and forces her eyes away from the corpse. She says, ‘it’s almost beautiful (...) But still everything is just scary, and I want to

run but I don't want to run alone' (Bulawayo, 2013: 18). She is shocked by the beauty of these women's bodies and the horror they face, and she struggles to place herself in these contexts.

This horror becomes inescapable and closer to her when Chipo, one of Darling's eleven-year-old friends, becomes pregnant. Chipo's pregnant body becomes a site of pain and terror which Darling and her friends attempt to destroy as they believe that bad things happen to pregnant women and mothers. Darling states, 'We're getting rid of Chipo's stomach once and for all (...) if we let her have the baby, she will just die' (Bulawayo, 2013: 80). Chipo's swollen stomach becomes a focal point as she is quite certain Chipo's pregnant belly is a source of pain that must be removed. Darling and her friends prepare to perform an abortion on Chipo, and in doing so, disassociate from themselves and take on the names and roles of characters from a famous U.S. television medical drama *E.R.* Sbhó states, 'This is what they do in *E.R.* (...) *E.R.* is what they do in a hospital in America. In order to do this right, we need new names' (Bulawayo, 2013: 84). In this role play, the children's bodies are symbolically replaced with fictional characters from television, as they disassociate in order to attempt the excision of the foetus. Their Zimbabwean identities do not fit the task at hand. In borrowing these new identities, the girls participate in a scene that is, according to Rushdie's terms, both fictional and real. In the moment, it is quite real for them, but the identities they draw from are based on people who never really existed. Darling and her friends abandon themselves and perform as these characters in order to protect themselves from their gendered fears.

A generational understanding of female pain and suffering is also expressed here, as the girls rely on second-hand information to conduct their 'operation'. Forgiveness, who adopts the title of 'Dr. Cutter' throughout the scene, uses knowledge she has gained from other women about the female body as she prepares to use a rusty coat hanger to rid Chipo of her pregnancy. She describes her medical knowledge, 'The clothes hanger goes up through the thing (...) I know because I overheard my sister and her friend talking about how it is done' (Bulawayo, 2013: 87). The other girls are stunned to discover how 'Dr. Cutter' knows what to do, but this is the only knowledge they have about how to terminate a pregnancy. In this moment, the girls are accessing generational responses to trauma as a means for survival. There is a collective aspect to the passing down of this information from older sister to younger sister, even if it is second hand. Presumably, the older sister gained this limited knowledge from older women in the village, and the ignorance of one's own body is clear here. As Jean Brandt puts it, 'the gendered aspects of trauma are experienced on the personal and collective level' (Brandt *et al.*, 2014: 370). By performing an abortion, the children are responding to the trauma they face on a collective and individual level - the trauma manifests itself on Chipo's body as she accepts this as the only answer for freeing herself. Darling describes Chipo's face while they prepare for the procedure as 'contorted, as if the hanger is inside her already. I notice her eyes are wide now, fearful. They remind me of the eyes of the woman dangling from the tree' (Bulawayo, 2013: 87). Darling recognises Chipo's fear as the same fear that was stuck in the dead woman's eyes; the tragedy of their circumstances becomes actualised with deadly consequences.

Despite the acts of disassociation experienced by the girls when preparing for the abortion, the terror of pregnancy and the procedure's dangers are still present in their bodily reactions and interactions with one another. It is only when an older woman in the village, MotherLove, stops the operation and saves Chipo from probable death, that motherhood returns to protect the girls. MotherLove embraces Chipo, and by sitting in her arms, Chipo becomes prepared to be a young mother. Chipo's body is ready to serve as a home for the child despite her fears through this transgenerational physical expression of love.

In these scenes, home in Zimbabwe carries an untitled danger for women's bodies. According to Brah, a location can 'articulate different "histories" and "home" can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror' (Brah, 1996: 180). Home, and the body by extension, can be a site of ambivalence, uncertainty, and (un)belonging. The women in Zimbabwe represent two versions of home for Darling – one of compassion and care and another defined by horror and lingering trauma. It is the same symbolic space with two distinct connotations.

HOMING THE BODY

Thinking through the role of the body as this paradoxical site of safety and terror, Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the body as paradoxical in and of itself provides a way to orient this reading of Darling within feminist philosophy. Grosz views the body as a 'peculiar thing' as it cannot be understood as just 'a thing,' but it also does not quite 'manage to rise above the status of thing' (Grosz, 1994: xi). The body exists as both a thing and a nonthing. Grosz also notes the body is the centre of 'perspective, insight, reflection, desire, [and] agency,' pointing towards the interiority of the body, making it an object that is able to comprehend itself as such (Grosz, 1994: xi). While the body is indeed a home for the individual as the place in which interiority takes place, it occupies this unique space between thing and nonthing. With Bulawayo writing Darling's physical body out of the text for most of the novel, the strained relationship between the interior self and the flesh is made more explicit. While her body is her home in the sense that it is the place in which her interiority is housed and the only consistent thread across nations,

the process of 'homing' her body is essentially a road to becoming embodied, which is a process that consolidates in the United States.

Darling witnesses other women undergo this process of attempting to find home in their bodies, specifically through the character of Aunt Fostalina. Darling's relationship with her body develops further through Aunt Fostalina's performance of U.S. femininity. Bulawayo presents Aunt Fostalina as obsessed with her weight and figure throughout the text. Darling describes her as hyperactive, 'always walking' and 'always moving' (Bulawayo, 2013: 153, 154). Darling recounts a scene between Aunt Fostalina and her husband, Uncle Kojo:

Uncle Kojo looks at Aunt Fostalina walking in one place and folds his arms across his chest (...) What are you doing to yourself, Fostalina, really-exactly-what? And punch. And kick. And punch. Look at you, bones bones bones (...) They are not even African, those women you are doing like, shouldn't that tell you something (...) There is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind (Bulawayo, 2013: 153).

Aunt Fostalina's relationship of denial with her body reflects her inability to feel at home in the United States. She continues to push herself by constantly working out, despite Uncle Kojo's objections, because she associates slimness with an ideal, white 'Americanness.' As Uncle Kojo and Darling's descriptions of her illustrate, she is already quite thin, and this constant movement is not good for her and is kind of cruel, as she will never actually achieve self-satisfaction; her imperfect physical body will never become a home of safety. At the end of her workout, Aunt Fostalina asks, 'You think I'm losing weight? Who is fatter, me or Aunt Da? Who is fatter, me or your mother?' (Bulawayo, 2013: 157). Through these questions, Aunt Fostalina is aspiring for a perfect body image associated with white U.S. femininity that Darling absorbs. So Darling's first experiences in the USA are associated with female insecurity, competition, and self-deprecation, reflecting a different type of danger and trauma for the female body than the type she faced back home.

These understandings of self-worth and relationship to physicality are then performed by Darling when her U.S. friends go shopping at the mall. When standing in a dressing room, Darling recalls the bodies of her friends in the mirror without exposing her own. She describes the one girl's breasts and the outfits of the others, but descriptions of herself are absent. Presumably, she is standing alongside her friends, looking in the mirror. Yet, the only description readers are given is of her shirt and how she is careful not to laugh at the jokes about her friend's appearance because she does not find herself acceptably comparable. This competition and comparison to other female figures strongly reflect the actions of Aunt Fostalina, who is constructing herself in relation to competitive femininity and western media ideals of beauty. Darling similarly does not see her own body as one which fits into the standards around her, drawing to light her body image. The body image, as Grosz understands it, sets the distinction between one's body, the space it inhabits, and other bodies while also mediating the connection, or disconnection in Darling's case, between one's mind and body (Grosz, 1994: 84). But the body image is 'always slightly temporally out of step with the current state of the subject's body' as a result of the projection of hegemonic ideals (Grosz, 1994: 84). This is especially seen in the case of gendered migrant bodies subject to additional internalised and external policing and heightened standards. It is for this reason that Darling finds her body an unacceptable home, as she finds her actual body image incompatible with such hetero-patriarchal practices as exhibited in her U.S. friends and Aunt Fostalina.

Darling does see Americanness as distorting the female body in an undesirable way. When first laying eyes upon an American bride at a wedding, Darling describes her as 'rolls and rolls of flesh; I cannot help staring, cannot help thinking, *But this is not just fatness*' (Bulawayo, 2013: 173). The novel continues to describe how she is unable to comprehend fatness in America, as it is 'a whole "nother level" of fatness' (Bulawayo, 2013: 173). Aunt Fostalina's reaction to the bride is bliss, as she, and others at the wedding, consider that they have a better appearance than the 'American' bride. While sitting in the bathroom, Darling also hears other Zimbabweans unkindly laughing about the bride and describing the difference between 'fat' and 'obese.' This wedding scene directly follows the chapter describing Aunt Fostalina's weight obsession, aligning the two scenes provides a focus on the public presentation of the female body. While one scene shows their internalised discomfort with American standards, the other shows how bodies that challenge conceptions of skinniness and beauty are judged by women who do conform to the societal standards. Readers never know where Darling falls on this assessment of 'appropriate' bodily size for women, as she keeps her own image hidden, while Aunt Fostalina is trapped in her never-ending competition with other women, and American white women are also presented as undesirable and ruled by uncontrolled appetites.

Yet, rich white girls her age play a different role. Specifically, the novel uses the character of Kate, her employer's daughter who has an eating disorder, to show how obsession with appearance can manifest within white privileged spaces. Darling finds herself unable to comprehend Kate's eating disorder, despite knowing that Kate has extensive mental health diagnoses from reading her diary. She states, 'She is not ugly; in fact, I think she is very, very pretty, so I don't know what her issue is' (Bulawayo, 2013: 269). In the scene to follow, Darling copes with this foreign

concept of 'eating disorder' by mentally returning to Zimbabwe, disconnecting her mind from her flesh. She pictures Kate's Cornell University shirt as belonging to her childhood friend, Bastard. She hopes that Bastard and her group of friends will appear with her in America, but her fantasy is disrupted by the striking figure of Kate holding a small plate with only a couple of raisins on it. Darling responds with laughter. She thinks, 'You have a fridge bloated with food so no matter how much you starve yourself, you'll never know real, true, hunger' (Bulawayo, 2013: 270). Darling reimagines her circumstances with her friends, who when she last saw them were starving, only to be brought back to the present through Kate's eating disorder. She is unable to comprehend the disconnectedness between the two worlds, one of privileged excess, one of famine, nor is she able to place herself in her present reality. The incompatibility in experience contributes to Darling's inability to fully place herself corporeally in the United States, despite her ongoing attempt to accept home in her body.

The work of making a home is an ongoing process, as Ahmed simply puts it, 'It takes time to feel at home' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 9). For Darling, this is two-fold as she must make a home in both the United States and in herself. The impact of this is exhibited in her heavy reliance on consuming the image of other women's bodies for conceptions of home, the erasure of her own physical presentation and bodily movements, and the collisions of memories, places, and times in the narration that contribute to this sense of unhomeing and ambivalence.

BODY AS A SITE OF COLLISION

Collisions between public/private, past/present, and Zimbabwe/USA binaries contribute toward Darling's struggle with her bodily identity. She struggles to find home in herself, while her body also finds itself used as a bridge, blurring dichotomies. These boundaries are reconstructed, challenged, and redefined as the world changes around Darling. While Darling grows, her relationships with her family, her community, and, eventually, U.S. society, are strained, producing anxiety. Linda McDowell views the female body as maintaining 'fluidity' and upsetting 'fixed and static binaries of space [and place]' (McDowell, 1997: 73). Darling's body is physically trapped between these binary spaces, existing instead in a type of borderline space, representing her psychological entrapment as well.

When her sick father lies in bed dying, Darling's body becomes the bridge between private and public worlds. Her mother tells her, 'You must not tell anyone, and I mean *an-y-one*' (Bulawayo, 2013: 95). Her friends come to the door to play, and her mother's words echo back. She stands, physically, between them and the door to her house, making up lies as to why she cannot play outside. When her friends attempt to break into the shack, Darling slams the door and places her body between her friends and her father. It is only when Darling accepts their knowledge of his existence that they can enter the building. When they enter, she takes a passive observational role, acting like she is 'just visiting' (Bulawayo, 2013: 102). She disassociates from her body, her friends' presence, and her father's dying body and merely exists. While serving as the bridge between worlds, she is unable to emotionally engage with the trauma of the present, instead, she passively bridges the spheres between the private and the public through the use of her reclusive feminine bodily presence.

The USA and Zimbabwe begin to collide thematically in the novel, as humanitarian aid organisations demand performances of private suffering in the public space, in order to mobilise western compassion. As James Arnett discusses in his piece, the dynamics of exchanging aid for suffering are uneven, and it places a toll on those forced to uphold the stereotypes, in a 'suffering fatigue' (Arnett, 2016: 169-170). For any of this performance to work, it relies on the public/private binary being conflated in a way that is amiable to western audiences. The children go from playing a game alone, to being the centre of attention as they begin 'singing and jumping' to show they are grateful for the gifts they will receive from the humanitarian people (Bulawayo, 2013: 52). As soon as the foreigners are on the scene, their cameras start flashing and the children perform their fake smiles, masking their private emotions. Darling describes the shame she and the other children feel at this, 'They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer that they didn't do it' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). The distance between Americans and Zimbabweans is explicitly maintained by the silent rules of their performance, they 'are careful not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). One of the children, Godknows, reminds them 'you are not supposed to laugh or smile' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). The representation of their bodies will circulate to audiences beyond their control and are the site for this exchange of images for cash. As the camera flashes, Darling's narration takes on the collective 'we' in these scenes as she describes the children operating as one, reflecting her own passivity in the situation. When the performance shifts from one displayed for the benefit of the cameras, to one for the NGO workers handing out gifts, Darling attempts to show the NGO workers her knowledge of English by saying 'Thank you so much' as she is given her gifts. Shocked, the woman 'doesn't say anything back, like maybe I just barked' (Bulawayo, 2013: 57). She and the others grow silent again here, and perform conventional thankfulness by smiling and waving their gifts in the air as the NGO workers drive away. The role they are expected to play is a silent, grateful one, not one where they speak in English as equals. Her small

attempt at conversation goes unnoticed as it does not fit the script for the performance demanded of the children. There is not much that Darling can do to stop what is happening, but the shame she feels and the dissociation she experiences shows her agency as removed.

Although Darling disassociates from her body in these moments when public and private realms collide, her body is, ultimately, the place she strives to find home in, mimicking the conception of home she sees performed in the female bodies around her. She is never fully comfortable in any space she inhabits, body or place; she is a 'displaced person'. While in Zimbabwe, she longs for the USA; while in the USA, she longs for Zimbabwe. And while her body is a site of tension for her, it is a site of connection and transition for others.

When Darling boards the plane to travel to the USA, her 'personal space' is broken and part of her identity is stripped from her, forcing her body to serve as a collision of nations. She takes nothing with her other than the clothing on her back, and she is stripped of her 'weapon,' a harmless item meant for ancestral protection, that she was instructed to 'never take off' (Bulawayo, 2013: 152). McDowell and Sharp's understanding of the body as a boundary helps understand the importance of this scene. As they put it, 'gendered spatiality (...) [is] a boundary between the individual subject and that which is Other to it, as the container of individual identity, but also as a permeable boundary which leaks and bleeds and is penetrable' (McDowell and Sharp, 1997: 3). For Darling, her personal space, her body's boundary, is physically and psychologically violated by the screening at the airport. While she is removed from her homeland, her connection to the homeland is also removed from her, as her body is a 'permeable' boundary.

Collisions between time and place also manifest themselves through Darling's body, namely in moments when she is incapable of reconciling the realities she is positioned between. For instance, on a drive to the mall, Darling expresses a disconnect from the other girls and their fascination with U.S. popular culture. While the singer Rihanna is playing on the car radio, Darling describes the song as 'stupid' and expresses contempt that Rihanna is being treated like 'a humanitarian crisis, like it was the Sudan or something' (Bulawayo, 2013: 220). She, then, begins singing the lyrics to a song she and her friends in Zimbabwe sang to drown out the music. She describes herself as being 'transported,' 'no longer in America (...) I am home-home now, with my friends at school' as the words fall from her mouth (Bulawayo, 2013: 222). The separation between Darling and her American friends is made clear in this scene, as she holds a stronger relation to an imaginary moment constructed from memories of her friends, than to those actual friends surrounding her in the car. Importantly, she expresses that she is not at home in the USA, surrounded by her American friends, but her 'home-home' is back in Zimbabwe when she is surrounded by her school friends. In going to the United States, the mythic place of desire has been actualised, but it is not where she feels she belongs. It cannot live up to the expectations she painted for it back in Zimbabwe. She looks back in this scene and constructs an imaginary homeland based on her memories of her friends' bodies, placing herself in the centre of the mix, but without revealing her body's appearance or actions except in relation to others. Her inability to fully inhabit her locality is expressed in her disconnection to the present, leading her identity to be torn between how she sees herself in Zimbabwe and in the United States.

A comparable instance occurs while Darling and her U.S. friends are watching pornography, and her mother's call interrupts them. This is perhaps a rite of passage for young adults in western societies. Although she is in the USA, when she hears the chatter of her old friends' voices on the phone, she responds by constructing mental images of them and being transported back home. She states:

I get goosebumps from hearing them talk. There is a strange feeling coming over me and I feel this dizziness and I have to sit down. Time dissolves like we are in a movie scene and I have maybe entered the telephone and travelled through the lines to home. I've never left and I am ten again (...) We're teasing Godknows for his buttocks, we're watching a fight, we're imitating church people, we're watching someone get buried (Bulawayo, 2013: 208).

What emerges from her disassociation is the privileging of Darling's nation of origin as the dominant frame of reference. In this instance, she reverts to the bodies and spaces she deems familiar to cope with the strangeness she is subjected to onscreen. What it calls attention to is how being trapped in the diaspora leads to competing understandings of self in relation to space and others. As Brah notes, '[Diasporas] are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble, and reconfigure' (Brah, 1996: 193). This scene illustrates the collision of memories and the present, and Darling's constant need to reconfigure and attempt to carve out space for herself in the present, past, and the imaginary homeland she constructs in order to comfort herself.

DIS/EMBODIMENT

Placing Seyla Benhabib and Elizabeth Grosz's definitions of embodiment in conversation with one another provides the framework for thinking through embodiment as it relates to displacement, home, and gendered bodies. Benhabib most simply defines embodiment as, 'the self develop[ing] an *embodied* identity, a certain mode of being in one's body and living that body...through the social-historical, symbolic constitution, and interpretation of the anatomical differences of the sexes' (Benhabib, 1992: 152). Hence, embodiment, to Benhabib, describes a state of existence that is not stagnant, but moves through discursive categories. Benhabib's definition does not necessarily connect to the fleshed body though. Grosz explicitly does this by linking embodiment to the corporeal body. She argues that embodiment and corporeality 'insist on alterity' (Grosz, 1994: 209). She then goes on to state that, 'Alterity is the very possibility and process of embodiment; it conditions but is also a product of the pliability or plasticity of bodies which makes them other than themselves, other than their 'nature,' their functions and identities' (Grosz, 1994: 209). It is through alterity that Grosz articulates how concrete, specific bodies emerge as something other than themselves through discourse as well as materiality. Alterity positions embodiment as both the means and the medium by which bodies become specific identities, but, alone, Grosz's definition leaves out the notion of embodiment as the body being lived in. In connecting Benhabib and Grosz's approaches to embodiment, one can better conceptualise embodiment as lived bodies, a corporeal body experienced in alterity.

In thinking through embodiment as it relates to forced and elective migration, Liisa Malkki extends a way to understand the severed relationship between the body, the space or place in which the individual is physically rooted, and the person's perception of these estrangements. Darling's lack of embodiment reflects her not feeling fully at home in her body nor in the spaces she inhabits; her desire for a home is internalised, and homing is a fraught process for her. Malkki's understanding of the internalised responses of the refugee, immigrant, or displaced person as a factor that psychologically impacts those who are experiencing harsh conditions or are removed from their place of origin is helpful in understanding Darling's state. She writes:

Our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement as not a fact about the sociopolitical context, but rather as an inner condition of the displaced (...) of not only bodily disconnection from homeland, but of disconnection between the body, space, and mind (Malkki, 1992: 33-34).

What Malkki is referencing here is the internal or psychical response to displacement, and how this is stimulated by our society's biased, sedentarist approach to the world. In other words, displacement does not only refer to the physical movement from homeland to foreign soil, but also to the psychological attempts to comprehend the self in these changed conditions. Bulawayo's decision to exclude Darling's body from most of the text is reflective of an attempt to capture the complexities of the diasporic experience. The juxtaposition of time and place throughout the novel illustrates this profound disconnect between spaces that Darling experiences.

In the final chapter of the novel, Darling's constructions of home shatter, when she is forced to confront herself. It is in this final phase of the novel where Darling's body enters the narrative. As Brah asks, 'When does a location *become* home? What is the difference between "feeling at home" and staking claim to a place as one's own?' (Brah, 1996: 193). Darling stakes claim to her body and her physical location in the USA as she becomes embodied in the face of conflict, rather than acting passively as she has in the past. She is forced to acknowledge her body and how her mind has become disconnected from her conceptions of both home and self. The break begins when she writes *iBio iyirabishi* on her bedroom wall and continues to decorate around it in red marker. The statement is a Ndebele English phrase meaning 'Biology is rubbish' an insult she is waging against the Biology assignment she is supposed to complete - but could also be read as an insult against her gendered body (Sibanda, 2018: 86). She realises what she has done and runs to get cleaning supplies to erase the words from the wall. It is here that Bulawayo begins to provide descriptions of her body. She runs directly into the kitchen table and the pain she feels is expressed, as is the feeling of her body moving through the house. When she returns to her room, she attempts to wipe the marker from the wall which results in the wall appearing as though it is bleeding, reflecting symbolically both her mental state and her relationship to the United States.

The following morning, in a panic, she covers the bloody walls with artifacts from Zimbabwe. Her movements are described as she rummages through the box, and she feels an ache in her heart. As this is happening, Darling's memories are swirling in the text, jumping from Zimbabwe, to her aunt's affair, to a scene of a club in the USA, with sexual dancing. She is unable to ground herself in the present until she calls her mother in Zimbabwe. Chipso answers and argues that Zimbabwe is no longer Darling's home. It is symbolic that Chipso delivers this message, with her daughter named after Darling by her side, showing a physical body replacing her old spot alongside her friend. The same child they attempted to abort is now grown and is Darling's replacement. Chipso says:

You left it, Darling, my dear, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country? (Bulawayo, 2013: 288).

Darling attempts to reconcile this conversation by referencing the television news she saw on the BBC, but she realises she has become just as bad as the Americans that surround her. Chipo draws this to light stating, 'But you are not the one suffering (...) it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have a right to even say anything' (Bulawayo, 2013: 187). Darling's response is outlined entirely by her bodily movements and physical responses from here to the end of the chapter. Every movement she makes and every feeling she has is clearly denoted; her embodied self interrupts the passive, dissociative roles she was previously subjected to, and she gains a sense of home displayed through her embodied agency.

What Bulawayo accomplishes in this scene is the shattering of Darling's nostalgic perception of home in Zimbabwe and her perception of lost, childhood self. Before the call, Darling is beginning to own and control her body independently from others in the United States. Her bodily pain is thoroughly described, and she acts independently without relying on others' bodies. No one is around her when she decides to draw on the wall; it is all her own actions. But, as she is coming to own and understand herself, she loses her connection with her homeland. She attempts to reconcile this by using decorations to cover her actions, and by calling her mother for reassurance. The hanging of the decorations over the blood-coloured wall reflects the layering of her identity. This imbalance between her Zimbabwean and American identity has been her internal conflict throughout the novel, and here she physically confronts it. Yet, the phone call pushes her even further away from her past identity, and her community of origin no longer allows her to identify with them.

CONCLUSION

Bulawayo's construction of the lead character Darling in *We Need New Names* reflects the complex experiences of displacement for female migrants. By layering memories over the present moment and writing Darling's body out of the text, readers are subjected to the process of homing and experience Darling's conception of self and home as a journey towards embodiment. Mother of Bones and the women around Darling in Zimbabwe at the beginning of the novel lay the foundation for her conception of home, and by extension body, as a space of both comfort and danger. Her attempts at homing are two-fold, as she looks to other women for home and also must address home in her own body. Collisions of public/private, past/present, and Zimbabwe/USA capture the psychological toll and disassociation she faces as she struggles to accept her body as her home, as her body functions as a bridge between spheres. When she finally accepts embodiment and becomes somewhat at home with herself, her identity unravels, forcing her to be an active agent to claim her identity, rather than a passive, reactive reflection of others.

Originating out of a particularly rich literary moment, *We Need New Names* offers readers an intimate picture of how displacement and the search for home manifest themselves in gendered bodies. Future analyses may further explore the connection between *We Need New Names* and other transnational works of literature as they relate to gendered notions of homing and embodiment. Although Darling's life may be a fictionalised one, the commentary it provides is poignant. Bulawayo's work humanises how living in the diaspora impacts perceptions of the self and conveys previously unimaginable conditions and feelings to readers living outside the diaspora with raw, unique power.

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