

GLOBAL CONTEXTS AND ISSUES IN *WE NEED NEW NAMES*

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Globalization, perceived as an economic phenomenon, is also the outcome of political, social and cultural factors. As a consequence, the world is becoming deterritorialized, transnational and diasporic (Appadurai, 2010, 21-22). And so is culture, undergoing a process of cross-cultural interaction in the context of an intensification of worldwide social relations and transnationalisation of the public sphere. The increased salience of cultural hybridity has given way to the rise of “world literature” (Fraser, 2014, 25), called global or transnational. This is literary fiction going beyond borders and cultures, rooted in global political, social and cultural contexts and raising issues like citizenship, nationhood, human rights as well as interconnection and interdependency. The transnational novel must also have some sort of cultural clash, inspiring to pose questions about the search for identity¹. It may also discuss relations between cultures and the dialogue between them, and explore the depth of meeting with the Other.

The transnational novel is a part of global culture and, as such, it plays a role in helping to organize diversity and provide ideas, symbols, concepts and models that can then seep into daily life. Thus, the transnational novel can add a layer to people’s experiences (Boli and Lechner, 2005, 36). However, the writers do not lose their native perspective and identity and they are still deeply rooted in it. Global novels often introduce a picture of countries and their local cultures shown in a broader and richer global context. The image of the author’s native country in the novel is often unique — deepened with the critical look of someone from the outside.

One of these is a novel by NoViolet Bulawayo *We Need New Names*, most frequently interpreted as a coming-of-age story, but it is also dealing with various current global issues and says a lot about the *status quo* of the world’s global political, social and culture problems. The author’s biography itself is an issue with a transnational context. NoViolet Bulawayo is a pen name of an author Elizabeth Zandile Tshele, born (in 1981) and raised in Zimbabwe. She completed her college education in the United States. The author is an immigrant who had an opportunity to get higher education and fulfill her aspiration to have a broader life choice. Although we do not

¹ G. Gangadharan, S. Dey, K. Boles, The transnational novel: What does it mean to us?, <http://thetransnationalnovel.weebly.com/what-does-this-mean-for-us.html> [accessed December 20th, 2015]

know the personal motives of the writer's emigration from Zimbabwe, it follows the pattern of the world's migration trends: from South to North, from the developing country to the developed one (Scheffer, 2010, 163). Papastergiadis stresses the growing number of educated women on the move across the world and he notices that migration is responsible for a broadening of cultural horizons and the introduction of critical perspectives (Papastergiadis, 2012, 45). This also shows the global change of the situation of women who have become more and more active and independent in making their life choices.

The plot of the novel, based on autobiographical motives and the experiences of the writer, takes place first in Zimbabwe and then in the United States, where Darling, the protagonist and narrator, emigrates. She leaves Zimbabwe and settles down with her aunt Fostalina who lives in Michigan. This path follows another migrant pattern: people leaving their native countries choose their destination according to their personal knowledge (*ibidem*, 47). They usually settle down with family members or distant relatives who sometimes agree to help them at the new place, accepting the role of hosts and brokers (mediators) between the two lifestyles. Martell calls it chain migration: migrants move to countries where previous or current generations of their family have settled (Martell, 2012, 108), so in a way the new country is not completely strange to them.

In Zimbabwe, Darling and her friends play a "country game" — in which "everybody wants to be the USA" (Bulawayo, 2013, 49). The Zimbabwean children are aware of the global hierarchy of the countries in the world. The USA is the largest receiving country (Martell, 2012, 108), and the leading world power, therefore the American Dream, shared worldwide by millions of people like Darling, can be perceived as a global experience. The girl is considered to be lucky and even envied by her Zimbabwean friends and neighbors because she has real plans to leave. She boasts: "I'm going to America to live with my aunt Fostalina, it won't be long, you'll see (Bulawayo, 2013, 14). Her American Dream already begins in Zimbabwe, before leaving for the land of her destiny.

She heavily idolizes it: "when I was a home, I heard that everything in America was better" (*ibidem*, 189). For the people dreaming their American Dream it is enough to think about "everything", and they expect that literally every sphere of their lives will be successful at the new place and they are not going to face any problems. At this stage they are focusing merely on the act of leaving, and they do not think about its consequences or the price to be paid, which in many cases can be incredibly high, for example family separation or broken relationships.

Darling's story is an illustration of a drama, behind which is hidden a contradiction between the rhetoric of global connectedness (as well as the attraction of the American Dream shared globally) and the practice of exclusionary American policies of immigration (Papastergiadis, 2012, 47). Darling admits: "We knew we did not have the money for school to begin with, but we

had applied for school visas because that was the only way out” (Bulawayo, 2013, 241). Her precious American Dream expires one year after arriving in the USA — exactly at the moment when her visa has expired. From now on she becomes an illegal immigrant, and she closely follows the path of her aunt who had arrived there earlier: “Well, go, go to that America and work in nursing homes. That’s what your aunt Fostalina is doing [...]” (ibidem, 15). This is another characteristic feature of the chain migration model mentioned above: not only is the destination of immigration the same, but so is the “ghettoized” lifestyle. In the case of the newcomers, it repeats itself in their new country. Darling begins to clean other people’s homes to earn money. Cleaning belongs to the category of jobs that are hard, unpleasant and underpaid. These are jobs only immigrants would agree to do.

One of the main reasons for migration is economic necessity. Economic causes of migration are bound up with inequality (Martell, 2012, 113): poor people seek for an improvement in the material conditions of their lives and this is why they search for a fulfilment of their aspirations in richer countries. Darling remarks: “In America we saw more food than we had seen in our lives” (Bulawayo, 2013, 238), which means she is aware of this huge gap between the economic levels of the USA and Zimbabwe. However, the economic gap is even deeper, and not only based on actual geographical territory. It also concerns people and their respective citizenship — those from the poor countries mostly find that wealth is unavailable and inaccessible. Just like Darling who finds herself “on the rich side”, i.e. on American territory, but, first of all, she is still a Zimbabwean citizen and therefore has not been included in American society for simply arriving in the USA. Instead, she has become an illegal immigrant, joining the category of redundant “junk people” (Bauman, 2003, *passim*). There is absolutely nothing she or anyone can do about it: American policy in this aspect is hard and unforgiving. The only way out is to leave the country — forever.

Apart from economic polarization there is also the polarization of individual hopes and chances: “junk people” do not have any rights, not even rights to have any prospects for their future, in their case the only option is to follow an illegal path. The American Dream is based on an assumption (mentioned before) that “everything in America was better”, but in fact the word “everything” must be substituted by its antithesis — “nothing”. Nothing is better for the “junk people”. They have nothing: no biography, no chances and no freedom to decide about themselves. Being illegal means not existing and being excluded from both the public and (at least partially) the private sphere.

American society is a society where everyone must be an individual, but an individual who is the same as others, and similar to the rest (Bauman, 2005, 26), therefore a key aspect of individu-

ality is limited. Being similar to others and being part of this society means, first of all, being legal there. Only then will the world open up to them, and they will have the right of a free choice. Darling and people like her will never be included, no matter where they find themselves: in their native countries or in the country to which they emigrate and in which they hope to improve their material statuses. Illegal immigrants are an excluded underclass, whose members are “invisible” and unable to join the social structures of any social class: “We would never be the things we had wanted to be: doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers. No school for us, even though our visas were school visas” (Bulawayo, 2013, 241), Darling confesses.

Darling, as many people before and after her, cleans other people’s houses, in order to earn money. Illegal immigrants is the only flourishing branch of industry in developing countries, as it has been ironically commented on by Bauman (Bauman, 2007b, 33).

There is no less irony in the scene of the novel where the Zimbabwean children observe a building site near their native village (Bulawayo, 2013, 46):

“What are you building? A school? Flats? A clinic? [...]

We build you big big mall. All nice shops inside, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace and so on so on. Good mall, big [...]

The irony is fully noticeable when you analyze the economic statistics for the country: Zimbabwe, a country of widespread poverty has an unemployment rate of 80%, a GDP of \$14.2 billion (approx.) and a GNI per capita of \$840², which is \$2.30 a day for an average citizen. The mall under construction and the global brands mentioned are icons of successful globalization, as well as being symbols of profound (and still growing) economic polarization. An Oxfam report announced that the 85 richest people in the world have a collective fortune with a combined value equal to value of the total wealth of the world’s bottom 3.5 billion people — which is half of the planet’s citizens together³. This has also been confirmed by Milanović, an economist in the World Bank research committee, who pointed out that at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the income of the top 5% of people was equal to one third of global income and it was also equal to 80% of the poorest people’s income (Bauman, 2011, 50). Half of all Africans live on less than one US dollar a day, one third in hunger (Martell, 2012, 165). Piketty notices that financial globalization is a key factor of the stratification of wealth in the 21st society (Piketty, 2015, 463), therefore this trend is most likely going to increase.

² <http://data.worldbank.org/country/zimbabwe> [Accessed March 14th, 2016]

³ Oxfam report 2014, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/even-it-up-time-to-end-extreme-inequality-33012> [Accessed February 19th, 2016]

The brands mentioned in the book also symbolize consumerism, which is another phenomenon developing in a global context, and it is considered to be an important factor in globalization. Consumerism entails a high level of consumption, creating “needs we do not need” and buying goods that are not essential for life. One of the models of consumerist behavior is buying brand products (Golka, 2012, 237). In the Zimbabwean reality, it sounds like a distant consumer utopia. How many Gucci, Luis Vuitton or Versace products will an average Zimbabwean with a statistical income US \$2.30 a day (mentioned above) be able to buy in his/her life?

Associating successful globalization with the mere presence of global brands in the poorest states — is a superficial approach and only the wishful thinking of enthusiasts of hyperglobalization: due to the economic gap the poor are economically excluded and they are not a part of the global community. They do not have any freedom of choice, they do not participate in the buy-sell chain, and they are excluded from the whole consumer culture. In general, it is unclear that globalization will allow the poor to trade their way out of poverty (Martell, 2012, 161). As it seems, globalization is only for the chosen and privileged ones, not for everyone. Zimbabwean people will not become part of the global system and global civilization, as the production of goods and services is not a mark of contemporary civilization nowadays. It is consumption which the poor cannot afford (Golka, 2012, 238). As non-consumers, they belong to the new category of “people who are problems for the rest” (Bauman, 2007 a, 126) and who are not necessary in the global market.

To conclude, the effects of globalization are not the same on all states and in all parts of the world and globalization is less inclusive than globalists suggest (Axford, 2013, 13). Globalization is making the economic gap wider — while rich countries make the most out of this process, the poor countries’ economies do not seem to be improving because of the mere fact that they have (at least partially) become part of the global system. The presence of global brands (or transnational companies) does not help much to change this situation.

Golka outlines parallels between religion and consumption (Golka, 2012, 238). We also notice another detailed aspect of it, no less interesting and yet very stereotypical: consumerism is being brought to Africa by “missionaries” of globalization, exactly like the way the Christian religion used to be brought there and implemented in the past. Although we live in postcolonial times, the mechanisms and directions of spreading new influential ideas seem to be similar.

Being “on the wrong side of globalization”, the Zimbabwean people from the village where Darling lives before her emigration can only count on being a subject of interest to one group of other people: the NGO members, bringing help and doing charity work. They arrive at the Zimbabwean village but they are mainly interested in making films and taking photos

of the natives. “Who will look at your picture? [...] Who will see our pictures?”, Darling wonders (Bulawayo, 2013, 53).

The people from NGOs bring gifts and distribute them at random: “each one of us get a toy gun, some sweets, and something to wear. I get a T-shirt with the word Google at the front, plus a red dress that is tight at the armpits” (Bulawayo, 2013, 55). Adults receive food (small packets of beans and sugar and mealie-meal), but they are embarrassed and disappointed by them, Darling mentions.

Papastergiadis reacts with skepticism at the idealistic claims by humanitarian NGOs (Papastergiadis, 2012, 138). What are their goals, actually? To bring help to Africa, distribute the gifts and go back to their own countries as soon as possible, without making any closer personal relationships. “We 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).

Direct touch is a key symbol of a deeper relationship. Touching means feeling someone, acknowledging them and developing personal relationships. Both the NGO people and the natives know: there is no question of closer contact here, everything must stay superficial. No closer relations mean no bonds — and no obligation or responsibility. This is also a characteristic feature of today’s world: when two strangers meet, this is an event without a past. More often than not, it is also an event without a future, a story most certainly “not to be continued”, a one-off chance (Bauman, 2006, 95).

Bauman notices that nowadays people are “surfaces” to each other, which means that the only measure they estimate in the other person is what they can notice on the surface (Bauman, 2000a, 158). The photos taken by the NGO members who arrive at the village is in fact an example of “taking surfaces” without getting involved into personal relationships. Touching might mean reaching beyond the surface and being obliged to take care of someone. Skarga defines the relation of an individual with the world as “taking by hand” or “catching” which means — “domesticating” and changing the world according to one’s own imagination (Skarga, 2009, 134). This surely does not happen between Darling and her friends and the NGO people. This scene also symbolizes a complete lack of any transnational solidarity or transnational (global) awareness based on ethics.

This relationship, being a form of interdependency, does not have any ethical features described by Lévinas where the Other has an individual “face” and is one we want to take responsibility for. This is not the kind of relationship that throws off the subjective “me” of “my” egoism (Lévinas, 1984, 33). Here, meeting the Other is facing difference, and not everyone is either

prepared for that, or willing or able to meet it. The most often applied strategy is to break contact (therefore not to touch each other) before it goes deeper (Bauman, 2008a, 196). Bauman talks about the dehumanization taking place in our times, i.e. wiping out the “face” of the Other (Bauman, 2011, 57) — let us say this is the wiping out the Lévinas’s “face”. This makes a clashing contrast to the ethical concept of the meeting with the Other as described by Lévinas. Bauman also notices the banishment of the poor from the human community and from the world of ethical duties (Bauman, 2007a, 127). As Golka sums up, meeting the Other does not exclude separation and does not establish full and harmonious contact between “me” and “the Other”, although this might be one’s wishful thinking (Golka, 2012, 319). In most cases, contact with the Other is not always full or fulfilling.

Bauman also describes a phenomenon called *aid fatigue* — the short act of international (global) solidarity simply fades out and exhausts people after just a few days (not even a few weeks!) when the act of help took place (Bauman, 2000b, 121). Any acts of solidarity or humanitarian help are mainly performed to clear one’s conscience, and not to really help or to take care of others in need. It is stressed here again that there is no deeper relationship or contact connected to it, there is no responsibility involved and no development of this relationship.

Zimbabwean people have contacts with other people from abroad, too. The irony continues here, as it is not Zimbabwean workers who are building the shopping mall in the village where Darling lives. The mall is instead being built by Chinese workers who have arrived there as cheap labor — paradoxically, even cheaper than the native workmen. In history, Chinese workers were often present in many places around the world — in the USA, beginning with the era of the Gold Rush in the middle of the 19th century and they were also used to build railways in the USA and in Europe: in France they were “imported” as *Corps de Travailleur Chinois* [Chinese Labor Cops].

The area of the village where the Chinese live and work is called “Shanghai” by the local Zimbabweans. The presence of the Chinese in Zimbabwe is a symbol of Chinese expansion nowadays: Darling mentions that “China is a big dog” (Bulawayo, 2013, 45). She even concludes: “Chinese is our national language now” (Bulawayo, 2013, 45), noticing in this symbolic way that China’s economy and power has been getting stronger and stronger. Indeed, its economy has been growing and expanding in the world. Data published in the year 2014 confirm that China is expected to overtake the US economy, the biggest economy in the world, in 2019, or beyond, for the first time in post-war history⁴.

⁴ International Monetary Fund: World Economic Outlook Report:

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/02/weodata/index.aspx> [Accessed on March 1st, 2015]

So, if China is going to be the number one in the world economy, maybe the Chinese language will become number one soon, surpassing the English which is a global language nowadays? “China is a red devil looking for people to eat so it can grow fat and strong” (Bulawayo, 2013, 47), remarks Darling. But still, the children’s game she plays with friends, everyone wants to be the USA (Britain, Canada, Australia or Switzerland) but nobody wants to be China, although it is one of the most powerful countries. Both China itself and the Chinese people who are in the village do not have a high status among the Zimbabweans.

These are the two kinds of relations between Zimbabwe, a (developing) country with the outside world: this country is either a recipient of charity, or a subject of exploitation and expansion. There is neither symmetry in the relationship, nor equality or partnership, which again stresses how unequal and unjust globalization is, failing to provide equal and balanced development to everyone who needs it. Deregulation in globalization is often cited as a key factor in making the poor even poorer (Bauman, 2011, 50). And indeed, *We Need New Names* shows that global processes are “one way”, only for the chosen (privileged) ones, not for everyone. It is highly questionable that globalization will allow the poor to trade their way out of poverty (Martell, 2012, 161).

The title of the novel: *We Need New Names* poses an important question about identity. Identity is how one understands, classifies and addresses oneself (Matthews, 2005, 36), therefore self-definition can be a metaphor of identity. Margaret Mead stresses the role in defining or stressing one’s identity in the rite of social initiation — one of the signs was giving one’s name (Golka after Mead, 2012, 314). One of the factors which forms one’s identity is categorizing, which is putting oneself in the structure of the world (mainly social structure) and adjusting oneself to this structure. We can see the mechanisms of inner life, as defined by Golka: inner dialogue, imagination and fantasy, accepting identity on a trial basis, longing for oneself to be someone else (ibidem, 315-317) — these are processes that are connected to self-definition.

Giddens points out that the cultural environment is a factor which shapes our identity in modern societies. Individual actions and making choices are the most important rituals in this process. Choosing a new name is a symbolic act, and it is being made in a world which has the highest range of possibilities to create oneself and build one’s identity as never before in human history (Giddens, 2008, 52-53). Therefore, a name becomes a tool to interact between the individual with the outside world which refers to the feeling of individual “self” (ibidem, 69). Choosing one name — and, at the same time, identity — can be seen as no less than a “game”, and interpreted in the light of the Wittgenstein concept of a language game (Modood, 2013, 98). Darling, making her choice, becomes a sort of an actress in the identity interplay which takes

place also between the local and the global (Axford, 2013, 50). She wants to forget the local and become global. She says: “you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same” (Bulawayo, 2013, 146).

Her “new name” shows her ambition and a wish of “who I want to be” (Papastergiadis, 2012, 70), which is one of the components of identity. But it also shows who Darling does *not* want to be. She does *not* want to be a migrant or a local. Her “new name”, she believes, will automatically include her into the society she has an ambition to be a part of. She thinks that changing her name in the new country will itself change her identity and her relationship with the new environment. She is convinced that with a new name her old “self” will automatically turn into the “new” self and make her a part of the “better world” she dreams about. Yet, she does not realize this is only her wishful thinking. Darling’s “new name” will always be a part of her American Dream. Choosing a name is a form of self-categorization, but she does not know that “self-categorization does not create a group” (Modood, 2013, 102-3). In other words, she will always be identified as a black African female, and (illegal) immigrant, and she will never go beyond this categorization. Darling will never get rid of her roots. The new name (even when typically American) will never make her a native-born American.

Neither is she able to realize that her new name would break the cohesion and continuity of her existence. The crack was not as wide as it was in the past when identity had been stable, given once in one’s life and rarely changed. In the modern global world identity is placed on the intersection of individual subjects and social structures, between subjectivity and objectivity, between free choices and forcing one’s own reflexivity and social experience (Golka, 2012, 304). It is liquid and flexible, possible to be changed literally at every moment. And when identity is a subject of choice, there is always an attempt to choose an identity which is widely recognized and highly socially accepted. This phenomenon is described as social gratification for accepting this and not the other identity (ibidem, 318). It reminds us of the “country game”: Darling and her friends always try to choose the richest and the most powerful countries (except China).

Finally, one of the shortest chapters of the novel, chapter 10 “How they left” (Bulawayo, 2013, 145-146) is a beautiful, yet dramatic and emotional literary portrait of human mobility — people being on the move, people looking for their own place in the world and crossing borders. Who is crossing them? Those with nothing, those with strength, ambitions and hopes. Migration is seen by many as a powerful social force — but, as a process, it is very complex and difficult to explain. However, all the models of migration patterns are driven by the laws of equilibrium: relying invariably on the transpersonal system of the “self-regulating” market. The “invisible hand of the market” is the factor working especially neatly during this process (Papastergiadis,

2012, 42-43). Migration can even be described in categories of physics, such as entropy and liquid flow. But although mobility has global range, yet it does not mean global connectivity. Migrants still stay “locked” in their own world, like Darling’s family members who live in the USA. They cannot become a part of its society.

This chapter is an illustration of the metaphor of “liquid modernity” which describes the wider perspective of the novel, also grasping the essence of the new contemporary phase in history of modernity, which is the context of globalization processes. New configurations, constellations, arrangements of dependencies and relations are being subsequently recast and refashioned (Bauman, 2006, 6-7), and their only steady feature is changeability. This short chapter is different from the rest of the novel — being a short “mid-air impression” with no time and place, there is weightlessness, buoyancy and shapelessness in it. Bauman describes modernity as a “tempting lightness of existence”, noticing that categories of time and place shrink until they finally disappear. Liquid modernity is the era of a lack of obligations, elusiveness, easy escapes and hopeless chases (Bauman, 2006, *passim*). There is no past, and no present. Will there be any future?

What future will modernity bring? How are global problems going to be solved? Is the future going to be posthuman? For example, it is predicted that ethical consciousness might be a term associated with biodiversity — the “empathy gene” OXTR has been discovered and it is going to be brought into the realm of ethical intelligibility (Kroker, 2014, 49-51). Will it have consequences for new models and forms of solidarity and NGO help? Will there be a non-human (posthuman or transhuman) social liberation and that of human rights (*ibidem*, 66)? Which way will the world go? Will economic polarization diminish or completely disappear? Where is the place of the “junk people” going to be — will they ever be given a chance to be fully integrated? What is going to happen if the USA stops being the leading power — how will the world order change then? If America is declining, what will the alternatives be (Martell, 2012, 283)? What will directions of migration be? One thing is for sure — the world will need new names for any new phenomena taking place.

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