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## Political Violence in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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No Violet Bulawayo (Pen name of Elizabeth Zandile Tshele ) was born in Tsholotsho a year after Zimbabwe's independence from British colonial rule. Her short story 'Snapshot' edited by J.M. Coetzee was published in *New Writing for Africa* in 2009. She won Caine prize for African writing for the short story 'Hitting Budapest'. Her first novel entitled *We Need New Names* was nominated for Guardian First Book Award and Man Booker Prize 2013. This made her the first black African and Zimbabwean woman to be shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. *We Need New Names* is a sad and beautiful story of a ten years old young girl called Darling who copes with extreme poverty, hunger and near homelessness in her own country. She has witnessed sexual assault, mass political violence, death from AIDS and murder. Bulawayo looks unflinchingly at harsh realities of Zimbabwe through Darling's perspectives eyes. The author covers the political unrest and promise for real change in upcoming elections.

Political violence is a common means used by people and governments around the world to achieve political goals. Many political groups and individuals believe that their political system will never respond to their political demands. As a result they believe that violence is not only justified but also necessary in order to intimidate populace into acquiescence. Many a time, ruling governments use force in order to defend their country from outside invasion or other threats of reactionary or terrorist forces and the like. Political violence can take a number of forms including genocide, human rights violation, war, police brutality, capital punishment and so forth. Non action on the part of government can also be characterized as a form of political violence.

Through this novel, No Violet Bulawayo has tried to present the existential realities of Zimbabwe, especially related to the bitterness of the political situation where a large number of people are forced into displacement "with shock on their faces and blood in their hearts." (146) Zimbabwe entered a state of violent political crisis with the aftermath of presidential election held in two rounds on March 29 and June 27, 2008. President Robert Mugabe led a campaign of terror against the opposition party and despite winning the June election he continued to implement brutal attacks against the political opposition. The United Nations and African Union failed to undertake effective measures to address the crisis. Civil Society Group such as Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Group swiftly responded and condemned the repression and human rights abuse of the government. Despite the establishment of a unity government through the signing of Global Political Agreement, the situation remained dangerous as political reforms were not implemented and Mugabe's party continued to engage into violence.

Bulawayo was inspired to write this novel when she was passing through the slum area where everything was broken and a child was sitting on the rubble. This incident confused her and she thought about the people that what their stories were and how those stories would develop which Darling presents through her memories of past. The writer can identify with the horrible plight of people: "There is dust everywhere from the crumbling walls; it gets into our hair and mouths and noses and makes us cough and cough" (66). The novel opens in Paradise, Zimbabwe Shanty town where Darling and her mother lives because their houses were bulldozed by government. The government program operation 'Murambatsvina' ("clear out rubbish")

destroyed entire neighborhood in a few hours, leaving more than three lakh people homeless. Darling has witnessed the mass political violence which led to their present condition with people living in nice homes being reduced to these shacks. Darling and her friends – Chipso, Stina, Godknows, Bastard and Sbhoo are reminded of their past memories as she says:

We didn't always live in this tin, though. Before we had a home and everything and we were happy. It was a real house made of bricks, with a kitchen, sitting room, and two bedrooms. Real walls, real windows, real floors, and real doors. Now all we have is this small bed that sits on some bricks and poles. (62-63)

Bulawayo has presented the extreme poverty of the people living in slum area because they do not have food to eat, cloths to wear and human rights to use. From the very beginning of the novel, we see the hunger of the people which is asserted by the children of Paradise. "We did not eat this morning and my stomach feels like somebody just took a shovel and dug everything out" (1). The children are as adventurous and playful as other in normal surroundings but their games are not quite as innocent. They go around an affluent neighborhood called Budapest for stealing guavas not for fun because they have no other choice. The games they play include violent reenactment of the events which they have witnessed in their community. They steal guavas a little like the way some American children go to rich neighborhood for better Halloween candy. Upon returning from Budapest the children find the body of a murdered woman hanging on a tree. At first time there is terror among them but then Bastard who seems to be very strong says that "Look did you notice that woman's shoes were almost new? If we can get them we can sell them and buy a loaf or maybe even one and a half" (18). This shows the harsh reality that Darling and her friends have to face.

We see that the public expectations were not fulfilled by the government. The poor people are not given proper food by the NGO representatives. They ignore them as if the government has said them to do so. The sadness of the people is clearly evident: "This time the NGO people are late; they were supposed to come on the fifteenth of the last month and the month came and went and now we are on next month" (51). With the arrival of NGO people, the adults also came out from their shacks without making a noise and standing in the line. The reason behind their silence is that they know that nothing good is going to happen. They are not satisfied by the food given by the NGO people because they handover small packets of beans to them. Mother of Bones, who is grandmother of Darling, shows her sadness by not going to the place where the people have gathered to take things from them. She does not even like to utter the name of the NGO people because they have caused a lot of hurt. It is the government which made NGO people to do so. The sadness of the adults is visible through the lines: "The adults are quite as graves like they are coming from burying the dead" (57).

There is political violence because the Pro- Mugabe Partisans are attacking the white folk and expelling them from their homes. They always find white people and their gang spread out in packs. They go about kicking down gates and jumping over Durawall to get into yards, where they pounds on the doors, shouting for the people to come out. They are wild and chanting and screaming. Budapest quivers with the sounds of their blazing voices:

Kill the Boer, the farmer, the khiwa!  
 Strike fear in the hearts of the white man!  
 White man you have no place here, go back, go back!  
 Africa for Africans, Africa for Africans!  
 Kill the Boer, the farmer, the khiwa!

Here we see the conflict between the white and the black people. The black are against the white folk before independence, they were colonized by the Britishers. They are shouting on them and saying that you have ruled a lot and now its our turn to rule. They are dragged from their houses and beaten to death. The condition of the white people is like rat in the holes. The white people are not even aware why such brutal treatment is being mated out to them. We find the elements of genocide because the blacks were expelling them from the country so as to finish the whole race. As black man says “This is a black man country and black man is in charge now” (118). With this the political violence erupted throughout Zimbabwe.

Bulawayo has presented the pain of people living there because when they are shouting at the white people, there is something that is searing them deep in blood. Their faces are dark with anger and they are leaving and storming into the houses and chanting Africa for Africans. Not only the white people but the children are also afraid of these scenes and they are hiding themselves into the leaves. There are mounds and mounds everywhere “like people are being harvested, like death is maybe waiting behind a rock with a big bag of free food and people are rushing, trapping over each other to get to the front before the hand run out” (132).

In Africa, we find human rights violation which is a part of political violence. The people of Africa are not free to live their lives not even allowed to vote by their own wish. Bornfree, who raised his voice, was brutally killed by the opposition party member. When Bornfree voted and raised his voice against the system, he was caught and tagged as a terrorist. The people were beating him saying:

What are you working for?  
 Sellout!  
 Who is paying you? America and Britain?  
 Why don't you scream for America and Britain to help now?  
 Friend of the colonist!  
 Selling the country to whites!  
 You think you can just vote for whoever you want?  
 Vote right now, we want to see, sellout!  
 You want change, today we'll show you the change!  
 Here's your democracy, your human right, eat it, eat eat eat! (141)

MaDube (Bornfree's mother) is crying but nobody is ready to rescue her son since the people are told not to help the white folk. The people of the Paradise are silent as if they are watching something holy. That incident causes extreme fear into the minds of the people living in Africa. Thus political violence has marked out by the novelist clearly. She is neither focusing white nor black people, rather than the brutality conducted by the political parties on the people

of their nation. The sole motive behind this brutality is to remain in power for longer duration and keep subjugating and harassing their own people.

The political nature of violence is also in cases of violence against women. As a result of contested national elections, women of all ages in Zimbabwe were targeted for their political affiliations. As we see, when police man get into the house of Mai Tari, she throws herself in front of the bulldozer and says: “you will have to bulldoze me first before I see my house go down” (66). One ugly police man points a gun on her head and hits. Blood gushes from Mai Tari’s head and the boots of the police man turned red. Another woman Nomiviyo, returns from the town and sees all the houses are broken. She screams for her son and digs through the broken slabs. She looks at the things that is her son and throws herself on the ground and “rolls and rolls until the thing that she has on her black bra and knickers” (67).

Political violence is also reflected in the form of extreme poverty, genocide and human rights violation which makes the life of people living in Zimbabwe, especially that of women and children extremely difficult. Government is not paying any heed to public outcries; Public expectations are not fulfilled by the government despite their votes. Their frustration towards the government is proved when they say “We put them in power and how they turn to us like a snake”(66).

The later part of the novel finds Darling dislocated to America living with her aunt and trying to adjust her new life, which although is more comfortable yet more unhappy too. She is all the time aware that something invaluable has been broken which she would never be able to mend. The chapter “How They Lived” narrates the sad tale of the immigrant’s life where children cutoff from their parents back home and their friends, find it painful to adjust to the harsh realities of an alien land:

When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be pacified for their foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strangled lands the wounds of their despair bandaged in faraway lands, their blistered prayers muttered in the darkness of queer lands. Look at the children of lands living in droves, living their own land with bleeding wounds on their bodies and shock on their face and bloods in their hearts and hunger in their stomach and grief in their footsteps. Leaving their mothers and fathers and children behind, living their umbilical cords behind underneath the soil, leaving the bombs of their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are , leaving because they no longer possible to stay. (146)

From the foregoing discussion it can be concluded that the writer has successfully highlighted the problems of people living in Zimbabwe, especially in slum areas. She has depicted their bitter experiences of life related to their extreme poverty, starvation and famine. The reader after reading this novel feels attached to those people who are forced to undergo such difficult times in their lives. She has also condemned the politics of Zimbabwe particularly under the rule of President Mugabe because he has been in parliament since last three decades. Her unhappiness with the president is clearly reflected in her interview with Jill Coates: “There was a time when he was good for the country but now I feel like that the time is gone. It’s quite sad that a country with much promise is forced on its knees because of their ruling party.” Her anger is

particularly directed towards the president policy of ‘Clear Out Rubbish’ that becomes the root cause of political violence. Eventually, the book comes to an end with no immediate solution or resolve in the offering that could put an end to this grim situation. The way Darling’s narrative voice gradually fades down to a grim and uncertain tone is a sad commentary on the nature of political violence and how it leads to large scale devastation in the lives of people.

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