

# **Emotion as a Border: A Reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names***

***Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan Gad\****

## **Introduction**

Like many Zimbabwean students who, under the rule of Mugabe, were compelled to seek educational opportunities abroad, award winning novelist and Man Booker Prize nominee NoViolet Bulawayo left her country of origin to study in the US when she was only eighteen (Gubba 2014, 7). Falola and Oyebade assign the label of contemporary African diaspora to this process of mobility, to differentiate it from the first diaspora when slaves were brought to the new world. They add that

since the closing decades of the twentieth century...the United States has seen large-scale immigration from Africa, more than at any other period since the end of the Atlantic trade. Thus, today, Africans are among the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States, constituting a dynamic community. (Falola and Oyebade 2017, 1)

Many countries felt uncomfortable with the phenomenon, and it was generally regarded as a maneuver to “[transform] education institutions into visa factories” (Murray 2011, 32). In the US, particularly after 9/11, most types of travel mobility, including non-immigration visas, were also considered as imposing potential threat. Successive administrations adopted firm travel restrictions, metaphorically constructing more walls. In 2020, for example, a travel ban was signed by President Donald Trump, which affected estimated 12,398 African people, from countries that “account for over a quarter of the population of Africa” (Knox 2020). Addressing the public, the administration was keen to emphasize that the ban was a preventive security measure against possible injury. The NBC News website explains that “President Donald Trump said he signed the proclamation because of national security concerns, claiming the countries had not met minimum security standards” (Knox 2020). Ironically, the

---

\* Associate Professor of English Literature, Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University.

*Cairo Studies in English* – 2020(2): <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>

concerns were never shared with the public, the NBC adds. Fear was the only justification given for a whole process of emotion-charged border formation.

Not only is emotion involved in border formation, but it also affects the ethical standards that monitor this formation. As Kristin E. Heyer underscores, security apprehensions often disregard the impact of historical colonialism and the immediate factors that motivate border crossing. Heyer observes that

Tucson's Bishop Gerald Kicanas lamented that during the attorney general's visit to Nogales, sessions neglected to hear border narratives of immigrants fleeing impossible situations, risking dangerous border crossings "in search of protection and a new life." (41) At his border mass in Ciudad Juárez, Pope Francis bade listeners to measure the impact of forced migration not in numbers or statistics but with concrete names and stories, evoking a counter-narrative to those dominating the airwaves: They are the brothers and sisters of those expelled by poverty and violence, by drug trafficking and criminal organizations. Being faced with so many legal vacuums, they get caught up in a web that ensnares and always destroys the poorest. (2018, 154)

The ability to perceive immigrants through "names and stories" has been an achievement marked by the bulk of critical commentary on Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names*. While typical Afropolitan texts as introduced by Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe depict privileged African migrants, who usually enjoy legal travel mobility, *We Need New Names* gives voice to silent, often illegal, immigrants (Santana 2016, 122). Similarly, Cobo-Piñero (2019, 473), in an article on the significance of mobility in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, classifies the novel as a picaresque dedicated to track the "displaced national or immigrant ... whose voice remains largely silenced". Likewise, Vilasini Roy (2016, 24) reads the text not only as a version of Afropolitanism that goes beyond the privileged, but also as a platform for the transnational, subaltern subject. Fetterolf and Kane (2017, 8) find the narrative as an articulation of African diaspora in terms of cultural, linguistic and geographical distance. These readings, however, overlook the paradox that the ostensible mobility of Afropolitan diaspora is largely circumscribed by feelings of spatial enclosure and confinement that overwhelmingly dominate the immigrant experience in *Names*. The various readings provided above also fail to recognize how emotion patterns sustain and perpetuate the isolation of this

enclosed community. The present paper therefore explores pockets of such tension, in terms of border construction based on emotional patterns specified in relevant affect theories.

Affect theories throw light on the intersubjective dimension of emotion, showing how it is manifested in forms of proximity or distance within space. Spinoza was the first to recognize this capacity through a distinction between two types of affect, affect as an individual power to act, and affect as a reaction or an emotional state that results from interaction between bodies (Ott 2017, 10). Discussing the notion of affect in geophilosophical context, Deleuze and Guattari define the philosopher as an émigré who lives, with a group of associates (strangers in flight), on “the borderlands of the Greek world”. ‘Strangers in flight’ are engaged in a continuous process of “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” that gives them a “pleasure in forming associations, which constitutes friendship, but also a pleasure in breaking up the association, which constitutes rivalry (1994, 86-87). They also developed Spinoza’s perspective along the lines of artistic creativity which they define as the ability to stir emotional sensations that occasion conditions of nearness or remoteness between physical or material bodies.

They propose that “great creative affects can link up or diverge, within compounds of sensations that transform themselves, vibrate, couple, or split apart” (1994, 175). Another significant contribution in this respect is that of Nigel Thrift (2008, 10-12) who introduces a theory which links emotion to geographical mobility. The theory elaborates on how emotion determines biopolitics of space through constructing “micro geographical landscapes”. Other emotion theories which do not take bodies interaction as their starting point still recognize the potential of emotion to inflict spatial closeness or remoteness. Perception theory, for example, introduces the concept of emotion episode that involves sensory perception, concrete imagination and emotional memory as elements that create or demolish barriers. Other components of emotion episodes, such as mood, facial expression and reoriented attention, may also set borders based on in-group and out -group categorization (Hogan 2011, 46-50). Hogan adds that a child recognizes compelling or repelling barriers through mirroring of the emotional response of his/her parents. The same pattern applies to the sensibilities aroused by emotional attachment and emotional memory. Roseman and Smith (2001, 6-7), on the other hand, find that spatial distance may be affected by an evaluative process of emotional experience. They propose an emotional appraisal theory that could account for conditions such as the shift from guilt (proximity) to anger (distance) in an emotional relationship

based on realizing the partner's attitude. Appraisal theory can also explain how bordering may be the outcome of controlled emotions, a notion that indicates the subject's expression of an emotional attitude that is contrary to what s/he innately feels.

Definitions of borders bear considerable affinity to the affect theories mentioned above. In "Theorizing Borders", Brunet-Jailly states that borders play the role of "buffer zones", keeping away the unwanted (2005, 635). Gloria Anzaldua defines a border in terms specifically related to the white/nonwhite context. In her groundbreaking book *Borderland*, borders stand for a dividing line between what is considered "white", and therefore "normal", and whatever that violates this normalcy (Anzaldua 1987, 3). The notion of border construction is frequently sustained by an urge to defend purity, as A. Ranjan explains. They are there to "keep away the pollutants, people who threaten to pollute the purity of a race or a faith (Ranjan 2018, 15). More importantly, however, borders are established to prevent the approach of fear-inspiring, hateful strangers. The feminist theoretician Sara Ahmed offers her interpretation of the phenomenon based on hate and fear as boundaries set against conceived threat of transgression (Ahmed 2004b, 132). Fear envisages the impossibility of containment as well as a mutual detachment symbolized in a sensation of coldness (126).

Border emotions often address ordinary people who dread a hateful other who might "invade" their home country and cause them pain or injury (118). Ahmed adds that the contemporary rationale that justifies borders, projects an image of a community in crisis; a community victimized by an imminent danger. This perception accumulates through two processes: motion and repetition. Borders develop, according to Ahmed, because of the motion of emotions, either by sliding sideways or going backwards. Both types of mobility incessantly extend the circulation and association of hateful attributes to an 'Other'. The dialectic of detachment and proximity is best introduced through the emotionality of texts, according to Ahmed who refers to the power of the text to "name and perform emotions through using metaphors or metonymy that help to stick figures together to create an effect" (12-13). Ahmed offers several examples to illustrate this point. For example, hate, directed at first against terrorists, gradually extends to suspect asylum seekers. Fear of rape gradually includes abhorrence of mixed coupling; phobias against immigrants soon develop into a phobia against whoever defies norms. Emotion borders also develop into justifications of aggression. Ahmed suggests that while the mobility of western subjects is defended, subaltern subjects are contained or detained. Borders thus limit the space of the feared subject (135).

Ahmed offers a macro approach that examines various structures of establishing borders. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, on the other hand, conducts a micro analysis that studies reactions of the border crossers. Anzaldúa maintains that the Chicano people who travelled through, and resided around American- Mexican border, experienced a split of a people and a culture. This rupture perpetuated a wound,

1,950-mile-long open wound  
dividing a *pueblo'*, a culture,  
running down the length of my body,  
staking fence rods in my flesh,  
splits me splits me  
*me raja me raja*  
This is my home  
this thin, edge of  
barbwire.  
But the skin of the earth is seamless.  
The sea cannot be fenced,  
*el mar* does not stop at borders. (1987, 6)

Anzaldua recognizes that the challenge of border crossing usually entails a condition of mixed emotions, or “mestiza”, expressed along the lines of a language metaphor. Multilingualism involves multiple emotional allegiances that fluctuate between border crossing and fear of losing ties with the homeland. Victor Konrad's theory of borders in motion goes a step further by suggesting that borders also involve how people resist barriers through the mobility of debordering and /or rebordering. This paper proposes to explain how such mobility is introduced in *Names* through two categories: perceptual emotional episodes and emotional appraisals. The analysis attempts to show that border crossing in the African part of *Names* is mainly recounted through traumatic emotion memories of compulsory border crossing, while the American part is narrated through evaluative emotion appraisals of working memory that sustains cautious, calculated, and self-imposed border formation. The analysis extends to include an evaluation of the three interludes told by a narratorial collective voice that represents African immigrants. The shift from the third person voice to the first person in these interludes corresponds to a collective, communal and ritualistic emotional attitude set in antithesis to the more individual structure of enclosure. Within this theoretical frame, the analysis starts with a consideration

of emotion as a border of polarity and asymmetries, then proceeds to examine borders of regulated emotion and finally discusses attempts of debordering through alternations of collective and mixed emotional patterns.

### **Fear/Hate/Anger: Borders of Polarity and Asymmetry**

#### ***Africa***

*We Need New Names* illustrates how borders are constructed/challenged through emotion episodes narrated by Darling, a ten-year-old girl who dwells within the boundaries of an unnamed African country, presumably Zimbabwe, and who aspires to join her aunt, an assimilated immigrant, who lives in the US. Darling lives in a shanty community of expellees forced by the authorities to reallocate into a poor, chaotic borderland ironically called “Paradise.” A group of children, including the protagonist, repeatedly “hit” Budapest, the name given to a gated white community, as a defying gesture to internal borders imposed upon residents of these underprivileged quarters. The name Budapest brings associations of the central Europe city well known for its exclusionary, anti-immigration policies, the most provocative of which was the Hungarian government's decision to establish a “4-metre-high fence along the 110-mile border with Serbia” to prevent the entrance of Muslim asylum seekers (Goździak 2019; Tremlett and Messing 2015). In this sense, hitting Budapest is like crossing the borders: “This place is not like Paradise, it’s like being in a different country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live” (Bulawayo 2013, 8).

Budapest signifies a barrier, a fortress; when the children manage to be inside Budapest, they are exalted by emotions of conquest, singing a song about Vasco Da Gama, the famous Portuguese explorer. Mezzadra and Neilson define internal borders as “patterns of spatial segregation ... Ghettos, migrant villages and slums [are] important instance of the proliferation of internal borders in the contemporary world (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 150). Likewise, residents of Budapest fear *invasion* by the poorer, outcast sectors of society. A security guard, who quarrels with the children in the chapter titled “Black Power”, expresses this abhorrence in similar terms: “Your uncultured fathers started terrorizing this neighborhood. It’s your fathers who’ve been coming here, preying on the sweat of decent citizens [...] and now you are surveying this place on their behalf” (Bulawayo 2013, 110). Even the NGO representatives, who come to Paradise to distribute humanitarian aids, hide behind glasses. The encounter between them and the local children is wordless, with the identity of the donors concealed: “Eyes look at us that we cannot really see because they

are hidden behind a wall of black glass” (54). Darling notes that the children are conscious of such reticent barrier, “We are careful not to touch the NGO, 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 (56).

Internal borders thus constitute the narrative’s starting point. The Mzilikazi road is an internal border separating Paradise from the affluent parts of the city. The children are given direct orders not to cross the Mzilikazi road. The name Mzilikazi brings historic associations of a great African king, and migrant, who moved with his people from the South Africa’s shores to settle in what is now Zimbabwe (*King Mzilikazi*). The migrant king of the Ndebele clan dominated several other races including the Shon who, after the decline of Mzilikazi kingdom, turned to form the majority of the Zimbabwean people. Although both clans fought for independence, the Ndebele community was later persecuted, dislocated, and deprived of the status of a homeland minority after independence (Moji 2015, 182). They were even regarded as outsiders: “The tag of “foreign” applies to the shantytown inhabited by the Ndebele in Bulawayo’s novel, a configuration that makes their existence and subjectivities even more precarious” (Cobo-Piñero 2019, 16).

Hate creates enclosure areas and confinement. Darling repeatedly has nightmares of the dislocation of the Ndebele community, her people. This is a typical practice of bordering based on Ahmed’s notion of a shrinkage of the black body. Even if the children are too young to be aware of all the details of this complicated legacy, they are endowed with emotional memory of the trauma of being treated as immigrants in their own homeland. In the chapter “How they appeared”, Darling records details of their departure: “Coming would mean that they were choosers. They did not come, no. They just appeared” (Bulawayo 2013, 75). In her memories, Darling recalls how bulldozers destroyed the houses of her people even though they participated in the liberation war. The accumulation of concrete details suggests a mood of chaos. Repetition accelerates the tempo of hilarious speed blended with overtones of wailing: “It is no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we scream and scream” and “Why why why, what have we done, what have we done, what have we done” (67). Terror is also conveyed through merging words in one segment, or lemma, to suggest intensity and urgency: “comeintothehousenow”. Finally, Bulawayo heaves a cluster of short, sensory and precise images, combined with animalistic metaphor, to suggest bestiality and kinetic imagery “spinning dust” to suggest urgency: “Bulldozers are already near, big, and yellow and terrible and metal teeth and spinning dust” (67).

Bulawayo thus suggests that being a refugee is not merely related to a displacement in space, since they did not yet cross an international border, but is essentially an emotional condition.

Animosity and anger engender violence. The chapter titled “Black Power” shows how, in Ahmed’s terms, “an over-investment in the wound” might evoke revenge and “allows injury to become an entitlement” (2004a, 32). The children witness this confrontation, taking place in Budapest again. Black gangs assume the right to annex a white man’s property. A fierce argument occurs between the black boss and the white owner who insists that he is African too, with rights of citizenship: “This is my fucking country too. My father was born here, I was born here, just like you” (121). While the infuriation of the black boss could be justified in a colonial context, the fact that he acts beyond any official control, deals a blow to the fairness of his cause. In sheer revenge he shouts:

Somebody please tell this white man here that this is not fucking Rhodesia [...] Know this bloody colonist [...] This is black-man country and the black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans, the boss says in thunderous applause [...] The veins of the white man’s neck are like chords, his face dark with anger. But nobody minds him. They are leaving and storming into the house, their chants about Africa for Africans filling the air. (Bulawayo 2013, 120-121)

Bulawayo creates a complicated case of how emotion moves sideways, widening the circle of animosity to include individuals who might be uninvolved in colonial activities. Yet they are treated as responsible for these grievances. This process of anonymous lumping is what Ahmed referred to in her discussion of fear as a border. Bastard, even though he feels the white owner is not to blame, refuses the sympathies Sbho shows for their predicament: “What? Are you crying for the white people? Are they your relatives?” (122). Darling watches and observes, not aware yet that once she crosses the border to America, she will find a similar situation, only in reverse.

### *America*

Crossing the American borders, Darling encounters similar consequences of irrational fear. This occurs when she faces checkup measures at the airport on arrival. Darling is wearing a talisman, a bone to ward off evil in the new land that she brings along with her from her home country. The bone is immediately recognized as a security hazard.



When I got to America the airport dog barked and barked and sniffed me, and the woman in the uniform took me aside and waved the stick around me and the stick made a *nting-nting* sound and the woman said, Are you carrying any weapons? And I nodded and showed my weapon from Vodloza, and aunt Fostalina said, What is this crap? And she took it off and threw it in a bin. Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America. (Bulawayo 2013, 152)

Bulawayo deliberately omits the quotation marks that signify dialogue, hence implying absolute elimination of possibilities of mutual recognition or interaction. All cultural and symbolic associations of spiritual protection and guidance, linked to the bone as weapon, are also dismissed before the frantic freaking out that redefines the cultural symbol as a possible tool of aggression. Forced into compulsory acculturation, Darling expresses helpless resignation “Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America” (Bulawayo 2013, 152).

In her comments on Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ahmed discusses an example that Fanon gives of coldness as a symptom of fear. Fanon narrates an encounter between a little white boy and a black slave who is shivering and in need of help. The boy misinterprets the shaking of the black man as a sign of aggression, and he shakes out of fear as well (Ahmed 2004a, 25). Likewise, during her first days in America, Darlings impression of the country is encapsulated in an image of snow:

What you will see if you come here where I am standing is the snow. Snow on the leafless trees, snow on the cars, snow on the road, snow on the yards, snow on the roofs, just snow covering everything like sand. It is as white as clean teeth, and is also very, very cold. It is a greedy monster too, the snow, because just look how it has swallowed everything... like it wants to kill you. Like it's telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you come from. (Bulawayo 201, 150)

Snow is not just a weather condition; it stands for a visible border, a displacement, for an internal fear that Darling entertains as an immigrant. “If I were at home, I know I would not be standing around because something called snow was preventing me from going outside to live life” (155). Snow is an enemy that spots her foreignness. Nostalgic and afraid, she decides never to step

outside the boundaries of her aunt's house. Darling's refusal to accept her country of destination is further developed through color imagery. Contemplating the whiteness of a heavy, snowy Detroit sky, Darling declares that "even the stones know that a sky is supposed to be blue" (153). This is an example of prosopopoeia, a literary device that employs concrete, sensory imagery to reflect emotional states (Plett 2012, 52). The image of the blue sky, for example, stands for home, and it is what expresses Darling's feelings of homesickness. To share knowledge with animated items, the stone in this case, is also a typical emotional bond that Darling frequently establishes with the natural world to convey emotional states that go beyond empirical parameters.

In America, however, Darling encounters borders that are no longer fixed or visible. As Kolosove and Scott put it, borders become "ubiquitous and invisible [...] categories of difference that create socio-spatial distinction between places, individuals and groups [...] Even a successful crossing of a border may result in the erection of new borders as an individual can become a member of a discriminated minority who has no access to social services and welfare benefits" (Kolosove and Scott 2013, par 36). Apart from the details of being bullied by school peers, Darling's stay in America is virtually eventless. Realizing that this is America, but not *her* America, Darling feels confined to an enclosure of silence and fear. Like Bulawayo, who, for more than thirteen years, was unable to return to her home country, Darling does not have American immigration papers. Any travel plans to visit her family are therefore aborted by the fear of not being able to return. Bulawayo employs food imagery to express a nostalgia shrouded in emotional apprehension. Guava is associated with Darling's childhood experience in her home country. Receiving a smuggled package of guava sent from home, Darling's first impression is one of anxiety: "if the border people find them, they throw them away. The smell of guava was all over, delicious and dizzying. I closed my eyes and inhaled like I hadn't breathed in ages" (Bulawayo 2013, 188). Darling soon realizes, however, that the real barrier is emotional "there are times though, that no matter how much food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country" (155). Darling, who crossed the distant shores because she was tired of the scarcity of food, falls prey to emotion borders that perpetuate a hunger for home.

## **Regulated Emotions and Borderland Dialectic**

### ***Africa***

According to Ahmed, emotions are the product of a certain interpersonal contact, then of an evaluation, or a reading, of this contact. This model

corresponds to theories of emotional appraisal that may suggest proximity or create boundaries that determine who is inside or outside (Ahmed 2004a, 12-13). Highlighting the domains of interpersonal communicative emotions, Anderson and Guerrero propose emotion display rules which refer to “cultural and social factors that regulate how we use emotion cues” (1998, 50). Three of these communication display rules are relevant to my discussion of smiling as a paralinguistic expression of emotion. The first is simulation, which means that you show a feeling when you do not have it; second, inhibition, which means that you suppress a feeling that you have. Finally, the masking display rule refers to feigning a feeling different from what you have (Anderson and Guerrero 1998, 57). Discrepancy between felt and fake smiling is generally registered in psychological emotion studies. Psychologists indicate eighteen different types of smiles, with only six types related to happiness (Niedenthal et al 2010, 417).

The smiles that reflect real happiness are termed Duchenne smiles, while the non-Duchenne smile is a more ambiguous cue that accepts ramified interpretations (Gorvett 2017). Bogodistov and Dost (2017) explain that a Duchenne smile is usually associated with emotional proximity while non-Duchenne smiles indicate emotional/social distance and/or politeness. Morse and Afifi add that non-Duchenne smiles indicate external accommodation, as contrasted with internal assimilation associated with Duchenne smiles (2015, 87). From another perspective, smile in primates is a smile of fear and submissiveness, “a gesture used by low-status individuals to appease more dominant members of the group” (“What Smiling Says”). Smiling in *Names* portrays a borderland of dialectics and encounters that bears close affinity to the above notions.

In addition to being one of the components of Darling's emotion episode in Africa, smiling provides the frame of her first border encounter. The first smile recorded in the narrative appears behind a “locked gate [...] with no keys to open it” (Bulawayo 2013, 8). The gate separates a group of hungry children who “hit Budapest”, searching for food. They meet a smiling British woman, described as “a caged animal” (10), who tells the children, from behind gates, that she is of African origins, and has come from London on a visit. To the children, a smile entails a promise, so “we wait, so we can see what she is smiling for, or at” (8). To their frustration, the woman ironically informs the children she is on diet, throwing off her food “like a dead bird” (9). When the woman brings her camera and asks the children to mechanically fake a smile, saying “cheese”, Darling does not respond. According to national myth, fake smiles could lead to death.

Eventually, however, she abides, thus receiving her first lesson of social mimicry.

The woman points at me, nods, and tells me to say cheeeese and I say it mostly because she is smiling like she knows me really well, like she even knows my mother. I say it slowly at first, and then I say, Cheese and cheese, and everyone is saying cheese ... and the camera is clicking and clicking. (11-12)

Realizing that compliance is not to be rewarded, Darling moves from hesitant compliance to explicit rage. Yet, in all these reactions she is confined to the role of follower:

Then Stina, who is quiet most of the time, just starts to walk away ... then Bastard starts shouting insults at the woman, and I remember the thing, and that she threw it away without even asking us if we wanted it, and I begin shouting also, and everyone else joins in. We shout and We shout and We shout; we want to eat the thing she was eating; we want to hear our voices soar; we want our hunger to go away.” (11-12)

The first smiling compromise thus fails. The gate remains locked, and the two worlds remain as separate and isolated as ever.

The children, like the adults, are aware of the manipulations, maneuvers and tactics that govern such complicated power relations. The effectiveness of smiling, for example, varies according to context. Smiling is not recommended, for instance, in the presence of the NGO people. It would spoil the impression of poverty they are keen to capture in their photos. “They don’t care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn’t do it, they just take the pictures anyway, take, and take” (54). Smiling is only permitted as a sign of compliance to please the NGO people, and this is what Sis Betty, who accompanies them as a guide, does to conceal her chiding and shouting at the children. Turning with a smiley face to the NGO people is an act of false translation that Betty undertakes to perfect her performance of a typical colonial power relations in which white superiority is sustained by a calculated, though fake, native inferiority.

### *America*

Crossing of the American border, both Darling and the collective extradiegetic narrator of “How They Lived” shift from being bewildered at the vacant social performativity of “white” smiles, to that of skilled practitioners of the smiling maneuver. Smiling reveals a calculated congeniality to those deemed higher in social status. For African immigrants, smiling is predominantly of the non-Duchenne type. It conceals fear and submission and becomes the codified reaction that they simulate to avoid any direct conflict.

Darling realizes that smiling stands for decorum rather than happiness: “Now I know that smiling at nothing is really a white people thing” (Bulawayo 2013, 174). In the chapter titled “Wedding”, Darling wonders at the white bride who smiles civilly, but incomprehensively, as she listens to email messages from the African groom’s parents being read aloud in their native language. Through a process of emotion mirroring, Darling learns to give similar smiles: “It is not exactly smile-smile, just the brief baring of teeth. That’s what you do in America you smile at people you don’t know, and you smile at people you don’t even like, and you smile for no reason” (176). For the “illegal” African immigrants facing constant threats of deportation, a controlled smile turns into a defense mechanism: “We heard exporting America, broken borders, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We bit our tongue till we tasted blood” (244). African immigrants have two options: either to build walls between them and their host country, or to return to their home countries. The collective narrator of “How They Lived” obviously opts for the former:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where Angelina Jolie got that poor baby girl? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there, where dissidents shove AK47s between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. (239)

Repetition of the reply “we smiled” embodies the typical emotion display rule of masking. It also underscores the absurd pretense of having a dialogue. Cultural barriers are constructed according to similar patterns of stereotyping.

Denied legal immigration status, the immigrants are compelled to self-imposed isolation. They accept being in their own “prison”: “We did not want their wrath; we did not want their curiosity. We did not want any attention. We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We did not meet stares and we avoided gazes. We built mountains between us and them” (244). The compulsion to exorcise the immigrant demon prevents immigrants from any genuine social integration within their host environment. Conversely, when they recall their memories of home, or encounter a native countryman, physical sensory imagery dominates: “We wanted to put our heads in their mouth to catch every precious word, every feeling” (248). ‘Touching’ words, and ‘catching’ feelings express concrete images of how emotion participates into possible debordering.

### **Collective Emotions/ Mixed Emotions as Measures of Debordering/ Rebordering**

#### ***Africa***

In an article on “Families across Borders”, Silver draws attention to “significant psychological and emotional repercussions of family member migration” (Silver 2014, 194). Correspondingly, *Names* displays aspects of immigrant family trauma resulting from the absence of a family member. As a child, Darling is indifferent to the long absence of her father and is detached from her busy mother. Through a series of emotional memories, Bulawayo provides details of the circumstances that caused relationships to deteriorate within the family. Darling registers an acute alteration in her emotions towards her father as being parallel to a drastic shift in his emotional condition from caring to anger, particularly after being forced to flee their home. It was therefore easier for Darling, when her father decides to leave to South Africa, to choose to stop thinking of him. Convinced that her parents now represent “just a country that is far away” (66), her defense mechanism is to build a wall. The decision to establish a border of detachment forms her new emotional territory:

Now father is in south Africa, working, but he never writes, never sends us money, never nothing. It makes me angry thinking about him so most of the time I just pretend he doesn't exist; it's better this way. (24-25)

Darling conceals the news of her father's return from her peers, partly because her mother tells her so, but also because she is reluctant to reveal her resentment,

which should be suppressed in a culture that considers overinvolvement as a sign of care. On hearing her father coughing, Darling turns away:

I just stand there, sweating and listening to the cough pounding the walls, pounding and pounding and pounding, and I'm saying in my head, *Stop, please stop, stop, stop, stop, stop please, but he keeps* pounding and pounding and pounding until I just turn around and slam the door shut. (97)

Again, repetition is the tool employed to indicate emotional crisis, creating an accumulation of sound waves that electrically clash. Darling could not comprehend the traumatic experience her father went through, being broken, humiliated and helpless. All these details are withheld from the reader, and it is only later that the narrator of the interlude titled "How They Lived", attempts to reveal them. Yet the other children can easily read the situation. Darling is surprised to find out that Bastard, who is usually aggressive and does not trust emotions, is the one who takes the initiative of a communal ritual. It seems that aggressiveness is part of his survival strategy, but it is not his innate nature.

With the help of the other children, Darling engages in a ritual of debordering. Bulawayo uses allusion to religious experience to elaborate on the feeling shared between the dying father and the children. Sboho sings a song about Job with the biblical connotations of suffering illness for a long period of time. Bulawayo embodies the communal feeling not only with the connotations of a similar condition of illness, but also with a ritualistic impact that reconciles the trying time with a need to communicate with God. The need for spiritual support overcomes Darling's skepticism. The ritual creates a physical proximity that Darling hesitantly tolerates, owing to a fear of being blamed by the others: "I reach out and touch him too because I have never really touched him since he came, and this is what I must do now because how will it look when everybody is touching him and I'm not?" (105). Even though this barrier is crossed, Darling expresses this crossing in images of decay:

We all look at one another and smile-sing because we are touching him, just touching him all over like he is a beautiful plaything we have just rescued from a rubbish bin in Budapest. He feels like dry wood in my hands, but there is a strange light in his sunken eyes, like he has swallowed the sun. (105)

This is a love/hate ambivalent emotion that is more recognized in non-European cultures. Darling's love /hate emotion is stirred by a sense of betrayal and an imbalance of equity of emotions. She loved her father dearly, but eventually she suppresses her feelings and decides to move ahead. Total debordering is therefore out of reach

### *America*

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldua marks a complicated case of emotional ambivalence as characteristic of the experience of border crossing (1987, 113). Anzaldua explains that, as time passes, the immigrant feels torn between nostalgia on the one hand, and inevitable detachment on the other. Time lapsing consolidates borders as it weakens emotional attachment:

I left and have been gone a long time.  
I keep leaving and when I am home  
they remember no one but me had ever left.  
I listen to the *grillos* more intently  
than I do their *reganos*.  
I have more languages than they,  
am aware of every root of my *pueblo*;  
they, my people, are not.  
They are the living, sleeping roots. (Anzaldua 1987, 113)

Through olfactory imagery, Darling expresses a similar pain that accompanies her as an immigrant: "I am remembering the taste of all these things, but remembering is not tasting, and it is painful" (211). As a consequence of crossing the borders, remembering becomes the opposite of tasting, emotional proximity is replaced with abstract memories. Darling craves for home, and yet she is emotionally drained by the fact that her family at home does not understand her suffering. Even though they incessantly request financial support, they do not offer any emotional gratification to alleviate the immigrant's homesickness. In a symbolic gesture, Darling deliberately hangs off a phone conversation with her mother and friends, thus marking her eventual consolidation of this ambivalent border space.

In America, Darling thus oscillates between two zones of feeling: "If I were standing outside of myself and saw this face I would maybe say, who is that? But at the same time, it also looks interesting and I'm happy with it" (167). In other words, Darling realizes that she has to accommodate cultural assimilation



as the sole path to fit in. She must find a way for the coexistence of African blue sky with America's white sky. The clearest effort in that direction relates to her language acquisition. Darling understands that to be admitted in the American ingroup, she must sound like them. She recognizes that language is a border "like a huge iron door and you are always losing your key" (199). Being inarticulate means that you remain imprisoned in the category of the outsider. This pertains basically to the first generation of immigrants who tried, but poorly adapted to life in their country of destination. As she witnesses the embarrassing frustration of her aunt because of her imperfect accent, Darling is resolutely determined to avoid similar experiences: "I promise myself I'll never ever sound like that" (199).

Darling soon engages in a relentless emotion work to regulate her feelings in accordance with what is culturally accepted. She gradually equates being American with being able to master the American accent. This is a conviction that is reflected in how she evaluates the credentials of her friend Kristel as an immigrant: "The truth is she can't even write a sentence correctly in English to show that she is indeed American" (201). Fervently determined to adapt, Darling imitates the accent of TV series and "have[ing] my list of American words that I kept under my tongue like talisman" to avoid a feeling of non-belonging (196). Fischer et al classify this phenomenon as emotional assimilation, mentioning that it "involves contagious acts of mimicry that automatically mimic and synchronize movements, expressions, postures and vocalizations with those of another person" (199). As a consequence, Darling gets more and more detached from her home bonds. She gradually stops writing letters to her friends at home, feeling no longer able to share or communicate.

### **Conclusion**

Collectively, Ahmed's affect theory, Anzaldua's concept of border crossing, and Konrad's theory of debordering serve as an applicable frame for evaluating the border experience depicted in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Through a combination of emotion episodes and emotion appraisals, Bulawayo explains how emotion constructs borders, whether perceived as concrete barriers or as unsurmountable psychological distance. As expellees and/or illegal immigrants, the narrators of Bulawayo's text are conscious of self-imposed borders that surround their threatened residence in America, but they are also aware of the emotional borders that separate them from a home they cannot return to. In terms of interpersonal emotions polarity, Bulawayo interprets the border experience through imagery that involves fear, hate, and anger. Subtle facial expressions are

often employed to convey how it feels to be in need to maintain, negotiate, or manipulate borders. Bulawayo also offers a range of interactive of borderland dialectics including a) smiling as a regulatory expression of emotions b) ambivalent of mixed emotions associated with patterns of debordering and rebordering, and c) collective emotion imagery of the newly established transnational immigrant community. Reflecting a cross-cultural understanding of displacement, *We Need New Names* redefines the experience of borders predominantly through emotion relations.

### **Works Cited**

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004a. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- . 2004b. "Affective Economies". *Social Text* 22, no.2: 117–139.  
<[https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2\\_79-117](https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117)>.
- Anderson, Peter A., and Laura K. Guerrero. 1998. *Handbook of Communication and Emotion: Research, Theory, Applications, and Contexts*. New York: Academic Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Bogodistov, Y, and F. Dost. 2017. "Proximity Begins with a Smile, But Which One? Associating Non-Duchenne Smiles with Higher Psychological Distance". *Front. Psychol* 8, no.1374. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01374
- Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel. 2005. "Theorizing Borders". *Geopolitics* 10, no.4: 633-649. {halshs-00379922}
- Bulawayo, NoViolet. 2014. *We Need New Names*. New York: Back Bay Books.
- . 2015. "Zimbabwean Author NoViolet Bulawayo: I Like to Write from the Bone." Interview by Sabine Peschel. *DW*, July 15, 2015.  
<[https://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwean-author-noviolet-bulawayo-i-like-to-write-from-the-bone/a-18572543?fbclid=IwAR2w8-Z4oyCm2IatyyD-6v\\_wIY7M4nN2sU3NhmXoCa\\_unw5h58BjMRehdo](https://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwean-author-noviolet-bulawayo-i-like-to-write-from-the-bone/a-18572543?fbclid=IwAR2w8-Z4oyCm2IatyyD-6v_wIY7M4nN2sU3NhmXoCa_unw5h58BjMRehdo)>.
- Cobo-Piñero, Rocío. 2018. "From Africa to America: Precarious Belongings in NoViolet Bulawayo's, *We Need New Names*." *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 40, no. 2:11-25. doi: <<http://doi.org/10.28914/Atlantis-2018-40.2.01>>.
- Cobo-Piñero, Rocío. 2019. "NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013): Mobilities and the Afropolitan Picaresque". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 55, no. 4: 472-485. doi: 10.1080/17449855.2018.1540161

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1994. *What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Falola, Toyin, and Adebayo Oyebade. 2017. *The New African Diaspora in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Fetterolf, Elizabeth and Jean Kane. 2017. “Lost in Translation: Reconciling Geographical, Linguistic and Cultural Distance in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*”. Digitalwindow.vassar.  
<[http://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior\\_capstone/6592016](http://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/6592016)>.
- Fischer, Agneta H, et al. 2004. “Emotional Assimilation: How We Are Influenced by Others”. *Cahiers de Psychologie Cognitive* 22, no. 2 : 223–245. <<https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.266769>>.
- Gorvett, Zaria. 2017. “There Are 19 Types of Smile but Only Six Are for Happiness”. BBC. April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.  
<<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170407-why-all-smiles-are-not-the-same>>.
- Goździak, Elżbieta M. 2019. “Using Fear of the “Other,” Orbán Reshapes Migration Policy in a Hungary Built on Cultural Diversity”. Migration Policy Institute. October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/orban-reshapes-migration-policy-hungary>>.
- Gubba, Angela. 2014. *The Effects of Student Migration to South African Universities on Higher Education in Zimbabwe*. PhD diss., University of South Africa.
- Heyer, Kristin E. 2018. “Internalized Borders: Immigration Ethics in the Age of Trump.” *Theological Studies* 79, no.1:146–164.
- Hogan, Patrick Colm. 2011. *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knox, Liam. 2020. “Civil Rights Groups Condemn Trump's Travel-Ban Expansion to Six African Countries.” NBC News. Feb. 27, 2020.  
<<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/civil-rights-groups-condemn-trump-s-travel-ban-expansion-six-n1142231>>.
- Kolosove, Valadmir, and James Scott. 2013. “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies.” *Belgeo* 1. <<https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10532>>.
- Konrad, Victor. 2015. “Toward a Theory of Borders in Motion”, *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 30, no.1: 1-17.  
doi: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2015.1008387>>.

- Mbembe, Achille. 2013. *Sortir De La Grande Nuit: Essai Sur l'Afrique Décolonisée*. Translated by Stephanie Bosch Santana, Paris: La Découverte/Poche.
- Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moji, Belinda. 2015. "New Names, Translational Subjectivities: (Dis)location and (Re)naming in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27, no.2: 181-190.
- Morse, Chris R, and Walid A. Afifi. 2015. "I'm Not Rude, I'm Just Moody: The Impact of Affect on Politeness in Initial Interactions." *Communication Research* 42, no.1: 87-106.
- Murray, D, et al. 2011. "State of Current Research in International Education". background paper for the International Education Research-Policy Symposium, IEAA. April 8, 2011.  
<<https://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/392>>.
- Niedenthal, Paula M, et al. 2010. "The Simulation of Smiles (SIMS) Model: Embodied Simulation and the Meaning of Facial Expression." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33, no.,6: 417-480.  
DOI: <<http://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X10000865>>.
- Ott, Brian L. 2017. "Affect". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. DOI: <<http://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.56>>.
- Plett, Heinrich F. 2012. *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age: The Aesthetics of Evidence*. Leiden: Brill NV.
- Ranjan, Amit. 2018. *India-Bangladesh Border Disputes*. Berlin: Springer.
- Roseman, Ira and Craig A Smith. 2001. "Appraisal Theory: Overview, Assumptions, Varieties, Controversies." In *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, edited by K. R. Scherer et el, 3-19. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roy, Vilasini. 2016. "New Homes and New Names: The African Migrant Novel in the Digital Age." M.A. diss., Stockholm University.  
<<https://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:943711/FULLTEXT01.pdf>>.
- Santana, Stephanie Bosch. 2016. "Contemporary Conversations: Afropolitanism: Reboot Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1: 120-126.  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1105128>>.
- Selasi, Taiye. 2015. "Don't Ask Where I'm From, Ask Where I'm A Local". TED, Oct 20, 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYCKzpXEW6E>>

- Silver, Alexis. 2014. "Families Across Borders: The Emotional Impacts of Migration on Origin Families." *Skilled Immigration Trends*, special issue of *International Migration* 52, no., 3: 194-220.
- South African History Online. 2020. "King Mzilikazi." August 11, 2020.  
<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/king-mzilikazi>
- Thrift, Nigel. 2008. *Non-Representational Theory*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Tremlett, Annabel and Vera Messing. 2015. "Hungary's Future: Anti-Immigration, Anti-Multiculturalism and Anti-Roma?" *Open Democracy*. August 4, 2015.  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/hungarys-future-antiimmigration-antimulticulturalism-and-antiro/>
- Yonge Eglinton Dental. 2019. "What Smiling Says about You: The Unhappy Smiles." January 21, 2019.  
<https://www.yongeeglintondental.com/2019/01/21/smiling-2/>