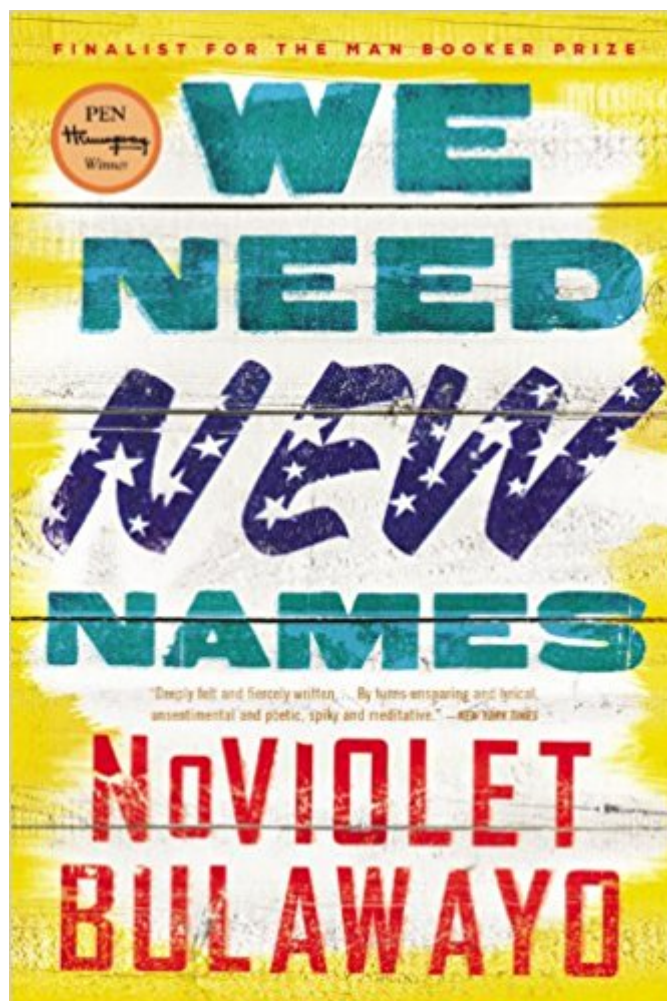


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# We Need New Names: A Novel



## Synopsis

A remarkable literary debut--shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize! The unflinching and powerful story of a young girl's journey out of Zimbabwe and to America. Darling is only ten years old, and yet she must navigate a fragile and violent world. In Zimbabwe, Darling and her friends steal guavas, try to get the baby out of young Chipo's belly, and grasp at memories of Before. Before their homes were destroyed by paramilitary policemen, before the school closed, before the fathers left for dangerous jobs abroad. But Darling has a chance to escape: she has an aunt in America. She travels to this new land in search of America's famous abundance only to find that her options as an immigrant are perilously few. No Violet Bulawayo's debut calls to mind the great storytellers of displacement and arrival who have come before her--from Junot Diaz to Zadie Smith to J.M. Coetzee--while she tells a vivid, raw story all her own.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *Bulawayo*, an engaging and often disturbing semiautobiographical first novel, 10-year-old Darling describes, with childlike candor and a penetrating grasp of language, first, her life in Zimbabwe during its so-called Lost Decade and then her life as a teenager in present-day America. What is at once delightful and disturbing is the fact that young Darling and her friends are so resilient amidst chaos. Darling must cope with absentee parents gone to who-knows-where, seeking jobs and a better life; abusive adults; and murdering bands of self-appointed police in a country gone horribly wrong. Yet she evinces a sense of chauvinism regarding her corrupt homeland when

she joins her aunt in America. There she discovers a country that has fallen into a different kind of chaos, primarily economic. She and her new family struggle while America fails to live up to her hopes. Ultimately what lingers is Bulawayo's poignant insights into how a person decides what to embrace and what to surrender when adapting to a new culture in a new land. --Donna Chavez --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Winner of the 2014 PEN / Hemingway Award for Debut Fiction  
Winner of the 2014 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for First Fiction  
Shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize  
Winner of the 2014 Zora Neale Hurston/ Richard Wright Legacy Award for fiction  
Winner of the 2013 Etisalat Prize for Literature  
Finalist for the 2013 Guardian First Book Award  
One of the New York Times Notable Books of the Year for 2013  
One of National Public Radio's Great Reads of 2013  
"A deeply felt and fiercely written debut novel ... The voice Ms. Bulawayo has fashioned for [Darling] is utterly distinctive - by turns unsparring and lyrical, unsentimental and poetic, spiky and meditative." --- Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times  
"Bulawayo describes all this in brilliant language, alive and confident, often funny, strong in its ability to make Darling's African life immediate ... She demonstrates a striking ability to capture the uneasiness that accompanies a newcomers arrival in America." -- Uzodinma Iweala, The New York Times Book Review  
"Writing with poignant clarity and hard-hitting imagery, Bulawayo delivers this first work as an offering of hope." --The New York Daily News  
"Bulawayo mixes imagination and reality, combining an intuitive attention to detail with startling, visceral imagery ... This book is a provocative, haunting debut from an author to watch." - Elle  
"Bulawayo, whose prose is warm and clear and unfussy, maintains Darling's singular voice throughout, even as her heroine struggles to find her footing. Her hard, funny first novel is a triumph." -- Entertainment Weekly  
"Nearly as incisive about the American immigrant experience as it is about the failings of Mugabe's regime [in Zimbabwe]." -- National Public Radio  
"Bulawayo's first novel is original, witty and devastating." ---People Magazine  
"Ms. Bulawayo's artistry is such that we can't help but see ourselves in that wider world ... Darling is a dazzling life force with a rich, inventive language all her own, funny and perceptive but still very much a child ... It would be hard to overstate the freshness of Ms. Bulawayo's language, with words put together in utterly surprising ways that communicate precisely." ---Judy Wertheimer, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
"How does a writer tell the story of a traumatised nation without being unremittingly bleak? No Violet Bulawayo manages it by forming a cast of characters so delightful and joyous that the reader is seduced by their antics at the same time as finding out about the country's troubles." -- Leyla Sanai, The Independent  
"Bulawayo has written a powerful novel. Her gift as a visual storyteller should propel

her to a bright future -- a dream fulfilled, no matter the country"-- Korina Lopez, USA Today

"NoViolet Bulawayo is a powerful, authentic, nihilistic voice - feral, feisty, funny - from the new Zimbabwean generation that has inherited Robert Mugabe's dystopia." -Peter Godwin, bestselling author of *The Fear and When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*

"NoViolet Bulawayo has created a world that lives and breathes - and fights, kicks, screams, and scratches, too. She has clothed it in words and given it a voice at once dissonant and melodic, utterly distinct." -Aminatta Forna, author of *The Memory of Love and Ancestor Stones*

"An exquisite and powerful first novel, filled with an equal measure of beauty and horror and laughter and pain. The lives (and names) of these characters will linger in your mind, and heart, long after you're done reading the book. NoViolet Bulawayo is definitely a writer to watch." -Edwidge Danticat, award-winning author of *Brother, I'm Dying and Breath, Eyes, Memory*

"Fans of Junot Díaz, who, as fiction editor of *Boston Review*, published NoViolet Bulawayo's early work, will love her debut novel, *We Need New Names* ...Bulawayo's use of contemporary culture (the kids play a game in which they hunt for bin Laden and, later, text like their lives depend on it), as well as her fearless defense of the immigrant experience through honoring the cadence of spoken language, sets this book apart-on the top shelf." -- Kristy Davis, *Oprah.com*

One of National Public Radio's Great Reads of 2013  
One of the New York Times Notable Books of the Year for 2013  
Finalist for the 2013 Guardian First Book Award

"[Bulawayo] shows the beaming promise of a young Junot Diaz. With a style all her own-one steeped in wit and striking imagination-she movingly details the complexities of the immigrant experience." --*The American Prospect*

"A stunning debut... The hyper-imaginative and often surreal ways Bulawayo's narrator describes people, places, and experiences almost sound like things imagined in her sleep." --*Flavorwire*

NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel *WE NEED NEW NAMES* is an original, and a stunning work. It has been identified as a coming of age work--with the central character of Darling. It has been described as having a plot that moves from Darling's childhood in Zimbabwe, to her coming to America, and her experiences as she moves into adulthood. I don't disagree with these descriptions; I just find them inadequate. First, this is definitely not a plot driven work. Certainly you can follow a progressive story line--but the story being told is of an interior landscape rather than a series of external adventures. Second, as the novel progresses, it settles into a shifting kaleidoscope of alternating focus--Darling's experiences; the larger geopolitical scene; and the interior anguish of people unmoored in their place in time and country. This novel is not for the faint of heart. There was at least one chapter that, frankly, I would have rather not read. And the experiences of Darling in

Zimbabwe are searing--as befits the current geopolitical scene. There is the genuine heartbreak of leaving and losing one's country. One of the reviews--in the New York Times--wrote about the third chapter from the conclusion. "At one point, in an effort to make Darling's experiences broadly representative, Ms. Bulawayo writes an entire chapter using the plural pronoun "we" speaking of the move to America, and the bitterness so many immigrants feel, as they are forced to take menial jobs or find their hopes frustrated...Such generalizations are the one misstep in this otherwise stunning novel. Not only because they try to project one point of view onto the experiences of a wide and varied group of immigrants, but also because they are not always true." And as evidence of this assertion, the review writer points out that NoViolet Bulawayo has flourished as an immigrant. TALK ABOUT MISSING THE POINT. Yes, this is a story of an immigrant, and of immigrants. But MORE SO--it is a story about losing one's country, one's connection to ancestors, one's place in the past and the future. For just that near final chapter alone--titled "How They Lived"--WE NEED NEW NAMES is a most compelling work.

This writing in this book is as creative as the author's nom de plume, No Violet. Her unusual use of language in showing the reader life in Zimbabwe through the eyes of a special wise child, becomes part of the reader's experience. Then, she juxtaposes it with her new life in cities she dreamed of in the USA. Neither is perfect. But she is self-possessed enough to navigate and explain the world of immigrants. "Undocumented" has become a loaded word. But her words render humor and compassion. Equal to her favorite book, "The Hairdresser of Harare", she shines a light on life in post colonial Africa. Junot Diaz chose her as an outstanding new voice. I agree.

We Need New Names is a lush, language-rich narration by a young African girl who gradually becomes an expat in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The narrator's voice has a wonderful innocence, even as she and her playmates (I'd say schoolmates but the teachers have all left the country and the school closed) play such games as "Find Bin Laden." She also has a special gift for capturing expressions on other characters' faces: "like she was hearing music inside her head and dancing to it" is a description of the expression of an aunt who has been complimented by an old flame who is marrying someone else. The disintegration of the home country, the desperate desire to be somewhere else, and the bitterness of those left behind are rendered in muscular, lyrical prose studded with native ("our language" which is never identified) and childish phrases. The description of eating the guavas (on which she used to gorge herself as a child) for the first time since coming

to the U.S. Is worth the price of admission: funny, tender, voracious, and yearning. The only piece of this novel that hit a sour note for me was a chapter at the end of the book narrated by a "we" rather than the "I" in every other chapter. It consisted of a lyrical, wild description of the labor of largely undocumented newcomers to the US. While beautiful in its own right, and easily capable of being a brilliant standalone essay, it was oddly out of place, especially as our narrator herself had barely begun to work. It sounded like an angry political squawk in an otherwise equally powerful but more subtle birdsong that is ultimately more personal and persuasive.

*We Need New Names* is a critical addition to the evolving brand of African literature that situates itself in a realistic global realm. Bulawayo's description of a Zimbabwe going through a dilapidating socio-political transformation through the eyes of a ten year old would have resonated not only with anyone who witnessed the country at the turn of the millennium, but provided vivid imagery for those who may just have heard of a country at crisis. Her move to the US does the same, immediately establishing universally recognizable characters and, most importantly, the immigrant rapport with an often unwittingly xenophobic place as well the gut-wrenching battle between holding on to 'your' country (in this case, Zimbabwe) and realistically acknowledging that there is a reason you left, there are experiences there you can no longer relate with and, for all its faults, there is a life here that you would not have had you still been home. Bulawayo's genius is further exemplified in how she does not focus only on the African/American dynamic; but in channeling intra-immigrant conflict and rapport, and even invoking the destruction brought forth by the Afghani war and the economic downturn that led created 'DestroydMichigan' A fantastic read...

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