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Women's Marginalization and Agency in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*: Transnational Genealogies, Politics of Space, and Colonial Legacies Through FCDA and Third Space

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Abstract

This study examines women's marginalization and agency in *We Need New Names* by situating the novel within broader frameworks of transnational genealogies, spatial politics, and colonial migration legacies. Utilizing Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), based on Lazar's gender ideology and discourse approach in (de)constructing gender identities and gender equality, along with Homi K. Bhabha's *Third Space* Theory, this study analyses how diaspora displacement and colonial past influence gendered identities. Through a qualitative and interpretive analysis of select textual episodes, the study reveals how spatial displacement, linguistic fragmentation, and cultural hybridity both inhibit and facilitate female empowerment. Women counter marginalization using everyday tactics such as silence, storytelling, embodied resistance, and discursive bargaining, turning marginal spaces into spaces of resistance. This paper makes a theoretical contribution to migration studies, spatial inequality, and decolonization by exploring gendered identities in transnational and postcolonial settings.

Keywords: women's marginalization; female agency; transnational genealogies; politics of space; colonial legacies; diasporic identity; gender equality; feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA); third space

1. Introduction

NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel, *We Need New Names*, intricately portrays the lives of young girls in Zimbabwe's shantytown, Paradise, and their subsequent immigrant experience in the United States. The narrative unfolded through Darling's eyes, whose journey from a war-torn homeland to the complexities of American life highlighted the intersection of gender, race, and identity. The novel's characters, particularly Darling and her friend Chipo, navigate a world in which patriarchal structures and cultural expectations shape their existence, often relegating them to the margins of society. FCDA served as the analytical framework for this study, providing a means to examine how these structures contributed to the marginalization of women. By focusing on the discursive practices that constructed gendered identities, FCDA revealed the mechanisms through which women's agency was constrained, while also shedding light on their struggles for expression and

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affirmation. Scholars have also examined the intersection of language, gender, and power in transnational contexts, particularly in relation to women's representation in diasporic narratives (Mahmood et al. 2026; Nusrat et al. 2025). Scholars such as Lazar (2005) and Sunderland (2004) have emphasized the importance of analyzing these discursive formations to understand the persistence of gender inequalities. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "*Third Space*" served as the theoretical framework for this study, offering a way to appreciate the fluidity of identity in postcolonial contexts. Bhabha (1994) argued that the Third Space was a site of hybridity where cultural identities were constantly reshaped and redefined. This space allowed the expression of alternative perspectives and the negotiation of new forms of belonging.

However, beyond being an exceptional piece of literature, this novel offers insight into the larger transnational genealogies that emerge from colonial pasts, forced migration, and the uneven global distribution of power. Migration from Zimbabwe to the USA represents not only the relocation of the physical body but also moving from one asymmetric space to another, created as part of colonial pasts. Such spaces are not empty or neutral; rather, they are shaped by complex power dynamics that inform identity formation. From this perspective, *We Need New Names* may be interpreted as a site of spatial politics.

Past studies explored how language and narrative practices contributed to the marginalization of women's voices while also highlighting moments of resistance and agency. Noreen and Asif (2023) investigated Muslim women's lives in Purdah and Polygamy (Hussain and Hashmi 2023), revealing how patriarchal structures silenced women within domestic spaces. They traced the emergence of agency through narrative refusal, yet did not extend this analysis to broader linguistic patterns across the novel. Shams (2025) examined Soniah Kamal's novel Unmarriageable (2019) as a postcolonial critique of Pakistani patriarchy and marriage norms, drawing on Spivak (1993) and Mohanty (2003). She demonstrated how female characters reclaimed subjectivity within oppressive discourse, although she did not specifically highlight linguistic mechanisms of empowerment. Khan (2019) performed an FCDA of Qaisra Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman* (Shahraz 2001), demonstrating how religious and cultural language positioned women as subalterns and identified their resistance via shifts in discourse; however, she did not examine the spatial or hybrid contexts that facilitated their agency. Subsequently, Hussain and Hashmi (2023) analyzed Sabaa Tahir's novel All My Rage (2022), illustrating how patriarchal and colonial discourses suppressed the protagonist, Noor Raza's, voice and underscoring the strategies Noor used to reassert her presence and pursue her own future. However, the above study did not frame these strategies in terms of spatial or discursive hybridity. Furthermore, Bhandari (2022) and Abou-Agag (2021) both demonstrated that postcolonial spaces enable resistance to domination and affirm agency. The above study aimed to explore how Bulawayo's characters, particularly Darling and Chipo, experienced and resisted marginalization within their social context. By applying FCDA alongside Bhabha's *Third Space* framework, the research sought to uncover how these characters asserted their agency and redefined their identities in the face of restrictive structures. Recent computational studies have employed hybrid deep learning models to detect and categorize gender-based violence discourse in digital texts effectively (Kurniawan et al. 2025). This inquiry deepened understanding of the complexities of gender and identity in postcolonial literature and highlighted the strategies women use to navigate difficult circumstances. Furthermore, this study added depth to postcolonial feminist studies by demonstrating how women's voices emerge, transform, and assert their presence within challenging spaces. The study thus follows the following research question. Although a substantial body of research addresses women's marginalization and resistance within patriarchal and postcolonial settings, notable gaps remain in understanding how diasporic

female identities are negotiated in contemporary African literature. While previous studies have explored silence, storytelling, and identity reclamation in South Asian and postcolonial narratives, few have combined Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), with Bhabha's *Third Space* theory to examine the intersecting dynamics of gender, culture, and hybridity in Zimbabwean diasporic fiction. Furthermore, existing research tends to focus on overt resistance, often overlooking subtle, everyday strategies such as nonverbal silence, intergenerational narratives, and embodied defiance through which marginalized women assert their agency. This study addresses these gaps by providing a focused, text-based analysis of *We Need New Names*, highlighting how female characters navigate liminal cultural spaces to resist and redefine oppressive gendered and colonial discourses. Through this dual theoretical framework, the research enriches postcolonial feminist discourse by illuminating the complex ways women's voices and identities are marginalized, contested, and reclaimed in diasporic contexts. Hence, this study examines how *We Need New Names* marginalizes women's voices through language, while also exploring the spaces of resistance and expression that enable their agency. Therefore, this study positions the novel not only as a literary text but also as a critical site for examining transnational migration, spatial inequality, and postcolonial identity formation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Existing Studies on Women's Marginalization

Existing scholarship on *We Need New Names* examines themes of migration, identity, and trauma in a postcolonial context. Scholars, including Alexander, Moji, and Gutierrez-Glik, explore the portrayal of diasporic displacement, cultural disintegration, and the mental consequences of migration in this novel. This research highlights the complexity of identity in Bulawayo's portrayal of global migration dynamics. It is worth noting that Bulawayo continues to engage with postcolonial politics and nationhood through her novel Glory; therefore, her body of work must be considered holistically rather than in isolation.

Bari (2014) and Strobel (2010) both focused on the representation of women, their marginalization, and resistance within patriarchal structures, employing FCDA based on Lazar (2005). Bari (2014) investigated how female characters are portrayed in Ice Candy Man by Sidhwa, Clear Light of Day by Desai, and The God of Small Things by Roy. Bari's study shows the mechanisms by which patriarchy marginalizes women and how women respond, sometimes with resistance and sometimes with subservience, within restrictive environments. The results revealed that these texts collectively challenge traditional gender roles and highlight the tension between self-determination and social pressures and demands. Ice Candy Man exemplifies this process by demonstrating how control is enforced through cultural and linguistic practices and by reflecting the influence of caste and religion on women's lives. Bari filled a gap in the literature by deepening our understanding of women's struggles and resistance within oppressive structures and by emphasizing their ability to assert agency in restrictive conditions. Strobel (2010), meanwhile, used FCDA, as constructed by Lazar (2005), to interrogate how silence operates as a form of resistance and an expression of agency for marginalized women in Three Novels of Female Development. The above study examines how female characters employ both speech and purposeful silence to negotiate their identities under restrictive patriarchal conditions. Strobel's results show how silence is not a manifestation of weakness but a powerful form of resistance and a way to undermine oppressive structures. Stroble's study filled a major gap by emphasizing the role of silence alongside overt expression in women's struggles for justice and representation.

Smith (2019) and Chandra (2021) both used FCDA (Lazar 2005) to uncover the mechanisms through which women undermine traditional gender roles and claim their own

spaces and identities. Smith (2019) focuses on the representation of women's resistance in South Asian fiction, employing a close textual analysis and thematic coding of Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, and Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies. The above study reveals the complex mechanisms by which resistance is exercised not through overt aggression but through subtleties of expression, adding depth to our understanding of women's struggles within restrictive environments. Smith's study filled a major gap by emphasizing the intersection of gender, struggles, and women's agency in South Asian texts. Similarly, Chandra (2021) used FCDA (Lazar 2005) in his study and focuses on the stories A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini, Burnt Shadows by Kamila Shamsie, and The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri. The above study shows how the deliberate use of silence, subtext, and coded expressions enables these women to subvert conventional gender norms and claim their own agency. Chandra filled a major gap by emphasizing the role of silence alongside expression in navigating oppressive structures and affirming women's resistance.

2.2. Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives

Nartey (2024) and Nazzal et al. (2025) both explore women's resistance to patriarchal structures and the strategies they use to assert their agency. Nartey (2024) draws on Lazar (2007)'s FCDA to examine Nigerian blogs as sites of resistance and affirmation of women's agency. The above study shows how Nigerian women challenge toxic gender narratives, undermine patriarchy and gender discrimination, and celebrate women who defy restrictive norms. Nartey highlights the struggles of women in dismantling oppressive structures and fostering solidarity and collective resistance. However, their study focuses predominantly on overt resistance, thereby ignoring subtler forms, which signals a gap for future inquiry into the complex intersection of women's struggles, resistance, and agency in digital spaces. Similarly, Amalia and Hartono (2023) adopts a feminist literary criticism framework (2005) to analyze Balinese women's resistance in Oka Rusmini's Tempurung. Through textual analysis and close reading, Amalia shows how the novel's women strive for economic independence, pursue knowledge, insist on visibility and voice, and undermine restrictive cultural practices. The above study highlights the struggles of the main female characters Saring, Sipleg, Jinah, Putu, and Pidagda as they assert their agency in a context governed by restrictive traditions. Amalia's study resonates with Nartey's in its demonstration of women's struggles and resistance in dismantling oppressive structures, and it adds depth to conversations about women's empowerment in a postcolonial context.

Al-Doory and Ali (2023) and Akhtar et al. (2015) both explore women's solidarity and resistance within oppressive structures from a feminist perspective (2005). Al-Doory and Ali (2023) focuses on Emma Donoghue's Pull of the Stars (2020) and shows how collective activity and reciprocal support among women enable them to resist persecution and domination. The above study underscores the struggles women face in securing resistance and highlights the mechanisms through which they negotiate these struggles. Al-Doory's work further contributes to understanding the intersection of gender, struggles, and agency in the literature. Akhtar et al. (2015) similarly adopts a feminist framework (2005) to explore the gender-based marginalization of women in Ice Candy Man (Sidhwa 1989) and The Holy Woman (Shahraz 2001). Akhtar's study shows how women's bodies become sites of control and cultural repression and how their voices are silenced by restrictive structures, a form of systematic marginalization that resonates strongly with Al-Doory's view. The above study highlights the physical, social, and linguistic mechanisms that enable and sustain their marginalization, while demonstrating women's resistance and struggles to assert their subjectivity and dignity. Together, these studies collectively illuminate the mechanisms by which women challenge oppressive structures through their voices,

solidarity, resistance, and negotiation within restrictive cultural spaces. This growing body of literature underscores the intersection of gender, struggles, and resistance in postcolonial, patriarchal, and oppressive regimes, adding depth and texture to our understanding of the struggles for women's empowerment.

Ilyas (2021) and Ramzan and Javaid (2025) both explore the intersection of gender, migration, and cultural pressures in the representation of women's struggles and marginalization. Ilyas (2021) focuses on Nigerian women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah (2013) and employs impression management (2010) to show how gender and culture jointly contribute to their marginalization and struggles. The above study reveals the struggles these women face due to restrictive institutions and cultural pressures, while also emphasizing their resilience and ability to redefine their own identities and paths toward liberation. Ramzan and Javaid (2025) compares gender roles and marital dynamics in Soniah Kamal's Unmarriageable (2019) and Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice (1813) through Cultural Materialism (1982). Ramzan's study highlights the commodification of women within marriage structures and shows how both texts portray their struggles and negotiation within restrictive institutions. The above study highlights which one underscores the significance of economic pressures and patriarchal controls in framing women's choices and their eventual struggles for greater autonomy, adding depth to conversations about the intersection of class, gender, and struggles.

Arshad et al. (2024) further illuminate the complex mechanisms by which women endure and challenge their marginalization and struggles within restrictive structures in South Asia. Drawing on Spivak's (2023) postcolonial feminist theory, Arshad et al. (2024) examines the intersection of religion, class, and gender in a modern South Asian context. The above study reveals the multilayered struggles faced by women Alice, Hina Alvi, and Zenab while emphasizing their resistance through small, resilient acts. This resonates with Arshad et al.'s (2024) critical discourse analysis of Our Lady of Hanif (2011), which shows the systematic silencing and dehumanization of its Christian, lower-class, and female protagonist, Alice Bhatti. Nonetheless, the study underscores Alice's ability to assert her agency and negotiate her struggles, adding a significant perspective to the understanding of intersectional resistance.

Kumar and Kamble (2022) and Raihan et al. (2025) shift the focus to South and Southeast Asia's representation of women's resistance under restrictive conditions. Kumar and Kamble (2022) analyzes Shobha De's Socialite Evenings (1989) and Starry Nights (1991) through a feminist theoretical framework (2009), demonstrating how women strive for independence and assert their desires within restrictive social structures and marriage institutions. The above study shows that De's female protagonists, Karuna and Asha Rani, are not powerless victims but active negotiators of their futures, thereby complicating the notion of submission under patriarchy. Raihan et al. (2025) likewise focuses on Ahmad Tohari's Bekisar Merah (1993) and its character Lasi, employing a qualitative literary analysis (2000). Raihan shows Lasi's struggles under oppressive marriage structures and the commodification of her sexuality, while emphasizing the small but significant acts of resistance through which Lasi rejects restrictive roles and strives toward moral and emotional independence. Raihan's study adds depth to the understanding of women's struggles and resistance within rigid sociocultural institutions, especially in the context of Indonesian literature.

Gabud (2024) used postcolonial, intersectional, and critical perspectives to uncover the mechanisms by which women resist oppressive structures and assert their identities. identity within restrictive national discourses. Rakhmayanti and Wiyatmi (2019) used Fairclough's (1989) Model of Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover the forms and mechanisms of women's marginalization in the novel Kremil by Suparto Brata (2002). This

study highlights six main forms of marginalization: control over productive power, control over sexuality, restriction of women's mobility, suppression of opinion rights, deprivation of ownership of assets, and social condition disturbances, and how these mechanisms collectively diminish women's struggles and agency. Furthermore, their study highlights moments of resistance and renewal, demonstrating that, despite restrictive structures, women can and do challenge their marginalization. The above-mentioned study filled a previously neglected gap by focusing on the structural forms of marginalization and on strategies of resistance in a literary context. Gabud (2024) employs FCDA (Lazar 2005) alongside postcolonial theory (1978) to examine Warsan Shire's poetry, focusing on the intersection of gender and displacement. Gabus's study emphasizes Shire's strategic use of expression as a potent means for women's resistance against restrictive structures. Gabud highlights how expression functions as a site of both marginalization and resistance, adding depth to understanding the nuanced modes of women's struggles in diasporic and postcolonial contexts.

Pratheeba and Vasuki (2022) and Manuel (1997) explored the struggles of women under patriarchy through their respective feminist perspectives and thematic analyses. Pratheeba and Vasuki (2022) used a thematic feminist literary analysis (2003) to highlight the marginalization and resistance of women in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters (1998) and The Immigrant (2008). Patheeba's study shows how education serves both as a tool for emancipation and a driver of estrangement, forcing women to question restrictive cultural and family structures. The findings illuminate a persistent tension between their personal aspirations and restrictive societal norms, emphasizing their strategies of resistance through daily negotiations. This study contributes to ongoing feminist discourse by emphasizing the significance of these everyday struggles for securing dignity and independence. Manuel (1997) conducted a study on the marginalization of women in post-colonial societies, applying a feminist perspective. The above study explored how female characters navigate a combination of colonial pressures and restrictive patriarchal structures. The five post-colonial texts under study, Cat's Eye by Margaret Atwood, Fire on the Mountain and In Custody by Anita Desai, Brown Girl, Brownstones by Paule Marshall, and Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys, collectively show how these women resist restrictive structures by employing expression to assert their identity and reclaim their agency. Manuel highlighted a gap by extending the discussion of post-colonial feminism, demonstrating the intersection of gender and colonialism and emphasizing the role of expression in navigating these intertwined forms of marginalization. Linguistic analyses of legal judgments have been used to examine societal attitudes and stigmatization toward gender-based violence victims (Khaleel et al. 2024).

2.3. Theoretical Framework: FCDA and Third Space

The Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, proposed by several researchers, including Michelle M. Lazar, provides an analytical tool for examining how discourse constructs and perpetuates gender power relations. According to Lazar (2005), gender is understood as an ideological construction within the discourse, creating social hierarchy and reinforcing patriarchal values. Therefore, FCDA focuses not only on how discourse reproduces and reflects inequality but also on its potential for subversion.

While FCDA is traditionally used in social science analysis, its application to literary texts allows the identification of the process of constructing gender identity through discourse and of resisting it by negotiating a position between silence and voice. At the same time, the systematic nature of FCDA allows analyzing strengths and weaknesses of using such an analytical tool.

Homi K. Bhabha introduced the idea of Third Space in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). According to Bhabha, the Third Space is an intermediate place where fixed identities become unstable and new meanings arise. The Third Space becomes a locus of difference and negotiation of identities, making it possible to contest dominant discourses based on the power of colonial authority.

Hybridity is the key term in the discourse of the Third Space because identities are always changing through intercultural contact. Diaspora includes individuals in marginal situations who neither belong to their place of origin nor to their current location. Their identities are incomplete but flexible. Such a theory is especially useful for analyzing the novel *We Need New Names*.

The combination of FCDA and Third Space theory creates an interesting theoretical framework that merges discourse analysis with spatial theories and postcolonialism. FCDA enables researchers to examine linguistic representations of gender and power relations, whereas Third Space theory helps place these representations within a broader context of colonial history and migratory practices. As a result, it enables a deeper understanding of women's agencies, expressed both linguistically and through spatial relocation.

Based on the above literature, this study adopts FCDA and Third Space theory as its guiding frameworks.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology to examine the marginalization and agency of women in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, utilizing FCDA and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "*Third Space*" as analytical frameworks. FCDA is a critical approach that interrogates the relationship between discourse, women's marginalization, and gender, aiming to uncover how societal narratives perpetuate gender inequalities. This study focuses on two praxes of FCDA.

3.1. Gender as Ideological Structure and Practice

This praxis examines how gender is constructed as an ideological system that divides individuals into categories of dominance and subordination, often reinforcing patriarchal structures. In the context of Bulawayo's novel, this approach allows for an analysis of how societal norms and expectations shape the identities and experiences of female characters such as Darling and Chipo, positioning them in marginalized, subordinate roles.

3.2. Discourse in the (De)construction of Gender

This praxis focuses on how discourse constructs and deconstructs gender identities. It enables an exploration of how the novel portrays women's experiences of marginalization and their efforts to assert agency through communicative practices. By examining the discursive processes within the text, this approach reveals the subtle mechanisms through which women are silenced and oppressed, as well as the ways they resist and negotiate their identities and struggles.

These practices are particularly relevant to this study, as they provide tools for analyzing how gendered social relations are enacted and challenged through discourse. By focusing on the communicative practices that construct and deconstruct gendered identities, FCDA reveals the subtle mechanisms through which women are marginalized and oppressed, as well as the ways they resist and assert their agency. The other three praxes of FCDA feminist analytical activism, complexity of gender and power relations, and critical reflexivity, were not included in this study as they focus more broadly on socio-economic resource allocation, everyday social interactions, and cultural symbolism. Given the specific textual and identity-focused scope of this research, which centers on women's marginaliza-

tion, struggles, and agency within discourse and identity negotiation, these praxes were deemed less directly relevant to the analytical aims of this study.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "*Third Space*" offers a theoretical framework to understand the fluidity of identity in postcolonial contexts. The Third Space is a site of hybridity where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined, allowing for the subversion of dominant narratives and the creation of new forms of belonging. In Bulawayo's novel, the Third Space becomes a metaphor for the diasporic experience, where characters like Darling grapple with their cultural heritage and the pressures of assimilation. This study utilizes the Third Space concept to explore how female characters navigate their identities amidst the intersecting forces of colonial history, patriarchal structures, and diasporic experiences. The Third Space provides a lens to examine how these characters resist marginalization and assert agency through cultural negotiation and hybrid identity formation. It allows for an analysis of how women's voices and struggles manifest within oppressive regimes, offering a model for exploring empowerment and resistance.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this research comprises the text of *We Need New Names*. A systematic reading of the novel was conducted, focusing on sequences featuring dialog, silences, internal thoughts, and moments of resistance exhibited by female characters. These instances were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that the data collected is rich and relevant to the research questions. The analysis involved a close examination of the linguistic and narrative mechanisms the author employed to portray gendered power relations. This included analyzing the use of language in constructing gendered identities, the representation of women's experiences of marginalization, and how these characters assert their agency. The analysis also considered broader narrative elements, such as cultural references and narrative techniques, to contextualize these linguistic choices within the novel's socio-political framework. This methodology enables a comprehensive analysis of how language and culture intersect to shape women's experiences in postcolonial and diasporic contexts. By integrating FCDA and Bhabha's Third Space theory, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities of gender, identity, and agency in *We Need New Names*. It contributes to the discourse on postcolonial feminist studies by highlighting the role of language and cultural negotiation in the construction of gendered identities and the assertion of women's agency.

4. Results

Text 1: The concept of Third Space becomes evident in moments where women navigate between submission and resistance. One example is when the protagonist of the novel Darling reflects on her shifting identity after moving to America:

> "*I open my mouth to say something, but the words come out wrong like they are not even mine. I close my mouth and just watch*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 43).

In this case, the protagonist Darling is what Bhabha imagines as the Third Space, which is mediating an identity between the insidious structures of her pre-memory and the new structures of her diasporic environment. Her broken speech describes the linguistic dissonance that reflects the internal struggle to find agency in the competing discourses of cultures. As an unstable hybrid subjectivity, language here becomes a place of articulation and a space of repression. These rifts in her voice also reflect the tension between the self and culture, and the form identity should take in diasporic spaces. However, here again, identity is regularly contested and re-negotiated in this liminal space.

This moment also reflects the spatial dislocation produced by colonial and postcolonial migration, in which language becomes a site for negotiating transnational identities across unequal cultural spaces.

Text 2*:* Bulawayo uses storytelling to help women retake control of their narratives. For example, every time the main character of the novel Darling recalls the stories spoken by the grandmother, the practice of telling a story turns into the manifestation of female agency:

> "*Grandmother would sit us down and tell us stories, stories of women who fought, who survived. We listened because those stories were ours*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 32).

In this context, storytelling is a potent counter-discursive weapon against patriarchal oppression. In the grandmother's telling of the women's survival, storytelling transcends mere recounting, becoming an instrument of empowerment as women reclaim their power over language to construct alternative historical accounts and legitimize female experiences. Through the transmission of collective memory and agency between generations, this narration challenges dominant patriarchal narratives and gives women's voices a place to hold/occupy. Through that exercise, storytelling empowers alternative discourses to challenge hegemonic structures and validates the embedded resilience in intergenerational female identity. This also highlights storytelling as a form of decolonizing memory, where marginalized voices reclaim space within transnational and postcolonial narratives shaped by colonial histories.

Text 3: In another section, a young girl, Darling's friend Chipo, the novel's protagonist, who has been sexually abused, becomes a sign of silent resilience:

> "Chipo does not talk much anymore. When we play, she just sits there, quiet, watching" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 58).

Chipo's trauma-induced silence is an effective icon of the gendered power struggles that silence in and of itself means much more than being silent; it becomes a hyper-charged place of oppression. Her silence is one imposed more than chosen, the gendered renunciation of voice, the ultimate psychological and discursive violence against female bodies. Politically, viewed from a FCDA perspective, this enforced quietness is important, as it exposes the way in which patriarchal ideologies operate not just with speech but, more dangerously, through silence. In this regard, muteness of Chipo represents both a symptom of trauma and a silent form of resistance that calls attention to the complicated knot of words, power, and female subjectivity. This silence can also be understood as a form of spatial exclusion, reflecting how colonial and patriarchal structures confine women within marginal spaces of visibility and voice.

Text 4: A defining point in this story is when Darling faces the cultural words that are thrown at her as a girl:

> "*They say girls must not climb trees. I say, if God wanted us not to climb, he would not have made trees climbable*" (Bulawayo 2013, pp. 85–86).

Darling's verbal defiance, "*If God wanted us not to climb*" in the above text, is a powerful articulation of empowered female agency through language. Her rhetorical challenge to traditional gender expectations exemplifies the deconstruction of patriarchal norms, as she reclaims her right to autonomy and visibility in spaces historically dominated by male authority. Through this defiant discourse, Darling subverts gendered power dynamics, using language as a primary tool of resistance. Her assertion not only destabilizes the prescribed roles for girls but also affirms discourse as a site where female subjectivity and empowerment can be actively constructed. This act of resistance also challenges the spatial boundaries imposed on girls within patriarchal and postcolonial societies, where access to physical and social space is tightly controlled.

Text 5: Bhabha's Third Space is powerfully illustrated in Darling's transnational journey. Her experience of cultural hybridity creates a liminal space where new identities emerge:

"*I am not one of them, but I am not one of us either*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 103).

Darling's assertion "*I am not one of them, but I am not one of us either*" reflects her identity negotiation within the diasporic Third Space, a conceptual site defined by cultural hybridity and in-betweenness. This articulation of liminality underscores the tension she experiences as she attempts to reconcile the cultural codes of her homeland with those of her new environment abroad. The Third Space, as theorized by Bhabha, becomes a dynamic site where identity is fluid, contested, and continuously reconfigured. Within this space, Darling's negotiation of conflicting cultural narratives exemplifies the complexities of hybrid subjectivity and highlights the potential for resistance and empowerment that emerges from navigating intersecting identities. This articulation reflects transnational identity formation shaped by colonial migration histories, where individuals occupy in-between spaces marked by cultural displacement and spatial inequality.

Text 6: These lines highlight how female characters assert their agency and resist patriarchal norms.

> "*Then Nomviyo comes running from the bus stop in her red high-heeled shoes because she is just returning from town. She sees all the broken houses and throws all her groceries and bags down, screaming, My son, my son! What happened? I left my Freedom sleeping in there*!" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 33).

This excerpt succinctly captures Nomviyo's immediate emotional response to the destruction of her home and her child. Her scream, "*My son, my son*!" becomes an expression of grief and resistance in the face of patriarchal and state violence. Crying out disrupts her passive role, asserting her voice as one of anguish and defiance in a context of immense personal loss. This part exemplifies language functions as a tool for female characters to negotiate their agency, using vocal expression to resist the societal structures that oppress them. Nomviyo's reaction is a form of bodily resistance, which can be explored through the lens of Lazar's FCDA, as it showcases how women, through their emotional and linguistic responses, reclaim power in spaces of vulnerability. Her response also reflects how violence and displacement, often rooted in colonial and state structures, reshape domestic and social spaces, positioning women within contested spatial realities.

Text 7: Highlighting power negotiation, particularly in the context of language and resistance, an example is:

> "*Can't you read? You brought English to this country, and now you want your language explained. Have you no shame*?" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 55)

This line reveals a critical moment of linguistic resistance and negotiation. The speaker challenges the authority of the white man by highlighting the colonial legacy embedded in language. The use of English as a tool of subjugation is turned back onto the white man, implying his ignorance of the power structures he has imposed. This interaction reflects both the resistance of the oppressed and the critique of colonial language, making it an excellent example of how language is wielded as a form of resistance and power negotiation. Through FCDA, this line can be analyzed as a moment of subverting patriarchal and colonial power dynamics. This interaction further highlights the politics of language as a colonial tool, where linguistic power operates across transnational spaces shaped by historical domination.

Text 8: In this passage, Darling, the novel's protagonist, faces gendered erasure as a male character repeatedly misgenders her. Her silence in response becomes a subtle act of resistance and self-protection within a patriarchal context.

> "*His voice sounds like something burned and seared his throat- my son. My boy, he says. Listening to him is painful; I want to put my hands over my ears. He is like a monster up close, and I think of running again, but Mother is standing in a red dress looking dangerous. My boy, he keeps saying, but I do not tell him that I am a girl, I do not tell him to leave me alone*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 43).

This passage reveals a moment of gendered erasure, where the protagonist is repeatedly misgendered and silenced. The male figure's insistence on calling her "*my boy*" reflects a patriarchal imposition that denies her identity. However, in her refusal to correct him, her silence functions as an internalized resistance, a strategy of self-preservation within a hostile, gendered power dynamic. Analyzed through Lazar's FCDA, this silence is not mere submission but a counter-discursive act highlighting the limits placed on female agency in patriarchal contexts. It illustrates how silence becomes a protective and resistant tool when speech is unsafe or ineffective. The internal conflict and the external power dynamic underscore the negotiation of gender identity and autonomy. This excerpt demonstrates the suppression of the female voice and the constraints on the expression of identity. It also suggests how language and silence are used to navigate patriarchal dominance. This moment also reflects spatial control over identity, where gendered bodies are regulated within hierarchical structures shaped by both colonial and patriarchal systems.

Text 9: In this excerpt, Darling navigates a patriarchal, spiritually charged space where surveillance and gendered expectations converge. Her quiet decision to keep her eyes open during prayer becomes a subtle act of resistance, asserting agency.

> "*Father's eyes are open, and the look inside them is that of waiting, like waiting for a miracle. I look to the side, and Mother of Bones has her eyes closed, praying fervently, with a vein popping on her forehead. Mother's eyes are open. She does not give me a look that says she will kill me for keeping my eyes open during prayer, so I just stay like that, watching*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 46).

This excerpt offers a layered exploration of gendered power relations within a domestic and spiritual setting. The act of prayer, often framed as an unquestioned ritual of obedience, becomes a place where surveillance, discipline, and resistance silently converge. The narrator's conscious decision to keep her eyes open while everyone else is immersed in prayer subtly breaks the normative expectations of female piety and conformity. Her action is not vocalized but is laden with meaning, a quiet rebellion that challenges the routine authority held by the mother figure. The lack of reprimand from the mother, who usually polices such behavior, suggests a temporary suspension of patriarchal discipline, possibly due to emotional exhaustion or shifting priorities. Through FCDA, this moment reflects the discursive boundaries imposed on women and girls, particularly in spiritual or moral domains, and how such boundaries are tested not through overt defiance, but through small, deliberate choices. The gaze, the act of "*just watching*," becomes a form of agency, enabling the narrator to occupy a reflective space outside the expected performance of religious devotion. This passage illustrates how the narrator negotiates her agency within a patriarchal structure through silent observation and non-participation. It reveals the layered forms of resistance available to female characters, showing how even within confined spaces, acts of resistance can be articulated through the body and gaze, rather than through voice alone. This subtle resistance demonstrates how agency operates within confined spatial structures, where women negotiate visibility and control within culturally regulated environments.

Text 10: This dialog unfolds among Darling and her friends Bastard, God knows, and Sbho amid a backdrop of social unrest. Here, Sbho, one of the few girls, joins Godknows

in firmly rejecting Bastard's call for violence, asserting a clear moral stance and showing gendered agency.

> "Maybe we should start hitting inside, Bastard says, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. No. We are not thugs, God knows, says, and I almost clap for him for talking sense for a change. *Yes, we are not those kinds of people, Sbho says* (Bulawayo 2013, p. 50).

This passage encapsulates a pivotal moment of collective ethical negotiation among the children, as they are momentarily suspended between impulsive action and moral reflection. Bastard's suggestion to escalate violence is met with immediate resistance by Godknows and Sbho, whose voices act as stabilizing forces steering the group away from dehumanizing behavior. Significantly, Sbho, a female character, mirrors and bolsters the ethical position adopted by God knows, associating herself with an identity that rejects the designation of "*thug*." This discourse is significant for its nuanced portrayal of female moral agency in a context shaped by socio-political turmoil. The children have encountered systematic violence and instability; their reluctance to emulate such behavior indicates a conscious rejection of oppressive norms. Sbho's succinct yet impactful assertion establishes her as an advocate of ethical resistance, actively contributing to the delineation of the group's moral boundaries.

Linguistically, "*we are not that kind of people*" demonstrates an awareness of the sociocultural consequences of labeling and self-identification. FCDA helps this instance to show how female characters, even in limited surroundings, express positions of resistance not only to patriarchal structures but also to more general cultures of violence and dehumanization. This excerpt contributes to exploring the second research question by highlighting how female characters, such as Sbho, assert agency and participate in redefining identity through dialog and moral positioning. Though situated in a group exchange, her contribution exemplifies how language serves as a conduit for resisting internalized violence and for reinforcing values of non-violence and self-respect. This reflects how ethical agency is constructed within unstable social spaces shaped by political unrest and structural inequalities rooted in colonial histories.

Text 11: In this intense interaction, Sbho, usually soft-spoken, confronts Bastard after his racially dismissive remark, showcasing her capacity for moral clarity and emotional power. Her response challenges colonial Hierarchy and affirms identity.

> "*What, are you crying for the white people? Are they your relatives? Bastard says. They are people, you asshole! Sbho says in this hard, hot voice we have never heard before, and I almost fall out of the tree because nobody has ever called Bastard that. Never. I wait to see what he will do, but he looks at Sbho with confusion*" (Bulawayo 2013, p. 56).

Through the interaction between Bastard and Sbho, this conversation exposes a tense moment. As Sbho vocally opposes Barbarian's degrading comments, the story shows a notable change in his character. His answer, which is characterized by strong language, upsets the accepted social order and is therefore a remarkable act of resistance and voice against injustice. Previously, silence or passive acceptance of insults from Bastard was replaced with a strong articulation of Sbho's moral posture and identity. The narrator's physical response, which surprises him with the unusual power in his voice, helps to emphasize the force of Sbho's words. The power dynamics at work are noteworthy, as Bastacle's uncertainty in responding to Sbho's outburst reveals the frailty of his authority. This represents a change from the hitherto unquestioned power systems among individuals. Against the background of colonial heritage, the dialogue evokes questions on social and racial structures since Bastacle's remark that people are "*crying for the white people*" suggests there have been past imbalances in power and continuing influences of colonialism. It

provides a site through which language becomes a device for re-making relationships and some form of resistance. Sbho's reply subverts the racialized and hierarchical presumptions inherent in Bastard's original question, acting as a counter-narrative that questions the groups previously held dehumanizing perspective. This exchange is significant because it illustrates language as an active tool for asserting individual agency and challenging oppressive systems. This chapter maps the shifting power relations between the characters, demonstrating how language not only supports but also actively challenges and negotiates the status and identity of marginalized speakers. The change in Sbho's voice marks a shift away from earlier passive or submissive positions, and his unexpected reaction subverts his presumptive control, thereby profoundly reordering social roles and power relations within the group. The conversation eventually reveals the tension between multiple cultural identities and the ways language can reinforce or challenge existing power relations. It clarifies how people negotiate the complexities of identity, resistance, and social norms, thereby advancing understanding of how power is expressed and challenged through language. This confrontation also illustrates how colonial hierarchies and spatial inequalities are contested through discourse, reshaping power relations within transnational and postcolonial contexts.

5. Discussion

This study has revealed that women's marginalization and agency in *We Need New Names* are inseparable facets of a dynamic process in which constraint and resistance co-emerge. Darling's fractured utterance, "*the words come out wrong like they are not even mine*," and her liminal self-definition, "*I am not one of them, but I am not one of us either*," together reflect the hybrid subjectivities negotiating between two cultural orders. This aligns with Bari's (2014) examination of South Asian heroines, where fractured voices and displaced identities underscore women's subordinate positions within patriarchal systems. However, these very fissures become sites of possibility, allowing female characters to reconstruct their sense of self. Similarly, De Costa (2022) illustrates how migrant women in the Gulf navigate identity through the language of labor and survival, suggesting that negotiation in hostile environments is itself a form of resistance. Darling's experience in the Third Space, as theorized by Homi Bhabha, demonstrates how diasporic identity is not merely fractured but continuously reassembled through agency and adaptive self-fashioning.

The grandmother's storytelling and Darling's rhetorical defiance of patriarchal proscriptions, such as when she resists being told not to climb trees, foreground everyday practices as powerful instruments of empowerment. These actions resonate with Al-Doory and Ali's (2023) findings on narrative solidarity, in which stories passed down through generations serve not only as cultural preservation but also as political tools that affirm female resilience and survival. Similarly, Pratheeba and Vasuki's (2022) analysis of Difficult Daughters shows that small, daily acts, such as attending school or choosing one's attire, can serve as sites of resistance in patriarchal societies. Bulawayo's narrative reflects these insights by framing storytelling and bodily defiance not as trivial moments but as transformative acts that reclaim women's physical and symbolic space within society. Silence and non-participation emerge as particularly nuanced strategies of resistance. Chipo's trauma-induced silence represents more than a psychological symptom; it aligns with Strobel's (2010) assertion that silence can serve as both a marker of oppression and a deliberate, resistant choice. The narrator's refusal to close her eyes during prayer or to correct her misgendering by an older male figure likewise exemplifies this double function of silence, both as imposed and reclaimed. These moments illustrate how FCDA helps uncover discursive power structures embedded in non-verbal acts, challenging the assumption that agency

must always be vocal or confrontational. Instead, silence and observation, as shown in these scenes, become deliberate forms of embodied defiance.

Resistance through language is another powerful motif. The accusatory line, "*Can't you read? You brought English to this country*," turns the colonial legacy of English language imposition into a moment of subversion. Smith (2019) and Chandra (2021) both explored similar tactics in South Asian fiction, highlighting how women challenge imperial structures by reclaiming or rejecting colonial linguistic authority. Bulawayo adapts this device within a Zimbabwean context, where the recolonization of voice is turned back on its author, unsettling both racial and patriarchal hierarchies. This moment exemplifies how discourse can be transformed from an instrument of control into a weapon of resistance. The emotional and physical outcry of Nomviyo as she discovers the destruction of her home, screaming "*My son, my son*!" becomes a visceral articulation of maternal grief. Nartey (2024) and Amalia and Hartono (2023) have examined similar moments in contemporary digital and literary texts in which women's emotional expressions serve as public and political dissent. In Bulawayo's narrative, Nomviyo's scream transcends personal pain to become a form of collective defiance against systemic oppression, both patriarchal and state-enforced. This expands the spectrum of resistance by demonstrating how vulnerability and grief are not signs of weakness but forms of embodied resistance. The moral negotiation among the group of children, particularly Sbho's rejection of violent behavior and her assertion, "*we are not that kind of people*," helps us understand how ethical resistance is embedded even among the youngest members of society. Sbho's stance reinforces a gendered moral agency and reflects her refusal to internalize the violence that surrounds them. This complements Pratheeba and Vasuki's (2022) findings, which emphasize that women's moral consciousness is often expressed through everyday decisions that challenge normalized systems of harm and patriarchal complicity.

In a subsequent scene, Sbho again asserts her voice with unexpected force, challenging Bastard's racialized remark about white people. Her sharp retort not only disrupts the group's social order but also reframes the conversation around human dignity and empathy. Her resistance mirrors Chandra's (2021) emphasis on the subversion of inherited racial hierarchies and patriarchal privilege. Sbho's dialogue illustrates how language can challenge entrenched systems of power, even when uttered from a marginalized position. The disruption of Bastard's authority and the narrator's astonishment at Sbho's transformation reveal the performative strength of language in reconfiguring power dynamics. Together, these textual instances demonstrate that female agency in *We Need New Names* is constructed not through grand gestures but through fractured speech, intergenerational memory, silent observation, vocal resistance, and hybrid identity work. Each strategy reflects how women negotiate marginalization, transforming constraints into opportunities for self-assertion. By synthesizing FCDA with the Third Space framework, this research offers a layered understanding of how female characters resist, redefine, and reclaim identity across postcolonial and diasporic spaces. This study contributes to the existing body of research by bridging thematic gaps left in prior research. While Bari (2014), De Costa (2022), Al-Doory and Ali (2023), and Pratheeba and Vasuki (2022) examine women's resistance in various socio-political contexts, few studies bring together discourse analysis and cultural hybridity to explore resistance in Zimbabwean diasporic literature. Strobel (2010), Smith (2019), and Chandra (2021) offer important insights on silence and linguistic defiance, but do not fully engage with how these strategies intersect with diasporic identity formation. This study thus fills a critical gap by demonstrating how women's agency is not only constructed through speech or silence but also through the negotiation of cultural codes, generational memory, and moral autonomy in the liminal spaces shaped by migration, colonial legacies, and gendered hierarchies.

These findings extend beyond literature analysis to reveal broader systems of migration governance and spatial inequality shaping diasporic identities. In this novel, the author reveals the enduring legacy of colonialism, which continues to shape modern migration flows, affiliations, and the marginalization of women. Through an analysis of women's agencies from a transnational and spatial perspective, the author shows how gender, migration, and postcolonial politics intersect.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that women's marginalization and agency in *We Need New Names* emerge from various approaches employed by female characters, including interrupted utterances, the formation of hybrid identity, storytelling, embodiment, silence, and vocal opposition to authority. Such approaches allow one to consider the process of overcoming postcolonial and patriarchal limitations imposed on women. From the perspective of FCDA, this process reveals subtle mechanisms of gender power, and Third Space theory by Homi K. Bhabha enables analysis of how people living in diasporic circumstances form their identities.

It should be noted that this analysis relies heavily on the interpretation of selected excerpts; therefore, it does not cover the entire novel, and the conclusions drawn from this paper do not reflect the complexity of the female experience in *We Need New Names*. Furthermore, the use of FCDA and Third Space theories leads the researcher to focus on language and hybrid identity without considering social stratification, age, and other factors. In the future, it would be helpful to adopt an intersectional feminist framework and conduct a comprehensive text-wide analysis to trace the evolution of the strategies of resistance under analysis.

It is also worth noting that this analysis contributes to debates on transnational migration, spatiality, and decolonization by shedding light on how agency emerges among marginalized women. By applying FCDA and Third Space theory, the researcher examines the relationships among language, culture, space, and power, enabling an analysis of how women overcome oppression. Thus, literary analysis makes a significant contribution to postcolonial feminist scholarship by allowing the consideration of migration, colonial heritage, and spatial marginalization from multiple perspectives.

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