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**Violence, and methodology of Resistance in Adichie's
Americanah (2013) and Bulawayo's We Need New Names
(2013)**

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Dedication

To my beloved mother Talbi fazia, my father Brahim, my sister Hanane and my unique little brother Djamel to my cousin Souad Acil and my dear friends Lynda Chetouani, Manissa Boudjabout, Sihem Boussad, and Belaid NAIT ALI.

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Abstract

This research undertakes a critical examination of the representation of violence and resistance in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). It argues that both novels expose the different forms of cultural and direct violence, particularly as experienced by Black female characters, and that these narratives serve as sites of resistance against patriarchal and institutional oppression. The study is conducted by relying on the dual theoretical lenses of Johan Galtung's "violence triangle" (1969) and Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) to explore how cultural and direct violence intersect and operate across both novels underlining the sexual and patriarchal violence faced by black female characters. Galtung's theory provides a framework for identifying the multiple layers of harm ranging from visible brutality to internalized narratives that shape the protagonists' lives in both *Americanah* (2013) and *We Need New names* (2013). Complementing this, Sandoval's theory foregrounds the subversive strategies deployed by the oppressed, particularly through differential consciousness, enabling characters to navigate and resist the dominant power structures. The study reveals how Black female characters endure sexual and patriarchal violence that is legitimized through institutional structures, cultural norms, and everyday experiences. By analyzing these mechanisms, the research highlights how literature not only portrays but actively critiques the systemic forces shaping postcolonial and diasporic identities.

Key words: Violence, Resistance, Galtung, Oppression, Consciousness, Gender, Patriarchy

I. General introduction

In recent decades, studies and analysis about African literature and the African diaspora has grown significantly, reflecting the African lives in the western world particularly the United States of America. Literature has become a vital space for critiquing displacement, racialization, resistance, and the search for belonging. These themes emerge as central in the context of migration, globalization, and the postcolonial challenges faced by those who leave the mother continent Africa in pursuit of better opportunities.

African literature is an ocean that reflects the cultural, linguistic and all the complexities of the continent from the era of colonialism to the corrupted system after the liberation, without forgetting the patriarchal societies and the social discrimination and structural violence. Many authors discussed those themes and voiced people under the shadow to illustrate real lives and denounce major issues such as racism, slavery and identity loss. Among the well know authors we find Chinua Achebe, Ngugi waThiang'o, and many others. They played a key role in shaping African literature by challenging colonial stories and sharing African ways of thinking through their fiction and essays.

Authors such as Ama Ata Aidoo, and Wole Soyinka continued this work by exploring topics like gender, exile, and political control after independence. Today, authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Mariama Bâ, and Teju Cole have taken African literature even further. They write about migration, racism, mixed cultural identities, and systematic violence. Their works do not only reflect social realities but use literature as a political tool, capable of dethroning dominant ideologies and proposing alternative visions of belonging and resistance.

In this context, the focus goes to two prominent authors in contemporary African diaspora literature who are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo. Through their

works, both authors explore how Black Africans experience racism, violence, identity loss, dislocation and psychological oppression in Western countries. Our study will mainly focus on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We need New Names* (2013). The two novels reflect the emotional and mental struggle and how characters resist while living in societies that often reject or misunderstand their blackness. Central to both narratives is the portrayal of direct and structural violence, including racial discrimination, systemic oppression, and patriarchal dominance, all of which shape the identities and resistance strategies of the protagonists. The two novels serve as a valuable tool for the study, that allows to explore deeply issues of identity, violence and resistance from multiple angles and perspectives.

The review of the literature

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* published in 2013 and was praised around the world for how honestly and clearly she talks about race, migration, and identity. Adichie based much of the story on her own life, as she spent time living in both Nigeria and the United States. Her personal experiences helped shape the story and the characters in a very real and powerful way. Maureen Corrigan, a book critic for NPR's *Fresh Air podcast* said: 'Americanah is a sweeping story that derives its power as much from Adichie's witty and fluid writing style as it does from keen social commentary.' (2013).

Mark O. Ighile and Charity Oghogho Oseghale studied *Americanah* in an article entitled "Mimicry, Rebellion and Subversion of western beliefs in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" (2020) and argue that navigating various cultural forms, such as language barriers is a major problem of immigrants in a host country. The paper also investigates the use of rebellion and mimicry by immigrants as survival tactics. They concluded with the idea that immigrants can effectively or somehow challenge prevailing western values and assumption

through imitation and outright rebellion.

In Abdullah Nejat Tongurin's dissertation entitled *Affectations, Conformation and Defiance in Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*,(2020) aimed to demonstrate how the characters, with their affections and aspiration encounter the social and the cultural conventions of a foreign land. The article also examines Ifemelu's developing racial and gender consciousness.

One more, in Eric Kipoech Mutai's article "Rethinking Globalisation through Afropolitanism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah", pointed to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by African diaspora in America. He referred to the ambiguous sense of identity and the necessity of investigating how the contemporary African diaspora deals with racism's dehumanising aspects. As a result, the study underscores Afropolitanism as a critical lens through which diasporic individuals negotiate belonging, resist marginalization, and reframe their cultural identities within globalized spaces.

As far as Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* is concerned, Leyla Sansai in her interview with *The Independent*, stated that Bulawayo succeeded to masterfully narrate a 'story of a traumatized nation without being unremittingly bleak ... 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.'" (2013). Leyla Sansai continued that Bulawayo succeeds to show harsh realities like poverty and governmental corruption in a joyful way through a child's eyes. The authors added sparkles of innocence in a world full for misery and aggression.

Margaret Wairau Waweru and Dr Peter Muhoro Mwangi wrote an article entitled "Names That Symbolically Relate to Post-Colonial African Societies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*". Their study is guided by post-colonial theory in which they studied and analysed certain names of characters and places in the novel as a representation of Zimbabwe

after independence by applying the postcolonial theory of Frantz Fanon developed in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Their analysis demonstrates how naming becomes a literary arm through which Bulawayo critiques the impact of neocolonialism, the deterioration of the political system and the social structure in Zimbabwe.

Shruti Haryana wrote “Identity and Language in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*” (2021) in which she seeks to comprehend the linguistic dynamics and the decision made by the immigrant community to overcome their status as oppressed and silent subjects in order to convey their experiences. She also seeks to comprehend the formation of hybridity and the issue of transnational identity.

In another study by Somia Ayaicha, Manimangai Mani, Hardev Kaur, and Mohamed Ewan Bin Awang entitled as *The Process of Becoming Black in No violet Bulawayo’s We Need New Names* (2021) in which they examined the evolving of Darling’s racial identity in the American environment. They relied on the theory of *Social Identity Theory* developed first by Henri Tajfel in 1970 and William Cross’s *Nigrescence Theory* (1971). They combined the two to explain how racial discrimination in the U.S. provoke her awareness of “Blackness” as a socially constructed identity shaped by exclusion and survival. This adds a psychological lens to the novel’s treatment of diasporic identity.

Issue and working Hypothesis

The scholarly works discussed above have examined *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* through various lenses, addressing key themes such as racism, mimicry, linguistic hybridity, diasporic identity, and the psychological formation of Blackness. These studies collectively highlight how characters navigate cultural displacement, resist Western norms. However, many of these interpretations do not rely on a clear critical theory. For this reason, I aim to analyse the novels using violence theory by Johan Galtung and Chela Sandoval’s theory

of resistance, precisely, the concept differential consciousness to offer a more structured and theoretical perspective. Although both concepts have been explored by different scholars in diverse ways, and the novels have received considerable attention, there is still room to apply these theories more directly and critically.

To my best knowledge, no study had gathered the two different theories in a one work. In the studies mentioned above, authors focused on the study of each novel apart. They have referred to the stories as a whole depicting of realities from being in the mother land to travelling across the world and being a black immigrant. My goal is to conduct a comparative analysis which will approach the issue of violence under its different forms and its impact on the characters. Although Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo originated from two different African countries and origins, they share the same heritage rooted in their black skin and identity. Their time in the United States provoked their awareness of racial and cultural displacement which inspired them to express it through fiction.

The study will centre on the female characters of the two novels Ifemelu, Darling, Chipso and Fostalina, who exemplify blacks' suffering, violence and identity uneasiness in America and in the mother land. I will then study the different forms of resistance in the two novels. To sum up, my work will analyse the psychological oppression of the above-mentioned women that led to oppositional consciousness.

Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, I started with a general introduction that presented the whole dissertation topic. The result section is divided into two main chapters, the first chapter will focus on the application of a theory introduced by Johan Galtung which is the Theory of Violence and its different forms including direct, structural and cultural violence on the two novels. The aim of the paired theories is to examine how violence oppressed the characters'

mindset and psychological state. In the second chapter, I will analyse the concept developed by Chela Sandoval of differential and oppositional consciousness and its forms including the equal right form, the revolutionary form, the Supremacist form and The Separatist Form. These concepts shall be explained by referencing to the novels. For the conclusion, will state a result for the whole work as a recapitulation.

II. Methods and Materials

A. Methods

For the purpose of reaching my goal, I have to appeal to two critical concepts that would allow me to approach Adiche's *Americanah* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* through the notions of violence and resistance. Referring to Johan Galtung's conflict theory, particularly his concepts of direct, structural and cultural violence, I explore how both novels reveal the hidden structural mechanisms of inequalities in the postcolonial and diasporic settings. To have a well-structured study, I would link Galtung's violence conflict to Chella Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness to analyze how female characters like Ifemelu and Darling and other female characters in the novel navigate and resist intersecting systems of oppression like race, class and gender.

1. Johan Galtung's Violence Conflicts

Johan Galtung a peace Norwegian political scientist, research scholar and sociologist made a foundational contribution to the comprehension of violence by introducing his peace researches. In his Journal presented first in Oslo *Violence, Peace, and Peace research: International Peace Research Institute*, he stated: "What we intend is only that the term on peace of 'peace' and 'violence' be linked to each other such that peace can be regarded as 'absence of violence'". 1968. p. 168). According to Galtung, violence is present when peace is absent. To

develop more the definition of violence, he explained in a *Journal of Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, “violence is present when human beings is being influenced so that their actual somatic and real realisations are below their potential realisations.” (Galtung, 1969, p. 168). According to this definition, violence appears when a person is prevented from reaching what he could really become physically, mentally, or socially, because the way he is treated is limited by his environment. The idea is seen problematic because it is hard to define one’s potential, it relies on a subjective notion of human potential, which is difficult to measure. However, this idea could represent the hidden that blocks people from living fully. Johan resumed this with the expression ‘actual’ and ‘potential’, so violence is about what could have been and what it is. To get closer to the definition of violence, the sociologist shaped types of violence in a conflict triangle to better understand it. The three form of violence are direct, structural and cultural or symbolic violence.

In his co-authored work with Dietrich Fischer entitled *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research* (2013), he broadened his definition of violence to include any avoidable insult to basic human needs or sentient life, whether *physical, emotional, or institutional*. These three forms of violence are deeply interrelated and illustrated in his well-known ‘violence triangle’ where structural and cultural violence often serve as the hidden roots of visible direct violence. Because direct violence often stems from long-standing cultural norms and systemic inequities, it cannot stand alone. According to Galtung, these forms of violence tend to reinforce one another, creating a cycle that is resistant to change.

1.1 Direct Violence

Direct violence is the use of physical or mental force to harm others. It can take various forms such as murder, torture, rape, beatings, and verbal insults. Such violence can cause harm to the victim's body and mind (Galtung, 1971). Threats of violence are also considered violent

as they deprive individuals of the ability to live with dignity and reduce their satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Violence can be committed directly against people and this can be seen in actions such as intentional injury, killing, sexual abuse, and assault (Galtung, 1990).

Direct violence is defined as ‘intentional, directed against a specific group or person and involves hurting or killing people, but it also includes verbal violence.’ (Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 11). According to Galtung (1969), physical violence results in bodily harm to individuals, with the most extreme case being murder. The use of force, including stabbing, grabbing, kicking, biting, and hitting, as well as the use of weapons such as knives and firearms, are all examples of physical violence. Direct violence can manifest as psychological violence and influence individuals’ mental health.

According to Galtung (1969), psychological violence is violence against the soul and can include lying, brainwashing, and threats to diminish mental potential. Verbal abuse, such as yelling, name-calling, and blaming, can also be a form of psychological violence. Psychological or emotional harassment may involve humiliating the victim, controlling their actions, isolating them from loved ones, or withholding information (Galtung, 1969). The deprivation of valuable items from an individual or group can also be a form of psychological violence that affects mental and emotional health, causing low self-esteem, destructive behaviour, withdrawing from society, and even suicidal tendencies (Galtung, 1969).

In direct violence, we also find sexual violence which refers to any act in which one person uses language or actions to manipulate or control another person into engaging in an unwanted sexual activity. This can include forcing or inducing someone to engage in sexual activity without their consent (Galtung, 1969). Sexual violence can occur across all age groups, including children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. According to Galtung (1969), sexual violence also includes acts that degrade, insult, attack, or use force against someone's body in relation to sexual desire without their consent. In his work, Galtung highlights gender-based

violence, with rape, sexual assault, and intimidation as examples of direct violence. He notes that women are often victims of direct and personal violence in both public and private spheres (Galtung, 1996).

1.2. Structural Violence

This type of violence is similar to social injustice and the structures that promote this social injustice. It is a rather invisible force that is formed by the structures that prevent the satisfaction of basic needs. It usually expresses itself indirectly and has no directly visible cause. Structural violence is insidious because it lacks identifiable perpetrators and is normalized through everyday practices and arrangements.

Structural violence operates through key mechanisms such as *penetration*, where dominant groups impose their influence over subordinates. Segmentation restricts access to knowledge and fosters partial awareness among the oppressed. *Marginalization* on the other side excludes vulnerable populations from full participation in society. Finally, fragmentation divides disadvantaged groups and prevents unified resistance. These mechanisms are not merely abstract concepts, they represent concrete forms of systemic oppression that obstruct access to basic human needs, including survival, well-being, identity, and freedom.

Galtung (1990, 1996) further underscores that structural violence is often maintained through exploitation. To be more explicit, disparities in power and resource distribution allow dominant actors to benefit at the expense of the subordinated. This inequality may occur in interpersonal relations, institutional frameworks, or global economic interactions. Importantly, Galtung notes that structural violence can persist without producing immediate physical harm.

1.3. Cultural violence

Galtung defines *cultural violence* as the symbolic mechanisms such as ideology, religion, language, and art that legitimize or normalize both direct and structural violence.

Galtung (1990) added the concept of 'cultural violence' which he defined as 'the intellectual justification for direct and structural violence through nationalism, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and prejudice in education, the media, literature, films, the arts, street names'(Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 11). Cultural violence refers those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.

Unlike physical harm or systemic injustice, cultural violence is subtle, often masked as tradition, or necessity. As Galtung explains, elements of culture are not inherently violent; rather, their use in justifying oppression is what renders them violent. He exemplified in his article that a violent message conveyed in English reflects that it is the speaker's intent, not the language itself that is violent. When such cultural norms are internalized, people may unconsciously accept or defend acts of harm. Galtung also notes that cultural violence can undermine identity and belonging, particularly when associated with ethnicity, religion, or ideology. Ultimately, it sustains and reinforces the other forms of violence within his theoretical triangle.

2. Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*

In order to deal with the issue of Oppression and Resistance in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), we will rely on the theory of "Oppositional Consciousness" discussed in a theoretical book entitled *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). The book is written by Chela Sandoval who is an associate Professor of critical and cultural theory and Chicano studies and an essential figure in third world feminism.

Methodology of the Oppressed (2000) is a contemporary guide in third world feminism, cultural, gender and ethnic studies. In her book, Sandoval recovers and implements methods of

resistance developed by subjugated people under colonial rules, slavery and Oppression. She combines these methods with the contemporary perspective of U.S feminists of colour. The concept of Oppositional Consciousness, first coined by Chela Sandoval's book is a response to the issue of race, genders, or class consciousness to face patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. Oppositional consciousness describes the mindset and behaviors of individuals within oppressed groups who actively challenge and resist systems of domination and inequality.

Sandoval developed a concept called “differential consciousness” that refers to a mode of oppositional consciousness that allows individuals to navigate and resist various forms of oppression by shifting between different ideological positions. She describes differential consciousness as a sort of ‘ideology-proxies’ that is particularly relevant to experiences of the U.S third Feminism. This sort of consciousness enables individuals to adopt their strategies and tactics depending on the context. It involves a fluidity that moves beyond binary categories of identity, allowing for a more nuances and dynamic approach to resistance. Here are the four types of oppositional consciousness according to the book:

2.1 The Equal-Rights Form

In her book, Sandoval mentioned that

the members of the subordinated group argue that the differences for which they have been assigned inferior status lay in appearance only, not in reality. These oppositional actors argue for civil rights based on the philosophy that all humans are created equally. The equal-rights mode of consciousness seeks duplication; politically, it seeks integration; physically, it seeks assimilation”. (Sandoval, 2013, p. 55).

The equal right form of consciousness in opposition serves for marginalized groups to achieve equal representation and visibility ‘aesthetically’ full participation in political and social systems. In addition, it boosts their acceptance and regulation within the dominant culture.

2.2 The Revolutionary Form

This form is a mode of Oppositional Consciousness, according to Sandoval “it identifies, legitimizes, claims, and intensifies its differences in both form and content” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 55). Practitioners of the revolutionary form believe that the assimilation of such myriad and acute differences is not possible within the confines of the present social order. Instead, they reason, the only way that society can affirm value and legitimate these differences will be if the categories by which the dominant is ordered are fundamentally restructured. In other words, the revolutionary form has the purpose to give more focus on the differences to get through a radical change and to get a social order.

2.3 The Supremacist Form

Sandoval states that ‘Supremacism ‘means the oppressed do not only claim their differences, but they also assert that their differences have provided them access to a higher revolutionary level than that attained by those who hold social power. The precept above guides any subordinated group that argues for its superiority over the dominant from cultural and radical forms of feminism to ‘nationalism’ of every radical, ethnic, gender, sex, class, religious, or loyalty type. Sandoval, C. (2013). *Methodology of the oppressed*

2.4 The Separatist Form

Chela Sandoval argues that for the Separatist Form, which is the final tactic of resistance, Practitioners of separatism recognize that their differences are branded as inferior with respect to the category of the most human. Under this fourth mode of agency, however, the subordinated do not desire an ‘equal-rights’ type of integration with the dominant order. Neither do they seek its ‘revolutionary’ transformation, nor do they stake a supremacist position

in relation to any other group. This form of Political resistance is organized, rather, to protect and nurture the differences that define its practitioners through their complete separation from the dominant social group. Sandoval, C. (2013). *Methodology of the oppressed*

B. Materials

A. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Biography

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, poet and essayist born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977. Adichie grew up in the campus of the University of Nsukka where her father was a professor. Adichie studied medicine for a year at Nsukka University but then left to the United States and decided to choose a different path at the age of 19. Adichie earned a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from John Hopkins University, Master of Arts Degree in African History from Yale University. She was also held prestigious fellowships at Princeton University (2005-2006), and Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University (2011-2012) in addition to honorary doctorate degrees from various Universities. (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)

Adichie's writings vary from novels to short stories to books, and the plot in her writings is mostly about postcolonial feminist literature and Nigerian civil war. Her novels have been translated into over thirty languages. Her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), won the Commonwealth writer's Prize for Best First Book and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award . Her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) received the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2007. *Americanah* (2013), her third novel, was highly evaluated and won the U.S National Book Critics Circle Award and was named one of the *New York Times* Top Ten Best Books of the Year. Adichie is not confined only to novels, beyond fiction she is also an active speaker on TED Platform known for her influential talks such as "The Danger of a Single Story" and "We Should All Be Feminists." (TED, n.d.)

Her acclaimed novel *Americanah* (2013) draws heavily from her own migration story.

Adichie explores how national identity, language, gender, and race intersect in everyday life in black American immigrants. She expresses by her narratives the internal and external struggles of individuals navigating systems of inequality while holding on to personal agency, memory, and cultural pride. Adichie's unique voice blends subtle critique with powerful storytelling, offering insight into what it means to live between worlds, and how individuals adapt, resist, and redefine themselves in the face of displacement and difference. Adichie reports realities in a strong and thoughtful way. She helps readers understand what it feels like to live between two places and how people change, stand up for themselves, and find new ways to see who they are when they face big life challenges. (Adichie, n.d.; TED, n.d.)

B. Summary of *Americanah* (2013)

Americanah, written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, follows the life of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who emigrates to the United States in search of higher education and better opportunities. The novel explores the tensions and transformations Ifemelu undergoes as she grapples with racism, gender discrimination, and feelings of dislocation in the United States. Upon arriving, she realizes that race operates as a fundamental marker of identity and belonging, reshaping the lens through which she understands herself and others. In the novel, she declared 'I came from a country where race was not an issue; I didn't think of myself as Black until I came to America' (Adichie, 2013, p. 290). Through relationships and encounters across different spaces, Ifemelu grapples with systemic discrimination while finding ways to assert herself. In doing so, she redefines belonging and embraces resistance as a vital means of self-reclamation.

C. NoViolet Bulawayo's biography

Elizabeth Zandile Thile in 1981 in Tsholotsho was born in Zimbabwe just a year after

her county's independence from British colonial rule. She grew up in Ndebele, which is the second largest city in Zimbabwe. When she was eighteen, she moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan. She chooses the name of NoViolet Bulawayo as a pen name, which reflects a deep connection to personal memory and national geography. "NoViolet" honors her late mother, combining "No" (a common prefix meaning "with" in Ndebele) and "Violet," her mother's name, while "Bulawayo" refers to the city in Zimbabwe where she was born and raised, anchoring her identity in both familial loss and cultural belonging. Bulawayo earned her MFA at Cornell University, where she completed her Master in Fine Arts in Creative writing and also awarded a Truman Capote Fellowship. Bulawayo won the *Caine Prize* for African Writing in 2011 for her short story *Hitting Budapest* which was originally published in *The Boston Review*. (Bulawayo, 2010)

NoViolet Bulawayo had a *Walles Stegner Fellowship* at Stanford University in California 2012-2014, where she now teaches as a Jones Lecturer in Fiction. Bulawayo's concern in writing is mostly about Africa in general and about her country Zimbabwe in particular. She writes about politics, immigration, diseases and many other circumstances that Zimbabwe suffers from. *We Need New Names* (2013) is Bulawayo's debut novel that made her known after its release. The novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013 and had a remarkable acceptance. In 2022 Bulawayo second novel entitled *Glory* was released, inspired by George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* and reimagines Zimbabwe's political landscape through an allegorical lens. Bulawayo's work resonates deeply with readers navigating questions of identity, loss, and transformation in a globalized world. Her ability to portray both the beauty and brutality of migration makes her a vital voice in contemporary literature. (Bulawayo, 2022)

D. Summary of *We Need New Names* (2013)

We Need New Names, by NoViolet Bulawayo, captures the struggles of a ten-year-old girl named Darling and her friends in a Zimbabwe ravaged by economic collapse, political aggression, and social decay. The novel captures moments of brutal violence and vulnerability, highlighting the precarious lives of children growing up amid poverty and trauma. As Darling later migrates to the United States, she grapples with dislocation and belonging, finding herself caught between the trauma of her homeland and the alienation of a new one. ‘We didn’t come to America for the American dream; we came because of the long dry spell’ (Bulawayo, 2013, p.93). Yet, amid moments of aggression and displacement, Darling finds ways to assert belonging anew. The novel exposes both the wounds of systemic aggression and the quiet resilience that emerges in moments of vulnerability, making it a profound lens through which to understand postcolonial African identities and their resistance across borders.

III. Results

Through my dissertation, I attempt to compare two novels of two well-known writers from the new generation in the African literature. The two novels are *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *We Need New Names* from the same year by NoViolet Bulawayo. My comparative study spots the light on violence and the way black female characters in the two novels resist. To reach the purpose of my dissertation, I have relied on two different theories. The first is Johan Galtung's *Conflict Triangle* as developed in his researches on *Peace Journals* published in 1969 and 1990 and book *Pioneer of Peace Research* (2013). The second theory is Chela Sandoval's *Differential Consciousness* developed in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) and to its four forms that are *the equal-right form, the revolutionary form, the supremacist form* and *the separatist form*.

The results of my analysis demonstrate similarities between the two novels. The findings demonstrate that black female characters endured the different forms of violence and harm as expressed in Johan Galtung's theory of violence in their native country exacerbated by the patriarchal society and the political injustice. The results also show that both novels portray the ways female characters, particularly Ifemelu and Darling navigate institutional racism, migration policies, economic disparities, and exclusionary cultural norms, which collectively prevent them from realizing their full potential in America.

Relying on Sandoval's theory of oppositional consciousness, the second chapter reveals how oppressed characters try to resist while being in the heart of a within a postcolonial, patriarchal society that tries to erase their existence. The chapter also reveals the characters' shifting responses to oppression such as adaptation, silence, memories and self-reinvention by raising their voices and recognizing their own worth. This part explores how the protagonists tactically navigate systems of power and assert agency across cultural, national, and gendered boundaries. The dual framework permit the understanding of how both novels interrogate

domination while focusing on strategies of survival, resilience, and transformation in the diasporic experience.

IV. Discussion

Chapter I: Mapping violence in *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*

Black people, especially female characters, are frequently exposed to complex forms of violence that influence their psychology and their state of mind. According to Galtung's peace and conflict theory, violence operates on three interrelated levels direct, structural, and cultural violence making it a pervasive force that affects not only the body but also the mind and the social fabric of communities (Galtung, 1990). In *Americanah*, Adichie exposes how these forms of violence intertwine to shape the lived experience of African immigrants in the United States. Studies by the American Psychological Association have shown that Black women in the U.S face disproportionately high rates of stress and trauma due to systemic racism and healthcare inequities Cole, A. B., & Watson, N. N. (2023). *Bulawayo* portrays the emotional and physical displacement of Zimbabwean youth against the backdrop of political repression and economic collapse, conditions that mirror the lived realities of many Zimbabweans who fled the country during the Mugabe era. Chigora, P., & Guzura, T. (2021).

In this chapter, the focus is on Ifemelu and Auntie Uju, two female characters in *Americanah* who struggles with violence and racism in everyday encounters in classrooms, workplaces, and casual daily life. As for *We Need New Names*, Violence under its three levels is visible and seen across the female characters Darling, Chipso and Frostalina. Direct, structural and cultural violence glued to Darling from her childhood until her adolescence in America. Both novels examine the theme of violence as a common suffering lived by the black female characters started from their own roots going to the others side of the world.

1. Direct violence

Ifemelu, the main character of *Americanah*, faces harsh judgment and disdain manifested as direct violence and attacks through words during her relationship with Curt, her white

boyfriend. The prejudices she encounters are especially apparent within Curt's own family circle, where she is viewed with scepticism and disrespect. In one scene, Morgan, a white girl and a member of Curt's family, openly expresses her disgust upon learning about her uncle's relationship with Ifemelu. She wanted to know whether they were dating. When Curt told her that they were a couple, the little girl expressed her dissatisfaction saying 'that's disgusting ... looking genuinely disgusted ... turned and stalked off upstairs' (Adichie, 2017, p. 194).

Morgan's interaction captures a form of verbal aggression rooted in racism and exclusion, aligning closely with Galtung's theory of direct and cultural violence. According to him, such moments of verbal aggression reflect deeper systemic and cultural structures that legitimize discrimination and justify the dehumanization of the 'other' (Galtung, 1990). In this scene, the overt verbal attack becomes more than an isolated insult, it is a reflection of the racism embedded in a wider social and cultural context, highlighting how intimate spaces can perpetuate discrimination and deepen psychological trauma.

Verbal violence encompasses the use of language or words to harm, demean, or degrade someone emotionally or psychologically (Teicher et al., 2006). Morgan's behavior exemplifies this type of violence. When Morgan responds to Curt's confirmation of Ifemelu being his girlfriend with the statement, "That's disgusting," engages in verbal violence, which constitutes psychological oppression. Her use of derogatory language and expression of genuine disgust directly attacks and belittles Ifemelu and her relationship with Curt. Morgan's comment reflects a clear intention to demean and devalue Ifemelu as a person.

In another incident, Ifemelu faced mental oppression by Elina, her white roommate. This can be seen in the following quotation:

Your dog just ate my bacon," she told Elena, who was slicing a banana at the other end of the kitchen, the pieces falling into her cereal bowl. "You just hate my dog." "You should train him better. He shouldn't eat people's food from the kitchen table." "You better not kill my dog with voodoo." "What? (p.153).

Here, the direct attack of Elena on Ifemelu can be observed while Elena's dog ate Ifemelu's bacon. Initially, Ifemelu confronts Elena about her dog eating the bacon. While this can be seen as a valid complaint, the conversation quickly escalates into a series of accusatory and offensive statements which are in reality superficial because it was just a pretext to attack the black roommate. Elena responds to Ifemelu's complaint by saying, "You just hate my dog," implying a negative motive on Ifemelu's part.

Elena's statement can be viewed as a form of verbal attack as it abuses Ifemelu mentally. Ifemelu then responds by suggesting that Elena should train her dog better to prevent it from eating food off the kitchen table. However, Elena's subsequent comment, "You better not kill my dog with voodoo," (Adichie, 2017, p. 152) introduces an element of racial and cultural insensitivity. This statement can be considered verbally violent as it mocks Ifemelu's cultural beliefs and perpetuates stereotypes.

Ifemelu's reaction of disbelief, expressed with "What?" indicates her surprise and potential hurt caused by Elena's offensive comment. Ifemelu's response reflects her genuine shock at Elena's hurtful statement. This argument occurred during a period when Ifemelu was psychologically unstable. This is shown in the novel when it is stated that "Ifemelu had wanted to slap her dissolute room-mate not because a slobbering dog had eaten her bacon but because she was at war with world, and woke up each day feeling bruised, imagining a horde of faceless people who were all against her" (Adichie, 2017, p.152).

Verbal violence can harm relationships, create hostile environments, and perpetuate negative stereotypes. The following quotation shows how harmful words deeply affected Ifemelu:

One day, at the farmers market, as she stood hand in hand with Curt in front of a tray of apples, a black man walked past and muttered, "You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?" She stopped, unsure for a moment whether she had imagined those words, and then she looked back at the man. He walked with too much rhythm in his step, which suggested to her a certain fickleness

of character. A man not worth paying any attention to. Yet his words bothered her, pried open the door for new doubts (p.212).

When Ifemelu and her white boyfriend Curt were at the farmers market, a black man suddenly voiced a hateful remark towards her. This situation can be analysed as an example of psychological violence in the form of “racial microaggressions” (Sue et al., 2007), which are subtle forms of discrimination that can have significant psychological impacts on individuals.

The black man's comment towards Ifemelu suggests that her partner may have a fetish for her “jungle” appearance. This demonstrates an example of micro aggression that can make individuals feel devalued, stereotyped, and disrespected. Ifemelu's response to the comment shows how such incidents can be particularly insidious, as they can be difficult to address or even recognize when they occur. She initially questions whether she imagined the comment, which suggests that the insidiousness of microaggressions can make it hard to distinguish between reality and imagined discrimination. Ifemelu's reaction to the incident shows how such comments can affect a person's self-esteem and sense of worth.

Even though Ifemelu knows the man is not worth her attention, his words still turns in her mind and opened the way for doubt, making her question what she had once believed. This highlights how psychological violence can lead to self-doubt and insecurity. The above incident also illustrates the harmful effects of microaggressions on emotional and psychological well-being and emphasizes the need to recognize and address subtle forms of discrimination as they can have a cumulative impact on individuals' mental health. This incident also raises questions about the complexities of verbal violence within marginalized communities. This case, the black man uses direct violence with words towards Ifemelu, it highlights how power and oppression can exist even between people who face similar struggles.

Direct violence is not always expressed through words or direct harm but can be gestural and behavioural. Non-verbal violence is a form of psychological aggression that manifests itself

through behavior, gestures, or attitudes (Galtung, 1990). In Adichie's *Americanah*, instances of such non-verbal aggression are evident in moments of discrimination, microaggressions, and demeaning behavior directed at the Black female protagonist, Ifemelu.

An example of non-verbal violence occurs when Curt, her white boyfriend, makes remarks that implicitly diminish the significance of racism and its impact, underscoring how deeply these gestures and silences can affect Ifemelu's sense of belonging and identity :

This is my girlfriend, Ifemelu," they looked at her with surprise, a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and in their expressions was the question "Why her?" It amused Ifemelu. She had seen that look before, on the faces of white women, strangers on the street, who would see her hand clasped in Curt's and instantly cloud their faces with that look. The look of people confronting a great tribal loss. It was not merely, because Curt was white, it was the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money (p.293).

Curt brings Ifemelu to the wedding of his cousin, Ashleigh. There, they met a group of Ashleigh's white female acquaintance. When Curt introduces Ifemelu as his girlfriend to them, they react with surprise, as depicted by their expressions. Some of them attempt to hide their surprise, while others openly display it. This behaviour can be considered a form of non-verbal violence as it subtly demeans Ifemelu and questions her presence and being among Curt's surrounding.

Ifemelu recognizes the familiar expression on their faces, which she describes as a 'great tribal loss.' This non-verbal expression conveys the discomfort and unease experienced by the white women when confronted with a relationship between Ifemelu, a black woman, and Curt, a white man. The non-verbal violence lies in their implicit judgment, stemming from racial biases and societal expectations. The description of Curt's attributes, such as his 'untamed golden hair, 'handsome face' 'athlete's body,' and the 'smell of money' adds another layer to the non-verbal violence. It suggests that the surprise and judgment from the white women

extend beyond race and include factors like social status and physical appearance.

Non- verbal reactions contribute to an environment of marginalization and discomfort for Ifemelu that provoked a psychological oppression. The subtle expressions and unspoken disapproval perpetuate racial and societal divisions, reinforcing discriminatory norms and biases. The following quotation shows another example of nonverbal violence:

When the strawberry-haired owner of the bed-and-breakfast in Montreal refused to acknowledge her as they checked in, a steadfast refusal, smiling and looking only at Curt, she wanted to tell Curt how slighted she felt, worse because she was unsure whether the woman disliked black people or liked Curt (p. 295).

Ifemelu experiences psychological violence in the form of racial microaggressions when she and Curt check in to a bed-and-breakfast in Montreal. The owner's refusal to acknowledge Ifemelu and her exclusive focus on Curt is an example of how psychological violence can manifest through subtle actions that undermine an individual's sense of self-worth and belonging.

The owner's steadfast refusal to acknowledge Ifemelu suggests that she is intentionally excluding her based on her race. This intentional exclusion can have significant psychological effects on Ifemelu, including feelings of alienation, self-doubt, and anxiety. Furthermore, Ifemelu's uncertainty about whether the owner dislikes black people or likes Curt can further exacerbate her feelings of anxiety and confusion. Ifemelu's desire to tell Curt how slighted she feels highlights the psychological impact of racial microaggressions.

These experiences can have a profound effect on an individual's sense of self-worth and their relationships with others. However, her reluctance to speak up and her fear that Curt would dismiss her feelings as overreacting or tired underscores the difficulty of confronting psychological violence and the impact it can have on an individual's ability to assert themselves.

During their temporary life in America, Ifemelu and the other female characters like aunty Uju in *Americanah* were subjected to both gender-based discrimination and patriarchal

violence. In addition to the psychological strain posed by racism and their status as Black immigrant women, they also had to contend with the aggression and abuse of men within their own circles. This compounded their struggles, as they were forced to navigate not only the challenges of belonging to a racial and cultural minority in a predominantly white society, but also the added burdens of sexism and gender-based violence.

Aunty Uju finds herself grappling with a situation where her autonomy and financial independence are being undermined. Her partner insists that she hands over her salary to him, claiming this is how marriage should operate because he is the “head of the family” (Adichie, 2017, p. 217). He further demands that she should refrain from sending money to her brother without his permission and that her earnings ought to be used to cover his car payments. This scene captures the essence of patriarchal dominance within the household, where a husband exerts control over financial decisions and treats his wife’s income as an extension of his authority.

The dynamics intensify when Aunty Uju reflects on how ‘He keeps wanting to make my work decisions’ (Adichie, 2017, p. 218), illustrating the persistent nature of patriarchal intrusion. In this context, traditional gender roles and unequal power dynamics intertwine, reinforcing the systemic marginalization of women. The excerpt exposes how patriarchal structures operate within intimate spaces, dictating women’s economic and personal choices and ultimately limiting their agency and independence.

The demands and behavior of Aunty Uju’s husband reflect patriarchal cultural norms that justify and perpetuate this form of dominance. This dynamic is emblematic of what Galtung describes as cultural violence, a process that legitimizes direct and structural violence by embedding harmful values, beliefs, and practices within a society. In this context, patriarchal traditions normalize the assertion of male authority over women, making such behavior appear acceptable, inevitable, or even necessary (Galtung, 1990).

Similarly, *We Need New Names* (2013) deals with the different forms of violence. Darling, a ten-year-old girl growing up in a Zimbabwean shantytown called Paradise, expresses her hate for church, viewing it as meaningless due to her traumatic experience with Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, the priest of Church of Paradise. The girl remembered when she went to the church and had her worst experience. She stated ‘Plus, last time I went, that crazy Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro shook me and shook until I vomited pink things. I thought I was going to die a real death’ (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 20). When Darling went to the church, she sought a spiritual cleansing by the prophet to let her grandfather’s spirit get out. They thought that her grandfather possesses her, as he was not buried properly because the white people killed him for feeding and hiding the terrorists who were trying to get the country back during the British colonization.

Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro’s healing session is supposed to purge sin, but instead he did the opposite. He put Darling in a traumatic state of mind with the violence she went through the act of shaking. Darling’s body was manhandled so ferociously that she retches ‘pink things. There is a huge contradiction, a church that claims to give life frightens and brings peace pushes Darling into thinking she will die a real death and her resulting attitude is a deep-seated aversion to organized religion. Her disdain and fear against the church, shaped by trauma, leads to her behavior, rejecting religious participation. This illustrates how non-physical forms of violence deeply impact the young girl psychology and mind.

Furthermore, we perceive interrelation between the direct violence and structural violence. The church in Darling’s world combines structural and direct violence according to its colonial-rooted authority as it is structural forces her into a brutal shaking ritual which is direct violence. Each act of shaking both stems from and reinforces the church’s power, oppressing Darling to do what she’s told. Galtung’s framework shows how these two forms of violence feed each other, creating a cycle that limits her freedom and life chances. He states

that ‘there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as an equal life chance’ (1968)

Added to the religious injury, Bulawayo implied the political conditions and the government abuse on people. Galtung, J. & Fischer, D based on the frustration-aggression hypothesis (1939) developed by J. Dollard & Cie’s, they argued that Frustration whether personal or systemic could manifest in two ways: internally, as self-directed dissatisfaction or psychological distress. It can also manifest externally as verbal or physical aggression toward others.

In the novel, it is stated ‘even if I want to sleep I cannot because if I sleep the dream will come, and I don’t want I it comes I am afraid of the bulldozers and those men and the police, afraid that I let the dream come, they will get out of it and become real.’ (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 64-65). The people of Paradise were mostly living in disastrous situations. Once, they had real houses and a good situation, nevertheless, the government attacked them by sending bulldozers to destroy the entire villages leaving people devastated and homeless, overwhelmed by despair, rage and hatred towards the governors.

The bulldozers in the novel symbolize how structural violence becomes direct in the form of physical destruction. The government targets the city, not to protect its citizens, but to erase poverty from view, reflecting real-life operations like Zimbabwe’s Murambatsvina in 2005. Galtung’s theory helps us to see this not as isolated brutality but as a cycle of how structural violence becomes direct violence which is then justified through cultural. The trauma does not end with the rubble but rather remains in Darling’s fear and nightmares, showing how deeply these forms of violence embed themselves in the psyche. The bulldozers don’t just destroy a town, they destroy trust, stability, and any illusion of safety under a state meant to protect its people.

NoViolet Bulawayo's characters in the novel use specific words including insults and verbal attacks considered as direct violence to express frustration, disappointment, defeat, annoyance and vexation. In his book *Pioneer of Peace Research Violence* (2013), Galtung explained that "violence can be physical, like wife-battering, or verbal, bad-mouthing" (p. 17), this means verbal violence and bad-mouthing could be placed in the same category as biting. Galtung insists that insults, slurs, and threats impose real harm, reduces self-confidence, self-esteem and block life chances. This idea shows that there is difference between physical and emotional harm as if words are meant to hurt someone, it is violence too.

Aunty Frostalina is constantly belittled by her husband. Frostalina wanted to integrate into the American society and be like those blond girls and wanted to do everything to have the American beauty standards. She practices sport and follows a diet but Uncle Kojo mocks her appearance and her efforts by telling her "You know, me, I actually don't understand why are you doing all this. What are doing to yourself, Frostalina, really-exactly-what? Kick. And punch. And kick. And punch. Look at you, bones bones bones. All bones." (Bulawayo, 2014, p.151) by repeating "kick and punch kick and punch" Kojo mimics physical assaults with language and each mockery is considered as insult offending Frostalina's self-worth.

In addition, by repeating the word 'bones' thrice he reduces her to an object of ridicule and reinforcing that her body is unacceptable as she is so skinny. Kojo added that when he sent a picture of them to his family, his mother too has something to say and protest "ah ahah, my son, oh, please please feed your wife and don't nah bring her here looking like this, you will embarrass us" (Bulawayo, 2014, p.152). The words of the step-mother hurts aunty Frostalina as each word that hurts sticks on her soul and is considered as violence.

In *We Need Names*, scenes of sexual violence and patriarchal abuse are prevalent. At the very beginning of Darling's adventure with her friends, we notice a quiet little girl named Chipso who is pregnant. It is beyond their understanding that an eleven-year-old girl could have

a baby in her stomach, and their naivety makes them ask how it is even possible to carry a child inside one's belly

Does she want a boy? No. Yes. Maybe. I don't know. Where exactly does a baby come out of? The same place it goes into the stomach. How exactly does it get into the stomach? First, Jesus's mother has to put it in there. No, not Jesus's mother. A man has to put it in there; cousin Musa told me. Well, she was really telling Enia, and I was there so I heard. Then who put it inside her? (p.3)

The quotation shows the children's bewilderment at seeing their young friend pregnant. The narrative exposes the direct violence and abuse suffered by a child of eleven years old. Chipso is described as mute as she still plays with her friends but cannot talk to them.

According to psychology, the direct abuse causes a traumatic mutism which refers to a sudden inability to speak due to a severe psychological shock. Raped by an unknown person, the girl experiences an extreme distress, and she was struggling to express her emotions verbally leading to a closure in communication. Her silence initially protects the rapist's identity.

Another layer of violence unfolds at the church when the Prophet and the Evangelists were preparing to punish a woman because she wanted to take another woman's husband under the name of Jesus. Women are treated like evil "The devil is a woman in purple dress that's riding to her thing and revealing her skin like maybe she is an angel" (Bulawayo, 2014, p.38) Moments earlier, the Prophet had warned the evangelists to prepare themselves because God had told him "The devil" was coming and this situation portrays how women are seen in men's eyes or specifically how religion depicts women. She was described as 'devil' because the woman was wearing a dress that reveals parts of her body.

The fixation on her exposed skin frames the woman as a source of temptation, the detailed physical description especially the focus on her appearance and uncovered skin expose her as a figure of seduction and attraction for the opposite gender. This scene illustrates the patriarchal, sexist attitude including the physical violence permitted by the church under the pretext of a religious mission. Bulawayo demonstrates the religious fanaticism, within the church

that justify violence and the belief that violence is just to achieve their religious goals or to please the male pride. The direct violence in this passage elucidated the misogynistic treatment of black women in contemporary African society.

Witnessing the so-called religious ritual shocks Chipo, the brutality of the scene gave her a sudden flashback and the image of the unknown rapist was clear in her head and soon she finds her voice “he did that, that’s what he did” (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 40). She confessed that her grandfather raped her “he did that my grandfather, I was coming from playing Find bin Laden and my grandmother was not there and my grandfather was there and he got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain” (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 40-41). Chipo’s confession, after prolonged silence highlights both the psychological toll of sexual violence and the complicity of a society that refuses to listen until a child’s trauma can no longer be contained.

Patriarchal and misogynistic treatment of Black women persists even in America. Moving to a new land does not automatically transform stuck mind-sets. Fostalina, Darling’s aunt, struggles with her husband Uncle Kojo constantly. When he returned from work, he did not find hot meal and complains “you know, me, I actually don’t understand why there is never any hot food in this house, Fostalina.” (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 155). Uncle Kojo complains about the absence of the hot food means she is not fulfilling her role as wife where domestic responsibilities are implicitly assigned to women, even when they also work outside the home.

Despite the full-time job of Fostalina, Kojo still expects her to fulfil traditional caregiving duties, reinforcing the idea that a woman’s primary role is to maintain the household. Fostalina is just like aunty Uju in Americanah. Uju told Ifemelu that despite working and helping her husband, he leaves all the domestic chores to her. She expressed her dissatisfaction by the fact that both of them work and earn money but her husband expects her to prepare his meals, take care of the house and serve him.

2. Cultural and racial Violence

While most theorists state that violence involves physical or psychological harm inflicted on someone, Galtung argued that violence goes beyond that narrow definition. He introduced the concept of cultural violence as a type of violence that is often overlooked because it is not as visible as direct or structural violence. Cultural violence is rooted in cultural aspects such as religion, worldview, language, empirical science, formal science and art, which can be used to justify or rationalize direct or structural violence (Galtung, 1990). It serves as a foundation for the other types of violence. Cultural violence can be linked to ethnicity, ideology, or religion since the essence of culture is present in both direct violence and structural (Galtung, 1990).

In Adichie's *Americanah*, cultural violence is evident in moments where systemic racism is dismissed or downplayed, illustrating a profound lack of understanding and sensitivity towards racial inequality and discrimination. This form of violence often manifests when perpetrators minimize the struggles of Black women like Ifemelu, ignoring the lived realities and deeper trauma associated with racism. To highlight this phenomenon, the following excerpt captures one such instance:

Once to a dreadlocked white man who sat next to her on the train, his hair like old twine ropes that ended in a blond fuzz, his tattered shirt worn with enough piety to convince her that he was a social warrior and might make a good guest blogger. 'Race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class now, the haves and the have-nots,' he told her evenly, and she used it as the opening sentence of a post titled 'Not All Dreadlocked White American Guys Are Down' (p. 3).

This scene captures the essence of cultural violence as defined by Galtung (1990) an attempt to neutralize systemic racism by reframing it as a class issue, denying its legitimacy and thus silencing the lived experience of Black people. The excerpt reflects the ways in which racism

operates invisibly, masked by the language of denial and dismissal. In this context, Ifemelu's role as a witness and commentator exposes the nature of these subtle yet deeply wounding forms of aggression.

The encounter between Ifemelu and the dreadlocked white man on the train offers a telling example for analysing cultural violence from Johan Galtung's theoretical lens. The man's assertion that "race is totally overhyped" and that Black people need to "get over themselves" reflects an attempt to dismiss the significance of race and its ongoing role in contemporary society. This statement can be viewed as a form of cultural violence, as it minimizes the systemic and historical factors that shape racial dynamics and perpetuate racial inequality.

By framing racism as a relic of the past and focusing exclusively on class divisions, this discourse obscures the deeply rooted interplay between race and class, thereby reinforcing a narrative that invalidates the lived experience of Black communities (Galtung, 1990). In this scene, Ifemelu's reaction to the man's comment serves as a sharp critique of his superficial understanding. By using his words as the opening line for her blog post titled "Not All Dreadlocked White American Guys Are Down," she exposes the flaws in his generalization and calls attention to the insidious nature of such cultural violence.

When Ifemelu and Curt walk into a restaurant with linen-covered tables, the host looks directly at them and asks Curt, "Table for one?" Curt quickly assures Ifemelu that the host did not mean it "like that," prompting Ifemelu to wonder, "How else could the host have meant it?" (Adichie, 2014, p. 295). This scene illustrates a moment of cultural violence rooted in racial prejudice, where Ifemelu is rendered invisible and treated as an afterthought. It also exposes how such instances are often normalized or excused within dominant culture, making their aggression appear insignificant or unintentional. Curt's reaction downplaying the host's behavior is a telling example of how individuals from privileged groups perpetuate cultural

violence. By minimizing its impact, he implicitly validates the behavior, allowing racism to continue under the guise of misunderstanding or coincidence.

Curt's explanation that the host did not mean it "like that" suggests that he is aware of the racial prejudice Ifemelu is experiencing, yet he chooses to minimize its significance. This denial is problematic because it obscures the harm caused by the host's behavior, and in doing so, perpetuated the very stereotypes and structural inequalities that maintain racial and gender discrimination. The host's assumption implicitly conveys that a Black woman is not worthy of the same respect or consideration as others, reinforcing a deep-rooted cultural violence. Ifemelu's internal question "How else could the host have meant it?" reflects her acute understanding that the host's behavior is neither accidental nor harmless, but rather a symptom of entrenched racism and cultural bias.

This scene highlights the urgent need for individuals to recognize and challenge such cultural norms, questioning their complicity in sustaining discrimination. By exposing the host's prejudiced behavior and Curt's tendency to justify it, the novel emphasizes the importance of acknowledging these moments as expressions of systemic violence. Only by naming and addressing them can society move towards a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable environment, where the dignity and worth of every person are fully recognized.

NoViolet Bulawayo approaches the cultural violence in *We Need New Names* by scenes where Darling faced racism and prejudices statements for who she is. For Darling, living her country for the American dream is all what she was dreaming for and it came true. However, despite the initial excitement full of hope, reality splashed her and quickly made her disappointed. As soon as she arrived at the American soil, prejudices and stereotypes started. "When I first arrived at Washington I just wanted to die. The other kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, the way I talked or said things the way I dressed, the way I laughed" (Bulawayo, 2014, p.166). This quote is a mirror of the microaggressions and cultural violence

that Darling experienced from the beginning of her journey and pursues her during all the time in America. She is insulted often, and every insult about her name, accent, hair, clothing, or even laughter makes her feel weak, small and unwelcome.

The teasing Darling faces is not just childish mockery, it is part of a broader societal system that legitimizes the idea that her differences (name, accent, hair, clothing) are unnatural or inferior. Galtung describes cultural violence as the mechanisms that make direct and structural violence seem acceptable. American cultural norms make Darling's African identity as something bizarre to be ridiculed and ashamed for. Those critics are classified as racial attacks because they target African hair, skin color and the way of dressing considered as elements of identity. Every insult operates as a reminder that her identity is different from the dominant culture. This creates a form of psychological violence, making her desire "to die" and feel pressure to assimilate or suppress aspects of herself to fit in the American society.

Furthermore, racial violence and the psychological oppression led Darling to have identity crisis. She said 'Kids teased me about everything, even the things I couldn't change, and it kept going and going so that in the end I just felt wrong in my skin in my body, in my clothes, in my language, in my head, everything (p.165). Darling's expression echoes her internalized troubles after being oppressed for a long time.

Darling's struggle and trauma started from her native country with the traumatic childhood, from stealing guavas because of hunger in the first chapter, to How they left their country by the tenth chapter. She explained how the people of her own country left their land in droves after being destroyed by bulldozers sent by the military forces. All these disturbing events affected the mind of Darling and the discrimination faced in America including the bias and racism made her doubt her own worth and identity.

Darling felt lost, disconnected and outside the place where she is living. Kids teased her about things she could not change, none could change his roots, and the African roots could be

seen miles away in a place full of whites. The teasing and rejection generate in her the feeling of loss, indecisive between adaptation and staying true to herself. Over time, she starts seeing her African traits, her looks, language, and culture not as natural parts of who she is, but as obstacles. This happens because society makes her believe that being different is a problem.

Chapter II: Resistance through Differential Consciousness in *Americanah* and *We New Names*

In the current chapter, I would apply Differential Consciousness concept of Chella Sandoval explained in her theoretical book *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Sandoval developed this concept about the oppressed people facing marginalization and racism from those considered *topdogs* which means superior. Differential consciousness refers to a mode of oppositional consciousness that allows individuals to navigate and resist various forms of oppression by shifting between ideological positions.

Sandoval explained in *Methodology of the Oppressed* “The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises” (p. 57). By this definition, the theorist means by the differential a flexible mode of consciousness adopted by the marginalized to respond in moments of crisis, or oppression. This form allows someone to examine the situation and respond strategically by switching roles, blending identities, or resisting from the margins.

This part of my work will show how the female characters in both novels relied on the forms of Differential consciousness. This is shown in the way they resist and raise their voices to denounce the double oppression they faced. To be more explicit, women were abused by their husbands due to patriarchy and were discriminated because of being black immigrants living in a white society. Ifemelu, Adichie’s protagonist and Darling, Bulawayo’s heroin defy society by denouncing and assuming their origins and identity as Black and African. This consciousness is embodied by the female characters who shift between cultural codes, racial identities, and modes of self-presentation as a means of negotiating systemic injustice

2.1. Linguistic and identity resistance in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the complex role of language as both an instrument of belonging and a vehicle of resistance. Ifemelu, upon arriving in the United States, quickly realizes that her natural voice and accent mark her as an outsider. To fit into a society that privilege American speech patterns, she reluctantly adopts an American accent. As Adichie writes, “Only after she hung up did, she begins to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame ... Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?” (Adichie, 2017, p. 175)

Adichie also hints at the physical effort Ifemelu made to mimic the American accent, noting that it demands a transformation not only of sound but of the body itself. Adichie emphasizes this when she writes: ‘It took an effort ... the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue’ (Adichie, 2017, p.175). However, later on, Ifemelu started to reject the linguistic assimilation and decided to be herself.

Ifemelu’s resistance is more clearly expressed later in the novel when she decides to return to Nigeria and stop faking her accent to sound American. Reflecting on this moment, the narrator states that Ifemelu ‘had spoken in her own accent, the singsong Nigerian English, and the receptionist’s reaction had made her feel like a small child, unsure of doing something forbidden’ (Adichie, 2017, p. 295). This shift represents a turning point where Ifemelu reclaims her linguistic identity and affirms her cultural roots.

This moment captures the internal conflict many African immigrants experience when grappling with questions of identity and belonging. Ifemelu’s initial choice to adopt an American accent is not simple but rather involves a deep bodily transformation, affecting how she uses her mouth, tongue, and voice. But as she becomes more aware of the societal pressures behind this adaptation, she recognizes that the expectation to "sound American" constitutes a form of systemic cultural violence.

To be praised for sounding American implies that her natural voice is inferior, an idea she ultimately rejects. Her decision to embrace her Nigerian accent is thus a powerful act of resistance, one that reasserts her identity and challenges the notion that assimilation requires erasure. In doing so, she exposes a racial and cultural hierarchy wherein certain ways of sounding and being are valued above others (Adichie, 2017, p. 175). The tension between accent and belonging becomes central to Ifemelu's resistance, underscoring how language is not merely a tool of communication, but a marker of identity, inclusion, and power.

A pivotal shift occurs when Ifemelu decides to reject the Americanized voice she once carefully adopted. At a seemingly ordinary moment while making a routine phone call, she instinctively reverts to her Nigerian accent. This moment is anything but mundane. Adichie states that Ifemelu 'felt a profound relief, as if some piece of herself long buried had surfaced' (p. 176). This act marks more than a linguistic change; it signals a symbolic homecoming, a return to the self after years of subtle self-erasure. It is the moment where Ifemelu stops performing and starts existing authentically.

The shift in Ifemelu's voice mirrors a deeper transformation in her consciousness. By reclaiming her natural way of speaking, she simultaneously reclaims her heritage, her cultural belonging, and her right to exist on her own terms. In this sense, the American accent is not a neutral code-switching strategy but a mask and emblem of conformity, social pressure, and muted identity. Its rejection becomes, as Adichie subtly conveys, a radical and revolutionary assertion that 'there is dignity in sounding like yourself' (p. 176). Through this act, Ifemelu resists the homogenizing force of assimilation and reaffirms that her Nigerian identity does not need to be softened or erased for acceptability.

This personal resistance is also deeply political. It exposes the racial and cultural hierarchy that governs which voices are considered legitimate and which are silenced. Ifemelu's initial adoption of an American accent was born from a desire to fit into a society that

systematically privileges certain ways of speaking. As she later recognizes, such adaptation comes at the cost of self-alienation. She exposes this structure by affirming her own voice, revealing how language becomes both a battleground and a means of liberation. As Adichie notes, ‘To sound American’ is framed as an ‘accomplishment’, a notion that implicitly devalues non-Western speech and identity (p. 175). The tension between accent and belonging thus becomes central to Ifemelu’s resistance, where language embodies both oppression and defiance.

Moreover, Ifemelu’s resistance operates in combination with her evolving sense of community within the African diaspora. Her blog becomes a powerful medium through which she articulates her experiences and critiques dominant cultural narratives. In one particularly poignant post, she writes ‘Why must we always change ourselves to fit in? What is lost when our voice is no longer ours?’ (p. 211). This rhetorical questioning expands the scope of resistance from personal to collective, inviting fellow immigrants to reflect on the psychological and cultural toll of linguistic conformity. Through shared stories and solidarity, Ifemelu finds affirmation not by suppressing difference, but by embracing it.

In reclaiming her voice, Ifemelu also reclaims her agency. Her rejection of the American accent exposes its role in reinforcing systemic inequality. By elevating a specific mode of speech as the norm, American society marginalizes those who sound ‘different’. For Ifemelu, the act of returning to her original accent is both a critique and a defiance of this norm. It reflects a conscious choice to reject the hierarchy of linguistic value imposed by a racially stratified society. As such, language in *Americanah* functions as a site of decolonization space where dignity, identity, and resistance converge.

Ultimately, Ifemelu’s journey illustrates that language is never just a tool for communication, it is inseparable from the politics of race, power, and belonging. Her story powerfully reminds us that to reclaim one’s voice is to reclaim one’s humanity. In the end,

Ifemelu's linguistic resistance is central to her journey as a character. By consciously choosing to reject the American voice and reclaim her natural speech, she embraces a more profound belonging, one that is not granted by others, but asserted and claimed by herself. As Adichie suggests, the sound of one's voice can carry 'the weight of heritage and belonging' (p. 176), making language itself a vital site of resistance, renewal, and belonging.

2.2. Cultural Memory and Defiance in *We Need New Names*

In *We Need New Names*, NoViolet Bulawayo explores displacement not merely as a physical condition but as an emotional and cultural fracture that demands resistance. For Darling, the young protagonist, resistance is not articulated through political protest or public defiance, but through the private, persistent act of remembering who she is and where she comes from. Her resistance is rooted in memory, sensory experience, and emotional yearning mechanisms that anchor her identity amidst the eroding forces of assimilation.

A powerful metaphor emerges early in her American experience as she stated "No matter how much food I eat, I am hungry for my country" (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 155). On the surface, this statement expresses physical dissatisfaction, but at a deeper level, it reveals a spiritual void, a hunger that no material abundance can satisfy. Darling is not simply homesick, she is experiencing a rupture of identity, where her Zimbabwean roots are slowly being silenced in a society that demands adaptation. This hunger becomes a metaphor for cultural displacement, illustrating the internal battle between memory and forgetting, between belonging and erasure.

This emotional hunger is compounded by the cultural dissonance she experiences in America. Surrounded by people who neither understand nor acknowledge the depth of her heritage, Darling is pushed to adopt behaviors and values that estrange her from her past. Yet instead of fully surrendering to this pressure, she begins to resist through remembrance. As she reflects on her childhood in Paradise climbing guava trees, laughing with her friends, walking

dusty roads under a scorching sun, these memories take on a restorative function. They reaffirm her connection to her homeland and function as quiet acts of defiance. As she describes: ‘I closed my eyes and felt the taste of guavas, the sting of the sun on my skin’ (p187). Such visceral memory serves not only to recall, but to preserve a self that America is threatening to overwrite.

The novel presents this memory as more than personal but rather a political one. In one instance, Darling watches an American news segment on Zimbabwe and is shocked at the representation. The country is portrayed only through images of suffering and dysfunction, erasing the complexity and beauty of the life she remembers. Here, Bulawayo critiques Western media’s monolithic narrative of Africa and underscores how resistance also lies in counter-narratives. Darling’s private memories become testimonies against a simplified, distorted depiction of her nation. Her refusal to adopt these imposed narratives is itself an act of resistance, a refusal to participate in her culture’s erasure.

Resistance also emerges through interpersonal confrontation. One of the most defining moments in the novel occurs when a friend challenges her: “If it’s your country, you have to love it to live it in it and not leave it you have to fight for it no matter what” (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 287). This moment captures a generational and diaspora tension and the idea that loving one’s country should not be passive but requires defense, memory, and sometimes pain. For Darling, this challenge triggers an internal reckoning she was asking in herself if we can truly belong to two places? Can love for a country survive from afar. Her decision not to renounce Zimbabwe despite her distance reflects a mature, deliberate form of resistance: choosing to hold space for both her heritage and her reality.

Darling’s resistance is not solitary, but it is deeply communal. In America, she remains connected to other Zimbabweans, and together they build spaces of cultural memory. They laugh at old jokes, exchange phrases in their native languages, and share songs from home.

These collective rituals transform kitchens and dorm rooms into sanctuaries where belonging is rehearsed and affirmed. As Bulawayo illustrates, identity is not preserved in isolation, it is nurtured in community. These shared spaces of remembrance become powerful sites of resistance, especially in a world that frequently renders them invisible.

Moreover, the tension Darling feels between the American Dream and her longing for Paradise reveals the psychological toll of migration. The promise of a better life in America comes with a hidden cost: the expectation to forget. Yet, throughout the novel, Darling refuses to fully comply. Even as she adopts aspects of her new life, education, food and language, she retains the ability to feel loss, to feel Zimbabwe living inside her. This capacity to feel, to mourn, and to remember is what protects her identity. It is a radical stance in a culture that often rewards forgetting.

By the end of the novel, Darling does not resolve this tension; she continues to live in-between. But her in-betweenness becomes a space of strength, not weakness. She understands that her belonging is not tied to geography but to memory, love, and cultural fidelity. *We Need New Names* ultimately offers a redefinition of resistance one rooted in the everyday acts of remembering, of telling one's own story, and of refusing to let go of the pieces of self that matter most. Through Darling, Bulawayo crafts a portrait of diasporic resistance that is deeply emotional, profoundly human, and quietly revolutionary.

In Bulawayo's novel, Darling's experience of displacement is shaped not only by emotional longing but by moments that reframe her sense of identity through acts of resistance. A particularly striking moment comes when a friend confronts her with the words: "If it's your country, you have to love it... You have to fight for it no matter what, to make it right" (p. 287–288). While this statement may initially appear to evoke patriotic sentiment or nostalgic attachment, it actually calls for a more radical form of engagement: political and moral resistance from exile. In the context of Darling's migration and increasing detachment from

Zimbabwe, this challenge becomes a turning point. It forces her to reconsider her position not as someone passively observing her homeland from a distance, but as someone who has a responsibility to remember, to critique, and to speak out. Thus, the emotional pull toward her homeland transforms into a form of diasporic resistance, rooted in memory, accountability, and refusal to forget. By keeping her country's struggles alive within her, even from afar, Darling affirms that resistance can take the form of remembrance and ongoing concern.

Moreover, this episode marks a shift from passive displacement to a more conscious and resistant stance. The idea of 'fighting' for one's country is symbolic of Darling's refusal to allow silence or erasure to dominate her diasporic experience. In a world that often expects migrants to assimilate and move on, Bulawayo's character refuses to sever emotional and cultural ties to her homeland.

Darling's response to this challenge is not necessarily expressed through political activism but through the preservation of memory, the act of storytelling, and the choice to remain emotionally connected. These everyday forms of resistance against forgetting, against imposed narratives, and against detachment become a powerful means of asserting belonging on her own terms. Thus, Bulawayo redefines resistance as a quiet, persistent loyalty that survives borders and time, rooted in a determination not to let her origins be erased, even in the face of systemic pressures to do so.

2.3. Gendered Resistance: Challenging Patriarchy and Oppression

In *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, Adichie and Bulawayo portray gendered resistance as a crucial force in shaping identity, voice, and belonging. The female characters in both novels navigate patriarchal landscapes both local and diaspora that attempt to suppress their autonomy and silence their voices. Yet, through defiance, memory, and solidarity, these women resist marginalization and forge spaces of empowerment. Their resistance is not always

loud, but it is resolute. It transforms everyday choices, speech, memory, and sisterhood into acts of revolutionary affirmation.

In *Americanah*, Adichie explores Ifemelu's growing awareness of gendered expectations and her refusal to conform to them. Throughout the novel, Ifemelu navigates social contexts in both in Nigeria and in the United States where women are expected to remain silent, accommodating, or secondary to men. In Nigeria, she becomes increasingly critical of these norms, particularly in her blog posts, where she uses satire and direct commentary to challenge sexist traditions. For example, she writes about the way women are raised to please men: 'The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are' (p. 355). This statement reflects her broader critique of patriarchy, not only as a social structure but as a system that shapes everyday interactions, especially romantic and professional relationships.

Ifemelu's resistance is not limited to thought or writing, but rather it is embodied in her choices. She ends relationships where she feels the expectation to compromise her values or shrink her identity. Her decision to leave Curt, despite the privilege and comfort he provides, reflects her insistence on authenticity rather than conformity. Similarly, her eventual separation from Blaine underscores her resistance to moral rigidity and performative liberalism, even within supposedly progressive circles. Adichie thus shows that Ifemelu's resistance to patriarchal norms is not abstract, it is grounded in everyday decisions where she refuses to be diminished. Through Ifemelu, *Americanah* articulates a feminist vision of self-definition and agency, where resisting gender roles becomes a way of claiming full personhood across cultural contexts.

Ifemelu's resistance continues to evolve as she migrates to the United States, where gendered expectations take on new shapes. Though embedded in a different culture, patriarchy persists, often cloaked in liberalism or romantic ideals. In her romantic relationships,

particularly with Curt and Blaine, she faces subtle pressures to conform to ideals of femininity that do not align with her identity. Yet she persists in her authenticity. At one point, she asserts, ‘I matter as I am’ (p. 327). This statement, seemingly simple, is radical in its context: a direct affirmation of self-worth in a world that often seeks to dilute the voices of women, especially Black immigrant women.

Similarly, in *We Need New Names*, Darling’s gendered resistance takes root in childhood, where early encounters with patriarchal authority begin. In the streets of Paradise, she and her friends refuse to be invisible. ‘We were girls, but we refused to be quiet’ (p. 189), she recalls. This statement, though brief, encapsulates a defiant solidarity refusal to internalize the silence often imposed on women and girls in patriarchal contexts. These girls reclaim their right to exist boldly in spaces that routinely diminish them. Even in moments of powerlessness, they craft small zones of agency mocking authority, sharing secrets, and protecting each other from the structural violence around them.

This communal resistance continues across borders. In the United States, Aunt Frostalina emerges as a complex figure negotiating her autonomy within the expectations placed upon immigrant women. Struggling with the pressures of assimilation and gender conformity, she asks, “Why must a woman bear the weight of a man’s name?” (p. 258). Her question does more than challenge tradition; it exposes the intersectional burdens faced by migrant women as burdens of cultural displacement, racialization, and patriarchal constraint. Bulawayo thus positions gender not as a secondary theme, but as a primary lens through which resistance and belonging are articulated.

Ultimately, gendered resistance in both novels is a deeply human, often quiet but persistent force. It is found in whispered conversations, in unspoken bonds between women, in the small acts of reclaiming space, dignity, and voice. Adichie and Bulawayo do not romanticize these struggles, but they honor them. They show that to be a woman navigating oppressive

structures is to engage in daily acts of resistance sometimes subtle, sometimes fierce, and always significant.

2.4. Resistance through Education and Critical Awareness

In *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, Adichie and Bulawayo portray education not merely as an academic advancement, but as a powerful act of resistance. Through learning formal, informal or self-guided, the protagonists Ifemelu and Darling confront racial injustice, gender oppression, and cultural displacement. Education in these narratives becomes a transformative space where silenced voices are reawakened, identities are reconstructed, and belonging is redefined on the characters' own terms.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's migration to the United States initiates a dual journey: geographical and intellectual. Her exposure to books, lectures, and lived experiences becomes the lens through which she begins to decode systemic racism and misogyny in both American and Nigerian societies. As she immerses herself in literature, she remarks: 'The more she read, the more she felt herself waking up' (p. 191). This awakening is not only limited to academic understanding but also marks the beginning of her resistance. Reading becomes an emancipatory act, enabling her to critique the whitewashed ideals of success and to unlearn the pressures to assimilate. Through authors like Chinua Achebe and James Baldwin, Ifemelu discovers language that articulates her own sense of alienation: 'Their words spoke for the part of me that felt silenced' (p. 384). These encounters deepen her racial consciousness and empower her to reject the superficial inclusivity of her new environment.

Her resistance takes concrete form in her blog, a digital space where she exposes racial microaggressions and challenges social norms. 'My blog is where I speak for myself' she declares (p. 276). Through writing, she reclaims her voice in a society that often expects immigrants, particularly African women, to remain silent or apologetic. Education, in this

context, is not confined to classrooms as it is embodied in reading, writing, questioning, and resisting.

Similarly, in Bulawayo's novel, Darling's relationship to education evolves from curiosity to conscious resistance. Growing up in Zimbabwe, her access to schooling is interrupted by poverty and political instability. Yet, her hunger for knowledge persists, and once in the United States, reading becomes her means of grounding herself in a foreign world. She confesses: "I read to remember... to hold on to words when the world tried to forget me" (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 231). Literacy becomes a tool of survival and resistance, preserving her memories of Paradise and helping her resist the cultural amnesia imposed by assimilation. Her education is not just about adapting; it is about preserving identity.

In one passage, Darling asserts: "I write so I do not forget" (p. 256). Her writing counters the erasure of her homeland by transforming memory into narrative. Bulawayo uses Darling's voice to illustrate how the classroom and the written words become sites of negotiation between past and present, between home and exile. Although she is geographically removed from Zimbabwe, her education allows her to keep Paradise alive within her, refusing to allow her background to be rewritten or diminished by the expectations of American culture. In doing so, she performs a quiet but powerful form of resistance insisting on the legitimacy of her story in a world that often dismisses African narratives.

Both novels make it clear that education is not just about accumulating knowledge, it is about cultivating the power to resist. For Ifemelu, critical literacy provides the framework to question racial hierarchies and patriarchal norms. For Darling, reading and writing allow her to maintain continuity with a life that migration tried to sever. In both cases, literacy and critical thinking empower the protagonists to resist invisibility. They reclaim space by refusing silence, by naming injustice, and by giving meaning to their memories.

Thus, Adichie and Bulawayo redefine education as an act of survival, remembrance, and

self-assertion. In environments marked by discrimination, racism, and exile, education becomes the ground upon which resistance flourishes. Whether through the blog posts of Ifemelu or the internal reflections of Darling, both authors demonstrate that the ability to read, write, and think critically can become a revolutionary force, one that allows displaced individuals not only to survive, but to belong with dignity and purpose.

2.5. Resistance against Political and Social Displacement

In both *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, displacement is not presented merely as a geographical transition but as a deeply disruptive experience both politically and emotionally. Yet within this rupture, Adichie and Bulawayo show that displacement becomes a generative force, one that gives rise to resistance. Their protagonists, Ifemelu and Darling, do not passively accept their marginalization; rather, they actively reshape their dislocation into spaces of belonging and self-affirmation. Through memory, speech, and narrative, the trauma of departure is transformed into an ongoing assertion of identity.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's departure from Nigeria is triggered by political frustration and societal collapse. She reflects bitterly: "Nigeria was too much for too long-too corrupt, too broken" (p. 102). But this decision to leave is not surrender; it becomes the first step in a process of critical awakening. In the United States, confronted by racial discrimination and cultural alienation, she resists not through direct confrontation but through voice. Her blog becomes a space where she articulates experiences of exclusion and injustice, transforming her marginality into agency.

When Ifemelu writes "We were taught that we had to swallow silence, but silence kills" (Adichie, 2017, p. 315), she affirms the power of breaking that silence, a form of resistance that reclaims both speech and space. Her resistance is sharpened by her refusal to internalize racial expectations, as seen when she declares: 'I refused to shrink myself anymore' (Adichie, 2017,

p. 311). This stance turns displacement into an opportunity to assert a fuller, uncompromised version of herself.

Similarly, in *We Need New Names*, Darling's forced departure from Zimbabwe due to political chaos and economic collapse reflects a collective wound. As she narrates the exodus from Paradise, she says: "Look at the children... leaving in droves" (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 146), casting migration as a trauma shared by a generation. Yet, Darling's journey to America does not offer the refuge she might have hoped for. Instead, it intensifies her sense of disconnection.

Like Ifemelu, Darling reclaims her identity through memory and reflection. Her declaration, "If you forget where you came from, then you are lost" (Adichie, 2017, p. 182), shows that for her, remembrance is not simply emotional, it is rather political. Remembering becomes a way of resisting the forces that seek to erase her origins and redefine her on foreign terms. Later, she states, "I'm remembering how beautiful it felt to be in a scene like that, everybody just there together, mingling together, living together, living before things fell apart". (Bulawayo, 2014, p.283). Darling's statement further anchors resistance in the act of preserving cultural memory. This moment captures a tender of nostalgia and grief for a lost sense of unity and belonging. The word 'together' emphasizes a communal time when people coexisted in harmony, before displacement, conflict, or migration fractured that closeness.

Both protagonists in *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* resist the erasure imposed by systemic racism and postcolonial disillusionment. In America, they find themselves positioned as outsiders, but they respond not with assimilation, but with redefinition. Ifemelu reclaims her narrative through the act of writing and speaking out. Equally, Darling holds onto her own identity and heritage through storytelling and the preservation of memory. Their stories show that displacement, though rooted in loss, can become a site of empowerment. It is through resisting silence, forgetting, and conformity that they rediscover a sense of belonging that is not tied to place, but to identity and memory.

In this way, Adichie and Bulawayo suggest that resistance is born not in comfort, but in crisis. Displacement forces their characters to understand the meaning of home. Through acts of remembrance and resistance, both novels redefine belonging not as return, but as reconstitution. Adichie and Bulawayo, in illuminating these intertwined paths of resistance, invite readers to rethink the meaning of belonging in the diaspora. Belonging is not just about where one lives, but how one remembers, speaks, and resists. Through the nuanced portraits of Ifemelu and Darling, the authors argue that resistance is not always grand or heroic. Sometimes, it is found in the return to one's accent. Sometimes, it is the refusal to forget. Sometimes, it is the telling of a story that insists on truth when the world demands silence.

V. General conclusion

This master's dissertation entitled *Reading Power: Violence and methodology of Resistance in Americanah and We Need New Names* of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo's has revealed that both novels depict violence as a structural and cultural phenomenon affecting female protagonists and their communities and the different ways of resistance to survive and oppose it. To attain the purpose of the study, I relied on two different theories: The first is Johan Galtung's concept of *conflict triangle* (1969) developed first on his peace research and the second is Chela Sandoval's *Differential Consciousness* exposed in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). These two theories from different intellectual backgrounds offer a cooperative study to examine the experiences of black female characters, revealing how violence is shaped in everyday life and how resistance takes multiple, shifting forms.

The dissertation offered a comparative analysis of Adichie's *Americanah* Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, focusing on how Black female protagonists resist violence across national and diasporic contexts. Drawing on Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle and Chela Sandoval's Differential Consciousness, the study revealed how characters like Ifemelu and Darling endure structural, cultural, and direct violence, yet respond with adaptive strategies voice, memory, and self-reinvention. Through this dual theoretical lens, the research highlighted how both novels interrogate systems of domination while foregrounding resilience, agency, and transformation in the postcolonial and migratory experience.

By the analysis of both novels, I concluded that the authors illustrated the realities of the African country after the independence and the corruption of the political system and this forced people to change and leave their countries in a hope of a better way of living. However, those people, especially the female gender, faced violence and experienced situations of harm and oppression because of their race, identity and gender and that lead them to resist and stand

against it. The intersection on identity, race and gender made the African women suffer from direct and indirect violence, systemic discrimination, and the patriarchal traditions. In the first chapter, I dealt with Galtung's violence concept to illustrate the harm and hit applied on the feminine figures from youth to old age in two opposite environments. I found that these feminine figures are subjected to direct violence through the language, body gestures, abuse and aggressivity and by the way of the cultural violence with racism, patriarchal society and identity based on oppression. In the second chapter, where I used Sandoval's concept of "Differential consciousness", I showed how the oppressed female characters tried to defend themselves by several tactics and forms. By studying the forms of the differential concepts and applying it on both novels, I deduced that they used language, memory, and communal belonging which operate as vital tools of defiance across *the equal-right form, the revolutionary form, the supremacist form* and the *separatist form*.

As a conclusion, this comparative analysis confirms that both Adichie's *Americanah* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* depict violence not merely as an individual or isolated phenomenon, but as a serious rooted social, political, and cultural reality. At the same time, the results illuminate the resilience and strength with which female characters navigate these terrains, employing strategies rooted in memory, language, belonging, and communal support. Together, the narratives underscore that resistance is both an assertion of identity and a collective endeavor towards belonging and self-emancipation.

It is evident that as students of literature and interdisciplinary approaches, we continuously seek fresh perspectives on well-known novels to deepen our understanding. *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo is no exception. This novel offers a rich psychological portrayal of identity formation, particularly through the eyes of a young girl navigating cultural dislocation. For this reason, a psychological approach to the novel is worth pursuing. Such a

study of Childhood and Political Awareness in a Postcolonial World that examines innocence, trauma, and resilience from the perspective of youth

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