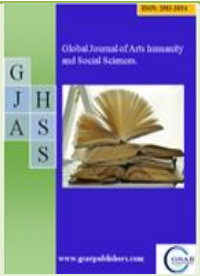


	Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences				
	ISSN: 2583-2034				
	Abbreviated key title: Glob.J.Arts.Humanit.Soc.Sci				
	Frequency: Monthly				
	Published By GSAR Publishers				
Journal Homepage Link: https://gsarpublishers.com/journal-gjahss-home/					
Volume - 5	Issue - 10	October 2025	Total pages 970-977	DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17446499	

Ideating Alternative Futures in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013): Between Utopia, Dystopia, and Heterotopia

By

Youssef DIALLO¹, Saliou DIONE²

¹ Doctoral Candidate African and Postcolonial Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)

² Associate Professor African and Postcolonial Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)



Article History

Received: 10- 09- 2025

Accepted: 21- 10- 2025

Published: 24- 10- 2025

Corresponding author

Saliou DIONE

Abstract

This article explores the ideation of alternative futures through the interwoven lenses of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). Both novels examine the tensions between imagined ideals and lived realities, situating their protagonists in transnational and postcolonial landscapes marked by displacement, inequality, becoming, and belonging. Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) engages with the diasporic condition through the protagonist's movement between Nigeria and America, offering a nuanced critique of race and identity. Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), by contrast, presents a child's eye view of postcolonial Zimbabwe and the immigrant experience in the United States, oscillating between dystopian precarity and the fleeting hope of reinvention. Rather than resolving these tensions, both novels embrace complexity, constructing heterotopic spaces that resist binary thinking and allow for the coexistence of contradictory realities. By situating their characters within overlapping geographies of loss and aspiration, both Adichie and Bulawayo challenge dominant narratives of progress and modernity. Drawing from postcolonial theory such as Frantz Fanon's *colonial alienation* and Homi Bhabha's concept of the *third space*, this article argues that *Americanah* (2013) and *We Need New Names* (2013) interrogate structural injustices while gesturing towards new imaginaries neither wholly utopian nor dystopian, but grounded in the heterotopic potential of transformative critique.

Keywords: Africa, postcolonial, imagination, utopia, dystopia, heterotopia, migration, diaspora.

Introduction

Postcolonial African literature mobilizes alternative futures as a mode of narration that entangles utopian, dystopian, and heterotopic imaginaries. Contemporary postcolonial African writers increasingly embrace complex, layered storytelling that critiques dominant power structures while gesturing towards both individual transformation and collective reimagining. Therefore, their exploration of alternative futures occupies a central space where they navigate between 'utopian ideals'¹, 'dystopian

realities'², and 'heterotopic landscapes'³, crafting and envisioning complex visions of the future that transcend simple categorizations

theorized by Sir Thomas More in his book "Utopia" (1516). Many other thinkers and writers have since expanded on the concept of utopia, including philosophers like Karl Marx with his vision of a classless society, and various science fiction writers who envision ideal futures.

² The concept of dystopia, an imagined society where everything is unpleasant or bad, is explored by numerous authors, particularly in the genre of dystopian literature. George Orwell in "1984" (1949) and Aldous Huxley in "Brave New World" (1932) are two of

¹ The idea of utopia, an ideal society, was first extensively



of hope or despair. In fact, postcolonial writers have often turned to heterotopian forms, such as the *contact zone*⁴ (1991), described by Mary Louise Pratt, to imagine decolonial futures. They imagine spaces of cultural collision and negotiation, where dominant and marginalized perspectives meet and transform one another. Rather than a unitary utopia, in their literary texts, the heterotopian contact zone suggests a future of ongoing hybridity, contestation, and the continuous remaking of identity and community. Alongside heterotopia, they have also engaged extensively with the dystopian imagination. As a conceptual extension, decolonial readings argue that the deconstruction of utopian thinking encourages a more nuanced, grounded understanding of the realities of globalization and transnational experiences.

Seminal works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*⁵ (1958) have powerfully deconstructed the colonial utopian fantasy, revealing how the civilizing mission of the colonizers systematically undermined indigenous cultural and political realities. In the same line of thought postcolonial theory has sought to imagine alternative futures that center the agency and self-determination of formerly colonized peoples. Postcolonial scholars argue that utopian visions, while often presented as universal ideals, in fact, reflect the cultural assumptions and imperialist agendas of the European societies that produced them. As Homi Bhabha (1994) notes, "*the language of utopia - the language that seeks to produce a blueprint for social and political change - has often been the language of imperial aggression and cultural dominance.*"⁶ Following the same literary trend, but with different writing styles and perspectives, both Adichie and Bulawayo, as female writers, respectively, in *Americanah* (2013) and *We need New Names* (2013), explore how individuals construct meaning and identity when caught between their homeland and diaspora, between optimism and harsh reality. It is consistent with this conceptualization of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) suggest that the search for a perfect society is an illusory quest, and that the truth lies in confronting the complexities of the world as it is. In their

representations of futures through utopian, dystopian, and heterotopian, both Adichie and Bulawayo challenge the reader to reflect on their associated assumptions and power structures. While imagining alternative spaces in contrast to the binary of utopia and dystopia, the concept of heterotopia, as developed by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1986), both Adichie and Bulawayo offer a more nuanced understanding of *alternative social spaces* with heterotopias as real, existing spaces that are simultaneously *other* and mirror the dominant societal structures. Through *Americanah* (2013) and *We Need New Names* (2013), both Adichie and Bulawayo weave together elements of utopian dreams, dystopian warnings, and heterotopic spaces and places that exist both within and outside conventional social structures. While African futurism as a literary subgenre takes this further by engaging directly with myth, speculation, and decolonial imaginaries, these realist novels nonetheless participate in the broader endeavor of envisioning alternative realities grounded in African and diasporic experiences.

This article delves into the multifaceted portrayals of alternative futures across geographies, examining how these narratives navigate the complexities of imagining new societal paradigms. Through a comprehensive comparative analysis of themes, narrative structures, and speculative elements, it unravels the diverse ways in which postcolonial literature grapples with the notion of alternative futures. To this end, leaning on postcolonial theory such as Frantz Fanon's *colonial alienation* and Homi Bhabha's concept of the *third space*, the article analyzes how the two female novelists deconstruct utopian dreams and postcolonial disillusionment, and imagine dystopian and heterotopian horizons, locating them between diasporic experiences and decolonial imaginaries.

I- Deconstructing Utopian Dreams and Postcolonial Disillusionment

In *Americanah* (2013), Adichie presents a nuanced view of the idea of utopia, deconstructing the notion of an idealized society. Rather than portraying Lagos or America as perfect utopian spaces, the narrative highlights the complexities and contradictions within these environments. For example, when Ifemelu first returns to Lagos, the city "*assaulted her*"⁷ with its "*sun-dazed haste*"⁸ and "*heaps of rubbish*,"⁹ this stands in contrast to the romanticized visions of Africa that some of her American acquaintances hold. Similarly, Ifemelu's experience of America is not one of unmitigated freedom and opportunity, but is marked by feelings of dislocation and the need to "*become black*"¹⁰ in a way she did not have to in Nigeria. Adichie also undercuts the idea of the "*American Dream*"¹¹ through characters like Emenike, who finds

the most influential writers who have examined dystopian realities.

³ The concept of heterotopia was introduced by Michel Foucault. He elaborated on the idea in his lecture "Of Other Spaces" (1967), where he described heterotopias as spaces that are different from all other spaces, often functioning as a kind of counter-space or mirror to society. These spaces can be physical, like gardens and libraries, or conceptual, challenging the norms and orders of the conventional society.

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt introduced the term "contact zone" in her 1991 essay "Arts of the Contact Zone." The "contact zone" refers to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.

⁵ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London Heinemann, 1958.

⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit., p. 171.

⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, op. cit., p. 373.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 221.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 350.



that his American education and credentials do not translate into the success he expected. Examining this from another angle, Obinze's difficulties in navigating the British immigration system further challenge the notion of the West as a utopian promised land. Rather than presenting idealized spaces, the narrative shows the disparities, contradictions, and struggles that exist within both Africa and the West. Regarding utopia, the narrator Ifemelu reflects on the idealized vision of America that she had before arriving:

In those weeks when she discovered the rows and rows of books with their leathery smell and their promise of pleasures unknown, when she sat, knees tucked underneath her, on an armchair in the lower level or at a table upstairs with the fluorescent light reflecting off the book's pages, she finally understood. She read the books on Obinze's list but also, randomly, pulled out book after book, reading a chapter before deciding which she would speed-read in the library and which she would check out. And as she read, America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalism, race, ideology, and region became clear.¹²

This assertion shows how Ifemelu's idealized utopian vision of America is complicated as she gains a deeper understanding of the country's social, political, and racial realities through her reading. The "promise of pleasures unknown gives way to an awareness of America's tribalisms."¹³ In contrast, Adichie presents dystopian elements, particularly in her depiction of the immigration detention center where Obinze is held:

His cell was smaller, colder, than the cell in Manchester and his cellmate, another Nigerian, told him that he was not going to allow himself to be deported. He had a hardened, fleshless face. 'I will take off my shirt and my shoes when they try to board me. I will seek asylum,' he told Obinze. 'If you take off your shirt and your shoes, they will not board you.' He repeated this often, like a mantra.¹⁴

This bleak, dehumanizing portrayal of the detention center subverts any notion of a utopian, welcoming America. Instead, it presents a dystopian reality of incarceration, deportation, and the violation of human rights. Therefore, *Americanah* (2013) explores the concept of heterotopia, which Michel Foucault describes as spaces that "[it] is defined by relationships of neighborhood between points and elements, which can be described formally as series, trees, and networks."¹⁵ In the novel, the blog that Ifemelu maintains serves as a heterotopic space where she navigates her evolving understanding of race and identity. Consequently, "the more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false [...]. Sometimes

making fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself."¹⁶ This statement highlights how Ifemelu's blog becomes a liminal space where she grapples with the complexities of race, constantly questioning her own perspective and the validity of her commentary. The blog exists as a heterotopic site, neither fully utopian nor dystopian, but a space of flux and self-interrogation. "These spaces, which are in rapport in some way with all the others, and yet contradict them, are of two general types. First of all, the utopias. These are arrangements which have no real space."¹⁷

Seen through a postcolonial lens, by presenting these competing visions and deconstructing the traditional boundaries of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia, the protagonist of Adichie resists simplistic categorizations and encourages the reader to imagine alternative futures that exist in the nuanced spaces between these concepts. In exploring the theme of utopian dreams and postcolonial disillusionment, in *We Need New Names* (2013), Bulawayo reveals the collapse of idealistic visions of independence. Through three key excerpts, she exposes the stark and often brutal realities of life in postcolonial Zimbabwe. She captures the frustration and disillusionment of the educated generation who had high hopes for a better life after independence but instead witnesses continued hardship and decay. In regretfully asking the question, "is this what I went to university for? Is this what we got independence for? Does it make sense that we are living like this? Tell me!"¹⁸ she is reflecting the gap between the utopian promise of liberation and the postcolonial reality of poverty and instability.

Moreover, Bulawayo deepens this sense of disillusionment through the voice of Gayigusu, a freedom fighter turned disillusioned citizen, who laments, saying "Salilwelilizwe leli, we fought for this facking lizwe mani, we put them in power, and today they turn on us like a snake, mphu, and he spits."¹⁹ Gayigusu's outburst conveys the deep betrayal felt by those who sacrificed for liberation, only to be abandoned by the very leaders they helped install. The snake, as a metaphor, poignantly captures the collapse of post-independence ideals and the erosion of trust in nationalist leadership. In a similarly poignant moment, Darling narrates: "get ready, get ready for a new country, no more of this paradise anymore [...] And once they say it like that, Pa-ra-di-se, we know that it is a place we will soon be leaving, like in the Bible [...]"²⁰ capturing the fragile space between anticipation and sorrow, as political transition looms. The elongated repetition of the word "paradise" underscores a deep ambivalence, expressing both the hope for change and the grief of leaving behind a place that was once cherished. The imagination of the protagonists of Adichie and Bulawayo to see their wishes become a concrete reality and

¹² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, op. cit., p. 12.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, op. cit., p. 332.

¹⁴ NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33

²⁰ Ibid., p. 35.



satisfactory experience involves at the same time transforming an aspiration into something tangible.

To make a wider emphasis just as in *Americanah* (2013) and *We Need New Names* (2013), in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016),²¹ the themes of utopia and dystopia are intricately woven into the narrative, reflecting the characters' hopes and struggles within the American socio-economic landscape. Mbue uncovers the *hope for legalization and stability* of the colonized in the post-colonial world. Like Ifemulu or Darling, the protagonist, Jende Jonga, embodies the utopian dream of many immigrants seeking a better life in America. This hope is poignantly expressed in a conversation about the potential for an immigration bill that would grant legal status to undocumented immigrants. This sense of optimism is expressed through Jende's wish that "*maybe one day, Inshallah, an immigration bill like the one Kennedy and McCain were fighting for will pass Congress and the government will give everyone papers. Then your wahala will be over.*"²² Jende's optimism about becoming an American citizen and enjoying the security and opportunities that status would bring encapsulates the utopian vision of America as a land where dreams can be realized. Contrasting the utopian ideal, the novel also starkly portrays the dystopian reality many faces, particularly during the financial crisis. Jende's anxiety about job loss and economic instability is vividly described as:

Every night he went to bed hoping it would get better soon, but it would only get worse in the coming weeks. More jobs would be lost, with no hope of being found in the immediate future. The Dow would drop in titanic percentages. It would rise and fall and rise and fall, over and over, like a demonic wave.²³

This passage highlights the volatility and uncertainty that pervade the lives of the characters, illustrating the dystopian aspects of their American experience. Furthermore, in alignment with Bulawayo's techniques in revealing immigrants' conditions, Bue shows how the economic strain also affects personal relationships, leading to tension and conflict within families. The deteriorating relationship between Jende and his wife, Neni, as they navigate their uncertain future, is a powerful example: "*gone were the moments of tender embraces in the kitchen, minutes of stolen passion in the bathroom while the children slept. They were now in two separate universes, each certain of his or her rightness and the other's senselessness.*"²⁴ This internal family conflict underscores the dystopian impact of socio-economic pressures on individuals' personal lives.

The descriptions of violence, displacement, and suffering throughout the war-torn landscape further undermine the

possibility of creating an ideal society. For example, the harrowing *scene of the woman carrying her daughter's severed head on the train* shatters any remaining illusions of a peaceful and harmonious world. In this way, the novel uses specific narrative details and character experiences to systematically dismantle the concept of utopia, revealing the harsh realities and complexities of life in 1960s Nigeria amidst the backdrop of civil war. Dystopian narratives, from George Orwell's "*Nineteen Eighty-Four*,"²⁵ (1949) back to Aldous Huxley's "*Brave New World*,"²⁶ (1932) highlight the dangers of totalitarian control, conformity, and the suppression of individual freedom in the pursuit of societal perfection. These works serve as a cautionary tale, reminding the reader that the road to utopia can be paved with unintended consequences and the erosion of fundamental human rights and liberties. Dystopian narratives also challenge the reader to critically examine the assumptions and power structures that underpin utopian ideals, and to consider the potential for such visions to become distorted and oppressive.

II. Crafting Dystopia and Heterotopia Horizons: between Diasporic Experiences and Decolonial Imaginaries

Introduced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1986)²⁷, heterotopia refers to spaces that exist outside of the conventional experience of everyday life, often reflecting and contesting the surrounding social order. Imagining alternative spaces in contrast to the binary of utopia and dystopia, the concept of heterotopia, as developed by Foucault (1986), offers a more nuanced understanding of *alternative social spaces*.²⁸ Heterotopias are real, existing spaces that are simultaneously *other* and mirror the dominant societal structures. Examples of heterotopias include *prisons, hospitals, cemeteries*, and even *gardens spaces* that are both part of and separate from the mainstream. A similar dynamic that appears in Foucault's concept of heterotopia suggests that the pursuit of an ideal society may not be a binary choice between utopia and dystopia, but rather a recognition of the multiplicity of alternative social spaces and experiences that exist within and alongside the dominant social order. Heterotopias are *counter-sites spaces* that are "*something like utopias, insofar as they are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society.*"²⁹ Like Foucault's, Adichie's and Bulawayo's concept of heterotopia, through juxtaposition, reveals the coexistence of *counter-sites* with dominant spaces, challenging binary oppositions like utopia versus dystopia by embracing the multiplicity of social realities. Unlike utopias, however, Adichie's

²⁵ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Secker & Warburg, 1949.

²⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1932.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, 1986.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces (Des Espaces Autres), Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, 1986, p. 24.



and Bulawayo's heterotopias are grounded in the real, messy complexities of the present, containing within them multiple, coexisting spaces and temporalities. They do not offer a singular, perfected vision, but rather a proliferation of difference and possibility.

Americanah (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo are, then, two novels that negotiate the tensions between liberation and disillusionment in the wake of formal independence. Rather than subscribing to linear narratives of progress, these texts foreground every day, multi-dimensional realities marked by the residues of colonialism, systemic inequality, and fragmented identities. In so doing, they disrupt simplistic binaries of utopia and dystopia by offering heterotopic spaces, zones of contradiction, displacement, and critical reflection. Through their representations of diaspora, migration, economic precarity, and psychosocial resilience, both Adichie and Bulawayo challenge entrenched paradigms while imagining more just and livable futures. They reflect the individual and collective dreams, visions, and a sense of 'imagined community' that diasporic subjects construct to navigate their complex relationships with both their homeland and their host country. They also bring to light a shared sense of place, nostalgia, and identity as a result of transnational territorialities and connections shaped by forces of displacement and globalization.

Indeed, the utopian, dystopian, and heterotopic dimensions in the works of both Adichie and Bulawayo offer valuable insights into the complexities of the postcolonial condition and its transformative potential. The protagonists the two authors craft, navigate fragmented worlds shaped by displacement, aspiration, and systemic collapse where dystopian realities and heterotopic possibilities coexist, challenging monolithic narratives of postcolonial futures. Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) subverts the traditional notions of utopia and dystopia, presenting a more nuanced and complex vision of alternative futures. Rather than offering a simplistic binary of a perfect utopian society or a nightmarish dystopia, the narrative explores the heterotopic spaces that exist *in-between* as a *liminal space*. The narrator, Darling, experiences the displacement and dislocation of leaving her homeland, Zimbabwe, which is depicted as a place that has fallen into disrepair and disarray. As she describes *the shacks*, the poverty, and the violence, it takes on dystopian undertones:

Look at the little houses, the little shacks, all in a row, leaning this way and that, the corrugated iron roofs glinting in the hot sun, the grass growing wild and high, the mud-brown walls, the wire fences, the rubbish, the sewage, the dogs, the goats, the chickens, the children, the old and the young, everyone, everything, just everything so sad and lost, you can't help it, it just breaks your heart.³⁰

With the vivid imagery and polysyndeton, Bulawayo amplifies the overwhelming sense of despair and chaos in the *shacks*, thus creating a dystopian atmosphere where poverty and violence

permeate every detail. The repetition of the word "everything" and the emotional appeal of "it just breaks your heart" evoke pathos, emphasizing the human cost of systemic neglect and societal collapse. However, Darling and her friends also find moments of joy, community, and resilience within this ostensibly dystopian environment. The children's games, the sense of (un)belonging, and the ways they support each other provide glimpses of a heterotopic space, a *third space* that exists outside of the binary of utopia and dystopia, designating a mental and cultural space of transition and negotiation where identities are transformed. It is neither a place of origin nor a place of reception, but a hybrid and intermediate space where elements of different cultures mix, creating new forms of being, expression, and identity. As Darling reflects on the issue, saying that "*we are playing, running, laughing, minding our own little business, and you would never think anything bad could happen to us, the way we are carrying on.*"³¹ The contrast between the dystopian realities and the heterotopic pockets of hope and humanity underscores how the novel resists simplistic utopian or dystopian visions. As Darling later experiences in America, the "*promised land*"³² has also its own forms of inequality, alienation, and disillusionment. The author suggests that the future is not a binary choice between perfection and ruin, but a complex negotiation of various *in-between spaces* and alternative possibilities.

Through the nuanced exploration of the future in *We Need New Names* (2023), NoViolet encourages the reader to imagine new ways of envisioning and constructing the future, not as a utopian ideal or a dystopian nightmare, but as a heterotopic space of multiplicity, contradiction, and of constant reimagination of what is possible. The novel ultimately disrupts binary readings of utopia and dystopia, showing how these concepts are mutually imbricated and shaped by the active participation of the people. Therefore, it points towards heterotopic spaces and narrative practices as means of envisioning more nuanced, grounded possibilities for the future. With the interplay of utopian, dystopian, and heterotopian modes of thinking, both Adichie and Bulawayo, as postcolonial writers, imagine alternative futures that are not beholden to the totalizing logics of colonial modernity. These imaginings are crucial to their decolonial project in which they offer the possibility of worlds that are radically different from the imperial present. At the same time, they remain attuned to the pitfalls of utopianism, seeking to craft futures that are also open-ended, contingent, and attentive to difference. This is in line with Foucault's examination of specific types of heterotopias, including those of crisis and deviance, and their evolution within contemporary society as he emphasizes that "*in our own society, these heterotopias of crisis are steadily disappearing, even though some vestiges of them are bound to survive.*"³³

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³ Michel Foucault, *of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, *op. cit.*, pp. 330 - 336

³⁰ NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.



In *Americanah* (2013), the narration reveals how Adichie weaves dystopian and heterotopic threads through depictions of childhood, diaspora, and emotional dislocation, offering layered decolonial imaginaries. Rooted in the desire to preserve traditional Nigerian manners in children, she reflects a dystopic critique of American childhood culture through the character of Aunt Uju, who postulates that “I don’t want the children to say ‘Hi’ to adults, I want them to say ‘Good morning’ and ‘Good afternoon.’ [...] I want them to say ‘I’m fine, thank you’ and ‘I’m five years old,’”³⁴ simultaneously gesturing towards a heterotopic desire to reclaim diasporic identity through discipline and cultural continuity. Similarly, the depiction of the *Nigerpolitan Club* underscores the heterotopic tension of returnees caught between imagined global cities and a complex and an autonomous Lagos: “Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York [...] Full disclosure: I am one of them.”³⁵ This space of (un)being, (un)longing, (un)belonging, (un)becoming, and of critique reveals the emotional landscape of diasporic return, where decolonial aspirations collide with neocolonial disillusionment. Finally, Adichie portrays the subtle ruptures of transnational relationships through understated emotional pain and fragmented intimacy in which “she hung up with a sense of that kind of pain, but only a small sense [...]. He wondered what pain she was referring to and hoped that it was the breakup [...]”³⁶ The smallness of the pain suggests a fragile but resilient reimagining of (un)belonging. Collectively, these moments reveal how *Americanah* (2013) navigates between dystopian disillusionment and heterotopic possibility, offering a layered exploration of identity shaped by childhood memory, diasporic experiences, and postcolonial reflections.

Examining the ambivalence experienced by immigrant characters in Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), who are caught between their native culture and the culture of their host countries, prove that they navigate and negotiate their identities in what Homi Bhabha terms the “third space”³⁷ (1994), where cultural identity is postracial, liquid, fluid, and dynamic, existing between the binaries of native and host cultures. This also aligns with Stuart Hall’s theories on *cultural identity*³⁸ focusing on the dual processes of “being” and “becoming”³⁹ that Adichie’s narrative also illustrates with the complexities of cultural negotiation for immigrants, showing how they navigate between retaining their cultural identity

and adapting to new environments. Furthermore, the immigrant characters in *Americanah* (2013) inhabit a *third space* that could be likened to a heterotopia, where they are neither fully part of their native nor host cultures. This space is neither entirely utopian nor dystopian; it is a space of negotiation and constant redefinition of identity, where *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* collide. Then, the tension between utopian and dystopian futures mirrors the tension in immigrant identities in the other. Just as utopian and dystopian visions provide a critique of existing societies, the immigrant experience in *Americanah* (2013) serves as critiques of the simplistic narratives of cultural assimilation and the binaries of native vs. host culture. This prompts Nagendra to defend that “the cross-cultural situation of the diaspora leads the immigrant characters to live in the cultural in-betweenness in which they involve in the process of adoption and resistance of the values and cultural practices of the host country. This process becomes virulent in the hair styling of Ifemelu.”⁴⁰ This reference points to the manner in which cultural *in-betweenness* shapes the immigrant experience, and how Ifemelu’s hair is a powerful symbol of resistance and accommodation in negotiating identity within a diasporic space. As postcolonial authors concerned with the themes of identity and belonging, both Adichie and Bulawayo unearth the tensions within this cultural negotiation. That is why in *Americanah* (2013), Ifemelu’s navigation of the *third space* is vividly illustrated through the metaphor of hair, which becomes a site of both resistance and assimilation, aligning with Adichie’s focus on cultural *in-betweenness*. Similarly, in *We Need New Names* (2013), Darling’s movement between Zimbabwe and America mirrors the ambivalence of navigating dual cultural realities, as her experiences critique the binaries of belonging and displacement, embodying what can be term the *constant redefinition of identity*.

Furthermore, Adichie’s and Bulawayo’s dystopian narratives, which depict nightmarish, oppressive societal futures, provide a powerful counter-narrative to colonial and imperial utopias. With their narratives, they envision transformative changes and challenging dominant narratives while inviting the postcolonial subject to engage with the complexities of utopian, dystopian, and heterotopic imaginaries, and prompting reflections on the possibilities and limitations of reshaping postcolonial worlds. As Homi Bhabha asserts, “it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.”⁴¹ The postcolonial critique of utopia, then, is a vital step towards envisioning more inclusive, pluralistic, and democratically grounded social imaginaries. As Bill Ashcroft et al. also note in *The Empire Writes Back* (2000):

Utopia has always been a problematic concept for post-colonial theory. The utopian vision of the ‘new world’ has frequently been used to justify the imperial enterprise, and the

³⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, op. cit., p. 444.

³⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, op. cit., p. 409.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

³⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p. 54.

³⁸ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222-237). London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pps. 222-237. Accessed at: <https://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/510/Texts/HallCultural%20Identity%20and%20Diaspora.pdf>

³⁹ Nagendra Bhahadur Bhandari, *the Cultural Negotiation of Immigrants in Adichie's Americanah*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁴⁰ Nagendra Bhahadur Bhandari, *the Cultural Negotiation of Immigrants in Adichie's Americanah*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit., p. 172.

'primitive' societies encountered by colonial powers have often been seen through the lens of a utopian fantasy, rather than in terms of their own social and cultural realities.⁴²

They critique the use of utopian ideals as tools for imperial domination, highlighting the dissonance between the idealized 'new world' and the lived realities of the colonized societies. By employing dynamic characters, juxtaposition, irony, and metaphor, both Adichie and Bulawayo expose how utopian visions justify exploitation, erase indigenous cultural complexities, and perpetuate systems of domination. Homi Bhabha has similarly critiqued the idea, writing that the 'utopian transparency' of colonial narratives masks the ambivalence and hybridity inherent in colonial relations, thus making the process involve a rigorous interrogation of the limitations and pitfalls of utopian thinking.

Conclusion

Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) have problematized the utopian/dystopian binary by presenting alternative futures through the concept of heterotopia. These authors have deconstructed idealized visions of liberation, revealing the fractures and contradictions in postcolonial societies. The analysis has demonstrated how Adichie's stories bring to light the tension between the dream of unity and the grim realities of oppression, while Bulawayo does the same with allegory and satire on authoritarianism and diaspora disappointment. The two authors have dug into their characters' psychic and social complications, avoiding simplistic solutions, creating together heterotopic spaces that refuse dominant structures, and urging the reader to think and dethink through power dynamics and envision a more equal future.

The analysis has also shown that Adichie's and Bulawayo's literary works critique and catalyze an engagement with systemic injustices and a hope towards an inclusively oriented world, focusing on such stories of the *otherwise* and hinting at the resiliency in postcolonial literature to hold up a world of persistence, resistance, and reimagining. In exploring the depictions of alternative futures across postcolonial literature, the two novels have, then, engaged extensively with the concepts of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia. This has displayed how both Adichie and Bulawayo have used these frameworks to navigate the complexities of imagining radically transformed societal paradigms beyond the constraints of colonial and neocolonial power structures. Aligning with the postcolonial critique of utopia as a central focus, with scholars like Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, the work has exposed how ostensibly egalitarian and emancipatory utopian visions have often served to mask the exclusionary and assimilationist tendencies of the colonial discourse. Through their writing styles and thematic concerns, it has demonstrated that a simplistic binary between utopia and dystopia is insufficient for envisioning decolonial possibilities. Instead, it has embraced the concept of 'heterotopia', as theorized by Foucault, to offer a more

nuanced framework for imagining alternative spaces that exist in the interstices of dominant social orders.

The study has further demonstrated how Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) navigate the complexities of utopian, dystopian, and heterotopian imaginaries, deconstructing the boundaries between these concepts and encouraging the reader to engage with the multiple, coexisting realities and potentialities within postcolonial contexts. The heterotopic spaces depicted in these narratives become sites of flux, contestation, and the continuous reimagining of identity, community, and the future. Ultimately, both Adichie and Bulawayo have showcased how postcolonial literature has been centrally concerned with the project of envisioning alternative futures that challenge the totalizing logics of colonial modernity. Through the interplay of utopian, dystopian, and heterotopian modes of thinking, these authors offer generative visions of decolonial possibility with futures that are open-ended, attentive to difference, and grounded in the realities of the postcolonial present.

By examining *Americanah* (2013) and *We Need New Names* (2013) this study has illuminated how Adichie and Bulawayo challenge entrenched power structures and confront pervasive social injustices. Though diverse in their stylistic approaches and geographical settings, they collectively critique the lingering effects of colonial legacies, the intersections of class, gender, and race, and the ways in which marginalized individuals and communities resist, subvert, or navigate these oppressive structures. In fact, each author brings a unique voice and perspective to the discourse on postcolonial power dynamics. Adichie's portrayal of post-Biafran Nigeria and the immigrant experience in the America and Bulawayo's vivid depiction of displacement and survival in a fractured Zimbabwean diaspora have all served to highlight the diverse and complex ways in which power operates and is contested in postcolonial societies. By centering the perspectives of the marginalized, these authors compel the reader to confront the realities of systemic oppression and consider the possibilities for transformative change. The survey has unearthed how the two narratives not only challenge the status quo, but also offer a powerful call to action, urging the reader to participate in the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality.

Bibliography

1. ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Knopf, 2006.
2. -----, *Americanah*, Knopf, 2013.
3. ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
4. BHABHA, Homi K, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994.
5. BHANDARI, Nagendra Bhahadur, "The Cultural Negotiation of Immigrants in Adichie's *Americanah*." Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
6. BULAWAYO, NoViolet, *We Need New Names*, Little,

⁴² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, op. cit, p. 154.



- Brown and Company, 2013.
7. -----, *Glory*, Viking, 2022.
8. COETZEE, J.M, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Secker & Warburg, 1980.
9. DANGAREMBGA, Tsitsi, *Nervous Conditions*. Women's Press, 1988.
10. -----, *The Book of Not*, Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006.
11. -----, *This Mournable Body*, Graywolf Press, 2018.
12. FANON, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.
13. FOUCAULT, Michel, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, 1984.
14. GIKANDI, Simon, *Reading the African Novel*, Heinemann, 1992.
15. HUXLEY, Aldous, *Brave New World*, Chatto & Windus, 1932.
16. LOOMBA, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2005.
17. MBEMBE, Achille, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, 2001.
18. -----, *Critique of Black Reason*, Translated by Laurent Dubois, Duke University Press, 2017.
19. MBUE, Imbolo, *Behold the Dreamers*, Random House, 2016.
20. MAMDANI, Mahmood, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton University Press, 1996.
21. ORWELL, George, *1984*, Secker & Warburg, 1949.
22. PRATT, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, 1992.
23. QUAYSON, Ato, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* Polity Press, 2000.
24. SARGENT, Lyman Tower. "Five Hundred Years of Thomas More's Utopia and Utopianism." *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue: On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia, 2016, pp. 184-192.