

We Need New Names

By NoVilet Bulawayo

Excerpt from the Chapter *How They Left*

Look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. These with nothing are crossing borders, those with strength are crossing borders those with ambitions are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders, those with loss are crossing borders. Those with pain are crossing borders. Moving , running, emigrating, going, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing- to all over, to countries near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names we cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves.

When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be pacified in foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strange lands, the wounds of their despair bandaged in faraway lands, their blistered prayers muttered in the darkness of queer lands.

Look at the children of the land leaving in droves, leaving their own lands with bleeding wounds on their bodies and shock on their faces and blood in their hearts and hunger in their stomachs and grief in their footsteps. Leaving their mothers and fathers and children behind, leaving their umbilical cords underneath the soil, leaving the bones of their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. They will never be the same again because you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same.

Look at them leaving in droves despite knowing that they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands because they do not belong, knowing they will have to sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave, knowing they will speak in dampened whispers because they must not let their voices drown those of the owners of the land, knowing they will have to walk on their toes because they must not leave footprints on the earth lest they be mistaken for those who want to claim the land as theirs. Look at them leaving in droves, arm in arm with loss and lost, look at them leaving in droves.