

## **(Un) Naming and Mis/Naming as a Thematic Strategy in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope***

**E. MAVENGANO**

### **Abstract**

*Previously, names in literary contexts were generally treated as peripheral lexical items or mere identity tags for the personages and geo-spaces in texts. Yet, recently, the subject has become a polemical one, accorded much scholarly attention as evident in a remarkable upsurge of fascinating examination of literary names and a profound increase of academic conversations about naming practices in fictive landscapes. What is more interesting is the argument that names in fictive discourse are an inherent and indispensable part of the textual composition which contributes to the overall semantics of the text. Drawing from this realisation, the study further explores the premise that naming is not arbitrary but rather, a salient and (sub) conscious artistic technique that provides significant semiotic avenues for the articulation and signification of nuanced and dynamic meanings. The main thrust of this study is to interrogate the stylistic, thematic functions, and semantic possibilities of some typonyms, anthroponyms, and charactonyms in selected contemporary Zimbabwean fictional novels from an onomastic perspective. It is appropriate to propose that this could be a critical and refreshing interpretive endeavour aimed to provide rich avenues of reading and decoding thematic preoccupations in the chosen novels since this dimension has not been given much attention. The study concludes that (un) naming and misnaming are conscious acts by the writers of the selected texts to foreground certain thematics.*

**Keywords:** Anthroponyms, charactonyms, fictive landscape, onomastics, typonyms

### **Introduction**

There is a consensus that literary discourse is a veritable medium for depicting sociocultural, economic, linguistic, and political realities which are in some cases considered ineffable and perhaps offensive (Nyambi, 2013, Ngoshi, 2016, Mavengano & Hove 2019). Names in fictive writings cannot be relegated to mere labels of identity because they are fundamental aesthetic aspects of the thematic construction of poetic texts (Likaka, 2009; Nyambi & Mangena, 2015; Ngoshi, 2016). The realisation of the significance of names and naming stylisations in literary works cannot be refuted and has recently triggered a growing increase of interest in the anthroponomastic and toponomastic web of texts. In this study, a critical engagement with the anthroponyms or personal names and typonyms or place names is meant to argue that names are complex semiotic sites that offer avenues to attain numerous semantic possibilities. Through the prism of *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *We need new names*, the study examines the extent to which literary onomastics helps in the discovery of fresh and paramount interpretative insights that contribute to the polysemantic potential or semiotic problem of these texts. However, it is imperative to state that only a few names are studied due to the limits of space and time, so this study does not offer a comprehensive onomastic analysis of the two novels examined.

### **Literary onomastic lens: the semantics of names**

This study is located at the multidisciplinary intersection of socio/linguistics and poetics thereby maintaining the cross-disciplinary nature of onomastics. The term onomastics is derived from the

Greek term *onoma* which means name and *onomastikos* which refers to the scientific study of names (Dehnart, 2009; Lynch, 2016). In this study, the literary onomastic perspective is used to read and interpret selected Zimbabwean fictional works written in the post-2000 historical epoch. This is a period linked to the notion of the 'Zimbabwean crisis' (Nyambi, 2013). According to Mbarachi and Igwenyi (2018), onomastics is a vast field that includes anthroponomastics and toponomastics. Anthroponomastics is the study of names of individuals whereas toponomastics is preoccupied with the examination of names of places. Koopman (2002, p. 8) brings to attention a very important dimension of onomastic reading and interpretive process when he points out that "as names are linguistic units which normally operate within a social context, onomastics can be considered as a branch of sociolinguistics." This means that onomastic reading regards the social context of language in use and its relations to social reality as essential. In other words, the onomastic perspective does not only consider the semantic potential of the linguistic construction of a text but also appreciates the outsideness of language and languaging as a critical interpretive endeavour to uncover more important semantic possibilities. Thus, onomastics as an analytical lens brings together the linguistic and extralinguistic or pragmatic aspects of the interpretive process. Likaka (2009) affirms that names are not mere linguistic labels but rather embody intricate semantic signification. Okello (2021) also posits that names are sites of observation and perception and have been used as avenues for encoding myths and metaphors for reflections. For Butler (2012, p. 4), naming practices should never be dismissed simply "as a stylistic embellishment, but as important functional literary devices that shape the texts in a significant manner." In a similar vein, Dehnart (2009) commenting on *Anthropos* posits that names have communicative functions, and they convey messages about the individual's reputation and personality. In agreement with Dehnart's view, Butler (2010) postulates that an onomastic perspective can present a valid and unique alternative mode for the interpretation of literature. Odelle (2012) Viriri (2018) and Okello (2020) further contend that names are a complex tapestry comprised of numerous interpretive threads, each requiring a distinctive unraveling. This is an important observation because it highlights the fact that names are expressive artifacts contributing to meaning-making in literary works. This means that names as semiotic constructs trigger the process of cognition of the extralinguistic reality which is linguistically represented. These scholarly ideas are important in this study because they suggest that naming in fiction is a contested site of artistic enunciations and meaning-making, therefore names should be accorded necessary attention in the interpretive endeavor of the fictive writings.

### **The post-2000 Zimbabwean fictional oeuvre: Narratives of crises**

The novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* marked Valerie Tagwira's maiden entry into Zimbabwe's fictional landscape. The novel was published in 2006 and is set in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. *We need new names* were written by NoViolet Bulawayo and published in 2014. The setting of the novel *We need new names* is implied rather through the onomastic stylisations rather than explicitly mentioned in the novel. It is generally agreed by critics and scholars that the novel is set in Bulawayo during the economic and political meltdown, citizenry grief, and political violence in Zimbabwe (Ngoshi, 2016, Mavengano, 2020). The selected texts capture daunting socio-historical and political moments in Zimbabwe during Mugabe's reign. This historical epoch is overtly accentuated in the Zimbabwean literary oeuvre as defined by bleakness, pessimism, the state's acts of brute force, and ordinary citizens experiencing extreme conditions of precarity. The plot of the novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* is constructed around the urban experiences of a poor protagonist Onai Moyo whose existential conditions epitomise that of other impoverished urban dwellers around her. Onai's circumstances are

not different from the experiences of Paradise residents in *We need new names*. The cityscape in both novels symbolically portrays the nation on the brink of collapse due to economic and political crises. The Zimbabwean nation space is a precinct of tension and inexorable distress for ordinary citizens. Both novels project a profound poetic dialogic and thematic intertextual propensity towards what is generally perceived as a turbulent period of Zimbabwean crisis which has received scholarly attention (Nyambi & Mangena, 2015). The protagonists of the selected novels are from sites of the periphery whose existential conditions are deplorable. The residents of these highly populated and impoverished sites are the precariat of the postcolony who endures relentless misery mainly generated from the political realm of their country. These novels seem to problematise the borders that separate fiction and lived realities in the troubled post-2000 Zimbabwe. Mavengano (2020:3) writing about the post-2000 Zimbabwean fictional writings points out that:

[t] the thematic preoccupations in the fictional texts are articulated within the daunting reflection nation on a verge of collapse, a haunting image of a country weighed down by an avalanche of failures...cumulatively categorized as the Zimbabwean crises.

Interestingly, Raftopolous (2010) claims that from 2000 onwards the state in Zimbabwe tightened its grip on power by utilising political violence, artistic and media censorship as well as intensified control mechanisms of the public discourses. This claim implies that during this historical phase, artistic freedom was truncated, and discreet expressive strategies of writing were necessary. This is essential when reading some of the onomastic aspects of the selected novels.

### **Polysemanticism in naming: charactonyms as symbolic tropes and thematic motifs**

Traditional linguistics viewed linguistic meaning as generated by linguistic knowledge of lexical items together with the understanding of semantic rules. This view has been criticized in recent research on linguistic and semantic perspectives that privilege pragmatic meaning or context-dependence interpretive process (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Ariel (2002) asserts that literal meanings are derived from coded linguistic meanings and all those inferences are dictated by the extra-linguistic context. The two novels have an intriguing onomastic item that stirs up the reader's imagination. In *The uncertainty of hope*, Garikai, or Gari, is one of the key characters of the novel. Garikai in the Shona language means to prosper and live in peace or comfort. Paradoxically, there is no evidence of prosperity or peace in Garikai's life. He and his poverty-stricken family live in a home inherited from Gari's parents. Garikai is a promiscuous and irresponsible husband who is dating Gloria (within the Christian religion is associated with a virtuous and honoured person), but in the context of the novel is a well-known prostitute. Garikai's reckless behaviour is further indicated by his constant wife battering. Garikai's abusive nature is captured through his wife Onai's "episodic facial bruising and blackened eyes" (Tagwira, 200, p. 5) The name Onai whose English translation means to look at or observe something invites readers to gaze at the marital abuse as well as the pitiable existential conditions of this and other characters in the novel. Tagwira's novel invites critical responses and suggests points of reflection through the misnaming of the characters such as Garikai and Gloria. Neither their personality traits nor their conditions of living speak to the meanings of their names. The author's choice of names in this case is a strategy that invites further inquiry beyond the lexical items in the interpretation of meaning. The ironic and pragmatic functions of Garikai's name can be also discerned in the economic and socio-political context of Zimbabwe from the year 2000, a period which was famously named the Zimbabwean crisis (Nyambi, 2013). Garikai is suffering from frustration and insecurity due to the looming retrenchment since his company is shutting down its operations in

Zimbabwe. He seeks solace in Gloria, his 'small house,' or concubine and beer drinking. Yet, these two do not bring him peace as he later dies of AIDS due to his wayward and promiscuous behaviour. Garikai provides an intriguing case of misnaming, it is a biting satirical reflection on some traits of the post-independent Zimbabwean society. The unhomeliness within the national space is juxtaposed with the post-independence expectations of admirable and peaceful living embedded in the names Garikai and Gloria. In this respect, Garikai, Gloria, and other ordinary citizens are victims of misgovernance. At the same time, Garikai and Gloria's immoral and egocentric behaviour conveys a loss of human conscience which characterises post-independent society. This speaks to the profound contradiction in the deictic function of Garikai's name. Similarly, there is nothing admirable about Gloria, her immoral fame is a source of shame and causes untold suffering to Onai and her children. Gloria is among poverty-ridden Mbare residents, who were immensely affected by the government's urban Clean up Trash programme, officially named Operation Restore Order or Murambatsvina in 2005 (Nyambi, 2013). The intention of Operation Murambatsvina as argued by the government of Zimbabwe was to rid the country of illegal structures, crime filthy stalls, and squalor. This was done through the demolition of illegal structures, an exercise that left thousands of poor urban communities displaced, homeless, and without any means of survival. Gloria later after Gari's death, becomes a victim of Murambatsvina, left homeless and broke. Her plight is worsened by the fact she is HIV-infected, ill, and with nothing to feed her child and herself. There is nothing glorious about this character, the novelist's onomastic strategy in this regard is also pertinent in exposing the plight of the common man in a failing state. The following passage is telling evidence of the impact of Murambatsvina on Mbare residents:

The aftermath of the first stage of the demolitions left no one in Mbare untouched... Homes and livelihoods were lost, almost as if on impulse. Mbare was the worst affected, by its level of overcrowding and social deprivation. People were constantly on the move with their families and possessions, just looking for open spaces in which to erect makeshift shelters (Tagwira, 2006, p. 154).

The callous demolitions caused loss of lives including that of Hondo, whose name means war, and is a liberation war veteran who committed suicide we are told that:

[t]here were three other funerals in Jo'burg Lines that week. The saddest was one for two toddlers who'd died instantly when the demolition team erroneously moved in without checking whether there were people inside the targeted shack. Not only had the parents been left homeless and impoverished, but also childless and grieving (Tagwira, 2006, p. 155).

Hondo's name carries echoes of the colonial era. Sadly, his contribution during the liberation struggle is ignored by state security who bulldozed his house amidst his protest. Hondo reminds state agents how he fought for freedom and progress of the nation, but his plea fell on deaf ears. His war name evokes historical memories and reveals the post-colonial betrayal of the liberation fighters and the masses whose participation during the liberation struggle is devalued by the state. It is also relevant to interpret the name Hondo (war) as referring to the continuous socio-economic and political struggle in the post-independence era. The end of the colonial period did not bring the end of the suffering of common people who are in a constant war for survival.

Mugabe regime then named its slanderous urban housing programme '*Garikai, Hlalani Kahle* meaning good living in both its isiShona and isiNdebele versions as a counter to Murambatsvina that attracted local and international condemnation. The name Garikai assumes a new political semantic function

as/ part of the state's political rhetoric. Shona and Ndebele are the dominant linguistic groups in Zimbabwe which explain why the state narrative aims to appeal to these groups. The misnaming of the programme aims to present a falsified euphoric political narrative on one hand and as part of the ruling party's insult to the public conscience. The state decides to construct a narrative that obfuscates gross human rights violations and violence against the victims during a state-sanctioned Operation Clean-up thrash (Murambatsvina). However, the misnamed Garikai, Hlalani kahle satirises corrupt politicians who engaged in corrupt schemes leaving out thousands of Murambatsvina victims without benefitting. These details deconstruct the state-constructed convenient narrative meant to falsify and conceal the grammar of violence and vulgarity of power embedded in Operation Murambatsvina. In addition to the hostile economic conditions, the Mbare residents' suffering is amplified by Murambatsvina programme.

The extralinguistic context is important in the disambiguation of the semantic opaqueness generated by the name of Garikai which in this context speaks to the rhetoric of deceit constructed by the state. The ironic name fits well in what Hove (2021, p. 157) describes as, "the choreographed distortions of history" that Mugabe and the ruling party masterminded. Hove also adds that the state's brutalities against its citizens take place contrary to "the nationalists' claims to be the progenitors and guardians of the postcolonial nation" (Hove, 2021, p. 159). It is thus, appropriate to argue that Tagwira's crafting of the name Garikai is aesthetically and semantically compelling. The name assumes polysemic quality in its ambiguity. Its metonymic transference to the official monological narrative serves as a satirical grotesque that mocks and troubles the state-constructed discourses which intend to hide the truth about the government's socioeconomic failures. The armed security forces that implement Operation Murambatsvina carry button sticks, and riffles used to instill fear into the victims. Murambatsvina has disastrous effects on poor and helpless urban dwellers in both *The uncertainty of hope* and *We need new names* since houses are bulldozed, residents are left homeless and vulnerable living in open spaces of Tsigra Grounds, the sad end of children trapped to death in debris when homes were razed down by bulldozers and vendors lose market stalls which are sources of their livelihoods. The urban poor's experience of Murambatsvina heightened their uncertainties about the future of living in a nation in crisis (Nyambi, 2013). In this regard, the misnaming strategy is employed by the author to ridicule the Mugabe government's pursuit of power which is done by hiding its violence against the citizenry. In other words, the onomastic aesthetics of the name Garikai, *Hlalani Kahle* serves as empty verbiage meant to muzzle imperceptible realities and divert public attention from the realities of crude power performed by the Zimbabwean government. It is hard for the reader to decipher its semantic irony without looking at the context in which this name is used. This troubles the view that names are mere lexical entities that do not have any intrinsic semantic value (Coates, 2009). It is critical to note that in both novels names are treated as linguistic and literary devices as well as semantic markers. In a different context but relevant to the discussion in this study, Watanabe (2005) explains that names given to people have deep insinuations for socio-cultural and political meanings because personal names are political and socio-cultural memes.

Another interesting name in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is Onai, the protagonist of the novel. Onai who is Gari's constantly abused wife is one of the urban precariats who survives through vegetable vending. Onai is a victim of both male abuse and misgovernance in Zimbabwe. Her oppressed status as a woman married to a womaniser Garikai is captured through her struggle to feed the family. In addition, her philanderer husband was dating an infamous Jo'burg Lines prostitute named Gloria and one of her

boyfriends had died of AIDS.’ (Tagwira, 2006, p. 125). We are told that “Gari was not an easy man to live with. Over the years, she had worn herself out just trying to conceal proof of his violence” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 5). She is constantly battered and taken to hospital where there is no medication, electricity, or running water. Considering these circumstances that define this character her name Onai (watch and contemplate), can be conceived as a verbal act appearing in an imperative mood which is an invitation to the reader to witness this woman’s suffering caused by male abuse and daunting existential conditions confronting citizens in the country in crisis (Nyambi, 2013). It is also important to note that the economic and political crisis further amplifies gender tensions Onai is Gari’s punching bag yet she cannot contemplate the idea of divorce because, in her whole extended family, nobody had ever had a divorce (Tagwira, 2006, p. 46). The novel through naming Onai as a socio-cultural phenomenon protests against Shona’s cultural teachings from which Onai belongs, which compels women to remain in abusive marriages. This reading is in line with Mbarachi and Igwenyi (2018, p. 29) who posit that “names are a reflection of people’s language and culture hence novelists often adopt names to capture their sociocultural background, the society in which their texts are set, or the background of their fictional characters.” Mbarachi and Igwenyi (2018) in their analysis of names used in four novels written by Nigerian authors concluded that language and culture are intertwined to bequeath an identity to the named character. Onai’s mother has been instrumental in her resolve not to leave Gari. The mother advises her to persevere and keep the marriage intact irrespective of the abuse “*Kugomera uripo chaiko mwanangu... no matter how hard it gets. Always remember that a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side*” (Tagwira, 2006, p.7). The readers’ gaze is also invited to see how cultural teachings work together with patriarchy to oppress women in marriages. Onai frequently suffers from severe headaches:” a headache was stealthily advancing behind her eyes. She saw stars and dark spots.” (Tagwira, 2006, p. 125).

In *We need new names*, NoViolet Bulawayo also deploys an onomastic technique to convey additional information about the post-2000 Zimbabwean nation. The scatological trope ‘kaka’ which means human faeces affective meaning speaks about everything that has gone wrong and the rottenness within the national space and the vulgarity of power (Mangena 2017; Mavengano, 2021). Zimbabwe’s national space’s unhomeliness metaphorically stinks like kaka or human faeces. It is the reason why the citizens are leaving their country ‘in droves.’ Citizens of Bulawayo’s fictive world whose unmistakable referent society Zimbabwe in the post-2000 period, face numerous hardships such as political violence, poverty, and hunger, among others. The profound excretory imagery speaks about the disgust felt by the common citizens who languish in their nation which has become a “house of hunger.”

### **(Un) naming and dis/ misnaming**

The police are the state agents who raze down the homes of the poor urbanites during Operation Murambatsvina in both novels. One of the victims of this clean-up programme in *We need new names* calls these police officers in the demolition team “dog-shit or kaka.” The affective meaning embedded in dog-shit takes away the significance of police as security agents but they have become co-referential of shit because they are involved in horrendous human rights abuses. The police are unnamed from being a dignified force that serves the interests of civilians since they have become instruments of violence against civilians. They are renamed ‘shit’ because they have been misnamed as law enforcement agents when in this context, they do not abide by the laws they should be representing. The same can be said about the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Nzou, a high-ranked official in

the ruling party who is involved in shoddy deals. His name Nzou, a Shona word that refers to an elephant. His name alludes to his huge physique of an elephant is symbolically significant as it personifies numerous figurative connotations for the ruling class. He represents the egocentric class that wields political muscle and loots resources at the expense of ordinary Zimbabweans. Nzou (elephant is among the big five who rule the jungle, in the same way, this character is among the rulers of the nation. These members of the ruling party are engrossed in their politics of eatery in Mbembe's (1992) vocabulary. Ironically, Nzou says pulling deals was always a way of securing a future for his children because "salaries were pathetic, and the cost of living was too high." (Tagwira, 2006, p. 143). One then wonders about the fate of the (un)employed ordinary citizens when a high-profile official claims his salary was far from enough to feed his family.

Similarly, the case of the character named Hondo (war) as aforementioned, provides an interesting avenue to read Tagwira's novel. Intriguingly, the conditions of living of this character provide a critique of the postcolonial government for failing to honour those who suffered and sacrificed their lives to liberate the country. Despite that Hondo is a war veteran, it could be argued he is misnamed or unnamed because he becomes a victim of state-sanctioned violence and displacement. On the other hand, the name provides a critique of the blind support of the repressive regime that offers nothing else except citizenry agony. This interjects and transgresses the nationalist discourses that erect political and economic borders between the perceived patriots and unpatriotic citizens as well as emphasise the difference. Tagwira's novel intertextually shows that even former freedom fighters share the same predicament with other ordinary Zimbabweans and the 'Bornfrees' of Bulawayo's text.' Paradoxically, the character Hondo is created to convey alternative counter visions that speak about the disturbing lexical/semantic ambiguities in the existential experiences of some of the ruling party's supporters and other citizens in Zimbabwe. State-sanctioned violence does not only affect the politically marginalised other but rather victimises some of the ruling party's bootlickers and staunch supporters like Hondo reminiscent of *Chinodya's Harvest of Thorns* and *Kanengoni's Echoing Silences*. Thus, naming serves as an act of indictment or speaking truth to power about how it has forgotten the sacrifices made and the promises which have never been fulfilled. Hondo is thus, a deconstructive figure used to question the state's false metanarrative constructed around the claim to safeguard the interests of black Zimbabweans including former liberators. Hondo is degraded by the very government he contributed to bring to power. Hondo feels humiliated:

When Onai got back home, she found the demolition team in a heated confrontation with Hondo, her neighbour, the war veteran. He was gesticulating and shouting irately at the riot police about their lack of respect for the people who had fought in the war to liberate the country from the British (Tagwira, 2006, p. 149).

Hondo becomes the victim of Murambatsvina in what I view as an act of dis (un) naming. His liberation worthiness is disremembered by the same government that he served before. His name could be read as a plea to those in power to remember the pertinent and immense contribution made by the veteran war liberators. The title *The Uncertainty of Hope*, together with the name Hondo also speak about the tragic fate of those who fought and sacrificed their lives to liberate the nation from British rule yet, in postcolonial Zimbabwe are left to languish in poverty.

The onomastic stylisation taps into the archives of memory and presents a strong objection to the exclusivist discourses constructed by the state which erects borders between the ruling party

supporters and non-supporters. The political pragmatics of the day within ZANU PF and war veteran structures is to defend the sovereign status of the nation against foreign interference, especially by America and Britain (Nyambi, 2013). Ironically, this fictional incident makes an interesting parallel to the reality of the late veteran singer Dickson Chingaira famously known as Chinx who lost his home during the Murambatsvina programme in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe (Mavengano, 2020). Hondo's case of losing a home through state-sanctioned evictions conveys extreme maliciousness at the same time exposes what Mavengano (2021) describes as the vulgarities of power in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The ruling party in the Mugabe-led government does not respect the humanity of its kind in its selfish ambition to cling to power. Both novels offer a tormenting depiction of Murambatsvina. The bulldozing of the former liberator's house could be interpreted as an act of unnamng by the Mugabe government which refuses to respect the heroes' humanity.

In *We Need New Names*, names or ononyms are employed as semantic fields with the capacity for emotional evocation. Through a naming strategy, the novel projects a biting critique of socio-political ills. A child growing up in stinging poverty is named Bastard. This could be interpreted as referring to a bastardised culture that is conveyed through greed and egocentric pastors and traditional healers who patronise naïve followers and rob them of the little money they struggle to get. The immorality of the postcolonial state is further exposed through a mother who invites her lover and has sex in a room that she shares with her young daughter. The name Bastard condemns the adult world's irresponsibility. The child and his mates are also victims of post-colonial state failures in Zimbabwe. We can also infer that the name registers disenchantment with the regime that has adopted egocentric cultural and political ideologies that are foreign to African contexts in which the ethos of *Ubuntu* is supposed to be practiced. The fictional narratives in this study deploy names for character construction and meaning-making. Bulawayo employs vulgar and grotesque to comment on the bastardised culture. The novel carnivalises the postcolonial environment through Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro whose name is considered vulgar in the Shona language because it refers to the male sexual organ. The prophet is a sexual psychopath which is denotatively captured by the name (a daring bitch). He pounces on women in the presence of congregants in his church. Bulawayo's misnaming of the prophet condemns his deviant and shameless carnal appetite that is even revealed in the church which is an ambivalent site with worshippers and sexual perverts. He is described as a crazy Prophet by Darling. The ineffable name brings two linguistic systems (translated English through suffixation and loan Shona word), together with the central trope and motif of human excrement (kaka) as a source domain of metaphorisation that generates grotesque satire and epithet utilised to produce nauseating images of a country. For Ngoshi (2016, p. 56) the "aesthetic of vulgar" is captured in the following passage through the prophet's grotesque dramatisation before his gullible church congregation:

Now Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro is busy thundering about Judas and Golgotha and the cross and the two thieves next to Jesus and things, making like he saw it all. When Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro is in form doesn't stand in one place. He paces up and down like there are hot coals under his feet (Bulawayo, 2014, p. 35).

It is during such dramatisation that the immoral prophet would touch women's genitalia on the pretext of healing them. The kaka metaphor thematises, paralytic horror generated by the failures and the level of immorality that defines those in positions of power in contemporary Zimbabwe. The illocutionary force of this statement foregrounds emotive or affective meaning. Zimbabwe is haunted

by ruinous political culture. Mother of Bones counts her worthless money on daily basis.

The name Bastard also points to the plight of citizens who seem to have lost their entitlement to state protection in the context of the hostile political environment presented in both novels. Interestingly, in *We need new names*, children living in shacks bear names like Nomore problems, Bornfree, and Bastard which seem to mock the unfolding shocking realities in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Mugabe's autocratic leadership prescribes who is considered a Zimbabwe and who does not (Mavengano, 2020). This condition disregards "alleged" enemies of the state who then become "bastardised" citizens, a name given to one of the children born and raised in the eponymous location misnamed Paradise since its biblical allusion contradicts the description as a shanty town at the marginal space where the poorest of the poor reside. It is then appropriate to argue that these children are denied their cultural and national identities hence their names cannot be traceable to these entities.

### **The poetics of unnamings in typonyms: Paradise, Mbare, Heaven way, and Golgotha**

The chosen texts have interesting typonyms which are analysed in this section. In *We need new names*, the conditions of the poor are foregrounded through a shanty town named Paradise.

According to Ngoshi (2016, p. 55), Paradise is:

[a] marginal space characterised by poverty and idle living. Paradise is not a befitting name for this place and those who name it degrade the idea of paradise.

In *We need new names*, the displaced people live in makeshift shacks in Paradise. Whereas, the biblical Paradise is a highly adored place of peaceful rest, Bulawayo's fictive construction is a compelling contrast. Paradise residents just like the people in Mbare are left at the mercy of AIDS, hunger, and political violence. Thus, the euphemistic name Paradise generates cognitive dissonance since the place is also regarded by the children as *a kaka* toilet. This speaks about how disgusting are the living conditions in Paradise.

Both Mbare and Paradise residents suffer in abject poverty due to their socio-economic conditions. These are sites of struggle. Onai and other Mbare residents like her walk from town because they cannot afford ever-increasing fares (Tagwira, 2006, p. 17). In Mbare most of the tower lights were faulty" and badly serviced roads to the hospital have outsized potholes (Tagwira, 2006, p. 13). The public health facilities in Zimbabwe had no electricity, drugs, or running water. Alternative use of the generator was unsuccessful because it was "on for two minutes, then it crashed," and the C section was done candlelight (Tagwira, 2006, p. 50). In addition, hyperinflation was evident and Onai satirically explained the plight of the poor when she said:

I never thought that in my lifetime I would be a millionaire. *Inini chaiye miriyoneya!* But look at me! ...must be amongst the poorest millionaires in the world" (Tagwira, 2006, pp. 55-56).

Similarly, in *We need new names* Mother of Bones languishes in poverty, she lives in a shack, yet she owns bricks of Zimbabwean dollars which she has been advised by others to throw away because it is worthless.

In *We need a new name*, Paradise and Heavenway are employed to articulate HIV and AIDS. Darling's father is a victim of the AIDS pandemic. Whereas the adult world lives in denial of the reality of the prevalence of the pandemic, Stina, a child metaphorically advises;

it's no use hiding AIDS... it's like hiding a thing with horns in a sack... one day the horns will start boring through the sack and come out in the open for everyone to see" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 100).

The name Heavenway conveys the loss of human lives due to the pandemic. It is a graveyard where fresh graves are always dug. This is unsurprising in a context where HIV drugs are in short supply and health services have greatly deteriorated as chronicled in *The Uncertainty of hope*. It is thus appropriate to argue that the name Heavenway as used in *We need new names* conveys the idea that AIDS has become a present-day way of dying (Mavengano, 2020).

The other toponymic aesthetic of interest is embedded in Golgotha. Golgotha in ancient Israel's Jerusalem was a place of skull because incorrigible criminals were executed. It is also a place where Jesus was crucified. Its use in the text symbolically speaks about the excesses of power in the postcolony that have generated untold suffering for the postcolonial subjects whose lives and survival continue to be threatened. The toponomastic and macro toponymic lexical item Golgotha reeks of anguish and death hence it could be linked to Paradise and Heavenway. In the biblical context, Golgotha is also known as Calvary this brings to the fore ambiguities that come with an exceptional significance in the Christian world since Christians believe that the crucifixion of Jesus saved humanity. In much the same way, Paradise, Heavenway, and Golgotha in *We need new names* are not just sites of precarity and death but rather serve as sites of protest and objection. The Paradise citizens demand political change and hope to transform their conditions of living. Bornfree is butchered for supporting the opposition change party. If this sense is to go by, the name Golgotha as Calvary is deployed to rename the marginalised Others who were previously misnamed. It is liberating and articulates subversive discourse that protests the metaphoric execution of citizenry whose metaphoric death is caused by the toxicity, absurdity, and obscenity in the political, economic, and religious realms in Zimbabwe. It is these people from marginal spaces who seek to redefine themselves as embedded in the title 'we need new names.' They reject names and identities prescribe by the oppressive state. Like Jesus, Bornfree sacrificed his life for the common good. The onomastic strategies here once again subvert and undermines both political and religious practices in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The onomastic quality in some cases is part of the vituperative virago that defines these novels.

### Conclusions

The foregoing discussion has highlighted that it is essential and productive to examine the onomastic construction of literary writings to attain more refreshing insights into hermeneutic practices. Considering the idea that Tagwira's novel *The uncertainty of hope* was published in 2006 whereas Bulawayo's *We need new names* is a 2014 publication, a period of eight years apart speaks about a daunting permanent condition of life in postcolonial Zimbabwe as rightly observed by Muchemwa (2010). The Zimbabwean nation space has remained a site of precarity, extreme citizenry anguish, political intolerance, detention, and other brutal atrocities performed by the state (Alexander & McGregor, 2013; Moyo & Mavengano, 2021; Hove, 2021). While the novels examined in this chapter have previously received scholarly attention. Writing for the two female authors is an act of remembering the postcolonial injustices especially perpetuated by the ruling party in Zimbabwe through naming and disnaming. The penetrating narrative voices together with some of the discussed naming practices in these texts open salient avenues of reading the memorable brutalities that defined the Mugabe-led regime from 2000 up to his demise in November 2017. It is an irrefutable fact

the two novels fictionalise historiography of the postcolonial Zimbabwe under dictatorial leadership practices. These fictional narratives remain significant archives that bring troubling memories of the acts of injustices, brutalities, and bleakness of Mugabe's reign. In a nutshell, in cognisance of the above readings of the selected literary texts from an onomastic perspective, names are crucial semes and memes that carry nuanced meanings, and names in some cases serve as cultural and socio-economic class tags. They also convey important traits of a character and offer descriptive features of a place. In other words, names and naming practices have textual and semantic implications because they are part of the expressive functions of literary discourse. Onomastic strategies provide useful semantic frames for salient thematic motifs or tropes and create fundamental polysemic/polyphonic significations.

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### About the Author

**Dr Esther Mavengano** is a Lecturer for Linguistics and Literature in the Department of English and Media Studies, Faculty of Arts at Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. She holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics and Literary studies obtained from the University of NorthWest in South Africa. Her research areas maintain a nuanced interface of areas in applied linguistics, gender, poetics, politics, and religion. She has published in reputable international journals and book publishers including

Cogent Arts and Humanities, African Identities, Literator, Journal of Multicultural Discourses, Palgrave, and Routledge among others. She is a Research Fellow at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, College of Human Sciences, UNISA, South Africa, and a von Humboldt Postdoctoral Research Fellow at TU (Technische Universität Dresden) Institute of English and American Studies, Department of English in Germany. She is a co-editor of several books including one titled Zimbabwe in the Post-COVID-19 Era: Reflections, Lessons and the Future of Public Health published by Routledge in 2023.