

---

## No Sacred Cow Spared: An Exploration of the Polemics in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.

**Mika Nyoni**

*Senior Lecturer in the Curriculum Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.*

### **ABSTRACT:**

*This paper examines the polemics in NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names*, which is a development from 'Hitting Budapest' a short story written earlier and entered for the Caine Prize for writing. Reader response literary lenses are used to analyse the work of art. This was chosen mainly because of the open cheque approach it affords the critic who has the license not only to read the lines but also to read between and beyond them unfettered by the barricades some literary theories erect. Any human decoder of signs in whatever form is a 'reader' and that reader brings with him or her a unique 'literary capital' which influences, consciously or unconsciously the appreciation of the work at hand. The book looks at the need for 'us' to assume new names. The conclusion from the transaction between this reader and the text under scrutiny is that no one is spared in Bulawayo's rebuking of how human beings across the globe (mis)manage their affairs whether in environments of material want or plenty. To Bulawayo humanity needs to assume new names in order to create a better place for the human race.*

**KEY WORDS:** NoViolet Bulawayo-*We Need New Names*, Reader Response Criticism, Zimbabwe

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Reader response theory is a critical movement whose proponents include Kenneth Burke, Wayne Booth, Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss and Walker Gibson. This is by no means a homogeneous group of thinkers as Reader response theory has different strands. Although these thinkers disagree on many of the features of reader response criticism, they share the premises that texts affect readers in unique and subjective ways, that readers are part and parcel of the interpretative process and that the reader's background has a profound effect on the resultant interpretation of a work of art (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 2005; Habib, 2005).

According to Rosenblatt, one of the most prominent reader response critics, the reading process involves a reader and a text. The reader and the text interact or share a transactional experience with the text acting like a stimulus for eliciting various reader past experiences, thoughts and ideas. The text simultaneously shapes the reader's experiences; selecting, limiting and ordering those ideas that best conform to the text (Bressler, 1994). In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt posits that:

---

There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual literary works. *A novel or a poem or a play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols* [Emphasis added](Rosenblatt,1995:24)

Through this transactional experience, the reader and the text produce a new creation called a poem. For many reader response critics a poem becomes an event that takes place during the reading process or what Rosenblatt calls the *aesthetic transaction* which happens each time there is interaction between the reader and text . Rosenblatt notes that the poem "...must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during the coming together, as compenetration of a reader and a text" (Rosenblatt, 1978:25). Meaning is therefore a product of the cross pollination between reader and text, a relationship which is not cast in stone but is kaleidoscopic. As noted by Hans Robert Jauss 'the horizon of expectations' by readers from different interpretative cultures and times will always yield different 'poems' from the same work. He elaborates thus: "literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue" (Jauss cited in Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, (2005:51).

For Roseblatt readers can and do read in one or two ways: efferently or aesthetically. Efferent reading involves reading for information where the reader is interested only in gaining new information not in the literariness discernible in the interaction of the actual words deliberately used by the artist (Bressler,1994) while in aesthetic reading the reader experiences the text: "We note its every word, its sounds, its patterns and so on. In essence, we live through the transactional experience of creating the poem" (Bressler, 1994:49).

When reading aesthetically, we involve ourselves in an elaborate encounter of give-and-take with the text. All this constitutes what Rosenblatt calls the 'literacy experience'.

For reader response critics the emphasis is diverted from the text as the sole determiner of meaning to the significance of the reader as an essential participant in the reading process and in the creation of meaning. In this paper NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* ,a book largely about Zimbabwe in the post 2000 era written by a Zimbabwean, will be analyzed by a Zimbabwean, who lived in Zimbabwe during the 'crisis period' which is the main focus of the work. The analyst is an insider and therefore the 'right' connoisseur for the art. There are certain aspects in the work which can fully be understood and appreciated by an insider. These include language use (including the African languages and special English variety used) cultural practices as well as names used.

### **ANALYSIS OF *We Need New Names***

The reader of the novel is struck by the title which implores 'us' to assume new names. The reader, who is included in the collective pronoun 'we' is jostled to want to look himself/herself in the mirror introspectively. Because of the use of the collective pronoun 'we', we can conclude that no one is spared. The use of the verb 'need' instead of 'want' reflects the gravity of the matter: the need for new names is a necessity not a luxury. The novel is set in part in Zimbabwe after the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina. The first part looks at the things we are doing wrong

in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular-we need, not want, to change our ways: our vices range from extra-marital affairs to political intolerance, from desperate scrounging for an existence to super wealth, from going to public gatherings such as Holy Chariot Church barefoot in the case of Darling or red tennis shoe on one leg and green high heeled shoe on the other (obviously salvaged from a dump site) in the case of Mother of Bones on one hand and Lamborghini Reventon driving on the other in one locality.

The second part of the novel is set in the U.S.A., an Eldorado to Darling, from a distance. On close scrutiny she realizes that the inhabitants there also need new names. They may not have exactly the same problems as those bedeviling those in far away Paradise but they lead a life not free from problems. They contend with such problems as socially/emotionally absentee parents, the damaging effects of Information and Communication Technologies and social decadence in general. We are presented with an Eldorado replete with racism, prejudice and xenophobia, among others.

Uppermost on the children's minds is an urge to escape from the debilitating poverty and in a way assume new names, new statuses. Bastard promises to go for bigger items when he gets older-he wants to graduate from a petty thief stealing guavas (p10) to a hardcore criminal going for bigger items while Sbhho wishes to escape by marrying a man from Budapest (p12) and the narrator is sure that her aunt, Fostalina, will one day come and whisk her away. In fact we are told of Godknows' uncle Vusa in the United Kingdom who used to send the family some goodies, Auntie Fostalina in U.S.A. and Darling's father in S.Africa who have left their country of birth in the quest to escape and assume new names and roles in the drama of life. All these are escapees. Vodloza, the traditional healer, tries to escape the poverty in the shanty town by duping his equally desperate 'clients', the socially and physically ill: his sign post says it all in red lettering on a white surface:

VODLOZA, BESTEST HEALER IN ALL OF THIS PARADISE AND BEEYOND  
WILL PROPER FIX ALL THESE PROBLEMSOME THINGS THAT YOU MAY  
ENCOUNTER IN YOUR LIFE: BEWITCHEDNESS, CURSES, BAD LUCK,  
WHORING SPOUSES,CHILDRENLESSNESS,POVERTY, JOBLESSNESS, AIDS,  
MADNESS,SMALL PENISE, EPILEPSY, BAD DREAMS, BAD  
MARRIAGE/MARRIAGELESSNESS,COMPETITION AT WORK,DEAD PEOPLE  
TERRORIZING YOU,BAD LUCK WITH GETTING VISAS ESPECIALLY TO USA  
AND BRITAIN,NONSENSEFUL PEOPLE IN YOUR HOUSE ETC. ETC. ETC.  
PLEASE PAYMENT IN FOREX ONLY (p27)

Vodloza claims he can 'cure' everything and promises instant riches to his clients yet he lives in a shack. Not to be outdone by his seemingly 'spiritual opposite' number but in reality a competitor in fleecing the desperate followers the Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro of the Holy Chariot Church of Christ, persuades would-be, followers through an advert, thus: "IT DOSNT GO BACKWARDS,IT DOESN'T GO SIDEWAYS,IT DORSN'T GO FORWARDS.IT GOES UPWARDS,TO HEAVEN.AMEN!" (p30)

At the very start of the story we are introduced to a group of five ‘urchins’ or part time street kids-these do not stay on the streets full-time but spend most of their time alone minding their business unattended and largely undisturbed by adults. The group consists of the protagonist, ten year old Darling and her friends Bastard (11),Chipo (11),Stina,Sbho (9) and Godknows (10) who live in a shanty town called Paradise. The children, whose average age is ten, manage their affairs alone giving the impression that they are neglected-the parents are busy elsewhere scrounging for a living. To compound or add to the neglect claim Chipo is pregnant at eleven and the grandfather is said to be responsible for that yet throughout the book the rapist is not brought to book. Society therefore fails Chipo and for that reason such an unfeeling society needs a new name, a complete metamorphosis.

Before staying in the squatter camp, the children and their parents had better accommodation which was destroyed by the authorities because they said it was illegal. This is an allusion to Operation Murambatsvina of May 2005.The children no longer go to school because of the teachers’ industrial action. This may be an allusion to the crippling 2008 strike which resulted in pupils and students attending school for just 23 days according to the then Minister of Education, Sport and Culture, David Coltart. Because the children do not have food to eat, they resort to raiding the affluent suburb of Budapest to steal guavas. There the fruits are in abundance and seem to be abandoned. The children are surprised to see the guavas rotting on the ground, spacious houses, wide quiet streets, odourless and noise-free environment which is in stark contrast with their shanty town environment, an observation which strengthens their resolve to escape and assume new names and new identities.

Like Bulawayo, Darling leaves Zimbabwe to stay with her aunt Fostalina in ‘Destroyedmichygen’ where she undergoes great metamorphosis: language ,outlook and priorities change .The plot of the book is in two parts .The first part is about 10 year old Darling and her friends Bastard, Chipo and Stina Sbho and Godknows who live in a shanty town called Paradise. The situation in the country and the world is perceived through the innocent and naive eyes of children.

Darling goes to the open air church, Holy Chariot Church of Christ , on Fambeki mountain whose leader is Prophet Revelation Bitchington Mborro, a name which is meant to unmask the underhand activities by the religious charlatan. The name ‘Revelation’ is supposed to be an advert pointing at what the prophet is supposedly capable of , that is , ‘revealing’ the spiritual secrets to the ordinary souls while the other two names are meant to point at the prophet’s perchance with carnal matters, his sexual escapades. The last name ‘Mborro’ can be said to be an artistic version of the term used to refer to the male organ in Shona, a language spoken by the majority of Zimbabweans. The slight difference is that the Shona word is spelt with one ‘r’. Reference to the male organ and ‘bitching’ is meant to point to the pre-occupation of the prophet, a preoccupation which is many light years away from his ‘calling’. The cruel depiction of the man of cloth shows the anger in the author and her quest to strip such impostors naked for all to see what stuff they are made of in an effort to make them realize their shortcomings so that they can, like Saul on the road to Damascus, see the light and make a U-turn in their lives and like the biblical Saul change their names to more palatable ones. In other words they are expected to assume new names and identities after throwing away their old dirty selves. Religion and

religious leaders are often taken as sacrosanct but Bulawayo spares no sacred cows in her novel. Some of the names used in the book are meant to make readers uneasy and sober up to what is happening in their neighbourhoods.

The children comment on whites stealing a whole country (p 20) –this is a simplistic comment on the surface but actually quite penetrating on close scrutiny as it is a comment on serious issues in their society-it's simplistic yet insightful showing humanity's folly. Many conflicts would be avoided if people, especially the adult world, would confront the simple facts of life in situ, sans lofty justifications and interpretations. Well after Zimbabwe's political independence the following scenario was obtaining:

About 4500 white farmers owned 11 000 000 hectares of Zimbabwe's prime agricultural land. The total white population of Zimbabwe constitutes about 1% of the total population. About 1 million blacks occupy 16 million hectares in far less fertile and more drought prone areas. The communal farming areas occupied by blacks are congested and land is over farmed. (Feltoe in Harold-Barry (Ed.), 2004:208).

The child narrator's comments come in the wake of the above sorry state of affairs a scenario which needed address or redress hence assuming a new character, a new name.

In the book as readers we 'accompany' Mother of Bones and Darling to church, the latter with mismatched shoes, one green and the other red while the latter is barefoot after bathing using laundry soap showing the depth of poverty the Paradise dwellers have to contend with. The divide between washing and bath soap is washed off by poverty. The author seems to be saying if this is their Sunday best then a 'revolution' is required to restore human dignity to these seemingly forsaken human beings. The 'victim', Mother of Bones is not spared: she seems to be a Christian with unchristian behavior judging from her bad mouthing. She needs to 'repent' and therefore assume a new identity. For instance this is how she responds to the children who want to entice Darling to come to them instead of going to church with her: "You you futsekani leave her alone you bloody mgodoyis get away boSatan beRoma" (p 21). From her utterance we note the very bad language full of expletives as well as the attitude the new church she attends has towards the Roman Catholic church which is here described as satanic yet the bible teaches against judging others.

On the way to church Darling sees a child being bathed in the open indicating lack of amenities – the water source is communal. It also shows vulnerability of the whole community which shares such facilities. If any contamination befalls the water source then everyone will be doomed. Such communities need to be helped to assume new identities.

The child living with albinism we meet on the way to church, we are told by our guide, Darling, is named Whiteboy, a name which stigmatizes him. The child, unlike others who need a metaphorical change of name, needs a real change of name to restore his identity. The other 'problem' name is Bastard, a name which might be coming from a barely literate parent who may have enjoyed the sound of the 'word' without being acquainted with its meaning. Such

parents do that in order to be seen to be sophisticated by giving their children exotic names. This is part of the colonial babalaas (hang over) still afflicting some formerly colonized peoples.

Darling can only see her father in a picture because he has emigrated to S. Africa abandoning her and her mother .In spite of his education he has left the country for greener pastures (p 20).The picture Darling has is one of a university graduate judging from the academic dress he is wearing.

Mother of Bones has a beautiful curtain on a glassless window –a sign of dreams deferred. The name is derived from the way she ekes out a living by cooking and selling ‘bones’-this is all she can afford. She has an old calendar which has an image of Jesus to show to the world how religious she is. The foul language she uses on her way to church and the craving for attention she displays at her church show that she needs to be born anew to be a true Christian. On the other hand Darling is confused about Jesus’ complexion an indication of the nature of religious under education imparted at their churches which leads to confusion.

There is reference to bricks of money which is an allusion to the stacks of bearer cheques due to the hyperinflationary environment in Zimbabwe which peaked in 2008. There is also reference to the multicurrency regime which came into effect in 2009 and the comment about the dollar being “hard to find”(p 25) leading to frustration and escape into religious or spiritual salvation from either Vodloza the ‘healer’ or Prophet Mborro by the ordinary shanty town dwellers.

There are idle men (p 26) in Paradise who have nothing to do not because they do not want to do anything. They seem to be helpless onlookers to the life unfolding seemingly outside their reach.

We are also introduced to Messenger and Bornfree who are ‘activists’ in the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (p29) . Mother of Bones doesn’t want to be involved in the politics-she ducks into the ‘safe’ haven of religion. She is skeptical about the opposition taking over from the ruling party likening the ruling party to a vicious lion.

The country game played by the children is meant to show the perception people have of different countries because of the interactions they have on the global stage (p49). There are countries which need to assume new names because of the behavior they are associated with. For instance America is described as the “big baboon of the world” (p 49) by the children a description which fits glove-like the USA superpower tag of which it is too eager to remind forgetful smaller nations often in not so nice a manner.

Like people the countries interact, exude good or bad were parenting or neighborliness which result in their being seen positively or negatively. Even young children see through these countries reputations-it is the adult world that has created certain perceptions of their countries-the children’s attitudes are only natural responses to that scenario:

But first we have to fight over the names because everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be the USA and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and

them. These are the country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for countries like Dubai and South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. They are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here. Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in-who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (p49)

To drive her point home the author makes reference to Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, both works concerned with a 'diseased' social scenario, a scenario which needs a complete turnaround.

The migratory children get to Shanghai where the Chinese are building a mall as explained enthusiastically by one of the Chinese nationals after Stina asks whether they were building a school or flats or clinic: "We build you big big mall. All nice shops inside, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace, and so on so on. Good mall, big..." (p46). From this we can discern a case of warped priorities. Even the children, through Stina, who had asked whether they were constructing a school (for their education), flats (for accommodation) or a clinic (to take care of their health), are shocked to be told that they were constructing a state of the art shopping mall in an impoverished social environment. The Chinese workers are in orange uniforms and helmets while blacks are "in regular clothes – torn T-shirts, vests, shorts, skirts, trousers cut at the knees, overalls, flip flap and tennis shoes" (p 42) . It is a luta continua with the racism and segregation suffered in colonial times now coming from 'friends' from the East. The narrator says:

We are booing and yelling when we walk out of Shanghai. If it weren't for the noisy machines, the Chinese would hear us telling them to leave our country and go and build wherever they come from, that we don't need their kaka mall, that they are not even our friends...

Godknows puts it more bluntly when he says: "China is a red devil looking for people to eat so it can grow fat and strong. Now we have to decide if it actually breaks into people's homes or just ambushes them in the forest..." (p47).

On the Zimbabwe-China relations Moyo and Mdlongwa (2015:28 ) have this to say:

the government's Look East Policy is problematic. Though it possibly has its own positive spin-offs for the country, the reality on the ground, from the ordinary person's perspective, points otherwise. This is to be expected given the fact that it was a hastily conjured up, reactive and fundamentally desperate move in response to the acrimony with western countries (Interactions: An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (Online ISSN 2347-2081) Vol. II Issue III, April 2015)

The author also touches on NGO activities in developing countries and again this is seen through the watchful eyes of the children. The NGO lorry is described as resembling "an angry monster" (p 51) a simile which points to the fact that Non-governmental organization people are up to no good. The people are belittled as they line up "as if we are ants going to a wedding" (p53) and when the truck is opened "we turn into dizzied dung flies" (p54). What is sad is that although the

children see through the NGO's hidden agenda, they go on to fawn for alms-they sing and dance to impress NGO people (p51). The children and their parents are dehumanized as their dignity is stripped bare for all to see.

Out of five NGO officials, one (Sisi Betty) is from the local area .This is an indication of marginalization -this one official is a front-the correct mask for a foreign agenda. Even the small children feel that the NGOs are not among them for their good. In fact the narrator confides in us thus: "We are careful not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them" (p54).The NGO people proceed to take pictures of the children without their consent as shown in the quotation below:

They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn-clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it, they just take anyway, take and take. We don't complain because we know that after the picture-taking comes the giving of gifts... Now the cameraman pounces on God knows's black buttocks. Bastard points and laughs, and God knows turns around and covers the holes of his shorts with his hands like he is that naked man in the Bible, but he cannot completely hide his nakedness (p 52-3)

The NGO cameraman is prepared to embarrass and tear down a ten year old's self esteem to shreds just to have an exhibit in foreign lands for 'bait' to get more assistance which only trickles down to the supposed needy people. Even Sisi Betty, their own,dances to the foreigners' tune by verbally abusing her people:

What are you doing , masascum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya,you think these expensive white people came all the way from overseas ipapa to see you act like baboons?...Futsekani,don't be buffoons zinja,behave at once or else we'll get in the lorry and drive off right this minute with all this shit! she says.Then Sis Betty turns to the NGO people and smiles her gap-toothed smile ...(p54-5)

When NGO people are around , parents do not matter the narrator tells us. This is another negative psychological contribution the NGO have in developing countries. We are told that parents get tiny mealie-meal packages which are meant to keep them dependent and desperate and hooked on to the morsels of food in drug addiction fashion. When a self respecting Mother love does not join the food queue and stands proudly like a baobab tree the NGO people are surprised and try to entice her by giving her more -her spurning of the alms puzzles and punctures their inflated supposed philanthropic stance. She is a rare species of the few black people who still have their pride intact and this troubles the erstwhile detached touch-me-not NGO officials who stampede to give her more than the official rations in exchange for her *dignity*.

We come across adults preparing to vote pregnant with hope for a new dispensation .Voting whether intraparty or interparty or in a multiparty scenario is expected to usher in a new dispensation-an improvement on the lives of the people hence the optimism and excitement reflected in the squatters. However this does not materialize as instead their squatter camp is demolished and one of them, Nomviyo, loses her child, Freedom, who was sleeping in the shack



when it was bulldozed (pg 67). It is ironic that the child is called Freedom in the circumstances. Motherlove's shebeen provides temporary escape through selling potent home brewed beer which is passed around in 'solidarity'. It is ironic that squatters can vote yet their structures are deemed illegal and destroyed. The hope and excitement displayed earlier only whittles down to pre-mature celebration for a new dispensation.

In another bizarre incident which calls for a need for new names we observe Darling, Forgiveness and Sbho planning to get rid of Chipo's 'stomach' in the fashion of the hospital television drama ER (Emergency Room) which Sbho, the main architect of the planned surgery, once watched from her uncle Godi's place in Harare. This is meant to show the naivety of the children as well as the influence of media on the young and impressionable minds. They are however stopped by Mother Love. The friends had decided to leave out Forgiveness, who is very light in complexion and may be of mixed race, from the top secret operation. The 'coloured' child is segregated by the other children. This shows the genesis of segregation, segregation they inherit from the adult world.

We learn of MaDumane a married woman who is forced by economic circumstances to emigrate to Namibia to become a maid in Namibia leaving her family and Nosizi takes over MaDumane's husband but dies during childbirth because of lack of health care because of the industrial action in the country.

Darling's father comes back home ill and the mother implores her not to tell anyone about her father who is suffering from AIDS. In fact she is ordered to play guard when the mother is on her errands depriving her of play. The tormented girl interior monologues:

I hate you for this, I hate you for going to that South Africa and coming back sick and all bones, I hate you for making me stop playing with my friends...Die. Die now so that I can play with my friends, die now because this is not fair. Die die die die.Die (p96)

Besides coming back home ill there is also the issue about xenophobia those who emigrate have to contend with. In S. Africa for instance they are given a new denigrating name—'Makwerekwere' (p92). All this shows the price of the great trek to S. Africa.

Prophet Revelation's diagnosis is that there is a demon afflicting Darling's father which can be exorcised if the family provides two fat white virgin goats whose blood Darling's father is to be bathed in. For this the prophet wants a payment of 500 dollars or euros. This is a wayward clergyman who waylays and misleads desperate blindfolded sheep he is supposed to shepherd. We gather that the people resort to consulting prophets and witch doctors because the doctors and nurses are on strike. There is a dire need for the prophet and those responsible for the welfare of the workers to turn over a new leaf, to assume new identities.

On one of the 'guava raids' by the community of children, demonstrators come to send white people 'home'. The treatment of the white couple's dog, which is kicked like a ball over the durawall shows the generations-long bottled up anger vented out on the soft target, the dog, in Freudian style displacement. Zimbabwe has been embroiled in the land question for more than a

decade. The issue has divided public opinion. The children, who come from that divided society are not spared-in fact they mirror the larger community. Bastard's reaction to Sbho who is crying when she sees the couple being interrogated by the demonstrators: "what, are you crying for the white people? Are they your relatives" (p 120) represents the hardline stance mainly associated with ZANU PF: that the blacks should take back their heritage from the former colonizer, that colonisers came and drove away the real owners of the land from their land, that there is nothing wrong in repossessing what rightfully belonged to you after all the colonizer for about a century benefitted from ill-gotten wealth! On the other hand the crying Sbho represents the blacks who may be described as liberal, apologist or brainwashed. This group is often associated with the opposition ,particularly the MDC. This group characterizes land repossessions as 'invasion' of white people's land arguing that those in possession of land when the invasion was done are virtually white 'Zimbabweans'. As white Africans they should not be discriminated against. After all, the argument goes, they were doing a good farming job helping feed the nation and the region employing many indigenes and earning the largely agricultural based country foreign currency. The argument for the support of the erstwhile colonizer is mainly on two fronts: firstly that it is morally wrong to take away someone's property and secondly that since the white farmer was so productive there is the risk of running down the agricultural industry thus threatening food security and worsening unemployment.

What is interesting is that the two groups of children are literally stuck in one tree which might suggest that the two groups have one country/world to share and compromise is unavoidable. The situation depicted is reminiscent of the situation in *The River Between* where River Honia, the river of life, is unavoidably shared by both the 'pagans' and Christians.

The situation at the white couple's home needs close scrutiny. There is a black security guard guarding expensive property yet he is modestly dressed and therefore reflects that he is underpaid. The white low density house with its massive grounds and big satellite dishes can be viewed as a small island of affluence with the Lamborghini Reventon icing that cake. This is contrasted with the poorly dressed black security guard and the hungry and barefoot guava hunting children from the neighbouring squatter camp. In a way it disputes the Zimbabweanness attributed to some of the white community, at least those represented by the white couple in the book who epitomize the hard core Rhodie with their motto: 'Rhodesians never die'. The incident at the house when they encounter the black demonstrators and other incidents show that the book is set after 2000 when the first land repossessions were carried out. The destruction of the children's homes may be said to be alluding to Operation Murambatsvina of May 2005. Therefore we are talking about a quarter of a century into Zimbabwe's independence yet the house spoke loudly of an attempt to freeze time in the style of the melancholic Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. There is definitely a need for such minded people to assume new identities-for the old Rhodesian identity to die and give way to a white Zimbabwean identity yet this is difficult judging by the signs in the house and the motto which declares, in no uncertain terms: "Rhodesians never die". One might be forgiven to conclude that some of them are part time Africans or Africans or Zimbabwean when it suits them. After the house is literally torn open and the lives of the inhabitants exposed to the world, the writer may be saying: dear reader after seeing what you have witnessed do these people deserve our sympathy?

The language used by the children, such as Sbho's reaction to Bastard's question on why she was crying for white people whose 'properties' were taken: "they are people, you asshole!" (p120) reflects the children's difficult and hostile upbringing. What is interesting is that the demonstrators just break expensive items in the house including writing the words 'Blak Power' in faeces on the wall. This shows the eruption of pent up anger that has been simmering for centuries. Many dormant volcanoes have been known to suddenly erupt. It is the observer who thinks the volcano is dormant-perhaps the volcano would just be taking a nap! The aforesaid writing on the wall is reminiscent of the writing on the wall for Nebuchadnezzar. It was the writing on the wall for the privileged white community which was used to be listened to hence the man's use of the word 'listen' many times during the short encounter with the demonstrators. His people have been commanding and being listened to. The signs in his ransacked house reflect on this: a picture of Ian Douglas Smith, the last white Prime Minister of Rhodesia, the slogan 'Rhodesians never die', the picture of the British Queen and the boy on a sad black horse speak volumes about the mentality of the inhabitants. The boy on a sad black horse reminds the reader of the Horse and Rider game the young Dedan Kimathi and Henderson used to play where the latter always wanted and demanded to be the rider in Ngugi's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, reflecting on the unequal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Bornfree, a political activist's death gives us a glimpse into the larger political terrain of the country. After his funeral the children dramatise the murder: Bastard acts as Bornfree and Chipso as MaDube, Bornfree's mother. Bornfree's politically realized death opens up Heavenway cemetery, the same way the closely guarded white laager is dissected by the intrusion of the demonstrators to the inquisitive children. Since African society does not allow young children to attend funerals, they can only explore Heavenway cemetery's goings on from afar and more closely when the adults leave. From the forays of the inquisitive children we gather that mortality is very high among the squatter population as shown in the observation by the young narrator below:

When you look at the names together with the dates you see that they are really now new names of the dead. And when you know maths like me then you can figure out the ages of the buried and see that they died young, their lives short like those of house mice. A person is supposed to live a full life, live long and grow old, like Mother of Bones... It's that Sickness that is killing them. Nobody can cure it so it does as it pleases-killing, killing killing like a madman hacking unripe sugarcane with a machete (p133).

This is reflected in the information they read on the graves which points to high youth mortality as a result of the AIDS scourge which is only referred to as 'the Sickness' to show how afraid the people are of the disease hence the need to assume new names to fight the pandemic.

From the children's interaction we gather that the main political parties were jostling for attention seeking mileage from Bornfree's death, a taboo in African culture where the dead, including those who might have been unsaintly in their terrestrial business, are expected to be respected. The Shona, for instance, have the saying 'wafa wanaka' to describe this. The expression literally means 'the dead are good' suggesting that only a fool begrudges and continues to think ill of a dead and therefore harmless dead body. From the children's

dramatization we are furnished with more information on how Bornfree met his fate. The name 'Bornfree' is one of those terms used a lot in Zimbabwe to describe a Zimbabwean born after independence in 1980. The term is often used derisively to imply a generation which was born with a political silver spoon in its mouth as contrasted with the preceding generations which suffered segregation, restrictions and the brunt of war. It is ironic that he has this name because according to the children's drama Bornfree's death was as a result of political intolerance leading to political violence. After the formation of the MDC in 1999/2000 Zimbabwean society became acutely polarized. It boiled down to one being either ZANU PF or therefore pro-government and pro-land repossession or being MDC and pro-West, anti-government, anti-land reform and therefore anti-revolution. The former had fought the West, particularly British hegemony for decades as ZANU and ZAPU before the Unity Accord of 1987. A bruising confrontation was therefore inevitable in the eyes of the belligerents. Bastard's curt response to the BBC reporter's question is quite telling: it implies that what they were engaged in with Bastard as Bornfree and Chipo as MaDube, Bornfree's mother, was at surface level drama but in reality *the reality* they were experiencing – "it was for real" (p144). The curt reply may indicate that even the young boy is aware that that is a politically sensitive subject. The author seems to be suggesting that as Zimbabweans we need to assume new names and political blindness for the furtherance of the common bigger agenda.

The political result following the elections seems to have been the straw that broke the camel's iron back. A victory for one of the politically charged groups meant doom for the other. The opposition was backed by big brother UK and cousin USA. It did not require a political science professor to conclude that a political and economic thunderstorm was acoming and the quicker one sought solid shelter the better hence chapter 10 is dedicated to 'the exodus' to countries near and far and the resultant xenophobia the emigrants faced upon their arrival in foreign lands. In fact Darling's characterization of her aunt's place as 'Destroyed Michygan' is ominous of the rude awakening she experiences when she gets there. The 'paradise' she had in mind proves to be a mirage: Auntie Fostalina has to moonlight to make ends meet. She can't afford to visit home as many times as she wants. In USA Darling is thrust in a completely different environment where she has plenty to eat, has her own bedroom and goes to a good school where she is however bullied for being different. She is welcomed by a dysfunctional family: Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo are from different worlds in terms of taste and values. The fact that they come from different parts of Africa exacerbates the situation. What is ironic is that it is Uncle Kojo who has stayed in the USA for a longer period (32 years) who still relates to African values-Aunt Fostalina is anxious to be swallowed by the American deluge. The two come from different parts of Africa with different cultural and linguistic differences which in itself is not a problem. However the two do not seem to have consciously built bridges to connect their two worlds instead they opt to settle for the borrowed linguistic bridge from their host country which is not adequate. When Auntie Fostalina hosts Zimbabweans in her house, for instance, Uncle Kojo, who feels left out because of the linguistic barrier, leaves the house giving the impression that the two are really individuals sharing a roof not a family per se. TK, the son, for instance cannot speak any Ghanaian or Zimbabwean language and as such is a 'stranger' to both parents' cultures and does not feel he belongs to either hence his decision to enlist in the USA army, without consulting them, to the chagrin of the father who slaps him across the face. There is a crippling communication problem: the son makes a big decision to join the army in a country

taken by his parents as a forest to hunt some fortune to take back 'home' to Africa to make a meal yet he takes the forest not only as his home but as a home he is prepared to die for. Children in the USA have lots of freedom which they abuse. For instance instead of studying Darling and her friends watch pornography and take a bet on who among them will lose her virginity first. They even 'steal' Marina's mother's car to go for a joy ride. We also hear of children bringing guns to school. TK, we are told, is always playing computer games which separate him from the father who is always watching television and the mother who is either at work attending to her demanding two jobs or resting at home tired from the same engagements or fussing over her looks reading fashion magazines (p151). Auntie Fostalina and Eliot, we gather as the story unfolds, have a public extramarital affair under the nose of Uncle Kojo. The family needs a new name-a different way of doing things.

In Darling's new paradise :children bring loaded guns to school and watch pornography instead of doing 'home work' in the privacy of their spacious bedrooms, lie that they are going to study while they go to partying and steal parents' cars for joy rides. The 'paradise' even boasts of psychiatric hospitals such as Shadysbrook Mental Hospital and deploys a whole army to gun down a spear-wielding black mental patient, Tshaka Zulu for carrying a 'dangerous weapon', a spear. There where it is 'normal' to spot black youths in police cars and where society is so superficial that a teenage girl is driven to want to commit suicide as revealed by what Kate wrote in her diary which Darling saw and read while cleaning (p 266) because her boyfriend described her as not sexy. Kate, Eliot's daughter, attends one of the best schools in America yet she is unhappy and malnourished-she cannot eat the food she loves for fear of gaining weight (p268) and be labeled ugly by her cruel society. There is no mentioning of the girl's mother-the single parent family set up is fine for her father and his society yet the impact on the offspring is loud and clear-the anorexic Kate badly needs a mother figure in her life.

In the new paradise at eighteen Darling has to perform menial jobs to supplement Auntie Fostalina's income while some Americans such as Eliot are so wealthy that they can afford to travel all the way from USA to Africa just to kill an elephant for a trophy. He does not talk about the African people but the animals. In fact his dog has a very expensive wardrobe yet in the same society many are struggling to make ends meet. How different is this from the white Lamborghini driving couple in Zimbabwe? In the new paradise the desperate Dumini settles for a marriage of convenience to Stephanie, a white fat elderly woman "for the papers" to stay in America. A guest at the wedding comments: "But the things people will do for these *papers*, my sister I tell you" (p 173). To top it all Dumini goes on to give Stephanie's son his father's name, Mandla, a taboo in Zimbabwean culture. Ironically the boy is spoilt and disrespectful to Dumini whose 'kind' gesture falls clumsily on its face. Dumini's gesture can be looked at as the height of self denial and a quest to obliterate his Africanness by 'denaming' and then renaming himself. At the wedding messages from relatives back home in Zimbabwe are censored or doctored and only what is palatable to American ears is announced:

I notice, though, that when the translator translates, he leaves out things like reviving the ancestral home and teaching the grandsons our beautiful culture and being quick on her feet and hardworking and obeying the husband (p 172)

In fact from the interactions between Africans and Americans at the wedding we gather that the latter's impression of Africa is grossly distorted, a sign that the marriage between the two, Dumi and Stephanie, is likely to be doomed as the two groups of people may not fully understand each other's cultures. As an illustration when Darling beats 'Mandla' in an effort to discipline him the African way after the child had made a scene at the wedding, the American public are thoroughly disgusted by this 'uncivilized' action.

Darling and her eighth grade friends from Washington Academy, Marina from Nigeria and Kristal from the USA besides watching pornographic videos also watch another one on female genital mutilation. Through this incident the author is attacking the misguided children, the *de facto* absentee parent as well as the cultural practice of female genital mutilation, a practice which is done mainly in Africa. All these groups of people need to look themselves in the mirror and change their ways.

Back home the diasporans hear and read of more and more difficulties for their relatives. For instance NaDumane's newspaper husband disappears, an allusion to the political intolerance in the country which seeks to silence the critical press. Auntie Fostalina's cousin NaSandi calls to say her son Tsepang was killed and eaten by a crocodile while crossing the Limpopo trying to illegally cross into S. Africa to run away from the hardships back home. There is need to assume new names so that there is more political tolerance and a better management of the economic affairs of the country to arrest the forced emigration. Although genuine SOS messages are being sent from back home, there are others which are bordering on greed such as Darling's mother's request for a satellite dish. All the above need to change their names for a better world.

Darling's work leads her and the reader to the inevitable ordeals of the immigrant workers from 'failed countries' who are forced to abandon their 'difficult' names for the names of their countries. Under normal circumstances the people would gladly assume their countries' names in patriotic pride but these who have left their countries in a huff do not have such sentimentality towards their countries and only begrudgingly assume these names. The workers are overworked and underpaid and faced with the burden of expectation from their relatives back home after assuming new roles as Darling pensively notes: "we were now their parents" (p 245). Besides the immigrants assuming new names they also give their children new "user friendly" ones for children (p 247-249) a mark of defeat. There is also the cultural price to pay for the diasporans:

And those children –they grew and we had to squint to see ourselves in them. They did not speak our language, they did not sound like us. When they misbehaved, we said only, No, Don't do that, Stop, Time-out. But that is not what we wanted to do. What we wanted to do was get switches and karabha and karabha and karabha. We wanted to draw blood and teach red, raw lessons to last them lifetimes, but we feared being arrested for bringing up our own children like our parents had brought us up... When we die, our children will not know how to wail, how to mourn us the right way... We will leave for the land of the dead naked, without the things we need to enter the castle of our ancestors (p249-250)

At the end of the story we hear Darling having some altercation with Chipu over the phone after the latter accuses diasporas of abandoning the country(p 285).Darling reacts by throwing the computer towards the wall where it hits the mask Darling had stolen from Eliot. The last chapter is entitled ‘The writing on the wall’, an allusion to King Nebuchadnezzar. After Darling has written, in red ink on her bedroom wall that ‘iBio iyirabish’(Biology is rubbish) in reference to Auntie Fostalina’s insistence on her to study sciences for ‘meaningful’ career prospects, after crashing a computer on the wall together with the stolen mask the writing was definitely on the wall for Darling. This of course is not in the text but can be filled in by the reader as postulated by Wolfgang Iser that literary texts always contain ‘blanks’ which only the reader can fill (cited in Selden, Widows and Brooker, (2005:47). The writing on the wall can also refer to the killing of Bin Laden pointing to the imminent end to terrorism.

This paper argued that NoViolet Bulawayo in *We Need New Names*, spares no one in her criticism. Through the journey motif technique which takes the young narrator from real houses with real walls to plastic shelter in Paradise squatter camp, from Paradise into Budapest and from Zimbabwe to America and its different areas, we are exposed to a cross section of the world’s inhabitants. The common denominator for all these people is the need to change their present ways of doing things.

#### REFERENCES:

- i. Bressler, C.E. (1994) *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- ii. Bulawayo, N.(2013) *We Need New Names*. London: Vintage.
- iii. Habib M. A. R. (2011) *Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present: An Introduction* . Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- iv. Moyo, T. and Mdlongwa, T. (2015) “Look East or Look Least? The Zimbabwean Experience of Chinese Economic Investment in Selected Texts and Examples” in *Interactions: An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*.(Online ISSN 2347-2081) Vol. II Issue III, April 2015.
- v. Rosenblatt, L.(1938) *Literature as Exploration*. New York: D. Appleton-Century.
- vi. Rosenblatt, L.(1978)*The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- vii. Rosenblatt, L.(2005)*Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- viii. Selden, R., Widdowson, P. and Brooker, P. (2005) *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory Raman*. London: Pearson Longman.