

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/PP/2026.v8n1.16>

An Analytical Approach to Nomenclature in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

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Abstract

This paper studies the names used in NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* through textual analysis and literary onomastics. It also examines the significance of names and tries to understand how naming is used as a technique for narrating the story and analyses the absence of proper names for addressing the protagonist's language and the country. Names are indisputably essential elements in the formation of a person's identity, especially the given name and the place name. Names have the primary function of distinguishing one from other. Therefore, human beings give prime importance to naming as we can see in many naming ceremonies across the world, making it a universal process. The role names perceive in literature is studied by many like Iraida Gerus-Tarnawecky, Martyna Gibka, Esther Igwenyi, Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, et al. Many have also shown their interest in studying the meanings of names and the different types of meanings like David Blair, Livingstone Makondo, and Staffan Nyström. This paper reveals the role perceived by names and their meaning in the novel *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo.

Keywords: Names, Literary Onomastics, Onomastics, Anthroponyms, Toponyms

Introduction

NoViolet Bulawayo is a Zimbabwean writer who was born as Elizabeth Zandile Tshele. She uses the pen name after her late mother and her hometown. She is best known for her short story "Hitting Budapest" which was later included in her debut novel *We Need New Names*. It follows the story of the child protagonist Darling in the process of fulfilling her dreams of going to America and the restlessness she feels after fulfilling her dreams by being trapped in between the sweet memories of past life and the advantages of present life.

The methodologies primarily used in this research are the processes of textual analysis and literary onomastics. Textual analysis is a broad term for different research methods used to describe, interpret and understand texts. Literary onomastics is the study of names used in

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literature. It is broadly divided into two based on anthroponymy and toponymy. Anthroponymy is the meaning of the names of people, and toponymy is the meaning of the place names. It also studies the stylistic function of names in literature. It considers the symbolic and pragmatic role of the names. There are also other divisions like temporonyms relating to time and anthrotoponyms, which are personal names named after places. The study of names in literature or literary names is called Literary Onomastics.

The author of *We Need New Names* has developed many characters and places with different names and uses names as a motif throughout the novel. Bulawayo speaks about her novel *We Need New Names* in an interview by Sabine Peschel explaining how names become a symbolic pathway for re-imagining and rethinking ourselves and where we are headed to.

The novel extensively uses names in implicit and explicit manner to mark the cultural, historical, political and economic background of the novel. The study of names in this novel gives us insights into the meanings of the names, the Zimbabwean traditions and the influence of displacements and other factors in the country. The novel *We Need New Names* though does not clearly demarcate the place where the novel is set on other than America, it is clear from the reading that it is a part of Africa, or more precisely Zimbabwe. Africa is known for its vivid ethnic culture when contrasted with America which tries to be a melting point of cultures. Therefore, names in African culture also differs with place, tribe and time.

African names retain their meaning-bearing function and are much less arbitrary, their meaning generally being transparent and accessible and often recording complex details about their bearers (qtd. in Makondo 24). That is to say, most of the African names have meanings that relates to characteristics or situations of the bearer or name giver. It could be something related to their birth, family, place or expectations of the giver. But it is not necessary that names would have literal meanings, it could be associational or symbolic meaning.

The plethora of names in the novel varies in its types of meaning as it comes from different origins. Furthermore, similar names from different origins makes it difficult to find an exact meaning for the same. Therefore, the meaning of names taken for study is chosen in regard with the novel and its background. The names can be classified mainly into theophoric, biblical, symbolic, paradoxical, familial, erroneous, totemic, circumstantial, historical, gendered, endearment names and deviational names.

The names could be also classified based on region of origin like Zimbabwean, Scandinavian, American, African, and Arabian or according to the religion or tribe as Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Zulu and Xhosa names. But this type of division may not be practical because nowadays names are getting mixed and merged due to interracial marriages, globalisation and transnationalism.

The African names are selected by them mostly with an intention. This can be read in the lines about Tshaka Zulu and his naming of his children and grandchildren even if he has not seen them after coming to America:

He has named all his children and grandchildren, given them names ... each name carefully thought out and finally given over the phone.

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It's how I get to touch them, Tshaka Zulu said to me one day when we were going over the names.

You see, every time they are called by name and they answer, I am the invisible hand touching them and calling them my own, he said. (Bulawayo 236)

One of the most basic qualities about a personal name is the relationship with a particular culture, which is termed as the social contextuality of naming by Wamitila in her research article. The choice of names in most cases reveals the society which the work is set upon. In literary analysis, one can therefore say that the character name reveals the characteristics of the character. Another feature of names is related to the concept of place setting. "One can approach names of literary characters as pointers to the social, economic and political setting in which they find themselves" (Wamitila 38).

Nuessel writes, "an artist's naming of his or her characters frequently involves calculated and conscious choices in order to deliver a message through the onomastic medium. Creative writers give names to their characters to send messages to prospective readers" (qtd. in McAdams 16). The writer uses different literary methods for this purpose like changing names, repeating, layering, multiplying, making it ambiguous and displacing it. Thus, names casually mentioned also become significant in the novel, as they point to other problems and events in the novel and outside the novel.

Other than these we also have theophoric names and circumstantial names. "Theophoric names", according to K. Agyekum, "are names which show a belief in supernatural being" (qtd. in Ennin and Nkansah 77). It is a name which embeds the name of a god within a name to invoke the god or to seek the protection. Many of the characters with such theophoric names live lives that are in complete opposition to the meaning of their names producing irony. The name Stina is predominantly a Scandinavian female name that implies 'Christian.' Fostalina is from Faustina, which is an Italian or Latin Christian name for girls. It means 'the lucky one' or fortunate, enjoying good luck. Names reflecting the Christian virtues like Constance meaning 'constant' in faith, Forgiveness and Perseverance are also portrayed in the novel. The influence of Christianity on names is visible in the novel.

Circumstantial names are temporonyms or anthrotoponyms which is related to circumstances during birth or growth. There are circumstantial names which are given according to the circumstances of their birth. Chenzira or Chenzhira meaning of the way/path, a place-oriented name, a daughter born on a journey near the road. It is also used for illegitimate children. Siza means a beautiful day, maybe the day the child was born. It also means help, maybe the child will be a help or maybe helped the parents in keeping their names. Kofi Annan means Friday or fourth born child. Sakhile in Xhosa means 'we have built a home'. Baako means the first-born child in Akan. The name Nomoreproblems is a name which is given to the child to represent the desires or hope of the parents or people especially during war.

Totemic names or names connected to totems are also utilised in the novel, such as Gono and MaMoyo. The subject of totemic names builds on that of flora and fauna names. Totems are popular between the Shona because they bring people together and identify them

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by their ancestors. Though they moved from one place to another and met someone with a similar totem, they regarded each other as if they were blood kin. Totems were revered, and marriages between persons from same totem were frowned upon. To do this, the Shona people advise suitors to first establish each other's totem before committing to a relationship.

In the event that some were rebellious to the extent that they wanted to marry each other, one would be asked to pay *Mombeyechekaukama* (Cow of ending a relationship) of a white colour. It is a known practice that the beast has to be white. It has to be difficult to find so that people are discouraged. Gono is a Shona word which is used during clan praise meaning a big bull reflecting the mighty of men who belong to the Moyo totem (Makondo). Moyo is the totem of heart. Endearment names like Darling and Nene meaning baby are also reflective of the naming culture.

Some names are used as literary devices in the novel, like foreshadowing and allusion. Some names act paradoxical in nature like Bornfree and NaBetina who in their names are born free but is tied up in the shackles of corruption and poverty. Bornfree even dies in the end while trying to be free from the government. Similar is the case of Freedom, a baby, who could not freely move when the houses were smashed by the bulldozers killing him. Eliot, whose name is taken from Elijah meaning rightly or truly acts opposite as he hides his illicit relationship with Aunt Fostalina.

Aunt Fostalina's name too sound paradoxical as it comes from Faustina meaning lucky, but she is proved unlucky most of the times except for the fact that she lives in America in a better situation than her relatives in homeland. The name of the pastor Revelations Bitchington Mborro is paradoxical as it contains 'bitching' in it which does not suit a pastor and it seems contradictory to have both Revelations, a biblical book, and bitching, spiteful comments. It opposes the act of preaching.

Kate's name means clear or pure, but she has a dual side to herself making it difficult to understand her. Especially for Darling who does not understand why she eats food, when she just wants to throw it up while there are many who are hungry. Similarly, Tsepang whose name means have trust in God, hope and faith is eaten by a crocodile while crossing the Limpopo River to South Africa. Jim is a variation of James who was known for patient perseverance during trials and temptations. He writes to encourage his readers to live consistently with what they have learned in Christ, and he condemns various sins, including pride, hypocrisy, favouritism, and slander. But here, the manager shows favouritism and infidelity falling into temptation and sin.

Another kind of names are the ones used as literary devices. The name of Bornfree's mother MaDube may be foreshadowing his death as the name may have roots in the name Madubeko meaning 'funeral problems.' The name Tapera in Bornfree Lizwe Tapera, although revealed only after his murder symbolises his predestined death. It means 'we are finished,' or 'a child born whilst the parents are in fear of death.' Mother of Bones is the grandmother of Darling, her name makes sense only after the entry of Darling's father who is referred to as

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“long bundle of bones” (Bulawayo 101) by his daughter. Her father has turned into skeletal due to the ‘Sickness,’ that is AIDS when he went to work in South Africa.

There are also names which are used as an allusion like Tshaka Zulu. Tshaka Zulu also spelled Chaka or Shaka, was a Zulu chief and founder of Southern Africa’s Zulu Empire. He is credited with creating a fighting force that devastated the entire region. It is generally accepted that Shaka was a highly skilled warrior (ashleycanall). Under his autocratic rule, the Zulu kingdom experienced significant expansion, quickly becoming the dominant power in southeastern Africa. The character of Tshaka Zulu in the novel also seems rebellious in nature and a person who fights to keep up with his culture even if he is called a mad man.

Another allusion is to biblical Peter when Tshaka calls Darling with that name. Peter was called the rock by Jesus on which he will build his church. It may be a hint on her role in building her community in America or a means to show Zulu’s trust on her as he calls her warrior later. Towards the end of the novel, we can see how Chipso calls Darling by her full name, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, reminding her of culture and roots. Nonkululeko means freedom and independence while Nkala means descendant of buffalo tribe. The freedom in her name also creates a hope for freedom.

Coming to African originated names, the names are mostly names having meanings because most of the tribes living in Africa prefer names with meanings and follows the tradition of their ancestors in this matter. While migrated Africans are mostly forced to name them differently in order to adapt to the migrated nation. Darling expresses her fears on losing her culture and on the need to adapt to survive in a racist country through the example of names in the novel:

And then our own children were born. We held their American birth certificates tight. We did not name our children after our parents, after ourselves; we feared if we did they would not be able to say their own names, that their friends and teachers would not know how to call them. We gave them names that would make them belong in America, names that did not mean anything to us: Aaron, Josh, Dana, Corey, Jack, Kathleen. (Bulawayo 247)

America is called the melting point of different cultures, though there exist implicit racist tendencies among the people, making it also a melting point of names. We know in colonial Africa, how the whites regarded everything African as primitive and unholy, whereas everything European was deemed appropriate and civilized.

The influence of colonialism is visible in some names, which connects it to the history of Zimbabwe and Africa. Zimbabwean names come under the category of African names, so it also follows the same pattern. Even the name Zimbabwe was changed from Rhodesia. Zimbabwean personal names are also influenced by the colonisation. Many Zimbabwean names were translated into English language (qtd. in Makondo 29). There was explicit multiplicity of spelling mistakes in many names.

We can also see how they preserved their African names translating it into English in the novel like Bastard, Fraction, Darling, Lovemore, Bornfree, Godknows, Mother of Bones,

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MotherLove, Nomoreproblems, Messenger and Freedom. Mborro could be an associational name associating it to the controversial prophet Mboro, whose real name is Paseka Motsoenengi. Some of these names reflect the characteristics or situations of their life like Bastard who does not even know his parents and his sister Fraction who is given only a fraction or mention in the story. This also demarcates the gender divisions in the society. Gender divisions are clear in the use of names which has both masculine and feminine versions like Tendai, a feminine version of Tatenda meaning 'give thanks to God'.

Darling is loved by all her friends in her homeland that her name was given to Chipo's daughter. Lovemore is loved by two women in the story. Godknows character is not much described other than his friendship with Darling and others and that he went to Dubai. "The name, MotherLove, becomes fitting for this character as she takes on a maternal role and comforts Chipo with something that she so desperately needs, love" (Fitzpatrick 23). The character of Messenger actually acts as a messenger of the Change that is propounded by Bornfree and he also acts as a messenger for Darling when he delivers things for her in America.

Another cause for change of names was the Zimbabwean Restore Order which made many homeless and force them to settle in unknown places with unknown people. Thus, giving rise to new names through intermixing. Also, there were people who migrated to the country like the Chinese or the British who had their own naming styles which sometimes were mixed into Zimbabwean names and vice versa. The names were given in accordance with the tradition in most areas like giving names of ancestors, flora, fauna and gods. Some names indicatives of the flora, fauna and the environment they live in are Mtha meaning sun rays, Sisa meaning flower, Douglas meaning dark or black river, Hove meaning fish, Primrose, a kind of flower and Tari meaning hill.

Some were given English names because some found it superior to the native names. Since colonisation, biblical names were common as many were converted to Christianity by the missionaries. The biblical names were often manipulated into shorter versions or by adding slight variation or by doing both. In this case Josephat mentioned earlier could be a variation of biblical name Joseph, Moshe of Moses, Samu of Samuel, and Betty and Lisa of Elizabeth. Other names are Dan from Daniel, Jim and Jameson from James, Meghan from Margaret, Eliot from Elijah, Tom from Thomas and Stephanie from Stephan meaning 'crown'. Some names are taken as such from the Bible like Peter and Aaron. Jabu is Hindi for Ahab, the King Ahab in Bible. Kivinienii notes that this trend of dictating biblical names has been mundane all over the world. The Europeans wanted names they could easily use (qtd. in Makondo 32).

The Zimbabwean names are thus a collection of different sets of names from different origins. But the American names are mostly said to be borrowed from various parts of the world except for the names of the Native Americans. This could also be caused by colonisation, conversions to Christianity and migrations.

The novel explores the racism and cultural difference using names. Bulawayo juxtaposes the African and American names to differentiate between them. Sbho expresses the need for new names when they try to abort the child of Chipo as they are afraid, she would die.

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They take up the roles of Dr. Bullet, Dr. Roz and Dr. Cutter in the ER TV show. The names are misspelt as the real names are Dr Boulet, Dr Ross and Dr Carter, which shows their lack of education. There is also a name called Prince, derived from Royal title, often bestowed on slaves with cruel irony, but has been perpetuated by their descendants with pride. It fits the character in the sense that he accepts the American democracy in its true sense and not in the biased manner.

The influence of foreign names like Chinese on place names and characters' names links it to the slave trades and other displacements. The novel portrays how the illegal migrants must go through difficulties to get into America as they are not welcomed to the extent that they must hide their real names and work in unwanted jobs. They were dehumanised and commodified as mere workers. They had to forgo their names which are part of their identity to fit into the situation;

Others with names like myths, names like puzzles, names we had never heard before: Virgilio, Balamugunthan, Faheem, Abdulrahman, Aziz, Baako, Dae-Hyun, Ousmane, Kimatsu. When it was hard to say the many strange names, we called them by their countries.

So how on earth do you do this, Sri Lanka?

Mexico, are you coming or what? (Bulawayo 243)

Compared to anthroponyms, toponyms are less discussed in literary onomastics. Lieven Ameel and Terhi Ainiala in their research article notes that "literary toponyms act as delineators and activators of a literary storyworld. They do so by conveying a range of different types of meanings, from a primary identifying function to semantic, etymological, and associative connotations" (207). Toponyms may have lexical, etymological or associative meaning. "In particular when they refer to existing locations, toponyms are instrumental in locating a literary place on a complex spatial, social, and moral map, and in contextualizing literary characters and plot development." The associative meanings are mostly interpreted according to the reader's personal experience and memories (Ameel and Ainiala 207-208).

Colonisation greatly influenced the naming patterns of places in Zimbabwe. The names of cities, towns, streets, and other locations in the country have changed since its independence in 1980 by the government, most prominently in a burst of renaming in 1982, hoping to remove vestiges of British and Rhodesian rule. Most major cities and towns were renamed, but some places with Ndebele majority such as Bulawayo, were not.

The place names in the novel are predominantly of three types: fictional, real, and real place name for a fictional land. Bulawayo in naming Paradise associates the village of poverty with a synonym for heaven. In naming Paradise as Darling's land Bulawayo summons the reader to see this space as home and a form of paradise all its own to Darling. By doing so she reclaims it as a complex space filled with its own beauty, love, and government abandon (Fitzpatrick 12). Or it could be that the place with the shacks is a Paradise for them when compared to dying in the streets. It may also mean that people living there are half dead or living dead. It could also be a reference to memoir written in 1993 by Breyten Breytenbach

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named *Return to Paradise* which is a pessimistic view about South Africa's future, and as it sees a civil war.

Budapest is a city in Hungary known for its rich culture, after which Bulawayo names the city of the white rich people in the novel. Hungary is a European country, this may be one of the reasons she chose this name and it is also analogous to "hungry" which 'represent a division of race and economic status that has caused the natives of the land to live in poverty' (Fitzpatrick 14). It could also be indicative to the children's reason for entering the place. It is also a place where an uprising begins. This rebellion named Blak Power correspond to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 as both were fighting against poverty due to oppression by the authorities. The Hungarians against the Soviet Union and the people of Zimbabwe against the economic and social oppression their government has allowed with the land reforms (Fitzpatrick 16).

Shanghai is also used similarly in the novel as Budapest. It is a city in China renowned as one of the world's largest seaports and a major industrial and commercial centre of China (Boxer). The line from the novel too gives a similar image of Shanghai and also hints at the historical relationship of African slaves and Chinese along with the present neo-colonialist tendencies:

It's just madness inside Shanghai; machines hoist things in their terrible jaws, machines maul the earth, machines grind rocks, machines belch clouds of smoke, machines iron the ground. Everywhere machines. The Chinese men are all over the place in orange uniforms and yellow helmets; there's not that many of them but from the way they are running around, you'd think they are a field of corn. And then there are the black men, who are working in regular clothes—torn T-shirts, vests, shorts, trousers cut at the knees, overalls, flip-flops, tennis shoes. (Bulawayo 42)

Two places are mentioned through the typography on t-shirts namely Darfur and Cornell. Darfur is a region in Sudan which was home for ethnic groups but later turned to an Islam region. It is infamous for the conflicts and violence between Arabs and Africans, which is considered a genocide by many because it is based on race. The Arab Sudanese displaced and murdered the Black Sudanese. In September 2004, US Secretary of State Colin Powell deemed the Darfur conflict a genocide and called it the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century ("Genocide in Darfur").

Cornell written on the t-shirt of Bastard may be an allusion to the Cornell University in New York. It could be a reference to the historic moment in 1969, when student-led takeover of Willard Straight Hall on campus, the Africana Studies & Research Center (ASRC) at Cornell University became the birthplace of the field of Africana studies. It represented one of the nation's earliest departments established in Black studies ("History of Africana Studies"). Or it could be a symbol of contrast between the poor and the rich who has the privilege to study.

The place Victoria mentioned in the novel in Budapest may be reference to the Victoria Falls which is not only a tourist attraction but also supplies energy to several cities in Zimbabwe, though not available in Paradise. Furthermore, Lake Victoria appears black due to

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the dark brown mud and silt just below the water, it may be representative of the foreshadowing of the black rebels in the areas of white settlers.

In addition, the Robert Street that appears in this part may be a real street name which was named after Robert Mugabe, the Black Nationalist (“Robert Mugabe”). Street names with names of British colonists such as Cecil Rhodes were changed with those of Zimbabwean nationalist leaders at that time. Robert Mugabe’s name eventually became attached to the main street or town centre of every sizeable town because of a spate of changes in 1990. Mugabe was a nationalist who turned into a tyrant after he became part of the government and remained in power for a longer period through corruption and deceit. (Winter).

Other than these South Africa, Botswana, Namibia are the countries referred in this novel which brings about the theme of migration as many travelled to such places for jobs to evade poverty especially teachers which caused the decline in the educational sector of Zimbabwe. Johannesburg or Jo’burg, mentioned in the novel is the largest city in South Africa. The city is known for gold and diamond trade, where the Zimbabweans went in search of job like Bastard.

The children even though lack education, can differentiate the countries from an economic point of view which can be seen in the country-game that they play using the names of real places:

Each person then picks a piece and writes the name of the country on there, which is why it’s called country-game. But first we have to fight over the names because everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be the U.S.A. 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? (Bulawayo 49)

The economic difference between different countries, even their own country is clearly marked in these lines.

Khayelitsha is a slum known for violence in South Africa which was a racially segregated residential area under apartheid regime. Fambeki hill in Paradise, mentioned in the novel, where Mother of Bones goes to pray is a real place name in Bulawayo. Heavenway is the name given for the cemetery. It could be because the people there believe that the dead will go to heaven after this or it may be in line with the name Paradise where the people are living dead due to poverty, hardships and diseases.

Destroyedmichygen is the name used by Darling and others in the beginning of the novel to refer to Detroit, Michigan. The misspelt names point to the lack of education of the children due to the closing of educational institutions because of migration of teachers. Darling after getting educated corrects it but her friends use the same name. It could also be the

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symbolisation of the economic decline of the city of Detroit during that time in America. Similarly, the mention of Crossroads mall may be symbolic of a crucial point in her life as the word crossroads signifies because after going there, she visits Tshaka Zulu with whom she has a conversation on the country, its culture, its names and the great nationalists. After which she comes to question the topic of true madness and realises how the two countries culture intersect in her and others living there.

The juxtaposition of names of America, Africa and England along with other countries brings out different issues of relevance to the forefront like colonialism, racism, globalisation, poverty, education etc. along with themes like transnationalism, diversity, ethnicity, culture, etc. The novelist does not name the country or language of the protagonist and Darling also avoids using the names in a conversation about the same. She just refers to the country as 'kaka country' which seems like the word cacophony and may mean a country in chaos. This shows how the novelist wants it to be a place which does not only limit to Zimbabwe but represent other countries in Africa or the world. The novel just mentions some of the place names but gives significant pointers to the historical, political or symbolical significance through it.

Names itself is used as a theme in the novel, as it is discussed in different instances. However, in some instances, names are avoided for the universalisation of the characters and the stories. And in other instances, names are replaced by other names to show how people are commodified and devalued for selfish purposes. The personal names are more of a cultural representation and are used as a literary technique for furthering the plot line. While the place names help in portraying the political, economic and historical background of the novel. The research is limited in its approach, as the novel is set in a different place, and most of the name meanings are unavailable for an effective analysis.

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