

Carnivalising Postcolonial Zimbabwe: The Vulgar and Grotesque Logic of Postcolonial Protest in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013)

Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi

Summary

This article set out to explore NoViolet Bulawayo's *We need new names* from the perspective of carnivalised writing. The objectives of the article were to unpack how the vulgar and the grotesque were used to create carnival moments in the narrative and to examine how marginal subjects gain voice and some degree of power to live an alternative life, even if this is momentary. It sought to examine how Bulawayo derives her aesthetics from the vulgar and the grotesque to create a carnivalesque logic that informs postcolonial protest in the novel. The analysis made use of the theoretical concepts of carnival propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin. This article argues that the text is constituted by a regime of the vulgar, which the child characters deploy for transgressing hegemonic practices and authoritative discourses. Social norms are suspended and the children have a subversive agency, courtesy of parody and satire. The article reveals that apart from speaking back to power, the children harness the image of *kaka* (human excrement) as a discursive resource to satirise the failures of the Zimbabwean postcolony and to degrade all forms of authority. It is concluded that while the scatological in the novel suggests social indictment, the images of *kaka* and dirt fail to transcend protest to see the realisation of a desired postcolonial condition.

Opsomming

Die oogmerk van hierdie artikel was om NoViolet Bulawayo se *We need new names* te bestudeer uit die perspektief van gekarnivaliseerde skryfwerk. Die artikel het ten doel gehad om te ontlee hoe die vulgêre en die groteske aangewend is om oomblikke van uitspattigheid in die verhaal te skep en om te ondersoek hoe rand-figure 'n stem kry, asook 'n mate van mag om 'n alternatiewe lewe te leef – selfs al is dit net kortstondig. Die artikel bestudeer ook hoe Bulawayo die estetika van die vulgêre en groteske gebruik om 'n karnivaleske logika te bewerkstellig wat post-koloniale protes in die roman aanwakker. Die ontleding gebruik die teoretiese kon-septe van uitspattigheid wat deur Mikhail Bakhtin geskep is. Die artikel voer aan dat die teks saamgestel is deur 'n regime van die vulgêre, wat die kinderkarakters aan-wend om hegemonesse praktyke en outoritêre diskoerse te oorskry. Sosiale norme word opgeskort en die kinders kry ondermynende mag deur parodie en satire. Die artikel

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onthul dat, afgesien daarvan dat die kinders terugpraat waar mag ter sprake is, hulle die beeld van *kaka* (menslike ontlasting) inspan as 'n diskoershulpbrom om die mislukkings van die Zimbabwiese postkolonie te satiriseer en om alle vorme van outoriteit te degradeer. Die gevolgtrekking is dat hoewel die skatologiese in die roman sosiale aanklag suggereer, die beelde van *kaka* en vuilgoed nie daarin slaag om protes te oortref ten einde 'n gewenste postkoloniale toestand te bewerkstellig nie.

Introduction: The Vulgar and the Grotesque in Carnival

This article examines how the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is deployed and informs the logic of protest and subversion in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We need new names*. It specifically focuses on how the aesthetics of the vulgar and grotesque are used in the narrative to create carnival moments that undermine authority and give marginal subjects some kind of power, even if this is temporary. Carnivals were common cultural activities in medieval Europe and elsewhere and it is through an analysis of these that Bakhtin developed a theory of the carnivalesque. Medieval carnivals were a time for various festive re-enactments and parodies of upper class lives. Carnivals enabled early modern European societies, composed mainly of peasants and artisans, to express popular resentments and at the same time affirm or reinforce certain hierarchical norms (Dentith 1995). This points to the ambi-valence of a carnival as the analysis in this article will demonstrate. Bakhtin (1984a: 122) argues that "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and with-out division into performers and spectators. In a carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act" and because of these qualities, a carnival can easily upset established order. According to Connelly (1984: 26) cited in Rayner (2010), "Bakhtin interpreted the carni-valesque as the voice of the people, as the vehicle of self-expression for the usually suppressed and regulated proletariat." Further to this, Rayner (2010: 6) argues that "According to Bakhtin, the carnival involved a temporary suspension of all hierarchies coupled with joyous, uninhibited celebration of the breaking of social norms, mocking authority and parodying official ideas and standards." Wade (2001: 106) points out that "carnival for Bakhtin was seen as a utopian 'loophole' in reality, a temporary semiotic subversion of ruling class power and the naturalising ideologies that sustain it". Notwith-standing this temporariness noted by Wade, a carnival clearly promotes anti-hegemonic tendencies, which is useful especially when contesting the abuse of power in a postcolonial situation. It offers an alternative way of living and Bakhtin (1984a: 9) posits that a carnival represented "the second life of the people, who for a moment entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance". Boundaries are broken down during carnival moments through vulgar and grotesque expressions and enactments of the life of the upper class and officialdom.

This article traces the adventures of child characters in *We Need New Names* before the narrator leaves for America and argues that the vulgar language

they use and the parodic acts they perform are a reflection of the vulgarity of political and religious power as exercised over society in the novel by the powerful on behalf of the nation state and other cultural institutions like the church. The vulgar is necessarily characterised by excess and, as seen in the narrative, there is excessive deployment of political and religious power over the characters, but the children of Paradise, a settlement set up by the poor following the state-sanctioned destruction of their homes, always find ways of creating spaces for political and social trans-gression in a carnivalesque fashion. Therefore, the article examines how the child characters resort to vulgar acts to undermine authority. Through the child characters' parodic acts and commentaries, the novel demonstrates how social formations stand on porous and shaky foundations. A carnival therefore has the potential to initiate postcolonial protest especially when overt dissent is not tolerated. This article argues that *We Need New Names* is carnivalised writing since a carnival energy permeates the narrative. Applying carnivalesque lenses to an analysis of *We Need New Names* will yield a better understanding of the postcolonial condition in Zimbabwe as well as enable an appreciation of the limits of a carnival as a protest mode.

Political and Cultural Indecency in the Postcolony

The narrator of the story in *We Need New Names* is Darling, a young girl who lives in Paradise with her struggling mother and has an absent father who is a migrant worker in South Africa. Her perspective as she observes and lives life in Paradise together with her friends, Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sbho and Stina, continually locates the excesses of power and domination in the realm of the grotesque and the vulgar. In the aftermath of the state-sanctioned demolition of houses considered to be unlawfully constructed, the homeless move to create a slum they ironically call Paradise. It is a marginal space characterised by poverty and idle living. Paradise is not a befitting name for this place and those who name it actually degrade the idea of paradise. The innocent voice of the child narrator questions the logic of destroying well-constructed houses, resulting in people living in make-shift accommodation. In contrast, the wealthy enjoy decent living in Budapest, a low-density and affluent suburb adjacent to Paradise. In the logic of a carnival, Paradise is Budapest's carnivalesque counterpart. Paradise is a manifestation of political indecency while it is at the same time the abode of cultural indecency as evidenced by the deviousness of some of the characters.

In Paradise one finds "the upsetting of hierarchy so intrinsic to carnival" (Holland-Toll 1999: 132). There is poverty and seeming idleness which are seen when the children leave for one of their many adventures. The children are generally left to their own devices with intermittent parental oversight. The narrator says, "Getting out of Paradise is not so hard since the mothers

are busy with their hair and talk, which is the only thing they ever do. They just glance at us when we file past the shacks and then look away. We don't have to worry about the men under the jacaranda either, since their eyes never lift from draughts" (pp. 1-2). This is a community in which adults renege on their parental responsibilities. Among this group of child characters is 11-year-old Chipo who is pregnant, but nobody cares to deal with this manifest case of child abuse.

To begin with, the narrator introduces us to the religious side of the inhabitants of Paradise, those who seek refuge from the drudgery of their poverty in religion. Therefore, in this community where existence is random, religion has some kind of authority and offers solace to the hopeless, yet the narrator also undermines it by carnivalising the supposedly spiritual experience at the Holy Chariot Church of Christ to which she is literally dragged by her grandmother against her will. She would rather be playing with her friends. Besides this church there is also Vodloza, a diviner who claims to be able to help the people to commune with their ancestors. Darling exposes all these religious activities as a sham. The church, nevertheless, stands for some kind of authoritative discourse that is, however, undermined by the narrator through carnivalising it.

The symbol of this religious authority is the obscenely named prophet, Revelations Bitchington Mborro. The last part of his name, when spelt without the double "r", is the Shona word for the phallus. The prophet's obscene name is thus symbolic of the vulgarity of his religious authority. The vulgar nature of the prophet's practices manifests in his exaggerated behaviours. Darling graphically describes the prophet's exaggerated and choreographed gestures and words when preaching. She says:

If Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro's voice were an animal it would be big and fierce and would knock things down. Once, when we still churched under the mopane, he told us how he used to have a small voice and that he rarely used it because he was quiet, timid man, until the night an angel came to him and said, Speak, and he opened his mouth and thunder came out.

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 he doesn't stand in one place. He paces up and down like there are hot coals under his feet.

(p. 35)

These gestures are the signifiers of the aesthetics of the vulgar and even the grotesque. The prophet's gestures and words are always out of proportion with the moment and context of his preaching. Darling's sarcasm in recounting the prophet's actions always undermines the religious authority that Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro supposedly wields over his congregants, most of whom are the oppressed and impoverished inhabitants

of Paradise. The narrator's sarcasm points to the debauchery of the prophet and as a result, from the child-narrator's view-point, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro is a false prophet whose behaviour during the church service is a well-rehearsed performance. Darling holds up the prophet for ridicule by commenting on his every move with a tone of disapproval and contempt. Her language demonstrates that she thinks the prophet is a joke. This perspective thoroughly undermines the spiritual authority that the prophet purports to have.

The bodily postures of the prophet are not only grotesque, but suggestive of the moral degeneracy of religious figures. When a screaming woman, supposedly possessed by demons is brought to Prophet Revelations' church for deliverance, the narrator says:

The Evangelists and the Prophet are already screaming prayers even before they've heard what is wrong. They pounce on the woman and pin her down. She is kicking and twitching like a fish in the sand; she obviously doesn't want them to hold her down like that and she's screaming for them to stop

....

(p. 38)

Then Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro raises both his hands for everyone to be quiet. He points his stick at the pretty woman and commands the demon inside her to get the hell out in the name of Jesus, his exact words, and in his most loudest (sic) voice ... when nothing happens, he wipes his forehead with the back of his sleeve, throws the stick to the side, and leaps onto the woman like maybe he is Hulkogen, squashing her mountains beneath him.

Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro prays for the woman like that, pinning her down and calling to Jesus and screaming Bible verses. He places his hands on her stomach, on her thighs, then he puts his hands on her thing and starts rubbing and praying hard for it, like there is something wrong with it. His face is alight, glowing.

(pp. 39-49)

Darling's tone is obviously that of disapproval and ridicule. She does not even wish to be associated with the rest of the congregants who are trying to subdue the woman. By suggesting that the prophet leaps onto the woman like a known world wrestling character (Hulk Hogan), Darling seems to suggest that there is nothing spiritual about this exercise. When the prophet also begins to caress the woman under the guise of exorcising demons, the narrator proves that the prophet is a rogue. The scene she describes is actually obscene, what with putting his hands "on her thing" and "rubbing and praying hard for it". It is at this moment that the pregnant Chipso, who hitherto has not uttered a word about her rape, is to recall her abuse by her grandfather after seeing the prophet on top of the pretty woman. The prophet's posture triggers memories of rape and not deliverance of the "demon possessed woman". This way the

prophet's authority is undermined and mocked as he appears to be deriving sexual satisfaction from an act that is ostensibly meant to bring spiritual deliverance to this woman. Through Darling's point of view, the prophet is degraded in the eyes of the reader.

Prophet Revelations' stature is further degraded when he attributes Darling's father's illness to a spirit that is sucking his blood when in reality he is suffering from AIDS. The same spirit, according to the prophet, is wreaking havoc in Darling's life. He prays for her and says the spirit is gone, but Darling reports that:

It doesn't mean the spirit is gone because it has now got into Father and is devouring his blood and body, making him all bony and sick and taking his strength away. In order to avenge the spirit and heal Father, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro says, we need to find two fat white virgin goats to be brought up the mountain for sacrifice, and that Father has to be bathed in the goats' blood. In addition, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro says he will need five hundred U.S. dollars as payment, and if there are no U.S. dollars, euros will do.

(pp. 98-99)

The reporting voice here is pouring scorn on the prophet and showing him to be spiritually degenerate. He is morally degenerate and degraded in the eyes of the reader.

Darling's loathing of going to church and her mockery of all that goes on at Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro's church is a carnival moment in the narrative. Bakhtin (1984) shows how a carnival expresses freedom from established norms and values such as the authority of the church and state. Interestingly, however, the Prophet's church in its self-styled nature is also carnivalistic. Its origins are in Paradise, which is an unofficial habitat created in the aftermath of the state-sanctioned destruction of houses. Therefore, the Holy Chariot Church is an African Independent Church and its practices are hybrid, but also substantially different from Christianity as practiced in traditional churches with European origins. Paradise, as a carnival space, has its own church which is different to the traditional ones often associated with officialdom and the normal.

The chapters titled "For Real" and "Blak Power" (sic) point to the political and cultural indecency that encapsulates the postcolonial condition in Zimbabwe. The chapter "For Real" captures the nature and consequences of political violence between the ruling party and the opposition represented by the Change Party. The children who in local cultural practices are not wanted near funerals, position themselves to witness the funeral procession for the burial of an opposition activist named Bornfree. The Change Party is a thinly veiled reference to the Movement for Democratic Change and the name Bornfree resonates well with the popular perception that it is those born after independence (1980) who have the audacity to follow opposition politics

since they have no appreciation of the national armed struggle for Zimbabwe. Thus, Bornfree as an opposition political activist is aptly named. The name carries propaganda baggage which suggests that those born free (after independence) are sell-outs and are not patriots. The “bornfrees” are thus accused of being functionaries of a regime-change agenda funded by the West. Bornfree died after being subjected to severe beatings for his political affiliation. After witnessing the funeral procession leading to Bornfree’s burial, the children decide to perform his beating by ruling party youths. It is this performance which re-enacts his subsequent death that unambiguously captures the violence and obscenity of political power wielded by the ruling elite.

The chapter, “Blak Power” (sic), further interrogates the overbearing exercise of power by those in authority over the ruled and apparently powerless. On one of their raids into Budapest, the children are confronted by a black security guard who commands them to go back. This is the exchange:

I command you to immediately turn around and retrace your steps. Extricate yourselves from these premises and retreat to whatever hole you crawled out of. Under no circumstances should I ever lay my eyes on you again, you follow? The guard says, pointing us to the road. He speaks with this tone like he owns things, but we know that even the baton stick in his hands is not his, that if he weren’t on this street he’d be nothing.

(pp. 105-106)

The security guard’s overbearing personality and feigned superiority are symptomatic of the irresponsible use of power by those in positions of authority. He appears to be very erudite judging by his language throughout his verbal exchange with the children. The language however, is too lofty for the occasion, which is a simple encounter with innocent, but unruly children. There is a disconnection between the exercise and display of power on his part and the trivial charges against the children. However, from the responses of one of the children, Godknows, this security guard has no real power. Godknows actually mocks him: “‘Why are you talking like that; did you go to university? My cousin Freddy went too and can speak high-sounding English as well’, Godknows says, but the guard doesn’t even look at him” (p. 106). As the children remain defiant, one of them, Bastard, proceeds to spit on the street and the security guard is enraged: “‘Who accorded you the permission to perform filthy functions on this street?’” (p. 106). Godknows responds: “‘What, you are complaining about just spit? Our friend has vomited on these streets before”, Godknows says, pride in his voice. “‘And why didn’t they give you a gun, or a guard dog? What if we were armed and dangerous?’” (p. 106). The children undermine the black power projected by the guard, but at a more symbolic level they are mocking the political authority of the black government. And to call the chapter “Blak Power” (sic) and then make this overbearing but practically powerless black security guard the subject of the

chapter, is to parody the postcolonial government. The guard symbolises the stewardship of the nation state, which is in the hands of the black ruling elite. His behaviour speaks volumes about the stewards of political power in the postcolony. The encounter between this guard and the children is a carnival moment in that they under-mine his authority by subverting both the social and political hierarchy. In answering back to the guard, the children overturn social hierarchies as well as the perceived authority vested in him as a steward. From a carnival point of view, the guard is just part of the masses and his lofty language is an example of “cheap imitations of power to reproduce its epistemology” (Mbembe 2001: 133). When Bastard spits on the clean streets of Budapest where the wealthy reside, the children are also clearing space for political resistance and demonstrating subversive agency. Speaking back to the guard and spitting on the streets of Budapest are signs of symbolic degradation of the politically powerful.

Bulawayo thus draws her narrative style from the aesthetics of the grotesque. Bakhtin (1984: 19) writes, “[T]he essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation”. On their first encounter with the guard, the narrator caricatures him and in a derisive tone she describes him thus:

I can't figure out if he is frowning or it's his general ugliness. He is tall and his navy uniform looks like it's just been slapped on him. On his left arm is a discoloured white patch with a picture of a gun and the word *Security* embossed in red letters, and on his breast is a ZCC church badge. The trousers barely reach the ankles, and his boots are unpolished. He is wearing a black woollen hat and matching gloves, never mind the heat. Everything about him looks like a joke and we know he is a waste of time – if we weren't this close we'd probably call him names and laugh and throw stones.

(p. 105)

The fact that the security guard has a Zion Christian Church badge means he combines secular and religious authority, which the children, however, parody. In a carnival-like fashion, the guard masquerades as a person of substantial authority and yet the children prove that his authoritative demeanour is a façade. Lindahl (1996: 66) suggests that the primary mode of a carnival is parody, which is meant “to ridicule and metaphorically destroy the established social order”. His physical appearance and dressing undercut the authority that he is supposed to have. In this instance both the church and political authority are carnivalised.

The narrator further reveals the obscenity of her community's existence as shown by the moral degeneracy that characterises relations. Darling reveals that unbeknown to her mother she is a silent observer of her sexual escapades with some man in the dinginess of their makeshift home. Bulawayo pushes the boundaries of vulgar aesthetics to interrogate the postcolonial condition in Zimbabwe. The living conditions of the people of Paradise are deplorable and there is no privacy, hence children can bear witness to the sexual lives of

adults. There is cultural degeneracy which points to political degeneracy in the Zimbabwean postcolony.

Chipo's pregnancy, which is a result of the sexual abuse by her grand-father, is another signifier of cultural degeneracy. Her grandfather is not brought to book for this sexual offence and life goes on in Paradise as if nothing sinister has happened to a minor. The grandfather's sexual violence that is not prosecuted speaks of the culture of impunity that characterises the postcolonial condition, especially in relation to political and economic indiscretions.

The children in *We Need New Names* are unruly, vulgar and generally indecorous. Given the argument advanced in this article regarding the obscene and vulgar deployment of power in the postcolony, they could be deriving their template from the nation or, if this is the type of child the nation is producing, then it raises questions about the kind of postcolonial nation that has been created.

The Aesthetics of Vulgarly and the Grotesque: Political and Social Transgression in *We Need New Names*

Bulawayo appeals to vulgar and grotesque aesthetics to metaphorically destroy Zimbabwe-Sino relations and in so doing makes a political statement about the postcolonial condition. In *We Need New Names* the exploitative nature of the Zimbabwe-Sino relations – tipped in favour of the Chinese – is visualised within the imaginary of grotesque, dangerous and insatiable beasts. When the children of Paradise visit the Chinese construction site, which they call Shanghai, the narrator is quick to notice the sorry state of workers and the grand construction work going on, but evidently at the expense of these workers. The children are even awed when they realise how much the Chinese have already accomplished in a short space of time. One of the children, Sbho, is awed and remarks: "They did all that already? It's hard to believe just how much has been done. The last time we came they had only burned grass and were bringing the machines and things in. Now there is this skeleton of a building that looks like it wants to belch in God's face" (p. 43). Another one of the children, Bastard, responds:

"Yes, didn't I tell you last time that China is a big dog? Was I lying? Isn't this major, all this?" Bastard says, sounding pleased. He makes a sweep with his hand like he is the one who sent the Chinese to build, like they are his boys and are here just to follow orders.

(p. 43)

The imagery of a building that appears as though it wants to belch in God's face speaks of the excesses of the Chinese and further highlights the wanton abuse of power and sense of impunity since, in reality, who would dare belch

in God's face? When they move around the site Darling draws our attention to the thin and poorly dressed and equally poorly equipped labourers and contrasts them to the fat Chinese foreman whom they surprise when they peep into his tent. Darling's description of the Chinese foreman is graphic:

It's surprise all over – he is obviously surprised to find us there peeping but we are more surprised at being caught but we are more surprised at his fatness; the other Chinese workers here aren't even half his size, so what is wrong with this one? And then to add to our surprise even more, the fat man starts ching-chonging to us like he thinks he is in his grandmother's backyard. He ching-chongs ching-chongs and then stops, the kind of stop that tells you he is expecting an answer Yes, somebody told Fat Mangena here that Chinese is our national language.

(p. 43)

This Chinese man's physical appearance is conceptualised as grotesque. He is obese and this casts him as an endless devourer of Zimbabwe's resources. The narrator deploys the imagery of obesity to invoke the insatiable quest for and exploitation of Zimbabwe's resources by the Chinese. The isiNdebele name, Mangena, which the children use to refer to the Chinese boss here, loosely translates to one who enters or intrudes. This suggests an invader and is an indictment of the Chinese nationals and the Zimbabwe-Sino relations. The children see the proliferation of the Chinese as some kind of invasion.

The children's visit to the Shanghai construction site thus instantiates a parody of the Zimbabwe-Sino relations in Zimbabwean literature. Ever since Zimbabwe officially adopted a foreign policy dubbed the "Look-East Policy", the Chinese have received preferential treatment in business and investment opportunities in the country. The nature of these relations is held up for ridicule by these children. Here the narrator deploys both parody and satire. The children's visit further exposes them to the sexual exploitation of Zimbabwean women by the Chinese. Darling and her friends witness two young skimpily dressed girls coming out of Fat Mangena's tent followed by the obese Chinese foreman whose belt is still unbuckled. Darling says:

We are still standing there when out walk these two black girls in skinny jeans and weaves and heels. We forget about fat Mangena and watch them twist past us They twist past the Caterpillars, past the mountains of gravel, twist past the groups of men who stop working and stare at the girls until they eventually get out of Shanghai and disappear behind the bend near the main road.

(p. 45)

The Chinese who have economic power, which they are using to extract benefits from Zimbabwe, also symbolise the phallocratic in postcolonial relations. Mbembe (1992: 14) argues that "pride in possessing an active penis has to be dramatised, with sexual rights of subordinates ..., the keeping of concubines, and so forth. And the unconditional subordination of women to

the principle of male pleasure remains one of the pillars of the phallo-cratic cycle.” While Mbembe was theorising the exploitation of citizens by the ruling elite in a case study of Cameroon, his observations are informative with regard to the Zimbabwean situation. The sexual exploitation of young Zimbabwean women is metonymic of the unequal relations between Zimbabwe and China, which in turn tips economic trade relations in favour of China. This parody of Chinese exploitation, conceived of in vulgar and sexual terms, is a statement about postcolonial existence and reality in Zimbabwe. It invites attention to new regimes of coloniality in Africa and the Third World in general. By being intrusive visitors to the Chinese construction site and holding up the Chinese to examination and ridicule, the children have subversive agency, which is also a characteristic feature of the carnivalesque. Bulawayo exploits the supposed innocence of children and their lack of inhibitions to carnivalise the Zimbabwe-China relations in a way that undermines the political rhetoric of the Chinese as Zimbabwe’s all-weather friend. However, there is nothing beyond verbally insulting the Chinese, that these children can do and this is one of the limitations of a carnival.

The narrator equates China to a red dragon. Darling suggests that “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’, Godknows says” (p. 47). China is equated here to a satanic beast that devours people to sustain itself. When Godknows wonders if China breaks into people’s homes or ambushes them, he is asking a fundamental question regarding whether China forces other nations into relations with it or waits for an opportune moment that normally comes when another nation is economically vulnerable and then launches an ambush. Some of the metaphors used by the children are not common in the linguistic repertoire of Zimbabweans, but obviously, they point to the ubiquity of the Chinese, and their products in Zimbabwe. The dragon also happens to be a potent cultural symbol for China.

The children are eventually frustrated after failing to extract gifts from the Chinese even after threatening: ““You want us to come at night and defecate all over? Or steal things?’ God knows says, and the Chinese man laughs the kind of laugh that tells you he didn’t understand a word” (p. 47). When the children threaten to defecate, this becomes a symbol of discontent and at the same time wasted energy (Ryan 2013). After realising they are not getting anything they leave and on their way the narrator states, “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” (p. 47). In Paradise development is passing them: no schools, clinics or proper houses are being built as part of the national development agenda. The children have carnival licence to critique

Zimbabwe's foreign policy. Earlier, one of them, Stina, had inquired what the Chinese were building: "What are you building? A school? Flats? A clinic?" (p. 46). The children are conscious of the immediate needs of their communities in areas of education, housing and health as captured in Stina's question. They are aware of the inadequacies of Paradise as a habitat. When they realise the Chinese are building a mall, which will house shops selling imported Chinese products, they have no kind remarks for them, hence their insults. In this way they undermine the much celebrated Zimbabwe-China relations.

This is a deconstruction of China, a degradation of the official Look-East Policy. When one of the children decides against playing a game based on China there is subversion of authoritative discourse, which posits that China is the all-weather friend. The children subvert all this by shouting at the Chinese to go back to wherever they came from, though this is all they can do.

Committing Linguistic and Ecological Violence: The Symbolology of *Kaka* (Human Excrement) in *We Need New Names*

Ryan (2013: 52) has argued that "we may find waste ponderous, unsettling, obscene, but we cannot dismiss it as merely an uncommon aesthetic curiosity. It takes many forms throughout African literature and film". In *We need new names*, human excrement is a trope or central motif that defines both the tone and the aesthetics of the novel and accentuates the carnival energy that runs through the narrative. *We Need New Names* is thus to a great extent scatological in as far as the children characters' obsession with excrement and general obscenity is concerned. The constant reference to *kaka* accentuates the carnivalistic protest mode in the novel. Right at the beginning of the novel, as the children are heading to Budapest to steal guavas, they debate about who exactly put the baby in Chipo's stomach. As the debate degenerates into a contest of facts about pregnancy between Bastard and the narrator, Darling, Bastard shouts her down: "Just shut your *kaka* mouth, you, it's not even your stomach" [my emphasis] (p. 3). Darling's mouth is equated to human excrement simply because Bastard is not agreeable to what she says about pregnancy. This utterance sets the tone of the children's language throughout much of the narrative, which is reflective of social decay.

On their way back to Paradise after stealing guavas, the narrator describes how they are deliberately dirtying the clean streets of Budapest. She says:

Going back to Paradise, we do not run. We just walk nicely like Budapest is now our country too, like we built it even, eating guavas along the way and spitting the peels all over to make the place dirty. We stop at the corner of AU Street for Chipo to vomit; it happens most of the time she eats. Today her vomit looks like urine, only thicker. We leave it there, uncovered.

The invasion of Budapest, or “Hitting Budapest” as the chapter is named, and the stealing of guavas by these children is a sign of protest and yet even more symbolic is the deliberate spitting of guava peels and then leaving Chipo’s vomit uncovered. The children are committing ecological violence. This is a satirical sign showing the ironies of power in the postcolony. These children are themselves perceived as gabbage as seen in my earlier dis-cussion of their encounter with the security guard. They are therefore pollutants in Budapest. Paradise, their place of residence, thus reminds one of the Dunghill in Patterson’s *The Children of Sisyphus*. It is a slum that is symbolic of moral and social degradation. By saying “We just walk nicely like Budapest is now our country too ...” the children are in the wrong place and are dirtying the nation or its image. On another symbolic level, vomiting at the corner of AU Street is a sign of trashing the African Union as a continental supranational body. To stretch the imagination, the basis of the children’s condemnation of the AU is its perceived complicity in the suffering of Africans in various crisis-torn countries. Dirt therefore becomes a potent symbol of resistance in the novel.

Notwithstanding their violation of Budapest, some of the children actually harbour a desire to reside there in the future. ““One day I will live here, in a house just like that’, Sbho says, biting into a thick guava. She points to the big blue house with the long row of steps, flowers all around it” (p. 11). This is evidence of the ambivalence of a carnival – it undermines and reinforces as Stallybrass and White (1986) have argued. The children trash Budapest by dirtying it yet they inwardly desire to reside in it as well. Darling asks her just how she is going to achieve that and Sbho says she knows it will happen one day. Typical of Bastard the spoiler, he throws a guava that explodes on the perimeter wall of the house Sbho has admired, staining the wall. Sbho is not amused and confronts Bastard, charging that he should have targeted a different house other than her chosen one for dirtying. Bastard’s retort is, ““Budapest is not a *kaka* toilet for anybody to just walk in, it’s not like Paradise. You’ll never live here’, he says” [my emphasis] (p. 12). Again *kaka* is used to describe their place of abode. Innocently, the children condemn the quality of life they lead. As the children go on quarrelling about this, Bastard then declares that “Well, I don’t care, I’m blazing out of this *kaka* country myself. Then I’ll make lots of money and come back and get a house in this very Budapest. Or even better, many houses: one in Budapest, one in Los Angeles, one in Paris. Wherever I feel like ...” (p. 13). When Stina says when they were still going to school his teacher had told him that one needed education in order to make money, Bastard responds: “I don’t need any *kaka* school to make money, you goat teeth ...” [my emphasis] (p. 13). For these children Paradise is *kaka* toilet, Zimbabwe is *kaka* country and school is *kaka*.

This level of vulgarity speaks volumes of the social decay in their community as well as acts as a symbol of protest.

The vulgarity of state power instigates the vulgarity of these children, and Anderson's (2010: 172) argument is instructive, "Since no one is immune to the obscenity and vulgarity of postcolonial domination, everyone is implicated." The obscenity and vulgarity are bi-directional; the state and the children are both implicated. This resonates with Bakhtin's argument stated earlier that all are participants in a carnival as none is immune to vulgarity.

The vulgarity of postcolonial existence is poignantly captured in the chapter titled "Country Game". In this game the children pick on favourite countries, most of which are First World. To the children, badly governed countries or what they have been made to know as failed states, are *kaka* countries. This is why, when they are playing the Country Game, none of them wishes to be called Sudan, Afghanistan, Haiti or Somalia because these represent failure and they are not "country-countries" (p. 49). Therefore, *kaka* is a symbolic resource in the narrative, as the children use it and spittle as discursive tools to vent their discontent with the social and political malaise. As the children leave Shanghai they think of playing a game to keep themselves from boredom. The narrator says: "We are back in Paradise and are now trying to come up with a new game; it's important to do this so we don't get tired of old ones and bore ourselves to death ..." (p. 48). Bastard, whose turn it is to decide on the game to play, thinks it must be about China. He says "I think China should be like a dragon That way, it will be a real beast, always on top" (p. 48). When Sbho counters that by suggesting that China must be like an angel doing supernatural things so that everybody will be running to it and pleading with it for help, and proceeding to sing and dance to show how everybody will be trying to impress China, Godknows dismisses that as *kaka*. "Yes, sit down, that's just *kaka*, who will play that nonsense?" [my emphasis] (p. 48). The children are quick to refer to human excrement to express disapproval or protest against whatever they object to.

Furthermore, *kaka* figures prominently at the end of the chapter, "Blak Power" (sic). When the children are stealing guavas on Julius Street in Budapest they witness the invasion of the suburb by ruling party youths. These are not named but implied. The narrator says:

We're in the middle of harvesting when we hear this crazy noise. We look and they are pouring down Julius like angry black water and we know immediately that it was a mistake for us to come to Budapest today. They are just everywhere, walking, rushing, running, toyi-toying, fists and machetes and knives and sticks and all sorts of weapons and the flags of the country in the air, Budapest quivering with the sound of their blazing voices.

(p. 111)

While the children observe from a privileged position up the guava tree, the marauders attack the white couple who own the house from which they are

stealing guavas. The marauders want to take over the property and when the white couple resists, they attack violently and abduct them. The household property is smashed and the marauders leave with the couple. Then, the children have the chance to be in a white person's home for the first time in their lives. It becomes a carnival moment as they ridicule the white couple's cultural artefacts, the Queen of England, and take the opportunity to enjoy the comforts of that home. They discover that the house has been turned up-side-down, but proceed to gorge themselves with food. The narrator says:

We eat things we have never seen before, things whose names we don't even know. "Wee fawgoat the fowks, wee fawgoat the fowks", Godknows says, sounding like a white man and we giggle. He starts towards the cupboards and rummages and rummages and rummages, and then he is back with the glinting forks and knives and we eat like proper white people.

(pp. 129-130)

This incident is instructive as far as the ambivalence of a carnival is concerned. Through imitating the white people, the children show that there is no strict resistance to political domination, but attempt to share the spoils. This is why they steal guavas from Budapest and enjoy the time they spend in the white couple's house. Mbembe (2001) refers to this as conviviality, the aim being to share the table with the autocrat.

At the end of it all Godknows decides that he wants to defecate and the children hunt for the toilet:

We find the toilet at the end of the long passage. There is a big white round thing where they bathe, then there is the glass shower, the soaps, the gadgets and things. There is also a terrible reeking smell, and we look at the other end, and there, near the toilet, we see the words *Blak Power* written in brown *feces* [my emphasis] on the large bathroom mirror.

(p. 130)

Faeces have been used by the marauding party to declare black political power in the postcolony. However, the deployment of power here is also ambivalent. The faeces degrade the white couple's status and equally, the marauders. As Esty (1999) has argued, this is excremental postcolonialism where in this case human excreta are a sign of misguided political energy.

Conclusion

The analysis in this article has shown how characters in *We need new names* are consumed by moral decadence at political and individual levels. The use of language by the characters is offensive to the reader and the indiscipline of the child and adult characters in the novel constitutes the vulgar. Evidently

there are multiple levels of indiscipline and vulgarity in the novel. Notably the children themselves are highly undisciplined, political actors represented by the marauding youths who destroy homes and beat up members of the Change Party are undisciplined, and those with parental authority also lack discipline. They are bereft of moral values by which to live. All this is parodied, ridiculed and ironised by the children, creating in the process the carnival logic of postcolonial protest.

Darling's narrative viewpoint enables some kind of resistance in that by ridiculing domination, religious and parental authority, she exposes the absurdities of postcolonial experience and this way enjoys some kind of freedom from domination and authority. For the brief moments they transgress social boundaries and clear political spaces of protest, the children bring down to earth hegemonic values and also evoke a utopian community (Dentith 1995) in which they long to live. When the children reject the etiquette and decency expected of them, they are symbolically degrading hegemonic ideas. Notwithstanding the protest mode of the novel, this does not translate into change for the children and their society; rather, some of them escape into the Diaspora later on in the novel. While the image of *kaka* or dirt in general is a discursive weapon used by the discontented children, it is also a limitation in that it does not allow Bulawayo to transcend protest.

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Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi

Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
hngoshi@yahoo.co.uk/ngoshiht@gmail.com