

The phallogentric paradox and semantics of Eve's myth in Zimbabwe's contemporary national politics: An ecofeminist reading of Bulawayo's novel, *Glory*

**Author:**Esther Mavengano^{1,2,3} **Affiliations:**

¹Department of English and Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

²College of Human Sciences, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

³Department of English, Institute of English and American Studies, Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow, Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden

Corresponding author:

Esther Mavengano,
esthermavengano@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 31 Aug. 2022

Accepted: 03 Jan. 2023

Published: 29 Mar. 2023

How to cite this article:

Mavengano, E., 2023, 'The phallogentric paradox and semantics of Eve's myth in Zimbabwe's contemporary national politics: An ecofeminist reading of Bulawayo's novel, *Glory*', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(3), a8070. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i3.8070>

Copyright:

© 2023. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

NoViolet Bulawayo's recently published novel titled, *Glory*, fictionalises the tragic fall of Robert Mugabe from the helm of power. The removal of Mugabe from power through the 2017 "military coup" engendered a problematic narrative that depicted the former first lady, Grace Mugabe as the biblical Eve's doppelganger. The purported resemblance of Eve, a character from sacrosanct text, and Grace of contemporary Zimbabwe is often based on mythical and misogynist (mis)interpretations of the former as an epitome of sin and the latter as instrumental to Mugabe's demise. Arguably, the construct of Eve in Zimbabwe and the personified allegory in the fictive society of Bulawayo is profoundly laden with semantics and tropes of power together interwoven with innuendoes that denigrate women. This article reflected upon the 'blame Eve myth' with interlocking discourses of toxic politics and religion that reinforce phallogentric attitudes and practices that denigrate the female gender in Zimbabwe. Ecofeminism enriches the discussions of the novel *Glory* as a satire that provides imperative fictional sites to chart these intricate discourses. Ecofeminist framework offers insights that enrich the discussions of Eve's myth and other representations which disparage women in the novel, *Glory*. The study concludes that blaming Grace Mugabe in her fictional doppelganger Marvelous, symbolically illuminates how women and the feminised nature are both insulted and held accountable for woes that befall humanity in both the fictive nation of Jidada and its referent Zimbabwe.

Contribution: Ecofeminist conceptual framework has rarely been used to examine the complex connection between gender, politics, religion and nature in Zimbabwean fictional writing. Thus, this study offered fresh insights that are significant in understanding these subjects from a multidisciplinary perspective because the analyses and readings of the novel were based on literary criticism, political discourse and theology.

Keywords: ecofeminism; Eve's myth; gender politics; phallogentric paradox; allegory; tropes of power; Zimbabwe's contemporary politics.

Introduction

Drawing discursive praxes from an ecofeminist lens, this article analyses Bulawayo's novel and intertextually aligns it with the lived realities of gender disparities in Zimbabwe's socio-political structures. The study interrogates the discourse of Eve's myth contrasted around the image of the former first lady Grace Mugabe in the post-coup Zimbabwean society, as a referent entry point into the discursive and fictional spaces of Bulawayo's recently published novel, *Glory*. The text is a political allegory of Zimbabwe's post-independence era. Readers acquainted to the country's postcolonial history barely miss details about mass killings and an orgy of political violence in the Matabeleland province between 1983 and 1987, recognisable onomastic construction of charactonyms and typonyms, the 2017 military coup, personification of key political figures among other unmistakable allusions to the Zimbabwean society. For instance, Marvelous, an outspoken former first lady of Jidada, always wearing Gucci shoes and expensive jewellery and was awarded a doctorate by a Jidada University before 'you could say diss, for dissertation' (Bulawayo 2022:12). Marvelous evidently represents Grace Mugabe whose passion

Note: Special Collection: Religion and Theology and Constructions of Earth and Gender, sub-edited by Sophia Chirongoma (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Linda Naicker (University of South Africa, South Africa).

for the Gucci label is well known. A striking allusion is also made to the controversies around her as a political figure as well as her attainment of a doctorate at the University of Zimbabwe that attracted legal and public scrutiny. It is claimed that Grace Mugabe's lethal politics ultimately led to the coup de tat in 2017 that toppled her husband from the 'Seat of Power' by the 'Party of Power'. The novel *Glory* further envisions a troubled postcolonial society through unambiguous linguistic and cultural construction rolled together to speak of the discernible political, religious and gender problematics. The present study's analytical gaze is on the 'blame Eve myth' as part of interlocking discourses about toxic politics and religion that reinforce phallogocentric attitudes and practices that denigrate the female gender in Zimbabwe.

Ecofeminist lens

This study is located within the interdisciplinary terrains in the context of Bulawayo's literary text, *Glory*. The entangled thematisation of politics, religion and gender is debated from an ecofeminist lens. The subjects of women's place in society and their relationship to nature find nuanced expression in Bulawayo's literary work. The qualitative inquiry in this study moves intertextually between the examined fictive text and Zimbabwe's political landscape with the main aim to unravel the intersections between the two. Warren (1990) views ecofeminism as a field that brings ethics and feminism together in order to interrogate the logic of patriarchal domination that connects nature and women as victims. In the same vein, Ruether (2012:12) postulates that 'ecofeminism examines the interconnections between the domination of women and nature.' Earlier on, King (1989) has argued that ecology is insufficient without feminism because it does not recognise the necessity of ending the oppression of women, and feminism is disembodied without the ecological perspective. In other words, ecofeminists draw pertinent parallels between men's millennial efforts to subdue Planet Earth and women (Walby 1990). Thus, it is appropriate to argue that the liberation of women is linked to redeemed nature and other oppressed sections of the society. Such liberation is a fundamental model for a just and prosperous Earth (Biehl 1991; Harris 2016; Ruether 2012).

Synopsis of the novel *Glory*

NoViolet Bulawayo's novel, *Glory*, is a political satire that uses a reworking of the traditional animal fable. The writer, born Elizabeth Zandile Tshela, is a Zimbabwean who is presently living in USA. *Glory* is her second novel that was published in 2022, and it came after her maiden entry into the novel genre with *We Need New Names* published in 2013. *Glory* has a convincing historicity in its insinuations to Zimbabwe's postcolonial dystopia and the painful search for a utopian socio-political order. Bulawayo uses social media technologies such as Twitter and Facebook, mixed together with traditional oral folklore in the production of new forms of African modernity, conviviality, trans/intermediality in

the tradition of Yvonne Vera. This is a fresh development in Zimbabwean/African historical fiction.

The novel strikingly shows interactions of speech and silence in the production of resistance and imagining the nation. Seemingly inspired by George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Bulawayo's plot follows the fall of the Old Horse, a long-serving leader of a fictional animal kingdom called Jidada. The Old Horse also known as the Father of the Nation is overthrown in a military coup along with his much-despised wife, a donkey named Marvelous. Initially, the removal of the Old Horse from the seat of power after 40 years is much celebrated by ordinary animals who expect a positive transition under a new ruling horse, Tuvius Delight Shasha. Tuvius, or the Crocodile, is a former vice president of the toppled Old Horse, also renamed the Saviour. On his ascendancy to power, Tuvius or just Tuvy encouraged all the Jidadans to bring back the long-lost promised land in the era of a new dispensation. Tuvy works closely with his inner circle of the chosen animals, which include the Vice President, General Judas Goodness Reza and General Blessing Bibi, from the Ndebele tribe in the Northern Province of Jidada.

Just like its referent Zimbabwe, Jidada is a country riven by decades of autocratic rule, mass killings and sexual violence of the Gukurahundi in Matabeleland, disappearances of political activists and opponents during elections in 2008 and 2019, land grabbing and displacement of the poor animals by the elite members of the chosen animals. A toxic political environment is foregrounded through a perpetual presence of vicious dogs and the Defenders of a Revolution that maul at whoever dares speak to the powerful Fathers of the Nation or rulers of Jidada. Jidada country has patriarchal organism because only 'Mals' [*sic*] born in possession of a fine, weighty set of testicles' should rule Jidada. The former First 'Femal' [*sic*] of Jidada, also known as Dr Sweet Mother, is vilified as:

[A] damned donkey ... a proper itch tail with no morals whatsoever; because she stepped on a bed of scorpions, when her little faction of minions, the pretentious and delusional so called Future Circle fancied themselves the upcoming leaders of the Seat of Power. (Bulawayo 2022:29)

The logics of patriarchal domination and Eve's myth

Numerous definitions of the term patriarchy have been proffered by various thinkers in the academia. Lerner (1986:239) submits that in 'a patriarchal scheme, men hold power in all the important institutions of society and women are deprived of access to such power.' Lim (1997:220) concurs with Lerner and points out that 'patriarchy is the system of male domination and female subordination.' Patriarchy is deeply entrenched in socio-cultural and political realities to an extent that women regard their subjugation as permissible. This observation re-enacts Beauvoir's (1953,2011:295) famous submission that 'One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.' Rakoczy (2004:31) contends that 'patriarchy is interwoven in the Christian tradition in distinct and pervasive ways.' Patriarchy as it is understood by Mary Daly (1975) is:

[T]he homeland of males ... Father Land and men are its agents ... a profoundly anti female society, a misogynistic 'civilization' in which men collectively victimize women, attacking us as personifications of their own paranoid fears, as The Enemy. Within this society, it is men who rape, who sap women's energy, who deny women economic and political powers. (p. 28)

Fiorenza (1983) and Daly (1985) point at the images of God in Scripture and liturgical prayer as overwhelmingly male, God the Father and King, Christ the Son. This alleged maleness of God and the male identity of Jesus are used to validate female relegation. Beauvoir (1953), Millet (1977) and Butler (1988) bemoan what they perceive as a deliberate brutalisation and marginalisation of the female gender from the centre by her more authoritative male counterpart.

In the book of Genesis, it is perceived that God granted man not humanity, dominion over creation. Feminists have problems with this phallogocentric structure of power, which they claim is the root cause of patriarchal ideology. Fiorenza (1983) cites Genesis 3:16 as evidence that endorses women's subjection to men. Eve's perceived rebellion against God attracted punishment. Feminist theology is concerned with misogynist readings of the Bible and the Christian tradition. Eve who became an embodiment of the female gender is accused of committing the first sin that angered God who then proclaimed punishment for humanity (Fiorenza 1983). It is also claimed that Eve caused the eviction of Adam and herself from the Garden of Eden (Daly 1985). All women are perceived as bearers of sin (Daly 1985; Ruether 2012).

In the Zimbabwean society, politics is assumed to be a man's game. Dube (2013) asserts that Zimbabwe is a signatory to various regional and international protocols on gender equality and particularly in the area of political representation. Yet, women have remained obscured. Similarly, Nzomo (1994) observes that very few female candidates are elected into political office, and these few seek approval of the powerful male politicians. Nzomo makes reference to Joice Mujuru, a former vice president of Zimbabwe as a case in point. She is the only female politician who was continuously appointed to occupy a ministerial position by Mugabe's government (Nyarota 2018). Parichi (2016) further adds that Mujuru uniquely held a vice president post in Zimbabwe for four decades. However, her political career was hinged on Mugabe's approval whom she always showered praises and called him 'my mentor and my father' (Nzomo 1994:10), just to keep her post. Writing in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979:184) states that a woman's identity is denigrated in society, and she is indoctrinated to be inferior and subservient through a 'normalizing process.' Mujuru's political career met its end when she fell out of Mugabe's favour in 2014.

The rise of Grace Mugabe without liberation war credentials in a political space that emphasises 'blood shedding as a critical and only memorable role that qualifies one for Zimbabwean political leadership or presidency, was fervently condemned in the same way. She became a scapegoat of 'all of Jidada's ills!' (Bulawayo 2022:281). Despite her questionable moral personality, it is inappropriate to shift all

the blame from Mugabe and his male allies who are still in the ruling party. The killings in Matabeleland, accidents and disappearances of political opponents are a long-established culture within the ruling party (Nyambi 2013). Thus, the 'blame Eve' discourse is an attempt to censor women's speech. In other words, the ruling party had its toxic political culture in place long before Grace Mugabe got married to the late president. Millet (1977:253) says: 'women hardly have a mouth yet in a patriarchal society.' The ruling party in Zimbabwe is never accountable for any wrongs. It is either the sanctions by the West or the opposition camp working with outside enemies to sabotage the government.

The novel also reveals how some religious leaders endorse female silencing in the socio-political arena and demonstrate their harmful gender-insensitive traits and/or tendencies. In his quest to align himself with the ruling elite, Prophet Dr O.G. Moses from the Prophetic Church of Churches denounces women who protest against the political killings and disappearances in Jidada country. Prophet Dr O.G. Moses makes intertextual references to the biblical Eve, Delilah, Lot's wife, Jezebel, Jidada's protesting sisters of the disappeared and a literary female figure of the Witch of Endor's shenanigans, as a telling story of how women are deceitful and harmful. The prophet even warns the nation about 'the danger of a delusional, godless female who takes after her sinning biblical grandmothers' (Bulawayo 2022:100). The condemned woman does not respect gender borders; she is a 'destitute of shushness,' an 'unbridled female' who does not understand the reason why 'God created a mal first,' the God who 'commanded a femal not to rule.' (Bulawayo 2022:100). According to Lerner (1986), the fusion of all women with Eve came with apostolic sanction and that Eve became the basis for the oppression of women. The prophet's toxic theology is criticised by the Duchess who in the novel represents feminist consciousness. She questions how the protest by the sisters of the disappeared is regarded as disobedience. She calls the prophet a swine and a fool who has demonstrated his ignorance. The prophet is apparently of questionable character because he brainwashes his congregants and enriches himself by selling perceived anointed oil that offers no solution to the impoverished believers. In *Beyond God the Father*, Daly (1985) points out how Christianity has been used to exploit and oppress women even in the church. In the same vein, Naomi Goldenberg (1979:28), in her book titled, *Changing the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* posits that 'Yahweh and Christ were shaped by males principally to deify themselves and to sanctify the power of men over women in patriarchal societies.' The male image of Christ and God is further problematised by a feminist theologian Carol Christ (1987) who contends that:

[A]s long as the Father continues to be invoked in churches and synagogues, the stage is being set for the continuation of pathological relationships to God and to the men in our lives. The God of the Bible, the God of liturgy and prayer, does not appear as a 'Liberator' to many women. (p. 18)

In this respect, Julia Kristeva (1977), writing in her essay titled *Stabat Mater*, had also earlier on claimed that the Virgin Mother in the Catholic Church is a symbol of a suppressed maternal semiotic system in a patriarchal Western world. Women in this semiotic system are presented from a phallogocentric perspective.

Scatological imagery, grammar of violence in the motifs of ‘dogs’ and ‘the defenders’

Bulawayo, just like her contemporary writer Valerie Tagwira, has maintained in her fictional works the enduring presence of the viciously militarised police and soldiers through the use of canine allegories and metaphors. The animalistic tropes of dogs, military force and scatological imagery of bodily scars are also discernible in her debut novel, *We Need New Names*. The canine metaphor of the vicious dogs and the motif of defenders are deployed by the novelist to criticise the state’s abuse of power. The beatings, sexual violence and killings of citizens speak to the performativity of power in the postcolony (Foucault 1979; Mbembe 1992). This also points at a crisis of change in Zimbabwe in the post-Mugabe era as rightly observed and earlier predicted by Nyambi (2013).

Gender injustices and cultural violation by Zimbabwe’s postcolonial leaders are thematised problematics articulated through daughters who are raped in the presence of their parents and mothers who are also sexually insulted while their sons watch. These acts also speak of the victims’ powerlessness, voicelessness and precarity. The Earth is defiled together with these victims. Ode (2010) elaborates the link between the two by stating that women are responsible for the continuity of the human life cycle just as trees and land (nature). Ode (2010) further associates the qualities of womanhood such as childbirth and menstruation to nature. This association in ecofeminist thought implies that the pains, disappointments and dejectedness are not only felt by women but also by nature. In the novel, *Glory*, the state’s ruthlessness is underlined and implied by the presence of the wall of the dead where names of the victims are written. Readers are told that the names kept on increasing:

[...]oon every inch of Simiso’s Durawall was red with butterflies, with names of the dead ... animals were arriving from places near and far ... came in silence ... and wrote the names of their dead in silence. Tholukuthi it was a lot of names. (Bulawayo 2022:331)

The above passage conveys the unspeakable horror that the citizens of Jidada country have experienced during the reigns of both the Old Horse and his successor Tuvy (the Crocodile). Apparently, ordinary animals (citizens) find themselves failing to distinguish the two regimes which were ‘hell-bent on flushing the country down the toilet’ (Bulawayo 2022:323). Citizens view the violence as their brutal fate and they have kept a terrible wound in their hearts that explains their voicelessness.

In another illuminating passage, Destiny visits Bulawayo, which is described as ‘a place of slaughter, massacre, devastation and despair, blood and tears mingle, and a site of the annihilation of families and family lines’ (Bulawayo 2022:308). During election times and public protests, women are raped by the likes of Commander Jambanja whose qualification into the military training was their convincing demonstration of a violent personality. An anonymous female victim says ‘I tell you, he raped me in the 2008 election violence, and now, almost a decade later, he rapes me not too long after a contested election’ (Bulawayo 2022:279). Ironically, the woman is a supporter of the ruling party. She is raped in the presence of her son who is a product of the previous rape. Readers are further told that ‘Jidada is really no different from Egypt under Pharaoh’s rule’ (Bulawayo 2022:282). The ruinous patriarchal system in Zimbabwean politics is also conveyed in the following quote:

Jidadans naturally ... understand that a child can play with its mother’s breasts all it wants and never, ever its father’s testicles ... the very day following the historic protests, Defenders came out full force and howled a song of war ... the children of the nation tried to get on WhatsApp, on Twitter, on Facebook and tell the world of the war come to their homes, but the Seat of Power had instituted an #internetshutdown (Bulawayo 2022:278).

During the infamous Gukurahundi, which is a historical civil war, entangled in ethnic and political conflict in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, Mugabe and his political allies including Emmerson Mnangagwa demonstrated their violent capacity. Gukurahundi, a Shona word, refers to the strong summer whirlwinds. This metaphor, however, evokes a profound image of a distressing storm that left thousands of civilians dead. Cetshwayo is falsely accused of being a dissident. He is forced to butcher his father to death with a blunt axe by the soldiers in a manner that befits Mbembe’s (1992) description of grotesque and vulgarity of power in the postcolony. A defender stepped on Cetshwayo’s body, kicked him in the privates and ordered him to chop his father, Sakhile Bathakathi George Khumalo, into proper pieces, not parts. The defenders holding guns and firing threatening bullets compelled Cetshwayo to perform a heinous act in the presence of his entire family amid the defenders’ laughter. The bereaved family of the butchered man is also ordered not to mourn him. Henry Vulindlela Khumalo who is Destiny’s father and his neighbours met the same fate during Gukurahundi.

The writer scoffs at the generally publicised new dispensation whose semantic hollowness is satirically evident in the sheer rhetoric of renaming. The socio-political malaises during Mugabe’s rule and after his demise show how the predecessors of Mugabe retain political violence, misgovernance, egocentric behaviour, ethnicity and gender hierarchisation. The following passage provides compelling evidence that shows how Tuvy and his post-coup government constructed an empty rhetoric about Operation Restore Legacy and New Dispensation:

If you thought Jidada under the Old Horse was shitty, then shit is about to hit the sky proper-proper. When we say these beasts don’t know how to govern, we mean these beasts don’t know how to govern (Bulawayo 2022:228).

Tuvy is desperate to appear like the biblical Christ 'A Savior sent from above' (Bulawayo 2022:228). He promises to bring back the nation's past glory as a Land of Milk and Honey, a promised land, a stunning Eldorado renamed Jidada, a 'proper jewel of Africa', is shot down by "things falling apart everywhere" (Bulawayo 2022:228). Readers are told that things are even getting worse after the ironic Operation Restore Legacy. One then is left wondering what type of legacy was restored after Mugabe.

For Mbembe (1992), power in a postcolonial state is performed in spectacles of *commandment*, a term that refers to a violent mode of rule, a replica of colonial forms. Bulawayo's subtle allegorical device of dogs and defenders of the revolution is arguably semantically laden. The dog is held on a leash by its master, a hunter and obediently takes instruction to viciously maul those who dare rebel against its authority. The state petrifies its subjects 'for not conforming to the conventions and rituals,' as rightly stated by Foucault (1979:257). Bulawayo exposes a false sense of freedom in the 1980s and its replica in post-Mugabe period because Zimbabwe's political leaders only shifted their battlefield:

[and] unleashed Defenders to defend the Revolution on the bodies of the children of the nation, [who] felt the sharp sear of burning tear gas, the thwack of Defender's whips- the hope for future lay broken, bloodied ... shortly after Independence ... We only emerged from one struggle into another! (Bulawayo 2022:172).

The fate of the postcolonial Zimbabwe is remarkably described as emerging from 'one struggle into another.' Neither does the removal of Mugabe provide a solution to the nation's problems. Tuvy's new cabinet is a satirical spectacle and a compelling allegory comprised Minister of the Revolution, Minister of Corruption, Minister of Things, Minister of Nothing, Minister of Propaganda, Minister of Homophobic Affairs, Minister of Disinformation and the Minister of Looting.

The aesthetics of the violated bodies, semantics of silence and wounds

Bulawayo employs the body to create provocative imageries, metaphors and striking tropes that convey the unpalatable grotesque in the postcolony. The bodies of the battered women, Destiny and her mother etch forbidding and heart-breaking images of transgenerational experiences of trauma and state violence against its citizens. In some of the telling passages in the novel *Glory*, Simiso silently undressed before her daughter Destiny who is also a victim of state-sanctioned violence:

Simiso whips her nightdress over her head. She's not wearing any undergarments ... turns around to give her back to her daughter, who gasps, covers her mouth at the terrible scars, the angry lines, furrows that cross and uncross all over the long back, the holes on the older goat's behind. This is the very first time Destiny is seeing her mother's body as naked as truth (Bulawayo 2022:223).

Readers are further told that later when Destiny reflects upon her mother's act of undressing and her nudity:

[... S]he'll feel that Simiso's undressing was also her own undressing. Which is why, how, she'd found herself taking her nightdress off ... Simiso did not flinch at her daughter's own devastated body ... those bodies both carried scars from Defenders, as if the Defenders that mangled Destiny's body on July 5, 2008, had taken meticulous directives from the Defenders that mutilated Simiso's body more than twenty-five years before that, on April 18, 1983 ... Defenders were creating on both bodies an important archive of the Seat of Power's cruelty (Bulawayo 2022:223–224).

Simiso's nakedness before her daughter brings to the public domain concealed a life of agony and bondage (Azuoonye 1987). In a different context but relevant to this discussion, asserts that the act of undressing by the victim in African tradition is a prayer to her *chi* or personal deity and ancestors to intervene in her case. Further claims that an offended female's nudity conveys:

[T]he peak of her frustration and a sign of innocence. Women are often compelled to rip their cloth off during unbearable situations. Likewise, trees shed off their leaves in the dry season. (p. 20)

The aridness could be related to an adversity because the dry season symbolises a period of lack in African literature. The naked bodies of violated women serve as emotive intensifiers as they bear deep cuts hyperbolically captured as 'furrows, angry lines and holes' (Bulawayo 2022:224). The physical injury and landscape metaphors profoundly enact associative imagery of how both the land and women are victimised. The rape assumes a symbolic meaning as it conveys the fate of the subdued social classes under a callous rule. The body of the battered women becomes a signifier of Otherness. The visibility symbolically speaks of the protracted suffering of women in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The use of the landscape metaphors is an allegorical symbol onto which the author inscribes her critique of the violent patriarchal society. Readers' attention is drawn to this nebulous parallel between the ruined ecology and the offensive insignias on the women's bodies in a despotic state.

The trope of silence complicates the interpretive process by generating semantic ambiguities that invite sensibility to pragmatic aspects in order to produce ensuing polysemic meanings. The silence of the abused characters registers their enormous grief and prolonged numbing pain, which they collectively experience in the postcolonial national space. Their lack of verbal speech also speaks about state-enforced silence in a space where speaking is not permissible and considered a recalcitrant act that invites state ruthlessness and retribution. The abused are denied the right to speech by the powerful ruling elites who strive to conceal their atrocious acts against the vulnerable members of the society. The 'dogs and the defenders' become symbols of state's *modus operandi* that censors and mutes discourses of othered bodies in a Bakhtinian conception of monologic discourse (Bakhtin 1984). The pain that is not verbalised is visibly captured in the semiotics of the

body scars, rape and beatings. It is thus suitable to interpret these characters' silence as a default mode of life in a space monitored and monopolised by an autocratic regime that considers speech as an attack. In feminist discourses, women's silence is seen as a condition of subjugation by men who control women's expressive capacity within a patriarchal society (Mangena 2015). Silence is also a gesture of protest against masculinised linguistic system whose use is prescribed by domineering men who alter women's experience and perceptions of their existence. The silence of these extremely violated women is also a commendable means of recovery. Narrating the traumatising events evokes painful memory and makes the wounds bleed anew. Destiny and her mother do not want to dwell on the wrongs of the past, which can obstruct the possibility of moving on.

Yet, Hooks (2015) in *Talking Back* encourages oppressed people especially women to speak out. Later in the text, Destiny reclaims her expressive voice through writing about the tragedies of the past which left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering and this continues to haunt the present. She becomes a 'radical voice' that speaks against the regime that has oppressed her and those of her kind. Pain also serves as an active agent, and its power is reinforced in Destiny's ultimate boldness. Female characters who exploit and exercise-free speech become a threat to the patriarchal systems in both the socio-cultural and political spaces. This reading is also applicable to Marvelous, the Old Horse's wife whose overt sensitivity to the expressive capacity of verbalised speech makes her a social and political dissident. Marvelous intimidates the powerful 'mal' politicians in the Party of Power by using her 'cutting words and lashing tongue.' The performative speech acts point at how articulation can pose a forceful threat to male organisms in patriarchal communities. In this instance, speech serves as a redeeming force. It is, however, significant to note that unlike Destiny and other radical women, Marvelous' subversive power is drawn from patriarchy. When the Old Horse's regime comes crashing down, Marvelous crashes with it. She and her dreams of greatness are squeezed out of power. Beauvoir (1953) and Fiorenza (1983) have rightly warned women to move away from the dependence syndrome that continues to entrap them under patriarchal authority that impoverishes women's lives.

Bulawayo uses complex metaphorisation to convey her vision of speech or lack thereof and its relationship to collective suffering and subjugation in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The collective experiences are captured through invented anonymous public voices whose disapproval of the regime is unmistakable. For example, the following voices are overheard from a queue at the bank, which arguably represents a public site and these voices are not attributable to an individual or any gender:

Me, what I just need is a visa to get out of this hell. I don't care where to anymore but I just want to go ... I'm tired. This Jidada is a coffin. We all need to just bury it once and for all, move somewhere, and call it a day (Bulawayo 2022:266).

The metaphor of a coffin in this passage profoundly depicts the country's catastrophic failure which has also produced a cul-de-sac national space in which citizens suffer from an overwhelming sense of entrapment. Citizens feel trapped, which explains their desire to escape the hostility of their motherland. The other anonymous voice conveys how the national space has become unhomely as citizens encounter multiple problems.

I was just thinking of this last night, coming from a queue to a house that had no electricity because of the power cuts, where I couldn't flush the toilet because of the water cuts. I almost wept thinking of back when you could at least count on things working in this country (Bulawayo 2022:266).

Ordinary citizens who thought they have seen all the follies of an authoritarian rule under the previous leader sadly realised that the worst was yet to unfold. The post-Mugabe leadership is ridiculed and perceived as worse than the previous one:

I never imagined I'd remember the Father of the Nation with any sentimentality but when I saw Tuvy preside over the official opening of a toilet with a whole entourage in tow, including the so-called brilliant Minister of Finance ... the Old Horse. With him we could at least count on common sense, which apparently is too much to expect from Tuvy's regime!. (Bulawayo 2022:267)

In both eras, a 'kaka' government is in place. The scatological term *kaka*, which means human faeces, becomes a powerful intertextual allusion to Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* in which the kakaness (socio-economic and political malaises) of the national space compels Zimbabwean nationals to flee in droves from their country (Mavengano & Hove 2019). The word *kaka* is found in both Shona and Ndebele, which are indigenous languages in Zimbabwe and its evocative use captures citizens' fury and frustration with their existential conditions in their motherland (Mavengano & Hove 2019). In the context of the novel, it is an expression of rage directed at the government that has no clue on how to take the nation out of its multiple problems.

The semiotics of the nature, Garden of Eden and Mbuya Nehanda mythology

Bulawayo's novel *Glory* proposes gender complementarity, which is a move to a 'new' realm of politics that is liberative and fulfilling. Through her use of mythological images, the novel creates striking motifs and female activism that interject the peripherisation of women. Readers are introduced to the Garden of Eden in the middle of a high-density suburb Lozikeyi, which was named after a female ancestor from the Ndebele tribe of Jidada country. The garden belongs to a duchess and is described as 'a spectacular phenomenon-a queer garden that is ever green and colorful no matter the season.' It is a garden 'with stunning profusion of vegetation' (Bulawayo 2022:193). Most fascinatingly, the duchess' real name, Nomadlozi, means 'with the ancestors' and she is a spirit medium endowed with supernatural power. The

duchess could summon whirlwinds and lightning, interpret unnatural phenomenon, speak to wild beasts and birds and every living organism, heal unnameable ailments and even scientists consult her (Bulawayo 2022:193). In the duchess' Garden of Eden, red butterflies float to the Mbuya Nehanda tree that stands tall inside the garden. According to the duchess, this is a special tree among other trees in her garden. The red butterflies are described as the dead spirits of Jidadans, who come to join the living to revolt against the autocratic regime. Women in this reimagined African cosmos are presented as holding the destinies of the nation (Magege 2016). Mbuya Nehanda is a heroic legend who fearlessly fought in the first encounter with the white oppressors in the history of Zimbabwe. The presence of the Nehanda tree symbolises the power of womankind embedded in the all-powerful mother goddess that nurtures all creation. The Mbuya Nehanda tree symbolically evokes a critical ecological and spiritual conscience; it is the archaeology of historical memory that must be kept alive to avoid inertia. The African cosmology privileges the interlocking of the past, present and the future (Mbembe 2001). It is also imperative to note how Christianity and African traditional religions, men and women, young and old, as well as Shona and Ndebele citizens come together in a reimagined community.

Women are represented as crucial to the organic African existence on a spiritual plane. The mythology of Nehanda locates women at the heart of African spirituality. Chikafa (2017) asserts that in the African cosmos, spirituality and womanhood are intricately connected because the woman as a mother is regarded as a giver of life. The role of nurturing the ecosystem is granted to the duchess. The African woman is spiritual and the highest incarnation of wisdom who foresees the future and the fate of the community (Bujo 1998). Women in the novel have a special relationship with the invisible world, and they are placed in positions of power and leadership. Destiny, Duchess, Simiso, Sisters of the disappeared together with other Jidadans demonstrate peculiar strength and virtues when they protest against Tuvy's oppressive government at the end of the novel. Their protest is to bring harmony for all Jidadans irrespective of gender, language, profession, age, religion or any other aspect that could be used to separate the children of the Jidada nation. The allegory of the red butterflies assumes another symbolic meaning in the envisioned nation. The butterflies represent the beauty that comes with the rebirth of a nation and the past beauty or glory that has been lost along the national trajectory from 1980. The environmental neglect and degradation represented through Uhuru Park in the postcolonial Jidada reflect extractive politics and the visible failure of the fathers of the nation to sustain life in all its forms. The environmental degradation of the park, together with inhuman treatments of citizens and subjugation of women, speak about a sad story of the post-independence Zimbabwe:

Uhuru Park, which was the meeting spot for Lozikeyi's young lovers back in the day because of the lush lawn and the flamboyant trees and flowers of every color and the photographers with their clunky cameras who charged ten dollars for a photograph. Now, a decade later, gone is the lush

lawn and gone are the colorful flowers and gone are the lovers and gone are the photographers (Bulawayo 2022:173).

In another telling passage, the Jidadans who are waiting for election results after the demise of the dictator wake up one morning to find that Tuvy is announced as the new President of Jidada through rigged elections. The Nature responds angrily:

[E]very single one of the flowers that were in bloom yesterday, that we admired yesterday, that filled Lozikeyi's streets with beauty and fragrance yesterday have dried and fallen to the ground, everywhere a sad carpet of dead flowers. Our intestines lurch, leap to our chests (Bulawayo 2022:192).

Thus, it is appropriate to argue that oral tradition in the Duchess and Simiso story telling, and a ritualised ceremony in the Garden of Eden led by women offer the most striking destruction of an authoritative value system. This suggests a quest for a recovery of the African inclusive culture that carves new contours of nationhood, Jidadaness and Zimbabweanness. The Duchess who epitomises women is assigned a vital function to repair Earth and mend damaged human relations. Their roles shift from being victims of toxic politics and patriarchy to African heroines who fight injustices for a common good (Azuonye 1987). The life-giving role is juxtaposed with patriarchy's destructive capacity. These women are Mothers of evolution; Goddesses who bring blessings to the nation that is a return to Achebe's 'Mother is supreme principle in Things Fall Apart' (1958). Women in this re-imagined African cosmology are no longer standing in the shadow of patriarchy. Destiny, who otherwise has never imagined herself a serious artist, writes with her grandfather's black Parker pen, the story of the nation weaving the past, present and future together. Her writing is, according to Hooks (2015:16), an act of talking back, 'speaking out is the act of overcoming our fear of speech, in a world governed by politics of domination.' Needless to say, the Duchess is seen as a custodian of the sacred laws of communal co-existence that hold human beings together in society and regulate their relationships with the higher supernatural powers. The concepts of natural law and the social contract are also conveyed. The Mbuya Nehanda mythology speaks about an earlier African religious system of thought anchored in strong matriarchal foundations of the nation. This earlier belief system is against the profanation of the Earth and relegation of women.

Moving beyond gender, political and religious binaries to foster a health ecosystem

In reminiscence of Ayi Kwei Armah's (1979) proposed 'way' in his novel, *Two Thousand Seasons* where he contends that it is not a question of which sex rules, but that the way is 'reciprocal or mutual.' Butler (1990) argues that for women, the male is not 'the other' but part of the human whole. Neither sex is completely whole in itself as Butler succinctly puts it.

The novel condemns toxic theology that is preached by false religious leaders whose morals are questionable. The narrator says these religious leaders:

[F]leeced us of our hard-earned moneys in the name of God who connived with the Seat of Power to keep us oppressed by telling us who to vote for, by telling us the blatant lie that our leaders were selected by God, by telling us to stay away from politics (Bulawayo 2022:346).

The nation needs new gender, political and religious consciousnesses that privilege justice, liberation and empowering expressive capacity (Mangena 2015). Such consciousness promotes the dignity of all the citizens and eradicates social classes and ethnicity. The current political and false religious leaders are presented as ‘ugly fiends who “governed us that we toiled and languished without relief in devastating cycles of poverty”’ (Bulawayo 2022:192). Certainly, what the nation requires is economic development and political stability, which restore the dignity of citizens. Talking from an Ibo’s worldview in Nigeria, Azuonye (1987:38) remarks that ‘if man does not harm nature, the nature keeps him safe.’ In other words, human practices in their environment ascertain the way nature would give back to humanity. The novel also criticises the question of tribes as:

[A] distraction ... the energy wasted instead this energy should be going to what we plan to do about these queues, and more importantly, about this Tuvy who doesn’t deserve a day on the Seat of Power (Bulawayo 2022:274).

In closing

Bulawayo’s novel envisions a nation that rises beyond disruptive dichotomies. It presents a vision of inclusiveness as a strong foundation necessary for a healthy, a non-violent and a non-hierarchical society. This vision is in tandem with the ethos of ecofeminism, which realises the interconnectedness of women, nature and all forms of life. In order to bring equality, it is essential to establish continued allegiance to systems that restore worth and value to the Earth and previously oppressed sections of the society. The reformation of life in the Garden of Eden takes a revolutionary stance that rejects patriarchal and political institutions that seek to suppress both nature and women. The reimagined African cosmos in the Garden of Eden recalls how African women as warriors, heroines, spirit mediums, deities, aunts, mothers, sisters and grandmothers have been celebrated in the African past. It is imperative to note that both women and the youth actively participate in reimagining the future of the nation. The young people are presented as ‘the butterflies of the Jidada’ which symbolically suggests a beautiful vision of the future. Certainly, Zimbabweans have endured a prolonged *Harvest of Thorns* by living in perpetual *nervous conditions* due to their motherland, which turned into a *house of hunger* in the postcolonial era. The citizenry yearns for *new names* in order to enjoy the *Glory* offered by a diversified ecosystem of the planet Earth.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Author’s contributions

E.M. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

There was no field research conducted in compiling this article, and there are no restrictions on the secondary data presented in this article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Achebe, C., 1958, *Things fall apart*, Heinemann, New York, NY.
- Armah, A.K., 1979, *Two thousand seasons*, Heinemann, Oxford.
- Azuonye, C., 1987, ‘Igbo Folktales and the evolution of the idea of Chukwu as the supreme god of Igbo religion’, *Nsukka Journal of Linguistics & African Languages (Univ. of Nigeria)* 1(April), 43–62.
- Bakhtin, M.M., 1984, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics*, transl. C. Emerson, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Biehl, J., 1991, *Rethinking ecofeminist politics*, South End Press, Boston, MA.
- Bujo, B., 1998, *The ethical dimension of community: The African model and the dialogue between North and South*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi.
- Bulawayo, N., 2013, *We need new names*, Little Brown and Company, New York, NY.
- Bulawayo, N., 2022, *Glory*, Viking, New York, NY.
- Butler, J., 1988, ‘Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory’, *Theatre Journal* 40(4), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Butler, J., 1990, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, London.
- Chikafa, R., 2017, ‘Representations of black womanhood in Tyler Perry’s and Ousmane Sembene’s films’, PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Christ, C.P., 1987, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA.
- Daly, M., 1975, *The Church and the second sex*, rev. edn., Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Daly, M., 1985, *Beyond GOD the father; toward a philosophy of women’s liberation*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- De Beauvoir, S., 1953, *The second sex*, transl. C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- De Beauvoir, S., 2011, *The second sex*, transl. C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- Dube, T., 2013, ‘Engendering politics and parliamentary representation in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of African Studies and Development* 5(8), 200–207.
- Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origin*, Crossroad, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M., 1979, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, transl. A. Sheridan, Vintage Books, Ann Arbor.
- Goldenberg, N., 1979, *Changing the gods: Feminism and the end of traditional religions*, Beacon, Boston, MA.

- King, A., 2004, 'The prisoner of gender: Foucault and the disciplining of the female body', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5(2), 29–39.
- King, Y., 1989, 'The ecology of feminism and feminism of ecology', in J. Plant (ed.), *Healing the wounds: The promise of ecofeminism*, pp. 18–28, New Society Publishers, Santa Cruz, CA.
- Kristeva, J., 1977, 'Semiotics and women', *Pacific Coast Philology* 12(10), 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1316481>
- Lerner, G., 1986, *The creation of patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Lim, Y. C. L., 1997, 'Capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy: The Dilemma of Third-World Women Workers in Multinational Factories', in V. Naline, D. Lynn, W. Nan & N.F. Laurie (eds.), *The women gender and development reader*, pp. 215–230, The University Press Limited, Dhaka
- Harris, M.L., 2016, 'Ecowomanism: Black women, religion, and the environment', *The Black Scholar* 46(3), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2016.1188354>
- Hooks, B., 2015, *Feminism is for Everybody*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- King, Y., 1989, 'The ecology of feminism and feminism ecology', in J. Plant (ed.), *Healing the wounds: The promise of ecofeminism*, New Society Publishers, Santa Cruz, CA.
- Magege, D., 2016, 'From Chinua Achebe to Fred Khumalo: The politics of black female cultural difference in seven literary texts', PhD thesis, UNISA, Pretoria.
- Mangena, T., 2015, 'Counter-discourse in Zimbabwean literature', PhD thesis, Leiden University, Leiden.
- Mavengano, E. & Hove, M.L., 2019, 'Kaka country: An intertextual reading of nation dysfunction in Bulawayo's We Need New Names and Jinga's One Foreigner's Ordeal', *Literator* 40(1), a1595. <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v40i1.1595>
- Mbembe, A., 1992, *On the postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Mbembe, A., 2001, *On the postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Millett, K., 1977, *Sexual politics*, Virago, London.
- Nyambi, O., 2013, 'Nation in crisis: Alternative literary representations of Zimbabwean post-2000', PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town.
- Nyarota, G., 2018, *The graceless fall of Robert Mugabe: The end of a dictator's reign*, Penguin Random House, Cape Town.
- Nzomo, M., 1994, 'Women in politics and public decision-making', in U. Himmelstrand, K. Kinyanjui & E. Mburugu (eds.), *In search of new paradigms for the study of African development*, James Currey, London.
- Ode, R., 2010, 'Women, their worst enemies: A comparative study of Tess Onwueme's go tell it to women and the reign of Wazobia', *Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 5(1), 81–103.
- Parichi, M., 2016, *The representation of female politicians in Zimbabwean print media: 2000–2008*, UNISA PhD thesis, Pretoria.
- Rakoczy, S., 2004, *In her name: Women doing theology*, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg.
- Ruether, R.R., 2012, 'Ecofeminism – The Challenge to Theology', *Deportate Esuli Profugbe (DEP)* 20, 23–33.
- Walby, S., 1990, *Theorizing patriarchy*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford.
- Warren, K., 2000, *Ecofeminist philosophy; a Western perspective on what it is and why it matters*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD.