LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Temporalities of (Re)Naming: The Zimbabwean City Past and Present in Petina Gappah's *Rotten Row*

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Abstract:
The act of renaming cities, streets and other locations as part of nation-building processes carries political and historical significance, emphasizing a concrete shift from a colonial past to the present moment. After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, a number of cities, municipalities and streets were renamed. This shift is also visible in contemporary literature, perhaps most prominently in Petina Gappah's short story collection *Rotten Row* from 2016, where not only cities and streets are renamed but inhabitants too take on new names. The aim of this paper is to examine the role and place of the past in Gappah's short stories through the act of renaming the Zimbabwean city and its inhabitants. *Rotten Row* manifests a new urban temporality where time goes beyond being a simple, singular continuum; stories in the collection do not appear in chronological order and the lives of characters intersect as they often appear or are alluded to in several stories. The paper draws on, among others, Ndhlovu's study of Zimbabwean place names (2009) combining it with temporal perspectives originating in philosophy and human geography. Does the colonial past remain a burden to be cast off or can it coexist with these new urban identities? The process of renaming the Zimbabwean city and its inhabitants in *Rotten Row* exposes layers of the past and this process is here examined as an act of temporal excavation. *Rotten Row* also shows that nothing stays buried, least of all the past.

Keywords: Petina Gappah; *Rotten Row*; renaming; temporality; Zimbabwean city; buried city.

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> [T]hat which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done and there is nothing new under the sun.
> (*Rotten Row*: x)

Since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, many of the nation's cities, municipalities and streets have been renamed in an attempt to break with the colonial past. Salisbury became Harare, Umtali became Mutare, and the name of the nation itself went through several changes during the colonial era before eventually being renamed Zimbabwe. In a country with an equally complex post-independence period, the act of renaming has come to symbolize much more than just overcoming a painful past. This is exemplified in Petina Gappah's short story collection *Rotten Row* (2016), which attempts to excavate the nation's buried past through stories where characters go about their lives in a number of Zimbabwean cities. *Rotten Row* suggests that the act of renaming, both in terms of place names and personal names, is inevitably connected to time; to past and present – and even future – existing in multiple layers and in several dimensions. This article examines the role of the past, present and future through the process of renaming, and argues that new urban realities emerge in *Rotten Row* where the city is no longer a mere backdrop but becomes an active performer and participant. The stories are also connected as characters appear and reappear, sometimes in unexpected situations and contexts. Temporality becomes an essential feature of the stories, as they do not progress in a chronological fashion despite the obvious connections between them.

The African city and its many layers that sometimes take physical form and sometimes remain mainly anchored in imagination and memory have been thoroughly explored in *African City Textualities* (2010) with particular focus on the future (Primorac 2010: 2). Meg Samuelson, for her part, examines Sophiatown in her chapter about the urban palimpsest (Samuelson 2010: 65). She talks about the 'sediment of Sophiatown' (72) and argues that in van Niekerk's novel *Triomf* (originally published in Afrikaans in 1994), 'layers of earlier urban worlds paradoxically provide a potential foundation for new narratives of urban belonging' (2010: 73). This article takes inspiration from that conclusion and argues that *Rotten Row* is another example of this new urban belonging from a Zimbabwean perspective and that it creates a reality where these layers of earlier worlds can coexist with new urban realities.

From a theoretical perspective, the idea of cyclical time as opposed to linear time functions as a starting place. African time has traditionally been seen as more cyclical than linear, particularly within colonial ideologies. The definition of African time as non-linear could then be used as justification for the need to modernize so-called primitive cultures. Mark Mathuray (2009: 130) provides a detailed discussion of this topic in his book on elements of the sacred in African literature, and argues that '[t]he opposition between cyclical and linear time coincided with the distinction between [the] traditional religious society of the colonised world and the West's modern secularism, where the cyclical was also designated as timeless'. The clear division into cyclical and linear time could then be used, according to Mathuray, to justify the colonial project. He also concludes that '[l]inear time is the reality of temporal irreversibility' whereas 'cyclical time functions as a non-time, as a suspension or destruction of the "true" nature of time; that is, its linear, non-iterative

and irreversible nature' (131). Jacques Le Goff (1992: 19) refers to similar notions in his work on history and memory, and concludes that "'a history" based on a sharp break between present and past is over'. Gappah's short stories reflect time and place, past and present, as existing simultaneously, in a non-linear but also non-cyclical fashion. The opening lines of this paper taken from 'A Note on *Rotten Row*' highlight this unique temporality. 'There is nothing new under the sun' implies that time itself is recurrent, making it a secondary feature of the stories which do not progress chronologically or follow a cohesive storyline. The short story as form is fragmentary in its very nature and lends itself well to fictionalizing life in the city.

Previous writing by Gappah as well as other works by Zimbabwean writers also reflect the importance of time and place names. In *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), 'Easterly' is the name of the place to which people were relocated 'after the government cleaned the townships to make Harare pristine for the three-day visit of the Queen of England. […] [G]ather them up and put them in the places the Queen will not see, in Porta Farm, in Hatcliffe, in Dzivaresekra Extension, in Easterly' (*Elegy*: 31-32). This refers to Operation Murambatsvina, which took place in May 2005 and was aimed at people living in urban areas taking part in the informal economy (Raftopoulos 2009: 223). NoViolet Bulawayo alludes to the same incident in her urban novel, though the time and place of events are never confirmed (Bulawayo 2013: 65-68). The title of her novel, *We Need New Names*, is also explicitly connected with naming and renaming and the disruptive effect of migration. Another recent short story collection, entitled *Where to Now?* and edited by Jane Morris (2011), refers to location and to related anxieties in its very title. Two of the main themes in the stories are migration and Zimbabwe's troubles after the turn of the millennium. A third text to be mentioned here is *Harare North* (2009) by Brian Chikwava, where the title again suggests place ('Harare North' here means London). *Rotten Row* offers a different scope in comparison to these texts published a few years earlier, as the stories no longer remain solely preoccupied with leaving and being in transit (though such experiences emerge as well). In *Rotten Row*, instead of being a location from which people cannot leave soon enough, the Zimbabwean city forms the solid centre in which its citizens' complex lives evolve and intersect.

Rotten Row thus stands out as a short story collection no longer as explicitly and overtly preoccupied with the past as history, but with the past as an inevitable, even irreplaceable, part of the Zimbabwean present and futures. The perspective of the Zimbabwean city (*city* here means any Zimbabwean city mentioned in *Rotten Row*) has shifted from being a symbol of poverty and deprivation; of the shortcomings of current politics and the scars of colonialism, to an arena for new urban fiction where the city itself is placed centre stage. Gappah writes the following in her introduction 'A Note on *Rotten Row*': 'In London, Rotten Row is a wide untarred road that begins at Hyde Park Corner and ends at Serpentine Road. Established in the time of William and Mary to provide access to the new palace at Kensington, the name is a corruption of "Route de Roi", French for King's Road' (*Rotten Row*: ix). She explains further that in Harare, Rotten Row became an important road connecting the city centre with the township now called Mbare. 'Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe, Salisbury Harare, Jameson avenue is Samora Machel, Harari Township is Mbare' (*Rotten Row*: ix). Despite the explicit focus on crime and courts in the short story

collection (*Rotten Row*: x), it is evident that place and renaming play a significant role for the stories as well. Location and time are key to most, if not all, of the stories as they all deal with crime in one way or another. Gappah herself also refers to the historical dimension, the temporal perspective, as a backdrop to her stories: '[Rotten Row] is a street redolent with remembrance' (*Rotten Row*: ix). This indicates that *Rotten Row* is ideal for a literary excavation of buried pasts of the city, its inhabitants and ultimately the nation itself.

Renaming

Renaming practices in an African context remain a current topic in research, as the colonial legacy can still be seen and felt in different ways (see for example the controversy surrounding statues of Cecil Rhodes in Cape Town, South Africa (Lowry 2016; Forrest 2018)). This interest in renaming practices is manifested in studies by, among others, Koopman (2012), Manatsha (2014) and Nyambi, Mangena and Pfukwa (2016). Zimbabwe itself has a long history of being named and renamed. After independence on 18 April 1980, Robert Mugabe became the first prime minister (Mtisi, Nyakudya and Barnes 2009: 174) and later president of the new nation. The country had been known by several different names when the transition to independence finally became reality: first as Southern Rhodesia until Zambian independence in 1964 (Zambia was known as Northern Rhodesia during the colonial period), and then as Rhodesia until the end of the liberation war. For a brief period in 1979 it was known as Zimbabwe Rhodesia, sometimes spelled with a hyphen (Zvobgo 2009: 207).

A *Names Act*, originating from 1983 and available online on the webpages of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, outlines the alteration of names since Zimbabwean independence. The Act states the following:

> No enactment, deed or document made or executed on or after the 18th April, 1982, shall be invalid or in any way ineffective solely by reason of the fact that in such enactment, deed or document a local authority, institution, statutory body, place or area was referred to by its new names specified in the second column of the Schedule before its name was altered by or in terms of this Act.
> (Parliament of Zimbabwe 1983)

This passage highlights the importance of the new names and their role in independent Zimbabwe and gives them legitimacy, without ignoring the existence of the old names. The Act emphasizes the existence of the new names before their gaining official status and goes on to list the old and the new names of towns, municipalities, villages, roads, squares, buildings and other significant institutions and establishments. Among these are, most notably, the city of Salisbury which was renamed Harare; Gwelo which became Gweru; Umtali which became Mutare; Gatooma which became Kadoma; Fort Victoria which was renamed Masvingo; Enkeldoorn which was named Chivhu, and Melsetter which became Chimanimani. Many of these towns, cities and areas appear in *Rotten Row* as well.

The practice of renaming undoubtedly has a significant political dimension and this is made explicit in *Rotten Row*. The collection consists of twenty short stories divided into

two sections called 'Capital' and 'Criminal'. One of the stories called 'From a Town Called Enkeldoorn' focuses partly on Enkeldoorn, renamed Chivhu, after independence. The story works almost like a series of screenshots from a fictional online forum where users discuss topics relating to Zimbabwe. Several of Gappah's characters from previous stories in the collection re-emerge in this forum, among them Fortune Mpande from the story called 'The President Always Dies in January': '[h]is favourite forum to troll is GreatZim.com, where he is an active and permanent member of the Political Commentariat' (*Rotten Row*: 165). The discussion thread in the forum which is outlined in "From a Town Called Enkeldoorn' begins with a post by 'Will in Vancouver' who asks about his relatives, the McConkeys, and whether anyone knew his relatives. 'My granddad was from a town called Enkeldoorn in your country' (237). The post immediately elicits an angry response from the profile 'Tobaiwa Nehasha' who writes the following: 'Enkeldoorn what, you idiot fool. It is called Chivhu, not Enkeldoorn' (237). 'Will' asks what 'Tobaiwa' means and gets another angry response. Other people join the conversation, scolding 'Tobaiwa' for being so sensitive about the name of the city: 'It is perfectly fine for Will from Vancouver to say Enkeldoorn if he means Chivhu. It's what the place was called when his mother was born for ***'s sake. It's what's on her birth certificate' (238). Here, national identity intersects with personal identity, revealing complexities and anxieties related to a recent past. The discussion does not end here, and a final outburst by 'Tobaiwa' underlines this uneasy coexistence: 'We renamed those places, okay, we renamed the places that you took. […] It was never Enkeldoorn. […] It is our land and we took it back, and you have no ***ing right to call any of OUR places anything else' (238). This exemplifies what Alderman and Inwood state in their article about naming as a cultural right (Alderman and Inwood 2013: 218). Forrest (2018: 54) also emphasizes the 'legitimising' role of renaming. 'Tobaiwa's' comment in the forum explicitly refers to renaming as political and legitimising, and emphasizes the importance of who it is that gets to name and rename. 'Power is exerted by those who name, exists in what is (re)named, and is interpreted in numerous ways by those expected to use the name' (54). Thus, the act of naming is separate from the actual usage of the name, which is a process beyond control. This is exemplified in the story called 'The Dropper' (*Rotten Row*: 3-10), where a former Rhodesian executioner remembers people he hanged and continuously resorts to using the old names of cities and municipalities.

Another relevant study in this regard is Finex Ndhlovu's (2009) work on renaming practices in Zimbabwe post-independence, particularly from a perspective of 'language policies in nation building and identity construction' (Ndhlovu 2009: 1). He has investigated the dominance of Shona and Ndebele over minority languages in Zimbabwe and argues that '[n]ational identity is, by definition and design, underpinned by notions of exclusion and inclusion in so far as it constructs parameters by which some people are included and others left out' (3). He also states that 'language use in any given linguistic ecology is also about politics; about domination, ideology and power' (35). An important question that he asks is why regions of Zimbabwe came to be named after specifically the Shona and the Ndebele (Mashonaland and Matabeleland) (105). As for Zimbabwe's renaming practices and processes after independence, Ndhlovu's conclusion is that they are directly connected to 'memorialization, history-making and patriotism' (40) and to 'the

independence euphoria' (39). This goes to show just how politically sensitive the matter of renaming is and how strongly connected it is to national identity.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by Adrian Koopman (2012) in his article on renamed streets in Durban (South Africa), where he outlines some of the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1994 when the country got its first majority regime and ANC became the ruling party. An interesting contrast to Zimbabwe is that very few towns and cities have actually been renamed (Koopman 2012: 136). According to Koopman, a 'perfect compromise' was reached where municipalities would be known by their African language names and the city or town itself would keep its colonial name (136-37). Manatsha (2014) for his part has examined the renaming processes in Botswana, and explains that Botswana was never a settler colony like Zimbabwe or South Africa and therefore has a slightly different relationship to its colonial past (270). However, he also concludes that despite some problematic aspects of the renaming process, it is 'geared towards righting colonial wrongs' (271). Naftali Kadmon (2004: 85) refers in an article on toponymy and geopolitics to 'political friction arising out of the use of contested geopolitical names'. Such a friction can be identified in Gappahs' fiction as well, as shown above, and these studies confirm that concerns and complexities still exist in relation to place names in Southern Africa.

Renaming in *Rotten Row* is, however, sometimes less 'geared towards righting colonial wrongs' and more focused on remembering. Interestingly, the collection opens with 'The Dropper' which does not perform nationalism or patriotism in an overt way. Alderman and Inwood (2013: 214) speak of 'spatial justice' as a useful concept, and they see naming practices as performative instead of merely being applied to already existing places. 'The first five drops at the end of my rope were as white as I am' (*Rotten Row*: 5). Gappah thus lets a character representing white Rhodesia open her collection – a person whose own past is entangled with that of the nation. The connections between the past and present become evident as the story progresses and the executioner remembers the work he did and the people he hanged. 'Up from Umtali he was. Don't mind me. I slip into the old names every now and again. Mutare, I mean' (6). He also mentions Chipinga instead of Chipinge (7-9), Salisbury instead of Harare (7, 9), Melsetter instead of Chimanimani (9), Gatooma instead of Kadoma (9, 10), and Enkeldoorn instead of Chivhu (10). The last paragraphs of the story are connected with the land reform and the violent land occupations in 2000, and the storyteller concludes that '[d]ebts have to be paid' (10). The dropper himself personifies and performs that past and the reluctance or inability to transform into a citizen of these newly named cities. The story ends with his reflections on the last drop he will make: 'I reckon I might as well end with myself' (10). It is no coincidence that the story is placed first in the collection, marking a starting place in time and in space and thus performing temporal irreversibility.

A clear contrast to the dropper is Fortune who participated in the forum discussion, as the three profiles that he switches between have different roles and purposes in online interaction. One of them is 'Rhodesian Brigadier' who 'does not hesitate to remind people of the glories of Rhodesia and the failures of Zimbabwe' (*Rotten Row*: 165), emulating a colonial persona who, like the dropper, is unable (or unwilling) to adapt. Another of his profiles is called Nyamande Mhande, whose profile picture shows the ruins of Great

Zimbabwe against the Zimbabwean flag, performing nationalism and patriotism in an explicit way. Through these invented profiles, Gappah introduces a meta-approach to place, place names and their connection to history. Fortune himself grew up in Victoria Falls but ends up living in Luton in Britain, where his asylum application has been successful. This existence is far from blissful and Fortune finds himself working in elderly care:

> As though anyone would leave Zim willingly to do this work. […] As though anyone would want to move from Harare or the resort town of Victoria Falls to live in Luton, a town described in a survey he had read as the bit of Syria that Assad does not want to control, the town at the end of humanity whose only redeeming feature was that its one motorway, three railway stations and airport allowed escape.
> (*Rotten Row*: 170-71)

The passage reveals the anxieties of relocation and migration, and the meta-dimension of place appears again as Luton is presented as a city to which one would not move voluntarily; on the contrary, Fortune reluctantly finds himself there, unable to travel back to Zimbabwe due to his status as refugee.

Not just cities and places exist on many temporal levels and in multiple layers in *Rotten Row*. People and characters in the stories appear and reappear, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section on temporalities. Several characters in the stories also experience personal renaming of one kind or another, and this offers yet another perspective of the buried city's past and present and how they intersect. In the story called 'Miss McConkey of Bridgewater Close', the main character remembers her childhood years in Rhodesia and the school she went to; Henry Morton Stanley Junior School, where Miss McConkey was her teacher.

> 'I can't pronounce Zvamaida,' [Miss McConkey] said, as she wrote my name down. 'Has she no other name?'
> As it happened I did have another name, my second name, Hester, a duty name, named for my father's second oldest sister, my Vatete Hester Muponda who was to die of grief while I was in Australia many years later, just one of the many funerals I would miss. It was a name I hated.
> (*Rotten Row*: 212-213)

Renamed by the (white) teacher, Zvamaida explicitly symbolizes colonial rule and Zimbabwe itself. She hates the name she is given, the 'duty name', and even though it is a name her parents gave her, it is still forced upon her by her teacher.

References to a buried past are explicit in a number of ways in this short story, as Zvamaida remembers how her father would strive for a better life for the family:

> [H]e took us for long drives along Salisbury Drive and pointed out Borrowdale, Ballantyne Park, Cotswold Hills, Marlborough and Mount Pleasant, Highlands and Avondale, Bluff Hill and Greystone Park, places whose very names evoked

> wonderful lives that were closed to us because the Prime Minister had decreed that not in a thousand years would black people ever rule Rhodesia.
> (*Rotten Row*: 211-212)

Salisbury Drive has since been renamed Harare Drive (*Names Act* 1983), adding a geographical significance to Zvamaida's childhood memory. Zvamaida runs into an aged Miss McConkey at the supermarket and helps to pay for some of her groceries, and watches her drive away from the parking lot onto Harare Drive 'the old Salisbury Drive along which my father had driven us a lifetime ago' (*Rotten Row*: 218). This is another reference to the colonial pasts and manifests how roles have been reverted, how time and place are in themselves transformed.

Temporalities

The characters in *Rotten Row* appear and reappear throughout the collection. This is one of the most explicit ways in which the short story collection attempts to defy linearity by not conforming to chronology despite taking place in some version of the present moment. These notions are also supported by Hurd, Donnan and Leutloff-Grandits, who for their part argue in the edited volume *Migrating Borders and Moving Times: Temporality and the Crossing of Borders in Europe* (2017) the following:: '[T]here is no presumption amongst our contributors that time is linear, progressive and orderly. It may be concurrent, parallel and synchronic; past, present and future may *coexist* in experience and imagination and/or *follow* one another' (4). One of the most interesting characters in *Rotten Row* in this regard is Pepukai, who appears in many of the stories, sometimes as a protagonist and sometimes briefly in passing.

In 'Miss McConkey of Bridgewater Close', Zvamaida remembers the girls with whom she attended school: 'Emily in Grade 3Red did not have any name other than Pepukai, so her mother plucked Emily out of the air of Miss McConkey's office' (*Rotten Row*: 213). Later, in 'Comrade Piso's Justice', the main character studied law at the University of Zimbabwe and remembers a student called Emily who had a nervous breakdown during her studies (255-56). He then mentions the University Book Prize which his friend, Comrade Piso, won and it was 'an honour he shared with Emily who by then had recovered her wits, only she now insisted on being called by her second name of Pepukai' (259). The information gathered in bits and pieces about Emily/Pepukai from the different stories where she appears shows how *Rotten Row* defies linearity and simple chronology of past, present and future. The stories that feature Pepukai as a main character are thus less revealing than the stories where she is only mentioned in passing by other characters who remember her from their childhood years or time at university. This exemplifies Paul Ricoeur's (1988: 128) statement: '[f]ictive temporal experiences cannot be totalized' since 'each fictive temporal experience unfolds its world, and each of these worlds is singular, incomparable, unique'. This suggests that the world(s) created by Gappah in *Rotten Row,* where seemingly independent and separate stories intersect and interweave with each other as the collection progresses, are all singular, creating an existence where they can be connected but remain unique at the same time.

In 'The News of Her Death', Pepukai gets her braids done in a hair salon in Harare, before flying to Amsterdam (*Rotten Row*: 33), although she supposedly lives in London (*Rotten Row*: 31). Pepukai reappears in 'The Old Familiar Faces' which parodies nongovernmental organizations providing international funding for various humanitarian projects. 'She introduces herself as a postgraduate student. Her name is Pepukai. She has almost finished writing her Master's dissertation, she explains. Transitional justice is her subject' (91). The third story to feature Pepukai is 'A Kind of Justice', where she visits Freetown in Sierra Leone to collect material for a potential documentary (140) and it is revealed that she is making something of a career for herself within the field of transitional justice. In this way, Pepukai comes to represent anticipated futures, as her activities involve examining the brutal past of Sierra Leone, seeking justice for victims of the civil war. 'Maybe a justice that came late and that came imperfectly was better than none at all' (149). The central aim of Pepukai's work is to find justice and this places her in a temporal space where the past is irreversible and an inescapable part of whatever is to come.

Other characters also appear in several of the stories, creating a simultaneity that resists chronological time. These temporal layers are shown through the character of Fortune for example, whose internet activities were outlined when discussing names and renaming practices. He is alluded to, present but not present, in 'A Short History of Zaka the Zulu' where one of the boys of St Ignatius 'was now the expansive and voluble owner of an employment agency that recruited care-workers for hospitals in Luton' (*Rotten Row*: 113). Fortune works for such a company, and his name emerges again in one of the later stories in the collection called 'In the Matter Between Goto and Goto', which is a satirical account of the divorce proceedings between Mr and Mrs Goto. Naboth Goto, the husband, had become involved with another woman, Miss Mhlanga, to his first wife's great dismay, and started a family with her. It turned out, however, that Mr Goto was not the only one Miss Mhlanga had a relationship with. The court issued an order of maintenance relating to Fortune Mpande, but '[t]he order has not been served. Mr Mpande fled this court's jurisdiction and is reported to have sought political asylum in the United Kingdom' (280). Again, the reader learns more about Fortune's life from the stories that are not explicitly about him but where he only momentarily appears. The fragmentary nature of *Rotten Row* is thus related both to time and to location.

When examining temporality in literature, space is an essential concept quite inseparable from time. Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope examines the connection between time and space particularly from a perspective of genre and literary history. Bakhtin explains that the chronotope means 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (Bakhtin 2008: 84). Doreen Massey's work on space and place has been foundational for human geographers, including literary geography and related fields. She writes in *Space, Place, and Gender* that 'temporal movement is also spatial; the moving elements have spatial relations to one another' (Massey 1994). The connection between time and space is therefore crucial to her, and this is reinforced by May and Thrift in their work on 'timespace' (2001). They argue that a necessary step is to 'think in terms of multiplicity of space-times' and refer to time itself as space: 'How can we inhabit the present as if it were a place, a home rather than something we pass in a mad scramble to realise the future?'. *Rotten Row* addresses the notion of time

as place, or time as home, in several stories, particularly through 'A Short History of Zaka the Zulu' which offers another meta-commentary relating both to history and to the actual story at hand. The storyteller remembers his boyhood years at the College of St Ignatius of Loyola, a prestigious boarding school in Mashonaland. One of the boys that went to school with him was given the nickname Zaka the Zulu (*Rotten Row*: 99-100):

> From that accent came our nickname for him. We called him Zaka, after the village in Masvingo Province, because he had the thickest Karanga accent that any of us had ever heard. We could just have named him Masvingo, but that name was already allocated. And we could have called him Gutu which is where he was actually from in Masvingo, but as his real name was Zacharias, we thought it rather clever to pun on his name in this way.
> (*Rotten Row*: 103-04)

Zaka the Zulu can be read as a reference to Shaka Zulu who was a Zulu king in the early 19th century. Carolyn Hamilton (1998) analyses the various images of Shaka that have lived on and how his legacy has been used for a number of political purposes in recent years. He has been depicted as a 'benign patron' and as a 'tyrant' and 'despot' (Hamilton 1998: 36-37). Place is relevant for Zacharias's nickname, as the other boys debated calling him Masvingo (known as Fort Victoria in the colonial period). Thus, Zacharias, who could have been renamed Masvingo or Gutu, becomes Zaka the Zulu, a name that bears geopolitical significance in every respect. The name thus performs both place and time, and Zacharias, just like Pepukai, embodies the space where both can intersect.

Performing history in this way also relates to a pertinent question posed by Paul Ricoeur in his work *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur (1988: 5) asks 'how are we to interpret history's claim, when it constructs a narrative, to reconstruct something from the past?'. Such reconstruction in terms of these temporal layers and the meta-text provided by the author on her own stories and characters, takes place in the story called 'Anna, Boniface, Cecelia, Dickson'. The story begins in the following manner:

> If you come with me this way, east of Rotten Row, walk straight past Town House on Speke Avenue, cross the flyover into Julius Nyerere Way, walk past Robert Mugabe Road and stop before we get to Kenneth Kaunda Avenue, we will find ourselves outside the downtown supermarket that used to be called Amato. […] They are long gone, the Brothers Amato, as are many of their brethren and indeed, there has not been a Bar Mitzvah here for more than ten years but that is all by the way. Nor does it matter what the supermarket is called now because we won't stay here long.
> (*Rotten Row*: 221)

The direct references to 'you', 'me' and 'we' introduce a narrator who speaks across the pages directly to the reader, breaking the fourth wall. The temporal aspect is central here too, and the name of the supermarket that is given is one that belongs to the past as it has since been renamed. However, the new name is not revealed as it is unnecessary according

to the narrator, due to the brief visit that 'we' are making. The present thus becomes secondary, a fleeting moment and paradoxically enough a mere afterthought, as the past takes precedence.

The precedence of the past relates to another question posed by Ricoeur which remains ever relevant for any discussion of fiction and time: 'is the past intelligible any other way than as persisting in the present?' (Ricoeur 1988: 144). For *Rotten Row*, this means that past, present and future do not represent a linear continuum – called 'physical time' by Ricoeur (107) – on the contrary, the different notions and layers of time become simultaneous, existing side by side. Just like naming practices can be performative, so can aspects of temporality as well. This also suggests that it is not necessarily always the past which is buried. In *Rotten Row*, layers of the past and the present are clearly visible in the stories, but it is often the future that remains elusive and concealed, and that also symbolizes the state of the nation itself. The short story ends with the words '[c]ome now, don't loiter, we don't have all day' (*Rotten Row*: 234). Again, there is a clear allusion to time, suggesting that all the stories presented in *Rotten Row* are told, or shown, by this all-knowing narrator and that everything happens in the same temporal dimension, in some elusive version and temporal space of the 'now'.

The last story in the collection, "'Ladies and Gentlemen, Bob Marley and the Wailers!"' brings most of the other stories to a close, emphasising the unique temporality of *Rotten Row*. Samson is a journalist living in Mbare, 'a place where something was always happening' (*Rotten Row*: 316). Samson reads the newspaper headlines which all refer to events and crimes committed in previous short stories in the collection: 'These were the stories Samson listened to and wrote up every day at Rotten Row, the same road down which he had first come from Masvingo to Harare as a boy' (323). In Samson, time and place combine once more and Gappah lets him tie all the stories together while he himself becomes nothing more than an ordinary citizen who goes about his daily life in the capital. The city remains central to the story and as the collection opened with 'The Dropper', a direct reference to the colonial past, *Rotten Row* ends with Samson in Harare, a newcomer to the city where all temporal dimensions merge. Gappah creates a space that allows for remembrance, for that which has been buried to be revealed, and it is Samson the journalist in his daily job who makes this possible. The interweaving of the past and the present removes any kind of explicit temporal linearity or chronology and everything that happens, all characters, become part of a singular continuum that has no clear beginning and no definite end.

Conclusion

The examination of renaming and temporality in relation to *Rotten Row* shows that the past sometimes takes precedence, but relating to Ricoeur's question, the past can never be fully understood anywhere else than in the present. Renaming the Zimbabwean city becomes a political act whereas the various characters who embody time and space – first and foremost Fortune, Pepukai, Zacharias and Samson – become part of an act of remembering. The legitimising effect of renaming as outlined by Forrest (2018) thus includes outright politics but also more subtle processes concerning the individual lives of

citizens. Both Pepukai and Zvamaida were forced to use English names at school, and for Pepukai the name was not even her own but invented by her mother specifically for school, and such renaming has an obvious political dimension too. As Forrest (2018) concluded, it is a question of who gets to name and in this case both Pepukai and Zvamaida have no say in the matter. The dropper who accidentally or intentionally used the old names every now and again represents the same political dimension but from a differing perspective. The politics of remembering becomes part of the act of renaming, which in the case of the dropper is manifested through a reversal of city names post-independence.

Gappah's stories show explicitly how the past cannot exist anywhere else but in the present, particularly in 'Anna, Boniface, Cecelia, Dickson', where a narrator who is not a character in the story directly addresses the reader as if the events retold in *Rotten Row* existed in a separate dimension, both temporally and physically, to which the reader has access guided by the narrator who is unimpeded by time or place. 'From a Town Called Enkeldoorn' with its internet forum posts becomes the explicit example of this separate dimension where actual characters from other stories take on invented identities behind which they can hide. This also relates to the concept of burying or being buried, which in *Rotten Row* is less about the physical act of excavation and more about how layers of time influence the lives of the different characters in the stories. Death is a recurring theme, as the stories centre around crime and courts, but more frequently it is secrets and lies that are being buried or uncovered. Nothing stays buried in *Rotten Row*.

Last but not least, it is relevant to remember Le Goff's words on history no longer being based on a sharp break between past and present. Petina Gappah's short stories highlight this as they create their own temporal dimension and a unique urban world. Despite the stories spanning decades and two continents, the characters seem not trapped in time but able to transcend it. Time does not become irrelevant in the process, quite the contrary. Without time and different interpretations of past and present none of the stories could be told. Zimbabwe's history emerges not as secondary but regains primary importance, and it eventually reaches a place where it can coexist with the present and a possible future. The colonial era clearly forms a kind of backdrop for the stories as the past is repeatedly referred to, but mainly from the perspective of individual characters.

Rotten Row's performative dimension is related both to renaming and to representations of time. 'The Dropper' is an excellent example of this as shown in the discussion; the main character, a white executioner from an era long gone, remembers people he executed and resorts to using the old names of towns and cities. He himself becomes a link to the colonial past when he says that debts must be paid. Pepukai on the other hand, one of the characters who appears in many places, works with transitional justice trying to make sense of what happened in West Africa after colonialism ended and of the conflicts that erupted. It is another past, equally present in the here and now and irrevocably part of the future too. The urban worlds that Gappah creates have complex historical backdrops but the ordinary daily lives of people in her stories suggest that the postcolonial condition is no longer simply defined by the colonial era itself but very firmly placed in the hands of Zimbabwean citizens: city-dwellers from every corner of society. *Postcolonial* as a term would also imply linearity; a transition from the colonial to the era

after independence. However, Gappah's stories embody these different temporal dimensions and show that the present state, time and space are, simply, Zimbabwean.

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