

**Within the Landscapes: An Ecocritical Reading of Yvonne Vera's
Butterfly Burning (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a
Name* (1994)**

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DECLARATION

I, Buhlebenkosi Dlodlo declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of African Literature, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. I confirm that the work has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other University.

Signature 

Date ...16/October/2020...

DEDICATION

To my mother and her mother. To Thabani, Ziyanda and Mzwandile. Thank you for all the prayers, the sacrifices and the tears you shed with me along this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The study problematises the anthropocentrism that dominates critical responses to Yvonne Vera's works through interrogating the relationship between the human and the nonhuman in *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994). I demonstrate that human concerns are inextricably linked to environmental concerns in Vera's writing. The study also underscores the connection between humans, nature and the spiritual realm as represented in the three novels. Contrary to some scholars' claims that most African writers have resisted the ecocritical paradigm, I argue that Africans have always been environmentally conscious in their writings and praxis. In the selected novels, Vera celebrates the nonhuman aspects within the landscape to recapitulate how human lives interlink with the environmental issues. Framed within an ecocritical theory, the study examines how Vera presents and critiques the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe related to reckless mining activities, deforestation, illegal dumpsites, industrial and sewage effluent contaminating water bodies and threatening aquatic life. An ecocritical reading of narratives conscientises while offering new perspectives of analysing African literary texts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction / Background

Since 1980, Zimbabwe has suffered a myriad of environmental problems in addition to its crippling economy and political instability. Media headlines have been inundated with news on recurring droughts that have impoverished and debased people's lives and significantly reduced wildlife and livestock, deforestation that has claimed about 1.5% of the nation's forest land, construction in wetlands threatening the quality and quantity of underground water, floods, illegal dumpsites, veld fires responsible for the destruction of over a million hectares of grazing land in tropical Zimbabwe, over a hundred elephants reported dead from cyanide poisoning at Hwange National Park, massive fish deaths attributed to water pollution from industrial waste and sewage effluent, extinction of the black rhinoceros due to poaching, land mines laid during the liberation war that continue to ravage the lives and livelihoods of Zimbabweans in Eastern Highlands, poor mining practices causing severe land degradation and pollution of water bodies.¹ Conservation groups such as The Harare Wetlands Trust, Zimbabwe's Environmental Agency, Environment and Sensing Institute have positively responded to these cataclysms through conscientising and influencing policy making in Zimbabwe. Parastatal organisations have also been set up to abate environmental decline and sustain a balanced ecosystem. Whilst the social movements, the media and other disciplines have projected what Njabulo Ndebele has termed the spectacular² in a different context, the question is, how do narratives capture the immediate and intergenerational impact of environmental injustice such as children who up to this day are born with deformities that can be traced back to environmental influences? In this study, I am more concerned with the literary representation of these environmental catastrophes. I focus on

¹ According to Radio Africa in 2013, a Chinese mall, Longcheng Plaza, was built on a wetland in Harare. This was done despite warnings from environmentalists that constructing on wetlands threatens the natural ecosystem and compromises the surface and underground water. In 2019, *The Chronicle* also reported an increase in veld fires in Matabeleland North due to human activities such as poaching. In September 2020, *The Guardian* published that two mining firms from China had been granted permission to clear and drill the land at Hwange National Park, home to many endangered species in Africa.

² In his essay "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" (1986), Ndebele critiques the South African apartheid-era writers for their obsession with the spectacular representation of reality. By spectacular he referred to the representation of the larger, overwhelming and highly dramatic issues in society. According to Ndebele, spectacular representations extirpate analytical insight and are done to maintain power. He argues that rather than preferring the spectacular events, direct focus of literature should be on the everyday, ordinary lives of people because they are central to all struggles.

narrative because it calls for a “rethinking of environmental calamities as having a universal effect, rather, it aims to expose how particular societies perceive and respond to a variety of social afflictions – from domestic abuse to posttraumatic stress and, in particular environmental calamities” (Nixon, 2011:3).

I begin by reflecting on Rob Nixon’s gripping concerns in his thought-provoking book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* where he poses profound questions:

How can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation – driven technologies of our image-world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention? (3).

From this perspective, the central questions underlying my study are: how have artists converted the environmental catastrophes into image and narrative? How have they interwoven the cultural, political and economic challenges with the ecological concerns? How does the narrative represent the injustices within the landscapes and how does nature capture what Nixon calls direct casualties? I explore these concerns through an ecocritical reading of Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994).

In the last few years, Zimbabwe has been signing multibillion-dollar deals with China that involve the mining of chrome, lithium, coal, iron-ore, nickel and diamonds. Ironically, the country is rated amongst the poorest in Africa registering a decrease in per capita wealth. Whilst the government is continually fragmenting its land to quench the insatiable appetites of the Chinese, only a few government officials are benefiting from the cash inflows. I hasten to think of Marange diamond mines where the concessionaires are all Chinese, exploiting, depleting and exporting the natural resources worth billions but there is no clinic in the vicinity and neither is there a single school with more than three blocks of classrooms. I also think of Lupane with its wildlife, gas methane and hardwood forest contributing a consequential percentage to the world’s tropical forests but the local people still languish in poverty with no electricity while the gas and timber is hauled through their landscapes degrading the land. The majority in the area are unemployed. The timber concession companies outsource workers and a few from Lupane are only exploited as cheap labour.

Nixon (2011:42) quickly brands such shenanigans as “extractive theft without service delivery” where the locals do not benefit from their natural resources.

I observe with interest the recrudescence of colonial diction in environmental discourse such as exploitation, manipulation, subjugation and cheap labour. Probably Bookchin (2005:1) was right to argue that “the very idea of dominating [...] nature has its origins in the domination of human by human.” In other terms, most environmental injustices are located within the realms of racist, sexist and elitist societies. I discuss this domination and exploitation further as ‘omnivores’ in the second chapter, a term I have borrowed from environmentalist Ramachandra Guha.

I write to this era where natural resources are politicised, privatised and only benefit the few elite at the expense of poor locals. An era where wildlife especially the elephants are sacrificed at political rallies for the glorification of politicians, and where the same politicians own conservationist sites with no systematic means of balancing the ecosystem. I also write to this era where money is siphoned from NGOs in the name of environmental sustainability projects while it only benefits individuals. An age where the African forests have been transformed into crime scenes. Here I am thinking of the Matabeleland massacre (Gukurahundi 1981-1987) and the Marange diamond massacre where according to BBC Panorama (2011), scores of women were raped by military forces in the forest and over two hundred civilian miners slaughtered and dumped in shallow graves, loosely covered by leaves.

The dramatic Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the early 2000s also contributed a share in the deterioration of the landscape and consequently, global warming. Extensive land was cleared for agriculture, wood harvested for fuel and construction poles resulting in massive deforestation. Political figures also rewarded themselves by carving up and sharing vast areas of land without implementing healthy ecological systems. Like most African countries where the media is state owned, it is virtually impossible for the government to conscientise when they themselves are culprits of environmental injustice. Such an age requires a narrative agency that has no respect for spatial boundaries, scrutinising the private and public spaces to expose the injustices that are seldom spoken.

This study is two-fold. My first focus is on the representation of environmental catastrophes in the selected novels. I investigate the anthropocentric activities that have contributed to

damages within the Zimbabwean landscape. I then propose a reading that goes beyond treating the landscape as merely the physical earth, but a broader approach that embraces all strands of the ecosystem. According to Nixon (2011:11), ecocriticism draws not only on the textual presence of nature in literature, but also heavily upon the environmental implications of our changing social and political policies.” Wylie also echoes the same thought and posits that “an ecologically-sensitive literary criticism thus goes beyond merely noting the presence of the natural in a body of literature [...] it rather attempts to assess and explain the place of that literature within the ecosystems of its time” (2005:148). In that view, my second focus then is concerned with how environmental issues are inextricably intertwined with the political, social, economic and cultural systems of the time. I explore how Vera treats the ecological features as tropes to foreground larger thematic concerns such as gender, sexuality, rape, infanticide, trauma and ethnicity.

1.2 Aim

This study pursues an ecocritical reading of Yvonne Vera’s oeuvre, in particular *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994). The aim is to explore how various ecological tropes in the novels foreground the cultural and socio-political concerns of different milieus in Zimbabwe. In *Butterfly Burning*, I examine how the author interweaves human and nonhuman nature to reflect and comment on the socio-cultural and historical realities of the people. The novel is imbued with symbols of trees, water, dry land, light and fire. An analysis of the symbolical representation of the elements will reveal the connectivity between gender relations, sexuality, humanistic values and the environment. As such, I argue that Vera celebrates nonhuman nature to recapitulate how human lives interlink with environmental issues. I then explore how the rocks and the trees in *The Stone Virgins* do not only inscribe the history of the land, but also comment on the traumas of the war and the harm that nationalist wars inflict on both women and the natural landscape. Lastly, I analyse how Vera’s representation of the forest and land in *Without a Name* is interconnected to social concerns such as rape, infanticide and sexuality in Zimbabwe. My overarching argument is that human concerns cannot be divorced from the environment. Premised on an ecocritical lens, an analysis of Vera’s novels in this study reveals the relational link between the human and nonhuman; and the varied ways in which this relationality can be detrimental or nurturing, depending on the human environmental practices.

1.3 Rationale

Ecocriticism is still a growing field in Zimbabwean literary studies with sporadic critical works generally stemming from male authored work and biased towards poetry.³ Yvonne Vera, one of the most prolific writers to have emerged from the Zimbabwean literary canon with a plethora of critical literature on her works has typically been read from postcolonial, feminist, psychoanalytic and historical criticist lenses. Minuscule attention has been afforded her prose fiction from an ecocritical perspective. In this study, I re-read Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, *The Stone Virgins* and *Without a Name* ecocritically. Postcolonial texts and discourses of nature have generally been regarded as representing divergent views. Coupling them in this study allows for new-fangled and nuanced ideas on how to rethink questions of gender, sexuality and violence. An earth-centred approach also considers the whole ecosphere, acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The texts selected for this study begin with a rich description of the topography and their entire plot is anchored on nature. Such a framing is suggestive of how Vera integrates the human and ecological concerns. The physical world becomes a character, sharing the agency with the human to retell Zimbabwean histories and to voice the injustices within the landscape, hence Vera's fiction can be read with an ecocritical eye. The novels may also be viewed as synchronous, exposing gender concerns and experiences of major ethnic groups across different geographical areas in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the novel as a genre offers a wide range of literary elements germane to this study. As Bakhtin (1981) states, the heteroglossia and dialogism that is distinct to the novel allows for negotiation of meaning through a constant interaction with multiple voices and perspectives. In an age of environmental catastrophes, an ecocritical approach to narratives conscientises while providing new methods of analysing African literature.

³ Examples include Mthatiwa (2007) who studied how animal representations in poetry reveal ecological sensibilities in "Human-animal relationship and ecocritical study of the representation of animals in poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa". Also, reference can be made to Wylie's "Mind has mountains: Poetry and ecology in eastern Zimbabwe" in Muponde and Primorac's *Versions of Zimbabwe: New approaches to literature and culture*. Wylie ecocritically analyses Shona and English poems in Zimbabwe including Zimunya's "Thought Tracks" (1982b) and Bretell's 1994 selection of poems.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on ecocriticism, a literary theory that studies the relationship between literature and the environment. It employs an interdisciplinary approach by drawing from existing fields such as ecology and environmentalism. According to Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in their ground breaking work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996:xviii), ecocriticism “takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies [...] which considers nature not just as the stage upon which the human’s story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama.” It is premised on the belief that “human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (1996: xix). This study then is anchored on Glotfelty’s views and considers how Yvonne Vera reads the interactions between nature and human subjects to articulate historical, socio-cultural and political concerns in Zimbabwean society. Ecocriticism enables a holistic and deeper analysis of texts as it examines the relations within the entire ecosphere, that is, the humans and their environment.

Ecocriticism possibly originated with the work of William Rueckert in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” By ecocriticism, Rueckert referred to the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, a definition which was more scientific. Glotfelty then excavated the term in 1989, popularised it and recommended its adoption as a critical approach, hence she is considered a pioneer in the field.

Within literary studies, Buell (2011) posits that ecocriticism was an initiative from British Romanticism and US nature writing, often divided into 2 waves. The first wave took place during the 1980s and the 1990s. It was characterised by rumination on nature writing as an object of study and raising awareness (Barry, 2009). The 2nd wave redefined the term ‘environment’ by expanding its meaning to include nature and the urban (Bertens, 2008). The theory is therefore a broad approach involving many strands such as the city, the forest, the animals, technology and even the body (Glotfelty, 1996: xxiii).

Scholars such as Buell (1998), Waugh (2006) and Gomides (2006) have defined ecocriticism from different perspectives, all sharing the basic premise of the interconnectedness of human culture and nature. Glotfelty simply defines it as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (1996: xviii). Kerridge and Sammels (cited in

Okuyade 2013:10) complement Glotfelty's definition by suggesting that "ecocritics want to trace environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear." Thus, Robert Kern (2000:18) proclaims that "what ecocriticism calls for then is a fundamental shift from one context of reading to another – more especially, a movement from the human to the environment, or from at least an exclusively human to the biocentric or ecocentric." What Kern advocates is a subversion of the conventional human centred approach to an earth-centred approach. According to Wylie (2005:149), a reading underpinned by ecocriticism "tries to unearth from behind the omissions and rifts of the work itself, evidence of the unspoken or recognised ecological dynamics not in a merely historicism or scientific mode, but as a means of explaining the cultured values, limitations and effects of the work's aesthetic itself." This study then aims at re-reading Vera's texts with new ingenuity.

Nirmal Selvamony (2007: xix) highlights that "ecocritics are not agreed on what constitutes the basic principle in ecocriticism, whether it is bios, or nature or environment or place or earth or land." This then partly explains the diverse nomenclatures used by scholars and ecocritical critics. Some like Buell prefer environmental criticism while others have embraced "green cultural studies," "literary ecology," "literary environmentalism," "ecopoetics" and "environmental literary criticism." Whichever description is adopted, Buell (1995) concludes that at the heart of ecocriticism is a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point.

The prefixes eco- and enviro- are differentiated by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) who expound that eco- studies the relationship between culture and the physical world while enviro- is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that humans are at the centre surrounded by everything else that is not human, which is the environment. Eco- in contrast implies interdependent communities, integrated systems and strong connections among constituent parts. This differentiation informs my choice of ecocriticism as a theory grounding this study as I intend on examining the constituents of the entire system and not just unitary elements of the ecosphere.

Ecocriticism looks at literature from two broad angles. It can be applied to a primary text by either interpreting it through investigating the natural elements involved or by examining an ecocritical trope within the text. In reading literary works ecocritically, Glotfelty and Fromm suggest engaging the following questions:

How is nature represented in this literary work? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play of ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? In addition to race, class and gender, should place become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world (1996: xviii).

Where nature is absent, another dimension could be questioning where the natural world is in the text. Most of the suggestions above underpin this research.

Christoph Parry in his book *Peter Handke's Landscapes of Discourse* (2003) introduces the concept of landscape of construct where he explains how meaning is assigned to the landscape or how word becomes a signifier through nature. Barry (2009:255) then classifies the physical environment into four areas:

- | | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Area 1 | - | The wilderness (The uninhabited continents, deserts, oceans) |
| Area 2 | - | The scenic sublime (The forest, lakes, mountains, waterfalls) |
| Area 3 | - | The countryside (The hills, the fields, woods) |
| Area 4 | - | The domestic picturesque (The parks, gardens, lanes). |

Although some scholars have critiqued the wilderness because of human interference, Barry's classification is imperative in defining an ecocritical text and justifying its selection. It also emphasises the forest, which is one of the key tropes I examine in this study along with water and the rocks which are all encompassed in the categorisation.

Warren (1997:50) modifies Barry's definition of the environment to include "power, domination, racism, discrimination...lack of housing for the poor and the homeless, [and] hazardous working conditions." Okuyade (2013: xi) goes a step further to incorporate all things affected and influenced by the environment such as food, fashion and technology. In other words, the environment affects and largely determines all aspects of humanity ranging from race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, law, religion, [and] economics (Mishra as cited in Zapf, 2016:263).

Nixon in *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) brings in a new dimension to ecocriticism by pinning it to industrialisation and modernisation. He gives a riveting account of how industrialisation was brought to Africa as a way of "correcting an inefficient global imbalance in toxicity [...] to ease the growing pressure from rich-nation

environmentalists who were campaigning against garbage dumps and industrial effluent that they condemned as health threats and found aesthetically offensive" (2). This resulted in what he calls slow violence – a term he coins to describe violence which is gradual and has long-term effects. It is fatal and destructive just like weapons, the only difference being that one is gradual and the latter is immediate. Nixon claims that the process of industrialisation and modernisation discounted Africans in three ways: as political agents, as long-term casualties and as cultures possessing environmental practices and concerns of their own (2). His analysis invites us to rethink environmental issues in Africa through colonial modernity that promised to ameliorate the standard of life, but instead, the locals remain on the margins of modernity with little benefit from their resources.

Although ecocriticism only became popular in the 1990s, Glotfelty points out that literary and cultural scholars have been ecologically informed since the seventies (1996: xvii). Joseph Meeker's "The Comic Mode" for example was published in 1972, and Neil Evernden's "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy" was published in 1978. As Glotfelty observes, these scholars might not have been organised into an identifiable movement then, hence their efforts were not recognised as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement(xvii). Similarly, in my opinion, Africans have always been environmentally conscious in their writings; contrary to Slaymaker's claims that "many African writers have resisted the paradigm that informs much of global ecocriticism" (2001:684). From foundational Anglophone novels such as *Mhudi* (1930) and *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to Yvonne Vera's oeuvre, African writing has always been deliberately attentive to human relationships to African flora and fauna. In our case, the entire plots of Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*, *The Stone Virgins* and *Butterfly Burning* highlight ecological concerns. Through ecological elements such as the land, the rocks, the trees and the river, Vera captures how anthropogenic and capitalogenic activities contributed to land degradation and pollution within the Zimbabwean landscape. In that light, writers such as Vera have been greening since her first prose *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*.⁴ This study's rereading of *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994) hopes to excavate and

⁴ Greening is a term introduced by Harold Fromm in the MLA special session entitled "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary studies."

foreground this consistent attention to human-environment interconnectivity in Zimbabwean literature.

In Africa, scholars such as Ogaga Okuyade, Wangari Maathai, Sule Egya, Catejan Iheka, Fiona Moola, Tilla Slabert, Isabel Hofmeyr and Byron Caminero-Santangelo have significantly contributed to the development of ecocriticism. Egya in “Anglophone Environmental writing in Nigeria” (2019), rebuffs assumptions about the emergence of ecocriticism as a new field of study in Africa. He argues that nature writing dates back to the inception of African literature, rooted in oral tradition that was fundamental in shaping human thoughts and actions toward the general good of the society. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the interconnectedness of humans and nature is bound to reflect in all forms of art without being informed by a western ideology. In his more recent book, *Nature, Environment and Activism in Nigerian Literature* (2020), Egya then advocates an ecocriticism that acknowledges the idiosyncrasies of postcolonial societies as regions with distinct experiences. His argument is that “environmental issues are necessarily local, even though there are global connections, attention to the local remains the most viable approach to understand the contribution of writers and other cultural artists to the fate of the earth” (4). In other words, in as much as the history of ecocriticism can be traced back to North America, it studied the particularities of American nature which is different from the ecological concerns in Africa.⁵

Iheka (2018) then introduces the concept of “distributed” or “shared agency” in *Naturalising Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*, a book that won him the 2019 ecocriticism book award. In his view, shared agency is where humans and nonhumans share agential power where they are both concerned, seeing the non-human as “constitutive of the living world and not as mere resources for indiscriminate exploitation” (5). Moolla (2016), just like Mavhunga (2014) adds animals to the discussion and like other ecocritics, she contends that African ecocriticism must be informed by specific cultural circumstances of the continent and not a mere universal framework.

Although this study is primarily grounded on ecocriticism, I also borrow some concepts from ecofeminism, a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of

⁵The essays in Glotfelty and Fromm’s anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), for example are limited to American scholarship, referencing American nature and subsequently their culture. Also refer to Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1995).

women and the domination of nature (Glotfelty 1996: xxiv). First introduced by French feminist and writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (1974), ecofeminism or ecological feminism is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates environmental and women's concerns. Although there are several strands to it, its underlying argument is that "the domination of women by men is associated with the domination of nature by men" (Warren, 1996:x). According to Coupe (2000:302), ecofeminism "resists both the domination of nature by humanity and the domination of women by men, exploring the connection between the two processes and seeking a new relationship between woman, man and nature." Warren (1994:2) offers a broader definition where ecofeminism examines the powers among social systems of domination in racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, imperialism [and] colonialism. In other words, the theory examines all the 'isms' interlinked with the unjust domination of women and the exploitation of nature by patriarchal structures.

The inclusion of this theory is motivated by the cognisance of how the exploitation and degradation of the environment in the selected novels is directly linked to the inferiorisation of the female characters. As will be demonstrated in chapter 4, the landscape is gendered according to dualities of masculine/feminine, and women struggle to transcend these binaries. By coupling the struggle of women and that of nature, Vera illuminates how all forms of domination are interconnected while advocating an egalitarian society where man, woman and nature are equal. Employing some facets of ecofeminism in this study allows us to rethink questions of gender, sexuality, production and reproduction which are all central themes in Vera's novels.

Ecofeminists such as Karen Warren, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard and Marti Kheel have significantly contributed to the development of the theory. I however find Mies and Shiva's views interesting and relevant to my study as they draw links between development, gendered division of labour, sexuality, reproductive justice and the destruction of the environment. In their collection of essays *Ecofeminism* (1993), they argue that ecological destruction and industrial catastrophes contribute a direct threat to everyday life, more so for the women and children (73). They further contend that there is a relationship between the patriarchal oppression and the destruction of nature in the name of profit and progress. Other noteworthy works include Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1989) where she critiques technology and modernity as bringing new forms of oppression and exploitation.

Ecofeminism then becomes valuable in examining the effect of hegemonic conventions portrayed by Vera such as colonialism and capitalism.

1.5 Literature Review

According to Mouton (1996:121), “a survey of the literature is an essential component of any study because it is the main access point or gateway to the relevant body of knowledge.” It highlights the already existing knowledge in the field, identifies gaps and determines if a research is worth pursuing. O’ Leary in *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project* (2010:71) contends that “the production of new knowledge is fundamentally dependent on past knowledge.” A literature review then, according to Schostak and Schostak (2013) strengthens one’s project. In this section, I review prior scholarship on Yvonne Vera and on ecocriticism so as to locate my work in conversation with the existing body of knowledge.

Cooper (as cited in Creswell, 2013, 61) suggests four forms that a literature review can take: It can be literature review that interrogates what others have done and said; that which criticises previous scholarly works; that which builds bridges between related topics; and that which identifies the central issues in a field. In this study, I combine the four forms so as to align my research in context with the existing literary works, both on Vera and on ecocriticism. In this section, I will briefly discuss ecocriticism outside Africa and ecocriticism in Africa before I home in to Zimbabwe. This division will afford a vivid portraiture of the development of the theory and its breadth in Zimbabwean literature, which is where my research is anchored.

1.5.1 Ecocriticism Outside Africa

The term ecocriticism can be traced back to William Rueckert’s essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978), where he used it to denote the application of ecological concerns to literature. Cheryll Glotfelty then popularised the term in 1989 and recommended its adoption as a literary theory, hence she is considered the founder. The branch of ecocriticism was then formally launched at the Western Literary Association with the formation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). Soon after, the Journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* was founded in 1993. This is where most of the current scholarship on ecocriticism can be accessed. An example is Emma Schneider’s “Listening to Landscapes: Ecological Healing in *The Birchbark House* and *Mama Day*”, and John Steinbeck’s collection of essays *Steinbeck and the*

Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches where he extensively establishes the connection between literature and the environment. *ISLE* was then followed by the publication of Harold Fromm and Cheryll Glotfelty's canonical text, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996).

The Ecocriticism Reader serves as a port of entry to the field of ecocriticism in literary studies (Glotfelty, 1996: xxv). The anthology is a collection of about twenty-five essays which define the history of ecocriticism and its ambit. These essays however, just like the collection in the *ISLE* mostly draw from native American literature. From Lyn White's "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" to Annete Kolodny's "The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters" (1975), the history and environmental concerns are all embedded in the American terrain. In short, most of the essays are only greening the American landscape or in Frederick Turner's words, they are "cultivating the American garden" (1996:40). This study draws from African literary texts and the aim is to reveal the interconnectedness between human culture and the natural world as depicted in Yvonne Vera's novels.

Rachael Carson is another significant figure whose works have influenced environmentalist movements across Europe today, including The Rachael Carson Centre named after her in Germany. A biologist, environmentalist and author, she combined her science background with creative writing to produce among other narratives, *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *Silent Spring* (1962). In *Silent Spring*, Carson lambastes the use of pesticides as being detrimental to the environment and in *The Sea Around Us*, she shifts the attention to sea life. Although the centre has published a multiplicity of ecocritical essays across different genres, the articles, just like those incorporated in John Steinbeck's *Steinbeck and The Environment*, do not engage with Africa and its cultural diversity that is intertwined with the natural environment.

1.5.2 Ecocriticism in Africa

Ecocriticism in Africa is rapidly developing although most of the scholarship is concentrated in Nigeria and South Africa. This however does not mean that other literary critics in the continent have totally neglected the movement. Wangari Maathai for example, a Nobel prize winner, founder and author of *The Green Belt Movement* (2003), *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), *The Challenge for Africa* (2009) and *Replenishing the Earth* (2010), raised awareness on the

ecological decline in Kenya for decades. In her work, she suggests afforestation as a mode of regenerating the landscape, an initiative meant to conscientise while ameliorating the Kenyan socio-economic circumstances. In *Replenishing the Earth*, she mainly draws from different spiritualities and extends an invitation to the world to reconnect with the natural environment. In her 2004 Nobel Prize lecture, Maathai drew connections between environmental sustainability, peace and a decent standard of living. According to Maathai, “when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged, we undermine our quality of life and that of future generations” (2). Planting trees then protects the environment while promoting peace and cultivating sustainable development. Her effort according to the Nobel committee citation, “has taken a holistic approach to sustainable development that embraces democracy, human rights and women’s rights in particular. She [Maathai] thinks globally and acts locally” (2004:4).

In *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, Caminero-Santangelo “examines the relationship between African literary writing, anticolonial struggle, social justice, and environmentalism in Africa” (2014:3). In addition to Maathai’s work, he presents at least four arguments. Firstly, he questions the assumption that there is little writing on nature in Africa. This is a debate that also resonates in Egya’s “Anglophone Environmental Writing in Nigeria” (2019), which rejects claims of nature writing as a new phenomenon in Africa. Caminero-Santangelo also challenges Western representations of the African environment and all the definitions attendant to it. His monograph mainly draws from a selection of environmental writing from West Africa, East Africa and South Africa. Zimbabwean literature is neglected in the analysis.

In a more recent edition, *Nature, Environment and Activism in Nigerian Literature* (2020), Egya advocates an ecocriticism that addresses environmental challenges in the African context with an attentive eye on the difference in culture and history. In his view, “the cultural, political and historical particularities of a people in a region cannot be bunched together” (2020:2). While ecological crises can be global, Egya emphasises that “the best way to view them would be from a local lens by which the local becomes the locus of understanding the global” (1), what he calls a “bottom up approach to the study of environmental literature” (2) or what Haag et. al in a different context call the “local beginnings, global echoes” (2019:1).

This thought is also taken up in *Natures of Africa: Ecocriticism and Animal Studies in Contemporary Cultural Forms* (2016) by Moolla who insists that ecocriticism must be informed by the cultural specificities of a people than being consolidated in a universal framework. Her work is commendable especially for including the interaction between all biotic life forms in the ecosystem and not just the plant life. She, just like Maathai, foregrounds the spiritual connection between humans and their environment.

Okuyade in *Ecocritical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* goes beyond the aesthetic to a more ethical approach to literatures of Africa. Instead of merely analysing the themes and the style of the writer, he proposes a more holistic approach that considers the environment as an active player in the ecosystem. African ecocriticism in Okuyade's view makes one glaring point: "the ambivalence of the contemporary situation in which the environment is idolised, idealised, or lamented about; vanishing or on the verge of being permanently lost" (2013: xiv). The difference with Okuyade is that he pays attention to other art forms such as film and he also includes a bit of Zimbabwean literature in his essays.

Phillip Onoriode Aghoghovwia in his thesis "Ecocriticism and the oil encounter: Readings from the Niger Delta" (2014) explores how environmental concerns are mirrored in literary representations. Using several prose narratives, 5 poetry collections and a Nollywood film, he concludes that the extraction of oil can be a signifier of many forms of violence upon the landscape. Like most ecocritical works from Nigeria, reference and emphasis is on the Niger Delta.

Elsewhere, Smit (2013) assesses a number of South African essays on ecocriticism. Most of the essays however, such as Gane's "The Forest and the Road: Transformation of Space in Novels by Achebe and Okri" and Wylie's "Long and Wandering Forest" are limited to the forest and not the entire landscape. Some, such as Lindy Stiebel's "The Thirst for the Wilderness was Upon Me: Africa as wilderness in Rider Haggard's African Romance" have been extensively criticised for being aligned to colonial literatures, depicting Africa as wilderness, with the wilderness signifying nature opposed to civilisation or depicting how "African nature is commodified for the consumption of the coloniser or adventure back home in Britain" (Njanji, 2014:12). In other words, emphasis is on asserting power over the natural environment rather than celebrating the harmonious African co-existence of humans and nature.

Other noteworthy ecocritical works are included in different anthologies such as *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental studies in Africa* (2011) and *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (2012). The underlying principle of the essays is the reimagining and regenerating of the African landscape.

1.5.3 Critical Works on Vera and Ecocritical Readings of Zimbabwean Writing

Works on Vera

Critical works on Vera's fiction have largely concentrated on how she redefines the interactions between history, nationalism and gender. Her writing has been eulogized locally and internationally "for its feminist breaking of taboos in a male dominated society [...] and how she gives voice to previously suppressed narratives and brings into focus fissures in the national discourse of power" (Muponde and Taruvinga, 2002: xi). She has been read from different anthropocentric paradigms that focus on the human subject, rarely considering "the value of nature in and of itself" (Heise, 2006: 507).

The ground breaking essay collection *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2002) established the critical platform for engagement with Vera's work (Samuelson in Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo, 2012: xii). Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo affirm that "it brought together a range of essays analysing Vera's work in terms of language, memory and history among other themes" (2012: xxiv). The essays in the anthology are grouped into 5 categories: that is, "Language, Voice and Presence," "Language, Technique and Imagery," "Body Politics, Memory and Belonging," "Spirit Possession and Resistance," and "History, Fiction and the Colonial Space." Of the seventeen essays, a scant attempt has been done to locate Vera within the realms of ecocriticism. Essays such as Samuelson's "A River in my Mouth: Writing Voice in *Under the Tongue*" only conceptualise gender issues as embedded in patriarchal and colonial discourses. Another shortfall with this collection of essays is that *The Stone Virgins* is underrepresented, owing to the fact that it was published the same year as the anthology of essays.

A subsequent volume, *Emerging Perspectives on Yvonne Vera* (2012), edited by Helen Cousins and Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo attempted to bridge the hermeneutic gap by resuscitating the previous essays, fairly representing *The Stone Virgins* and commenting on Vera's unpublished

novel, *Obedience*. The essays are also divided into 5 distinct yet interrelated segments, “all of which are concerned with gender, language, and with the political in reference to colonialism and nationalist struggles” (Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo, xxiv). Just like their predecessors, only Cousins, who will be discussed at length later fully embraced ecocriticism as a theory informing her reading of Vera’s short stories. Angeline Modongonda in “The Language of Pain: (Re)interpreting Nature as Metaphor in Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue*,” focuses on how nature can be interpreted as a metaphor of pain. Although she approaches *Under the Tongue* through theories of post-traumatic stress disorders, her essay is the first to zoom in on the natural world. She interprets the natural images in *Under the Tongue* from a Shona cultural perspective where natural spaces are revered as the abode of African spirits. Madongonda focuses on stones, water and the moon to illustrate the connectedness between humans, nature and the spiritual world. Her argument is that when the characters seek refuge in natural spaces, they are seeking divine protection from their pain. Madongonda also draws parallels between natural phenomena and character development as exemplified by Zhizha whose pain and emotional turmoil are associated with rain and lightning.

Essays in Cousins and Dodgson’s first segment “Political and Historical (Re) Imaginings”, are bound by the thread of the Zimbabwean history, political unrest and nationalism. Musila in “Beyond the Frame of History: Colonial Modernity, Love and Freedom” for example, grounds her analysis on the trope of photography, especially the frame and the mirror to explore how Vera challenges narratives of the Zimbabwean national history and diverse constructions of love. Christiansen in “Rewriting Discourses of History and Identity in Zimbabwe” reads *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* as engaging in what she terms “the discursive field of national history and identity in Zimbabwe,” from a political discourse perspective. She focuses on the spirit mediums, national identity and political representations of identity and argues that *The Stone Virgins* functions as an opening of the discursive space of national identity. Her essay analyses the relationship between literature and the politics of identity whereas this study intends to explore the relationship between literature and the environment.

Also noted in the essays is how the Zimbabwean concerns are strongly linked to the land. Cousins for example identifies land in Vera’s short stories as depicting notions of belonging and possessing. Muchemwa in “Vera’s Fictional Palimpsests: The Land, City and Peripatetic Bodies” also asserts that “identity is grounded in narratives of the land. This grounding

generates land metaphors and practices of belonging and exclusion in contexts of historical precision and supersession" (279). Land then becomes a site "in which Zimbabwean fictional texts rehearse, refract and interrogate political themes" (Primorac, 2006:2). Ecocriticism brings fresh insights to these mainstream perspectives as it focuses on the land as an agentic entity in itself, not a passive possession or metaphor. In other words, it reads the land for its concerns and not just as a geographical cartography to define boundaries of belonging.

Other essays such as Shaw's "Turning her Back on the Moon: Virginité, Sexuality and Mothering in the Works of Vera", Musila in "Embodying Experience and Agency in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*" (2007), and Muponde's "Reading Girlhood *Under the Tongue*" (2007) tie feminist ideologies to nature. They reflect on marginality, embodied experience and sexual violation which according to Musila, adopts the tropes of soiling and dirtying, interpreted as a way of polluting the land. Nature is often feminised. Women are embodied with characteristics of nature such as beautiful, gentle, kind and nurturing. Such dichotomies of woman/nature are socially constructed gender stereotypes that collapse women into subjects to be dominated just like nature. Vera deviates from such traditional binaries and each character in her fiction has distinct characteristics, including nature. For example, Umguza River in *Butterfly Burning* refuses to give away its water and Phephelaphi who would stereotypically be expected to be life giving as nature also rejects motherhood.

The section on "Crossing spaces" is more concerned with the navigation between rural and urban spaces. Through a reading of *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, Lipenga examines how women struggle to occupy both geographical and literary spaces in "Rewriting the City: Women's Occupation of Urban Space in *Butterfly Burning* and *Under the Tongue*." According to Lipenga, literary spaces should be spaces of freedom for women free from demarcations such as the city in *Butterfly Burning*.

In their introduction, Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo state that Vera's significance as an author "is reflected in the amount of critical attention she has attracted" (2012: xvi). Volumes of essays have been compiled in full length books, journals and online articles to discuss various aspects of her literary works. The reviewed literature in this section highlights the gap that the critics have overlooked, that is, an ecological appreciation of *Butterfly Burning*, *The Stone Virgins* and *Without a Name*.

Ecocritical works on Zimbabwe

In acknowledging the paucity of publications on ecocriticism, Vambe (2013:1) posits that “in Africa as a whole, and Zimbabwe in particular, published works on criticism of the representations of the environment in fiction are scarce.” Ecocriticism is still an under researched area in Zimbabwe; most of the literary works from renowned critics such as Robert Muponde, Ranka Primorac and Meg Samuelson have been anthropocentric. However, a small handful of scholars couple the thematic concerns with the environment surrounding the authors and their work.

In “Dwelling in Zimbabwean Land: An Ecocritical Reading of Yvonne Vera’s Short Fiction,” Helen Cousins reads Vera’s short stories in the anthology *Why Don’t you Carve Other Animals* as questioning notions of belonging to and possession of rural areas. Her integration of postcolonialism and ecocriticism enhances the understanding of social problems associated with land through her ideas of dwelling. Although Susie O’Brien (2001) believes that more realist texts such as short stories and poetry are more susceptible to an ecocritical approach, McLoughlin in “Women’s Short Fiction in Zimbabwe” however argues that the challenge with short stories as form is that “the manner of telling [...] tends to be chronological [...] there is little technical experimentation [and] writers rely mainly on dialogue and family tensions” (as cited in Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo: 2012:27). Liz Gunner and Neil Ten Kortenaar in their introduction to the special issue of *Research in African Literature* on Vera echo the same argument that short stories lack the experimental form that characterises Vera’s novels. Although Cousins’ contribution is commendable, she dwells more on land and neglects other ecological features. She also admits that “short stories do not utilise the experimental forms of Vera’s novels” (27). The novel in my view grants more depth in terms of character development, plot complexity and style.

Wylie in “Mind has Mountains” appreciates Zimbabwean poetry through an ecocritical reading. What makes his analysis laudable is how he lucidly explains the interconnectedness of the environment and humans, reflected in their spirituality. Monumental spaces in Zimbabwe for example bear names of geographical features and Shona totems reference animals on the land, the sea and the air. While Wylie can be credited for recognising almost the entire ecosystem, his work is only confined to one genre which is poetry, and by male

authors. This study hopes to generate new insights into ecocriticism by conducting a close reading of prose fiction from a woman writer.

Mwangi (2019) elaborates on Wylie's notion regarding the sacredness of animals. His book exposes how animals occupy an esteemed space in terms of social and cultural values. In Mwangi's argument, animal representation in literature promulgates the socio-political, cultural and environmental sensibilities.

In another gripping article, Vambe and Khan (2009) ecocritically scrutinise the Zimbabwean national anthem. Of interest is how they tie the significance of the name Zimbabwe, which literally means house of stone to the flora and fauna celebrated in the national anthem. Special emphasis is placed on the land which they interpret as a signifier of freedom. Other features alluded to are rain, the crops and the seasons, all of which are central to the sustenance of humanity.

Juliet Pasi offers a reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2000), Neshani Andrea's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) and No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). Her reading draws interconnections between the human domination of nature and the dominance of women. Her analysis is informed by ecocriticism and ecofeminism hence she defines nature as a feminist space.

Njanji (2014) explores the representation of the environment in Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988) and *Ancestors* (1996). He builds on Veit-Wild (1992), Zhuwarara (2001) and Primorac (2006), whose main focus in Hove's novels was on the land issue and the liberation struggle. Njanji interrogates how Hove represents the colonised environment as custodian of human, animal as well as plant life and how these co-exist.

Kandemiri (2018), in a rather lengthy research touches on trauma, death, religion, education, spiritism and the family among other themes. Her analysis of *Waiting for the Rain* and *The Grass is Singing* is grounded on post-colonial theory, ecocriticism and ecofeminism. In her findings, both the coloniser and the colonised in the novels are perpetrators of what he terms "environmental mortification."

The first chapter of *Ecocritical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013), is Vambe's analysis of Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1972) and Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* (1989).

Vambe challenges notions of land as a cultural and personal space. According to Vambe, this can lead to romanticising the environment, preventing us from creatively using it in innovative ways that balance the ecosystem in order to benefit the whole community involved. It is hoped that Zimbabwe can also publish its own collection of literary works on ecocriticism as it has a huge reservoir of literary texts such as Vera's opus.

In *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2002) Muponde and Taruvinga, posit that Vera works outside any identifiable literary tradition, and seems to challenge reading models of any attempt to classify her as a specific kind of writer. This study attempts to locate her within the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. In this study, I seek to add my voice in this growing branch of literary studies and suggest fresh ideas of reading Vera's texts.

1.6 Methodology

Research methods refer to the systematic ways or techniques used for collecting, analysing and interpreting data in order to solve a phenomenon. Since this research is about examining the relationship between literature, human culture and the physical environment, a qualitative approach based on textual analysis and library research will be adopted. A qualitative paradigm is more appropriate for this research as it provides an in-depth analysis of the literary representations of social phenomena that I explore in this study. According to Creswell (2009:4), "a qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." In other words, it is more interested in opinions, attitudes and behaviour rather than quantifying the phenomena.

In this study, I mainly relied on a close reading of the primary texts *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994), guided by the ecocriticism theory. A corpus study of Vera's prose works was explored to get a better understanding of the author and her style of writing. These include *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992), *Nehanda* (1993) and *Under the Tongue* (1996). The corpus study facilitated the analysis of patterns in Vera's works and was influential in reaching reliable and credible conclusions about how the relationship between nature and humanity comments on issues of oppression, environmental degradation, violence, nationalist wars, gender and power relations.

Other critical sources such as articles, journals, blogs and research papers were also scrutinised so as to get a comprehensive understanding of the theory, and identify gaps from the previous researches, all in an effort to enrich this study. The generated data is presented in narrative form and used for the formulation of conclusions. I hope that having employed these research methods, there might be a new dimension to understanding *Butterfly Burning*, *The Stone Virgins* and *Without a Name* and a better appreciation of ecocritical theory.

1.7 Chapter Outline

This study is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing the background, aim and rationale. It also outlines the literature review, methodology and the theory underpinning the study. The chapter concludes with the current synopsis of the study.

Chapter 2 examines Vera's *Butterfly Burning*. The focus is on how Vera interweaves human and nonhuman nature to reflect the socio-cultural and historical realities of the people. An analysis of the symbolical representation of ecological elements such as water, fire, the dry land and trees reveal the connectivity between gender relations, sexuality, humanistic values and the environment.

Chapter 3 discusses *The Stone Virgins* where I explore how the city and rural landscape reference histories of the land. I begin by tracing how colonial modernity transformed the Zimbabwean landscape, domesticating it as evidenced by the jacarandas, eucalyptus and petunias that drape the streets of Bulawayo. In the chapter, I also investigate the relationship between the rocks, the rock paintings and Sibaso's violence, all tied back to the title of the novel.

Chapter 4 analyses *Without a Name* and the focus is on how Vera's representation of the forest and the land is interconnected to cultural concerns such as rape, infanticide and sexuality in Zimbabwe. This I analyse in the backdrop of the war that frames Vera's narrative. I pay particular attention to the multiple functions of the forest and how that space differs from the rest in the narrative especially as far as gender relations, sexuality and class is concerned.

Chapter 5 will conclude the study by summarising key findings from the analysis.

Chapter 2:

Butterfly Burning: The Landscape of the Poor

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are (Berman, 1982:15).

He has watched each building acquire its own mood, the darkening walls where the factory smoke has tarnished the paint, where the train smoke has built over the front building of the main railway station. He has built. When he is dead, his hands will remain everywhere. He does not know if he is part of the larger harm (Vera, 1998:25).

2.1 Introduction

In her interview with Jane Bryce, Yvonne Vera states that *Butterfly Burning* “celebrates some of the elements of urbanisation which came with colonisation, and the creativity which it unleashed for people to survive these things.” She goes on to say, “of course, I am writing about my city, Bulawayo, and I am celebrating it” (2002:224). In this chapter, I focus on *Butterfly Burning* to examine how Vera interweaves human and nonhuman aspects to reflect people’s socio-cultural and historical realities. An analysis of the metaphorical representation of the ecological elements such as the land, water, air, fire and the trees will reveal the connectivity between power relations, race, class, gender, humanistic values and the environment. I take urban development in colonial Zimbabwe as my point of departure as it captures the anthropogenic activities that transmogrified the landscape to sustain the gargantuan appetites of British colonial capital while immiserating locals living within the same landscape.

2.2 *Butterfly Burning*: A Synopsis

Butterfly Burning gravitates around the lives of Fumbatha and Phephelaphi, a couple living in Makokoba, one of the oldest and most neglected black townships in Bulawayo. Vera describes a city grappling with colonialism and phallocracy. Life is dire and the choices are limited for black people, more so for the women. Vera’s narrative is not chronological. The events shift back and forth between 1896-1946. As the story begins, it is 1946 and black men are working the parched land in severe hot weather conditions. This is quickly followed by a flashback, a horrendous site where about seventeen black men hang on trees, their bodies blown onto branches by harsh wind, feasted upon by birds and later dumped in Umguza River. One of

these men is Fumbatha's father, murdered for defying British rule in 1896. This is a historical period in Zimbabwe referred to as *Chimurenga* 1 in Shona or *Umvukela* in Ndebele, which means a revolution. The plot then fast-forwards to 1946 again where not so far from the forest, children play with rubbish in a garbage dump, empty bottles and packets of everything they did not purchase nor consume. Elsewhere, Phephelaphi appears to Fumbatha out of Umuza River. They fall in love and cohabitate in Fumbatha's cramped one roomed house in Makokoba. Through insightful flashbacks, readers are presented with Phephelaphi's background where she is brought up in brothels, first by her adoptive mother Getrude who is callously shot by a white policeman and later by her mother's best friend Zandile, who is also her biological mother. Phephelaphi is an ambitious young woman discontented with the constraints of domestic spaces. Falling pregnant derails her chances of training as one of the first black nurses in Rhodesia and so she aborts. Fumbatha is disappointed, their relationship is strained. He then finds comfort in the arms of Phephelaphi's friend Deliwe, a well-known shebeen queen and prostitute in Makokoba. A concatenation of betrayals including that of her lover, her best friend, her own body and of the patriarchal colonial economy drives Phephelaphi to another abortion, and suicide.

2.3 Urbanisation, Social Inequality and the Environment

As is the case with most sub Saharan countries, in Zimbabwe, Munzwa and Wellington (2010:121) assert, "one cannot discuss urbanisation without making reference to colonisation." The term colonisation or colonialism according to Mudimbe (1988), is derived from the Latin word 'colere', which means to cultivate or to design. In other words, colonialism has to do with redesigning or re-arranging. It could be a re-arrangement of topography, time or even psychic spaces (Lunga, 2002:192). In Southern Africa, Musemwa (2019) contends that the control of natural resources was at the core of British colonisation.

Before colonial incursion in Zimbabwe, Africans had an established social and economic system anchored on subsistence agriculture and small-scale mining. The white settlers transformed all these modes of production and re-arranged the entire landscape through urban development. Wekwete (1992) explicates how they set up administrative structures, developed supportive infrastructure and communication linkages in the form of roads, railway lines and telegram lines. This urbanisation translated to the reorganisation of the land

where black Zimbabweans were uprooted from their fertile lands in high rainfall areas to unproductive soils in low rainfall regions. Colonial legal instruments and policies such as the 1930 Land Apportionment Act enabled this reorganisation of the landscape to the benefit of the coloniser, a direct result of the influx into the city and neighbouring South Africa around the 1940s. The various taxes imposed on the black Zimbabweans were a colonial stratagem to feed the growing agricultural and mining economy labour demands. Mlambo in “A History of Zimbabwean Migration to 1990” iterates that Zimbabwean men migrated to South Africa to meet the colonial tax requirements at home (2010:52).

To control urban settlement in Zimbabwe, Kaarsholm (1994:8) states that “early attempts concentrated on moving as great a proportion of the African population as far as possible from town itself into the Location and railway and Industrial compounds.” This meant that the African shanty towns were directly exposed to all sorts of pollution from the industries while the colonisers enjoyed the greenery and fresh air in the suburbs. Musemwa in “A Tale of Two cities: The Evolution of the City of Bulawayo and Makokoba Township under Conditions of Water Scarcity, 1894-1953” provides a riveting account of how white suburbia established and maintained green gardens in Bulawayo. In Musemwa’s analysis, aesthetic beauty and vegetation existed in suburbs because of the inequitable access and distribution of water. Looking at the placement of the black townships, they were in contrast with the white low-density suburbs. Townships were positioned in the west, where the wind blew the smoke and effluvia from the factories. In mapping the location of African residence in relation to industries, the narrator in *Butterfly Burning* notes that: “their own homes are not too distant from this, from that, and always, they can smell this, and that, and squalor of every kind” (20). A glimpse of this injustice is depicted through the women of Sidojiwe E2 as they move within their designated parameters:

The women, dizzy and spellbound, walk through the night and past the factories and refineries which make nothing but sugar. They might hate the smoke but they like this astonishing dedication to sweetness and so they move a little faster. They skip over the thick stems of burdened cane which have fallen from large trucks in the afternoons. The strong sugary scent claims the morning air and sobers them a little [...] They smell the sugar burn. Smoke curls out of six towering thermal pillars and hides the stars (58).

Vera in the above paragraph presents a paradoxical encounter with sugar. Sugar cane is a naturally healthy crop but it is seen burnt and strewn on the dirty streets. The women detest

the smoke but love the promise of sweetness in the sugar. I read this bitter sweet encounter as metaphorical to the paradoxes of colonial modernity. Modernity is bitter to the colonised subjects because its promises of mobility and huge economic rewards remained in the realms of dreams and imagination. The sweetness of sugar is also ambivalent if not deceptive as it is linked to detrimental medical conditions such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. While the profits of capitalists rocket, the physical, psychological, moral and economic health of the ordinary people deteriorates.

Elsewhere, as the children from the same location play closer to the factories, they become witnesses to the environmental damage just close to their homes, and yet very far from the white settlements:

Sidojiwe E2 sees the fire blaze the sky as the oil tank bursts at the factory site and the men working underneath are swallowed in the blistering flames [...] the fires glaze the sky like a dream, billowing with dark fuming smoke which builds a mountain in the sky, thick and blocking the sun for as long as they stand there (21).

Before I expound on the immediate and long-term environmental calamities denoted in this extract, I need to read a bit into this fire that decimates industrial black labour in an act of absolute capitalist insouciance. In the above passage, black male bodies are consumed in fire precipitated by colonial machines. The fire represents a colonial flame, a result of negligence and colonial structures that are insensitive to the needs of the poor ordinary workers. Under the colonial flame, black lives are rendered meaningless, usable, disposable and forgettable. To elucidate this notion of disposability, I turn to the question of what it means to be human in Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation –An Argument" (2003). According to the Western categorisation, "there is Man" and the "racially inferior Human Other" who is also "the ostensible missing link between racial humans and irrational animals" (267). 'Man', therefore signifies the human and is the measure of humanness. McKittrick in "Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis" adds that the other is identified as "colonised-non-white-black-poor-incarcerated-jobless people who are not simply marked by social categories but are instead identifiably condemned due to their dysselected human status" (2015:7). It is this definition of the human that renders the entire black population as inferior, subhuman, and disposable. In *Butterfly Burning*, the train continues feeding the colonial system with more desperate

black labour: “Everywhere there is an attempt to get on the train for the long trip to the city” (53). This train contains metaphors of a continuous journey of the ‘human Other’ to a slow but sure death under capitalist industrial production practices.

The fire can also be linked to Phephelaphi’s self-immolation at the end of the novel. The phallocentric colonial system that polices women’s mobility and reproduction, coupled with the traditional patriarchal structure from which Fumbatha considers her body to be a fertile site to plant and perpetuate his ancestral line chokes Phephelaphi. Colonial policies and exigent patriarchal demands then become the two logs that ignite Phephelaphi’s flame. Her fire is different in that it is somehow ritualised. Vera describes it as something beautiful, “a ribbon of flame,” “an enticing spectacle,” and “glorious and unquenchable flame” (148). Even as she dies, it is more of a metamorphosis, sizzling into “a liquid breeze” (150). With the men however, the fire is described as “blistering flames,” “dark fuming smoke” which clouds the sun (22). Even the flame is red compared to Phephelaphi’s which is blue and yellow. On one level, Phephelaphi’s self-immolation is an act of defiance to two oppressive systems that claim her body. At the other level, it is an ultimate rebellion against simplistic valorisation of motherhood through the annihilation of a compromised or conflictual body that is susceptible to falling pregnant. By committing suicide, she is taking charge of her spirit and her autonomy.

Apart from the industries and their own share of pollution, the National Railways of Zimbabwe had its headquarters in Bulawayo. Trains were serviced there and the oil residue was disposed in ditches which poured into Umguza River:

Along Sidojiwe E2 is a long ditch which carries waste from the factory on the other side of Jukwa Road. This ditch is black with sediment, a viscous factory water and oil, harsh yet fascinating to young minds and absolutely tolerable to their senses, going past and flowing, over the other side of Makokoba, pouring into the Umguza River. The children do not wander that far, not beyond the boundary where the houses stop suddenly then yield to rock, to distances of flowering thorn bushes, then further down, land so empty and barren the soil simply slides and falls among a few stunted shrubs, scarcely living. Their houses are much closer together than the bushes, though equally stark (20).

Umguza River has been a source of water for local communities and their livestock, supplying fish and irrigation water for farmers. There has been nonetheless a tragic cost to marine and human life as reported in *The Chronicle* (2012) where a number of children were discovered to be born with deformities owing to pregnant women being directly or indirectly exposed to

the contaminated water. Scientific research indicated that the river contained high levels of lead and mercury, of which, according to one doctor quoted in the paper, “the effects of this poisoning that can manifest even after 20years or in other generations is giving birth to congenitally malformed children or having extremely dull children” (3). In adults, contaminated water and farm produce can also lead to chronic diseases such as cancer and liver failures. In other words, the poisoning of Umguza River slowly but surely robbed into the future of Matabeleland.

Such slow poisoning is not exclusive to Zimbabwe but is a continuing practice in post-colonial urban cities. In a similar case in Kenya for example, a lead smelting factory was constructed near a shanty town in Mombasa where the operations contaminated both the air and the municipal water bodies. Although activists and the local community battled with the Indian owners of the factory in court, according to one researcher Felix Horne (2020), the environment had already been damaged and the local communities inherited lifelong health effects such as brain damages, permanent intellectual disability, miscarriages, kidney, liver and neurological damages.

Another interesting aspect of the quoted passage above is how nature and humans are juxtaposed. The fate of the non-human is intertwined with that of the human, “equally stark.” Nature and humans are so interconnected that the domination or the exploitation of the other has direct implications on all social and economic systems of humanity. To colonialists, both nature and blacks were wild terrain to be tamed and conquered hence they were subjected to the same treatment. Hughes in *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging* (2010) explores how the white settlers aligned themselves to the African landscape through taming it and in a similar manner domesticated the black Zimbabweans. It is because of this relationship that the racial massacres on the land are directly pinned to the forest where the trees have to bear the weight of this injustice. As exemplified in the case of Fumbatha’s father, regardless of the number of times the trees rejected the bodies, the colonisers lynched them back. In the forest, Vera’s narrator informs readers that: “life is pulled out of the body like a root. When a man falls free from the tree and still breathes the knot is slowly released. He is pulled once more from the ground and yanked back into the branches. A man can be hanged more than once” (1998:13).

Referring back to the aesthetically unsightly ditches, these are the same ditches where carrions and hair shavings are dumped. Probably that is why Umguza River is described as greedy and not giving away its water because of all the toxicity from the anthropogenic activities from the land.

I need to pause on the thermal power stations that Vera mentions for a while. Firstly, these stations were powered by locally mined coal whose extraction defaced the landscape. Secondly, their operations had repercussions on the general health of the black urban population. Lastly, these stations are an indicator of power, racial and social inequality that existed within the landscape. According to historians, the Bulawayo thermal power station was established between 1947 and 1957. Chikowero in “Subaltern Currents: Electrification and Power Politics in Bulawayo, Colonial Zimbabwe, 1894-1939” (2007) states that electricity development constituted one of the central driving forces behind the town’s urbanisation and industrial processes. Around the same period in *Butterfly Burning* however, Deliwe relies on candles for lighting throughout the narrative. In the same neighbourhood, kerosene which produces one of the most poisonous substances is used for poor people’s energy needs and it is the Indians who are benefiting from the sale of this environmentally unfriendly substance. Electricity was harnessed in Bulawayo, using locally mined coal and yet the Africans who were directly affected by the whole process did not have access to it. This ‘extractive theft’ follows Nixon’s resource law of inverse proximity where “the closer people live to the resources being ‘developed’, the less likely they are to benefit from that ‘development’” (2011:165). Distribution of electricity was racially and class based. It only powered the privileged spaces such as the homes in the white suburbs and industrial sites. As for the African population, electricity was in-fact a monitoring tool, only used in street lights to keep track of the movements made by black subjects. Chikowero (2007:1) explicates this point more lucidly when he argues that:

Electrical modernisation was a parochial project that benefited the white settler residents of the town almost to the total exclusion of Africans [...] while electricity was a luxury enjoyed by those who were privileged to use it, the town council also harnessed it to control and police the underprivileged in a way that accentuated racial segregation in the town.

Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* comments on this asymmetric distribution of resources and the ambivalence of colonial modernity through juxtaposing the settler and native landscape. He observes that:

The settler's town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town [...] The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light (1967:30).

Thermal Power Station in Bulawayo



Figure 1

Basic commodities such as sugar and corn are also produced within the Zimbabwean landscape and yet the black majority in Makokoba scramble and scrabble the soil particles to get a share of what the white man has tossed from his balcony. The point I am making is that there is a direct link between urban modernity, the environment, power relations and social inequality. The black colonised Rhodesians clean pavements they do not tread and wave at cars they do not ride. They assemble trains they will never drive and build an economy that marginalises them. Fumbatha illustrates this point as he has built the city brick by brick and yet the demarcations in his cubicle are made of cloth. It is in this sense that Berger defines modernity as “the orbits of the powerful and powerless spinning further and further apart from each other” (2007:122). It is against this backdrop that I consider in this study what I call omnivores and ecological refugees.

2.4 Of Omnivores and Ecological Refugees

When Ramachandra Guha analysed the dynamics of resource consumption in “How Much Should a Person Consume?” (2003), he classified the population into various classes according to the share of resources. Although Guha’s interest was in the Indian culture, I find two of his categories enthralling because they resonate with the Zimbabwean context projected in Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*: the omnivores and the ecological refugees.

The term omnivore was first used by Guha in environmental discourse to refer to those wealthy consumers who overstrain the earth, the consumers who feed on every biota in the food chain. These are consumers who exploit all the available resources within the ecosystem to enrich themselves. Ecological refugees on the other hand are the displaced, the dislocated and the marginalised. Those whose sweat aggrandizes the omnivores and those who dwell in the favellas of urban cities with limited resources at their disposal. Looking closely at Guha’s stratification of the society, it still follows Wynter’s logic of Man as human and the rest as the Human Other. This logic further explains the creation of ecological disasters and ecological refugees.

According to Guha, omnivores draw upon the natural resources of the whole [country] to maintain their opulent lifestyles. They are indifferent to the environmental degradation that they cause and they pass on the costs of their land injustices to the society (2003:1). Guha further argues that the land-based projects of omnivores fuelled by greed, displace people from their environment creating what he calls ecological refugees, synonymous to Rob Nixon’s developmental refugees where local communities are physically and imaginatively displaced under the banner of development (2011:150). Using the South African Apartheid as an example, Nixon elucidates how certain spaces were developed for the (white) ‘Man’ and the majority of the black population, especially women and children who were deemed superfluous to the labour market, were forcibly driven out of sight (151). In other words, they were not only excluded from colonial modernity but because they were not human enough, they were also shoved into invisibility. Ecological refugees were also created under the banner of wildlife conservation in South Africa where tourist attracting game reserves such as the Kruger National Park were created. Scores of poor South Africans were displaced, dumped in native reserves and through a string of colonial taxes, were cornered into fuelling the

capitalist economy. Another example is the Niger Delta where the extraction of oil displaced a huge percentage of the local people.

In this section, I use the term omnivore to refer to the owners of the “No blacks, whites only signs” in *Butterfly Burning*, the caste that limits movement and mobility within the landscape. I am referring to those inside the barbed wire fences whose operations are only visible through the solid smoke saturating the air and the effluent flowing into Umguza River. By omnivores I also refer to colonial and patriarchal domains that confine women such as Phephelaphi to the margins of modernity and slip them into perpetual subordination. It is virtually all the dominant systems of power generating immediate and long-term human and environmental catastrophes. Stratifying the population in this manner demonstrates the unequal consumption of resources and the unequal distribution of environmental risks. This imbalance is explicated by Wynter (2003) more lucidly when she observes that:

20 percent of the world's people's own 80 percent of its resources, consume two thirds of its food, and are responsible for 75 percent of its ongoing pollution, with this leading to two billion of earth's people's living relatively affluent lives while four billion still live on the edge of hunger and immiseration, to the dynamic of overconsumption on the part of the rich techno-industrial North paralleled by that of overpopulation on the part of the dispossessed poor (260-261).

The dispossessed poor here are the ecological refugees who live in slums, exposed to all manner of pollution flowing from the omnivores higher up in the economic hierarchy. The word slum has its roots in the Irish term ‘slomic’, which etymologically means an exposed vulnerable place. There is no urban planning in slums, home to human effluent churned through industrial channels, a locale that lacks safe reliable water, electricity, access to sanitation and security. This description fits Vera's Makokoba where ecological refugees occupy tiny houses bunched together with a communal tap and no clinic in the vicinage. A place where even boulders of rock are used to instil pain on each other and no legal investigation is initiated. These ecological refugees seek to escape their circumstances somehow but the grim reality of the inhospitable industries repeats itself in their inhospitable homes, places meant but which fail to provide security, peace and comfort.

In one of the bizarre scenes in the text, Vera captures how the ecological refugees bear the consequences of omnivore activities on the landscape. A man mysteriously dies in Sidojiwe E2 and the wife quickly ferries him in a wheelbarrow. According to Vera's narrator, “the

tragedy is her exclusive property. They know but the absurdity is not. After she has disappeared from view and hearing distance they enquire at the quality of the man who has died through the force of a word gathered in another's mouth" (63). I examine the quality of life this man led in a slum, sharing the landscape with garbage, near ditches with stagnant oily water, exposed to kerosene and other fossil fuels from cars and the industries, and speculate that the man might have succumbed to cardiovascular death due to respiratory complications.

Furthermore, the industrial sites are constructed at the foot of the African settlement and yet there is no measure taken to safeguard their health nor are there precautions set up to shield the environment. The coal that powers the thermal plants in particular has a more grave and long-term impact on climate change. The carbon dioxide it produces when burnt causes global warming and that partly explains the extreme heat and drought that pervades the whole narrative in *Butterfly Burning*. The land is dry, it hardly rains because of the anthropogenic activities fuelled by the omnivores, a slow death perpetrated on both humans and the environment.

2.5 Living within the cracks

During the 2002 Johannesburg earth summit, the late president of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe made headlines when he blasted Tony Blair after calling Africa "the scar on the conscience of the World." "Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe" is a statement that not only unleashed debates on the land issue, but also invited new perspectives on the condition of the black bodies in post-colonial Africa. According to Mugabe, Zimbabweans were still floundering in poverty and disease because whites still owned about 78% of the land. In other words, the black majority were still living within the cracks while the capitalists enjoyed the benefits of their labour, in their landscape. It is this living within the cracks that is captured by Charles Mungoshi in *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972) and *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978) and Musaemura Zimunya in *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* (1982). Yvonne Vera also creatively articulates the living within the cracks through describing the socio-economic condition within the Bulawayo landscape in *Butterfly Burning*.

According to Glotfelty and Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), although ecocriticism studies how nature is represented in literature, when absences are noticed, ecocriticism asks where the natural is in a literary work. Vera's *Butterfly Burning* is devoid of moisture. There are only smidgen amounts such as sweat, tears and blood in the first chapters. It only rains in dreams and the only large water body that gives life to the narrative rarely overflows. In Fumbatha's dream, Vera describes how "clouds gather in the sky and there is heavy rain. Umguza is in flood full to the brim. Children drown because they understand nothing of rivers which are in flood" (14). The plants that survive in Bulawayo where the story is set resemble desert vegetation characterised by thorns to lock in moisture and long tap roots to draw water from the lowest levels of the water table. The land is just dry with multiple layers of heat curling from the ground. It is this scarcity of water in the text that I use in this section as a trope to examine the spiritual and moral drought. By this I am referring to all dimensions or factors that affect the human soul as opposed to the physical. My main focus is on how Vera uses drought as an apt metaphor connoting various aspects of the human condition in Zimbabwe around the 1940s, what she calls in her narrative "living within the cracks."

Musemwa in "A Tale of Two Cities" (2006:187) states that Bulawayo is generally a dry region because it lies in the semi-arid south west region of Zimbabwe. Its history of low rainfall averaging about 575.7mm a year as compared to other cities such as Harare that receives an annual rainfall of about 831mm on average, partly explains its recurring droughts. Musemwa however argues that while the area is generally dry, the scarce water resource could be shared equally so that all Zimbabweans experience the same quality of life. Refilwe Mabula in "Water Wars in Bulawayo" (2018:2) also concurs that "for Africans in Makokoba, water scarcity was the result of power exercised by colonialists through racial and spatial segregation." Due to discrimination, the whites selfishly enjoyed the privilege of greenery in their gardens and left so little that failed to meet the basic demands of the black community. According to Musemwa, "as much as the scarcity of water was due to natural causes, the Makokoba environment was in large measure brown because it was inhabited by poor people who could not benefit from investment in infrastructure to address water scarcity" (209). This then simmers down to Homer-Dixon's hierarchy of scarcities where he states that water scarcity in Makokoba is "structurally induced because it arose from a deliberate and

systematic inequitable distribution of a scarce resource” (1993:8). Even the Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project meant to alleviate the scarcity of water in Bulawayo through drawing water from the perennial mighty Zambezi River remains elusive because of political meddling. So, while Bulawayo as a city is naturally dry, the drought is exacerbated by the man-made discriminatory system. In other words, the Makokoba residents, Makokoba being a microcosm of the whole region, are living within the cracks because of natural and anthropogenic interference within the landscape. As Vera’s narrator notes:

Bulawayo is not a city for idleness. The idea is to live within the cracks. Unnoticed and unnoticeable, offering every service but with the capacity to vanish when the task required is accomplished (6).

A crack is a very thin fracture between two hard surfaces that are splitting. In rocks, it is normally a result of extreme weather conditions and in a building, cracks may indicate a structural problem. Plants that attempt to grow within the cracks have stunted growth and discoloured leaves. They have a flaccid appearance and they never grow to a full size; the reason being that cracks are devoid of sunlight and do not receive nor retain enough moisture. Within the cracks the space is too small and the roots cannot tap far. There is inadequate room for growth and plants just suffocate to premature death. For human beings, living within the cracks paints an image of people who live within very challenging conditions with limited resources. It is making do with the little that is there and not being able to realise one’s potential. It also means mere survival rather than ideal living within a stunting and oppressive system. *Butterfly Burning* begins by outlining the city of Bulawayo and its colonial labour.

In the air is the sound of a sickle cutting grass along the roadside where black men bend their backs in the sun and hum a tune, and fume, and lullaby. They are clad in torn white shorts, short sleeves, with naked soles. The grass burns over their palms where they reach over and pull at it (3).

The tense and depressing atmosphere in the introduction depicted in poignant auditory, tactile, and visual imagery highlights the hard labour that circumscribes black people’s movements to peripheral spaces. It is a city devoid of love, relationships characterised by “cold embraces” with only the Kwela music to connect their forlorn spirits. As Vera’s narrator states, the music offers “curing harmony as sudden as it is sustained” (5).

Kwela music has often been read through the lens of healing, resistance and catharsis. Because in this study I am more concerned about the environment, I read Kwela as a re-assembly of junk, a recycling of visible waste transformed into a new aesthetic, beauty and survival. My reading is inspired by the waste hierarchy model that focuses on the socio-materiality of waste. The model prescribes possible solutions of waste management including product reuse, recycling, incineration and prevention (Hultman and Corvellec, 2011). By following this model, waste can be transformed from an environmental problem to a resource which is what Vera's characters are doing in the novel, producing rhythm and harmony in the strings of junk; "There is a choice of guitars made out of empty, battered cases of Olivine Cooking Oil. And flutes. Of pawpaw stems" (17). Similarly, even the children rummage through the garbage heap and out of that waste, they reassemble beautiful toys. This re-assembly can also be linked to the origins of Kwela music which is a re-assembly of different music genres such as spiritual, Western jazz and choral developed in the segregated slums of Johannesburg.⁶

Revisiting the colonial labour, Musemwa (2006) claims that the connection between colonial labour and the city is inseparable as a metaphor of subjugation. Colonisation in Zimbabwe did not only claim the land but it also expropriated the time and black bodies. The men in the narrative own neither their sweat nor their time. In the first chapter, Vera meticulously describes every minute detail of their labour, under harsh weather conditions with no protective clothing and inexorably concludes that "the work is not their own: it is summoned. The time is not theirs: it is seized. The ordeal is their own. They work again and again, and in unguarded moments of hunger and surprise, they mistake their fate for fortune" (5). Again, the paradox of modernity resurfaces here as the black men do not realise its promises. Vera thus likens this extreme poverty of the slaving working class in the city to living within the cracks.

In describing Fumbatha's room, Vera clearly captures the living within the cracks in colonial Zimbabwe:

⁶ In this respect see Coplan in *Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (1985). Also refer to Allen's "Commerce, Politics, and Musical Hybridity: Vocalizing Urban Black South African Identity during the 1950s" (2003) where she explores the origins and role of Kwela music.

One room. Solid brick walls. Asbestos and cement. Phephelaphi and Fumbatha had a bed though it creaked and sagged and scraped down to the floor. A paraffin stove. A wire running diagonally across the room above the bed where they placed their clothing and let it hang down to partition the room; the bed was split in two, the top half on one side, the bottom on the other. The cooking was done on one side and they bent under the skirts and trousers and sat on the bottom half of the bed and held painted metal plates and ate hot meals from their laps (47).

This seemingly brief paragraph summarises Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence. To validate my point, I will draw on two health risks that Fumbatha and his wife are exposed to in their domestic space. Firstly, they use asbestos roofing sheets and research has proved that inhaling asbestos fibre may lead to mesothelioma, a type of chest and lung cancer. Cullen and Baloyi (1991) in their study of the health risks posed by chrysotile asbestos mined in Zimbabwe also added morbid asbestosis, non-malignant pleural disease, malignant mesothelioma and lung cancer among the diseases associated with the mining and use of asbestos. Before moving onto the second substance, let me quickly add that up to date, with the post-colonial government, the same old locations such as Makokoba, Nguboyenja and Mzilikazi are still using asbestos roofing sheets because of their accessibility and affordability. Secondly, the paraffin or kerosene that they use for energy produces a pungent odour and poisonous substances such as carbon monoxide which causes long-term respiratory complications.

Living within the cracks can also refer to systemic and structural exclusion. The Bulawayo Central Business District (CBD) for example had spaces reserved for a white minority cluster and the majority were excluded. Important to note is that the exclusion of black women was more stringent than that of black men. It was cheaper to shelter black men without the burden of their families; for that reason, urban towns such as Makokoba were closed to black women who were required to slave in rural areas. This is why Zandile rhetorically questions Phephelaphi when she leaves her home: "[w]hat are you going to do in Makokoba without being a man? [...] Makokoba is unkind to women like you who pretend to be butterflies that can land on any blossom they choose" (1998: 129). All the same, black people had to perform a certain movement in the pavements that spoke to their own survival. According to the narrator:

The people walk in the city without encroaching on the pavements from which they are banned. It is difficult, but they manage to crawl to their destination [...] they understand something about limits [...] They help these [white] men into an upright

and respectable position, then lead them into solid black cars. Then they spit on the pavements and move on (6-7).

This is a racial inequality drought, not reaching the measure of being valued as human, or what Wynter terms 'a Man.' Black people survived on the periphery with no share in the consumption of goods and services produced within their landscape. Musila (2007:58) also speaks of a "gender exclusionary urban economy" that restricted women to certain spaces. In fact, women were required to apply for passes to visit their husbands in the city. The 1946 Native Accommodation and Registration Act introduced regulations that restricted entry into the urban space unless one had a town pass. The urban space was a masculine space and the hostels were designed for bachelors. The city for women represented hope and freedom from all dominant powers. However, in reality it did not recognise women and hence they had to acquire different skills of survival. Most landed in brothel owning, shebeens or even sacrificing what defined them as women in order to be integrated into the system. The struggle for survival is clearly articulated by Musila in "Embodying Experience and Agency" (2007:3) where she asserts that "women's marginalised bodies become their weapons of resistance, their means of surviving the cracks." The cracks could be the system itself, living to outsmart the police kwela jeeps like Deliwe and endure the scars of memory.

At prima facie, one would conclude that the law was against the sale of cheap home brewed beer because it posed health hazards to the public. However, Kaarsholm (1994) states that "the great pride of the Bulawayo City Council was the high rate of growth in profits from the municipal African beer brewery and the monopoly of beer sales and of beer gardens in the townships" (10). As a shebeen owner, Deliwe was therefore a competitor and the police were only protecting the interests of the council. As for Phephelaphi, she seeks upward mobility through training as one of the first black nurses in Rhodesia. For her nursing was "the movement forward – the entrance into something new and untried" (71). However, the colonial policies that policed women's mobility and reproduction become a restriction to her growth. Pregnant women and mothers were not eligible to train and like the plants struggling to grow in cracks, Phephelaphi is suffocated which leads first to her painful abortion, then suicide at the end of the novel when she falls pregnant again.

Nomenclature is also another device that Vera employs to capture different aspects of drought in her narrative. Sidojiwe that houses so many struggling black people in Makokoba

for example, means we have been picked up, salvaged. The ironical name is a cry for help, someone to pick up the residents and put them in better living conditions. It is a cry for a system that will emplace women in an equal terrain with men, not to be recognised only for their sexual and reproductive labour but also for their intellectual capabilities. When Phephelaphi is born, she is named Sakhile which means we have built. The name is connected to the land which in a way suggests stability, safety and accumulation. As she grows however, Getrude quickly changes her name to Phephelaphi, a name in form of a question literally translating to where do we find refuge? I find the new name as a collective tag for all generations of women in the narrative. It is a name wrung of all hope and born out of a realisation of a woman's condition, a cry for refuge:

As soon as I was born her struggles began. When I was born, she had given me another name. She called me Sakhile. Then she discovered that Makokoba had no time for a woman who was raising a child on her own, so she renamed me. I was six years old by then. She still called me Sakhile, but she sat down often with me and said that Phephelaphi was the name she had found for both of us. She had struggled (30).

Deliwe means abandoned, a state that characterises most characters in the narrative, abandoned either by family or by the colonial system of governance. Fumbatha means clench your fist, hold on and never let go. Muponde & Taruvinga (2002) comment that instead of clenching his fist, Fumbatha has opened his hand and he builds, loves a woman and hopes for a child. However, all his endeavours of creating a meaningful life for himself are futile. He also uses his hand to outline Phephelaphi's path in life because "he wanted to own her like he owned the land" (73). Phephelaphi is frustrated into redefining freedom outside the context of marriage.

The children in Sidojiwe are also crowned with names connoting a better future, the likes of Themba (Hope) and Vusumuzi (Home builder). So much hope is built on the younger generation but what hope is there when children only experience rain in their imagination and production through the barbed wire fence? As they play:

They pick the skeleton of an old umbrella and hold it up to the sun as though they have found shelter in a separate and distinguished kind. They huddle under the umbrella and pretend heavy rain is falling and their tattered clothes are now wet. They bend over, drenched, and wipe water seeping down their foreheads, and draw their dripping arms under their chests to retain whatever warmth they can, in this beating rain. One of them holds the umbrella upright. The children raise their eyes to the empty sky: it hardly ever rains (17).

The children's pretend game points to both a physical lack of rain and the spiritual drought as well. They are born and raised at a time when freedom, owning and belonging is just a dream. They long for rain that can transform their destiny but the sky is clear, the future is bleak: "They only have to look at each other to feel that they have been born not only for a healthy but a joyful purpose" (19). Ziwire (2014) in his analysis of Zimbabwean literature states that rain is symbolic of life-giving energies that are absent in colonial Rhodesia, of political, cultural and intellectual freedom. Freedom that the children do not possess. Martin Shaw in "The Habit of Assigning Meaning" (2002:31) also posits that rain is a sign of life and regeneration. The absence of rain therefore equates to the absence of life hence Phephelaphi parallels her ambitions to thirst: "She is thinking of her thirst, and wondering how long it will be before she can taste water [...] she is in dry land" (123). Zandile also comments that "opportunity has taken too long and is buried too far in the future" (38). Bulawayo is just arid.

Amidst the drought presented in the novel, Vera introduces Umguza River as a way of breathing life into the black community. It is nonetheless instructive to remember that this river skirts Makokoba rather than run through it. Although water is normally used to mark boundaries of who belongs where, Vera uses it as a foil to the oppressive land. It then becomes the only mark on the landscape to marvel at.

The river is something to look at, to marvel, and live near. Just a short distance from it, the land is nothing but bushes blooming with large thorns that jut out like porcupine quills (24).

What I also find interesting is the way Vera subtly exposes how the colonialists colonised both the land and the water. Dead bodies and animal carcasses, industrial waste mixed with human waste were all channelled towards water bodies. This alludes to what Musemwa outlines in his introduction when he argues that the drought in Bulawayo was due to natural and anthropogenic conditions (2006:187). In other words, human activity contributed to the dryness and in this case, it is the white settlers or the omnivores who owned the means of production at the time. According to Hofmeyr and Bystrom (2017), water is an archive of memory, it brings memory and is a creation of history. If there is no water then there is erasure of spirituality because water connects people to the ancestors.

It is the lack of water in the text that dries up the protagonist in the 'crack' and like her name suggests, Phephelaphi spreads her butterfly wings and seeks refuge elsewhere by setting herself on fire. Fire is a cleansing element and Phephelaphi's death becomes an honourable death of all sorts. The flame is not even red but it is blue, melting Phephelaphi into a beautiful liquid breeze.

Gunner and Kortenaar (2007) assert that the spaces in Bulawayo are marked by a perpetual threat of death, both literal and social death. There is a very minute difference between living and dying as Vera's narrator states in *Butterfly Burning*: "The earth is too still. The dead as dead; the living equally dying and bewildered" (11). Through the metaphor of drought and living within the cracks, Vera discusses this lack of that puts the living and the dead on the same scale. With the men it is the racialised system, with the women it is a double oppression of both the racialised system and the phallogocentric society that denies autonomy and crushes dreams. These dominant systems of power destroy physically and emotionally hence the characters struggle to survive within the cracks.

Phephelaphi's refusal to survive rather than live a full life compels her to self-immolation. Because her death is of her own making and choice, I read it as a heroic or symbolic act of self-determination. She somehow does not die but transforms to another form of living. Her death is a seed for all the women who groan under the multiple yokes of colonisation from diverse angles such as traditional patriarchy, capitalist patriarchy, political patriarchy and matriarchal burdens.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how Vera interweaves the human and non-human in *Butterfly Burning* to reflect on the social, cultural, economic and even political realities of the Zimbabwean people during the colonial era. An analysis of ecological elements such as water, fire, air and the land exposed the asymmetric power relations, gender inequality, poverty and discrimination that exist within the Zimbabwean landscape. I also traced the negative impact of urban modernity both on the human and natural landscape.

Chapter 3 will discuss *The Stone Virgins*. In the chapter, I still trace how colonial modernity transformed the Zimbabwean landscape using the trees and the flowers that drape the

Bulawayo city. I will then analyse how ecological features such as rocks and the trees in the rural landscape reflect on larger thematic issues such as violence, ethnicity, trauma and rape.

Chapter 3

The Stone Virgins: The Landscape of the Invisible

Even though some traumatic experiences may be unspeakable, they are not necessarily unrepresentable (Nossery and Hubbell, 2013:2).

These are the murmurs of those who sleep in pain, with wounds that no one can heal; the wounds are in their hearts. These are the wounds of war, which no one can heal; bandages and stitches cannot restore a human being with a memory intact and true inside the bone. Only the skin heals (Vera, 2002:95).

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how Vera in *Butterfly Burning* interweaves the human and non-human to reflect the socio-cultural, economic and political realities of Zimbabwean people. An analysis of ecological elements such as water, land and trees revealed the connectivity between race, gender, poverty, power relations and the environment. In that chapter, I used urbanisation as my point of departure since it captures the anthropogenic activities that radically altered the landscape of colonial Zimbabwe to enrich the British colonial capitalists while immiserating black Africans who were scavenging within the same landscape.

In this chapter, I turn to *The Stone Virgins* as I explore how the rural and city landscapes reference the history of the nation. My discussion is organised into three interrelated parts. In the first section, I trace how colonial modernity reformed the Zimbabwean landscape, domesticating it through the jacarandas and eucalyptus that drape the streets of Bulawayo. I then shift to rural Kezi to investigate the relationship between the rocks, the painting of the virgins and Sibaso's violence, all tied back to the title of the novel. In the last section, I analyse how ecological features such as trees and flowers reflect larger thematic issues such as identity, violence, trauma, rape and even healing.

3.2 The Stone Virgins: A synopsis

In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera excavates a painful and rarely discussed history in Zimbabwe. She narrates the story of how Robert Mugabe's Fifth Brigade which operated under the codename Gukurahundi combed through villages in Matabeleland and Midlands, butchering, decapitating, raping and bundling up ordinary citizens in buildings before immolating them.

Countless bodies were dumped in debris while some were staked in shallow graves in the sacred hills of Gulati. The plot of the story alternates between two landscapes, Bulawayo and Kezi. The first part is set in Rhodesia between 1950 and 1980. Here Vera describes a colonial city with an anglicised landscape pattern. An off-ramp from one of the main roads swiftly moves the story from Bulawayo to Kezi where most of the events take place. Vera describes Kezi as a rural enclave characterised by porous soils, thorny bushes and a rocky terrain. The second part is framed between 1981 and 1986. A genocide is set in motion, a curfew is announced, roadblocks, grenades and landmines are planted on all target places. Vera captures the pogroms and attendant traumas during this period crucially from the perspective of ordinary citizens. The Gumede sisters, Nonceba and Thenjiwe, are at the heart of the story. The eldest, Thenjiwe, is brutally murdered by Sibaso, a guerrilla soldier who decollates her before raping and mutilating the younger sister, Nonceba. Elsewhere, a woman is forced to behead her husband with an axe in full view of their two sons. Mahlathini, a local business owner is tortured to death through dripping melting plastic onto his naked flesh. In the middle of all the atrocities, Vera weaves in a love story between Cephas, an archivist working for the Bulawayo museum and Thenjiwe in a reminder that the flame of love lingers regardless of tragic circumstances. They meet at Thandabantu Store which is more of a social hub in Kezi. After a brief romantic encounter, he goes back to the city as Thenjiwe begins obsessing with his identity. However, on learning of the tragedy that befell the two sisters through a newspaper article, Cephas journeys back to the village and offers Nonceba a new start in the city. The last part of the novel is set back in Bulawayo with the hope of both Nonceba and Cephas finding healing and a possible future together.

3.3 Re-membling Gukurahundi: 'A Moment of Madness'

Speaking during Joshua Nkomo's funeral in 1999, the late president of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe referred to Gukurahundi as "a moment of madness" (Ellis 2006:40). According to Sithole and Makumbe (1997:133), Gukurahundi is etymologically a Shona term that refers to "the first rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains." Mugabe and his regime however appropriated the term and used it as a codename for the fiendish killings and vicious torture they inflicted upon the Ndebele people between 1981 and 1987.

I begin with a brief background to the interethnic tensions in Zimbabwe. The liberation war, also known as Second *Chimurenga* in Shona or *Umvukela* in Ndebele was fought by two

military wings: the Zimbabwe People's Revolution Army (ZIPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). ZIPRA was a PF ZAPU military wing, a largely Ndebele political party led by Joshua Nkomo. On the other hand was ZANLA, a mainly Shona ZANU PF military wing led by Robert Mugabe. ZANU PF principally recruited its soldiers from the east and west of Zimbabwe covering Mashonaland, and ZAPU recruited from Midlands and Matabeleland. By implication, the two political parties comprised the two dominant ethnic groups, the Ndebele and the Shona. Kezi, which is Vera's rural setting in *The Stone Virgins* is in Matabeleland South and is one of the regions that experienced extreme violence. Firstly, this could be because Kezi is Joshua Nkomo's home area and thus was PF ZAPU's stronghold. Secondly, the natural landscape in that zone allowed for convenient concealment because of the hills, the caves, thick bushes and old mine shafts. It is this natural landscape that Vera interweaves with the human to articulate the post-colonial struggles in Zimbabwe.

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, Mugabe's idea of a one- party state led a new power struggle along ethnic fault lines in which ZAPU became the main threat that had to be neutralised. Shari Eppel in writing about narrow national legitimacy in Zimbabwe notes that:

In October 1980, less than six months after assuming power, Mugabe entered into an agreement with the North Koreans to train a praetorian guard that would answer to him personally – this became the Fifth Brigade, given the name Gukurahundi by Mugabe himself (2008:10).

Gukurahundi, which is associated with the act of violence and the whole period of the Ndebele massacre is what Vera captures in the second segment of her narrative. The pacy staccato arrangement of sentences, like gunshots, captures the sudden and unanticipated return to war for the civilians.

The war begins. A curfew is declared. A state of emergency. No movement is allowed. The cease-fire ceases. It begins in the streets, the burying of memory. The bones rising. Rising. Every road out of Bulawayo is covered with soldiers and police, teeming like ants. Road blocks. Bombs. Land mines. Hand grenades. Memory is lost. Independence ends. Guns rise. Rising anew. In 1981 (65).

Although Gukurahundi claimed over 20,000 lives according to the 1997 report filed by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, the state has treated it as an 'ordinary disaster.' Writing in a different context, Davies (1995:242) uses the phrase ordinary

disaster to refer to a calamity that is incorporated into history but rendered forgettable, ordinary and dismissed as accidental. Writing in the same vein, Nixon (2011:65) adds that although victims of calamities carry proof of their physical damage, they remain in the margins in terms of visibility and official memory. Contextualising Gukurahundi, let me point out that up to date, no official discourse between the state and the Gukurahundi victims has taken place. In her interview with Swarns (2011:2), Vera states that Gukurahundi atrocities had been a silenced subject and that the discussion of the issue was clouded in absolute fear. Mugabe referred to the carnage as a moment of madness and later dismissed the call for dialogue on the red herring that remembering would only open old wounds and tear the nation apart: “If we dig up the country’s history in this way, we wreck the nation and tear up our people apart into fractions” (as cited in Weatherall, 1997:21). The question however is, did the wounds ever heal? If not, how then can narratives document such bleeding histories without reliving or reviving the trauma, but facilitating healing? This is the onerous task that Vera grapples with in *The Stone Virgins*.

Remembering, according to Ncube and Siziba (2015:13) has two aspects. Firstly, it involves bringing to the fore that which dominant political and cultural discourses have pushed beyond the margins. Secondly, re-membering implies a reconstruction, reconstitution, and a bringing together of elements which had been hidden and/or forgotten. In this chapter, I focus more on how Vera’s narrative interweaves the human and nonhuman as a means of remembering Zimbabwe’s colonial and post-colonial struggles. Leaning on an environmental approach, I consider the role nature plays in representing that which is unspeakable, the ordinary disasters perpetrated on ordinary people within the Zimbabwean landscapes across different milieus.

3.4 Foreign Intruders: An Indigenous Landscape.

The Stone Virgins begins with a cartographic representation of the Bulawayo landscape.

Selbourne Avenue in Bulawayo cuts from Fort Street (at Charter House), across to Jameson Road (of the Jameson Raid), through to Main Street, to Grey Street, to Abercorn Street, to Fife Street, to Rhodes Street, to Borrow Street, out into the lush Centenary Gardens with their fusion of dahlias, petunias, asters, red salvia, and mauve petrea bushes, onward to the National Museum, on the left side. On the right side, and directly opposite the museum, is a fountain, cooling the air; water flows out over the arms of two large mermaids. A plaque rests in front of the fountain on a raised platform, recalling those who died in the Wilson Patrol. Wilson Street (3).

From the streets, which I will later revisit, Vera seams in the flora nurtured within that landscape:

Farther down the road is a host of eucalyptus trees, redolent, their aroma euphoric. Selbourne Avenue is a straight, unwavering road, proud of its magnificence. The first half, beginning at the centre of the city, is covered with purple jacaranda blooms. Vibrant. These large trees stand high off the ground, with masses of tiny leaves; their roots bulge off the earth where they meet rock, climb over, then plunge under the ground [...] But first, the jacarandas. Their leaves and petals merge above the wide street and the pavements flanking it. The trees create a dazzling horizon. On the face of every passerby, the flickering movement of the leaves traces shadows of the trees like spilled dye, while light swims from above through their dizzying scent; the shadow is fragrant, penetrating. These trees, carefully positioned to color the road, create a deep festive haze (3-4).

At prima facie, Vera appears to be simply depicting a comprehensive picturesque view of the Bulawayo landscape, an aesthetic identity of the city. However, as Rotenberg avers in *Landscape and Power in Vienna* (1995:1), the landscape itself is a language. The city layout and built structures parallel the dreams, fantasies and political outlooks of designers and those who commissioned them (ibid.). Although Rotenberg was studying the green politics of Vienna, the Bulawayo landscape fully resembles what he terms “the garden of order.” According to Rotenberg, “the garden of order is designed to represent a colonial world view, to legitimise control over the natural and social environment and to criticise given power relations” (1995:2). Vera’s extensive description of the landscape design is therefore layered with meaning, encapsulating the colonial mission of controlling not only the mind but the landscape in its entirety, to construct landscapes that reflect a British identity. Ransford in *Bulawayo: Historic Battleground of Rhodesia* writes:

Rhodes is said to have had strong opinions about the shape and size of the new town [Bulawayo]. It was to be laid out, he said, on a grid pattern, and like Jerusalem, was to be a square mile in area; it was also to be surrounded by parklands so that its people would never have to walk far to reach open country. Willoughby, at Rhodes’ suggestion, roughed out a sketch plan which would embody these points. The great man was anxious that shade trees be planted along the street, and because he believed climatic conditions of Matabeleland were similar to those in Australia, he got agents to send him seeds of various eucalyptus trees (1968:62).

Carey Baraka in his article on the history of jacarandas in Africa opines that since “the British were building a colony in Africa, they had to import some of the elements that reminded them of their beautiful homes in Britain” (2019:2). In other words, they had to tame the ‘wild’ African landscape, to ‘civilise’ the ‘uncouth’ terrain after the image of their own. Seeds were imported from their botanical gardens and planted along the roads in the cities, where they

lived, where they worked and around their places of recreational activities. It was basically all the spaces where black bodies were proscribed. By tracing the roots and the route of the jacarandas, Vera is primarily marking the Bulawayo British enclave where the air is fresher, the vegetation greener and the streets are cleaner. The only blacks to be spotted in the city are those reduced to colonial labor and confined to '*ekoneni*.' According to Vera,

Ekoneni is a rendezvous, a place to meet. You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because this city is divided; entry is prohibited to black men and women; you meet outside buildings not at doorways, entries, foyers, not beneath arched windows, not under graceful colonnades, balustrades, and cornice, but *ekoneni* (11).

A few facts that I still need to point out about the jacarandas. This foreign plant cannot coexist with other plants in the ecosystem because of its robust roots that can tap far into the water table, outcompeting the indigenous plants. Such a bellicose inclination in nature resembles aggressive British colonial practises. In Africa, jacarandas have been classified under invasive species due to their tendency to overuse available resources, their displacement of native plants and the fact that they are intractable. No wonder after outlining the Bulawayo topography, Vera tells the reader, "but first, the jacaranda" (4).

I cannot but read arid Bulawayo in the backdrop of these jacarandas. In *The Stone Virgins*, the better part of Matsheumhlophe River is in the suburbs where the jacarandas lower the water table and reduce waterflow. With a low volume, this river cannot alleviate the water crisis in the city. Furthermore, the little of that natural resource feeds and beautifies the landscape of the rich colonials while a minuscule proportion is dribbled to the poor black locations. Through the nature of jacarandas, Vera underscores how the imperialists' overexploitation of natural resources in Africa mainly affected those in the lower levels of the political and economic hierarchy. While the powerful enrich themselves, the natives wallow in deep poverty. The green landscape of the former is embellished with concrete mermaids and fountains spewing gallons of sparkling clean water into the air while just a stone's throw away towards the west of the city, in Makokoba and Njube which is Sibaso's home, water for basic amenities remains scarce. Musemwa (2006) terms this dichotomous mapping as "a tale of two cities"; a cartography that mirrors Fanon's afore-cited distinctions between the native quarters and the settler quarters.

Streets, buildings and monumental sites in Bulawayo speak of a ubiquitous colonial presence. Rhodesia is named after Cecil Rhodes himself. Streets are also named after English poets and buildings after their heroes. The plaque that leans in front of a fountain in the Bulawayo city centre celebrates the lives of British soldiers. Wilson Patrol for example, also known as the Shangani Massacre Patrol was a military unit of the British South African Company. The British troop headed by Allan Wilson perished just before the Shangani River in Matabeleland during the first Matabeleland war that was fought between 1893-1894. This was a period of mass exploitation in the region, the grabbing of farms and goldmines. As I mentioned earlier, gardens or order are dominated and controlled by the powerful and hence in Bulawayo, the white settlers had the audacity to erect monuments within the landscape as a means of celebrating their fallen heroes. Today, the remains of Cecil Rhodes lie in the hills of Matopo, a natural space believed to be the spirit world of black Zimbabweans.

In the first chapter, Vera refers to Selbourne as the most splendid street.

Selbourne carries you straight out of the city limits and heads all the way to Johannesburg like an umbilical cord; therefore, part of the city is here. Its joy and notorious radiance are measured in the sleek gestures of city laborers, black, who voyage back and forth between Bulawayo and Johannesburg [...] They have been dipped deep in the gold mines, helmeted, torchlit, plummeted, digging for that precious gold which is not theirs. Not at all. They are not only black, they are outsiders. They make no claim. This is paid work, so they do it (5).

Although Mabura (2010) reads the connection between Bulawayo and Johannesburg as signifying kinship between the Ndebele inhabitants of Bulawayo and various ethnic groups in South Africa, Baker in "Trauma and the Desiring Subject" (2012:138) argues that "Vera's umbilical cord positions Johannesburg and Bulawayo as twins of colonial modernity – both economically dependent on black labor, administratively dependent on the metropole and specially organised by the racialised logic of apartheid." I add that this Selbourne link conceptualises Cecil John Rhodes' ambitious vision of conquering Africa from Cape to Cairo, a failed plan just like The Jameson Raid that Vera also references in the text.

The weaving together of Bulawayo (the economic hub of Zimbabwe at the time), and Johannesburg (the beacon of South Africa established through extractive mining economy), offers the readers a different angle of understanding the paradoxes of colonial modernity and extractive capitalism that defined colonial cities. Migrant workers, mostly from Zimbabwe probably because of the proximity of borders and the blending of their languages, fuelled the

South African colonial economy. I find it interesting that Vera draws the coordinates of the two cities and deliberately excludes the patterns of movement. The umbilical cord was strengthened by Zimbabweans whose access to the country was hydro-facilitated. Passports at the time were a privilege only accorded to a few elite and the ordinary poor citizens had to illegally cross over the Limpopo River. Again, typical of Vera's representation of nature, the Limpopo was rarely kind to the desperate Zimbabweans who met their death within the deep and angry waves of the river. Secondly, those who made it through did not bring much home except for physical and psychological scars. Because they were black, they were subjected to racism. Because they belonged to a 'different blackness', they were discriminated by their fellow black South African brothers. Originally, the Ndebele tribe in Zimbabwe are a breakaway from Shaka's Zulu kingdom in the 19th century. Their geographical separation was reinforced by the colonial state maps but their language and culture remain similar. This discrimination from their own brothers somehow explains the overdramatised performances that black Zimbabweans display when they arrive home. Ironically, it is a home where they are still confined to *ekoneni* by the racial system, similar to apartheid in South Africa hence Gagliano refers to these black bodies as "perpetual outsiders" (2007:66).

Although extractive mining is the lifeblood of the South African economy, its impact is catastrophic both to the environment and humans. Apart from the visible mine dump tailings that are offensive features on the landscape, acid mine drainage contaminates the soil, poisons waterways, affects wildlife, corrodes infrastructure, threatens heritage sites and disrupts aquatic life.⁷

3.5 The Mazhanje Tree – A Landscape of Identity

When Cephas boards the Kezi-Bulawayo-Kezi bus on his first trip, his intent is to see "the mopani shrubs, the Mtshwankela, the Dololenkonyane, the balancing Matopo hills" (41). He was fascinated by the natural landscape in Kezi, in particular the trees and the rocks. In between his mission, Vera slots in a different love affair between him and Thenjiwe who is a native of Kezi. Their dalliance however ends when Thenjiwe fails to connect with the root of mazhanje, a dry seed Cephas has brought from a totally different landscape. It could be mind

⁷See McCarthy Terrence (2011) on the impact of acid mine drainage in South Africa. For a more detailed discussion, reference can be made to *The Report of the International Ministerial Committee on Acid Mine Drainage* (2010).

boggling why Vera would introduce a tree from Mashonaland in Matabeleland, through a man, and in the middle of tribal atrocities. According to Johns (2011:160) “trees may become powerful presences which articulate practices and memories of home and other forms of identity and belonging.” In other terms, while trees are aesthetic constituents of the landscape, they are also markers of inclusion and exclusion spaces. In this section, I read the mazhanje tree as connoting various forms of identity in the narrative.

Before the whole rigmarole of the mazhanje seed, Cephas and Thenjiwe had felt complete in each other. He had professed loving every grain of her body and associated her with natural elements such as the seasons, the anthills and dew. This feminising of nature or naturalising of women is however problematic as it reinforces the oppressive stereotypical representation of women. Ecocriticism reacts to such dichotomies and posits that there is nothing inherently feminine in nature in as much as there is nothing inherently natural in hegemonic interpretations of femininity. I need to sit a little bit with the images created by Cephas. Seasons sustain humanity but they come and go. No one can control them. Anthills shelter insects but they melt away when the rain comes. Dew balances the moisture on the ground but it gradually evaporates as the sun rises. What Cephas buttresses then are patriarchally constructed qualities of women that continue to ground them. For example, the contradictory perception that women are nurturing but unstable, inconsistent, irrational, emotional and uncontrollable. This resonates with the branding against Maathai, an environmentalist who threatened the patriarchal, political and environmental status quo and so was labelled as “overly emotional, unhinged, an unnatural woman, uncontrollable, unattached with no husband to keep her respectable” (Nixon, 2011:147). Ruether (1975:204) accordingly warns that “there can be no liberation for [women] and no solution to the ecological crisis with a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination.”

Cephas and Thenjiwe’s relationship takes a knock as soon as he puts the dry mazhanje seed in her mouth, leading to her obsession with the roots of the tree. She asks him:

On what soil the mazhanje grows, how long before each plant bears fruit, how fertile its branches, how broad its leaf. She rises to ask what kind of tree the seed comes from, the shape of its leaves, the size of its trunk, the shape of its branches, the color of its bloom, the measure of its veins. Does it indeed bloom? Which animal feeds on its fruit, on its leaves, and can its branches bear the weight of a child, more than that, more than one child? Could it grow on the edge of a cliff, on a hanging incline? Near a river? Inside a river? (42).

While the above passage may be an extract about just one tree and not the entire forest landscape of a region, its presence in Kezi is significant in exposing the tribal tensions that existed in post-colonial Zimbabwe, particularly between the Shona and the Ndebele tribe. Mazhanje is a fruit from Chimanimani, in the Eastern Highlands where Cephas comes from. The seed then confirms Cephas' ethnicity and Thenjiwe immediately stops calling him by name. He becomes a stranger despite the fact that he has explored her entire body and fallen in love with every bone that defines it. This tribal antagonism is foreshadowed by the image at Thandabantu Store when they first meet. As Vera's narrator describes, "a man sits alone at the edge of the stoop at Thandabantu Store; the shadow of the roof cuts his face into two halves, one dark, one light" (31). His ethnic identity then defines their love. In trying to explain this concept, Thenjiwe takes:

a piece of paper and using a piece of charcoal, she makes a pattern for him of all the roots she knows. Some of the roots are thick, smooth, lost treasures between a man and woman. These rise toward the trunk like plums held up, like veins on the earth, capillaries. Some roots spread farther and farther apart, and it is clear that though they have the same source, they will never touch again (43).

By mapping the landscape using the indigenous trees, she is defining the boundaries of marriage according to nurtural ethnical pillars. Because she is Ndebele, she can only marry within her tribe represented by the dololenkonyane, the mopani shrubs and the marula trees. It is no wonder then that she kept her romantic entanglement with this Shona man concealed from her sister.

Although the Mazhanje tree is mostly found in Mashonaland, the fruit is loved and consumed in most parts of the country. In Vera's narrative, Thenjiwe who is a Ndebele girl struggles to appreciate the seed after learning of its origins and immediately spits it. Shonarising the Mazhanje though can be problematic as it can be interpreted as accentuating the toxic ethnic politics that define the Zimbabwean landscape. Towards the denouement of the narrative however, Vera bridges the ethnic gap when Cephas, despite their tribal differences offers Nonceba a new beginning and smooths her path to healing. Through the interethnic relationship, Vera presents the readers with a refreshing if not healing kind of love. She is suggesting the possibility of a wholesome relationship that goes beyond tribal differences, the easing up of boundaries between a people bound by the same soil that was at the core of the liberation struggle. Musila (2012:17) adds that Cephas signals the possibility of a healthier

relationship. Sibaso, belonging to the same tribe molests his Ndebele 'sisters' and Fumbatha, a Ndebele man in *Butterfly Burning* also drives his wife to suicide because of his over-possessiveness.

The image of the seed can also be analogous to the fate that befell most of the girls in Matabeleland during Gukurahundi. The Gukurahundi soldiers had brought their manhood seeds in their loins and planted them on the Matabeleland soil through raping and deliberately impregnating young girls. 'Fatherless' children were born who up to this day do not know their paternal roots and do not have birth certificates. Failure to register with the department of births in a country translates to legal non-existence. This invisibility had long term traumatic and material effects for the Gukurahundi offspring and their mothers. They could not register in formal schools, had no access to state funds and to this day, they cannot vote. In other terms, these children remain as Gukurahundi's bleeding wound.⁸

Similarly, in Rwanda where rape was also used as a weapon of genocide, approximately 20000 children were conceived. According to Kahn and Denov (2019:152), these children "face administrative challenges in registering their births, their legal names or their rights to citizenship, with long term consequences for their lives." Commenting on the same matter, Mahmood et al (2017:18) highlight that "lack of citizenship can result in a denial access to medical care, education, or other social benefits, as well as a secure sense of identity." Neenan (2017) then brands these war casualties as 'stateless children.' Had Vera considered conception as another angle to her narrative, Nonceba's child born out of military rape would also have been subjected to such challenges, a 'stateless' and 'rootless' child with no paternal identity.

Apart from the Gumede girls, Nonceba's rapist is one character that Vera fleshes out both from the third person and the first- person narrative. Vera digs into his past, enters his psyche and allows him to speak for himself. It is through his character that readers learn of how the war destroyed nature and humans alike. We are invited into the Gulati caves, witnessing how land mines blasted the shrines and how the bombs degenerated the landscape. We observe how trees suspended human life and how water bodies carried the dead. Sibaso describes

⁸ Refer to Dumisani Ngwenya's "Healing the wounds of Gukurahundi: A participatory action research project" (2014).

the mass graves and how the hills of Gulati sheltered all living organisms. When Nonceba first meets him, she sees an ordinary man in ordinary clothes (72). Later on, Vera describes him as a “wounded being,” a “scalded mind” and Gagliano reads him as “deformed” and “estranged from civic life” (67). This representation of Sibaso calls for a reading that goes beyond the spectacular performances of rape and murder that made it to the media, and invites us to read them as ordinary beings physically and psychologically scarred by the war.

The woman who axed her husband to death for example had mourned for the gruesome murder staged in her homestead and “for the heart of the soldier, which she said had died with the war” (89). In other words, while heinous crimes are not excused, men such as Sibaso and other guerrilla fighters with blank stares on the Thandabantu veranda were also victims of the war. Judging by his name, Sibaso could have been of Ndebele origin probably driven to this war crime against his kin by anger, rejection, emasculation and as other scholars such as Ranger (2002:207) claim, by betrayal and lacking support from the Ndebele people in whose name he supposedly joined the liberation struggle. I will revisit this ‘ordinary’ man later in the discussion when I zoom in on the presentation and significance of flowers in the narrative.

3.6 The Mphafa Tree – A Landscape of Death

When Cephas journeys back to Kezi, he finds Nonceba “sitting under the perfumed shadow of the mphafa tree and listening to the smooth calling of doves” (146). Nonceba describes its shade as cool and the earth beneath it as “placid.” Although we only encounter this tree once towards the denouement, I argue in this segment that it is one of the most significant trees in Vera’s rural landscape. Firstly, Vera plants it inside the Gumede homestead while all the other trees in the narrative are scattered in public spaces. Its positionality and frequency in terms of appearance may tempt readers to flout it because even Nonceba herself does not go back to seek its shade after meeting Cephas. According to Carolyn Shaw in “The Habit of Assigning Meaning: Signs of Yvonne Vera’s World”, nothing just ‘is’ in Vera’s world. There is nothing simple with the way she uses nature (2002:26).

The mphafa tree is native to Africa and popular throughout Zimbabwe. Apart from its expansive shade, it does not have much utility with its bitter fruits. However, for Ndebele readers familiar with local ecological epistemologies, an additional layer of meaning can be drawn from the representation of the tree. Firstly, it is taboo to chop down this tree and

making fire with its logs is believed to turn women into widows. Also, due to its very strong trunk and branches, the tree is revered and reserved for burying people hence in the Ndebele culture, umphafa is referred to as 'umlahlabantu', loosely translating to 'that which buries humans.' The tree is associated with death. That is why in compatriot NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names*, Darling and her friends assume new identities in the forest but when they decide to kill, the abortion is performed under the mphafa tree.

I therefore read this tree as a symbol of death, both in the physical and spiritual sense. My argument in this section is that such a reading of the mphafa tree propels us to rethink questions of exclusive colonial modernity, the effects of war, tribalism and sexism all tied to Cephas' comment of Kezi being a cemetery.

Most regions in Matabeleland are arid and dry. Kezi in particular rests on a rocky terrain and rivers rarely overflow. In *The Stone Virgins*, there has been a succession of droughts and Nonceba explains that to be the reason why the marula tree has been bearing fruit since. Vera's narrator writes:

For a long time, there has not been enough rain to bury the bridge; the rain is sporadic, apologetic. The river has been so burned by the sun you can measure it grain by glittering grain, and by the number of children swarming it like bees (20).

I highlighted a similar incident in *Butterfly Burning* where the children play in a dump site with damaged colonial products they desire but cannot afford. Here the children also play with garbage comprising of discarded packaging of modern products from Bulawayo: "empty packets of Willards potato chips- onion flavored, vinegared, salted. Then broken bottles of Coca-Cola, sharp and dangerous, empty red one- liter cartons of Chibuku beer" (20). While Kezi is naturally a dry region, anthropogenic activities are also a contributing factor to its climate patterns. The rivers that should be life giving are polluted with plastics and bottles while the war uproots rain making trees and bombs rain making shrines, as will be discussed later.

Of interest also is Vera's choice of Shoeshine, a bus connecting Kezi to the modern Bulawayo. Shoeshine in Matabeleland is referred to as a bus that goes nowhere. In *The Stone Virgins*, this bus could be a metaphorical representation of general stagnation across countless levels.

Dreams are thwarted and relationships are broken. There is no development in the area except for Thandabantu Store and an incomplete telephone booth.

In this green booth, they hold hands where the handset should be, having sought the mouthpiece, the hearing piece, and found none. Having sought the telephone cord that would link them to the city centre, with Bulawayo or even Salisbury, with Gwelo or Gatooma, and found none. Having sought the directory with all their names listed, and found none of their own, the one copy chained to the booth revealing the small printed names and addresses only of Bulawayo residents, people entirely unknown and uninteresting to them. Not Kezi, not their Kezi, just this tantalizing contraption left in their midst to mock their lack, to rouse their want. The delay is part of the signature of their lives. This is familiar. Like the tarred road that ends abruptly at the Thandabantu Store and goes no further, as though there were no possibility of the mind ever wanting to wander off steadily into the distance, further than the eye can see (22-23).

This is the landscape that the Gumede sisters call home. It is a home built around the mphafa tree, a motif of death across the narrative. As Nonceba sits under that tree after her assault, she may be physically alive but she is socially dead. A part of her died with Thenjiwe. They were not only tied by the same umbilical cord but according to the narrator, “they dreamed the same dreams” and “accepted how necessary they were to each other” (160). It is with the arrival of this Shona man who is probably working for Zimbabwe’s infamous Central Intelligence Organisation that Nonceba emerges from her catatonic state and imagines living again.

Cephas likens Kezi to “a naked cemetery where no one is buried and everyone is betrayed [...] there is no certainty of life, only death. To die here is to be abandoned to vultures and unknown graves” (159). His observation directly echoes the cyclical situation in Zimbabwe where a number of critics have referred to the place as a cemetery where people only go back to be buried. In Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain*, Lucifer the protagonist makes the analogous point that “home is a heap of rubble, a place where one comes back to die, after having lived a life elsewhere” (1975:52). Five decades later, corruption and all the ‘isms’ have once again turned Zimbabwe into a failed state resulting in a serious upsurge in brain drain. Most Zimbabweans live as refugees in foreign lands and are only ferried back to the country as corpses to be buried in the land of their forefathers.

Furthermore, the culture itself appears to be enslaving more than liberating. The Gumede’s are for example ripped apart. The parents divorced because of the traditional pressures of

bearing a male child. The father dies. Although there is ambiguity around the cause of his death, reading in between Nonceba's statements, it could have been depression. Sihle, Nonceba's aunt is also ostracised for refusing to be bound in marriage. The insertion of this narrative helps to highlight internecine cultural fissures which complicated lives outside open war frames.

When the genocide begins, the Kezi landscape is awash with blood. The land which is the abode of ancestors even fails to protect its own. Thenjiwe is beheaded and Mahlathini whose name ironically means a bush is brutally murdered along with a shedload of civilians in his shop. Mahlathini's death brings to memory Owen Maseko's "Siyabathontisela" (we drip on them) art exhibition which was banned just a day after the official opening of the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo. According to Maseko (2011:24), siyabathontisela was one of the torture techniques used by the Fifth Brigade to scourge Ndebele civilians. They would drip hot melting plastic onto the bare flesh of poor non-combatants. Mahlathini in *The Stone Virgins* was subjected to the same torment, resulting in his slow, painful death. Maseko was arrested, his voice silenced for capturing the ordinary sufferings of people during Gukurahundi. Vera creatively assigns meaning to different ecological features to be that voice of the silenced and the invisible through the eternal pages of her symbolic novel.

3.7 The Marula Tree

As Shaw in "The Habit of Assigning Meaning: Signs of Yvonne Vera's World" (2012) observes, meanings are slippery in Vera's sign system (26). They become largely dependent on the relationship that each character has with the landscape. Thenjiwe for example sees herself as bound with her landscape and so she associates the marula tree with the land, the link to her identity. She enjoys the mazhanje fruit but is not satisfied as it is not the marula that grows within her landscape. To understand and accept Cephas' background, she has to make him appreciate her own culture first which is entangled in the marula tree.

She would start, perhaps, with the marula tree. She wants to discover the shape of its roots and show them to him till these roots are no longer under the ground but become the lines planted on his palms, each stroke a path for their dreaming. She knows that If she finds the shape of these roots, at least, he knows a deep truth about her land (46).

Amarula is sometimes referred to as the king of African trees since it can withstand drought. In all the natural elements around Kezi, this tree has faithfully sustained the ecosystem across seasons, feeding humans and animals alike. Nothing is discarded in the fruit from the soft juicy flesh, its kernel and even the bark that is deemed medicinal. The tree could be a representation of the nation, with its long branches offering a support system to the fruits and providing shade to humans; explaining why Thenjiwe says the tree will never be felled.

This tree is also an archive of memory connecting the Kezi people to home. Even though the smell of rotting fruit intoxicates the air, Ranger (2012:211) suggests that it is both intolerable and necessary – something to survive every day and to recover every morning. It is the only natural element that reminds them of home, that links them to their past and hence “they hold on to its fecundity, and indeed, its past memories. After all, there is nothing else left communal since the day Thandabantu Store blazed down” (143). The tree has been a bus stop, witnessing love being built and destroyed, the colonial products that carry empty dreams, the despondent faces of the woman soldiers and above all, “the guns rising, rising anew. In 1981” (65). Important to add is its resilience which is analogous to that of rocks, metaphorically signalling the resilience of ordinary Zimbabweans in colonial and post-colonial times.

3.8 Floral Landscapes

“Red flowers are the brightest flowers. You must like them” (Vera,2002:88). Flowers are one ecological element that bound the Gumede sisters. They bedecked their home and were part of their reconnecting with nature in the Kwakhe River. Before Thenjiwe’s death, Nonceba had associated flowers with her because she was fond of picking some at the riverbank. Although what may be apparent in the whole flower picking exercise is their aesthetic beauty, what I find intriguing is the indirect comment on the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. According to Vera’s narrator:

Whenever Nonceba imagines flowers, she sees only these double blooms growing along the Kwakhe River after the first rains, at the end of the year. If the rains are late and the flowers are not there, then it has not been a good year, Nonceba can only sit and recall all the events that have caused the flowers not to appear (93).

In the above observation, the blooming flowers are an indicator of good rains which subsequently translates to sustenance of humanity. Here we are presented with a non-

hierarchical co-existence where every element in the ecosystem is interdependent on the other. On another level, the human experience is entangled with nature and one of the widely held beliefs in many African epistemologies is that whenever there is blood shed on the landscape, there will be scarcity of rain.

Red hibiscus flowers, which are also on the cover of one of the editions of the novel are associated with Cephas in the narrative. When he first visits the hospital, Nonceba sees the towering red hibiscus flowers first before the man. On his second trip to Kezi which he took at the peak of the war, Cephas appears on the meandering pathway with a bush of red hibiscus flowers as a visible background to his frame. I find Owen Maseko's paintings useful in analysing this portraiture. Most, if not all of his paintings rest on a red background. In describing one of the art works that got him detained in 2010, Ncube and Siziba (2015:14) detail how in the portrait:

Mugabe, on the left, is seated upright with Joshua Nkomo slumped over a table, carrying a piece of paper and with blood gushing out of his back. Behind the figures of Mugabe and Nkomo stand to the left shadowy figures donning large dark spectacles (evocative of the inescapable intelligence operatives) and to the right another group of inconspicuous figures wearing large red berets (these are obviously Fifth Brigade soldiers).

What this portrait alludes to is the 1987 Unity Accord signed between ZANU PF and PF ZAPU. Two issues are made apparent by the image. The red background symbolises Zimbabwe's historical but present bleeding wounds while the picture depicted in the foreground is a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Similarly, Cephas in the text could be that symbol of peace, a call to re-member. As soon as they break the tribal barrier between them, Nonceba starts gathering her own flowers again, yellow daisies to decorate her room and yellow and white roses for the lounge. Yellow and white denote warmth, joy, light and a new beginning. As part of her routine, she changes the water regularly to keep them fresh longer. The regular water changes point to the human need to keep watering interethnic dialogue and relations. The use of fragile flowers also captures the thin line between hate and love between the Shona and Ndebele.

Another character who is associated with flowers is Sibaso:

His hair, cemetery flowers. That is what Thenjiwe said about hair like this [...] Cemetery flowers never bloom. No one waters them. Wild flowers with strong hearts

take any season to bloom. Just to make sure the flower outlives the planter, it must be the sort to bloom fiercely during a drought, shedding petals like old skin. To know this sort of flower, you need to have buried a lover or a child [...] Here was a man with just such hair. He thinks of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals before a war, after a war, during a war. Sibaso (77-78).

The cemetery flower metaphor embodies images of abandonment, neglect, betrayal, memory, trauma and loss. According to Gagiano in "Reading *The Stone Virgins* as Vera's Study of the Katabolism of War" (2007:69), "Sibaso is part of those whose societies do not afford them a sense of belonging or recognition." In one of his soliloquys Sibaso laments that "independence is the compromise to which I could not belong" (97). Having dropped out of university and gambled with death in the bush, he comes back a landless and fatherless destitute with only a book and a crushed spider to inherit. The passages where Vera describes him evoke compassion more than indignation. Nonceba's dramatic rape for example, is interluded with his yearning to belong and be loved. Statements such as "Hold me. Touch me here" (71), and "Your fingers are warm. Touch me with these smooth hands" (72) reflect a hollowed inner self in need of healing. He also exudes this need when he rocks Nonceba "like a wounded child." Gagiano then asserts that his behaviour "is a result of a malformation process he has undergone" (2007:70).

As suggested by the image of cemetery flowers, to understand men such as Sibaso one has to share in their ordeals. These flowers could symbolise the harm of war which prematurely ages people. Sibaso joined the liberation war when he was in his first year in university and so should not be having grey hair. The war has claimed his youth and moral compass. The cemetery flowers represent "men and women both broken by war, both silently screaming" (Gagiano, 2007:67) and narratives have a role to play in drawing attention to all the silent screams of war.

3.9 The Gulati Landscape

The remains of one of the most controversial figures in the politics of Southern Africa Cecil John Rhodes, his allies Allan Wilson, Starr Jameson and most of the British soldiers that we meet as street names in the first chapter of *The Stone Virgins* lie in various caves of the Matopo Hills. Impressed by the panoramic view from the summit of the rocks, Rhodes chose Malindidzimu which means the hill of benevolent spirits as his last resting place. Mzilikazi, king of the Ndebele kingdom is also one of the significant figures whose body was buried in

between the natural boulders of Matopo. By implication, all these male bodies associated with political violence have appropriated the landscape that according to Mabura (2010), had been historically associated with both male and female spirit mediums.

The Matopo hills is a cultural landscape that was originally known as the Matombo, meaning the rocks. When the Ndebele conquered the place, Mzilikazi changed the name to Matobo which translates to bald heads. As part of the colonial project that had begun in the urban space through naming, Rhodes further anglicised the name to Matopos. In *The Stone Virgins*, Gulati is a fictional name given to Matopos which according to Ranger in *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture & History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (1999:3), is a Kalanga word that means the voice from the rock.

From the stone age through different generations, these hills have been a landscape of refuge, a battlefield and the nerve centre of different ancestral spirits. Oracles such as the Mlimo, Mwari and Umdali (all referring to a creator), reside in the shrines and in the sacred caves of the hills such as the Njelele (referred to as Mbelele in *The Stone Virgins*) where rain making ceremonies are performed. According to Ransford (1968):

The Rowzi, who were the ruling aristocrats of the conquered Karanga, or “people of the sun,” had semidivine rulers called Mambos and had developed a religious cult worshipping a deity known as Musekawanu (our creator) and later on as Mwari or Mlimo. This was a god largely concerned with the phenomena of nature and particularly with the control of rainfall. The spirits of dead Mambos and this deity were very powerful and influential. They were approached by the living through spiritual mediums living in recognized cave shrines in various hills, including the Matopos (9–10).

The landscape of Matopo Hills reveals the relationship that the people had with nature. For example, if a hunted animal sought refuge in the caves, the hunt would be called off and the animal regarded sacred. This was however different during the war as the Fifth Brigade bombed the shrines thought to be harbouring ex Zipra soldiers. The drought in Matabeleland then could be explained both in scientific and spiritual terms. How can there be rain when the rain making shrines are invaded with explosives, when the spiritual world is polluted with dead bodies? The same concern is raised by Charles Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain* where all the rain making trees have been hacked and there are no signs of the rain. In essence, nature and the human are so interconnected that an injustice to one affects the other. In precolonial Matopos, it was taboo to cut the trees around the area and the deities through

spirit mediums would warn the villagers of any eminent natural disaster such as drought or floods. A catastrophe on the land was resolved through appeasing the spirits residing in caves, rivers and trees.

The Khoi or San people who once occupied the place inscribed stunning paintings on the Matopo rocks which reflect the interaction between the people and the landscape. Although there are many cultural representations of the stone paintings such as the hunting tradition, Vera chooses to home in on the painting of virgins, which is where the title of her novel is derived. Through the 1st person narrative, Sibaso recounts:

I place my hand on the rocks, where antelopes and long breasted women stand together. Tall women bend like tightened bows beneath a stampede of buffalo, while the rest spread their legs outward to the sun [...] Disembodied beings. Their legs branch from their bodies like roots. The women float, moving away from the stone. Their thighs are empty, too fragile, too thin to have already carried. They are the virgins who walk into their own graves before the burial of a king. They die untouched. Their ecstasy is in the afterlife [...] The female figures painted on this rock, the virgins, from a circle near the burial site, waiting for the ceremonies of their own burial [...] I place my hand over the waist of the tall woman, on an inch of a bone yet forty thousand years gather in my memory like a wild wind (104).

Through the image of the virgins, Vera evokes lingering memories of precolonial history where women were subjugated across Africa. Virgins were sacrificed to appease offended spirits, they settled debts and their bodies also paved the path of dead monarchs so they continue serving them even in the afterlife. A good example is Nandi, Shaka's mother whose body was buried cushioned among living virgins. The San virgin painting provides a valuable metaphor in which I read Nonceba's rape.

In the horrific scene of rape that the readers witness, Sibaso, like in a movie scene desecrates the bodies of the two sisters. Their sight sparks the image of the stone virgins he saw while taking refuge from the rocks. All he sees in them are objects worthy of sacrifice:

He seeks her dancing heels, her hands chaste dead bone, porous thin, painted on a rock. Her neck is leaning upon a raised arrow, her mind pierced by the sun. She is a woman from very far, from long ago, from the naked caves in the hills of Gulati. She does not belong here. She bears the single solitude of a flame, the shape and form of a painted memory. He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past (78).

He grasps Nonceba from the waist the same way he had grabbed the virgin painting in Gulati. The two sisters become victims of war, antidotes to the psychological traumas of emasculated men. "My name is Sibaso", Vera allows the man to introduce himself:

A man must grow openly like a tree, with nothing between his cry and the elements. Instead, it is a war, and a man becomes a stalker, always a step behind some uncanny avenue of time, and he follows all its digression, its voyage into tragic places. He finds himself in dark places, unlit sites, dark and grim. A shadow when he walks, a shadow when he sleeps. His mind is perforated like a torn net and each event falls through it like a stone. When he stands, his head hits against something heavy- he discovers that history has its ceiling. He is surprised. He has to crouch, and his body soon assumes a defensive attitude; he possesses the desire to attack. If he loses an enemy, he invents another. This is his purge [...] Of course, this idea involves desecration, the violation of kindness. It is a posture both individual and wasteful. He cannot escape. He is the embodiment of time (82-83).

Although Sibaso's actions cannot be excused, reading the above passage invokes new dimensions of reading violence. He is trapped in the memory of war, its aftermaths and the postcolonial exclusionary government. He becomes invisible again and is propelled to seek refuge once more in the Gulati hills. To live with the trauma, he targets what he sees as weak links, the women.

The narrative of women in *The Stone Virgins* is a story of multiple oppression. First by precolonial local leaders, second by the colonial masters in the Rhodesian era, then by tribalistic compatriots, and, the patriarchal traditions of their culture. This is the history of women written on stone across generations, a history that cannot be erased and which Vera artistically implicates in her novel.

Siwila in "An Encroachment of Ecological Sacred Sites and its Threat to the Interconnectedness of Sacred Rituals" (2015) explains how sacred sites and sacred ritual ceremonies are linked to gender roles, justice and issues around purity. According to Siwila, the sacrifice to the shrines was only brought by pubescent and post-menopausal women to maintain the shrines' purity (145). Married women who were still experiencing menstruation were said to pollute the spiritual landscape with blood. What is interesting in *The Stone Virgins* is that the blood inside the caves is shed by men. Black Zimbabwean males desecrate spiritual landscapes into genocidal scenes where innocent blood is shed and bones are dumped on earth or drowned in water bodies. Natural landscapes become sanctuaries for criminals, harbouring atrocities of the government considering that there were curfews and

roadblocks so no journalist had access to report the carnage. In order to excavate this officially suppressed narrative, Vera reads rock paintings as unlikely but poignant historical texts.

Before I conclude, I need to draw parallels between Vera's hills of Gulati and Zimbabwe. The term Zimbabwe is drawn from a Shona phrase 'dzimba dzemabwe', which literally translates to house of stone. Gulati Hills can be read as a metaphorical representation of the socio-cultural and economic condition in Zimbabwe. It is the same condition that Dambudzo Marechera captures in *The House of Hunger* (1978), Rosa Tshuma in *Shadows* (2012) and *House of Stone* (2018). Just like Kezi, Zimbabwe's landscape is largely dry and can also be likened to a cemetery. As I mentioned before, a consequential percentage of Zimbabweans squat elsewhere as refugees while most of those who remained face imminent death. Mortality rates are high from decrepit health facilities, poor nutrition, comatose economy and combative politics. Unbridled greed has bled the economy and dissent voices are silenced in the government's invisible chambers, the present-day caves. Zimbabweans are just sucked dry and experience all manner of scarcity. Like Cephas says, "no one knows when it will all end, or if it will end" (159).

While Bulawayo is first described as a colonised landscape, towards the end, Vera transforms it into a landscape of refuge. It becomes a space of healing and self-realisation. Although Cephas still occupies a flat at the corner 'ekoneni', Nonceba who is both a woman and a Ndebele speaker is able to secure a job inside the city. As the novel ends, there is a glimmer of hope, a possibility of reconciliation and healing. Cephas, despite his Shona origin is actively involved in the reconstruction of Lobengula's kraal which was initially positioned for its military advantage, the same reason Cecil Rhodes adopted the site for his cottage. The new kraal however, will be built on "tender branches" which suggests a demilitarised memory. By ending with the construction of the beehives, Vera calls for healing and a construction of an inclusive national memory that accommodates all just like Thenjiwe, the beehive in *The Stone Virgins*.

A new nation needs to restore the past. His focus, the beehive hut, to be installed at Lobengula's ancient kraal, KwoBulawayo, the following year. His task is to learn to re-create the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry, the way grass folds smoothly over this frame and weaves a nest, the way it protects the cool, livable places within-deliverance (184).

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how the landscape in *The Stone Virgins* references the history of colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. I investigated how different ecological features such as trees, flowers and rocks reflect larger thematic concerns such as ethnicity, violence, rape, gender, trauma and healing. In the following chapter, I analyse *Without a Name* and the focus will be on how Vera's representation of the forest and the land is interconnected to cultural concerns such as rape, infanticide and sexuality in Zimbabwe. I pay particular attention to the multiple functions of the forest and how that space differs from the rest in the narrative especially as far as gender relations, sexuality and class is concerned.

Chapter 4

Without a Name: Redefining the Landscapes

What you say about the land is true, but does this truth belong equally to all of us? (Vera, 1994:40).

My body was my property alone, but the land of our country was theirs to own (El Saadawi, 1983:84).

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how the landscape in *The Stone Virgins* references the history of colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. I investigated how different ecological features such as trees, flowers and rocks reflect larger thematic concerns such as ethnicity, violence, rape, gender, trauma and healing. In this chapter which discusses *Without a Name*, I focus on how Vera's representation of the relationship between the forest, the land and humans is interconnected to political and cultural concerns such as rape, infanticide, sexuality, oppression, power and gender inequalities. I engage ecofeminist thoughts to answer the following questions which draw from my objectives: How has capitalist patriarchy and phallographic norms shaped the way in which women relate to and appreciate nature? What is the relationship, if any, between the exploitation of the environment and the domination of women? I begin by examining how the land is directly connected to human concerns around gender, power, and inequality. This I will discuss in the backdrop of the war that frames Vera's narrative. I will then shift to the physical forest and its multiple functions before I pay attention to the metaphorical forest, that is, the symbolical meaning that different individuals attach to the forest. My discussion considers how the forest intersects with multiple forms of domination connected to race, gender and class.

4.2 *Without a Name: A Synopsis*

Without a Name is Yvonne Vera's second novel set in three different geographical locations in Rhodesia: Mubaira, Kadoma and Harare. It is 1977. The guerrilla nationalist liberation war is at its peak and death lingers everywhere. Mazvita who is the focaliser of the narrative is raped by a freedom fighter in the forest. Her village is torched and she finds refuge in a tobacco farm in Kadoma where she falls in love with a farm worker, Nyenyedzi. They however do not share the same vision regarding the war, the land and freedom. Mazvita, described as a woman unafraid of departures, leaves again for the city where life promises to be 'nyore

nyore.’⁹ Here she rides into a new life at the back of Joel’s bicycle, a man she shares a single room with in one of the black high-density suburbs in Harare. With Joel things are different: “there is no arrangement, no proposal, no discussion” (Vera, 1994:58). This freedom is however cut short by the arrival of a baby conceived from the rape back in Mubaira. Mazvita has to choose between the baby and her freedom. She chooses the later and commits infanticide. A bulk of the chapters provide the readers with a picture of this woman traversing the cityscape with a dead baby on her back, onto the Mubaira bus and back to her homeland where she will probably bury the baby. Vera’s narrative is not chronological. The storyline unfolds in flashbacks, flashforwards and even trances.

4.3 The Land and the Woman

The Zimbabwe fast-track land reform program or 3rd *Chimurenga* (Revolution) that was spearheaded by the war veterans in the year 2000 inundated both local and international news. Although the figures are imprecise as to the number of families that benefited, Goebel (2005) avers that most of the newly resettled farmers during the inception of the resettlement programme were males, due to the fact that Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society in which customary law favours men. According to Goebel (2005), throughout the provinces of Zimbabwe, ordinary peasant women in the villages entered the process of fast-track land reform and joined hands with women war veterans to mobilise for women’s independent access to land. However, as Gaidzanwa in “Women and Land in Zimbabwe” (2011) observes, the number of women beneficiaries remains low in comparison to that of men. The question then is, where are women and how does an ecofeminist analysis of this skewed distribution of land reflect larger political, economic and socio-cultural concerns in Zimbabwe?

Mabura in “Black Women Walking Zimbabwe: Refuge and Prospect in the Landscapes of Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins*, Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and its Sequel, *The Book of Not*” opines that:

Since the nineteenth century, land in Zimbabwe has been a contested site with far reaching implications in the socioeconomic and political scenario, first between Africans of different ethnicities and, subsequently, between these Africans and European immigrants. As such, a plurality of contesting narratives addressing the land

⁹‘Nyore nyore’ is a Shona term that translates to ‘easy easy’ in English. The expression was adopted by Teddy Cohen when he established the first and only furniture store that offered credit to black Africans in Rhodesia. The history of this chain store highlights how blacks were excluded from the mainstream economy and rendered untrustworthy by the system. Vera also employs the phrase to capture the illusion of city life during that period.

question directly or indirectly exist more so today than ever before in a scenario where the land question has become inextricably linked to Zimbabwe's political future (2010:89).

Writing in a similar vein, Musila asserts that "in many African countries, land and freedom lay at the core of liberation struggles. Yet, in many such societies, land belonged to men, and women were mainly part of the labour in these farms" (2012:6).

The above observation highlights how land ownership in Zimbabwe is still entrenched in archetypical patrilineal systems that privilege men, and women can only co-title through marriage to a man. Decades after the liberation struggle which was anchored on an egalitarian ownership of the land, women are still marginalised as far as owning and controlling the land is concerned. Although they are the machinery behind agricultural output and mainly survive on cultivating the land, discriminatory policies and norms still slip their rights under those of men. Pressure groups such as The Women Land and Lobby Group (WLLG) launched in 1998 to lobby the government into considering women's interests in relation to land ownership, and Section 80 (3) of Zimbabwe's constitution are all aimed at protecting the land rights of women. And yet there is still a discrepancy between theorising and implementing as traditional and customary laws still treat women as minors that can neither own nor inherit. In the event of divorce or widowhood, many women lose the land to male relations of their husbands, the registrants of the land (Gaidzanwa, 1991).

As both a physical aspect of the earth's surface and as a trope, land imbues most of Zimbabwe's nationalist discourse. Here I am thinking of fictional work such as Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and Douglas Rogers' *The Last Resort*, where "land is normally identified with the man and is most easily interpretable as a political symbol" (Cousins, 2012:25). An ecofeminist reading however renders fresh insights into reading the land as it transcends the political to illuminate socio-cultural problems related to it (ibid.). Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* in particular posits some interesting links between the land, the man and the woman.

According to Wenner in *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen*, "landscape begins as a recognition of the natural world around us having value, both socially and financially" (2006:5). Wenner further argues that "gender affects the way landscape is seen"

(ibid.). Writing in a different context, Berndt (2005:167) claims that when it comes to land, women do not hold the same attachment as their men. To explore this variation and how it ties back to other concerns in the novel, I begin by examining how different sexes relate to the land.

The conversation inside the Mubaira bus in *Without a Name* sets an enthralling stage demonstrating how traditional African men have essentially positioned the woman in relation to the land:

Are you going to Mubaira?

Yes, I am going to Mubaira, and you?

Yes, I am going to Mubaira. My wife is waiting for me there. It is our home because my wife is there. She plants the crops.

I work in the city too. My wife also plants the crops.

My wife stays at home, we had a large harvest of groundnuts last year. A whole ten sacks.

We harvested a lot too [...] I plan to sell all the harvested crop and buy a plow (61).

Two things are illuminated by the above passage. Firstly, the conversation which flows so naturally from the masculine perspective speaks to the alienation of women as far as land is concerned. It frames how both capitalism and phallocracy controlled the way women related to the land both in the city and the countryside. The pass laws during colonialism as explained by Violet Lunga in “Between the Pause and the Waiting: The Struggle against Time in Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*” (2002), confined black women to the rural landscape where agriculture was the main source of livelihood. While women were driving an agricultural economy hinged on land they did not own and produce they did not control, men were free to navigate between the city and the rural area. This gendered division of labour and masculinised control of resources corroborates with the ecofeminist argument that:

Women’s increasing underdevelopment was not due to insufficient and inadequate participation in development but rather, it was due to their enforced but asymmetric participation where they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits (Shiva, 1993: p.74).

The bus conversation also resonates with an earlier dialogue between two lovers at the farm where Mazvita laments:

We are servants paid poorly for our labours. We cannot decide which crop to grow, or when to grow it. We do not pray for the success of our crop because it is no longer our crop. We cannot pray for another's crop [...] we labour because it is our task to labor. We do not own the land (39).

Although Nyenyedzi's comment had been directly related to the colonial masters who had appropriated the land for themselves, Mazvita's response appears to be more nuanced, suggesting that different power systems have the same claim on women. Capitalism owned black labour and in a similar fashion, patriarchy also claimed the land and women's labour. It is this vacuousness of being loyal to the land that shapes Mazvita's decisions throughout the narrative.

The impassioned conversation between Mazvita and Nyenyedzi at the farm accentuates the conflicting views that Vera's characters hold regarding the land. Mazvita fails to engage with it the same way her partner does. Just like Naboth in the Bible, Nyenyedzi believed that "he could not leave the land, and be a man" (46). For him land was a symbol of birth and death, a source of livelihood, the definition of humanity and the umbilical cord to their ancestry. Their duty was to "keep the land for the departed" (33). Mazvita, who on the other hand shared subordinate roles with the land wanted to be freed from it and she rhetorically asks: "what you say about the land is true, but does this truth belong equally to all of us?" (40). The ancestors who are the spiritual custodians of the land had remained silent and impotent when British capitalist colonisers invaded the sacred spaces, commodified the land and turned people into what I described earlier as ecological refugees. In her opinion, the land and its attendant phallogocentric values preyed on women and remaining on it would be accepting the subalternity of her gender.

Nyenyedzi desperately reminds her that:

To move away from the land is to admit that it has been taken. It is to abandon it. We have to wait here. We have to wait here with the land, if we are to be loyal to it, and those who have given it to us (38).

For Mazvita however, "waiting would be waiting for a new death, for the death of the land" (40). Reverting to Nyenyedzi's claims, by abandoning he means betrayal. In other words, those who leave the land betray the struggle and are sell-outs. This branding as sell-outs or *mutenges* as popularly known in Zimbabwe summarises the country's polarised politics where divergent views are silenced and criminalised. You speak against the corrupt

Zimbabwean government; you are labelled a sell-out working with the West to unseat it. If you openly support an opposition party you are imprisoned or 'disappeared.' Those who fight for women's rights are also problematically marked as western influenced sell-outs.

What Nyenyedzi calls abandonment translates to freedom and emancipation for Mazvita. As Vera's narrator reveals, Mazvita "had loved the land, saw it through passionate and intense moments of freedom, but to her the land had no fixed loyalties" (40). Just like Lucifer in *Waiting for the Rain*, the land had nothing tangible to offer hence she detaches herself from its repressive cultural practices which undermine and peripheralise women. She can no longer latch to the land that confines women to marginal spaces, doubly imprisoning them in an anti-colonial war situation. Here I am reminded of the soldier rapist who arm-twists Mazvita into playing the wife role for him. As described by Vera's narrator:

He had claimed her, told her that she could not hide the things of her body, that she must bring a calabash of water within her arms, and he would drink. He had tired of drinking from the river. She must offer him water with cupped hands. She must kneel so that he could drink (34).

The graphic detail of the whole procedure entails how 'respectable' Shona women are expected to treat their men. As I will discuss in detail later in the chapter, the natural landscape, or the forest and the land then become sites of reinforcing oppressive gender norms from which Mazvita flees to the city, a space that she naively perceives as ungendered. Similarly, at the farm the patriarchal capitalist owner redelegates her from meaningful interaction with the land to making "tea in the little kitchen behind the storehouse for the foreman and his assistants" (29).

I also read this futility of being loyal to the land back to the rape, in Mubaira. When Mazvita flees from home, it is in the middle of the war. The two implicit reasons for her flight as stated in the narrative are the rape and the torching of her village. On closer analysis, it is the whole framing of the rape more than the act itself that cuts deeper into her pain and leads her to despair. Her body is ironically violated on the same land that is central to the war being fought, by a man fighting for it. The natural elements of the sentinel bird, the dew, the grass, the mist and the land witness this violation. Again, Vera enfeebles the connotations of nature as feminine, being motherly, nurturing and offering protection. Instead, nature seems to

conspire in Mazvita's calamity. As the mist disguises the rapist's identity, the narrator states that:

She transferred the hate to the moment itself, to the morning, to the land, to the dew-covered grass that she had felt graze tenderly against her naked elbow in that horrible moment of his approach, transferred it to the prolonged forlorn call of a strange bird she heard cry in the distance, so shrill and loud that she had to suppress her own cry which had risen to her lips. The unknown bird had silenced her when she needed to tell of her own suffering [...] she hated the land that pressed beneath her back as the man moved impatiently above her, into her, past her. Mazvita sought the emptiness of her body. Afterward, she did not connect this emptiness to the man because she thought of him not from inside her, but from outside. He had never been inside her. She connected him only to the land. It was the land that had come toward her. He had grown from the land. She saw him grow from the land, from the mist, from the river. The land had allowed the man to grow from itself inside her body (36-37).

Like all the wars fought within the Zimbabwean landscape, land was central to the 2nd Chimurenga war which forms the backdrop of Vera's narrative. In her interview with Hunter (1998), Vera explains that she merged the rape with the land because the war was about the land. In a different interview with Primorac in 2001, Vera also affirms her commitment to bringing to the fore the biographies of unknown women, those stories that are rarely discussed and underrepresented in mainstream nationalist narratives. I draw on these different interviews to explain Mazvita's loathing of the land and her pinning the rape to the land. Following Vera's lead, there is a possibility that Mazvita could have been a chimbwido, fighting hand in glove with the freedom fighters.

During the liberation struggle, Mutanga (2018:14) states, "guerrillas enlisted local youth, both boys and girls into the war of liberation as chimbwidos and mujibas." Ranger (1991:41) then explicates how these recruited youths became their cooks, informants and their local messengers. They mediated between the freedom fighters in the bush and the community masses; informing the former of any sell-outs and alerting the latter of any landmines or traps planted within their proximity. Food was cooked and delivered by girls to the military bases in the forest and night vigils were held to give morale to the freedom fighters, lasting the whole night. It is crucial to highlight that girls (chimbwidos) were prone to sustained sexual predation from liberation fighters. It was virtually impossible to escape the menace, for refusal could be framed as selling out which could sentence an entire village to a cruel death at the hands of freedom fighters. Judging by the time she was up to fetch water and her

position in relation to the river and the burning village, it is possible that Mazvita could have been coming from those night vigils and one of the freedom fighters tracked her home.

When people think about the war, the immediate picture is that of men in camouflage, brassards and heavy boots. Men heavily armed with AK-47s. They also think of guns blazing in the bush and dismembered bodies strewn onto the entire forest scape. But rarely do they consider the role played by unarmed ordinary citizens, especially women such as Netsai in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*.¹⁰ The war for the land then becomes a man's struggle. The role played by the chimbwidos might not be perceived as spectacular as carrying the gun, but they engaged with everyday wars both in the forest and within their communities. This probably explains Mazvita's embitterment when one of her own violates and betrays her: "Even those who fight in our name threaten our lives" (39). What bound the black men and women was the stolen ancestral land they were fighting to reclaim; that is why the rapist could claim kinship with Mazvita: "Hanzvadzi [...] he said. You are my sister, he whispered" (35). Hanzvadzi is a Shona word for sister and here Vera allows the aesthetic of the indigenous language to elucidate on the closeness of the claimed relationship. The land also becomes part of that language, it is an indigenous terrain that should unite them in one purpose. This framing then reconceptualises Mazvita's profound feeling of betrayal from three levels; the land, the supposed male guerrilla liberator and the entire struggle. It follows a simple premise that the struggle is for the land, the land belongs to men, therefore, men and the land are synonymous. Mazvita at that particular instance then brackets both the man and the land as treacherous rapists.

Through aural imagery, the complicit perfidious bird that shrieks in the rape scene could be read as a representation of the Zimbabwean Bird engraved on the national flag, bank notes, postage stamps and the Zimbabwe coat of arms. The national bird has spiritual significance and is also an icon of independence. Its silencing of Mazvita in the rape scene can be linked to how independence has continued flouting women's needs in Zimbabwe. Vera's short story "Independence Day" from the anthology *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* captures the continued objectification of women's bodies and betrayal of their needs in post-colonial Zimbabwe. In the story, a man celebrates independence with a cold beer and transactional

¹⁰ Although Netsai had joined the liberation struggle, she was denied ammunition because of her sex. She was then relegated to domestic roles of satisfying the physical and sexual needs of male soldiers.

sex. As the new flag with all its promises (embodied in the new colors and the engraved national bird on the flag) is raised, the old one is lowered in tandem with the woman, signalling their exclusion from the promises of the new government. The Prime Minister on the eve of Independence promises “jobs and more money. Land and education. Wealth and food” (29). However, as Mabura notes, in post-colonial Zimbabwe, women still held no legal or hereditary rights to land (2010:90). In fact, the new government “did not go so far as to challenge or reverse women’s access to and rights over land in the context of Communal lands where patriarchal ‘customary’ laws and practices prevail” (Hammar cited in Mabura 90). As signified by the old and new flag all caught along the hedge in Vera’s short story, for women, the new patriarchal government was no different from the old colonial government.

Owning the land can also be read as analogous to owning the body. Men control and reap from the land the same way they control and benefit from women’s bodies. This parallel between the exploitation of the environment and the domination of women is focal in ecological feminism. The fertility of the land is used to sustain and establish a man’s position in the phallographic society in as much as the fertility of the woman is used to continue the male lineage. This is the dominance that Mazvita resists throughout the narrative. By rejecting the land as will be discussed later, she is refusing to oblige normative valuing of women’s reproduction potential rather than production in the public space, hence her desire to work just like Phephelaphi in *Butterfly Burning*. She rejects maternity, to be claimed, owned and hence she leaves her child without a name. To her:

A name could not be given to a child just like that. A name is for calling a child into the world, for acceptance, for grace. A name binds a mother to her child. A name is for waiting, for release, an embrace precious and permanent, a promise to growing life (85).

The act of committing infanticide in the private space then becomes “a ceremony of her freedom” (108), a refusal to raise the violently conceived child and a refusal to supply more sexual objects to men (Egya, 2018).

Crossing the landscapes from Mubaira to the city is also an internal journey to freedom and autonomy for Mazvita and other women who cherish her freedom such as her ‘sister’ who she envies at the back of a bicycle in the city. It is freedom that defies all capitalist and cultural practices attached to women’s subjectivity such as marriage, motherhood and sexuality. The

men- both white colonialists and colonised blacks had gendered the land, where they interpret the city as masculine and the country feminine. The man in the bus had boldly declared:

I cannot let my wife join me. The city is corrupt. A serious woman will not manage to live there. A woman can lose her head. Only a man can manage those streets [...] If you marry a woman from the city you will have made fire and sat on it (61).

It is interesting to note that this observation is self-deprecatory towards men because it is men who are responsible for the ills and evils of the city. Through her mobility, Mazvita defies the traditional categorisation of respectable and unrespectable women. To explain this categorisation, I draw on Chipso Hungwe's essay "Putting them in their Place" (2006) where she explains how women were and are still categorised into "respectable" and "unrespectable" by the level of their attachment to, and reliance on men. According to Hungwe, "women could garner respect through marriage, bearing children within wedlock and earning money for the patriarchal family unit" (39). Respectable then becomes an esteemed position associated with honour and dignity, becoming a given to all married women be it in a monogamous or even a polygamous relationship. "Unrespectable" is reserved for all single women such as Mama Abby in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Lucia in *Nervous Conditions* and all the women in *Without a Name* who have claimed their freedom in the city, embracing their sexuality and refusing to be appendages of men. These are women who dare to redefine their public and private terrain and women who are self-sufficient. This thread of branding can also be traced in how African women writers are labelled as feminists for using their creativity to redefine or foreground women's experiences in the domestic space. Vera in her interview with Primorac for example, shares how people always wondered why she lived on her own without a man, and that was deemed immoral (Cousins & Dodgson-Katiyo, 2012: 367). This dichotomy of "respectable" and "unrespectable" according to Hungwe, serves a patriarchal agenda of aligning women within the patriarchal margins, a boundary that Mazvita transcends in all the landscapes away from Mubaira. She rejects Nyenyedzi's marriage proposal. She loves the city because it has no rituals. She is comfortable with her arrangement with Joel and embraces her new sexual encounters. In fact, she appears to find sex pleasurable in phallogentric traditions which police and dread feminine-centric sexual gratification. Certain African societies even practice female genital mutilation to mute female sexual pleasure. It is considered a threat to phallogentric subordination of women bodies

which 'must' serve male desires at all times and on men's terms. However, Mazvita does not want to be woven into any man's dreams: "She did not dream dreams around Joel. She dreamt dreams around herself. In Harare, however, Joel was necessary to her dream [...] Joel made Harare accessible" (66). The intention was to use him to realise her freedom the same way men use women to achieve their goals.

Commenting on Mazvita's mobility, Musila states that:

These are the acts of resistance, as these women refuse to be stifled by a gender exclusive colonial economy. Significantly, beyond directly challenging the economic order, the very movement of women into the urban spaces was an act of subversion of both the colonial order and African patriarchy, both of which had interest in controlling African women's mobility and sexuality (2012: 11).

This is the same resistance that Firdaus displays in *Woman at Point Zero*. She does not only redefine her physical boundaries but also freely expresses her sexuality. Firdaus also comprehends that the land oppresses women. In narrating her story, she mentions how she once utterly refused to sacrifice her body for the land and was accused of being unpatriotic. According to Firdaus, "at the back of [the men's] minds patriotism meant that the poor should die to defend the land of the rich, their land, for [she] knew that the poor had no land" (31). The poor in this instance being women who should bow to traditions that are detrimental to their survival.

In as much as Mazvita's peregrination across landscapes can be read as a motif of resistance, I also read her journey as reflecting the Sisyphean path to freedom that is constantly travelled by Zimbabweans within their landscape. Mazvita's cyclical journey begins and ends in Mubaira. In fact, when she returns, she is more of a disfigured being with a dead soul on her back. Let me also point out that throughout the journey, Mazvita is nameless just like her child. It is only when she arrives in her home land that through a vision, her mother calls her by name.

Going back to Zimbabwe where the novel is set, the 1980 flag- independence failed to solve the economic, social and political issues that were entangled in the land fought for during the liberation struggle. The reclaimed land and new opportunities were not distributed equally; and a new tribal tension rose again during Gukurahundi when it was now an ethnic tension for hegemonic power in the post-colonial state. And then came the Fast Track Land Reform Program in 2000, a war also referred to as the 3rd Chimurenga or *Hondo yeMinda* (war for

fields). This land resettlement was aimed at addressing the lopsided distribution of land carried over from the colonial era. However, only a few ordinary people benefited and the entire operation had dire consequences for all Zimbabweans. Sanctions were imposed by Western nations and this further dwindled the ailing economy. Even within the ruling party, the land reform program only benefited the political and military elite in the ZANU PF camp where they inherited fully equipped fertile farms while the rest of the low-key war veterans and ZANU PF supporters were allocated small arid communal lands. The Zimbabwean economy which had mainly been anchored on taxes paid by the white farmers and which sustained an agro-based industry plummeted even further. The new beneficiaries to the land failed to observe simple fiscal rules and this resulted in high outstanding water and electricity bill arrears in the farming sector. Because government revenue fell, there was little money to invest in water, road and infrastructure maintenance and improvement. In consequence, load-shedding, pot-holes and collapse of infrastructure ensued. Companies such as Cotton Printers closed, the economic web crumbled and forex influx from market gardening and meat produce normally sold in lucrative western markets crippled.

In light of such economic collapse, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) sparked new hope for Zimbabweans. The citizens' astounding vote for change was however met with a new operation in 2005, *Murambatsvina* which literally translates to 'remove the filth.' Although the operation was introduced as a cleaning and order campaign to clear slums and illegal commercial activities, it only affected the urban dwellers where the MDC had a stronghold. Because the population in the cityscape had voted for the opposition party, and by implication had sold-out the land, they had to be punished through demolishing their houses and livelihoods. Fast-forward to the recent 2017 coup that rekindled hope in most Zimbabwean refugees across the world that autocracy, poverty, violence and discrimination would finally end. What was overlooked in 2017, just as was the case in 1980, is that the whole nodus did not lie within an individual but the entire ZANU PF juggernaut that dominated over all the natural and human resources. Three years after the coup, Zimbabweans are in a worse off situation. The mortality rate has skyrocketed with people dying from drinking contaminated water, lack of health facilities and poor nutrition. Those who speak out are abducted because they are 'sell-outs' either working with the late Mugabe's faction G40, or the United States of America government that imposed sanctions. It is under this

marginalisation and political purge that #Zimbabweanlivesmatter social media frenzy becomes a convenient outlet for Zimbabweans. Its effectiveness or otherwise is a matter for another disquisition.

4.4 The Forest Landscape

Forests in Africa surpass coloniser timber harvesting and trophy hunting ends. They serve a physical, spiritual, aesthetic and ecological function. According to Ikeke in “The African Traditional Thought and Practice,” forests have an intrinsic value that includes sheltering both animals and humans, recreational purposes, regulating temperature, pharmaceutical relevance and socio-cultural significance (2013:345). Murck (2005) also holds that forests provide environmental services such as stabilising the soil, replenishing the soil’s nutrients, holding humidity, harbouring extensive reserve of biodiversity, regulating climate change and helping in the hydrologic cycle. When forests are destroyed, “the wildlife that make the forests their home also become casualties as they are either killed directly or driven away (Iheka, 2018:133).

Maathai in *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006), proffers a gripping account of how in the pre-colonial era humans were directly linked to nature from birth and how they lived harmoniously with the nonhuman. Infants were nourished from the produce of the land before being introduced to breastmilk. This ritual, according to Okuyade (2013:143), was “a very powerful spiritual-cultural ordinance which reminded humans of their moral-ethical responsibility to their environment.” In her autobiography, Maathai also points out that sacred landscapes such as the rivers, the mountains and the forests were revered and they in turn sustained the human race. Rain forests as portrayed by Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* and Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain*, brought rain and the entire ecosystem was sustained.

African forests were home to the African gods and not the heaven that was projected by the white religion. The fig tree in Maathai’s village for example was referred to as “a tree of God” (2006:63). The cutting of that tree translated to “uprooting man from the presence of God” (148). Egya (2018:209) also underscores this spiritual dimension of trees and highlights that “when a tree is made sacred or worshiped as having the ghosts of ancestors, it is the way spirituality brings man and nature into harmony” (2018:209). In the African cosmology,

humans and all forest life form an interrelated web where every element is interdependent on the other. Conserving the natural forest is therefore indirectly preserving human life.

Rituals, rites of passage and different religious practices such as ancestral worship are all performed in the forest. Sacred spirits in Africa are believed to inhabit natural spaces such as trees, the rivers and caves. As such, tree felling, hunting or cultivating in certain natural spaces was prohibited. Land was administered by nature-centric taboos as opposed to capital-centric colonial and post-colonial policies which are formulated by egocentric rulers to serve multinational corporations. Certain trees such as the mphafa that I discussed in the previous chapter, and the Nehanda tree in Harare which recently caused a stir in the media when the city council chopped it, were not cut, specifically for spiritual reasons. The fact that these utilitarian beliefs preserved the environment and promoted the mutual human-nonhuman coexistence authenticates them. The undisturbed forests continued with their ecological role of conserving the landscape and regulating climate change.

Before colonial incursion that transformed the epistemological, sociocultural and economic landscape in the name of modernity, there was harmony in the ecosystem. According to Maathai, missionaries “introduced new methods of exploiting our rich natural resources: logging, clear-cutting native forests, establishing plantation of imported trees, hunting wildlife, and undertaking expansive commercial agriculture” (2), and hence she warns against blaming the poor for destroying the environment when it is actually the powerful that are responsible.

It is against this background that I begin my discussion by exploring the Kadoma tobacco farm which is part of the colonial environmental violence that Vera addresses in *Without a Name*. Extensive areas of the indigenous forest were wantonly cleared to make way for the capitalists’ voracious appetite for wealth. While commercial tobacco farms became spectacular sites of ‘development’ generating employment and contributing to the upsurge of the economy even as the damages they caused far outweighed the benefits. In this section, I argue that tobacco farming hugely contributed to the notion of slow violence against Africans because of its long-term damages to both the environment and public health.

Let me first paint a picture of how Africa became a target for toxic environmental activities. In 1991, the former president of the World Bank Lawrence Summers proposed a global shift of heavy polluting industries to the poor African continent. In his argument he states:

I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles...shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries? (as cited in Nixon, 2011:2).

A decade later, Johnson, Pecquet & Taylor endorsed the waste trade claiming that “there is little evidence that hazardous wastes, which are often chronic carcinogens, contribute to death rates in developing countries” (2007:398). They further argue, “people in developing countries would rationally accept increased exposure to hazardous pollutants in exchange for opportunities to increase their productivity and, hence, their income (ibid.).

This reckless environmental strategy was not only confined to heavy industrial enterprises but also extended to any activity performed within the landscapes with catastrophic effects on the environment and human health. This included strenuous forms of agriculture such as tobacco farming which had both immediate and long-term effects on the entire ecosystem. Africa also became a good site for this type of farming because there was extensive virgin land, cheap labour and ‘free’ natural resources. I deliberately highlight ‘free’ because the fans they used for curing the tobacco leaf were fuelled by wood which they freely chopped from the indigenous forests without replenishing. The meagre taxes they paid did not regenerate the landscape, nor did they improve the lives of the poor communities. Instead, it was pocketed by the politicians and those affiliated with the ruling party.

When Mazvita flees from Mubaira, her first stop is Kadoma where she works briefly at a tobacco farm. Here the entire space is a forest landscape in its varied forms, a space where some of Vera's salient themes are hinged. A huge part of that landscape was cleared by the white settlers to make way for tobacco farming. In Zimbabwe, this type of farming has been declared one of the main causes of deforestation. It clears large woodlands for its production and relies on a large wood input for the construction of barns and the curing of its leaf. According to environmentalists, deforestation displaces people, affects wildlife, interrupts weather patterns and is one of the major causes of climate change. In the conversation between the two men in the Mubaira-Harare bus, one of the men comments that “the earth has changed. Who ever heard of such heat?” (62). Part of what Vera does through that comment is to dismantle the myth that global warming is a contemporary phenomenon when it is actually a distillation from the colonial period when the white settlers started tampering

with the natural environment, breeding long-term ecological disasters where desertification, heat waves and massive droughts have been recorded throughout the country.

Compared to other cash crops, tobacco farming also damages the physical landscape through leaching the nutrients in the soil just like the jacarandas I discussed in the previous chapter. Geist (1999) posits that:

The agricultural practices of topping and desuckering, that is, designing the tobacco plant as a consumer product that will have a high nicotine content results in a uniquely high uptake of all macronutrients from the soil, and tobacco's regular need for fertile (virgin) soils which are often provided by land clearances involving deforestation (19).

Because tobacco is a monocrop and susceptible to a variety of diseases, large amounts of pesticides are applied to the fields and these pose a health risk to all those involved in its production, including the nearby communities. An example of a pesticide that is normally used is dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT). I especially mention this pesticide because its hostility to the environment inspired Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) where she warned against its use for health and environmental reasons. The pesticide has however been banned in most developed countries and yet the white settlers fattened their bank accounts through exposing the African landscape to this poisonous chemical. Research has also shown that tobacco pesticides have long term effects on pregnant women, children, the elderly and in extreme cases can even lead to death. More than once in *Without a Name*, Mazvita comments on the smell of decay from the plant that permeates the air. One then wonders how many pregnant women were exposed and infected. Looking at the whole production cycle of tobacco from cultivation, its packaging to consumption, it has adverse effects on the entire ecosystem especially the vulnerable and the poor. Moreover, the nicotine is toxic to aquatic life.

Commenting on tobacco growing areas, Fraser (1986) notes that the area of all types of forest in most African and Asian countries is now below the level at which it is capable of meeting the current and future demand of fuelwood demand on a sustainable basis. This means that accelerating deforestation can be expected, with potentially serious ecological consequences.

The capitalist 'development' of the landscape also devalued the relationship between humans, nature and the spirits living in the natural world. When they cleared the land, they

invaded sacred places. Mazvita remarks that “they have grown the tobacco where we once buried the dead [...] they have grown tobacco where we once worshipped and prayed” (40). Commenting on colonial modernity in Zimbabwe, Mabura (2010:107) also contends that “the improvement on the landscape alienated black women from their liminal and rejuvenating spaces where they could position themselves to effectively resist or overcome what were often predominantly patriarchal and racist societies.”

The guerrilla liberation war is fought in the forest, a space that provides the soldiers with camouflage and shelter. But as Nixon (2011) and Njanji (2014) explain, military activities have a catastrophic effect on the entire ecosystem. Forest cover is destroyed, water bodies are contaminated and very often, the damage is intergenerational. The forest is then used as a stage for political and sexist agendas, which is what ecocriticism and ecofeminism argue against.

Rwafa (2013: 20) asserts that “besides balancing biodiversity and satisfying certain material human wants, African forests command symbolic meanings associated with how they can also be assigned meanings that transform them into conceptual spaces for the renegotiation of African identities.” Therefore, apart from the forest being a physical landscape offering humans a livelihood and harbouring freedom fighters in Mubaira, it can also be a metaphorical representation of other concerns in the novel.

4.5 Forest as Metaphor

Mazvita is raped in the forest, a natural landscape that should be ungendered and a landscape embodying the protection of all the African gods residing in the caves and crevices of the forest. As Murphy and Rivero (2018) argue, there is nothing inherently good or inherently bad in a landscape unless we start assigning meaning. In this instance, the forest and the mist couple to entrap the woman. Mazvita’s body is desecrated in the natural space, a space that is a paradoxical battleground for black emancipation regardless of gender. Mist is water vapour just above the ground. It clouds vision and limits visibility. It is this invisibility that Vera picks on to reflect Zimbabwe’s uncertain future especially as far as liberation and freedom is concerned. In narrative terms, the novel features mist entangled with the sex scenes, first with the freedom fighter in the bush then with Joel in the city. The mist becomes a

smokescreen concealing the predatoriness of the freedom fighter, confirming the shadowy nature of the liberation dream where the liberator is also the perpetrator.

The prolepsis of danger is further buttressed by the sentinel bird which shrieks just above the scene and overpowers Mazvita's own scream. A sentinel is like a prognosticator that detects risks and warns humans of imminent danger. The nature of the war and the liberation is then questioned especially as far as women are concerned. Would the awaited independence be gender inclusive where women can hold title deeds? Would the post-colonial government accommodate all Zimbabweans regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation? Would the war yield a democratic government affording equal opportunities to all? Judging by the sewage and smell of decay that permeates the landscape, corruption, moral decadence, abuse of power and resources are the natural fruits of the liberation dream.

On another score, this invisibility also crowns Vera's city women whose freedom and relevance is linked to being closer to 'white.' They bleach their skins and become invisible both to their fellow brothers and to their ancestors. This invisibility is somehow a mockery of the new freedom that the women had acquired for themselves in the city. Easy freedom according to Vera, that can even be squeezed from a bottle. Mazvita's version of freedom was tied to her sexuality as well but there is no hope for her endeavours as we witness a resurfacing of the mist in a different sexual encounter in the city.

The forest can also be read as reinforcing heteronormative gender roles where women must cook for the soldiers and also provide sexual gratification. According to Rwafa (2013:327), "the objectification of the female body by male guerrillas enforced traditional roles of women as sexual objects that the war was beginning to allow African girls to question." They questioned the very nature of the war and their pleasure-object role as women in the struggle.

Although Rivero and Jeanie (2018) contend that forests and swamps often create visions of peril and entrapment, Rwafa argues that "the African forest might be a space upon which they [women] redefine their identities" (2013: 325). The forest in Kadoma is one example of such a landscape where a woman subverts the traditional perceptions of sexual impulses where men are viewed as sexual beings and women as sexual objects. This landscape is imbued with sexual images of a fragile egg laid between the crevices, the lush greenness of

the grass and the cushiony mushrooms sprouting under decaying logs. I particularly find the mushroom image fascinating as it ties back to various scenes in the novel where a woman's identity is defined in phallocratic terms. Vera's narrator writes:

The mushrooms stood meek beneath the decaying log that was partly buried in the ground, and she had bent forward and touched them fearfully. Touched their floating beauty, for they seemed ready to break, seemed waiting to break if they were touched. They were white beneath the cold black shadow, the wet earth, the decay (10).

There are two ceremonies that are performed within this forest landscape. It is the free sexual encounter between Mazvita and Nyenyedzi, and the re-naming of the former to howa (mushroom): "He named her. He reminded her of what they had found together" (10). Because he is a man, Nyenyedzi feels by default he holds the authority to rename and give Mazvita an identity of his choosing. What is also implied by the new name is that he is embracing her sensuality more than her personhood. He thinks of her as this soft, pure fragile being that can nourish him both in the physical and sexual sense.

In "Language, Voice and Presence in *Under the Tongue* and *Without a Name*," Muchemwa opines that:

The tactile and visual image has different associations for the namer (Nyenyedzi), the named (Mazvita), the author and the reader. For the namer, mushroom has the connotations of the tenderness of sexual intercourse and the peace found in nature; for the named, mushroom holds the promise of untainted and fragile beauty, while for the author the associations seem to have been clearly established. To the reader, the mushroom that is found under the rotting log is poisonous; it is the mushroom of madness that is associated with psychic dysfunction and death. The association of Nyenyedzi and Mazvita with this type of mushroom implies that their relationship is tainted by Mazvita's memory of her traumatic encounter with the soldier-rapist in a more or less similar physical setting (2002: P11).

Writing in the same vein, Toivanen (2002: 173) suggests that "the act of naming implies the dominance of masculine economy, striving for fixed definitions and ownership that forecloses the possibility of unconditional giving and the intangibility of the feminine."

I read the mushroom encounter back to the tobacco farm where Nyenyedzi accuses Mazvita of being impatient. He says, "you want to possess, to hold things between your hands and say they belong to you" (39). He adds, "only that which we can carry between our fingers can belong to us" (42). Mazvita cannot carry the land between her fingers and so she distances herself from it. There are three instances in the novel where she holds something in between

the fingers. It is the stem of the mushroom, Nyenyedzi himself and the baby's neck when she strangles it. In the forest, Mazvita:

held the neck of the mushroom between her fingers [...] she reached her thumb and forefinger ever so delicately, and held the soft cushiony head, held it so gently, feeling already the grooved underneath so tender and the surface above so smooth that her finger slid over the head past the grooves and met a thin polished stem, soft, then she held that stem tight but gentle, pulled at it tight but gently (11).

In the city when Mazvita kills her child, Vera's narrator states that "the neck was broken. Still, she held the knot firmly between her fingers" (110). Mazvita is determined to make her rules and claim her place. She kills in the domestic space and makes love in the ancestral forest. From the stated instances, Nyenyedzi's comment then can be interpreted as delineating what a woman can rightfully claim and what she has control over. Through holding the broken neck of the child, the message conveyed is that motherhood is a choice and women should not be coerced into maternity. The mushroom metaphorically represents sexuality. According to Palmer (2006), Mazvita is a desiring being with limitations because she is a woman. In the forest however, she subverts the traditional sexual practices where the woman has to suppress her libidinal impulse for fear of being labelled as unrespectable. She initiates and makes love in the forest: "Mazvita pulled Nyenyedzi down beneath the rocks which had been warmed by the sun, and felt the warmth rise over her naked back" (20). The second time she makes love in the forest is on her own terms. And this time because it is consensual, she feels the ground pressing against her feet and not against her back. The feet here symbolising her journey to freedom as opposed to the back that is suppressed on the ground.

On seeing Mazvita carrying her own mushrooms, Nyenyedzi is somehow threatened and he quickly names her just to keep her in check. To name is to own and to control. He further crushes the poisoned mushroom. I read the beautiful mushroom growing under decay as Mazvita, being a representative of other women as well whose efforts are thwarted by the phallocratic society that desperately confines them to the land. Women such as Wangari Maathai who have been labelled as uncontrollable simply for alleviating poverty among women through forest regeneration. Even under such decay, be it a man stifling their potential or the patriarchal government which subsumes their rights under those of men, women still shout to be heard. They refuse to be held and neither do they want to be claimed. That is how Mazvita becomes poison in phallocentric societies. She vitiates the gendered

cultural norms and threatens the status quo. Probably that is why Vera names this protagonist Mazvita, which means thank you. Thank you for defining your own boundaries and creating your own destiny. Thank you for dislodging poisonous male-centric constructions on colonialism and narrow nationalism.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, my focus was on *Without a Name* where I discussed how Vera's representation of the relationship between the forest, the land and humans is interconnected to political and cultural concerns such as rape, sexuality, infanticide, oppression, power and gender inequalities. I began with an ecofeminist analysis of how the land is directly connected to human concerns of dominance, gender and power inequality. In the second section of the chapter I explored the physical forest and its multiple functions, the liberation war and its impact on both humans and the environment. Lastly, I explored the metaphorical forest and how it reflects the cultural, socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe. The following chapter will conclude the study by summarising the main insights from the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Telling a story presupposes a feeling for the necessity that that particular story be told. Narratives which leave a very strong impression of the landscape do so by integrating that landscape into the motivation of the plot. They tell a story that is at least in part about the landscape. Thus motivated, the landscape no longer serves simply as background (Parry, 2003:35).

5.1 Introduction

This study undertook an ecocritical reading of Yvonne Vera's three novels: *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and *Without a Name* (1994). The aim was to explore how these narratives capture the environmental catastrophes within the Zimbabwean landscape and how various ecological tropes foreground the socio-cultural, economic and political concerns of different epochs in Zimbabwe.

My reading of Vera's novels through an ecocritical lens was inspired by the radical transformation of the Zimbabwean landscape under the banner of 'modern development' and land redistribution, the realities of climate change and the ramshackle economy that has driven scores of Zimbabweans into foreign lands. Here I am alluding to how Chinese companies build malls in wetlands (for example the Longchen Plaza in Harare) and construct tile factories in upper stream Norton.¹¹ I am also referring to the Chinese mining companies given rights to clear the land, drill and construct infrastructure at Hwange National Park, the largest nature reserve in Zimbabwe. Apart from this area being a nature preserve, it also sustains the livelihoods of the local Nambya people, a marginalised minority group in Zimbabwe. I also have in mind some high ranking local political leaders who feast on wildlife at private functions and exchange crocodiles as birthday gifts.¹² I am thinking of the baby elephants that are continuously alienated from their mothers and clandestinely shipped to Chinese zoos. I am also referring to the elephant and rhino tusks surreptitiously exported to Asia for medicinal purposes at no benefit to the nation at large. Although foreign currency is

¹¹ Norton is a town in Mashonaland, Zimbabwe. It is located about 9km from Lake Chivero, Harare's main water supply.

¹² Although a number of local newspapers in Zimbabwe capture the lavish parties thrown by government officials, *Independent* in 2015 reported that five impalas, two sabres, two elephants, two buffalos, a crocodile and a lion trophy were donated towards birthday celebrations for the late Zimbabwean former president Robert Mugabe. Villagers and nature conservationists who disputed the donation were all dismissed as enemies of the president and ungrateful beneficiaries of the land reform programme.

realised from these illicit international dealings, it appears that not much is directed towards alleviating the poverty of local communities or the conservation of wildlife.

While the state-owned media (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation and Zimpapers) mask such practices as beneficial in reviving Zimbabwe's economy, ordinary citizens on social media have blasted the government for desecrating the local ecologies that are part of Zimbabwe's identity. As an ecocritical scholar, my focus in this study then was more hinged on how Vera's selected fictional narratives imaginatively represent the harm done to the wildlife, the earth and the poor ordinary people within the Zimbabwean landscape. Through an ecocritical reading of the selected novels, I investigated the anthropogenic activities that contributed to the environmental catastrophes. I also explored how environmental issues are inextricably linked to the economic, social and political crises in Zimbabwe. Lastly, I examined the role played by different ecological features such as trees, flowers, fire, air, water, rocks and the land in foregrounding pertinent thematic concerns.

The study was divided into five chapters. In the introductory chapter, I highlighted the capitalogenic and anthropogenic activities that have contributed to climate change in Zimbabwe and the attendant human crisis. I also noted how the state-owned media has mostly represented the spectacular visible events within the landscape while overlooking the immediate and long-term environmental harm posed on the local poor people (with thinking Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence). The chapter further outlined the ecocritical theoretical framework undergirding the research. Ecocriticism, a developing theory in literary studies enabled fresh insights from Vera's novels which have hitherto been read from other perspectives. Whilst on the surface the stories appear to be human-centric, ecocriticism enables an earth centred approach where all elements of the ecosystem are interconnected rather than subordinating nature as a mere backdrop for human activities. Such a reading of narratives opens up a deeper and nuanced understanding of the ecology of life. Lastly, the chapter reviewed existing scholarship on ecocriticism outside Africa, in Africa and in Zimbabwe to situate the research within these ongoing debates.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 were based on a close textual reading where I dedicated each chapter to a single novel from the selection. Accordingly, in chapter 2 I focused on *Butterfly Burning* where I examined how Vera interweaves human and nonhuman nature to reflect people's socio-cultural and historical realities in Zimbabwe. In the chapter, I took urbanisation as my

point of departure to illustrate how the supposed development through modernity transmogrified the landscape of colonial Zimbabwe, enriching the British colonial capitalists while immiserating black Africans who were scavenging within the same landscape.

I borrowed terms such as omnivores and ecological refuges from environmentalist Guha Ramachandra who argues that omnivores sustain their lifestyle through exploiting all the non-renewable resources within the landscape while the poor locals bear the costs. The terms enabled me to analyse the unequal consumption of resources and distribution of environmental risks in Zimbabwe. The British colonial land policies, taxes and economic practises displaced animals and people creating ecological refugees. The influx into urban cities and South Africa in that era also dismantled familial structures where women were confined to the not so productive rural landscape while their men fed the colonial economy. Secondly, blacks were disconnected from their spiritual world believed to reside in natural spaces such as forests and rivers. Thirdly, the quality of life for ordinary workers deteriorated physically and psychologically. They lived in slums such as Makokoba where they were directly exposed to all pollutants from the industrial factories.

In my analysis, I drew from Sylvia Wynter's thoughts on who counts as human, Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence and Guha Ramachandra's notion of resource consumption and risk distribution through his categorisation of omnivores and ecological refugees. Insights from the above suggest that it is the Western definition of human that renders black bodies subhuman, disposable and subject to death. Omnivores relate to nature in the same manner in which they relate to the human Other. They have the ability to draw on all the earth's resources to maintain their lifestyle and be apathetic to the environmental damage they cause. In fact, it is the poor ordinary citizens who suffer the risks. From my analysis, the omnivores treat both humans and the environment as exploitable and disposable resources. In *Butterfly Burning*, the invasive waste is dumped in Makokoba black township. Colonial urban planning policies had strategically positioned the settlements in such a way that they are directly exposed to all pollutants. From an ecocritical perspective, I argued that it is often the vulnerable poor who bear the immediate and long-term impact of environmental harm. Tragically, it is the same poor people and the damaged environment that remain invisible in mainstream artistic and media representations.

In the same chapter I also discussed Rob Nixon's extractive theft where omnivores exploit all the natural resources from the landscape without benefiting the local people. For example, coal is mined in rural Zimbabwe yet electricity is a privilege afforded by the rich and politically connected in urban and peri-urban areas. My argument here is that there is a direct link between urban modernity, the environment, power relations and social inequality.

An analysis of the metaphorical representation of the ecological elements such as water, fire, air and the dry land underscored the connectivity between race, gender, sex, power relations, the environment, systemic and structural exclusion within the landscape of Zimbabwe. The way we relate to the land is similar to how we relate with the invisible other.

So many traumatic events have occurred within the Zimbabwean landscape. Because some have been rendered as 'ordinary' disasters, they are rarely discussed at official platforms. However, the fact that something is unspoken does not translate to its erasure from memory. In chapter 3, I examined how Vera interweaves the human and natural elements such as the rocks, the flowers, the trees and the rivers to articulate the bleeding Zimbabwean histories such as Gukurahundi which brutally claimed over 20000 Ndebele people in Matabeleland and Midlands between 1981 and 1987. In the chapter, I provided a brief background to the interethnic conflicts in Zimbabwe since they frame Vera's narrative. From the background, what stood out for me is that as elsewhere in the world, the battle for natural resources have been the cause of most wars in Zimbabwe.

Guided by Rotenberg's analysis of landscape designs, I also traced how colonial modernity drastically transformed the Zimbabwean landscape, domesticating it through the jacarandas and eucalyptus that embellish the streets of Bulawayo. The colonial street names, buildings and the imported vegetation reflect a British landscape and through what Rotenberg termed the "garden of order," such a redesigning of the landscape was a colonial stratagem to undermine the existing powers and legitimise control over the entire landscape. From this analysis, a link between the landscape, power and race was established. What was revealed is that a study of the landscape can reflect the history of a nation.

The analysis then progressed to Kezi rural enclave where the landscape was turned into a crime scene. Unarmed men such as Mahlathini were slaughtered, women were raped and infrastructure was demolished. An ecocritical reading of the events in the narrative highlight

how both humans and nature were casualties of war. Different images of ecological features provided valuable metaphors in which to understand the lingering memories of precolonial and postcolonial histories. The image of the San virgins painted on rocks for example, is directly linked to the subjugation of women in the precolonial era. This metaphor also became useful in reading Nonceba's rape and Sibaso's violence. Reading Sibaso from an ecocritical perspective provided nuanced ideas of interpreting war crimes. The detailed description of Gulati hills which was home to most freedom fighters provides a glimpse of the psychological traumas that the soldiers had to bear. After sacrificing his education and future in the name of fighting for land, the new Zimbabwe still excludes the likes of Sibaso from the promises of independence.

Sibaso is associated with cemetery flowers in the novel, a metaphor that Cephas also adopts to describe the condition of life in the rural landscapes of Matabeleland. Through different natural elements that Vera scatters in the plot, larger thematic concerns such as tribalism, racism, sexism and nationalism are reflected. However, the daisy flowers towards the denouement of the narrative and the construction of Lobengula's kraal by a Shona man suggests a collective writing of the national history. My argument in this chapter was that a study of the landscape references the history of the nation and the natural elements play a vital role in assembling and re-membering the 'forgotten' and rarely discussed histories of Zimbabwe.

In chapter 4 I was more concerned with Vera's representation of the relationship between the forest, the land and humans. From an ecocritical and ecofeminist approach to the novel, what I observed in my reading is that women do not relate to the land the same way as men. The reason being that both the patriarchal colonial system and traditional patriarchal structures excluded them from land ownership. For women land is as oppressive just like all the dominant systems of power; that is why Mazvita is so desperate to detach herself from the land. She even brackets the land with the soldier rapist because the war was about the land and the land belonged to men.

Crossing landscapes for women then becomes an act of defiance both to the patriarchal colonial system that policed women's movements and the traditional patriarchal system that controlled women's reproductivity and productivity. I explained this domination of women through Chipso Hungwe's categorisation of "respectable" and "unrespectable" women.

In reading the forest landscape, I mainly relied on Maathai, Iheka and Oguyade's thoughts on the physical and spiritual meaning of the forest. The capitalists clearing of the African forests to make way for cash crops such as tobacco in the Kadoma farm discounted black Zimbabweans in innumerable ways. It created ecological refugees, compromised the health of the local communities, interrupted wildlife and also devalued the relationship between humans, nature and the spirit world.

Again, Vera relativises the fixed attributes assigned to nature. In her narrative, different forests connote varied meanings. In Mubaira, Vera presents an image of a forest dominated by freedom fighters and war activities that are harmful to the environment. The natural space also reinforces gender roles where women must satisfy the physical and sexual needs of men. Mazvita is also violated in the same natural environment. In Kadoma however, Mazvita uses the same space to negotiate and redefine her identity. Through embracing and celebrating her sexual desires, she subverts the traditional sexual impulses where women are muted sexual objects. Mazvita makes love in the forest and kills in the domestic space, still emphasising how she redefines herself outside the realms of domesticity. Vera, through a rich description of the landscape is enabling agency for the vulnerable in the society, that is, both women and nature.

An ecocritical and ecofeminist reading of the relationship between the environment and humans provided nuanced insights into understanding cultural issues such as infanticide, rape, and sexuality. Furthermore, the representation of the land and forest in the novel intersects with multiple forms of domination connected to race, gender and class.

To sum up my arguments, although Vera imbues nature with meanings that carry over from one novel to the next (Shaw, 2002:25), she repudiates the conventional tendency of feminising nature or naturalising women. An ecocritical reading of her texts suggests that there are no fixed qualities in women that associates them with nature and vice versa. For example, Vera's natural world is not as nurturing, loving and accommodative as the stereotyped woman should be. In fact, the rivers rarely overflow and when they do, they claim lives. The forest also harbours criminal activities, it claims lives and passively witnesses the desecrations of women. The land which should sustain harms. Furthermore, natural elements such as fire do not have a fixed destructive attribute. Phephelaphi's fire is more cleansing from all the toxicity of the land and can also be read as a form of re-birth. In reading the

natural elements under that framework, most of Vera's characters such as Phephelaphi and Mazvita cease to be victims of their circumstances but instead, their acts are interpreted as a bold defiance to all the systems that marginalise them. Sibaso's violence can also be linked to a broader national crisis requiring social and political intervention.

In conclusion, I reflect on Alice Walker's holistic vision of a harmonious relationship between nature and humans where she claims that "while the earth is poisoned, everything it supports is poisoned. While the earth is enslaved, none of us is free [...] While it is treated like dirt, so are we" (as cited in Simcikova, 2007:86). In other words, nature and humans have a symbiotic relationship and preserving the former, is sustaining humanity.

5.2 Further Research

There are a number of areas that can be pursued in future research. It might be interesting for other scholars to consider an ecocritical reading of Zimbabwean novels probably across gender, genres, generations, languages and national borders. What I mean by across genres is reading prose along other genres such as poetry, songs or folkloric forms. Another angle could be engaging with narratives from different authors. Instead of concentrating on one scholar, novels from different writers can be read to reveal how writers across generations have captured the environmental injustices in Zimbabwe. Also, another approach could be conducting a comparative reading of Zimbabwean novels across gender. That is, comparing the representation of environmental issues from the women and the male perspective. Another interesting dimension worth pursuing would also be a comparative reading of environmental issues across national borders. In sum, it is hoped that Zimbabwe would have its own anthology of ecocritical works as the theory goes beyond a mere representation of societies but is also instrumental in conscientising against environmental degradation.

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