

In the present study, the novels of late Zimbabwean feminist writer, Yvonne Vera have been dealt with. It is observed that Vera not just wailed for the ignorance of Zimbabwean women as writing and written subjects. Infact, what she did was that she triumphed over this neglect, by writing about the women and by breaking their silence through re-visioning. According to Lewis,

[Vera] urges her readers to consider different forms of marginality, silencing, and violation, and insists on the need to hear the voices of those that are powerless and victimized. She traces the confluence of courage, determination, futility and despair in the struggles of those whose voices are not heeded in society. Her writing therefore opens up expansive visions of freedom and ever-widening paths of resistance. (3)

Vera deals with the violation of her female characters in numerous ways and also lays bare the fact of their resolve to come out of their oppressive situations so as to create their visions of freedom. While paying tribute to Vera, Lewis notes that at the time of her death, “she had published five novels (*Nehanda*, 1993; *Without A Name*, 1994; *Under the Tongue*, 1996; *Butterfly Burning*, 1998; and *The Stone Virgins*, 2002), a short stories collection entitled *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, 1992 and an array of cultural, literary and social criticism” (1). In her short literary career she carved a niche for herself and received several literary awards as mentioned in Lewis (2005) and Zhuwarara (2001). Zhuwarara admits that “in all these outstanding publications one senses a writer who is deeply committed to her art and is often exploring Zimbabwean experience from the point of view of women” (261).

In the present study Vera’s five novels were taken and in these works it is observed how Vera reclaims the Zimbabwean women’s marginal positions. She depicts these positions as spaces of strength instead. It is further seen that these marginal positions are reversed when her women characters choose to step out of their marginal positions of the ‘Other’ and take up the significant status as the Subject. This overturning of women’s subsidiary status is clearly seen in her novels. The narratives are filled with historical realities – the First Chimurenga, Matebeleland massacres, Second Chimurenga and Third Chimurenga.

The main concern in the thesis has been to articulate the sites of enunciation wherein the characters, especially the female ones deal with their fragmented conditions. Though the situations in each novel, for each character is different, but pain and agony felt by them is the same. Her females endured more than they ever achieved in terms of emotions. It is also observed how the accounts of the African woman have been created as a sort of “negotiation” that allows them to accept their loss of self as something tragic as well as liberating. This reinforces Trinh T. Minh-ha’s standpoint that women must re-establish themselves in order to evade external definitions. Talking about how women have been “defined” and “dehumanized,” Trinh in *Women, Native, Other* contends:

You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your reality, your voice – you know. And often you cannot say it. You try to keep on to unsay it, but please – we must say it – they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said. (80)

What Trinh speaks about are the concerns that African women writers have, especially the positioning of the African woman in relation to patriarchy in such a way that she is not superficially defined. Vera has always been intensely conscious of the need for the women to voice out their own facts and realities, and if in any case they fail to do so then, the dominant system will speak on their behalf. In all the novels under study, it is seen that while the gendered theorizations are evidently clear and pervasive but along with that a different counter-narrative is also at work: these are narratives of exploration, survival, challenging limits and indicating new possibilities.

Man always held a privileged position in African societies which resulted in an erasure of identities and subjectivities of several women. This meant that reconstituting from this cultural expunge is a tough and shaky voyage. In claiming their right over themselves as individuals, the cultural expectations, like their maternal roles restrict them to their prescribed roles as subordinate beings and there is a perpetual reminder of the fact that the true place of a woman is her domestic realm and she remains voiceless.

In her essay entitled *The Female Writer and her commitment*, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie urges the African woman writers to be conscious of their art since they seek to give it their all. She suggests the women writer to “be committed to her vision,” but most importantly, to “tell her own truth, and to write what she wishes to write” (63). The appeal confirms with what Ogundipe-Leslie terms the “mystification” of the African woman that is seen in typically in male writers works of art. Here, the African woman has two classifications, one is that of a refined city girl and the other being rural woman. He further states that these figures are “often shallow, exaggerated and false” (59). Adding on, she pleads women writers to consider a variety of social predicaments in their societies. She also appeals them to situate the cognizance and way out to the African woman’s dilemma in the larger global context. Stemming from the significance of the settings of the chosen novels, the present study has sought to explore the relationship between the women and their conditions in war-torn Zimbabwean that always held them to subsidiary status.

In the first chapter “Re-visioning the History”: *Nehanda*, it is seen that by re-visioning the history, and by ascribing the women characters, major as well as minor, women are ascribed a status that they were earlier deprived of. The task of Vera here taken as that of a black writer who gives voice to the voiceless. In the actual history, the prominence was laid only on the male spirit- medium Kaguvi but what is actually seen in the novel is the complete turn of events with woman taking the leading roles. The birth of a girl possessing the prophetic powers is shown to be special occasion. The women having the prophetic dreams decide the course of events. The spirit-medium Nehanda is shown to be a link between her people as well as her ancestors. Having all the powers to prophesise, she finally leads the people into uprising against the white settlers. Nehanda functions as a podium from which Vera chooses to speak about her valiant women characters. It sets the stage from which it becomes clearly evident the position that women in Vera have. It shows how power does not necessarily restrict itself only to the male counterparts. History has always been a highly-contested terrain and in the first chapter of the thesis it is observed how Vera re-visions it by giving eminence to her female characters. She brings this about by actually mis- representing a few important historical facts wherein she attempts at breaking the silence of women.

In this particular chapter, Vera aimed at creating possibilities of what could have been the situation in contrast to revealing the reality of what actually happened. Vera re-visioned the position of Nehanda and depicts her as a great spirit-medium who initiates the people into the rising against colonial rule in the First Chimurenga. Vera gives considerable importance to her other female characters as well in this novel, something that they were deprived of in their actual lives in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe.

The focus here has been on the black artist, especially the black writer. Talking about the intricacies that are entrenched in the African communities, Walker always held the belief that for the women living on the margins, it is really important that they are conscious of their roles as well as themselves, and one such role is that of a black writer, especially a female black writer. She further mentions that the women's engagement with each other especially African women, helps in the building of a society that is balanced and harmonious. Walker believes that the task of a black writer is to represent "the consciousness of the people" (228) and this is what is clearly brought about in the chapter with Vera bringing to the fore the consciousness of her women characters, central as well as minor and thereby becoming the voice of her people.

In the novel, the re-visioning of the history works as an in-between space where the established hegemonic and normalizing practices are challenged and negotiated. It is a space of transition, where post-colonial power relations and norms are subverted.

In *Nehanda*, Vera confers power in the eponymous protagonist Nehanda, in contrast to the real historical facts. These facts depicted Kaguvi as the chief spirit-medium of the First Chimurenga. What Vera does in the novel is that she provides with an account of the pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwean society and the First Chimurenga in a non-linear style. Basically, she presents everything from a female standpoint. The birth of Nehanda is shown to be a special occasion. The focus on the birth of a girl child is, in itself unimaginable and Vera's intention here is to bring to the light the importance of other female characters who assisted in her birth. Nehanda is represented as a connection between the Shona people and their ancestors. When she

grows up, Nehanda is endowed with the powers of foresight. She could even speak with her ancestors over the interests and wellbeing of her people. Consequently, she instructs and guides her people in the revolt against the white colonizers.

The present novel subverts the idea that history is something that is 'fixed and unchangeable'. It daringly disputes and contests the original recorded accounts of history and the nationalist history of Zimbabwe by completely understating the part that men shared in it whilst highlighting only her women. Though in actual, the voices of the women were mostly interceded by the men but here Vera celebrates the power that her women possess, she celebrates their ability to speak and portrays them as masters of their own lives. The male characters are depicted as subservient to the female ones which is in contrast to the official nationalist history. It is well depicted in the novel, where Kaguvi takes the charge only in the absence of Nehanda. Otherwise, the kind of dictatorial authority that Nehanda possesses in the novel would not allow any male to attain the status he always had. Not just by changing the historical facts as per the advantage of her woman does Vera achieves what she ought to but there were several other ways too. She re-positions her women by giving them the privilege of narrating the events long before male characters. Right from the beginning to the end what is observed in the novel is that Vera's female characters achieve subject positions that stood witness to the fact that their role in the making of Zimbabwean history was significant as seen in the ways – they take leading roles in their personal lives, having visionary dreams, to be able to narrate events, taking up the arms in the hills together with men.

The use of the symbolic language is another strategy through which there is a focus on women. Vera envisions a view completely different from settler version of history. The movement across time is a central theme. This indicates a departure from the established traditions, colonial histories as well as patriarchal social practices. The strength of narrative techniques is deeply rooted in the poetic nature of these writings and since the novel is polyphonic, it ascertains space for manifold implications in its revisioning of Zimbabwean history.

The synthesis between the poetry with prose narrative aids in drawing the links that transcend place and time. The poetic and often complicated narrative conveys a story

that persistently suggests the complicated roles that women play in conventional society that defies stereotyping. By writing in an imagined mythic consciousness allows for reinventing and surpassing the colonial facts. By purposely making the rural women as leading characters Vera imagines them as powerful. The women who assisted at the time of birth of Nehanda are precursors to the prophecies of the spirit-medium, Nehanda. As is clearly seen, women are celebrated in their totality. By empowering a woman character, that too in the times when women were looked down upon, Vera with her immaculate strength of writing Re-visions them, elevates them and celebrates them. The inference here is that Vera, through her narratives, opens up spaces through which her women articulate their subjectivity and contest their societal roles.

The Second Chapter titled “The Journey of Becoming”: *Without a Name* (1994) explores the inner self of the character named Mazvita. She is a rape-victim who gets raped by a freedom fighter in the name of land and that too, in her rural home, Mubaira. In *Without a Name*, Mazvita, the protagonist does not get absorbed in self-pity after she gets raped by a freedom fighter. Rather, she longs for a relief, that she feels, she might get if she moves out of the very environment that keeps reminding her of that brutal incident. It was the same environment in which she has been violated of her Self. Therefore, the solution to the problem lies in the Journey she has had to undergo towards the city though this turns out to be a mirage for her. Here also, what is depicted is the national importance of re-locating and reconceptualising women.

Obioma Nnaemeka, held the belief that for the women living on the margins, it is really important that they are conscious of their indigenous values. African feminism contests via negotiation and compromise. The nego-feminism knows how to utilize the culture of negotiation in order to deconstruct the patriarchy for the benefit of woman. It believes that it is the weak people that seek revenge. Strong people tend to forgive and intelligent people always ignore. Nego-feminism talks about the issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, and collaboration. Embracing the thoughts of nego-feminism then, Mazvita comes to terms with herself by arriving at peace with her innerself. Obviously, she does make some negotiations but those negotiations come with a strong resolution as well as compromise.

One of the biggest challenges that Vera faced in conquering the past silencing of women was by delving into the inner consciousness of her women characters. Through this Vera breaks the cultural taboos that always restrain the women in expressing themselves. It is pertinent to mention that considering the circumstances that women were in Vera's time, speaking about the things such as rape was considered as taboo. In investigating how Vera's women break these taboos, it can be inferred that the act of speaking in itself a way of 'opening spaces' to affirm the self as well as occupying empowering subject positions. This is seen as a way in which the women recover from the violence that is meted out to them.

Mazvita's character here, supposed as a nomadic figuration, is a gender –defined status that traverses physical and psychological limitations. A nomad is a symbol of transgression and subversion. It discards fixity and makes use of the strategic re-location so as to release what is required of the past with the intention of tracing the ways of transformation of lives. Mazvita's nomadic journey stands for her geopolitical defiance against the laws of the territory. A nomad is symbolical of deconstruction of the conventional concepts of fixity and individuality. Mazvita is a colonized subject, and her figuration as a nomad aims at speaking from beyond the definite position that is constructed by race, gender, nationality or even class.

After getting raped, Mazvita decides to leave the place that violated her. She runs away from her village to the city – the city of her dreams, Harare. She leaves her village, her lover, named Nyenyedzi for whom the enthusiasm for the native land was higher than his desire for Mazvita. Thereupon Mazvita abandons him. Upon reaching the city she realizes that she is pregnant. The pregnancy here stands for the violence of rape but it also does stand for Mazvita's uncertainty in continuing with it. She commits the horrific act of infanticide after she is repudiated by her lover Joel. It is not just the refusal that makes her commit this horrendous act but it is the restriction that Mazvita feels she will have on her freedom if she continues with her pregnancy. She takes the baby, ties it on her back and heads towards her rural home and retraces the steps backward.

The Journey of Mazvita occurs at various levels: it is physical as well as psychological. Throughout the novel Mazvita is seen to be in an everlasting journey. The

journey from her rural home to Harare, from Harare to finally the journey back to her home, Mubaira. The reason why she left her land was that the land has been presented as a site of restriction here. It limited the woman like Mazvita from expressing themselves. It was the same land upon which Mazvita was raped, and it was the same land fighting in the name of which the guerilla soldier raped her.

The city for Mazvita turns to be a ground of transgression. Mazvita does not keep herself fixed at one place. She moves wherever she wanted to and disrupts the idea that as a woman she cannot choose the course of her life. Mazvita's journey of becoming of herself, therefore, comes with an acceptance of the history. It is seen that Mazvita retraces her steps backwards with the baby tied to her back. Upon reaching her rural home she places the dead baby on the ground as an offering to her ancestors which implies that she gives back to the land what she had got.

Mazvita is aware that she cannot escape the reality of her life, though she is somewhere contended to find that her entire village is conflagrated and so, no one is there to identify her. This is the place which has at last become her destination when she releases the baby from her back. This gesture looks like as if she has harmonized herself to her history, as a mother and as the killer of the child. She settles up with her history, her people and communal identity and thereby, tries to rise above the concerns of the past. With no one to remember her, no eyes to identify her, the novel's ending indicates the possibility that she can still start afresh.

She is truly emblematic of that "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *wilfull* behavior" (Walker xi). All these qualities allude to doing/saying something that is not self-evident or easy, yet doing/saying it with full determination and a lot of motivation. Saunders asserts, "[t]he emphasis is on 'wilfull' because for so long, so many black women have not been considered to be in possession of their own free wills, and no small part of the problem has resided in the psyche of black men" (1-11).

Mazvita disrupts the idea that as a woman she cannot choose the course of her life and contrary to this she chooses one. Throughout the text it is observed that her actions have truly been courageous and *wilfull*. Never is she seen surrendering to her fate. But



finally when she retraces her steps backwards, it reveals her mature, grown up attitude. She does not act womanish, but becomes one. Her acceptance of herself and her life is associated with being responsible. It is rooted in a feeling of responsibility, of being in charge of her fate.

The Third Chapter named as “Re-claiming the Self”: *Under the Tongue* (1996) is about a girl named Zhizha who is bereaved of her will to speak, or it could be said that her circumstances silenced her. Written in 1996, *Under the Tongue* is a novel that is narrated in alternating chapters. Partly, the chapters are told by heavy-tongued Zhizha. Actually, her father rapes her and as a result of which she resorts to an unending silence. The other chapters, that are introduced in the third person, convey the story of her parents, Runyararo and Muroyiwa, and how their life ends. Zhizha’s grandmother, in this novel seems to have the most important role. The story is not presented in a linear way, intentionally by Vera as the story is too painful to be delivered directly.

The story is presented lyrically and in fragments. Vera links the story of Zhizha’s father and mother, the terrible events that led to her Mother’s custody as well as the death of her father. It was with this novel that Vera became Zimbabwe’s first writer to deal with the subject of incest. Vera, with her bold writing style, and with her bold topics that has always been considered as taboo in Zimbabwean society, proves herself to be a writer of great potential. Vera writes in an evocative style.

It is noticed in this chapter that Vera creates such strategies from which safe spaces for the women in the novel, especially Zhizha is created. It is with the help of these spaces that women are re-inscribed in their social order. The chapter has been analysed using the concept of Collins “Safe Spaces”, considering the first of the three primary safe spaces, which gives importance to the bond between the women, in their guidance, in their strengthening mechanism that provides for their emancipation.

Female friendship or female bond gives rise to a new zeal in black women. Their shared experiences insist upon forming a solid bond of friendship among them. The female bond between the two sisters, two friends, mother and daughter and even grandmother and granddaughter imparts the source of strength that aids them bounce

back against patriarchy and the racial and sexual prejudices. Here, the relationship between the grandmother and granddaughter is emphasized upon. The focus is upon the theme of sisterhood between the protagonist Zhizha and her grandmother and also how this sisterhood helps the protagonist to Re-claim her self. Female friendship helps the black women thwart the forces of patriarchy. It also offers them with solace and safety healing their pain.

In *Under the Tongue*, the relationships play an important role in raising the status of the women from the restrictions imposed by patriarchy. Therefore, when ten-year old Zhizha gets raped by her father and loses her ability to speak, then it is her grandmother who helps the girl regain the voice (through love and care) that was otherwise suppressed. The novel portrays the infidelity in relationships as a consequence of the war. The lack of visibility and the loss of the speech together with a persistent longing to forget the crime is emphasized over and over again in the novel.

Vera's style of writing here is obscure that adds to the depressing air of the story. The story is narrated in a fragmented way. The rape is used here as a sign of patriarchy's control over women. Not only the role of grandmother is depicted in an elevated manner, but also that of Runyararo, Zhizha's mother. The name of Runyararo in shona meant silence or calming. She is a dutiful wife and does not speak much in the novel. But her act makes her stand out as a character when upon discovering that her daughter has been raped by her husband, she does the unimaginable and kills her husband. It was a maternal stimulus that results as a reaction to her daughter's abuse. Like a true mother, she too protects and shields her daughter though at the cost of her husband's life.

The women in this novel develop a bond that strengthens them. The conversations that Zhizha has with her grandmother helps her in speaking about herself. Through reading and writing and by articulating her pain, she retrieves her voice. The efforts she makes at writing allows her to become a speaker of her own story. Moreover, the generational knot between the grandmother-mother-daughter acts as a therapeutic portrayal that situates mothers as sites of restoration.

Silence, therefore, works as an act or strategy of resistance or choice to fall in the clutches of patriarchy. As it was stated by Patricia Lawrence that silence was a way of saying the “unsayable”. Silence is not something to be construed as passive, but it takes an active form when looked at as something of response in its own right (Trinh 83). Henceforth, it is observed that by refusing to speak, a space has been created by Zhizha that is possible yet feasible. She has been trained to speak a voice that is strange and her silence looks like an act where she comes to terms with herself.

It is therefore examined that the bond between the females is vital to the women’s literature. These provide them with the spaces that permit women to work on their individuality. The women under these spaces give up the submissive roles to which they have been relegated to by the patriarchy. Thus, the spaces not just open avenues for a realistic representation of female character. It also is concerned with an analysis of the normalized ways of life. Vera’s novel renders the precarious and the exultant facets of “silence” as a safe space. In this safe space, the protagonist Zhizha revives her voice by sheer love and care of her grandmother and reconsiders the notion of speech and silence. It is seen how through love and care provided by the bond between Zhizha and her grandmother castoffs the obscure dark world that her father’s incest had created. While tracking Runyararo through the streets of Dangambvura and selling her mats, we bear a testimony to a resurrection of the human spirit. In the same way, Grandmother’s power to articulate her life account permits her to comprehend the discrimination that she was subjected to by her relatives. It is seen that how Zhizha under the love and nurturance of her grandmother articulates and Re-claims her self.

The Fourth Chapter entitled “Assertion of the Self”: *Butterfly Burning* (1998) deals with the novel *Butterfly Burning*, which is situated against the backdrop of colonial Zimbabwe in 1948. It depicts the story of a girl named Phephelaphi who falls in love with a man much above her age named Fumbatha. For the few years, her life seems happy and joyful, but soon she realizes that she has merely been confined as a maternal image that Fumbatha harbored all his life. When she discovers about her pregnancy, she aborts the fetus. Phephelaphi is an extremely ambitious girl who always dreamt of attending the nursing school and pregnancy would have never allowed her that. By aborting the fetus,

she gives birth to her “Self”, though tentatively but she achieves a new sense of identity. But when she realizes that she is pregnant for the second time she goes mad. Knowing that she has no resources to manage her life on its own, and thinking upon the implications the child would have on her life, the nursing school which only remains a far-fetched dream for her, and having been given an ultimatum to leave the apartment that she shared with Fumbatha and additionally, the betrayal she receives from her friend as well as her lover, are too much for her to bear. Thereupon, in order to bereave of all the burden she resorts to self-immolation. Suicide, an act of self-immolation works as her way of resistance. By subverting the tenets of motherhood and by committing suicide she makes claim upon her body, which rightfully belonged to her more than anyone else.

Phephelaphi’s act of self-immolation allows her to enter a space of extraordinary openness. It is a place expanding the geographical limitations. She leaves the earth, the land and embraces a multitude of perspectives, thereby, attaining her status of reclamation.

The character of Phephelaphi tries to discover her authentic self. Her act of abortion, her will to leave her lover in order to live her dreams are the acts which prove that the will to assert herself had been inherent in her. She is ambitious and right from the beginning she is aware of her sense of self when she meets Fumbatha. She is very clear of what she wants and awakens in her new prospects of awareness and growth. The western concept of the self is self-centered whereas for the blacks it is collective that is ‘We’. But subverting the idea that as a black she must adhere to, Phephelaphi sticks to the concept of ‘I’ instead of ‘We’.

Like a fighter she fights every time, wanting to assert herself. She is deceived by her best friend, faces infidelity through her lover and could not attend the nursing school which she desperately hoped to, repudiates motherhood and fights till the last breath. Her act of abortion and self-immolation is a matter of putting herself as a subject-position by following her own norms. She is not willing to accept anything she is not willing to. She does not want to be possessed and owned so having no prospects to lean on she takes her life her own way, which indicates that her life as well as her death is something she takes a total control on.

The concept that a woman can assert herself through economic independence is vital to womanist thought. Having no hopes for the future, knowing that she is pregnant for the second time, and being fully aware of the fact that continuing would mean depending on Fumbatha, which she was not ready to, she resorts to self-immolation and thereby asserts herself.

The idea here is that though Phephelaphi commits suicide in the end but the conviction and resolve with which she led her life had been inspiring. Living in the times when women were not even considered humans and cherishing dreams in those times is courageous and this courage comes through an awareness of the self.

Not just Phephelaphi, but the character of Deliwe, Phephelaphi's close friend is one of brave and audacious. In the novel she is presented as someone who cannot be suppressed. No man can dominate upon her. She too, asserts herself in her own way. Sleeping nude, claiming a right over her own body, running a brothel and enjoying the way men come to seek solace in her arms all signal her ways of claiming herself.

In reading Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, it is observed that Vera discovers the connections between discursive practices as well as the embodied experience of these discourses for women dwelling on the boundaries of society. It is also seen that what these women experience is spent by, and on their own bodies. These experiences are crucial in shaping the alternatives they choose and their exercise of agency. Vera's heroines compel us to reconsider the conception of nature/sex/body as unyielding and unchallengeable, and hence as an impossible site of intrusion in gender struggles.

The radical figurations of women like Phephelaphi in *Butterfly Burning* choose alternative strategies in order to refuse imposed reproductivity and motherhood. These women do not connect or negotiate with anyone but their own selves and negotiate their own state of affairs.

Chapter Fifth "Re-visiting the History/Restoring Hope in *The Stone Virgins*" is set in the rural Kezi at the time of violent—and still largely unacknowledged – period of Zimbabwe's early independence known as the *gukurahundi*, the novel tells of two sisters, Thenjiwe and Nonceba, who are violated by an ex-guerrilla combatant, Sibaso. After

decapitating Thenjiwe, Sibaso rapes and mutilates Nonceba, leaving her for dead as he retreats into the hills of Gulati. That rape functions as a devastating weapon of war is made apparent by the novel; however, Vera's purpose extends further than to highlight this very cruel reality. *The Stone Virgins* shows us that rape emerges as an effective political weapon out of a context that sanctions the subjugation of women, even in times of peace, and that a woman's vulnerability under a system that does little to vitiate coercive forms of masculine desire can be felt even in the tender embrace of her lover.

*The Stone Virgins* focuses its attention on some of the most vulnerable and blameless casualties of this conflict: young women living in the rural areas who were victimized both by embittered ZIPRA combatants and by ZANU's vicious militia. The *gukurahundi* remains an unacknowledged period in the nation's "official" history, as promulgated by ZANU (PF). The narratives of patriotic history assert that the country has enjoyed a state of peaceful solidarity since attaining freedom from the Rhodesian Front government.

By voicing this silenced period of her country's post-independence history, Vera's novel critically contests the truncated narratives of "patriotic history" and the myth of national unity that it promulgates. However, Vera extricates her critique from the political, ethnic, and ideological polemics that provoked the conflict; the novel represents both Fifth Brigade and "dissident" violence, mapping both as unfathomably cruel and irreducible to the narratives of political history. Her focus, instead, falls on the scapegoating of guiltless women who are made to bear the material wounds of these ideological struggles. In particular, the novel discloses the sociocultural myths that engender their vulnerability in this context.

The novel is not, however, without hope for restoration. Its latter half traces Nonceba's courageous struggle to find a voice to speak her trauma, to find "the language of all wounded beings" (83). In the final chapter of the novel, we witness her reintegration into a social realm, despite her realization that "everything has changed, gone, not to be recovered" (82). She can no longer enjoy the feeling of undifferentiated unity represented by her bond with Thenjiwe, but must build her future independently: "There had always been two of them, one walking beside the other like a shadow, now she is

alone, the shadow to her own being” (83). Vera does not claim for Nonceba a unified subject-position after her trauma, but celebrates her courageous effort to survive despite the “wounds of war which no one can heal” (86).

The important thing in the novel is the help that Cephas offers to Nonceba in the process of her recovery. He enables her reintegration into society. He takes her away from the violence of Kezi to the thriving city of Bulawayo, whose citizens are able to enjoy the freedoms of independence denied those living in war-torn Matabeleland. The relationship that develops between Cephas and Nonceba, who share the aching loss of Thenjiwe, has within it the promise of growth and restoration. Cephas refuses his desire to “possess” Nonceba and, through recognizing her autonomy, is able to offer her a truly restorative love, thus finally realizing the potential that his love for Thenjiwe originally represented.

The novel’s ending suggests that healing from patriarchal violence can only occur when male desire is no longer accorded primacy. In the absence of a coercive masculinity, Nonceba is able to embrace a future, despite the wounds of the past: “A new path has opened for her . . . . She has the strength for it, the resolve” (157). Importantly, Cephas acknowledges that Nonceba will never be completely restored from the traumas of the past as it is impossible. The novel offers no easy solutions to the traumas of violation, but rather stresses the need for the nation to conceive of female identity in different, less violent ways. It is through the ethical acknowledgement of women’s brutalization and suffering, and in the respect for their autonomous identities, that Vera imagines the possibility of both personal and national healing. Although intensely hopeful, the novel’s conclusion is thus far idealistic. Nonceba’s “lingering scars” (157) refute the narratives of post-independence nationalism, which claim that colonised subjects have been restored by the new nation-state, and the novel asserts that traumatic histories must not be concealed by idealized mythologies. Only when the brutalized, fractured subject is recognized as constitutive of the decolonized state can a new and different future be imagined.

Vera portrays a rapprochement between men and women and intimates that healing may come from the confrontation of history, making it the most hopeful novel.

Womanist is committed to the “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker xi). Therefore, the assistance provided by Cephas to Nonceba, by paying for her surgery and finding her a new job wherein she can start afresh, is clearly indicative of the womanist stance of Alice Walker that entails inclusiveness of both women and men in order to build a constructive and harmonious society.

The study looks at the critical textual accounts in order to establish subjective spaces, or sites of enunciation through which women imagine possibilities of change. Through an examination of Vera’s five novels, we see that the spiritual, earthly relation that her women share ensures their survival and allows them to regain control over their lives and enables them to access the most private space of all, the space inside a woman’s body. By re-visioning the texts through a womanist stance highlights intervening spaces for the women that are effective in describing the process through which they negotiate a female consciousness and subjectivity. These are the spaces that are devoid of trauma, stress, violence and exploitation and the women in return receive love, affirmation and support.

In her preface to an anthology called *Opening Spaces*, Yvonne Vera contends that the task of literature is to make available a discursive space for subjects that have always been silenced by authoritative socio-political systems. Her emphasis is on the transgressive value that literature possesses for the African women who are, “without power to govern, often have no platform for expressing their disapproval” (Preface 2). For her, writing offers a platform for such women from where they can express themselves. It is a “free space” that is not provided to them in the spoken discourse: “The written text is granted its intimacy, its privacy, its creation of the world. It retains its autonomy much more than a woman is allowed in the oral situation”. “Writing,” she upholds, “offers a moment of intervention” (Preface 3).

In the five novels that Vera published during her lifetime, she consistently sought to realize the potential of literature to “open spaces” for the articulation of previously suppressed narratives. She steadfastly endeavored to imagine the emotional and psychological lives of Zimbabwean women and to disclose the histories of violation and brutality responsible for their silences. Her novels represent an unwavering confrontation



with traumatic and “taboo” (“Preface” 2) subject matter, such as rape, incest, and abortion, experiences that “all too often remain unspoken and unspeakable” (Primorac 86). While there is a central focus on women’s relationship to discourse and agency in Vera’s writing, her texts are also crucially concerned with tracing the suffering of women, whose narratives have been excluded from the dominant versions of Zimbabwe’s history. The characters that populate her novels are subordinate, disempowered men and women, whose suffering is disregarded by the dominant system, and Vera seeks to imaginatively reclaim their histories of struggle and survival. Her fiction is thus often regarded as speaking, “in a specific manner, for the Zimbabwean voiceless” (Primorac 86).

The endeavour in this project has been only to provide an imagined identity through which women regain control over themselves even if that comes through these subversive acts. Vera celebrates her female characters as complete entities who struggle to make themselves heard. Thus, Re-visioning of the women in Vera is brought about in the ways in which she provides threshold to them, in the form of spaces they occupy or thwart, from where they can imagine new ways of representing themselves. A world more hopeful more equal and more humane.

As Lewis truly affirms “like the artistic creation she sought to encourage, Vera’s storytelling is not simply ancillary, or a form of preparation for action. The expansive meanings configured within her texts actively constitute political action in challenging a present world and pointing towards a society that is possible but also ‘not yet’” (3). By making use of her unique narrative technique and poetic style she successfully challenges the circumstances of women in present-day Zimbabwe that points to a viable Zimbabwean nation which, as Lewis exclaims, is “possible but also not yet” (3).