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An Ecocritical Exploration into Yvonne Vera's
Butterfly Burning and
The Stone Virgins

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------------|--|----|
| ABSTRACT | | 2 |
| 1 | INTRODUCTIOON | 4 |
| 2 | MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY | 10 |
| 2.1 | Yvonne Vera and her novels | 10 |
| 2.2 | Butterfly Burning | 11 |
| 2.2.1 | Zimbabwe in the colonial era | 12 |
| 2.3 | The Stone Virgins | 13 |
| 2.3.1 | Zimbabwe in the chaotic period before and after independence | 15 |
| 2.3.2 | The Matopos – the hills of Gulati | 16 |
| 2.4 | Literary review on Vera’s works | 17 |
| 2.5 | Methodology | 21 |
| 3 | THEORIES | 24 |
| 3.1 | On Culture and Nature | 24 |
| 3.2 | Ecofeminism | 31 |
| 4 | BUTTERFLY BURNING | 37 |
| 4.1 | Gendered Nature | 38 |
| 4.2 | Identities in landscapes | 44 |
| 5 | THE STONE VIRGINS | 52 |
| 5.1 | The City and the Enclave | 53 |
| 5.2 | A Tree and a Nation | 59 |
| 6 | CONCLUSION | 66 |
| WORKS CITED | | 71 |

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Master's Thesis: An Ecocritical Exploration into Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*

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ABSTRACT

Yvonne Vera, one of the most outstanding novelists in Zimbabwe retells the agonies that women experienced in a male-dominated society and presents us with the most chaotic moment in Zimbabwe's history. She daringly confronts the taboo topic in Zimbabwe – the 1980 genocide. Her poetic writing style has gained her international readership and literary critiques. By employing ecological literary critique, also known as ecocriticism, my thesis explores into the discursive landscape in Vera's two award-winning novels: *Butterfly Burning* (1997) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and illustrate how the landscapes in her novels reveal the culturally, socially and politically sensitive issues, such as feminism and colonialism and nationalism.

A qualitative literary research into her novels reveals that the discursive landscapes in her novels are socially, historically and politically conducted. Intertextual analysis shows how ecofeminist dualism is manifested in her novels. Dualistic connections such as woman/nature, man/culture, and wilderness/city are found to be abundant in Vera's novels. The spatial difference between the white citiness and the black wilderness has its colonial and nationalist implications. The nationalist authenticity is attached to the trees and the roots buried underground.

An ecocritical study in African literature provides us with some critical considerations over our anthropocentric notions on human culture. A dialogue between human culture and the natural world may not only inspire us to review the current ecological crisis in our planet from a humanistic perspective, but also reveals ecological interconnections between humankind and our social-culturally constructed surroundings.

KEYWORDS: Yvonne Vera, ecocriticism, African literature

1 INTRODUCTION

This river grows among thorns. This river does not belong to dry land. It is greedy and gives nothing of its water.

–*Butterfly Burning* (Vera 1997:27)

It is true: everything in Gulati rots except the rocks.

–*The Stone Virgins* (Vera 2002:104)

The river and the land, the thorns and the water, butterfly and the virgins made of rocks that will never rot; Yvonne Vera (1964–2005)’s novels always have clusters of natural elements. Women are being killed while the river never gives up; a nation in horror while the rocks never rot. Women as river, men as land; the philosophy lies in the rocks. An ecocritical exploration into Vera’s two award-winning novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins* will discover the sophisticated interconnectivity between mankind and our surroundings.

In a recent book *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2002), a collection of analytic essays on her works, Vera’s novels are being studied, analyzed and interpreted by international scholars. Her works are considered to be poetic, her style is allusive and her boldness in daring “handle the most difficult subjects and confront taboos often evokes strong and diverse responses in the reader, and has fostered intense discussion about her writing” (Muponde & Taruvinga 2002: xi) has gained her multiple awards in literature.

When I read Vera’s novels, not only being thrilled and shocked by the bloody scenes she has created: raping, killing, infanticide, decapitation being some of the atrocities in her novels (Gunner & Kortennar 2007:3); I am also fascinated by the landscapes in her novels. The landscapes and natural surroundings in her novels reflect the history and realities as if they are interacting with the protagonists and telling the stories on behalf of the storyteller. Culturally and politically sensitive issues are rendered and told by the landscapes with relatively few human involvements. These ecological interactions

between human culture and the environmental surroundings have precious values in our anthropocentric notion of nature; humanity, in its sense of manmade culture, and the otherness of nature reveal some philosophical implications for contemporary literary and cultural studies. An ecological literary study on Vera's works may reveal some of the complicated relations between the mankind and the surroundings.

Being a well-known English novelist in Zimbabwe, Vera writes about women and history as well as nature. She writes how women are maltreated and destroyed in a male-dominated society and how the people are controlled and marginalised in a colonial nation. Moreover, beauties of Zimbabwe's nature, the rivers, the hills and the landscapes are abundant in Vera's novels. To sum up Vera's writings, I have the following points to present.

Firstly, all of Vera's novels are set in important historical junctures in Rhodesia (later known as Zimbabwe after its independence from the UK in after 1980). *Nehanda* is set in 1896–1897 when Rhodesia was under British occupation. *Without a Name and Under the Tongue* are respectively set in 1977 and 1979 when Zimbabwe was about to end the civil war and declared its independence. *Butterfly Burning* is set in 1946, the time Zimbabwe was in its colonial era. *The Stone Virgins* is set during 1970–1985, when Zimbabwe has gained its sovereignty over Britain and involved itself in a chaotic civil war after that (Muponde & Taruvinga 2002:xi.). The struggle for independence, the indifference toward the intruders and the desire for an independent state are broadly told in Vera's novels. It is apparent that there are deeply embedded colonial, postcolonial themes in Vera's works. Moreover, there are also studies on her works based on feminist theories and gender issues, especially on the female characters that Vera has created.

Secondly, Vera speaks for females and calls for a gender balanced social atmosphere in her works. She often presents us with some extreme agonies: rape, incest, infanticide, beheading are among the most breathtaking cruelties in Vera's works (Gunner & Kortennar 2007:3). Vera excels in creating thrilling scenes to imprint those female characters deeply in readers' minds. Tortured women (such as Phephelaphi in *Butterfly*

Burning and Thenjiwe and Nonceba in *The Stone Virgins*) and daughter (such as Zhiza in *Under the Tongue*) raped by her father boldly present us with some cruelties that women go through in a male dominated society. Female characters in her works are widely studied. For example, Robert Muponde's essay "Reading Girlhood under the Tongue" looks into the suffering of a little girl raped by her father. Muponde finds that Vera is trying to "place the struggles of traumatized and silenced voices on an equal footing with the national liberation struggles" (Muponde 2007:36). Carolyn Martin Shaw examines virginity, sexuality and mothering in the works of Vera. She claims that there is a consistent interconnection between mother and daughter in all Vera's works (Shaw 2002c:35). Furthermore, Shaw's essay "The Habit of Assigning Meaning: Signs of Yvonne Vera's world" gives detailed analysis on the meanings and roles of various recurrent symbols and motifs in Vera's works. She interprets the symbolic metaphors; various natural existences are written in such a way that they are integrated with the protagonists (Shaw 2002b:30–35). Shaw is not the only one who has studied Vera's works with an insight into the interconnectivity between the characters and the natural surroundings. The beautiful landscapes in Vera's novels are not to be ignored as they do not only serve as the settings of the stories but also have obvious social-cultural implications.

Finally comes nature, or the surroundings. In Vera's works, the people and the surroundings are interwoven so that nature becomes a cultural construct and a part of the voices telling stories. By using the word "interwoven" here, I mean Vera uses the landscapes and natural world to express some social-cultural values in human society. The natural surroundings carry human identities. The landscapes are personified by various metaphors and descriptive narrations. The identities of women and men are built on some feminine earthly elements. For instance, in *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi, the abused heroine, frequently carries natural elements on herself; she becomes water, land and lights in Fumbatha's eyes. In *The Stone Virgins*, like the title indicates, the sisters, Thenjiwe and Nonceba reside in the rocks of Gulati, experience the darkest moment in Zimbabwean history. Furthermore, male characters also have their identities told by the natural surroundings. For example, Fumbatha in *Butterfly Burning* is often compared with the land and the city while women are read in connection with feminine natural

elements such as water and flowers. Men's attitude towards women can be reflected by these contrasting elements such as city/wilderness and man/woman. However, In Vera's works gender identities are constructed through the changing notions towards those natural elements. The existing conception of nature constantly changes while the identities or moods of the characters change as well. Not only are gender identities constructed by the natural surroundings, but also a national identity, the identity of the people in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe is mirrored by the landscapes.

Rivers are polluted while colonisation brings about urbanization and industrialization. The rivers in both of Vera's fictions, e.g. The Umguza in *Butterfly Burning* and the Kwakhe in *The Stone Virgins*, not only carry a woman's hope, a man's desire, but also they play a role as Zimbabweans' spring of life and accumulation of force calling for freedom. The importance of the rivers is understood by the people who live on it while the meanings of the rivers are not only limited to their natural functions. Therefore, the rivers serve as a national foundation on which the people are dependent. The spatial and functional differences between a colonial urban space and a real untouched Zimbabwean wilderness also have cultural implications. Moreover, the hills of Gulati, in *The Stone Virgins*, have a holy spiritual connection with the Zimbabweans (Ranger 1999b:3-5). It is also the site where massacre took place. The sacredness of the hill is stained, however the unchangeable authenticity of a real Zimbabwe locates not in the dying people but in the rocks that never rot.

Beside all the rivers and the land, women and men; the city and the wilderness, in both novels the trees and the roots also contribute to the construction of human identities. In searching for the roots, people are searching for the buried conscience of human beings. In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi's numerous attempts to search for roots but not branches could be understood as a desperate young woman's desire for equality in a male-dominated land. In *The Stone Virgins*, Thenjiwe searches for the roots of Mazhanje, a kind of fruit tree native to Eastern Zimbabwe but also the name Thejiwe gives to her lover, instead of showing her interests in her lover's personal background. And after all the terrors happened during the chaotic period, the marula tree cannot be uprooted, even the store in front of it is burned down and the owner of the store is shot.

The trees and roots have formed a tight connection with the conscience of the people, therefore the national identity and the social–cultural reality is told by the landscapes.

From an ecological point of view, I will reread Yvonne Vera’s two award–winning fictions, namely *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, at the same time, I aim to illustrate how the landscapes in these novels recapitulate the history and constructs social–cultural reality on behalf of the people.

Nature, as perceived by human intelligence, contributes to the understanding and development of human culture. The landscape actually makes our “culturalscape” (Wylie 2002:149). Interpretation of the natural surroundings in literary works has implications on human culture. Dan Wylie claims that the language of nature is “more or less socially coherent, accepted or historically localized descriptive languages” (ibid). This is the main concept that I am using when interpreting and rereading Vera’s novels. I will examine the rivers, the trees, the rocks, the untamed wilderness, the difference between urban space and rural enclave and try to answer how the landscapes and surroundings bear the specific historical and humanistic values and what exactly these values are signified by the natural surrounding are two of my main research questions. How these landscapes are linked with the people and humanities? What are the implications of this interconnectivity between the humankind and nature? I will offer some explanations on these questions by employing the ecological literary critique, or ecocriticism.

The ecocritical analysis in my thesis provides a critical thinking over the existing conception of the mankind and nature. My findings will be useful for those who are concerned with our ecological world that has been devastated by the mankind. Philosophical implications on the relation between the humankind and the surroundings, especially with regards to gender traits and national identity in natural elements, give us a critical view on the humanities and the worldly existence. Furthermore, ecocritical studies on African literature may gain us an inspiring perspective on the existing literary critiques on colonialism, post–colonialism and world literature.

My thesis is composed of six chapters. In the following chapter, I will present the materials and methodology included in my research. A Survey over Yvonne Vera and her two novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, is introduced. Concerning the background of these novels, a brief introduction of Zimbabwe's history also appears in this part and the ecocritical methodology is briefly discussed. I will also present some previous studies concerning Vera's novels and writing style and ecocritical implication in these studies will be discussed.

In the third chapter of my thesis, I will present the theoretical framework of my research. Firstly, I will discuss the confusion in our anthropocentric notions on human culture and critical thinking over our natural world. Secondly, a brief introduction of ecological literary critique comes along with a detailed presentation of ecofeminist philosophies.

The fourth and fifth chapter involve qualitative literary research into the landscapes in Vera's novels. *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins* will be studied respectively in these two chapters. A conclusion, making up the sixth chapter, contains comparative research into the two novels and ends my thesis with Vera's remarks on her ecological writing style.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Vera's two novels, *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002), serve as the main sources of my research. Since I partly pursue a question of national identity built in the landscapes, history of Zimbabwe set in these two novels will be introduced. With regard to the spiritual connection between the people of Zimbabwe and the hills of Gulati, some historical facts on the Matopos will also be included in this part. Then, I will present some previous studies on Vera's novels and reveal some ecocritical findings of the landscapes and human culture. Finally comes the methodology of my literary research.

2.1 Yvonne Vera and Her Novels

Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera is one of the most successful women writers from southern Africa. According to Ranka Primorac, Vera is an ethnic Shona who had grown up in Matabeleland but moved to Canada in order to obtain her doctorate. She returned to her homeland and worked as the director of Bulawayo's National Gallery until she passed away at an early age. In 1992, she made her debut in literature by publishing her short story collection titled *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*. Since then, she has published five novels: *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1996), *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). At the time of her passing-away, she was working on her new novel named *Obedience*. Her novels are published in her homeland Zimbabwe, Canada, USA and several other countries. They are also translated into Italian, Spanish, Swedish and accordingly have gained her international readership as well as multiple prizes in literature (Primorac 2002:101).

Butterfly Burning (1998) received German Literature Prize 2002 and was chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th century in the same year. *Without a Name* (1994) was awarded Commonwealth Writers' Prize for African and Zimbabwe Publishers/Literary Award. She died at the age of forty-one, shortly after accomplishing her last novel, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), gaining Macmillan Writers' Prize for Africa.

Being one of the most influential African writers during the last two decades, Vera has been widely studied and appreciated by literary scholars.

Women and the nation lie in the centre of her novels. Vera's works are concerned with women, her country – Zimbabwe and the spiritual connection between the people and their land. My research mainly explores into two of her award-winning novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, which serve as the main research materials in my thesis.

2.2 Butterfly Burning

There is a pause. An expectation.

–*Butterfly Burning* (Vera 1998:1)

Butterfly Burning tells a story of a young woman in colonial Rhodesia. Phephelaphi, the heroine, meets Fumbatha, who is much older than her, in a Bulawayo township in 1946. Their relationship provides Phephelaphi with shelter both emotionally and physically. She is a young girl full of energy and dreams, which make her different from those people around her. She desires to become a nurse and is enrolled into a training school for nurses, which recruits black trainees for the first time. However, she finds herself pregnant which makes her disqualified for becoming a student there. Being so determined to be a nurse, she has to terminate her pregnancy by carrying out a self-abortion on a hill outside of the town. This action deteriorates her relationship with Fumbatha. However, Fumbatha makes her pregnant again. Finally, she chooses to commit suicide by dousing her body with paraffin and burning herself to death.

The story is told in such way that it unfolds the characters' "emotions, motivations, secrets and past histories" (Primorac 2002:102). In the end of the novel, all the secrets are uncovered, an unexpected series of relationships between Phephelaphi, Getrude, Getrude's best friend Zandile and Zandile's lover Boyidi being revealed. Zandile is Phephelaphi's real mother and she has no choice but to give her baby away to Getrude

who had been taking care of Phephelaphi until she was killed. After that Zandile has been supporting Phephelaphi until she moved out to Fumbatha's place. Fumbatha is the son of a man who was hanged in 1896, the year of the first African uprising against the intruders. Fumbatha has affairs with Deliwe, a woman who has scorpion in her eyes but inspires Phephelaphi in dreams of independence and freedom.

A desperate young woman is destroyed by men and a male-dominated society while the land does not belong to its people. A breathtaking tragedy happened in the colonial Rhodesia that provokes readers into thinking seriously how inferior a woman in a male-dominated world could be and how the local people are marginalised in a nation under foreign control. In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi, a feminist advocate for freedom and a gender balanced society, also longs for an independent country that belongs to its people. Next, I will present a brief introduction of the history of Zimbabwe before its independence, during which the novel is set.

2.2.1 Zimbabwe in the Colonial Era

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in the southern part of the continent of Africa, began as a part of the British crown colony of Rhodesia in the 1880's when the British and the British South African Company (BSAC) were settled in there (Sibanda 2005:18–19). The intruders then promoted a series of colonisation actions on the land including a concession for mining rights as well as control over labour and precious metals and other resources (Bryce 2007:170). The name "Rhodesia" was adopted in 1895 for the territory of Zambesia (Steward 1996:226). In 1898 "Southern Rhodesia" became the official name for the region south of the Zambezi, which now became Zimbabwe while the northern part of the region was named Northern Rhodesia, which is known as Zambia currently (Gary 1956:78).

The Shona, the major ethnic group in Zimbabwe, of which Vera is also a member, along with the Ndebele comprise the dominant majority in the country. The Shona performed unsuccessful revolts in 1896 and 1897, also known as Chimurenga, against the British

colonizers, which resulted in loss of many lives. This historical moment is documented by Vera in the beginning of *Butterfly Burning*, the hanging of the seventeen black men (Primorac 2002:102.).

In 1965, after years of fighting against the British colonizers, the white–minority Rhodesian government made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from the United Kingdom and consequently declared a republic in 1970. A civil war started with black Zimbabwean leaders Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People’s Union) and Rober Mugabe’s ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and assistance from its a independent neighbours (Simbanda 2005:161–164.).

Butterfly Burning is set during 1946–1948, when the country is totally colonized by the British after the unsuccessful fight against them in the 1896 Shona revolt. The hanging of Fumbatha’s father along with other seventeen ethnic Shona begins the story with a voice calling for independence in a colonized nation.

2.3 The Stone Virgins

A new nation needs to restore the past.

–*The Stone Virgins* (Vera 2002: 184)

The Stone Virgins is divided into two chronological parts. The first part of the division is set between 1950 and 1980, during which Rhodesia is a British colony. The second part is set between 1981 and 1986, a period Zimbabwe has gained its independence from Britain but been involved in a civil war. *The Stone Virgins*, two sisters – Thenjiwe and Nonceba, live in the most chaotic period in Zimbabwean history, witnessing the disorder and suffering the cruelties taking place. The story begins in the late 1970’s in Zimbabwe’s second largest city, Bulawayo, a city full of white colonizers, the black people being marginalised. The war is approaching and people fear it. Outside the city, in the rural Kezi community, Thenjiwe falls in love with Cephas, a traveller from faraway eastern Zimbabwe. Their relationship only lasts briefly before she sends him

away because he does not belong to that place. Thandabantu store under a big marula tree serves as a place for gathering of the people of Kezi, the rural enclave that belongs to the black Zimbabweans. The store is full of men returning from the city and foreign products like Lux and Coca Cola. A bus connection links the enclave with the city of Bulawayo and the bus station is just outside the store.

The war begins in 1980, a war that is foreseen and within everybody's expectation (Ranger 2002:207). Zimbabwe is in chaos. "Memory is lost. Independence ends. Gun rise, Rising anew. In 1981" (Vera 2002:65). A civil war succeeds the declaration on independence. Kezi becomes "a naked cemetery" (ibid. 159). Thenjiwe is raped, tortured and beheaded by a man called Sibaso, who used to be a university student but now serves as a guerrilla warrior. The warriors hide in the bush and take refuge in the hills of Gulati, the most sacred place in Kezi. The soldiers kill and torture the residents of Kezi. Nonceba, Thenjiwe's younger sister witnesses the killing of her sister and has her lips cut off by. Nonceba survives and is carried to hospital in Bulawayo.

In the last part of the story, Cephas, having read of Thenjiwe's death in local newspaper, travels down to Kezi, finds Nonceba and takes her back to the city of Bulawayo. Nonceba starts her new life in the city with her memories of Kezi, the enclave where everything has happened.

In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera retells the history of Zimbabwe's most chaotic period by presenting us terrors the two sisters witness and go through. Historian Terence Ranger comments that the book "confronts the reality of History" (Ranger 2002:206) and acknowledges how "women have been the victims of real history"(ibid. 205). Vera tells the history through women's experiences and patriotic nationalist feelings.

2.3.1 Zimbabwe in the Chaotic Period Before and After Independence

The first part of *The Stone Virgins* is set in the 1970's, when the white minority declared Zimbabwe a republic after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Ethic

Zimbabweans under the leadership of Robert Mugabe formed ZANU and ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo have been fighting against the white republic through years of guerrilla wars. Nkomo's ZAPU is hiding out in the bushes and hills outside the white-controlled city. In *The Stone Virgins*, Sibaso is a member of the ZAPU that hid in the hills of Gulati. In March 1978, the white government reached an agreement with three black African leaders that guaranteed the safety for the white civilians. Shortly after signing the accord, on June 1st, 1979 a new country was born under the name of Zimbabwe Rhodesia. However, the Patriotic Front, composed of ZANU and ZAPU, was not satisfied with this solution. On December 1st 1979, the British and the newly formed Rhodesian governments and the Patriotic Front signed the Lancaster House Agreement that ended the civil war (Ranger 2002:206–208.; Christiansen 207–209.).

However, distrust among the new leaders of the country and their struggles over control of the new nation stirred up Zimbabwean society and a nation was completely in disorder, as Ranger comments:

Early in 1982 Joshua Nkomo's party is targeted by the new regime and some ex-ZIPRA (also known as ZAPU) guerrillas, Sibaso among them, flee back into the bush and take refuge again in the hills of Gulati. No longer supported by the people, some of these 'dissidents' use terror against them. On its part, the Mugabe Government deploys its armed forces; set up road blocks; impose curfews [...] (Ranger, 2002:207)

During 1981 and 1982, ethnic struggles between the Shonas and the Matabeles, ZAPU and ZANU, led to Mugabe's Fifth Brigade, also known as Gukurahundi, carried out a final crush in Matabeleland, where *The Stone Virgins* is set. Atrocities against the Matabeles include genocide of an estimated 20,000 Matabeles and brutal tortures. The violence ended with an agreement between ZANU and ZAPU in 1988 that merged the two parties into a single party ZANU-PF (Eppel 2008:1.).

The terrors happened during the darkest moment in Zimbabwe's history are documented in *The Stone Virgins*. Raping, beheading, women and children forced to beat their husband to death are among those terrible brutalities have their "transfigurations" (Ranger 2002:208) in the novel. Thejiwe is raped and decapitated; Nonceba is raped

and had her lips brutally cut. A woman is forced to cut her husband's head apart in front of her children. All these happened in the black enclave of Kezi, near the sacred hills of Gulati, the nation's spiritual foundation.

2.3.2 The Matopos – the Hills of Gulati

In his book *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (1999), historian Terence Ranger presents us with plenty of facts about the Matopos Hills through his years of field work in the area. The site of the Matopos Hills was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003 and the area is now The Matobo National Park of Zimbabwe. Ranger claims that the hills of Matopos, the sacred shrine caves “contain statements about environment, history and politics which have influenced not only the inhabitants of the hills but also hundreds of thousands of people throughout Matabeleland and beyond” (Ranger 1999b:3).

The divine in the hill and the sophisticated connection between the rocks and the people thus become a matter of fact either in Vera's fictional work or in reality. Vera calls the Matopos “Gulati” in her novel. Gulati is a Kalanga expression means “The Voice from the Rock” (Ranger 1999b:3). The virgin figures in the rocks of Gulati, the two heroines in the story – Thenjiwe and Nonceba, present us the spiritual power of the nature in a cultural context. The hills of Gulati in this novel cannot be only understood as a symbolic, ideological or spiritual message. The genocide, raping and killing also happened in the hills in Zimbabwe's history. Vera responds to the hills of Gulati and recaptures the terrors happened in the darkest moment of the nation, a topic that has been a taboo in the country (Ranger 2002:209). She brings the tragedies of the 1980s' by constructing the mass murder in the holiness of Gulati again. Instead of judging history from her own perspective, Vera uses the landscapes to question the lawfulness of the brutal deed and the wickedness of the soldiers. People are dying but the rocks of Gulati never rot.

Butterfly Burning and *The Stone Virgins* have profound historical, cultural and political implications in them. The identities of women and men, the patriotic nationalism in a colonial country have been studied by scholars in the humanities.

1.4 Literary Review on Vera's Works

A recently published collection of essays on Vera's work, *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (Muponde & Taruvinga, 2002), evaluates Vera's literary achievements. In that work, Meg Samuelson comments that "Yvonne Vera's writing offers a critique of colonialism, oppositional nationalism and patriarchal structures, and their customary ideas of land ownership and control over the female body and its fertility" (Samuelson 2002:15). From a historical point of view, as I have discussed in the previous pages, *Butterfly Burning* is set in a time before the Zimbabwean liberation struggle for dependence while *The Stone Virgins* is divided into two parts, the first part being the colonial period and the second part being the independent period. Nationalist patriotism in Vera's works is told by the landscapes and people's attitudes towards the natural surroundings, which also reveals feminist ideologies.

Feminist ideologies in Vera's novels are found to have strong connections with the natural surroundings. Carolyn Martin Shaw presents us with "Turning Her Back on the Moon: Virginité, Sexuality and Mothering in the works of Yvonne Vera". She discovers that in Vera's works, gender issues are explicitly presented. Not only because all the protagonists in Vera's works are young women "defeated by maternity" (Shaw 2002c:35): infanticide, rape, marginalized class, but also the interconnections between mother and daughter are within Vera's concerns. Natural elements contribute to the construction of feminist ideologies. Earth, sky, water and air are among the mostly employed natural elements in her novels. These earthly elements determine the mood and motivation of the protagonists. However, she argues that 'Vera does not give nature the transcendence of ecofeminism; instead of being a comfort in a troubling world or a special province of women, nature reflects that world through its contradictions and

antagonisms” (Shaw 2002c:39). There is a failure in recognising that Vera’s novels apparently have ecofeminist implications. This is possibly caused by the constantly changing conceptions of the natural landscapes that are captured by human vision and influenced by human subjectivity.

The natural existence and human consciousness are found to be dialogical in Vera’s works. In “The Habit of Assigning Meaning: Signs of Yvonne Vera’s world”, Shaw offers an explicit analysis on the meanings and roles of various repetitions of symbols in Vera’s works. She examines the symbolic world in Vera’s novels and discusses the contradictory meanings the protagonists assign to the same object. She implies that the contradictions and realities presented in Vera’s texts are build upon the natural surroundings. She claims that the real “world that Vera creates can only be known through the consciousness of her protagonists”. And human reflections on our surroundings “do present alternative world views” (Shaw 2002b:25).

There are also dualities that reveal connections between women and some earthly elements, such as rivers and water. In “A woman speaks of rivers: generation and sexuality in Yvonne Vera’s Novels” (2002a), Shaw implies that it is the rivers and waters that connect generations between African women. The metaphors in Vera’s novels constantly confirm this connection as she writes:

In representing the spirit of woman as water, Vera invokes an endless cycle from sky to earth, from birth to death, from suffering to healing. Most of her novels end tragically – the oppositions, dualities and dichotomies [...] are not easily resolved. (Shaw 2002a:92)

She points out the complexity in our conceptions of nature, indicating that the connections between women and their sexuality in Vera’s novels are presented by the rivers and waters. The symbolic meanings carried by earthly elements like earth, sky, water, etc are far more beyond their concept of being the nature outside us. The interactions between the mankind and natural surroundings actually influence our understanding of sexuality and human culture.

The landscapes and natural surroundings in Vera's works contribute to the creation of a male dominated society and human identities are told by nature. Men's domination over women does not only lie in the concrete oppression against women but also lie in our conceptions of nature. However, Shaw fails in admitting that Vera's conceptions of nature are within ecofeminist philosophies. I would rather suggest that the landscapes in Vera's fictional world definitely reveal some ecological ecofeminist philosophies in terms of dualities between woman and nature, man and culture. Men's control over nature often metaphorically reflects the conceptual oppression against women.

Grace Musila claims that "corporeality of women's bodies frames their experiences" (Musila 2007:49) in *Butterfly Burning*. She suggests us to reconsider our concepts about nature/sex/body as "rigid and immutable, and therefore an unviable site of intervention in gender struggles" (ibid). She examines *Without a Name*, in which a young woman is raped by two soldiers and finally gives birth to a baby, who is born literally "without a name", and argues that in rejection of her violated identity "lies further manifestation of a disabling discourse on sexual violation which adopts the tropes of 'soiling' and 'dirtying'" (ibid. 56). These aggressions against the land reveal the domination over women. Raping a woman is interpreted to be an action of polluting (ibid). The forceful penetration into a woman is considered to be an action of pollution.

In his essay "Reading Girlhood under the Tongue", Robert Muponde (2007) explores Vera's third novel, *Under the Tongue*. He argues that the narratives of suffering and loss that focus on the bodily experience of the young girl, Zhizha, "initiate the beginnings of new orders of knowledge and subjective consciousness" (Muponde 2007:36). Furthermore, he carefully studies the metaphors which imply contrasting states of suffering and recuperation and healing; 'river', 'trees' and 'roots' are among those healing powers which connect an abused little girl with nature.

Ranka Primorac discovers that feminist discourse in *Butterfly Burning* "is firmly embedded within the set of semantic relationships between space/time, land/body and language/power" (Primorac 2002:104). He suggests that the narrative spaces constantly unfold the social reality. Women are marginalised in urban space that is claimed by

male. I would further suggest that women in *Butterfly Burnings* are connected with the wilderness; dualities between men and women, city and wilderness, are formed in the ecofeminist dualism in the domination of nature by the humankind.

So far, it is obvious that feminist discourse in Vera's novels are built on the landscapes and nature. The earthly elements that make up the landscapes in Vera's novels not only contribute to the settings of the stories but also draw up a social-cultural totality that the objectivity of nature becomes culturally oriented. National identity in a colonial country is also set in the landscapes.

Sarah Nuttall studies the citiness and township in Vera's two works – *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*. In her essay “Inside the city: reassembling the township in Yvonne Vera's fiction”, she examines how the citiness is built in colonial and post-colonial townships by their dwellers. According to Nuttall, the identity of the township is expressed by its residence and the cities' infrastructures, or say the “assemblages of urban objects and things” (Nuttall 2005:191). She discovers the subtle relationship between our culture and the surroundings. She points out that it is subject and object are non-dialectical because “subjectivity itself is built and refashioned through the intersections of subject and object, person and thing” (ibid). Colonial institutions, here the citiness, is constructed by various elements that include both human beings and nonhuman objects. I would suggest that the unbalanced attribution of power in Rhodesia, the marginalised black nationals, is told by the contrast between the urban citiness and the wilderness.

The discursive landscapes in Vera's novels reveal gender identities, history and social construction. The metaphors Vera employs in her novels are mostly concerned with earthly elements. By reading the titles of her novels, it is so apparent that how mankind and nature are interrelated, for instance, *Butterfly Burning* has an implication of woman's identity in a male dominated society. The Butterfly, which actually symbolizes the heroine, struggles for her freedom against the male-ruling culture, suffering, having no other choice rather than committing suicide by burning herself. *The Stone Virgins* tells a story of two sisters happening shortly after Zimbabwe's

independence from its British colonizers. Two of the main characters, the Stone Virgins, suffered in the chaotic state before and after Zimbabwe's independence. The Stone and rocks from the hills of Gulati are personified as if the sisters are the Stones in terms of the toughness and resistance they have in common.

Vera's writings are as beautiful as the landscapes of Zimbabwe. They are full of descriptions on the natural surroundings, imagined, metaphorized, personalized and sometimes contradictory. Identity of Zimbabwean women in Vera's works are built upon the acclaimed daringness of challenging the existing social structure either by employing dramatic conflicts and extreme atrocities or by creating meaningful metaphors and assigning meanings to nature. From an ecologically-oriented point of view, these social-cultural ideologies are told by the discursive landscapes in Vera's novels by assigning meanings to the nature, either the natural world in contrast to human culture or the surroundings from human perspective. In *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, there is no appearance of white characters, however, the inequality between the white intruder and the black nationals is heartedly told by the landscapes and the connections between the people and their land. An ecocritical study on Vera's works will reveal how these cultural discourses are unfolded by the landscapes.

2.5 Methodology

Based on the previous studies on Vera's works, I will conduct a qualitative research into Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*. Ecological literary critique, or simply ecocriticism, and ecofeminist philosophies are set in the theoretical and methodological background of my research. Detailed theoretical introduction will be given in the following chapter of my thesis. As Ecocriticism "considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature" (Coupe 2000:302). I will examine the relations between the characters and the surroundings and suggest some philosophical implications in these interactions.

In ecocritical studies, narrations on the human mentality and natural surroundings are examined without boundaries between the human and the non-human. As Sueellen Campbell puts it, “Theory and ecology agree that there’s no such thing as a self-enclosed, private piece of property, neither a deer nor a person nor a text or a piece of land.” (Campbell 1996:133). The notion of nothing is self-enclosed indicates that ecocritical research into literature examines the surroundings within human knowledge. Cultural and ideological implications in the interactions between the humankind and nature are bases on a culturally oriented nature landscapes in literature.

If ecocriticism search for philosophical meanings in our environmental surroundings, ecofeminism examines the oppressions of women with regard to nature. In ecofeminist perspectives, the domination of women by men is associated with the domination of nature by men (Warren 1996:x). The landscapes in Vera’s novels are read with humanistic considerations rather than the background of the story. Concerning the existing ecocritical and ecofeminist theories, the dominated women and the dominating men are rendered by the intertextual analysis of the fictional landscapes in the novels.

In analysis of *Butterfly Burning*, the gendered natural settings in the novel will first be discussed. I mainly employ ecofeminist dualism in this part of the presentation. With regard to ecofeminist claims on the gendered nature, I am to analyze how the heroine – Phephelaphi, is involved in the surroundings in a way that her characters are presented by some feminine earthly elements, such as the river and the water. On the other hand, the hero, Fumbatha, is associated with some contrasting elements that stand for culture. I will illustrate how feminist dualism on woman/man, nature/culture, and wilderness/citiness is broadened into the ecofeminist dualism in the domination of nature by the mankind.

Moreover, in *Butterfly Burning*, a national identity under colonisation is mirrored by the landscapes. The notion on Umguza River at times embraces the identity of a nation as a whole. The colonial invasion into the country as how the River is polluted can be seen as a nationalist view on the landscapes. The spatial divide between the city and the wilderness also reveals a colonial reality. The searching for the roots that have been

buried under the land over foreign control will also be illustrated as expression of patriotic nationalism.

In *The Stone Virgins*, I will begin with how the white citiness in contrast with the authentic black wilderness constructs a colonial space and social reality. The blacks I will probe into the holiness of the hills of Gulati and the colonial urban space. Then I will analyze how the trees are plotted in the story and how it contributes to the building of a national identity and the patriotic meanings that the trees express.

3 THEORIES

Confusions in our anthropocentric notions of culture and the otherness of nature have existed for a long time. The way how nature is read in literature reveals the interconnections between the human culture and the natural world.

3.1 On Culture and Nature

Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language.

–Raymond Williams (1983:219)

When talking about the definition of culture, in its broader sense, we seem to be confused. There are acknowledged definitions of culture of course, however, the accuracy and the inclusiveness of these definitions are disputable, if not problematic. There are more than dozens of them. If not being over-generalized, the notion of culture has been anthropocentric, humanocentric, or in plain word, of human supremacy. Studies in culture, which is conducted by human beings tends to be anthropocentric as well.

The notion of human culture is often humanocentric. Politics, in which decisions made by a group of influential people are studied; social structures are constructed by groups of classified people. Cultural studies on fine art focus on works created by human beings so does literary studies interpret a piece of work composed by a human being. This human-centred thinking of culture as manmade is quite understandable, since we, human beings, are the most intellectual creatures in this planet, but, here again, anthropocentrically *we* consider ourselves the most intelligent ones as is called human supremacy.

However, humanistic studies on culture have been expanding into nature during the last two decades. Especially in the area of literature studies, scholars become aware of the

non-human sphere of our planet and the so called “ecocriticism” becomes a relatively new genre of literary criticism in culture studies.

Ecocriticism is coined out of two words – “eco” and “criticism”. In literary studies, the later “criticism” implies that ecocriticism is among one of the critical approaches. The beginning part “eco” can be understood as ecology. Ecology is “the study of the environment in its interlaminating relationships, its change and conservation, with humanity recognized as a part of the planetary ecosystem” (Murphy 1995:194). Literary study of ecology, or ecocriticism, “is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996:xviii) and it “considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature”(Coupe 2000:302). Ecocritics study the humans and our surroundings and the interrelativeness between the manmade culture and nature is thus examined literally.

A basic assumption of ecocriticism, as how Glotfelty claims, is its focus on the “interconnections between the material world and human culture, specifically the cultural artifacts language and literature” (Glotfelty 1996:xix). If human culture interconnects with the outside world, there might possibly be two conditions under which the two interact: the first one, it draws our attention to the physical world which has been neglected in contemporary literary critiques, a revaluation on the importance of our environment. The second one, it questions our anthropocentric idea of man-made culture, to be specific, human dominance of nature. As Robert Kern comments:

What ecocriticism calls for, then, is a fundamental shift from one context of reading to another – more specifically, a movement from the human to the environmental, or at least from the exclusively human to the biocentric or ecocentric, which is to say a humanism (since we cannot evade our human status or identity) informed by an awareness of the ‘more-than-human’. (Kern 2000:18)

The concept of “humanism”, according to Kern, shall take into our ecological surroundings into consideration. The existence of nature either in literature or in the ecological world is examined by ecocritics from humanistic perspective.

The notion of nature, not surprisingly, is found to have sophisticated connection with our manmade culture. Upon wilderness, Henry David Thoreau writes “The west of which I speak is but another name for the wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wilderness is the preservation of the world” (Thoreau 1862:23). He senses that our natural wilderness is the only attraction in literature; “all good things are wild and free” (ibid. 24) as he sums it up. “The wilderness of the savage” (ibid. 25), as compared to the civilized humanness, is the spring of human joyfulness and happiness. A man is, on the one hand, a man, on the other hand, an animal which relies on nature as source of satisfaction.

Thoreau is one among the earliest writers who consciously unveil the interrelativeness between culture and nature. By saying “consciously”, I mean Thoreau discovers that human culture somehow connects with nature and a human being, at the most joyful moment, is driven by one’s most natural wilderness. We depend on food and beverage. When hungry, we eat and drink, when lustful, we yearn for sex; when chilled, we want to be exposed to sunshine; etc. The actions of satisfying ourselves contribute to our notion of culture. However, these satisfactions are performed in terms of interaction with nature. Is there a real nature that exists beyond human knowledge? How shall we understand the nature that is interpreted and apprehended by the humankind? The duality of nature does exist, if we interpret nature according to our thoughts and experiences. John G. Rudy gives us explanation:

To encounter ‘the light of things’ themselves, one must shed the notion of light as emerging from a separate source. Indeed, one must relinquish the idea of separateness itself. To come into the light of things, one must become the things themselves, must see through things as things. (Rudy 1996:109)

How we understand nature depends on how nature, or the non-human, presents itself to us. Nature can be easily misinterpreted because we have the tendency to be subjective. The idea of nature is constructed in human subjectivity; thus, the notion of nature is within human culture. At least the natural world within human knowledge should have

cultural implications. The meaningfulness of nature is exactly what ecocriticism focuses on. However, the process of how nature makes sense to us is considered to be dialogical.

As early as in the beginning of the 19th century, English poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge discussed human subjectivity and objectivity of nature in his essay “The Dialectic of Mind and Nature”.

Now the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE, we will henceforth call NATURE, confining the term to its passive and material sense, as comprising all the phenomena by which its existence is made known to us. On the other hand the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE, we may comprehend in the name of the SELF OR INTELLIGENCE. (Coleridge1817:21)

These two concepts are considered to be “in necessary antithesis” (ibid), as “intelligence is conceived of as exclusively representative, nature as exclusively represented” (ibid); conscious as to unconscious, to know as to to-be-known. However, the boundary between human subjectivity and natural objectivity exists, thus the possibility of knowing and knowledge requires “a reciprocal concurrence of both” (ibid) subjectivity and objectivity. Interaction between human intelligence and nature becomes inevitable in the process of acquiring knowledge. Human subjectivity, either unconsciously or not, makes nature culturally constructed as well. At least, the image of nature is captured by human vision, then processed by our nerves and finally the image is visualized and notion of nature makes sense to us. The process of visualization and realization somehow determines the concept of nature in human culture.

The concept of realization has also been widely studied in many disciplines of the humanities (Coupe 2000:2). However, the concept of nature “exists primarily as a term within a cultural discourse, apart from which it has no being or meaning” (ibid). In literary studies, manmade nature, which is assumed to reflect the realities in the world (ibid), has been dealt with for a long time. Moreover, nature, in culture studies, is frequently regarded as “a sign within a signifying system” (ibid). Nature is considered to be a signifier that stimulates human minds and thus makes sense to us. A plain explanation of the “signifying system” would be like this. The rivers and the rocks,

when they are realized and presented in human minds, the existence of either the rivers or the rocks becomes culturally constructed and these cultural constructions consequently make up our idea of nature.

Ecological and environmental crisis have become a worldwide topic especially during the past ten years. Although literary scholars claim to have examined contemporary pressures, according to one recent authoritative guide to contemporary literary studies, they have obviously ignored the most critical contemporary pressure of all – the global environmental crisis. Ecological literary studies not only examine the environmental issue, but also explores into the connectivity between human beings and nature, to be specific, the landscapes appearing in literary works.

The presence of nature in literature in its textual format, or narration, makes the dialogue between human culture and the nonhuman nature possible. In fictions, movies, paintings, poets, etc. the settings of a story are situated in a manmade world, a worded world, a signified world, a narrated nature.

On narrated nature, Professor Christoph Parry, in his book *Peter Handke's Landscapes of Discourse* (2003), has studied Austrian novelist and playwright Peter Handke's works and offers us some thoughtful remarks on the presence of nature in literature. He claims that

Nature has in itself no meaning because it cannot “know” what meaning is. It does not speak because it has nothing to say. It has nothing to say. It must therefore not only be made to speak but also given something to say and it is in art and literature as much as in science and religion. (Parry 2003:18)

In Parry's view, the meaningfulness of nature is assigned by the humankind. In his opinion, presence of nature in literature and art works is “familiarized and humanized” (ibid). Therefore, the real nature becomes a challenge to writers because there is an absence of the nonhuman nature. The expressions, either in a form of artwork or language, thus become inadequate to describe the real nature. Since the landscapes are

built upon human cultural discourse, interactions between man and nature makes the latter unnatural.

Taking a step forward, Parry introduces the concept of “landscape of construct” (Parry 2003:14). The landscapes presented in literature is “part of the social environmental construct”(ibid), being constructed upon human experiences with the natural world. The landscapes have shared meanings that a community is agreed on. However, the landscapes are by no means personal; they are “intersubjective” (ibid). It is the shared behavioural environment that produces shared meanings, or culture. The positionality where we stand between nature and culture, or objectivity and the unfamiliar thus becomes an ontological difference between “the ideas we have of nature and that which the ideas are about” (Soper 1995:151). The question lies in what is known to us and what is beyond our knowledge. Kate Soper dramatically points out that “it is not language which has a hole in its ozone layer; and the real thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier?” (ibid). Ecocritical enquiry should therefore suggest what “the real thing” might involve through examination on the complexity of language.

Ecocriticism does not deny that it is the language that makes the world meaningful to us (Coupe 2002:3). Ecocritics provide a literary reconsideration on our manmade world in connection with the notion of nature and the interaction between nature and the human culture. It is apparent that beyond the manmade nature in literature, there is nature remaining unknown to us; the reality that exists beyond human knowledge. The limited human knowledge restrains us from knowing what the real nature is. Ecocritics suggest that it is the “artifacts of language and literature” (Glotfelty 1996:xix) that makes the dialogue between human culture and the real nature becomes possible.

There is a dialogical relation between the humankind and nature. In his essay “Ecofeminist Dialogics”, Patrick D. Murphy presents us with the irresolvable ‘dialectical synthesis’ (Murphy 1995:194) on the mankind and nature: ignorance and knowledge, male and female, emotion and intellect. He considers it problematic as if meaning of nature can be comprehended only through verbal dialogues. Thus, if nature

is regarded as a passive object, the humanistic conversation between the humankind and nature can never take place. He claims that ecocriticism is “a study of interrelationship, place, and function, with its bedrock the recognition of the distinction between things–in–themselves and things–for–us” (ibid). Ecocritical study of literature does not exclude humans at all; it involves the “differential comparison of self and other” (ibid). The dialogue between human culture and nature is regarded as interrelated. Ecocriticism interprets our existing cultural structures from an un–humanly centred point of view. It questions the reality of our anthropocentric worldview within our epistemological boundaries and provides us with new interpretations on literature and the humanities.

In addition to the contemporary literary theories, ecocriticism considering our rapid industrial progress as much as the impacts accompanied by drastic socio–cultural changes, it is concerned with the living conditions between man and nature, or say, in terms of current sustainable development of human societies, ecocriticism questions the rivers and trees, the ozone holes and the pollutions, which are known to us and critical to the survival of mankind. Within the boundaries of our acquired knowledge, it might be reasonable to refresh our concept of culture and nature, from a different point of view, from a non–humanly centred standpoint, from an ecological perspective.

The landscapes in Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins* will be respectively analysed in regard to their cultural and social implications. The rivers and trees do not merely set in the background of the stories. They reflect the social–cultural reality. Interactions between the people and the natural surroundings construct the totality of a colonial and postcolonial society. There is a deep patriotic attachment to the land, the rivers, the trees, the roots and the wilderness. However, the constant changing meanings of the natural surroundings suggest that the realisation of nature is subject to human minds.

3.2 Ecofeminism

First introduced by French philosopher Françoise d'Eaubonne (Warren 1994:1, see d'Eaubonne 1974: 213–252), ecological feminism, or simply ecofeminism, “resists both the domination of nature by humanity and the domination of woman by men, exploring the connection between the two processes and seeking a new relationship between woman, man and nature”(Coupe 2000: 302). It includes a number of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the interconnections within our human systems of domination in “subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature” (Warren 1994:1). What makes ecofeminism different from traditional feminist philosophies is that ecofeminists study various forms of domination in human society within our ecological world and attempt to suggest reasons of existing social domination by reviewing our idea of nature. Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood points out that the rationalities in domination does not only lie in human mentality but also connect with the natural world, thus it is problematic to say “nature includes everything that reason excludes” (Plumwood 1993:20).

According to American ecofeminist scholar Karren J. Warren, ecofeminism, having an insight on the interconnection between women and nature, examines the powers among social systems of domination, in racism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism etc. (Warren 1994:2).Ecofeminists look into the dominating sources of our societies from a “a” plurality of positions” (ibid). As Warren claims “there is not one ecofeminism, anymore than there is one feminism” (Warren 1996:x). Ecofeminist enquiries of the existing inequality are based on philosophical dualism of women/nature. However, feminist philosophies have also noticed the dualist domination of man over woman (Plumwood 1993:41). Ecofeminism, then, differs from feminism by examine the dualistic domination of nature by the mankind which links the feminist domination of woman by man with environment.

Ecofeminist dualism has historical and causal groundings (Warren 1996:xi). After having studied the historical role played by rationalism and the social construction in colonialism, Val Plumwood, an Australian ecofeminist, in her work called *Feminism*

and the Mastery of Nature (1993) claims that the philosophic term dualism can be defined as “an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs differences in terms of an inferior and alien realm” (Plumwood 1993:42). Let’s think about what makes the differences. According to Plumwood, nature has been subordinated to “the master subject” (ibid. 63), masculinity over femininity is considered to be equal as rationality is to animality. Dualism is a pair of contrasting elements, for instance, dominant and submissive, or ruling and ruled. Here are ecofeminist dualities that Plumwood has listed

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| culture | / nature |
| reason | / nature |
| male | / female |
| mind | / body (nature) |
| master | / slave |
| reason | / matter (physicality) |
| rationality | / animality(nature) |
| reason | / emotion(nature) |
| mind,spirit | / nature |
| freedom | / necessity(nature) |
| universal | / particular |
| human | / nature (non–human) |
| civilised | / primitive (nature) |
| production | / reproduction (nature) |
| public | / private |
| subject | / object |
| self | / other |

Column 1. Value dualities presented by Plumwood (1993:43)

Ecofeminist dualities presented by Plumwood clearly express the differences in dualistic value contrasts between male and female, culture and nature. We can discover how “feminine” nature, in the right part of the column (see Column 1), is

systematically belittled, controlled and dominated. They are not only simply contrasting words concerning culture and nature, but also an ecocritical understanding in feminism, about dominating and being dominated. The value hierarchies, or perceptions of diversity organized by a spatial up–down metaphor or diction which attribute higher value, such as status, prestige, to that which is higher in our built conceptions. Plumwood’s value dualities expand the feminist dualism of man/woman into human/nonhuman, domination of nature by the mankind.

Similarly, ecofeminist Karen J. Warren also discovers important conceptual connections between the dualistic domination of woman by man and nature by humans. She points out that all our social “isms” of domination. (Warren 1990:141), such as racism, classism, heterosexism, as well as naturalism and the feminist dualism shape and reflect our humanistic conceptions on oneself and the others. These philosophical claims on social classes and relations justify themselves by confirming that there is a real “logic of domination” (ibid. 128) in which a patterned subordination on human and non–human exists. This subordination also constantly reinforces and perpetuates feminist dualism on woman and nature. The logic of such domination can be justified by the following arguments

- (A1) Humans do, plants do not, have the capacity to consciously change the community in which they live.
 - (A2) Whatever has this capacity is morally superior to whatever doesn’t have it.
 - (A3) Humans are morally superior to plants and rocks.
 - (A4) For any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y.
 - (A5) Humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks.
- (Warren 1990:129)

She employs the same logic in the feminist domination of woman by man with an ecological association of women with nature and offers the following counterparts:

(B1) Women are identified with nature the realm of the physical; men are identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental.

(B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (“below”) whatever is identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental.

(B4) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.

(B5) Men are justified in subordinating women. (Warren 1990:130)

Warren’s framework articulates the domination of nature by the mankind and the existing feminist domination of women by men. Therefore, Warren implicates that the domination of women relies on the domination of nature by humans. Ecofeminism thus links feminism with our ecological world.

Plumwood’s value dualism and Warren’s logic of domination have called for an epistemological connection between humans and nature (Warren 1996:xiv). As Val Plumwood says, if one assumes that environmental philosophy deals only or mainly with human ethics, one will ignore “a key aspect of the overall problem which is concerned with the definition of the human self as separate from nature, the connection between this and the instrumental view of nature, and the broader political aspects of the critique of instrumentalism” (Plumwood 1991:13). Ecofeminist epistemology would address on these human/nature dominations.

In literary studies, ecofeminist scholars have explored the symbolic association of women and nature, which is manifested in art, literature, religion and theology (Warren 1996: xiv). Starting from feminist literature, Patrick Murphy argues that dualistic conception on nature and women has justified “a two-pronged rape and domination of the earth and the women who live on it” (Murphy 1988:87). Other ecofeminists study the symbolic linkage between sexist and naturist language. To be specific, language is found to inferiorize women and non-human nature. Ynestra King questions about whether this gendered language is “potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continued subordination of women”. (King 1990:106) For instance, women are often described in animal terms, e.g. foxes, songbirds, pussycats, and often in derogatory terms such as bitches, birdbrains, chicks and cows; while nature is often described in

feminine and sexual terms: nature is mastered, polluted, stained, conquered controlled and raped etc. These symbolic patterns of language are repeated and practiced on a daily basis that they actually feminizes nature and naturalises women. Symbolic dualism in language is proved by our gendered language that perpetuates, describes and reflects the domination of women by men and devaluation of nature.

Upon gendered language, Kate Soper offers us her philosophical interpretations in her book *What is Nature* (1995). She claims that nature and human culture are inextricably interwoven. In her essay “Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature”, she argues that the ‘coding of nature as feminine... lies in the double association of woman with reproductive activities and of these in turn with nature.’ (Soper 1995:59) Furthermore, she searches within the history of the female nature connection, e.g. agriculture, reproduction, and suggests why we tend to associate woman with nature and, in other cases, nature with woman. The domination of women by men roots from the domination of nature by humans. The symbolist study in language and literature is also an important aspect for ecofeminist scholars.

As ecofeminist philosophy links environment and feminist, the interconnections among the conceptualizations and reality call for a feminist ethical analysis (Warren 1996:xv). Ecofeminist ethics deal with the maltreatment and domination of women by men as well as the polluted nature. As Warren claims, “ the goal of feminist environmental ethics is to develop theories and practices concerning humans and the natural environment which are not male–biased and which provide a guide to action in the prefeminist present” (Warren 1994:37).

Ecofeminism links feminist dominations with our environment, the domination of women by men and the devaluation of nature by humans. Ecofeminist literary studies initiate a philosophical question on our idea of nature and address to the environmental crisis. Ynestra King says

It is my contention that the systematic denigration of working-class people and people of colour, women, and animals is connected to the basic dualism that lies at the root of Western civilization. But the mind-set of hierarchy originates within human society. It has its material roots in the domination of nature by human, particularly women by men (King 1990: 106–107)

She implies that our classed society has an androcentric traditional rather than anthropocentric one. When King says that conceptualized thinking in social hierarchy, has its “material roots” in human domination, she is indicating that androcentrism, or men-centred worldview, is prior to other forms of domination; the domination of nature by human beings. In her essay, “Wrong of Passage: Three challenges to the Maturing of Ecofeminism”, Deborah Slicer probes into the fundamental root of human rationality. The issue of anthropocentric and androcentric bias is discussed. She claims that there is a root cause to multiple social oppressions, including environmental issues (Slicer 1994:33). The root is either androcentrism or anthropocentrism. The linkage between women and nature is so profoundly perpetuating that feminism and environmentalism thus becomes inseparable.

Concerning Vera’s novels, the landscapes will be read with ecofeminist wisdom. Colonial domination is told by the foreign occupied land and the urbanised space that does not belong to the the people of Zimbabwe while the feminist attachments locate in the unpolluted wilderness.

4 BUTTERFLY BURNING

Butterfly Burning presents us with a young female character that is abused and destroyed in a male dominated society. As the title of this novel indicates, a burning butterfly is a combination of both vulnerability and bravery. Critiques concerning *Butterfly Burning* have drawn to the meaningful landscapes (see Shaw 2002a, Shaw 2002b).

Narrations on the natural landscapes can be found in almost every page of the novel, making up the unbalanced power distributions in the society. There are various natural elements, such as butterfly, flower, sunlight, river, lightning, fire, soil, etc. They carry meanings and contribute to the construction of protagonists' personalities (Shaw 2002b:26). Contrasting elements represent the power inequality in the society. Feminist dualities of woman and man, dominated and dominating have ecological implications. I would suggest that the unpolluted natural wilderness is integrated with the heroines, thus the manmade city could be read as a dominating power. Ecofeminist dualities locate in the manmade world and the untouched nature, the domination of nature by humans rather than domination of women by men.

A colonial national identity is also told by the landscapes. Pollutants dumped into the Umguza River are considered to be as unpleasant as the intruders. Therefore, there are value dualities between the native and foreign, polluted and polluting, controlled and controlling.

Upon human realisation of the real nature, I would suggest that the landscapes in *Butterfly Burning* are merely constructed by human mentality. The meanings of nature constantly change, depending on the protagonists' moods and experiences. Therefore, The landscapes are socially and culturally constructed in this novel

4.1 Gendered Nature

The manner in which nature is treated by humans conveys human institution on our social reality. As ecofeminists put it, feminist notion on the domination of men over women could be understood in a broader sense of the domination of nature by the mankind “among all social systems of domination”(Warren 1994:2) . Visualised nature is made meaningful through metaphors and symbolization. Feminist dualism is illustrated by various contradictory natural elements and value dualities in *Butterfly Burning*.

Phephelaphi, the heroine in the novel, has a definite connection with water, light, river and land. Being one of the main attributes and natural elements, water points to Phephelaphi’s vitality, young energy and life force. She is represented by water and the air:

Each of her motions carefully guided, and her voice rising drop by drop, toward him, smooth like the water before them. She was sunlight. (Vera 1998: 26)

Fumbatha’s first impression on Phephelaphi when he sees her rising from the Umguza River gives an instant connection between water and air as woman. Man’s view of woman as water comes from the natural functions that the water plays: reproduction and a fountain of joy. Phephelaphi is also considered to be air, the basic earthly element that we need, clear and breathable. Men cannot survive without air and women; humans can breathe in the air at anytime and breathe out. The air is formless, just like woman, but vital for human survival and the regeneration of the mankind. The light also stimulates our visual nerves, in contrast to the darkness, giving us pleasure and conveys the message containing hope. Here comes another repetition

She rose out of the water like the sun and he looked at her in total surprise. The words tumbled out of her as she spoke and gasped for air. She was water and air (Vera 1998: 27)

Throughout the story Phephelaphi's sexuality is connected with water, light and air. Water can be counted on its purity and scarcity in this context. The fertility in women leads to the possibility to take women as land, the following lines illustrates

Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet from which birth had severed him. (Vera 1998:28)

The similarity between a woman and the land can be understood in women's fertility. Fumbatha wants to own the woman since she is fertile as the land. Feminist dualities of men and women, dominating and dominated are exemplified here. Fertility being one point, another point is the cultivation of land. It is the man who cultivates the land thus makes it bearable and fertile; the land, on the other hand, can only be passively cultivated. Man here as the cultivator becomes culture and woman becomes nature. Fumbatha's instinct to own and the eagerness to cultivate on the fertile land draw a clear boundary between women and men in terms of the powerful and the powerless, passive and active. Considering women as land at times confirms these value dualities. Men's action on or against the land can be seen as a domination over women. The following lines illustrate

For almost twenty years Fumbatha has done nothing but build, and through this contact, Bulawayo is a city he understands closely, which he has held brick by brick, on his palm, felt the tension of effort over his back. He has held this city, without a clear emotion of anger or love; with an unresolved abandon. (Vera 1998:25)

Fumbatha has been constructing and cultivating on the land for a long time. He has no affection for what he has been doing. The numbness in Fumbatha's attitude towards the land explicitly illustrates how women are ploughed and exploited in a male dominated society. Land being transformed, city being built, the social structure is constructed in the landscape and the human notions of nature reflect the unbalanced social power.

Narrated landscapes build the social reality in a man-dominant society, women suffering and men being affectionless. The city becomes a male space while the outskirts

of the city, the untamed wilderness, becomes a female space. The dualism appears again in city and wilderness as to man and woman.

Historical findings claim that women in the early Rhodesian town, especial during the colonial period, were not considered as rightful inhabitants. A woman, especially a black woman cannot claim any urban place as her own (Jeater 2000:29–42; Primorac, 2001:105). The boundary between urban place and the wilderness draws a serves as an inevitable border between women and men, the controlled and the controlling. This could probably serve as a reason why women tend to be nearer to nature and even be conceptualised as being a part of nature. Fumbatha has claimed the city and land as his own while the natural wilderness is left for woman. When Phephelaphi carries out self-abortion, she chooses a spot outside of the city, a hill from which one has a good view over the town. As Vera writes

She longs for some hill, some shape for her eyes to move over before she can touch the sky. She longs for the long branch of a tree just waiting for birds to perch on it, something to rid the anxiety.(Vera 1998:116)

Escape from the city becomes the ultimate solution to relief from the hardship she experiences, resolution being to take the foetus from her womb. Phephelaphi turns to Mother Nature when she is desperate. The agony of practicing this abortion is relieved by making herself as a part of the natural world; “her shoulders are half buried in the abundant and soft soil” (ibid. 117). When the severe pain passes by, “She presses her face down further and her hair is the firm warmth of the sun, and her hair is the color of sand”(ibid). She weeps tears and “the land welcomes her tears like rain” (ibid)

At this point, Phephelaphi becomes a part of nature and the nature becomes a caring mother, only the land knows how painful this is and only nature, the sun and the soft soil can heal her wounds. The wilderness provides a woman with a shelter from the hazardous reality. After regaining her consciousness, illusion appears as she realizes that “the sky has hills in it, the sky has many hills in it”(ibid. 118). When she calms down, “A feeling, clean and ordered, floods her waiting body” (ibid. 119). Purity and calmness provided by the wilderness cure a woman’s bleeding body. She calls for water

Strong wave after wave is released like a flood breaking over the bank of the river, discovering a new shore where water has not been there. She is at the bottom of the river but its dry there. She is untouched by the flood tearing the riverbed from shore to shore. The river is a pounding and deafening omniscience. This is not water but a liquid wind – a pool of fire in which she burns without pause. Nothing has been born. Nothing has been born at all. Nothing has been taken away. (Vera 1998:119–120)

Phephelaphi is haunted by another illusion which is an unreal but mentally constructed view on nature. A cluster of earthly elements and phenomena appear in Phephelaphi's mind. Having suffered from the agony in self-abortion, Phephelaphi's vision and mind are full of waves of water. As I have previously discussed, water and Phephelaphi are combined together, symbolizing femininity. The land is lacking of water as it is a male dominated society. Waves of water may be understood as the ultimate call for a gender balanced society. A "new shore" is the place to which Phephelaphi wants to escape, but "the water has not been there", therefore there is no place to go. Contradictorily, when she stands at the bottom of the river, the waves have gone, the reality appears: a land dominated by male. She remains unchanged as being a desperate woman in that society. The river becomes furious as it start "pounding and deafening" the male dominated world. Then the water changes into wind and fire; she dissolves and becomes a part of nature. Nothing has changed; it is only illusion. This series of illusional symbols carries a woman's nature and hope; it also represents a feminist call for the demolition of the male domination.

The illusional nature and the human mentality it reveals draw into a contradictory dialogue between human and nature, meanings and signs, mentality and reality, the powerful and the powerless. This is a living example of an ecological interaction between human intelligence and nature, the man-made culture and the dominated nature. The interconnection between woman and nature can be read in the end of the story when Phephelaphi knows that she has been made pregnant for the second time:

I see myself die in a storm. A storm has amazing sounds, beautiful, like eggshells crushed between palms, only louder. More certain. There are loud sounds and there are small sounds in a storm. It is the small sounds which are ephemeral, thin like life, and they make me long to die in a storm, amid its small and alluring sounds, wrapped in those tiniest sounds; a blanket made only of petals. (Vera 1998:146)

She is hopeless and despairing while illusion appears again. She sees herself dying in a storm. Instead of severe wind blows, the storm is full of beautiful sounds, crispy but loud. When a person becomes absolutely desperate, there is nothing unpleasant. The reality and the unreal form a dichotomy between the object and human subjectivity. Even now, sounds have gender as the lower gentle sounds are as “thin as life”, as a destroyed woman, these feminine sounds encourage Phephelaphi to join in them, to be finally swallowed by those louder sounds as she is dying. Vera uses a group of very vivid adjectives to feminize the sounds: “ephemeral”, “thin” alluring” and “tiniest”. Sounds can only be linguistically measured in this way as it is not possible in the science of physics. These adjectives also reflect the reality, women in that land has no power and social status at all.

Again and again, Phephelaphi calls for water. Water and rains come again, following a call made by a desperate woman as Phephelaphi imagines

Rain falls briefly here, but when it does, you can look up at the sky and see clouds gather. The darkness of the clouds is the softest thing there is. Lightening makes a beautiful sound; to die in lightning is to be gathered in a beautiful light, more beautiful than stars. Something opens in the sky, something beautiful which desire to be seen [...] (Vera 1998:146)

Phephelaphi, either mentally or spiritually, links with the following nature elements; the rain, the sky, clouds, lightening and sound. A woman subscribe to the belief that only nature can cure her wound, however harsh it would be, the mother nature is the final destination to which a woman belongs. A woman of water, a woman in pain; a woman belongs to nature, a woman is nature. A world dominated by men, the social construction is told by the landscapes in a woman’s voice, expectation or illusion. The nature becomes a social conduct. A dry land lacks water; a nation where women are

marginalised and neglected. Phephelaphi keeps calling for water and rain falls. “When the first rain falls the dust rises from the ground and I can smell it and I want to fall down” (ibid. 147), as she claims. The rain moisturise the dry land and she “want(s) to feel the rain on my tongue” (ibid). Then “the rain falls in large drops” and “stops suddenly and “the grounds has numerous small holes dug into it” (ibid). A series of natural phenomena: the rain falls then the wind blows and the lightening. The dusts jump and the land is moisturised. The rainfall stops and the land is marked with holes. A social reality appears in the natural surroundings. A land where women are destroyed by men, a desperate young woman, who has to give up her dream of being a nurse, cannot make any change of this social reality but the rainfall does. At least it can temporarily leave some marks on the land. A feminist expectation for a balanced world is told by the nature. However, the land is still waterless; men still dominate women and the nature. The reality of the social structure is presented by the narrated landscapes.

The gendered nature in *Butterfly Burning* expands feminist woman–nature duality into the ecofeminist perspective in the domination of nature by the mankind. Literary critique Carolyn Martin Shaw comments on the role of earthly elements, from sky to earth, birth to death (Shaw 2002b:25–36). Shaw underlines that Vera is accustomed to assigning institutional meanings to nature. By employing these metaphors and symbols, Vera presents social realities to us, the dualities in nature can be understood as a feminist reconciliation between gender and sexuality. In my opinion, in the fictional world that Vera creates, the landscape and the characters involved in it has profound ecofeminist insights in them. The feminist dualism of man/woman culture/nature, superior/inferior are included in ecofeminist dualism of nature/humankind in Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*. I have also discussed the dialogical interactions between human subjectivity, or mentality, and the surroundings. Through illusion and imagination, a natural object carries subjectivity and interacts with human, therefore, the narrated nature mirrors man–build cultural reality through bodily and spiritual exchange with human beings.

4.2 Identities in Landscapes

In this chapter, I will explain how the landscapes in Vera's fictional world contribute to nationalism and rejection of colonial constraints. The panorama of a country under the control of colonizers is reflected by the landscapes. Urbanization brought by colonialism in the constructed citiness has drawn to a nationalist identity of Rhodesia. From an ecological perspective, the domination of women by men and the domination of the country by the colonisers are told by the polluted river and the manmade city.

Butterfly Burning is set in the period when Zimbabwe is a British colony. The story involves conflicts between the local people, between man and woman. Previous studies reveal that *Butterfly Burning* has "discourses of history and identity in Zimbabwe" (Christiansen 2005:203). Historian Terence Ranger, to whom the novel is dedicated, describes the novel as having been "written in the pauses of the historian's narrative, at a moment when everyone expects something to happen but nothing has" (Ranger 1999a: 695). In his essay "Iron butterflies: notes on Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*", Ranka Primorac provides us with a brief discussion on how the white colonial presence is built in the novel although there are no white characters in the fiction. He claims that "the fictional concept of female identity is firmly embedded within the set of semantic relationships between space/time, land/body and language/power" (Primorac 2002:104).

The national identity of a country under foreign control is reflected by the surroundings, revealing a spiritual connection between the land and the people. I will start with the Umguza River, which has a spiritually and symbolic connection with the people as I have discussed in the previous chapter. The river also serves as a symbol of Zimbabwe in its colonial context. The interactions between the people and the river reveal a definite patriotic passion for the land. Then, I will discuss another earthly element, which has countless appearances in the novel, namely the trees and the roots. The buried roots under the land and the constant searching for the roots also reflect a national identity under foreign control. Finally I will discuss how a contract between the wilderness and the presence of a colonized township contribute to a tangible national identity of Rhodesia under colonial domination.

Umguza River serves as the spring for life in the town ship of Makokoba as many key moments in the novel take place in the vicinity of it. Phephelaphe's first meeting with Fumbatha takes place when she was swimming in the river; ironically, her painful self-abortion also happens near the river. The river provides necessary irrigation for the people and joys for children. The river and its water is the spring of production and regeneration and a joyful playground. As I have discussed before, women and water, the river are tied up to construct the dominated female while men are connected with the land and the city, forming a power dualism. Here is a detailed description on the Umguza River

A full river on this dry earth where the sun is seen rising before it rises, before it has any rays, a pure circle without any light and it seems possible to touch it. There is nothing else but this river and this harsh light and earth, the ground is a smooth floor dipping down into a seamless horizon. So 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 just out like porcupine quills, the thorn on each bush is thick like branches, which the tips sharp and pointed, tight, holding on to the last drop of water inside them, seeking the water not in them, On the other side of the river, the city is a commotion of activity. The city has swallowed the river. (Vera 1998:24)

The vitality and the purity of the river form a strong contrast with the dry and barren land. The discursive landscapes present a social reality to us. Rhodesia is under foreign control. A tranquillity of a nation and the river is appreciated by the people as the exclusion of any foreign intruder is considered to be unexpected. "There is nothing else but his river and this harsh light and the earth". However, the land is occupied, the annoyance of the intruder is like "porcupine quills", tough and ugly, while the untouchable thorns reserves the "last drop of water inside them". A drop of water symbolises a single national in the country, but the water is not there; the water only exist in the river, the land being occupied and swallowed by the colonial city. Scholars have found that colonialism and urbanization in colonies are interrelated (Nuttall 2005:179). The colonizers, or intruders, somehow break up the long lasted environmental balance in Rhodesia, where the wilderness and the people coexist in a

harmonious state. The city reveals the intruders' totally materialization, or devaluation, of the natural lands, the 'swallowed the river'. If the river here symbolizes the heroine in the novel, Phephelaphi, this colonial urbanisation, human exploration in the natural world, may stand for the domination of women by men as well.

Kate Soper argues that for colonizers, nature is both a "nurturant force" and a "virgin' terrain ripe for penetration" (Soper 1995:104). Here is an example of possible colonialist occupation expressed by the landscapes:

This river grows among thorns; This river does not belong to dry land. It is greedy and gives nothing of its water (Vera 1998:27)

The contrast between the river and the land forms a duality in power contrast between the people and the coloniser. The people are the river while the land is occupied, the greediness and indifference in the river implies a patriotic conscience against being dominated, used and polluted. In another scene of the river, it is polluted:

[...] a long ditch which carries waste from the factory...black with sediment, a viscous factory water and oil, harsh yet fascinating to young minds and absolutely tolerable to their senses... pouring into the Umguza River. (Vera 1998:20)

Pollution, the human disastrous destruction of nature, is brought about by colonizer's exhaustion of Rhodesia's nature resources, and possible primary process of the raw material, in that viscous factory, which leads to the doomed pollution of the symbolic Umguza River. The River, the assemblage of the people of Zimbabwe, renders the nations identity. The River has everything that the locals depend on, the joy of the children who swim in it. This human action of polluting can be understood as the cause for the domination of women by men, the polluted femininity. Moreover, the pollution also reveals the power differences between the colonisers and the locals, the dominating and the dominated, the aggressively polluting and the passively polluted.

Women's identity and the national identity of the country are constructed in the contrast between the colonial township and an untamed wilderness. As I has discussed in the

previous pages, the domination of women by men also has an ecological notion of the domination of nature by the mankind. Fumbatha legally declares the ownership of the city and land while women are marginalised and dominated. In chapter 13, the prostitute Zandile, Phepehlaphi's real mother, walks in the streets of Makokoba and gives us a detailed image of the town. She looks at the shops, shacks and unfinished buildings and recalls the generations of young women who moved from the rural areas to the township bearing traditional Zimbabwean names in order to "cure the persistent loss in their men"(ibid. 92), Vera writes:

Such girls, with names like Simangele.. Sizalelaphi... Ntombemhlophe... Siphetheni... could really cure a man's eye, mellow his thighs to a temporary retreat. Zandile stopped humming about the number of girls called Mary..called Libery... called Gail... and felt again the loss...(Vera 1998:92)

Zandile apparently loses her definition of the real Zimbabwean women in a colonized city. "Those humble girls who first arrived in Makokoba back before 1930 before bus ticket did and Sunlight Soap" (ibid) with traditional Zimbabwean names have disappeared in this township. The intruders have arrived and brought their British merchandise – "the Sunlight Soap". The city has become a foreign place for the locals, especially for women which are changed and destroyed by the city. The people are under control and their names have changed. However, Phepehlaphi, having a traditional Zimbabwean name, remains unchanged. She fails in searching for a space of her own: in a colonial township where every traditional thing has vanished but containing only tangible colonial artifices, such as manmade concrete buildings and invading foreign products, because " there was a gap of empty land there which could not be wasted" (ibid. 90)

The national sovereignty is terminated by the invasion of the colonial citiness as the river lost its purity because of the pollution. A man-made space where women are suffering, but there is a place remains untouched, a wilderness in the city owned by a Deliwe, a woman "who had the pride of an eagle" and "eyes like scorpions" (ibid. 104). She owns a shebeen on Sidojiwe E2, the main street in the town, as Vera describes

Her small house on Sidojiwe E2 was a hive of activity even in the small hours of the morning. She had partitioned the front into a porch and planted a thorn-bush hedge all round. In winter the bush bloomed yellow seeds which were long and angled with a juice thick like syrup, pouring out of there cracks. (Vera 1998:59-60)

The location of such an untamed wilderness in the centre of the town and the way how Deliwe landscapes her house by planting “a thorn-bush hedge all round” her house make a sharp contrast between the manmade citiness and the shelter of a woman in the wilderness. Deliwe is a courageous woman, the one who encourages Phephelaphi to apply for the nursing school, the one who runs a shebeen and “sat calmly on one of the empty beer crates which saide, in large black print, Southern Rhodesia. The possession of this crate was a crime for which she could be punished” (ibid. 60) She is “not even a large woman to look at” but “did not fear the police” (ibid). Fumbatha has a bitter resentment towards she because “she liked to see a man fall on his knees.”(ibid. 64) Deliwe’s bold and brave image in this polluted male-dominated is mirrored by the manner how she decorate her gardens. A shebeen surrounded by those prickly thorns makes it a perfect place for those who long for the real Zimbabwean wilderness. Desperate Phephelaphi turns to Deliwe again after knowing that she is pregnant. In that shebeen protected by the thorns, Deliwe listens to Phephelaphi’s story but shakes her head and the young woman “could barely breathe as she staggered back along Sidojiwe E2” (ibid. 112).

The identity of being a woman in a polluted society is reflected by the special and contextual positionality of a social artifice. The contrast between the city and the wilderness mirrors an unequal social status between men and women. Women are marginalised in the city and the society but they find themselves in the heart of the wilderness. The wilderness provides a shelter for women from the male-dominated and foreign invaded country. A man is an outsider of the secret in wilderness.

As he (Fumbatha) passes on the other side of Deliwe's flamboyant thorn bushes, Fumbatha sees that Deliwe's door is partly open and wonders quietly what kind of woman invites, without regret or burden, and at whatever time of day it was, at whatever cost, everything infinite sorrow going past her doorway. (Vera 1998:131)

The contrast between the city and wilderness presents us with a social totality within landscapes. Women's identity is illustrated by their connectivity with the wilderness on the one hand; on the other hand, a real Zimbabwe can be only comprehended in the nature, a national identity is carried by the unpolluted river and wilderness outside the colonial urban place. The real Zimbabwe resides in the river and in nature. Next, I will reveal my discovery in another earthly element, which has been mentioned throughout the novel, namely the trees and the roots. I will illustrate how they are connected with the expression of social and historical identities.

The story begins with a group of men cutting grasses. Fumbatha's father is one among those seventeen men who were hanged by a white man under a big tree. A white man without a name but those who were killed by him "must be treated with care"(ibid. 137). The hanging took place in 1896, when the ethnic Shonas staged unsuccessful revolts against the unlawful intrusion into their homeland. The nation is in crisis, the people being enslaved. "The work is not their own: It is summoned. The time is not their own: it is seized. The ordeal is their own."(ibid. 5) The discontent people who cannot take in charge of their homeland and time are going through an ordeal. An explicit account on a real nightmare, however:

Often they manage to pull the roots out of the ground; to free something; to conquer a stubbornness; to see what is below; to touch what keeps something alive and visible. (Vera 1998:5)

Searching for the roots reveals Zimbabweans spiritual connection with their fatherland in the colonial period. The land is occupied while the roots deep inside earth are stubborn; an instinctive desire for the land and earth is ineradicable. The roots are buried by the land under occupation. These ethnic Shonas were digging them out of earth. The patriotic national identity is being freed, keeping the people alive and visible. However,

the attempt is unsuccessful; the men are hanged to death by a white man. A nation under occupation and the people are being killed. The colonizers destroyed the nationals' rejection against colonization by hanging the men. "Life is pulled out of the body like a root" (ibid. 13). The roots are the spirit while the trees above the ground merely survive and suffer. There are trees "have been brought from faraway lands", foreign trees are unlike the domestic ones,

They are the sort of trees which do not seem to need water, or when they do, send tentacles that burrow deep, no matter how hard the ground. With no regard whatsoever for the lack of pliable soil, or absent drops of edible rain. (Vera 1998:8)

The way how the foreign trees differ from the local ones forms a sharp contrast. These foreign trees stand for the foreign intruders. They do not use their roots to get water from the ground. They do not have passions for this land as other national trees do. They have forcefully invaded into and grab the land however the land is unwilling to conquer, carrying "improper histories" (ibid. 8). Phephelaphi also searches for the lost Zimbabwean identity as she "wonders how she could find the root of a tree instead of its branches" (ibid. 82). The confusion carries the hope which is buried under the land. She is searching for her buried identity and the identity of the controlled Zimbabweans.

Finally, the butterfly, the name of this novel which carries symbolic young women's identity, although seldom appears in the text, has its ultimate utterance on the interconnection between woman and the wilderness. When Phephelaphi turns to Zandile after knowing she is made pregnant again, "Zandile is like a spider; she wants her caught in a web." (ibid. 129) and she says

You are not a man, Phephelaphi. What are you going to do in Makokoba without being a man? Do you not know that a woman only has a moment in which to live her whole life? In it she must choose what belongs to her and what does not. No one can verify her claim except time. Makokoba is unkind to women like you who pretend to be butterflies that can land on any blossom they choose. (Vera 1998:129)

A vicious spider, Zandile is the real mother of Phephelaphi and the one who survives in the shadow of a male dominated world, a land under foreign control. The township of Makokoba is build and made by men and it is a colonial artifice. Women have definitely no place in the town, being marginalised. A young woman who is discontent of being destroyed by the social reality is doomed to die. However, the wilderness has a inseparable connection with women. A woman is a butterfly, only in the nature can she fly freely like an unbridled horse. Only outside of the city can a woman find her final destination which does not exist.

All in all, I have presented my ecocritical analysis on Vera's Butterfly Burning in which a cruel social reality is not only presented by the conflicts among the characters but also mirrored by the landscapes. The nature/culture dualism in Vera's feminist writing is apparent. Feminine elements such as water are directly linked with the heroine, water being polluted and water being a rescuer. On the other hand, men are related with culture; the city constructed by men is swallowing the river as the colonizers invade into the land. Passions for the fatherland are shown by the nationals' genuine attachment to the land while resentment towards the intruders are reflected by the indifference to foreign objects either existing in the city or natural spaces.

5 THE STONE VIRGINS

The Stone Virgins recapitulates the terrors which happened during Zimbabwe's independence period. The cities were occupied by the white people while the blacks were fighting against each other to gain their political power in the new country. Thenjiwe and Nonceba have witnessed and suffered from the darkest moment in Zimbabwe's history— the 1981–1982 genocide of estimated 20,000 ethnic Matabeles and brutal torture of the ethnic minority (Ranger 2002:206–208).

I will begin with a search within the spatial difference between the white urban space and the black enclave of Kezi. A colonial white citiness is considered to be an assemblage of colonial objects and human mentalities (Nuttall 2005:180). The names of the streets and the infrastructures in the city claim itself against the black people. The nationalist authenticity of being a Zimbabwean lies in the untamed wilderness, the rural enclave of Kezi. The beauty of the land lies in the unpolluted nature to which only the black Zimbabweans have access. The resentment towards the white occupied township contrasts to the passion people have for their untouched wilderness. The holy hills of Gulati will also be examined in this part. The sacredness of Gulati has a spiritual connection with the black Zimbabweans; it is also a place of birth and the site of the genocide. Searching within the hills of Gulati will reveal the incurable wounds in Zimbabwe's history.

After that, I will examine how the marula tree is plotted in the story and how the tree is visualized and realised by the heroine while the terrors happen. The marula tree can be understood as a symbol of the nation's authenticity. The people are dying while the tree cannot be uprooted.

5.1 The city and the enclave

In the first two chapters of the novel, Vera describes the city of Bulawayo and the enclave of Kezi respectively. She presents us with two contrasting landscapes where the story mostly takes place. The urban space and the rural space form a sharp contrast. The developed urban township is full of colonial marks while the rural enclave remains its connection with nature and it is the latter the people have passion for. I will begin my presentation by introducing a recent study on Vera's urban space. The story begins like this:

Selborne 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. (Vera 2002:3)

In her essay "Inside the City: reassembling the township in Yvonne Vera's Fiction", Sarah Nuttall explains how a colonial city space is built upon the "infrastructural matrix" (Nuttall 2005:188). The streets named after English poets – "Kipling, Tennyson, Byron, Keats, and Coleridge" (Vera 2002:5); the buildings and sites within the city, Centenary Gardens, National Museum, military plaques, fountains and statues, reflect the centrality of a colonized space. The city is full of colonial marks: Sir Willoughby's Douslin House "he was among the first pioneers with the British South African Company (ibid) the "Selborne Hotel" built 1897. The city is equipped with advanced infrastructures and places for entertainment. There are apartment stores, cafes and hotels, but these facilities are for white only. Black people "are not only black; they are outsiders. They make no claim."(ibid) A city is owned by the white colonizers:

Ekonemi is a rendezvous, a place to meet. You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because this city is divided; entry is forbidden to black men and women; you meet outside buildings, not at doorways, entries, foyers, not beneath arched windows, not under graceful colonnades, balustrades, and cornices, but ekonemi.”(Vera 2002:11)

Black and white are divided in the city, people are discontent because they make no claim on their own land. A colonial urban space excludes black people, they are marginalized and cornered to ekonemi. “The city is part of you and you are not part of the city” (ibid. 14). So where do the black people belong to? In chapter 2, Vera introduces the rural enclave called Kezi, where most of the story takes place.

Kezi is a rural enclave. Near it are the hills of Gulati. When you leave Kezi, you depart from the most arable stretch of flatland there is. There are towering boulders of rock, then hills and an undulating silence for a whole bus journey, till on the horizon you see Bulawayo beckoning. If at night, city lights glow like a portion of the sky (Vera 2002:17)

Far away from the city, Kezi is a place for the black people, the Zimbabwean. It reserves its nature beauties as being undeveloped and untouched by the white colonizers. In contrast to the urban place in Bulawayo, “the land here is rock “and “everywhere there are thorn bushes” (ibid. 8). An untamed wilderness owned by the black people. There is a bus connection, a product of colonial industrialization, links the city and the enclave. It transports workers to the city and commodities from the city. Dwellers in Kezi assume that the bus drives from Kezi to Bulawayo to Kezi, “of course, Kezi comes first”(ibid. 19). There are constant contrast and comparison between the urban space and Kezi. A river, the Kwakhe River between the urban space and the rural space draws a geographic boundary which is also reflects the institutional difference between the white and the black. The river separates the white citiness from the black wilderness, there is a narrow bridge over the river which serves as the only possible linkage between the two. However, “whenever the Kwakhe River is full, the bus fails to cross the bridge” (ibid), a predictable tension between the white and black is also reflected by the rising of the river. I have discussed in the previous chapter concerning the Umguza River in *Butterfly Burning*, Vera also embeds the same idea into the Kwakhe River: the River is the people, a rising river stands for the awaking of the nation. When the people

are stranded and have to wait. They are “nestling their treasured wares gathered from the city, while listening to the rivers sulk” (ibid. 19). Apparently they are quite comfortable with the raging of the river as it is unpreventable and the war is coming soon.

A geographical difference between the city and the wilderness is divided by a raging river. The picture of a colonial white citiness and the discontent raging black wilderness is mirrored by the landscapes. The social structure is also shown by the functionality of the city and the wilderness.

Telephone booth in the city which is found to be useless since the telephone directory in the booth only records people who live in the city of Bulawayo, “people entirely unknown and uninteresting to them”(ibid. 22). The urban space does not belong to the blacks, “not Kezi, not their Kezi, just this tantalizing contraption left in their midst to mock their lack, to rouse their want.” (ibid) Urbanization comes along with colonization, this is seen in the city of Bulawayo as the of foreign industries flow in.

Blue Ribbon Foods and Security Mills and Archer Shirts, Kaufmann Shoes and Gees Refrigeration – all those places necessary to the city, but just workstations to the people in Kezi, places where one can locate long-lost uncles and relatives who have taken the Bulawayo bus all those many months ago and not come back, not written, not sent a message. They have faded into the city. (Vera 2002:23)

The functionality of a city merely meets the interests of the colonizers, as the names speak for this, Archer, Kaufmann and Gees. None of them belongs to the local black Zimbabwean people; all of them are foreign and white. Urban place becomes a representative of colonization, “all those places necessary to the city” but the people of Kezi, those black Zimbabweans have no passion for the city at all. It is in the untamed and unpolluted Kezi where they can find their spiritual connection with their relatives. They have not moved into the city, but they “faded”, without passion for it.

By building an urban space in contrast to a rural enclave, Vera presents us with a nation under foreign invasion. The white citiness in contrast to a black wilderness is illustrated

by the infrastructures and functionality of the city. Furthermore, a clear spatial difference between the two locations draws a vivid map of a white dominated colonial country. In the following part of my presentation, I will explore into Kezi and the untamed rocky hill of Gulati to illustrate how the untamed black wilderness is linked with the spiritual institution of the people.

In chapter nine, when Sibaso, the brutal murderer and rapist, hides in the hills of Gulati and comes into the shrine in Gulati, a cave called Mbelele, “ an enclosure, enormous, known throughout Gulati as the most sacred of sacred places”(ibid. 100). Sibaso, a student in university but now a guerrilla warrior who rapes the two sisters and killed one of them in Kezi, now is searching within the rocks of Gulati. He has a spiritual dialogue with the wilderness there in the dark cave. A man lost his human conscience in the war while his kindness is overwhelmed by his brutality. All the horrors happen in Kezi, a place of black wilderness, a chaotic Zimbabwe. He discovers some ancient paintings on rocks. He places his hand over the waist of one woman painted on the rock and ponders over the meanings of the hill,

It is true: everything else in Gulati rots except the rocks. On the rocks history is steady, it cannot be tilted forwards or backwards, It is not a refrain. History fades into the chaos of the hills but it does not vanish. In Gulati I travel four hundred years, then ten thousand years, twenty more. The rocks split open, time shifts and I confess that I am among the travellers who steal shelter from the dead. (Vera 2002:104)

Being a confused man, a victim of the war, he searches within the sacred cave of Gulati and attempts to regain his conscience. Kindness is destructed in Zimbabwe during the civil war; people are killing people of the same ancestors. A disaster brought by the war, genocides, raping and murdering. He realises that the country is not a country at all as everything “rots”, but the ultimate spiritual institution that all Zimbabweans have in common lies in the “rocks”. The rocks have documented every single detail of this chaotic period. What happened cannot be forgotten as history cannot “be tilted forwards or backwards”. A spiritual dialogue with the rocks reveals the sinfulness and guilty a man has.

The virgins painted on the stone are “waiting for the ceremonies of their own burial”. The stone virgins, Thenjiwe and Nonceba, one is beheaded and another is badly injured. They are holy eyewitnesses of the history, a state in disorder. The people lose their consciousness, the darkest moment in the history of Zimbabwe.

A nation in crisis, the sacredness of Gulati being stained, a group of guerrilla soldier fight for the unknown future, being manipulated and now hiding in the hills of Gulati. Kezi is the holy place for the black nationals in Zimbabwe; it is also the place where Thenjiwe is raped and beheaded, the place where Nonceba is brutally hurt. After all these violence and horror, the place called Kezi becomes unfamiliar to the people living there, everything has been changed by the war as Nonceba observes

She is alone now, looking out through the window. Everything is gone. She is without shelter. Everything is changing. She has a desperate feeling that everything has already changed, gone, not to be recovered. Nothing can be the same. Her own arms have changed, her body. Kezi, her place of birth, is no longer her own. She remembers Kezi, surrounded by the hills. She has loved every particle of earth there, the people, the animals, the land. The sky above her is now different; a sky should carry dreams. The things she remembers have changed: the nature and measure of pain, of joy. (Vera 2002:90)

The physical settings of Kezi remain unchanged but in Nonceba’s view, everything has been changed already. The true blackness in the hill has gone, a nation in civil wars. People are killed by those who have same skin colours, not the white intruders. A nation in the darkest horror; Nonceba always has a strong spiritual connection with Kezi and the hills of Gulati. In the end of the story, Cephas Dube, the one who has met her dead sister, Thenjiwe, a victim of the war, succeeds in tracing down Nonceba and apparently has a tender passion for her. He says that:

Is this not what everyone is calling Kezi, a naked cemetery where no one is buried and everyone is betrayed? There is no certainty of life, only death. (Vera 2002:159)

This statement reveals the ultimate reality to Nonceba and renders the theme in this novel. The enclave of Kezi, which was once the joy of spring for every black skinned

people in this colonial country, the white citiness has eliminated the blacks and this untamed Kezi is the blacks' final destination, a once sacred place now becomes a "naked cemetery". The country is involved in a horrible civil war in which people lose their conscience and soldiers slaughter the civilians. Kezi is the place where Thenjiwe is beheaded but not the place for her soul, not for anyone neither. The new leaders of this new country have been manipulating his people. The real murderer is uncertain but the chaos has destroyed a once united nation under foreign control. Nothing in the future is within expectation while the truth is that the blackness of Kezi is damnable place. Nonceba had "no wish to leave Kezi" though; she asked "why should I run away? The war is everywhere. Is it not there in the city?" (ibid. 161) Her spiritual connect with Kezi, the untamed blackness is so strong that despite all these happened to her, she still wants to stay in Kezi, to keep her real blackness where the true Zimbabwean spirit lies. The unwillingness also contains her doubt of Cephas, a man remaining unknown to her like the once familiar Kezi now becomes a complete strange place. Finally, she chose to move out of Kezi to the city, living with Cephas. But the memory of this dark history will not fade away.

In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera recaptures the chaotic period of Zimbabwe during its independence and civil war. A colonized country is presented by the difference between the white urban citiness and the black rural wilderness. The social reality is reflected by the geographical and functional difference between the two spaces. The blackness resides in the nature, the hills and the rocks. There is a spiritual connection between the wilderness and the people of Zimbabwe. The horror of the history is also told by the hills and rocks, through the different meanings assigned to them. Moreover, the holiness of the blackness is stained by the guerrilla soldiers, reflecting the brutal social reality in historical settings.

Similar to the hills of Gulati, the marula tree stands in front of Thandabantu store is also found to be socially and culturally constructed. It can be seen as another eyewitness of the history.

5.2 A Tree and A Nation

Descriptions of flora and fauna are abundant in this fiction. Different kinds of trees are plotted in the story. Either from third person narration or first person, trees reflect the colonial country under foreign control and reveal identities of the people. They are observed from different angles and from different aspects. The unique marula tree that is native only to southern African countries could be understood as a symbol of Zimbabwe. I will start from the very beginning of the story by analyzing the trees that speak on behalf of its people.

The story begins with a vivid description on the township of Bulawayo. Large blooming jacaranda trees and the lovely “flamboyant trees” (Vera 2002:3)

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, and then plunge under the ground. Wedged in between them are the flamboyant trees, with blistering red blooms, flat-topped, which take over territory from December to January, brightening the sky louder than any jacaranda could. (Vera 2002:3)

The toughness of the jacaranda trees and the loveliness of the flamboyant ones form a sharp contrast at first hand. The toughness of the jacaranda is considered unpleasant as they “create a dazzling horizon”, and they have “dizzying scent” (ibid. 4). These giant jacaranda trees deeply root into the earth. Their stubbornness, and unpleasantness are toned with a feminist vision of nature. The characters of these large jacarandas are masculine in an unpleasant way. However stably they stand, however overwhelming their sizes and scents are; they are just annoying. After their blooming and flowering, their leaves fall down and the seed matures. When it starts raining,

The trees now are naked and majestic, while feathery seeds waft into the glassy sky. They drift. Higher than the trees. They land in the sky. (Vera 2002:4)

Their seeds are metaphorically related to the female who have the ability of reproducing. With their sizes compared, a seed is much tinier than the trunk of a tree as a woman is

usually smaller than a man. Feminist advocacy for a more gender balanced world is carried by these seeds. They have the ability to get rid of the trees and relocate themselves, however, they fly into the sky, which is unbearable and unpredictable but stands for hope and possibility. The vulnerability of the feminine seeds in contrast to the deep-rooted dominant masculinity in Rhodesia is rendered by these trees and their seed. This social-cultural structure is told by the landscape, the trees in the city centre where human activities take place. The weakness of women and the overwhelming manhood in this country are expressed by this contrast. Vera introduces more trees to uncover the real Rhodesia. In chapter two, the marula tree comes:

In front of the store, close to the large marula tree, which stands higher than the roof of Thandabantu Store and higher than any other tree near or far, the impatient crowd rushes toward the bus to meet relatives and friends who have returned from the city, from Bulawayo. They find many; they find none. Each moment yields the fervent excitement of discovery. The bus the bustle, is all under the tree—that is how tall the tree is, full of leaf and height, branches sweeping down over the bus, and enough marula fruit to accompany every leaf.(Vera 2002:26)

The positionality of this marula tree is quite critical. It stands in front of Thandabantu Store, a popular grocery where a plenty of activities take place. It is so attractive that “the radio from Thandabantu is louder than the voices emerging from the bus[...]

(ibid. 24). The surrounding walls of the store are seated by men who chat “endlessly, knowingly, forgetfully”(ibid. 25) and “ a few meters away from Thandabantu Store are the hoof prints, the smell of dung, the sun, vermilion”(ibid). The marula tree stands in between the colonial white citiness and the black wilderness. It is above everything around it. It covers the Store, which sells Coca Cola and Lux —American brand that invades every corner of the planet including the British colony. It covers the buses and the passengers—the local black people who work in the city by reside in the enclave. It covers the dirty tracks in Bulawayo, the underdeveloped real Rhodesia. The marula tree stands high enough that it has a full view of the reality of that British colony. Found to be native to southern African countries, it stands for the nation of Zimbabwe, a colonized, underdeveloped chaotic and masculine society. A country blessed with an

abundant natural beauties that every leaf of the trees is accompanied by a fruit while the the people in the country become insane

In other words, the tree observes the real chaotic Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe. During the civil war, after the horrible killing of the shopkeeper, Thandabantu Store is burnt and buried while the marula tree in front of it remains untouched.

It is only cherishable link with dawn, and they dare not cut that marula tree down for their firewood or any kind of escape; they dare not be superstitious, preferring to persevere in that profuse and dreamlike air with its promise of rescue. The marula tree. 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. (Vera 2002:128)

The holiness of the marula tree survives while the nation collapsed. The killing of the shopkeeper and the destruction on Thandabantu store stir up the local community. Zimbabwe is in a disordered and messy state again. The marula tree's "promise of rescue" comes into effect. The nation is in horror while the tree remains unharmed, the root of the nation standing still. The patriotic passion lies in the marula tree, curing the chaotic mass. The people "hold on its fecundity", the femininity and reproduction. The women come to rescue and ail. The destruction of a nation and its culture has left nothing but the women and their femininity to survive. The marula tree metaphorically becomes feminine at this point while it still serves as the representative of the nation.

In the second part of the fiction, before Zimbabwe's independence, Nonceba's observation on the marula tree is, from the first person, written in the following lines

First, the dirt road, then the ground is smooth, tarred. I can see the marula tree as we drive pass and leave it behind us. I see it and the sky above it. The leaves are moving softly. (Vera 2002:115)

Nonceba has witnessed the beheading of her sister, Thenijiwe, before this. She has been raped. After experiencing all these agonies, Nonceba is now with the murderer and the rapist sitting beside her. Her vision of the marula tree sounds neutral. The tree remains unchanged as Zimbabwe. Although left behind, the tree cannot be neglected. The

history cannot be forgotten, the murder and the rape have taken place, the psychical and physical ordeal are not to be neglected. The reality of a man dominant culture and the suffering of women in this culture as the marula tree represents cannot be changed. The reality is left behind. It is not to escape as nobody can escape from this brutal reality. The manner is quite simple as to “drive pass”. However, the sky above the tree is vast, carrying hope again—a woman’s hope for peace.

Being the first person narrator, Nonceba’s observation on the landscape reflects her subjectivity. First the tree being the reality, then comes the sky as the hope, and finally she goes back to the reality as she sees “the leaves are moving slowly”. The leaves making the tree alive are the people that make Zimbabwe a nation. They are slaughtered and crippled in the massacre.

In chapter 13, the marula tree, after Zimbabwe has claimed independence from Britain, glories as the nation gains itself sovereignty. Being the first person narrator, Nonceba’s description of the tree:

Nineteen eighty-two. You can smell the unpicked fruit from the large marula tree for distances, past one village to the next, and another, as far around Kezi as your body can go. If you cannot catch the scent of it, for whatever reason of your own, then for sure you can hear it; it is in all the minds of the otherwise solitary and quiet inhabitants of Kezi. Fruit has been falling off the marula tree endlessly, and now the rains are near—if there are going to be and left a starved and violated population even more bewildered. There is no harvest. Now this. The marula tree has been yielding and dropping fruit nonstop since the middle of the year, and in the morning, when the air embraces the first light, simultaneous with that light and that embrace, there is the scent of a divine and almost sinful succulence.(Vera 2002:127)

The employment of synaesthesia here makes the marula fruits saturate into everybody. The fruits in the marula, the joyful sweetness after the independent, can be smelt, heard and visualized. In comparison to the notion of the tree before the independence, the whole Zimbabwe now glories and even the most dreadful residents in Kezi can feel it. The marula fruit is associated with the people of Zimbabwe, as Vera writes

The (men's) fingers peeling skin off sweet marula fruit, how many lives have vanished into those arms [...] (Vera 2002:62)

The killing of people is metaphorized as the action of eating marula fruit. And even "Both the people and the animals eat the marula; they thrive on its liquid flavor." (ibid. 104). The vulnerability of the fruit represents the weakness of woman at men's disposal, the victims of the massacre. The fruit also symbolizes the Zimbabwean people in whole. The people in Zimbabwe are mercilessly eaten by the people and the animals. The destructive massacre and the killing of the people are presented in terms of natural phenomenon. However, the fruit has been falling constantly after the independence. The falling of the fruit tells the murdering of people. It happens so constantly that the fruits drop "nonstop since the middle of the year", since when Thenijiwe is beheaded. The divinity of a woman contracts to her "sinful succulence". The massacre should be condemned while the dying of women is considered to be divine.

From a feminist perspective, Nonceba's notion of the marula tree might be understood on a nationalist level. The social reality of Zimbabwe is reflected by the tree while desperate Nonceba observes and senses the unchangeable social orders and cruelties that women experience in the country

Noon. The scent of the marula fruit filters into the air, its fragrance spreading into the sparkling midday light and confusing the senses. Nonceba can raise her arm and breathe in the marula's scent, a fine layer of perfumed air over her. She inhales the tranquil and intoxicating smell of this tree, and she closes her eyes to see it, closes them enough that she can block from her mind what lies behind the tree, the remains of Thandabantu Store, which is now buried, not there, destroyed and gone. It has never been. The marula tree is alone in the clouds, high branches drooping with fruit, dangling yellow to the ground. The fruit is falling down. The skin of the fruit swells with the heat, then cracks, and the sweetness spills. Large slippery seeds hatch and hide out. The liquid flavor spreads and rises with the heat of the day, carried on the slightest breeze. The scent is everywhere, penetrating each dream, each decision. The sun is shining bright, striking pure and downward and hot enough that everyone says today it will rain, but the only thing raining down is the marula haze, coloring every dream from morning to noon to sundown. (Vera 2002:145)

The reality is mirrored by the tree through a woman's sense. The beauty and charm of the women in that country can be felt and smelt. They are fragrant and confused. When Nonceba braces the scent of the marula, she becomes a part of it. The femininity lies in the tree and in the nation. Nonceba becomes nostalgic. She remembers the sweetness of the past good time, before the war, before the killing of her sister. She comes back to the reality again and realizes that the tree remains unchanged, its fruits falling down as before and being dried by the sun, the reality is cruel and "the only thing raining down is the marula haze" Women are dying and being neglected. She smells the scent again and sees hope, "the scent is everywhere, penetrating each dream, each decision" and "coloring every dream from morning to noon to sundown". Then she calls for the rain. The rain can expel the dryness in that country, it healing the wounds and nourishing the land. The calling for the rain is the calling for peace.

Being despairing, Nonceba has no other choice but to escape. The mphafa tree comes to rescue

The shade of the mphafa tree where Nonceba sits is a refreshing island of cool air; in its shelter, she feels the heat drain off instantly from her armpits and her entire body, but only the heat moves off her and not the marula flavor, which clings to her; which clings to everything; which is the air itself. (Vera 2002:145–146)

The refreshing coolness that the mphafa tree provides make it the "shelter" for Nonceba. The shelter is temporary but critical to a hurt woman. The unpleasant heat gone, but not the reality as the "marula flavor" the scent of femininity remains. The identity of being a Zimbabwean woman does not change. It "clings to everything"; the honour of being a woman is so natural that it is "the air itself".

The marula tree is mentioned for the last time in the near end of the story. It casts the "dizzy spell" (ibid. 148) over the sinful civil war. Nonceba attempts to escape from the cruel social disorder:

She was resting under the mphafa tree, letting her mind just empty into the cool air around her so that she could breathe, quietly and alone. (Vera 2002:148)

The trees are historically and personally constructed through the story. A nationalist institution is built upon a female's concepts on the trees and the landscapes. A feminist review over the unlawful civil war expresses her patriotic passions. Most of the time, the trees are observed and sensed by women, reflecting the conscience of a person. The changing meanings signified by those trees vary from different perspectives as the experience of the heroine changes. The notion on the trees is subject to the story-teller's emotions and the protagonists moods. On the other hand, the trees are given human subjectivity to observe and retell. In this way, the natural landscapes involves itself in the making of history and identity.

6 CONCLUSION

Our bodies and our earth, the smell of rain, beetles and our noses, this was writing.

–Yvonne Vera (1997:60)

For Vera, nature means writing. The narrated landscapes and wilderness contribute to the aesthetical aspect of literature, they are also encrypted to mirror the social–cultural structures (Wylie 2005:149). In Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, the waters and trees, the women and the nation, the city and the enclave, the landscapes rise from the background, speaking on behalf the the people, retelling the history. From ecocritical point of view, Yvonne Vera's feminist writings does not only cover the traditional woman/nature dualism. The dominated women by men and the dominated country by intruders have drawn to the dominated nature by the mankind. Heroines and a colonial country are connected with the nature, the water, the river, the land while men's toughness and colonisers' aggression towards nature form the dominating powers. This humans/nature relation justifies the ecofeminist theory concerning dualistic notions on our nature and culture, the dominated and the dominating.

The reality of the nature; the philosophical dialogue between the humankind and nature is distilled into such a state that the people and nature are interrelated. They communicate with each other; represent each other and heal each other. The vitality of women is symbolized by numerous feminine natural existences, water, trees, lands, etc. The natural surroundings are constructed in such a way that the devaluation on nature mirrors the ruthless masculine oppression on woman and, at times, they reflect the colonizers' devastation on Zimbabwe as well. Colonialism, another theme in Vera's novels, although seldom worded explicitly, shapes its concrete self in the action of pollution. Vera clearly sees the disastrous pollution and the manmade citiness as malicious intrusions into the natural world.

Human notions on nature, at least the narrated nature in these two novels, are built upon human interactions with nature. The trees in *The Stone Virgins* are the observers of the

chaotic human society. They represent the human mentality and express human subjectivity. The native marula tree is as passionate as the people making the nation. It is not only the people who contribute to the idea of culture and identity, but also the surroundings, the nature, that we at times differentiate ourselves from our manmade culture.

Vera retells Zimbabwe's history in a way that the landscapes in the novels are not merely the backgrounds of the stories but also contribute to the making of the story.

Parry writes in his *Peter Handke's Landscapes of Discourse*:

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)

The discursive landscapes in literature and art reveals the subjectivity of the storyteller and the objectivity in the otherness of the non-human surroundings becomes subjective, an active eyewitness of human social constructions. Narrated and socially constructed (Parry 2003:14), the landscapes in Vera's novels should be read with humanistic concerns. The discursive landscapes in her stories mirror the society, the cruelty and the horror, the social-political existence that differ us from the otherness of nature. An ecologically-oriented appreciation of literature reveals a dialogical discourse between the mankind and the environment, human culture and nature. I will discuss Vera's writings in connection with the ecofeminist rationality on dualism, a spiritual connection between the black and the wilderness and the confusing national authenticity respectively.

Firstly, women and nature in Vera's novels mirror a male-dominant world. Feminist claim on the dualism between woman/man, nature/culture/ dominated/dominant is expanded to the domination of nature by the mankind as claimed by ecofeminists. Women, in *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virigins*, have definite connections with nature. The heroines are metaphorically symbolised to, butterflies, scorpions, spiders,

the sun, light, etc. the denotations of these symbols in Vera's fictional world reflect the human devaluation of woman and nature. Also the women are raped, killed and destroyed by men. This justifies "a two-pronged rape and domination of the earth and the woman who live on it" (Murphy 1988:87). The contrast between a womanly wilderness and a manly citiness and the spatial boundaries between the wilderness and citiness divide the landscape into a feminine and a masculine one, the dominated and the dominating one. The spatial difference also constructs the ecofeminist dualism. The connection does not only lie in the symbolic or metaphoric layers but also in human consciousness, the conceptual level. The oppositional meanings in these paired dualist terms, such as city/wilderness, culture/nature, man/woman, reveal our conceptual devaluation of women as nature (Plumwood 1995:43), or as the inferior wilderness while men stand on the superior citiness. This "power-over" conceptions of power and relationships and the conceptual logics in these dualisms justify a male dominated world and the human devaluation of nature (Warren 2000:46-47).

Second, the real African blackness resides in the untamed wilderness. By saying "African blackness" here, I do not express any derogatory meanings. The blackness of Africa is the real African spiritual connection with their land and their ancestors. In *Butterfly Burning*, the wilderness lies in the thorn bushes, the rivers and the waters; in *The Stone Virgins*, we also find the explicit connection between the people and the hills of Gulati, the unpolluted and undeveloped enclave of Kezi. The wilderness in Vera's novels reveals identities of the people, either a feminist identity as being discontent and dominated or the anti-colonial nationalism. Ecocritical critiques examine how nature surroundings contribute to general awareness of the environment, as a reflection of "pragmatic practices" which include the distribution of land, racial attitudes or conservation of the environment (Wylie 2002:148). The white citiness as an assemblage of colonial objects and colonial institutions (Nuttall 2005:117-180), is not and cannot be the place for the black people. The real blackness is somehow marginalised into the outside of the city, the hills and bushes where the black people have a spiritual connection with nature. Vera constantly compares the urban space with the wilderness. In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi has a spiritual connection with the wilderness and the untamed nature; Deliwe's shebeen hides in a bush of thorns in the city, providing shelter

for the girl and healing her desperate heart. Phephelaphi carries out self-adoption in the hills outside the city where she experiences agony and has a spiritual dialogue with the wilderness. In *The Stone Virgins*, the black wilderness is even more obvious. The colonial white citiness excludes the blacks. The sacred hills of Gulati, where ancient paintings of virgins can be found, have spiritual connections with the marginalised and dominated blacks. The untamed enclave of Kezi, a place for the blacks, is also where the horrors take place. Raping, killing and violence, a country surrenders in chaos while the rock never rots. At this point, white/black, city/wilderness, dominant/dominated, these pairs of dualism appear in Vera's historical writings. The wilderness presents us with the real African blackness.

Third, in Vera's works, social-cultural structure is built on the landscapes. As I have discussed in the two passages above, the discursive landscapes in Vera's novels mirror a male-dominated world and, respectively in *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, a colonial country and a nation in chaotic civil wars. There is a lack of human activities and words in both of the novels; instead, there are abundant descriptive texts on the landscapes. The characters in both of the novel have spiritual dialogues with nature. These dialogues connect their humanness with nature on the one hand; on the other hand, the landscapes reflect their personalities and identities as well as their patriotic nationalist passion for freedom. There are constant searches for the roots, which are buried under the ground. The ecological linkage between the roots and earth is the patriotic connection between the people and their land. Vera repeatedly looks for the roots while she attempts to search for the human conscience, the hope of a destroyed woman in a male-dominated world. The roots never rot, as the malara tree in front of Thandabantu Store could not be uprooted even though the store is fired into ground and the sacredness of Gulati is stained. The history and reality is written by the people but told by the nature; the people are suffering and killed but the tree cannot be uprooted; "everything in Gulati rots except the rocks" (Vera 2002:104). As I have mentioned at the beginning of my thesis, the people or nature, mind or rock. It's controversial and confusing.

Ecocriticism thus opens up debates on acknowledged literary critiques in the humanities. It probes deeply into the linkage between human culture and our ecological surroundings. It would be fruitful to rethink on our humanities, our manmade culture in the light of “nature”, the notion of which is as confusing as “culture” itself. It is exactly the confusion that directs us to search for our humanness within a polluted environment.

Does the environmental crisis we are having in the earth have impact on human culture? The answer is affirmative. Try to image a Finland without its pines and birches; a China without the Yangtze and bamboos; a Zimbabwe without the hills of Gulati, we can grasp the idea that the identity of a nation is also built on the nation’s landscapes, besides the people within its boundary. Also the activities in which the people interact with nature make the ground for human culture. The idea of culture, at least in Vera’s novels, comes from nature.

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