

'STANDING ON THE OUTSIDE'. WOMAN'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN
YVONNE VERA'S *WHY DON'T YOU CARVE OTHER ANIMALS AND WITHOUT
A NAME*.

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DECLARATION

I declare that: “‘Standing on the Outside’. Woman’s Search for identity in Yvonne Vera’s *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* and *Without A Name*” is my own work and all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature:

Date:.....

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of my mother Raida MaTshuma Ngulube for her courage in daring to believe in her daughters when her society believed that educating a girl child was a sheer waste of resources. Her quiet aggressiveness in fighting for what she believed was right and just continues to be a source of inspiration to me.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to discuss Yvonne Vera's representation of various aspects of women's identity in a patriarchal and colonial context as they manifest themselves through the women's relationships. I explore ways in which the question of self for some of Vera's women seems characterised by marginalisation across racial, cultural, ethnic and generational divides. The short stories and novel studied seem to emphasise that for women, under patriarchy and colonialism in Zimbabwe, seeking an independent and fulfilling identity seems to be interpreted as defying society's expectations and dictates. However, even as Vera tells of the various women's failure to make breakthroughs, she points at a less gender- inflexible future where both men and women will be valued for their true worth, and not their mere biology, through foregrounding the women's stories as they challenge and subvert their societies' received norms, traditions and values.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of identity in Vera's texts, namely *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and *Without A Name* (1994), seems to manifest itself in a number of ways. It is these varied perspectives of what constitutes self for both individuals and groups of characters (in particular women) that I wish to discuss in this study. Vera brings to the fore the stories of women who battle, in different historical and socio-cultural contexts, with the question of self and being. Some of the women try to define their sense of self as individuals whilst others seek their identity as members of groups. A few others, such as the 'guerrilla recruiter' MaDube in 'It is Hard to live Alone' (1992), search for their identity both at individual and group levels.

Vera's texts depict events that happened at the height of Zimbabwe's colonisation, which dated from the advent of colonialism up to the period of the country's liberation struggle. As a result her women characters have to deal with exclusion because of the forces of both patriarchy and colonialism. Writing out of these women's history seems to cut across the racial and cultural divides, as the gender inequalities are evident in different cultural and racial settings. Part of my focus will thus be to explore whether these women seek identity as individuals or as a collective concept or at both the self and group levels. In the process of pursuing this focus, I hope to show that some of Vera's women, like Ma Sibanda in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992), are presented as victims of patriarchal oppression. However, others, like Chido in 'It is Over' (1992) and Mazvita in *Without A Name* (1994) attempt to actively take control of their destiny and so challenge patriarchy's 'unyielding circle' (1992: 75).

Most of Vera's women characters in the collection of short stories appear to suffer a greater invisibility than the male and white characters in stories such as 'Crossing Boundaries', 'It is Hard to Live Alone', 'Getting a Permit', 'Ancestral Links' and 'An Unyielding Circle' (1992). The women are presented mainly as objects to be dictated to. These women's main function seems to be unquestioningly to follow the traditional roles defined for them by both their colonial and patriarchal masters. They are thus cast as inferior/ 'other' (Fanon: 1961) to both the white man and white woman, on the one hand, and the black man, on the other. In such a hierarchy of selfhood, as conceptualized by Fanon (1961), in the Manichean relationships he argued were typical of colonial contexts, some of Vera's women are sometimes almost non-existent both as a group and as individuals. They appear to be appreciated only when they fulfill their societal expectations such as rendering support services to their various levels of master, be it their husbands, the male members of their society, or the white employers on the farm. They are in some instances exploited sexually, the extreme example of this being Mazvita's rape (Vera: 1994), and in other instances for their labour. Some have even learnt to accept their definition in the terms traditionally set out for them by the master. Such women have been trained to believe that their role is to serve loyally in the domestic sphere. Even when their existence is unfulfilling the women are expected quietly to act according to societal expectations. Rudo sums up this socialisation aptly when she says, 'we only know our loss and our fear and our silence. We know we are women asked to bear children.' (1992: 44). In a similar fashion Rebecca's mother in 'Shelling Peanuts' (1992) cannot accept her daughter's venture into 'masculine' territory. She has come to believe that her daughter's adventurous and fighting spirit, her joining the boys 'in the fight for territory' (1992: 38) is a disturbingly masculine trait. She believes that her motherly role is to curtail this fighting, independent spirit because it is the same spirit that led Rebecca's father to join the liberation war which she views as 'a piece of battleground in the bush, where he could claim some territory' (1992: 39). She therefore feels duty bound to call Rebecca back in order to '... give her some woman's duty in the house' (1992: 39).

The next area of identity that emerges in Vera's texts is the conceptualization of production and reproduction, the private versus the public spheres, as they impact on the women's definitions of who they are. MaMlambo sums up the stereotypical view of most of the market women as she says '[a] woman who has never suckled a child on her breast is not a complete woman' (1992: 43). To her, and most other women in the texts, motherhood is the ultimate reason for fulfillment in a woman's life. A woman's role is therefore to be a reproductive assistant to the men. Some of the women, such as Rudo, have been fully socialized into accepting this state of affairs even though they 'know that to bear children will bring [them] suffering' (1992: 44). Even though Rudo is aware of the fact that motherhood is hard to celebrate during the war as 'the land must be watered with the blood of [their] children' (1992: 44), she is still convinced by the group that it is noble for them to provide a continuous supply of manpower for the war. There is in this context of collective identity no room for individual pain or choice or, as MaDube puts it, 'no time for childhood fears or hopes or dreams' (1992: 44). The individuals are expected to operate within the confines of their traditionally defined communal identity. They are called upon to be reproducers of the community's soldiers and not selfishly to hold back their reproductive powers for fear that they will suffer when their children of necessity die at the war front.

Women's active participation in the war, alongside their male counterparts, does not seem to change the traditional views of women's roles if Chido's story in 'It is Over' (1992) is typical of their homecoming. Even after the war Chido's mother takes no time to understand her returned fighter daughter's changes and fears but is impatient to remind Chido that her absence has meant that she has been left behind in her mothering role. Merely two days after Chido's return her mother tells her in a veiled tone of dissatisfaction

[the] girls you left behind are all married and have children You should be thinking of getting married. At least that would be a beginning. (1992: 95).

To the mother, the daughter's enlisting in the army and fighting alongside men was not an accomplishment and a source of pride. It was rather an unnecessary interruption of the girl's expected development and fulfillment of her societal expectations. The mother believes that the girl had no business venturing into the public sphere. As a result she feels that the girl needs to be quickly reminded to forget her dream of individual fulfillment and fulfill her 'primary' role of reproduction.

This apparent denial of a clearly defined and fulfilling self leads some of the women to look for spaces, outside the traditionally available ones, in which to work out their sense of self. Chido, above, finds her mother's insistence that she becomes just another village girl who gets married and is valued for her reproductive powers so frustrating that she tells her mother, barely three days after her return, that she is leaving 'tomorrow' for an as yet unknown destination. To her the old village has no solution for her fears and hopes and so she prefers to strike out into the unknown city to search for herself since after the war '[s]he did not know who she had become' (1992: 94). Even though upon her arrival she 'did not want to find out' (1992: 94) who she was, her mother's failure to appreciate her 'fears' and her insistence that Chido conforms to her culturally defined identity, force her to rebel and leave home yet again. She leaves her village to search for and face the as yet scary reality of her postwar self.

The war zone does not seem to have given Chido the concept of self she was hunting for. She seems to have failed to obtain fulfillment through its 'space' and so '[s]he did not want to remember' (1992: 94) its experiences. It is clear though that Chido, and perhaps other women soldiers like her, was not valued as an equal during the war but could easily have been emotionally or even sexually abused. This could explain why she wanted to obliterate the experience from her memory and why she was aggrieved that her mother wanted 'to find her out' (1992: 94). Women's vulnerability thus seems to have permeated the battlefield for the Zimbabwean women in a manner similar to what Goldstein (2001) chronicles to be part of the historical 'gendering' of the war zone. Unlike the mythical Amazon women who were celebrated for their militancy and could negotiate with their Scythian husbands on an equal

footing, Chido and her fellow combatants appear to have been totally discriminated against as well as undervalued in the war zone. As Chido leaves her village, she carries the secrets of the war experience with her and hopes that the city will offer her the opportunity for fulfillment as an individual.

Such rebellion heralds attempts by some of Vera's women characters to challenge the concept of marriage and motherhood as all- fulfilling. Mazvita (1994) even goes to the extreme extent of infanticide as she views motherhood not as her destiny, but as a hindrance to her attainment of her destiny. She and characters like her thus subvert the concept of motherhood/ reproduction as a core concept in the conceptualization of 'woman'. Both Mazvita and Chido are examples of some of Vera's women characters whose views of womanhood and motherhood run contrary to those of their patriarchal societies. To them it is not necessary to have a man in order to feel complete; they desire to lead independent lives as active participants in their societies' public spheres and not to exist as objects of other people's actions. To such women the question of agency is primary to the quest for self. They thus journey, at times against many odds, from one space to another in an effort to recreate themselves. However, even these bold women's efforts are, by and large, frustrated by patriarchy's apparently relentless colonisation of all spaces that are available. Some of them, such as MaMoyo in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) end up resigning themselves to their lot once it is clear that their 'masters' cannot think of any other option for them than the drudgery of the farm. Others, such as Nora (1992) resort to some form of escape or other, such as painting or fantasising about a better and more fulfilling future.

Faced with the difficulty of surviving as individuals some of Vera's women find solace in the concept of their solidarity against male domination and hostility. The women's support for each other gives them a sense of collective identity and helps them survive. The green mealie vendors can therefore survive the onslaught of the chauvinistic comments aimed at them through this sisterly solidarity as when, in '[t]he men's boasts frightened the women, and they glanced at each other in understanding and sympathy for each other' (1992: 77). Another example of this group solidarity is seen in the market women in 'It is Hard to Live

Alone' (1992) where the women are battling with the new landscape of the war. They keep their equilibrium through the support they obtain from one another and are thus able to navigate wartime's unsure waters where nobody 'knows what the rules are anymore' (1992: 44).

One other aspect some of the women have to deal with is the issue of the past and its bearing on the present and future. MaSibanda in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992) boasts that she has fulfilled her role as a productive woman because she has given birth to six children. Since in her opinion she has proved herself a 'complete' woman, she therefore feels superior to barren MaNdlovu. Towards the end of the story, though, she becomes uneasy as she contemplates the possibility of the end of the war and a return of 'six husbands'. If that eventuality were to happen she would have to deal with the past in defining what kind of woman she is. This same society could even censure her heavily for her 'bigamy' in spite of the fact that it would have applauded her for contributing many soldiers to the cause. Mazvita (in *Without A Name*) also reaches the end of her story without resolving her conflict of identity. Like Chido in 'It is Over' (1992) she has no sure idea of who she is or who she has become after the several unsuccessful attempts to recreate herself. Her efforts to escape her past: Mubaira, the war, her rape and the exploitation on the farm, prove impossible as in the end she is forced to return to this past. She is forced to return to Mubaira with her child's corpse, completely disoriented and feeling totally unable to define who she has become. Her past (through her rape, relationships and subsequent pregnancy) catches up with her and so shatters her dream of a fulfilling working life in the city.

Vera's stories also highlight the effect that the process of colonisation had on the identity of the colonised and in particular the identity of colonised women. So strong is the belief in the inferiority or sub-human nature of the blacks that they are denied the right to any ownership of the land and gain the infamous name of 'squatters' (Vera: 1992). In *Without a Name* (1994) their whole village is torched because they are suspected to be harbouring and feeding enemy forces. The coloniser's creation of a negative identity for the Africans (Dube: 1999) appears to have been even more thorough with the women as they seem to have been

denied any access to the 'master' except through the male members of the community. In 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) Nora's only contact with the women is when she is looking for her servant, James. She is piqued by the fact that James' wife (MaMoyo) and her friend ignore her approach and do not stand up when they hear her dog barking. Even her renaming James is further proof of Nora's patronising attitude to the black servants. She gives a very unconvincing excuse that the new name 'was easier on her tongue than his native name' (1992: 13). The writer emphasises Nora's condescending manner by indicating that she had never tried to learn or understand the meaning of the servant's 'native' name.

As a result of behaviour similar to the example referred to above, of being negatively recreated and made nameless, MaMoyo in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) finds herself totally dissatisfied with the stagnant life of the black men who have to work for the whites, generation after generation. She attempts in vain to persuade James to move to the city, where she believes her children can obtain an education that can prepare them for destinies more satiusfying than farm labour. In a similar fashion Mazvita in *Without A Name* (1994) refuses to remain at the farm with Nyenyedzi because she is aware of the exploitation and negative identity that the coloniser has crafted for the black workers. Mazvita is stifled by the smelly tobacco fumes in the tobacco barns and tries in vain to convince Nyenyedzi that they should move on in search of a more fulfilling life. She tries to persuade Nyenyedzi to join her because she believes the city is 'the perfect place to begin' (1994: 24) as there is no danger of the war and the fear it has instilled in the rural folk. 'Look at how frightened we are here' (1994: 24) she pleads with him but her plea is in vain as the more pragmatic and tradition- bound Nyenyedzi argues that the city can make them lose their sense of identity. He argues that the city can make '[them] forget [their] own mother[s]' (1994: 24). In both of Vera's texts the men seem to be more willing to accept the coloniser's idea of them as his perpetual servants. They are given hope by their belief that the earth surely belongs to them and that one-day they will reclaim the land from the settler. The women have, on the other hand, never owned the land. They have grown tired of waiting and so feel the urge to seek an alternative identity, outside the master's space. They want to move away from the likes of Charles's beliefs that '[t]he natives cannot shape our history' (1992: 21) or that the natives are cheeky when they ask for a small piece of fallow land, which they need for their

sustenance. Black women like Mazvita are also not too sure that the new collective African identity to be ushered in by independence is near enough to their ideal or that it will necessarily address their personal identity needs. They therefore yearn for migration as they hope it might open up other avenues for them.

In the final analysis both Vera's texts challenge women's silencing by foregrounding various women's stories as they either challenge or affirm their societies' received traditions, norms, values and taboos. The telling of the women's stories seems not only to present the idea of women's identity as multi-faceted but also to indicate clearly that there is no simplistic way of defining women. The identity question cannot be approached in simplistic terms of African/ European, coloniser/colonised, superior/inferior, self/other, as some of her women characters exhibit combinations of these apparent binary opposites in themselves, and so blur the boundaries of the binaries.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will trace the question of womanhood within the African, and in particular, the Zimbabwean context. The period I would like to focus on is the period covering Vera's two texts under study, namely *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and *Without A Name* (1994). Historically, the texts capture experiences covering the period that stretches from the advent of colonialism, through the colonial era, up to the time Zimbabwe gained its independence. I have tried to select, for review, texts that contribute towards the debate on how over the years women's naming has led, in different forms and degrees, to their silencing and systematic exclusion from the centre stages of their communities.

Some of the works selected trace attempts by some women to redefine themselves both at individual and group levels. Others examine some women's calls to have their contributions recognised in the telling of their societies' histories. Such women, as evident in the example of MaDube in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992), take advantage of their traditional invisibility to make their mark in the writing of the liberation history of their communities. MaDube is able unobtrusively, yet actively, to recruit candidates for the liberation war because, 'as a woman she would be less suspicious to the authorities' (1992: 42). Meanwhile, women much younger than she are aggressively writing their own heroic tales at the war front, where 'it was rumoured that women were actually being trained to fight in the bush alongside the men' (1992: 42). One of Vera's female characters, Chido in 'It is Over' (1992), becomes a living example of these women who ventured into the apparently gender neutral crack that the war seemed to offer. The war was a new phenomenon to all and as such did not have any clearly defined roles or rules. As a result women were among the people who tried it as a possible avenue in their quest for self.

The chapter will, further, trace briefly how 'woman' in the African context has been mainly defined 'negatively' due to the influence of colonisation on the conceptualisation of various nations' gender ideologies. In the process I wish to also briefly examine the history of women's domestication and its effect on their sense of being in various cultural contexts.

It is within the context of the creation of the concepts of identity that Anne McClintock (1995) critiques the development of identities for men and women during the Victorian era. She argues that the creation of the cult of the domesticity of women was a crucial element in the creation of both the male and female identities in this era. She further argues that race, gender and class are intertwined in their moulding of, in particular, the urban male and female identities. In such a context the male is cast as the superior class and the female as the underclass (Simone de Beauvoir's 'second sex'). This depiction of woman as man's 'other' is challenged by many feminist theorists who share the sentiments expressed by Marshall et al that 'a small social group has dominated society for too long. This group is made up of white middle-class, Western heterosexual men' (LITHEO-6: v). These men believe, like Charles in 'Crossing Boundaries' (Vera 1992), that in the hierarchy of being the white male is at the top, followed closely by the white 'madam'. Below the white female would come the black man, whose only value lay in his labour. Somewhere at the edge of the white farmers' property, and at the bottom of the ladder of being, would be found the black women. Charles and his kind had no use for these women, as they believed that these women were an inconvenience. Such white settlers also believed that they had a right to dislodge the native dwellers of their new land over and above having a right to these natives' cheap labour. Charles even names the black people on his farm 'squatters' to underscore his conviction that they have no right to the land. He tolerates the male population merely as farm hands. By referring to his black workers as squatters, Charles categorises the black population that he found on the Zimbabwean soil as an underclass.

Frantz Fanon (1961) takes the idea of this 'othering' of those different from the dominant group to the race relations in the colonial world. He views colonial relations as founded on the Manichean theory of white/black, good/evil, superior/ inferior, with the

white coloniser characterised through the positive descriptors and the colonised through the negative ones. He therefore sees the white people as enslaved to a superiority complex and the black people to an inferiority complex. He believes that these complexes account for the neurotic orientation typical of both groups' actions, as exemplified in Vera's 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992), by 'madam' and James who are 'on guard against themselves whom they feared' (1992: 2). Throughout 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) Charles is at pains to emphasise to Nora that she should not tolerate any form of familiarity from the 'natives' and Nora is herself uncomfortable about this black population as indicated in the statement that she 'thought of the squatters, whom she distrusted' (1992: 19). Her only solace lies in her assurance that 'these people were merely squatters, and she could send them away whenever it suited her' (1992: 19).

Ifie Amadiume (1987) agrees with Fanon on colonialism's primitivisation of darker races but goes on to posit that black women were even more negatively affected since they were thrust to the end of the scale of primitivism. She argues that the black women's pre-colonial positions of economic and religious power were eroded by colonialism's introduction of fixed gender systems that replaced the pre-colonial flexible gender ideologies and relegated women to a position of inferiority and subservience in relation to men. An example of such inflexible gender expectations can be noted in Vera's 'An Unyielding Circle' (1992) in the drinking men's 'Knees! Knees! A woman must bend on her knees to give food to a man' (1992: 75). This comment summarises this patriarchal society's rigid gender divisions and expectations of women's subservient and loyal service to men.

The growth of feminist thought in the so-called third world has seen an increased dissatisfaction with earlier versions of 'Western' feminisms which African women, in particular, have found inadequate in the face of their peculiar realities. Antonio Akpabio Ekpa, in Ernest Emenonyu (2000), takes issue with African feminism because she believes it is a western importation that imposes a patriarchal identity on African societies. She argues instead for the promotion of co-operation between men and women and for complementarities that she says are typical of African gender systems. Such a complementarity of the male and female elements in the African context is evident in a

number of Vera's stories. MaDube's recruitment of fighters in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992) is an example of women working alongside men for the achievement of common societal goals. MaDube takes advantage of the apparent innocence of women in matters of war effectively to recruit youths for her nation's armed struggle. At the same time she encourages the other women to support the struggle through providing human resources to ensure the offensive is sustained until independence is gained. She thus gives a new meaning and a positive dimension to the reproductive power of women. Through their power of reproduction the women are no longer merely fulfilling their patriarchal society's expectations, their children become a vital tool in fuelling the war at hand. Similarly in 'Getting A Permit' (1992) the narrator's grandmother emphasises the role of women in the family/ communal rituals. She reminds her sons that the burial of their father would be incomplete if she is not available to '...call your father's names ... as you send him to his ancestors' (1992: 67). Faced with such intricacies as the naming of the father as they seek his passage to his ancestors, the men would find themselves incompetent if the women did not fulfill their religious roles of intercession. In a similar fashion Gayatri Spivak (in Mary Eagleton 1996) also exhibits great impatience with 'first world' feminists for their assumption that they can speak for the less privileged 'third world' feminists. She argues that the first world feminist ideas are irrelevant to third world situations as they portray the first world women as the 'self' and the third world women as their 'other'. Perhaps what these first world feminists need to appreciate is that their role should be a complementary one to that of the third world feminists. As the grandmother mentioned above reminds her sons of their inadequacy in matters of ritual and religion, the first world feminists would have to allow the indigenous populations, who know their own traditions best, to write their own 'histories'.

Musa Dube (1999) agrees with the feeling that feminism should address people in their diverse environments and not assume any essentialist depictions of the universally oppressed woman. She sees a danger in ignoring cultural differentials as she views it as leading to the oppression of 'third- world woman' by her 'first-world sister'. She therefore prefers a feminism that will have the freedom to choose and to reject aspects from different cultures and not one that will assume it can speak to every situation. The problems Nora, in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992), faces are vastly different from those faced by the 'squatter' MaMoyo even though they live on the same farm. Their racial and

class differences hardly allow them to be 'sisters', since in their current colonial situation Nora's race and class afford her a lot of advantages that MaMoyo can never dream of.

Cecily Lockett, in M.J. Daymond (1996), goes further to argue for an indigenous South African Feminism that is different from Anglo-American and French versions. She accuses western feminism (especially French feminism) of too much focus on the body and theory to the exclusion of women's material conditions and so dismisses post-structural feminism as incapable of offering practical solutions to women. She thus calls for the need to recognise the oppressive structures of race, gender and class for South African women. Vera's Zimbabwean women are battling with similar oppressive structures that affect their material existence. No foreign theory, no matter how well articulated, can adequately address their peculiar problems. MaMoyo's main concern in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) is to help her daughters access an education that can ensure a future away from the squatter camp and farm labour. She, like Nora in the same story, is battling with her husband's patriarchal training that makes it difficult for him to appreciate that women have any important role in decision making. Faced with the uncertainty introduced by the war situation both women, black and white, are faced with the common problem of the lack of a voice in matters that affect their destiny. The narrator and a fellow woman client in 'Getting A Permit' (1992) are subjected to the sexist attitude of both the government official, who is supposed to grant her a permit, and the men who are also waiting to be served. For such women therefore theory has no easy answer. Their solution lies largely in fighting the racial, class and gender inequalities that affect most aspects of their material existence.

Some theorists have, however, avoided extremely dismissive stances and argue for a middle road in the theorisation of 'woman'. Among these is Pamela Ryan, in M.J. Daymond (1996) who sees the route for the future lying in the fusion of the Anglo-American and French concepts of womanhood and the indigenous subversions of these discourses. Such a hybridised form of feminism seems to me to be characteristic of Vera's gender perspective as seen in the two texts under study. In these texts there is evidence of Zimbabwean women's subversion of their colonial and patriarchal cultures. In *Without A Name* (1994) there is even an adoption of the mainly French

psychoanalysis-based version that focuses on the ‘covert, the hidden, and the repressed features of women’s marginalisation’ (Ryan 1990). Vera’s protagonist, Mazvita, battles, especially towards the end of the text, with the restrictive reality of her maternity which ‘pulled her back from her design to be free’ (1994: 64). To her the ‘surreptitious birth’ (ibid.1994: 64) is a burden, a clipping of her wings as she tries to challenge her tradition and its neatly defined gender roles for her as a woman. Her confused psyche in the end leads her to the illusive belief that she can ‘bury the child inside her’ (1994: 64) and so continue to search for a more fulfilling self whose definition would not be limited to her womanhood.

Mazvita’s tale seems to be a good example of what Eva Hunter (2000) describes as Vera’s destabilisation of the gender divisions of colonial and post-independence Zimbabwean national discourses. Hunter examines how Vera’s texts, in the case of the texts under study through characters like Mazvita (1994) and Chido (1992), deflate the glorification of motherhood. Hunter does this through an analysis of the cruel realities of maternity and the history of matrophobia, especially in the light of women’s taste of freedom as combatants alongside their male compatriots. Hunter argues that these texts challenge the wholesale glorification of manhood and the corresponding domestication of women’s combat activities. Indeed women like Mazvita and Chido yearn for recognition as individuals whose role is as important as, and independent of, that of their male counterparts. The story of their lives runs against the grain of their communities’ expectations of their behaviour and role as women.

Wilson Tagoe Nana, in Newell (1997), argues for a non-antagonistic theory that focuses on gender relations within a cultural context shared by both men and women. She calls for men and women to dialogue continuously as women seek redefinitions in the fluid transitional phase of a changing world. As in some of Vera’s stories mentioned above, the white and black people, men and women have to learn to cross the boundaries set by their traditions. They need to do this if they are to survive in the changing world in which Rudo in ‘It is Hard to Live Alone’ (1992) poignantly asks ‘Who knows the rules anymore? Who knows what to do?’ (1992: 44).

Nnaemeka (2003) agrees that African feminism is a gendered practice that appreciates the co-existence of men and women and does not insist on an exclusive woman's world at war with a man's world. To her African feminism negotiates and compromises as it is practised from one geographical/ cultural locality to another. It thus takes on localised faces as various women of the world grapple with the question of who they are and where they are headed, both as individuals and as groups. The women fighters who are engaged in Zimbabwe's war of liberation are an example of the need for the amicable co-existence of men and women as suggested by Nnaemeka above. These women combatants have taught the young boys in 'Shelling Peanuts' (1992) that 'we must call the girls to join us' (1992: 32). The boys are learning that there should be no exclusive games for them, but that the girls have a role alongside them and thus they need to be socialised together so that they can fit into the new world that is being ushered in by the war.

Gwendolyn Mikell (1995) takes this gender-inclusive model a step further through adopting Filomena Steady's argument for a feminism that deals with women first as human beings and not as sexual beings. She views women's search for gender equity as central to African women's feminist cause and believes its focus is not on the body and autonomy from men. In Vera's 'The bordered Road' (1992) both the male and female workers face a common enemy, namely colonialism. They are, however, prevented from waging a common war against their master because of their 'gendered' lives. They walk beside the road 'as though it represented some larger oppressive thing which they struggled against' (1992: 63). The road is not frightening merely because it represents the colonial power, but it has also become an oppressive symbol of gender separation 'the men stuck to one side of the road and the women to the other' (1992: 63). The road ironically both unites and separates these workers. The narrator can only dream of a future state of gender equity, as hypothesized by Steady, where 'perhaps the road would disappear and stop pushing them to the fringe. Perhaps they would meet in the middle, along a different road' (1992: 63).

Yet other theorists have bemoaned the marginalisation, silencing and exclusion of women from the world of writing. Among them is Florence Stratton (1997) who challenges the trend in the African literary tradition to exclude women's writing from its canon. She also questions the tendency, particularly of male writers prior to 1980, to demonise female characters. This tendency, she argues, has resulted in a negative gender ideology that she believes can be changed through genuine dialogue between male and female African writers. Her study urges both male and female African writers to come up with plausible male and female national subjects whose worth depends on merit and not gender.

This, and similar arguments above, brings gender and social issues to literature and society's centre stage so that 'woman's story' is valued fairly alongside 'man's story'. It will help to explain the prejudices against women and their double silencing under both colonialism and patriarchy as depicted in Vera's texts. Stratton's call for the foregrounding of woman's story and her view of literature as a weapon against negative phallogocentric practices may make it easier to appreciate Mazvita's contradiction-ridden search for agency in *Without A Name* (1994). It will also explain the emergence of the questioning women in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992).

In a similar manner Trinh T. Minh-ha, in Nnaemeka (1997), makes a call for the foregrounding of women's stories through her argument for a focus on what she terms 'mother's story'. This is a story about the ordinary and mundane matters surrounding women's daily lives that she feels are often ridiculed and dismissed as mere gossip. Her paper argues for less focus on manly stories of war and violence and a greater focus on ordinary women's lives and the gender issues that shape their daily lives. It therefore raises the vital question of dialogue across gender lines and a balance in viewing both male and female contributions to the well-being of the African society (Nnaemeka's 'nego-feminism'). It challenges the unfair treatment of women in both the political and literary spheres and as a result calls for the empowerment of women.

The issue of women and their systematic disempowerment through various historical eras and across cultures is central to Vera's *Why Don't You Carve* *other Animals* and *Without A Name*. Trinh T. Minh-ha's study is useful for understanding the motives and feelings of women as well as their use of silent 'spaces' in the two texts. The 'gendered' arrogance and contempt of men in their 'unyielding circles' (Vera: 1992:75) may be seen more clearly in relation to the historical context of their gender stereotyping.

By critiquing Tsitsi Dangarembwa's *Nervous Conditions* as a text that raises intriguing questions about post-colonial identity, Charles Sugnet, in Nnaemeka (1997), also deals with similar issues of gender stereotyping as handled by Zimbabwean women writers. He sees in the book an examination of how both colonialism and patriarchy deny women an education that would grant them an agency and a chance for them to define themselves outside their men's spheres. These are obstacles women like MaMoyo in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) try in vain to articulate to their men. Sugnet further explores how this double yoke of patriarchy and colonialism at times leads women to violent eruptions of resistance in their attempt to achieve some meaningful and independent identity. This appears true of Vera's Mazvita (1994) who is ultimately driven to insanity, as all her attempts to escape patriarchy and regain her violated sense of self prove fruitless.

Makuchi Nfah Abenyi, in Nnaemeka (1997), further traces how literature can be used as a tool to gain women, especially traumatised women like Mazvita and, later, Phephelaphi in Vera (1998) some agency. She views Beyala's *Tanga* as an example of breaking the silence and telling woman's complex, ambivalent and painful story. Abenyi believes that Tanga's abuse forces her (Tanga) to view her body, first as an 'other', which she is ashamed of, but later as something worth repossessing. In her attempts to re-construct her identity Tanga moves through various stages of illusion and disillusionment and experiences many facets of womanhood such as woman-child, prostitute-child and woman-mother. Abenyi's study illuminates my analysis of Mazvita's character and her attempts at self-definition, especially after her rape and the accompanying feeling of dismemberment. Mazvita's wish for a nameless identity also seems to point at how her violation had forced her to treat her body as an object of shame, 'an other' she could not

fully claim as still her own. The rapist's violent actions as he 'claimed her' (1994:28) left Mazvita paralysed and 'unaware that she still had a name she could call her own' (1994: 29). Mazvita's journey echoes Tanga's journey as she attempts to repossess her violated body and sense of self.

Francoise Lionnet, in Nnaemeka (1997), further explores the role of the written word in lending women a voice. Her study traces some women's subversion of their cultures as they become dissatisfied with the idea that marriage and maternity should be their goal for self-definition. She also traces how some women, victimised by patriarchal social structures which perpetuate their dehumanisation and invisibility, resist the objectification to the point of committing murder in an attempt to reclaim their agency and sense of self. This study sheds further light on how violence acts on Mazvita's psyche and leads her through her tortuous and cyclic journey of guilt, confusion, pain, insanity and infanticide.

It is thus apparent from the texts cited that the woman question has moved and continues to move in unsettled and unpredictable directions that are shaped by geographical, historical, cultural and group differentials. Vera's own depiction of women and their struggles for self definitions as individuals and groups is therefore analysed with an awareness that the women are largely dependent on the societal peculiarities of the small communities that they depict and are not a mirror of the whole Zimbabwean society. The different women characters' gender perspectives are also examined in their historically and culturally diverse situations in order to avoid tendencies to treat women as a homogeneous group.

Chapter 3

Why Don't You Carve Other Animals

‘What kind of woman is this?’ (Vera 1992: 75)

The above question underlines the destabilisation of central beliefs about gender relationships as treated by Vera in a number of her short stories in the collection *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992).

The underlying gender position in most of the stories in this collection is a patriarchal one. Patriarchal societies generally base their stance on the premise that men are superior beings to women and must therefore be always ‘waited upon’ by women. Men are thus viewed as the self (the centre) and women as their ‘other’ (the margin). Colonialism complicates this relationship further as the white man becomes the self and both the white woman and the black man and woman his others. The black man adopts the role of ‘other’ to both the white man and ‘madam’ (the white woman). He is dispossessed of his original place as self and pushed to the margins of the white world where he is at times forced to wonder why it was necessary for him to ‘beg... for something that perhaps belonged to him’ (Vera 1992: 1). Such a scenario pushes the Zimbabwean woman in Vera’s texts even further to the edges of the relational circle. Since she is peripheral to an already marginalized ‘self’ she becomes almost invisible to the white world.

‘Crossing Boundaries’ (1992) sums up how the advent of colonialism in Zimbabwe marked the dispossession of black people. They suffered ‘a forced movement across the country... the loss of their link with the soil’ (1992: 4). This tearing of the black people from their origins was equivalent to the loss of their identity and sense of worth as they were ‘asked overnight to become strangers to their land’ (1992: 5). The white settlers further pushed the black people to the margins by resettling them on barren land where ‘there was nothing for the exiled spirit to

cling to' (1992: 6). This sense of alienation and marginalisation is captured in the old man's memory of his feeling of impotence, as a seven year old boy, after the family's expulsion to the new unproductive and 'unhomely' place that was 'set aside' for them. The old man's sense of loss is captured through his painful memories as 'he remembered that he had gone to herd the goats, feeling dismayed, helpless and afraid' (1992: 6). Even the attempts to salvage his situation by working on various white farms proves unhelpful to the old man as the work is tiring and the rates miserly and too inadequate to sustain him and his family. The old man's life captures the impact of the Rhodesian government's Land Tenure Act whose racially biased apportionment of land totally disempowered the black population and made it completely dependent on the white settlers for its sustenance. The old man thus feels both dehumanised and degraded since the desolate place purportedly set-aside for the black population is infertile and thus forces them to live a life of drudgery as they have to offer their labour to the white masters in return for their sustenance.

This exploitation of the black people continues through various generations. The black families, now referred to as squatters, continuously had to beg for small pieces of land on which to subsist. When the old man thinks of their dispossession he is filled with impotent rage as he 'could not let go of the thorns and cactus that populated the dry crackling terrain of his boyhood' (1992: 8). Vera further underscores this pushing of black men to the periphery through her comment that 'they lived precariously along the fringes of the land, their souls barren of hope and their vitality sapped by alienating labour' (1992: 8). They have been turned into strangers to their native land and designated squatters by strangers who 'hung on to the land', used it to increase their wealth and denied the indigenous population access to the land despite the fact that the black people needed the land for their existence. In the old man's story the black woman remains invisible. This may be due to the fact that both patriarchy and colonialism have no space for her story. In the old man's patriarchal world she is a character behind the scenes, only called upon to provide a support system to her man. In the white man's world only her man's labour is needed and so she recedes further into the fringes of the man's world.

The black man's loss of identity under colonial rule is further demonstrated through the story of the old man's son, James. This 'good black' is given a new name by 'madam' because his native name is too hard for her (as if she ever tried to learn it!). James tries to keep his old name in memory so that he can still wield 'a power and an authority over his identity' (1992: 13). This naming by the 'stranger' madam leads to the native's namelessness and his metamorphosis is completed through his acquisition of an identity document from the colonial administrative office so that 'he gained his new identity and his entrance into her (madam's) world' (1992: 14). The identity document marks him as subservient and peripheral not only to the white man (as in his father's case), but also to the white woman's world, as he takes on feminised roles. His duties are not only limited to the farm, since at times he has to work in the madam's kitchen. In this new identity lies his humiliation and degradation as both a man and a human being since it makes him realise that 'he was incomplete because this was how she (Nora) chose to deal with him' (1992: 13). It is through this deliberate policy of rendering the black men second class citizens that Nora acquires a superior position over the African men and women. She emerges with the new status of 'master' to these 'superstitious' blacks and 'their unrefined language'. This makes her 'maintain a sense of difference and of privilege' (1992: 14) as she compares her status to that of the newly formed underclass.

The black man feels the white woman's power heavy on him because of his new peripheral status. It is as a result of this inferiority complex that James finds himself unable to face Nora with a request for more land for his brother and even blames himself for his fear when he proclaims 'I was foolish not to ask her' (1992: 8). He is unaware that this nervousness is a deliberate result of the coloniser's effort to train him to accept his role as perpetually inferior and wrong (in their neurotic relationship as defined by Frantz Fanon, 1961). Nora, on the other hand, has been trained to expect servitude and unquestioning obedience from the Africans and is thus hurt by the fact that James' wife does not seem to recognise her superior status. She expects her power to be felt and so she is angry when James' wife and her companion 'ignored her, as though she was not even present. Why did they not stand up and abandon their tasks when they heard her dog bark?' (1992: 19). MaMoyo, James' wife, even said 'madam' with 'great distaste' in her manner and thus Nora views the women's behaviour as defiant, a challenge to the white woman's authority. She meets the challenge, by arguing that she is

superior because she 'owns' the land and the blacks are merely 'squatters'. This incident seems to indicate that the black woman (MaMoyo) is more able to challenge the white woman's authority because her world seldom meets the master's. She is therefore able to avoid the systematic training to be subservient, a thing that her husband cannot avoid.

In a manner similar to Charles' obsession with the land, James, like other squatters, feels that the link to the soil is an essential element of his identity. This is evident through the way these men 'loved the land and the smell of the earth on it ... It was a kind of homecoming, this communion they had with the soil' (1992: 13). Whereas James' wife, MaMoyo, yearns to escape to the city where she can map out a 'different future for her daughter' (1992: 22), James believes that their life and dignity depends on the land. MaMoyo's impotent anger with James' immobility is illustrated when James insists that they stay on the farm in spite of the dangers posed by the war. She feels betrayed by what she considers his stagnancy but is unable to influence his belief that his roots are in the land, even though he no longer owns it. James' sense of identity is drawn from his sense of history and the possession of the land. Like Charles, his white master, James cannot leave the familiar life that made him lord over both the land and his womenfolk to venture into an unknown territory where his power base could be under threat. The women (Nora and MaMoyo) are prepared to venture onto unknown ground because they are tired of 'waiting' and unlike their men have no past that assured them of power and an agency which they would want to hold on to. MaMoyo sums up the women's dissatisfaction with their male-dominated worlds when she declares that she could obtain fulfilment from the mere ability to 'pick up her problems and carry them to new ground' (1992: 25). She shows a pioneering spirit that is not afraid of untried and unknown future worlds. MaMoyo and Nora's stories demonstrate the marginalisation of women in a patriarchal world (across the racial divide). They are silenced and thwarted by men's power over them:

She (MaMoyo) knew he would not budge from his resolution, and she wished she had not even started the discussion. (1992: 23)

She (Nora) would speak her mind...She was not silenced and did not care for his pardon, or his kindness, which she no longer expected... She could not forget that he could be unkind to her. (1992: 15)

Ironically both Nora' and MaMoyo's efforts to speak out and change the course of their lives in a patriarchal world, yield no positive results. They are sidelined because they are women and because they are under the direct control of their men. Theirs is truly a life outside the mainstream of their societies.

'Independence Day' is a story that draws a painful picture of the unidentified woman as a sex tool. The woman (a sex worker) views the independence celebration as a chance to make money and earn her living. On the other hand, the man sees in the celebrations, a chance to celebrate the lowering of the British flag 'in style and triumph'. This, he argues, he would do by 'pushing the woman to the floor (1992: 29) and getting rid of her as soon as he was through with using her to celebrate. To the man therefore the woman is not important as a person, but only as an agent to help him express his joy and triumph. The woman can only escape from this ugly and demeaning life of a sex slave through going to 'the green space in her head ... withdr[awing] into the safe space in her mind' (1992: 28). She loathes the life she is leading, but is forced to continue in her trade by the sheer need to survive in an otherwise unkind urban space that offers no jobs for women like her. She remains nameless throughout the story, quite likely because the author wants to emphasise the fact that she has no sense of individual identity because to society she is just a body to be used to fulfil any man's sexual needs. Her story echoes the story of MaMoyo's aunt in 'Crossing Boundaries'. MaMoyo explains that her aunt resorted to a life of prostitution because she had no education when she went to the city. She had moved to the urban space unprepared for its demands and its cruelty, as James points out to MaMoyo. James reminds MaMoyo that the cost of living in the city is high and as a result life, for an unemployed woman, can be very difficult. In the urban space, the lack of any other options eventually forces uneducated women to forget all ethical considerations and trade in their bodies in order to eke out a living. The country's independence does not seem to guarantee a quick change to the fate of these women, if the story of the woman in 'Independence Day' is anything to go by.

The lot of women as sex objects is also evident in the story 'During the Ceasefire'. Here some women view the visits to the transit camps, where returnee freedom fighters are, as an opportunity to obtain money from these soldiers. Some of these men need women to satisfy their sexual needs, as they had not met any women for many years (1992: 90). When a fight breaks out, the soldiers quickly abandon the women and join in the fight. Ironically it is only the women who are punished when they are caught in the camp. The men apparently have no case to answer, even though they were entertaining the women. The fact that the men are prepared to pay for the sexual services of the women is ignored as the law is applied selectively in favour of the men. The men, who are the lawmakers, ensure that even though both the men and women committed the offence, it is the women who have to bear the consequences. The women are thus cast as the evil group that needs disciplining.

'Shelling Peanuts' summarises the stereotyping of women characters by their largely patriarchal society. Rebecca fights the stigma in the boys' comment that 'girls don't know how to fight and they cry if you push them' (1992: 37) by insisting on beating the boys in their game. She finally wins herself a place in the otherwise 'all boys' game as one of the boys admits 'not all girls cry if you push them. Rebecca doesn't cry' (1992: 37). She is viewed as an exception and is almost 'masculinized'. However, with the advent of the war, new types of women are emerging. These women are defining themselves alongside men in these new spaces and so challenging the old stereotypes. The women soldiers like Chido in 'It is Over' are proof that the fight for Zimbabwe's independence can only be won if both men and women join hands in order to defeat the colonial power. The war seems to have created a less rigidly 'gendered' space where the women's identity may depend on their courage and individual input and not merely on their gender. Such women's stories are beginning to affect these young boys' images of women as one of them concludes that the women's involvement in the country's war of liberation means that the boys need to allow the girls to join them in the erstwhile all-male games.

Rebecca's mother has, however, been socialised to believe that a girl's place is in the domestic sphere and not in fighting for territory with the men. She is thus disturbed by her daughter's 'uncharacteristically masculine behaviour' and cannot stand the girl's independent and 'determined voice'. Furthermore, she is worried that she will not be capable of raising the children alone, after her husband's departure to the war. Her training has taught her that the role of providing for as well as disciplining the children was a man's job. She has thus calmly accepted that only her man has the capacity and freedom to make a choice. The man can make his plans to leave without consulting her and her only response is 'what could she say. Everything had come to her already decided' (1992: 39). As a woman, she has been trained to believe that she cannot be involved in decision-making processes but has to live with decisions made for her. Society has, further, taught her to be very dependent on her man and hence her feeling of inadequacy when she is left alone to look after her children. She thus has no other identity throughout the story apart from the fact that she is 'Rebecca's mother'. However, just before her man leaves Rebecca's mother shows signs of defiance of her culturally defined role. The man expects her to 'come forward, to give herself' (1992: 39) so that he can touch her, but she does not offer herself and so he leaves since it would have been unmanly for him to appear to beg her. 'Shelling Peanuts' ends with culture as the victor as Rebecca's mother's final act is to send Rebecca into the house with the shelled peanuts. The only solace for Rebecca and other girls of her age is the knowledge that they can periodically leave the domestic sphere and fight for territory with the boys.

Chido, in 'It is Over' offers a living example of the lonely and unappreciated lives of some of the women who dared enter man's space at the war front. After her sacrifice of taking up arms to fight for her country's freedom, Chido comes back, not to garlands and a rousing heroine's welcome, but to an apprehensive mother who does not know what to do with this 'frightening stranger' who used to be her daughter. She starts yearning for the ordinary domestic bound daughter she would have wanted and so counsels her daughter that she 'should be thinking of getting married. At least that will be a beginning' (1992: 95). The mother seems to be accusing Chido of betraying the family by not doing what girls should do, which to her seems to be the production of children and the offering of services to their men. Instead of identifying with and trying to understand this new daughter the mother alienates her with her stereotypical thinking. In the end the daughter gives up on the mother's domesticated space:

The girl knew that she was being told to leave, soon after she had returned.

The girl knew that she was a burden on Mother, who did not have the means to shelter her. (1992: 96).

Chido thus makes her final break with her tradition-bound family and decides to leave for a possibly less suffocating space, the city. In this she echoes other female characters in Vera's writing, namely Nora, MaMoyo (in 'Crossing Boundaries') and, later, Mazvita (in *Without A Name*).

The tendency by some societies to give men the sole right to make choices is further echoed in 'A Thunderstorm'. In this story Ponderayi decides to leave for the armed struggle but fails to communicate this decision to his wife. He wishes to tell her but perhaps because he will not be 'man' enough to face her reaction, he slips off into the night. In him we witness how the burden of culture, the need to prove he is a courageous man, outweighs his love and concern for his wife, Tsitsi. All he is able to do, to show his love, is leave a 'big load' of firewood for her use. In a less patriarchal community Ponderayi would have reduced his internal conflict and burden by discussing his wish with his wife and reaching an agreement with her on his need to join the war.

Some men's belief that the public sphere should be their preserve is dramatised in 'Getting A Permit'. The narrator relates her ordeal in a government office. Her experience, and that of another woman in the same queue, sums up such men's impatience with women who think they can make independent decisions. When the woman ahead of the narrator in the queue asks for a pass to travel at night the first hurdle she meets is the government official who asks her questions 'with a voice tight with irritation' (1992: 68). To him she obviously is an irritant and he would like to dismiss her as quickly as he can, especially since she is a woman. His ensuing series of questions are annoyingly sexist: 'what about your husband? ... You just make children on your own? (1992: 68-9). The man ridicules the woman for daring to live without a man and even argues 'her man' must have left her 'because you are a bad woman'

(1992: 69). The other men in the queue actually approve of the humiliation the woman is subjected to. The woman, apparently used to such attitudes, informs the man that she kicked the husband out for his drunken behaviour. She says this whilst looking him straight in the eye 'as though the comment relates somehow also to him' (1992: 69). The narrator takes in every detail of this encounter and is satisfied to see this woman win. Her turn, though, is also characterised by name-calling (she is referred to as 'a complete fool' 1992: 69) and intimidation. The government employee apparently gives her the permit for fear he might be thought foolish for lecturing her for very long and then denying her the document (1992: 69). The women thus seem to get the services from this office against the men's wishes.

'Ancestral Links' is a further example of Vera's focus on the narratives of daring women and the resistance they meet from the male world. Fari and her grandmother brave the journey through the war-torn countryside in order to bury Fari's grandfather. They suffer sexist insults at the hands of soldiers at a roadblock. One officer asks:

A woman going to the country to bury her father! Do you not have customs where you come from? ... Why did you not stay in the city and let the men travel? A real township woman hey? (1992: 83)

For this officer women need men's protection and guidance. In his opinion they have no business taking on such huge and 'manly' responsibilities. They thus need to be constantly reminded of their proper place which, in the soldier's view, is in the home. This incident at the roadblock clearly underscores the women's belittling at the hands of both patriarchy and the structures of the colonial government. The soldier does not even seek an explanation for why the male members of this family were unable to travel with the corpse. He is content with venting his anger at the bereaved women for the simple reason that he believes they are behaving in a manner he thought was reserved for men.

The height of women's humiliation is in 'Unyielding Circle'. This short story opens with a demeaning comment aimed at MaSibanda (the green mealies vendor):

Knees! Knees! A woman must bend on her knees to give food to a man. What kind of woman is this? (1992: 75)

Ma Sibanda is forced to behave as dictated by her drunken male customers because her livelihood depends on selling the mealies. The applause from the men indicates their satisfaction that they have been accorded the respect traditionally due to them as the 'masters'. Poor MaSibanda can only 'beat her arms angrily about her' (1992: 75) in frustration at a fate she seems unable to control. The men's insults are not only limited to demands of respect: some even boast about their sexual and physical power over women. One drunk proclaims 'I can handle any woman, any woman', to which another drunk, responds 'The only way to control a woman is to beat her' (1992: 76). To such men, women are sex tools, servants or unreasonable children who need to be perpetually and forcibly reigned-in or else forced out of their homes. It is no wonder therefore that faced with such a masculine, hostile and insecure world MaSibanda feels 'alone, so completely alone' (1992: 76) The only solace that she and her friend MaDube have lies in their solidarity, their 'understanding and sympathy for each other' (1992: 77).

Almost as if to maintain their sanity in the face of the abusive men, the women laugh at their fate. MaDube tells MaSibanda to 'remember to kneel' (1992: 77) when the men call for some more maize. MaSibanda approaches the circle of men feeling inadequate and unwelcome and is met with 'Two hands... A woman must use two hands to give food to a man' (1992: 77). The men insist that tradition must be 'expertly and immediately performed' (1992: 77) Sadly for MaSibanda, the one young man who sympathises with her is terribly outnumbered and quickly silenced by the patriarchs. The final insult comes with the third round of the maize cob order: 'Sit down! ... A woman must sit down when she is among men'. As the imperatives increase in number MaSibanda gets angrier and more confused as she is pushed to her place:

outside the men's unyielding circle. She can do nothing but wait and hide 'in a silence that protected and consoled her' (1992: 78). Like Nora in 'Crossing Boundaries' and the woman in 'At Independence', she has to escape the harsh reality of her subjugation and humiliation by seeking a space only she can inhabit and control. This hiding space is safe, no matter how temporarily, from patriarchy's derision and the woman's own powerlessness against it.

In some of Vera's stories in this collection women's socialisation proves a hindrance to their conceptualisation of themselves as complete human beings, capable of controlling their destiny outside men's influence. The first example is Chido's mother in 'It is Over'. She cannot understand her strong-minded and independent (ex-fighter) daughter who is not prepared to be somebody's good childbearing wife. In the end she can only give up and note that 'She had nothing that she could claim as her own' (1992: 95) in this 'new' daughter. The mother in 'Whose Baby Is It' also feels totally inadequate when her daughter poses a series of questions about the abandoned baby recovered from the garbage. Unable to handle the child's curiosity, she can only regret the fact that she has a daughter 'whom she is raising alone' (1992: 59). The problem she has, like other women similarly socialised, is that she was not trained to view the parenting role as one she could be capable of fulfilling independently of her man. Her concept of herself as a woman and wife is that of a support system to her husband and not of full responsibility for the nurturing of her children and thus her feeling of inadequacy.

Most of the women in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' also bear testimony to this aspect of their socialisation. MaSibanda constantly bemoans her status of being without a man, saying 'I don't have a man. It is hard to live alone' (1992: 43) and seems to be outside the world of the other women. In the end the other women ignore her constant chorus about the difficulty of living without a man and move on with their general discussion. She re-emerges towards the end of the story with her familiar tune 'I do wish I had a man in my house. It is so hard to live alone' (1992:45). Sadly, her story of total dependence on a man for her identity is repeated in the stories of the other women. Faced with the reality of the raging war and the departure of most of their men to join the war, several of the women tell their sad experiences of feeling inadequate. Rudo sums up the women's fears and dilemma as they feel these shifting sands

surrounding them: 'We only know our loss, our fear and our silence. We know we are women asked to bear children. We know that to bear children will bring us suffering.'(1992: 44). Even MaDube who is rumoured to be an independent and courageous woman who is not afraid to state her opinion and has ventured into the traditionally masculine world of recruiting freedom fighters, still feels frustrated by the fact that women have to 'bear sons for men who are leaving' (1992: 44). Even though she believes in the need for some sons to 'return to the soil', she acknowledges the greater difficulty for the women as they are left alone to bear the brunt of the actual war.

It is also ironical that the women's sadness seems to lift only when they celebrate their motherhood; a role they have been trained to see as their primary reason for living. MaMlambo mocks Mandlovu because of the latter's barrenness: 'How can you claim to be a woman when you don't know the joy and pain of childbirth? ... A woman who has never suckled a child ...is not a complete woman' (1992:43). MaMpofu concurs and argues that barrenness is shameful for a woman. Neither of these women stops to consider whether the childlessness was due to the woman or man's fertility problems, nor that MaNdlovu possibly had no choice in the matter. They have been trained to celebrate their fertility even to the point of laughing at one of their kind. The emphasis placed on fertility is shown in how MaMpofu boasts that she has six children with different men and so has 'done my job as a woman' (1992: 43). She believes that the society that would have otherwise censured her for her many 'husbands' appreciates her better than it does a barren woman. The sin of barrenness is thus viewed as worse than that of 'promiscuity' in a woman.

It is MaMlambo who sums up the women's frustration with their unexciting lives and their constant waiting; for customers, their men, fulfilment, the end of the war when she says 'I am tired of waiting' (1992: 42). Even at the end of the story the women are worried about the emptiness of their lives without their men. Rudo worries whether their daughters will 'find husbands to marry them' (1992: 45) and MaDube sends Rudo back home to 'prepare for your husband. It is a cold day and a man likes to find a warm meal after work' (1992: 45). The workplace (public sphere) is portrayed as strictly man's domain and the house (domestic

sphere) as a woman's domain. For these market women (who significantly are identified by their family names and not individual/personal names) joy is achieved through service to the men as well as the fulfilment of other duties determined by their patriarchal society. They are like the carver in 'Why don't you Carve Other Animals', who is, apparently, incapable of carving other animals apart from his deformed giraffes. They seem unable to imagine different definitions of woman's identity. Even in the story 'The Bordered Road' where they have ventured into the formerly all-male world of formal employment and possible independence, the women stick, almost apologetically, to their side of the road. Their only hope seems to lie in some distant future where 'Perhaps they (the men and women) would meet in the middle (of the road that divided them), along a different road' (1992: 63).

As these stories explore the pushing of women to the fringes of society, the voice of the women's struggle for recognition is heard in comments like 'Someone will begin to see the folly of suppressing another group' (1992: 63). This comment, made by one of the women in 'The Bordered Road', applies to both the marginalised blacks and the oppressed women in Vera's collection of stories. Even as Vera underlines the women's powerlessness and helplessness before the 'unyielding circles' of patriarchy and colonialism, she celebrates the disturbing undercurrents caused by some women who begin to question the way things have been handed down to them. These women have begun to dream of a different world where woman's identity will not depend on her ability to serve and procreate but on a different set of criteria. These are women like the narrator in 'The Bordered Road', Rudo in 'It is Hard to Live Alone', MaMoyo and Nora in 'Crossing Boundaries', Rebecca in 'Shelling Peanuts' and Chido in 'It Is Over'. As Vera explores the Zimbabwe she writes about through the eyes of women, her stories seem to point indeed to a future where it is possible to create a world that will treat each gender equally. Unlike the dividing road in 'The Bordered Road', this would be a 'road' where both men and women would be at the centre of their communities' stories.

Chapter 4

Without A Name

“She would have liked to begin without a name, soundlessly and without pain” (Vera 1994:102).

In the previous chapter I examined how Vera foregrounds the stories of various groups of women in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992). This collection of short stories seems to point at Vera's great interest in issues that affect women in their quest for fulfillment and self-definition further developed in her later works such as *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998). In *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992), Vera traces the stories of women pushed to the margins of their communities by both patriarchy and colonialism. She explores how most of these women have been trained to resign themselves to their lot as support systems to the male members of their communities. At the same time Vera starts focussing on the lives of a few women who are beginning to make attempts to escape from their patriarchal and apparently suffocating roles in order to find some measure of freedom in hitherto male dominated spaces. It is in such stories that Vera seems to point to her later texts where she focuses on the lives of individual women in their quest for identity.

Vera's main character in the final story in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) actually abandons both her rural life and her mother (who to her is the epitome of the patriarchal order) and boards a train to search for a new and possibly more fulfilling life in the city. The writer gives the reader no clue as to whether Chido will meet any fate that is different from the one she is escaping, but the migration itself indicates an independent and pioneering spirit that had as yet been unknown to the local population. For the women Chido leaves behind, her move might hint at the possibility of new ways of defining themselves. However, the writer already strikes a warning note that the route of migration might not provide a sure route to fulfillment for the women who opt for it. Some of the

stories such as 'Crossing Boundaries', 'At Independence' and 'Getting A Permit' already hint at the fact that the urban space does not always offer ready opportunities for fulfillment to women. As a result, even as Chido leaves for Harare the reader feels apprehensive about her fate in the urban space.

Without a Name (1994) takes the thread of migrating women further as it chronicles the story of Mazvita's quest for self and fulfillment. The novel concerns itself with this young girl who is raped by an unidentified soldier and thereafter leaves her village, Mubaira, in search of her lost identity and freedom. Mazvita leaves her village, which the soldiers have razed to the ground, and journeys through one of the areas of settler-owned farms, to what she believes is the destination of her dreams, the city of Harare. Once she embarks on her initial journey, Mazvita's life becomes one long and unpredictable quest for self and fulfillment which, ironically, turns into frustration, disillusionment and despair in the city of her dreams. Her experiences in the city torture her young psyche so much that she ends up committing infanticide and ultimately losing her sanity.

It is the journey motif in relation to Mazvita's quest for her identity that I would like to track in my reading of *Without A Name* (1994). Mazvita's journey occurs at several levels: the physical, as well as the psychological. So crucial is this thread that even as the novel moves to its close, Mazvita undertakes yet another journey, but this time she almost retraces her steps as she moves from the city to her point of departure, her rural home. She returns totally disoriented and broken and appears to have only one wish, that is, to carry her child's corpse to Mubaira and then die. The wheel seems to come full circle for Mazvita as the thought uppermost in her mind at that moment is a wish for death. Her quest turns out not to be one where she, in the fashion of the Greek epic heroes, returns as a victor or a heroine to be celebrated by the people she had left behind. Ironically it seems to have been one long nightmare where all the potential opportunities turn into nothing but unfulfilled and empty dreams. Mazvita returns as a lonely and disillusioned woman whose final destination appears to be a desolate and dead village.

My focus will be on Mazvita's development from a frightened, inexperienced rural girl, through her daring, naïve and dream-filled phase (at the white settler-owned farm as well as during her early days in Harare) to a totally disoriented, disillusioned and hardened mother. The picture that haunts the reader in the end is one of Mazvita the mother, who carries her baby's corpse strapped to her back during a nightmarish and tortuous bus journey to her village, Mubaira, and a 'silence... deep, hollow and lonely' (1994:103). Her quest for her identity seems to have been futile as it leads her away from her village, takes her to unfulfilled promises of a whole self and finally pulls her back to a seemingly meaningless existence at the village, which she had sought to escape.

My reading will also attempt to explore Mazvita's quest for the recovery of her sense of self and her lost voice after her rape by an armed man. I will trace her development from the moment she is violently raped and feels that 'she ha[s] lost the world' (p.30), through her short and comparatively happy stint on one of the settler-owned farms to the elusive promise of 'easy freedom' in Harare. At the emotional and psychological level, I will examine her movement from shock and horror upon her rape and the torching of her village, through her short period of optimism and happiness at the farm, to her short-lived joy in Harare. I will then follow her through her disillusionment as her dream of obtaining a job and independence in Harare is thwarted, up to her emotional and mental breakdown that culminates in her infanticide. After this Mazvita then moves into a period that is characterized by guilt and schizophrenia, especially after she discovers that Joel and her very maternity have ironically prevented her from fulfilling her dream. Finally, I will track her return to Mubaira, the village's unwelcoming nature upon her homecoming as well as her mental journey to 'yesterday' (1994:101) and the unpleasant memories it brings to her. Alongside these major issues, I will also examine other issues that are critical to understanding Mazvita's development. These include, among others, Mazvita's violation and how it affects her, the war and its impact on her worldview as well as elements of her own psychological and emotional state such as isolation, betrayal, guilt, madness: all of which culminate in her death-wish.

The first leg of Mazvita's quest takes her away from her burning village and her rape to a tobacco farm where she meets Nyenyedzi. This young man's love restores joy and laughter to Mazvita after her rape by a gunman had robbed her of her voice and sense of identity. The Mazvita the reader meets at the farm is full of expectations about her future. On one occasion whilst she awaits the arrival of Nyenyedzi, she searches dreamily for a pure white mushroom but is continuously disappointed as she discovers brown spots underneath each of the mushrooms she pulls out. There is an ominous atmosphere as her search for purity (and possibly a dream of herself as whole once more) is continuously thwarted by the reality of the imperfection that surrounds her world. She waits eagerly for Nyenyedzi but when he finally arrives, his pragmatism provides a striking contrast to the naïve and dreamy Mazvita. He crushes the mushroom proffered him because he is aware of the danger of poisonous plants among these mushrooms. The action scares Mazvita as it reminds her of the rapist's ravaging. She can only hope that this man 'would be gentle—different' (1994: 7). Nyenyedzi's difference from the rapist is shown in his genuine interest in and appreciation of Mazvita. When he names her *Howa* (1994: 7) during one of their physical encounters Mazvita becomes extremely excited as she believes that he has given her back her identity. To her the naming echoes the naming ceremony in her tradition where a child would be given its individuality and identity. Mazvita is thus happy that he equates her to a mushroom ('Howa'). She believes that the fact that he names her after this delicacy indicates how much he values her. However, by equating her to a delicacy, Nyenyedzi might not be attaching as much value to her as she believes. This might even be more probable since Nyenyedzi's initial reaction to Mazvita's handling of mushrooms was an ominous gesture of crushing them for fear they might be poisonous. To Nyenyedzi the girl might not be a unique and precious being, but just one of the meals he sometimes has, the difference between her and some other women being that she is one of the delicious ones. She might even be viewed as one of the potentially poisonous ones that Nyenyedzi destroyed. This opinion is supported by the fact that even as Mazvita exults over his naming her, Nyenyedzi cannot remember what name he has given her in his excitement. It thus raises questions on how long Mazvita will remain fulfilled with this young man. Furthermore, Nyenyedzi's response to Mazvita is an enigmatic laughter that may suggest that his future reference to her by the new name might have no special significance but be merely aimed at humouring her so that he could easily access his 'delicious meal'. Mazvita would therefore, as was the case with the rapist,

still be reduced to a tool that is used to satisfy men's desires. This may also explain why, in spite of her excitement during the naming encounter, Mazvita is still unsatisfied and continues to search for 'the spotless white mushrooms' (1994: 9). She still dreams of finding a perfect, whole self, in spite of the love Nyenyedzi provides for her.

Mazvita's lack of fulfillment on the farm is evident when she discovers a brown egg which seems possibly to offer promises of new beginnings, '[i]ts promises hidden but complete...a shy silent awakening' (1994: 12). Instead of giving her the certainty that she was loved, Mazvita's relationship with Nyenyedzi seems to have renewed her resolve to discover her full potential. She feels the pull of the sky and thus dreams of a life that would be better and more satisfying than the tradition-bound one that she and Nyenyedzi are currently leading. So, even when she is intimate with him she still yearns for greater things. The cry of a sentinel pierces her ears almost as if to warn of looming danger, perhaps of the failure of her quest, but Mazvita appears oblivious to any sense of danger. Even as she is ecstatic, 'restored' and comforted in Nyenyedzi's embrace, even as she shares his triumph as '[t]hey lay still in a triumphant arch' (1994: 15), Mazvita's ambitious nature is evident when she remembers the brown egg. She feels that the egg is about to hatch an identity tailor-made for her, a different self that is 'supple and wholesome' (1994: 12). As a result the challenge to her seems to be to search for and find this whole new self whilst Nyenyedzi, on the other hand, is pragmatic and accepts what life offers him, especially this girl whose name he finds pleasure in calling. He has no dreams to go after and so is happy to live for the moment. Their relationship appears doomed to fail, as they appear to have radically different approaches to life.

Their incompatibility finally leads to their parting. In Nyenyedzi's eyes Mazvita is impatient; she '[rises] above the land and scorn[s] its slow promises' (1994: 39). He, on the other hand, fears unknown spaces and hence prefers the history and tradition of his people. He is satisfied with a communal identity and thus cannot understand Mazvita's wish to carve out an individual identity. Nyenyedzi's feeling of wholeness is easy to understand since his history has not yet been affected by the war, as is the case with Mazvita. The

torching of Mazvita's village and the total destruction of her community transformed her from a trusting to a frightened and traumatised young girl. Nyenyedzi's mistaken belief that Mazvita scorned the land can also be attributed to the fact that he does not have full insight into how Mazvita's rape had negatively impacted on her worldview. He thus tries to will Mazvita to stay on and even evokes his ancestors and the land to 'give him this woman that he cared for' (1994: 39). He is finally forced to give up when he discovers that she is strong-willed and determined to search for her individual identity in other places.

To Nyenyedzi then, the African identity can only be communal. Like the land they dwell on, it cannot be apportioned to individuals, but is owned jointly. However, as Mazvita has experienced, the communal identity is under threat due to the war and its ravaging of whole villages and communities, as exemplified by her community. People who, like Mazvita, have thus been displaced, can no longer identify any roots in their communal history. They are therefore forced to migrate in search of an alternative identity, even if it involves danger, as they challenge received ideas of what their communities accept or do not accept. As a result, throughout their relationship, Mazvita's dilemma is that even as she loves Nyenyedzi she cannot stay on with him. He is too attached to the land that harboured her rapist and believes that through protecting the rapist the land forced her to lose her world and her sense of being. She therefore fights to free herself of Nyenyedzi because the memory of her traumatic experience is still too fresh and he can never appreciate its full impact, even if she were to try to tell him. His world has been and continues to be secure: safe from the war and safe from the dangers to women as represented by the armed rapist. Even the deep physical desire that Mazvita feels for this man cannot erase her private nightmare and so she decides to move on to the untried urban space, Harare.

Mazvita's quest has so far yielded no lasting or fulfilling results. In a manner similar to Chido in 'It is Over' (1992) Mazvita is restless and fails to find joy in life as either a villager or farm worker due to the proximity of the war. She therefore desperately feels that, like Chido, she needs to escape the communal space and try the urban space. The two women's

tales underscore how traditionally available spaces appear to offer no options for women who need to identify themselves as individuals.

When Mazvita finally arrives in Harare, she discovers that the one aspect of the new urban identity that she has to deal with involves a false feeling of easy freedom (*nyore nyore*) as well as the adoption of another self. This new world seems to demand a nameless identity where Mazvita can drift along with no sense of responsibility or accountability to anyone. It apparently promises an unconventional existence where she would have no fixed identity, but could experiment with several possibilities without fear of breaking any rules as '[t]o be here was not to be here at all, that's what made being here' (1994: 45). The urban identity's paradoxical invisibility is characterised by a void which according to Mazvita's naïve view, 'filled you up' (1994: 45). She appears not to be alone in holding this illusive optimistic view as many young women at this time seem to have shared similar fantasies about the city and its promise of freedom as '[t]hey chose the greater danger, arriving unprotected, ready to be injured. That is how naïve they were about freedom' (1994: 45). These women were, like Mazvita, satisfied to know that they were nameless and unknown and so believed that they could venture into the unknown territory to work out an illusively easy freedom. Ironically, this freedom that Harare seems to promise adventurous youth like Mazvita is not only illusory but also false and artificial because it seems to be based on self-denial.

These black young women's sense of freedom and fulfillment relies on creating an image that is an echo of the colonial master. In order to attain this ideal image of self, the young women have to bleach themselves to an artificial whiteness. They have to use harsh abrasive and corrosive products like Ambi, burn their hair and wear mass produced 'revolution' trousers. Instead of them joining their country's liberation struggle, they seem content with removing anything that could link them to their African self and identity. They are thus satisfied with a freedom that is skin deep. They have become what Fanon described as 'white masks', people that had drifted into a state of disinheritance through a denial of their black identity. Vera captures this denial through her description of them as 'without any faces, invisible, like ghosts' (1994: 27). It is thus an extremely 'unreal' reality that Mazvita

finds herself in. However, like Harare's Ambi generation, Mazvita is ready to embrace this new identity, possibly because she does not have access to any other options since she is an uneducated, inexperienced and unskilled young rural girl. To the inexperienced rural girl this pseudo-freedom marks a break with Mubaira, the war and the harrowing past and is thus welcome. Mazvita chooses to try this 'urban' freedom since the freedom that the liberation army is fighting for back in the country has taught her nothing but pain through her rape and the torching of her village.

The urban space also brings Mazvita into contact with Harare's world of sex workers and yet another example of group identity. The sex workers have turned themselves into white masks in order to taste what the author describes as their individual pieces of 'fleeting' freedom. Ironically, through imitating the white master these women have killed off their black selves. The writer emphasises the dehumanising nature of the trade to which the women have resorted. Prostitution has turned the women into absurd corpses and 'monsters who offered their bodies as a ransom for their land.' (1994: 63). It is not clear whether these women actually chose the route of prostitution or were forced into it by the ruthless urban space. However, the writer's indication that these women behave this way because of shattered dreams hints at the fact that, as newcomers themselves, they had dreams of achieving independence in the city. These dreams appear to have, unfortunately, been shattered by their experiences in these very cities. Moreover, Mazvita's story of unfulfilled dreams in Harare seems to imply that the women were forced into prostitution because they had no other options available to them. The writer's satiric attack on these women who 'conjured freedom from chaos' (1994: 62) is thus double-edged. It is not only an attack on the women's loss of their African identity, but also a scathing attack on society's failure to prepare room for women in the urban space.

Vera's negative depiction of the city is evident when she paints it as a world where the natural order of things has been reversed. There is no sense of past or continuity and things appear to be topsy-turvy, '[t]he past had vanished. Perhaps they offered beginnings, from

the outside in' (1994: 81). The impersonal and rootless nature of the city seems to be symbolised by the lifeless and impersonal gesture of the dummies lining the display windows, '[s]ilent eyes fixed on passersby. The eyes saw and spoke nothing. The eyes were voiceless. They burrowed, ate their own bodies.' (1994: 81). Although the dummies appear like real people, the writer emphasizes the fact that they are mere imitations. To the inexperienced arrivals from the rural areas though, these 'glasses and protected women' seem to suggest role models of city women. They also ignite in the newcomers the illusion of 'a purchasable salvation' (1994: 81), namely that they can obtain freedom through purchasing clothes. Perhaps that is the reason why these women from outside the city 'cruelly imitated' (1994:81) the dummies, why they even wore artificial brown hair and painted their lips red. The women would obviously have arrived without any idea of what the city had to offer. Their first idea of urban women would thus have been borrowed from the dummy white madams who seemed to promise a freedom that could be easily acquired: a freedom founded on falsehood and imitation.

It is to such a cold and unkind urban world that Mazvita is introduced without any initiation. She spends the greater part of the day feeling completely invisible and overwhelmed by the city's speed, its population's concern with time and its sheer size. She is thus easy prey to Joel's practiced 'deliberate motions of liberty' (1994: 48). The illusions of freedom, derived initially from the glitter of the city windows and pavements, are furthered by Mazvita's dreamy assumption that Joel 'was being thoroughly helpful' (1994: 48) in inviting her to move in with him. Mazvita's dream of freedom in the city, coupled perhaps with her desperation after waiting all day without anyone paying attention to her presence, makes her inattentive. She is blind to the ludicrous characteristics of a caricature that the writer ascribes to Joel. The writer depicts Joel as a comic and nimble sex machine that is excited about this new girl because she demands no money. He is an experienced playboy, whereas Mazvita is a naïve and trusting rural girl whose inexperience fools her into enjoying his disastrous offer of a bike ride and accommodation in exchange for the free sexual services that she will offer him ' [a]t least until he tired of her' (1994: 49). Mazvita's immaturity is made even clearer when she describes their relationship, that is born out of sheer convenience, as 'freedom divine', without pausing to think of the dangers she is exposing

herself to through the unprotected sexual encounters. Her naïveté might, however, be due to the fact that her first sexual encounter was a forced one and so she never had the opportunity to know any better about initiation into womanhood.

The cruelty of the urban space to the inexperienced is further evident when Mazvita's story takes on an ironic twist after she discovers that she has fallen pregnant. The pregnancy becomes a clear indicator to her that she cannot gain access to Harare and her quest for a whole and pure self. Both the man responsible for her pregnancy and her own sexuality, thus become impediments to her entry into the city and the realisation of her dream. Mazvita's reaction is to feel betrayed and so she rejects her baby because '... it pulled her back from her design to be free' (1994: 64). Her frustration with her body's betrayal is echoed in her unsuccessful attempts to consciously push the baby to the back of her mind, as '[s]he hated to think of the baby. She thought of the baby.' (1994: 73). The reality of her motherhood brings with it rejection of the baby and the idea of being a mother. It also induces fear and uncertainty, as Mazvita is fully aware of the fact that Joel's scheme of things does not involve commitment. She thus falls into a phase of denial of her pregnancy as shown by her unsuccessful attempts to 'bury the child inside her' (1994:64). At the same time she begins to show signs of extreme fear and insecurity, so that '[h]er arms trembled... She shivered. Mazvita was cold and afraid' (1994: 67). She loathes Joel for the betrayal, as indicated by the fact that she cannot 'stand the sound of him' (1994: 73). She knows that he can never accept responsibility for the child and feels insecure because she is not certain of the child's paternity.

When Joel discovers that Mazvita is pregnant, his relationship with her almost predictably takes a downward tumble. He has no room for the baby and its mother because his world has no room for binding relationships. He thus accuses Mazvita of a 'final and inexcusable' (1994: 74) deception. To complicate matters for Mazvita and almost vindicate Joel's harsh attitude the baby arrives too early and gives Joel the impression that Mazvita is not special, but untrustworthy. To him she becomes just 'like any other woman' (1994: 74).

Mazvita is angry with her body because it has betrayed her and banged the door of the city in her face. She is unable to name the child because of the barrenness of her current existence. Naming would give the child an identity and denote acceptance, but Mazvita is too numb to handle the new identity of mother. The child takes a nameless existence as Mazvita numbly performs her duties as a mother, 'simply [holding] the child, and [feeding] her from her breast' (1994: 75). Meanwhile her relationship with Joel worsens. Mazvita accepts that there is no future with Joel but she remains almost stubbornly rooted in his room. In spite of his violence, she is aware that she has no other Harare outside Joel. She cannot access the city except through him and thus she continues to live with him, against all reason. She has obviously reached the end of her tether and so begins to exhibit signs of a nervous breakdown as exemplified by the fact that 'one morning, she woke up in a sweat' (1994: 75). The trauma of motherhood and homelessness, yet again, starts gnawing at her consciousness.

Mazvita's dilemma is dramatised in her confused thoughts regarding the child's paternity. When she fantasises that the child belongs to caring Nyenyedzi she loves it, but when she thinks of it as Joel's child, she hates it. If it had been born in a warm relationship, Mazvita would have loved this baby. Mazvita is thus not against motherhood as a concept but against its closing down her opportunities to access Harare and find out her true potential and identity. As she continues to think about her situation, Mazvita begins to experience a deep sense of mental disorientation. She confuses Joel and Nyenyedzi in her thoughts and at times even forgets that she is pregnant. These occurrences prepare the reader for her final nervous breakdown as well as her rejection of her identity as a mother.

Meanwhile Joel's growing impatience with Mazvita becomes even more pronounced with the question 'When are you leaving?' (1994: 83) constantly repeated. His hatred of both mother and child grows to a climax until he issues the final injunction 'Leave. Tomorrow' (1994: 83). He closes Mazvita out of his world almost as swiftly as he introduced her into it. In each instance he gives her no time to think through her reactions and therefore

exposes her to the danger of making rash decisions. In this instance Mazvita's immediate and impulsive reaction to Joel's cruel exclusion is to reject the child as indicated by her action of moving 'the baby from her breast' (1994: 82). Any warmth she had felt for this child has been overshadowed by her fear of rejection and a future unknown and uncertain. The irony of her situation lies in the fact that Mubaira, her village, and the farm are 'inaccessible' and unsafe to her due to the war and yet she knows no other places. On the other hand, the city could only have been accessed through Joel, but he has given her an ultimatum to leave. She thus has practically nowhere to begin and no future to look forward to. Mazvita's experiences so far have gradually sapped the energy from the young girl who earlier argued that she had 'no fear of beginnings'. She is once again forced to lose her sense of her identity, as Joel, like the rapist before him, seems to deal her a deathblow through his rejection.

The final straw comes with Joel's dismissive instruction 'Leave me' (1994: 79). The instruction is callously given in the middle of the night, at a time when Mazvita is grappling with accepting her status as a mother. Her screaming (during her dream) at the possibility of the loss of her child indicates her confusion about her feelings towards her child and her role as a mother. To her, Joel's rejection is therefore her ultimate betrayal and final rejection by the apparently male-controlled urban space. Since she has held many dreams about her future in the city, Mazvita is devastated. She therefore turns her hatred on Joel because he finally and firmly shuts off this opportunity for her. In spite of using her for seven months he is not prepared to compromise with her so that she can fulfill her dreams. Joel does, however, not surprise the reader when he rejects Mazvita since the barrenness of their relationship, from the very beginning, would have made it difficult for them to come to an agreement at this late moment.

Mazvita's disillusionment and frustration after her total rejection by Joel lead to the intensification of her mental confusion. This becomes clear when she begins to confuse the past, present and future and finally, during this deluded phase commits infanticide. As her story proceeds we again meet the split persona that Mazvita felt she had become during her

rape. Mazvita presents as two personas, one a loving and caring mother and the other a hardened and uncaring woman who enables Mazvita to watch herself calmly as she murders her child. This second persona is the strong and hardened persona Mazvita created initially to cope with her traumatic rape. It is the persona who could detach herself from Mazvita and watch the rape from a distance but who now develops into a completely demented persona who takes control of Mazvita in some instances. This time this dual personality is heightened. At times we meet a tearful and suicidal mother who regrets the desire to kill her child and ‘the madness that made her press her palm down, again, over the baby’s eyes’ (1994: 93) because she is aware that her behaviour is ‘ill-conceived and harmful’ (1994: 93). Vera casts Mazvita in such instances as a lonely, dejected and depressed woman who wants to erase the memories of the child, ‘crawl into a lethargic sleep’ (1994: 93) and die. This is the mother who, once the enormity of her actions hits her, will be truly horrified and almost choked by the memory of the murder when she grasps that ‘[s]he was responsible for some horrible and irreversible truth concerning her actions She could no longer breathe cleanly and regularly’ (1994: 97). This sane Mazvita gradually learns, after the murder of her child, that she has little choice but to accept responsibility for her actions and her past. She realises that she has reached a cul-de-sac in her life and so one of her decisions becomes to ‘bury the child in Mubaira, then she would die’ (1994: 98).

Mazvita’s loneliness and depression, culminating in her death-wish, leads her to be totally confused about her identity. She forgets who she is until the reader meets her during a parody of a naming ceremony as she finally remembers her name and ‘[sings] it to her baby’ (1992: 41). It is some kind of mad naming ritual where the dead child is accepted and given some identity. However, the lack of tenderness in the lullaby Mazvita sings to her baby reminds the reader of the incident in which Mazvita cruelly strangled her child. Vera describes the song as a ‘dying lullaby’ (1994: 17) to emphasise its macabre nature. The ritual further emphasises the fact that Mazvita is no longer in full control of her actions. Her other persona, the mad and uncaring infant killer, is now more often in control of her actions than the sane, sensitive and dream-filled Mazvita. Her song also seems to be her swan song as ‘[s]he was certain there would be no life for her after this’ (1994: 42). Mazvita has become a disillusioned and hardened mother who realises that her apparent ‘beginnings’, her

opportunities for self-discovery, had been nothing but illusions. Her life is now characterised by ‘departures’, disillusionment and failure. Her initial naïve certainty that Harare was her destination and destiny had been proved false and so now she cannot be sure of her next destination or her fate as she now ‘knew nothing of arrivals, only departures Futile illusions had marked her departures’ (1994: 42). She has lost all sense of her bearings and is now truly on the outside, a perpetual traveller and almost a tramp who was ‘unanchored... always moving forward’ (1994: 42) without a definite direction or destination. Her life is now rudderless, she has lost her dreams and with them her focus, orientation and sure sense of her identity. Meanwhile she has to grapple with her dual identity as mother and murderer. To further complicate her situation, she has to decide what to do with the reality of the corpse of her baby, which is securely strapped to her back. She has to handle this dilemma despite the fact that she is fast losing her sanity, as emphasised by the writer’s comment that ‘she held on to ... her last strands of sanity’ (1994: 42). Mazvita’s quest is gradually taking on the appearance of a nightmare. She is no longer in control of the course of the search but seems to be swept along by the current of her mounting troubles as she drifts from one point to another.

The futility of individual women’s attempts to find an individual identity in a largely patriarchal society seems to be underscored during Mazvita’s bus journey back to Mubaira. The writer stresses Mazvita’s isolation and defeat as she sits curled on the bus seat, completely excluded from the conversation of the people around her. These other passengers are in a world totally different from that of Mazvita. Their talk reaffirms the patriarchal nature of their lives and almost appears to be a summary of the futility of any individual’s attempt to challenge it. The men celebrate the sheer physical power of their wives who work in their fields as they boast that a ‘woman’s strength is not to be frowned upon’ (1994: 52) and a ‘woman’s back is as strong as stone’ (1994: 53). Here, women appear to be valued primarily for their ‘horsepower’ and their economic contribution to the family. In their role as family workers these women are glorified, and their strength is even exaggerated. Their identity is limited to the group identity of strong, loyal and hardworking wives. Moreover, they are not allowed into the city, ostensibly because of the danger that they may be tempted to engage in prostitution as well as the inherent risks of the city’s uncontrolled freedom to

an unsuspecting woman. The men believe that only a man can manage the urban life, but they argue that a 'woman can lose her head' (1994: 52) due to the city's limitless freedom. These men have apparently colonised the urban space and will only allow prostitutes, who one of the men describes as the corrupt city women, into the city for the sole purpose of cooling the patriarchy's heat and frenzy. Even in the city the women are categorized as a group, there appears to be no room for individuals. Such stereotypical views and comments indicate how difficult it was for a woman to survive the urban space, especially a young inexperienced girl like Mazvita. Mazvita and probably most of the women who dared to venture into the urban space would have had no prior warning of the dangers posed by the city's predators, such as Joel. Such women would therefore become easy prey to these 'hot' men and be turned into the men's sex toys. The odds against such women would be too high and their chances of carving out individual identities, outside of the patriarchy-defined one of prostitutes, would be almost non-existent. This grim reality is what Mazvita seems to have discovered during her quest and so she seems to return to her village with the same negative message her first encounter with a man had taught her, that in her patriarchal community a woman is nothing but a man's sex toy.

This sad ending to Mazvita's search for a fulfilling self leads me to examine some possible contributory factors to the failure of her search. One of the primary contributory factors appears to be her rape and its impact on her psyche and worldview. The reader first learns of the war and Mazvita's rural village, Mubaira, when Mazvita recalls her 'unalterable encounter' (1994: 30) with her armed rapist. The indelible scar left by the rape is aptly captured through Mazvita's vivid memory of how on that horrible misty morning 'something pulled [her] down... pulled hard at [her] legs' (1994: 23). Mazvita clearly recalls the nightmare of that morning as the soldier 'claimed' her and, in a typically patriarchal manner, told her that she 'could not hide the things of her body, that she must bring a calabash of water within her arms... She must kneel so that he could drink' (1994: 28). To the soldier Mazvita is not an individual worth respecting. He views her as just another woman who should not be negotiated with, but dictated to. She is an object that he believes he can use to satisfy his desires, thus he expects her to wait upon him and do his bidding. Like MaSibanda in Vera's 'An Unyielding Circle' (1992), Mazvita is expected to perform

her traditional and subservient role 'expertly and immediately'. The rapist's condescending manner is captured when he gives Mazvita instructions about the forced sexual encounter 'as though he offered her life' (1994: 28) when in reality Mazvita feels that he violently takes away everything: her identity, her self worth and her privacy. To Mazvita therefore, the rape involves both an emotional and a psychological death as she argues that the rapist has forcibly taken her life from her.

The rape completely alters Mazvita's worldview: she can no longer trust herself or her judgement. She can no longer define who she is or understand what she has become. Nothing in her young life had prepared her for this premature graduation from childhood to adulthood and this ravaging. The encounter leaves her feeling worthless and suicidal, longing for 'a silence without a ripple or an echo in it' (1994: 28). The psychological trauma Mazvita experiences as a result of the rape is underscored by both the death-wish referred to above and her total loss of a sense of identity, it leaves her 'unaware that she still had a name that was hers' (1994: 29). To survive the ordeal, Mazvita enters into a denial phase during the rape and tries to push the horrible incident into 'that distance she had prepared inside her' (1994: 29). She thus retains her sanity throughout the rape by psychologically removing herself from the reality of the man's impatient movements above her and hiding in a silent space that she has instinctively created inside her. This ability to create this hiding place appears to be some form of a defense mechanism and a survival strategy. The experience thus forces her to change into a new being, a new hardened self who could move on in spite of the trauma of her present. Mazvita also tries to forget the triumphant cries of the completely self-absorbed gunman who confuses her by stirring emotions she had never experienced as hers before, but is too involved with his own satisfaction to notice what he has done to the young girl or attend to her emotions. Vera underscores the horror of the rapist's actions through his apparent blindness to Mazvita's fear and both mental and emotional confusion.

As Mazvita becomes more and more traumatised by her crude initiation into adulthood by the gunman she develops a double personality as a survival mechanism and so 'she held her

body tight to close him out, to keep the parts of her body that still belonged to her' (1994: 29). This Mazvita with a dual self is an early indication of the Mazvita who later detaches herself and watches from a distance as she herself as the angry, disoriented and disillusioned mother strangles her baby whilst the more sensitive Mazvita, at the same time, 'stood outside her desire, outside herself' (1994: 95). It is this rape that seems to have killed the gentle, innocent, trusting and loving Mazvita and left a split Mazvita who feels dismembered and totally silenced, the only thought on her mind one of 'being buried, of dying slowly after he had killed her' (1994: 84).

The rapist seems to represent a particular type of patriarch who is uncaring, selfish and has no respect for women as people. As he is 'typical' it thus is fitting that he remain unidentified, a mere gun-wielding devourer who robs Mazvita of her name and voice. Even when Mazvita tries to cry out and release the feeling of her pain and suffering the shrill cry of a strange bird suppresses 'her own cry which had risen to her lips' (1994: 30). It is as though nature, in cruel agreement with the rapist, has also decided to silence her and emphasise how insignificant she is in Nature's scheme of things. Perhaps if Nature had allowed Mazvita to mourn the death of her innocent self, she would have emerged as a calmer girl who would later have been able to reconcile herself to this inescapable part of her history and deal with her future differently. As it is, the trauma of this first forced sexual encounter not only marks her very crude initiation into the adult world but also seems to leave an indelible scar in her mind that she carries with her throughout her story. The extent of her emotional and psychological trauma is seen through the fact that even when she later meets Nyenyedzi and regains some sense of being and worth, Mazvita cannot tell Nyenyedzi all the details of her rape. The rape continues to haunt her and as a result affects the quality of her decision making. It is too painful for her to relive even after several months and has made her mistrust all men and so, in her eyes, not even Nyenyedzi can be totally trusted because he is a man.

Vera underscores Mazvita's nightmare through the repetition of the rape episode throughout her telling of Mazvita's story. She constantly employs flashbacks to fill in the details of

Mazvita's rape as a way of further emphasising how painful it was for Mazvita to remember the incident. The disjointed manner in which the details of Mazvita's rape are conveyed to the reader thus clearly indicates how Mazvita struggles to deal with the reality of this experience that; leaves her feeling dismembered as '[h]e tore at her legs He removed her legs from her body' (1994: 85). The gunman holds Mazvita in a vice-like grip during the rape, and seems to tear her to pieces, piece by painful piece, like the predator that he really is. All the while he is careful not to be seen or identified and so he keeps his face turned away from Mazvita throughout the rape. He comes through as a callous predator with Mazvita his hapless prey.

Ironically, the mist covering Mubaira that morning gives the gunman a perfect camouflage and so he remains a nameless and faceless nightmare that haunts Mazvita throughout the greater part of her life. Again nature appears to collude with the rapist in his heartless mission. Mazvita is too numbed by the man's action to attach any feeling to him as she argues that '[h]ate required a face against which it could be flung, but searching for the face was futile' (1994: 30). Mazvita wishes that this man could have a face like the other men in her life, Nyenyedzi and Joel, so that she could forget him and the 'deathblow' she feels he had dealt her. In the end since she cannot picture his face she finally transfers her hatred of this invisible enemy to the land because she feels that it had betrayed her as 'it had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body' (1994: 31). This image underscores how Mazvita's hatred for the man is inseparable from her mistrust of the land and therefore explains her wish to escape from this land and the war that is being waged on it.

This land that Mazvita has come to hate introduces the reader to the war of liberation that was raging in the then Rhodesia. It is a war waged by the black majority who felt that the white settlers had robbed them of their identity, history and tradition when they forced them out of productive land and drove them to settle in dry unproductive areas. This war led to the presence of armed men some of whom, unfortunately, raped innocent civilians like Mazvita and even burnt their villages if they were suspected to be supporting enemy forces.

The war had thus made the villagers vulnerable, as they could never predict what each of the warring sides could demand from or do to them. Mazvita's rape is one example of the dangers the civilians were exposed to because of the war.

Soon after the rape Mazvita has to face yet another bombshell as she discovers that her village is burning. The hopelessness of her situation is captured through her futile attempt to save her village. She is frustrated because no matter how hard she screams and stretches out her hands to protect her village, she cannot stretch her hands out enough to 'rescue the people ... to put out the flame' (1994: 25). This futile but desperate attempt to put out the flame with her hands underscores Mazvita's horror upon discovery of the arson. When it dawns on her that her village, and therefore her whole communal identity, has been destroyed, she is forced to develop a hardened personality. She moves away from the initial feeling of helplessness and decapitation that gripped her during the rape. She is forced to deal with the reality of her total loss and isolation and come up with a strategy of survival. Thus the shock of the inferno that her village has become forces her to grow into a different woman who 'recovered her name. Mazvita. She sheltered in the barrenness and silence of her name. She had discovered a redeeming silence. Mazvita' (1994: 30). The repetition of her name signals her slow return to consciousness from the shock of the reality of the war, as exemplified by both her rape and the arson. The only item Mazvita can be certain of in her attempt to rediscover herself is her name; otherwise her sense of her identity and her history has been totally destroyed by the soldiers' actions. To Mazvita, therefore, the land, the war and her history become closed chapters; her name becomes her only possession. The unknown future now seems to her the only possible avenue through which to escape the agony and devastation caused by this war.

In spite of this negative introduction to the war, the rationale behind the war of liberation becomes clear to the reader when Mazvita comes face to face with the exploitation of the black labour-force at a tobacco farm. Here, the labourers are forced to work for unwholesomely long hours until Mazvita, who has become one of them, feels the decaying tobacco rising 'from inside her' (1994: 22). Even though she appreciates the need for the

liberation war, Mazvita fears the forest and the war because of her experience in Mubaira and therefore believes that neither Mubaira nor the farm offer safe options to her. When Nyenyedzi asks her why she left home she sums up the tension-filled lives of the villagers through her comment, '[t]he war is bad in Mhondoro. It is hard to close your eyes there' (1994: 23). She feels that because of her negative experience of the war she dare not return home but must seek new havens, which can provide her safety from the war. She believes that she can find these new avenues in the city, where she naively believes 'freedom' has already arrived.

Nyenyedzi does not share Mazvita's fear of the war because it has not personally and devastatingly touched him in a manner similar to the way that it has affected Mazvita. In a manner similar to Charles and James in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992), Nyenyedzi feels his identity lies in working on the soil to which he feels strongly bonded. He is content to stay in a place he now knows, to keep to a culture and tradition he understands and not to venture into the unknown. He believes that his contribution to the liberation struggle lies in continuing to lay claim on the land by working on it since to move away from the land would be, in his view, to 'agree that it has been taken' (1994: 32). His practical side and his preference for 'the histories of his people' (1994: 39) offers a striking contrast to Mazvita's pioneering spirit. Mazvita wants to venture into the city because she believes '[o]ne can forget anything there' (1994: 24) but Nyenyedzi warns her of the danger of losing everything in the very city. Mazvita's impatience is understandable because both the land and the war remind her of a bruised past that she needs to forget if she is to begin again. Therefore, even as she ignores Nyenyedzi's warnings one feels that she did not have much choice as her rape had literally closed the land option to her. Her resolve, 'I must move on. I will move on.' (1994: 25) thus seems to be born out of her frightening history and not merely a sign of her naïveté or a stubborn nature. Unlike Nyenyedzi, whose patriotism is fired by his working on the land in the belief that 'the land defines our unities' (1994: 33), Mazvita's life is currently ruled by fear and suspicion, as she argues that in a war situation, 'even those who fight in our name threaten our lives' (1994: 33). To Nyenyedzi then, the African identity can only be communal. Like the land they dwell on, it cannot be apportioned to individuals, but is owned jointly. However, as Mazvita has experienced, the

communal identity is under threat due to the war and its ravaging of whole villages and communities. People who have thus been displaced like Mazvita can no longer identify any roots in their communal history. They are thus forced to migrate in search of an alternative identity, even if it involves danger, as they challenge received ideas of what their communities accept or do not accept.

Mazvita's mistrust of the war seems justified later during her final journey back to Mubaira. It is during this trip that the reader experiences the reality of the war and thus gains a deeper insight into Mazvita's fear and her earlier vow: 'I can never go back there' (1994: 23). The war has led to a great sense of insecurity among the populace, as life can be easily lost at the hands of either of the warring armies as the writer points out that '[p]eople were known to die amazing deaths... It was hard in those rural landscapes' (1994: 76). The war has increased the vulnerability of the villagers as some people 'had vanished in the middle of their journeying' (1994: 77). The war has also destroyed the communal identity of the people and made them become individualistic and self-centred: it had 'changed everything, even their idea of their own humanity' (1994: 76). The people could turn against one another just to survive and save their bodies, which were at risk of facing all types of abuse: torture, death, rape, beatings and mutilation. The writer underpins the unpredictable nature of life during war times through her comment that it 'was not known what could happen to the body as it journeyed' (1994: 77). The brutality of the war is captured through the passengers' terror at the sight of soldiers. This evidence of the war forces the passengers to involuntarily sink 'further into their seats' (1994: 77). The impact of the war on Mazvita as an individual is in this instant underscored through her vague 'recognition' of the scarred soldier. The reader wonders if this could possibly be the man who raped her and who still carries the mark of her resistance.

If the soldier is her rapist, the scar could be an indicator of the extent of the violence of Mazvita's rape. To some extent this would explain why Mazvita had to try and forget this nightmare through creating some space in her head, where she could hide the fact of the rape. It would also shed light on why Mazvita, after the incident, constantly seeks refuge

from her fears and her terror in illusions. This need to escape her pain affects both Mazvita's emotional and psychological development as her tale progresses. She moves through stages of illusion, optimism to disillusionment, despair, guilt and loneliness and eventually to a total nervous breakdown. When Mazvita abandons her life as a farm worker she is confident 'she [can] grow anywhere' (p.34) and also argues that because the city is not as tradition-bound as her village, it will be 'the perfect place to begin' (1994: 24). Her buoyant and illusion-filled mood is captured in the author's comment that:

She did not care for certainties, each moment would uncover its secret, but she would be there, ahead of that moment, far ahead. (1994: 34)

It is such illusions that seem to characterise her as she arrives in Harare. Ironically though, underlying these illusions there are, almost immediately, currents of disappointment and disillusionment. Mazvita feels both excited and frightened by the possibilities Harare is offering her. On the one hand the tall buildings seem to hold a promise for her, but the impersonal nature of the city's inhabitants makes her feel completely excluded as if ' [s]he was not there at all' (1994: 46). The city appears to have no ready space for her at all as 'no one cast her a pitiful glance' (1994: 46). She is an invisible intrusion from outside the city. Back in the village her name would have been used to identify her, but in Harare the name has no significance to anyone but herself. It is her secret identity tag. So she feels she has no fixed identity, just like Doris Lessing's Martha Quest, who argued, 'What difference did it make to her, the sense of identity, it did not matter what name one gave a stranger who asked "What is your name?"' (Lessing 1969: 18). Mazvita contemplates the exciting possibilities her nameless urban self gives her. She approaches Harare with this illusory feeling of being without an identity, and so possibly any accountability, and even toys with the idea of changing her name in order to fit her new situation. However, she finally decides against it and so, 'Mazvita she would remain' (1994: 46). She is probably too scared of the responsibility the new and unknown freedom and identity would place on her and so might want to obtain some sense of security from keeping some part of her history.

Mazvita's optimism continues even after the first day clearly showed her that no one cared about her except Joel, who needed her as his sex toy. She continues to strongly believe in her 'ability to begin' (1994: 55) in the untried 'geographies' of Harare. She is aware that the male dominated urban sphere would require the intervention of Joel and so even as '[s]he dreamt dreams around herself' (1994: 57) she is fully aware that she could only fulfill these dreams with his help. Mazvita hopes to use Joel to access Harare and regain her lost voice. Her search for fulfillment seems even more urgent as the city has exposed to her aspects of herself that she had hitherto not been aware of. She thus begins to search 'for who she was ... someone new and different, someone she had not met' because 'she had to find a voice with which to speak' (1994: 58). She is discovering in herself the potential to speak after she had been silenced by the rapist and would like to find this voice independent of Joel. She is also aware of the fact that she needs initially to exercise patience and remain optimistic that she will in the end find her happiness outside Joel's influence. However, Mazvita becomes blinded by her dreams and totally forgets to calculate the possible consequences of her co-habiting with Joel and offering him free sexual services. Mazvita's lack of exposure to the adult world becomes very apparent in her relationship with Nyenyedzi and is even more pronounced, in her relationship with Joel. She becomes, in the end, Joel's willing sex slave.

As her life with Joel becomes more and more meaningless, Mazvita begins to realise that she needs some kind of catharsis before she can find her voice. She needs to rid herself of the two major symbols of her sexual exploitation, namely the rapist and eventually Joel. As she continues to live with Joel, she begins to feel a great deal of emptiness in their relationship and to realise that Joel is not going to offer her a lasting sense of fulfillment. She thus tries to rid herself of Joel during one of his intense sexual excursions where she comes to terms with her emptiness upon realising that she '[is] completely alone when she [is] with Joel' (1994: 59). She consequently makes an effort to forget Joel and the rapist through collapsing these two symbols of her sexual exploitation. For the first time since the rape, as soon as she gives the rapist Joel's face, Mazvita is able to relive her rape. All along she could not resolve her feelings about the rapist as she could not picture his face, but once she collapses him with Joel, she is able to hate him and then forget him. She is even able to

cry for the loss of her innocence. Her cry this time is uninterrupted and so she cleanses herself of the memory of her initial abuse even as she laughs at Joel whom she still naively believes she can use to achieve her own objectives. The irony, though, lies in the fact that this release of her emotion means that she no longer has the 'redeeming silence' that helped her survive the difficult months after the rape. She is thus left vulnerable even as she moves, unknown to her, to the terrible pain of the knowledge of how her body has, through its maternal powers, painfully betrayed her.

Consequently, when Mazvita discovers that she is pregnant and is not certain of the child's father, she feels terribly betrayed: by Joel, the baby, her body and the rapist (the past). She begins to appreciate that it is impossible to ignore the past since '[t]he past was more inventive than she was' (1994: 87). She has been trying to run away from the past but it keeps, cruelly, catching up with her. Her pregnancy is from the past. It can be attributed to either Nyenyedzi or even the rapist, since she stopped her menstrual cycle sometime after the rape. Mazvita has been working as a maid in the suburban homes in order to save enough money to launch her into the future, but now Joel's eviction of her means she will no longer access Harare and her dreams. She believes that his action has thrown her back into a past of violation, frustration and fear and in her disillusionment, feels that he has dug a hole 'so deep and so old and heavy on [her] back' (1994: 87). This image echoes the physical weight of the dead child strapped to Mazvita's back and underlines Mazvita's guilt and pain.

It is Mazvita's failure to escape her past that destroys her illusions and leads to her fast approaching delusion that she will fall into the dungeon that Joel has dug for her. She does not, as yet, fully grasp how her own illusions and naïveté have contributed to the crashing of her dreams. In her mind, Joel has become her killer. Mazvita describes him in terms similar to how she felt about the rapist. She believes he has killed her. When the rapist pulled her roughly towards him and quickly ravished her Mazvita felt as though she was 'dying slowly' (1994: 84) and in a similar fashion she feels as if Joel is killing her through throwing her into a dungeon as she mutters to herself 'Joel, this body is not the sinking into this hole

so deep and dark' (1994: 84). This delusion is an indication that she is fast losing her grip on reality and begins to create her own demented reality. She wishes to sing the song of her suffering, a song full of pain, sung by one without a mouth, without fingers and without 'tears to drink'. Her death wish fits into her fast disappearing sanity, as she begs 'let me thirst and die. Let me lie down and die because I have died in this sleep' (1994: 84). At the centre of her torture is Joel whom she believes is responsible for the 'pain and suffering heavy on [her] back' (1994: 84). Her sorrow and grief at the way things have turned out is so hard for her to bear that it takes on a physical 'heaviness'. The writer again emphasises Mazvita's suffering by making it parallel the weight of her child's corpse.

The monologue in this chapter is heartrending. It shows a mind tormented and twisted by suffering, a mind that is truly desirous to pour out the thoughts that poison it. Sadly, though, this mind finds neither a suitable place where it can 'speak this tale', nor a capable mouth that can recount its tale, nor a sympathetic ear that would hear its song. To Mazvita's burdened soul therefore Joel's rejection signifies both a death and an imprisonment. She cannot escape the responsibility of this child and so she feels frustrated. The child drags her into her past, prevents her from 'embracing the future' (1994: 87) and robs her of the opportunity of fulfillment she had hoped for. Mazvita then begins to feel weighed down by her situation and her history. She is again continuously haunted by her infanticide as captured through her delusions of 'mountains growing on [her] back' (1994: 86) as her past lays 'claim on what belonged to it' (1994: 87). The weight of her dead baby continues to increase her guilt and her realisation that she cannot escape responsibility for her past actions as they play a key role in defining who she has become. Joel has indeed become a repeat of Mazvita's past abuse and 'killing' by the rapist and so she feels angry and betrayed by him. Her guilt and pain are so great that they lead her to lose her focus on the present and indeed the future.

As her delusions intensify the reader sees the re-emergence of a schizophrenic Mazvita who now takes control of the young woman's psyche. Mazvita takes on a dual persona as she did when she tried to cope with her rapist's actions. The emerging demented persona takes

Mazvita through the infanticide with determination and occasionally with appreciation. To this other persona, killing the baby is simply 'to close the eyes of her child, slowly and gently' (1994: 94). It is portrayed as merely an act of freeing herself from the baby and is propelled by a madness whilst Mazvita is in 'a violent but calculated trance' (1994:94). This trance transports Mazvita to a different realm where she ritualistically kills her child. Her movements are deliberate and repeated to the extent of giving the event an eerie atmosphere and a deliberate rhythm, as 'Mazvita [sang] low and dear to the baby that she felt was hers, was not hers, was hers, was not hers' (1994: 94). Throughout the murder the writer notes details of Mazvita's feelings as she swings from 'an easy satisfaction', through fear, as evidenced by profuse sweating, and through intense loneliness and rejection to culminate in bewilderment, guilt and depression. Mazvita's dementia leads her through this pendulum of feelings to a climax where she 'wandered far and distant. She had reached a completely new horizon' (1994: 95). In this new realm she is disembodied, '[s]he stood ... outside herself ... her head turned away from this ceremony of her freedom, from this ritual of separation.' (1994:95). She is a totally different creature who is out of control and is not even aware of her wild actions, 'of the eyes dilating...her elongated arms, of her shoulders stiff' (1994: 95). Her madness and violent streak make it impossible for her even to realise that she is crying over her rejection of her baby, 'of the things that were hers, that were of her body' (1994:95). The ripples of water that blind her betray her softer and humane side and are an indication that if the rapist and Joel had not pushed her over the edge, she would not have killed her baby. However, the pain, frustration and aloneness these men have forced on her makes her incapable of acting naturally and so she methodically and carefully proceeds to strangle her baby. The very effort of this mad ritual gives Mazvita the delusion that her back is broken. The tremendous effort she puts into the act is out of proportion with the tiny infant and this further indicates Mazvita's mental confusion. Her post-partum madness has indeed made Mazvita lose touch with reality.

Mazvita's instability is also emphasised later by her longing for the growth of her dead child's hair as well as her wish that the child were still alive. She muses that '[p]erhaps the child [is] not dead. She carrie[s] the child on her back' (1994: 95). She even sings to the child with the deluded hope that the child would stir. The painful picture of Mazvita's

dementia is completed when she sings her child ‘a faint lullaby ... of dying mushrooms, the ones she had found’ (1994: 98). There is a parallel between the defenseless mushroom Nyenyedzi had crushed at the farm and the defenseless baby Mazvita has just crushed. Perhaps it is an indication of how the vulnerable suffer at the hands of the powerful, even as the power of patriarchy and the burden of depression and guilt crush Mazvita. Thus the bitter irony of Mazvita’s attempt to claim her freedom lies in the fact that, after the infanticide, she feels no sense of victory but is tormented by guilt. She is described as sitting ‘in painful isolation, convinced that what had happened was not true at all ... yet, when had she put it [the blindfold on her child] even there’ (1994: 97). The trance had blinded her to her actions as she could not remember ‘the path she had taken towards this particular horror’ (1994: 97). She had been completely out of control when she performed the ritual, but is now forced to come to terms with the true horror of her actions. As a result, instead of joy and freedom she feels ‘a fathomless and heavy guilt’ (1994: 97) and can only delude herself that the child is not dead after all. Her realisation that the wish for a reversal of the infanticide is a mere delusion increases Mazvita’s depression and guilt. It is due to the heavy burden of her guilt that she begins to contemplate Mubaira and death. Meanwhile she is fully aware that since the village was completely destroyed there can hardly be any beginning out there and thus suicide presents itself as her only option.

This swing between the sane mother and the demented child killer is also evident when Mazvita buys an apron in which to carry her baby, as she grapples further with her new double identity of mother and child killer. She is learning to come to terms with the reality of being a mother, although it is too late. As she recalls the woman who sold her the apron she realises that because she carries her baby she has now gained herself the title *Amai* (Mother) and is likely to have that tag henceforth. She understands also that it is not a sign of recognition or warmth but a mere identity tag. This realisation intensifies her isolation and guilt. She begins to understand that nobody cares about her as a person, even the street vendor with whom she traded values the money she received and not the purchaser.

Once again Mazvita loses her secure sense of identity. As with the rape, she is left with no sure sense of who she is and her dream of an independent and successful self in Harare has been crushed. She has instead turned out to be a frightened and lonely murderer who is on the run but has literally nowhere to go. As a result her delusion of the 'growing mountain' on her back, her guilt, depression and pain increase to the point where she begins to imagine the child's head ballooning up. She tries to cope with her macabre situation by trying to wish the reality of her child's corpse away. She initially tries to bury 'the baby in her arms' (1994: 40) and later deludes herself that she has 'buried the baby on her back' (1994: 41). The simple act of holding her baby or carrying it on her back is transformed into a metaphorical internment ritual. Mazvita seems to believe that if she could so bury her child, society would not see through her and she would therefore not have any guilt to deal with. Mazvita therefore seems to argue that in such a situation she could, with time, learn to forget her actions. She would not have to deal with the reality of the murder of her child and could thus start a new life. However, when the saner persona takes over from the deluded persona, Mazvita realises that she is fully responsible for her actions and cannot escape their consequences. This realisation makes her depressed and suicidal. The writer reflects Mazvita's guilt, depression and mental disorientation through the death imagery and the demented actions that permeate Mazvita's tale after she murders her infant.

Mazvita's guilt oppresses and haunts her so much that her actions become disjointed. She sways over the child and feels some release. She wishes that she could forget all memories of her infanticide, believing that in so doing she would be purged of her feelings of guilt. In her schizophrenic state Mazvita believes that she is made up of a number of persons, one of whom she can free and so obtain relief from her guilt, '[I]f she could remove her head and store it a distance from the stillness on her back, then she could begin. She would be two people One of her would protect the other' (1994: 19). Mazvita is possibly searching for her lost innocent self, the pure white mushroom she never found at the farm. In her frenzied effort to liberate this other self, Mazvita almost sprains herself as she tries to move out of her tainted old self, '[h]er neck rose upward and she felt a violent pain delve downward to her back' (1994: 19). Her physical actions almost become absurd and horrifying as they are driven by a mad wish to live out her illusions. The intensity of Mazvita's guilt and delusion

is again captured through the way that she secures her baby to her 'waiting' back. An otherwise ordinary operation is transformed into a strangling activity, the knot is tied so hard 'it threatened to sever her across the middle' and '[t]he apron ... strangled her last breath' (1994: 20). It is almost an act of self-immolation. Mazvita is now so emotionally and psychologically numb that she has to inflict pain on herself in order to keep alive. This self-inflicted pain is again evident later in Mazvita's actions when she repeatedly tightens and ties the knot on the apron even when she 'grew threateningly faint' (1994: 41). Her guilt seems to have numbed her to the point where only self-torture can keep her alert.

With her burden of guilt Mazvita starts on her journey, away from Joel and Harare, very sombrely. She 'walks through the impassive faces, in a tunnel of her own where it [is] truly unlit, desperately narrow' (1994: 10). She suffers excruciating physical, emotional and psychological pain, is in tears and in a daze:

the blindness [rises] from inside her She no longer [speaks]. Mute and wounded she move[s] through the streets and [weeps]' (1994: 10).

Her unpleasant experiences in Harare have once again silenced her. She leaves Harare disillusioned, completely silenced, hurt and broken. Her loneliness, insignificance and rejection is emphasised by the way the world around her continues its daily business, oblivious of her suffering as when the writer notes, 'she had purchased the apron in the middle of a busy indifferent street' (1994: 11). The city is as indifferent to her exit as it was to her entry. It is this isolation, exclusion and 'aloneness' that marks Mazvita's whole 'journey' and heightens the sense of her hopelessness and the utility of her quest for an individual identity in a world that does not seem to recognize individuals. At this stage Mazvita is weary and begins to feel faint. This feeling intensifies with her growing pain until she collapses 'into the mounds of filth and decay and stale water' (1994: 17). She is cast as a perplexed and pathetic figure that appears not to care anymore and continues to

have mixed feelings towards her baby. She rejects the baby but almost immediately returns it to her stomach. Her infanticide haunts her so much that she wishes it could be reversed. She wishes her child could return to life and she even repeatedly pleads for the child to stir. The feeling uppermost in Mazvita at this moment is one of being 'truly alone' (1994: 18). She is becoming more and more isolated as her life continues to be empty and to point towards even greater disillusionment and frustration. The buoyant young girl who 'had no fear of departures' (1994: 33) has now learnt that one's history forms an integral part of one's identity. It can neither be wished away nor ignored.

Later, as Mazvita continues to wander through the streets of Harare, she is carried forward by a violent wind. She is no longer in control of her actions but is pushed forward, in a manner that appears typical of this city she had initially hoped would fulfill her dreams. She is now truly without an identity as '[n]o one noticed or remembered her' (1994: 35). Mazvita feels completely enervated and even develops an illusion that her back is broken, in a manner similar to her child's body that curved as if its back was broken. However, this is not surprising because throughout her demented state, culminating in the murder of her child, she has been violent and cruel to both her child and herself. Her pain is now so intense that she believes no other pain could surpass it and Vera captures this poignantly in the expression that 'she could not hurt beyond the hurting so hurtful' (1994: 35). Vera further emphasises Mazvita's immense emotional and psychological trauma through the image of a waterfall as she states that Mazvita 'had found herself on the edge of a cliff One could live in such uninhabitable places' (1994: 43). This image aptly captures how difficult it has been for this woman to find the fulfillment of her dreams and to reach her true potential in a largely patriarchal society. As a woman she meets many impediments along her way and is forced to the edge of several patriarchy-defined 'cliffs'. Her traumatic experiences started with her rape, moved through her insecurity and frustration at the exploitation on the farm, through the abuse and rejection by Joel and culminated in her dementia and infanticide. In the end she is led to a delusion-filled life where she feels that she is drowning in life's rivers as they 'tumbled over [her] head, and stones followed ... and [she] screamed and screamed' (1994: 43). Her life has been so full of pain and trauma that her sanity has been pushed to its limits. She becomes so disillusioned that she even looks forward to death as she argues that

‘death, properly executed could be mistaken for progress’ (1994: 36). The writer underscores Mazvita’s pain and guilt through the repeated image of ‘mountains’ growing on her back as well as through detailing Mazvita’s constant bouts of depression and the ensuing death wish. Mazvita therefore continues to merely drift like an automaton, ‘past caring’ (1994: 36).

When the reader meets Mazvita at a bus stop, her sharp contrast with the free children who are playing around the shed brings her exclusion into focus. She is nervous and scared (lest her secret be discovered). She is edgy, broken and tired. The writer describes her skin as loose, her neck as twisted as ‘[s]he stood ... on the outside. She stood on the outside. She stood alone’ (1994: 2). Unlike these children who ‘had a limitless tenacity for dream’ (1994: 3), Mazvita now seems incapable of joy and dreams as she seems to have once again lost her sense of being a whole but imagines that she is now carrying ‘fragments of her being’ (1994: 3). She is no longer the optimistic and buoyant girl who left Mubaira, almost a year before, in search of a new and whole self but is now described as someone who has lost her focus and now ‘needed a new angle to her reality’ (1994: 4). Her experiences have transformed her from a strong-willed and passionate girl, who was full of dreams, to a guilty, frightened, frenzied and silenced woman who has developed an abnormal concept of the reality around her. Her deluded state leads her to believe that

all her body was moving slowly into that lump, ... that she would eventually
turn to find her whole being had abandoned her, pushed into that space beside
her neck for she heard voices there (1994: 4).

Her fear of discovery is making her continue to lose her grip on ordinary reality and to substitute it with a deluded reality. It is not surprising then that, as her story unfolds, Mazvita’s death wish intensifies and she sees in the finality of the act ‘another kind of freedom’ (1994: 44). She cannot define the freedom death can afford her but feels that whatever death has in store for her is better than the option of going to her dead village where there is definitely no homecoming to anticipate. She has indeed come to the worst depths of depression and despair.

The journey motif, in the novel, seems to underscore Mazvita's restless nature, her continuous but apparently futile search for her self and her destiny. Her growing morbid nature also seems to bring to the fore the vulnerability of marginalized groups as they try to rebel against the norms, taboos and values of the main group. Moreover, the largely inflexible nature of her society's communally defined systems and tradition, as captured in the character of Nyenyedzi, makes Mazvita's attempts at self-definition seem to have been doomed from the very start. She is apparently punished for having dared to defy her traditional role (as a rural wife to, perhaps, Nyenyedzi or at least as a mother) and to have dared to hope she could carve out an individual destiny different from that of the community. As Nyenyedzi warned her earlier, their society has no room for individualistic people who, like the settlers, wish to own things for themselves. Vera thus poignantly points out the restrictive roles for a woman in pre-independence rural Zimbabwe through Mazvita's story.

When her bus journey back to Mubaira finally begins, Mazvita's imminent nervous breakdown is foregrounded. She is still undecided about her destination and as dazed and detached as she was whilst she was waiting for the bus. Her fear of discovery verges on hysteria, as she takes on an unnatural posture where she keeps her neck 'stiff and unreasonable' (1994: 67) and ties the knot on the apron unnecessarily firmly in the belief that this would protect her from being discovered. The avenues she has tried so far have all shut her out to such an extent that she now fears 'her world would move into another room in which the door was tightly shut against her' (1994: 68). Her fear graduates into delusions of footsteps racing in her head, as well as an illusion of herself confidently holding her head high when 'in reality she sat curled in a miserable lump of fear' (1994: 68). The sounds and visions only apparent to her serve to emphasise her schizophrenic state. Mazvita is so depressed that she feels suicidal, but is rescued by the forlorn sound of the *mbira*. The musical instrument's sorrowful sound seems to speak to her inmost being and to revive her soul as it temporarily takes the burden of the rape, Joel, Harare and infanticide off her shoulders. Although she is now mature enough to realise that complete healing is impossible, Mazvita is relieved that the music leaves her with pleasant memories, and thus offers some relief from the sad and painful memories of the rapist and Joel. The optimism brought about

by the *mbira* music makes her hope for a new beginning, perhaps even being able to accept a new identity as a mother. This is evidenced by the fact that at one point she was hopeful and almost pleased when she thought her child was stirring, '[s]he felt a movement. She allowed herself to hope' (1994: 70). However, even this relief is short-lived as she is pulled back from her dreamy state to reality when '[t]he notes [of the *mbira*] collapsed' (1994: 71). With the sudden stop to the dreamy music she has once again to concentrate on the burden on her back as well as her new identity as a child murderer.

As the journey proceeds, Mazvita continues to be isolated and to inhabit her own separate world. She cannot identify with the other passengers' laughter and hence believes that '[t]heir laughter must be different from hers, then' (1994: 88). Guilt and fear cause her delusions to persist: she projects her own 'dead' self onto a woman who is covered in dust and believes the woman can see through her secret. Later she even collapses the woman and herself into one, so that 'Mazvita spoke, the woman spoke. Their voices were one. The woman spoke with Mazvita's voice.' (1994: 90). The delusion reaches a climax when at a roadblock she is shaken from her surreal world at the sight of a soldier. This awakens memories of her rape and Mazvita then becomes convinced that the soldier had killed the woman whom she believes wanted to invade her privacy by seeing 'into the place she chose to hide' (1994: 89). The soldier's coming onto the scene erases the illusion of the woman she believed was her 'double' and so gives her the impression that the other woman had been killed by the soldier, thoughts of whom now preoccupy Mazvita. Her tortured psyche creates an incongruous reality for her and, sadly, Mazvita accepts it. The height of her breakdown comes when she loses complete control of her actions and has an illusion of herself screaming, laughing and untying the apron in which is hidden her child's corpse. Her conscience as well as her unconscious self seem to take over as '[s]he long[s] to be discovered, to be punished, to be thrown out of the bus' (1994: 91). Her guilt and exclusion are too heavy for her and so she wishes to be purged, to be discovered, labelled, identified rather than suffer the total isolation and exclusion she is currently experiencing. On the other hand, the conscious and sane Mazvita is not brave enough to face the punishment society would mete out to her. This explains her relief when she discovers that her untying of the apron was an illusion. However, Mazvita continues to remain uninvolved, a mysterious and lonely woman who keeps to herself and refuses to release her baby from her back, in spite of the suffocating heat. Mazvita has turned out to be a woman who is difficult to name as she

takes on many roles during her 'journey' and seems to defy any sure label. She remains outside the world of her fellow travellers, without a name and without a definite identity. She joins them in their laughter, but her laughter remains different, as it hides her dark secret.

The wheel appears to come full circle for Mazvita when she finally reaches Mubaira. She returns to a barren and desolate Mubaira where there 'are no leaves on the trees' (1994: 101). It is a disillusioned Mazvita, barren of all her hopes and dreams, who looks up the empty branches of the ghost trees. As she looks at them she contemplates the past, her yesterday, and muses, '[b]efore she must have looked up like this, just like this, learning to forget, bare and troubled' (1994: 101). She has, however, not been able to forget because she carried the scar of her rape and burning Mubaira with her throughout her journeys and has been forced to journey back empty handed to it.

She regrets the burden of history and wishes she could overcome her fear, perhaps also her guilt and the war, and be granted a chance to start another chapter of her life story on a clean slate, to 'begin here, without a name' (1994: 101). The fear of her name lies possibly in its ability to identify her with a specific location, parentage, community, tradition and history. In her case this history has been marred by abuse, failure, pain, guilt and frustration and so she wishes she could erase it and 'begin without a name, soundlessly and without pain' (1994: 102). It is yet another illusion that Mazvita allows herself to hold in spite of the painful reality that her life seems to have reached a dead end, to be ending where it began, with nothing but pain and destruction around her.

The memories of the past eventually pull Mazvita from her wishful thinking to a full remembrance of the events of the day her village was torched. First she remembers her mother and the soft beckoning call of her name. It is the first mention of her mother and currently the only sweet memory from Mazvita's past. Mazvita moves from this brief reprieve as she then relives the burning of her village even as she sees evidence of the arson in the burnt grass. She reminisces about how her whole village and its identity were destroyed on that misty morning, how the village simply disappeared as she was being ravaged. It is a painful but inescapable part of her history and so the returning Mazvita resolves to accept this

history and not run away from it. She accepts the fact that she cannot escape the burden of her history but that she:

will carry the burning grass with her. She will carry the voices that she remembers from this place She has not forgotten the voices (1994: 102).

She thus reconciles herself with her history, with her people and their communal identity, and so overcomes her fear of the past. She embraces 'yesterday' as she walks to the shells of the burnt huts 'the place of her beginning' (1994: 103) which has finally turned out to be her apparent destination as 'she releases the baby from her back, into her arms' (1994: 103). Through this gesture she seems to reconcile herself to that part of her history also, to her identity as both a mother and the murderer of her infant. She takes responsibility for all her actions, both planned and unplanned, and appears to make peace with her inner self.

The tragic irony of her story lies in the fact that even as her 'tale' ends, Mazvita is back in the Mubaira she thought she could escape, a place she had vowed she would never come back to. The war is still raging and there is no guarantee of her safety in the Mubaira she returns to. Life has battered this woman to a point where, as the curtain closes on her narrative, she sits alone, with the silence around her 'deep, hollow and lonely' (1994: 103). Her solitude seems final and as the reader parts from her, it is not clear what her next step will be. However, her calm acceptance of her history, as she moves 'gently' towards her roots, as well as the indeterminate nature of the novel's ending, seems to point at the possibility that she can still begin again. As an individual she might have been defeated so far but the text seems to suggest that she can still begin again. Her tale might be pointing to the fact that, in a different place and at a different time, other women who yearn to carve out individual and fulfilling identities can carry Mazvita's quest on to a fruitful end.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As Sugnet, in Nnaemeka (1997), argues, the double yoke of patriarchy and colonialism leads to complications in the question of identity and, in particular, African women's identity. Vera's telling of several women's stories in both *Why Don't you Carve Other Animals* (1992) and *Without a Name* (1994) indicates how complex and multi-faceted the concept of identity is in relation to Zimbabwean women during the colonial era. This question of self emerges as, to a large extent, dependent on the gender ideologies of the communities in which the women live and these ideologies are in turn affected by the political changes occurring over the historical periods depicted in the two texts.

As indicated in the reading of Vera's short stories, the women characters seem to be accorded identity mainly as a group. They are valued primarily for their support services to the men. Rudo in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992) appears to sum up her society's expectations of woman as wife. No matter what questions she has about the value of wifeness and motherhood in a society where the war sees most men desert their wives, and possibly die at the battlefield, she is counselled by the market women not to question anything. The women urge her to conform to her society's expectations of her and so to find satisfaction in waiting upon her husband. Her fears for her unborn child are also swept aside and deemed secondary to the larger society's need for soldiers to continuously replace those that die at the battlefield. The society expects the women to suppress their individual fears and wishes and subscribe to its dictated norms, values and customs as well as gender roles.

Chido's mother in 'It is Over' (1992) and Rebecca's mother in 'Shelling Peanuts' (1992) seem to provide good examples of what their societies expect of good wives and mothers. They are impatient with the independent and individualistic traits they see in their daughters and therefore try to force their girls to conform, like all the other girls. Chido's mother even feels frightened by her returning freedom fighter daughter and so chastises the girl for neglecting her womanly duties of being a wife and a mother. She urges Chido to make herself useful to society by quickly getting married and trying to catch up with the other girls. For such women society's received traditions, norms and values are to be cherished and guarded jealously and any sign of deviation is to be frowned upon and, wherever possible, curtailed. They feel a sense of shame at having mothered children they believe are

self-centred and too ‘manly’ in outlook and so believe that they are duty bound to bridle their daughters and shape them into ‘proper’ women.

Furthermore, at group level, Vera’s women appear to be appreciated and even glorified for their role as providers of food for their families as well as intercessors in religious rituals. The market vendors in both ‘It is Hard to Live Alone’ and ‘An Unyielding Circle’ (1992) have to endure the negative aspects of their lives, including the men’s demeaning and humiliating insults, because they are duty bound to provide for their families. Mazvita’s fellow passengers on the bus to Mubaira also remind her of the fact that rural women are valued for their sheer strength in working the fields. One of the men even loudly sums up the stereotypical belief that working the land is ‘woman’s work’ by arguing that men cannot compete with women in the backbreaking labour because ‘[a] woman’s back is made for work’ (1994: 53).

Women also appear to be honoured and even glorified for their role as intercessors where religious ceremonies are to be conducted. This is exemplified by the grandmother in ‘Getting a Permit’ (1992). The old lady is only allowed to undertake the dangerous journey to the rural areas to bury her son after she argues that the children would be unable to perform the necessary ritual for the passage of their father’s soul to his ancestors. The sons have already judged the trip too risky for her, especially in the light of the raging war, but they are quickly silenced by her reference to her role in the burial ritual. When her crucial role in the ritual is mentioned, the children quickly agree that their mother has to undertake the journey. After the reference to her religious role, the grandmother’s personal security apparently becomes secondary to her need to communicate with the ancestors and ensure the father a safe transfer to his ancestors. So, even in this important role as intercessor the old woman’s value, ironically, seems to lie in her rendering assistance to the men.

There is yet another group of women that seems to have emerged in the city. These are the commercial sex workers whose role seems to be, primarily, to entertain the patriarchs when they are far away from their hard-working rural wives. Most of these women appear to have been forced into prostitution because there appear to be no ready job opportunities for uneducated women in the city. Vera satirically explores the sad and demeaning lives of the sex workers in such stories as ‘During the Ceasefire’, ‘At Independence’ and ‘Crossing

Boundaries' (1992) as well as in *Without a Name* (1994). These women are vilified by society and yet it is the very society that creates them through providing jobs mainly for men but providing no accommodation for the men's families. The uneducated women who venture into the urban space thus often find themselves with no option but to offer sexual services to the men in order to survive. The men enjoy their services but are quick to judge these women as evil and not fit to marry. Vera's exposure of this apparent societal hypocrisy is explored more fully in her later work *Butterfly Burning* (1998) where she gives a microscopic depiction of life in the overcrowded squatter camp conditions of Sidojiwe flats. In these flats one room can house as many as ten people and so young people are, in such situations, exposed to the adults' sexual activities. In such instances young girls become easy targets for older men and run the risk of later joining the world of sex workers as it would be the only world they would have come to know. Vera sums this up by describing Makokoba as a township where 'poverty prevails over innocence' (1998:4). It is a place where the innocent girls are forced to sacrifice their innocence because of their lack of means and the sheer need to find food and shelter. For many women therefore, the city becomes a place where they are moulded into willing sex slaves to the men and where they have to trade their bodies or die of starvation.

Phephelaphi (Vera's protagonist) seems to be the epitome of the insecurity of the life of the poor children who are born in the city under the squalid conditions of townships like Makokoba. As a child Phephelaphi's 'mother', Gertrude, would carry her to each of her rendezvous, prompting her friend Zandile to describe her as 'stubborn impossible Gertrude who brought a baby strapped to her back to every possible encounter with every possible male stranger' (1998: 35). Gertrude could not afford a job other than the sex work and because she had no relatives and could not afford a child minder, she was forced to take the child along. Later Gertrude dies violently at the hands of one of her lovers in full view of the young girl. She leaves the young girl traumatized and without a proper family to look after her. Later on Zandile, Gertrude's friend and apparently Phephelaphi's biological mother, offers Phephelaphi accommodation in her one room but the life she leads cannot offer the young girl a stable family set-up, nor take away the trauma of Gertrude's death. Phephelaphi is continually exposed to the risky life of the sex workers and their 'temporary love[s]' (1998: 34) and thus becomes extremely vulnerable to abuse. As a result she later welcomes an invitation by a total stranger, Fumbatha, to move in with him. To her this offer

appears as a better alternative to her current one of witnessing Zandile's sexual escapades with 'her men'.

The final group of women that I see in Vera's texts is that of formally employed women as depicted in 'The Bordered Road' (1992). These are women who appear to have some skills that the industries in the cities need and so are formally employed, unlike their uneducated counterparts. However, Vera emphasises the non-integration of these women into their male counterparts' public world. This is underscored by the fact that they always keep to their side of the road despite the fact that they are walking to the same workplace with the men, and at the same time as the men. The women dare not cross the road to join the men because there appears to be an unwritten law that this action is taboo. The women can only bemoan their suppression but appear powerless to do anything about it. The public sphere thus appears to accommodate them due to their skills but has not created equal opportunities for them in the workplace. The women are discriminated against for the simple reason that they are women. They can only hope that in the future some people will see the folly of discriminating against women as it means that a crucial proportion of the nation's manpower is not developed and so the nation's development is itself undermined. Interestingly, these working women do not believe that they are capable of changing the gender politics of their times and so can only hope that someone in the future will bring about this change. This tendency to accept their powerlessness to change their lot indicates how the women's socialization has led them to unquestioningly conform to their society's gender definitions and expectations. The discrimination against women in the public sphere seems to have even affected women guerillas like Chido in 'It Is Over' (1992). Chido's role as a liberator of her nation does not appear to have been recognised alongside that of the male soldiers. Whilst the reader meets some male former guerrillas in a camp (possibly awaiting integration into the new country's army) in 'During the Ceasefire' (1992) there is no mention of female guerrillas at this or similar camps. Instead the reader meets Chido on her way to her rural home where her mother wants her to be integrated into the world of mothers and wives.

A study of Vera's texts indicates that the road to individual identities for Vera's women characters is characterised by difficulties, across cultural groups, due to the influence of both

patriarchy and colonialism in their lives. For the men (both white and black) the question of identity appears to be inseparable from the ownership of the land. Nyenyedzi (1994), James and Charles in 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992) are strongly bound to the land and do not want to move to the city in spite of the dangers posed by the war because they believe that the land belongs to them. Charles argues that the land is his because his ancestors took it from the black population and claimed it for their own use. He views the indigenous population as squatters who have no right to the land, but the blacks, as represented by James and Nyenyedzi, believe that the land is a crucial part of their history and thus they are fighting to regain it from the whites. For both races then the ownership of the land is crucial to the male population's sense of self worth. However, for the women the land appears to have no bearing on their sense of self, mainly because they have had and still have no right to own it. The women fight a marginalisation that is apparently gender- and not politically related. They are discriminated against, both in the domestic and public sphere, for no other reason than the biological fact that they happen to be women.

Vera's interest is in the women who feel this marginalisation personally and want to challenge the traditions and received cultural norms that are responsible for it. These 'deviant' pioneering women face many odds in their battle for self-determination and are largely crushed under the stronger will of the larger society. Mazvita's battle cannot be won because she is attempting single-handedly to fight a more powerful and male-dominated system. This system has over the years developed entrenched stereotypical beliefs about the roles of men and women in society, which cannot be changed overnight. Thus, even as Mazvita sets out to try and work out a new definition of who she had become after her rape, Nyenyedzi warns her of the risk of losing her very identity (as communally defined) in the city. Mazvita is initially naïve enough to believe that she can survive in any environment, as she argues that 'she could grow anywhere She wanted to discover something new in her world.' (1994: 34). She wants to discover her full potential and genuinely believes in her own power and authority to shape her own destiny but she does not fully grasp the larger power of her patriarchal society to silence her and frustrate her individualistic 'tendencies'. She does not fully understand the implications of Nyenyedzi's warning against possessiveness and his argument that the communal definition of their identity cannot be easily escaped. Nyenyedzi's warnings thus cast an ominous atmosphere around this adventurous girl's ambition and her future. Mazvita attempts to find new dreams but

Nyenyedzi almost prophetically warns her that these can never replace their communal history and identity. It is not surprising therefore that Mazvita is later crushed under the wheels of her society's traditions in a manner parallel to the mushrooms Nyenyedzi crushed on the farm. Nyenyedzi crushed the mushrooms because he argued that they could be poisonous. Mazvita also seems to be destroyed by the greater will of society, probably out of a fear that she might 'poison' other women around her and make them adopt ideas deemed dangerous to the society's well being.

Vera also emphasises the power of the patriarchal system by showing its negative impact on the psyche of her main characters such as Mazvita. Mazvita's buoyant spirit is gradually and almost systematically shattered as she discovers that each door of opportunity that she tries seems to shut as soon as she tries to enter it. She initially argues that she is not afraid of beginnings but is in the end forced to see that what she had mistaken for opportunities were mere illusions. The attendant frustrations lead to her mental breakdown and infanticide. This mental and emotional destruction of the women who dare challenge what their community deems to be right is later echoed in the story of Phephelaphi in *Butterfly Burning* (1998). In the stories of both women, the failure to achieve independence and fulfilling individual identities leads to a systematic breakdown under the severe depression and frustrations brought about by the futility of their fight against society's definitions of women and the roles assigned to them.

The lone battles that Vera's protagonists fight against all too powerful patriarchal and colonial systems almost doom them to failure and destruction. Mazvita is pushed to a mental breakdown and a contemplation of suicide whereas Phephelaphi is gradually pushed to the edge and ends up committing suicide, through self-torching. The tragedy of their situation is that the women characters around them do not appear to help their cause. Instead they seem to assist the men to punish 'the deviants'. Both women are deprived of mother figures early in life, a fact which seems to help them take the risky road of individual identity searches as there is no mother to help them find their place as women. Ironically, this very ability to venture into men's world makes them vulnerable and so they hurt all the way to the end of their searches.

However, the events in Vera's texts also indicate that there are strong undercurrents of change for women as society begins to open up gender-neutral cracks, such as the battlefield, where the daring women can begin to gain agency and write their own stories alongside the men. Moreover, the open-ended note on which some of the women's stories (Mazvita's and Chido's for example) end seems to imply that in spite of all the setbacks the women have hitherto faced in their search for self, there could still be a chance to begin again. The tragedy of the women's stories so far could lie in the fact that they were born somewhat before their time and so their dreams could not thrive in their particular communities. Their stories and dreams could, however, serve as an inspiration for women who would live during later generations, in less gender inflexible environments. In such environments women would not need to feel worthless and without an identity simply because they are women. They would have no reason, like Mazvita and Dorris Lessing's Martha Quest, to feel that they were '... a taste or flavour of existence without a name' (1969:17).

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