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INTERACTIVE POSSIBILITIES OF HISTORY AND IMAGINATIVE RE-CREATIONS IN YVONNE VERA'S *THE STONE VIRGINS*

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Abstract

Fiction has been the means through which the writer makes his/her experiences known. The writer is a lens through which the past is recovered or reconfigured and, as well, offers the means into its understanding. It represents an elucidation of social reality. It is also in this sense that literature is seen as a national biography, recounting the social conditions of certain periods in a nation's history. It is within the above milieu that the research highlights the gap, nature and extent to which the novelist Yvonne Vera through characters, styles, plots, settings and events, portray the interaction of fiction and historicity in *The Stone Virgins (2002).* The research also provides the understanding and interpretation of the selected work in its use of historical facts and imaginative re-creations. The study also investigates the different scopes of history prevalent in the selected novel as regards to its political, cultural, economic, religious, social and aesthetic patterns. New Historicism is the theoretical framework majorly used as it advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history it textualizes, that is history codified. Methodologically, this study is Content Analysis based. Some critical works on the writings of the novelists by other critics were used as secondary sources. It

was discovered that some critics disagree with the interplay of fiction and history, but this work reveals the various dimensions this interplay can be achieved and how the selected writer has re-creatively blended fiction with historical facts.

Keywords: Literature, Fiction, History, Imagination, African

Introduction

The literature of a particular community can be defined as the sum total of all works of imagination either in oral or written form, in prose or in verse which have helped to reflect and project the life and culture of that community in the areas of narrative fiction, drama and poetry. Literature draws on human experiences and tries to reflect the same and communicate it back to humanity in an ordered and artistic form. This is because the human condition is the reality on which literary artists depend for their writings. Kolawole Ogungbesan is of the view that, "A writer is a member of society and his sensibility around him. These issues form a part of the substance of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle" (5-6).

Fiction, being one of the genres of literature, is created in the imagination of its writer, though it may be based on a true story or situation. It encompasses an act of creative invention so that reality is not typically assumed or affected. Science fiction, fan fiction, flash fiction, mysteries, romance, thriller, fantasy, crime fiction are all genres of fiction in the form of prose, especially short stories and novels. In fiction, the author invents the story and makes up the characters, the plot, the dialogue and the setting. A fictional work does not claim to tell a true story, instead it immerses the reader in experience that he/she may never have in real life, introduces him/her to various types of people one may never visit in any other way

and takes him/her to places he/she may have never been to. Fiction can inspire us, intrigue us, scare us and engage us in new ideas. It can help us see ourselves and our world in new and interesting ways. Fiction is free to depict events that never occurred. The writer creates an imaginary story and is free to deviate from reality. The truth that applies to history may or may not apply in fiction.

Historicity is an essential part of history, which helps us to know about the past through historical accounts of myths, legends and tales of the people, which have proven over the years to be the bag of knowledge, information and fertile sources of materials for novelists. This brings us fully to the ideas of historicity, which is the historical actuality of persons and events, meaning the quality of being part of history as opposed to being historical myths, legend or fiction. Historicity focuses on the true value of knowledge of the past and, as well, seen as the characteristics of having been in history.

Some critics like David Harvey, Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, M. Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead argue that historicity is an aspect of all natural events that take place in space and time. Others like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Reinhart Koselleck, David Hume, R. G Collingwood argue it as an attribute reserved to certain human circumstances, in agreement with the practice of historiography. Herbert Marcuse explains historicity as that which "defines history and thus distinguishes it from 'nature' or from the 'economy' and signifies the meaning we intend when we say of something that is 'historical'" (22). M.A.R Habib also contributes to the idea of historicity when he states that, "Historicism has been characterized by a number of features. Most fundamentally, there is an insistence that all systems of thought, all phenomena, all institutions, all works of art, and

all literary texts must be situated within a historical perspective" (265).

Historicity is also viewed as a feature of human ordinations by which we are located in historical circumstances. Octavio Paz is of the view that "History has the cruel reality of a nightmare, and the grandeur of man consists in his making beautiful and lasting works out of the real substance of that nightmare or to put in it another shapeless horror reality— if only for an instant by means of creation" (104). It is known that fiction is the lens by which a society is mirrored, while historicity itself is seen as a reflection of time and period as regards to identification of authenticated events, characters, peoples and patterns in the study of man's past. So, historicity through fiction regards texts, not only as a reflection of the culture that produces them, but also as product of that culture playing an active role in the social and political conflicts of a period. This results to the interaction between the historical context of a work and the understanding and interpretation of the work.

Various periods in world history have been associated with some literary trends which have effectively discussed or related humanity to the ideas of fiction and history. According to Terry Eagleton, "Literature draws strength from actual life, it deals with the joys, sorrows, poverty, plenty and above all, death to which man is subjected and which is man's enemy" (33). To this effect, this research work is based on the accounts of historical spheres which the selected writer has drawn her sources from: the second and third Zimbabwean Chimurenga Wars.

Furthermore, the concept of fiction as historical in nature or deriving value from historical reality is the result of the theory of its origin because a good fiction writer or novelist should possess some sense of history as espoused by T.S Elliot. Fiction and historicity are more alike discourses as they

communicate with humanity, because they tend to evaluate and analyse the ways in which humanity reacts to the events in their environment or the role they play in such events. This brings to the mind the idea of faction which is the blend of fiction and facts as used by any creative writer. Faction, in short, as regards to this research embraces historicity. This is because history is also fact. Michiko Kakutani of The New York Times, in a review called faction, "an unfortunate genre of writing that evades the responsibilities of both history and fiction. While it trades on the news value of a story, it obeys none of the rules of journalism; while it exploits the liberties of fiction, it demands little exercise of the imagination" (1).

Thus, the researcher in this study, analyzes Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins,* and examines how her work is simultaneously understood through cultural and historical contexts; how it is influenced by historical facts of the time in which it was produced, as well the social sphere in which it moved, the books and theories that may have influenced it, especially the author's country's recent or pre-independence history.

Statement of the Problem

A historian and a fiction writer create essentially the same thing: a narrative. Part of the difference seems to lie in their motivation, their intent and their ultimate goal. A historian will try to approach history and his work with at least an objective of adhering to the truth, no injection of fiction or creativity in as far as this is possible. It is possible that a fiction writer has the same goal. But in this case, the possible motivations are endless, and may be very different from the truth-objective a historical writer has. In modern African literature, the interplay of fiction and history has been complementary as well as problematic. Its problematic dimension is that some critics disagree with the blend of these

categories (fiction and history); hence, the problem of this study is the gap and interactive possibilities and dimensions between fiction and historical facts as well as their interaction, interpretation and understanding in *The Stone Virgins*. And analyzing how the novelist fictionalizes history in the selected novel as regards to events, characters, contexts and styles, settings and techniques reflect historical facts and project literature. How the novelist employs literary aesthetics and elements to clothe history realistically, authentically yet imaginatively.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the theory of New Historicism majorly framed the study. The New Historicism is a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 when he collected some essays and then, "out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, he wrote that the essays represented something he called a 'new historicism', which became popular in the 1980s, reacting against both the formalist view of the related texts to the economic infrastructure. (Habib, 266)

As a literary theory, New Historicism identifies the authenticated events, characters, people and patterns in a situated context. Habib explains further,

> New historicism saw the literary text as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses—religious, political, economic, aesthetic—which both shaped it, and in their turn, were shaped by it. Perhaps what was new about the procedure was its insistence, drawn from Michel Foucault and poststructuralism, that "history" itself is a text, an interpretation, and there is no single history. (266)

It also rejects any notion of historical progress or teleology, and breaks away from any literary historiography based on the study of genres and figures. In the same way, the "culture" in which New Historicism situates literary texts is itself regarded as a textual construct. Hence, New Historicism refuses to accord any kind of unity or homogeneity to history or culture, viewing both as harbouring networks of contradictory, competing, and un-reconciled forces and interests.

New Historicism views literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire complex in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalizations or to commit to any definite political stance. It looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts colour the critic's conclusions. This advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history is textualizes, history having been codified. No privileging of text over the history it textualizes or vise versa. No back-dropping. This equal weighting of literary and non-literary texts to reveal truth is what Louis Adrian Montrose terms "the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (qtd. In Abrams 219). It means that history is taken to be "textualized". Therefore, New Historicists consider "historical" accounts as equally interpretable as literary texts, since both are seen as "expressions of the same historical moment" (Barry 173).

As a literary theory, New Historicism owes its impetus to the work of Foucault. Habib states, "Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limit of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents in order to understand the episteme of a particular time" (267).

Interactive Possibilities of History and Imaginative Re-Creations in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*

To help understand how the selected author from Zimbabwe has made use of the interplay of fiction and history, one must discuss the main factor in them, which is *Chimurenga* war(s). The authors portray in great detail the dire consequences of the second and third *Chimurenga*. *Chimurenga* is a Shona word that means struggle. According to Gunner, "the Zimbabwean *Chimurenga* was a guerilla war and it was in important ways a people's war with land and a sense of dispossession at the centre" (qtd in Ogbazi 1). The second *Chimurenga* war is also known as the Rhodesian Bush War or the Zimbabwe Liberation War; it refers to the guerrilla war of 1966 – 1979 which led to the end of white-minority rule in Rhodesia and to the independence of Zimbabwe. Its physical manifestation was, however, as a conflict between the predominantly white-minority government, headed by Ian Smith, and the Black Nationalist movements of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), respectively led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo.

The third *Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe was an extensive repossession of land by the majority local indị genes from the white minority commercial farmers. It was initiated by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government on the 15th of July 2000 under the leadership of Robert Mugabe in order to repossess and redistribute land. The centrality of land at the heart of this scheme resulted in the third *Chimurenga* (Ranger, 14)

Zimbabwe, as a nation, has undergone series of national instabilities, strife and development as regards to power: the interpenetration of power shaped developments in Zimbabwe during the 1980s and 1990s. World-system unevenness

manifested specifically in the struggle of the new Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government to consolidate political and economic control while foreign powers and International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) continued to interfere. National sovereignty and global capitalism battled for control over Zimbabwe's economic policy, coupled with violent civil strife that was driven in part by foreign intervention. In Zimbabwe the inextricability of foreign investment from the legacy of colonialism is particularly evident: independence from minority-white government was not accompanied by the redistribution of the ownership and control of land and finance to black African leadership.

From independence in 1980 onward, world-system control encroached on national sovereignty. The Lancaster House Constitution was composed and signed in a room in London that included a delegation of 22 British dignitaries and military personnel. Its provisions prevented the economic agenda of ZANU-PF for nationalization and redistribution of majority white-owned land from coming to fruition ("Report of the Constitutional Conference"). Instead of codifying the land policy agenda of the black nationalist parties, post-independence law entrenched private property rights and allowed land redistribution only with a "willing-seller, willing-buyer" approach (Hammar et al 4). The policy of "national development" the Constitution effected was "aimed at convincing a skeptical international community given Mugabe's explicit Marxist predilections of the sufficiently liberal democratic (or at least modernising) credentials of the new government, in order to generate much-needed financial support" (Hammar et al 24-25). Thus, the Zimbabwean state, from its inception, was subjected to world-system economic coercion. Notably, no women, Zimbabwean or otherwise, were present at the Lancaster House talks (Charumbira and Christiansen-Ruffman 87-88).

In *The Stone Virgins*, Yvonne Vera retells the history of Zimbabwe‘s most chaotic period by presenting the terrors the two sisters, Thenjiwe and Nonceba, witness and go through. Historian Terence Ranger comments that the novel confronts the reality of history and acknowledges how women have been the victims of real history (205). Vera tells the history through women‘s experiences and patriotic nationalist feelings. The story textualizes the terrors which happened during Zimbabwe‘s independence period. The cities were occupied by the white people while the blacks were fighting against each other to gain their political power in the new country. Thenjiwe and Nonceba, the main characters in the story, witnessed and suffered from the darkest moment in Zimbabwe‘s history, the 1981–1982 genocide of estimated 20,000 ethnic Matabeles and brutal torture of the ethnic minority (Ranger, 208).

The terrors that happened during the darkest moment in Zimbabwe‘s history are documented in *The Stone Virgins*. Raping, beheading, women and children forced to beat their husband to death are among those terrible brutalities that have their transfigurations in the novel (Ranger, 208). Thenjiwe is raped and decapitated; Nonceba is raped and has her lips brutally cut. A woman is forced to cut her husband‘s head apart in front of her children. All these happened in the black enclave of Kezi, near the sacred hills of Gulati, the nation‘s spiritual foundation.

The first part of *The Stone Virgins* is set in the 1970‘s, when the white minority declared Zimbabwe a republic after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Ethic Zimbabweans under the leadership of Robert Mugabe formed ZANU and ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo have been fighting against the white republic through years of guerrilla wars. Nkomo‘s ZAPU is hiding out in the bushes and hills outside the white–controlled city. In *The Stone Virgins*, Sibaso is a member of

the ZAPU that hides in the hills of Gulati. In March 1978, the white government reached an agreement with three black African leaders that guaranteed the safety for the white civilians. Shortly after signing the accord, on June 1st, 1979 a new country was born under the name of Zimbabwe Rhodesia. However, the Patriotic Front, composed of ZANU and ZAPU, was not satisfied with this solution. On December 1st 1979, the British and the newly formed Rhodesian government and the Patriotic Front signed the Lancaster House Agreement that ended the civil war (Ranger 206–208; Christiansen 207–209).

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

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

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

The story begins by providing the layout of colonial Bulawayo and the labouring black bodies within it from a

third person point of view. This narration hovers, dipping in and out of consciousnesses without lingering, traveling swiftly from Bulawayo to Kezi as if flying above the bus line with winged grace. Thenjiwe, the ostensible protagonist, is not introduced until Chapter Three and is dead by Chapter Five. Thus, the narration is literally floating free for much of the text. As the story progresses, it gives a long meditation on the power of natural beauty, profusion, and growth. This is done to show the disposition of Zimbabwe. Vera describes the rise and fall of the blooms using military metaphors. The flamboyant trees, with "blistering red blooms," "take over territory from December to January, brightening the sky louder than any jacaranda could" (Stone, 3). Vera suggests both that this continually recurring, vibrant profusion has the power to infiltrate ordered categorizations of place and time and that its beauty and dominance of the cityscape is frequently forsaken. In this way the flora are metaphorical for her conception of the power of the feminine, expressed perennially in the beauty, sensuality, activity and reproduction of the female body that has been frequently excluded from histories and geographies. The lasting strength and persistence of Kezi's marula tree in emanating its heady scent provides hope, offering "the only cherishable link with dawn" and a "profuse and dreamlike air with its promise of rescue (Stone, 128)". The villagers "hold on to its fecundi ty, and, indeed, its past memories" (Stone, 128). Vera also offers this hopeful growth in the Mazhanje seed that Thenjiwe holds in her mouth before her death. Vera's representation of cyclical time and the wild overtaking of the landscape by the unchecked profusion of floral growth in *The Stone Virgins* is her counterpoint to the futility of a linear and ordered representation of the violence in the novel and in Zimbabwe's history.

The Stone Virgins is divided into two chronological parts. The first part of the division is set between 1950 and 1980, during

which Rhodesia is a British colony. The second part is set between 1981 and 1986, a period Zimbabwe has gained its independence from Britain but been involved in a civil war. *The Stone Virgins*, two sisters – Thenjiwe and Nonceba, live in the most chaotic period in Zimbabwean history, witnessing the disorder and suffering the cruelties taking place. The story begins in the late 1970‘s in Zimbabwe ‘s second largest city, Bulawayo, a city full of white colonizers, the black people being marginalised. The war is approaching and people fear it. Outside the city, in the rural Kezi community, Thenjiwe falls in love with Cephas, a traveller from faraway eastern Zimbabwe. Their relationship only lasts briefly before she sends him away because he does not belong to that place. The Thandabantu store under a big marula tree serves as a place for gathering of the people of Kezi, the rural enclave that belongs to the black Zimbabweans. The store is full of men returning from the city and foreign products like Lux and Coca Cola. A bus connection links the enclave with the city of Bulawayo and the bus station is just outside the store.

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

In the last part of the story, Cephas, having read of Thenjiwe‘s death in the local newspaper, travels down to Kezi, finds

Nonceba and takes her back to the city of Bulawayo. Nonceba starts her new life in the city with her memories of Kezi, the enclave where everything has happened.

Vera also relates moments of violence in narrative loops. These moments of violence are facts taken from her national history. The cyclicality can be a source of suffering as well as a source of growth, in a parallel to the combined vulnerability and strength of women's bodies. Vera relates Sibaso's arrival in Kezi later in the novel more than she relates the violence he commits there (Stone, 67), so that the novel itself functions as a narrative loop. She describes the scene of Sibaso's murder, rape and mutilation of the sisters once, twice, then a third time, switching from third-person to first-person and also second-person in places. She focuses on the embodied experiences of Nonceba throughout: "there is only the scent of this man, the cruel embrace of his arms, the blood brown of his shoes, the length of his neck, and the gaze bendị ng close" (Stone, 67). As she tells and retells this part of the story, Vera's sentence style becomes simpler and more direct, to represent Nonceba's living and reliving of these moments, each time grasping for more clarity. These looping streams of narrative capture an experience that both destroys life and reproduces itself as inescapable memory. Vera also tells the moment in which Thenjiwe and Cephas meet three times (Stone, 31, 32, 38). Each interaction becomes clearer and more concise and answers more of the questions raised by the previous meandering sentences and descriptions. These narrative loops represent the cyclical temporal register of Vera's narrative style, in which one moment is repeatedly relived. The increasing clarity suggests that revisions of history, especially those that accommodate the cyclicality of embodied experience, can illuminate such moments at least enough to expose the violence on women's bodies that occurred. In this way, Vera captures the incommensurability of experiencing this terror, the illogical pathways to such violence, as well as

the ways these incidents disturb linear temporality and rational thinking. Her narrative loops respond to the difficulty of representing the outcomes of combined and uneven development.

The idea of trauma amidst the national struggles is represented by the character, Sibaso. Sibaso is an ex-Liberation War combatant who suffers from (Post-Traumatic Stress Disease) PTSD and a bush "dissident" probably raised in a poor minority community, targeted by a state enacting violence on its own citizens in attempt to secure its power in the world-system. He is both instrument and victim of the violent conflicts of capitalist modernization. The bodies of Thenjiwe and Nonceba, as his victims, are triply casualties of these dynamics. The decapitation dismembers not only Thenjiwe's physical body but also the relationship between embodied experience, memory and spirit that Vera has so carefully constructed. The act of decapitation forcefully separates the body from the mind and spirit, destroying life and the spiritual significance of the body. The act of rape exploits the female body's particularly feminine vulnerability and takes away Nonceba's agency, and echoes Sibaso's own possession as "an instrument of war." The removal of Nonceba's lips is an attempt to take away voice as well as a cruel disfigurement of feminine beauty. As "survival is in the mouth," it seems Nonceba should not survive such an ordeal. In this way Vera brutally and un-shrinkingly reinserts the female body at the center of national history and exclusionary historiography. These bodies, she suggests, are central not only to the stories told about the nation, but also to the horrific story of the power struggle and uneven development. She insists on illuminating that struggle's destruction of women's bodies, lives, stories, households, agency and voices. Women bear the brunt of combined and uneven development of the country; they are thus burdened with its history. Yet women's mouths also have the power to bear the stories of this

suffering; their bodies also have the power to bear future generations. As always, Vera couples embodied suffering and destruction with the possibility, at least, for the entrance of the divine: "Kezi is a place gasping for survival—war, drought, death,and betrayals: a habitat as desolate as this is longing for the miraculous" (Stone, 128).

In Nonceba's recovery and her eventual ability to begin to resurrect the meaning of her sister's life, the novel offers this paradoxical hope. Nonceba very nearly becomes a stone virgin, as captured in several passages of haunting embodied experience: "I lie on the bed, listening to my body turning slowly into stone. My jaw is held tight. I do not shout" (Stone, 123). For a long period, Sibaso's act succeeds in silencing Nonceba. Yet she still carries memories, some of which do not belong to her alone: "I move my arms, murmuring, my mouth stiff, as though sewn up, stitched like the hem of a dress, folded; heavy with numbness. I am unable to speak, my forehead is heavy. I carry words at the back of my mind, names of things, objects, places I do not know" (Stone, 123).

In the end Vera resurrects Nonceba as she did Nehanda. Cephas returns, repentant, longing to atone for his role in attempting to ensnare Thenjiwe before her death. Rather than saving Nonceba, he seeks salvation from her. His role in helping to reanimate Thenjiwe's sister is a way of resurrecting Thenjiwe also: "He looks up at someone else in the room, not her, as though someone else has said something and he is listening to this other voice speaking to both of them and making it unnecessary for them to say anything at all" (Stone, 162).

In restoring Thenjiwe's voice, Cephas and Nonceba are able to move forward. And this can be related to the Zimbabwean nation as when they align together, despite the national struggles and wars, they are able to move forward and enter

another phase. This can as well serve as a prophecy, that the entities of the Zimbabwean nation should forgive one another and find possible and better ways to move ahead and develop.

Bulawayo, Kezi and Gulati hills are historical places made important in the story by Vera. This technique is used to show the dispositions of the places before the disputes and wars arose, and how it desolated and ruined them. Bulawayo is a developed urban township full of colonial marks (the white Zimbabweans), while Kezi and Gulati hills retain its connection with nature and it is where the Black Zimbabweans are left to stay. The story begins like this:

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

Bulawayo is a city equipped with advanced infrastructures and places for entertainment. There are apartment stores, cafes and hotels, but these facilities are for whites only. Black people, are not only black, they are outsiders. They make no claim of anything in the city. Bulawayo is a city owned by the white colonizers. And this historical fact is infused in the story to relate more about what the Zimbabweans went through.

In Bulawayo, black and white are divided, people are discontent because they make no claim on their own land. A colonial urban space excludes black people; they are marginalized. In chapter two, Vera introduces the rural enclave called Kezi, where most of the story takes place. Kezi is a rural enclave. Near it are the hills of Gulati, "When you leave Kezi, you depart from the most arable stretch of flatland there is. There are towering boulders of rock, then hills and an undulating silence for a whole bus journey, till on the horizon you see Bulawayo beckoning. If at night, city lights glow like a portion of the sky…" (Stone, 17)

Kezi is a place for the black people, the Zimbabwean. It reserves its nature beauties as being undeveloped and untouched by the white colonizers. In contrast to the urban place in Bulawayo, the land here is rock and everywhere there are thorn bushes. It is an untamed wilderness owned by the black people.

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

> It is true: everything else in Gulati rots except the rocks. On the rocks history is steady, it cannot be

> tilted forwards or backwards, it is not a refrain. History fades into the chaos of the hills but it does not vanish. In Gulati I travel four hundred years, then ten thousand years, twenty more. The rocks split open, time shifts and I confess that I am among the travelers who steal shelter from the dead. (Stone, 104)

As a confused man, a victim of the war, Sibaso searches within the sacred cave of Gulati and attempts to regain his conscience. Kindness is destructed in Zimbabwe during the civil war; people are killing people of the same ancestors. This is a disaster brought by the war, genocides, raping and murdering. He realises that the country is not a country at all as everything rots, but the ultimate spiritual institution that all Zimbabweans have in common lies in the rocks. The rocks have documented every single detail of this chaotic period. What happened cannot be forgotten as history cannot be tilted forwards or backwards. A spiritual dialogue with the rocks reveals the sinfulness and guilty a human has. The virgins painted on the stone are ―waiting for the ceremonies of their own burial‖. The stone virgins, Thenjiwe and Nonceba, one is beheaded and another is badly injured. They are holy eyewitnesses of the history, a state in disorder. The people lose their consciousness, the darkest moment in the history of Zimbabwe.

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

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

The disposition of Kezi remains unchanged but in Nonceba's view, everything has been changed already. The true blackness in the hill has gone, a nation in civil wars. People are killed by those who have same skin colours, not the white intruders. It is a nation in the darkest horror; Nonceba always has a strong spiritual connection with Kezi and the hills of Gulati. In the end of the story, Cephas Dube, the one who has met her dead sister, Thenjiwe, a victim of the war, succeeds in tracing down Nonceba and apparently has a tender passion for her. He says that: "Is this not what everyone is calling Kezi, a naked cemetery where no one is buried and everyone is betrayed? There is no certainty of life, only death" (Stone, 159). This statement reveals the ultimate reality to Nonceba and renders the theme in this novel. The enclave of Kezi, which was once the joy of spring for every black-skinned people in this colonial country, the white citiness has eliminated the blacks and this untamed Kezi is the blacks 'final destination, a once sacred place now becomes a naked cemetery.

The country is involved in a horrible civil war in which people lose their conscience and soldiers slaughter the civilians. The new leaders of this new country have been

manipulating the people. The real murderer is uncertain but the chaos has destroyed a once united nation under foreign control. Nothing in the future is within expectation while the truth is that the blackness of Kezi makes it a damnable place. Nonceba has no wish to leave Kezi; though she asked, "why should I run away? The war is everywhere. Is it not there in the city?" (Stone, 161). Her spiritual connects with Kezi, the untamed blackness, is so strong that despite all that happened to her, she still wants to stay in Kezi, to keep her real blackness where the true Zimbabwean spirit lies. The unwillingness also contains her doubt of Cephas, a man who remains unknown to her like the once familiar Kezi which has now becomes a completely strange place. Finally, she chooses to move out of Kezi to the city, living with Cephas. But the memory of the dark history will not fade away.

The Marula tree is historically constructed throughout the story. A nationalist institution is built upon a female 's concepts on the tree and the landscapes. Most of the time, the tree is observed and sensed by women, reflecting the conscience of a person. The changing meanings signified by the tree vary from different perspectives as the experience of the characters change. The notion on the tree is subject to the story–teller 's emotions and the protagonist's moods. On the other hand, the tree is given human subjectivity to observe and retell. In this way, the natural landscapes involve themselves in the making of history and identity. Vera introduces a tree to uncover the real Rhodesia. In chapter two, the marula tree is revealed:

> In front of the store, close to the large marula tree, which stands higher than the roof of Thandabantu Store and higher than any other tree near or far, the impatient crowd rushes toward the bus to meet relatives and friends who have returned from the city, from Bulawayo. They find many; they find none.

> Each moment yields the fervent excitement of discovery. The bus the bustle, is all under the tree, that is how tall the tree is, full of leaf and height, branches sweeping down over the bus, and enough marula fruit to accompany every leaf (Stone, 26).

The infusion and positionality of this marula tree is quite critical. It stands in front of Thandabantu Store, a popular grocery store where plenty of activities take place. The tree observes the real chaotic Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe. During the civil war, after the horrible killing of the shopkeeper, Thandabantu Store is burnt and buried while the marula tree in front of it remains untouched. The holiness of the marula tree survives while the nation collapses. The killing of the shopkeeper and the destruction on Thandabantu store stir up the local community. Zimbabwe is in a disordered and messy state again. The marula tree metaphorically becomes important at this point while it still serves as the representative of the nation and what is left of it.

In chapter 13, the marula tree, after Zimbabwe has claimed independence from Britain, glories as the nation gains it sovereignty. Being the first-person narrator, Nonceba describes the tree:

> Nineteen eighty–two. You can smell the unpicked fruit from the large marula tree for distances, past one village to the next, and another, as far around Kezi as your body can go. If you cannot catch the scent of it, for whatever reason of your own, then for sure you can hear it; it is in all the minds of the otherwise solitary and quiet inhabitants of Kezi. Fruit has been falling off the marula tree endlessly, and now the rains are near if there are going to be and left a starved and violated population even more bewildered. There is no harvest. Now this. The marula tree has

> been yielding and dropping fruit nonstop since the middle of the year, and in the morning, when the air embraces the first light, simultaneous with that light and that embrace, there is the scent of a divine and almost sinful succulence. (Stone, 127)

There is the infusion of vulnerability of the black female body in the story. It is captured by telling of the terrible violence inflicted on Thenjiwe and Nonceba. Yet the novel also offers the hope of resurrection in Nonceba's new life at the end of the novel, where the final word is "deliverance". Vera reinserts these black female bodies into the heart of national history, illuminating them as the casualties of core-peripheral power relations as they manifested in the internecine violence of the 1980s in Matabeleland and the Midlands. She also suggests that reanimating these bodies as part of that history is necessary to reclaim national consciousness moving forward; in this sense even though they are the site of such brutal abuse and suffering, these bodies offer symbolic power and hope. The story suggests that the violence enacted on bodies in majority Ndebele areas in the 1980s, especially women's bodies, is central to how the nation-state as it currently exists was formed, and is also linked to the history of violence on black bodies and sovereignty by imperial power. This novel is not simply an indictment of the state, but instead reaffirms the unlikeliness of nonviolent transitions after such a brutal era of primitive accumulation of land and protracted struggle for independence.

The novel is clearly critical of the state-sponsored violence enacted in the 1980s and revises national history to include that violence with unshrinking brutality. When "The war begins" in *The Stone Virgins*, both "the bones" and "the guns" are "rising," "rising anew" (65). Although "bones rising" is a clear reference to the popular conception of Nehanda's prophecy that her bones will "rise again", the rising of these

bones does not resurrect Nehanda as Vera does in *Nehanda*. The rising of the bones in *The Stone Virgins* is accompanied by "the burying of memory" rather than the restoration of that memory (Stone, 65). *The Stone Virgins* depicts the destruction of Kezi, a village in Matabeleland South, as a result of agents of the state attacking Zimbabwe's own citizens. The grocer Mahlathini is burned alive in his own store by presumably Fifth Brigade "soldiers" who "had demonstrated that anything that had happened so far had not been random or unplanned. Atrocious, yes, but purposeful. They committed evil as though it were a legitimate pursuit, a ritual for their own convictions" (Stone, 132, 135). These soldiers are so blinded by the words of propaganda and the ideology of the state that their minds are "evaporating" (Stone, 135). The material violence inflicted on the bodies of villagers is associated with the symbolic violence of excluding various groups from history, including women, female combatants, who returned to the bush and majority-Ndebele communities in Matabeleland and the Midlands. Characters who belong to these groups become aware that independence does not necessarily reach or apply to them. At independence, the women of Kezi note that,

> The rocks remain as solid as ever; the boulders are still. Not different. The trees are bare of leaves and carry a stunned and lethargic silence. The women expect sudden and spectacular fissures on the rocks. They expect some crack, some sound that will wrap over them like lightning and they will not need to ask if independence is truly here, or if indeed this is a new day. (Stone, 51)

These women of Bulawayo and rural areas in Matabeleland can see from the advent of independence that it is only superficial while they remain in a periphery within the world-system, and a further peripheralized community within the nation.

Vera's gendered revisions to national history critique the double peripheralization of places like Kezi within an already peripheral postcolonial situation. She locates the violent destruction of Kezi within the history of the struggle between IGO coercion and national sovereignty by tying it not only to state-sponsored violence but also to the drought that incapacitated state control of the economy: "Last year again, the maize crop withered and left a starved and violated population even more bewildered. There is no harvest" (Stone, 27). The death and destruction in Kezi take on a layered significance, suggesting cycles of crimes that are not all attributable to the post-independence Zimbabwean state: "Kezi is a place gasping for survival—war, drought, death, and betrayals" (Stone, 128). The emphasis on the suffering of the land connects this destruction to many generations of colonial exploitation. "War" suggests not only the impacts of internecine warfare but also those of the Liberation War, much of which occurred in the bush areas of Matabeleland. This land, Vera shows, has suffered betrayal upon betrayal. Yet her purpose is not to undermine the hope necessary for focused resistance to specific tyrannies, not to diffuse the critique, but to render it more comprehensive. The failings of the ZANU-PF state need to be placed within the context of the world-system dynamics in order to be comprehensively understood. Vera's narrative style, in which time is collapsed and contradictions are illuminated rather than obscured, responds to this historically and geographically layered crisis.

Conclusion

Clearly this research has evidently shown that history and fiction can intersect and blend in many different ways as artistically explored by the selected novel, and most importantly in the depiction of the central character(s). The

author attempts to represent the daily reality of these characters, which she characterizes as interpretable from multiple perspectives. In essence, the novel is the author's discourse about the past, and it shows her relationship to that past. As White points out, we can only access history through language, and its discourse must be written before it can be digested (5). In this line, a historian refers to facts about the past, and portrays belief or set of beliefs about the past, and purports to report or outline the past by adhering to the truth. In doing so, readers do not relate to the complete actual happenings of the past which embraces the emotions, loss, happiness, joy, businesses, relationships and interactions, sex or celibacy and all other involvements of a particular people in a given past. That is to say, a historian doesn't involve the intricate day-to-day lives of the people and their relationships with one another, which is an important aspect of any society, in what he/she has recorded. On the other hand, a historical fiction merges historical reality with imagined reality, that is to say, the writer takes from the facts and re-imagines them, thereby involving the exact day-to-day lives of the people who own the past. The creative output of a writer is well appreciated when we comprehend its relevance to the other two worlds, the writer's world (his experiences) and our world (the society). This is the view this study has intricately elaborated and pointed out. In this manner, emotions, loss, happiness, sex, joy and all other attributes of human interactions and relationships are relayed to achieve a striking goal in the reader's mind and in the development of a society.

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